

ENDRE SIK AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN STUDIES  
IN THE USSR: A STUDY AGENDA FROM 1929

Colin Darch  
Universidade Eduardo Mondlane

Gary Littlejohn  
Universidade Eduardo Mondlane

I

Writing in 1963, the late D.H. Jones commented on the first volume of the Hungarian Endre Sik's *History of Black Africa*<sup>1</sup> that

"this is simply another pot-boiling account of the European colonisation of Africa, about 1910 vintage, distinguished from others of its kind only by the slightly greater space it allots to speculation about the mysterious native past...Professor Sik's unexact standards of evidence are those of the crudest type of political controversy."<sup>2</sup>

On the second volume, the same reviewer wrote four years later that it was

"a very bad book which invites the strictures levelled against its predecessor: a crudely partisan selection and treatment of the evidence, a very imperfect acquaintance with recent research, an outmoded, essentially European-centred perspective...Professor Sik is...deficient in narrative skill and historical insight...All the diversity and detailed irregularity of the historical landscape is smothered under a uniform blanket of naive moralising which all but obliterates its significant features."<sup>3</sup>

This is undoubtedly strong stuff, especially as Jones was some way from being a reactionary scholar; although he noted that Sik's book (hereafter *HBA*) is "sharply Marxist in tone," he pointedly refrains from attacking it on that score. Sik, according to Jones, is simply incompetent.

However, two points need to be made, which show that the

case is not quite as straightforward as all that. The first is a simple point of information: although *HBA*'s publishers make no reference to the fact, Sik completed the work in Moscow in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and apparently did not seriously attempt to revise it when it appeared in print some twenty years later.<sup>4</sup> It is thus necessary to take Jones' rhetorical phrase "about 1910 vintage" a little more seriously than Jones, perhaps, intended, and to place the book in the context, not of the bourgeois and early nationalist historiography of the 1960s and 1970s, but a full generation earlier, when Western (i.e. non-Marxist) history of Africa effectively did not exist. This leads us to our second point, which is that Sik's claim to our attention is not primarily as a Hungarian historian, but as the teacher, *in the Soviet Union*, of a generation that included some of the most influential Soviet students of Africa. As "A.A. Shik," he was the author of a series of articles in the 1930s and 1940s that exercised considerable influence on the development of African studies in the USSR and later in other socialist countries. The present paper, consisting of an introduction to Sik's ideas and a translation of one of his early pieces, attempts to show why he must be taken seriously, especially by Marxists, despite his demonstrable failings as a historian of Africa.

In the 1920s, Endre Sik was a Hungarian political refugee in the Soviet Union. Born in 1891, he had served in the Austrian army in the First World War, and had been won over to Bolshevik ideas during a period as a prisoner-of-war of the Russians. After the end of the war and his release from the Russian camp, he returned to Hungary and played an active part in the Hungarian revolution of 1919, when a Soviet Republic was established that lasted just over four months before being crushed by reactionary interventionist forces. Sik fled to Moscow, with hundreds of his compatriots, and began an academic career. He graduated from the Institute of Red Professors and taught at the Communist University of Toilers of the East, known by the acronym KUTVA, as well as at other colleges.<sup>5</sup> He appears to have been interested initially in what was then called the "Negro question" in the United States, which he studied intensively. According to one of his former students, Sik was "soft-spoken and modest...an out-going person who radiated warmth," and was a favorite teacher at KUTVA, where he taught Leninism and party history. He seems to have attempted to form a study group on the "Negro question," together with some of the black students at KUTVA.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Sik produced a series of articles, chapters, reviews, and a book on such themes as the agrarian question in Africa, the general history of tropical and southern Africa, and the race question and Marxism.<sup>7</sup> After the end of the Second World War he published no new writing on Africa in Russian, and the belated appearance of *HBA* in English, French, and Hungarian apparently marks the end of his career as a working historian of Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Sik's activity in the 1930s and 1940s originated as a response

to certain decisions about the colonial question taken at the 6th Congress of the Comintern (the Third, or Communist International) which had met in Moscow in July, August, and September 1928. It is important to remember that the Comintern was regarded at that time as the supreme body of the communist movement worldwide, of which the various communist parties were, nominally at least, the national branches. The decisions of the Congress, as the supreme organ of this supreme body, had a peculiar and binding authority on the parties and on individual communists. In any event, the 6th Congress had accepted a document on the colonial question, in which much more attention was paid to the analysis of the problems of revolutionary political work in the colonies than any previous Congress had considered worthwhile.

In this climate, Sik began to attempt to focus attention on the African colonies, which had always occupied a much lower position on any political scale of priorities than China, India, or southeast Asia, for a variety of reasons. At that time the institutional base for the Marxist study of Africa was already on the way to being created. The Scientific Research Association for the Study of National and Colonial Problems (NIANKP) had originally been set up within KUTVA, but by 1929 was an autonomous organization. On 13 April 1929 Sik presented a paper, translated here, to a seminar within NIANKP, which attempted to provide an agenda for such a Marxist study of Africa. It was essentially the first attempt to systematize African studies in Marxist terms; but it was drawn up in the context of a series of struggles over theory at a much more general level, which must be taken into account in the evaluation of Sik's ideas.

## II

### The Sixth Congress of the Comintern and the Debate on the Colonial Question

The paper was published in *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok (The Revolutionary East)*, NIANKP's journal, in 1930, with the note "for purposes of discussion;" that is, it was not given full editorial endorsement at the time. This is not surprising, since Sik's earlier analyses of South Africa and the Afro-American question in the United States had been used to provide theoretical justification for opposition to what became, in 1928, the official line of the 6th Congress of the Comintern.

The Comintern's analyses of South Africa and the United States were linked, apparently because both cases were considered distinct from, but closely related to, colonial problems. The American Harry Haywood has described the Negro Commission, which was set up as an independent body to deal with Afro-Americans and with the South African question, as being in reality a sub-committee of the Colonial Commission of the 6th Congress.<sup>9</sup> Haywood was closely associated with the position that treated both cases as involving national oppression, that

is as *national* rather than *racial* questions. Consequently, in both cases Haywood argued in favor of national self-determination, a line that he had developed during the winter of 1927-1928 with the Russian Nasanov and the South African J. La Guma.<sup>10</sup>

The contrary line, as in Sik's arguments, was that in both cases the prime factor in oppression was racist ideology. This "racial minority" line implied the deliberate assimilation or integration of blacks into the respective American and South African Communist Parties and trade union movements. The ideology of white chauvinism was seen as the principal block to the unity of black and white workers. According to Haywood, this line ruled out all nationalist movements as divisive and distracting from the struggle for socialism.<sup>11</sup> It effectively attempted to fit the Afro-American question and the South African black peasant question into a simplistic framework of "pure proletarian class struggle."<sup>12</sup> For Haywood, such a position was one of "abstract Marxism," a mistake made by those "unable to relate Marxism to the concrete experience of their own people." In his view, the contrary thesis of self-determination "had correctly elevated the fight for Black rights to a revolutionary position, whereas proponents of Sik's theories attempted to downgrade the movement, seeing it as a minor aspect of the class struggle."<sup>13</sup> The outcome of the "self-determination" analysis, which emerged victorious during the debates of the 6th Congress, was the advocacy of an "independent Native South African Republic, with full and equal rights for all races, as a stage towards a Workers and Peasants Republic."<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the defects of Sik's analysis and the merits of the analysis that emerged as the position of the 6th Congress, it is clear that Haywood's line does not itself escape the charge of "abstract Marxism." There are immense difficulties in insisting that Afro-Americans in the United States are waging a national liberation struggle "to solve the problems of land and freedom which the bourgeois democratic revolution of the Civil War and Reconstruction left unfinished."<sup>15</sup> Even if an agrarian-democratic national liberation movement *had* constituted itself in the 1920s, the situation has been transformed by subsequent developments. These include particularly industrialization in the South and the growth of a Black proletariat, which even the 6th Congress resolution on the Afro-American question recognized as "the most important phenomenon of recent years."<sup>16</sup> Yet Haywood, writing in 1978, still clung to on the whole a 6th Congress position, while recognizing certain weaknesses in the 1928 Afro-American resolution. This is his only acknowledgment, in terms of theory, of the massive economic and demographic changes of the intervening half century.<sup>17</sup>

