

## AFRICA AND THE WEST

THE recent passage of the Vice-President of the United States through parts of Africa and his presence at the independence celebrations of Ghana signal the increasing importance of Africa's millions, their attitudes and aspirations, in the shaping of to-morrow's world. The peoples of Africa have been known to the West, with profit, for centuries now. That they also have opinions to which regard should be paid was only yesterday discovered. But then the scramble for raw materials and markets between the West and the Soviet Union, the whole delirious rush for alliances, has given to the countries of Africa and to the riches inside them a luminous value even the most near-sighted politically can see. With great reluctance the West has learned at last that whoever may own them at present, it is the peoples of Africa who are ultimately in possession of the countries of Africa. And with Russia piping now in the Middle East, the opinions of these peoples have suddenly been invested with an urgent significance.

This re-assessment of Africa by the Western world has come only just in time. For were the West to go into forced liquidation now, it is improbable that there would exist enough goodwill to constitute an asset. And the world has arrived at a point where good-will is becoming both more profitable and permanent than possessions. True Ghana has been given, and Nigeria promised, independence. But in Kenya the Africans have mere squatter's rights in the country of their birth, the title-deeds are as firmly held as ever in the hands of the settlers. The Nyasas will not easily forget the florid hypocrisy with which they were forced into Federation for their bodies' sake. In Angola and Mozambique the clanking of the labour gangs at work shuts out the shouting in Accra. And all over the Continent the symbols of Western civilization are the pass and the pick-up van of the South African Government, rule by baton and sten-gun and the tight-clenched vote.

The West has a great deal to live down, as much of it in the present as in the past. It also has a great deal to live up to. For in its shrill solicitation of Africa, the Western world pictures itself as a city of only skyscrapers and parks, without its downtown tenement houses and its shacks on the other side of the railway line. It rejoices in the liberties it claims all its citizens

enjoy and sanctifies before all the world the enjoyment. And because of this especially, it chastises in its newspapers and over its radios the tyranny of Russia, the many moral mutilations of the Communist world.

No doubt what the West says of Russia is unfortunately true. But its effect upon the peoples of Africa is considerably diluted when the West shows itself as eager as the regime it castigates to deny men their freedom and then suppress the agitation that inevitably follows. Africa would more readily admire the righteousness of the West if the West acted more by example and less by abuse. As it is, the Africans in Kenya may be appalled by the savagery of the Red Army in Hungary. But they are still paddling in the shallows of an Emergency which suppressed much more than the Mau Mau it set out to crush, without eradicating any of the evils that produced the Mau Mau in the first place. And in Kenya they are much less aware of the delicate distinctions to be drawn between terror in Europe and terror at home than those in London and New York to whom Africa is still a dark Continent in which dark things are expected to take place. The Africans in Angola and the Congo are no more free to choose their own governors than the people of East Germany, and the Africans in South Africa are too busy keeping themselves merely hungry and out of the hands of the police to give much of their attention to street riots in Poland or the silent terror in Roumania.

It is questionable whether one really does choose the devil one knows before the devil one doesn't. And however stupid in the long run it may be, Africa can hardly be blamed if in her despair she turns from the West she knows to the Russia she doesn't. Where no liberty exists anyway, the promise of enough to eat carries its own halo. Above all, many Africans feel that they have nothing to lose. And assuredly, for the Africans in South Africa to-day, things could hardly be much worse than they are, and it would be an original tyranny indeed that could manufacture fresh forms of oppression for them to endure.

The evidence of Western civilization stands stark before Africa's eyes. It is the evidence that must be changed. And fondling babies and distributing autographed pens will not accomplish this. America may think that she speaks to Africa in the voice of the festive Mr. Nixon. But she speaks to the Africans of Mozambique in the voice of Portugal and to the

Africans of the Union in the voice of the Nationalist Government. And as Africa hears the West so she will judge it. Africa has hungered long enough for her liberty. Her appetite will not be satisfied by puffy expressions of sympathy and formal proclamations of an ever formless intention.

America should be in no doubt over what to do, she need only remember her Declaration of Independence and the roots of her pride. She must persuade those colonial powers over whom she exercises so enormous an influence to deliver up their colonies to self-government as quickly as possible. And if she cannot persuade them, then she must compel them, by assisting with her money and prestige the national movements working for independence and democracy throughout the Continent. If she refuses to do so and continues to sit complacently in the dress-circle of events, waiting for the winner to be declared before taking sides, she may find herself soon without function or influence in Africa, the leader of the West who having ventured nothing, loses all.

Britain is already a participant and she has the choice of continuing to fight with the certainty of being beaten out of Africa in the end, or of giving up her claims now and surrendering the territories she controls, both directly and indirectly, to the peoples entitled to have power over them. If she does so now, she will in very truth earn for herself the name of a great power, for she will do not only what will ultimately be in her best interests, but what in the final sure judgment of mankind will be recognized as right. For her, greatness is so easy, she need hardly stretch out to seize it. And it is surely more important to be great than to look it for a little while or be called so. That indeed will be the ultimate lesson of Imperialism, the meaninglessness of a colour on the map. And if Britain discovers nothing else but this, she will have discovered all.

Africa will not be bewildered by decorated decoys into believing herself free if she is not so in fact. What she wants and what she must have is the right to govern herself as she pleases, to choose as she wishes between Socialism and Capitalism, Christianity and Islam, Order and Chaos. Nothing less will suffice, nothing less will, in the end, be granted her.

There have been so many denials, so much deceit. There is hardly time enough left to wipe out the disgrace. Yet there is time.

If the West will now give Africa her freedom, her right to

sit and not only serve at the table of nations, whatever the immediate loss in power and riches, it will build into its own future the security of an Africa faithful to the ideals and practice of democracy, an Africa proud and glad in her liberty and strong to uphold it. But if the Union is permitted to continue her orgy of oppression, if France, Belgium, Portugal, Britain and America pay more regard to their Company reports than to the struggles and ambitions of men, there will grow up in Africa a fear and a hatred of the West and all things Western that only a century of flaming enmity will be able to cremate. For the sake of those whites who have made Africa their home, for the sake of the blacks whose home Africa has always been, for the sake in the end of the whole bitterly divided world, Africa must be given in peace its right to be free.

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*It is with deep regret that we record the death of two of our Sponsors — Joyce Cary, the English novelist, and Willard S. Townsend, the American Labour leader. We are glad and grateful that they should have found it possible to associate themselves so closely with 'Africa South'. Let this be our tribute therefore, the magazine itself, which was born out of that same deep love of right that gave to both men the body of their strength and their accomplishment.*