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THE SIXTH PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS

AN INTERVIEW

with

GERRI STARK

[Ed. Note: In the morning of March 19, 1974 a friend of *Ufahamu*, Comrade Malik Chaka interviewed Sister Gerri Stark, Information officer of the Temporary Secretariat of the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar Es Salaam about "the potentially historic" forthcoming Congress. We are pleased to present to our readers not only a glimpse of what it took to organize the Sixth Pan-African Congress, but also what some of the issues to be discussed at the Congress might be. We are greatly indebted to Comrade Chaka for providing *Ufahamu* with this interview.]

QUESTION: *Sister Stark, in the armed social revolutions -- to differentiate them from purely national struggles -- being waged in Southern Africa and Guinea-Bissau the question of the position of women in the society looms very large. Will the depressed position of Sisters through out the African world be discussed?*

ANSWER: Yes, the position of Sisters throughout the African world is sure to be discussed, but within the context of the total situation of African people. For example, some liberation movements use the term "National Reconstruction." Within that term is great significance because it implies a reconstruction of the nation physically, and a reconstruction of attitudes, values, systems of economics, politics, and culture. It is something that takes a long time.

In my opinion, the folks who are most advanced along this road are the liberation movements in their armed struggle and in their liberated areas. One of the facets of this kind of national reconstruction is revolutionary change in the position of women. I don't think I need to elaborate for anyone who has read political material on the liberation movements. We both know that the rest of the African world lags somewhat behind the liberation movements, at varying stages, in both the realization of the problem and the tackling of it. This to me is one more reason for the desirability of a political forum at which the liberation movements have the part of full

delegates, in company with those of us from African states and African communities elsewhere.

QUESTION: The illegal settler regimes and the Portuguese colonists are sometimes opposed by more than one fighting movement or underground political organization. What criteria will be used to pick liberation movement delegates?

ANSWER: The liberation movements which are invited to send delegations to the Congress (as opposed to observers) will pick their own delegates. The Secretariat will only outline for them the kinds of topics they will be asked to address or to discuss in a total context along with other delegates, so they have these in mind when selecting their delegates.

There are several places in Southern Africa with more than one liberation movement, including Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Political bodies or forums always find themselves in the difficult position of being asked to judge which ones are "legitimate." The exception is in a case like Guinea-Bissau where it is clear from the total people themselves which party liberation movement speaks for them as a nation. I hope no one underestimates, or is naive about the contradictions and conflicts involved in people outside the war zones establishing criteria for recognition of movements. The judgement about recognition, or even understanding of the movements, is based on a combination of things: First, and this is most rare, on site empirical observation in the areas of struggle; Second, the movements' own external propaganda and exhibits; Third, and more commonly for most people, the propaganda of the imperialist or the socialist press, each representing a certain view; Fourth, the findings of the OAU Liberation Committee and its inspection teams, which is the African states' current method. None of these methods is entirely divorced from so-called big-power politics, nor from pettiness, personality conflicts, and deceptions which sometime influence political judgements.

It had been pointed out to me by representatives of several liberation movements, that the whole question of recognition in Africa, at least, is in a state of flux reflecting the political flux of the struggle.

At present, our method for determining which movements to invite is to ask OAU-recognized movements. Steering Committee members from North America and interested parties in some African countries have strongly urged the reconsideration of this method of selection, primarily on behalf of UNITA in Angola. Naturally the Secretariat has to consider these views. I think the International Steering Committee will have to finally decide on the Congress delegations by the end of April.

QUESTION: *What is the anticipated role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its various components, e.g. the Liberation Committee, in the up coming Congress?*

ANSWER: The OAU, as the organization which represents 42 politically independent African states -- the 42nd is Guinea-Bissau -- will be asked to participate at the Congress. For example, I think a major speech is to be delivered by an OAU representative, and someone from the Liberation Committee will definitely participate in the workshop on the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

QUESTION: *In the Caribbean you have seemingly recognized a duality of power because both the ruling parties and opposition groups will be represented here in Tanzania at the Sixth Congress. What is the Congress' stand on the opposition parties in the independent states where power is often seized and exercised behind the backs of the masses?*

ANSWER: I would say that the Caribbean participation in the Congress, which is a political forum, will reflect some of the political realities specific to the Caribbean. The Caribbean delegation is still in the process of formation. There have been some problems, and I'd rather not comment further at this time.

