

Notes of the Month

BLACK AND WHITE

Your bond is not mere colour of skin but the deeper experience of wage slavery and contempt.

W. E. B. Dubois, Message to Accra Conference, December, 1958.

MAY Day, 1960, dawns at one of the highest moments of the long battle of human liberation. At the Summit Conference the choice of peace or war for the future of the world is approaching the anvil of decision. In South Africa the choice of slavery or freedom is being presented with an urgency which is searing the conscience of mankind.

The blood of the martyrs of Sharpeville and Langa, the screams of men, women and children lashed and beaten up and shot indiscriminately in the streets and in their homes, the mass heroism and resistance of African national patriots unarmed in face of their butchers—all these are the signals that herald the approaching downfall of the vile system of 'apartheid' slavery. A century ago the execution of John Brown, whose soul goes marching on, heralded the legal abolition of slavery in the United States, even though the struggle continues today at new heights in the Southern States to end the heritage of that accursed foundation of colour slavery on which the fortunes of the wealthy in Britain and the United States have been built.

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Four decades ago the butchery of 379 Indians at Amritsar heralded the approaching end of British rule in India. Today the speed of events is greater. Africa Year 1960 was the slogan proclaimed already at the beginning of the year. That was before Sharpeville. Now the battle for African freedom, all over the continent, and above all in the key fortress of barbarous servitude and racial terror, in South Africa, visibly in the sight of all occupies the forefront of the international situation.

Their Cause Is Ours

Never before has such universal anger, horror, indignation and protest swept so immediately and swiftly through every country in the world as over the events in South Africa. The truth of fascism and Nazism was long concealed and distorted by governments and official press in the West until years later after the outbreak of war the White Paper giving the long withheld dispatches about the concentration camps was published as an item of progaganda. But here is the direct descendant of Nazism in action, the open admirers and disciples of Hitlerism also during the war now constituted as a government and acting with an indiscriminate violence and terror which even their Nazi tutors, today entrenched in their midst, might envy. In vain the see-no-evil (except in communism) diplomats and ministerial appeasers try to deprecate popular criticism and protest as likely to cause embarrassment or constitute intervention in a 'domestic' question. They cannot escape their own responsibility in this matter. From the blood and tears of African slaves the rich tide of golden tribute flows today into the Tory mansions of Britain, just as of old the slave trade built their fortunes. With sure instinct popular feeling throughout the world has recognised that this struggle against racial fascist terror in South Africa is no domestic question, but the common concern of all of us. Mankind 'cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free'.

What is 'Apartheid'?

How is it possible that the horrors of the slavery regime in South Africa (and Southern Rhodesia) could have been so long held hidden from wider general consciousness, beyond progressive and democratic circles (but with extending protest among these, as shown in the widening support for the international boycott campaign since its inception in the summer of last year and extension to the Labour Party this year) until the explosion of

Sharpeville blew up the conspiracy of silence and brought the monster into the centre of the international arena? One of the reasons is the customary deception of language always used by modern exploiting classes to cover a very different content. Just as the 'mixed economy' is used to describe modern monopoly capitalism, 'integration' to describe colonialism in Algeria, or 'multi-racialism' to describe the refusal of universal suffrage democracy in British settler-dominated colonies in Eastern and Central Africa, so 'Apartheid' has been coined in the jargon of South African exploiter politics to describe the most elaborate apparatus for the subjection and servitude of the majority of the population yet devised in any state (an even more complex and complete subjection and servitude than fascism).

Myth and Reality

'Apartheid' might be imagined by the innocent outsider to mean, and in the bland explanations offered by South African politicians for foreign consumption is described as if it meant, that the two so-called 'races', 'European' and African (or 'Bantu' in the deliberately illiterate terminology adopted by them to designate the various African peoples, with long and proud histories, concerned), as well as the 'Coloured' and 'Asian', are so different in language, tradition and culture that in their mutual interest they should best develop separately without contact. If the logic of this argument were to be followed literally, it would evidently point to the practical conclusion that there should be 'European Reserves' for the European minority, on an area of territory proportionate to their minority numbers, in order that they should be able to live according to their supposed wishes separately from the African majority. But heaven help the simple-minded *Candide* who might expect to find this accurate fulfilment of the alleged doctrine. The exactly contrary reality was comically illustrated (in the midst of the tragedy) when the Day of Mourning on March 28 and the general strike of African labour brought the South African economy to a standstill, and the bitter complaint went up that the European ladies were having to wash up their own dishes. That the White folk should wash up their own crockery and the Africans theirs might have seemed an ideal fulfilment of 'Apartheid'. On the contrary, it was regarded as a gross violation of the principle.

