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I. Introduction

Scholars, theoreticians, and statesmen in the West and in the Communist world have propounded numerous explanations of the political, economic and social underdevelopment of Africa and Asia. But few have sought to determine exactly what the leaders of the underdeveloped countries themselves think about the problems of underdevelopment. To what do they attribute their retarded status? Answers to this question are important for at least three reasons. First, their views serve as basic theoretical and empirical foundations for domestic measures designed to ameliorate the relatively backward conditions. Second, their answers also temper and condition their attitudes and policies toward the West and the Communist world. Third, a comprehension of their views gives us an opportunity to assess their current ideological tendencies and thus it provides an added dimension in which to discuss future Western policy alternatives. This paper, therefore, attempts to describe and analyze the various explanations for underdevelopment advanced by the leaders of six West African states—Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal.

African theories of underdevelopment are inextricably linked with the concepts of imperialism and colonialism. Consequently, a clarification of these elusive terms would be in order. African nationalists use the terms colonialism and imperialism loosely and frequently interchangeably. In most cases, however, it is the modern colonialism of the European powers to which they refer. By generally equating European colonialism with imperialism they have adopted, perhaps unwittingly, the Leninist nomenclature.

Lenin’s application of the term imperialism is somewhat different from that generally used in the West. Imperialism ordinarily applies to any attempt by a state or group of states to exercise control over another people or territory. In other words, imperialism is simply expansion into additional territory and domination of subject peoples for the advantage of alien rulers. As a general phenomen-
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enon, imperialism is as old as recorded history and is not associated with any particular ideology, belief, or economic system. Modern colonialism, however, is a particular form of imperialism. The two are related but distinct concepts, and must not be confused or used imprecisely. What Lenin was referring to in his classic pamphlet, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, was not imperialism as a general phenomenon, but colonial imperialism or colonialism. In its modern context, colonialism is the establishment and maintenance by one nation-state of political domination over a geographically separate territory, and the subsequent social, cultural, and economic subordination of its indigenous population. The criterion which distinguishes modern colonialism from other kinds of imperialism is that the former is marked by significant racial, cultural, and/or religious differences implying a superior-inferior relationship between rulers and ruled, all of which is reinforced by a political and legal system designed to maintain, if not perpetuate, this definite supremacy and subordination.

**II. African Explanations of Underdevelopment**

The leaders of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali openly state that their backwardness is a direct product of European colonialist exploitation. In their view, colonial rule has prevented the socioeconomic development of Africa in the interests of the indigenous masses. Quite accurately they contend that the Europeans regarded the African economy as an appendage of the metropolitan economy, to be exploited for enhancing the national power, profit, and prestige. The Europeans took slaves, profits, and raw materials out of the continent, the argument continues, and left virtually nothing in return. The resulting conclusion is that in order to foster development in their own interests, Africans must terminate colonial political control.

President Sékou Touré of Guinea, in particular, assumes a most intransigent position on this question. Rejecting traditional Western explanations (racial inequality, intellectual retardation, and ethical or social inferiority, among others), he asserts that Africa's level

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of development is a product of the economic conditions brought about by foreign intervention and domination.\(^2\)

Touré attacks the entire foundation of the colonial political and economic system. He maintains that imperialist domination brought about the fragmentation and destruction of the precolonial African economy.\(^3\) The reconstituted economy was then integrated as a subordinate part of the economies of the metropolitan countries. All colonial policies, notwithstanding philanthropic and altruistic justifications and rationalizations, were instituted on the basis of just one criterion: did it benefit the metropolitan interests? Funds were denied potential African entrepreneurs. Technical training was limited to those select individuals who could bolster the colonial system and help it function. Social welfare schemes were developed to keep African workers healthy and therefore productive. Traditional institutions were either destroyed or retained on the basis of their utility to the colonial regime. According to Touré, this was the real nature of European colonialism.

