

## George Padmore Engaged Pan-African Activist and Theorist: The Relevance of His Political Praxis and Theorization on Pan-Africanism

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### Abstract

This writer is well aware that ideas and tactics have but a brief shelf-life and what would have been relevant for a particular historical period might not be pertinent for the present moment. Notwithstanding this caveat, this paper seeks to examine whether aspects of George Padmore's political praxis and his theorization on Pan-Africanism are still relevant. The reader is provided with a brief overview of Padmore's activities and his achievements, to provide the justification for selecting him above other outstanding Pan-Africanists as a role model for young Pan-Africanists. The article assesses the extent to which his political organizational methods still have validity, lessons to be learnt and pitfalls to evade. It also evaluates Padmore's theorization on African unification in Pan-Africanism or Communism and his efforts to realize this objective; as well as his conception of Pan-African Socialism as the handmaiden for the United States of Africa. Today, the issue of African unification and socialism are still widely discussed across the African continent and within Pan-African circles outside of Africa, therefore Padmore's thoughts on these matters merits some interrogation.

**Keywords:** Pan-Africanism, Black International, Colonialism, Neo-liberalism, Communist, Socialism, Capitalism.

### Résumé

L'auteur est bien conscient que les idées et les tactiques n'ont qu'une courte durée de vie et que ce qui aurait été pertinent pour une période historique particulière peut ne pas l'être pour le moment. En dépit de cette mise en garde, cet article cherche à examiner si certains aspects de la praxis politique de George Padmore et de sa théorisation du panafricanisme sont toujours pertinents. Le lecteur dispose d'un bref aperçu des activités et des réussites de Padmore, qui justifie le choix de ce dernier, parmi d'autres panafricanistes exceptionnels, comme modèle pour les jeunes panafricanistes. L'article évalue dans quelle mesure ses méthodes d'organisation politique sont encore valables, les leçons à en tirer et les pièges à éviter. Il évalue également la théorisation de Padmore sur l'unification africaine dans le panafricanisme ou le communisme et ses efforts pour atteindre cet objectif, ainsi que sa conception du socialisme panafricain en tant que serviteur des États-Unis d'Afrique. Aujourd'hui, la question de l'unification africaine et du socialisme est toujours largement débattue sur le continent africain et dans les cercles panafricains en dehors de l'Afrique. Les réflexions de Padmore sur ces questions méritent donc d'être interrogées.

**Mots-clés:** Panafricanisme, Internationalisme Noir, Colonialisme, Néo-libéralisme, Communiste, Socialisme, Capitalisme.

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## Introduction

“One day, the whole of Africa will surely be free and united and when the final tale is told, the significance of George Padmore’s work will be revealed.” Kwame Nkrumah, Broadcast Speech by the RT. Hon. Prime Minister on the Death of Mr. George Padmore – 29th Sept. 1959

In nearly every conversation that I have with young Pan-Africanists about the immense challenges facing Africa and Africans globally, the question that usually arises is if I have a strategy or a blueprint that I would be willing to share with them as they struggle to overcome these hurdles and create a better world. Unfortunately, I have to confess that I do not have any ready-made approach because it is my belief that the strategies will be formulated in the actual struggle based on the objective and subjective conditions. My counsel to them is to study the political praxis and ideas of the leading Pan-Africanists, to see whether they have any relevance, and what lessons can be learnt from their engagement and as a source of inspiration. One Pan-Africanist that I highly recommend is George Padmore who dedicated his life to freeing Africa and the Caribbean from colonial rule.

### **Who was George Padmore and why is he worthy of emulation?**

Padmore was born in Trinidad and Tobago in 1903. His father, James Nurse was one of the leading Pan-Africanists on the twin island of Trinidad and Tobago. Padmore migrated to the United States in 1924 to pursue higher education and became heavily involved in student activism at Fisk and Howard Universities. Padmore joined the Communist Party of the United States in 1927 because he felt that this organization could assist him with his political objective of liberating Africa from the grip of European colonial rule. At this time he felt that all of the ills of the world stemmed from the capitalist system and “only by abolishing this nefarious system will the oppressed races and classes be emancipated and the brotherhood of man established.” (Padmore, 1928?). Padmore was very impressed with developments within the Soviet Union especially on the race question, self-determination and support for the anti-colonial and labour struggles in the colonies. In 1920, at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) V.I. Lenin, the leader of the Soviet Union submitted his Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions, and made it clear that all Communist Parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies. (Adi, 2013, Weiss, 2014). At the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, a Negro Commission was established and this congress noted that the international struggle of the Negro race is a struggle against Capitalism and Imperialism and it was on this basis that the World Negro Movement must be organized. (Adi, 2013). After this congress a Negro Bureau was established. The Comintern “created a space for a vision of Black internationalism that could transcend without negating a completely racialized view.” (Kelly, 1994: 39).

