Nationalism in Colonial Africa

by THOMAS HODGKIN.

(Frederick Mueller, 106)

Basil Davidson

Nationalism has had a bad press in recent years; and with reason. The intellectuals have got it so thoroughly into their heads that it is a bad idea to distrust it. Didn't Franco invade and crush the Spanish Republic in the baleful name of "the national idea"? Wasn't nationalism the last-ditch defence of the British Empire? And are we not still to be found working categories of bourgeois thought, and refused to overlap its quarrels and unite? We saw the League of Nations driven headlong on the rocks of fascism and war: we watched the dictators, one by one fish out their silly sodden symbolism of "young nations" and "old nations", and go about to smash half the world for this or that nationalist lunacy. Could someone form a rally cry, in the 'Fifties, for untold millions of people in the colonial world?

It was once held, in the working class movement, that socialism could very well vary in any given country only after that country had passed through a more or less prolonged period of capitalism. This idea emerged later, in connexion with the colonial world, as a statement that colonies could become independent only when they had passed through several stages of capitalist evolution, and acquired advanced and not bourgeois culture. But in the "bourgeois stage" of this process of self-liberation there would be a period of "bogus liberation" when the native bourgeoisie would exercise the functions of the native bourgeoisie: thus there were some who held that India's independence in 1946 was only apparent, and they were much surprised when they perceived, after a time, that this was not so after all. The same attitude was present in some left-wing attitudes to recent constitutional advances by British colonial peoples in West Africa: these advances, it was held, were, in fact, and illusionary — how could they be anything else, since they were more or less peacefully granted by the imperial power? And yet we now see that it was this attitude that was fake and unreflected, and that the constitutional advances. Beyond any doubt, these constitutional advances in colonies such as Nigeria and the Gold Coast (now Ghana) represent genuine and even far-reaching gains for the cause of equality and independence. Clearly, we have to examine colonial nationalism a good deal more carefully than in the past. We shall find ourselves, even further removed from understanding what the colonial peoples want and mean to have: and we are far enough removed, in this country as it is.

People's Party, according to its statutes, is "to support the demand for a West African Federation and of Pan-Africanism by promoting unity-of action among the peoples of Africa and of African Americans."

And on this understanding, in 1956, that the imperial government would agree to Gold Coast independence in 1957, Nkrumah recalls, "I reflected on the long and difficult road which we had traveled toward the goal of Independence. African nationalism was not confined to the Gold Coast — the new Ghana. From now on it must be Pan-African, and the ideology of African political consciousness and African political emancipation must spread throughout the whole continent, into every nook and corner of it."

Meantime, while this spreading process went on, the independence struggle in the Gold Coast rapidly became confined to the Gold Coast. Probably there was no other way: yet such was the dividing pressure of imperialism — the British and French together in West Africa that the African political leaders of all these territories have appeared unable to concert even a small degree of common action. The independence, by the way, of the Gold Coast have never been concerted with those of Nigeria: nor those of British Africa with French Africa. Unfortunately, for all their ideas about Pan-Africanism, African leaders were pushed further and further into a limited nationalism; and it remains to be shown how and when they will reverse their tracks.

For the truth is that this crystallisation toward nation-states is not simply a choice, a fashion, a passing political tactic. On the contrary, it is the product of all those many factors which have combined, these many years, into the African awakening of our day. It is the product of Imperialism. It is the product of the gradual disintegration of tribal society, of the undermining of old chiefly hierarchies, of the disintegration of agriculture, of the passing of tribal land tenure. It is the product of the growth of towns and cities, up and down Africa, into which the displaced and dispossessed could pour: so that there is scarcely a great conurbation in Africa south of the Sahara that has failed to double and quadruple its pathetic "native slums" over the past few years. It is the product, in short, of the detribalisation and the urbanisation (and, increasingly, now, of the industrialisation) of many millions of Africans, driven out of their world of their day into the world of European generation, but not admitted to that new world except on terms of helotry and hunger.

As Hodgkin shows, Dakar in Senegal has grown from 92,000 inhabitants in 1936 to 300,000 in 1955; Bamako in the French Sudan from 22,000 in 1941 to 100,000 in 1955; Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo from 27,000 in 1935 to 340,000 in 1955. Here in these seething conglomerations of shanties, huts, ker-chiefs and suchlike, where millions of Africans have forced an entry into the modern world. But they have brought with them not only their avid thirst for a shining multitude of identity and things but also the complex of the forests and savannahs could not give them. They have also brought with them the strong vessels of their own
indigenous culture, their African consciousness, their sense of distinction and originality: and it is into these specific-in myths and mysticism; it remains true that the nation-states of Africa will make their own original contribution to the sum of human wisdom.

