

CAIRO SEMINAR

Michael Harmel

A MOST notable event took place in Cairo at the end of October—the Seminar, *Africa: National and Social Revolution* held under the joint auspices of *Al Talia* (*Vanguard*), the theoretical journal of the Arab Socialist Union, and *World Marxist Review*, international monthly of the Marxist-Leninist parties. For the first time, representatives of revolutionary parties and liberation movements from all over the African Continent came together in a scientific discussion of the practical and theoretical implications of Africa's anti-imperialist revolution and its advance towards socialism; to evaluate the lessons, the advances and setbacks of the immediate past; to analyse the related problems of the fight to free the remaining enslaved areas, and the ways to maintain, strengthen and deepen independence in the liberated areas.

In addition to leading statesmen from the governing parties in the UAR, Guinea, Mali, Algeria and Tanzania, the seminar was attended by representatives of the fighting movements from the battle-fronts of the Portuguese colonies—Mozambique, Angola and Guinea (Bissau)—and of the fight against white supremacy in South Africa, Zimbabwe and South West Africa, as well as by leading progressives from a score of other African countries.

The tone of the seminar was set by the two opening papers, by Alexander Sobolev, executive secretary of the *World Marxist Review*, and El Sayad Loutfi El Kholi, editor-in-chief of *Al Talia*. Both were remarkable for their studied absence of stereotyped formulae, their recognition that the unfolding of the anti-imperialist African revolution, in today's world, poses unprecedented problems, requiring searching analysis and fresh thinking. In his absorbing examination, from the standpoint of historical materialism, of the special laws of the non-capitalist path of development in tropical African societies with their background of communal relationships, Dr. Sobolev warned: 'These are my own thoughts, and I am far from thinking that I have managed to find the absolute answers to the problems of Africa today.'

And Loutfi El Kholi, demanding that 'the revolutionary national African forces should reject in theory and practice the policy of anti-communism' called also on African Communists, at the same time, to 'reject doctrinal rigidity in the face of the new phenomena that appear in Africa'.

The same spirit—scientific marshalling of facts, avoidance of over-simplified slogans and rhetoric—characterised practically all the papers and discussions that followed throughout the week, on such vital themes as the penetration and techniques of imperialism in Africa; the analysis of classes and social strata; the various types of army take-over, especially the tragic experience of Ghana; agrarian problems; the question of ‘mass parties’ and ‘vanguard parties’; the consolidation of progressive African regimes through the extension of democracy and the advance to socialism.

There were over sixty written papers and reports presented to the seminar, besides a great many extemporary contributions to the discussion of each. Clearly it is impossible even to catalogue, let alone describe them, in a brief report of this nature. One recalls the detailed and stimulating analysis of the working class in Senegal, by Majhemout Diop of the African Independence Party; Dr. Nkrumah’s interesting re-appraisal of ‘African socialism’ (the ‘anthropological approach’)—read by Mrs. Shirley Graham Du Bois; the brilliant contributions by the Mali and Guinea delegations; and by Ali Yata of the Moroccan Communist Party.

The Egyptians themselves not only acted as most generous hosts, but had obviously put a tremendous amount of research and thought into their many papers. All these documents require prolonged and detailed study and discussion when reported on by all who attended as delegates or observers, and published, not only in the two convening journals, but also, it is hoped, in the journals of all the organisations which participated. This process will constitute the main, long-term effect of the seminar—one is convinced, a very important one indeed.

But the immediate effect was one of tremendous stimulation and confidence. Gathered in Cairo, for the first time, were leaders and theoreticians from widely distant regions of Africa and for that matter of various schools of revolutionary thought and approach. Yet the temper was one of unity and fraternity, of a common language of resistance to colonialism and of conviction that the road towards scientific socialism is the only way to securing and extending true independence. The note of doctrinaire self-advertisement and shrill pseudo-polemics was markedly absent.

From several countries more than one delegation attended. For example, from Sudan came both the representatives of the Communist Party and of the People’s Democratic Party; from South Africa, both the African National Congress and the Communist

Party; from Morocco, both Ali Yata and the leader of Ben Barka's National Democratic Party. Yet in each case the delegations were in practice united and spoke with one voice.

The seminar met under the shadow of the counter-revolutionary planned offensive of imperialism which had made dangerous inroads, especially the sinister coup in Ghana, until yesterday the pride of Africa. One felt that here, seriously and soberly, our leaders were rallying and marshalling our forces, weighing the lessons, laying the essential theoretical basis for fresh advances, more profound and lasting, more firmly based in the masses.

It was obvious that such a seminar, held in Cairo, an embattled front-line fortress in the struggle against imperialism, could not bear a merely abstract or academic character. Africa is at war with imperialism, a war in which ideas are most important weapons. The dynamic and creative ideas, the profound unity of purpose and language, which emerged in Cairo are a heartening sign of the maturity of our advanced leaders, their determination and ability to win the complete emancipation of Africa, her unity and her advance to socialism.

Dr. Hewlett Johnson, 1874 - 1966

The Editorial Board of *Labour Monthly* pays tribute to the memory of Dr. Hewlett Johnson, an outstanding champion of peace and socialism, respected by millions throughout the world.

His life of tireless service, courage and devotion was an inspiration to all. He led the way in helping to promote closer understanding between Christians and non-Christian Marxists in the pursuit of common human aims.

He was the author of many fine books, the most famous of which was *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, a book which opened the eyes of many people, giving them new hope and understanding.

Always a good friend to *Labour Monthly*, his valued contributions were frequently in our pages over the years from 1941 until July 1966 when he sent us a message of greeting on our 45th Anniversary, saying 'I cannot express what we owe in debt to you'.

It is with pride that we repeat these words of a man whose service to the cause of justice and humanity leaves us all indebted to him.