Within a relative short period of time Padmore became one of the leading black Communists not only in the United States but in the Communist International. He served as the Chairman of the Red International Labour Union, the Executive Secretary of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) and the Editor in Chief of the Negro Worker. As the Executive Secretary of the ITUCNW and the editor of the Negro Worker Padmore sought to use these entities to build a black international and worked for the liberation of global Africans from the ravages of capitalist and colonial exploitation. In 1933, Padmore resigned from the Comintern when he thought that the black international project was being compromised because of the rise of fascism and the attendant international relations dynamics facing the Soviet Union. Before his resignation Padmore had started to lose faith in the viability of the proletarian internationalism to liberate Africa and the Caribbean from colonial rule. He began theorising about a double revolution taking place in the colonies – the first a racial revolution aimed at the white imperialists and the second one was a class-based revolution to be arranged by the party shortly after the first. (Hooker, 1967).

After leaving the Comintern Padmore continued to work for the liberation of Black people as a Pan-African activist and theoretician for close to two decades. He played a key role in organizing the 5th Pan-African Congress that was held in Manchester in 1945 which is now seen as the most productive of all the Pan-African Congresses held. Padmore was the ideological mentor of Kwame Nkrumah and he subsequently served as his Advisor on African Affairs from 1957–1959 when he died. Padmore was also a prolific writer who wrote countless newspaper articles, pamphlets and books that critique the system of imperialism in Africa and the Caribbean and called for self-determination for all colonial peoples.

### **Political Praxis**

Padmore was heavily influenced by the Leninist method of political organization to which he was exposed to during the seven years that he was a communist. He functioned in very tight centralized vanguard organizations, operating on the principles of democratic centralism. This was evident within the American Negro Labour Congress, Communist Party of the United States, International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers and the Red International Labour Union. The “vanguard” was the most advanced section of the industrial working class, whose task was to direct the thoughts of those who were dissatisfied with the existing socio-economic and socio-political conditions. The vanguard party was to be led by a small cadre of professional revolutionaries who

were totally committed to bringing about the revolution that would lead to the creation of a socialist society. The vanguard party followed the principle of democratic centralism.

After Padmore broke with the Comintern, he brought vanguard tendencies to the Pan-Africanist organizations in which he played a prominent role namely: the International African Service Bureau (IASB) and the Pan-African Federation (PAF). Padmore was cognisant of “how the ideas of the party became obedient to the Central Committee and the Central Committee became obedient to the great leader” (Campbell, 2017). He had seen the degeneration of vanguardism in the Soviet Union and the utilization of violence to stamp out any opposing ideas, positions or individuals. Padmore critiqued the resultant violence that took place in the Soviet Union during Joseph Stalin “purges and show trials” in the 1930s, by stressing that “democracy and brotherhood cannot be built on intolerance and violence.” Moreover, he described himself as a socialist and a democrat to demonstrate that he had severed ties with the dictatorship of the proletariat and vanguardism but these predispositions still persisted. (Padmore, 1971: xvi). Peter Abrahams, the South African journalist and a member of the IASB who knew Padmore quite well, mentioned that he was known as the “Comintern man” to his comrades inside the IASB because of his former association with the Comintern and since his method of political organization remained unchanged (Abrahams, 2000: 39).

Padmore viewed the IASB and later the PAF as the vanguard of the Pan-African formations in Britain and those located outside of Britain. The IASB functioned like a typical vanguardist organization with Padmore being the chief ideologue and strategist. Abrahams informs us that the members of the IASB “never argued with or never crossed Padmore” (Abrahams, 2000: 39). This suggests that Padmore was held in very high esteem by his comrades inside of the IASB who valued his knowledge and experience as a strategist and propagandist. The IASB saw its mission as mobilizing and leading the struggle against racism in Britain and colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean. Padmore took this task seriously and strongly believed that the members of the IASB should show the same level of commitment and dedication to the principles and programs of the organizations, akin to Lenin’s professional revolutionaries. This position led him to be critical of the members of the IASB for not being sufficiently devoted to the task. He blasted them for coming to meetings late or for not completing assigned tasks in the agreed time frame. For Padmore, this tardiness was a clear indication of a lack of discipline and a signal that they were not taking their duties as seriously as they should. He wanted them to be totally dedicated to the task of bringing about the African revolution. Richard Wright captured Padmore’s total commitment to the struggle when he visited him in London: “it was all political talk, nothing to lift the minds or emotions” (Polsgrove, 2009: 45).

