

WSWS International Editorial Board meeting

Africa and the perspective of international socialism

Part Two

Richard Tyler
27 March 2006

Part 1 | Part 2

Published below is the conclusion of a two-part report on Africa by Richard Tyler to an expanded meeting of the World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board (IEB) held in Sydney from January 22 to 27, 2006. Part one was posted on March 25. Tyler is a WSWS correspondent and a member of the Socialist Equality Party in the UK.

WSWS IEB chairman David North's report was posted on 27 February. SEP (Australia) national secretary Nick Beams' report was posted in three parts: Part one on February 28, Part two on March 1 and Part three on March 2. James Cogan's report on Iraq was posted on March 3. Barry Grey's report was published in two parts: Part one on March 4 and Part two on March 6. Patrick Martin's report was published in two parts: Part one on March 7 and Part two on March 8. John Chan report on China was published in three parts: Part one was posted on March 9, Part two on March 10 and Part three on March 11. Uli Rippert's report on Europe was posted in three parts: Part one on March 13, Part two on March 14 and Part three on March 15. Julie Hyland's report on New Labour in Britain was posted in two parts: Part one on March 16 and Part two on March 17. Bill Van Auken's report on Latin America was posted in two parts: Part one on March 18 and Part two on March 20. David Walsh's report on artistic and cultural issues was posted in two parts: Part one on March 21 and Part two on March 22. Richard Hoffman's report on democratic rights was posted on March 23 and Wije Dias's report on South Asia posted on March 24.

Military engagement in Africa by various great powers has been rising in the more recent past.

I would like to quote briefly from a paper entitled, "External Relations and Africa", drawn up by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), which describes itself as "the Intelligence Community's centre for strategic thinking within the US government" and provides the president and senior policy makers with analyses of foreign policy issues:

"Military engagement has shifted from direct support of proxy regimes or movements during the Cold War to a combination of capacity-building and, especially post-9/11, direct American military involvement in basing areas such as Djibouti."

A section deals with "Future Trends in External Engagement with Africa". Here, couched in the rhetoric of the "war on terror," the authors outline some of the factors leading to increased "military engagement by external powers". One of the prime reasons they cite is "the increasing importance of the oil sector in especially but not exclusively US policy calculations on Africa. Importantly, most of Africa's oil producers are not OPEC members—notably Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo-

Brazzaville and Cameroon."

The US is not the only imperialist power seeking to assert itself militarily in Africa.

In 2000, Britain sent 1,000 troops into Sierra Leone to deal with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), run by Charles Taylor in neighbouring Liberia. The RUF controlled the extraction of diamonds, looting and terrorising the population. Most of these troops have been withdrawn, but Britain still directs things or "advises", as it is euphemistically called.

Similarly in neighbouring Ivory Coast, the French sent in 5,000 troops to deal with a civil war between the largely Christian south and Muslim north. As we meet this week, Ivory Coast has once again witnessed an outbreak of internecine violence.

China is also increasingly involved in African military affairs. It sold an estimated \$1 billion worth of arms to Ethiopia and Eritrea during their border conflict between 1998 and 2000. It has also sold arms to Sudan, helicopters to Mali and Angola, and military materiel to Namibia, Sierra Leone and Mozambique.

Although still on a relatively small scale, via various UN missions, China has stationed more than 1,500 troops across the continent, primarily in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia.

Another country with significant Chinese involvement is Zimbabwe, the only African regime that has proved somewhat less amenable to Western free-market demands. But the actions of the regime of President Robert Mugabe also demonstrate the complete bankruptcy of nationalism. After following IMF directives and collaborating with the West since taking power in 1979, the Zimbabwe government faced a deepening economic crisis in the late 1990s. In order to out-manoeuvre the Western-backed opposition, Mugabe organised land seizures and drove out some of the white farmers. Tobacco production on these farms—Zimbabwe's main export—has since virtually disintegrated.

Mugabe promised a national revival of the economy based on indigenous agriculture. But with Western banks and investors withdrawing support and run-away inflation there was no money to provide the seeds, fertilisers and expertise for the new farmers. As a result, more than half the population now face starvation and the economy is on the brink of collapse.

An article on the web site of the US-based Council on Foreign Relations, which publishes *Foreign Affairs*, outlines China's close relationship with Zimbabwe:

"China is the principal supporter of the Mugabe regime, which is reviled in the international community for Mugabe's ruthless crushing of the opposition and his most recent removal of hundreds of thousands of city residents to the rural areas, with no respect for life, health, or satisfactory

alternative arrangements. China is investing in minerals, roads and farming, and supplying Mugabe with jets and other armaments. ‘Zimbabwe is all but owned by China,’ say some observers. ‘In return for a rare hand of friendship in an increasingly hostile world, Mugabe has offered Chinese companies almost anything they want, regardless of payback’” (http://www.cfr.org/publication/8436/chinas_rising_role_in_africa.html - _edn7).

The dead end of Pan-Africanism

In the period after World War II, there was a build up of working class organisation and massive strike struggles. This was part of an international revolutionary wave in the immediate post-war years, which swept through India, China, and whole parts of Europe. By that time, there were some huge concentrations of workers in Africa, especially in mining, and there was a series of big strike battles. Thousands of miners in South Africa organised themselves against the British mine owners. In the Congo, up to a million miners worked in the copper and diamond mines, and it was also where uranium for the atomic bomb was mined.

Many such movements were brutally suppressed, but it was also recognised in London and Paris that political mechanisms had to be found to keep this movement under control. The British government worked with the Trade Union Congress to send conservative trade union leaders to its colonies to show Africans how to set up collective bargaining arrangements and all the other bureaucratic mechanisms to police the working class. And the very small nationalist organisations—virtually non-existent in the French colonies—were encouraged to come to the head of the mass opposition movements.

