

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH: HISTORICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES ON A MARXIAN LEGACY IN AFRICA

By

Claude AKE\*

What is the political economy approach? As a methodology, the political economy approach is still in the process of formation. Its general thrust is clear enough, but the details are blurred and there are areas of considerable confusion and contradiction.

## HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

It is best to begin with the concept of political economy. Political economy was the name of the social science now commonly called economics. The new nomenclature was firmly established at the beginning of the 19th century. This was more than a change of nomenclature; it entailed some change in the techniques and methodology and some value commitments of the science, changes of a magnitude as to raise some doubt whether political economy and economics could properly be regarded as different names for the same science.

As a discipline, political economy grew in step with the development of capitalism. In effect, it was the discipline for understanding capitalism and rationalizing it. It is not entirely clear how to date the beginning of classical political economy. Some may wish to date it from the mercantilist theories of the 16th and 17th centuries; we could date it from the age of the physiocrats, 17th and 18th centuries, especially QUESNAY's *Tableau Economique*, 1758. Or we may date it from Adam SMITH's *Wealth of Nations*. SMITH was definitely the first political economist of industrial capitalism, for he focussed political economy on the study of industrial capitalism, a legacy which endured. Another legacy which SMITH bequeathed to political economy was the comprehensiveness of view. Because he made the division of labour and exchange such an important organizing concept of his analysis, he took a total view of the social formation. This was reinforced by his interest in the social relations of production; it was he who correctly identified the emerging classes, capital, labour and land-owners. The range of SMITH's interests is impressive; his analysis touches on the nature of man, motivation, politics, culture, morality, international economic relations and the evolution of economic institutions.

After SMITH, the tendency to take a comprehensive view, that is, to place the issues of production and distribution of wealth in broad social context remained. John MILLER, a disciple of SMITH, was not merely interested in locating economic ideas in a social context but in the broader context of history. So did RICARDO. David RICARDO, perhaps the greatest of the classical political economists after SMITH, was concerned less with the production of wealth as with its distribution among social classes.

---

\* Professor AKE is Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

He was concerned about the increasing tension between capitalists and wage labourers and he elaborated a theory concerning the tendency of wages to stabilize at the subsistence level. These concerns put him into the realms of history, politics and culture.

As industrial capitalism developed and its class contradictions deepened, political economy became less concerned with understanding capitalism and more engrossed in justifying it. Political economy entered what Isaac RUBIN has called a vulgar phase, restricting «its investigations to superficially studying phenomena as they might appear to the capitalist, instead of probing into the internal connection between them». (*A History of Economic Thought*, p. 381). The effect of this partisanship is well illustrated by the crude attempt of SAY and SENIOR to refute the labour theory of value.

By the middle of the 19th century, a new tendency was emerging in political economy: the concerns of the disciples were becoming narrower and emphasis was increasingly placed on techniques, particularly mathematical techniques. The protagonists of these developments were Herman GOSSEN (1810–1858); Leon WALRAS (1834–1910); William JEVONS (1835–1882); A. COURNOT (1801–1877) and J. DEPUIT (1804–1866). Among the works which epitomized these changes were COURNOT's *Recherches sur les Principes Mathématiques de la Théorie des Richesses* (1838) and JEVON's *Theory of Political Economy* (1871). Political economy became more and more engrossed in the refinement of techniques while the questions it posed got narrower and more specific and increasingly unhelpful for understanding the social system (as opposed to the manipulation of certain aspects of it to induce specific effects). As if to underline the fundamental character of these changes, it was in this period that the nomenclature economics displaced political economy. Of course, it was not simply a situation of one thing displacing another; classical political economy and the new economics had something in common, but they existed in deepening mutual contradiction.

The work of Karl MARX emerged in the midst of these contradictions. MARX relentlessly exposed the biases, misrepresentations and sterility of vulgar political economy and proceeded to develop, building on the achievements of the physiocrats, SMITH and RICARDO, the concepts and methodology for a scientific understanding of capitalism and society in general. MARX reached back to the legacy of these predecessors in another sense: he returned to the idea of political economy as a comprehensive social science, indeed he tended to treat political economy as the science for understanding society in its entirety. This is evident in all his major works especially *Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital*. The very first sentence of the Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* is typical of MARX's comprehensive perspective. «I examine the system of bourgeois economy in the following order: capital, landed property, wage-labour, the state, foreign trade, world market».

