

AFRICA, AFRICA !

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IT was Burke who said that a populace never rebels from passion for attack, but from impatience of suffering. Looking at Africa today, the Government and the Press say otherwise. It is not easy to estimate just how much sheer misery people are expected to endure before they earn themselves the right to stand upon their feet and cry cease. But if there's some level of oppression, injustice and suffering at which men acquire the right to strike out at their tormentors, then the people of Africa reached that point long ago, and passed it.

One hundred million Africans were sold into slavery. Whole civilisations were destroyed. Peoples once healthy, prolific and cultured were reduced to diseased inertia and starvation. Untold wealth was sucked out of the continent. Millions of acres were stolen from the African and given to the European. At the same time, enough roads were built to ensure military and commercial communications. Enough health services were established to ensure the survival of the white man. Enough education was permitted to provide the skilled labour force that colonisation required. What else has been introduced—and it has been little enough in all conscience—was in the way of insurance against revolt.

For these things Africans are expected to be grateful. Men who try to keep their families alive on four shillings a week are reproved, by five-thousand-a-year Ministers of the Crown for their ingratitude. The Africans are told Britain is in Africa (like France, Belgium and the rest) upon a civilising mission bent—disinterested, devoted and quite reluctant, at bottom, to stay. They say that; and then they say things like this:

Through the almost inevitable evolution of the world, Great Britain's economy has suffered set-back after set-back, and it is difficult to see how anything like the present standard of living can be maintained unless new sources of raw materials and favourable markets are found to replace those which we have lost. . . . Africa holds out one of the few solutions, provided that affairs in the Continent are handled wisely and with a practical sense of urgency.

That is the voice of General de Guingand in the *Sunday Times*. We begin to see contradictions in what is said about Africa. And the contradictions thicken in the columns of the financial press, where

City interests are willing enough to indicate that the reason for their interest in Africa is that the place is still highly profitable.

It always was, of course. But with the virtual loss of Britain's Asian possessions—with the general shrinking of the areas of the world available for colonial exploitation—Africa steadily becomes relatively more important. It becomes the main single source of colonial plunder and it becomes a vast rear base of imperialism—the last place where monopolists of the Western Powers can do as they please—dig gold and copper, grow coffee and sisal, export cocoa and palm oil, build airfields and bases—without interference and dirt cheap. Or can they?

If Africa is so overwhelmingly important for imperialism, the liberation of Africa must logically be equally important for anti-imperialism, for the common cause of the world's common people. Thus it is that the arrival of the peoples of Africa in the very vanguard of the struggle for liberation is a political fact of historic and world-wide importance. It would be difficult to overestimate its significance. Consider: within the very heart of imperialism's last great base, always regarded as inviolate, unshakable and safe, a determined and widely-varying struggle for freedom of continent-wide scope has come into being, and has already demonstrated that it cannot be crushed by the traditional methods of repression, nor diverted by the newer methods of political fraud. Once one has grasped the dimensions of that historic fact, some most important conclusions become inescapable for the people of this country. First a word on the struggle itself.

Burke said 'impatience of suffering'. Take one example alone, and from one of the least poverty-stricken parts of the whole Continent. In 1951 a team of British social and medical experts surveyed a richer-than-average village in the Gold Coast. They found that after 105 years of British rule only six children were attending school (three miles away), only 87 of the last 162 babies born in the village had survived beyond their first birthday, one half of the children were suffering from malnutrition, the water supply was filthy, there was no sanitation, and malaria was universal.

This village lived by growing cocoa. Now consider the economics of Gold Coast cocoa. The Cocoa Boards of Nigeria and the Gold Coast have a total monopoly of the purchase and marketing of the crop. In the 1947-48 season the Boards paid £20 millions to the farmers for the entire crop and sold it for £56 millions. Net profit for the year was £33 millions. In 1948-49 there were difficulties and

they made no profit. In 1949-50 they made £24 millions, and in 1950-51 they made £35 millions. Thus, close to one hundred million pounds were squeezed out of the villages of West Africa for one crop alone in four years. And medical experts find half the children dying before they reach their first birthday.