Although his book is an interesting and useful source of information about these struggles, Haywood was, of course, a relatively minor figure whose personal significance should not be overestimated. The position that he defended, however, continues to be of some current importance in, for example, the ideological struggles on the fringes of the South African liberation movement. The journal *Ikwesi*, for instance, published in

Nottingham, England, and closely (but not explicitly) linked to a so-called "Maoist wing" or tendency within the P.A.C., makes extensive use of exactly this line of analysis, often elevating the Colonial Theses to the position of an authoritative text for the present day.<sup>18</sup>

Haywood's account of South Africa suggests that he saw any independent Native South African Republic as an intermediate stage in a socialist revolution, just as in the United States he had analyzed the right to self-determination in terms of completing the bourgeois democratic revolution.<sup>19</sup> Such a conception of history can scarcely avoid being called "abstract Marxism" in the sense in which Haywood uses the term. It is precisely this kind of supra-historical conception that treats history in terms of apparently "universal" concepts, and that blocks the analysis of the specific social forces operating in any particular situation.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, our critique of Sik should not be equated with the criticisms that were made of his work at the time of the 6th Congress. It is clear from Haywood's account that the latter criticisms formed part of a very complex set of struggles that were being waged between Stalin and Bukharin in the Soviet Union, and between different factions in both the Communist Party of South Africa (C.P.S.A.) and the Communist Party of the United States of America (C.P.U.S.A.). They also involved criticism of the policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.) towards the colonies at that time. With respect to the C.P.S.A., it is clear that the line of the 6th Congress was not immediately implemented. It had been resisted by the South African delegation to the Congress, but was adopted by the C.P.S.A. at its conference of 28 December 1928 to 1 January 1929.<sup>21</sup> The later refusal of some party members to accept the decision of this conference seems to have caused considerable conflict within the C.P.S.A. This strife, coupled with a highly sectarian and leftist implementation of the programme by the new leadership in the context of the severe state repression of the time, was responsible for the party's decline, which was not to be reversed until the late 1930s.

Sik's programmatic paper, translated here, must be interpreted in the light of these debates at the 6th Comintern Congress. Edward T. Wilson has correctly pointed out that, while Soviet academic interest in sub-Saharan Africa dated from the early 1920s, it remained for the 6th Congress "to stimulate a real expansion of Soviet interest in Negro Africa."<sup>22</sup> However, he may be exaggerating when he states that, after the 6th Comintern Congress, Sik "had been regarded as something of an authority on the general question of Negroes."<sup>23</sup> While it is true that Sik's article "The Comintern Program and the Racial Problem" had appeared in the Comintern journal *Communist International* in August 1928, right in the middle of the 6th Congress, Haywood's account makes it clear that this article and the paper that Sik presented to the Negro Commission (which started to work on 6th August) were the theoretical basis for a position which was rejected by the Congress. The same issue of *Communist Inter-*

*national* contained a series of discussion articles, including one by the American Pepper, whose line was different from Haywood's, and one by Haywood himself.<sup>24</sup> It would seem that no very great authority can be attached to Sik's position, merely one of several in 1928. He may have simply been attempting to reinforce his standing at the time of his April 1929 agenda paper. Thus it may be more appropriate to interpret the agenda as a partial change of position by Sik, without completely abandoning his emphasis on race rather than nationality as a key element in his analysis. Indeed, this may account for what seems at first sight to be a rather strange definition of nations in terms of ethnic, tribally-constituted entities.<sup>25</sup> Sik may not only have been setting out an agenda for future work, but also re-establishing his *political* acceptability by modifying his position.

Wilson argues that Sik's 1929 paper provided a basis for all subsequent Soviet African studies, and provoked as a response the establishment of a permanent African Bureau under the auspices of NIANKP.<sup>26</sup> While these points are basically correct, the idea that Sik's paper provided the basis for all subsequent Soviet *Afrikanistika* (as it is now known in the USSR) should not lead one to suppose that all his theoretical positions were rigidly adhered to by his colleagues and students. Wilson points out that I.I. Potekhin and A.Z. Zusmanovich were among the emerging group of African specialists, and he treats the first work on which they collaborated (*Forced Labour and the Trade Union Movement in Negro Africa*) as remarkable for the depth of its investigation of some of the questions posed by Sik. This 1933 work has recently (1979) been translated into English as *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*.<sup>27</sup> It seems to us that it is precisely that "remarkable depth" to which Wilson draws attention that prevents one from treating it simply as an implementation of Sik's programme. Nevertheless, some passages do show the influence of Sik's ideas quite clearly. The following passage, for example, discussing the work of the 6th Congress on the "Negro question," studiously avoids mention of the central "Black Republic" resolution, and instead emphasizes the secondary (to the Congress) idea of racial assimilation:

"The sixth Comintern Congress resolution on the Negro question states that we must involve 'white workers in the struggle for Neg[r]o demands'. One should remember that the black masses will be more widely drawn into the revolutionary struggle if the conscious element among white workers proves, by its actions, that it is struggling alongside the blacks against racial persecution and inequality in all its forms. The sixth Congress also stated that in order to eradicate the bourgeois ideology of racial 'supremacy,' the struggle, both in words and deeds, must above all be directed against chauvinism among the workers of oppressor countries, and also against the bourgeois tendency towards separatism, evident among downtrodden

nationalities and resulting from racial oppression."<sup>28</sup>

As Robin Cohen dryly comments, "the inclusion of this passage and interpretation of the Sixth Congress is of great interest in the view of the South African Communist Party's [i.e. C.P. S.A.] adoption of the Black Republic slogan."<sup>29</sup> It is clear that this analysis is much closer to Sik's argument for racial assimilation on a common class platform than it is to assimilation under the banner of a Black Republic.

Nonetheless, *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa* escapes many of the weaknesses of Sik's own theoretical positions, which have been noted in developed critiques of his well-known four-volume work *HBA*<sup>30</sup> and in our translators' footnotes to the present paper. Furthermore, the institutionalization of Soviet Africanistics that took place following Sik's 1929 paper should not be overstated. As Wilson points out in another work, there was a subsequent loss of both political and academic interest in Africa in the later 1930s as the Soviet Union turned its attention to the growing threat of Nazi Germany.<sup>31</sup> It is precisely for this reason that one can say that Potekhin "presided over a renaissance" of Soviet Africanistics in the late 1950s, and that renewed political emphasis arose at that time on the idea of a non-capitalist path of development.<sup>32</sup>

### III

#### The Non-Capitalist Path of Development

Sik's use in his 1929 paper of such terms as *obshchina* (used in Russian to refer to the repartitional commune of Russian peasants) and even *put' nekapitalisticheskogo razvitiia* (path of non-capitalist development) had a certain resonance in the context of contemporary Soviet debates on the fate of the commune and agrarian transformation. At that time, of course, there was virtually no attempt to relate such general theoretical questions to the African situation, despite the increased interest in colonial problems in general. Sik's influence was therefore all the greater within the tiny world of African studies.

The general debate on the commune dates essentially from 1925, with some earlier contributions.<sup>33</sup> It took place, of course, within an even more general and immediate debate on the agrarian question and on industrialization, both pressing policy questions confronting the Soviet party and state at this period. The relevance of these debates to Sik's work on Africa lies in the fact that the participants had been greatly influenced by the now famous drafts of Marx's 1881 letter to Vera Zasulich, first published in full in Moscow in 1924.<sup>34</sup>

N. Sukhanov, for example, tried to use Marx's drafts, while arguing that the October revolution had so transformed the commune that it could now impose progressive policies on its members, thus becoming an instrument of progress and socialism.

