

# National Liberation or Socialism in East Africa?: Some Theoretical Consideration\*

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In the Third World countries, the dominated countries everything remains to be done. There must be a fight against the overlapping dominations of imperialism, of old exploiting classes and new exploiting classes nascent bourgeoisies and "techno-bourgeoisies". At the same time there must be a fight against the effects of having been crushed for a 1000 years and against the effects of modern pillage: poor production, nourishment, and health mortality and illiteracy. The recovery of independence – national or "continental" – appears necessary and this is not a matter of becoming liberated from one domination in order to fall under another: the formation of a large group of non-aligned countries is here fundamental.

Sometime in 1967 the Arusha Declaration was proclaimed as a blueprint of intent to transform Tanzanian society along socialism. Influenced by the climate and events of those times: by the national liberation wars, particularly in Vietnam, the cultural Revolution in China, the Urban upheavals exploding in Paris in 1968 and throughout Europe and the United States, and by a repulsion against the official European left, which sought to smother the revolt and channel it into harmless byways, broad forces looked to anyone and everyone who invoked armed struggle against United States led imperialism and imperialist domination ranging from revolutionary communists like Mao Tse Tung to revolutionary nationalists like Amilcar Cabral or Franz Fanon, not to mention centrists like Ho Chi Minh. Under such a world conjuncture, the Arusha Declaration catapulted Tanzania into the headlines of major world newspapers and henceforth Tanzania's voice on international issues has been one to reckon with.

Today we are having deliberations and reflections on the past twenty years of the Arusha Declaration. Twenty years is not much of a milestone in human history. Of course it does pay to have moments of reflections and sum – ups of where we are. The point, however, is that today it has become so difficult to know where we are. Just how do we know where we are in terms of the social forms of consciousness and transformations that could act as our guide to make up a summary of twenty years of the Arusha Declaration? In any case, why research on the Arusha Declaration at this point in time and who is carrying out the research? For whom? What is the Arusha Declaration? From which point of view is the twenty years of the Arusha Declaration being studied?

From the perspective on one of the themes for this Conference – the future of socialism in the region – how is the future envisioned? Do we have the *capacity* to envision the future? In terms of the socialist movement, can the twenty years of the Arusha Declaration help us to grasp if we are moving near it or not? What is the current status of socialism and what is this socialism anyway? Is socialism a social movement or a goal to be attained? What is the current status of the East African social formations? What are the driving forces of these social formations in terms of their

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rupture/transformation or their retention? In what epoch and phase of that epoch are these social formations? What are the key trends of the epoch?

## The World Situation

In point of fact, the current period in the history of mankind in general and socialism in particular is a dangerous one. Everybody seems to be studying it but there is intense division in the produced results. Both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are studying the unfolding of the world conjuncture but divisions abound in each camp. In a sense the difficulties are understandable for there is no structure, organization or reference base either for the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. The result of the absence of a reference base is resort to borrowings. Yet short of the reference base we cannot define what is possible/impossible at anytime and hence the difficult to intervene in the political processes of our time.

Briefly, we are passing through a moment in world history threatened with terror and devastation of nuclear threat as a result of struggles for world hegemony by the superpowers and the pure threat of death as a result of hunger on the part of the majority of mankind. Other specific elements that characterise the current conjuncture include the following: restoration of colonialism in many independent countries in the third world occasioning and widening disparities and inequalities that have led to the break up of the third world into Western-aligned, eastern aligned and non-aligned countries, the North-South stalemate, economic crisis in the West, emergence of peace movements and the aggravation of the national question in Europe opposing to the Valta logic with the unification of Germany as the key issue, chaos in the international monetary system with particular reference to the debt-burden of the third world, multiplications of zones of tensions and conflicts in the world, multiplications of large movements against the logic of state everywhere; crisis of the Soviet system i.e. workers' resistance, human rights, etc.

