

Letters to The Times

Problems of Africa

Denial of Rights Held Threat to a Democratic World

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

Now that the silence of the press and of liberal thought on Africa and its problems has broken briefly, may I venture to stress the critical importance of these matters.

Since the First World War, Africa has been appealing to the world for hearing and redress, in clear logic and modern phrase. With disappointing unanimity, the world has refused to listen, the press has failed to notice and forward-thinking people have been content to remain ignorant.

In 1915 the Congress of British West Africa, attended by representatives of chiefs, professions and business from four colonies, made a plea for democratic institutions, which deserves to be called a great document.

During the San Francisco conference, the Non-European Unity Committee of The Union of South Africa addressed "A Declaration to the Nations of the World," to which neither our free press nor any member of the conference paid the slightest attention.

Protest Quoted

Dr. A. B. Xuma, a native practicing physician of Capetown, president of the African National Congress of South Africa, now in New York, writes:

"We Africans of South Africa protest and oppose the incorporation of Southwest Africa into the Union. The Africans of Southwest Africa have no share in the Government and therefore are no party in the incorporation negotiations. South Africa itself denies political and economic rights to her 8,000,000 Africans. Eighty-three per cent of the land is reserved for 2,000,000 Europeans only; less than 17 per cent for 8,000,000 Africans. Only 40 per cent of African children are accommodated in mission schools; there are no Government schools for African children. . . . Ninety-five per cent of the African prison population is imprisoned for discriminatory regulations used against Africans only. . . . African trade unions are not recognized. Africans are excluded from skilled work. In short, Africans are underfed, underpaid, undereducated, underemployed, poorly housed and poorly and indirectly represented." . . .

The Cameroon Native Council, over the signature of Etia Moume Leopold, appealed to the United Nations in October, 1946, to be placed under United Nations trusteeship.

In Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Rhodesia and South Africa strikes against alleged starvation wages, aggravated by sharply rising prices, have been made but neither the world press nor philanthropy has made an adequate effort to inquire into cause and results.

All these matters are not isolated phenomena. They are part of a definite policy, originating in South Africa and in its daughter state Kenya, to separate African colonialism from Asiatic and perpetuate in Africa that slavery, serfdom and exploitation of labor and materials which the wiser world is trying to abolish as the one and only path to democracy. In 1923 the plan was enunciated in a pamphlet published in Nairobi, "The Thermopylae of Africa."

This plan developed during the First World War by the capture of German East Africa; was pushed further in the Second World War in the attempt to put Kenya and its leaders over Ethiopia. It still persists in the refusal to give Ethiopia access to the sea, by depriving her of Eritrea, and seizing Ogaden, its granary; by garrisoning Ethiopia with British soldiers and airmen, and by the proposed transfer of British military bases to East Africa.

Warning to U. N.

I am calling attention to all this, not simply as a plea for Africa, but as a warning to the United Nations. Is it possible to build one world, free and democratic, on the foundation of a continually enslaved Africa? Of an Africa, whose labor at twenty cents a day is in direct competition with the free labor of the world?

Finally, what shall 15,000,000 Negroes in the United States, many more than the population of the Argentine, and of Belgium and Holland combined, do to secure recognition of their rights as human beings at the hands of the peoples of the world? They are in majority disfranchised. Their disfranchisement in the South makes democracy unworkable in the nation and a third party movement impossible. Their rights of travel, domicile, use of public facilities, and right to work are widely infringed. Five thousand of them in fifty years have been lynched by mobs without trial and no lyncher has been punished; because as the Attorney General in the nation admits, the law gives him no adequate ground on which to prosecute.

Is this the way to build a new world? Is even the atomic bomb of greater importance than the freedom and manhood of 200,000,000 black men?

W. E. B. DU BOIS.

New York, Nov. 8, 1946.

Civil Service Workers Defended

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

I would like to take exception to M. D. Litman's letter of Oct. 29. He seems to be laboring under the impression that civil service workers constitute a vast army of bureaucratic do-nothings. He further contends that the reason they seek Government work is because of the security, pensions, good hours and little responsibility.

Mr. Litman may recall that during Fiorella La Guardia's Mayoralty, the Mayor urged young people to make Government service a career and that at least one of New York's universities instituted a special department to train students for a career in public service. Acting on Mr. Litman's premise, it would seem that Mr. La Guardia and

that particular university were in effect telling the youngsters that Government service was an opportunity of getting paid for doing nothing.

As for calling civil service worker "business hamperers" rather than aid to business, is not that gentleman aware of the publication by Government workers of innumerable pamphlets for business men and people in all walks of life?

Mr. Litman's castigation of civil service workers is entirely unwarranted.

LOUIS GORDON.

Brooklyn, New York, Nov. 7, 1946.

Presidential Resignation

People Have as Yet Shown No Desire For a Program, It Is Said

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

The statement by Senator Fulbright suggesting that the President, in view of the results of the recent election, appoint a Republican as Secretary of State and then resign, so that the executive and legislative branches of the Government would be of one party, is answered only in part by your editorial of Nov. 8. There is a more controlling reason why, at this particular time, there should be just this division between Congress and the White House.

No definite issue of policy was broached in the election of Nov. 5, no great difference of opinion on any subject fundamental to the welfare of the people of the United States was exhibited, and certainly no well-defined program for even the next year was put forth by either party. How, then, can we desire that a Congress and President, united as to party, move forward on broad lines of policy at this time when the people have shown no great demand for any one program of action?

To legislate now without a clear mandate from the people as to what they want their Government to do would be to invite the unsteady groping and searching for a legislative program not backed by popular support. Better by far it would be to wait out these intervening two years, by which time the paramount issues may be formed and ready for a showdown, than to move with haste and confusion into a series of enactments based on the whim of some powerful individuals in either the Executive Mansion or in the Congress.

Perhaps it was to help ease us over just a period like the present, when the common mind of the American people is testing and feeling its way among the welter of post-war problems, that the constitutional system of checks and balances and off-year elections was devised. The founding fathers, may we be permitted to say without inelegant eulogy, knew well what they were building.

PAUL DOLAN.

Newark, Del., Nov. 8, 1946.

Airplane Din in Manhattan

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

This letter is meant to constitute a bitter note on progress in life in New York. One of my earliest memories is that of the steam locomotives on the elevated lines which were retired not simply because of the smoke and soot but because of the noise they made. We have come a long way; the elevated railroads are almost completely gone, but we have bigger and better noise-makers. Thanks to the end of the war there has been an extraordinary increase in arrivals and departures from La Guardia Field. I know because the planes pass right over the apartment building I live in near Columbia, so low indeed that some day, I fear, they may not be right over it but in it.

Also, they fly so low that the vibrations seem to shake this quite solid apartment building. They affect radio broadcasting not only by the fact that they drown out the broadcasts by their own noise, but they seem to affect the volume of the broadcasts themselves. I leave it to some airplane engineer to figure out whether this is true.

By night when I try to sleep, a plane, headed probably for the quiet deserts of Arizona, passes over my head. It makes me wish I had gone to La Guardia Field in time to catch it. By day the feeble comments I am making on Plato in a lecture seem helplessly feeble as they are drowned out by planes every few minutes. Progress seems to consist in air travel that carries one rapidly from one city to another one made equally hideous by planes cruising over them on regular schedule.

Where is the Anti-Noise Society that has been trivially fussing with taxicab horns and neighboring radios?

All this is not as lighthearted as it may sound. Is there no legal arrangement by which planes can be made to fly higher over the city? Or is this constant din a low price to pay for progress?

IRWIN EDMAN.

New York, Nov. 4, 1946.