

HOW BRITAIN APPEASES APARTHEID

Michael Harmel

THE three British-ruled territories in South Africa, Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, are commonly known as the 'Protectorates,' a term originating in agreements made in Queen Victoria's time whereby Britain was to defend the inhabitants against the insatiable appetite for African land of South Africa's white colonialists. The result in each case was the enforced cession of vast tracts of the most desirable land in each area to the same White colonialists, and the replacement of independent African administrators by parasitic and incompetent British civil servants.

The main interest of British imperialism in South Africa has always been the extraction of huge profits for investors out of the mineral and other resources and cheap labour of the African people. This explains Britain's abysmal policy towards South Africa in general, and in particular in the Protectorates. Poverty in these countries, which drives the men out to seek work in the Rand gold mines and other enterprises in South Africa, and which subordinates them to South African colonialism, suits these interests admirably. It is worth recalling that the essential groundwork for the whole monstrous edifice of apartheid, as we know it today, was laid down by a law of the British Parliament. This was the South Africa Act of 1909, which provided for the amalgamation of the four British colonies—the Cape, Transvaal, Orange River and Natal—into the Union of South Africa, governed by an all-White Parliament elected by Whites. In all its essentials this Act remains the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to this very day.

It was then contemplated that the Protectorates might also at some stage be incorporated in the Union, and a clause of the Act even provides for this possibility after 'consultation' with their inhabitants. The various Pretoria administrations have from time to time demanded incorporation, and only powerful resistance from the people of the territories and their friends in Britain averted such a monstrous betrayal. Particularly during the past decade the African Revolution has spread to the three countries. Militant liberation movements, enjoying the sympathy and support of the masses in the Republic and in Free Africa, have arisen, demanding independence and democracy and an end to the British version of apartheid.

Under these pressures, and particularly with the departure of the Republic of South Africa from the Commonwealth, some grudging and superficial concessions have been made. The colour bar has been removed in hotels and cafes, but not in the upper ranks of the civil service. Delegations, usually of a dubiously representative character, have been summoned to London to negotiate the details of new constitutions which would provide the appearance, though not the reality, of independence and self-government for Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland.

A cardinal concern of the Colonial Office is to ensure that nothing is done to alarm or annoy the fascist and racialist regime in Pretoria. The excuse is made that the interests of the inhabitants require this in view of their economic dependence on the Republic and their vulnerability to military aggression. It is true that typical colonialist neglect, stagnation and lack of development has resulted in the almost complete subordination of the economies of the three territories to that of South Africa. Their currency, banking and customs are controlled by the Republic, on which they depend largely for manufactures and employment. More than half the adult male population of Basutoland are always away from home, working in the gold mines and elsewhere across the border, and a similar situation exists in the other two Protectorates. It is also true that the territories have no organised defence forces. During the second world war their people responded to the call to enlist, but thereafter the troops were disbanded and disarmed, leaving the countries without military protection against their powerful and aggressive neighbour armed to the teeth by Britain and her Nato allies. But these facts do not justify British policy; rather they prove that the first essential for the Basuto, Swazi and Bechuana people, if they wish to attain and preserve economic and political independence, is to get rid of the rule of British imperialism with its fatal policy of appeasement.

Verwoerd has carefully studied the techniques of his mentor, Adolf Hitler, for use against small neighbours; Britain's rôle recalls the days of Munich. Agents of the Republic have set to work to recruit and purchase supporters. In Swaziland and Bechuanaland they have a ready-made Fifth Column in the form of the small but powerful groups of white settlers, nearly all South African citizens, who own much of the best land (in Swaziland, nearly half) and predominate economically. Verwoerd hopes to use these groups, together with reactionary indigenous elements to achieve by cunning what his predecessors failed to accomplish by diplomacy—*de facto* incorpor-

ation into the Republic, as part of the diabolical 'Bantustan' swindle. British policy encourages these hopes. Under the pretence of conceding 'independence' and 'self-government' a new sell-out is being planned. Verwoerd himself recognises this well, and welcomes these moves.

Looking at the present British-imposed constitution for Swaziland, for example, one sees what Verwoerd means. Of twenty-four members of the legislature, eight are elected by the tiny White minority of South Africans; a further eight appointed by the feudal court of the Ngwenyama Chief Sobhuza; leaving only eight to be elected by the Swazis. Last year, the biggest protest demonstration and strike ever seen in Swaziland took place in opposition to these proposals; a demonstration eventually suppressed by British troops flown over Republican territory by kind permission of Pretoria. The subsequent elections were held under conditions amounting to martial law, with the main leaders of the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress and the trade unions, who had led the strike, in prison. Not unexpectedly, the result was a 'legislature' dominated by Carel Todd's White settlers and Sobhuza's royalist party—an outcome highly satisfactory to Pretoria. The most influential man at Sobhuza's court today is a Mr. van Wyk de Vries, a Johannesburg lawyer high up in the Broederbund, Verwoerd's fascist secret society which dominates South African politics.

