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CLASS FORMATION IN AFRICA : A CASE STUDY OF KENYA

by

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I certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree at any University and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

Kenya is an underdeveloped country as a result of seventy years of British colonialism. The underdeveloped status of the country has, as in other African states and elsewhere, stimulated the development debate which has proceeded along two lines: one line denies the existence of classes in independent Kenya, the other acknowledges their existence, but denies to the Kenyan national bourgeoisie an independent role vis-a-vis the international bourgeoisie. The two lines of argument have their characteristic fallacies. The adherents of the first line fall into two groups of writers. The first of these argues that there are no classes in independent Kenya because the pre-colonial African community was socialist and has remained as such and that therefore the task of post-colonial development boils down to removing all the colonial blockages to this traditional socialism. This argument is well summarized by the former Minister for Economic Planning in Kenya, Tom Mboya. He recapitulates this argument thus:

"I strongly believe that in the field of economic relations we can similarly be guided by the traditional presence of socialist ideas and attitudes in the African mental make-up...

When I talk of 'African Socialism' I refer to those proved codes of conduct in the African societies which have, over the ages, conferred dignity on our people and afforded them security regardless of their station in life. I refer to universal charity which characterized our societies and I refer to the African's thought processes and cosmological ideas which regard man, not as social means, but as an end and entity in the society." 1

For Mboya and his like, the post-colonial development of the country means developing this traditional socialism which was arrested by colonialism.

The second group of writers deny the existence of classes in

Africa in general, and Kenya in particular. They argue that the majority of African people remained in the traditional sector and that only a minority attained elite status. It was these elites who assumed the nationalist leadership and at independence became the ruling elite. Hodgkin argues that:

"[The elites] can reasonably be described as belonging to 'the middle class,' though certain problems are raised by the use of this term in the African context. Clearly there is some correlation between the rapid development during the post-war period of associations of a modern type, including political parties, and other familiar processes of social change - economic expansion, the growth of towns, the spread of Western education; and, as a consequence, the emergence of new social groups, ranging from professionals, administrators, and the larger entrepreneurs, through minor civil servants, teachers,² and contractors, to the wage-earning class."

Hodgkin concludes that this "intellectual-professional-commercial-administrative elite"³ has replaced traditional leadership. Professor Miller supports this viewpoint for he insists that there is no class conflict in independent Africa; what there is, is conflict among diverse elites competing for scarce resources. He writes:

"For the present it would appear that a more potent source of conflict than class derives from friction within the elite between the status layers of the elite, between elite generations and between the bureaucratic and political elite."⁴

Implicit in this is the argument that classes did not exist in colonial Kenya and equally that they do not exist in independent Kenya. Or if they do exist, they are either too nascent or too tradition-ridden to correctly describe them as classes. Hence, these writers conclude that there is no class struggle in the country.

The other line of argument acknowledges the existence of classes in the country, but underestimates the independent political-economic role of the national bourgeoisie vis-a-vis the international bourgeoisie. The error inherent in this argument stems from the economic

determinism of underdevelopment theory which tends to absolutely subordinate the national bourgeoisie to the international bourgeoisie. According to these writers, the Kenyan national bourgeoisie remains dependent or auxiliary. Professor Leys subscribes to this view when he writes:

"The real result of African businessmen's political activities and of the government's policies was to foster the emergence of African capitalist-owners, a distinctive kind of 'auxiliary bourgeoisie'... [cementing] a firm alliance between foreign capital and the new African 'auxiliary bourgeoisie' operating under more and more heavily protected conditions."⁵

The Kenyan auxiliary bourgeoisie remains subordinate to the foreign bourgeoisie in this analysis because the former depends on the latter for capital, aid and expertise knowledge etc. In my thesis, I argue to the contrary and criticize these theories for seeing different trees without recognizing the forest.

Therefore, in the following analysis, I intend to go a step further than the aforementioned analysis of disparate periods of Kenya's political development by approaching these periods - pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial - as inter-related by showing that this interdependence between them constitutes progress whose motive force is class struggle. To demonstrate how class struggle has effected progress in the country, I show in chapter one how the evolution of classes and their struggle undermined African communalism; following this, chapter two shows how the emerging classes from the communalist society were reconstituted by colonialism along racial lines; chapter three demonstrates the importance of class struggle in the Mau Mau liberation war; chapter four reveals how the African liberator classes were displaced by British colonialism in favour of the collaborator classes; and finally, chapter five shows how the classes displaced under direct colonialism are taking the initiative under neo-colonialism against African bourgeoisie and its international

allies. I hope this study will stimulate further insight into this crucial aspect of the country's political development and progress.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tom Mboya, "African Socialism," in African Socialism edited by W.H. Friedland and C.G. Rosberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p.251.
2. Thomas Hodgkin, African Political Parties (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), p.25.
3. Ibid., p.31.
4. Robert A. Miller, "Elite Formation in Africa : Class, Culture and Coherence," Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.12 (1972), p.533.
5. Colin Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya : The Political Economy of Neo-colonialism (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp.168-169.