REFORMISM, POPULISM AND PROLETARIANISM IN URBAN AFRICA

by

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In a paper in 1975 on political consciousness in urban Africa, my first sentence read as follows:

> *Within Africa today, two groups, with irreconciliable differences, confront each other: the rich and the poor.*[1]

It is a statement which can be made about most of the world, even of those countries which are said to be socialist, although perhaps not of those which have opted (for the present for a radical socialist structure and orientation. It is also, in a significant and real manner, a condition which appears to be timeless. It is therefore not a new human condition. Yet, surely, it is also a condition which can be altered; to eliminate oppression and exploitation. Thus the industrial-based welfare state has attempted to diffuse some of these irreconcilable (economic) differences by legislation which offers some (if small) measure of protection for the poor. But the circumstances in the low income countries are rather different. In the first case, we can only understand what is going on in thes countries, which contain the greater part of the world's population, if we ask a critical question but in a historical frame of reference: why are these countries so poor and, in our own ethnocentric and materialistic terms, so "underdeveloped"? We can supply an answer in purely racial terms, or allow historical analysis to give us insight. We can say that the people of the poor nations are both poor and underdeveloped because they lack initiative, ability, and the "Will to be Modern" and that they are trapped in a procrustean primordiality. A less racial explanation might be offered by some liberals who concede that while the poor nations are the victims of an evolutionary process which has shunted them aside, this hardly absolves them from blame for the circumstances which make them poor. They do not accept, we are told all too frequently, the idea of progres of achievement, and of motivation. They are culture bound and they lack the ability to "take off".

I do not think this to be a journalistic formulation. A closer look at the ideological underpinning of international relations (between rich and the poor worlds) reveals, in my view, a neo-Victorian perception of the peoples of Africa, Asia

and Latin America. The global class system, while rather more complex today then in the heyday of colonialism, divides the world not only between the rich and the poor, but also between the masters and the servants, the powerful and the disadvantaged, the technologically superior and the so-called primitive, and leaders and those (still) to be led. In Canada we speak of the "two solitudes" (the French-English confrontation), an apt formulation which can also be used to characterize the unequal relations between the industrial/rich world and the (primarily) subsistence poor world. But let us not labour this obvious class division.

Poverty has historical roots - conditions and circumstances which present themselves with obvious and clear objectivity. Africa is poor for many reasons, a primary reason being that the continent was and is exploited both in terms of natural resources and in human ability and contained aspirations. The roots of these circumstances are deeply embedded in the history of a small part of the world, that which is known as the industrial western world. In order to understand this we must go back to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when an economic and political system was taking root which came to be known as capitalism. Why is this a necessary point of departure?

Rather than define what capitalism was or is, its early forms of primitive accumulation, its later forms of imperialism, and its present multinational structure, let us briefly enumerate the world wide *processes* which capitalism has generated and the unity of structure it has succeeded in creating - and is still in the process of creating.

Capitalism as an international system, the first widespread economic system in world history and now of respectable vintage (some 500 years at least), destroyed or transformed a myriad of local economies and political structures, established new forms of trade and marketing and encouraged migration of labour and capital. In doing so the *autonomy* of local economies and polities largely disintegrated being replaced by various forms of dependence and domination under the progressive hegemonic rule of various western powers themselves frequently in conflict over the problems associated with attempts to create their own version of an international capitalist structure. However, capitalism from its earliest times continued to coexist with non-capitalist and peripheral capitalist modes of production both at the local, regional and national levels. The evolution of capitalism, paradoxically, attempted both to overcome this *unevenness* of its spread while at the same time it deliberately continued its selective operations all over the world. Thus it has frequently been argued that the unevenness

of the spread of capitalism was and is an essential and necessary feature of its internal dynamic.

> *By drawing the countries economically closer to one another and levelling out their stages of development, capitalism operates by methods of its own, that is to say, by anarchistic methods which constantly undermine its own work, set one country against another, and one brand of industry against another, developing some parts of the world economy while hampering and throwing back the development of others.*

Imperialism in particular operated

> *by such antagonistic methods, such tiger-leaps and such raids upon backward countries and areas that the unification and levelling of world economy [was upset by it] even more violently and convulsively than in the preceding epochs.*[2]

If one feature of the evolution of capitalism is its (deliberate) uneven spread, imposition and performance, another of equal importance is the extraction of *surplus-value* in the process of production and, of even greater significance, that its mode of production determines class relations. By definition, and certainly in the Marxist tradition, capitalism is the property (as it were) of a capitalist class which "buys" the labour of a (once) "free" labour force (although recent writing has viewed this formulation as a somewhat economistic interpretation of Marx's views of what constitutes the capitalist mode of production). As capitalism develops, and reproduces itself, as it must, its penetration, the "space" and limits it occupies, will vary from country to country, region to region and continentally. As it reproduces itself, destroys old economies and creates new (capitalist) ones, the capitalist system feeds on the principle of primitive accumulation, i.e. the process whereby an emerging bourgeoisie appropriates from the producers the surplus-value they have created thus concentrating large amounts of capital in its own hands to be used again for the further creation of surplus-value. This is a process which began in the sixteenth century and which we identify with mercantilism as operated, first, in the "home market" and later via voyages, exploration and trade with Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The age of the merchants was radically transformed in

Western Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century with the onset of the so-called industrial revolution which largely transformed "merchant capital" into "industrial capital" while maintaining basically the same (capitalist) social relations of production. However, this transformation was, probably, of greater significance for the (by then) colonial people than has so far been appreciated and documented. The development of industrial capital heralded the "mature" stage of capitalism. Further, it almost immediately resulted in the aggressive expansion of capitalist operations, i.e. the need for both raw materials *and* new markets; first within western Europe and North America and later to the colonies and neo-colonies. This needed expansion reinforced and eventually completed the global hegemony of the system. Surplus-value was being created at an accelerated rate leading to over-production and a fall in the rate of profit; and when that happens capital has no choice but to seek out new markets. Success or failure produces the familiar "busts" or "booms."

Finally, central to the points raised so far, inherent in the capitalist system, is the development of "contradictions," of alienation, antagonism and class struggle all of which are part of the normal functioning of the system. The most fundamental conflict is between capitalists and workers - and where there are capitalists, there are workers. As the means of production and ownership have progressively concentrated in the hands of fewer capitalists, more workers (particularly in the low income countries) have become involved in a class struggle - a struggle which intensifies as the rate of overexploitation of the workers (again, particularly in the low income countries) intensifies in an attempt to maintain profits and markets. In terms of Marxist theory, this sets in motion the class struggle which is an attempt to alter, totally, existing relations of production to be replaced by socialism which, it is argued, allows the true development of the forces of production without destructive contradictions.

Thus the capitalist system has developed and, it is confidently predicted, will continue to do so, two mutually exclusive classes - bourgeois and proletarian - particularly in the low income countries. This dynamic springs from their late and severely restricted entry into the world economy due to their retarded or late industrialization; their "peripheralization" following the complete or partial destruction of their "natural" economies; the "unequal" terms of trade between the producers of finished products and the exporters of raw materials; the consequences of widely fluctuating commodity prices (which only the oil producers have been able to control); the severe recessions of the late 1920s and 1930s and now of the 1970s; the tight control over the export of contemporary tech-

nology; and, perhaps as significant as any of these, the massive and mounting problem of unemployment.

While the formation of these mutually exclusive classes is going on apace (although subject to considerable modifications - and interpretations - in western capitalism[3]), the question of class consciousness and class actions through class struggle is another and rather more complex, but certainly not unresolvable, issue. While I think it to be beyond question that in Africa we can quite clearly identify two "an sich" classes (those contained within the same objective condition, the rich and the poor), there is some doubt how clear the class struggle has revealed itself, i.e. the "fur sich" classes. Indeed few writers have brought the much needed degree of clarity to the question of class in Africa, although there are very important exceptions.[4] Failure to come to grips with the problematic of class formation in Africa (the historical processes in Asia and Latin America have produced a more definitive situation) is due in part to the absence of in-depth historical analysis of the continent. It is only recently that a) we have concentrated on the early pre-colonial, economic and political history of Africa, b) have rejected some standard premises and assumptions about African societies in general such as that these societies were undifferentiated internally, kinship directed, technologically, economically and ideationally "simple. Furthermore, it is not infrequently argued that a) the "state" was at best rudimentary, or totally absent in Africa - we know too little of the "early empires" (and their contacts) to fit them into a generalized system of political evolution, b) that socio-economic class formation is the unique product of complex societies (which for long have been internally differentiated along religious lines, the distribution of skills, wealth and education, ascription or achievement) and in particular in more recent - perhaps two hundred years - industrialized societies; hence c) class formation and (Marxism) analyses (in particular) are "imports" into Africa which when applied can only lead to making the data "fit" an alien theory.[5] I believe that enough has now been written a) to indicate that the (Marxian) model of political economy can be usefully applied even to pre-colonial Africa,[6] and b) there is surely no longer any question of its applicability under contemporary conditions,[7] although some social anthropologists have raised serious doubts preferring to analyse problems raised by the unequal distribution of wealth and obvious hierarchization leading to unequal access to power and resources in less than dynamic terms (such as the present emphasis on cognitive structures).[8]