It was obvious that Padmore placed a high value on commitment and steadfastness to freeing Africa and the Caribbean from colonial rule. Given the enormity of the challenges confronting African peoples these qualities are admirable and should be a staple of any Pan-African project. The struggle to transform the condition of the African masses is a serious engagement and not a picnic, therefore all persons involved in this struggle must be prepared to make some sacrifice and work assiduously to make this a reality. However, the centralist and anti-democratic tendencies within vanguardism must be resisted because they will ultimately lead to the kind of authoritarianism and anti-democratic tendencies that have retarded Africa’s advancement. Brian Meeks, the Jamaican political scientist in looking at the collapse of the Grenadian Revolution in 1983, informed us that while vanguardism was critical to the success of the revolution it ultimately became “its dialectical opposite afterwards.” He further explained that vanguardism “led to a rapid fall in the number of active cadres and a highly hierarchical top-down system of command, both inimical to popular democracy and empowerment” (Meeks, 2015: 58). That is why vanguardist tendencies must be resisted but the spirit and work ethic of professional revolutionaries must be embraced.

Between 1931 and 1933, Padmore was the Editor in Chief of the *Negro Worker*, the organ of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers. This paper provided Padmore with the newspaper that he desired to be the mouthpiece of black workers. From his first editorial Padmore made it abundantly clear that it was not his intention to make the paper into a kind of theoretical journal, but one to “discuss and analyse the daily struggles of Black workers and connect these with the international struggles and problems of the workers” (Editorial, *International Workers Review*, 1931). Although the paper was controlled by bureaucrats from the Comintern who were interested in promoting the virtues of the Soviet Union, Padmore was still able to carry out his agenda of building a popular journal that discussed the daily struggles of black people; attack capitalism and expose the ills of colonialism while promoting Black internationalism. The *Negro Worker* also carried numerous articles about conditions and developments on the African continent. CLR James, the Trinidadian Marxist Pan-Africanist argues that the *Negro Worker* gave “information, advice, guidance, ideas about black struggles on every continent” (CLR James, n.d: 16). During the period, he also wrote for *Le Cri des Negres*, *La Race Negre*, and *Moscow Daily News*, where he continued to attack capitalism and colonialism.

After Padmore’s resignation as editor of the *Negro Worker* he did not have a newspaper like the *Negro Worker*, with its readership or distribution network. However, he was mindful that he needed to continue to share his ideas with his former followers and to reach new ones. Therefore Padmore wrote for many newspapers: *Crisis*, *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *New Leader*, *Controversy*, *Forward*, *International African Opinion*, *Tribune*, *Survey*, *Socialist Leader*, *United Asia*, *Beacon*, *Public Opinion* and many more newspapers in the Caribbean and Africa. Abrahams tell us that Padmore in all of his dispatches stated “Please pass on to other periodicals” to

insure that he reached the widest possible audience (Abrahams, 2000: 38).

Many of the newspapers did not pay Padmore but he continued to write for them because they provided a platform for him to attack colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean. Padmore saw the wisdom in using the resources and the connections of these newspapers to release his articles.

His articles provided information about struggles taking place throughout global Africa and allowed African peoples to see that they faced similar struggles and had a common enemy – colonial imperialism. The newspaper articles were like a bellows whereby he sought to fan every spark of anti-colonial struggle and of popular outrage into an inferno. Abrahams posits that “many newspapers and magazines in the colonies received a non-European perspective on what was happening in the colonial world” from Padmore (Abrahams, 2000). The newspapers and magazines definitely received a Pan-Africanist perspective on the issues confronting the peoples of African descent worldwide. Kwame Nkrumah confessed that he was very impressed with Padmore’s articles which had “aroused his interest and sympathy” when he was residing in the United States (Nkrumah, 1957: 49). From around 1938 to the late 1940s Padmore wrote for the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Crisis*. This admiration for Padmore’s writings led Nkrumah to speak to CLR James about sending a letter of introduction to Padmore informing him that he was coming to London in 1945 (CLR James, 1984). Leslie James posits that journalism provided Padmore with a medium for directly stating his line of reasoning about “the exploitative nature of empire” and the location of “black and non-white people within the system of international relations but it was also the most prolific form of his incessant compilation and dissemination of facts which he believed could be the cornerstone of social and political action” (L. James, 2015: 94).