M. Kubanin replied that Marx's argument had been that the commune could have been saved as a social basis for revolutionary transformation *by a revolution at that time*, that is, before the development of capitalism in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly after the Russian commune disappeared in the collectivization drive at the end of the 1920s, the debate on its role was reopened by S.M. Dubrovskii, who had participated in the agrarian debate of the 1920s.<sup>36</sup> By 1933 Dubrovskii was attempting to justify theoretically the abandonment of the commune while salvaging "Marxist statements about the possibility of bypassing the capitalist stage of economic development in Russia."<sup>37</sup> The actual expression "non-capitalist path" had been used for the first time at the 6th Congress, but the chairman of the Colonial Commission and drafter of the Colonial Theses, Ottomar Kuusinen, had pointed out that no theoretical work had been done on the question in "backward countries."<sup>38</sup> Dubrovskii's intervention, and indeed Sik's agenda, may be seen as preliminary attempts to rectify this situation, although no real debate over or developed theoretical justification for the concept of the "non-capitalist path" was to appear before the 1960s.<sup>39</sup>

Dubrovskii tended to follow the dominant party line, and there are grounds for supposing that the idea of a "non-capitalist path" based on the development of communes might well have been acceptable to the Party, given that Dubrovskii was expounding it in the infinitely less liberal atmosphere of the mid-1930s. He certainly argued in his article in favor of communes as the basis for agrarian transformation in contemporary Mexico.<sup>40</sup> However, with regard to the USSR itself, he appears to have taken the position that the preconditions for such a development--namely a supporting proletarian revolution in Western Europe and the maintenance of capitalist penetration in the countryside at a very low level--were absent.

Marx's letter does appear to support the idea of a potentially revolutionary role for the commune, given these preconditions. This view is close to that of the Russian populists who, although they could not have known of the long drafts of Marx's letter, did consider that they were drawing on Marx's analysis of capitalism in Russian conditions.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear from Sik's article translated here that he was close to arguing that Africa did fulfill the necessary preconditions for using communal forms of social organization as the basis for agrarian transformation, since the supporting proletarian revolution had taken place, not in the West, but in the Soviet Union. Certainly a position fairly close to this has become common in the USSR now, at least as far as the possibility of following a non-capitalist path (that is, achieving socialist transformation without passing through a capitalist phase) is concerned. The debate within the USSR is by no means over, as positions taken throughout the relatively liberal era of the 1960s show.<sup>42</sup>

Sik's ideas on Africa found a semi-official echo in Dubrovskii's more general work and it is clear that--despite, rather



than because of--positions taken by the Comintern 6th Congress, such ideas have continued to gain ground in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries, especially since the 1960s.<sup>43</sup>

## IV

It is clear that Sik's agenda was presented at an important conjuncture in the development of Soviet views on the nature of the USSR itself and on the relation of the USSR to the colonies in general (and Africa in particular). It is also apparent that the precise form of the development of Soviet *Afrikanistika* starting from Sik's agenda over the period from 1930 to 1960 requires further investigation, if it is not to be treated merely as the realization of Sik's ideas. The actual conditions in which early Soviet investigators worked must also be taken into account if we are not to fall into the error of attributing all shortcomings in their work merely to ideological orthodoxy. A.B. Davidson has written

"In those years the Marxist scientists who studied Africa worked in extremely difficult conditions. None of them, with the exception of Albert Nzula and some other Africans, had ever set his foot on African soil and seen Africa with his own eyes. The very limited access to African realities, the absence of broad contacts with foreign scholars, sharp differences in the character and quality of the scientific grounding of the first Africanists--all this could not but make itself felt. Besides, in those years, in conditions of a sharp struggle against bourgeois ideology, some traditions of classical oriental studies were temporarily lost, and a 'nihilistic' attitude towards history was sometimes displayed."

Nonetheless, Davidson goes on, the work of these early researchers is important because it represents the first attempts at a problematization in Marxist terms of specific questions related to African social formations, attempts that continue to have resonance, especially in the socialist countries, in our own day.<sup>44</sup>

J. Slovo has argued that at a 1960 World Congress of eighty-one Communist and Workers' Parties, the substantiation of the theoretical framework for the notion of a non-capitalist road, supported internationally by socialist countries, was still lacking, although Lenin had called for it in the 1920s.<sup>45</sup> This raises the question of what happened to academic research that might have formed the basis for such a theoretical framework. How far did the later work of the African Bureau, and of scholars such as Potekhin and Zusmanovich, surmount the weaknesses of Sik's position? Debates on the question of the non-capitalist road and the relevance of Soviet agrarian history of the 1920s underwent a revival in the Soviet Union in the 1960s. What

was the influence of such academic work on the formation of Soviet foreign policy positions in the 1960s and 1970s? These and other questions suggest that an understanding of the role of the Soviet Union in Africa must be sought, at least partially, through research on the production of African history in the Soviet Union, as well as the development of Marxist theory in general since 1930.

## NOTES

1. *History of Black Africa*, (4 vols; Budapest, 1966-1974), also published in French and Hungarian.
2. *JAH*, 4 (1963), 129-130.
3. *JAH*, 8 (1967), 549-50.
4. A.B. Davidson, "Marxist Literature on the Problems of Colonialism and Anti-colonialism in Africa South of the Sahara (From the 1920s Until the End of the Second World War)" in László Krizsán, ed., *Sources and Historiography on African National Liberation Movements* (Studies on Developing Countries, 96) (Budapest, 1978) 9, 14.
5. KUTVA (in Russian: Kommunisticheskii Universitet Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka) was one of four party schools operating in the 1920s. The Institute of Red Professors trained Marxist university teachers, and the Lenin Institute, the Sun Yat-sen University of Chinese Toilers, and KUTVA trained party cadres from the USSR, China, and what would now be called the Third World. NIANKP (Nauchno-issledovatel'skaia assotsiatsiia natsional'no-kolonial'nykh problem) originated within KUTVA in 1927, but by 1929 was an autonomous institute with its own library and publishing program.
6. Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, 1978), 162.
7. "Chernaia Afrika na revoliutsionnom puti" [Black Africa on the revolutionary path], *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok*, 8 (1930), 235-51; *Rasovaia problema i marksizm* [The race problem and marxism] (Moscow: NIANKP, *Trudy*; vyp. 6, 1930); Reviewed by N. Nasonov, *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok* (9/10): 323-31; Sik's reply, *ibid.*, 331-34; "Vliianie mirovogo krizisa v Chernoi Afrike" [The influence of the world crisis on Black Africa] *Agrarnye Problemy*, 78 (1931), 107-55; Chapter on Black Africa in *Agrarnyi vopros i krest'ianskoe dvizhenie: spravochnik* [The agrarian question and the peasant movement], 1st ed., book 3 (Moscow, 1932) 127-79; "Agrarnaia politika imperialistov v Chernoi-Afrikanskikh koloniiakh" [The imperialists' agrarian policy in Black Africa] *Agrarnye Problemy*, 5/6 (1932), 89-107; 12 (1932), 86-102; Review of N. Mitchell, *Land Problems and Policies in the African Mandates of the British Commonwealth* (Baton Rouge, 1931) in *Inostrannaia Kniga*, 12 (1932), 21-23; "Agrarnyi krizis v negritianskoi Afrike" [The agrarian crisis in Negro Africa] in: *Agrarnyi krizis* [The agrarian crisis], book 4 (Moscow, 1933) 257-324; "Agrarnyi vopros v IuAS" [The agrarian question in the