Certainly, there is no question that the pre-independence struggles, the contemporary civil African state system, or the structure and operation of the military state, reveal a

close fit to Marxian propositions. But we can go much further than this, and see the implications for class and political consciousness, if we concentrate on the present internal structure of the African economies and on their external relations with the world system as a whole. There seems no doubt that primitive accumulation continues as the main objective of various types of bourgeoisie anxious to appropriate surplus-value, to make their skills available to externally-controlled capital, and to take control of the state apparatus whether it be socialist or capitalist in its objectives and organization. It is no longer contested that the civil service salariat, the professionals, merchants and traders feed on the state, while the rural and urban poor are largely left to their own devices. All this takes place in essentially only peripherally capitalist African societies which, over the past hundred and fifty years, have been brutally cut from their economic, political, social and ideational anchorages while searching for a foothold in a world unwilling to let them move up the ladder. Old modes of production, and their concomitant social relationships, albeit in much distorted form and function, may exist alongside the capitalist contemporary mode of production. Highly capitalized industry has developed (such as oil refineries, iron and steel complexes or car assembly plants) in stark isolation and making only inconsequential use of wage labour. Diversification of national economies has simply not taken place as mono-economies (producing for an uncertain world market) still predominate. Mines, railways and docks have either not increased their labour force during the last ten to fifteen years, or actually have reduced their employment very substantially. Those laid off have nowhere to go while at the same time school leavers from various levels of the educational system can expect nothing more than a take-off into sustained unemployment and poverty. Those who acquire skills in industry or as artisans may well eventually comprise a labour aristocracy - although this is presently debated.[9] Capitalism, if defined in terms of constant reinvestment to meet the demands of an expanding market, is clearly not operative in Africa (and only minimally so even in South Africa), nor has cheap labour prevented some capital intensive developments using relatively advanced production methods.

While the economic, social and political ingredients for class struggle exist in the post-independent African state, they have not manifested themselves explicitly.[10] Yet much the same can be said of the rich industrial countries where concerted demands by workers, rather than an overt class struggle, has led to an increased standard of living rather than the end of the capitalist mode of production. To be sure we can point to a few African countries which, for the present, have chosen the socialist model for transformation. But where this is so

a sustained effort in that direction remains problematic. In such countries the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production (by no means complete) has been replaced by state capitalism rather than state socialism. In either case Shivji is probably correct in saying that the "silent class struggle" rages everywhere. The question is when will the silence end and the demonstrations, riots and insurgence begin?

I doubt whether we can answer the question until such a time when we know a great deal more about the history, structure and ideology of the African working class and the bourgeoisie; until we know far more about pre-colonial and colonial history; until we have more precisely analysed African reactions to the incorporation of the continent into the world capitalist system. Had Africa not been colonized, exploited and oppressed, what economic system(s) might we now expect to find, and which social classes might have evolved in what relationship to one another? In the absence of solid documentary records, it will be difficult to obtain clear answers to such questions. We must avoid historical speculation while we must also reject a narrow empiricism.[11]

However we must always avoid abstracting whatever problem we select for detailed study from its major context, namely that the continent was drawn into a particularly nefarious economic and political order. Under the influence of that system social formations were dominated by capitalist marketing linked to an international economy. Yet the peripheral capitalism which evolved very unevenly penetrated African societies, a fact which is sometimes put forward to help explain Africa's present underdevelopment. After all Marx did insist that the transition from feudalism (in Europe and Asia rather than Africa) to capitalism might be treated as a "progressive force." Modern industrial and agricultural capitalism has been blocked in most "Third World" countries.[12] Yet the boundaries of the system have for a considerable time encompassed the world and even the peripheral areas were and are essential to its functioning and survival. The characteristics of the system, a particular mode of production and particular social relations of production, meet the essential requirement of universality and (historical) specificity yet allow for some variability, i.e. older modes coexist alongside contemporary capitalist modes and likewise their social relationships.

As a system, the capitalist mode of production is geared towards a market and maximizes profits by appropriation of surplus-value. The market principle dominates - production is supreme and decision making flows from the specifics of the capitalist mode of production. Who does what, where, when and for whom becomes the most critical internal dynamic of capital-

ism. It is this which leads to the internal contradictions and antagonisms which range from the problems created by overproduction to the sharing out of spheres of control, marketing and pricing. Thus the conflict, whatever form it takes, rotates around resources, markets and owners and producers. Simplistic as this formulation might appear, it is the key to our understanding when analyzing class formation in Africa and the potential of class struggle on that continent. For socialism to take over, for it to be successful at all levels of its penetration, it must totally replace capitalism and become, as its predecessor, a world system. Because this is not yet the case, various forms of consciousness and activism exist.

I have devoted some space to setting out (too briefly and hence likely too didactically) what I consider an essential and critical baseline; to place into a historical, conceptual and systemic context the formation of Africa's class structure. This structure is, in my view, fashioned explicitly by the nature of colonialism which, quite simply and without variation, created two antagonistic classes: the ruled and the rulers, an almost caste-like separation further reinforced by racialism. But due to the unevenness of capitalist penetration, the class structure of the colonial and post-colonial countries is far from the same; hence political and class consciousness, reformism, populism and proletarianism will vary. Internal differences are likely to be significant. Rural-urban balances and ratios will differ, as will the degree of commercialization/industrialization; much will depend on the specifics of commodity production and export (let us say the export of cotton versus oil). Much will depend on the duration of exposure to western capitalism (let us say coastal West Africa versus coastal East Africa), the conditions and forms of reproduction of a) peasantry/subsistence farmers and b) various types of bourgeoisie. Transformation has created intermediate and transitional types; more stagnant economies and some intermediate ones (let us say Liberia versus the Ivory Coast or Nigeria). Hence the former are unlikely to have a true industrial proletariat, while the latter can identify a significant number of urban wage or self employed workers. While some African countries claim to have socialist parties, none have working class parties which constrains working class protest. Socialist governments, or those aiming in that direction, will attempt to forge a symbolic relationship between peasant/farmers and urban workers (as in Tanzania, for example); more truly peripheral-capitalist countries will reveal a huge chasm between rural and urban workers but, generally, exploit both with equal vindictiveness - although peripheral capitalism is more likely to step up the rate of exploitation of the peasantry and in doing so create a landless and shifting rural proletariat

as in much of Latin America and parts of Asia. In other countries the development of exportable products has created a peasant bourgeoisie (a predictable by-product of the "green revolution" for example). Thus, as the conditions are far from homogeneous, class alliances are not only shifting but usually of short duration. When they do occur they may not follow a predictable direction but are joined on pragmatic grounds and hence susceptible to contest and conflict. Furthermore, the mechanisms of imperialism, divide and rule, the concentration on "tribe," ethnicity, language and religious divisions, pitting rural against urban workers, apart from outright physical repression, are all obstacles in the way of alliances and class assertion. Prolonged peasant rebellions, as those in Europe, Asia and Latin America, are rather rare in Africa--although rural protest to seek reformist concessions (rather than radical systemic transformation) and carried along by a populist ideology, have taken place and will continue to manifest themselves. How then should we look at political and class consciousness? It is to this question that we must now turn.