He also wrote the following pamphlets: *What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers?*, *Life and Struggles of the Negro Toilers*, *Negro Workers and the Imperialist War*, *Forced Labour in Africa*, *America Imperialism Enslaves Liberia*, *Labour Imperialism in East Africa*, and *Hands off the Protectorates*, some of them were extensions of newspaper articles that he had written. Padmore also co-authored *The White Man Duty* and edited *Voice of Coloured Labour and the History of the Pan-African Congress*. The pamphlets were important tools of propaganda and expanded the discussion of Padmore’s articles

Padmore also wrote six books *How Britain Rules Africa*, *Africa and World Peace*, *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire*, *Africa Britain’s Third Empire*, *The Gold Coast Revolution: The Struggle of an African People For Freedom and Pan-Africanism or Communism*. These works extended the discussion of the newspaper articles and pamphlets and helped to further propagate his ideas as he exposed the ills of colonialism, promoted the idea of self-determination and solidified his commitment to the creation of a continental Africa Union pursuing a Pan-African socialist path of development. During the 1930s and the 1940s when Padmore wrote the majority of his books, such writing was not the common practice among Africans or African descendants. According to Carol Polsgrove, for an African writing a book – asserting his views of the world in the form that Europe had claimed as its own – was itself a political act: “A book was a form of speech that Europeans would take seriously” (Polsgrove, 2009: 6). Padmore used the Marxist historical materialism method in his writings because “it provides a rational explanation for a good deal that would otherwise be unintelligible” (Padmore, 1971: xvi).

### Conferences

For Padmore conferences were important organizational devices. Although he once stated that conferences “are a typical British institution, and this is a malady which we as British subjects have not been able to escape” (Aptheker, 1978: 78). He participated in, and organized several international conferences starting with the Trade Union Unity League Convention in 1929. Padmore was one of the main organizers of the International Conference of Negro Workers in 1930; the International Seamen and Harbour Workers in 1932; and the Congress of the International Labour Defence in the Soviet Union in 1932. He was intimately involved in planning the aborted Negro World Conference in France in 1935. He attended a European socialist conference in Paris in 1939. Padmore participated in two Subject Peoples Conferences that took place in London in 1945 and was the chief organizer of the historic 1945, 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester. He attended the British Centre Against Imperialism Conference, London, 1946 and attended the Paris Peace Conference that same year. Padmore was the main organizer of the Conference of Independent States in April 1958 and the All African Peoples Conference in December 1958, held in Accra. Padmore attended the Guinea-Ghana Conference in May 1959 and the Ghana-Guinea-Liberia Conference in July 1959.

It was not accidental that Padmore attended and participated in numerous conferences because they were an important aspect of his politics. These Conferences provided a forum for interactive dialogue, where like-minded individuals shared information, experiences, disseminated ideas, made and reinforced contacts. They also provided an avenue for instant feedback and constructive criticism that were not forthcoming with a newspaper article. The conference for Padmore transcended discussing and voting on resolutions and making presentations. The conference assisted in building solidarity and providing inspiration for the task at hand. James reminds us that Padmore and he would be present at “any conference that was sympathetic to colonial peoples or which were dealing with colonial matters” (James, n.d: 29).

As a conference organizer of some repute Padmore recognized the critical importance of timing in arriving at the decision as whether to hold a conference. He was aware that the last Pan-African Congress had taken place



in 1927 and a number of developments had taken place since then that made it necessary for this confab, namely: the rise of fascism, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the rise of anti-colonial agitation in Africa and the Caribbean, the Second World War and the growth of Pan-Africanism. Padmore and the PAF made the “call” for the 5th Pan-African Congress to coincide with the World Federation of Trade Union Preliminary Conference in February 1945. The World Federation of Trade Union Conference (WFTU) was a major development in the international labour movement, it was the first time that “coloured colonial workers were given the opportunity of voicing their grievances and expressing their hopes and aspirations through trusted leaders” (Padmore, 1945: 3). At this historic gathering representatives came from Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and British Guiana. The call was sent out to get the support and assistance of these delegates when they returned for the full conference of WFTU later in the year. Padmore was cognizant of the fact that although trade unions were only recently legally recognized in many territories they had a large membership base and many of the trade unions were tied to the emerging political parties. According to Padmore, “the trade unions came from the masses and have deep roots in the masses” (Aptheker, 1978: 65). Therefore he sought to use the trade unions to assist him in getting the widest possible support of Africa people to the conference. He insisted that all the representatives who attended the congress had to have a mandate from a mass-based organization and they would not “speak for themselves but would speak for the masses, the workers organizations, the cooperatives, peasant associations, labour parties and national liberation organizations” (Aptheker, 1978: 88). When the congress took place in Manchester in October 1945, over two hundred delegates attended representing political parties, trade unions, farmer movements and students. This was a departure from the earlier Pan-African Congresses that were sponsored by W.E.B. Du Bois, which were attended by a small number of bourgeois reformers and intellectuals.

Padmore placed a lot of emphasis on “advanced planning” in order to have a successful conference. He strongly believed that advanced planning was necessary in order to orient the conference in a particular political direction. It also facilitated getting the specific issues to be discussed placed on the agenda and the resolutions to be prepared in advance.

