

designed to place effective control with the Colonial Office. But if leaders can be found who will stooge to, and do the dirty work of the imperialists, then 'advanced' constitutions will follow."

If the Gold Coast Government's White Paper should be credited with any seriousness as a genuine document on independence for the Gold Coast, the negotiations during the "transitional period" should be made clear.

The demand of the Gold Coast is that full independence should be achieved right now. It must be independence without strings. The masses and the youth of the Gold Coast have been paying dearly for this independence and they are not prepared to accept selling out of any kind.

---

# **THE ROLE OF CAPITALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY**

## **First Attacks of Colonialism on African Society**

**By H. LAWSON**

**The first two articles in this series appeared in previous issues  
of LIBERATION**

### **BOER CATTLE STEALING**

The wealth which enabled the nations of Western Europe to develop capitalist industry was to a large extent drawn from the peoples of Asia, Africa and America by the most ruthless methods of robbery and violence. We have illustrated some of these methods of "primitive accumulation" by quoting some of the practices of the Dutch East India Company (See Liberation, Feb. 1956), and we have also indicated how the white settlers at the Cape applied these methods to the Hottentots whom they robbed of their land and their cattle. (See Liberation, No. 17.)

The economy of the Boers was of such a primitive nature that theft constituted almost the only means known to them of increasing their herds. When the trekboers reached the eastern parts of the Cape towards the latter part of the eighteenth century they turned their attention to the vast herds and lands possessed by the African people. These they tried to obtain by the same methods of robbery, treachery and violence that had defeated the Hottentot tribes.

In 1770 the boundary of the Colony was officially established a'

the Gamtoos River where Africans and Boers had met fifteen years previously. But the Boers soon invaded the African lands in search of loot. Early in 1780 two Commandos made a cattle raid and murdered many defenceless people. In 1781 a Commando took 5,330 cattle in two months. In 1788 a Graaff-Reinet official wrote to Cape Town that "some of the inhabitants here have already for a long time wished to pick a quarrel with this nation (the Xosas) in order that, were it possible, they might make a good loot, since they are always casting covetous eyes on the cattle the Kaffirs possess." In 1793 they obtained their object. The first Commando of that year took 1,800 cattle and murdered the owners, another Commando took 2,000 cattle and murdered 40 people, while the third and largest Commando under the "Liberal" Maynier took no fewer than 10,000 cattle and also 180 women and children as prisoners for slave labour. The Boers told outsiders that they were merely recovering cattle that had been stolen from them; but that truthfulness was not one of the Boers' outstanding characteristics may be seen from the fact that the total number of cattle shown on their tax returns was only about one-eighth of the number they claimed to have lost.

It is an absurd distortion to describe these cattle raids as "wars." As a matter of fact, in these "wars" there were no Boer casualties! The methods of the Boers were those of the sneak thief; their cowardice was as great as their appetite for loot. Thus Maynier writes of the Boer Commandos: "I have always found that when there was not a considerable number of Hottentots with them to be placed in the front, and the first exposed to danger, they never succeeded. An instance in proof of this may even now be seen in a late Commando, to form which 300 inhabitants were summoned but of whom only 80 appeared, and according to the accounts no more than 12 ventured to attack a kraal, mostly filled with women and children."

In 1799 war did break out. The oppressed Hottentot servants of the Boers threw off their yoke and made common cause with the Africans. On the causes of the war Governor Young writes in 1800 "that neither the Hottentots nor the Caffers have been the aggressors but the savage and oppressive conduct of the Dutch Boers, more uncivilised even than the others."

The decisive action of the war was fought in June 1799, when a Commando of 300 Boers under van Rensburg was defeated by 150 Xosas and Hottentots on the east bank of the Sundays River. After this the Boers fled in panic. However, they tried to make up for their military defeats by redoubling their efforts to rob the Africans of their cattle. In 1802 they captured no less than 15,800 in a single year. In these efforts they were soon decisively supported by a power infinitely greater than their own, the power of British Imperialism, which had reasons of its own for desiring the destruction of African society.

## **INTERVENTION OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM**

At the time she gained possession of the Cape Britain was engaged in a life and death struggle with her great rival, France. Britain had lost

a large part of her American colonies as a result of the successful war of liberation which some of the latter had waged. The centre of the British Empire now lay firmly in the East. Britain's eastern trade increased more than three times between 1790 and 1817. It was the necessity of protecting these commercial interests that determined British policy at the Cape in the first place.

In their occupation of the Cape the British rulers found themselves with an alien and largely hostile population. In order to deal with this situation they adopted a policy which was a typical mixture of oppressive and conciliatory measures. Politically, they destroyed what little freedom had existed in the Company days. The British Governor had far more autocratic powers than his predecessors, and the abolition of the Heemraden meant the end of any semblance of democracy for the white settlers.

Having stifled the possibility of any political opposition the Colonial rulers proceeded to win over certain sections of the white community. They abolished the trade restrictions that still operated and so ensured the support of the local budding capitalists. At the same time the frontier boers were helped against the Africans. By these means Britain sought to create a social basis for her colonial rule among a section of the local inhabitants.

As far as the African population was concerned, the new rulers brought calamities compared to which the cattle raids of the Boers had been mere flea bites. In the first place, the British army was not composed of cowardly cattle thieves but of ruthless and dehumanised mercenaries whose profession was destruction. Moreover, they appeared in their thousands where the Boers had mustered only a few hundred. When they attacked the African people the damage they were able to inflict was tremendous. In the very first campaign against chief Ndlambe 23,000 cattle were taken, but this was only a foretaste of greater horrors to come.

