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TRAGEDY IN AFRICA

A WARNING AND A CHALLENGE

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FIVE years after the racial tyranny of Hitlerism was crushed by the armies of the United Nations, disturbing reports of a new racial tyranny come from within the British Commonwealth itself. This tyranny is not yet aimed at other white men as Hitler's was, but at the native peoples of South Africa.

These people say that they are being driven into the darkest slavery. They say that the Nationalist policy of segregation, called *Apartheid*, means for them an ever-deepening misery. They say that they are deprived of the most elementary rights, and even of the right to live. Their infant mortality rate is in many areas so high as to condemn one child in two to death; in some areas it is worse than this. Month by month the Nationalist Government enacts new measures of repression.

What is the truth? The following report, prepared after research by the UNION OF DEMOCRATIC CONTROL, gives a condensed answer which no enlightened man or woman in Britain can afford to ignore.

SOUTH Africa today is a stricken country, torn by racial antagonism. Two streams of thought have emerged since the coming of the white settlers. The one has envisaged progress towards a point where members of every race should achieve equal citizenship. The other has tried to

crush the forces of evolution into a rigid pattern which should perpetuate for all time the present inequalities.

The first stream of thought has had the support of powerful economic and social forces that derive from the industrialisation of the country and the urbanisation of the native peasants. But these have conflicted with other economic forces—primarily with the insatiable thirst for cheap labour for the white man's farms and mines.

These mining and farming interests have dominated the political and parliamentary life of South Africa. Yet in spite of their repressive influence, the process of industrialisation has revolutionised African life. Africans have swarmed to the towns and settled there permanently. They have learnt to read and write. They have acquired from white civilisation new skills and ways of thought and action. Every year, thousands of Africans have migrated to the Union from the colonial stagnation of surrounding countries, often walking hundreds of miles, in order to share in these new things.

The war hastened this process. The most backward of South Africa's politicians, whose sympathies with Hitler had led them to demand neutrality, were forced out of the Government. For nearly nine years the country was governed by men whose outlook was more "modern" than that of any since union nearly half a century ago. Much social legislation was introduced which did not discriminate against Non-Europeans. Many white South Africans, particularly those in the Army, began to change their attitude towards the traditional problems of their country. It seemed as if the tide had turned.

Then, in June 1948, the Nationalist Party came into power in coalition with the Afrikaner Party. They received only four-fifths of the votes given to the other parties, but a small majority of seats. Their supporters were the most backward white men of South Africa—farmers who longed for the restoration of the docile force of cheap native labour which their fathers had known; white smallholders, driven from their land by poverty, who came into direct competition with native labour in the towns; petty officials, used to regarding the civil service as a nationalist preserve.

During the electoral campaign, the Nationalists whipped up racial prejudice to the point of hysteria. Once in power, they began to satisfy that hysteria by a series of measures, petty at first, which insulted the Non-Europeans and flattered the vanity of their own supporters. Racial segregation was introduced on the trains of the Cape Peninsula where, for generations, Europeans and Non-Europeans had travelled peacefully together. Notices of *Europeans Only* were posted in many places of public assembly. Most Non-European workers were excluded from the Unemployment Insurance Act. That part of the Asiatic (Land Tenure) Act which gave Asiatics the right to elect three Members of Parliament was repealed. School meals for African children were abolished (though later partially restored).

Scholarships for Africans to study medicine at the Rand University were abolished (though later restored for a limited period). The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was passed. A ban was placed on Africans leaving the country. The passports of Europeans with whom the Government disagreed were confiscated. The trade unions were undermined. An industrial Legislation Commission was appointed with terms of reference steeped in the confessedly Nazi ideology of the Nationalist Party.

The Nationalists claim also to be the *Herrenvolk* among the white peoples of South Africa. They have passed a Nationality Act withholding citizenship from British settlers for five years, then making it conditional on the approval of the Minister concerned; they have withdrawn recognition of the British citizenship of Union Nationals. Only the opposition of the small Afrikaner Party stopped the Nationalists from abolishing the Cape franchise and removing the Cape Coloured voters to a separate roll.

These were new measures. But the statute book was already encumbered with previous measures of racial discrimination, many of which were in disuse. These old measures the Nationalists have revived and enforced with merciless vigour. They have combed the towns for Africans who had broken one of the many intricate Pass Laws. These Africans they have arrested by the hundred, and have given them the choice of signing contracts for work on farms or in the mines, or of being prosecuted and going to prison. These thousands of convicted natives are hired out to farmers who form co-operative societies to build and maintain private gaols. In this way the Nationalists have reversed the rising trend of native wages, and have sent new streams of native labour into the farms and mines. It is their greatest boast.

Today, in South Africa, the Non-Europeans are desperate or despairing. There is rising in their hearts a hatred of the white man and his ways, which, for anyone not blind to the lessons of history, is terrible to contemplate.

How Many Suffer ?

