

SOUTH WEST AFRICA—THE HOUR OF DECISION

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AFTER 19 YEARS of evasion and defiance, South Africa's white state enters the last phase of the battle to defend its robbery of the territory of South West Africa. Towards the middle of this year the International Court of Justice at the Hague is expected to deliver judgement on the claim by Ethiopia and Liberia that South Africa is in breach of the letter and spirit of the League of Nations' mandate in terms of which she was first given certain administrative powers over the territory. (It is a commentary on the primitive state of international relations after the first world war that South Africa's racial government should have been nominated as the custodian of a 'sacred trust' with the injunction to 'promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the indigenous inhabitants').

The International Tribunal is asked to hold that the application to South West Africa of the latest variant of white domination—apartheid—constitutes a violation of the original mandate because, amongst other things, in the words of the applicants

in sum under apartheid the accident of birth imposes a mandatory life sentence to discrimination, repression and humiliation and the application of territorial apartheid is unsound, inhuman and incompatible with the obligations of the mandate.

It is also the contention of the applicants that illegally, without the consent of the United Nations and in a way which is inconsistent with the international character of the territory, South Africa has altered its status (a euphemism for blatant colonisation).

Up to now, aided and abetted by its imperialist allies, South Africa has, year after year, succeeded in staving off world action on its barbaric treatment of the indigenous African people who form an overwhelming majority of the population of South Africa and South West Africa. Not only has it turned a deaf ear to the numerous appeals for a modification of its race policies but, encouraged by world inaction, it has become bolder and bolder. As in South Africa, so in South West Africa, Dr. Verwoerd has proceeded with a steadily growing confidence that United Nation's

anger would not find concrete expression because of sabotage by South Africa's powerful allies.

To add insult to injury the Nazi-inspired racialists speak of the United Nations in terms which in themselves are sufficient to make them unfit to be part of a civilised world community of nations. Speaking on an attempt by the United Nations to achieve some sort of supervision over South West Africa, Eric Louw who until his recent retirement was Verwoerd's Foreign Minister and many times his emissary to the United Nations Organization, said

It (the United Nations) consists of predominantly coloured and asiatic countries and of countries whose inhabitants are of mixed blood . . . a large number of South American and Central American peoples are predominantly of mixed blood. . . . The U.N. should be afforded no opportunity, by the submission of reports, to interfere with our affairs or discuss our administration of South West Africa.

They hurl this type of race insult and spit defiance and contempt at world opinion because up to now they have been pretty well assured that when the dust of debate settles those who claim to be the citadels of the 'free world' will ensure that the enslavement of South West Africa is left undisturbed. The reason for this is plain. The last report of the United Nations Special Committee on Colonialism (October 1964) which examines the activities of mining and other international companies with interests in South West Africa, concludes:

Foreign capital holds a dominant position in the economy of South West Africa and the main sectors of production are controlled by foreign enterprises or by settlers of European descent who are mainly from the Republic of South Africa. It has concentrated on the development of highly profitable primary export industries namely mining, fishing and karakul farming which exploit the territory's rich resources. . . .

The foreign companies operating in South West Africa have no interest in developing any sort of balanced economy in the territory . . . the African inhabitants live at a barely subsistence level.

The desire of the South African government to annex South West Africa is directly connected with the activities of international companies which are interested in keeping the territory as a field for the investment of the capital, a source of raw material and cheap labour. . . .

The discriminatory laws of South West Africa in respect of mining and labour are designed to exclude the Africans from any direct participation in the mining industry and to guarantee the industry a permanent supply of cheap, unskilled migrant labour. . . .

The policy of apartheid which is being carried out in South West Africa by the South African racist regime offers the foreign companies every opportunity for the exploitation of the indigenous inhabitants. In fact the exploitation of low-paid non-European workers is a feature of the territory's economic system, especially in

its mining industry and agriculture. This enables the foreign companies and the local European farmers to reap high profits and makes any improvement in the living conditions of the Africans impossible. The work which the Africans perform for mining and other companies is basically forced labour and therefore the African population lives as though in slavery. . . .

