

COLLISION COURSE IN AFRICA

William J. Pomeroy

IT has been more than a decade since Harold Macmillan's 'winds of change' speech, delivered in South Africa, set a certain tone of adjustment by the imperialist powers to the independence storm sweeping over the African continent. Not many years were to elapse, however, before the nature of that adjustment became plain: it screened efforts toward the neo-colonial retention of all the key features of continued economic domination and toward the keeping open of traditional avenues of imperialist investment and trade.

Independence for 41 African countries in no way implied a retreat by imperialism from Africa. In virtually all cases political independence was not complemented by the essential ingredient of economic independence. The big western banks, mining companies, plantations, oil corporations and trading interests preserved their positions unaltered and uncurtailed. Wherever local leaders undertook steps toward independent economic development, as in Ghana, coups, plots and direct western intervention occurred to restore the neo-colonial pattern.

Furthermore, the winds of change were not permitted to blow over the whole of Africa. Since 1965 a gun-mounted wind-break has been erected along the Zambesi, to preserve a white-supremacy fortress for imperialist investment in southern Africa. Backed by Nato and made in particular a keystone of present British Tory policy, the southern Africa base strategy is emerging as a threat to all forms of independence on the continent.

There are significant reasons for this latter development. In recent years new trends and factors have entered the picture. A new wave of independence and liberation has spread across Africa from north to south, while fresh problems and contradictions have arisen for the imperialist countries, impelling them toward more aggressive policies. In the clash of these opposing forces, Africa promises to be a major arena of struggle in the 1970s.

One of the chief motivations of present imperialist policy in Africa can be detected in the speech delivered at the annual general meeting in London on December 15, 1970, of the Overseas Mining Association by its outgoing president, Mr. Beville Pain. Declaring that 'the consumption of minerals and metals throughout the world is increasing at a fast pace,' he warned that this 'is likely to continue

to a point where it could outrun supplies of some important raw materials unless new sources continue to be discovered and opened up. . . . A *secure* supply of raw materials is essential for industry.'

This was not all that bothered Mr. Pain, who went on to say that 'Other major consuming countries, in particular Japan and West Germany, are now participating actively in the search for new minerals and are establishing long-term pre-emptive contracts through investment in new mineral projects, particularly in Australia, South America and Africa, thereby *securing control over future supplies.*'

Two months earlier, in October 1970, an almost identical warning was made in New York by Mr. Ian MacGregor, chairman of the big US international mining corporation, American Metals Climax, which, like such huge British mining corporations as Rio Tinto-Zinc and Lonrho, has extensive and spreading investments in African countries. In alarmist tones MacGregor pictured a critical shortage of metals in the US in the coming decades, saying that the US 'will never again be self-sufficient in most of the metals it requires, indicating continued and *increasing dependence on foreign sources.*' He called for increased government assistance to aid overseas mining ventures.

A renewed scramble for the riches of Africa in particular is voiced in these utterances of imperialist need and greed. It is marked by intensifying imperialist rivalry on the one hand, and by hardening opposition to African independence and liberation on the other. These have figured in a number of episodes in Africa in the recent past. In Nigeria the tragic 'Biafra secession' was linked with a clash of western oil interests. The Republic of Guinea, where American and West German hands were visible in the iron glove of Portuguese invasion, happens not surprisingly to be the location of one-fourth of the world's assured deposits of bauxite. Behind the riddled screen of UN sanctions in Rhodesia a fight for advantage has occurred, with Japan and West Germany, not covered by the UN decrees, moving in to undermine Britain's position; 1971 began with the defiant sanction-breaking US shipment of chrome ore from its Union Carbide mines.

Most conspicuous feature of the imperialist drive for plunder is the American penetration challenge. In 1960 American private direct investment in Africa was but \$975 million; by 1968 this had jumped to \$2,700 million and has now passed the \$3,000 million mark. US investment earnings taken out of Africa were only \$33 million in 1960, but were \$671 million in 1968, with the rate of

profit reaching a fantastic 25.1 per cent in 1968. The first-ever US policy document on Africa, issued in March 1970 (*The US and Africa in the 70s*), put emphasis on private investment instead of government 'aid' and declared opposition to African liberation movements.

A third leg of the US policy declaration was opposition to the 'tied' aid and preferential trade agreements that are part of the neo-colonial pattern of the old entrenched colonial powers, through which the US wishes to break, a stand reiterated in the strong American protest of January 1971 against EEC preferential agreements that will encompass most of Africa.

The power of the American drive was evidenced in September 1970 when a consortium headed by a US Standard Oil subsidiary (Amoco Minerals) won a major mineral concession in the Congo, against the bid of the Belgian Union Minière that was once the Congo overlord. President Mobutu said he had been assured of \$1,000 million of American investments over the next five years, which, in a single area, would boost the total US stake in Africa by one-third. Not surprisingly the report coincided with an opinion by analysts that the Congo was being groomed as a right-wing 'balance' to anti-colonial African governments.

It is not difficult to conclude that the 'national interests' of Britain used to justify Mr. Heath's desperate arms for South Africa policy are seen to be threatened as much by the doubling of the American share in foreign investments in South Africa in the past decade and by the usurpation of a \$100 million annual arms sale to the apartheid regime by France as by African liberation movements and non-existent Red Fleets in the Indian Ocean.

