# Hakim Adi's "Pan-Africanism and Communism": A pro-Stalinist attempt to erase the Trotskyist alternative — Part One

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**2 November 2026**

*This is the first part of a 10-part series responding to British-based historian Hakim Adi's recently republished book, Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa, and the Diaspora, 1919–1939.*

Across Africa, a new generation is entering into mass struggle against the political order inherited from decolonisation. In Mozambique, the Liberation Front (FRELIMO), once committed to "Marxism-Leninism", violently suppressed the 2024–25 protests, leaving more than 400 people dead. In Tanzania, the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), heir to Julius Nyerere's "African socialism", responded to the 2025 uprising with a brutal crackdown that claimed the lives of 3,000 protestors. In Kenya, the state founded by Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first President and a central figure in the Pan-African movement, saw Gen Z protests against International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed austerity erupt into a mass revolt against the entire post-independence state. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), in alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP), presides over more social inequality than under Apartheid, regularly repressing striking workers and inciting xenophobia to divide the working class.

These are the historical consequences of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist movements that, in one form or another, embraced Pan-Africanism and promised that "independence" based on capitalism and the borders imposed by colonialism would end imperialist domination and social oppression. Many also proclaimed their allegiance to socialism, "Marxism-Leninism" or "African socialism". Half a century later, workers and rural masses continue to face the brutalities of impoverishment, imperialist war and dictatorship.

As mass struggles erupt against Africa's bourgeois nationalist governments, Professor Hakim Adi has republished his intellectually dishonest book, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa, and the Diaspora, 1919–1939*.

First published in 2013, the book examines a relatively neglected chapter in the history of the international socialist movement: the Communist International's intervention among Africans and people of African descent in the two decades following the October Revolution. It traces the Comintern's policy on the "Negro Question", its efforts to organise black workers across national boundaries and to advance a socialist perspective among the millions of workers and rural masses awakened to political struggle by the First World War and the brutal realities of colonial oppression. It assembles considerable documentary material on the organisations, conferences and personalities through which African, Caribbean and African American revolutionaries were drawn to Bolshevism.

But Adi's book is an exercise in Stalinist historical falsification. He turns the history of the Communist International into a grotesque caricature to lend revolutionary credentials to Pan-Africanism, a petty-bourgeois nationalist ideology whose common premise is that Africans and people of African descent share fundamental racial and cultural interests transcending class divisions. The Comintern's perspective, his central thesis claims, was "essentially Pan-Africanist".

To support his thesis, Adi falsifies the Comintern's history. He presents the revolutionary International of 1919, founded by Lenin and Trotsky, and the Stalinised Comintern dissolved in 1943, as one. Stalin is portrayed as Lenin's legitimate heir and successor. The epochal struggle between Trotskyism—which defended the strategy of world socialist revolution and upheld the political independence of the working class from the national bourgeoisie—and Stalinism—which subordinated the communist movement to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and alliances with bourgeois nationalist forces—disappears. Adi wipes from the historical record the conflict between these two irreconcilable programmes that determined the fate of the Communist International and the international working class in the 20th century.

The erasure is systematic. In more than 400 pages devoted to the years 1919 to 1939, Trotsky—who, alongside Lenin, was the principal leader of the October Revolution, drafter of the founding manifesto of the Communist International, and central figure in its first four congresses—is mentioned only three times, all in passing. Adi cites not a single work by Trotsky. The Left Opposition and the Fourth International, founded in 1938 to defend Bolshevism's revolutionary heritage and program, are excluded entirely.

No less revealing is the virtual disappearance of Joseph Stalin, the butcher of the October Revolution. He is mentioned only four times and even then, chiefly to minimise his malign influence. The doctrine of "socialism in one country"—the central political dogma of the Stalinist Comintern from the mid-1920s and of the Soviet bureaucracy until its self-dissolution in 1991, and a doctrine opposed from the outset by Trotsky and the Left Opposition—is never examined. The result is a defence of Stalinism without Stalin.

Adi's treatment of the Stalinist terror of the 1930s is a form of apologetics. The murder of the Comintern's own cadres is dismissed as an aside in the foreword to the second edition, where (as we will show), he justifies the terror only to claim that it falls outside the scope of his study. Sixteen of the revolutionaries who appear in his book, several widely cited and discussed, were victims of the terror, murdered or left to die in Stalin's concentration camps on the orders of the bureaucracy whose policies Adi presents as a legitimate expression of the Comintern's work.

How can a professional historian produce such a book? Adi is no marginal figure. A prominent historian of Africa and the African diaspora, his publications include *West Africans in Britain, 1900–1960* (1998), *Pan-Africanism: A History* (2018), and *African and Caribbean People in*

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*Britain: A History* (2022), shortlisted for the 2023 Wolfson History Prize. In 2015, he became the first historian of African heritage appointed to a history professorship in Britain. He spent ten years researching the book, drawing on more than a dozen major libraries and archives across Russia, Britain, France and the United States, with support from the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust.

*Pan-Africanism and Communism* represents a variant of what David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, identified in the early 1990s as the "Post-Soviet School of Historical Falsification." This academic trend emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was widely proclaimed as the final discrediting of socialism. Its central political argument was that no revolutionary alternative to Stalinism existed and that the crimes and collapse of the Soviet bureaucracy proved the socialist project bankrupt. Trotsky and the Left Opposition's historical struggle against Stalinism, a powerful refutation of the "end of socialism" thesis, was therefore attacked or dismissed. Ian Thatcher, Geoffrey Swain, and Robert Service, all key figures in this school, wrote biographies of Trotsky that sought to falsify and discredit his historic role. Their distortions were subjected to a detailed critique in North's book *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*.