After destroying the indigenous African economy, the imperialists replaced it with capitalism — not competitive capitalism as a rule but monopoly capitalism in its most odious form. The commercial system which evolved, the *économie de traite*, sought to exploit in a systematic way Africa's resources and raw materials at the expense of the native population. In Touré's words: "The colonial system took our goods at a very paltry price and sold them at a very high price. The profits . . . did not go to the producers who were the real creators, the true owners of the products; they went through many middlemen . . . into the cash boxes of the colonialists."\(^4\) It was this "mercantile circle" — from the commission-agent to the importer, to the wholesale dealer, to the retailer, to the African peddlers and hawkers, and finally to the keepers of the market stalls — which made the colonial commercial system so distasteful. Caustically he told the United Nations General Assembly: "This is why . . . no colonized country has yet attained a social level comparable with what are considered the lowest levels in Europe."\(^5\)

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\(^4\) *Ibid*.

Touré's views are shared by the radical wing of Mali's governing Union Soudanaise. Its spokesman, Minister of State for Justice Madeira Keita, once asserted that aside from the Office du Niger, a gigantic cooperative agricultural project, French colonialism contributed nothing to Mali. In public works, health, power, transportation, education, and the general economic infrastructure, he continued, Mali made almost no progress under French control. The officials of the militant Union Nationale des Travailleurs Maliens, Mali's only labor union, concur in fixing responsibility for underdevelopment on the colonialist powers. The dominant moderate faction of the Union Soudanaise, still relatively revolutionary in the overall spectrum of African political thought, is only slightly less inclined to censure colonial rule in toto. Although President Modibo Keita sees foreign oppression as the prime reason for African backwardness, he is less hostile in his condemnation of colonialism, and implies that in some respects it might have been beneficial. Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah joins the Guineans and the Malians in branding underdevelopment a product of colonial rule.

Far less denunciatory criticisms of colonial rule have been

Records, A/PV. 896 (October 10, 1960), p. 564. Perhaps the prime, indeed the only relevant example of an Afro-Asian state that managed to avoid colonialism or external domination of one sort or another was Japan. The Japanese were able to retain control over their islands, and thus stand as an embarrassing example of an underdeveloped country that reached higher levels of economic development without being subjected to, or blessed by, European political and economic control. Japan demonstrates that it was possible to modernize and industrialize through imitation and emulation rather than through subjugation. While too much reliance cannot be placed on this lone example, it does serve in a small way to strengthen Touré's argument.


expressed by the leaders of Nigeria and Senegal. The most effective nationalist in preindependent Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe, was uncompromising in his appraisal of British rule. As scathing as Touré and Nkrumah, Azikiwe’s earlier views by no means resemble his current moderate position on other matters relating to underdevelopment such as trade policies and economic planning. An ardent anticolonialist, the colonial theme dominated almost all of Azikiwe’s pre-1960 writings and speeches. Colonialism, he felt, interrupted normal African development, and forced backwardness on the technologically less advanced natives.\textsuperscript{10} In a postindependence speech he told a London audience: “Slavery played its shameful role in depopulating Africa; capitalism denuded it of its wealth; colonialism deprived it of its birthright, and imperialism emasculated its will to live as a human being [sic] and to enjoy its fair share of the bounties of the good earth.”\textsuperscript{11} To Azikiwe, the white man has cause to be ashamed of the way in which he carried his “burden” or his \textit{mission civilisatrice}. To many Africans, the “white man’s burden” was more often a bag of plundered gold than an altruistic mission to improve the Africans’ lot.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo, inspirational leader of the opposition Action Group, is also implacably opposed to foreign political and economic domination. But before his ideological about-face he was a good deal less impassioned in his evaluation of the British presence in Africa. In 1957, for example, he praised the British for giving the Nigerians a “common nationality” and for leaving behind a heritage of “order, good government and parliamentary democracy.”\textsuperscript{12} For him, imperialism took on a tripartite meaning. He once said that there were three imperialisms reigning side by side and in concert. They were, first of all, the “imperialism of ignorance, disease and want,” second, British colonialism, and third, the “imperialism of local caesars who flourished under the aegis of British imperialism.”\textsuperscript{13} He warned his compatriots that it would be naive and dangerous to imagine that the only enemy to be destroyed was British colonialism. On the contrary, unless Nigerians

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Nnamdi Azikiwe, “Ethics of Colonial Imperialism,” \textit{Journal of Negro History}, XVI (July, 1931), 287-308. He wrote this article while a student at Lincoln University.