Which is as much as to say, no doubt, that Africans will take their own way towards independence. One could allude to some examples. In the Belgian Congo, the diligent and autocratic Belgians have long been labouring at the task of building “an African middle class”: by which they have meant a more or less numerous body of Africans who would “side with them” in exchange for social, economic, and perhaps even political privilege. Yet it turns out that the nationalist movement of the Belgian Congo — perhaps one should say proto-movements, for they are still at an early stage — have recruited their most solid adherents precisely from these “privileged strata”. The dilemma here is likely to present itself to a bold and thoughtful man of the Bakongo or the Baluba peoples to name only two of the Congo’s leading tribes: is it not whether to “side with the Belgians” or to “side against them”: his dilemma is whether he will give his loyalty — whether history will demand him to give his loyalty — to a Bakongo or to the Belgians? — to embracing Congo nationalism. He feels himself on the threshold of a new life, an altogether different life, certainly a better life. What will he find beyond?

It will be obvious to anyone who has given more than a passing thought to the political geography of Nigeria that in these last few years, that imperialism has had much less influence in this crystallisation process than most of us have previously believed. No doubt it has proved capable of producing a nationalism that is the principal political movement of the 15 million people of Northern Nigeria has found itself in growing conflict with the principal political movements of the two southern regions. It may be convenient to imperialism that the Yoruba movement, in the south, is often in conflict with the Ibo movement. But nobody need question that these conflicts have developed along lines that are, in fact, endemic to these old established societies and their newly-felt national consciousness.

But that is not to say that the policies of the imperial powers cannot and do not profoundly influence the immediate structure of these emergent national-states in West Africa and of nationalist movements in other parts of Africa. Conservative and Labour colonial policy has seldom differed in more than emphasis and detail: but that is not to say that the shape and texture of these new African nations and “nations” (for some of them are still early on the road) could not and would not be very different in the circumstances of a socialist Britain. This does not mean that constitutional advances under a capitalist Britain are not real advances: in the circumstances in African national consciousness is a step towards equality and independence. But it does mean that socialists in Britain owe a vote of thanks (as well as to the others) to give much more serious attention to the colonial fact than they have ever been willing to give in the past. Unless we understand what is happening today, every advance we have in a sound appreciation of the meaning and potentialities of nationalism in Africa, we shall make a hash of our future ties with these peoples who are now becoming nations. We shall lose what chances we have and already they are slender enough — of helping our natural political allies against our natural political enemies.

This need to think about the realities of colonialism is the principle reason why Hodgkin’s book is valuable and important. Here in sensibly compressed form there are set forth in clear detail a great many of the right questions: circumstances: the policies of the colonial Powers and their contradictions — as, for example, that Africans in the Belgian Congo may be engine drivers and skilled workers and so on but Africans in neighbouring Northern Rhodesia may not: which is as much as to say, no doubt, that Africans will take their own way towards independence. One could allude to some examples. In the Belgian Congo, the diligent and autocratic Belgians have long been labouring at the task of building “an African middle class”: by which they have meant a more or less numerous body of Africans who would “side with them” in exchange for social, economic, and perhaps even political privilege. Yet it turns out that the nationalist movement of the Belgian Congo — perhaps one should say proto-movements, for they are still at an early stage — have recruited their most solid adherents precisely from these “privileged strata”. The dilemma here is likely to present itself to a bold and thoughtful man of the Bakongo or the Baluba peoples to name only two of the Congo’s leading tribes: is it not whether to “side with the Belgians” or to “side against them”: his dilemma is whether he will give his loyalty — whether history will demand him to give his loyalty — to a Bakongo or to the Belgians? — to embracing Congo nationalism. He feels himself on the threshold of a new life, an altogether different life, certainly a better life. What will he find beyond?

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The Accumulation of Capital
by JOAN ROBINSON
(Macmillan, 1956, 28/-).

Professor H. D. Dickinson

Since Keynes’ General Theory, two books on economics have appeared in Britain that, in the reviewer’s opinion, represent the best achievement of economic science. These are Professor A. W. Lewis’s Theory of Economic Growth and Mrs. Joan Robinson’s Accumulation of Capital. Now at last we are seeing a convergence of economists from various quarters upon the problems of long-period economic change.

In what follows, I shall concentrate upon Mrs. Robinson’s Accumulation of Capital. It is, of course, upon this book that the present discussion is based. It contains a spectrum of technique, economic fluctuations within the long-term process of accumulation, finance, a rentier class (who consume out of profits); diminishing returns, the theory of prices, and international trade. Thus she works into her scheme practically the whole of the conventional content of economic theory. It is truly a work of architecture, a monograph that is very close and is, in places, difficult to follow. But it is very rewarding. Not least of the reader’s rewards is to find familiar topics put into an unfamiliar context, thereby acquiring new and greater significance.