## MARX'S POLITICAL ECONOMY AND NON-INDUSTRIALIZED SOCIAL FORMATIONS

MARX's system of thought was very attractive for the colonized and exploited countries of the periphery. The centrepiece of MARX's system was the problem of oppression. In the *Theses on FEUERBACH*, MARX had noted that other philosophers had interpreted the world, but the thing however is to change it. Changing it meant liberating man from oppression which MARX considered corrupting and dehumanizing both for the oppressor and the oppressed. The central concern of MARX's system was epitomized in the concept of proletariat, a concept which allowed MARX to bridge the traditional philosophical dichotomy of «is» and «ought». For MARX, the proletariat expressed the most salient reality of existence but this reality was at once the corruption and degradation of man and at the same time the engine for propelling him into the ideal state of being.

The second attraction of Marxism to the periphery formations was its preoccupation with how to change social reality. MARX relied heavily on the concepts of classical political economy, particularly as they were developed by the physiocrats and David RICARDO. While they used these concepts for what was essentially a science of equilibrium, MARX used them to develop a science of change. In this MARX was helped by his ideological commitment to liberate man from oppression, his use of the dialectical method, his conception of reality as process, by his focus on the industrial revolution and his perception in seeing what he called 'modern industry' as its essence.

For all that, the relevance of MARX's work to the periphery, particularly Africa, was limited. He provided the outline of the appropriate social science; the general thrust of this science was equally appropriate. MARX's work was however a historical product, whose focus was also historically specific, despite its scientific validity. MARX was concerned with capitalism and the industrial revolution and, as a practical man, with the urgencies of bringing about revolution in Europe. His interest in the study of pre-capitalist formations was limited. Not surprisingly, he had very little to say about them. With exception of the odd piece such as the journalistic dispatches on India, his writings on pre-capitalist formations lack concreteness (certainly in comparison to his work on Industrial Europe).

MARX's interest in the industrialized capitalist Europe was highly focussed. What really captured his fancy was the relatively mature capitalism whose essence was «modern industry». MARX made a distinction between two aspects of the industrial revolution, manufacture and modern industry. At the stage of manufacture, «the revolution in the mode of production begins with labour-power». At this stage, the instruments of labour are still largely tools, whereas in modern industry the revolution begins with the instruments of labour which are now largely machines. It is with this transition that the industrial revolution really takes off and capitalism drives to maturity: it is now that science is systematically pressed into the service of capital.

*«Modern industry never looks upon and treats the existing form of a process as final. The technical basis of that industry is therefore revolutionary, while all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative. By means of machinery, chemical processes and other methods, it is continually causing changes not only in the technical basis of production, but also in the functions of the labour, and in the social combinations of the labour-process».*

MARX's treatment of modern industry underlines the fixity of his gaze on industrial capitalism. His concentration on this form of capitalism did not help his relevance to periphery formations. The relevance of his work was largely limited to those areas in which the necessities of industrial capitalism elicited attention to the periphery formations, for instance, the tendency of industrial capitalism to lead to imperialism.

*«... so soon, however, as the factory system has gained a certain breath of footing and a definite degree of maturity, and especially, so soon as its technical basis, machinery, is itself produced by machinery; so soon as coal mining and iron mining, the metal industries, and the means of transport have been revolutionized; so soon, in short, as the general conditions requisite for production by the modern industrial system have been established, this mode of production acquires an elasticity, a capacity for sudden extension by leaps and bounds that find no hindrance except in the supply of raw materials and in the disposal of the produce.*

*... By constantly making a part of the hands «supernumerary», modern industry, in all countries where it has taken root, gives a spur to emigration and to the colonization of foreign lands, which are thereby converted into settlements for growing the raw materials of the mother country; Just as Australia, for example, was converted into a colony for growing wool. A new and international division of labour, a division suited to the chief centres of modern industry springs up and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field». Capital, Vol. I, p. 424–5.*

MARX foresaw the link between capitalism and colonialism, the emerging international division of labour and the globalization of capitalism. But he hardly worried sufficiently the question of the implications of this globalization. He continued to maintain a Eurocentric vision, and confined himself to analysing capitalism in the European context, as if the future of capitalism would be decided by the internal dynamics of the European capitalist system with little or no reference to what happens in other parts of the globe. This became a strong legacy of Marxist thought.