worked hard and in the right direction, "when Britain abdicates sovereignty in Nigeria, she would leave behind the other two imperialisms, whose reigns would be poignantly grinding and oppressive." This was a time when most nationalist leaders insisted that the surest and most rapid path toward self-government lay in focusing unified mass pressures on the alien power. In their speeches, as has been illustrated, there was just one cause for underdevelopment — colonialism. In choosing to scatter the blame for backwardness in three directions, Awolowo was risking political suicide. Indeed, a case might be made that this was the result, for his Action Group soon came to be regarded as a special interest, regional, and ethnic party whose electoral appeal was severely limited. Subsequent elections have, in large measure, demonstrated this.

On one occasion Awolowo even dared to criticize anticolonialism *per se* as a political strategy. In his eyes, it thwarted the interests of the Nigerian people. He asserted that anticolonialism was coterminous with "negative nationalism," which sees nothing good in foreign rule. Thus any cooperation with the colonial powers was regarded as an act of treachery. This "negative nationalism," he argued, would simply result in the prolongation of African enslavement.

Since his Action Group became the Opposition in the Federal Legislature, Awolowo has substantially altered his pronouncements. In the past Awolowo admitted that in some respects colonialism was beneficial to Nigeria. But his postcolonial approach, largely a tactical shift, may be illustrated by the following passages from a speech delivered in June, 1961.

The scramble for Africa as well as the permanent settlement of Europeans in certain parts of Africa was motivated wholly and solely, and without any redeeming feature, by the political, economic and military self-interests of the European powers which engaged in that unholy adventure.

* * *

For more than sixty years thereafter [since 1885], Black Africa suffered under the grinding heels of alien conquerors and settlers. Today, for most parts of Black Africa, the inhuman, humiliating and degrading position delineated above remains more or

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., pp. 294-295.
less the same . . . barring a handful of countries on the Continent, Africa is still as ever under Western imperialist bondage.\textsuperscript{16}

Without attempting to explain this ideological change of heart, it should be noted that the Action Group is an almost wholly Yoruba-based party securing its electoral support primarily from the Western Region and in the Yoruba areas of the Eastern and Northern Regions. Since no broadly based revolutionary political movement has taken root in Nigeria, perhaps Awolowo and his partisans sense a gap in the country’s political spectrum. Should the moderate policies of the government coalition fail to satisfy popular expectations, the left-moving Action Group could conceivably be the logical successor, perhaps in concert with other parties or movements. In many respects, therefore, the doctrinal evolution of the Action Group is primarily a function of political expediency in its struggle to expand its political influence.

Senegalese leaders attribute underdevelopment to a variety of factors, not the least of which is colonialism. President Léopold Sédar Senghor explains that European conquest and colonialism have brought profit not only to the capitalist bourgeoisie, but also to the European middle classes and proletariat.\textsuperscript{17} In linking colonialism to capitalism he feels that “European monopoly capitalism,” by buying raw materials at extremely low prices and selling manufactured goods at artificially high prices in the colonies, was the “economics of slavery.”\textsuperscript{18} Colonialism thus contributed to the industrial development of Europe and raised the living standards of the European masses, to the detriment of Africa and Africans. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that to the Senegalese officials colonialism is not the only reason for African backwardness.

Senghor places colonialism in a broad historical perspective. As he sees it, colonialism is a “transitory stage” of history, like feudalism and capitalism. But like other stages of history, it had its “moments of light” as well as its “dark moments.” He employs a Marxist historical interpretation in which successive stages of

\textsuperscript{18} Léopold Sédar Senghor, “A Community of Free and Equal Peoples with the Mother Country,” Western World, No. 18 (October, 1958), 40.
history are considered to be at once progressive and yet, in their
dying years, regressive. Thus colonialism had both negative and
positive features. "If it destroyed some of the values of our civili-
ization," he has said, "Europe sometimes brought us substitutes,
almost always fertile ones: complementary ones."\textsuperscript{19}

In this framework, the clash between two civilizations is always
tortuous for the weaker of the two. But as Senghor optimistically
observes: "What matters is that from this encounter, inhuman
though it may be at first, a new civilization should arise, grafting
the skills of the colonizers on to the living stock of the colonized."\textsuperscript{20}
Europe brought destruction to Africa, but unintentionally she also
brought values that were lacking in African life — technical skills
and methods. Placed in this context, colonialism would appear to
be for Senghor a necessary evil — a historical necessity.