During the exchanges between Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois in connection with the convening of the 5th Pan-African Congress, Du Bois told Padmore that they should be no “attempt to impose any fixed ideological pattern upon the conference” or have any resolutions drawn up before the commencement of the conference (Aptheker, 1978: 88). Padmore sought to allay Du Bois’ fears by stating that “we have every reason to believe that there will be unanimous agreement upon the fundamental aims and objects which the Conference desires to arrive at” (ibid). He also told Du Bois that no resolutions would be prepared in advance of the Congress for the delegates “to approve or to reject,” and “the resolutions would be drafted by the sub-committee after getting reports from different countries and discussing them” (ibid). Notwithstanding all that Padmore told Du Bois, it was clear that Padmore was able to influence the conference to achieve the desired objective hoped for. This was evident in the strong self-determination line taken by the conference as well as seen in “The Challenge to the Colonial Powers” and “The Declaration to the Colonial Workers, Farmers and Intellectuals,” the two major documents of the 5th Pan-African Congress.

Padmore viewed the All African Peoples Conference that took place in Accra in December 1958 as a follow up to the 5th Pan-African Congress although Nkrumah insisted that it should be called the All African Peoples Conference to demonstrate that “Ghana and Nkrumah had begun a new tradition” (Rooney, 2007: 208). At this gathering delegates came from sixty-two nationalist organizations. The aim of the conference was to encourage nationalist political movements in colonial areas as a means towards continental unity and socialist transformation of society. From the “Call” to the resolutions passed, Padmore’s prints were etched on the conference. The resolutions on Frontiers, Boundaries and Federations: i) Endorses Pan-Africanism and the desire for unity among African peoples; ii) Declares that its ultimate objective is the evolution of a Commonwealth of African states; iii) Calls upon the Independent States of Africa to lead the peoples of Africa towards this objective and iv) Expresses the hope that this day will dawn when the first loyalty of African States will be to an African Commonwealth; these reaffirmed sentiments expressed by Padmore in *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (Thompson, 1969: 352–353) Moreover, he was able to ensure that the conference’s objectives were institutionalized by the creation of the Pan-African Secretariat with its main objective being “to develop the feeling of one community among the peoples of Africa with the object of the emergence of a United States of Africa” (Thompson, 1969: 358).

#### **Network of contacts**

It was claimed that Padmore had over four thousand contacts scattered across Europe, North America, the Caribbean and Africa. Although this figure seems somewhat inflated, it was clear that Padmore had numerous contacts many of whom he had cultivated when he was the chairman of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers and the editor of the *Negro Worker*. He used these contacts to assist with the distribution of the *Negro Worker*. Padmore also used his connections to help promote conferences and other political activity. After the decision was taken to organize the 5th Pan-African Congress, Padmore’s “contacts throughout the Commonwealth and empire were alerted,” according to Peter Abrahams (Abrahams, 2000: 45–46). Many of these acquaintances were politically active with connections to the emerging political parties and the trade unions.

The contacts also provided Padmore with information about political developments that were occurring inside their territories. This knowledge kept Padmore abreast of the struggles taking place in Africa and the Caribbean.

### **Student Activism**

Padmore believed that change would only come through struggle and this led him down the path of activism. He recognized that the only way to struggle effectively was in an organization of like-minded individuals. Therefore he joined existing organizations or started new organizations to agitate and fight on behalf of global Africans for a better world free from racism and colonial oppression. As a student at Fisk University, Padmore was deeply involved with activism on the campus; he claimed that he “was part of a group of students that organized the biggest student strike in the South” (Adi, 2013: 143). He was instrumental in the formation of a Pan-African student organization to “foster racial consciousness and a spirit of nationalism aiming at the protection of the sovereignty of Liberia” (Azikwe, 1970: 138). Liberia held a special space in the psyche of most Pan-Africanists as a place of great possibilities for an African renaissance. Padmore saw the defense of Liberia as a duty and a right of Black people as the territory was an important symbol for Pan-Africanists during the 19th and early 20th Century. He also developed a reputation both on and off campus as one of the leading anti-colonial speakers. Furthermore, Padmore was very involved with student activism at Howard University as the secretary of the Anti-Imperialistic Youth League.

### **Communist Activism**

In 1927 Padmore became a member of The American Negro Labour Congress where he worked as an organizer and wrote for and edited articles for the Negro Champion. Around this time, he was also a member of the Harlem Tenants League, an organization which led rent strikes, protested against evictions and fought for better housing conditions for the residents of Harlem. In the same year he joined the communist party of the United States (CPUSA) and became a professional revolutionary in order to “render in a fuller way some aid to my brothers in Africa” (Padmore, 1935). As a member of the CPUSA, Padmore was described as “active, devoted and fearless.” It was these qualities that brought him to the attention of the hierarchy of the CPUSA and the Comintern.