QUESTION: *Where will the Western Hemisphere and Diaspora delegates come from in addition to the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean?*

ANSWER: At this time we can say for certain that delegates will come from Britain, France, and Holland. In Britain there is a Temporary Steering Committee of representatives from nine Organizations. Among these are: Black Unity and Freedom Party (London), Black Workers Movement (London), Black Peoples Movement ((Bristol), and Afro-Caribbean Self-Help Organization (Nottingham). This Temporary Steering Committee has the basic responsibility for organizing a British delegation.

In France, Holland, and elsewhere in Europe the organization of delegates is less definite. So at this point, I can't disclose more specific information to you, except to say that the Temporary Secretariat has been in contact with interested organizations and individuals.

QUESTION: *A document distributed by the Secretariat speaks of socialism emerging as a "rational choice" for oppressed people. Does this mean that it is only a question of good men making a "rational choice" or will socialism in Africa be the result of intense bloody civil wars like the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions?*

ANSWER: The reference to a "rational choice" is from a speech by President Nyerere to the Sudanese Socialist Union in Khartoum, January 1973. The implication from his speech, if I understand it correctly, is that African people -- must have a revolution which is scientific and therefore rational. He says we must decide to embark on a struggle for an economic and social system which eliminates inequality, oppression, exploitation, and dependence.

Then people who make the choice of socialism are faced with determining their methods for building socialism, and eliminating obstacles in their way.

I think that the question of *how* socialism in Africa will come into being is not one which has a pat answer. For example, Tanzania has opted to follow a policy of building a socialist society. There has been no bloody civil war here. It is significant that TANU states that it regards itself as a liberation movement, as well as a political party, with all that this implies for socialist national reconstruction. It may be that other parts of Africa will require the following of a path which has similarities to that of Russia or China or Cuba. If this is so, then it still will not necessarily be a bloody struggle especially because it *has* to follow a past blueprint to socialism. But if a bloody struggle does occur because the unique objective conditions demand it, then the people will have no alternative but to engage in the actual struggle.

QUESTION: George Padmore, justly described as the "Father of African Independence" by Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, said, "Pan-Africanism offers an ideological alternative to communism on one side and tribalism on the other". Does the Sixth Pan-African Congress view the world socialist system in the same way?

ANSWER: First, accepting your quote from Padmore, he didn't say socialism offers an alternative to communism and tribalism, he said Pan-Africanism. So I don't quite understand how the second part of your question follows from the first.

Second, the Congress delegates will be the ones to answer the questions of how the ideology of socialism is viewed by the Congress. I can't comment on the "world socialist system" because I'm not clear what that is.

However, I think that most progressive people who will be at the Congress view socialism as the economic/social system which will help bring about the complete liberation of Africa for African people. The other important question before the

Congress would seem to be what work is necessary for this, and what things all African people can contribute to the concrete work. A socialist *system* for Africa implies an economic infrastructure, political organization and cooperation, skilled people and techniques, besides just analysis and making the choice. None of these exist yet.

The Congress reflects some of the contradictions now present in the African world. It will not be, as some people have already truthfully pointed out, a revolutionary Congress, or a Congress of revolutionaries alone. But if it can make a positive contribution to the discussion of the matters about which I have just spoken; if it can encourage certain directions of thought among a wider spectrum of African people; if it can even heighten some contradictions in the interest of struggle, then I think the overall impact can be positive.

QUESTION: *The Congress Call that I believe was written by Mzee C. L. R. James calls for drawing a line of steel against those Africans included, who hide behind the slogan and paraphernalia of national independence while allowing finance capital to dominate and direct their economic and social life. (emphasis in the original) Is this a statement of intent or is the secretariat assuming that most African States are following the valiant examples of Tanzania, Guinea, Somalia and Congo-Brazzaville by moving towards disengagement from international finance capital?*

ANSWER: The Call was written by a committee of people, among them Mzee James. At this point I'd just like to remind you that the Secretariat has the task of preparing for the Congress, but is by no means the totality of the Congress. You understand that I get a little off balance, when you ask it "the Secretariat assumes this or that". However, to get to what I think is the intent of your question, a realistic political understanding of Africa has to note that most African States are not following the kind of political-economic policies followed by Guinea or Tanzania or Congo.

The Call was meant to outline a political framework and direction which the Temporary International Steering Committee and Sponsors, calling people to the Congress, advocate. Between a statement of intent or even revolutionary pronouncements and their accomplishment is a long road.

