

January 17, 1961

Dear Arthur Wine:

Thank you for your letter and for African Life. Pardon me if I disagree in one respect with the concept that Marxist-Humanism has not been considered in Africa. You are right, of course, in a technical sense, that is to say, that no Marxist-Humanist work has been published there and no one who calls himself that has expounded what Marx called his philosophy originally — Humanism. However, because Marxism is not just in books, but in the aspirations of the common man, it has not only been considered by the Africans, but emanates from him. If you have read my pamphlet, "Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanist and the Afro-Asian Revolution", you will have noticed that I consider 1955-57 to have been the period in which both the Hungarian Freedom Fighters and the African Freedom Fighters raised that question. In the case of the Hungarians, it was done openly because the opposition to Russian Communism and its puppets in Hungary began on the part of other communists who considered themselves the genuine Marxists. Thus, Imre Nagy, in his appeal against expulsion (it was published in this country as "Imre Nagy on Communism", Praeger, New York) stated that we have forgotten what the philosophy of Marxism is and why we have joined this liberation movement which was to have freed humanity. The same thing was true of the intellectuals who were not communist-party members, but were close to them in the Petofi circle, and finally when the workers defined what they wanted, workers' control of production through Workers' Councils, as against domination by the communist state, they all used the original expression of Marxism, which was "A thorough-going Humanism or naturalism". The reason Marx so characterized his philosophy was due to the fact that he was fighting on two fronts: (1) Capitalistic private property, and (2) Vulgar communism, which thought that all the ills of capitalism would be over with if only we did away with private property. Marx' contention, on the other hand, was that that could be only a first step and that unless they did away with what was most evil in capitalism — did the vision between mental and manual labor, which degraded common man to a cog in a machine — they would only get themselves a new form of exploitation and not to freedom.

Now, it is true that in Africa none of those phrases were used and as you correctly stated, people rejected or accepted Marxism on the basis of what was going on in Russia or even more precisely what they thought was going on in Russia in the case of rapid industrialization. Nevertheless, the various countries that were gaining their independence from the first one, Ghana, it was quite clear that they did not want to become part of the two-world nuclear powers struggling for world domination. They were looking for a new path to industrialization — a human path. It is this, precisely, which got Khrushchev worried enough to decide to enter Africa and make them accept the communist path, either through economic aid or an ideology which claims to have divested itself from Stalinism, and to be genuine Marxism-Leninism, or to muddy up the waters politically — anything so long as they could get them to oppose the "West". Both from the speeches of Leopold Senghor and even to Toure, who is closer to Russia than any of the other African countries, it is quite clear that they did want a humanist, a universal civilization, free from all exploitation and discrimination. Whether it is possible to get that in a world divided into two is another matter. Naturally I consider that unless they do make their world the truly third force of freedom through self-activity of the masses and oppose both private capitalism and the state capitalist variety that calls itself communism, neither Africa nor the rest of humanity may have any history to tell after the nuclear holocaust.

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Just one more point on the question of Humanism in Africa, or rather how I knew that that was the opposition, Russian Communism was meeting. In 1955 they unleashed a very sharp campaign against the early Marx where Marx had developed this idea of humanism, stating that he was still young and immature at the time and under Hegelian influence. It struck me odd, indeed, that a campaign should be unleashed against works that very few people knew about and which had never been published in English at all (I was in fact only translating them for the first time into English to be published as an appendix for my book, "Marxism and Freedom"). Knowing Russia as well as I do, I knew that they would never be interested in a theoretical debate for its own sake; that they are a great power and like any capitalistic power they must be feeling a real live opposition which bases itself on this. I wrote defending the young Marx as being no different than the old Marx and at the same time said that this type of an attack must mean that the East German Revolt against communist rule in 1953, which was crushed, was not really dead, but only driven underground and that we might expect some real fireworks from the East European countries. As you know, the very next year we had the Hungarian Revolution, and it was nearly six months after that before the documents began coming out which showed that the Hungarians had indeed raised the question. If there weren't such a big division between some of the African intellectuals and the African masses, they, too, would know that their aspirations for freedom and the Marxist theory of liberation is one and the same thing.

I do hope I will have a chance to give my analysis of the African Freedom Fighters at the UCLA Campus. Bessie wrote me that you were to speak to Dr. Coleman. His "Nigeria" is very fine, especially because there are so few studies by whites that really know the national movement. However, it is naturally limited by his own viewpoints, and some of the references he makes to Trotsky are quite unworthy of a scholar, since they are taken from Tertiary; however, that is minor. What is of major importance is to recognize the struggle in life and in theory because we live in an age where there can be no division between theory and practice. I want to thank you in advance for anything you might do to get that lecture for me.

I was very interested to read "African Life" and especially so to see the problems that the Africans are encountering in the Trade Union fields where, unfortunately, white labor plays a reactionary role. That, too, I would like to discuss with you some day. Meanwhile, I enclose five dollars for which I would appreciate your entering my subscription to "African Life"; we will also run a little ad in News and Letters for you and trust that will bring you some subscriptions. Is the handsome man on the front page your brother?

Do please give my warmest greetings also to your wife whom my sister describes as an absolute beauty.

Yours,

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