Whether through consortiums or the ruthless competition of rival corporations, the effects of grasping imperialism have weighed heaviest on independent Africa. (The total US investment on the continent of \$1,700 million in 1960-68 was outweighed by the total US profit taken out of Africa of \$2,800 million in the same period.) The new imperialist offensive has coincided, therefore, with a mounting and determined effort by African countries to achieve their economic independence, and to halt the drain on their development means.

As concluded by Prof. Reginald Green in his contribution to the important collection of studies contained in the recently published *African Perspectives**, 'the quest for economic independence is a

* *African Perspectives*, edited by Christopher Allen and R. W. Johnson. Cambridge University Press, 438 pp., £5 5s. (£5.25).

necessary part of the creation of national institutions and structures capable of generating sustained development.' In the past year or so this quest has spread across Africa like a crusade. Nationalisation measures ranging from moderate to sweeping have been enacted in Zambia, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Kenya and elsewhere.

'In the Sudan it came as a great shock when on May 24, 1970, President Nimeiry announced the immediate nationalisation of all foreign banks,' reads the annual report of Barclays Bank DCO. Imperialist corporations claim that some degree of nationalisation was expected, but not its extent and its step by step progression to more complete independence, as in Libya, where the foreign oil companies, compelled bit by bit to yield up more of their profits, see the handwriting of full nationalisation on the wall.

Zambia began with taking over 25 leading foreign-owned companies in 1968. It was a prelude to the 51 per cent control over the copper industry taken in 1969. In November 1970 this was extended to all foreign banks, insurance companies, building societies and others.

Wrote the *Times Business News* on May 27, 1970: 'The worrying aspect of the recent measures is that they appear to have been undertaken to placate internal demand for greater economic independence.' In Uganda, which assumed 60 per cent control of 83 foreign corporations in that month, President Obote had previously announced support for a 'Common Man's Charter' aimed at overcoming feudalism and moving 'away from individual and private enrichment'.

Foreign banks, one of the main targets in many countries, were accused of failing to recruit or to develop Africans on their staffs, with not opening new branches to serve development needs, and with restricting or denying credit to Africans. Banking institutions, as under Zambia's new Findeco agency, are to be harnessed to serve national development and not foreign investment operations.

Nigeria, announcing a £1,800 million four-year development plan in November 1970, shocked foreign interests by declaring a 'public sector control of strategic industries' and taking a 55 per cent share in oil, steel, petrochemical and other key industries. Asserted was 'control of the repatriation of dividends and capital and encouragement of their investment within Nigeria', and the 'Nigerianisation of ownership and management at all levels'.

It is glaringly obvious that these trends of imperialism and of the African peoples are in conflict and must increasingly collide.

It is equally apparent that imperialism intends to resort to every direct and indirect means to retain its neo-colonial grip. In Zambia, the architect of the nationalisation programme, Andrew Sardanis, who had been appointed in May 1970 to head the overall government Mining and Industrial Development Corporation, was bought off in December by the British Lonrho group, resigning to head a Lonrho subsidiary, African Industrial and Finance Corporation. The painfully small number of African technical personnel is one of the drawbacks to development, and their absorption by imperialist firms is deliberate. Related the Barclays report cited above: 'In the case of one country 80 per cent of those sent abroad on fellowships paid for by the UN disappeared either into the private sector or into the developed world.'

Furthermore, nationalisation measures or the adoption of non-capitalist methods of development are not in themselves a guarantee of decisive progress, as the tragic example of Ghana has proved. To move forward to complete freedom from imperialist control and to the socialism that many African leaders profess to advocate, a conscious revolutionary force must exist in a leading role.

Fortunately, this trend, too, has begun to emerge in Africa. In the Sudan and in Algeria the issue of an independent Marxist-Leninist core for the revolutionary front is being fought out. The Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party is struggling to play a vanguard role in Nigeria. One of its leaders, Tunji Otegbeye, has recently called for the recreation of a force like the All-Africa Peoples' Conference that disappeared when the Organisation of African Unity came on the scene, an OAU in which neo-colonial elements have hamstrung the policies and committees for liberation of all Africa that have been formally adopted. As Otegbeye has said:

... today Africa needs a new organisation for summarising the revolutionary experiences of the people and working out a concerted programme for the total liberation of our continent from colonialism and neo-colonialism. Such a struggle against neo-colonialism is part and parcel of the struggle for economic independence, for the choice of the non-capitalist road. Such a struggle must by its content have a core of the working class-peasant alliance and the progressive intellectuals. Such a front heralding a new trend to a socialist future must have the Marxist-Leninist vanguard in order to ensure correct tactics and the success of the revolution.

There is no doubt that one of the main reasons for the increasing Nato backing of Portugal's colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guiné Bissau is fear of the type of liberation movement that has been forged in these struggles. Men like Amilcar Cabral of

the PAIGC, Aghostino Neto of the MPLA, and Marcellino Dos Santos of the FRELIMO are quite different from most of the African leaders and their organisations to whom independence was granted early in the 1960s. Their victories will go far toward bringing to the fore genuinely revolutionary and dynamic forces in Africa.

Imperialism, of course, has driven itself into having to confront such a reality by its stubborn resistance to freedom in southern Africa, just as its present compulsions toward the exploitation of independent Africa are creating the trends and forces to throw off its control.