The fact that the greater part of the territory's economic production is in the hands of foreign enterprises, has serious implications not only for the territory's economy but also in the political and social fields. . . . In the ultimate analysis it can be shown that the overwhelming majority of the mining companies belong to a complex of foreign capital which operates in many areas of Southern Africa, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, the Congo (Leopoldville) and Angola and in reality is directed by a number of monopolistic combines controlled by financial interests in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Republic of South Africa. As a result of this an overwhelming proportion of the profits obtained in the territory goes to the above-mentioned countries and also to other countries which invest their capital in South West Africa. . . .

Foreign companies operating in South West Africa, motivated by high profits rather than the development of the territory and its people, share South Africa's interest in perpetuating the existing system of administration as long as possible. It is precisely from those member states with financial interests in the territory that the Republic of South Africa derives its main support in the United Nations and outside which encourages its continued non-compliance with the Charter and the numerous resolutions of the United Nations concerning the question of South West Africa.

It remains to be seen whether if, as is to be expected, the International Court's judgement goes against South Africa, these same powerful financial interests will once again wield sufficient influence and strength to stand in the way of United Nations action. Already there is a hint of another betrayal. *The Times* (London) with traditional insincere pomposity recently expressed doubt whether the enforcement of a judgement against South Africa on the South West African issue would not risk 'developments out of all proportion to the dispute.' The excellent documentation which is contained in the report of the Special Committee in support of its conclusions will leave no one in doubt that the chief risk which *The Times* has in mind is the risk of bringing about a position in which South West Africa is no longer open house for financial plunder.

One thing is crystal clear. What the United Nations Organisation does on the question of South West Africa after the judgement is delivered has implications which extend beyond this territory. If, after almost 20 years of the most patient pleading and armed with the imposing sanction of the International Court, the United Nations Organisation is once again rendered impotent because of the manoeuvres of imperialist financial interests, there exists a

crisis of the first magnitude. This crisis must by its very nature threaten the whole future of the international body itself. Can there be any doubt that anything short of effective concrete measures to enforce such a judgement will make a mockery of international law and of the United Nations Organisation as an instrument against international banditry.

Reports from South West Africa suggest that there still exists a touching faith by the South West African people that they will not, once again, be betrayed by those who have the obligation to exercise authority and power in the interests of a defenceless colonial people. The tragic history of these people who have been conquered, decimated and used as an object of international horse-trading between the big powers, is filled with much struggle, much expectation and much betrayal. It also abounds with examples of heroism and great deeds by South West Africa's political and military leaders.

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

The process of colonisation in South West Africa followed the same pattern as in most other colonial territories. 'The missionary and the trader must precede the soldier', said Bismarck. And long before any colonial power started its official plunder under the guise of 'protection', the advance parties of various religious orders infiltrated into the territory. Trading concessions were obtained and by a judicious blending of religion and commerce the members of the German Rhenish Mission Society soon came to occupy a position of influence in the territory. Inevitably the territory was to fall prey to a more direct form of imperialist domination. For this was the period when our Continent was treated as a carcass to be sliced up after the hunt. Despite a period of manoeuvring and gentlemanly back-stabbing amongst the hunters, Britain, with a typical self-assumed power to take or to grant what was not hers, gave her blessings (and God's blessing) to the German plunder of South West Africa. Gladstone, on finding that Germany's gun-boat had berthed before Britain's was sporting enough to say:

If Germany is to become a colonising power, all I can say is, God speed her. She becomes our ally and partner in the execution of the great purposes of Providence for the advantage of mankind.

And the German colonising machine did not waste much time in executing the purposes of 'Providence'. In some cases by treachery and deceit, treaties of protection were extorted from the scattered and divided chiefs. In other cases brute force was the weapon.