The recent elections in Bechuanaland were also held under a made-in-London constitution which favours the White ranchers in the Tati concession area and places undue emphasis on the complex tribal structure, carefully preserved in typical colonialist fashion. These circumstances seriously handicapped militant and modern liberation movements, such as the Botswana Independence Party headed by Mr. Motsamai Mpho, demanding independence now and far-reaching democratic reforms, and the election was won, with a big majority, by the Bechuanaland Democratic Party. Although he was favoured by the British colonialists, the leader of this Party, Seretse Khama, is no Sobhuza. He was once exiled to Britain and removed from his hereditary position as head of the Bamangwato tribe by Patrick Gordon Walker, then Labour Colonial Secretary, for the 'crime' of marrying a white woman, and thus offending the racialists in Pretoria. Before the elections he told the Johannesburg *Star* that the B.D.P. would 'continue the policies of the present government' (i.e. of British imperialism) and that independence meant little to most Tswanas—'an unsophisticated tribespeople'. He

also opposed a boycott of South African goods, and favoured a policy of 'neutrality' towards the Republic and steering 'very gingerly' a course between the Organisation of African Unity and apartheid South Africa. But the Tswana are not so 'unsophisticated'. They know fascism and apartheid from personal experience, as workers in the Republic, and thoroughly detest both. Mass pressure has at last succeeded in removing the capital of the country from Mafeking, where it had been for the last fifty years—a unique and unenviable situation of a country's capital being situated in a foreign territory!—to Gaborone. The same pressure will impel the Khama administration to more and more steps towards Africanisation of the public service, redemption of alienated land, genuine independence from both British and South African imperialism, and closer alignment with the states of free Africa. In these aims, Bechuanaland is favoured by geography. It is the largest of the three territories, though unfortunately much of this is made up of the Kalahari Desert. Its cattle-raising economy is more nearly self-sufficient than those of the other Protectorates. More important, it has, with its short common border with Zambia, direct access to the north and the independent states of the Organisation of African Unity.

The reverse is true of Basutoland (Lesotho) whose small and mountainous territory is entirely surrounded by the Republic. But here there is no 'white settler' problem. Thanks to the far-seeing wisdom of the founder of the nation, Moshoeshe, one of the most brilliant of nineteenth century statesmen, all the land is the inalienable property of the nation. The Basuto, inheritors of a long and unbroken tradition of independence have won a greater measure of democracy and self-government than their fellows in the other two 'Protectorates'. The forthcoming elections will be held on the one-man-one-vote principle: universal adult franchise.

Both of the larger parties, the Basutoland Congress Party (which has a majority of elected seats in the present legislative council) and the Marematlou Freedom Party, have advanced similar policies demanding complete independence now. It is to be regretted that differences, largely of a personal nature, have prevented them adopting the proposal of the Communist Party of Lesotho and the Lekhotla la Bafo for a united patriotic front against reactionary and pro-colonialist elements. In the constitutional talks held in London last May, the Tory government succeeded in persuading the Basuto delegation to defer independence for one year after these, already

overdue, elections. In the meantime, the British Government Representative will 'retain responsibilities for external affairs, defence and internal security . . . he will also be responsible for the appointment, promotion and discipline of public officers'.

A characteristic feature of the present period of South African history is the very considerable number of opponents of apartheid who have escaped into all three territories from fascist repression in the Republic. The treatment of these refugees by the British authorities stands in sharp contrast to their toleration of agents of Verwoerd who are allowed to come and go as they please, and to carry out organised terrorism in the 'Protectorates'. Opponents of apartheid are required, immediately on arrival, to sign undertakings to take no part in political activity, either in any of the Protectorates themselves, or regarding any neighbouring territory—including, that is, the Republic, Mozambique and Rhodesia. Lifelong opponents of racialism are thereby precluded from even so much as writing articles on Southern African public affairs—though supporters of Verwoerd are free to interfere as much as they please, an opportunity of which they take full advantage. A number of well known anti-apartheid spokesmen, including Duma Nokwe and his wife, Jack and Rica Hodgson and the present writer, have been declared 'prohibited immigrants'.

