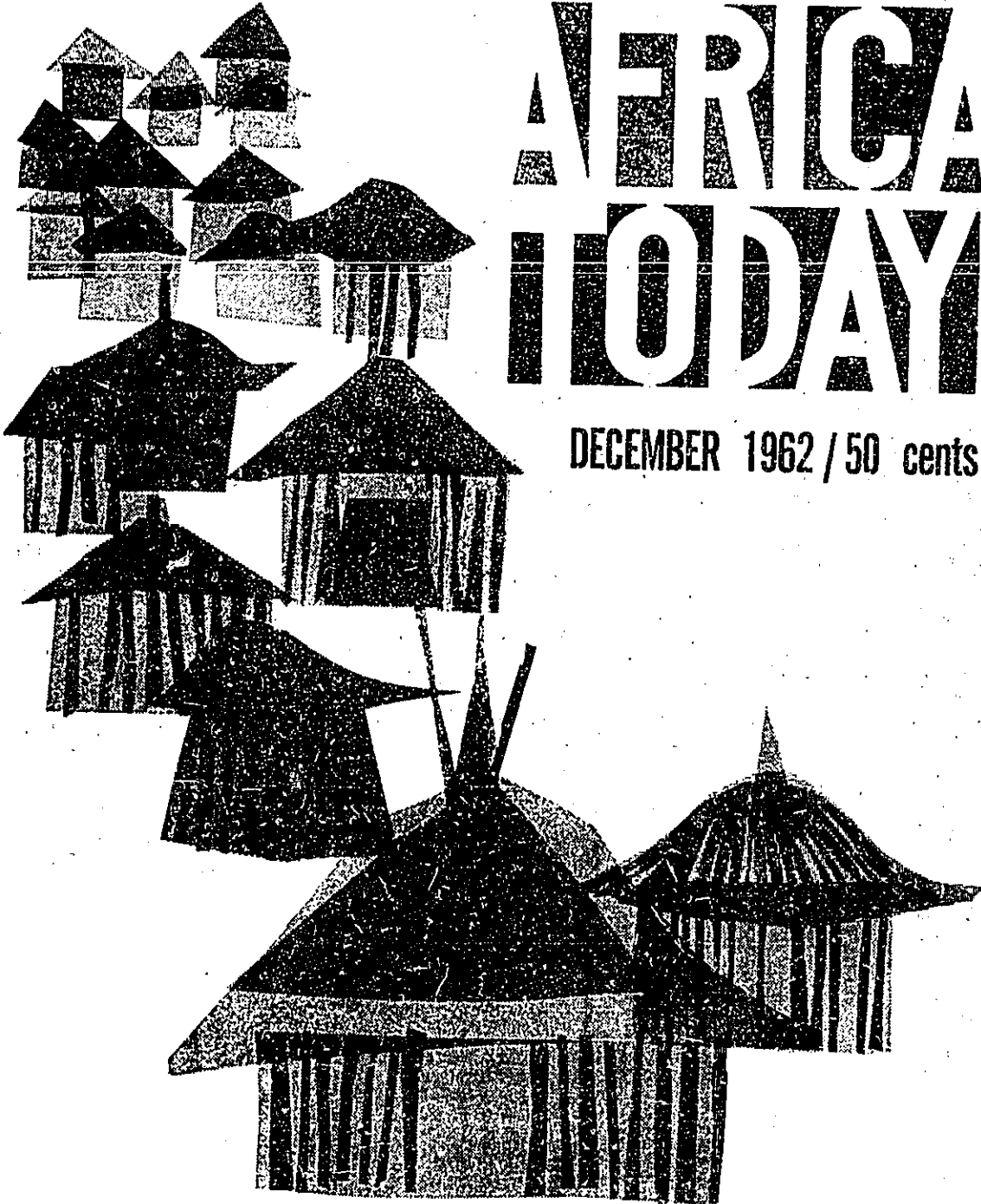


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AMERICA TODAY

DECEMBER 1962 / 50 cents

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GHANA/three

Out of Colonization Into the Fire

BY RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA

THE TRAVELER IN WEST AFRICA who is at all sensitive to freedom's call is under a compulsion from the surge of the liberation movement to become engaged. The dynamism of "Freedom Now" infuses even old ideas with a force capable of piercing any shield of apathy.

A mild American demurrer that there are "too many tribal languages" brought a heated response that there is always some African who knows the other tribe's language. Indeed, the sound of a single drum beat, or the sound of a truck with party flag flying, brings out an entire village. In less time than it takes the visitor to get out of the truck the whole village has assembled, with a minstrel present to transmit loudly, for all to hear without benefit of wireless, the words of the most bashful of any tribe. In a flash the *bantaba* becomes transformed from a place of gossip to one charged with political discussions lasting far into the night. On many occasions I have had cause to doubt that Africans sleep at all!