During his career within the Comintern he brought the same characteristics in promoting the Black International. However, his major weakness seemed to be that he was not sufficiently rooted in Marxist-Leninist theorizing. Harry Haywood, in his assessment of Padmore held the view that he seemed more of a pragmatist with only a superficial grasp of Marxist theory (Haywood, 1978). Padmore in a letter to his friend Ottis Olliviere declared that “he was not interested in this high-brow stuff. His main concern was in getting rid of the damn white blood suckers from the West Indies and Africa” (Padmore letter to Olliviere, 1932). He seemed to be suggesting that he was not a big fan of Marxist-Leninist theorizing for its own sake but as an engaged Marxist his energy would be better spent trying to defeat colonialism in a concrete manner. This is why he wanted the Negro Worker to be a popular journal that would discuss the daily problems of the African toilers and not a theoretical journal to discuss resolutions. Padmore did a lot of work within the Comintern in exposing the evils of, and attacking the system of colonialism and building a black international but he did not contribute meaningfully towards the enrichment of Marxist thought as his writings were largely polemical.

### **Pan-African Activism**

In 1935, the fascist Italians under Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. For many Africans and African descendants Ethiopia occupied a special place in their hearts as a nation with a history going way back into antiquity. At this time Ethiopia was the only remaining really independent African territory. Ethiopia was revered because she was able to defeat the Italians in 1896 and halt the advance of European colonialism. Padmore who had written that it was the “task of every black man and woman to render the maximum moral and material support to the Ethiopian people”; joined the International Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) soon after arriving in London in 1935. He stressed that the battle “of the Ethiopians was a fundamental part of the struggles of the black race the world over for national freedom, economic, political, social and racial emancipation” (Padmore, 1935).

Throughout global Africa sections of the people and Pan-African organisations provided solidarity, moral and material support for the Ethiopian peoples and widely condemned Italy for invading Ethiopia. In Jamaica members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association volunteered to fight in Ethiopia. In Trinidad and Tobago the Negro Welfare, Cultural and Social Association posted several protest resolutions including one to Benito Mussolini titled, “Hands off Abyssinia.” They also sent one to the League of Nations calling “for the unconditional withdrawal of fascist Italy from Ethiopia and condemning the policy of world imperialism for dividing up of Abyssinia” (Adi, 2018: 112–113). In Barbados there were several prayer vigils on behalf of the Ethiopian people and funds were collected for the Ethiopian Red Cross (Browne, 2012). The Nigeria Youth Movement organized a meeting in support of the Ethiopian people. In Sierra Leone an Ethiopian Relief Fund Committee was set up. In the Gold Coast an Ethiopian Defence Committee was established (Adi, 2018). In the United States of America, the Provisional Committee for the Defence of Ethiopia was created in 1934 and the Ethiopian World Federation was established in August 1937 (Adi, 2018). SKB Asante, argues that the protest against the Italian aggression was Pan-African in sentiment, scope and activity. He further explains that the protest was: i) a practical expression of the consciousness of

Africans and peoples of African descent and ii) an expression of the unity of purpose and action existing among the black people of the world (Asante, 1977: 3–4).

In Britain, the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) was created in 1935 “to arouse the sympathy and support for the British public for the victims of fascist aggression and ii) to assist by all means in their power the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Abyssinia. Although Padmore was not a founder member of this organization CLR James tells us that he quickly became the dominant figure (James, n.d: 29). As a member of the IAFA Padmore was very active, he would speak in Hyde Park regularly or address any individual or progressive organization that was interested in the colonial question.

In 1937, Padmore and some of the former members of the IAFA established the International African Service Bureau. This formation was “formed to assist by all means in our power the uncoordinated struggle of Africans and people of African descent against the oppression from which they suffer in every country” (Editorial, International African Opinion, 1938). The IASB under the astute leadership of Padmore became the leading Pan-African organization in Britain and the epi-centre of anti-imperialism in London. CLR James credited him for making the IASB into a genuine political force (CLR James, n.d: 29). The IASB provided Padmore with the platform to continue the anti-imperialist work that he was doing in the Comintern and to advocate Pan-Africanism as the ideology for Africa.

As the consummate political animal and political activist, Padmore called several protest meetings whenever he discovered an issue affecting Africans in London or globally. At the meetings the gatherings would pass resolutions which Padmore or another member of the IASB would submit to the colonial office. Padmore felt that it was imperative to hold meetings whenever some incident took place because if they did not have meetings the people would believe that the IASB had no interest in the matter. In addition, he wrote several letters to the Press and numerous newspapers articles to many newspapers in order to keep the issue in the consciousness of people. He also sought to persuade Members of the British Parliament who were sympathetic to the colonial question, to bring the issues affecting colonial peoples to the attention of the House. The IASB also held many lectures and discussions where they were able to interest a section of the African intellectuals in London.

