



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Africa: The Roots of Revolt** by Jack Woddis. Published by Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1960. Price 21s.

**Africa: The Lion Awakes** by Jack Woddis. Published by Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1961. Price 21s.

I AM no expert on Africa. My knowledge of that continent comes only from fleeting visits and continued contact with a number of Africa's new leaders. So to say that I am attempting to "review" the two books written by Jack Woddis, would be only to expose my vital ignorance of the subject.

But Mr. Woddis—while giving a broad sweep of African history, of recent social and economic development—is, of course, as interested in presenting a wider political argument. His reading of the African revolution is not that of a dispassionate observer. It is that of a fully-committed participant in the major political arguments which rage over the world today.

Now the social and political direction of the African revolution will doubtless be finally resolved in the capitals of the newly emergent States. But any fundamental resolution will inevitably be shaped by external factors. And, what is more important, the course of the African revolution will affect the structure of the political struggle in the world outside Africa as well. The Congo operation is conclusive proof of this. For it has already gone some way towards reshaping the United Nations itself, and it is certain that the course of events in the Congo has had a substantial effect on the policies of the Great Powers.

It is at this point that I would like to take up the argument presented by Mr. Woddis. He has presented in both his first and second book the impressive and stirring record of the revolt against colonialism by the African peoples, and then moved on to discuss the "new colonialism". He comes at last to the Congo operation, which provides for him one of the hinges of his argument.

“Added to the disunity of the Congolese people and parties, there was the disunity of the African States themselves. Disunity not merely between the ‘Casablanca’ States and the ‘Brazzaville’ States—but partial lack of cohesion, or resolution even, partly explained by the varying degrees of reliance placed by the different African governments on the U.N. operation in the Congo. This arose because some African States and leaders have maintained a blind faith in the U.N.—not the real, existing U.N. of Hammarskjöld, the U.N. controlled by N.A.T.O. and by the United States, but an entirely imagined U.N., an impartial referee who would safeguard the Congo’s independence, drive out the imperialists and uphold the Congo’s sovereignty and liberty. Thus it was that as each successive deterioration in the situation took place, these African States threatened to take drastic measures, to withdraw their troops from the U.N. Command, to place them at the disposal of the legal government headed by Lumumba, to set up their own African Command to rescue the Congolese people from disaster. But no unified, resolute steps along these lines were ever taken.

“Why was this so? Why was it that the Congo was strangled not only by imperialist finance, imperialist representatives and imperialist puppets, but also by honest African troops from independent African States? The failure of the African States to save the Congo from disaster and to save Lumumba and his colleagues stems, ironically enough, largely from their desire to ‘keep the cold war out of Africa’. This just desire of the African people to retain their continent as a zone of peace and not to be drawn into imperialist war plans and military entanglements has been interpreted by some African national leaders as a necessity to keep the Soviet Union out of Africa. But the U.N., as it stands at present, controlled by the Western Powers, is itself an instrument of the cold war, even of hot war. The African States were reluctant to rely on assistance from socialist countries, they hesitated to act resolutely themselves to aid the Congo, they were justifiably suspicious of the intentions of Western imperialism—so where could they turn? Only, they thought, to the U.N.

“Through having no hesitation, in their moment of peril, in turning to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, Guinea, Cuba and the United Arab Republic safeguarded their independence and still live; but Congo, poor, bleeding, torn Congo, tragic martyr of imperialist greed, lies temporarily

under the heel of the oppressor. Is there not a lesson here for the African States?

“Certainly the African people have learnt much from the experience of the Congo. They now understand. When, after the news of Lumumba’s appalling end, they rose in their anger in a score of capitals, it was not alone the Belgian Embassies which were the targets of their wrath. U.N. offices and American Embassies and Information Centres were likewise attacked.

“Experience sometimes has to be bought at a terrible price. The disaster in the Congo is not solely a catastrophe. The people of the Congo—and indeed of all Africa—can yet turn this set-back into triumph, provided that they learn the lesson of the Congo well. There can be no real and lasting peace for the African people until the last remnants of imperialism, the last imperialist puppet, the last imperialist economic root, the last imperialist soldier has been driven out of the African continent. And to carry through that job, Africa must recognise fully and clearly who are her real enemies and who are her real friends.”