Despite the exhilaration of the mass mobilization it is necessary to probe the bleak reality of what is coldly called "the problems of the underdeveloped economies"—the general poverty that is not restricted either to "the bush" or to the city slum, but embraces the elite as well as the earth itself. It would be easier to get under the umbrella of "African socialism" and to see "no need for the bitter polarization of socialist ideas that is part of European history." But it is impossible to write of African socialism when one discusses the division between Casablanca and Monrovia, and compounds this error by isolating himself from a confrontation with the opposing forces within the newly independent African nations. The truth is that the African revolutions have reached the crossroads so early in their development that even the reporter who evades an answer must at least pose the question: "Which way now?"

No doubt the impact of the world struggle between the two nuclear world titans has hastened this repercussion on the African continent. As the recent strikes in Ghana showed, however, not every development can be attributed either to the Cold War or to the machinations of outsiders. The strikes revealed an internal dualism that vitiates the designations of Left, Right, and Center, *within* the independent countries. The "Left" has become "Right" in its attitude to labor.

Ghana is a sobering experience. No sooner had this reporter reached the point of deciding that its leadership had crossed the Rubicon over to the Communist

orbit than she met Africans from countries still under colonialism, who spoke of Ghana as the haven for those fighting for independence.

In this short article I shall deal with only one aspect of Communism—its impact on the African trade union movement and, more particularly, Ghana's involvement in this penetration.

The story begins with the African desire for a continental trade union movement free of cold war ties. Africa had for some time been the scene of a struggle between the Western-oriented International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Eastern-oriented World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The WFTU had led a most barren existence in the 1957-1961 period when no fewer than 21 African nations gained independence without the organization's having held so much as one convention. But at the same time, African affiliation with the much more active ICFTU, with its Brussels headquarters and large contributions from the AFL-CIO, had grown increasingly more difficult to justify, particularly on the part of the Nigerians.

The All African Peoples Conference of December 1958 had urged the foundation of an independent workers movement, but nothing had been done about it. Then, in May 1961, African trade union organizations under the leadership of the five Casablanca powers plus Algeria established the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF). The Secretariat of this convention met July 14-17 and, as the "Permanent Secretariat," chose to hail the creation of AATUF as a "great victory" and a "severe blow to the splitting elements represented by imperialism and the ICFTU."

Ibrahim Zakaria, Secretary of the WFTU, discovered a similarity between the stand of the AATUF and Khrushchev's 1969 UN speech, which had been made the thesis of the 22nd Russian Communist Party Congress and summarized in the main speech, "For the Abolition of Colonialism."

"The struggle against neo-colonialism" became the pivot, the very reason for the existence of the African trade unions, whether they were in independent countries or not. With this, WFTU saw its chance to lead

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the struggle from the "inside" against the "outsider" ICFTU. The insider chosen for the role was Ghana.

Nothing is said now, by either Accra or Moscow, about the fact that President Nkrumah himself addressed the first African Regional Organization, an arm of the ICFTU, in Accra in 1957. Nor is mention made of the fact that, after the Gold Coast became the independent state of Ghana, and an all-African trade union body was talked about, it was never as one that would have no international relations. Far less is any mention made of the fact that the Ghana Trades Union Congress was itself affiliated with the ICFTU, and that its General Secretary, John K. Tettegah, was a favorite there for his regular attacks on the WFTU as a "world threat."

When I got to Accra in April 1962, the massive strikes had ended. John K. Tettegah had been relieved of responsibility for the "internal affairs" of the Ghanaian Trades Union Congress, and had been sent to Lagos to find headquarters for the AATUF. These two inseparables—discipline of one's own workers, and "leadership" over other African countries—are, of course, the determining factors in the country's development internally, and in its foreign relations.

Picking up the April 7 issue of the Ghana Trades Union Congress's *News Bulletin*, I noted that "the new structure" the trades unions have adopted is "based on Marxian principles." They turn out to be a typical Communist incorporation of the trades unions into the party-state apparatus, in this case the Convention People's Party (CPP). The Trades Union Congress was organized under the banner of "Toward Nkrumahism." The *News Bulletin* assured its readers that "Osagyefo himself" had launched that slogan, but failed to say what is Nkrumahism. When I interviewed Mr. Magnus-George, Deputy Acting Secretary of the Ghanaian Trades Union Federation, I did not ask for further enlightenment on that question, but limited myself to questions as to the loss of independence of the trades union movement with its merger with the CPP. A blustery individual, Mr. Magnus-George spoke belligerently:

"We do not see the reasons why people in Europe always ask us why we are an integral part of the CPP. It is not their business to tell us what to do. We're living in a free country and can do what we like. We're an integral part of the CPP and have no separate trade union card. We're going to step up productivity with the Three-Year Development Plan (July 1961 to July 1964) and we don't come to the point of American wildcats."