## The World Socialist Movement

The crisis in the current conjuncture has not spared the Socialist movement at the world level. The movement is afflicted all roundedly by a double crisis of theory and practice. Paul Sweezy<sup>2</sup> for instance, is of the view that post-revolutionary societies have not behaved as Marx thought they would, which, however, is not to argue out the impossibility of Post-revolutionary societies being socialist in the Marxian sense. Fundamentally, Sweezy is asserting the need to recognize that a proletariat led revolution can give rise to a non-socialist society. At issue here is the proletarian class political capacity. Is it in crisis?

Charles Bettelheim<sup>3</sup> in a similar vein to Sweezy's in a recent article advanced a number of theses with regard to the socialist movement that:

- (a) None of the twentieth century's "socialist" revolutions is socialist in the sense that Marx used the term.
- (b) The twentieth century revolutions did not bring to power "the proletariat organized as the ruling class" but rather installed "tightly organized revolutionary parties drawn from elements of various sections of society".
- (c) "Upon seizing power, these tightly centralized parties invariably stamped out all democratic rights, prohibiting all forms of economic and social organization not controlled by them, and imposed a formal centralization of all important economic

decisions. The beneficiaries of the new system were a dominant class which controlled the state apparatus and which collectively appropriate the labour product of the mass of direct producers" thus defeating Marx's vision of social emancipation.

(d) None of the "twentieth-century revolutions" has abolished the wage relation.

Basically, the point in Bettelheim's theses is a crisis of reference; a crisis in proletarian transformation of capitalism, the point of departure of any socialist transition.

Crises in the theory of Marxism as the theoretical expression of the unfolding of the proletariat movement in its struggle against the bourgeoisie to transform capitalist society is as old as Marxism itself, but the axis of the crises of practice of transformation essentially dates from 1917. During that year and in the midst of the imperialist World War I, the imperialist chain of which Lenin spoke of as being the 'eve of the socialist revolution' did break in Russia through a politically organised coup led by the Bolsheviks. Without support externally, as a result of the defeat of the Western proletariat, the break seemed in danger and Lenin's thesis on imperialists as the 'eve of the socialist revolution' made in view of the actuality of the situation became transformed into a theory to explain why revolution had not broken elsewhere particularly in the West. It remains so to date.

Out of the "anomalous" constellation, a socialist society was to be built co-existent rather than subsequent to the capitalist society, as the competitor rather than the heir of the latter". What was said to be socialism turned out to be identified with industrialization (Soviet power and electrification - Lenin). In that way, socialism, the period of transition to communism became the end point to which a transition was headed, transition to socialist - transition to communism! Thus, what was intended as a transformation of society-relations among people, between people and their means of life so as to dissolve the present society turned out to be 'the ideology of growth' and hence reinforced/created a variant form of capitalist exploitation of the working classes through taxation; the specific economic form through which surplus is pumped out in the Soviet economic formation. Coupled with Soviet international behaviour of invasions and occupations of other countries, theories of Soviet expansionism, capitalist restoration<sup>4</sup> now abound and hence demolishing 1917 as a reference point for socialism.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a revolutionary referent, the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, did promise to tackle problems and deviations posed by 1917. The Cultural Revolution posed concretely the pursuit of the class struggle under Dictatorship of the proletariat. Arising on the midst of the great mass upsurge, the January Revolution in Shanghai through instituting the commune system virtually supplanted the Party/State apparatuses. The inclusion of non-Party members in the commune movement apart from signifying the gaining of subjectivity by the self-proclaimed leading role as a letter to mass initiative. Mao nevertheless insisted on the Party's leadership in as much as he accepted the principle of the masses historical initiative. With that the Cultural Revolution as a new form of revolutionary transformation of society in transition failed. Indeed in this post-Mao period marked with the shift from the politics of transition/transformation to the economics of modernization and production, the cultural revolution has been condemned as a catastrophe to China.<sup>5</sup>

The failure of the two major upheavals that made their appearance on the basis of leading the Socialist movement to victory together with the continued defeat of the

Western Proletariat, the bourgeois re-orientation of the self-proclaimed national liberation movements of the third world are of such proportions that the post-1975 period is marked with the total disintegration of revolutionary transformations in the name of socialist. The failure of the Polish revolution of 1980 which attempted to reconceptualize social transformation of civil society without posing the question of struggles for state power on the basis of tackling concrete tasks of the large masses of people requires a sum-up.