Historians of economic thought have often suggested that the shift of interest away from dynamics and towards statics and equilibrium, has occurred (probably unconsciously) by political motives. Equilibrium is so much safer. Once you start enquiring where the economic system is going, you don’t know what sort of answer to give. (A good example of this is that the Marxist law of the falling rate of profit is implicit, given that the accumulation of capital proceeds faster than the growth of the Marshallian system of wages and profits equated to marginal productivities. But none of the orthodox economists recognised it explicitly. And when Keynes, on quite other grounds, suggested that there was a secular tendency for the rate of profit to fall, his respectable colleagues were surprised and pained). Cannan and Pigou tuj-ned utility theory from a w-a-

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The wages bill then appears as income from sequences. There are dark references to gers). The excess of the product over the at agreed wage rates and organise their owned by a small number of individuals who hire the labour of a large number as an economy in which 'property is evils. This is under capitalism, defined that in the absence of Golden-Age conditions we may expect falling real wages, , . the competitive mechanism working freely, population growing (if at all) at a steady rate and accumulation going on fast enough to supply the labour of all available labour, the rate of profit tends to be constant and the level of real wages to rise with output per man. There are then no internal contradictions in the system. The system develops smooth- ly without perturbations. Total annual output and the stock of capital then grow together at a constant proportionate rate compounded at the rate of increase of the labour force and the rate of increase of output per man. Much of her analysis is devoted to elucidating the conditions under which a 'Golden Age' can occur, and, more men- acingly, to the consequences of these conditions not being fulfilled. The implications of this are that Golden Ages are of rare occurrence (perhaps the nineteenth century in Western Europe was one: per- haps it is impossible for the nineteenth century in the United States will turn out to be one — it is too soon to say) and that in the absence of Golden-Age conditions we may expect falling real wages, unemployment, inflation, balance-of-payment problems, and other various evils. This is under capitalism, defined as an economy in which 'property is owned by a small number of individuals who hire the labour of a large number at agreed wage rates and organise their work (directly or through hired managers). The excess of the product over the wages bill then appears as income from property. The 'rules of the (capitalist) game' are such that in many situations they lead to self-contradictory and destructive con- sequences. There are dark references to the paradoxes of the 'capitalist rules of the game' and to situations in which the rules of the capitalist game become 'unplayable', in which case there is the possibility of 'adopting a different set of rules'. What these rules might be is a subject that Mrs. Robinson does not deal with.

Orthodox economics has often been referred to as a 'game of capitalist apologists'. In a sense this is unfair. Economics is a description and an analy- sis: it neither praises nor blames. But in another sense the accusation is true. Every newspaper editor knows the pro- aganda value of selection. It merely deciding what is relevant detail and what is not, given that it can be portrayed in a form which is purely descriptive — every word of it may be true — and yet it makes a definite emotional impression upon the reader. So with orthodox econo- mics: the empirical arguments to the classes of society who are on the whole, satisfied with things as they are, choose unconsciously to study, out of the whole range of possible economic phenomena, those phenomena which result. This helps to explain the emphasis laid during the last seventy-five years on equilibrium economics — the balance of supply and demand in a static (or micro-economically) rather than as a whole (macro-economically). The allocation of resources to different uses according to the relative pressures of money demand (assuming that money supply is given, at least in some way to human needs) is a fascinating subject. The price mechanism is one of the most beautiful pieces of institutional organisa- tion that social evolution has so far been capable of; and the psychological mechanisms that the economy tends spontaneously to full employment, in spite of abundant evidence to the contrary.

But this state of affairs is changing. Either because the awkward facts of capitalism imperatively demand recogni- tion, or because economists are no longer drawn almost exclusively from the comfortably-off classes, academic economics is beginning to range much more freely over the whole territory of economic phenomena. Since Keynes, the subject of booms and slumps is no longer segregat- ed into a sort of ghetto called 'trade, cycle-theory or economic fluctuations (note the implication of those titles), but has become a fundamental, if not to be made to integrate it with the broad sweep of general economic theory. As I have said, Mrs. Robinson's axioms and postulates are those of a 'capital- istic society' (as described on her); she does not concern herself with the economics of a socialist society. But much of her analysis is applicable mutatis mut- andis to a socialist economy. The funda- mental and technique hold good under socialism as under capitalism. Even if wages and profits, considered as class-in- comes, disappear, there will remain the understandable income and the surplus that is retained by the planning authority for social pur- poses. And the relation between con- sumption (including social services) and capital-accumulation is not utterly differ- ent from what it is under capitalism. There is no doubt that Joan Robinson's brand of economics, al- though it is not socialist economics, is a very sound foundation upon which to build a workable system of socialist economics.