The major works of MARX's era beginning with KAUTSKY's *Agrarian Question* (1899) which sought to develop MARX's work failed to shake off this legacy. LENIN's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*

(1899) gave useful insights into a rural economy and precapitalist formations, but was basically the application of capital to a European country with a mixture of modes of production. HILFERDING's *Finance Capital* (1904) and LUXEMBURG's *Accumulation of Capital* (1913) broke some new ground in the treatment of imperialism and the globalization of capitalism. So did BAUER's *The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy* (1907) and BUKHARIN's *Imperialism and the World Economy* (1915). But through all this we still had a very Eurocentric vision; there was still the basic commitment to the understanding of capitalism and its future possibilities in terms of the analysis of capital in the context of experience of the West. It is only with LENIN's *Imperialism: Highest Stage of Capitalism*, that we begin to see a major advance in dealing with capitalism as a global phenomenon. But even here, LENIN is really dealing with the changing nature of capitalism and using it to explain the World War I than on developing a theory about the world system that would pay close attention to the non-industrialized parts of the world. It is strange that even after the Russian revolution dramatically exposed the error of focussing narrowly on the industrialized countries, this was slow to register on Marxist theory: again it was LENIN who began to absorb the significance of this event as the last piece which he published showed «Better Fewer, But Better.» *Pravda* (March 2, 1923).

Besides such modest advances, there was very little progress towards the development of a theory of global capitalism with particular reference to the impact of imperialism on the periphery, the nature of capitalism and struggles within the periphery. But a significant advance came in the 50's, first with R.P. DUTT's *India Today*, (1950) and A. BARAN's *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957). BARAN's work which is concerned with economic development, analyzed capitalism with particular reference to transformation both in the industrialized countries and in the developing countries. His contemporary, a fellow American, Paul SWEEZY also made a useful contribution towards making Marxism less Eurocentric in his influential work, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* published in 1942. What was interesting about the contribution of SWEEZY in this respect was that he tried to show that the collapse of Western Capitalism would depend heavily on external factors such as the Soviet Union and the emergence and behaviour of socialist regimes elsewhere. In several occasional writings (see, *Modern Capitalism and Other Essays*), he shed light on the global character of capitalism and its manifestations in the non-industrialized world. Despite these promising developments and historical developments such as the spate of socialist revolutions in non-Western and non-industrialized countries, Marxist scholarship in the West has continued to be very Eurocentric and even introspective. Perry ANDERSON's survey of main developments in Western Marxist Scholarship, *Considerations on Western Marxisms*, shows the extent to which this is so. So does an analysis of the leading Western Marxist journals such as *New Left Review*

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

It is against this background that the emergence of what we are calling the political economy approach to the study of social formations is to be seen. The roots of this approach reach back to classical political economy, especially the work of Karl MARX. The main inspiration of the approach is to develop the work of Marx with particular reference to the elucidation of the global character of capitalism and its application to the periphery. So the political economy approach has developed in the general context of Marxism and relies a great deal on the conceptual apparatus and analytic framework of Marxism. Indeed the influence of the theory and methodology of Karl MARX has been so pervasive that there is considerable confusion as to where Marxism stops and the political economy approach begins. And worse, whether there is even a political economy approach as distinct from Marxism. The confusion has been compounded by the continuing use of the term political economy to describe the economic writings of orthodox Marxism and in some cases to describe the discipline of economics, for instance, AFANASYEV, L. et al. *The Political Economy of Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974) contains the following:

*«Political economy is the study of the system of social production at various development stages. The subject of this book is the capitalist mode of production».*

These and other passages in the book suggest that (a) political economy is a discipline (b) that the discipline is Marxist economics and (c) that in so far as political economy is an approach and not merely a discipline it is nothing other than Marxism. However, there is a political economy approach which is clearly distinguishable from Marxism despite its evident Marxist methodological thrust and in some respects its relation to Marxism is not without contradiction.

