

AFRICA'S BITTER DILEMMA

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Revolutions have often occurred in the history of nations. From time to time the people of a state have found it necessary to abolish the form or nature of the Government which they themselves or their progenitors set up. In cases where the form or nature of the Government machinery has been defined by Constitution and where circumstances do not call for immediate changes, revolutions still take place in the way of suffrage where a definite percentage of people are called upon to indicate their confidence in, and their loyalty towards, the personalities or groups which have been changed with Government business for a specific time.

The electoral system is the major characteristic of democratic institutions because it is there that Government get their mandate from the people they govern. It is accompanied indispensably by a free press, freedom of religion, impartial judiciary, parliamentary debates and legislations, armed forces for internal and external security, an indigenous and impartial civil service, etc.

In Africa, parliamentary democracy had been considered as one of the best forms of Government because it safeguards the rights of all citizens who have a share in the Government irrespective of their economic or social status.

Yet, even where genuine parliamentary democracies have been enthroned it has become necessary for more sudden and even violent changes of Government to occur. Some of these revolutions have been considered as a disgrace on human history because the motives that drove men to take up arms against their rulers have been base. But other revolutions can be devised to ensure that the violation of human rights can be averted. Failing to reach a 'rapprochement' by debate, men have had recourse to the sword and bullet.

Revolutions have always entailed some form of suffering to those who have been attacked and even to all concerned, and on reflecting upon the amount of suffering entailed by those uprisings, it is indeed difficult to say without reservations when revolutions are justified at this point. But because Government itself is but an invention of man, the occurrence or otherwise of revolutions means only that the principles for which men have found it necessary to form Governments have been realised or have not been. And when we look into concrete instances of revolutions we can easily discern some justification for their occurrence.

One of the most famous revolutions that has occurred in human history is what has been known as the American Revolution of mid-eighteenth century and the Declaration of American Independence which ushered it into being provided a relevant manifesto for all revolutions and for all time, and I quote:- "When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men were born free and equal and that they have been endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that to these rights governments are instituted amongst people deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. And that whenever any government proves to be detrimental to these ends it is the right to institute in its place such a government as to them shall seem most likely to secure the ends for which they were made. . . ."

We, therefore, the representatives of the United Nations in conference assembled today, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do declare that these states are and ought to be free and independent. . . ."

Thus the Declaration of Independence of the American Colonies goes into history as one of the most articulate expressions for the justification of Revolutions. From this manifesto we can discern three basic principles which can be applied to all revolutions.

First of all we are made to understand that Revolutions need not be irrational and unjustifiable. Although revolutions have been accompanied by violent actions the motives that primarily brought about these revolutions can be justified. It is worth while to note how the declarants of America express their "respect for the opinions of mankind" and make their appeal to the "supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of their intentions".

Secondly, the Declaration of Independence has within it a truth which men have often evaded - that all men were born free and equal, that governments exist only to safeguard the rights of all citizens.

The third point is a corollary of the second. If the government proves to be detrimental to the goal, for which it was made, it is the right of the people to abolish it and to replace it with the one they consider more likely to foster the ends of government.

It is this third point that we are now going to hack at. When does a government prove to be detrimental to the end for which it was made? When is a revolution justified?

Broadly speaking there are three types of revolutions. There are revolutions which are said to be bloodless where changes have been effected by peaceful arbitration. In the other extremity there are violent revolutions, what might be called "coups d'etat" where authority is seized by the armed forces. These are usually the aftermaths of a long term of insecurity and unrest and failure to reach any agreement

between parties in conflict, for instance Dahomey and Congo (Kinshasha). Midway between these two extremities there is one where there is a clash of arms between parties but which have not come suddenly but have been anticipated and even threatened in public speeches like Nigeria.

In the case of bloodless revolutions the causes have been dissatisfaction towards the particular type of governmental authority, for instance Upper Volta. The fight for independence by many African states which formally were under the yoke of imperialist countries like, England, France, Spain, etc., exemplify this type of revolution. They are justified by the fact that the system of government is inimical per ipse to the wants of the citizen because they are ruled by a foreign power.

