Nationalism in Colonial Africa

by THOMAS Hodgkin.
(Frederick Mueller, 10/6)

Basil Davidson

Nationalism has had a bad press in recent years; and with reason. The intellec
tuals who had gone to war to save the bourgeo
ses of bourgeois thought, and re
ton to distrust it. Didn't Franco invade
this or that
fish out their silly sodden symbolism of
baleful name of "the national idea"?
and crush the Spanish Republic in the
recent years; and with reason. The in-
tellectuals of the 'Thirties had good rea-
...
indigenous culture, their African consciousness, their sense of distinction and ideas with our ideas, this nationalism in Africa will not be a poor thin copy of what others have already done. The apologies of cultural relativism may lose their way in myths and mysticism; it remains true that the nation-states of Africa will make their own original contribution to the sum of human wisdom.

Which is as much as to say, no doubt, that Africans will take their own way towards independence. One could allude some examples. In the Belgian Congo, the diligent and autocratic Belgians have recruited their most solid adherents precisely from these "privileged strata". The dilemma is whether he will give his loyalty — to a Bakongo or the Baluba peoples to name only two of the Congo's leading tribes — or to 'side against them'; his dilemma is whether he will give his loyalty — whether history will demand him to give his loyalty — to a Bakongo or to an all-embracing Congo nationalism. He feels himself on the threshold of a new life, an altogether different life, certainly a better life. What will he find beyond?

It will be obvious to anyone who has given more than a passing thought to the history of Nigeria in recent years, that nationalism has had much less influence in this crystallisation process than most of us have previously believed. No doubt it has proved convenient for those who support the principal political movement of the 15 million people of Northern Nigeria has found itself in growing conflict with the principal political movements of the two southern regions. It may be convenient to imperialism that the Yoruba movement, in the south, is often in conflict with the Ibo movement. But nobody needs to believe that these parties have done otherwise than what is in fact, endemic to these old established societies and their newly-felt national consciousness.

But that is not to say that the policies of the imperial powers cannot and do not profoundly influence the immediate struggle around these new nation-states in West Africa and of nationalist movements in other parts of Africa. Conservative and Labour colonial policy has seldom differed in more than emphasis and detail: but that is not to say that the shape and texture of these new African nations and "nations" (for some of them are still early on the road) could not and would not be very different in the circumstances of a socialist Britain. This does not mean that constitutional advances under a capitalist Britain are not real advances; in the sense that in African national consciousness is a step towards equality and independence. But it does mean that socialists in Britain owe it to themselves — as well as to others — to give much more serious attention to the colonial fact than they have ever been willing to give in the past. Unless we understand what is happening today, every advance towards a sound appreciation of the meaning and potentialities of nationalism in Africa, we shall make a hash of our future ties with these peoples who are now becoming nations. We shall lose what chances we have and already they are slender enough — of helping our natural political allies against our national political enemies.

This need to think about the realities of colonialism is the principle reason why Hodgkin's book is valuable and important. Here in sensibly compressed form there are set forth in clear detail a great deal of discussion of the circumstances: the policies of the colonial Powers and their contradictions — as, for example, that Africans in the Belgian Congo may be engine drivers and skilled workers and so on but Africans in neighbouring Northern Rhodesia may not:

The Accumulation of Capital
by JOAN ROBINSON
(Macmillan, 1956, 28/-.)

Professor H. D. Dickinson

Since Keynes' General Theory, two books on economics have appeared in Britain that, in the reviewer's opinion, represent major contributions to economic science. These are Professor A. W. Lewis's Theory of Economic Growth and Mrs. Joan Robinson's Accumulation of Capital. Now at last we are seeing a convergence of economists from various quarters upon the problems of long-period economic change.

In what follows, I shall concentrate upon Mrs. Robinson's Accumulation of Capital. It is a very important book in that it is focused upon three fundamental variables: population, capital and technical knowledge. (She makes clear the distinction, so rarely observed, between a change in technical knowledge and a shift from one technique to another within the range — she calls it a 'spectrum' — of techniques already known. Such shifts may occur in association with changes in the amount of capital or in the ratio of capital to labour to natural resources). Of these three, changes in the amount of capital (due to changes in the rate of accumulation) are treated as the most significant. Population is considered for the most part as variable, but not according to known rules: at any given moment it must be taken as given, though it may vary in the short run, are given: in the long run they may be effectively increased through changes in technique. The accumulation of capital is the significant variable, in the sense that it is the one most closely related to social institutions and class structure.