Following the pioneering work of LENIN, BARAN, SWEEZY and DUTT, the political economy approach got its main impetus from scholars working on the periphery especially in Africa and Latin America, from about the 60's when these parts of the world had at last begun to establish a strong presence in the international system. As was to be expected, the indigenous scholars from these parts of the world, especially in Latin America, played an important role in the development of the political economy approach because of their historical situation. They were progressive, invariably involved in struggles and under pressure to understand current reality for which Marxism provided a very rough guide which did not always fit or even direct attention to what seemed like the most critical questions. But there were also very significant contributors from Europeans who were working on the periphery formations; again these were often people very much committed to ongoing struggles for development and liberation in these parts of the world. Among the works which reflect or have contributed to the development of this approach are: A.G. FRANK,

*Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*; G. ARRIGHI and J. SAUL, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*; I. WALLERSTEIN, *The Modern World System*; M. MAMDANI, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*; I. SHIVJI, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*; S. AMIN, *Accumulation on a World Scale*; *Unequal Development*; J. MITTLEMAN, *Underdevelopment and the Transition to Socialism: Mozambique and Tanzania*; G. KAY, *Development and Underdevelopment*; B. MAGUBANE, *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*; C. THOMAS, *Dependence and Transformation*; C. LEYS, *Underdevelopment in Kenya*; T. SZENTES, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*; A. EMMANUEL, *Unequal Exchange*; J. RWEYEMAMU, *Underdevelopment and Industrialization in Tanzania*; R. PREBISCH, *Towards a Dynamic Development Policy for Latin America*; W. RODNEY, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; E. A. BRETT, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa*; P. GUTKIND (ed.), *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa*; Dos SANTOS *Dependencia y Cambio Social*; G. WILLIAMS, *State and Society in Nigeria*; NABUDERE, *The Political Economy of Imperialism*, A. NNOLI, *Paths to Nigerian Development*; P. REY, *Colonialisme, Néo-colonialisme et Transition au Capitalisme*; T. Dos SANTOS, *La Crise de la Théorie de Développement et les Relations de Dépendance en Amérique Latine*; *L'homme et la Société*, No. 12, April-May-June, 1969; C. FURTADO, *Economic Development of Latin America*.

This is only a sample of the growing body of literature which either reflect the political economy approach or at any rate have contributed to aspects of the development or application of this methodology. These works are profoundly different in many respects and it will not be surprising in the least if some of the authors cited here are not self-conscious methodologically or if they feel little mutual affinity. They reflect the divergent and sometimes even contradictory trends and the fluidity of this still evolving methodology. Nonetheless there are common trends: affinity to Marxism and a general disposition to adopt (albeit critically) Marxist categories of analysis, rejection of Eurocentric Marxism, scepticism of the view that the possibilities of capitalism and socialism in the world will be determined in Europe; a special interest in the periphery and the global character of capitalism with particular reference to the impact of imperialism and colonialism on periphery formations, and the theory of capitalism and capitalist development in the periphery.

But it should be emphasized that there is also considerable disunity, contradiction and confusion in this body of literature. For one thing, the writings cover a wide range of themes; different writings concentrate on different combinations of themes, and some of the themes have been worked over with intensity and with similar conceptual tools so that they have acquired a self-definition and a unity that is also methodological. This is true particularly of underdevelopment theory, dependency theory and centre-periphery theory. These theories (they are really analytic perspectives rather than theories, proper) are very close, reflecting the

fact that they all belong to a larger whole, the political economy approach. They are all dealing with the nature of capitalism in the non-industrialized world and the possibilities or otherwise of development in the context of the dynamics of global capitalism. Underdevelopment theory taking its point of departure from Paul BARAN's *The Political Economy of Growth* is specially concerned with the problem of autonomous capitalist development in the non-industrialized world. Centre-periphery theory treats the problem of development and the syndrome of underdevelopment in the context of the relationship between centre and periphery capitalism, seeing this relationship as the salient focus of analysis. Dependency theory might almost be treated as a special type of centre-periphery theory (and indeed as a special type of underdevelopment theory). It singles out the fact of dependence as the salient feature of centre-periphery relations as well as of underdevelopment. Despite these affinities these theories have developed identities separate not only from one another but also from the political economy approach.