There are no explicit references to Marx in this book. Nevertheless, Marx's spirit hover over it. Many of the cate- gories that Mrs. Robinson works with are closely akin to those of Marx. Her concept of social classes is very like the Marxian; wages and 'quasi-rent' play a similar part in her thought as wages and surplus-value in Marx's; The schema of production and simple reproduction with which she starts are very like Marx's; so is her treatment of accumulation and of what Marx calls 'extended repro- duction'. Many of her conclusions are, at many points at which the sociological economics of Marx has deeply influenced Mrs. Robinson. This, in the reviewer's opinion, is as it should be. Marxism as a doctrine is sterile, but Marx's outlook and methods, interpreted with intellectual flexibility and in the light of recent history, can enormously enrich and stim- ulate our social and economic studies of today.

THE TORMENT OF SECRECY
by Edward Shils
(Wm. Heinemann, 15/-.)

Professor Shils' book is a study of McCarthyism. Other eminent scholars have written on the prevalence of witch-hunt- ing in the United States, mainly from the angles of constitutional law or of classical liberal theory. Such attacks on McCarthyism have come from those who see its clear infringements of legality and who deplore the use of political and economic blackmail to suppress individ- uality and enforce conformity. Professor Shils would not concern himself with such allies in the cause of decency, but would, I think, disagree with them in their analysis of the problem.

Professor Shils sees McCarthyism as a natural product of certain strains in the American democratic tradition, especially in the manner in which that tradition treats the idea of class. Here "class" must be understood not in the simple terms of capitalist-proletarian position but in the much wider and more complex sense in which the term is used by sophisticated American and British sociologists. Professor Shils is a prominent American sociologist, but he knows as much as we do about the British academic sport of mangling the barricades to repel the jar- goneers of transatlantic social science. He has lived with us; he knows us well; he can't be said to love us to excess or to approve of snobbery, lack of initiative and our acceptance of undemocratic soc- ial mores. But in comparing McCarthyism with whatever it is we have in England, we come out best. The "old boy" systems and the subtle flatteries that won away the poli- stic members of our political world to the world of deference, the joint com- mittees, the dining clubs, the senior com- mon rooms, from the Commons to the Lords, and Board's are beyond all this when added to the actual and largely accepted hierarchical structure of our political and social world, and to the fact that administration is efficient and pol- luted by snobbery, lack of initiative.
about book burning being suppressed by the official Voice of America. In England the Empire Loyalists quietly lose their deposits.

The class aspect of all this is important. In Parliament both parties contain large numbers of conventionally well-educated people. Using class to mean social and professional educational status there is a struggle between Wykehamist Ministers and Wykehamist civil servants, nor indeed much between Ruskin and W.E.A. backbenchers and University front benches. In contrast the Congressman is, in the popular mind, and sometimes in fact, an ill-educated bigoted time-server who, if he had any real talents would not be wasting them on the unedifying and unprofitable profession of flattering constituents, getting himself cheap rides and press publicity, and reading high school poems on "America" into the Congressional Record. For nearly one hundred years Congressmen have had something of this reputation, and so for most of this time have civil servants. But with the New Deal a new type of civil servant appeared in Washington — young, sophisticated, interested in theories, despising Congressmen, quick to answer under questioning, well educated, often at the Harvard Law School and frequently enough Jewish to arouse the anti-Semitism latent in all professional super-patriots.

Status anxieties (and the frustrations and aggressions resulting from them) are now an important rival to the constitutional theories of Freud in the literature of American psychology. In respect of the desire of Congressmen to injure the government department and the arts, the status thesis is not unhelpful: here it is brilliantly handled by Professor Shils. Scientists suffered at the hands of McCarthy because they are (a) intellectuals, (b) Congressmen, (c) have their own internal standards of judging facts and men, and (c) because they are the guardians of secrets. Secrecy, whether or not it is warranted drives the McCarthyites mad. Like all of us, they are intrigued by those who have the secrets in their safe-keeping to Congressmen, so they will sell truth or falsehood with equal pathetically heard over here. In American terms it is a plea for conservatism and in consequence this is a book which the Left here will find both stimulating and provocative.

RICHARD PEAR.