One of the most notorious cases is that of Sydney Kitching, British-born trade unionist who owns a large cattle ranch in Swaziland. On a visit to the Republic Mr. Kitching was held under the notorious '90-day' detention-without-trial law. The British representatives in South Africa not only failed to take steps for his release, but on his return to Swaziland subjected him to a number of acts of petty persecution and eventually ordered him out of the country. Time and again, agents of the special branch of the South African police, who operate a secret terrorist organisation in each of the three territories, have committed blatant acts of aggression with impunity. Anderson Ganyile and two companions were kidnapped in Basutoland by special branch agents and kept, secretly and incommunicado in a Transkei jail—until Ganyile managed to smuggle out a letter, and the resultant publicity compelled their return to Basutoland. A similar case occurred last year in Bechuanaland—that of Dr. Ken Abrahams, kidnapped from Bechuanaland at gunpoint, but eventually returned after a storm of public protests. Mrs. Rosemary Wentzel was similarly kidnapped from Swaziland. In her case no action was taken by the British authorities who said they

were 'investigating'. The investigations took so long (though the facts were well known) that Mrs. Wentzel broke down under police interrogation and agreed to give state evidence in a recent sabotage trial in Johannesburg. Also from Swaziland, agents of the P.I.D.E., Salazar's Gestapo, have been permitted to abduct members of the Mozambique Liberation Front and spirit them across the border to fascist dungeons.

The Verwoerd agents do not restrict themselves to kidnappings. An East African Airways plane, chartered to pick up refugees at Francistown, in Bechuanaland, was burnt to ashes on the airfield—the African National Congress alleged that the fire was caused by time bombs which exploded prematurely; they were intended to go off while the plane, with its passengers, was airborne. Anti-apartheid leaders have repeatedly been subjected to murderous assaults in the territories, their assailants never brought to justice. The Verwoerd government openly censors letters on their way to the three countries. It has demanded, and Britain has accepted, humiliating and outrageous regulations whereby all aircraft overflying the Republic to and from the territories—and it is impossible for planes otherwise to enter Basutoland—must land and submit to a search by South African police.

Many of these disgraceful actions of appeasement of apartheid were vigorously criticised by the Labour Party when it was in opposition. The Labour Front Bench loudly condemned the sending of troops to Swaziland to suppress the strike against the shameful constitution. Four months after the elections, with Labour in office, the constitution is still in force; the troops are still there. In fact the Labour government has not taken a single step that anyone can see to reverse the disastrous policy of their predecessors.

Genuinely independent Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland, under popularly elected governments, and taking rapid, purposeful steps to develop their economies and provide employment, would be an inspiration to all the enslaved peoples of Southern Africa. It should be the main purpose of a Labour Government to open the way to such genuine freedom and democracy without delay. The restrictions and bans against anti-apartheid South Africans should be lifted immediately. In Swaziland and Bechuanaland, all further land deals should be stopped at once, and existing land-holdings in the hands of settlers should be stopped at once, and existing land-holdings in the hands of settlers should be bought out and restored to the indigenous people. The Swaziland and Bechuanaland consti-

tutions should be replaced with democratic structures based on the principle 'one man, one woman, one vote'. The popularly-elected governments should enjoy sovereign powers, including foreign affairs, defence, security and the civil service. Only thus would they be enabled not only to cast off the crippling rule of colonialism, but also to defend themselves against direct and indirect aggression, economic blackmail and domination from Verwoerd's Republic. For, once they were able to form the necessary alliances with other African and world states, any attack by the Republic across the borders would face Verwoerd with a world alliance and certain defeat.

Is it unreal to expect such a reversal of policy, an end to appeasement, and the establishment of genuinely independent and democratic governments in the three Protectorates? It should not be so. Many senior members of the Labour government are aware, in broad outline, of the facts of the situation. What is lacking is a well-informed and vigorous movement of labour and democratic opinion to insist that, after a century of double-dealing, justice should at last be done to the African people of these three key territories.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Internationale

R. Palme Dutt

Lawrence & Wishart. 418 pp. 36s.

R. PALME DUTT has long been associated in theory and practice with the history of working-class internationalism. Indeed his first major publication was *The Two Internationals* (1920), a study of the breakdown of the second and the origins of the third international, which is of great value to the historian. It is therefore not surprising that, in the centenary year of Karl Marx' International Workingmen's Association—the 'First International'—he should have turned again to this theme and produced a survey of the entire course of socialist internationalism from the early nineteenth century to the present. *The Internationale* 'lays no claim to original or profound historical research'. This is a slightly misleading piece of

modesty. It ought not to suggest that the author does not possess original and profound knowledge, for obviously he does, especially about the period of the Communist International. It simply indicates that he did not set out to address a public of historians or other experts, or to add to the already vast specialist literature on the internationals. His book, in his own words, 'is no more than a very rapid and elementary sketch for the new reader'.

The Internationale begins by analysing internationalism, distinguishing the bourgeois from the working-class kind. The author then deals with the fore-runners of the international, and the First and Second Internationals. The greater part of the book—about two-thirds—is devoted to the period since 1914. The core of this section lies in the six chapters which cover the period of the Communist International. Three chapters on 'The World System of Socialism', 'International Communist Conferences and