Law, custom, and prejudice divide the people of the Union into the following categories (according to the Census of 1946) :

Europeans (about 60 per cent Afrikaans-speaking)	2,372,690
Africans (<i>alias</i> Natives or Bantu)	7,805,592
Coloureds (a mixture of aboriginal with other races)	928,484
Asiatics (mainly Indian, but some Chinese)	285,260

Of the Europeans 72 per cent live in towns, but of the Africans only 23 per cent. Of the Indians 40 per cent live in Durban. Of the Coloureds 20 per cent live in Cape Town.

How Do They Work ?

Agriculturally, the country is poor. Not more than 15 per cent of the land is arable; of this, only a third is suitable for intensive cultivation. Yet over 60 per cent of the population is rural. Principal natural wealth is mineral—mainly gold from the Rand which yields about one-seventh of the national income. Coal, and thus electricity, is cheap. An important steel industry has emerged in the last twenty years.

South African agriculture and mining are based on cheap native labour. Usual wages on a farm are fifteen or thirty shillings a month, with rations of maize meal boiled as porridge. In the gold mines the natives are housed in "compounds;" and their average rate of wages in 1948 was slightly over £4 a month. By contrast, the usual wage in secondary industry is about £2 a week and in some cases more.

As things are now organised, cheap labour means high profits. Any rise in wages means a corresponding reduction in dividends. Farmers and mineowners have the strongest personal incentive in seeking out native labour and keeping its wages as low as possible. In this they conflict with the secondary industries of the towns.

How Do They Live ?

Under an enlightened administration, secondary industries would have grown and flourished much more than is the case today. The Non-Europeans would have acquired technical skills and increased their value to themselves and to society. Gold mining and agriculture would have lost their positions of monopoly. The culture of a balanced life—in the cities and on the land would have beckoned the Africans.

But these developments, offering the Africans an entry into modern civilisation and a due share in its benefits, would have injured the interests vested in mining and agriculture; and the State has intervened to curb them. Intervention is through a mass of laws which limit the right of Africans to move or acquire property, but which greatly favour the Europeans. Between these two extremes are the Indians and the Coloureds, each enjoying certain privileges over the Natives but subject also to certain restrictions.

Discrimination is founded on the South Africa Act, passed by the Parliament of Westminster in 1909 for the union of the four colonies of the Cape, Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal. Only in the Cape was the right to vote not dependent on colour—there, citizenship depended on literacy and property. That Westminster should have perpetuated the electoral autocracy of the other three colonies was the first tragedy in the development of the Union.

When union took place, only Europeans could sit in Parliament, and only they could be elected. There followed a stream of discriminatory

legislation aimed mostly at regulating the Europeans' most fiercely guarded asset—cheap native labour.

Native labour was needed, and was got. The method was simple. The natives were to be contained in "Native Areas" or "Reserves," the boundaries of which were laid down by the Natives Land Act, 27 of 1913 (amended by 18 of 1936). Having pinned the natives down, means were found of driving them to work. Taxes were imposed which, though calling for the payment of only a pound or two a year, necessitated the earning of money that was not to be found in the non-monetary economy of the Reserves. Natives were thus indentured to mining or farming employers; and breach of such contracts was made to carry penal sanctions. Having driven the natives to work, means were next found to keep them there. They were herded in "compounds" under the guns of company police, and at the end of their contracts they were returned to the labour pool whence they came.

The system has proved savagely successful; but only up to a point. Land is scarce. It is now a long time since the Europeans took most of it; today over three million Africans (more than all the Europeans) are crowded into 13 per cent of the country's surface. The sheer force of hunger drives men and women into the towns; and no law, farmer, or mine manager, is capable of stopping them.

But many laws were made, and are still being made, to try to stop them. The Riotous Assemblies Act (27 of 1914) made it a criminal offence to do, say, or write anything which might be calculated to engender feelings of hostility between Europeans and any other part of the population. The Minister of Justice was empowered to banish an offender from one part of the country to another—to take the native from the town, that is, and force him back to the Reserve.

Perhaps the most astounding of all these Acts is the Native Administration Act (38 of 1927), which appoints the Governor-General "the supreme chief of all the natives in the Provinces of Natal, Transvaal, and Orange Free State"; and confers on him, in conjunction with the Cabinet, absolute powers to make and unmake laws for the Reserves, to appoint and depose chiefs, and to move individuals or whole tribes "from one place to any other place." This right to move individuals is widely used to "discipline" Non-Europeans who excite the displeasure of petty officials.

In 1936 and 1937 General Hertzog introduced three Acts to "solve the native problem." One removed the Africans of the Cape from the common voters' roll and limited them to electing three (European) Members of Parliament. Another, the Natives Laws Amendment Act (displaced afterwards by the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 25 of 1945), gave wide powers to municipalities to regulate the flow of Africans to and from the towns. In order to leave the Reserves or farms, they have first to acquire a permit; then, after arriving in a town, they have to register at a Pass Office—an operation often needing several days. Meanwhile the

applicants are sent from office to office by abusive officials and policemen. Having at last acquired a permit to seek work, they are given two weeks' grace. If they have found no employment when these elapse, they are sent home or to another place where native labour is required.