The author proceeds from the simplest assumptions — a quasi-Ricardian system with constant technique and two classes: workers (who are assumed to consume all their wages) and entrepreneurs (who are assumed to re-invest all their profits). One by one, she introduces complications: a spectrum of technique, economic fluctuations within the long-term process of accumulation, finance, a rentier class (who consume out of profits), diminishing returns, the theory of prices, and international trade. Thus she works into her scheme practically the whole of the conventional content of economic theory. It is truly a work of great ambition and it is a pity that it is very close and is, in places, difficult to follow. But it is very rewarding. Not least of the reader's rewards is to find familiar topics put into an unfamiliar context, thereby acquiring new and greater significance.

Historians of economic thought have often suggested that the shift of interest away from dynamics and towards statics has been a great misfortune. It is perhaps (probably unconsciously) by political motives. Equilibrium is so much safer. Once you start enquiring where the economic system is going, you don't know what sort of hope you are going to get. (A good example of this is that the Marxist law of the falling rate of profit is implicit, given that the accumulation of capital proceeds faster than the growth of the Marshallian system of wages and profits equated to marginal productivities. But none of the orthodox economists recognised it explicitly. Again, when Keynes, on quite other grounds, suggested that there was a secular tendency for the rate of profit to fall, his respectable colleagues were surprised and pained). Cannan and Pigou tu-nned utility theory from a w-a-
Review

pon to be used against the Marxian theory of value into a powerful critique of incrementalism. The 'rules of capitalism' (a critique which the 'New Welfare' theorists of today are trying desperately to blunt the edge of); but their attack on capitalism was ethical rather than positive. For Keynes, not 'Capitalism is self-destructive'. Keynes's critique of capitalism was much more effective in this genre; but, being based upon short-period analysis, it was open to the criticism that the flaws in capitalism were "only" short-terra defects, which would be eliminated in the long run.

It would be untrue to say that Mrs. Robinson provides a critique of capitalism. Her work is too soberly analytical for that. But some of its implications are disturbing for the supporters of things as they are.

One important concept in her scheme is that of a 'Golden Age' — a period of history in which, to use her own words, 'technical progress is . . . proceeding steadily . . . the competitive mechanism working freely, population growing (if at all) at a steady rate and accumulation going on fast enough to support production of all available labour, the rate of profit tends to be constant and the level of real wages to rise with output per man. There are then no internal contradictions in the system. The system develops smoothly without perturbations. Total annual output and the stock of capital . . . then grow together at a constant proportionate rate compounded at the rate of increase of the labour force and the rate of increase of output per man. Much of her analysis is devoted to elucidating the conditions under which a 'Golden Age' can occur, and, more menacingly, to the consequences of these conditions not being fulfilled. The implications of this are that Golden Ages are of rare occurrence (perhaps the nineteenth century in Western Europe was one: perhaps it is the first quarter of the twentieth century in the United States will turn out to be one — it is too soon to say) and that in the absence of Golden-Age conditions we may expect falling real wages, unemployment, inflation, balance-of-payments deficits, and the various other evils. This is under capitalism, defined as an economy in which property is owned by a small number of individuals who hire the labour of a large number at agreed wage rates and organise their work (directly or through hired managers). The excess of the product over the wages bill then appears as income from sequences. There are dark references to property'. The 'rules of the (capitalist) game' (as described by her) of this society are the 'rules of the capitalist game become unplayable', in which case there is the possibility of 'adopting a different set of rules'. What these rules might be is a subject that Mrs. Robinson does not deal with.

Orthodox economics has often been referred to as having a capitalist apologists*. In a sense this is unfair. Economics is a description and an analysis: it neither praises nor blames. But in another sense the accusation is true. Every newspaper editor knows the propaganda value of selection. It is merely deciding what is relevant detail and what is not, given what can be portrayed in a form which is purely descriptive — every word of it may be true — and yet it makes a definite emotional impression upon the reader. So with orthodox economic theory. The analysis yields of Marx in many points at which the sociological economics of Marx has deeply influenced Mrs. Robinson. This, in the reviewer's opinion, is as it should be. Marxism as a doctrine is sterile. But Marx's outlook and methods, interpreted with intellectual flexibility and in the light of recent history, can enormously enrich and stimulate our social and economic studies of today.

