

APARTHEID IN AMERICA

by B. Pela

“You from Africa,
I from these States,
We are brothers—you and I.”
—Langston Hughes.

One in every ten citizens of the United States is of African descent.

As far as we Africans are concerned, nothing makes greater nonsense of America's claim to be the “leader of the free world” and the home of democracy and liberty than the outrageous treatment of our brothers and sisters in the United States, the denial of citizen rights, the lynchings and Jim Crow laws, the discrimination in every field of human endeavour.

Many of the worst practices of Verwoerd and other white supremacists in Africa are paralleled by the treatment of those whom the Americans call Negroes—that is, the descendants of those who were forcibly abducted as slaves from our common motherland, Africa.

Let us look at some facts.

NEGRO POVERTY

Negroes make up about one-tenth of the U.S. population. A recent survey conducted by the U.S. Government revealed that of the 32,200,000 poorest families in the U.S., *one-fifth*, or 6,400,000 families are Negroes. And these 6,400,000 make up more than *one-third* of the Negro population in the U.S.A.

In 1948, Arnold Rose, an American sociology professor, wrote that “except for a small minority enjoying upper middle class status the masses of American Negroes in the rural South and in the slum quarters in Southern and Negro cities, have been destitute.” At that time Negro farm labourers in Mississippi spent only 37 cents a day on food. *They spend practically the same to-day.*

Significantly, Negro families in Mississippi subsist on less than \$500 a year, while the average per capita income of white Mississippians is \$834 per annum. New Yorkers average \$2,258 a year. Though Negroes make up practically half the population of Mississippi, they own only 17 per cent of the land of Mississippi.

The homes of the rural Negro people are usually no more than hovels, in most cases without running water or proper lighting or sewerage.

Average Negro life expectancy in the U.S.A. is 57.8 years, while average White life expectancy is 67 years. The infant mortality rate among Whites is 43 per 1,000 live births, among Negroes it is 73 per 1,000.

These facts illustrate the bitter exploitation of the masses of landless share-croppers, tenant farmers and day labourers on Southern farms. Seventy per cent of these farmers are Negroes, who live in dire poverty and illiteracy from the cradle to the grave.

U.S. "goodwill" missions to Africa, when confronted with such facts, attempt to answer by asserting that to-day nearly two-thirds of all Negroes are city dwellers. But the Afro-American in the city is little better off. It is true that a handful have become capitalists in banking, insurance, service industries and similar lines of business. There is also a Negro middle class and a Negro intelligentsia.

But the bulk of our people in America are labourers, who are victims of the worst types of discrimination. *They are kept out of certain industries, confined to certain jobs, relegated as a rule to unskilled and semi-skilled operations and paid lower wages than Whites.*

The legal system of the Southern states continues the tradition of slavery, although this institution was formally abolished in 1863. Laws are made in the interests of the cotton planters and the plantation system. Debt peonage still exists, and there are "vagrancy" laws practically as brutal as South Africa's "pass" system. "Vagrants" have to choose between a job on the plantations or forced labour in chain gangs. According to Rose "threats, whippings and even more serious forms of violence have been customary to maintain strict discipline over Negro labour."

VOTES FOR "RESPECTABLE" NEGROES

All classes among the Negro population, particularly the poorest, suffer from gross political discrimination. In the South, before a Negro may vote he has to satisfy all sorts of property and literacy

tests, and be of "good character" in the eyes of White citizens. Negroes are kept from the polls by legal trickery, intimidation and outright violence.

To-day Negroes have *less* say in running the Government of the U.S.A. than they had a hundred years ago, shortly after the Civil War. In the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War, 22 Negroes sat in the Senate and House of Representatives. In 1960, there were only three Negroes in the House of Representatives, and one in the Senate, all representing Northern constituencies, not one coming from the areas of major Negro population in the South. Proportionately there *should* be 50 Negroes in the House of Representatives! In 1896 the Negro vote in North Carolina was 120,000; in 1960, though the Negro population of the State had trebled and women had won the franchise, Negro registration stood at 150,000. Among 1,795 representatives in the State legislatures in all ex-slave states, *not a single Negro* can be found. Again, it is striking that there were twice as many Negro representatives in *one* state (South Carolina) in 1878 as there are to-day in *all* Northern State legislatures combined!

This, then, is the pattern of American "progress" and "free world democracy"!

THE BATTLE AGAINST SCHOOL SEGREGATION

All the world has heard about the rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court since May 1954, which have declared that segregated public schools are unconstitutional. These rulings have been held up as a shining example of "how American democracy works".

It should be noted, in the first place, that this is the same Supreme Court which in 1961 upheld the vicious Smith and McCarran Acts to stamp out democracy in the United States, by virtually outlawing the U.S. Communist Party, and opening the way for persecution of Communist leaders.

Secondly, we are bound to ask: how is it possible that the so-called "democratic" legal processes of the U.S.A. can be twisted by Southern legislatures in order to get around the Supreme Court decision by schemes such as making public schools "private", and by threatening jail for those advocating integration? In Louisiana alone \$100,000 of public money has been paid to lawyers to devise schemes for keeping Negro children out of the schools.

Thirdly, discrimination still exists to a very large degree in Southern schools. Nine Negro children entered Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. To-day in *all* the former White schools

of Little Rock there are only *five Negro children*. For 2,000 other Negro children in Little Rock, segregation still exists, with all its injustice and inequalities. In fact, in the South about three times as much public money is spent on the education of White children as on that of Negro children.