In many of his writings and speeches Senghor implies that those
very same processes which enrich European life materially could
and should have been used to Africa's benefit, had the Europeans
desired it. This is central to Senghor's critique of European colo-
nialism. There is an important distinction here between the ethical
and the objective or practical consequences of colonialism. Ethically
colonialism is evil. The object is to dominate alien peoples for
a multitude of economic and political reasons. But objectively,
colonialism is progressive — that is, it has a modernizing and gen-
erally beneficial effect on Africa's history. This is what Senghor
speaks of when he regards colonialism as a necessary evil. It could
have been more progressive had the Europeans chosen to give the
Africans a greater share of the fruits of the African economy. If
the "white man's burden" had been taken seriously, and its spiritual
and moral components given play, then Africa would have gained
a good deal more than it actually did from its contact with Europe.
But the benefits of colonialism, its objective consequences, were
largely residual or fortuitous in character. They came as by-
products of policies undertaken to bring political, strategic, or
economic advantage to the metropolis and its people. They were
not the primary intention or objective of the colonial powers, but
rather unintentional, often accidental, by-products of European
contact and exploitation. Similarly, there are both positive and

\textsuperscript{19} Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Some Thoughts on Africa: A Continent in
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}
negative facets of Communism in Eastern Europe, Nazism in Germany, and Japanese expansion into Southeastern Asia, for example. The questions to be raised in cultural contacts of this sort are: what price must be paid for positive achievements? Could Westernization and modernization have been introduced with less exploitation and less psychological damage?

If Senghor seems a bit reluctant to attack the colonial powers for their African activities, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast is even more restrained. Indeed, since his Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (R.D.A.) severed its parliamentary alliance with the French Communist Party in October, 1950, Houphouët might well be considered on the surface an African apologist for French colonial policies. His ruling party has conspicuously refrained from using colonialism as a scapegoat for all domestic or African ills or for excoriating France. Since 1950 he has seldom directly blamed the French for African underdevelopment. On the contrary, he has sought to identify his interests with those of France and has repeatedly referred to the “Franco-African community,” “Frenchmen of Africa,” and “the mother country” in laudatory terms. He once even hinted that underdevelopment might, to some degree, be the result of natural handicaps of tropical countries.21 Praising France’s colonial policies as being “liberal” and beneficial to the African masses, he asserted that “France’s accomplishments are even more praiseworthy if it is remembered that she has borne the impact of two wars . . . .”22

While the French presence in Africa is “the result of military conquests” or of “peaceful penetrations,” France has, to her credit, suppressed slavery, halted interethnic quarrels, educated the masses, and instituted sanitary and medical improvements without precedent, and has given her culture to an African elite.23 Thus French rule, far from the cause of underdevelopment, is regarded by Houphouët as the motive force behind Africa’s economic, political, and social development and maturity. This, argues the former French cabinet minister, is the real legacy of colonialism.

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22 Ibid., 595.
23 Ibid., 598-599. In another instance he has stated: “Despite certain mistakes made by the colonizers, we have profited from the progress of their colonization, and they have left us in the best possible condition.” Afrique Nouvelle (Dakar), No. 711 (March 22, 1961), 5.
For as long as Houphouet can make his pro-French posture pay, in terms of satisfying his countrymen’s desires or in terms of blunting their expectations, and thus minimizing dissatisfaction and solidifying his own ruling elite in power, he will no doubt maintain his present ideological orientation. One thing seems certain: Houphouet is a clever and pragmatic political opportunist whose rise to power and retention of it are due to his willingness to abandon one doctrinal stance for another, if it proves expedient. His shrewd ability to assess popular currents and to manipulate and ride them obviates the necessity for theoretical consistency.