Thus the crisis in the theory and practice of socialism at the world level is a real one to the extent of prompting assertions that were the working classes to liberate themselves from "their" capitalist bourgeoisie, what is most probable - taking into account precedents and inertia - is the passage to a new class society, dominated by a "new ruling class" (constituted in part from the high "techno-bourgeoisie" and the management of party and union apparatus), with the establishment of a system combining state collectivism and a market economy,"<sup>6</sup> on the one hand and that "the Marxist communist project through proletarian revolution is now out of the question, as the proletariat as a whole has become completely integrated in capitalism and identifies itself with capitalist rationality as such i.e. proletarian revolution or radical needs have become identical with ordinary needs in capitalist society,"<sup>7</sup> on the other hand.

#### East Africa: Socialism or National Independence

Having examined the question of socialism at the world level, we now move onto the regional level of the East African social formations. These formations comprising of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are understood as geo-political units under domination and exploitation within the imperialist world economy. The articulation between the dominant and dominated social formations on the basis of the principle of differential predominance has a lot of implications for the population struggles in East African type formations. The struggles in dominated social formations to remove themselves from the dominant world imperialist circuit of capital places the national question as the key contradictions to be resolved.

In the wake of the Bolshevik triumph, the nation question and its mode of resolution enjoyed a one to one connection with socialism.<sup>8</sup> Then, it was said that the bourgeoisie's struggle for self-determination were henceforth superseded by struggles of working men, who had no country. Nonetheless, the strategic bridge built between Europe and Afro-Asia establishing a new connection between revolutionary forces in the west and the east did not last for long. The disintegration of the colonial system under the leadership of the bourgeoisie showed very clearly that they were in fact capable of leading the national revolutionary movement to victory on their own without communist assistance.

Yet in spite of decolonisation, the phenomenon of underdevelopment reverberated in the popular movements of the Third World with such a force that in the post World War II period, the fusion of national liberation and socialism became complete. Be that as it may, the direct connection between anti-imperialism and the struggle for socialism has not been proven in practice. Indeed, that connection has often blinded judgement to envision the growth of local capitalist classes which would exploit the masses of people even after decolonisation.

## On Nationalism

In a perceptive essay on nationalism,<sup>9</sup> Fredy Perlman has cogently argued that "the purpose of the nation entities was not to develop languages, religions or customs, but to develop national economies, to turn the countryfolk into workers and soliders, to turn the motherland into mines and factories, to turn dynastic estates into capitalist enterprises" and that "without the capital, there could be no munitions or supplies, no national army, no nation".

From the above theses, there could be no better analysis/explanation of nationalism hence the contradiction in fusing national liberation in the dominated countries with socialism. It is this confusion that has often led leftists into despair whenever the truth of real structures of liberated third world countries surfaces glaringly and visibly. The issue arises from the transformation of 'Marx's critique of the capitalist production process through which social formations of the East African type occupy oppressed nation status 'into a manual for developing capital, a "how-to-do-it" guide' – in plain language, the transformation of oppressed status into an independent status to achieve a significant level of accumulation as prerequisite for raising the popular standard of living. The invoking of socialism to oppose the capitalist logic through a supposed alternative in transforming the countryside seems to reinforce capitalism – primitive accumulation *a la* preobrazhensky.