Structure of Slavery

The essential purpose of allocating the African three-quarters majority of the population to 'reserves' on less than one-eighth of

the territory of their own country, while declaring the rest of the country 'European' territory, is not in order that the African majority should live separately on these reserves, but that they should not be able to live on them. The nominal confinement of the eleven million Africans to twelve per cent of the territory, on which it is physically impossible for them to maintain life, is only a hypocritical device ('Apartheid') to ensure that the greatest part of their able-bodied manpower shall be compelled to seek employment in the European 88 per cent as 'alien' wage-workers without rights in their own country, cut off from their wives and families, forbidden by law to acquire skills (reserved for European workers), and in practice pass-law serfs, either on the farms (two and a half millions) or in the mines and factories (half a million) or as servants in the households of the European masters. On this elementary basis of expropriation, deprivation of rights and subjection, the vast apparatus of pass laws and kindred legislation is erected, with savage penalties for every breach (three-quarters of a million sentenced annually for breaches of the pass laws) and serving to provide European farmers with convict labour in privately owned and run convict jails on the European farms. Such is the modern structure of slavery in A.D. 1960, elaborated with all the ingenious cruelty of a Malan, a Strijdom and a Verwoerd, compared with which the world of Simon Legree was an idyll.

Freedom Struggle

Against this vicious system of enslavement the freedom struggle of the African people has moved forward on a new and extended basis since the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the Congress Alliance on June 26, 1956. This Charter was adopted by the unity of the African National Congress (the major representative organisation of the African people), the Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress and the Congress of Democrats (composed largely of progressive Europeans). The Congress Alliance thus represents the unity of the progressive democratic representatives of all four sections of the population, which 'Apartheid' seeks to divide, with the African National Congress as the decisive force. The Government replied to the Freedom Charter with the mass Treason Trial under the 'Suppression of Communism' Act. The Treason Trial was opened in 1956, and formally still continues, although the majority, if not all, of those charged have since been arrested or detained under the present Emergency.

Boycott

In December, 1958, the decision was reached at the Accra All-African Peoples' Conference, on the proposal of the African National Congress, to call for an international boycott of South African goods. The boycott was launched on June 26, 1959, the third anniversary of the Freedom Charter. It was widely taken up, including by the Government of Jamaica, and by trade union, co-operative and progressive organisations in many countries. In Britain the Boycott Movement was initiated in the second half of 1959 by the co-operation of the Committee of African Organisations and the Movement for Colonial Freedom. By the beginning of 1960 support was so strong that the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress, as also the progressive religious organisation, Christian Action, together with the Liberal and Communist Parties and progressive Conservatives like Lord Altrincham, officially joined the Boycott Movement and called for a boycott during the month of March. Hundreds of local Boycott Committees were formed all over the country, expressing the unity of all sections of the working class and democratic movement in support of this common aim. Originally the official support of the Labour Party and T.U.C. for the boycott was intended to be confined to the month of March. But the events of Sharpeville made it abundantly clear that it would have to be extended beyond. It is understood that the proposal has been put forward for the Boycott Committee to become an Anti-Apartheid Committee, to continue the campaign until the evil system of 'Apartheid' is ended.

Macmillan's Tour

It was in this situation not only of the universal freedom upsurge throughout the African continent, but also of sharpening international democratic concern over the crisis in Africa and the beginnings of solidarity action, that Premier Macmillan made his tour of British colonies and Commonwealth territories in Africa during the first six weeks of 1960, culminating in his Capetown speech to the South African parliament on February 3. In face of the advance of African national revolt British imperialism has sought to adapt its 'Asian' model, and to develop a perspective for the 'constitutional' advance of a series of selected African former colonial territories to the status of independent states under governments still with close connections with the old imperialist state apparatus and likely to protect imperialist economic assets and exploitation. It was with this perspective in view of partial adaptation to the

African national struggle, while seeking at the same time to maintain the interests of the European colonial exploiting monopolies and settlers, that Macmillan exercised all his diplomatic adroitness in conducting his tour of British colonial territories or newly ex-colonial territories in Africa, as well as visiting the smouldering danger zones of the Central African Federation and South Africa.

From Capetown to Sharpeville

In South Africa Macmillan sought with his customary facing-both-ways ingenuity to bridge the gulf of the contradictions of imperialism in Africa by simultaneously exchanging compliments with his hosts, the racialist-fascist Verwoerd Government, complying with their wishes to meet no African leaders, and deprecating the boycott, and at the same time expressing in his speech to the South African parliament on February 3 a diplomatically worded warning and dissent on the dangers of maintaining a rigid policy of racial suppression in the modern world. In vain. These subtle manoeuvres could not paper over the gulf between the real policies of colonialism and racialism, most brutally and openly expressed by the settlers on the spot, whether Algerian *colons* or the Welensky Government or above all the South African Government, and the aspirations of the African people. 'South Africa has been given formal notice', commented the leading Government organ, *Die Burger*, 'of a state of emergency in her relations with the West'. Macmillan's 'enlightened' Capetown speech had been preceded by his own Government's atrocities and killing of unarmed Africans in Kenya and Nyasaland. It was followed by Sharpeville and its sequel in South Africa.

Campaign Against the Pass Laws

In South Africa by the beginning of this year the campaign was carried forward to the preparation for the next planned objective of non-violent mass refusal to carry the passes of slavery. This stage had been planned by the African National Congress to open on April 1. The campaign was, however, precipitated a fortnight earlier through the action of a smaller section which had broken away on grounds of tactical differences from the Congress to found the 'Pan-Africanist Congress'. The tactical differences do not concern us here, since they belong to the internal problems of the movement in South Africa; the common immediate objective of all sections is the abolition of the pass laws; and Government repression has fallen on both organisations. So far as can be seen from

here, the tactical differences turned on objection to the Congress Alliance conception of co-operation of African with non-African progressive democratic organisations willing to fight Apartheid, criticism of the African National Congress as 'communist-inspired', and the trend to see the conflict in purely racial terms (black versus white, irrespective of political outlook). The main base of the P.A.C. was in Sharpeville and Langa; and it was here that the Government's ruthless firing on peaceful demonstrations of unarmed Africans and killing of scores of men, women and children opened the present major crisis and aroused the horror of the world.

Explosion

The Sharpeville massacre was not the end, but the beginning of a major conflict for African freedom, which has already borne many of the characteristic features of a revolutionary situation—when the ruling regime of oppression finds itself increasingly unable to maintain its rule in the old way and the masses refuse to be governed in the old way. The sequence of events is here important. The Sharpeville massacre on March 21 was in effect the 'Bloody Sunday' not just the repetition of the prototype of an Amritsar, which temporarily terrorised the movement in the Punjab, but leading, like Bloody Sunday, to a still higher level of struggle. The masses were not intimidated, but thronged in thousands to the police stations to court arrest for failure to carry passes, until by March 25 the police authorities admitted that it was impossible to arrest them all because there was 'no room' in the prisons (Cape-town police chief, March 25).

The Sixteen Days

Thus developed the Sixteen Days, from March 21 to April 6, during which the height of the mass movement paralysed the authorities from being able to enforce the operation of the pass laws. On March 26 the police authorities announced temporary suspension of arrests for failure to carry passes. This enforced concession was not a change of policy. It was accompanied by the announcement that enforcement of the pass laws would be resumed as soon as diminution of the 'tension' made it possible, and that new repressive legislation would be immediately introduced against African organisations and leaders. This resumption of enforcement was officially announced on April 6, as soon as the new terror had been imposed with the proclamation of the Emergency, banning of the African organisations and wholesale arrests. Thus the enforced

temporary concession only revealed the crack in the power of the regime, and so far from appeasing the popular movement, raised it higher.

General Strike

The African freedom movement replied with the call for a Day of Mourning on March 28, a mass general strike and the burning of passes to demonstrate the demand for the ending forever of the pass system in place of the temporary suspension of its operation. The general strike had full support (at least 80 per cent according to the *London Times*, 95 per cent according to the American magazine *Time*), together with a hartal of Indian shopkeepers. South African economy was thus brought to a standstill on March 28. South African shares slumped. By April 8 they were reported to have fallen by £125 millions. The potential strength of the Africans as the basis of the South African economy was demonstrated.

Government Terrorism

The Government replied with new terror legislation, introduced on March 28, to ban the A.N.C., P.A.C. and all African or other progressive organisations, with ferocious penalties of five years prison, ten strokes of the lash and fines up to £500. Nevertheless, the movement continued with more demonstrations, strikes and burning of passes. On March 30 the Government proclaimed an Emergency, and arrested 234 leaders of all the African organisations and also progressive European spokesmen in the Liberal Party or Congress of Democrats. This was followed by widespread further arrests, with censorship forbidding the publication of the facts or names of those arrested. The African liberation movement replied with gigantic mass marches for the release of their leaders, notably the march of 30,000 to Capetown. The Government called out Army and Navy units to surround African townships, and mobilised the Territorials or European Volunteer Reserve. Orders to shoot to kill were given, and indiscriminate violence employed to prevent further marches and terrorise the Africans back to work. By April 6 renewal of enforcement of the pass laws was announced. Meanwhile the United Nations Security Council on April 1 by a vote of 9 to 0 (Britain and France abstaining) had carried the resolution 'deploring' the actions of the South African Government and calling on it to 'abandon its policies of apartheid and racial discrimination'.

Sitting on Bayonets

'You can do everything with bayonets except sit on them.' Napoleon's dictum was wasted on Verwoerd, Erasmus and Swart. These gentlemen believe rather in the literal truth of Carlyle's dictum 'God has put into every white man's hand a whip to flog the black'. The preliminary trial of strength during these days of crisis has revealed a series of distinctive features of the character of the struggle in South Africa. The first has been the Government's reliance absolutely and in effect exclusively on armed violence, repression, bans, arrests and terrorism as its sole weapon against the unarmed movement of the African majority. Up to the time of writing there has so far been absolute rejection of any approach, customary in such conditions of crisis, towards negotiation, partial reforms or concessions, or attempts to separate and win over so-called 'moderate' leaders in order to demobilise an overwhelming majority mass movement. It is true that, since the armed forces (though not the police) in South Africa are exclusively European and racial in character, no question could arise of reflection of the mass movement within the armed forces. On the other hand, the weakness of reliance solely on armed force, without any social basis within the oppressed majority, has become increasingly manifest; and the impermanence of any 'settlement' on this basis has been warningly noted by outside observers of every political colour. Hence the manifest anxiety of fellow imperialists over this glaring disregard of the necessary technique of modern imperialism in face of the strength of the national liberation movement in the world today.

Working Class and National Liberation

The second distinctive feature of the African national liberation movement in the conditions of South Africa arises from the fact that the South African economy is based on African employed labour under virtual slave conditions. In all the other colonial territories the main body of the population, and the main basis of the national movement, is the peasantry exploited by imperialism (only Kenya and Southern Rhodesia represent partial exceptions, more comparable to South Africa). In South Africa, through the operation of the system of 'apartheid' servitude already described, the mass movement is overwhelmingly a movement of enslaved wage workers, denied the most elementary rights of organisation and held down by violence. The development of the national

bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie (small traders, or intelligentsia educated in Christian missions or abroad) is very minute; the small traders are mostly Indians. There is no upper skilled section, since the Africans are debarred by law from skilled jobs and rates, which are the prerogative of European workers receiving twenty times an African wage. These conditions make organisation difficult, but the potential strength very great, once unity is achieved. This was shown by the united action of March 28, which brought the entire South African economy to a standstill, leaving the rulers no immediate answer save armed violence and wholesale arrests and terrorist intimidation.

International Repercussions

The third distinctive feature signalled by the events in South Africa has been the speed and extent of the international repercussions, not only within the working class and democratic movement in all countries, but also within the imperialist camp and among their governments. The storm aroused on an international scale by the events in South Africa has been more intensive and widespread than in almost any previous national struggle, including Algeria, and more comparable to that aroused by the Suez War. Alongside the universal popular support and solidarity, the reasons for special concern also among the ruling class of other countries in the imperialist camp, as revealed in the vote on the United Nations Security Council, are manifest. At a time when the imperialists are endeavouring to counter the national revolt in the majority of their African colonial territories by a policy of concessions, proclaiming a new and enlightened outlook and professing to repudiate racial denomination, the open and unconcealed racialism and reckless armed violence of the South African Government is an embarrassment to the other imperialists and even seen as a grave danger holding out the possibility of the loss of all Africa. Hence the complaints of the South African governmental spokesmen and racist press that British imperialism is sacrificing them to the interests of its wider African policy. The equivocal position of the British Conservative Government was demonstrated in the United Nations, where previously Britain, France and fascist Portugal had been the three States daring to vote against a resolution condemning apartheid, and where now the British and French Governments judged it more prudent to abstain—and brought shame upon themselves by their abstention.