Despite Houphouet’s theoretical flexibility, he appears most sympathetic and most intent in defending the interests of the indigenous cocoa and coffee farmers. Houphouet himself is a member of a prominent Baoulé family, and his father was a prosperous coffee planter. In 1940 Houphouet became Chief of his home district and a planter in his own right. Since that time his personal landholdings have been steadily augmented. In 1944, largely because European planters enjoyed privileges and advantages at the expense of Africans, Houphouet helped organize and became president of the Syndicat Agricole Africain, an African planters’ trade union. This body defended the interests of the small African farmers who were being squeezed by the big French planters and lumbermen, and the large commercial enterprises. The P.D.C.I. grew out of the Syndicat, and since that time the Party has reflected the interests of the indigenous planters. The economic power of the Ivoirien coffee and cocoa planters is substantial. Coffee production, accounting for over 45 percent of her exports by value, is central to the country’s economy. Cocoa contributes another one-third of her exports. African farmers control some 95 percent of the production of each commodity. Thus, through all subsequent ideological (which in fact were largely tactical) transmutations, the interests of this increasingly prosperous landed group have been upheld.

III. A Comparative Analysis of African Views

From the foregoing description it appears that there exist in West Africa diverse shades of opinion on the etiology of underdevelopment. Nevertheless, those Africans who blame colonial rule and colonialism are the dominant voice. This suggests that such a thing as an “African” explanation of underdevelopment is dis-
cernible. With the obvious exception of Houphouet, the leaders of the six states examined here, to one degree or another, fix responsibility for their status on European colonial regimes.

It is understandable that the politically conscious, Western-educated, bureaucratic African ruling elites should direct their antagonisms at the colonial system. The Europeans had brought with them alien political domination, racial tension and conflict, and economic exploitation; although, to be sure, they were not the first to impose such relationships on Africans. Although Africa's leaders were trained and made politically aware by Western contacts, it was the colonial system that imprisoned them. The system had whetted their appetites, raised their expectations, and cultivated their aspirations, but simultaneously denied and frustrated their advancement beyond fixed limits. They had been socially, politically, and economically thwarted by an order imposed from without for the benefit of foreign interests. Feeding on an inflated self-image of their societal importance, they soon realized that the colonial order was the only barrier between them and total political power.

Despite their underlying anticolonialism, West African leaders differ in the degree to which they link colonialism and European capitalism. Some conform to what might be called a crude Leninist interpretation of underdevelopment. The most extreme — Touré and the Malian radicals — accept Lenin's explanation that colonialism is an inevitable structural outgrowth of capitalistic society. This view stigmatizes capitalism at the same time that it attacks colonialism, for the latter, it is believed, arises out of the necessity of capitalist countries to find outlets for investment or "finance capital." The officials of Mali's labor union actually usurp the Hilferding-Lenin nomenclature. The term "finance capital" was also used at the Sixth Pan-African Congress in 1945. Nkrumah, Touré, Awolowo, George Padmore, and Senghor, all have expressed the opinion that colonialism is a product of capitalist "economic necessity." The first four maintain that this is a normal characteristic of highly developed capitalist societies. Senghor indicates that this was a normal characteristic of all technically advanced peoples. But in accepting certain aspects of Leninist analysis, it must be emphasized that African nationalists reject the Leninist prognosis of the eventual construction of a socialist (Communist) state by violence, if necessary.
Kwame Nkrumah adheres to a position, only slightly less Leninist, between the doctrine that colonialism is an inevitable stage of capitalism, and the view that colonies and colonialism are not necessarily "the highest stage of capitalism," but rather the result of policy choices made by imperialist governments.

Perhaps the most widely shared position on this question holds that colonialism is a policy which might be undertaken by any state or group of states — not uniquely by capitalist states in a certain stage of development. In this camp can be found President Azikiwe, President Senghor, former Prime Minister Dia, President Houphouet-Boigny, and others. Senghor, Dia, and Houphouet, in particular, are especially wary of Communist imperialism. They emphasize that Communist regimes are no less capable of imperialism than are the European powers. At other times, they stress the possibilities of "micro-nationalism" and "micro-imperialism" — that is, the danger that African states might attempt to "colonize" or dominate other African states.