Why has this happened? These theories or perspectives offered the advantage of dealing with specifics, they brought down the political economy approach from the level of general consciousness of the limitations of the application of orthodox Marxism to the periphery, from the vague discomfort that the character of global capitalism or periphery capitalism were not specified or even theorized. They offered specific characterization of capitalism in the centre and the periphery. And so on. As so often happens in the preoccupation with these specifics, the general concerns of which they were particularizations have been shunted to the background. Also, there was no question that these theories developed around problems that were to all appearances considered absolutely fundamental by the articulate sections of society in the periphery, namely, the problem of underdevelopment and that of their weakness in relation to the industrialized and imperialist centre. Theories dealing with these realities could hardly fail to capture the imagination of scholars of the periphery anxious to translate the developmental aspirations of their people to reality. The general relation of the dominance of these theories to existential conditions is underlined by the case of dependency theory. The emergence and currency of this theory cannot be dissociated from the highly conspicuous overlordship of the United States.

Finally, we must also bring into the picture the enormous attention which these theories attracted. On both the left and the right, the theories were seen as dangerous scepters that had to be exorcised. Bourgeois social scientists criticized them for every conceivable fault from being too vague to being blood-thirsty, in admitting the necessity of revolution. Orthodox Marxists criticized them for de-emphasizing internal contradictions and class struggle, for wanting to remove the yoke of imperialism without revolution. These are some of the factors which have enabled these theories to acquire self-definition and prominence at the expense of the political economy approach.



## AFRICA AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

But this was more true of Latin America than Africa. In Latin America, Marxist scholarship was well-established. This partly accounts for Latin America's immense contribution to underdevelopment theory, dependency and centre-periphery theories. These contributions arose mainly from Marxists trying to relate Marxism to the realities of Latin America. In Africa, Marxist scholarship was much less established. Radical consciousness among African social scientists appears to have gone hand in hand with the growth of nationalism, although Marxism also played a significant role. The radical consciousness in indigenous social science initially tended to take the form of a critique of Western social science and its ideological and value assumptions – the critique was in turn conceived as part of the ongoing struggle against imperialism. It was from such beginnings that some radical social scientists went into a serious study of Marxism and became also part of the movement for underdevelopment and dependency theories. African radical scholarship contributed rather little to these theories and analytic thrusts. But it was more methodologically self-conscious and contributed more to the development of the political economy approach in the way that it is now evolving as a methodology inspired by Marxism rather than as a shorthand for theoretical constructs remedying the deficiencies which limited the applicability of Marxism to the periphery.

Why was there more methodological consciousness in Africa? This had much to do with the nationalist and anti-imperialist beginnings of African radical scholarship, and its commitment to finding a way out of underdevelopment. Initially radicalism manifested itself not in the embracing of Marxism or in the quest for correcting Marxist theory and sensitizing it to African conditions, but rather in a painstaking critiques of Western social science to expose its values and ideological biases and interest disguised in seemingly value-free analytic tools and methodologies. These critiques also showed how the concepts and methodologies were part of the apparatus of imperialism and a hindrance to the pursuit of development. They posed the problem of finding an appropriate manner of proceeding. This search fostered by the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa and by indigenous professional associations, such as the African Association of Political Science as well as UNESCO, became a very potent force in humanities and social science scholarship in the 70's. This is evident in books such as Samir AMIN's *Accumulation on a World Scale* and the present writer's, *Social Science as Imperialism and Revolutionary Pressures in Africa*. A look at some of the themes and papers of social science conferences held in Africa in the 70's indicates the anti-imperialist thrust, and the preoccupation with finding an appropriate method of proceeding especially in regard to the realization of development.