A British Foreign Office document at the time pointed out: “Pan-Africanism, in itself, is not necessarily a force that we need regard with suspicion and fear. On the contrary, if we can avoid alienating it and guide it on lines generally sympathetic to the free world, it may well prove in the longer term a strong, indigenous barrier to the penetration of Africa by the Soviet Union.”

Kwame Nkrumah was the first Pan-African leader to be put in power in Ghana in 1957. His journey from prison cell to government was a pattern that was to be followed in most of the British and French colonies in Africa, as London and Paris sought to maintain their power through a system of indirect rule.

For all their declarations of unity, the Pan-Africanists accepted the division of the continent into more than 50 states, accepting borders drawn up by the colonialists. These borders were completely irrational from any geographical standpoint—or even drawn on the reactionary basis of ethnic homogeneity, which has now been seized on by separatist movements—and were manipulated to facilitate imperialist intrigues.

The real threat to the continuing imperialist domination of Africa was that the movement of the working class in the post-war period could get out of control and overthrow capitalist property relations. Here, Stalinism played an invidious role, giving support to bourgeois nationalism and betraying the socialist revolution in Africa as it did elsewhere.

George Padmore, the principal theoretician behind Nkrumah and the British Pan Africanists, had been an international leader of the Communist Party and a devoted supporter of Stalin. His job in Moscow in the early 1930s was to serve on a special committee investigating the Chinese Communist Party to root out “Trotskyists” and oppositionists to the Stalinist line. This was after the Stalin leadership had betrayed the 1927 Chinese revolution by completely subordinating the Communist Party there to the nationalist Kuomintang, a betrayal in which thousands of

Communists were murdered by the nationalist forces.

Padmore only broke from the Communist Party in the later 1930s when it became clear that Stalin had no real interest in the nationalist movements in Africa or anywhere else, except as pawns in the deals he was trying to make with imperialism. But Padmore’s ideas remained those he learnt under Stalin—that there would first be a national democratic revolution and that socialism would only come at some unspecified future date.

The representatives of the newly independent African states met in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in May 1963 to found the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Under the OAU charter, African unity was to be secured by accepting the absolute inviolability of the political borders drawn up by the previous colonial masters!

The professions of unity did not prove of lasting value. The economic crisis that gripped Africa in the 1970s also heralded a wave of bitter armed conflicts, within and between numbers of African states. As William Keylor pointed out:

“Two of these confrontations, the civil war in Chad and the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria over the former Spanish Sahara, reduced to a shambles the Pan-African ideal of the sanctity of frontiers and the sovereignty of postcolonial states” (*The Twentieth Century World—An international history*, p. 419).

The OAU was wound up in 2002 and replaced by the African Union. The new organisation professed many of the same Pan-Africanist aims of its predecessor, including the “accelerated socio-economic integration of the continent” and defence of the “sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States”.

However, the African Union has signed up to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) economic platform, promoting the full integration of Africa into the world capitalist economy. Supported by the G8 powers, it forms a convenient lever to use on behalf of the major corporations in what is a continuous trade war designed to open up the continent’s markets.

Conclusion

A balance sheet of Africa’s almost 50-year experiment with programmes based on various forms of nationalism can now be drawn.

Far from the national bourgeoisie and various petty bourgeois national movements offering a way out of the poverty and misery confronting millions of Africans, they have acted to suppress the development of a genuine struggle for social and political emancipation and have ensured that Africa remains in thrall to the international banks and corporations.

The nation-states over which they have presided did not and do not provide a viable means of securing the interests of the African masses, given the continued domination of the continent by imperialism.

While for a brief period, they were able to lean on the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its policy of economic autarky exposed the real relations between the African bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers.

The local elites have mostly dropped their radical nationalist rhetoric, and now vie to secure direct links to one or other of the imperialist powers as a means of ensuring their own privileged existence.

Imperialist domination of the globe fuels class antagonisms in the underdeveloped countries of Africa. Precisely because the penetration of the transnational corporations has spurred the development of the proletariat, the opposition of the national bourgeoisie in Africa to imperialism has always been conditional and entirely secondary to the necessity of suppressing an independent movement of the working class that might

threaten its own survival. The goal of the national bourgeoisie is limited to seeking a better arrangement with the imperialist powers, allowing it a greater share in the exploitation of the workers and peasants.

At the start of our discussions at this International Editorial Board meeting, the question was posed: could a future Africa witness the sort of rapid capitalist economic expansion now in progress in China?

What is clear is that a new “scramble for Africa” is already underway, with the former colonial powers such as Britain and France seeking to reassert their interests, while America is also intervening aggressively. Added to this already potentially explosive mixture is the growing penetration of Africa by China, which is seeking both to secure its own access to critical raw materials, particularly oil, and to establish vast new markets for its goods.

This renewed involvement in Africa is not for the benefit of millions of African workers and peasants, but at their expense.

Moreover, the vast continent is once again becoming a battleground, where rival corporations, imperialist powers, their local representatives and military forces collide in ever more bloody conflicts.

The struggle to end the imperialist domination of Africa and overcome its bitter legacy must be led by the working class, in alliance with the peasantry, in a revolutionary struggle for power.

However, the survival of proletarian power in one or more of the underdeveloped countries and the necessary construction of socialism is unthinkable without a common struggle with the working class in the advanced countries to overthrow imperialism in its heartlands, and above all the United States.

Nowhere is the internationalist perspective advanced by the Fourth International as urgent and necessary as in Africa.

Concluded



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact