

AFRICA IN FERMENT

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THE events currently taking place in Africa south of the Sahara, notably in Kenya and the Union of South Africa, have thrust the liberation struggle of the African people into the forefront of world affairs. No longer can the vast, compact land mass, which constitutes the African continent, be regarded as some tranquil backwater in the affairs of the nations. Africa is no longer the happy hunting ground that it was once thought to be for world imperialism engaged in the extraction of huge quantities of loot from the so-called under-developed countries of the world.

The African people everywhere in the continent are raising in their millions a determined challenge to the rule of foreign imperialism which deprives them of the most elementary political rights, exploits them ruthlessly and condemns them to a position of permanent racial inferiority. The upsurge of the African people comes at a time when the crisis into which world imperialism entered as a result of World War I and the Great October Socialist Revolution has been greatly intensified following victory over Fascism in World War II and the emergence of the People's Democracies of Europe and People's China. It coincides with a period when the imperialists are counting on compensating themselves in Africa for the vast losses they have incurred through the removal of one-third of the globe outside the orbit of imperialism.

Nearly four years ago, when the revolutionary movements of Eastern Asia ranging from Northern China through the hills of Burma to Malaya and Indonesia were filling the imperialists with alarm, *The Times* (March 1, 1949) commented that 'with Communists either in the leadership or striving towards it, the challenge to Western security is at least as great as if Africa were in ferment'. Now Africa is, indeed, in ferment. And in the process the contradictions which dominate the relations between the subject people and their imperialist oppressors and the contradictions between the imperialists themselves have become sharper and deeper.

The struggle of colonial peoples against oppression and for freedom from alien domination is as old as the colonial system itself. The 19th century is replete with the battles which the African people, organised in tribal groups, as were the Zulus, Xhoses, Matabeles, Ashantis, Basutos and Hauses, fought to avert the imposition of

imperialist rule. In the modern era there are the beginnings of an African bourgeoisie and an African working class and modern organisations of a mass character such as trade unions and mass political parties are coming to the front in national liberation movements.

At the beginning of the present century during its 'pacification' of Africa, British imperialism introduced a system of so-called 'Indirect Rule' which sought to utilise the tribal chiefs as subordinate instruments of British Rule. This system, first introduced by Lugard in East Africa, and the Glen Gray Act of 1894, the product of Rhodes and Hofmeyr in Cape Colony, set the pattern by which British imperialism was to concentrate African manpower in a way convenient to itself for the exploitation of the continent's resources. Thus were produced the native reserves of South and East Africa which range from relatively small areas of land to large 'Protectorates', like Bechuanaland, Swaziland, Basutoland and Nyasaland.

The impact of the imperialists' own economy has been to set in motion forces leading to social change and the break-up of the very tribalism which the British rulers were seeking to utilise for their own purposes.

The imposition of poll tax forced African males to leave their tribal villages and go to work on the farms of white settlers or in the mines. And the need to cultivate cash crops for a world market led to the development of individual ownership of land in place of the communal system of land tenure. The social revolution in the African countryside was well under way when World War II began. And the effect of the experiences of the war was to push it forward enormously. The tremendously increased rate of extraction of Africa's resources undertaken by the imperialists in the immediate post-war years has further stimulated the process of social change. The *Review of Economic Conditions in Africa* issued in February, 1951 by the UN Economic and Social Council revealed that in a span of about 12 years, from the pre-war period to 1948 several African territories greatly increased their number of wage earners. Kenya, for instance, had an increase of 85.4 per cent., whilst Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo had increases of 65.6 and 67 per cent. respectively. On the subject of their wages the report said:

It is a significant paradox that, in the face of almost constant complaints of shortage of labour in Africa, the wages of Africans in many parts of Africa and over long periods have remained relatively static.

Daily wage rates of Africans are as low as 2s. 3d. in the Belgian Congo and 1s. 2d. in Nigeria, whilst in Uganda the monthly rate ranges from about 20s. to 35s. Monthly rates in Tanganyika and Kenya vary between 21s. and 63s., and 21s. and 39s. respectively. The UN report stated further that it is probable that the average annual per capita income in tropical Africa is not more than £17 10s.

From the labour of these same Africans is produced 98.4 per cent. of the world's diamonds; 80 per cent. of its cobalt; 57.7 per cent. of its gold; 35.5 per cent. phosphates; 30 per cent. chrome ore and manganese; 18 per cent. copper; nearly all the columbite; 68.3 per cent. cocoa; 69.5 per cent. palm oil; 75.5 per cent. sisal; 40.4 per cent. hard fibres; and 15.35 per cent. coffee. There is little wonder that such vast resources and the even greater untapped wealth have attracted the attention of US imperialism. When the Marshall Plan was launched the US State Department made it clear that in 'partial return' for assistance received, the Marshallised countries would be expected to provide the US with certain badly needed raw materials—tin, industrial diamonds, rubber, manganese, chromium, copper, lead, zinc, etc.,—from 'within their own territory or that of their colonies, territories or dependencies . . . under an aggressive plan of exploitation, development and expansion of productive facilities'. And in November, 1950, a group of President Truman's special advisers on Foreign Economic Policy reported that:

. . . despite the fact that Africa's known resources are only partially developed, it is the source of a substantial and for some commodities a major part of our supplies of certain strategic and critical materials.

While the European imperialists are engaged in intensifying the exploitation of Africa on their own account they are at the same time faced with the problem of satisfying the demands of the major imperialism. Thus African workers have to produce a considerable surplus over and above what was previously required of them. British imperialism therefore attempts to secure conditions in its African territories which, whilst strengthening its own grip, at the same time meet the demands of American dollar imperialism. Being under such pressure, it is, in securing these conditions, adopting methods which more and more take on an American character. This and the need to push ahead more rapidly with war strategic plans in Africa account for the present savage repression taking place in Kenya, and the determination of the Tory government, reported in the *Financial Times* (October 23, 1952) to have the

Central African Federation plan passed before the Summer recess despite the overwhelming opposition of the African people of the Rhodesias and Nysaland. Until quite recently British imperialism weathered its crises in Africa without any suggestion of loss of control. When in February, 1948, the Gold Coast, the 'model colony' rose in revolt the imperialists were astute enough to grant a new constitution by which they appeared to give the shadow of power into African hands. A similar manoeuvre took place in Nigeria following the Enugu shootings in 1949.

In the post-war period new constitutions have been the fashion in Africa. In those territories where conditions of extreme crisis obtain and where the upsurge of the people threatens to develop into revolution with the aim of the immediate overthrow of imperialism, a show of 'handing over power' is made. In these cases imperialism in search of new allies to replace the chiefs, whose power and influence has waned with the break-up of the tribal system, directs its favours towards the rising bourgeois elements. With these elements imperialism forges a counter-revolutionary alliance against the working-class, against the liberation movement, so as to maintain intact the essential economic and strategic interests of imperialism. Where the stage of political development is not so far advanced only minor 'concessions' are made, such as one, two or three more seats on a legislative council. Whatever the step taken it is always ensured that political power is left effectively where it was and where it is intended to remain.

Imperialism still has room in which to manoeuvre in Africa. But space is getting exceedingly small. The imperialists are being daily faced with new problems arising from the fact that the African people have not only developed a sense of unity and discipline among themselves, but are also increasingly forging unity with other peoples, first of all, as in the Union of South Africa, with the other non-European people who live among them. A great responsibility rests on the British working class and democratic movement to respond actively in support of this rising struggle of the African peoples, and thus to help to forge the common victory which can ensure a new and happier future, freed from the fetters of imperialism, equally for the African and British peoples.

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