1. «Social Science and Development Planning in Sub-Sahara Africa», Nairobi, December 2–6, 1974.
2. «Social Research and National Development in Nigeria», Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research, Ibadan, Nigeria, September–October, 1975.

3. «State and Role of Social Sciences in Africa» (Centre de Coordination des Recherches et de la Documentation en Sciences Sociales Desservant l'Afrique Sub-Saharienne, CERDAS), Kinshasa, Zaïre, November 29–December 4, 1977.
4. «Social Science, Research and National Development in Africa», CODESRIA/DSRC, Khartoum, November 4–8, 1978.
5. «Social Science Research Methodologies and their Relevance to African Development, CERDAS, Douala, Cameroun, April 24–28, 1978.

The growing radicalism and methodological consciousness of social science scholarship in Africa which came together in the development of the political economy approach received considerable impetus from professional associations and journals in Africa. Among the international professional associations which made the most significant contributions are the African Association for Political Science, the Association of Third World Economists, the Southern African Universities Social Science Council. Some national professional associations in Africa are contributing to the development of the political economy approach or at any rate reflecting its currency. In 1981, the Nigerian Political Science Association had its annual conference on the theme 'Nigeria: the Political Economy of Development'. Judging by the proceedings of this conference and the conference of 1982, the Association appears to have moved decisively in the direction of the political economy approach. Even the notoriously conservative Nigerian Economic Association has not been unaffected by these developments. Its 1982 Port Harcourt Conference was on the theme 'Political Economy'. The first session looked at the political economy approach and its possibilities. The journals which have reflected and promoted the political economy approach are *African Review*, *Review of African Political Economy*, *The Journal of African Marxists* and *Africa Development*. The Nigerian Political Science Association is planning to produce a *Nigerian Journal of Political Economy*. These, then, are some of the circumstances which have fostered the development of the political economy approach in African social science and have made this approach African in much the same sense that dependency theory is Latin American.

What are the specific tenets of the political economy approach? Since I have already elaborated on the approach in a familiar work, *A political Economy of Africa*, I will answer this question in a summary form here, with particular reference to its advantages:

1. The Political economy approach accepts the basic categories and basic methodological and theoretical commitments of Marxist thought, to this extent it may be construed as a variety of Marxism.
2. The approach is singularly interested in the nature of capitalism as a global phenomenon, the nature of the relation between centre and periphery, and the specificities of periphery capitalism especially as they illuminate the possibilities of the development of productive forces. Its development has been conditioned by the limitations of orthodox Marxism and Western social science methodology as a whole in providing these forms of understanding.

3. Tendency to assume that imperialism has been and remains a decisive influence on the nature and the possibilities of the periphery. This tendency has led orthodox Marxists to accuse the «political economists» of neglecting the class struggle.
4. Tendency to assume that the reality is characterized by dynamism arising from the pervasive contradictions of material existence. This is an element from the legacy of Marx which the approach has singled out for special attention.
5. Particular interest in the possibilities of development and associated with it, a preference for developmental analysis of phenomena; a tendency to see reality as a process.
6. A commitment to treat social life and material existence in their relatedness, and associated with this, a rejection of the discipline specialization and preference for the interdisciplinary approach; but an interdisciplinary approach which is conceived not as the simultaneous application of specialized disciplines but rather the forging of synthetic discipline, a social science (on materialistic foundations) to replace the social sciences.
7. Commitment to treating problems concretely rather than abstractly. This is often taken to the point of regarding scholarship as creative praxis, something to be guided by experience and reciprocally a guide to scholarship. It insists that the experience of periphery formations be taken seriously on their own terms, that they may be possibly new or unique realities not necessarily shadow imitations of things that have been elsewhere and which are to be understood by mechanically applying notions that might have illuminated other historical situations.