Imperialism and South Africa

On the other hand, it would be a dangerous illusion to regard the South African situation as a peculiar and anomalous 'internal question' of the South African ruling class (as the spokesmen of the Macmillan Government seek to pretend) separate from the interests and policy of international imperialism. Anglo-American imperialism, and especially British imperialism, has a powerful and dominant interest in the South African economy. Total overseas capital in South Africa at the end of 1959 was estimated at £1,580 million, with Britain holding 'more than half' the total (£865.6 million already in the census return of 1956) and the United States £250 million (*Financial Times*, March 31, 1960). Over fifteen hundred million golden (or diamond) reasons for extreme 'delicacy' in taking care not to offend the South African Government or do anything to upset the precarious balance of lucrative exploitation.

Dilemma of the Imperialists

From this arises the peculiar dilemma of the imperialists in relation to the present situation in South Africa. Gigantic fortunes have been made, and continue to be made, and vast incomes drawn by the wealthiest families in Britain, including ministerial families, from the slavery system of 'apartheid'. From the end of the nineteenth century and the Edwardian era 'Kaffirs' have played and continue to play a leading role on the London Stock Exchange. Hence the extreme nervousness when the reckless bull in a rage policy of the Verwoerd Government threatens to wreck the whole structure of African exploitation. But hence also the extreme hesitation to offend or get on the wrong foot with the Verwoerd Government so long as it remains the main physical bulwark of British imperialist interests and profits in South Africa. On the one hand, the South African Federation of Industries, mainly British, calls for immediate negotiations by the Government with 'moderate influential African leaders' and the replacement of the existing system of pass laws by a new reformed system of identity cards for all and limited control of movement of Africans. On the other hand, the United Party, the political organ of British interests, and constituting the 'Opposition' for the past ten years, has no alternative policy to Apartheid, and has supported the Verwoerd Government in all its actions in the present crisis and voted for all the new terror laws. No wonder Macmillan's Ministers can only

mumble incoherently, when bombarded with awkward questions in parliament.

Towards What Goal?

We are still only at the beginning of the deeper conflict which has now opened in South Africa, and which, together with the Algerian war of independence in the North, has today come into the front line of the battle of liberation of the whole African continent. It would be premature at this stage to judge the immediate next phase of this still developing and explosive situation. The Verwoerd Government has for the moment re-established and reinforced its physical domination, but at heavy cost and with obvious and permanent insecurity. The sensitive barometer of the money market and the Stock Exchange has revealed the lack of confidence in the future. It may be assumed that British policy, in contact with associated interests in South Africa, will endeavour to manoeuvre for a less dangerously rigid strategy. Influential British interests, reflected by such leading press organs as *The Times*, would evidently wish to see a replacement of the Verwoerd Government by an alternative or Coalition (British and Afrikaner) Government which could show a 'new face' and make some concessions, whether of release of mass leaders or recognition of limited rights of organisation (the model represented by the release of Dr. Banda in Nyasaland, or drawing in of a few representative African leaders to junior ministerial positions in Kenya). But in the conditions of South Africa, with the elaborate apparatus of absolute racial suppression, the unity of the two main parties in upholding it, and the absence of any previous development of a privileged or compromising leading stratum in the African population, such methods of manoeuvre and partial concession are less easy to fulfil. The united demand of the entire African population of South Africa is maintained for the abolition of the Pass Laws and Apartheid, and is strengthened by universal international support.

Unity for Freedom

That is why the strongest possible international solidarity and practical support in unity with the struggle of the African population and all democrats in South Africa is now of such paramount importance. The Emergency Committee of the suppressed African National Congress has issued its call on April 4. In order to

resolve 'the present grave crisis which is sweeping the country', the Congress has put forward the following urgent propositions:

1. *The State of Emergency must be ended, our leaders must be released, freedom of speech and organisation established.*
2. *Pass Laws must be abolished.*
3. *Wages must be raised to a minimum of at least £1 a day.*
4. *A new National Convention representing all the people on a fully democratic basis must be called to lay the foundations of a new Union, a non-racial democracy belonging to all South Africans and in line with the United Nations Charter and the views of all enlightened people everywhere in the world.*

These aims deserve and require international support with the united strength of the peoples of the world to hasten their fulfilment. During the past decade and a half the victory of national liberation has swept forward over the greater part of Asia and the Middle East. Now the battle goes forward in Latin America, and above all in the final reserve and bastion of imperialism and colonialism, in Africa, to win that victory of freedom which shall end for ever the shame of discrimination and servitude on the basis of race or colour, and thereby open the gates to the advance of united humanity.

April 12, 1960.

R.P.D.