
Defence and Aid, London

The bridge between generosity and courage

E. S. SACHS

AT DAWN, WEDNESDAY, 5 December 1956 140 homes throughout the length and breadth of South Africa were aroused by the "Policeman's Knock", and 140 men and women—Africans, Afrikaners, Englishmen, Coloured, Indians, young and old, graduates and illiterates, were rushed to jail on charges of "High Treason", a capital offence under South African law; 16 more were arrested later.

The whole world was shocked by this outrage of the Nationalist government and its then Minister of Justice (now President of the South African Republic) Mr. C. R. Swart. Several of us South Africans residing in London received cables from South Africa urging us to secure the moral and financial support of the people of Britain for the victims and their families.

That evening there was a meeting of a South African Committee in the House of Commons and, as a member of that Committee and then Honorary Secretary of the Fund for African Democracy, I raised the mass arrests at the meeting as a matter of extreme urgency. In my life-long experience in the progressive movement, I have often found people who are anxious to do things but are entirely devoid of any organising ability; also some who are great organisers but use their talents for wrong causes. I must frankly state that my frantic appeals to the members of the Committee resulted only in frustration.

The following morning, I called on Canon L. John Collins, Chairman of Christian Action, London, who had interested himself actively in the struggle and suffering of the African people for a number of years and had paid a personal visit to South Africa in 1954. It did not take me more than a few minutes to realise that here was a man who combined a warm sympathy for the cause of African freedom with a brilliant mind and tremendous organising talent. In a matter of days, the South African Treason Trial Fund was established under the auspices of Christian Action. Prominent men and women from every walk of public life became sponsors of the Fund and appeals for donations to provide legal defence for the arrested and relief for their dependants soon appeared in leading daily papers in Britain. Donations began to pour in, not only from people in Britain but also from other countries.

No one ever dreamt then that this farce, this ordeal, would drag on for over four years; but Mr. Swart and his

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governors were determined to get a conviction at all costs. Three times Mr. Swart amended the laws of the country to help the prosecution, led by no less a person than the late, unlamented South African Nazi Number One, Oswald Pirow.

But just as Swart and his henchmen were relentless in their attempts to secure a conviction, so Canon Collins and his Committee, wholeheartedly assisted by the sponsors, carried on an energetic, incessant campaign to expose the dastardly action of the Nationalist government and to mobilise maximum financial and moral support for the victims of cruel oppression and their dependants.

At first the Fund set itself the modest target of £10,000; but over £100,000 was raised in addition to £70,000 collected in South Africa.

What the Fund has achieved may be gleaned from the letter which all the accused signed when the special criminal court found them not guilty and discharged them. This letter, with its warm expressions of gratitude, may not be quoted here, since it was signed by many people banned by the Nationalist Government. The outstanding team of defence counsel and the financial help to those 156 families deprived of their livelihoods were indeed largely made possible by the Treason Trial Defence Fund.

LONG BEFORE THE TREASON TRIAL came to an end, Canon Collins and his Committee realised that a permanent Defence and Aid Fund would be necessary as repression increased and the number of victims grew. Thus the Fund raised over £60,000 to help the victims of the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960, and the 2,000 detained without warrant or charges when the "State of Emergency" was declared one week after Sharpeville. The Fund has rendered assistance in countless other cases where individuals or small groups of people were involved. By the middle of 1963 a quarter of a million pounds had been dispensed to provide legal aid for political victims of apartheid tyranny and their dependants.

Who are the contributors? Before I became the Appeals Secretary of the Fund at the end of 1962 I was under the impression that most of the money was subscribed by the Trade Union and Labour Movement and other progressive bodies. Having had an opportunity of examining the records, I have found that, whilst the Trade Union and Labour Movements of Britain, Australia and New Zealand have made very generous contributions and substantial donations have been received from the International

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Save CONTACT!

Send donations to Granite Publications (Pty.) Ltd.
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The survival of one of the last South African freedom newspapers is threatened. Immediate help is essential. *Contact* has no backers, no strings—it is *you* who can save or kill *Contact*, a weapon for nonviolent, nonracial united action in South Africa.

Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the United Automobile Workers of America and other bodies, such as churches, universities, schools, etc., probably about 70% of the total came from individuals, mostly women, from retired business people and agricultural labourers, wealthy industrialists and poor old age pensioners, the widows' mite and cheques for £100, £300 and £500 from generous women who, judging from their letters, are inspired far more by human sympathy than by any political considerations.

"I gladly send this cheque for the Defence and Aid Fund", writes G.M.B. in August 1963. The cheque was for £300, and this warm-hearted woman has donated £710 already.

Miss Aileen Hallsworth, from Manchester, has with the help of friends been organising a weekly concert in aid of the Defence and Aid Fund. To date the Fund has received £241 from her.

"I hope the enclosed will help a little those people who have the courage to stand up for human dignity in South Africa", letter from Mrs. M.L., June 1960, with cheque for £300.

Of course, not every donation is for £300. Here is a sample of one of the many thousands of letters we have received from poor people:

"I am sending you a small donation of 2s. 6d. for the Defence Fund. I do feel so sorry for all those poor African starving children. I only wish I could send more. I am sure there will be a great many people which will feel the same but my small fee is only the widow's mite", from Mrs. M.H.

THE ROLE OF THE FUND is limited but not insignificant. From its very inception, it has concentrated on rendering practical help. Its endeavours, however, have not only mitigated suffering but have also built a bridge of lasting friendship between the peoples of Africa and the rest of the world over the chasm created by the self-appointed saviours of white Christian civilisation. The architects of apartheid are motivated by fear, bigotry and hatred; the bridge that the Fund is helping to build rests on courage and generosity—the courage of men and women of all races in Southern Africa who, in the face of persecution and terror, are striving for human rights; and the generosity of the men, the women and the children of Britain and other countries who demonstrate their sympathy for the victims of oppression in a practical manner, by sending donations to the Fund. The brave in South Africa and the warm-hearted people abroad are both moved by the same spirit. There is a common bond, a common love of humanity, a common urge for freedom between such as Albert Lutuli, confined to his village, and the old age pensioner in Sheffield who sent his last five shillings and good wishes to the Fund. Nelson Mandela, sentenced to five years imprisonment, will bear his suffering and humiliation with great fortitude because the miners of South Wales have sent £1,000 to help his oppressed brothers and sisters. Helen Joseph, placed under "house arrest" for five years, will find life in her prison-home more tolerable in the knowledge that the women of Britain, the country of her birth, have contributed over £150,000 to the Defence and Aid Fund. ●

GEZIRA

Planners, Entrepreneurs, Farmers

*Part 2 of a series on
methods of economic development*

FRANCIS WILSON

SOUTH OF KHARTOUM, in the great triangle bordered by the two Niles, lies the Gezira plain: 200 miles long and stretching for 80 miles across its base from Kosti in the west to Sennar in the east. This part of the Sudan has been the scene of one of the most interesting agricultural experiments in history, and one which is of particular relevance to those countries which are seeking to raise themselves above a subsistence economy without becoming the take on puppets of a richer big brother.

Fifty years ago the people of Gezira lived there in poverty and at the mercy of the uncertain rains. Today the grandsons of these semi-nomads live as independent but co-operative farmers in one of the most highly developed cotton producing areas in the world. The history of the Gezira experiment which was responsible for this miraculous development is fascinating not only because it is one of an economic success but also because it shows how the peasants have come to feel themselves responsible for the scheme instead of being merely productive cogs in the machinery of some large company.

As white South Africans are not at present being granted visas to enter the Sudan it was not possible to visit the Gezira to see it for oneself but fortunately the excellent book* by Arthur Gaitskell enables one to understand just how it was that the scheme achieved its success and enables one, further, to draw lessons which might be applied in other parts of the world, particularly in Southern Africa. It is a book which all those who are grappling with the problems of political and economic development in Africa should certainly read for Mr. Gaitskell does not, as so many 'experts' do, skate over the surface with vague generalisations: rather he goes deeply into the particular subject with which he is dealing and then, in the light of his experiences there, suggests one or two ideas which may hold elsewhere as well. Those who desire economic freedom and who realise that it will be achieved not by slogans but by a long uphill struggle will find almost every page of Mr. Gaitskell's book rewarding.

**Gezira—A Story of Development in the Sudan* by Arthur Gaitskell (Faber and Faber).