As is to be expected, the political economy approach is much criticized by orthodox Marxists. These critics do not often refer to the political economy approach as such. They are often directed as specific writings that use the approach or made in the context of discussions of underdevelopment theory or dependency theory or other «neo-Marxist» theories. Emile KATANA's comment on Samir AMIN (in *Studies of Developing Countries*, No. 101, Institute for World Economics, Budapest, 1979) is typical of orthodox Marxist critics of the political economy approach. KATANA calls the theoretical perspectives of the political economy approach in Samir AMIN's work too fatalistic, condemning the underdeveloped countries to unalterable, deteriorating position, almost irreversibly determined by neo-colonialism (p.24–25). According to KATANA, this fatalism cannot offer any tangible prospect of a quick escape from underdevelopment. This is all the more so because political economists remove «the possibility for socialist transformation from a national framework» and make it dependent «of a simultaneous revolutionary transformation all over the world». (p. 25). KATANA is disturbed that AMIN speaks of «the common interest of bourgeoisie and proletariat in the developed and underdeveloped countries respectively». According to KATANA, «this standpoint falsifies the international interests of the working classes inciting them — even if only implicitly — against each other in the backward

and developed countries» (p. 26). He concludes that «this is by no means the manifestation of Marxism not even in a new form. It does not promote the cause of the masses but it is rather in ideological alliance with capitalism itself» (p. 28).

The kinds of criticism also made against the underdevelopment and dependency theories and the political economy approach underline the Eurocentric tendencies against which these modes of analysis have found limiting to the development of a scientific understanding of society. The criticisms invariably boil down to the question of deviating from orthodoxies (for instance, moving from the notion of international division of labour to think of exploiter and exploited social formations) or failing to maximize certain values, for instance, proletarian internationalism, belief in the inevitable victory of a revolutionary struggle. The criticisms are phrased not so much in terms of whether what is being said by «political economists» is correct as whether it conforms to orthodoxy; they are very rarely made by testing them in a rigorous way against the actual historical experience of the situation whose illumination is at issue. Also the criticisms have tended to be of a negative kind, a tendency to condemn and reject rather than to correct and refine.

At the very least, the political economy approach has brought into clear relief the problems of the application of Marxism to the historical specificities of the periphery. Assuming indeed that everything that dependency and underdevelopment theorists and political economists say is wrong, it might have been expected that the new interest in the problems of application of Marxism to the periphery might have led to attempts by Western Marxists of a more orthodox bent to extend Marxist analysis in those areas where it falls short of illuminating significant aspects of the experiences of the periphery. But this expectation has not materialized, as a reading of Perry ANDERSON's *Considerations in Western Marxism* or an analysis of the concerns of the *New Left Review* will confirm. Western Marxism remains largely self-absorbed, little affected by the changes going on in the periphery, still posing and debating the same questions it has always posed only now with a touch of scholasticism. There is something strangely unMarxist about this intransigence of Western Marxism, the heresies from the periphery are dismissed formally, they are not treated as forms of consciousness emanating from actual conditions and so reflecting concrete contradictions which have to be resolved in a higher synthesis attesting to reality and its understanding as a process.

Not much is gained by arguing abstractly whether the tenets and manner of proceeding of the political economy approach are right or wrong, useful or useless. As a form of consciousness it can only be finally understood in the context of its «history», that is, by relating it to the contradictions of material life which it expresses. Placed in this context it is a reality whose very existence is interesting and instructive. It represents concrete aspirations and concrete struggles; it points to certain experiences and certain realities that are not sufficiently accounted for by existing forms of struggle and practice of science. Whether it sufficiently accounts for them or not, its dialectical engagement with other forms of consciousness (scientific) and struggle is likely to leave us clearer and more incisive in the end.

## RESUME

Comme son titre l'indique clairement, cet article traite des liens entre l'Approche de l'Economie Politique, le Marxisme, et la Science Sociale en Afrique. Il commence par une revue d'ensemble du développement historique de l'économie politique en tant que discipline en Europe, discipline atteignant son point culminant avec Marx et son œuvre. A travers l'œuvre de Marx, l'économie politique se retrouva à tel point imbriquée au Marxisme que plus tard, économie politique et marxisme devinrent synonymes dans l'esprit de bon nombre d'individus.

