

RHODESIA

A NEW STAGE IN THE STRUGGLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY

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(*Extract from*
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In order to put the problem of Rhodesia into proper focus, I think we should see it in its setting as part of the Continent of Africa. In order to do this it will be necessary to deal with some of the aims of Imperialism and try to understand what it is all about.

It may seem a platitude to say that Imperialism is a world phenomenon. Imperialism relates every event anywhere in the world with every other event. It thinks and plans on a world scale. For this reason it becomes imperative for us also to learn to think in terms of the world. For a long time our weakness has been to treat each event in isolation. We do not understand its ramifications, the relation between one event and others taking place elsewhere in the world. It becomes imperative for us to begin to think in terms of planning on a world-wide scale and understand the relationship of forces in all parts of the world. It is time we acquainted ourselves with how the Imperialists think and plan.

Now it is my view that, faced as we are with the problem of Rhodesia, all sorts of remedies and panaceas have been advocated, many of them quite unrealistic for the simple reason that they flow from an approach that isolates the Rhodesian problem. Rhodesia serves a particular function in relation to the complex of Southern Africa and thus to the rest of Africa. If the progressive forces had understood this and had therefore tackled the problem differently, it would not have reached its present critical stage.

Neo-Colonialism - A Plan

First, we must see from the point of view of Imperialism how this situation developed. After the Second World War there was a change in the approach of Imperialism to the problem of colonies. Britain was no longer able to hold its colonies as before and the United States was seeking to muscle in on the British colonies, which had been a closed concern for British Imperialism. It adopted what is called neo-colonialism. The plan was to hand over political administration to the local leaderships in the various countries. But Britain maintained the economic power over them.

Vietnam

In the process of granting so-called independence, according to plan, Britain succeeded in India and hoped the plan would work well in Africa also. For a long time France thought to maintain the old colonial system, but was bled white by the forces of liberation. When it was driven out of Indo-China, the United States moved in. Thus in Vietnam today we see the United States attempting to fill in what Imperialism considers to be a vacuum. With their great financial and military resources the United States intend to maintain that part of the continent of Asia under their domination. They realised that the revolution in Vietnam would be carried by its own momentum and, with the inspiration from China, the chances were - in fact it was a certainty - that the revolution would be carried to its logical conclusion. For this reason the United States stepped in to try to crush the revolution.

When Britain had shown the road of neo-colonialism in Africa, Belgium thought she would do likewise. After being defeated in Algeria, France also adopted the plan of neo-colonialism in her other territories in Africa. But things didn't seem to work according to plan in the Congo, so Imperialism intervened under the guise of the United Nations. Lumumba, not realising the actual nature and function of the United Nations Organisation, invited it to come and assist him against Tshombe. You know what happened thereafter. Lumumba was slaughtered and Tshombe took over on behalf of his masters. But to this day they are still looking for a person or group of persons to run the affairs of the Congo according to their dictates.

The Revolutionary Factor

Now it turns out that even the British policy is not succeeding

as it was planned. A new factor has entered into the situation. It is a new process of vital significance, a continuous revolutionary process which is taking place throughout the world. Imperialism is faced with this process unfolding in Africa, too. All the governments that Imperialism thought would run its affairs for it are proving to be unstable. Indeed it is hardly possible that they should be stable.

Before we deal with this aspect of it, let us deal further for a moment with what the imperialists themselves had planned. I am of the opinion that the African States were taken unawares by what has happened in Rhodesia because they accepted those declarations of Imperialism - concerning independence - at face value. Why (they ask) should it not grant independence to Rhodesia, as it did to other States? After all, Britain was willing and able to dismantle the Rhodesian Federation, in spite of all the threats of dire consequences by Welensky. Moreover, Zambia was the richest of the three colonies. It has the copper. Yet Britain handed Zambia over to a Black Government. At the time, people wondered why it took care to leave the air-force in the hands of the Rhodesian Government. Now we know why.

If the African States had realised that the granting of independence to one state after another was according to plan, part of a scheme that embraced the whole continent of Africa, they would not have been taken unawares by what is happening today.

Strategic Importance of South Africa v

Imperialism has big plans for Africa. That continent is one of the richest in the world. It supplies ^{much of} the raw materials for the industries of Europe and the United States. It is vital to their nuclear industry. Imperialism is bent on maintaining Africa. The problem is how to maintain it. South Africa, at the toe of the continent, is an important base for Imperialism χ and from there it has to work upwards. It has to maintain two places that are of vital importance to it; the one is South Africa, the other is the Congo, that huge country in the centre of Africa. Whoever dominates these two, dominates the African continent as a whole. That's why there was such a clamour over the Congo, so much violence and treachery. Apart from the fact that it is one of the richest countries in Africa χ in mineral resources, of far greater importance is its strategic position in relation to the continent as a whole.

