

Views of Youth - 1

The youth of Africa will choose

SHAKESPEARE MAKONI

WHAT IS THE NATURE of Communist influence in Africa today? What factors have brought about the penetration of Communist influence in the continent that for long has been a haven for Western colonialist influence? If significant Communist influence exists in Africa, is it likely to grow any stronger, if so why, and how could it be combated — if Communism be indeed an evil politico-economic system that must be kept out of Africa?

Most African peoples know little or nothing about Communism. In Rhodesia and South Africa it is not uncommon to hear the whiteman decry African nationalist political activity as being Communist inspired, financed and directed. In South Africa political opposition parties and individuals that do not believe in apartheid are penalised under the Suppression of Communism Act. In Rhodesia one Rhodesian Front backbencher has even called UNESCO lecturers at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland "subversive elements," in other words, Communists.

Over the radio we hear, in the newspapers we read, that American planes have bombed or poison-gassed, Viet Cong Communists. This makes the ordinary African wonder whether in fact these people are responsible for most of the evils of the world or at least the so-called undeveloped world. In the United States where the number of Communists, if any, is minute, segregation and violence against the Negroes has continued. The Ku Klux Klan, in spite of its possible smallness, seems to be spreading to other European countries. Part of Nazi Germany's policy was to destroy communism, yet it was Nazi Germany that launched the world into an unprecedented international war and set about the extermination of about six million Jews.

There is no doubt that Communists have been ruthless in many instances especially during the Stalinist era in Russia and during the 1956 Hungarian Rebellion. The fact that this ruthlessness is found on both sides of the Iron Curtain, goes to prove that neither side is more, by any considerable degree, human than the other.

MOST YOUNG AFRICANS who read anti-Communist propaganda or indeed factual material on Communism are either indifferent to the Communist system or just inquisitive to know what makes Eastern Europe tick and why it is so hated in the West. Few of us have come face to face with Communists or studied in their countries. In consequence few of us have friends, if any, in the East. It would therefore be unrealistic for us to support the anti-Communist front in the cold war politics.

On the other hand many of us have friends and quite likely personal enemies in the West. We read, write and speak in one or other of the former colonial European powers' languages when we participate in any international dialogues. We know more of the West. We deal with them daily. We have dealt with them as colonial rulers before the liberation of many African countries. Some of us are still subjects of foreign and European settler rule. We are humiliated on the grounds of race. We are denied the vote in our own countries. Through an economic system based on race, we are deprived of the fruits of free enterprise. Our labour is under

paid while that of the settlers is overpaid. We are prohibited from residing in certain parts of our own countries. In Rhodesia because of the Land Apportionment Act, Africans are considered undesirable aliens in urban centres. As a result a parent living in any of the African townships in urban Rhodesia, a parent whose sons and daughters are neither in school or employment and are over sixteen is required to pay fifteen shillings monthly rent per child. Like branded cattle we are required to move with identity cards wherever we go. Police searches are a daily occurrence. Restrictions and banishment for holding political opinions contrary to the status quo are not uncommon.

It is in this personal contact, in the master-servant context, that many Africans in at least white colonial Africa, remember or see the relationship between the European and the African. It is under this contact and influence that our favourable or distasteful response or reaction to whites, forms. Naturally our response is human. We either like or dislike whites as a result of the experiences we undergo in our social, political, cultural or economic life, before or after the independence date. It should never surprise the Westerners to find Africans seemingly anti-West. If the African appears anti-West it is because he knows more of the European's weaknesses as well as his favourable points. Paradoxically he may form strong ties with some whites.

IN AFRICA TODAY Western influence predominates and this influence is likely to be permanent and independent of European manipulation. If today the West, whose links with Africa are stronger in terms of time and experience, and whose influence hitherto dominated and indeed to a considerable extent, continues to dominate, should feel that its influence is being displaced by Communism, then the West needs to pause and ask why. Instead there is a tendency on the part of the white people to brand and abuse any African leaders who may feel it an act of sovereignty and non-alignment to befriend the NATO world and the Communist front.

After asking why Africa should seem to be growing cold towards whites, the West must then try faithfully to discover the real reasons. They must look at their own attitude towards Africans generally and the attitude of European settlers in Africa in order to discover the cause of coldness. They must also find out the attitude of the Communists towards Africa and the African attitude towards both the West and the East. Initially it could be assumed that former slaves are unlikely to be fond of former masters. This however has not always been so, in fact the achievement of independence from colonial rulers has generally created a climate of better understanding between the former colonies and the colonisers.

IN AFRICA NORTH OF THE ZAMBEZI, colonial European powers, for fear of aggressive Communist activity that would have supplied arms and training for African guerilla fighters to wrestle independence from foreign rule, quickly granted self-determination. Of course the fact that the climate was unfavourable to European settlement had something to do with this early hand-over of power. In Southern Africa the climate is favoured by whites and the wealth and privileges the whites have, they want to hold for ever

the East and West to befriend Africa may make a truly non-aligned Africa an honest broker in an ideologically divided world.

One thing we all have in common in Africa is a distrust for the two power groups. They seem to us to be two sides of the same coin. That far we shall not replace hyena domination with crocodile rule. We have suffered subjugation and would loathe to be subjugated yet again. The ill treatment of African students in the East and the black people in the West confirms African fears that these powers discriminate against the non-whites.