When the true history of South West Africa is taught the sagacity, patriotism and generalship of Hendrik Witbooi the Nama chief, will rank him amongst the greatest of the early liberation fighters in Africa. To Chief Maharero who entered into a treaty with the Germans he said: 'You will have bitter eternal remorse for this handing of your land and sovereignty over to the hands of the white people. This giving of yourself into the hands of the white people will become to you a burden as if you were carrying the sun on your back'.

The refusal by Witbooi to accept the burden of 'protection' was the signal for a surprise attack on his stronghold. With the cry from Witbooi 'I will never surrender my independence,' the Nama people fought back until the unequal balance of military strength forced them to surrender. Other risings by smaller groups were also drowned in blood.

By 1903 more than half the cattle of the Herero had passed into German hands and the familiar process of 'liberating' the African from his land and passing it over to the White settler had begun. Such was the extent of the plunder that even Samuel Maharero, an unwanted nominee of the German administration, who succeeded the builder of the Herero nation, Maharero, was driven to defiance and a new war of resistance began in 1904. With 7,000 fighting men only a third of whom were armed with primitive and outmoded rifles, the rebellion challenged German rule for almost a year. But the arrival of government reinforcements and the superior might of the colonialists' arms once again ended a heroic stand. What followed was one of the most horrific operations ever carried out even in a Continent which abounds in examples of acts of inhumanity and barbarism committed in the name of God and Providence.

General von Trotha threw a cordon across every possible escape route and issued his notorious Extermination Order (*Vernichtungs Befehl*). This required the killing of every Herero man, woman and child within the belligerent area of the north.

Once again Hendrik Witbooi rallied all the tribes in the south and started a guerilla struggle that was to last 3 years. Witbooi was himself killed in action after a year and his place was taken by Jacob Marengo. By 1907 the resistance was crushed. By then half of the Nama population had perished and the Herero had been reduced from a cattle rich population of 80,000 to 15,000 impoverished land-hungry fugitives in the country of their fathers.

UNDER SOUTH AFRICAN RULE

The defeat of their cruel conquerors during the first world war awakened new hopes in the heart of the decimated people of South West Africa. They were to be quickly disillusioned. An offer to help fight the Germans was met with a response from the South African Commander in Chief that this was a 'white man's war' and he didn't want any coloured participation on any side. When the war ended South Africa was awarded South West Africa as a mandate. Even at that early stage outright annexation was difficult to sanction in the light of what was known of South Africa's race policies.

The war had hardly ended when, in a joint military operation, between South African forces and Portuguese colonialists in Angola, the rebellion of heroic 21 year old Chief Mandume standing at the head of the Ukuanyama, the second largest tribe in Ovamboland, was drowned in blood. In all over 5,000 Africans had been killed in the battles first against the Portuguese and then against the South Africans.

A few years later the return from exile of Abraham Morris, a leader of the Bondelswarts in the second Nama war against the Germans, was made the occasion for another massacre of horrifying dimensions. When the people refused to hand Morris over to the authorities, they were told 'The lead of the government will now melt upon you.' This promise was fulfilled. This time the conqueror was helped by his aeroplanes which rained bombs on the people.

The question of who was boss having been settled the South African administration proceeded to transform its newly acquired territory to conform to its own traditional pattern of race rule. The influx of new white settlers was encouraged by the allocation of large and rich land holdings. In 1913 the white population of the territory was 14,830. Whites owned 11,490,000 hectares. By 1962 the white population was over 72,000 and whites owned 5,800 farms the areas of which totalled about 40 million hectares. In the same year the non-white population of half a million owned 21,825,497 hectares.

The familiar process of squeezing the African population into "natural homelands" to make room for white expansion proceeded apace. When asked by the Trusteeship Council in 1948 why the Herero had been split into 8 separated reserves and why their land had never been returned to them, the South African government stated that its efforts to resettle the Herero was limited by the extent to which land alienation had 'in the meantime' taken place.

The position is well summarised in *South West Africa* by Ruth First.