At this time he spent a lot of time speaking to individuals from all over the colonial world. During these conversations, Padmore would formulate an “article, a resolution, a manoeuvre with the Colonial Office, an approach to a Labour Member of Parliament, an avenue for some propaganda in the British Press” (James, 1984: 257). Some African politicians – Wallace Johnson, Jomo Kenyatta, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Joe Appah – visited the IASB to confer with him “for advice on tactics and strategies to utilize in their various anti-colonial struggles” (James, 1977: 56). James observes that Padmore had the ability to understand a situation from the “slenderest data” provided and then formulate a policy for inexperienced Africans and African descendants to make use of. He added that Padmore did extensive research which allowed him to know “details of all sorts of people including colonial officials, what had been their education; what social stratum they belonged to; with which business firms they were connected” (James, n.d.: 29). Dudley Thompson, the Jamaican Pan-Africanist, notes that Padmore’s knowledge was so extensive that “he could give details of the party’s struggle in Cambodia, or the duties of Church elders in Barbados or compare agrarian problems in Jamaica and Tanganyika” (Thompson, 1993: 43).

In 1944, the IASB joined with about a dozen Pan-African organizations to create the Pan-African Federation. The PAF sought to build a united front of Africans and people of African descent in Britain and to establish links with Pan-African organizations in different colonial territories. Padmore continued to play the leading role in this united front. The PAF published a number of pamphlets dealing with specific colonial problems, authored by its members. During the Nigerian General Strike of June 1945, the PAF contacted a number of organizations in the colonies and inside the United States for support for the striking workers. The PAF held meetings in London, Manchester and Liverpool where they collected funds to send for the strikers. Padmore confessed that he was the person behind these initiatives (Padmore, letter to Cyril Ollivierre 1945). Chief A Soyemi Coker of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria stated that the PAF was the first organization to come to their assistance during the strike and that the “organization gave moral and financial support beyond our expectations” (Adi & Sherwood, 1995: 81).

### **A United States of Africa?**

Whilst the discussion thus far has explored Padmore’s political praxis it would be incomplete in my estimation without some mention of Padmore’s unfulfilled dream for the organic unification of the African continent. Padmore spoke regularly and passionately about the unification of the African continent and in his major theorizing on Pan-Africanism in his work *Pan-Africanism or Communism*; he wrote that “Pan-Africanism extends beyond the nation state in Africa” and encompasses the “federation of regional self-governing countries and their ultimate amalgamation into a United States of Africa” (Padmore, 1971: 356). In a “Guide to Pan-African Socialism,” Padmore explained that the revolution taking place in Africa was threefold: i) First there is the struggle for national independence; ii) The second is the social revolution, which follows the achievement of independence and self-determination and iii) Africans are seeking some form of regional unity as the forerunner of a United States of Africa (Padmore, 1964: 228–229).

Padmore and Nkrumah shared the same vision of the organic unification of the continent although their approach to the realization of this goal differed as Nkrumah favoured: i) national independence, ii) national consolidation, iii) transnational unity and community, and iv) economic and social reconstruction on the principles of scientific socialism (Nkrumah, 1973: 130–131). President Nkrumah used the resources of the state of Ghana to realize the objective of promoting a continental African Union by holding the All African Peoples Conference in December 1958. Padmore was the main organizer of this meeting as Nkrumah's advisor on African Affairs. W. Scott Thompson, the author of *Ghana Foreign Policy, 1957–1966: Diplomacy, Ideology and the New State* argued that only Nkrumah had a greater hand than Padmore in shaping Ghana's foreign policy during the first two years of its independence (Thompson, 22). As Nkrumah's advisor on African Affairs Padmore was a member of the Ghanaian delegation when Nkrumah and Sekou Toure formed the Ghana–Guinea Union in November 1958. It was hoped that this union was going to be the nucleus for a larger union and then the ultimate unification of the African continent. Although Padmore acknowledged that the attainment of a United States of Africa would not be easily attained, he was overtaken by the rhetoric of African unification and minor initiatives taking place on the continent which led him to declare in March 1959, that a continental African state would become a reality during his lifetime. Padmore, had abandoned the three-stage model he had articulated for realizing African unification by sidestepping the social revolution and regional unity as the precursor for African unification. Unfortunately, Padmore died a few months later in September 1959 and his dream of the realization of the continental state has not been realized.