Now, although my political views profoundly differ from those of Mr. Woddis, I think it is impossible to differ with the basic facts and sentiments which he presents in this passage. Of course one may differ slightly with him over some of the ways in which he has interpreted events; yet he has posed the essential problem which faces the African States today. There remains, however, an important question to be asked: to whom is Mr. Woddis addressing his books? Is it to Europeans who cannot fully understand Africa’s problems, or is it to Africans who are increasingly looking outwards as the revolution on their own continent moves towards success? The passage which I have quoted gives the key. Mr. Woddis is no mere historian; he is the active proselytiser of a political faith.

Who are Africa’s real friends and who are her real enemies? Mr. Woddis supplies the answer to this question in the last 70 pages of his second book, where he deals with the economic struggle for Africa. Their friends will be the “planned” societies in the East; their enemies the “imperialists” of the West. There is no third choice for the Africans.

And, indeed, in the present situation (which is graphically described by Mr. Woddis) the choice is bleak. Although the aid which is flowing from the East is limited, it is being supplied for purposes which the Africans want—the industrialisation of their countries. Western aid often comes in company with

a demand that it be used in a specific manner. If such a situation persists—and there is no apparent reason to believe that it will change—then the choice before the Africans will be simple. Any Western plea that they are sacrificing one ‘colonialism’ for another will fall on disbelieving ears. And, indeed, if Russian policy moves more rapidly to an accommodation with ‘uncommitted’ countries, then these warnings will not only be vain, but also false.

The choice for Africans is not, however, confined to the future of their continent alone. The direction they take will materially affect the destiny of the whole world. Their voice is strong and likely to grow stronger in the counsels of the ‘uncommitted’ nations; and it is here, rather than with the Great Powers, that the structure of the new world will take shape.

What will the response of Africa’s new leaders be? Will it be to opt for simple alliances that solve neither African problems nor the problems of the world? Or will it be to steer a course that can offer real hope for the world?

One man in Africa, perhaps, has seen the relationship between the African revolution and the changing world situation more clearly than any others. He is Kwame Nkrumah. In the preface to his recent book, *‘I Speak of Freedom’*, he says:

“The present leaders of Africa have already shown a remarkable willingness to consult and seek advice among themselves. Africans have, indeed, begun to think continentally. They realise they have much in common, both in their past history, in their present problems and in their future hopes. To suggest that the time is not yet ripe for considering a political union of Africa is to evade the facts and ignore the realities in Africa today.

“The greatest contribution that Africa can make to the peace of the world is to avoid all the dangers inherent in disunity, by creating a political union which will also, by its success, stand as an example to a divided world. A union of African States will project more effectively the African personality. It will command respect from a world that has only respect for size and influence.

“The scant attention paid to African opposition to the French atomic tests in the Sahara, and the ignominious spectacle of the U.N. in the Congo quibbling about constitutional niceties while the Republic was tottering into anarchy, are

evidence of the callous disregard for African independence by the Great Powers.

"We have to prove that greatness is not measured in stock-piles of atom bombs. I believe strongly and sincerely that with the deep-rooted wisdom and dignity, the innate respect for human lives, the intense humanity that is our heritage, the African race, united, under one federal government, will emerge not just as another world bloc to flaunt its wealth and strength, but as a Great Power whose greatness is indestructible because it is built not on fear, envy and suspicion, nor won at the expense of others, but founded on hope, trust, friendship and directed to the good of all mankind.

"The emergence of such a mighty stabilising force in this strife-worn world should be regarded not as a shadowy dream of a visionary, but as a practical proposition, which the people of Africa can, and should, translate into reality. There is a tide in the affairs of every people when the moment strikes for political action. Such was the moment in the history of the United States of America when the Founding Fathers saw beyond the petty wranglings of the separate states and created a Union.

"This is our chance. We must act now. Tomorrow may be too late and the opportunity will have passed, and with it the hope of free Africa's survival."

That is the answer to Mr. Woddis. It is the answer which all of us must try completely to understand.

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