Capital accumulation, primitive or advanced, surplus-value appropriation, pre-capitalist or capitalist modes of production and labour reproduction, all take place in urban as in rural space. Urban structure, particularly African towns and cities tracing their origins back to the era of imperialism/colonialism, is bound to reflect the colonial mode of production - and its related division of labour. Harvey, in his book *Social Justice and the City*, has this to say:

> *The city and urbanism can therefore function to stabilize a particular mode of production (they both help to create the conditions of the self-perpetuation of that mode). But the city must also be the locus of the accumulated contradictions and therefore the likely birthplace of a new mode of production. Historically, the city appears to have variously functioned as a pivot around which a given mode of production is organized, as a centre of revolution against the established order, and as a centre of power and privilege (to be revolted against).*[13]

If this conceptualization is correct class relations and the class struggle are extant in and of substance in urban areas, although this is not to suggest that the exploitation of urban labour is any more severe than that faced by rural

workers. However, we should not forget that urban workers are primarily wage workers, although the balance between them and the self employed will vary from town to town, and over time. Yet few would contest the premise that wage workers occupy a particular class position in both metropolitan capitalist and peripheral capitalist countries. Whether urban African wage workers are also proletarianized, even if we consider them to be proletarians, is another matter, although I believe we should accept the view that they are but in manner different from western, Asian or Latin American workers. Thus it would follow that their latent and manifest class and political consciousness is also likely to differ as well as their class actions. Perhaps more important than any differences with urban workers elsewhere, the dynamic of class formation, consciousness and action in urban Africa, is that

> *the wage earning class is continually involved in developing and refining those organizations which reflect a growing class consciousness determined by their consistently subordinate relationship to the industrial mode of production. (Class based acts are) not to be seen as an isolated experience under exceptional circumstances...more importantly (they are to be treated as an) overt manifestation of on-going socio-political processes.*[14]

This, it seems to me, defines for us both a clear condition (i.e. proletarians) as well as a process (proletarianization). Likewise, as there are various types of bourgeoisie (military, administrative, professional and commercial - collectively the "ruling groups"), we would also expect that the formation of the proletariat, and *proletarianization*, bears some determinate relationship to the objectives and strategies (both of which will vary over time) of the ruling class(es), for it is this class which determines the exact nature of the appropriation of surplus-value, wages, working conditions and, perhaps most significant, when and what alliances will be tolerated - if any.

Furthermore, the processes of class formation (of "development" and so-called "modernization" both aptly described as "developmentalism"), surely follow very different patterns and sequences in Africa compared to Europe and North America. Hence we can, again, expect different manifestations of consciousness. While in Europe and North America we can document a transition from small scale (initially) agriculture to (presently) very large scale industry, and a very large wage earn-

ing class, in Africa, Asia and Latin America urbanization has taken place with little or no industrialization. What industrialization there is is of the extractive kind for export rather than manufacturing. While this has created a significant wage labour force in relation to the population as a whole, only a small number are permanently employed skilled and semi-skilled workers. Thus the conceptual problem (posed by some scholars) whether an African working class exists is merely a mystification; the issue is not its existence but its size; not its consciousness which, by definition as an exploited and humiliated people it has always had, but its manifestations, not its proletarianism but its specific expression and, like its counterpart anywhere, not its homogeneity but its internal divisions (be these ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and, certainly with such groups as the white-collar workers, economic differences). Africa's proletariat (be it "proto" of otherwise) comprises the vast majority of the population: underpaid workers be they farmers or urban workers, producers rather than owners. Not least of the conceptual problems is the relationship of the Africans working class to those above and those below them (the abject poor). Peter Waterman, whose thoughts I have briefly paraphrased above, sets out these relationships as follows:

> *The process that in Europe produced a mass working class also simplified social relations in another way, by producing a fairly homogeneous class of industrial-financial-commercial capitalists that came to dominate economically and socially, and increasingly to control the state. The relationship of conflict between labor and capital became <u>the</u> social and political issue, and it remains so today. The lack of a thorough-going industrialization in the Third World means that a comparable simplification of social structures and social relations has not in general occurred. The new working class finds itself subordinate not to one ruling class, but to conflicting capitalist and feudal classes (Ethiopia, Thailand) or such "modernizing elites" as capitalists, bureaucrats, and politicians who have not yet coalesced into a stable power bloc. The crude exhibition of great wealth and power by the dominant strata does tend to alienate the working class from them. But this is not true of the middle class of teachers, clerks, students, and professionals. The*

> *fact that many of the latter are themselves wage (or salary) earners and that they have skills (literacy in the official national language, legal or financial expertise) which the workers lack lead the workers to some kind of dependence on them. But, while the middle strata might themselves be unionized and have some considerable interests in common with the workers, they have their own specific class-like interests and may abandon the workers if and when they achieve these.*[15]

From this Waterman concludes, as I do, that

> *These features create obstacles to the development of the kind of consciousness that could be considered appropriate to its (the working class) present situation and condition as well as necessary to overcome it. Non-consciousness of class is not, of course, confined to Third World workers, but the extent and variety of "other-consciousness" is much greater than in industrialized or post capitalist countries.*[15]

Why "other-consciousness"?

> *Because they either have a pre-working class origin, or express the direct interests of non-working class strata, and in neither case can they be shown to serve the long-term interest of workers as a permanent class ...one is not talking about a thing so much as a process. There are, in fact, different levels of consciousness which are yet distinctly working class. And one can also identify a process of development or escalation, occurring either gradually or explosively, from a low to a high level. Reverse processes are also possible. (Emphasis is mine, P.C.W.G.)*[17]

Waterman concludes somewhat eliptically but I think correctly:

> *Despite complexity and ambiguity (the latter, I think, is revealed by him as much as by the situation he analyses),*

> *I see a determinate process occurring in the Third World. This is the development of the one necessary modern class. It is obvious that modernization demands industrialization and that industrialization demands workers...we cannot conceive industry run without workers! If modernization in the Third World means the overcoming of Mao's "Three Great Differences" (mental and manual labour, large-scale industrial and small-scale agricultural production, town and country) then it must also imply the increasing number and power of the working class, including the self-transformation of the peasantry into an agro-industrial working class. Should this not occur, the countries of the Third World will either remain in a stagnating or worsening situation, as in India, or imitate the inegalitarian, violent and increasingly crisis-ridden pattern of the industrialized west, as in Singapore and Hong Kong.*[18]

Waterman, like others, raises the possibility that a proto- (semi or lumpen) proletariat may persist for a considerable time. While this is not a pleasant prospect (both in terms of the appalling conditions of work, wages, of casual labour, retrenchment or prolonged unemployment, as well as the possibility that discontent and protest is captured by right wing and fascist leaders), it might well be the necessary condition to bring into being a more consistent and radical consciousness. Capitalists, i.e. the rich world, seem quite prepared to gamble with time as well as with various seductive devices such as the "trickle effect," or the more standard technique of cooptation of successive waves of radical leaders. While in Europe and North America attempts have been almost successful in absorbing large slices of the proletariat into the bourgeoisie, the late start of the low income countries, and the determination not to allow heavy industrialization to take place (presumably capitalists deplore the success of Japan) make this scenario rather unlikely.[19]

Intensive urbanization will of course continue creating an ever larger "informal sector" which can only be viewed as symptomatic of peripheral capitalism, encouraging further marginalization[20] and intensification of the modern-traditional dichotomy (involving a linear theory of change which must be rejected). In recent years, much attention has been paid to the structure of the informal sector (sometimes also labelled the "murkly sector") and its relationship to the "formal" sec-

tor. Indeed there are those who have suggested that the informal sector has considerable earning and employment potential.[21] Clearly many western economists consider whatever potential there is in the informal sector sufficiently adequate to meet the needs of the low income people! Yet Weeks has pointed to the contradictions in neo-colonial capitalism because of its failure to develop a "strategy seeking to reproduce a western consumer economy."[22] While the west wants such a consumer society, like its own, it will not allow a widespread development of competitive centers of production unless they show total subservience to the west - as in Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea. Thus it is hardly speculation to suggest that by the end of this century tens of millions will be unemployed or at best enjoy little more than casual, sporadic or "informal sector" employment. We must assume that those who have no opportunity to work cannot purchase much either! Faced with such predicaments it really would be naive to insist that class struggles were not in the cards, for it seems rather unlikely that masses of unemployed will accept peacefully further suffering - the victims of "urbanization without industrialization."[23]

The problem of urban absorption, not to mention job creation, will influence much of the political life of the low income countries in the next few years. A statement such as this will be treated as less trite when it is realized that the urban population of the world (living in centers of 20,000 and above) will grow by 1,326 million to 2,336 million between 1970 and the year 2000 - and that 972 million will drift into the towns and cities of the low income (so-called "Third World") countries. Only a radical transformation of the world economic order might facilitate such countries coping with problems of this magnitude. How much room is there, we might ask, to absorb more rural migrants into the fabric of urban life, into self-employment, into family-centered and small scale enterprises, or into the contemporary corporate production sector? Even illegal earning opportunities have a limited absorption capacity! The alleged elasticity of the informal sector has been overestimated no doubt because bourgeois models of "development" treat this sector as an opportunity for urbanites to work out their limited achievement motivations. Its relationship to the formal sector is merely to make a labour reserve readily available.

I indicated above that it would be surely the height of naivete to assume that the unemployed, the poor (rural or urban), the semi-skilled who cannot find jobs, or the primary school leavers, would simply roll over, as it were, and disappear out of sight. Silence or inaction should not be interpreted as a sign of acquiescence, today as in the past.