L'article s'attache ensuite aux rapports économie politique – groupes sociaux non-industrialisés.

Ici, le Professeur AKE soulève un point important : les études de Marx sont largement centrées sur l'Europe industrialisée et capitaliste et le rapport de ces mêmes études à l'Afrique en particulier est très limité. Des contemporains de Marx et des écrivains du début de ce siècle essayèrent de développer le marxisme par rapport à l'accumulation du capital et aussi par rapport à l'étude des sociétés non-industrialisées, la Russie des moujiks – paysans faisant l'objet d'une étude particulière.

Le Professeur AKE souligne le fait que tous ces travaux étaient Eurocentriques et très peu pertinents; seul Lénine se distingua des autres.

Le développement important suivant survint après la 2ème Guerre Mondiale, et plus spécialement dans les années cinquante, lorsqu'il y eut une sérieuse tentative de définition des liens entre l'accumulation du capital et les rapports périphéries – Europe et Amérique du Nord industrialisées et capitalistes. Dutt, Baran et Sweezy ouvrirent la voie.

La troisième phase remonte aux années soixante et soixante-dix, quand l'Amérique Latine, l'Afrique et l'Asie firent leur entrée sur la scène mondiale pour y jouer un rôle décisif dans les domaines économique, politique et diplomatique. Les chercheurs en sciences sociales du Tiers-Monde, faisant face aux réalités de l'oppression, l'exploitation et même de la lutte politique commencèrent à écrire sur la situation dans la périphérie en utilisant en même temps l'Approche de l'Economie Politique et le Marxisme afin d'analyser plus complètement les groupes sociaux de la périphérie et l'impact de l'accumulation du capital sur ces groupes. L'auteur dresse une longue liste choisie des écrivains qui se sont fait connaître lors des années soixante et soixante-dix, dans le Tiers-Monde. Bien que différents en termes de choix des thèmes et même en termes méthodologiques, ces auteurs avaient néanmoins certaines affinités; le Professeur AKE les recense dans cet article. L'aspect le plus important de toute cette phase est la convergence sur l'analyse des spécificités de la périphérie dans le cadre global de l'Economie Politique et du Marxisme.

Le Professeur AKE démontre que bien que l'Economie Politique d'une part et le Marxisme d'autre part aient des liens étroits, il n'en est pas moins qu'il faut faire la distinction entre les deux.

Ensuite, il remarque que pour des raisons historiques et autres, les Latino-américains ont commencé à écrire beaucoup plus tôt, et qu'ils ont finalement mis sur pied diverses écoles de pensée, dont la plus remarquable est l'«Ecole de la Dépendance». Toujours pour des raisons historiques ou autres, les africains se sont fait connaître beaucoup plus tard et prirent une voie différente.

Premièrement, étant très engagés dans le mouvement nationaliste et le nationalisme «per se», ils commencèrent par la remise en question des sciences sociales émanant de l'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord avec la prétention d'être «impartiales et objectives». Ils remirent aussi en question leur pertinence par rapport à la situation africaine. Ainsi, progressivement, et par un processus de réaction, les chercheurs africains en sciences sociales retournèrent à l'approche de l'économie politique; ce faisant, ils cherchaient – et cherchent toujours – à tâtons des outils conceptuels plus précis dans le cadre de l'Approche de l'Economie Politique, outils qui reflèteraient plus fidèlement la situation africaine spécifique.

Claude AKE décrit les nombreux journaux et institutions africains qui utilisent et préconisent l'Approche de l'Economie Politique. A ce stade, il énumère ce qu'il considère être les piliers essentiels de l'économie politique en Afrique et plus particulièrement en termes d'avantages de cette approche.

En fin de compte, il indique que l'Approche de l'Economie Politique en Afrique a aussi bien été critiquée par les chercheurs en sciences sociales bourgeois que par les marxistes orthodoxes, et il termine en disant: «... l'Approche de l'Economie Politique a pour le moins permis d'amener au grand jour les problèmes de l'application du marxisme aux spécificités historiques de la périphérie» – la périphérie étant dans ce cas l'Afrique.