

AFTER REVOLUTION, WHAT?

(Reactions after reading "The Wretched of The Earth" by Franz Fanon)

By HAROLD M. BERGSMAN

The subtitle for Fanon's book is "The Handbook for the Black Revolution that is Changing the Shape of the World." This is, in essence, a very brief resume of its direction: a handbook for revolution for blacks. The stirring concluding chapter is an appeal, a call if you will, to all blacks everywhere, to unite, to mobilize, to rebuild, and to innovate. The call in these words is reiterated in poetic style, much like a refrain, "Come then comrades," or "Come then my brothers."

Jean Paul Sartre's introduction sensitively sets the stage for this work-of-soul of Fanon. Sartre picks out a basic theme in his writing and builds his brief introduction about it: "In the past we blacks *made* history, now it is being made for us. It is time for us all to begin to make our own history again." Shame at being submerged in European culture, of aping and submitting; shame at being the mouthpiece for the colonials, yes, shame is the beginning of a revolutionary sentiment, says Sartre.

How apt the title, *The Wretched of the Earth*, and how true it is of the condition of so many million blacks scattered around the earth. Fanon, however, reverses the focus and views the other wretched ones: those who have brought oppression, colonialism and debasement of the soul to so many Africans, while their own countries are stagnating in "the logic of equilibrium" rather than in a rational and live dialectic.

The entire book is in the form of a call to action, a call to individuality, a call to consciousness. No longer can the blacks afford to play the rear-guard for Europe; they must rather capture their own social and political front lines.

This book is organized rather strangely, from my perception; however, this criticism reflects the "equilibrium" which is perhaps a part of me. In my opinion, a more logical sequence of reasoning, and a greater emphasis on the theme of the book, could have been achieved by beginning with "On National Culture".

Part of the problem for blacks that Fanon describes is the problem of putting roots into the past and recognizing and cherishing their origins. Basic to the concept of "revolution" is that of one's own evolution. Orphans, whose umbilical cord is cut by the "white doctor" and who lack the fondling and cuddling of the "black nurses" of their past, become atavistic. This point, made so strongly by Fanon, could have given even greater meaning to the next section, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" and then to "Concerning Violence" if it had preceded it.

Just a word about the last chapter, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." Standing as it does at the end, and as a stark statement of the havoc wrecked on individuals both black and white by being involved in the "revolution", it speaks to me of the tragedy of any revolution, the destruction of many individuals for the sake of the emergence of the individuality of a people. This chapter represents, in my thinking, an unconscious, or perhaps conscious, statement by Fanon that revolution is not without its price — and the price is a big one — the price of the horror of losing one's mind if need be for the sake of a greater cause.

It is extremely difficult not to personalize much of what Fanon describes in his work, but I feel that such personalization may in itself represent unconscious biases, and therefore not allow for a "black" understanding of the work as it is. One concept continually disturbs me when I am attempting to relate to and understand the "blacks'" perception of their problems and their revolution. Briefly it is this: no matter how close I may come to achieving what I feel is a kindred sympathy, I still remain a 'white' as far as my skin is concerned, and as far as my evolution is concerned. Therefore my problem is in "living into" the black experience, and in the process, recognizing that this may not be recognized by "blacks".

Whites so often talk about "them"; however, I have felt that blacks also refer to whites as "them". Therefore the problem is actually a polarization of sympathies. I am reminded of my childrens' "magnet dogs", which were painted black and white. They would only stick together if opposite poles were placed in close proximity. However, if the 'white dog's' north pole was placed close to the 'black dog's' north pole (which

are like forces) they would repel each other.

Having just stated that there is danger in personalization I continue in this vein. Fanon's chapter on "Concerning Violence" brought to mind so many past experiences I have had while living as a white "colonial" in India and Africa. It provided insight, however, mainly because it repelled the polarity I exhibited in my attempts at sincere understanding.

Fanon's description of colonization is vivid and full of insight. "The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession — all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible." The colonized man, says Fanon, is an envious man. The Kerner Report speaks of American blacks in the ghetto areas, who in essence represent a nation of people who have been exploited, listening and looking with frustration and envy at "middle-class white advertising" on television — in fact everywhere. The black looks on the white and says, "The cause is the consequence, you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."

The next step is violence. The colonial master carefully protects his vested interests, and speaks and writes and thinks in terms which are paternalistic, proprietary and often debasing. "We must not let the *breeding swarms* become a threat to us. The *spawn of evil*, the *bestiality* of the lives of the underprivileged must not be allowed to impinge on us." To maintain his vested interest, the colonial-white begins to pour money into the "swarming masses"; the colonial speaks of the need for economic aid and the focus is shifted among the blacks for just a bit, but the next step is violence. When the colonized emphasize the principle taught by the colonizer — "that all men are equal" — and then claims this as his right — claims equality with the settler — the next step is violence.