Section 29 of this Act empowers a policeman to arrest without warrant any African whom he suspects of being "idle, dissolute, or disorderly." Normally, those thus arrested are held for a fortnight while the police investigate his record. No proper record is kept of individuals arrested in this way, so that it is frequently impossible for their relatives to trace them—until they are discharged or, being found guilty, sent to a farm colony. Every year, tens of thousands of Africans are given their first taste of prison life in this manner.

Under this same Act, Africans may live only in "locations" set aside for them in the towns or at their place of work. A husband who passes the night in the room of his wife who is, for example, a domestic servant, commits a criminal offence. Nor, in such circumstances, is a mother allowed to have her children to stay with her.

In 1946, after a racial campaign directed against the Indians, the Smuts Government passed the Asiatic Land Tenure Act which sought to impose on the Indians some of the disabilities suffered by the Africans. Indians are now permitted to buy land only in restricted areas. They were given the right, however, to elect three Members of Parliament in the same way as the Cape Africans, though these Members had of course to be Europeans. One of the first actions of the Nationalists after they came into power was to repeal this section of the Act.

From Bad to Much Worse :

With the coming of the Nationalists, this longstanding discrimination has become savage and unrestrained. In 1949, the Nationalist Government passed the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. "A marriage between a European and a Non-European," says this Act, "may not be solemnized, and any such marriage solemnized in contravention of the provisions of this section shall be void and of no effect."

In the Native Laws Amendment Act of the same year, the Nationalists made provision for greater equality between farms and mines in the sharing of African labour. "Compound" managers were given the right to arrest and search any native committing, or suspected by them of having committed, an offence. The minimum qualifying level for participation in the Unemployment Insurance Act was raised to such a level as to exclude the great mass of Non-Europeans. Fresh disabilities, such as those already mentioned earlier in this pamphlet, were loaded on the Africans.

To "deal with" the Trade Unions, the Nationalists appointed a com-

mission of enquiry into the affairs of the Garment Workers' Union, after one of this union's meetings had been attacked by fascist-minded hooligans; they appointed another commission to enquire generally into industrial relations. The only Act at present providing a legal prohibition of the performance of skilled work by the natives is the Mines and Works Act of 1911, which empowered the Minister of Mines to restrict certain types of work to Europeans. But now the Government proposes to introduce a Bill applying similar measures to the building industry. Under this Bill, Africans are to be allowed to work as artisans in their own areas, where opportunities of course are minimal, but are to be excluded even from the little skilled work they do in the rest of the country.

The Mandated Territory of South-West Africa has been virtually incorporated into the Union in defiance of the United Nations. And now comes the demand for the three British-administered Protectorates, Bechuanaland, Swaziland, and Basutoland. This demand is based on two considerations: first, on the belief that more cheap labour can be squeezed from them; and, secondly, the fear that they may otherwise develop along democratic lines and eventually present a challenge to the racial dictatorship of the Union.

The only strength of the Nationalist argument lies in the weakness of British administration. Such is the economic stagnation in the British Colonies which border the Union that, every year, thousands of Africans leave them to brave the terrors of that country in search of work. In 1946 as many as 47,522 mineworkers, or 17 per cent of all the workers in the Union mines, were natives of the three Protectorates; 12,750 were from Nyasaland, and 3,500 from Northern Rhodesia. Recruiting in these territories was permitted in spite of the fact that the Union has not ratified the Convention of the International Labour Office on indentured labour. It is estimated that, in the same year, a further 50,000 "foreign" Africans were at work in the Union in non-mining occupations (Native Laws Commission Report, 1946-48: para 17).

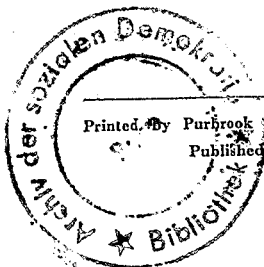
The African outside the Union is today presented with a terrible dilemma. He can stay at home and starve; or he can go to work in bondage. But there is no choice for the Non-European inside the Union. The frustration and repression of the past, from which he was hoping to escape, have reached a new intensity. This is happening at a time when colonial and subject peoples everywhere are reaching out toward a new life.

In the light of history and of these present strivings among the backward peoples of the world, the actions of the small band of Nationalists who have gained power in the Union of South Africa are a tragic invitation to racial strife. These actions are doomed to failure, just as the Nationalists, who represent the ideas of the past, are doomed to disappear. Meanwhile, they make a mockery of white civilisation, they condemn millions to conditions bordering on slavery, and they risk a terrible retribution of violence.

It is of the utmost importance for the welfare of South Africa, European and Non-European, that the Nationalists' grip on Government should be shaken loose. It must be hoped that the European electorate will understand this, and will act with courage and determination. But whatever course they take, the reputation of the British Government and people in Southern Africa is still high, and their responsibility still great. That reputation and responsibility must not be compromised by weak submission to Nationalist demands. It is urgent that the strongest possible opposition to compromise with South African racialism should be expressed in this country. You are urged to add your voice to this opposition by every legitimate political means, and especially by representation to your Member of Parliament.

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