Here I would wish to dwell more on one example of today. The problem of Africa South of the Sahara, particularly Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) offers excellent example for the second type of revolution: the bloody revolution. This usually comes in the wake of insecurity and unrest, usually brought about by dissatisfaction of the masses. This dissatisfaction in turn is the result of economic and social inequality and the armed forces are harnessed towards a dethronement of the former head of state and his regime from whom the state of unrest can be said to have emanated. In fact the many coups d'etat that have occurred in many African states are also a standing example of this state of affairs. There, the people to whom the reins of governments have been given have misused the privilege given to them by the masses - who are far poorer than themselves to be used as tools in the hands of the former European masters. But as I had said I want to view this aspect from the problem posed by the rebel regime of Ian Smith's Rhodesia.

To think that Ian Smith and his partners in crime will continue to rule illegally in Rhodesia is a great source of mental unrest to anyone who has the slightest taint of justice in him; to live under the fact that a handful of whites will eternally remain overlords of a large majority of blacks is highly offending and frustrating. And on the other hand to maintain that Britain will act more than what she has already done offers no glimpse of hope at all. For Britain has proved beyond all reasonable doubt that, in this respect, she is nothing more than a paper tiger. Because whereas the Rhodesian issue demands a firm radical action on the part of Britain, she continues to toy with the matter. Surely something must be done, and done now!

This is an extreme situation. But when the late Malcolm X, out of a similar desperate situation, declared that extreme problems need extreme remedies, some false peace prophets brandished him a radical trouble monger. Yet even such a notable advocate of non-violence like Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia was constrained to say, "I have recently had to remove one of these noble words from my vocabulary. It is 'patience'". I also am a firm disciple of Henry David Thoreau the exponent of non-violence or as he called it "Civil Disobedience". But we are all human beings and not angels. And where all possible chances of non-violence have been exhausted surely the opposite remains the on-

ly recourse. Force! We cannot continue to look to Britain; it is in fact a blind look to the moon. Remember, Rhodesia is not Aden or Guyana where Britain sent paratroopers to shed blood in defense of a right cause; yet their fault was not as treasonable as that of Ian Smith. Worse of all the Zimbabweans, the true sons of the land are not only robbed of their dignity, social and legal rights but are also denied their most able leaders, from the local to the national level. What can be more provoking than this?

Hence I call on all Zimbabweans within and without to shun their political differences and revolt against the illegal regime of Ian Smith. Domestic problems can be attended to after the common enemy has been defeated. I also appeal to the Liberation Committee of the OAU to step up its aid towards this fight. I summon all mankind that can distinguish between right and wrong to render all possible co-operation to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, South West Africa and South Africa. Undoubtedly this is justified revolution! What makes a revolution justified is the underlying principle behind it. True, violence involves the shedding of blood and loss of life. But tell me, where has freedom been attained without this sacrifice being done. Who can tell the number of souls that went in the American war of Independence. Besides, the shedding of blood and the loss of lives is only the effect, the consequence. And the judgement of any action as well as that of revolution is determined not by its effect alone but mostly by the cause. If the cause is right and just, O.K.

I am convinced that in the worst of things there is always a degree of good. And so the fight must not be abandoned. The flame of nationalism should not be extinguished. Its sparks must continue to glow in the hearth of African Nationalism. Fight! I say fight, until the battle is won and victory achieved. This generation may not reap the fruits of the struggle but it will be a noble pearl to bequeath to posterity; a free and peaceful land to live and govern themselves. And they will remember us for that.

No, we must not flinch. I am convinced that one day the sword of justice will strike through the barriers of injustice; I am sure that one day a new sunny day will dawn; yes, I hope that one day a bright new era will usher. With this I think I have driven home my point.

The midway type of revolution which takes a long time to germinate in the minds of men before it manifests in the form of action is usually based on a change of ideology. The French Revolution was a conflict between the rich and poor only outwardly, behind the scenes were powerful ideological factors which did what they could to transform public opinion. There are also a few revolutions which have occurred in Africa because of this.

"I represent a party which does not yet exist: the party of revolution, civilization. This party will make the twentieth century . . ."