THE TORMENT OF SECRECY

by Edward Shils

(Wm. Heinemann, 15/-).

Professor Shils' book is a study of McCarthyism. Other eminent scholars have written on the prevalence of witch-hunting in the United States, mainly from the angles of constitutional law or of classical liberal theory. Such attacks on McCarthyism have come from those who see its clear infringements of legality and who deplore the use of political and economic blackmail to suppress individuality and enforce conformity. Professor Shils is concerned not with such actions of such allies in the cause of decency, but would, I think, disagree with them in their analysis of the problem.

Professor Shils sees McCarthyism as a natural product of certain strains in the American democratic tradition, especially in the manner in which that tradition treats the idea of class. Here "class" must be understood not in the simple terms of capitalist-proletarian position but in the much wider and more complex sense in which the term is used by sophisticated American and British sociologists. Professor Shils is a prominent American sociologist, but he knows as much as we do about the British academic spirit of manning the barricades to repel the gargones of transatlantic social science. He has lived with us; he knows us well; he can't be said to love us to excess or to approve our snobbery, lack of initiative and our acceptance of undemocratic social mores. But in comparing McCarthyism with whatever it is we have in England, we come out best. The "old boy" complex and the snobbery which impose the subtle flatteries that won away the political members of our public world to the world of deference, the joint committees, the dining clubs, the senior common rooms, from the Commons to the Lords and Boards and beyond all this when added to the actual and largely accepted hierarchical structure of our political and social world, and to the fact that administration is efficient and pol rotten and a little too mean that there is little profit and little power in the business of patriotism in this country. In America McCarthy could terrorise the army, blackmail shipowners and insist that what the President said
about book burning be suppressed by the official Voice of America. In England the Empire Loyalists quietly lose their deposits.

The class aspect of all this is important. In Parliament both parties contain large numbers of conventionally well-educated people. Using class to mean social and professional educational status there is a struggle between front benches and a class struggle between Wykehamist Ministers and Wykehamist civil servants, nor indeed much between Ruskin and W.E.A. backbenchers and University front benches. In contrast the Congressman is, in the popular mind, and sometimes in fact, an ill-educated bigoted time-server, who, if he had any real talents would not be wasting them on the unedifying and unprofitable profession of flattering constituents, getting himself cheap rides and press publicity, and reading high school poems on “America” into the Congressional Record. For nearly one hundred years Congressmen have had something of this reputation, and so for most of this time have civil servants. But with the New Deal a new type of civil servant appeared in Washington — young, sophisticated, interested in theories, despising Congressmen quick to answer under questioning, well educated, often at the Harvard Law School and frequently enough Jewish to arouse the anti-semitism latent in all professional super patriots.

Status anxieties (and the frustrations and aggressions resulting from them) are now an important rival to the constitutional theories of Freud in the literature of American psychology. In respect of the desire of Congressmen to injure the individual they represent and at the same time to call himself their representative, the status thesis is not unhelpful here; it is brilliantly handled by Professor Shils. Scientists suffered at the hands of McCarthy because they are (a) intellectual, (b) have their own internal standards of judging facts and men, and (c) because they are the guardians of secrets. Secrecy, whether or not it is warranted drives the McCarthyites mad. Like all truths, they are intrigued by knowledge that there are important secrets — they are incensed that the government will not turn them over for safe-keeping to Congressmen, so they probe into every possible (and impossible) aspect of the lives and thought of those who have the secrets in their keeping. For the sake of publicity they will sell truth or falsehood with equal even-handedness. Democracy, they declare, would both bring out the public and total secrecy — and the easiest road for them is via total conformity. Security on the other hand demands neither total secrecy, total publicity or total conform- ity. McCarthy contributed nothing to the security of the American Republic, on the contrary, his hectoring attitude towards the government departments, his character assassination and his leaks were all at the expense of the men whose life story he had told his political eclipse, that of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was loudest.

What is the fundamental cause of all this? In Prof. Shils opinion it is native American populism, the traditional desire to form all Americans in the image of the folksy, patriotic, Christian, rural or petit-bourgeois average Anglo-Saxon who dislikes the foreigner abroad and the thinker at home. Professor Shils' plea for the development of a genuine pluralistic community in which individuality is not under continual suspicion, and in which institutions like the Universities can tell State governments and Congressmen that they are sympa-thetically heard over here. In American terms it is a plea for conservatism and in consequence this is a book which the Left here will find both stimulating and provocative.