JIM LARKIN: THE RISE OF THE UNDERMAN

by R. M. Fox

(Lawrence and Wishart 18/-)

When Sir Lewis Namier said that there were "two dozen Irelands" in nineteenth-century Europe, he meant national minorities. For us on this island think of the "Irish problem" as a national one which found its "solution" in Home Rule. Mr. Fox's book reminds us helpfully that the gathering tension in Ireland before 1914, which made the future for the United Kingdom seem as insecure as that of the Empires of the Hapsburg or Romanov, had social as well as national ingredients: that linked with the struggle for self-determination went the fight for life of a labour movement, inspired on its political side by its connection with the cause of national freedom, and on its industrial side by the desperate poverty of the Irish workers.

The theory in which nationalist and socialist aspiration were inextricably tied up with each other is clearly illustrated by the career of the labour leader, Jim Larkin (1867-1947). Although his Irish Transport Workers Union earned the reproaches of Sinn Fein leaders for concentrating on industrial rather than patriotic agitation, Larkin himself, invited to tell a London labour audience about the great dock strike of 1913, insisted that the "struggle for National Freedom in Ireland was more important than the 1913 Labour struggle" (which was "received in dead silence"). This duality of aims continued until Larkin left for America in October 1914. As Ireland began to fill with armed bands in response to Carson's challenge, he had insisted on his followers forming a working-class Labour Defence Force distinct from the general Irish Volunteer movement but his patriotic efforts still earned the approval of such prominent non-socialists as Sir Roger Casement; and his career provides an interesting study of the rise to power of a bitter man who was hated but as the representative of millions victimised by both economic and racial oppression — a type of man whose role in history may be only just beginning.

Mr. Fox inevitably draws special attention to this aspect of Larkin's significance by devoting about half his book to the heroic strike-campaign in 1913 and 1914 in Dublin, while he skips very briefly over Larkin's nine years in America and his later activities in the Dail, as a member of the Dublin Corporation, and as General Secretary of the Worker's Union of Ireland. Even in dealing with the events to which he devotes most attention, however, Mr. Fox does not always give more than a one-sided picture of the situation. The traditional and bitter mistrust between Protestant and Catholic workers, which Larkin tried determinedly and with great success to overcome, is written off as "sectarianism", and although this is what it was, seen from the point of view of the class-war line-up which Larkin was trying to bring about, Mr. Fox's phraseology is too simple to describe such complex and deeply-rooted group attitudes; Larkin's achievement would seem greater, not less, if its background were more scrupulously presented. Again, Mr. Fox adopts without question Larkin's own view that the government acutely tried to split the Irish workers in 1913 by wilfully misinterpreting the Dublin strike as a nationalist demonstration and sending troops to stir up trouble between Orange and Green factions of the working class; there is no evidence for this, and it seems at least as likely that the civil and military authorities assumed out of sheer obtuseness and force of habit that the Dublin disturbances had nationalist causes, and reacted in their traditional way.

Mr. Fox tries to take a wide view, so that his eulogistic tribute to Larkin succeeds in re-creating something of the atmosphere of the period; it is all here, the violent oratory at mass meetings, the brawls between strikers and blacklegs, the law-courts hopelessly prejudiced against labour leaders, even such titbits as the revealing assertion that the police "always made a dead set at any musical instruments when the strikers marched to a band". On the other hand the purpose nowadays of a book like this — apart from its intended readership, performing an act of piety to a lost leader's memory — is not clear. The historian, even the social historian, will not have much use for it. And the times are surely past when the working class public, even the labour public, felt itself set apart from society in general and identified itself exclusively enough with the labour movement to form a market for this sort of party-literature; while it wants to read now is life-stories of men with less social purpose and more societal appeal than Jim Larkin — of sports-stars, war heroes, and band-leaders. The story of Jim Larkin will appeal, naturally, to those who knew him and to others who were attracted to the ideas he stood for, but a wider public can only be reached by the Labour Movement if it realises that this particular genre of propaganda for socialism has no future but as it presents itself to the reader of Socialistic Nationalist Movements among impoverished colonial peoples 'Larkinism' may have a new lease.

ROGER MORGAN,
Pre-colonial African societies were of a highly varied nature. They could be either stateless, state run or kingdoms, but most were founded on the principles of communalism in that they were self-governing, autonomous entities, and in that all members took part, directly or indirectly, in the daily running of the tribe. An overarching feature of pre-colonial Africa was that its societies were not designed to be the all-powerful entities that they are today, hence the abundance of confederation-type societies. One reason for this was that the villages and tribes commonly owned the land, a fact that undermined the basis for a market economy and a landed aristocracy, another that there was an abundance of available land to which dissatisfied individuals or groups could move.