- Union of South Africa] in *Agrarnyi vopros na Vostoke* [The agrarian question in the Orient] (Moscow, 1933) 327-61; Review of D.M. Goodfellow, *A Modern Economic History of South Africa* (London, 1931) in *Inostrannaia Kniga*, 3 (1933), 40-41; Review of J.R. Sullivan, *An Economic Geography of Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1931) in *Inostrannaia Kniga*, 3 (1933), 41-42; Chapter on the Union of South Africa in *Agrarnyi Vopros i krest'ianskoe dvizhenie: spravocnik*, 2nd ed., v. 3 (Moscow, 1935), 78-97; Chapter on tropical and southern Africa on the eve of the French Revolution in *Novaia istoriia kolonial'nykh i zavisimykh stran* [Modern history of the colonial and dependent countries] v. 1 (Moscow, 1940), 82-92; Chapter on tropical and southern Africa in the period of the victory and expansion of capitalism in the leading countries (1789-1870), in *ibid.*, 346-63; Chapter on tropical and southern Africa, 1870-1918 in *ibid.*, 489-523; "Samori" *Tridtsat' Dnei*, 4 (1941), 68-71; "Iz istorii russkoi afrikanistiki [From the history of Russian African studies] *Sovetskaia Etnografia*, 2 (1946), 173-81; this last later reprinted as "E.P. Kovalevskii protiv rasizma" [E.P. Kovalevskii against racism] in *Izuchenie Afriki v Rossii (dorevoliutsionnyi period)* [African studies in the Russian Empire before the Revolution] (Moscow, 1977), 126-37; "Kolonializmu net mesta na zemle" [There is no place for colonialism on the earth] *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'*, 3 (1961), 3-16; "Mirambo: ocherk iz knigi vengerskogo afrikanistika *V teni velikogo Mirambo*" [Mirambo: a sketch from the book *In the shadow of the great Mirambo* by the Hungarian Africanist] *Vokrug Sveta*, 3 (1963), 38-40.
8. He is described in one source as a "scholar and politician" and as President of the all-Hungarian Peace Council. We have not had access to Hungarian bibliographic sources, but we know of no published work by Sik written later than 1946. See *Izuchenie Afriki v Rossii*, 178n.
  9. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 259.
  10. *Ibid.*, 270. It is interesting to note that according to E.T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II* (New York, 1974), 169-70, esp. n.28, this self-determination approach, advocating that American Negroes had some of the characteristics of a nation, had been put forward by Stalin in 1925 to a group of five Afro-Americans who had come to study at KUTVA. Among them was Otto Hall, brother of Harry Haywood (*ibid.*, 336n28 and Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 265) who opposed Haywood's position at the 6th Congress. According to Wilson, (169) the 6th Congress position on the United States included advocacy of an independent Negro republic in the southern "Black Belt," thus adopting an element from Garvey's otherwise unacceptable platform. This certainly seems to be the implication of Haywood's position, which he admitted was based on a study of the Garvey movement (*Black Bolshevik*, 248). Yet interestingly, he does not explicitly say this. Per-

haps this is because by 1978 he was arguing (ibid., 280) that the 6th Congress resolution "document should have made clear that one cannot hold absolutely to the national territorial principle in the application of the right of self-determination." (It seems possible, incidentally, that the Nasanov referred to here is the same N. Nasonov who reviewed Sik's book on the race problem; see above note 7.)

11. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 264.
12. Ibid. There is perhaps some substance to Haywood's critique of Sik's position on this point, although one cannot be certain without seeing the document that Sik presented to the 6th Congress. Nevertheless, Sik's line in the debate as presented by Haywood has certain resonances in current (1980-1982) Trotskyist criticisms of the South African Communist Party, criticisms that have in effect treated the current South African situation as ripe for a "pure proletarian revolution." We are thinking here, for example, of the so-called "Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC" (which is not in fact a "tendency" of the ANC at all and whose members are currently suspended from the ANC). This group has recently published *The Impending Socialist Revolution in South Africa* (London, 1982).
13. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 266.
14. Ibid., 270. See also Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943* (London, 1956-1965) 2: 546-47, where the extract from the 6th Congress Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries reads as follows:

"In the Union of South Africa, the Negro Masses, who constitute the majority of the population and whose land is being expropriated by the white colonists and by the State, are deprived of political rights and of freedom of movement, are exposed to the worst kinds of racial and class oppression, and suffer simultaneously from pre-capitalist and capitalist methods of exploitation and oppression.

The communist party, which has already had some successes among the Negro proletariat, has the duty of continuing still more energetically the struggle for complete equality of rights for the Negroes, for the abolition of all special regulations and laws directed against Negroes, and for confiscation of the estates of landlords. In drawing into its ranks Negro workers, organising them in trade unions, fighting for their admission into the trade unions of white workers, the communist party is obliged to struggle by every means against racial prejudice among white workers and to eradicate such prejudice entirely from its own ranks. The party must vigorously and

consistently advance the slogan of the creation of an independent Native Republic, with guarantees for the rights of the white minority, and translate this fight into action..."

We quote this extract *in extenso* because this position had a profound effect on the development of the Communist Party of South Africa, as it was known until 1950.

15. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 279.
16. *Ibid.*, 269.
17. *Ibid.*, 280.
18. *Ikwesi: a Black Liberation Journal of South African and Southern African Political Analysis* (8-11 Victoria Centre, Nottingham, England). See, for example (15) October 1980, where references to the Black Republic slogan appear on pp. 2, 28-29, 32, and 35.
19. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 271. Here Haywood suggests that the South African delegates opposed to the resolution argued that the South African revolution was a socialist one "with no intermediate stage, an argument which posed a sort of South African exceptionalism." Clearly Haywood is referring here to the "American exceptionalism" in the C.P.U.S.A., which opposed the self-determination line supported by him. The question arises: exception to what? The only apparent answer is, to an abstract theory of revolution involving a necessary set of historical stages; in other words, a strongly teleological conception of revolution--each stage must be completed before going on to the next. It implies a *necessary temporal sequence* of stages or phases, rather than aspects which may occur more or less simultaneously in a complex revolutionary process.
20. In other words, Haywood's position is similar to one from which Marx distanced himself when he argued against "an historico-philosophic theory of the general path of development prescribed by fate to all nations, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves." Marx to *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* (November 1877) in *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, (3rd rev. ed.: Moscow, 1975), 293.
21. See the Introduction by Robin Cohen, to A.T. Nzula, I.I. Potekhin, and A.Z. Zusmanovich, *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*, (London, 1979), 3.
22. E.T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 186. While Wilson concentrates on Sik here, he also points out that Moskovskii Rabochii (Moscow Worker) Press released a series of pamphlets in 1929 edited by E. Pashukanis and B. Vinogradov, entitled *Mirovaia Politika* (World Politics) dealing with such subjects as "Imperialism on the Dark Continent" and "French Imperialism in the Colonies." E. Pashukanis later became an influential figure in Soviet legal theory whose work *Law and Marxism: A General Theory* was published in English in 1978 by Ink Links, London. The rapid movement of talented young academics into this field (Potekhin and

Zusmanovich are two clear examples in the early 1930s) suggests not only that high priority was given to such work but also that the development of Soviet Africanistics cannot be simply treated as the application of Sik's 1929 agenda that is translated here. It would be interesting to see how far Potekhin and Zusmanovich in later life followed the research topics and *also the general analytical lines* advocated in Sik's 1929 program.

23. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 340n106.
24. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 267.
25. See our translators' footnote 7 to Sik's paper below; also Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 341n113.
26. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 189 and accompanying footnotes.
27. See note 20 above. As Cohen points out in his Introduction, Wilson fails to draw attention to the role of "Tom Jackson" (A.T. Nzula, the first black General Secretary of the Communist Party of South Africa) in writing this book. Cohen is careful not to underestimate the contribution of the other two authors.
28. Nzula et al., *Forced Labour*, 118.
29. *Ibid.*, 147.
30. See for example the critiques by I. Hrbek "Towards a Periodisation of African History" in T.O. Ranger, ed., *Emerging Themes of African History* (Nairobi, 1968); H. Odera Oruko "Marxism and African History," *Kenya Historical Review*, 1 (1973), 139-50; and in particular Henry Bernstein "Marxism and African History - Endre Sik and his Critics," *Kenya Historical Review*, 5 (1977), 1-21.
31. F.T. Wilson "Russia's Historic Stake in Black Africa" in *Communism in Africa* (Bloomington, 1980). On page 81, Wilson says that "the years 1927-1933 marked a high point of concern for this area, including Africa." On page 82, he points out that "scholars associated with NIANKP's African Bureau--such as I.I. Potekhin--subsequently presided over the renaissance of Soviet African studies in the 1950s." (There was, of course, an upsurge of interest in Ethiopia in 1935-1936, when that country was attacked and occupied by Fascist Italy: for a list of works published see Colin Darch, *A Soviet View of Africa* [Boston, 1980]).
32. For a discussion of the renewed emphasis on the non-capitalist path of development at about this time see J. Slovo "A Critical Appraisal of the Non-Capitalist Path and the National Democratic State in Africa," *Marxism Today* (June 1974), reprinted in *Utafiti* 3 (1978), 245-75.
33. Accounts can be found in D.G.G. Atkinson "The Russian Land Commune and the Revolution" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1971); S.G. Solomon "Controversy in Social Science: Soviet Rural Studies in the 1920s," *Minerva* 13 (1975); and S.G. Solomon *The Soviet Agrarian Debate: a Controversy in Social Science, 1923-1929* (Boulder, 1977). The two works by Solomon differ in emphasis and complement