> *People fancy that when all's quiet that all's stagnating. Propagandism is going on for all that. It's when all's quiet that the seed's a-growing. Republicans and Socialists are pressing their doctrines.*[24]

An even greater error would be the view that political and class consciousness of the African urban worker is of recent origin and as such has not filtered deeply into his ranks. Recent publications by van Onselen, Phimister, Hooker, Henderson, Harris and MacKenzie, among others, testify how deep and substantial the roots of workers' consciousness are.[25]

To what degree African workers are alienated from and by their social environments is a question about which we still know very little. On the whole the conventional view prevails that what alienation they experience in the work, or non-work, situation is mediated by the embrace of kin and ethnic group. While we cannot put this anchorage aside, as it is situationally rather than structurally important for some workers, it is also a cosy illusion which has been propagated by anthropologists whose views are sometimes conveniently adopted by others when it suits their conception of what change and transformation is all about. To assume that African workers who suffer as a result of their exploitation are not alienated (from whatever that something is, so to speak) is to withdraw into racial arguments and cast such workers as the dull recipients of oppressive economic and political dispensations. While the African proletariat might not yet be progressive in action and outlook,[26] this should not lead us to the opposite conclusion that they are heart happy folks to whom sex and dance matter more than aspirations for themselves and their children.

Such views are usually based on the premise that some form of economic and political integration can be achieved which will allow for a measure of upward mobility and political participation within a system of controls which can diffuse any revolutionary forces - with or without outside help. What has not received adequate treatment so far is how the work situation influences and defines the African urban worker's political consciousness. When strike action takes place (local rather than national) it reveals not only perceived injustices by workers of their subordinate situation, but also their ability to organize (and to be organized) into a entity with clear class identity.[27] There can be no effective strike action without a considerable measure of class consciousness - however recent the proletariat and whatever their (narrow) ethnic or kin ties. Nor does it follow that strong rural ties are an impediment to workers' militancy, although some studies of

voting behaviour do suggest that industrial workers are rather more militant than recently arrived unskilled migrants (see Nelson, op. cit., 1969). Certainly, we would expect to find significant differences between the lower stratum of workers only partially proletarianized, and generally outside of the wage structure, and wage workers in the middle and upper strata who have made a more complete break with rurality maintaining only limited, yet important social and not infrequently economic, links with the rural areas. While this latter strata has established avenues of organized protest, the former lack these channels and must either use what avenues others have established, hire themselves out as a spearhead for the protests by others (a common view of what an "opportunistic" lumpen will do), or create networks of patrons who help them along. More often than not we seem to detect a group consciousness rather than a class consciousness; a factory consciousness rather than a "fur sich" consciousness; and ambiguous consciousness, leaning at one time to the immediate group of kin and friends and at another time to a wider collectivity. But over time there does appear to emerge a more inclusive class sentiment which is revealed in the occasional general strike, or in joint action by two or more important occupational groups such as miners, railway and dockworkers (as in 1961 in Ghana and Nigeria in 1964). Of course we have examples of very concerted and unified action in the immediate pre-independence period. But as the literature cited indicates, such events as the Copperbelt strikes of 1935 and 1940 were highly significant even before unionization was as extensive as it is today among key occupational groups.

It is these strata of the African working class which can be linked to various forms of consciousness. In an earlier paper[28] I drew a distinction between reactive consciousness (on subsequent consideration not a particularly suitable label) seeking a revolutionary and total system transformation. I think it is clear that the consciousness and activism of African urban workers has to date been restricted to the former despite the appearance of socialist and radical revolutionary regimes in Africa which cast themselves, at least in their propaganda, as workers' states, such as Algeria and Congo (Brazzaville). In such states protest and strike action are generally not permitted as workers are told that they *are* the state and the state has provided and organizational framework for the expression of grievances. Thus the socialist state not only encourages workers to work toward the elimination of a rural/peasant and urban/proletarian division, but also toward a unified national consciousness untarnished by ethnic polarization but vigilant in its opposition to bourgeois ideologies. The radical state is both liberator and developer, yet great emphasis is given to cooperative and communitarian models of transformation. In less radical states a "mixed" economy is standard, giving considerable freedom to various forms of private enterprise - from self-

employment to the firm. While the radical state emphasizes unity of the nation (Somalia), the conservative, and reformist-minded state, gives some freedom to important ethnic segments (Nigeria).

All political movements claim that their roots and support rest, to different degrees, in "popular sentiments," a grass roots swell of support for ideologies and political and economic strategies. As such, populism exists, of course, across the spectrum of right to left. It is therefore possible to speak of reactionary and radical forms of populism. Alike, the basic premise of a populist appeal appears to involve the lower strata of a population which gives the false impression that populism is left-leaning when in practice it can be brutally authoritarian - as in fascism and Nazism. Most commonly, populism is associated with a mass party, yet a distinct populist appeal can often be made by small splinter and fringe political movements - as the Western Guards and Britain's National Front who say that they "speak for the people."

In the low income countries, the presence or absence of populism is closely related to a complex of circumstances which are rooted in the colonial nature of most of the countries which have been labelled "underdeveloped." Not least of these important features is the role which localism plays in the general political arena. Thus populism only rarely springs from a broad national support (as district from the pre-independence nationalism), but more often from sectional (such as ethnic) interests and pressures.

The appeal of populism, while generally identified with the rural areas, does not fall on deaf ears among African urban workers. Thus Adrian Peace speaks of "populist militants" (in regard to workers in Lagos) and that the proletariat has

> *the organizational capacity and resolve to oppose firmly those actions of the ruling groups which they consider to be most iniquitous, 'populist' in that they thus express through their class actions general grassroots sentiments of strong antagonism to the existing order.*[29]

But whether it is "ethnic nationalism" or a more broadly based class sentiment, will vary not from country to country but from one situation to another. Aggrieved workers may turn to their trade unions, or spontaneously create their own ad hoc organization to present their specific demands - forging a temporary unity which breaks up once their goals have been achieved, or their mission has failed. Political parties may enter the fray on one side or another either to support the workers, to

repress them, or diffuse potentially dangerous situations. Protests and strikes are not always indicative that the class struggle has commenced or is being continued. More often than not protest reveals the fragile structures which brought workers together. This, however, should not detract us from the basic premise that workers' actions should be treated as an encounter between producers and appropriators. It is in this confrontation that populist, reformists, and revolutionary ideologies have their origin. But populism is not merely the "will" of the poor and the proletariat. Each class has its particular grievances which can be distilled into a popular sentiment - be it Bonapartism, Poujadism or McCarthyism.

A large range of meanings obfuscate a precise definition of the term. As such it is more appropriate to look at processes and conditions which generate certain reactions. Most African workers, in my view, form a true proletariat yet their consciousness is situational rather than an expression of a clear understanding of their class position and of the need to engage in the class struggle. This, for the present, leads them to seek reformist rather than radical transformation. Yet the stage of their current political consciousness does not exclude that they will and do reject being conned and deluded by populist leaders whom they suspect of being in league with the ruling strata. Populist movements and ideas fail if they do not deliver and meet the aspirations of those who make demands - and African workers, alongside African farmers, are making progressively the kinds of demands which require the rejection of traditionality and all those structures which contribute to their exploitation, for they know that it is their labour which creates the goods and services of which only a small part is returned to them.

Neither reformism nor a false consciousness, which populism tends to generate, can ever sustain the strategies to overthrow neo-colonial capitalism. The stress must be upon solidarity rather than upon an awareness of those forces which divide workers, while at the same time not ignoring the tensions between various societal elements as an understanding of these determines the appropriate strategies of change. African workers' consciousness is not enhanced if they find themselves trapped in the "false decolonization" Fanon spoke of. Nor will African workers achieve their liberation if they fall prey to a populism which emanates from a new class of external agencies.[30]

The key to our understanding of various forms of class and political consciousness involves a systematic analysis of the capitalist mode of production, and the appropriation of surplus-value and workers' reactions to this. Future research

must therefore concentrate on the specific niche in the economic system occupied by various strata and occupational groupings of African workers. Such an analysis provides the framework and explanation of why some workers are reformist in orientation while others seek more radical action; why some follow shallow populist appeals and others reject such. It is this framework which is used to creative effect by Saul and Worsley.[31] To illustrate this Saul quotes the following passage from Kilson:

> *The term 'modernization' refers to those social relationships and economic and technological activities that move a social system away from the traditional state of affairs in which there is little or no 'social mobilization' among its members. More specifically, the term 'modernization' refers essentially to those peculiar socio-economic institutions and political processes necessary to establish a cash nexus, in the place of a feudal or socially obligatory system, as the primary link relating people to each other, and to the social system, in the production of goods and services and in their exchange.*[32]

Saul goes on to suggest that a distinction might usefully be made between a "communalistic" and an "individualistic" response, the former "defending the traditional unit of solidarity, at the first impact of capitalism" while the latter is "essentially market oriented, defending itself against the further 'rationalization' of an expansive capitalism." It has been the theme of a number of my own papers that this is the substance of the transition from a reformist to a socialist-radical political consciousness. The transition is slow and does not exclude reversals, in part because of the unevenness of the capitalist penetration, and also because the neo-colonial African state uses various techniques of repression or cooptation to channel class consciousness and resistance in a specific direction. As we indicated earlier, it is this unevenness of penetration, and, hence, the unevenness of the decay of the traditional economic and political order, which spins off, as it were, different responses to the transformation taking place. There will be those workers or farmers who will slide easily into opportunities provided by training and the acquisition of skills to become an indispensible part of capitalist production and perhaps even move up into the category of intermediaries - a new class of technocrats or rich farmers filling up the top ranks of state or private sectors. Their influence is likely

to be out of proportion to their numbers but they soon will fill the few higher strata slots which are available.