ALL-ROUND DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is an everyday fact of life for U.S. citizens of African descent. Public libraries, parks, and recreational facilities are often closed to them. They frequently get longer jail sentences than Whites for the same crimes, they are less frequently pardoned. There are still a number of segregated jails.

Moreover lynching is not dead. Between 1882 - 1946 there were 4,715 recorded lynchings in the U.S.A., three-quarters of those murdered being Negroes. There has been a fresh spate of lynchings in reprisal for the valiant campaign by Negroes against discrimination in public services in recent years.

THE ANSWER TO CONFUSION

Such is the reality of Negro life. How then are we to explain the contradiction between the ballyhoo about equality, democracy and justice, and this reality? Why does the U.S.A. maintain this backward "back-yard" of race oppression and poverty, when it is able to offer millions of dollars to the so-called "under-developed" countries of Africa and the rest of the world? Why does the U.S. Government not spend its millions in raising the standard of life of the Negro people? Why does it not stamp out White supremacy in the South instead of building up its strength for a new world war, and for colonialist expeditions in Laos and elsewhere?

The answer to these questions is to be found in Lenin's analysis of the nature of imperialism. *Monopoly capitalism develops according to definite laws, and one of these laws is that it is more profitable for the monopolists to engage in the export of capital to the "backward countries", where labour is cheap, and land abundant, rather than devote these resources to uplifting the "backward areas" in their own country.*

The industrialists of the North and the planters of the South have a vested interest in maintaining discrimination against the Negro people, because this system keeps profits high by holding down Negro wages and stifling opportunities for Negroes. The White "planters" of the South, the *colons* of Algeria, the Kenya "White

Highlanders” and the White supremacists of South Africa have an essential unity of outlook and purpose.

THE DILEMMA OF U.S. IMPERIALISM

“The U.S. is engaged in a grim type of international gamesmanship,” declared the American Assembly in 1958 in its publication *The United States and Africa*. “In view of our great strength and the image we have created . . . it is ironic that we are vulnerable on race,” bemoaned the Assembly. This is the dilemma of U.S. imperialism, which is highlighted by every fresh incident of discrimination. Such incidents evoke the immediate sympathy and solidarity with the White South on the part of White South African racialists and Algerian *colons*. But they provoke bitter indignation on the part of the African people. Try as it may, U.S. imperialism is incapable of resolving this dilemma.

OUR PEOPLE ARE FIGHTING BACK

It is a heart-warming thing for every African to see how our people—aided by the progressive labour movement and above all by the Communist Party of the United States of America—are fighting back against race discrimination and the U.S. brand of apartheid. In one stirring campaign after another, especially in recent years, Americans of African descent have shown themselves the foremost force for progress in the fight against American reaction—the leader of world reaction.

In an article in *Freedomways* (Summer, 1961) William L. Patterson points out:

“Negroes, more so than any other group, now hold more power to mobilise the American people for a struggle for elementary decency, against the degrading effects of racism and for new and inspiring relations in the spheres of economics, politics, and culture.”

And in the same magazine (Winter, 1962) G. and E. Edwards point out that—

“The Negro liberation struggle is the spearhead of the anti-monopoly struggle in the United States. And the struggle against monopoly in this country to-day holds the key and the only key to the future of our whole people.”

No African can fail to feel the greatest legitimate pride in this vanguard role of our brothers and sisters in the United States.

HIGH TIME TO STOP IT

But it is necessary for us to do more than feel legitimate sym-

pathy with dark-skinned people in White Supremacy America, or pride in their heroic struggles. It is time for us to take practical steps to assist them to achieve their birthright of human equality and dignity, wherever they may be.

Times have changed. To-day we have independent African states whose voice and influence can be felt in the world, and in the United Nations.

That America continues to oppress and discriminate against people of African descent is not only an insult to Africans in Africa, it is also a flagrant flouting of the United Nations Charter. The U.S. representatives try to curry favour with African and Asian statesmen by voting at U.N. to condemn apartheid in South Africa. But what about apartheid in the U.S.A.?

Many African statesmen and delegates to U.N.O. have felt the harsh and insulting brutality of American *apartheid*. When are we going to do something about it? This is a crying international scandal—and we cannot rest content until it has been ended.

“AURORA” BELONGS TO ALL MANKIND

“Before we came to the Soviet Union, we had certain misgivings and this was understandable when one thinks of the bitter campaign of discrimination and lies which is conducted against the Soviet Union. They told us, for instance, that religion is banned in your country, so imagine our surprise when we saw a mosque in Leningrad. They told us, too, that there was no freedom of the individual in your country. But everywhere we went we saw (perhaps this was just a first impression, but first impressions are generally right) freedom and respect for human dignity. . . . We have become convinced that the Soviet Union, which has gone through extreme difficulties in the past, has advanced to the vanguard of progress, thanks to the efforts of its working people and the wisdom of its leaders, and also thanks to Marxism-Leninism. While we were in Leningrad we visited the cruiser ‘Aurora’, which in 1917 gave the signal for the Russian Revolution, and we said that the ‘Aurora’ belongs not to the Soviet Union alone, but to all mankind, to all who suffer, all who languish under the colonial yoke, all who are exploited.”

—Sourou-Migan Apithy, Vice-President of the Dahomey Republic (in an interview with *Moscow News*, June 9, 1962).