A SUBTERRANEAN SWING towards Communism may be detected among the ranks of the young Africans. This leaning can grow more pronounced and more open only if the West fails to revise its activities in Africa and especially its attitude towards the white minority governments of Southern Africa. In the eyes of these young people the West, because of its support, open or tacit, for settler and colonialist rule in Africa, is an enemy. It appears hypocritical in its communication of democracy and the concept of majority rule in Southern Africa. This hypocrisy is confirmed by the West's apparent support for the anti-African activities of the former colonial rulers. The West's apparent indifference to the French war in Algeria, the NATO support for Portuguese policies in Africa, the reluctance or even refusal of the West to support strong United Nations resolutions against Portugal, the refusal of the chief trading Western powers to support a total boycott of South Africa, the Western continued supply of armaments to South Africa, which arms are for the purpose of suppressing African aspirations; the continued and increasing volume of Anglo-American investment in the country of apartheid, the seeming British desire to hand over independence to the Rhodesian White minority rulers in spite of the South African experience and of course the NATO opposition to revolutionary forces against these regimes—all these things are going to have a decisive influence on whether or not Africa will become pro-Communist.

Yet Africans have no desire to be pro any of the Cold War powers. They want to be and are pro-Africa.

In spite of Western contradictions, in spite of the colonisation of Africa by Europe, Africans had grown an affinity for the Western ideals of democracy, human dignity, the rule of law and the sanctity of universal suffrage based on neither race nor property. The problem of the NATO powers is that they are more interested in immediate short-term gains. The Communists on the other hand are strategic in their organisation, they are more interested in long-term gains. The West's short-term interests have the possible effect of alienating Africa for good.

THE YOUTH OF AFRICA requests in desperation that the West disassociate itself militarily and economically from the minority governments in Southern Africa. We request that in order to avoid a racial war blood bath in Africa, the NATO powers assume their responsibility to assist colonial Africans to be free from racialist minority rule and to bring about majority government in these areas. Britain and America will be responsible for any racial war in Africa. They are in a position to prevent this at present by refusing to support minority governments. It will be the indifference of NATO powers to the African quest for a free majority-ruled Africa that might move Africans towards Communism. The Communists are prepared to assist Africa in its fight against white minority rule. When the Communists support the Africans militarily, for example, the West might militarily support the minority governments of Southern Africa. Should this occur a world war is not unlikely to occur. The safety of Africa from Red influence and control does not lie in the continued existence of settler rule in Southern Africa and the continued support for these settlers by the West: such support makes Communism more appealing to Africans.

We ask the West to show that they can be better trusted than the Communists, that the ideals they cherish are superior to Communist doctrines, and that they pursue the interest of humanity and disassociate themselves from regimes that disgrace the principles of racial equality, social justice, fair sharing of economic gain and the concept of majority rule. We request the leading nations of the NATO world to turn their good words into good deeds.

and in this they seem to receive the tacit support of the West. It is a fact, however, that the boggy Communism and its armed struggle gospel acted as a catalyst in the emancipation of Africa in so far as the Communists were ready to aid the Africans in an armed struggle against foreign rule.

IN AFRICA SOUTH OF THE ZAMBEZI the West has pursued a very opposite policy. Under the argument that "you can always trust your kith and kin" and that European settler governments in these areas are a bastion against international Communism, the NATO powers have tended to support, in African eyes, the unpopular settler rule. It was only a few months ago that the Labour Party Government of Britain banned the export of arms to South Africa. At the same time we learn that some Britons are soon to emigrate to South Africa where they are going to work on the manufacture of war equipment. France, in spite of United Nations resolutions to ban the supply of arms to apartheid South Africa, defiantly exports to this country armaments. Silent support is being given to Portugal by the NATO powers. She is supplied with arms and West Germany is committed to increase investment in Angola in order to strengthen the Portuguese economy and capacity to keep in subjugation the African people there. In the Congo Natoists are four-square behind Tshombe who in the eyes of most Africans is a betrayer of the African cause. In the minds of most Africans it is widely held that the West brought about the death of Lumumba. During the Algerian liberation war again the West seemed to have stood indifferently to French atrocities in that war. When Zanzibar was liberated from the rule of former slavers the West expressed disappointment.

The Red countries on the other hand seem to have fully supported the case of African liberation. In Algeria, it was Russia and China and indeed the freed North African states that assisted the Algerian revolutionaries with arms and training facilities. In the United Nations the Red powers have been uncompromising, at least in their surface attitude towards the Western colonial rule in Africa.

IN AFRICA IN PARTICULAR and the world over generally, the Communists want to get rid of all Capitalist influence. Hence they want to see in Africa:—

1. The total withdrawal, physical withdrawal of colonialist forces and NATO influence. They believe this can be done through supporting African liberation. On this score they seem to have been genuine friends.

2. They would be keen to replace the West and possibly impose their own domination of Africa. However, failure to take over Africa will not worry the Communist very much. They are aware of President Nyerere's words that "Africa is not for sale." They know too that the West would not stomach such a neo-colonisation of Africa nor would Africans permit it. Hence the chief Communist interest in Africa is destroying Western influence and privileges and securing the friendship of our continent. Thus even if the West withdraws from Africa, the Communists will intensify their ties of comradeship with us rather than withdraw too. The central position of Africa in the cold war dialogue and the wish of both