RICHARD PEAR.

JIM LARKIN: THE RISE OF THE UNDERMAN
by R. M. Fox

(Lawrence and Wishart 18/-)

When Sir Lewis Namier said that there were "two dozen Irelands" in nineteenth-century Europe, he meant national minorities of us on this island think of the "Irish problem" as a national one which found its "solution" in Home Rule. Mr. Fox's book reminds us helpfully that the gathering tension in Ireland before 1914, which made the future for the United Kingdom seem as insecure as that of the Empires of the Hapsburg or Romanov, had social as well as national ingredients: that linked with the struggle for self-determination went the fight for life of a labour movement, inspired on its political side by its connection with the cause of national freedom, and on its industrial side by the desperate poverty of the Irish workers.

The story in which nationalist and socialist aspiration were inextricably tied up with each other is clearly illustrated by the career of the labour leader, Jim Larkin (1867-1947). Although his Irish Transport Workers Union earned the reproaches of Sinn Fein leaders for concentrating on industrial rather than patriotic agitation, Larkin himself, invited to tell a London labour audience about the great dock strike of 1913, in- sisted that the "struggle for National Freedom in Ireland was more important than the 1913 Labour struggle" (which was "received in dead silence"). This duality of aims continued until Larkin left for America in October 1914. As Ireland began to fill with armed bands in response to Carson's challenge, he had insisted on his followers forming a working-class Labour Defence Force distinct from the general Irish Volunteer movement, but his patriotic efforts still earned the approval of such prominent non-socialists as Sir Roger Casement; and his career provides an interesting study of the rise to power of a bitter man who saw his efforts, because of millions victimised by both economic and racial oppression — a type of man whose role in history may be only just beginning.

Mr. Fox inevitably draws special attention to this aspect of Larkin's significance by devoting about half his book to the heroic strike of 1912-1913 in Dublin, while he skips very briefly over Larkin's nine years in America and his later activities in the Dail, as a member of the Dublin Corporation, and as a member of the General Council of the Irish Union of Ireland. Even in dealing with the events to which he devotes most attention, however, Mr. Fox does not always give more than a one-sided picture of the situation. The traditional and bitter mistrust between Protestant and Catholic workers, which Larkin tried determinedly and with great success to overcome, is written off as "sectarianism", and although this is what it was, seen from the point of view of the class-war line-up which Larkin was trying to bring about, Mr. Fox's phraseology is too simple to describe such complex and deeply-rooted group attitudes; Larkin's achievement would seem greater, not less, if its background were more scrupulous-ly presented. Again, Mr. Fox adopts without question Larkin's own view that the government acutely tried to split the Irish labour movement in 1913, wil- fully misinterpreting the Dublin strike as a nationalist demonstration and sending troops to stir up trouble between Orange and Green factions of the working class; there is no evidence for this, and it seems at least as likely that the civil and military authorities assumed out of sheer obtuseness and force of habit that the Dublin disturbances had nation- alist causes, and reacted in their tradi- tional way.

Mr. Fox tries to take a wide view, so that his eulogistic tribute to Larkin suc- ceeds in re-creating something of the atmosphere of the period; it is all here, the violent oratory at mass meetings, the brawls between strikers and blacklegs, the law-courts hopelessly prejudiced against labour leaders, even such titbits as the revealing assertion that the police "always made a dead set at any musical instruments when the strikers marched to a band". On the other hand the purpose nowadays of a book like this — apart from entertaining and performing an act of piety to a lost leader's memory — is not clear. The historian, even the social historian, will not have much use for it. And the times are surely past when the working class public, even the labour public, felt itself set apart from society in general and identified itself exclusively enough with the labour movement to form a market for this sort of party-literature; when it wants to read now is life-stories of men with less social purpose and more societal appeal than Jim Larkin — of sports-stars, war heroes, and band-leaders. The story of Jim Lark- in will appeal, naturally, to those who knew him, and it is true that the Worrimented to the ideas he stood for, but a wider public can only be reached by the Labour Movement if it realises that this particular genre of propaganda for socialism has no future but in the ranks of Socialist Nationalist Movements among impoverished colonial peoples Larkinism* may have a new lease.

ROGER MORGAN.