- each other.
34. Atkinson, "Russian Land Commune," 282-88.
  35. The articles by the former Menshevik N. Sukhanov, and a reply by M. Kubanin were published in *Na Agrarnom Fronte* 11/12 (1926).
  36. Solomon, *Soviet Agrarian Debate*; idem, "Controversy," *passim*.
  37. Atkinson, "Russian Land Commune," 326; Dubrovskii, "Marks i Engels ob obshchine i o vozmozhnosti nekapitalisticheskogo razvitiia Rossii" [Marx and Engels on the commune and the possibility of a non-capitalist development of Russia] *Agrarnye Problemy* 4/6 (1933), 23-54.
  38. VI Kongress Komintern, *Records* 4 (1929), 6, quoted in J. Slovo, "Critical Appraisal."
  39. See, e.g., *ibid.*, and on the concept applied to Africa, the articles in Mai Palmberg, ed., *Problems of Socialist Orientation in Africa* (Uppsala, 1978). On the closely-related concept of the "advanced socialist society" see Marie Lavigne "Advanced Socialist Society," *Economy and Society*, 7 (1978), 367-94. For the Soviet view, e.g., M.T. Iovchuk et al., eds., *Socialist Society in the Present Stage* (Moscow, 1978).
  40. Atkinson, "Russian Land Commune," 328.
  41. For an excellent summary of Marx's position, the populist position, developments at the 6th Congress, and their modern implications, see Slovo, "Critical Appraisal." For two differently nuanced recent accounts see S.M. Shipley "The Sociology of the Peasantry, Populism and the Russian Peasant Commune" (M. Phil. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1978); A. Hussain and K. Tribe *Marxism and the Agrarian Question, II, Russian Marxism and the Peasantry, 1861-1930* (London, 1981). Hussain and Tribe take a position close to Kubanin's in their interpretation of Marx on the commune.
  42. See Atkinson's accounts of the analyses of, e.g. S.D. Zak, V.P. Danilov, and S.P. Trapeznikov ("Russian Land Commune," 327-28).
  43. Sik's publication of his massive four-volume *HBA* from the mid 1960s onwards is itself evidence in support of this.
  44. Davidson, "Marxist Literature," 10.
  45. Slovo, "Critical Appraisal," 253.

"Establishing Marxist Study of the Socio-Economic Problems of Black Africa"\*

The exploitation of Black Africa is one of the important power-bases of contemporary imperialism.

Black Africa, of all the major colonized areas, is the *most securely consolidated* for the imperialists. It was much more backward than anywhere else as regards the development of local capitalism, and in Africa the national capitalist ambitions of the indigenous bourgeoisie hindered the plans of the imperialist predators less than anywhere else.

Furthermore, Black Africa, of all the major colonized areas, offers the most favorable conditions for the *expansion of the colonial economy* of the imperialist powers.

Obviously, then, Black Africa is enormously significant for imperialism, and by the same token, for the world revolution.

As the most backward section of mankind, the most oppressed and the most exploited by imperialism, the peoples of Black Africa offer a vast reserve of potential allies for the international proletariat in its struggle against imperialism.

All these circumstances took on a special significance after all the free territories had been divided up by the imperialist powers; after the imperialist [First] World War this significance began to grow in importance, and continues to do so, year by year, with increasing speed.

The reasons for Black Africa's growing significance after the World War can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Shrinking markets supplying raw materials, and for the sale of manufactured products; shortage of territory for capital investment; and the increasingly sharp competitive struggle between the imperialist powers under these conditions.
- (b) Increasing unrest in other, more developed colonies, threatening the imperialists with the loss of a significant part of the material base of their power.
- (c) The bourgeoisies of the imperialist countries increasingly need surplus-profits, to hold back the revolution in the metropolitan countries by splintering the proletariat.

All these points are forcing the imperialist powers to exploit Black Africa more and more fiercely. In turn, this leads to the growth both of despair and of the consciousness of the oppressed Black African masses, and by that very fact creates increasingly favorable conditions for their revolutionary development.

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\*From a paper delivered by the author on the 13th of April, 1929, in the N.I.A.N.K.P. to an organised gathering of the scientific research circle for the study of socio-economic problems of Black Africa. It is printed for the purposes of discussion.



On this basis, we can affirm that *Black Africa will be one of the most likely protagonists in future conflicts between the imperialist powers, as well as one of the most probable breeding-grounds, in the very near future, of revolutionary uprisings against imperialism by the oppressed peoples.*

As a rule, one can distinguish three tendencies in any area of social science research: the bourgeois tendency, the petit-bourgeois social-democratic tendency, and the more-or-less well-developed Marxist tendency. In the field of study of Black Africa, we have a special situation. All African social science up to now has been purely bourgeois.

The imperialist bourgeoisie has paid and continues to pay exceptionally close attention to the study of Black Africa; hundreds and thousands<sup>a</sup> of scientists and researchers study geographic, economic, and other conditions, with exploitation in view, to devise better and more reliable means of oppressing and enslaving Black Africa's downtrodden toiling millions. Of course, there are various tendencies within bourgeois Africanist science, from the most openly reactionary to radical liberalism. But consciously or unconsciously, all this research is conducted in the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie, and objectively serves one and the same goal--the justification of the system of colonial exploitation, one way or another; the improvement of opportunities for the imperialists; and an *increase in the chances* of extraction of surplus-profits.

The founders of Marxism paid little attention to Black Africa, and it could not have been otherwise, since the region gained its special significance for the world revolution only with the flowering of imperialism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The ideologues of the Second International could not avoid Black Africa. The general colonial problem was one of the main questions on which the Second International moved away from revolutionary Marxism to counter-revolutionary opportunism. But how monstrous are their sins regarding questions of the most backward colonies, especially Black Africa. In the resolutions of its various congresses on the colonial question, the Second International confined itself, as a rule, to general radical-liberal phraseology. At the same time, it sometimes included some revolutionary positions, under the influence of its revolutionary left wing. But in the scientific works of its ideologues, of whatever tendency, we find (without exception after the war, and with only the rarest individual exceptions before the war) the purest of bourgeois views. On one side there is open justification of the bourgeoisie's imperialist policy, and on the other, hypocritical liberalism, condemning some forms and methods of imperialism and justifying others. Even the most "revolutionary" of these authors have not gone further than the bourgeois liberals, who approach the problem of the oppressed African peoples from the interests of capitalist civilization, while taking into account--but only in words, and to a certain extent--the interests of these same oppressed masses.

It has thus fallen to orthodox Marxists not only to criticize and revise the existing literature, but to create an absolutely new Marxist science about Black Africa. The task is to restore scientific truth in the place of bourgeois lies and hypocrisy. It is to replace the "truth" of the English, German, and other imperialist predators with the truth of a hundred million oppressed black toilers, allied to the truth of the international proletariat.

One of the basic principles of Leninism on every national-colonial question is the recognition of the right of every nation and ethnic group <sup>b</sup> to *self-determination*.

The question of self-determination was examined at great length by Lenin and his disciples in relation to oppressed peoples who had already been more or less formed into developed nations with their own national bourgeoisies. But Marxist-Leninists have not yet elaborated this question in relation to ethnic groups which are not yet formed into nations. Up to now, the Comintern and its sections have generally paid very little attention to the question of the most backward colonial countries, of the Black African variety. This is true both in the area of the scientific study and theoretical elaboration of the problems, and in the area of the development of concrete programs of practical political work.