East African spades of African socialisms that have thrived or still do thrive are no exception to the experiences of Russia, China, Cuba, Eastern Europe, Vietnam etc. Sharing the philosophical position of African exceptionalism, African socialism "denies the existence of classes and is unable to clearly indicate in which historical period we are in: transition to socialist transition, or transition to capitalist underdevelopment or socialist transition to 'traditional communal society'".<sup>10</sup> Thus failing to specify the historicity of current African society, African socialism in obliterating the whole history of colonial domination and exploitation facilitated a new thrust of imperialist grip of the African masses of people.

In the epoch of 'struggles for a second independence,' African socialism has currently been exposed as the ideology of the rising African state classes in crisis and in need of legitimization to stem off mass resistances against them. The practice of Ujamaa socialism has, for instance, "consisted in learning on the poor peasants to curb the rich peasants, in the vain hope of smoothing over both sets of class contradictions – but siding with the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and rich peasants when the workers and poor peasants have "gone too far".<sup>11</sup>

Like the movement of socialism generally, the movement of African socialism in East Africa within the specific circumstances of oppressed national social formations has benefitted capitalism.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

There does not exist in the present world in general and East Africa in particular social forces discussing the liberation from wage labour exploitation but only those for national liberation. Neither the so-called proletarian revolutions nor the dead-end non-starter third road African socialist promulgations have proven themselves in practice. The result: socialism has been transformed into the theory of economic development, a category properly belonging to the capitalist epoch.<sup>13</sup>

Yet because of imperialist exploitation and domination, and hence the phenome-

non of national oppression, national liberation still remains a possibility. Perlman Fredy summarizes this in the following words:

Every oppressed population can become a nation, a photographic negative of the oppressor nation, a place where the former packer is the super-market's manager, where the former security guard is the chief of police. By applying the corrected strategy, every security guard can follow the precedent of ancient Rome's Praetorian guards. The security police of the foreign mining trust can proclaim itself a republic, liberate the people and go to liberating them until they have nothing left but to pray for liberation to end.<sup>14</sup>

## NOTES

1. Beaud, Michael, *A History of Capitalism*, London, MacMillan Press, 1984, p. 229.
2. Sweezy, Paul, *Post-Revolutionary Society*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1980, Chapter 9.
3. Bettelheim, Charles, "The Specificity of Soviet Capitalism," in *Monthly Review*, No. 4, September 1985.
4. Gerstein, Ira, "Capitalist Restoration or Transition to Socialism," *Theoretical Review*, No. 25, November-December 1981; *Red Papers* No. 7, Chicago, 1974; Martin Nicolaus, *Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR*, Liberator Press, Chicago 1975, Koshis Mavrakis, *On Trotskyism*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1976, Charles Bettelheim's *Class Struggles in the Soviet Union* series, *Monthly Review* Press are just a few of the works that could be consulted on the issue.
5. Amin, Samir, *The Future of Maoism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1963.
6. Beaud, Michel op. cit., p. 228.
7. Camatte, Jacques, *Invariance*, Various Volumes, quoted in Wamba-Dia-Wamba, "Background Elements for an Understanding of the 'Crisis of Marxism,'" mimeo, University of Dar es Salaam.
8. Melchers, Konrad, "The Soviet theory of Non-Capitalist Development," *Ikwezi*, No. 12, June 1979.
9. Perlman, Fredy, "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism," Detroit, December, 1984, p. 15.
10. Wamba-Dia-Wamba, op. cit., p. 20.
11. Fogel, D., *Africa in Struggle*, Seattle, Washington, Ism Press, Inc., 1982, p. 191.
12. Two recent works in my view do shed some clarity in this issue.
  - (a) Chachage, C.S.L., "Socialist Ideology and the Reality of Tanzania," Ph.D. thesis, Glasgow University 1986 (unpublished).
  - (b) Kanywanyi, Joe, "Insurance in Post-Independence Tanzania: Effect of Ujamaa-Socialism on Insurance Law and Practice," (under submission – I'm grateful to the author for allowing me access to the work).
13. Marx, K., *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chapter IV, "The General Formula for Capital" just deals with this issue.
14. Perlman, Fredy, op. cit., p. 28.