For the vast majority of African workers, mostly rural born and lacking skills, the acquisition of which has been denied to them, class and political consciousness finds expression in the daily hunt for jobs outside factory gates, construction sites or in the bazaar areas. I have tried to capture this consciousness with two somewhat journalistic phrases, the "Energy of Despair" and the "Anger of Despair."[32a] I have further tried to indicate that the anger of despair appears to lead to a greater degree of class consciousness. Yet I am also mindful of the evidence which suggests that a unilinear development is not involved. Some of the most frustrated workers who express strong views nevertheless may see their hopes realized if they can find a willing patron, while others will give their loyalty to whomever appears to them to offer the greatest hope for bringing about better times.

Clearly some categories of workers are in trades and occupations which have been unionized for a good many years, such as mineworkers, railway workers and dockworkers, or such (guild) trades as dyers, leatherworkers, carvers or silversmiths. Such workers are likely to develop a common solidarity and are often the most class conscious, perhaps also because their occupational stability is generally high. I cannot find any evidence to the contrary that such workers are not an "an sich" class; indeed they often reveal that they have turned the corner and demonstrate an understanding of what is demanded of them in a class struggle.

In his book on *The Third World*, first published in 1964, Worsley suggested that "the African worker does not work to a rhythm dictated by a moving belt." Even in 1964 this was less than an accurate statement, although there were few such workers (outside of South Africa) who worked on Detroit-like assembly lines. Yet today such assembly lines do exist. He also was of the opinion then that Africa had few genuine industrial workers - also less than accurate if we take into account mining operations in Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia and elsewhere. He also came to the observation that while "adjustment to the demands of factory work is relatively easily made," he fell for the anthropologists' mystification that the "accommadation to the multifarious demands of a new city culture is much more difficult."[35]

We can then, I think, identify three types of consciousness among African urban workers: the reformist, the populist - progressive or conservative, and true proletarianism. The African worker who seeks reformist objectives is likely to empha-

size gradual and incremental change covering wages, working conditions and security of employment. He seeks fair but not privileged treatment. Generally he has a strong self-interest and may have limited interest in and linkages to trade unions. Many are in commercial rather than industrial employment and may see themselves as moving into better white collar jobs. Yet many industrial workers also will make only limited demands and, if unionized, the leaders will use constitutional channels and established negotiating machinery. While "reformists" may throw out challenges to the rich, and attack "the system," they will only react sharply if their standards are seriously threatened. Solidarity among them is situational; they come together when the situation demands it, such as when wage commissions[33a] are set up and pressures are likely to achieve policies more favourable to the workers. Union leaders will tend to be reform minded and press for "enlightened" policies, and economic demands will take priority over political pressures. Productionist policies will also be emphasized yet not wholly at the expense of a consumptionist orientation. A reformist orientation does not emphasize workers' control or participation, in part because many workers consider it important to establish patron-client relationships - although this is a device used by many workers wherever they stand on the class and political spectrum.[34] However, by and large reformist sentiments are progressively identified more with the rural population of farmers, although agricultural wage labours have repeatedly shown a considerable militancy though often lacking sustaining pressure.

Class and political consciousness which is shaped by populist appeals must be seen in the context of a broader political matrix as such appeals spring from a specific state structure, the operation of political parties, the force of nationalism and rural-urban relationships.

Populist ideologies can be radical-progressive and democratic, or radical-conservative and authoritarian. Workers' attitudes and actions may be a manifestation of either in different contexts and at different times. Thus African workers can support or oppose socialist leaders or capitalist employers; they can be part of a mass-based party or be restricted to a dissenting group; they can give their support to trade unions or vandalize their offices and break up their meetings. They might be employed, casual workers or unemployed; they can be recent migrants or longer established urbanites and they may follow populist leaders or suspect them of being conmen and swindlers. A consciousness of class, teased out of workers by a leader with charasmatic powers, can bring workers together from various strata within the working class just as much as it can keep them divided, most often on ethnic grounds. Local as well as national strikes can be organized on the basis

of "the popular will" of a people or segment of the workers. Thus the populist appeal can strike at anytime, to meet most any economic and political situation, and involve any worker in any occupation and at any level of the class hierarchy. Is it then a useful concept to apply?

While it may be difficult to define (but perhaps less so when analyzing rural protest), many African leaders try to develop a populist perspective believing that there is such a condition as mass popular sentiment and aspirations. This leads them to give essentially simple answers and promises to complex questions and problems. We must therefore see populism, as indicated earlier, in the context of what fathers it: the enormous inequality between the rich and the poor, the uncertain future of African workers, their limited mobility to increase their status, the fear of retrenchment, the massive unemployment, the instability of political regimes, military rule which restricts freedom of expression, widespread corruption which invariably follows reformist promises which remain unfulfilled, acute shortages of basic commodities, high rates of inflation, housing shortages and high rents. Such conditions make a populist appeal easy and only the most perceptive workers will be able to assess whether their predicaments can be solved by a commitment to the ideas of a leader who promises much but delivers little. Only a few workers will have reached a stage of consciousness, and an understanding of political and economic structures, to see the pitfalls of a false consciousness; to achieve a solidarity only to learn that this facilitates more effective manipulation of the working class (as in fascism and Nazism). Few African urban workers have reached the stage which allows them to clearly and unequivocally point at the true enemy and to know "What is to be Done." Thus for the time being populist appeals (mostly without substance) will continue to be beamed at Africa's working class.

Finally we come to the consciousness which is based on true proletarianism which is radical-democratic and socialist in its orientation and purpose. It is a consciousness which rests on the firm foundation of an understanding of the operation of capitalism and its market system in both the local and wider setting. But I consider proletarianism to be more than an ideology, a consciousness of class and a dynamic which informs action. It is also a *condition* of life, a *relationship* vis-a-vis those considered the bourgeoisie and an *ideology* distinctly identified with workers and producers, and not with managers and owners, whether they be urban or rural. Where there are capitalists, few or many, autonomous or dependent, there is a proletariat; where there is wage labour and appropriation of surplus, by whatever means, there is a proletariat - although this does not by definition suggest that there must be a clear

expression of true proletarian consciousness.

I think the closest we come to such a consciousness is among those categories of workers engaged in heavy and often dangerous labour; among those who have for long been unionized; among those whose leaders have consistently used their authority and fraternal relationships to educate workers; among those whose protests and strike actions have received the best results; among those who understand how divisive it is to separate rural from urban workers; among those who reject short term gains in favour of the long term struggle.

Proletarianism confronts the rich directly and does not merely threaten them from the sidelines; it seeks alliances on the basis of principle and not strategy; it pressures all the time for a structural transformation and not merely at a particular moment of crisis; it prepares, therefore, workers for active involvement and action; it plans for its future in relation to major features of economic and political life and its role in that life; it responds to complexity by analysis of situations and structures rather than by ecleticism and ambiguity; it fosters a revolutionary fervour in the context of a cosmopolitanism; above all it does, or must, avoid feathering its own nest, rejecting the temptation of allowing workers to become a "labour aristocracy."

Are there workers who are likely to fit that description in Africa today? The answer is clearly yes, whatever minority they represent. More important than their numbers is the certainty that this kind of proletarian consciousness is very much in the making. We can say this not because we are father to the wish but a) because among certain categories of workers such a consciousness does exist already, and b) because the ruling groups in the African state are working assiduously to create the very consciousness and power which they so dislike and want to prevent from gaining a foothold, namely working class power. Thus as the African continent is kept in the periphery of the modern world capitalist system, and is an essential part of this system in terms of resources and light manufacturing, workers are left with no option but to create the kind of solidarity which gives them both hope and opportunity. Thus the socio-cultural transformation will be as far reaching as economic and political change.