The last remark was in response to my interruption, which had pointed to the recent strikes in Ghana and intimated that perhaps the Ghanaian workers were following the example of the American workers who, when their leadership refuses to authorize a strike for legitimate grievances, "wildcat." "It will be very interesting for you to know," continued Mr. Magnus-George with an air of discovery, "that any

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time there is a misunderstanding with the state and workers down tools, after their grievances are redressed they work free to make up lost time." He then pointed proudly to a letter of his that had appeared in that day's press, congratulating the workers in the Kade Match Factory who, "guided by the spirit of duty-consciousness, patriotism, and love for the nation, voluntarily worked overtime to increase the output of production from the factory." Evidently, in line with the spirit of "Osagyefo the President" Mr. Magnus-George had also contributed his "humble donation of £5 with which the workers of the Kade Match Factory can have a social party for enjoyment." Rockefeller with his charitable dimes didn't do less!

On the decisive question of the relationship to labor, the loss of independence of their trade union organization, the opposition to the austerity budget and forced savings, the complaints of poor housing and bad working conditions, the trades union official would not budge at all from the position that it was not for "a European" to question. "Americans always write lies anyway."

In the interval between the Casablanca Conference and the adoption of the new trade union structure by the Ghanaians, a gathering of African trade unionists from the Monrovia bloc, plus Tanganyika (which had just gained its independence), met at Dakar. In the interview I had with Mr. Magnus-George, Deputy Secretary of the Ghana TUC, he bellowed that "Tom Mboya was a lackey of the ICFTU, which established itself as part of neo-colonialism . . . If the Nigerian trade unions don't join the AATUF, we shall interpret that as a stab in the back." Lest I may have thought that his venom was limited only to Kenya and Nigeria, he handed me the official organ of the Casablanca trades union group, *The African Worker*, featuring an attack on the Tunisian delegate, Ahmed Tlili, "the Judas of imperialists."

I didn't get to Tunisia to interview Mr. Tlili, but I did get to Dakar, and interviewed Alioune Cisse, of the Senegal TUC, who is presently Ambassador to Guinea. He tried to assure me that Touré, Senghor, Nkrumah are all friends. "This [pointing to the copy of *The African Worker* that I had been given in Ghana, and that I had handed to him] is mere propaganda. The trouble is that, though the Casablanca group are only five, and at Dakar 41 organizations from 30 African countries in West Africa and East Africa, plus Madagascar, Tunisia, and Libya, were present, the five want to speak for the whole of Africa . . . But our orientation is Pan-African, and we will all get together and work matters out."

Whether or not such scurrilous writing can be dismissed as "mere propaganda" that will disappear, the truth is that the relationship of the trades unions to the mass of the workers is the nub of the question.

I think that a more typical African reaction to the AATUF strategy was that of M. E. Jallow, who heads the Gambia Workers Union: "Believe me, what has

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(Dunyevskaya, continued from page 11)

happened [the attacks of Casablanca trade union leaders on those who met at Dakar] is worse than the worst done by ordinary politicians. We aren't interested in Mboya and Tili as individual leaders. But they have great masses of workers who follow and respect them, and for whose interests they fight, and when you attack them in such a manner . . . I have the highest respect for Presidents Touré and Nkrumah as fighters; they are trying to adapt socialism to African realities; but, to be realistic, the AATUF was built up for ideological reasons. And now in Ghana they call workers' strikes 'labor indiscipline.' We will never bow to such an attitude to labor. I think the workers' interests come first. In the Gambia here we stay neutral as between the political parties. We would oppose any proposition to give up our trade union independence. We fight for workers' rights and that is the function of all trades unions. We will not bow to an organization that calls workers' strikes 'labor indiscipline.'"

In Ghana itself there is by now so deep a gulf between the trades union leadership and the rank and file that all sorts of new underground oppositions are being born. These have nothing whatever to do either with the old United Party opposition led by Dr. Danquah, or with the Dakar-led Trades Union Federation. They are, for the most part, composed of young

militants in the forefront of the revolution led by Dr. Nkrumah himself. Far from wishing to take any steps backward from that revolution of independence, they want it to go forward to "true socialism." One worker spoke to me bitterly about the fact that the Members of Parliament had voted to double their pay from £980 (\$2,744) to £1,800 (\$5,488) annually while asking for further sacrifices from the workers. "The workers' claims were ignored," he continued as he approached the story of the strikes, "until we began to hum. Then we were given increases of 25s (approximately \$3.50) per month but we were asked to pay 5 per cent compulsory contribution towards National Development out of our total earnings and 2s per annum Trades Union dues, which we abhor because of the pittance nature of our pay, the way M.P.'s and the officials are mis-using funds and the control the Government exercises over the Trades Unions."

The tragedy of the African revolutions at the cross roads can be gleaned from a letter I received from a C.P.P. member since my return home. It reads: "A bomb exploded near our President's lodgings one Sunday and three demonstrators died. It was an unwise bombing because the President was not there. Today he wishes he were like the poor workers earning £15 per month and could move about without any fear of being bombed, as in former days."