In any case, cattle were a subsidiary consideration with the British. They were more interested in trade, for example. As British industry expanded British Imperialism had to find markets for British manufactures. Thus trade fairs for the African trade were started in Grahamstown in 1817. The volume of this trade gives some idea of the economic wealth still commanded by the African people at this time. Thus, in one seven-month period in the eighteen-twenties for which records are available the Africans exported 15,000 skins to Grahamstown.

The effects of this trade on African society will be more fully *discussed in our next article*; at present let us *merely note* that it introduced a completely new factor into the relations between African tribes. Thus Gaika, for example, was given a sort of trade monopoly by the British which he used for his own enrichment. It was this which drew upon him such fierce retribution. The fight against Gaika was not just a "tribal squabble"; it was a struggle against a new force that was fast tearing the fabric of African society to shreds.

Another British interest was in African land. While the African people were still strong, land was obtained by all sorts of trickery, but later, when their strength had been broken, simple annexation was

resorted to. After the end of the Napoleonic War in 1815 the British began to look around for space on which to dump people whose livelihood had disappeared in the great economic depression that followed the war. The frontier regions of the Cape seemed to offer possibilities, so the Africans were persuaded to evacuate a strip of territory on the grounds that it was to be a "neutral" belt between the Colony and themselves.

This seemed to be a proposal in the interests of peace, but, no sooner had the Africans departed, than Governor Somerset writes to his superior: ". . . the country thus ceded is as fine a portion of ground as is to be found in any part of the world and . . . might perhaps be worthy of Your Lordship's consideration with a view to systematic colonization." His Lordship was only too agreeable, and so in 1820 the British settlers were dumped in the "neutral" territory, now called "ceded" territory. The indignation of the African people at this piece of trickery was great—they were not yet accustomed to "civilized" methods of statecraft.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF COMMODITY PRODUCTION IN AGRICULTURE**

The first third of the nineteenth century was marked by the first substantial accumulation of capital within the Cape Colony. The reasons for this development lay in the robbery of the wealth of the African people, the expenditure of the large British garrison (war profiteering was common), the increase of activity at the port of Cape Town and the opening up of new export markets for Cape products in England. The capital accumulated could only be invested in trade or agriculture. The former was a limited field, and so we find in this period the first development of a new type of capitalistic agriculture directed towards the production of commodities for local and overseas markets. This new type of agriculture slowly replaced the methods of slavery and nomad pastoralism. Its great opportunity came with the expansion of the British textile industry which created an insatiable demand for such raw materials as wool. Between 1822 and 1862 wool exports from the Cape increased from 20,000 lbs. to 25 million lbs.

The new type of farmer soon began to make profits which showed his system to be a much superior form of exploitation than slavery. For example, a handbook printed in 1868 reproduces the accounts of two representative wool farmers, one showing a profit of £2,860 in three years from an initial investment of £1,250, and the other a profit of £8,065 in seven years. This was a big change from the days when many white farmers hardly knew the use of money.

But to make these profits the farmers needed an army of wage labourers to exploit. This labour was needed not only on the farms themselves, but also on the roads and docks, for without these the wool could not be exported. Now, at the beginning of the new period there existed in the Cape no free wage labourers suitable for capitalist exploitation. The period covering roughly the second quarter of the

nineteenth century was therefore given over to the **creation** of such a class of labourers, for without this the accumulated capital was as unproductive as buried treasure. In order to make a profit the capitalist must use some of his money to purchase the labour power of workers who must sell their labour power in order to live. Where the capitalists do not find such a class of workers in existence they will do all in their power to create one.

In the Cape there were three distinct sources of labour power which might be converted into reservoirs of wage labour; these were, the Hottentot serfs on the farms of the trekboers and of other backward elements, the slaves and the Africans beyond the border. The first group were the smallest and the most easy to deal with, the last group were the most difficult but promised the greatest gain.

The conversion of the Hottentot serfs into wage labourers was completed by the well-known Ordinance 50 of 1828. This "freed" them from their dependence on the more backward farmers in order to deliver them into the hands of the new capitalistic farmers who could teach the trekboers a thing or two when it came to the exploitation of labour. The slaves were similarly freed a few years later, an event which was immediately followed by a tremendous wave of prosperity at the Cape. The point was that the dissolution of an outworn system had set free new economic forces of tremendous power.

Reactionary historians who long for the good old days of slavery have claimed that the freeing of the slaves was a great economic blow for the colonists. But any examination of the economic statistics of the period will show exactly the opposite to have been the case. Even the Nationalist Prof. Schumann is forced reluctantly to accept this fact. Of course, slavery was not abandoned for philanthropic reasons, either at the Cape or anywhere else. This step had become an economic necessity in the era of industrial capitalism. Slavery is a most inefficient method of production, and the short-sighted methods of the big West Indian slave plantations were seriously threatening the profits of British capitalists. In the early years of the nineteenth century sugar exports from the West Indies greatly decreased owing to the exhaustion of the soil, and hundreds of sugar planters went bankrupt. The freeing of the slaves with liberal compensation came as a welcome financial relief to many of them.

The amount of wage labour that became available in the Cape Colony as a result of the alteration in the status of serfs and slaves was insufficient for the growing needs of the capitalist farmers. The African territories therefore had to be converted into labour reservoirs. This process we will deal with in our next article.

(The fourth and last article in this series will appear in "Liberation" shortly.)