QUESTION: *We sometime forget our Brothers and Sisters dwelling on the islands off the African coasts. Will the Islands of Africa both free, e.g. Malagasy, Mauritius, and colonized, e.g. Comoro Islands, Seychelles Islands, Sao Tome and Principe be represented at the Congress?*

ANSWER: I think that forgetting about the African Island is more a problem with bloods in the states because people here are in physical proximity with these islands. Malagasy and Mauritius, will be represented in the same way as other politically independent African states.

The liberation movements of the Seychelles (S.P.U.P), Sao Tome, and Principe, (M.L.S.T.P.), and the Comoro islands (MOLINACO) are being invited to participate in the Congress in the same way as other liberation movements.

QUESTION: *Reading through the Congress literature I was struck by lack of any reference to the various classes and strata that Africans are divided into. Does this mean that Africans are seen as an amorphous glb without antagonistic contradictions, e.g. bureaucratic bourgeoisie or comprador capitalists on one hand, and workers and peasants on the other; or that certain classes and strata have a leading role, e.g. Cabral's revolutionary petty bourgeoisie or subsidiaries or peasants as the main physical force in revolutionary struggles?*

ANSWER: Perhaps one can have that interpretation of Congress literature if one only perceives reference to issues of exploitation within African communities and states when the traditional Marxist-Leninist terms are used. The Call makes reference to these issues, and a recent historical article in *Black World* makes references to the role of class differences at the time of the Fifth Congress. And I think the content of the discussions at the Congress will reflect analysis of classes within the African World because some delegates are sure to make a class analysis.

Any discussion of economic independence and an end to exploitation, or of liberation movements, would have to take into account class differences. We just shouldn't lose sight of the fact that there are many ways to say the same thing to vocalize the same analysis. For example, some people have explained that the liberation of Africa, which is not yet complete in *any* place, has to mean liberation of each individual from economic misery, political repression, etc. This is expressing the point completely in positive terms. Another way to say this might be to say the situation calls for an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, anti-fascist struggle, because these are things that stand in the way of liberation.

I would hope that the Congress discussions will in the end be assessed on what they positively and concretely contribute to the objective of a totally liberated Africa. That includes an end to any exploitation of one class or strata of

Africans by another. My own view is that the more pressing problem is exploitation and oppression of Africa by those who control and direct imperialism, and therefore make possible the role of their agents among us.

QUESTION: By what means has the organizing of the Congress been financed up to this point -- by governments or by volunteer contributions from various organizations? What are some of these organizations, if any?

ANSWER: The Secretariat's funds have come primarily from three major sources. First, two Caribbean governments, Jamaica and Guyana; the Congress hosts, TANU; and the World Council of Churches. From this first category have come the largest lump-sum contributions. Other African governments are being asked to make contributions.

Second have been individual contributions, primarily from North America, as a result of fund-raising appeals. There have been a lot of these, mostly below \$100. The individuals themselves have usually been members of local and national Black organizations.

Third, organizational contributions both in cash and material, mainly from local Black organizations in the U.S. and Canada. For a list itemized by names of organizations, I have to refer you to Sylvia Hill, the Regional Secretary-General, or James Turner, the Executive Committee Chairman. I am speaking only from memory when I cite some examples; the Institute of African Education in Minnesota, MACE in Mississippi and various Black studies programs at colleges where Congress representatives have spoken.

QUESTION: What has been the posture of the Soviet Union, the Peoples Democracies in Eastern Europe, Cuba and China to the proposed Congress?

ANSWER: About the Eastern Europeans its hard for me to divorce the interest they've expressed in the Congress from that of the Soviet Union, which has been very interested indeed. We have had many journalists from these places visiting the Secretariat for information. When we had our first press conference here, almost the entire Eastern European press establishment came. We have also been given to understand by various African States, organizations and individuals that the Soviet Union is concerned about whether the Congress will be "racist". We've been told they are concerned about whether the Congress is an extenuation of the political concerns of African people in the States, about the participation of North African states, and of well-known Black members of the U.S.

Communist Party, among other things. I'm sorry I'm not in a position to elaborate more at this time, but I have found their attitude to be politically very interesting indeed.

About Cuba, I would characterize their attitude as one of study and reservation; they have been asked to send delegates as part of the Caribbean Region. I don't think a decision has been made yet by them as to whether they will participate.

About China, they have shown what I would call quiet interest, sending representatives to the press conferences, etc. I emphasize this as my personal opinion; the Chinese do not seem to have the same apprehensions and attitude about political forums which are all-African as the Soviet Union. As you know there are also differences in the two nations' policies regarding Africa and African people.

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