

MUKHTAR MUSTAPHA

A New Start in Africa

The real problems
of independence
have emerged

Commentators on African politics and economics have skilfully deleted from their writings the genesis of the real problems that beset emerging African independent states. That Africa has just emerged independently and is still bogged down with an acute colonial mentality is completely forgotten.

1. Independent African States are still tied down to a system of government which, to say the least, is totally baroque.
2. Most independent African states are drastically short of trained personnel, and almost total lack of technological skills and managerial expertise.
3. Africa's natural resources are not harnessed for a continental development but on a piecemeal basis, much to the benefit of the overseas shareholders, whose aims are not to invest profits accrued but to take them out of the continent.
4. Shortage of capital for extensive agricultural programmes which would stimulate a much diversified economy, create a situation of massive food production and feed Africa's teeming millions.
5. The intellectuals which Africa has produced are for the most part mere fine gentlemen contemptuous of any sort of radical change and are still toying with clichés that are sterile and static.

To analyse Africa's problems is a colossal task. Africa's dilemma is not a case of paucity of resources but one of *true intentions*. This point might need clarification since true intentions can mean subjugation and economic slavery. Furthermore, to prescribe a remedy to replace the present bizarre political institutions one can be caught in a trap. To become too vigorous and doctrinaire in one's approach to changes in Africa there is the ever present danger that one can be burdened with too much at a time. Africa's political history is imperialistic for all intents and purposes and oftentimes very feudalistic. African states have the onus of furthering a colonial pattern of Government which they would not necessarily have subscribed to but colonialism has dictated the pattern. The masters in London and Paris, and the kings of Belgium have left us with constitutions loaded with decrees and meaningless statutes.

Because African Governments find themselves playing the tricky role of interpreting a constitution which they themselves know little about it is not surprising when one hears of the infringement of the habeas corpus or any other Latin jargon. The chief preoccupation of African leaders is to make rapid economic development and in that process the executive is clothed with tremendous powers. This tends to weaken the system of consultation. The real truth is that independent Africans are caught up in the economic struggle: they have to fight or fall behind the rest. This removes all incentives to examine their political role and we have witnessed the eroding of many governments. Unless a truthful political situation evolves, probably based on Tanzania's model, Africa will always remain a political infant. The niceties of western-orientated constitutions are far fetched. The illiteracy and traditions frustrate the primary aims of whatever good intentions the colonial masters had when they presented Africa with questions and answers of constitutions. The absence of a continental elite capable of breaking new ground in the political and moral fields is bound to stifle public opinion worthy of exerting pressures toward sincere and constructive reforms.

Africa has long been and still is the chief supplier of raw materials and a ready market for finished goods. Such finished manufactured goods are useful, but irrelevant to development. Also since Africa is short of trained personnel, a direct result of colonial failure, the prerequisites and basics are still not fully met. The need for home technicians to maintain and service agricultural machines is forever growing, market research and distribution is still conducted in a primitive way. This will always hold African countries back from facing the challenge which the international economic cartels pose.

The main emphasis should be put on technical education rather than relying on the Sorbonne and Oxford to provide the graduates who in any case display only cold feelings towards the distant miseries in Africa. A new code of morals should be encouraged, the old attitude of materialism by the educated class should go. A complete reorientation of values, morals and priorities should be encouraged. This will induce fresh attitudes.

Though more complex to appreciate, the rudimentary problem which Africa's independent countries are facing is one of a persistent worsening of trade terms.

The overseas buyers convene meetings and fix prices for primary produce. This excessive power to determine the standards of living in Africa is still a vexing question. Not only do they determine the price of raw materials but also that of finished goods. While they continue to buy cheaply and sell dear African states continue to negotiate financial loans, which form only a trickle in the ocean. What Africa would need is capital on a long term basis with interest free loans. There must be a complete reorganisation of trading arrangements with overseas firms. African countries should break away from small economic units, anticipating the abolition of customs barriers and the erratic tariff system. If and when the arbitrary borders are demolished a new dimension of economic growth would be seen.

A striking example of foresight and investing for the future in Africa is the Volta River project. This capital development will not only serve Ghana but some of her neighbours. The Hydro-electricity generated would form the basis for new industries. These could be run cheaply and would save capital flowing out of the continent. The richer countries must be prepared to invest twice as much as they are now doing. China has recently shown the capacity of saving and investing twice as large a proportion of its national product as India. Zambia will no doubt derive full benefit from the £108-million deal to construct a railway system. This is a very important piece of achievement in black Africa. When the rail project is completed Zambia and Tanzania will be on the road to a sound economic footing. The construction of the railway will facilitate Zambia's copper exports. It will also avoid their going through unfriendly territories such as Southern Rhodesia and Mozambique. Again, since Zambia is landlocked the rail system should prove a big opening for Africa's future economic progress. The bold stand taken by Kaunda and Nyerere to pursue their plans for the giant steel tracks is laudable—a venture which the World Bank thought was commercially inopportune. If the Chinese succeed in carrying out this economic project then where will the

grants of the west stand in the eyes of Africa? China will probably have emerged as the closest comrade of the East African people and of the continent of Africa at large. Dr. Nyerere and President Kaunda in the present setting are resolved to see their joint economic aspiration come true, unmindful of the source of aid. This is the attitude Africa needs, the sort of attitude, too, the new African would require. Self-mindedness and forthrightness.