That is one aspect of the overall plans of Imperialism. But there is another. Imperialism seeks to maintain its economic grip on Africa. At the present stage of development, it is well nigh impossible for the African States, operating on a capitalist base, to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. They have to rely on Europe and the United States for capital for development, for as long as Imperialism keeps its hold on Africa. In this situation South Africa again becomes the deciding issue.

It depends on which way South Africa goes, whether or not Africa shall be placed in a position to free itself from the economic stranglehold of Europe and the United States. South Africa, with its great industrial potential, with its gold mines and its already high standard of industrial development, with its technical know-how and its mineral wealth, is the one country that could, if it became free, liberate the whole of Central and East Africa to start off with. By freedom I don't mean the so-called independence that has been granted to the other African States. I mean real freedom and real democracy, if South Africa became a socialist State. South Africa, then, has the potential to establish an agriculture throughout Central and East Africa capable of sustaining the development of industry.

Such a development would immediately upset the plans of Imperialism whereby the continent of Africa has to remain a perpetual client of Europe. With South Africa liberated, it could then free the whole of Southern Africa and from there a revolution knows no artificial boundaries. It could sweep northwards, knocking down those separate little States that are being kept in bondage to Imperialism and whose foundations are inevitably shaky at the moment. As I have said, we are witnessing a process of a continuous unfolding of revolution in the continent of Africa. The Imperialists know this and must do everything in their power to counter it. This shows the prime importance of a South African revolution in the plans of the progressive forces in Africa. Thus, everything converges around South Africa, which is the main base of Imperialism.

The other States around it are simply satellite States and whatever happens to them happens in a particular way because of their relationship with South Africa. This applies equally to the British Protectorates, Basutoland (now Lesotho), Swaziland, Bechuanaland (now Botswana) to South West Africa and Southern Rhodesia. It is from this ^{starting} point that we have to examine the problem of Southern Rhodesia and why it is that British Imperialism has decided to put a stop to what appeared to be its

declared policy up to now. The territory is far poorer than Zambia economically, but, as I said; it is of the utmost importance to Britain in the complex of Southern Africa.

Role of Britain

If the African States had understood this, they would not have depended on Britain to liberate Rhodesia. If we had understood this, the national liberation Movements also would not have depended on Britain to grant Rhodesia its majority rule. Indeed, from the very beginning - as I think everyone knows - the national Movements were calling on Britain to grant them majority rule, and then called on Britain to get rid of Smith. This very attitude of mind, which is a direct result of a mistaken approach to the problem, in itself put the national Movements at a disadvantage. You will notice that Britain sat quietly watching while one government after another in Rhodesia became more and more fascistic, until Smith took over. Then Britain quietly watched Smith decapitate the national Movement. Yet this was a British colony.

When the African States brought the matter up at the United Nations, Britain at first said: "This is not our concern". "Rhodesia is a free country." And when the lawyers settled down to prove the sovereignty of the country vested in Britain, and proved it conclusively, Britain turned round and said: "Well, then, the U.N. should keep out of it. It is a matter for us to solve". Meanwhile Smith took action and declared UDI on his own. He did so because he had been encouraged by Wilson himself. It is true it was embarrassing for Wilson when the impatient Smith actually declared UDI. Nonetheless Wilson had stated beforehand that even if he did so, Britain would not come and shoot down what was a rebel government. It would not treat rebellion as it had always done in the past. Smith would receive different treatment. And this of course encouraged Smith to do what Britain did not expect him to do. Neither did Verwoerd for that matter expect him to do it. His declaration of independence was an embarrassment to both of them. It suited them to maintain the position as it was, without drawing it to its logical conclusion.

The point I am making is this: all that happened in Rhodesia had been planned that way and was the result of a policy which is counter to the policy set for the rest of Africa to the North. Rhodesia itself is a buffer State acting as a protection between the North and South Africa. At the same time it is a jumping-off ground for the South African forces

in the process of re-subjugating Africa as a whole. For there is a new policy afoot, for the reconquest of Africa. As I have said, this granting of independence had results they had not reckoned on. Because of a new factor, the unfolding of a revolutionary process in Africa, they have to alter their first tactic.

Reconquest of Africa

Now when the United States intervenes in Vietnam it is because the old imperialist policy was no longer workable. In Vietnam, when the French pulled out, they had to come in to stop the revolution. From there the United States intends to turn its attention to Africa. I have on a previous occasion mentioned that one aspect of the Vietnam war has not yet been examined, namely, the United States is flying a kite in this war. American Imperialism wants to know how far it will be permitted to use those atrocious methods of destruction against the people. It wants to know if, when it turns seriously to the re-conquest of Africa, it will be permitted by the world to use napalm, poison~~ous~~ gases and the rest of the atrocities it is now letting loose on the people of Vietnam. The continent of Africa is far too precious for the imperialists to allow it to break away from their orbit. In fact, it is the life-blood of the economy of Europe and the United States, to a certain extent. These are the reasons why we are faced with the problems we have today.

