Hakim Adi’s “Pan-Africanism and Communism”: A pro-Stalinist attempt to erase the Trotskyist alternative — Part Eleven

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This is the eleventh and concluding part of a 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.

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Against the Post-Soviet School of Falsification: Recovering the Trotskyist Alternative

Hakim Adi's dishonest *Pan-Africanism and Communism* is part of a broader trend in contemporary academic writing that selectively appropriates socialism to give revolutionary credentials to Pan-Africanism, post-independence states, and petty-bourgeois nationalist movements on the continent.

In his epilogue, Adi declares that the Comintern's approach to the Negro Question had 'a lasting impact not least on the wider Pan-African movement'. He identifies the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress as a major expression of this influence, citing its focus on the 'masses' as the driving force of the anti-colonial struggle. He notes that its participants included George Padmore, I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, Jomo Kenyatta and others formerly associated with the Comintern and its International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW).[1]

But what did the Fifth Pan Afican Congress held in Manchester produce? Organised principally by Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah, with W. E. B. Du Bois presiding, it brought together trade unionists, anti-colonial activists, and future leaders of independent African states. Its declarations demanded an end to colonial rule and called upon workers and peasants to organise through strikes and boycotts. Among its participants were Nkrumah, subsequently Ghana's first president; Kenyatta, Kenya's first president; and Hastings Banda, who established an authoritarian regime in Malawi.

The ascendancy of Pan-Africanism within the anti-colonial movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s took place under definite historical conditions. The international working class had suffered devastating defeats through fascism and Stalinist counterrevolution, while its established organisations in the imperialist centres remained under the political domination of reformist and Stalinist bureaucracies. The postwar economic boom had provided the basis for a period of relative capitalist stabilisation, reinforcing the grip of these bureaucracies over the working class. The revolutionary traditions of the early Communist International had been suppressed, and the Fourth International confronted the immense political consequences of Stalinism's destruction of revolutionary leadership.

Under these conditions, bourgeois nationalist movements were able to present formal independence and state-directed capitalist development as the culmination of the struggle against imperialism. Within two decades, these figures had assumed political power. Nkrumah pursued state-led economic development under the banner of “African Socialism”, Kenyatta became a darling of the West as he looted the country, while Banda established a brutal dictatorship. None overcame the domination of imperialism.

Yet Adi's falsification of the Comintern reflects a broader rehabilitation of the political traditions that dominated Africa following formal independence.

In *Socialist De-Colony: Black and Soviet Entanglements in Ghana's Cold War* (2025), Nana Osei-Opare presents Nkrumah's Ghana as a socialist state and seeks to establish the Leninist credentials of its capitalist economic programme. Osei-Opare argues that Nkrumah's encouragement of foreign investment and private enterprise followed the precedent of Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) of the early 1920s. But the NEP was a tactical retreat carried out by the workers' state established through the October Revolution. Nkrumah's policies were pursued by a bourgeois nationalist government that preserved capitalist property relations. Osei-Opare uses the Bolsheviks’ temporary concessions to capitalism under proletarian rule to theoretically justify capitalist development under bourgeois nationalist leadership.

Adam Mayer carries this rehabilitation of nationalism and Stalinism into the domain of military rule. His *Military Marxism: Africa's Contribution to Revolutionary Theory, 1957–2023* (2025) argues that bourgeois military-led regimes across the continent are a distinctively African contribution to Marxist revolutionary theory. Mayer constructs a historical lineage from Nkrumah's writings on guerrilla warfare and the nationalist movements of the 1960s to the self-proclaimed “Marxist-Leninist” military dictatorships of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia and Siad Barre in Somalia, alongside the military-led government of Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso. Military Marxism, he claims, is the very “backbone” of Africa's socialist tradition. He argues that those seeking revolutionary change must abandon what he calls their “formalistic frames of mind when it comes to democracy.”

Such falsifications occur amid the resurgence of military coups in West Africa, with the juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger having exploited widespread hostility to French imperialism and the corrupt, pro-imperialist regimes they overthrew. Their anti-imperialist rhetoric,

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denunciations of Western domination, and invocations of Thomas Sankara have generated considerable illusions among workers and youth, who see these military officers as champions of African national liberation and social transformation.

