

Activist Scholarship*

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What should Western-based movements do to facilitate African liberation? There are several important measures. One is opposition to military build-ups. Another is lobbying for the conversion of armaments expenditure to investment in genuine development efforts. Similarly, pressure on Western governments to adopt a non-interventionist policy in countries undergoing fundamental structural change is essential. But policy makers do not usually act against the interests of the groups that put them in power. To ask capitalists to refrain from expansionism is to ask them to cease being capitalists. This is not to suggest that tactical decisions are predetermined. Surely the anti-war movement influenced the U.S. decision to withdraw from Vietnam. Nonetheless, it is not enough to stop Western states from interfering in Africa.

Basic change must come about within African countries themselves. In this process, Western support for realigning the domestic divisions of labor in Africa should be linked more closely to the internal situations within the advanced capitalist countries. Just as production is increasingly international, struggles in various parts of the global political economy must be interwoven. As the struggles intensify, moralizing about the evils of exploitation should not replace thoroughgoing analysis of the crisis.

Equally important to contemplate is the question of what has not been done adequately at all. Although state actions must be continually challenged, it is wrong to allow those who hold the reins of power to set the agenda. Unfortunately, many opponents of their government's policies in Africa have largely been reactive, their strategies crisis-oriented. Typically, critics have formed single-issue

movements: anti-apartheid, nuclear freeze, pro-Sandinistas, and so on. What is required is an interlinking of movements that mobilize constituencies across such diverse issues as militarism, feminism, and intervention in different parts of the world. It is essential to bring home to workers, community groups, and intellectuals precisely how individuals are personally involved in Third World struggles.

Surely there is a long road to travel before liberation is achieved. Setting aside the exaggerated optimism of the early post-colonial period and the ensuing pessimism about Africa's prospects for development, it is a truism to say that massive struggles in earlier historical epochs, such as the passage from feudalism to capitalism, a transition which engulfed the entire globe, have spawned fundamental transformations. It is out of the crucible of crises and from hard-fought struggles that new social forces emerge and invent creative solutions to deeply embedded problems. Improvements do not come steadily; there are traps and confusions, followed by sudden breakthroughs. And even then it can be hard to measure progress.

If liberation requires a monumental feat, one can say that the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars has contributed modestly to the struggle. Political work and research by Africanist scholars over the last decade have helped to reformulate questions and provide vital information for educators. Now we must continue to expand our membership, form coalitions with like-minded groups, consider the merits of a broader publications program, seek new ways to alter U.S. foreign policy, and open additional channels for assisting the liberation movements. The task is no less than devising novel ways to abolish the grim conditions in which the majority of humankind has been condemned to live and charting strategies for the course ahead.

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