We cannot and should not give this transformation a date. Capitalist penetration is not about to operate with greater commitment to equality of wealth and opportunity. The power of capitalism is great and its seductive appeal greater still. Revisionism may be as natural as it can also be calculated, and betrayal of principle is not the sole property of

evil men. Consciousness and the class struggle are also a function of education, debate and the dialectic and the need to bring theory and praxis into a symbiotic relationship.

African workers got a relatively late start but this should not lull us into the belief that they must pass through various stages; that they must first learn to walk before they can run. We have left them very little choice.

To summarize, I cite below the same argument which I presented in a monograph published in 1974:

> *The colonial state in Africa, with its racist economic and political policies, polarized African society in such a way as to create a proto-proletariat (which I would now revise and suggest that a true proletariat does exist) in both rural and urban areas. The migrants in particular protested against their subjugation, exploitation and conditions of labour thus placing them in the vanguard of anti-colonial resistance. This in turn gave rise to anti-migrant attitudes and policies by colonial governments who viewed the migrants as the main cause of political, economic and social disruption and commonly referred to them as the 'urban mob.'*[35]

I then dealt with the period from 1910 to 1950, but essentially what I said was that a proletariat did exist, because the colonial state created it, and that the colonialists knew this but when faced by the workers they labelled them the "urban mob" thus misreading their political consciousness and mistaking their purpose.

Clearly, the central question for the kind of analysis which has been made is how to apply and how to interpret, in the context of the low income countries, basic Marxian premises. The answer is not made any easier by virtue of the significant divisions within the Marxist intellectual world; nor can one ignore the major uncertainties which are the present hallmark of the world political scene and, not least, the paradox of stagnation yet rapid change. Proletarians today turn into a bourgeoisie tomorrow (as in some of the advanced capitalist countries) if not as self employed or managers, then as subscribers to capitalist ideologies (as the "hard hats" of America, neo-fascists in Italy or National Fronters in England). Clearly, both the bourgeoisie and proletarians seem to find a niche

in capitalism, and for that reason the analysis of class structure has become rather more complex in the industrial-rich nations while the low income countries are illustrative of various stages of class formation. What separates workers from owners and managers is that the former create surplus and the latter use it for themselves (at least in part) to create more capital.

In the low income countries (with the exception of the radical and revolutionary states such as China, Vietnam and Cuba), reformism and populism are of greater instrumentality *at present* than the thrust toward socialist and radical transformation, i.e. away from the maximization of surplus-value with its expected rewards (profits) for individuals or groups. Due to the absence of radical leadership in virtually all the African countries, the seductive mirage of capitalism is presently able to distort the vision of the proletariat. The hope seems eternal for a constant expansion of production, reinvestment and reward. Those who cannot accumulate capital, probably at least ninety-five percent of the world's poor, will have to live with other arrangements of which the class struggle is one possibility. The position for them, as for the bourgeoisie, is far from static - form and function change over time, changes which are linked to the world economy and to political and class struggles everywhere. Marxist analysis concentrates on *processes* and not on some abstract model or ideal typological construct. Hence our only way, the Marxist way, is to turn to historical analysis which reveals which societal processes are extant - and how these differ from country to country and continentally. It is these processes, which range from the predominantly economic (the market economy) to the ideational, which create the dynamic of a) class formation, b) class consciousness, c) class actions, and d) the ideology which determines the manifestations of a to c. How classes were created in England, Germany or Russia will differ from, no doubt quite substantially, the dynamic of their creation in Nigeria, Kenya or South Africa. Yet class formation and action is always rooted in the particular nature of the economy simply because the ultimate determinant of class is the participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority, power and control over surplus-value. Racial and/or ethnic conflict in Africa, as elsewhere, is generally heavily disguised class struggle (what better example is there than South Africa?). Economic exploitation and the political struggle always go together contrary to the view expressed by L. Kuper who has suggested that

> *there are some societies in which the relationship to the means of production does not define the political struggle, and in which class conflict is not the source of revolutionary change.*[36]

While the interplay of economic and political class is complex and variable, this should not lead us to a rejection of the Marxist model, as Dahrendorf attempted in 1959 when he wrote (without comprehension of the non-deterministic nature of Marxism and its contrary emphasis on process).

> *It is not the thought of the process of the empirical scientist who seeks only piecemeal knowledge and expects only piecemeal progress, but that of system builder who suddenly finds that everything fits! For if private property disappears (empirical hypothesis), then there are no longer classes (trick by definition)! If there are no longer any classes, there is no alienation (speculative postulate). The realm of liberty is realized on earth (philosophical idea). Had Marx, conversely, defined property by authority relations, his empirical observation would not have "fitted," and he would have had to drop his philosophy of history. For effective private property may disappear empirically, but authority relations can only do so by the magic trick of the system maniac.*[37]

At present, so it appears to the superficial observer, Africa is raked by ethnic and what is seen as simply political conflict; that the continent's leaders are indecisive, vacillating and opportunistic and, hence, to label these events as manifestations of a class struggle, however incipient, is to dignify them beyond their significance. The more conventional explanations continue to be that Africa was simply not ready for self-government, that primordiality continues to produce a situation whereby ethnic, language and religious groups provide the primary attachment while an insignificant elite (themselves said to be articulate manipulators of local or regional chauvinism) manipulates the state apparatus for its own (tribalistic) benefit. It is generally argued that the elite forms a "political class" but not an economic class because ethnicity has become the all encompassing principle. Economic class is subordinate because access to state power is achieved by ethnic or racial forces. Hence it follows that workers (and the bourgeoisie) are internally divided, i.e. that members of the political (ethnic) class in control of the state at any moment will not join with workers in a subordinate position (not the political class in control). This model has deep roots in theories of racialism and its latter-day version, the plural society model. Economic classes, it is argued, are a special case of phenomenon of class - and these are restricted to the more

homogeneous and industrially advanced western societies. What economic class there is in the low income countries, in Africa in particular, has barely taken on a clear form - structural change has been limited and what has taken place is a mere jockeying by various ethnic groups wishing to "put their hands in the cash box."

But while these myopic, comforting and ahistorical conclusions are drawn, economic, political, social and ideological transformation is taking place. As the bourgeoisie evolves so does the proletariat. For both class consciousness increases and their determination to hang on to what they have, by the former, and to gain what they do not have, by the latter. Who shall control the market, the internal structure of the economy, is no longer a question which only the owners and managers debate as trade unions, cooperatives and other mass-rooted collectivities no longer see themselves as just passive recipients and act accordingly. Polarization is structural and confrontational. Proletarians, be they urban or rural workers (ignoring internal hierarchical divisions among them for the moment) must seek a greater control over the distribution and ownership of surplus-value if their subordinate and exploited class position is to change. They know they must contest their subordinate position unless they have committed themselves (and their children) to an immutable poverty. As the pressures of the internal and external market forces intensify - as they have under colonialism and neo-colonialism and the conditions of the present recession now almost ten years old - the myth of "free labour" is revealed to the workers, torn, as they are, from their rural anchorage (as were their parents), unable to make a living in a disintegrating rural economy and even more unable to find employment in the urban-based economy. Cash crop producers are barely better off being the victims of uncertain market prices (which the marketing boards are largely powerless to control, and, even when they are, their resources are drained away by either the military or the bureaucratic elite). Of course we must accept that there are enormous differences in various types of labour, in contractual relationships and in political dispensations in control of the market. But in the low income countries poverty is the universal leveller despite, or because of, the widespread introduction of the wage labour system and cash payments for goods and services produced. Wage labour is the key process of proletarianization, and control to the operation of capitalism.

But the capitalist world economy contains, like other inclusive systems, considerable contradictions. Thus wages are costly if there is not a constant rate (more or less) of expansion of production. Presumably when production is slack wages may stay constant but labour forces are reduced, possibly never to climb back to the numbers employed at an earlier per-

iod. Yet at the same time, in the industrial world and even to a *limited* degree in the low income countries, for the wage rewarded producer wages have risen (and also fallen in purchasing power) with two consequences (which have manifested themselves differently among western and non-western workers): a) proletarian class and political consciousness has intensified, and b) proletarians have moved over into a petit bourgeoisie helped along by legislative provisions or collective political actions spearheaded by unions. Not infrequently, workers have become employers, i.e. living on the surplus-value created by others, a not unusual development in Africa as successive waves of migrants tend to push up earlier waves of workers (the case of Buganda might be instructive in this regard). Hence the concept of a "new working class" might be more applicable than the contested and pejorative label of "labour aristocracy." It is at this juncture that the state and the structure and operation of the multinationals become critical variables in their efforts to internationalize production and capital and restrict the operations of "the market" to fit their supra-corporate objectives - a development which, Vernon suggests, "comes very close to lacking a relevant [historical] precedent."[38] These multinationals, who are spearheaded by the Trilateral Commission, not only define an appropriate ideology for the ruling classes, but also an ideology they consider appropriate for their enemies - and they have the means to enforce it. The class struggle, therefore, springs from the processes and manner of incorporation into the multinational and trilateral network. Yet it is also this more systematic incorporation which intensifies political and class consciousness and forces the state to either repress or concede to demands. Incorporation calls not just for control of the market, but curbing of demands for democracy.