This diversity of views corresponds rather closely to the Marxist spectrum, for even within Marxist ranks different notions of the causes of colonial imperialism have arisen. These range from the views of Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg to those of Rudolph Hilferding, Karl Kautsky, and Karl Renner. Renner went so far as to suggest that imperialism was no longer an exclusively capitalist impulse.\(^{24}\) The current Soviet and Chinese Communist doctrines accept Lenin's explanation. In this regard, most West Africans are not followers of contemporary Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Nevertheless, their attitudes toward this issue do resemble Lenin's and spring from the Marxist womb.

In attributing their underdevelopment to colonialism, from whatever sources, Africans, excepting Houphouet, stand in direct opposition to traditional Western views of underdevelopment. Western statesmen, in the past, have fallen back on several different explanations. For example, notions of tropical climate and health conditions, cultural stagnation, racial inferiority, geographical isolation, the "Negro personality," psychological resignation to environment, absence of challenge, or the presence of overly demanding challenge have enjoyed currency from time to time. More recently, imper-

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sonal forces such as lack of investment capital, scarcity of technical training and skills, and other economic determinants are designated. But too few Western politicians go deeper in their search for the underlying reasons. Few are willing to ask the sometimes embarrassing question, why is there so little capital, technical skill, education, or economic incentive? Few are willing to fix even partial responsibility on Western colonialism.

Consequently most West Africans regard official Western explanations as inadequate and incorrect. In the African view, Western theories do not get to the heart of the problem. Since Western theories of underdevelopment in large part are rationalizations and justifications for Western colonialism, it is understandable that they should ignore or fail to recognize the essentially political barriers by which the colonial powers have hindered any development in the interests of the indigenous masses. Western ideas are also rejected because they are largely static rather than dynamic theories of underdevelopment. In other words, there is a built-in yet often unrecognized pessimism in official Western views which the African is forced to disregard if he is to see any possibility for future advancement. Explanations for backwardness based on geographical, climatic, racial, and psychological factors are largely deterministic—they admit of little or no immediate possibilities for change. Politicians in underdeveloped countries can never accept what they regard as an unfavorable status quo. To adopt such Western views would be to resign themselves to a perpetually underdeveloped or relatively less developed status. Quite naturally they are not so inclined.

But there is still another, more obvious and understandable, reason why Africans subscribe in varying degrees to Marxist-Leninist rather than Western explanations of underdevelopment. In large measure Marxism-Leninism absolves the peoples of underdeveloped areas of all responsibility for their backwardness. Objectively, this makes a great deal of sense. Colonial rule offered Africans and Asians little opportunity to exercise a real option to develop or not to develop. Although Africa may not have developed in the absence of colonialism, at least it would have been the Africans' choice and their clear responsibility. Thus, it is easy for nationalist leaders to affirm views which place responsibility for unhappy circumstances on outsiders. Lenin's theory supplies a simple explanation readily acceptable to the underdeveloped peoples.
To blame the colonialist powers for Africa’s underdevelopment suffers, objectively, from the weaknesses of most monocausal theories. A multiplicity of causal factors is thereby reduced to a single-factor explanation. But although this oversimplification may be empirically inadequate, it is politically expedient and fruitful. To comprehend such a theory, one must return to the nature of political ideology. Its raison d’être is successful political action, and historically, simplified theories yield results in mobilizing mass action. Sophistication of theory may be possible and indeed useful in influencing potential elites. But the masses are generally moved and persuaded by monocausal theories.

Too often Westerners are content to sit back and “destroy” Marxism-Leninism in an abstract way, or “prove” its logical or theoretical unsoundness. But it must be pointed out that political theory does not attain validity simply in an abstract way. How does Marxism-Leninism measure up against the effectiveness of complex analytical systems employed by Western decision makers, particularly in regard to underdeveloped areas? As far as the Africans are concerned, Leninist theory appears more in tune with their life experiences, than are Western theories. But it must also be understood that Africa’s leaders accept merely the essentials of Lenin’s doctrine of imperialism — that underdevelopment arises from colonialism. Only a small number adhere to the argument that there is a direct causal relationship between “monopoly capitalism” and modern colonialism. Even fewer accept in its entirety the orthodox Leninist account which marks the genesis of colonialism as stemming from internal pressure from the interests of “finance capital.” None accepts the direction of the Communist parties of the Soviet Union or the Chinese People’s Republic, the earthly interpreters of orthodox Marxist-Leninist dogma.