The role of the educated African in a society which is ready for change should be vital, for economic and political progress. The saddest thing is that there is a rising class of African elite whose big dreams are wild appreciation of luxuries and undisturbed pleasures. This typifies the general attitude of the intellectuals. Their unwillingness to change and re-educate themselves is forever growing. Whenever they do contribute anything in the form of writings it is marred by a false sense of values. They are the agents against progress. Their very rigid minds are apt to interpret a departure from the Westminster pattern as the end of the world and the collapse of everything. The elites must be prepared to go into the bush to tackle the problems from their grass roots. Of course one would fall short if all the blame were heaped on their shoulders, but if we are to see a new start, Africa must denounce these people who only know they have their salaries to receive and nothing more. With this qualification perhaps the next decade will usher into Africa capable people to direct her affairs.

Keep abreast of news and development of Africa,

read **AFRICAN WEEKLY REVIEW**.

Obtain your copies from: The Circulation Manager,
AFRICAN WEEKLY REVIEW,
172 Gower Street, London, N.W.1. or from your Newsagent.

GENEVA – AFRICA

The Journal of the Geneva-Africa Institute

Africa in time past lent the European imagination that touch of exotic adventure which its own milieu did not always provide. That time is no more. Africa today seeks her own way through difficulties and uncertainties to which no one open to her desire to meet on terms of equality can remain indifferent.

It is the wish of Geneva-Africa to be an active partner in this unconditioned dialogue, and to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the problems and opportunities facing an emergent Africa.

Published twice yearly.

Price per copy: Switzerland Fr. 6,-; France NF 7.50; United Kingdom 12/-; United States \$1.65; Africa NF 7.50 or 12/-;

Price of subscription for four copies: Switzerland Fr. 22.50; France NF.27,-; United Kingdom £2.05; United States \$6.30; Africa NF 27,- or £2.05.

Address: Institut Africain de Genève
2-4 route de Drize
Carouge – Geneva,
Switzerland.

Youth Movements in Southern Africa

ERIC WOOD

The organisation of youth activities in Central and Southern Africa has to be seen in an historical perspective to be understood. Traditionally there was a horizontal stratification of society by age—the degree of organisation being designated by “sets” or “regiments”. Whilst showing a strong attachment to the extended family group, the young man, once having undergone initiation and seclusion either through ceremonial rite or through passage of time, entered into a pattern of age-group activity characterised by a high degree of corporateness. The adolescent youth thus achieved status at an early age. He realised that, whilst not achieving complete incorporation into adult society, nevertheless his role and position in that society was assured and understood.

It is possibly in terms of the role-action of youth that we can best examine traditional youth culture in Africa. Amongst the more decentralised peoples of the East, age-set formations were very strong. The participation of a young person in such organisation was intense. Age-sets were formed to organise youth in many spheres of societal activity—as a means to acquire knowledge of the society’s economic pursuits, the system of law and order and, above all, the moral order and system of values.

Much of this has changed. Age-sets have changed their function in the urban areas, although initiation and seclusion still persist in the rural areas.

The types of youth cultures operating in the different countries in Africa vary with different social, economic and political conditions. In South Africa, the rigid partition of the country into socio-ecological areas by race (so-called Group Areas), has resulted in the emergence of a dynamic and vital sub-culture diametrically opposed to the politically dominant but numerically inferior White group. Such a sub-culture aims, not to bridge the gap between family and community, but to operate outside the existing family order. Before examining this sub-culture in greater detail, mention should be made of the *persistence* of some aspects of the traditional family order. Thus, amongst the rural Xhosa (Red) migrant workers in towns of South Africa, age groups have been set up to perpetuate age-mate association based on a tribal pattern, although with a considerable change of function in the urban setting. Despite the emphasis on sociability and the settlement of disputes between members, however, Red Xhosa age-groups in town do not form *corporate* groups the absence of permanent membership being noticeable as well as the permeability of barriers between Red (traditional) youth groups and School (educated) contemporaries.

Emerging from the interaction of these two youth groups, has grown the phenomenon of “tsotsi-ism” (*ikhabi*) which has been described by one investigator as a completely dispossessed, amorphous gang formation organised for criminal purposes, who terrorise the black populations of the larger urban complexities of Central and Southern Africa.⁽¹⁾ They commit a whole range of criminal