Mayer intervenes directly in this political climate. He hails the emergence of “popular military governments,” describes junta-ruled Niger as “revolutionary Niger,” and insists that these movements possess a “genuine Marxist theory” and an intellectual tradition rooted in Africa's anti-colonial struggles. He declares that “armies also represent working-class agency,” arguing that military forces can represent the interests of workers and peasants. Mayer appropriates Marxism to confer revolutionary credentials on bourgeois military rule.

This revisionism is not confined to Africa. In Britain, the US and other imperialist countries, it forms part of a decades-long ideological offensive against Marxism, in which the centrality of class struggle has been displaced by racial, ethnic and other forms of identity. Such conceptions serve to divide the working class and provide ideological prop for imperialism, while privileged layers of the middle class present themselves as representatives of the oppressed.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not signify the failure of Marxism. It was the culmination of the nationalist and counterrevolutionary programme of Stalinism, vindicating Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state. Trotsky insisted that the working class could save the gains of October only through a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy and extend the 1917 socialist revolution internationally. Without this, the Soviet Union would regress to capitalism. The Stalinist bureaucracy's 1991 restoration of capitalism confirmed Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution: the socialist revolution could not be completed within the USSR under the nationalist program of “socialism in a single country”. As new generations enter struggle across Africa, we must return to Trotsky’s struggle to recover the only theoretical and political framework capable of explaining the twentieth century's victories and defeats, and arming the working class for the struggles of the twenty-first.

The Fourth International, founded by Trotsky in 1938, and represented today by the International Committee of the Fourth International, remains the sole embodiment of this programme — based on the fight against Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism, and the perspective of world socialist revolution — is the indispensable foundation of revolutionary struggle in the 21st century.

But the conditions facing the African working class are not those of the early 1960s. Decades of capitalist development, urbanisation and the global integration of production have created a powerful, youthful proletariat across the continent, tied through countless economic and social connections to workers in the imperialist centres. Africa's mines, factories, ports, transport networks and agricultural industries form part of an international system of production dominated by the same banks, corporations and financial institutions that exploit workers throughout the world.

The deepening crisis of world capitalism is bringing these objective connections increasingly into the open. Across Africa, workers and youth are entering into struggle against austerity, unemployment, dictatorship and imperialist domination. In Europe, too, strikes, demonstrations and mass protests are developing against declining living standards, cuts on public services, militarism and war. These struggles are unfolding alongside one another on an unprecedented international scale.

Africa is simultaneously becoming a central arena in the intensifying struggle for the redivision of the world. The US and European imperialist powers, confronting the expanding economic influence of China, are competing for control over the continent's resources, markets, transport corridors and military positions. Africa's immense reserves of oil, gas, cobalt, copper, lithium and other critical minerals are indispensable to global industrial production and the expanding war industries. The growing struggle over access to these resources threatens to draw the continent ever more deeply into the military and geopolitical conflicts between the major powers.

There is no programme of national capitalist development, no alliance with one or another imperialist power, and no scheme for a united capitalist Africa that can resolve this crisis. The African bourgeoisie, bound to international finance capital is incapable of carrying through the struggle for genuine liberation from imperialism.

The alternative is the Trotskyist perspective of the United Socialist States of Africa, as an integral part of the world socialist revolution. This requires the independent mobilisation of the working class, drawing behind it the oppressed rural masses, the overthrow of capitalist rule, and the revolutionary unification of the continent across the borders imposed by colonialism. The banks, mines, plantations and major industries must be placed under democratic workers' control so that Africa's immense resources can be directed towards meeting social needs rather than enriching the corporations and ruling elites.

Such a transformation cannot be achieved within the confines of Africa alone. The struggle for socialism on the continent must be united with that of workers in Europe, the United States and throughout the world. This is the essential content of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which rejected the Stalinist subordination of the working class to the national bourgeoisie and insisted that the struggle for democratic and national liberation was inseparable from the fight for workers' power and international socialist revolution.

The decisive task is therefore the revival of revolutionary Marxism in Africa. This demands a conscious reckoning with the crimes and betrayals of Stalinism, the recovery of the revolutionary heritage of the October Revolution and the early Communist International, and the assimilation of the historical and political lessons of the struggle waged by Trotsky and the Fourth International against Stalinism, reformism and bourgeois nationalism. On this foundation, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International must be built throughout Africa, as part of the struggle to construct a world.

Concluded.

Op. cit., p. 404.

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[1] Op. cit., p. 404.

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