The burning problems of China, India, and other colonial countries have fully occupied us, and have confronted the Communist Party with questions which did not brook any delay. But our Marxist-Leninist revolutionary world-view does not acknowledge or permit a hierarchy of colonial countries. Because of factors outside our control we have not yet been able to fulfil our obligations towards these peoples, obligations laid upon us by our communist program. Nevertheless, the program exists, and it is binding on us. In the near future we shall have to do everything we can to fill this gap.

We must do it quickly and unconditionally, because it is in the persons of the colonized peoples of Black Africa, more oppressed and exploited than any others, that we have our potential allies in our struggle against the imperialist system. These most backward and undeveloped peoples, lacking, as a rule, their own more or less developed proletariats, are the most defenseless of the victims of world imperialism. Without enormous educational and organizational work and support from the vanguards of the world proletariat, they will not only be unable to free themselves from the slavery in which they find themselves, but they cannot even begin the real struggle for liberation. The bourgeoisies which are arising or which may arise among some of these peoples are by their very nature agents of imperialism, as we shall see below. They make harmless demands on the imperialists, such as the raising of present colonies to dominion status, or for economic or political concessions to the exploitative leadership of the natives, which are never met.

Our task amounts to the study of the socio-economic problems of contemporary Black Africa. But in order to understand the present, above all we must study the past.

There is a wealth of work before us in the area of the study of the history of Black Africa. Our task is to study and to write for the first time the history of Black Africa, for up until now all "scientific" work on this history was concerned only to justify the conquest by white colonizers. The various authors who have written on this subject can be distinguished only in that some defend British imperialism, others German; some defend this method of conquest and exploitation others that method. But almost without exception all this scientific research is falsified, tendentious, and conducted from the viewpoint of alien oppressors. We not only lack an objective scientific history of Black Africa in general, but there is no objective research on any single aspect of that history. The exceptions can be counted on the fingers of one hand; for example, the work of F.D. Morel\*, who has given us an unvarnished picture of the history of the creation and development of the so-called Congo Free State.

The fact is that when we deal with bourgeois authors, we are dealing not simply with ideologues of imperialism, but with ideologues of this or that specific imperialist country. Its bourgeoisie is the enemy, not only of the natives of its colonies, but of all (or almost all) the other imperialist powers. This is a circumstance which simultaneously complicates and facilitates our work. Of course, it is impossible to rely to any degree on the writings of, say, the English imperialist authors, either on British or on German colonies. But, read with painstaking care, the rich material which they deploy for the exposure of German colonial policy can serve us as a most valuable source.

We can divide the history of Black Africa into three great epochs.

1. The history of Black Africa up to the incursion of the white conquerors.
2. The epoch of capitalist conquest and colonization up to the advent of imperialism.
3. The epoch of imperialism.

The last epoch can be divided into two periods--up to the imperialist World War, and afterwards.

We must begin the study and elaboration of the history of Black Africa not with imperialism, not even with the slave trade, but with the most ancient times. From the epoch before the incursion of the white colonizers the following questions have special significance for us.

\*E.D. Morel, King Leopold's Rule in Africa, London, 1904; the Congo Slave State, Liverpool, 1903; the Future of the Congo, London, 1909; Red Ruler [*sic*], London, 1906 and other works.

- (a) The history and culture of the ancient Negro states, the causes of their rise, heyday, and fall. This is to refute the fables of Negro inferiority and incapacity for culture.
- (b) The history of the migration, intermingling, and wars of different Negro tribes, and between Negroes and other peoples. This is to refute legends about the Negro's racial purity, as well as fables about "racial feelings and racial hatred" and theories which justify the colonial incursions. Special attention should be paid to the history of South Africa, which was falsified by the English to justify their incursion.<sup>d</sup>

From the epoch of capitalist conquest and colonization up to the imperialist period, the following points are especially significant:

- (a) The history of the rise, apogee, and liquidation of the slave trade. It is particularly important to reconstruct the truth regarding these questions, given the existence of a huge body of literature written by the opponents of slavery and the slave trade. They supposedly approached these questions in a spirit of impartial objectivity. In fact, the whole of this literature began from and was finally intoxicated with lying bourgeois hypocrisy. It only obscured the actual material situation of historical facts and events with its lying idealistic humanitarianism.
- (b) The history of the "humane" colonization of Sierra Leone and Liberia, and the unsuccessful experiment of the repatriation of American Negroes.
- (c) The history of resistance by indigenous tribes to the capitalist seizure of their territory, and the history of native riots and uprisings.<sup>e</sup> Bourgeois historians are either silent about this, or else they produce false information and completely distorted ideas.

The struggle of the imperialist powers for Black Africa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is of exceptional interest and importance for revolutionary Marxism for several reasons. Firstly, the Black continent was a single broad territory, which had still not been divided, up to the beginning of the present imperialist epoch.<sup>f</sup> Secondly, almost the whole of this vast area was still in the primitive stages of economic development and, as a result, the ways and means of imperialist competition, conquest, colonization, and exploitation of backward countries appeared in their most naked form in Africa.

The situation of imperialist competition in China, India, and elsewhere was exceedingly complicated. The imperialist powers were not simply confronted there with the straightforward task (for technically advanced societies) of subjugating and exploiting defenseless natives. There they had to compete, and the one that came out on top had in the best conditions to reach an agreement with the reactionary classes of the local society, with the feudal lords and the national bourgeoisie, to convert them into imperialist agents. In the vast majority of cases in

Black Africa, however, the competition is not between three sides--two mutually hostile imperialist powers and a national bourgeoisie--but between two imperialist powers only. For this reason the struggle is more open and direct.

The following questions are especially important on the history of the imperialist division and redivision of the Black continent:

- (a) The rise, development, and intensification of Anglo-Franco-German rivalry in Black Africa.
- (b) The interpretation of authentic facts and figures on the atrocities committed by the imperialists against all the colonised nations<sup>g</sup>; on the true face of "Anglo-French humanism," "German civilization," "Belgian philanthropy," and so on.
- (c) The elucidation of the role of science and religion (churches) in the service of imperialism.
- (d) The construction of the true history of the causes and results of the Anglo-Boer War, and the relationship between the two exploiter nations in South Africa.
- (e) The question of the German colonies before and after the war; the refutation of both English and German lies about "good imperialists."
- (f) The modern history of Liberia and of Abyssinia; the vivid lesson of the mendacity and stupidity of both conciliatory pacifist and reactionary utopian<sup>h</sup> ideas and movements among oppressed colored peoples.
- (g) The after-effects of the changes produced by the World War, in relations between and groupings among the imperialist great powers, in their competitive struggle over Black Africa, and especially in the growing interest of American "global" imperialism in Black Africa.
- (h) The influence of the World War and of the postwar economies of the Russian, Chinese, and other revolutions, on the political development and on the ideology of African Negroes; the postwar development of anti-imperialist liberation movements.<sup>i</sup>

Of the contemporary socio-economic problems of Black Africa, the following are the most important:

1. *The natural resources and economic potential of individual countries and regions*, which define their significance for imperialism, as well as their future role in the development of socialism.
2. *The specific features of the economic development of individual countries and regions.*

The most characteristic feature of the economy of Black Africa is the quite unparalleled mixture of social structures. A multiplicity of economic systems and structures co-exist in the same territory, or in an immediate vicinity, generating very diverse variations and combinations.

In order to investigate these diverse economic structures which we find in Black African countries in the contemporary imperialist epoch, we must acquaint ourselves above all

- (a) with the special features of the native economy in each country, with the pre-capitalist modes of production and social formations encountered by the penetration of capitalism; and
- (b) with the ways and means which were used initially by merchant and industrial capitalism, and nowadays by imperialism, either to destroy or to subordinate to themselves non-capitalist productive and social forms.