It was not a shortage of land that restricted African occupation but a matter of policy, the traditional South African policy of rigid race rule. Throughout the history of its control over South West Africa, the South African government has always found enough land—and the best land—for white farmers, and never enough for the African tribes. Only the code of white supremacy can account for the double entries in the books of the administration. In 1922 it was an 'utter impossibility' to restore the tribes to their former lands. In 1928 the administration had huge areas at its disposal for the settlement of the Angola boers. . . . Segregation policies initiated in the first years of the mandate entrenched for all the future of South Africa's administration a system of white privilege and non-white subjection in every sphere of life.

Over 75 years ago the Herero chiefs, with rare insight, foresaw this and stated in a public document: 'We have learnt with deep concern that a very extensive gathering of Dutch farmers has arrived . . . to settle. . . . They intend to make war on us and compel us to submit. . . . We have no unoccupied land for the admission of any other nation, more especially one who, we have been led to believe, has always looked upon the black tribes with scorn and indignation and who both recognise and practise slavery.'

Their fears were well founded and the prophecy was fulfilled. Its very fulfilment is now used as a basis for the perpetration of further historical outrages. This is how it works. First, by conquest followed up by alien rule a people is deprived of all political rights and of their land heritage. It is dispersed into artificially created reservations. It is prevented from participating in the ownership of the minerals and other riches of its own country. These acts of banditry then become the basis and the 'justification' for yet another act of plunder—the final fragmentation of a nation and the creation of ethnic labour ghettos which the white supremacists call Bantustans.

Last year's infamous Odendaal Commission report incorporated this morally indefensible approach. It proposed the partitioning of South West Africa into 10 separate 'homelands' for non-whites covering an aggregate area of 32,629,394 hectares of the territory's 82,388,000 hectares. The bulk of the land will become the preserve of the white minority settlers or the white South African government. An analysis of the provisions relating to the administrative powers of the future 'governments' of these homelands, leaves no doubt that they will be under the perpetual domination of the South African state. If any additional evidence were needed to substantiate

this fear, an examination of the show-piece of apartheid—the Transkei Bantustan—disposes of the question.

For the moment Verwoerd has been forced by international pressure to suspend implementation of the Odendaal apartheid scheme pending the outcome of the International Court's decision. If it is left to the South African white state there can be no doubt that, whatever detailed scheme is finally implemented, the real source of wealth and power will remain out of the reach of the indigenous population. It surprises no one that in the so-called natural homelands of the S.W.A. people there is no industry, no working mine and no viable economic structure. In 1961 two companies, the Tsumeb Corporation Ltd. and the Consolidated Diamond Mines Ltd. of South West Africa between them controlled the extraction of 94 per cent of the territory's useful minerals. These companies are controlled by a group of South African, English and American financial oligarchs. They will go all out to prevent any interference with Verwoerd's schemes because they know that apartheid is amongst the most effective modern devices for the economic exploitation of an indigenous people. A British businessman quoted in the magazine *Time* (December 21st, 1962) said: 'If it weren't for apartheid—never mind whether we like it or not—we would not think of investing there'.

In defence of its barbaric treatment of non-white people in the Republic the South African government has with monotonous regularity attempted to put up a case that the issue was a 'domestic' one. In the early days she was supported in this contention by her imperialist friends. In time even the latter could no longer pretend that what was going on in South Africa should not be subjected to international scrutiny. How much more force then is there in the contention that South Africa's treatment of a people in respect of whom it is supposed to be exercising an international trust, must conform to civilized standards and is the business of all mankind. If it is held that such administration does not conform to civilized standards there can be no legitimate reason for any failure on the part of the United Nations to act in order to enforce its will.

The main responsibility for ensuring that there is not another betrayal by the United Nations Organisation lies with the Afro-Asian states and the socialist world. If on an issue such as this which goes to the very root of international law, the imperialists get away with it, they will get away with anything. Let us not underestimate our strength. The double game which the imperialists have been able to play on the South African question has been

made easy by the fact that up to now they have managed to have the best of both worlds—profiting out of apartheid and having cordial relations with many newly emergent nations. The time has come when they must be made to feel that this sort of duplicity will no longer be tolerated.