The significance of these developments for the "labour question" in the low income countries has, of course, received a good deal of attention in recent years - although Africanists trail behind scholars of Latin America and Asia. Thus Meillassoux has pointed to the continued importance of the "domestic mode of production"[39] as integral to the operations of peripheral capitalism, i.e. the fact that the "informal sector" provides important goods and services for the bourgeoisie with minimal rewards to the producers. Hence the domestic mode of production must at least be partially preserved a) because the cost of the reproduction of labour must not be borne by the capitalist sector and b) it provides a safety valve for the unemployed and retrenched workers. In that respect, capitalists argue, labour is "free", i.e. workers can move in and out of wage employment, while in practice it indicates that primitive accumulation is still taking place (by locally based capitalists) and will continue in the non-western world[40] unless so-

cialist revolutions put a stop to this. To date, most African states have facilitated the operations of the multinationals in their illusionary search to become more truly capitalist while all they have managed to achieve is the creation of an administrative and commercial (comprador) bourgeoisie.

I have sometimes thought that African state capitalism cannot be very different from the merchant states of Europe which followed the feudal agrarian states in the sixteenth century. But on reflection I doubt whether this thought would get us very far. At the same time it is surely obvious by now that the rich world has clearly determined that the low income nation will not be allowed to go much beyond their present underdeveloped capitalism. The inequality among nations will increase, as will the inequality within the poor nations. Palloux has suggested quite correctly that while the rich world appropriates to itself mental work, it leaves manual labour ("creative labour versus unnecessary toil") to the poor nations.[41] Under such conditions, African workers turn, paradoxically, to the enemy (the bourgeois controlled state) as well as trade unions (which are generally an integral part of the state or, if otherwise, operate under serious handicaps) to create jobs. But as the multinationals and the trilateral network bite ever more deeply into stagnant economies (with the obvious exceptions of *some* of the oil rich nations), the power of the strike weapon, demonstrations and riots, are largely muted as the large corporations can (generally) shift their operations utilizing cheap and often submissive labour forces elsewhere. (The recent heavy layoffs by INCO in Sudbury, Ontario, were prompted by the simple fact that labour costs in Guatemala and Indonesia are substantially less.)

As pressures on profits increase, labour in the low income countries will be subject to an intensification of exploitation which can only be achieved with local state support. Of course, this development also raises the hope of intensified worker reaction and increased militancy of unions. At the same time, as Cohen and Sandbrook make clear, "one should not be misled into thinking that militant trade unions in Africa are manifestations of the collective will of the workers." As organizational skills are by no means uniformly available in Africa, workers have often "had to rely on their own resources and internally generated leadership in a moment of industrial crisis.

Only in the socialist states of Africa has anything resembling workers' participation and control been implemented - but even then under state supervision. Widespread alliances of peasants and workers are still rather rare although at the national level a number of African countries claim that their internal structure is representative of a workers' and peasants'

state, i.e. the Peoples' Republic of Mozambique. Pressure towards reforms rather than radical transformation has so far defined the objectives of union and workers' actions. Cohen and Sandbrook conclude their study with the observation that "workers in dependent capitalist African societies may not know fully 'where to go'; but they do know where their rulers are going and they have shown that they are not prepared to acquiesce passively in their own exploitation."[43] And that is why the class struggle is joined in Africa - a final conclusion which these authors fail to put forward.

Differences rather than similarities highlight the determinants of class formation, although the levelling effects of the capitalist world economy, combined with a certain similarity of structure of the low income state, tend to produce systems which allow comparison. Yet as the world (economic) system changes, as technology cuts more deeply into labour utilization, so does the consciousness of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat intensify which in turn may transform the system. The structural positions within the world system are, of course, subject to considerable change - minor at one moment and more extensive at other times - change which produces new alignments as market forces adapt and accomodate to new technologies and political forces (for the latter we ought to cite the emergence of mainland China, while the former might be illustrated by the demands for computer technology by many nations). Such changes within the international economic system may alter the relationship between core and periphery (a la A.G. Frank, I. Wallerstein and S. Amin) with, perhaps, unpredictable consequences. The production relations associated with mono-economies and extractive industry will continue to determine both internal class relations within the low income nations and externally in the world class system.

This article has attempted to use a Marxist perspective, if not a clear Marxist model, to help us understand (perhaps in a too generalized manner) some critical considerations which we must take into account if we wish to understand the range and diversity of political and class consciousness and action of African urban workers. Although I have used a Marxist perspective, there will be those who either think it too imprecise or too assertive without any in depth analysis. Both critics will likely share the caution of the editors of the *Review of African Political Economy* (RAPE):

> *All too often, Marxist analyses, in attempting to correct...(various bourgeois) tendencies, mechanically transpose to African societies schema of the class relations characteristic of Western capitalism, and its development from European feudalism. These Marxists tended*

> *to proceed by assertion, from some exorable historical precedent, rather than through the analysis of African societies and their relations to the rest of the world. Marxist analysis cannot proceed from textbook definitions of classes removed from their history and their society. It is not a matter of a theory of a model claiming universal validity. Marxist analysis requires examination and analysis of the material conditions which determine the possibilities for and obstacles to revolutionary action by the exploited classes. It demands a political analysis in terms of class struggle, of the steps necessary to fashion the conditions under which a class, in alliance with other classes, can transform its own situation and end its exploitation. It is not a matter of disputing, say, in the abstract, but of examining the relations of workers and peasants to their exploiters and to one another, in order to identify the conditions under which the struggles of the exploited classes may converge in opposition to the entire system of exploitation.*[44]

I rather doubt whether I have succeeded in presenting both the kind of data necessary or placed it in the kind of frame the editors of RAPE would want. If this is so, the fault is mine and better efforts will have to supplant the present one.

But to those whose objections are strongly against any form of Marxist analysis, half-baked or textbook doctrinaire, I think they might ponder over the two following quotations:

> *The Marxist theory was (and is) clearly dangerous in that it appears to provide the key to understanding capitalist production from the position of those <u>not</u> in control of the means of production. Consequently, the categories, concepts, relationships and methods which had the potential to form a new paradigm were an enormous threat to the power structure of the capitalist world.*[45]

Even more poignant would seem to be the view expressed by Barrington Moore.

> *In any society the dominant groups are the ones with the most to hide about the way society works. Very often, therefore, analyses are bound to have a critical way, to seem like postures rather than objective statements...For all students of human society sympathy with the victims of historical process and scepticism about the victors' claims provide essential safeguards against being taken in by the dominant mythology. A scholar who tries to be objective needs these feelings as part of his working equipment.*[46]

We should not hesitate to use the one model which allows us a closer understanding of realities.

Footnotes:

1. "The View from Below: Political Consciousness of the Urban Poor in Ibadan, Western Nigeria," *Cahiers d'etudes africaines*, Vol. 15-1, No. 57, 1975, pp. 5-35 (37-55 for critiques), p. 5.

2. Trotsky, L. *The Third International after Lenin*, Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 19-20.

3. Poulantzas, N. "Marxism and Social Classes," *New Left Review*, No. 78, March-April 1973, pp. 27-54; "Social Classes and their Extended Reproduction," in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London, New Left Books, 1975, pp. 13-35; Giddens, A. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

4. Cohen, R. "Class in Africa: Analytical Problems and Perspectives," in *The Socialist Register 1972*, R. Miliband and Saville, J. (eds.), London, Merlin Press, 1972, pp. 231-255; xxx (Samir Amin), "The Class Struggle in Africa," "Revolution," Vol. 1, No. 9, 1964, pp. 23-47; E. Toyo, *The Working Class and the Nigerian Crisis*, Ibadan, Sketch Publishing, n.d.; A. Seidman, "Class Stratification and Economic Development in Africa," *Pan-African Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1972, pp. 7-26; I. Wallerstein, "Class and Class Conflict in Africa," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 26, No. 9, Feb. 1975, pp. 34-42; J.S. Saul, "Class and Penetration in Tanzania," in *Socialism in Tanzania*, Vol. 1, L. Cliffe and J.S. Saul (eds.), Dar es Salaam, East African Publishing House, 1972, pp. 118-26; K.W.

