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

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5 November 2026

[Part One] [Part Two] [Part Three]

This is the fourth 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.

> because of the offensive of all the big powers against Soviet Russia, which was in 1920 still defending itself against foreign invasion, there was a need to unite all the anti-imperialist and national liberation movements with the Soviet Union against imperialist powers. The importance and the nature of this struggle meant that the Comintern would even work with 'bourgeois nationalists' in the colonies.[2]

Part 4: Lenin and the colonial bourgeoisie

Adi's falsification of the early Comintern's programme extends to his treatment of Lenin's position on the national bourgeoisie.

He devotes considerable attention to Lenin's *Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* presented at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920. Adi notes Lenin's insistence that the Comintern pay particular attention to those "people oppressed through colonial dependence," who constituted "70 percent of the world's population," and quotes Lenin's warning that "without the control of the vast fields of exploitation in the colonies" the European capitalist powers could not maintain their existence. Lenin therefore advocated, Adi explains, "a united struggle between the workers in the advanced capitalist countries and the oppressed people in the colonial and dependent countries against the common enemy—imperialism."[1]

But Adi summarises the tactical implications of this policy in the following terms:

However, in his preliminary theses Lenin insisted that while the Comintern could enter into a "temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy" in the colonial and backward countries, it "should not merge with it," and must "under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form." Lenin insisted there be "a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class."[3]

In the Second Congress of the Comintern, Lenin submitted the *Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions* (1920), which Adi does not cite, where he noted there had already developed "a certain rapprochement between the bourgeoisie of the exploiting countries and that of the colonies," so that "very often—perhaps even in most cases—the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries," despite supporting national movements, was "in full accord with the imperialist bourgeoisie," joining forces with it "against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes."[4] Lenin explained that the

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bourgeoisie of an oppressed country did not become a revolutionary force simply because it clashed with imperialism.

For Lenin, temporary tactical collaboration against imperialism did not mean political subordination to the national bourgeoisie. The working class had to champion every genuine struggle against colonial oppression while simultaneously fighting to establish its own leadership over the oppressed masses. This linked the early Communist International's colonial policy directly to the strategic lessons of October and Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. In Russia, the Bolsheviks had rejected the Menshevik demand that the working class subordinate itself to a supposedly progressive bourgeoisie in the democratic revolution. The same fundamental class problem reappeared throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world.

The historical significance of Lenin's formulation lies precisely in this distinction. The issue was never whether Communists could enter temporary practical agreements with bourgeois nationalist movements against imperialism, but whether the working class would surrender its political independence and leadership to them.

Adi reduces Lenin's position to a willingness to cooperate with bourgeois nationalists, suppressing the very warnings that distinguished the early Comintern's revolutionary policy from the class-collaborationist perspective later advanced by the Stalinised Comintern.

Adi's first chapter establishes the method that runs through the book. Trotsky and Permanent Revolution are torn from the history of the early Comintern. The Comintern's early proletarian internationalism is recast as Pan-Africanism, and Lenin's insistence on the political independence of the working class is falsified as a willingness to work with bourgeois nationalists.

This allows Adi to move seamlessly from the revolutionary Comintern of Lenin and Trotsky to the Stalinised International of the late 1920s, as though no fundamental political break had occurred. The decisive question as to what happened to the strategy of world socialist revolution after the first four congresses is never addressed.

To be continued

Op cit., p. 15.

Op cit., p. 15-16.

V. I. Lenin, "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International" (1920). Available at Marxists Internet Archive. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm

V I. Lenin, "Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions". Available at Marxists Internet Archive: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm

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[1] Op cit., p. 15.

[2] Op cit., p. 15-16.

[3] V. I. Lenin, "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International" (1920). Available at Marxists Internet Archive. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm

[4] V I. Lenin, "Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions". Available at Marxists Internet Archive: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm



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