How beautifully Fanon presents his arguments. These can be applied to North Africa, South Africa, or the United States with equal force. Fanon describes the forces which play on the blacks and then the social and psychological forces coming from the blacks themselves, which cause them to stop and self-criticize. "He fails to see the whole movement all the time," says Fanon. However, the

process is the important thing. The movement is the vital concern. Revolution, then what? I ask. But Fanon speaks for the "then what" as the present task of the black of re-introducing himself into the bosom of the mankind of the world *now*. The "then whats" will follow.

I must admit that I have only lately understood this concept — that the *process* itself is vitally important. Evolution can only be recognized, maintained and protected by the bared teeth approach of the hairy ancient fore-fathers of Darwin and Robert Ardrey, protecting their "territorial rights."

The chapter, "Spontaneity, Its Strength and Weakness", describes the evolution of black leadership while under colonial pressures. Initially, there is the strongly nationalistic shift of the "educated elite blacks" to liberate and to unite the black forces against the colonial oppressors. The next step Fanon describes is that taken by the "elite", armed with intellectual tools of the colonials, in mastering their own countries and peoples. The 'elites' soon represent their own vested interests and in much the same fashion as their white colonial masters, perpetuate their own positions.

A tremendous social distance between themselves and the 'masses' is soon felt. *Thus the independance so dearly paid for by means of revolution, becomes a political framework for creating a new class of black dependents.* The weakness in this phase is that black leadership becomes alienated from the black masses.

Fanon then describes the revolution within the black national communities, and the emergence of new leadership from among the masses. The masses represent the tribal elements, and leadership polarizes itself about tribal rather than regional or federal affiliations. The Congo syndrome is the next step, or should it better be called the "Biafra syndrome." A war of liberation is fought to liberate the revolutionaries in "Congo" or in "Biafra" from their own unfortunate separatism — to rejoin the benevolent masses of the Federalist Evolution. The freedom to be equal is brought about in the black African countries in this stage by violent counter-reaction by the Federalists to make the dissenters conform and be part of the system of the ex-colonial government. The next step is violence, and starvation, and mental disorder.

Fanon's last chapter, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders", in microcosmic manner presents a picture of the result of revolution and violence and counter-revolution to end violence; of what has occurred in Biafra recently. The children can become mentally unbalanced with Marasmus and Kwashiorkor

and die by the millions for the sake of future dreams of a new and better state.

Fanon's handbook for revolution concludes with a call for black Africans to "change our ways." The changes he calls for are what he has decried in the rest of the book; that is, leaving behind mimicry, sterile litanies and European ways. The sterile spiritual disintegration of Europe, which has for centuries preached the dignity of man yet murdered men in order to preserve this dignity, is not for black Africans. "Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth." Fanon speaks of creating a Third World and a new history of man with its beginning in Africa. He calls for the creation of a new man who will try out concepts different from those Europe has taught.

One can support Fanon's call for Blacks to mold their destiny and to create their world in ways meaningful to them. The future for Blacks, as I see it, will perhaps have its period of "Monroe Doctrine Isolationism" and self-determinism, but it must also be a future of dialogue and interaction with and upon the "European" peoples of the world. "White Europeans" need the people of Africa, and Africans need them. The shrinking world demands that its peoples must become more sensitive, more informed and more willing to tolerate differences. No people can live in isolation, Africa especially. If Africa allows herself to evolve at her own pace economically without seeking assistance and help in the process, the "modernity" gap which exists today will only widen. The problem involved in accepting aid of course is that "aid" usually has political strings attached, and Africa cannot afford to get herself ham-strung in this developmental phase by European ideologies.

American blacks face much the same problem. After revolution - what? Again the persistent question arises. But one can intellectually project and think about alternatives and consequences. I do not envision the possibility of an all black nation geographically isolated within our nation, or next to it.

Fanon has described revolution and counter-revolution so clearly, and the revolution which follows these. I fear that extreme Black Nationalism will create counter-revolutionary forces in other segments of our country, as the Ibos in Nigeria, "to maintain the Federation and the right for freedom and

equality of opportunity." Rather, I seek for integration of all peoples in this country.

It is my hope and prayer that my sons may have as equal and free a dialogue with Black Americans in future years as they have had with Black Africans in the past.

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