Then we must study with special care, to what degree, and in what forms this process of capitalist (imperialist) destruction and subordination is already complete at the present time in each country being studied, and at what rate and in what forms it will continue to develop. (The development of an internal market and money-commodity relations, the destruction of the native commune<sup>j</sup> and the indigenous economy--nomadic, peasant, artisanal, and so on--the class differentiation and pauperization of the native population.)

- 3. The question of *labor power, of the forms and methods of imperialist exploitation of the natives*, has special significance. Of course, these forms and methods change to correspond, on the one hand, to the natural conditions in each locality, and on the other, to the historically complex socio-political relations between conquerors and natives, and also between different segments of these two.

When the capitalists appear in a primitive country where feudalism has not yet developed, they have three possible options.

- (a) the expropriation of the land of the natives, and the capitalist organization of production through the exploitation of the natives' labor power (insofar as the natives volunteer or can successfully be compelled), or the importation of white (or colored) labor power from other countries.
- (b) the extermination of the natives and the importation of labor power.
- (c) the creation of slave management systems and the transformation of the native population into slaves.

However, the European capitalists encountered two difficulties in Black Africa. Firstly, the importation of white workers was impossible in the majority of cases because of climatic and other conditions. It was least possible of all in those countries where the native population maintained and maintains the strongest resistance--namely, in the tropics. Secondly, the penetration of European capitalists into the interior of Black Africa took place in an epoch when the creation of an old-fashioned pure slave management system was already impossible.<sup>k</sup>

Because of these complications the European capitalists created three different combined systems of capitalist exploit-

ation:

- (a) a system of exploitation of forced native labor--of petty producers--of the whole commune or on an individual scale. This was either by direct compulsion or by supposedly "voluntary" contracting together with the simultaneous, regular, but partial annihilation of the native population used as a means of terrorization and compulsion.
  - (b) a system or using slave or semi-slave ("contract") native labor in the capitalist economy in conditions of supranormal exploitation, plus partial annihilation, as above.
  - (c) a system of large-scale transformation of natives into "free" wage workers employed in capitalist enterprises alongside imported labor power, but subject to significantly higher levels of exploitation compared to the white workers.
4. Special attention should be paid to the question of the *specificity of class composition in different regions and among different tribes.*

In this connection, the characteristics of Black Africa are the following:

- (a) the presence of a multiplicity of societies which differ in their class composition. These extend from the classless primitive societies right up to societies showing full\* class differentiation of both black and white populations, not unlike European countries.
- (b) the presence of special types of class groups, distinct from those existing in capitalist and even in other colonial countries. For instance, some tribes comprise an oppressed class of semi-free petty producers or workers, exploited by a class of white exploiters.

At a first cursory glance it is possible to distinguish among the *broad mass* of the native population of Black Africa, the following main class-types:

- (a) native tribes, which constitute a more or less differentiated peasantry, with or without a mercantile bourgeoisie.
- (b) native wage-laborers subject to super-exploitation.
- (c) undifferentiated native tribes, which form a class of semi-enslaved petty producers in relation to the white exploiters.
- (d) undifferentiated native tribes, which form a class of enslaved or semi-enslaved wage workers in relation to the whites.

This schema is, of course, very provisional and incomplete. The process of internal differentiation in native tribes is

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\*Full in the sense that all the classes of European countries are present; but not, of course, in the sense that class differentiation is developed to that degree.

taking place almost everywhere, but, in the majority of cases, at a relatively slow tempo. Because of this, a relatively developed native bourgeoisie already exists in some places, especially, of course, a mercantile bourgeoisie. This is true mainly of South Africa and British West Africa. Finally, Abyssinia and Liberia stand quite alone.

5. The question of *the ethnic and national composition* of the different Black African countries and regions; the question of the economic, political, and social *daily relations between different native tribes* on the one hand and between *whites and natives* on the other. Following on from this, special attention should be paid to the questions of the economic, social, and political *position of the so-called "coloreds"* in South Africa, who are isolated from the whites and from the black natives. Then there are the questions of the *Indian immigrants* to southern and eastern Africa, and of the interrelationship between native heathens, natives who have no religion, native Muhammadans and native Christians.

Of all the economic problems of Black Africa, the question of *the possibility of non-capitalist development*<sup>1</sup> has special significance.

This question appears, in Black African terms, in what we may call a pure form. In the majority of Black African countries it is not a matter of possible transition to socialism from some still feudalistic system (incorporating the more or less numerous elements of an underdeveloped capitalism), without completing capitalist development. (This, let us say, is the case in China and India.) It is, rather, this question: whether a transition to socialism is possible from pre-capitalist--and even primitive--economic systems, *omitting capitalism more or less completely*.

Moreover, in relation to such countries as China, India, and some others we may speak of two perspectives: the possibility of the victory of the perspective of non-capitalist development, alongside the possibility of a (temporary) victory of the capitalist path of development. But in relation to Black Africa these two perspectives do not exist. The development of indigenous capitalism is impossible, as a rule, for the peoples of Black Africa. The development of a capitalist native bourgeoisie is possible only in rare and exceptional cases (in certain parts of southern and west Africa) and then only in the form of a comprador bourgeoisie; for the most important precondition for the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie is the presence of *free* labor. For this reason, at a time when China and India stand at the crossroads between the capitalist and socialist paths of development, the peoples of Black Africa have only this choice. They can either perish under the yoke of imperialism, or they can set out along the path of anti-imperialist revolution, united with the international proletariat. By that very fact, they will be advancing along the path of non-capitalist development,<sup>m</sup> the path of socialism.



"Black Africa" is not a united whole. It includes a multiplicity of different countries, each one of which has its own specific history, its own specific economy, its own specific social relations. Of course, they have much in common. But there is no more in common between South Africa and the Congo or, say, the Congo and Abyssinia, than between the Sudan and Algeria. Hence we must study individually each rough grouping of similar "countries" (understanding by the word "country," not a colonial unit demarcated from others by the imperialist masters, but a country inhabited by a definite tribe). In order to do this, we must first of all group the countries together.

It is clear then that we must begin the study of Black Africa with a study of basic questions on a general scale, with a study I would say, of a *comparative character*.<sup>n</sup>

Before starting a detailed study of the history of individual countries or regions in Black Africa, we must study the history of all the parts of the Dark Continent in parallel.

Before examining the specific socio-economic problems of individual countries or regions, we must investigate and elaborate

1. a comparative economic geography of Black Africa;
2. the distribution of various economic structures and economic systems in Black Africa;
3. the differences in form and method in imperialist exploitation in different countries and localities;
4. the specific importance of individual countries or regions of Black Africa, from the viewpoint of imperialism;
5. the relative importance for the revolution of individual regions.

Only after working out solutions to these general questions will we see clearly how to group Black African countries, a) with a view to detailed research, b) for future revolutionary work, and c) for future socialist construction.

It follows from this that in the first instance, the following themes underlie research and further development.

1. the basic stages in the history of Black Africa;
2. the ethnic and national groups and their interrelationship in Black Africa;
3. economic structures and forms in Black Africa, the history of their development, their current condition, and tendencies in their further development;
4. class differentiation in Black African countries;
5. Black Africa as the object of *competitive* struggle among the imperialist powers:
  - a) Black Africa as a market for the supply of raw materials and for sales, and as a sphere for the investment of capital.
  - b) the clash of imperialist interests in Black Africa.
6. the forms and methods of imperialist oppression and exploitation in Black Africa.
7. liberation movements and organizations of the oppressed

peoples of Black Africa.

After this preliminary work on the elucidation of basic general questions has been completed, it will be possible to start on a detailed elaboration of concrete individual themes. This should proceed along two lines:

1. Research on the same questions already specified, but in relation to individual countries or groups of countries. (For example: "Forms and methods of imperialist exploitation in the French Congo" or "Class differentiation in British West Africa.")
2. Along the line of the breakdown of these common themes into their constituent parts, for example, "Anglo-French rivalry in Black Africa before the Imperialist War" or "German imperialism in Black Africa" (on general theme no. 1); "Capitalism in agriculture in Black Africa" (theme no. 3); "The native bourgeoisie in Black Africa" (theme no. 4); "The workers' movement in Black Africa" (theme no. 7); and so on.