Multiply that picture, sharpen it for the even poorer areas, vary it in the sweated-labour mines and industries of the Centre and the South, and you have Africa as the African endures it.

So he rises to his feet and demands a better life: a house instead of a shack, a school for his children, medicines, enough to eat, a union, a vote, a place in his own African sun. And this protest, sweeping the Continent from Lagos eastwards to Nairobi and from Tunis south to the Cape, takes many forms. In Kenya it took legal, traditional forms. The Kenya Africa Union is a broad political organisation, seeking to use the traditional forms of struggle—demonstrations, agitation, petitions, the demand for the vote. The young working class, as elsewhere in Africa, organised its unions and placed itself in the forefront of the struggle. So the settlers smash the unions and exile their leaders, beat up peaceful picket lines and pass crippling anti-labour legislation; then they go after the leaders of the Kenya Africa Union with charges of organising violence.

What happens? There *is* violence. People are killed. Secret organisations operate where mass organisations are prevented from operating. But to those who are hasty to denounce Mau Mau, it is perhaps possible to say: what of the hundred million slaves? what of the children who die before their first birthday? what of the earlier massacres in East Africa, which you may forget because they did not happen to your people, but which the East Africans may conceivably be forgiven for remembering. How much suffering must a people take—how many unjust judges and brutalised policemen, how much slum and disease—before they earn the right to strike back?

And since we talk of violence, let us talk of all kinds of violence. Mr. Lyttelton admitted in Parliament on April 22 that 430 Africans had already been shot 'while resisting arrest or attempting to escape'. One might have thought that even a Tory Minister would no longer have the effrontery to use that disgraceful euphemism for police killing. Canon Bewes has spoken publicly of what was privately known—that Kikuyu are beaten to death by the police in efforts to get them to inform against their own people. *The Times* admitted

that allegations of 'ill treatment of Kikuyu suspects in order to get them to talk may be well-founded', and it added that 'in extenuation it should be said that the crimes which (the police) have been called upon to investigate make restraint most difficult to exercise'. But if there be extenuating circumstances for police torture, illegal arrests and mass executions, what about the intolerable, age-long provocation of the Kikuyu people—robbed of their lands, forced to live in squalor and want, insulted because of their race, assaulted when they seek to organise for their rights. Is there no extenuation here? The forgiveness of *The Times* is a one-way affair.

When the Kikuyu organise to fight for their freedom, the cry of 'murder gangs' goes up as it once went up against the people of Ireland. Let the *Irish Times* of April 10, 1953, answer that from its own impressive experience:

The papers are constantly reporting the killing of Africans while 'resisting arrest', 'failing to halt' or 'attempting to escape'. These are terms which Irish people remember as synonymous with sheer murder by British forces and police of unarmed Irishmen and women. The recurrence of such expressions in reports from Kenya has a sinister ring in Irish ears. Whatever the happenings, it has become evident that the mass of the people are against the present regime. Most of the penalties have been inflicted for 'refusing to give information'. This was also a standard 'crime' in Ireland thirty years ago.

In Kenya the struggle has taken a violent form for clearly definable local reasons. In South Africa it has reached great heights in the united civil disobedience campaign. In the central areas new forms of struggle against Central African Federation are emerging. In the West, in Nigeria, a united fight, supported by the mass of the people, is being waged against the fraudulent and unworkable Constitution. In the North, in the French-occupied territories, every type of mass struggle is taking place in waves of increasing power. In Egypt and the Sudan the nation-wide movement for national liberation is rapidly maturing. Wherever you turn, you find Africa awakening, struggling to her feet, just as Asia has struggled to hers.

Faced with this, what do people in Britain say? The Tory reaction is uncomplicated, founded as it is upon the principles of colonial Government denounced long ago by Lord Erskine

. . . having no rest in consent and affection, no foundation in similarity of interests, nor support from any one principle that unites men together in society, (it) could only be upheld by alternate strategem and force.

In the Gold Coast, strategem; in Kenya, force; in Central Africa, the two.