Grundy, "The 'Class Struggle' in Africa: An Examination of Conflicting Theories," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1964, pp. 379-93; I.G. Shivji, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, 1976.

5. A.G. Hopkins, "On Importing Gunder Frank in Africa," *African Economic History Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1975, pp. 13-21.

6. M. Godelier, "Modes of Production, Kinship, and Demographic Structures," in *Marxist Analyses and Social Anthropology*, M. Bloch (ed.), London, Malaby Press, 1975, pp. 3-27; E. Terray, "Classes and Class Consciousness in the Abron Kingdom of Gyaman," ibid., pp. 85-135; C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Research on the African Modes of Production," in *Perspectives on the African Past*, M.A. Klein and G.W. Johnson (eds.), Boston, Little, Brown, 1972, pp. 33-51, as well as article by W. Rodney.

7. See for example *The Review of African Political Economy* (first issue August 1974) and *The African Review* (first issue March 1971), apart from well known studies in depth of book length.

8. P.C. Lloyd, *Power and Independence: Urban Africans' Perception of Social Inequality*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

9. P. Waterman, "The Labour Aristocracy in Africa: Introduction to a Debate," *Development and Change*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1975, pp. 57-73; J.S. Saul, "The 'Labour Aristocracy' Thesis Reconsidered," in *The Development of an African Working Class*, R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds.), London, Longman, 1975, pp. 303-10.

10. Of course the national liberation struggles in Africa, and those still in progress in South Africa, were class struggles. Yet these more recent and ongoing struggles differ from true class struggles in as much as they were and are not primarily directed against the capitalist system (although against colonialism which is the same, but was not seen always as such by the leaders or the masses) nor against the local African bourgeoisie, but primarily against racism and to achieve, as a first step, national independence.

11. While the work of Walter Rodney is seminal (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania Publishing House, 1972), and has had significant impact on Africanist thought, one of his main propositions - that techno-

logical evolution was arrested by the European impact - calls for a good deal of further documentation.

12. P.P. Rey, *Colonialism, neo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme*, Paris, Maspero, 1971.

13. D. Harvey, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973, pp. 203-04.

14. A. Peace, "The Lagos Proletariat: Labour Aristocrats or Populist Militants?", in *The Development of an African Working Class*, R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds.), London, Longman, 1975, p. 300.

15. P. Waterman, "Workers in the Third World," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 29, Sept. 1977, pp. 50-64.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

19. See for example, E.J. Hobsbawn, "La marginal idad social en la historia de la industrializacion europa," *Revista Latinoamericano de Sociologia*, Vol. 5, 1969, pp. 237-48.

20. D. Lambert, "L'Urbanisation acoélerée de l'Amérique et la formation d'un secteur tertiaire refuge," *Civilisations*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1965, pp. 158-70.

21. K. Hart, "Small Scale Entrepreneurs in Ghana and Development Planning," *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 6, 1970, pp. 104-20; "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 11, 1973, pp. 61-89; R.F. Salisbury, "Development through the Service Industries," *Manpower and Unemployment Research in Africa*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1971, pp. 57-66.

22. J. Weeks, "Does Employment Matter?", *Manpower and Unemployment Research in Africa*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1971, pp. 67-70.

23. P. Worsley, "Franz Fanon and the 'Lumpenproletariat'," in *The Socialist Register 1972*, R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds.), London, Merlin Press, 1972, pp. 193-230 (p. 209).

24. H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol. 1, London, 1862, p. 22.

25. C. van Onselen, *Chibaro African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*, London, Pluto Press, 1976; "Worker Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1973, pp. 237-55; I.R. Phimister, "African Worker Consciousness: Origins and Aspects to 1953," *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 1, July 1976, pp. 23-42; J.R. Hooker, "The African Worker in Southern Rhodesia: Black Aspirations in a White Economy, 1927-36," *Race*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Oct. 1964, pp. 142-51; I. Henderson, "Early African Leadership: The Copperbelt Disturbances of 1935 and 1940," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. Oct. 1975, pp. 83-97; P.S. Harris, "Ten Popular Myths Concerning the Employment of Labour in Rhodesia," *Rhodesian Journal of Economics*, Vol. 8, No. 1, March 1974, pp 39-48; "Industrial Workers in Rhodesia, 1946-1972: Working Class Elites or Lumpenproletariat?", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1975, pp. 139-61; J.M. MacKenzie, "African Labour in the Chartered Company Period," *Rhodesian History*, Vol. 1, 1970, pp. 43-58 P.C.W. Gutkind, *The Emergent African Urban Proletariat*, Occasional paper series no. 8, Montreal, Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, 1974.

26. J. Nelson, "Migrants, Urban Poverty, and Instability in Developing Nations," Occasional Paper in International Affairs, no. 22, Sept. 1969, Cambridge, Harvard University, Center for International Affairs: "The Urban Poor: Disruption or Political Integration in Third World Cities *World Politics*, Vol. 22, 1970, pp. 393-414; M. Weiner, "Urbanization and Political Protest," *Civilisations*, Vol 17, Nos. 1-2, 1967, pp. 44-50.

27. R. Cohen, J. Copens and P.C.W. Gutkind (eds.), *Labour History in Africa*, Sage series on African Modernization and Development, Vol. 2, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications 1978. (In press).

28. P.C.W. Gutkind, "Are the Poor Politically Dangerous? Some Thoughts on Urbanism, Urbanites and Political Consciousness," in *Colonialism and Change*, M. Owusu (ed.), The Hague, Mouton, 1975, pp. 85-113.

29. Peace, op. cit., p. 289.

30. I think the political history of a number of African leaders who at one time supported socialist policies but were later drawn into the salariat, will illustrate this point. I rather suspect that the late Tom Mboya might fight this bill.

31. J.S. Saul, "Africa," in *Populism, its Meanings and National Characteristics*, G. Ionescu and E. Geliner (eds.), London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, pp. 122-50; P. Worsley, *The Third World*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967, pp. 118-74.

32. Quoted by Saul, op. cit., pp. 133-34 from M. Kilson, "African Political Change and the Modernization Process," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Dec. 1963, pp. 425-40.

32a. P.C.W. Gutkind, "The Energy of Despair: Social Organization of the Unemployed in Two African Urban Areas: Lagos and Nairobi. A Preliminary Account," *Civilisations*, Part I, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1967, pp. 184-214; Part II, Vol. 17, pp. 380-405; "From the Energy of Despair to the Anger of Despair: The Transition from Social Circulation to Political Consciousness Among the Urban Poor in Africa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1973, pp. 179-198.

33. Worsley, op. cit., 1967, p. 161.

33a. Major worker unrest took place in 1964 in Nigeria when the Morgan Commission reported; in 1971 when the Adebo Commission reported and in 1975 when the Udoji Commission issued its report.

34. This is a point made repeatedly by P.C. Lloyd in his *Power and Independence: Urban Africans' Perception of Social Inequality*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

35. P.C.W. Gutkind, op. cit., 1974, p. v.

36. L. Kuper, "Race, Class and Power: Some Comments on Revolutionary Change," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 14, Sept. 1972, pp. 400-21 (p. 400).

37. R. Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959, pp. 30-31.

38. R. Vernon, *The Economic and Political Consequences of Multinational Enterprise: An Anthology*, Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, Division of Research, 1972, p. 8.

39. C. Meillassoux, *Femmes, greniers et capitaux*, Paris, Maspero, 1975.

40. A.G. Frank, "On So-Called Primitive Accumulation," *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 1976, pp. 87-106.

41. C. Palloux, *Les firmes multinationales et le proces d'internationalisation*, Paris, Maspero, 1973. Worsley, for example, has suggested that we should concentrate our attention on the semi (or proto) proletarians and the lumpenproletarians as dominant elements, at least in numbers, in the labour force. P. Worsley, "Proletarians Sub-Proletarians, Lumpenproletarians, Marginalidos, Migrants, Urban Peasants and Urban Poor," *Sociology*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Jan. 1976, pp. 133-42.

42. R. Cohen and R. Sandbrook, eds., "Conclusion," in *The Development of an African Working Class*, London, Longman 1975, p. 314.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

44. "Editorial," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 3, 1975, p. 2.

45. Harvey, op. cit., pp. 126-27.

46. B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1966, p. 523.

* * * * *

George Jackson, symbol of political prisoners of the World. By: *Quant*.

The following article originally appeared under the pseudonym of *Frank Talk* but actually had been written by *Steve Biko*. The police, meanwhile, had gone on a witch-hunt for a Frank Talk. Later, in one of his defenses on trial by the South African regime *Biko* admitted that he was the author of the publication. When questioned further, he said he did it because:

"I Write What I Like!"