In conclusion I want to point to the close connection between the study of Africa and the study of the Negro question in other countries.

*The study of Africa is exceedingly important and necessary for the resolution of the Negro problems of other countries, for the following reasons:*

- (a) the question of the extent to which we can treat North and South American Negroes as national groups; additionally, the question of the national development of the Negroes of Haiti cannot be resolved without further research into the ethnic origins of Negro slaves.
- (b) in order to overcome the racial pacifism of the toiling masses of the black racial minorities of the two Americas---the utopian belief in the possibility of full racial equality under imperialism---the common *imperialist roots* of contemporary racial oppression in both its forms must be exposed before them.
- (c) in order to refute Negro racial chauvinism (Garvey) it is necessary 1) to study the history of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Abyssinia; 2) to elucidate the distinctive character of the oppression of backward colored colonial peoples, as well as of the oppression of racial minorities in capitalist countries.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that *it is necessary for African Negroes to study the American Negro question.*

- (a) in order to surmount the influence on the toiling masses of the racial pacifism of elements of the emergent bourgeoisie in Black Africa, it is necessary to study the history of the treachery of the American Negro bourgeoisie.
- (b) to overcome the influence of the supra-class racial solidarity of the oppressed African peoples, it is necessary to conduct research into the class differ-

entiation of American Negroes.<sup>o</sup>

Endre Sik

*Translators' Footnotes*

- a. Sik's picture of hordes of bourgeois researchers swarming across Africa in the service of imperialism is an understandable polemical exaggeration, given that he is writing an agenda for a Marxist-Leninist *afrikanistika*. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that "African social studies" in the imperialist countries at the end of the 1920s remained focused largely on ethnographic questions, and were in an extremely underdeveloped condition. "Hundreds" is probably much closer to the mark than "thousands."
- b. There are two difficulties here: the question of the "absolute right" and the definition of the nation. Lenin did not in fact favor an absolute right to self-determination. Sik's sentence and the paragraph following present an extremely unnuanced and offhand version of complex Leninist ideas on the national question. Sik appears to define "ethnic groups" as nations-in-embryo, and leaves unclear in the text as written how the right to self-determination, normally exercised by nations through their practice and consciousness, could be claimed for such groups, or by them. Indeed, such an absolute principle, it might be argued, could even play into the hands of the theorists of tribalism or apartheid, since it lacks an explicit formulation of the crucial elements of class struggle and proletarian line. This would be necessary to situate an adequate discussion of the question of national self-determination.
- c. Although Sik was later to reject racial formulations such as "Black Africa," "white conquerors," and so on (*HBA*, 1: 15-16) he repeatedly employs them in this article, and in *HBA* itself (for instance in the very title). Haywood had accused him as early as 1928 of arguing that blacks were a racial minority (Haywood, *Black Bolshevism*, 262), and there seems to have been some substance to this charge (see our introduction hereto).
- d. The Russian phrase "iuzhnaia Afrika" can refer to southern Africa in general, or to South Africa: it is not clear to us whether Sik has any specific falsification in mind in this passage, or why he regards the colonial historiography of south(ern) Africa as especially mendacious. He may con-

ceivably have had Rhodes' aggression against the Ndebele and its subsequent *apologiae* in mind, or the whole history of Anglo-Boer rivalry.

- e. The question of "resistance historiography" is, of course, currently the subject of controversy. Radical but non-Marxist historians like Terence Ranger and Allen Isaacman have come under attack for their failure to identify the class basis of primary resistance, and have responded vigorously. Sik deserves some credit for having identified this important area of future research. See, *inter alia*, Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa," *JAH*, 9 (1968); J. Depelchin, "Towards a Problematic History of Africa," *Journal of Southern African Affairs* 2 (1977); and Ranger's survey article in A. Triulzi *et al.*, eds. *Storia dell' Africa e del Vicino Oriente* (Florence, 1979).
- f. This is ahistorical nonsense: quite clearly, and this should have been evident to a Marxist historian even in the 1920s, the suppression of Africa's histories by colonialism cannot lead us to accept that those histories are impossible to reconstruct *or to differentiate*.
- g. Sik exhibits some confusion in his concept of "colonised nations." He later on defines "country" as "not a colonial unit...but a country inhabited by a definite tribe." Yet throughout his work, up to and including *HBA*, he deals in fact exclusively with colonially-defined territories. The absence of any clearly defined concept of a social formation, and the confusion of such ideological terminology as "tribe" and "country" with colonial states-in-formation leads him logically to a final position in which "Black Africa" is treated unproblematically as a given object of study.
- h. This is a reference, which would have been immediately understood by Sik's Soviet colleagues in 1929, to the analysis of Garveyism and other nationalist movements contained in section VI(1) of the "Programme" of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern:

"Similarly, Garveyism, at one time the ideology of the American Negro petty bourgeoisie and workers, and still with a certain influence over the Negro masses, today impedes the movement of these masses towards a revolutionary position. While at first advocating complete social equality for Negroes, it turned into a kind of 'Negro Zionism' which instead of fighting American imperialism advanced the slogan 'Back to Africa'. This dangerous ideology, without a single genuinely democratic feature, which toys with the aristocratic attributes of a non-existent 'Negro kingdom', must be vigorously resisted, for it does not promote but hampers the struggle of the Negro masses for liberation from American imperialism." Degras, *Communist International*, 2:519.

- i. This is a very early use of the Russian term "osvoboditel'nye dvizheniia"(liberation movements). The ANC of South Africa (founded 1912) was already referred to as a liberation movement by, for example, Communist Party of South Africa members at this time, although the CPSA itself, and Communist Parties in Sudan and Egypt, for example, would not have been so described.
- j. Sik's use of terminology in this passage again requires comment. The word "obshchina" (commune), chosen rather than such neutral expressions as "derevnia" (village or countryside) or "selo" (village), would have had a certain resonance as we have seen to readers familiar with the debate centering around Marx's famous letter of 1881 to Vera Zasulich.
- k. This section is very curiously argued. Sik seems to be implying that feudalism is impossible in Africa, although he does not produce any evidence. From this he goes on to assert that the introduction of slavery is firstly a "possible option" for colonial policy, then that it was "already impossible." This leaves him with a capitalist mode *per se*, either based on mixed forced labor and migrant labor, or simply forced labor. The whole construct is internally inconsistent, extremely mechanistic, and largely unrelated to available evidence.
- l. The section that follows is of great importance in the development of the theory of the non-capitalist path of development (see Introduction).
- m. This is one of the earliest occurrences of the expression "put' nekapitalisticheskogo razvitiia" (non-capitalist path of development) in the literature, for which see our introduction.
- n. For a Marxist to have written this paragraph is extraordinary. Sik actually *inverts* classical Marxist methodology, which is traditionally formulated as movement from concrete to abstract in investigation, and movement from abstract to concrete in presentation, concrete > abstract > concrete. He confuses Marx's method of *presentation*--in for example *Capital*, which begins with abstract general principles--with his method of *research*, which began with very specific empirical research into British nineteenth-century capitalism. This part of Sik's agenda reads more like John Stuart Mill's method of "agreement and differences" than anything else. In other words, it appears to rest on the assumption that the appropriate concepts will result from comparison of various aspects of the real. It is interesting to note, however, that many published Soviet works on Africa exhibit a similar general theoretical character. For examples, see the bibliographical annotations in Darch, *A Soviet View of Africa, passim*. See also Darch, *East Africana in Russian* (Boston, forthcoming).

- o. Sik is quite correct even today in pointing out that the question of the influence of supra-class black nationalist ideology needs to be investigated. Such concrete examples as the struggle for a class line within FRELIMO in 1968-70, the split by the "Africanists" from the ANC which led to the formation of the PAC, or the abortive Nitista coup in Angola in 1977, all revolved around exactly this problem of the ideological use of "racial" and linguistic solidarity by elements of an emergent bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie to combat potentially revolutionary class analysis.