The Right-wing leaders of the Labour Party when they were in power (and even now that they are in opposition) combined the two methods, using them variously as the situation required. In West Africa, where they were faced with a relatively developed African bourgeoisie on the one hand, and a highly explosive general situation on the other, strategem was the order of the day. But it is not the naming of Kwame Nkumah as 'prime minister' that will dam or divert the sweeping national torrent in the Gold Coast or elsewhere.

After all, the Macpherson Constitution in Nigeria was supposed to head the movement for freedom and democracy into safe channels. But today the Nigeria national movement is reaching new heights, and new political alignments are manifesting themselves in the struggle against that very Constitution. Perhaps the Africans themselves are in a better position than anyone else to judge the benefits of Right-wing Labour rule and the reliability of Right-wing Labour talk. On January 10 of this year, the *West African Pilot* wrote:

The British Labour Party delegation now in Lagos must have realised that the masses of this country are not giving them even a cold welcome. . . . The Labour Party in Great Britain is a party of the masses, and when some of their representatives come to this country and arouse no mass interest, then it must be logically concluded that something is fundamentally wrong with that mission. In this instance, the thing wrong is Mr. James Griffiths, former Colonial Secretary. . . . It was Mr. Griffiths who refused to do anything to bring to book the shooters of the 21 Enugu miners on November 18, 1949. We assess the attitude of a man to Nigeria when he is in power. . . . But now that Mr. Churchill's party has chased him out of the Colonial Office, Mr. Griffiths wants to pretend to be a champion. We do not require his services now, thank goodness. So he can return to Wales from whence he came.

To which nothing useful can be added, except the essential qualification that Mr. Griffiths is one thing and the rank and file of the Labour Party another.

It is with the rank and file of the movement that we are concerned. And it is time that all of us in the movement realised how urgent and important are the problems set for us by the upsurge in Africa. That upsurge is one of the two or three most important political facts of our time. It is an integral part of the general struggle for emancipation, democracy and peace that the common people everywhere—including Britain—are now engaged upon. It is one of the most important sectors of that struggle. This being so, solidarity with the peoples of Africa ceases to be an act of charity and becomes an act of profound self-interest for the people of Britain. The

African peoples are themselves ending for ever the myths of 'backwardness' and the alleged inferiority of the coloured races. They are freeing themselves by their own exertions and—to adapt a useful phrase—helping to free us all by their example. Every blow they strike against colonialism is a blow against capitalist exploitation of every kind; every time they force a high command to shift an airfield, dismantle a base, reject as unreliable a territory once considered safe for military purposes, they are contributing powerfully to the movement against a future war; when they wring concessions from the British Government or a British monopoly, they weaken those forces against which our own Labour Movement is fighting. We owe the people of Africa far more than any solidarity movement here can ever repay.

But solidarity there must be, not only to fulfil the honoured traditions of our movement, but to support our African allies. We must demonstrate by our actions that this is not a racial conflict of Black versus White, but a conflict of the common people—Black and White alike—against oppression, exploitation and war. We have not yet done this. We have scarcely begun to do our duty. We have not begun to understand our own interest. It is high time and more that we did.

FROM THE *LABOUR MONTHLY* OF 25 YEARS AGO

AN INTERESTING PREDICTION

It is perfectly possible to imagine a formal recognition of complete independence of India, in which the reality of imperialist exploitation continues unchanged through Indian bourgeois republican forms if financial penetration and dependence on British capital is already complete and remains unbroken. . . .

In the last resort, the difference between independence and Dominion status, if taken formally and in isolation, may be no more than a constitutional figment. It is the reality that matters. *The reality of independence depends upon the breaking of the power of British capital in India.* . . .

In order to make clear the real meaning of independence it is necessary that it must be combined with a more concrete demand, expressing its character, i.e., the direct attack on British imperialist exploitation. The demand for independence needs to be combined with the demand for the repudiation of the foreign debts and expropriation of the foreign concessions and capital holdings in India. Then alone will the demand for independence take on its real and living character.

(From *Notes of the Month*, by R.P.D., June, 1928.)