Adi employs a different method. He makes no attempt to refute Trotsky's ideas; he simply eliminates them from the historical narrative. It is the literary equivalent of Stalin's practice of excising Trotsky from photographs of the October Revolution.

Adi's book was not written merely for the complacent and privileged layers of the black middle class in Britain, Europe and America, for whom the study of Pan-Africanism and black studies has become a means of securing academic appointments, scholarships, research grants and professional advancement within capitalism. Its significance extends beyond this privileged milieu.

Across Africa, workers and young people are being radicalised. In seeking an alternative, they will inevitably turn to the great struggles of the twentieth century, above all the October Revolution of 1917 and the founding of the Communist International.

In this process, they will encounter Adi's book, with its pretensions to historical authority. But instead of explaining the revolutionary programme of the early Comintern and its subsequent destruction by Stalinism, Adi's falsified history seeks to disarm a new generation, especially in Africa, who are seeking a socialist orientation. He directs them back to the very bourgeois nationalist politics whose catastrophic consequences they now face.

Adi outlined his claims for Pan-Africanism in 2018, as follows:

"Pan-Africanism – the striving for unity and liberation of Africa and Africans – still has some relevance because many consider that Africa and Africans are still not completely free or united. To put it another way, the consequences of enslavement, colonialism and its legacies, a capital-centred world, and imperialism are as relevant today as they were in 1897 when Henry Sylvester Williams and Alice Kinloch formed the African Association in London. Colonial rule, as it existed at the dawn of the twentieth century, has been eliminated in much of Africa and most of the Caribbean. Nevertheless, many still feel the need for all those of African descent to unite, to speak and act as one in order to change the world in the interests of Africa and all of those of African heritage. […] History suggests therefore that Pan-Africanism has been not so much a dream, or simply a vision, but a many faceted approach designed to address common problems faced by Africa and Africans."[1]

By drawing a direct comparison with 1897, Adi seeks to gloss over the national bourgeoisie's failure, over more than a century, to overcome imperialist domination and oppression. The Pan Africanism he holds up as the solution, is the same perspective long advanced by the fathers of "independence". Who today most loudly professes allegiance to Pan-Africanism? None other than the African bourgeoisie.

Kenya's Ruto proclaims his commitment to "trade-driven Pan-Africanism". South African President Cyril Ramaphosa declares: "Pan-Africanism is not only a political philosophy. It is a driver of economic progress. It is the foundation of our shared prosperity." Rwanda's dictator Paul Kagame insists that "our respective national identities" do not stand "in contradiction to Pan-Africanism", while Uganda's Yoweri Museveni identifies "patriotism and Pan-Africanism" as guiding principles of his ruling National Resistance Movement, alongside a programme of "emancipating the private sector and encouraging it to be the basic creator of wealth in the economy".

Adi's historical falsifications have contemporary political implications, as evident in an interview on *BreakThrough News* on October 5, 2026. He credits the Comintern with introducing the organisation of workers and farmers and the need for the forcible overthrow of colonialism, before declaring: "The communist movement brought this perspective to Pan-Africanism". Adi points to its influence on the liberation struggles in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, invoking Amílcar Cabral, Nelson Mandela, and Walter Sisulu as evidence.

Here, the political utility of Stalinism for Adi's Pan-Africanist perspective becomes clear. Stalinism retained the language of Marxism, socialism, revolution, and anti-imperialism while repudiating Bolshevism's internationalist programme. Its two-stage theory subordinated the working class and the struggle for socialist revolution to a supposed first stage of national liberation, requiring the workers and oppressed masses to submit to the leadership of the national bourgeoisie.

After the Second World War, this gave emerging African nationalist movements a ready-made justification for postponing socialism indefinitely in favour of national independence and economic development under bourgeois leadership. Nationalisation and state planning could be proclaimed as "African socialism" while political power remained in the hands of nationalist elites and the subordination of African economies to imperialism continued. Stalinism thus furnished bourgeois nationalism with revolutionary credentials, allowing movements committed to preserving capitalist relations to claim the mantle of Marxism and the October Revolution. This historical role makes Stalinism useful today for Adi's efforts to present Pan-Africanism as a continuation of the revolutionary communist tradition.

When asked how the struggle for African unity is being waged today, Adi answers, pathetically, "I think the best example of modern Pan-Africanism would be something like the reparations movement." Adi burnishes the credentials of a movement led by the African and Caribbean bourgeoisie, who appeal to the imperialist powers for compensation for slavery and colonialism, to line their own pockets as they brutally enforce IMF austerity and service imperialism. Absent from his account is any reference to the Gen Z movement in Kenya, Madagascar and Morocco, or the mass protests against FRELIMO in Mozambique, or the bloody repression of demonstrators by the CCM government in Tanzania.

Adi's *Breakthrough News* interview reveals the contemporary political content of his history of the Communist International. The revolutionary struggle for the independent political mobilisation of the working class is subsumed under the broader class-indeterminate banner of Pan-Africanism. He removes the fundamental antagonism between the African working class and the national bourgeoisie, while the institutions of the existing capitalist states remain central to his conception of African unity.

This review will show that Adi's account cannot withstand serious scrutiny of the historical record. Recovering that history is essential to the struggle for an independent socialist perspective for the African working class.

*To be continued.*

Hakim Adi, Pan-Africanism: A History (2018), pp. 221-224.

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[1] Hakim Adi, Pan-Africanism: A History (2018), pp. 221-224.

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