Basis of Unity

The African States have been trying to unite, but they have been encountering great difficulty and always will. It is my personal view that a continental government is incapable of consummation for as long as the various States have different economic bases. It will be necessary for the various States to have a common base. And a common base today can only be a socialist base. Since you cannot turn the wheels of history backwards, since there is a ferment on the continent of Africa, and since it is not possible for any of the countries to stabilise themselves on the basis of the status quo, the only possible unity can be achieved on a different economic base altogether. A continental government is possible only on the basis of united socialist States.

In my opinion the problem needs to be clearly formulated in this way, so that the various countries should link together their fight for unity and the aims of socialism, the economic aims with the political aims. Furthermore, it becomes the primary task, therefore, of all those States

that are dedicated to a fight for unity in the African continent to assist and actively engage in the revolutionary movements all over the continent.

The OAU.

It is true, we have the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). But the OAU is up against many difficulties. We can say that for as long as they are able to create a climate in which all the States come under the OAU, it is possible to inhibit the most reactionary States from doing what they would like to do. But this seems as far as the OAU can go. Those States which are willing and anxious to take action in the process of liberation, will have to do so irrespective of and apart from the OAU itself. You cannot expect the OAU to play a revolutionary role, to be the spearhead of revolution in Africa.

What Smith has done in Rhodesia^{-ia} has first of all shown up the position of the OAU. The leaders of some of the African States have formulated itⁱⁿ this way. "We have passed brave resolutions, but when a tiny little country like Rhodesia acts as it has done, we are unable to move."

I am glad some of the African States feel incensed at their own inaction. It means they are going to move, and they must move. What is likely to happen is that those few States who are serious about their business will now begin to coalesce together and will start perhaps in a small way to do something. Joint ^{efforts} action by a few States will expose the ultra-reactionary States and draw the neutral ones towards themselves. At the same time they will begin to seek to unite themselves with the national^{liberation} movements, an important step that was necessary in the first place.

National Liberation Movements.

The Rhodesian situation poses this question: if the African States, as States, attack Rhodesia, they will know it is not simply Rhodesia they are attacking. They are up against South Africa. They are up against Portugal. In touching Portugal, they are touching the NATO powers. They know also that they are up against British Imperialism and this is what makes them hesitate. This should force them to take stock of their own position. How much easier it would have been from every point of view, diplomatically as well, if they had concentrated on helping the revolutionary forces in Southern Africa and helped them also to unite, so that they had a plan for a revolutionary undertaking for the whole of Southern Africa.

If this had been done, then Rhodesia would have been face to face with nationalist revolutionary movements and not with States. Thus any country

that would come to the assistance of Rhodesia would have exposed itself as intervening in the interests of British Imperialism and of Imperialism as a whole. In this way the African States would have been placed in a position of vantage. They could have given all the necessary assistance to the liberation movements without being called upon to intervene directly as States. At the same time they could have stood firm at the United Nations - or anywhere else - against direct imperialist intervention in Rhodesia. Thus their position would have been ~~much~~ stronger, both from the point of view of international conventions and also from the moral standpoint, in that they as States did not invade another State. They could claim the moral right to grant assistance to save the lives of their brothers who were being slaughtered by a pirate government, that has no legal status. They could claim - and rightfully so - that the Smith regime is a group of outlaws that had taken it upon itself to let loose a reign of terror upon a defenceless people, whose only crime was to claim the right of self-government in their own country and to decide their own fate as a nation. They could at the same time assert their right as African States, i.e. as neighbour States, ^{demand military intervention} ~~to intervene militarily~~ against any state that sought to support the fascist gangsters in Rhodesia. In this way they could isolate them, inhibit Imperialism from coming to their aid, and call on all the anti-fascist states to seal off Verwoerd from interfering in Rhodesia, as well as forbid the NATO powers from interfering through Portugal.

What the Rhodesian situation has brought into sharp focus is the vital necessity for all those engaged in the struggle for liberation to know, first, exactly what it is they are fighting for. If they do, they are in a position to choose their allies. They would not make the mistake of reposing their faith in those who are, in the final analysis, their real enemies. Secondly, they must know whom they are fighting against. The enemy is not always the obvious one. They must be aware of all the political and economic ramifications of Imperialism. I said before that Imperialism thinks on a global scale. We, too, have to learn to see a given situation or a particular event as related to other events elsewhere in the world.

Once more I repeat: Africa is on the move. We are witnessing the unfolding of a revolutionary process on a continental scale. Indeed this process is taking place throughout the world, in the continents of Asia, Latin America and in Africa.

The events in Rhodesia have helped to hasten this process in Africa. Smith has set in motion a train of events, the scope and power of which he has no conception. It is in this light that the Rhodesian crisis should be

viewed. It becomes meaningful when it is seen as part of that whole complex of the struggles and conflicts in all of Southern Africa.