Nkrumah failed to convince the other African leaders who met in Addis Ababa in 1963 to unite and bring about the unification of the continent. This meeting led to the creation of the Organization of African Unity. The vast majority of the leaders favoured gradualism and functionalism and not the political unification that Nkrumah desired. In 1965, at the Accra Conference Nkrumah was unsuccessful in his quest to bring about the unification of the continent. The other leaders were still wedded to functionalism and gradualism. In 2007, at the 9th Ordinary Assembly of Heads of States and Government in Accra a “Grand Debate” took place on the desirability of a Union Government. The gradualists prevailed as they did in 1963 and 1965 and dashed the hopes of those people who wanted to see the unification of the continent (Lecoutre, 2008). Abdul Raheem contended that the “Union Government proposal was not defeated because there was agreement on the importance of unifying the continent with political structures and political authority to act in the collective interest of all desirable for the continent” (Abdul Raheem, 2010: 84). Although the Accra Declaration, the main policy statement, did not provide a timeframe for the achievement of a United States of Africa it stated “the formation of a Union Government in an indeterminate future, whose timetable has not yet been specified, but at a realistic pace and achievable by the various states of the continent” (Lecoutre, 2008: 55). Horace Campbell is convinced that only “a new alliance of traders, workers, small farmers, progressive students, cultural artists and religious leaders to create a new movement for putting in place the mechanism for the unification and freedom of Africa;” given that the present state managers are a stumbling block to African unity (Campbell, 2018).

The economic model for Padmore's continental African Union was Pan-African socialism or democratic socialism with an African flavour. Pan-Africanism according to Padmore, “subscribes to the fundamental objectives of Democratic Socialism” (Padmore, 1971: xvii–xix). In this system the state would play an important role in the provision of health and education to its citizens. In the early 1930s Padmore told Kobina Sekyi, the Pan-Africanist from the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society in Ghana that he “often dream of the day when every black boy and girl in mother Africa will be guaranteed a proper, sanitary home; good, healthy food and every educational opportunity” (Rodhe, 1965: 393). Padmore continued to have this dream in the 1950s and felt that the state had a major role to play in making it a reality. Padmore's Pan-African socialist model was influenced by the scientific socialist model in the Soviet Union and the welfare state model. With the collapse of really existing socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s this model is no longer seen as attractive or even viable. Moreover, the welfare state has been under constant attack by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in pushing the neo-liberal agenda. However, it is clear that the neo-liberal model that have been a feature of the structural adjustment International Monetary Fund and World Bank programmes has been a monumental failure in the periphery; it has exacerbated the wretchedness of the masses of global Africans and led to an intensification of their exploitation. Global Africans must intensify the struggle against neo-liberalism and insists that the state must still play a major role in the provision of health, education and social welfare as these functions cannot be left to private enterprise where the only motive is the realization of profits. The neo-liberal model runs counter to the Pan-African socialist model envisioned by Padmore that would transformed the lives of the majority of African peoples.

Central to his Pan-African socialism was popular democracy based on universal adult suffrage. Padmore was convinced that only “popular elected leaders can harness the emotions and loyalties” of the masses and guide them down the road of “peaceful economic and social reconstruction” (Padmore, 1971: 317). He stressed that fundamental human rights, social justice and the rule of the law were imperative. Abdul Raheem identifies the greatest challenge facing democracy in Africa is that of the continent seeking to “develop a democratic society without democrats whether in government or opposition, at home or in the workplace.”



He acknowledged that “democracy is always a work in progress” and is revitalized from one generation to the next. Abdul Raheem acknowledged that the main mechanism of the democratic process is the political party but there seemed to be a dearth of vibrant political parties on the continent, therefore “citizens have a duty to form them, join them, and be active in them in order to produce leaders that will serve their interests” (Abdul-Raham, 2010: 154). However, Ernest Wambia-dia-Wamba contended that the focus on democracy inside of Africa has been viewed too narrowly on “multi-partyism” geared towards elections but there is a need to go beyond this conception and “create Pan-African structures to deepen the democratic process, the democratization of Pan-Africanism itself and the unification of Africa” (Wambia-dia-Wamba, 1996: 209).

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that some elements of Padmore’s political praxis still have some currency for Pan-Africanists today: the use of political journalism, the need for political activism, the use of conferences and building and maintaining contacts. Padmore’s commitment and dedication to the struggle for over thirty years is still worthy of emulation. Padmore’s dream of a continental African Union, under the banner of Pan-African socialism still lives in the hearts and minds of many Pan-Africanists on the African continent and worldwide. Many Africans are still expecting that democracy, social justice and the rule of law will become an integral feature of their societies. Pan-Africanists must mirror Padmore – dedicated and totally committed to the struggle in pursuit of the continental African Union, Pan-African socialism and the democratization of their societies; while working for the creation of a better world. They must be prepared to battle long and hard in order to realize these objectives.

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