

March, 1970

SHARPEVILLE: DEATH BLOW TO NON-VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

March 21, 1960, marked the end of non-violent resistance to oppression in South Africa. On that day Africans - men, women, and children - gathered for a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville to burn their "pass books." The white police moved in with armored cars and machine guns and fired on the crowd. Over 60 people were killed, and many more were wounded. Most of those shot were shot in the back.

The pass books are symbols of the government's policy to control every aspect of a person's life - where he can work, what kind of job he can hold, where he can live, whom he can marry, where he can travel, and what he can say or write. For violation of the pass laws or any other law in South Africa, a person can be held in prison for as long as 180 days without trial. Since 1960 oppression in South Africa has become even more brutal. The pervasive fear among South African whites is manifested in high protective fences around homes and elaborate alarm systems. Under the Suppression of Communism Act there is no freedom of speech or press. Books, movies, art, and anything which suggests that black and white people just might be able to live together in an equal person-to-person relationship is banned. This is understandable, because the South African whites form only 19% of the total population. South Africa is a rich land, and the whites who control it are not about to give it up.

Non-violence had been the policy of the African National Congress for fifty years, under the leadership of such men as the late Nobel Peace Prize winner, Chief Albert Luthuli. Time after time attempts to bring about peaceful change in South Africa were repressed with new laws. The Sharpeville massacre was not the only one of its kind, but it brought to the attention of the world the true nature of apartheid, South Africa's policy of "separate development."

In the decade since Sharpeville the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress, and other banned political parties have mobilized for guerrilla warfare in South Africa. But South Africa forms only part of the total picture of oppression in Southern Africa.

MINORITY RULE IN RHODESIA (ZIMBABWE): THE FINAL BREAK

On March 1, 1970 Rhodesia declared itself a republic. This action marked the final breaking of official ties with Britain and symbolized the intention of 220,000 white settlers to hold prisoner the 5 million Africans in that country. Since the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, repressive and discriminatory legislation has increased in Rhodesia (known to the Africans as Zimbabwe). The "Property Owners' Protection Act," the "Municipal Amendment Act," and the "Constitution Amendment Act" are examples of the laws which restrict the use of schools and hospitals on racial grounds, segregate public facilities, and put the power of appointment and dismissal of chiefs in the hands of the Minister of Internal Affairs. The new Constitution, adopted in June, 1969, would, in Prime Minister Ian Smith's own words, "sound the death knell of the principle of majority rule".

PORTUGAL'S COLONIES

Mozambique and Angola form another piece in the Southern Africa picture. In these two huge Portuguese colonies, there are even fewer Europeans than there are in Zimbabwe. Portugal itself is an underdeveloped nation, and her presence in Africa is sustained chiefly by her powerful NATO allies. What is more, only the small power elite in Portugal benefits from the fruits of colonial exploitation, while the majority of the Portuguese people are virtually powerless. Portugal justifies her domination of Mozambique and Angola (as well as tiny Guinea-Bissau in West Africa) by considering them "overseas provinces," integral parts of Portugal itself. Thus, they make no apologies for using American weapons against the freedom fighters in their African colonies.

SOUTHWEST AFRICA (NAMIBIA): ILLEGALLY RULED BY SOUTH AFRICA

Namibia, as it is called by Africans, completes the scene of European-dominated Southern Africa. About the size of Texas and Louisiana combined, this country has a population of about 650,000, 84% of which is African. A great proportion of the land is desert or semi-desert.

Namibia is legally an international territory which was mandated to South Africa by the League of Nations. In 1966 the U.N. General Assembly terminated South Africa's mandate, but the latter has refused to comply with the ruling. Namibia has thus become virtually a fifth province of South Africa, though 84% of its population has had no voice in deciding which way the country should go. Needless to say, South Africa rules Namibia with a brutal hand, for it is of vital strategic importance to her in her battle with the free countries to the north. Just across the Zambezi River from Zambia lies the Namibian Caprivi Strip, on which is based a large South African offensive military installation. No wonder South Africa is determined to keep Namibia.

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

On his recent trip through Africa, Secretary of State William Rogers pledged support of Zambia and the other independent African countries in their struggle against white racism in Southern Africa. As has been official U.S. policy for years, Rogers verbally condemned the minority regimes and called for a search for peaceful change in Southern Africa.

But the declarations of intent are meaningless and hypocritical. Despite policy statements, U.S. bombs are being dropped on villages in Zambia (yes, Zambia), Angola, and Mozambique. The U.S. helps to train Portuguese soldiers in guerrilla warfare techniques and maintains a missile tracking station and military and diplomatic interaction at all levels in South Africa. U.S. companies continue to increase their investment in Southern Africa, profiting from cheap African labor. When the liberation movements start making substantial progress in Rhodesia and South Africa, whose side will the U.S. be on? Will we live up to our verbal pledges, or will we again go in to protect our economic and military interests, as defined by our previous involvement, alongside those Southern African whites who claim to be the "last bastion of the free world against communism"?

(Distributed by the Madison Area Committee on Southern Africa)