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Book Review

Africa's Wind of Change or Revolution

J. W. Forje*

John Henrik Clarke (1991) *Notes for An African World Revolution - African World Revolution - Africans at the Cross Roads*, African World Press Inc. Box 1892 Trenton, New Jersey, 450 pages, ISBN 0-86543-270-8 (HB) \$49.95 ISBN 0-86543-271-6 (PB) \$18.95

To many the crumbling of the nations behind the iron-curtain signalled a new wind of change across the African continent. Since the attainment of independence many African states adopted the governance system practiced in the then Eastern European Countries. The disappearance of this system showed how fragile the African governance system was. But is the tumbling of Eastern Europe really the beginning for a new system in Africa?

African at the Cross-roads makes a significant attempt of putting into correct perspectives the ills of the continent and what should be done in righting the wrongs caused by both external and internal factors. *Notes for an African World Revolution* brings together a comprehensive scientific and objective analysis of the roots of the African and African-American Freedom Struggle in the African World and within a rapidly changing global environment. The author does so through a detailed discussion of the "uncompleted revolution" of five monumented African leaders - Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Tom Mboya. In addition he penetrates into the pathetic situation in Southern Africa from Angola, Mozambique, through Namibia to South Africa, the bastion of the policy of apartheid. In between these he looks at the grassroots struggle ranging from the conquest of the continent to the struggles for the freedom of the continent. He poses a pertinent question - "Can African People Save themselves"?

The important message of the book is that of mental decolonization; for as he puts it, decolonization must be based on "African people searching to be whole again and searching to be a nation again" (p. 16). He goes further to point out that only a revolution can save the continent. "African history, political or otherwise, has been seen mainly through the eyes of conquerors, missionaries, and adventurers, whose interpretation of Africa and its people in most cases is a kind of sick fantasy, it is time that Africans tell their own African story" (p. xi) and this implies that "our next assignment in history is nation management and nation structure" (p. 11). This is necessary if we are to be loyal to the cause of our liberation. Africans throughout the world must begin to practice the essential selfishness-of-survival. Our open-mindedness and our hospitality to strangers have been turned against us (p. 4).

Divided into five parts, part one - "Notes for an African World Revolution" sets the stages for the nineteenth century origins of the African and African-American freedom struggles, education for a new reality in the African world and ends with

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Africa – American Historians and the reclaiming of African history (p. 3–76). In the introduction, the author states that “capitalism has no flags and no national loyalty communism also has no national flag or national loyalties. If either of these systems is to be used for African salvation, African scholars, thinkers, and politicians must reshape these systems and Africanize them to the point where they are applicable to Africa’s situation. Perhaps the greatest political mistake that has been made in Africa in relation to the independence explosion is the European training of the African Heads of State and their respective supporters, whose ideas of the state are negatively influenced by this very training. Whatever system the Africans use for themselves must be reshaped by the concept of Africans for Africa. Neither the communists nor the capitalists have a master plan for African freedom (p. xiii).

And since there is no master plan, there has to be a revolution – a cultural revolution which must first be based on regaining our confidence in our ability to handle everything in a nation. To handle everything requires *self-confidence* based on an understanding of both one’s culture and religion. So far, Africans have continued to develop on the concept of dependency. The most dangerous of all dependencies is to depend on your powerful oppressor to free you and share power with you, because powerful people never train powerless people to take their power away from them.

The author points out that political independence is not enough. The most essential factor is to decolonize our mentality and western culture and to resurrect our lost cultural heritage as the basis for nation-building. We can technologize without being westernized and made to believe that nothing good can come out of the continent.

Part Two – Five Africans and their Uncompleted Revolutions, Nkrumah, Lumumba, Malcolm X, Garvey and Mboya’s aborted political dream. John Henrik Clarke sees Kwame Nkrumah as a human being with many virtues and some faults, but that he remained the one African who took Africa for its political walk in the sun, made Africa believe in itself again, and made Africans throughout the world proud of being Africans (p. 83). Turning to Patrice Lumumba’s short lived unhappy political career, he sees it as an African tragedy that was not solely created within Africa. Lumumba was a victim of conflict and competitive international forces over which he had no control and little knowledge of their intent (p. 83). The Ghanaian troops in Congo (now Zaire) were prevented by their British Commander, General Alexander, to save Lumumba’s life because of the International complot which changed the entire political landscape of the continent. The Congo situation, on all sides, was full of paradoxes and contradictions. What was at issue was not the people of Congo but European control over the vast mineral and agricultural wealth of the Congo. A situation we are currently experiencing in Cameroon and in other parts of the continent three decades after the attainment of so-called political independence. Tom Mboya was a product of East Africa, the most invaded part of the African continent, and he was one of the three great African personalities who may have determined the future of the continent and its people. These personalities in different ways set the train of African revolution rolling and it is imperative of us all to complete the revolutions started some years ago. In Cameroon we remember people like Sampson A. George, Augustin N. Jua, Oyomobe; in other parts we can think of Steve Biko, Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Nnamdi Azikiwe etc.

Part three – deals with different roads to freedom, tracing the basis of the Berlin Conference, the concept of African Nation-Formation in the twentieth century and ending with white nationalism.

Part Four looks at Africa, Zionism and Friends without friendship, which deals among others with the raid at Entebbe, the land question in Palestine and in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Part Five focuses attention on colonialism and the conquest of the mind. This section dwells exclusively on the image and mind control in the African world, its impact on Africans at home and abroad. The crisis of the Negro intellectual and reappraisal of some neglected aspects of the crisis and ends with “Can African People Save Themselves”. This chapter sees a need to re-examine the role of education and miseducation in order to confront the fact that oppressors cannot afford the luxury of educating an oppressed people. If people are truly educated they will find a way out of their oppression.

The chapter shows how the West has all along presented a false image of the continent in order to support and justify their thesis of civilizing the uncivilized. As a result, Africa is caught between a golden age and an age of continued despair; depending on how they view themselves in relationship to the totality of history and its ironies. The cruelest thing slavery and colonialism did to the Africans was to destroy their memory of what they were before foreign contact. Can African People Save Themselves (p. 383)?

To do so, they must see themselves in relationship to the total history of mankind; they must also understand the insecurity of their invaders that caused them to down-grade the importance of African people in history in order to aggrandize themselves at Africa’s expense.

Note for an African World Revolution is a scholarly work exposing why the continent is poor, exploited and underdeveloped in the midst of plenty and of once being the centre of world scholarship. The significance of African history is shown in the book, though not overtly, in the very effort to deny anything worthy of the name of history to Africa and the African peoples. It further shows how the prime significance of African history becomes still more manifest when it is realized that this deliberate denial of African history arose out of the European expansion and invasion of Africa which began more than five hundred years ago.

John Henrik Clarke is saying, in essence, that African history must be properly looked into and from a new and holistic perspective and equally seen in its relationship to world history. There is no doubt that a people without knowledge of their history is like a tree without roots. As Frantz Fanon points out in *The Wretched of the Earth*, to take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves. In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with

the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity (p. 166 Pelican
tion).

The book gives a creative sampling of African history that should inspire us to pu
further readings on this subject and the role great African personalities have pl
in world history. It sets out the strategic framework on which to launch a revoit
on – that should redress the current pathetic situation of the continent in world
tics. Notes for an *African World Revolution* is an evocative, nostalgic, irresist
publication that brings vividly to life a vanished cultural and scientific schol
heritage with the earliest seat of civilization on planet earth.

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