

A DECADE OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE

Ross K. Baker

Ten years ago, in the space of eight months, between January 1 and August 17, 1960, sixteen independent states emerged in Africa. No previous period of history had seen such an upsurge of new sovereignty. For Americans, with their habitually peripheral and fantasy-laden view of the so-called Dark Continent, the emergence of states with such exotic names as Mali, the Ivory Coast, Chad, and Nigeria was regarded with a puzzlement and imperfect understanding which has prevailed for a decade. Vast tracks of desert, savannah, and rain-forest became states equal, in theory at least, with the United States, France, and England. If some of these new states were unprepared to deal with independence, the United States was similarly unprepared to grasp the full thrust of this spate of state creation. Our experience with African states was limited to the two historically independent ones—Liberia and Ethiopia. The former was a creation of American paternalism and a desire to be rid of freed slaves, and the latter an isolated and autocratically ruled Christian kingdom at the headwaters of the Nile. Their unique conditions would provide little in terms of enabling this country to cope with an entirely new breed of state—the post-colonial country with its problems of national identity, bewilderingly diverse populations, and poorly balanced economies.

It is still impossible to say whether it was fortuitous or irrelevant that the most intense period of decolonization in Africa coincided with America's most active period of international commitment and its concomitant outpouring of concern and material resources. A great deal of American awareness of the emergence of Africa stemmed from the fear that Africa would be a political vacuum into which could pour hordes of Soviet and Chinese personnel bent upon converting Africa's eleven million square miles and 250 million people into a Marxist-Leninist preserve. Little of the emotional and material interest lavished on Africa in the past ten years by the great powers was prompted by any particular desire to build up Africa for its own sake. Rather, the inclination to aid the continent was a sort of auction with almost unlimited bidding, in which allegiances and

orientations were sought for the price of a hydroelectric plant or a highway. When the Africans astutely took from both sides, they were condemned in Congress for their shabby duplicity. The presence of a Chinese trade-mission or a Soviet team of engineers was enough to send American ambassadors into paroxysms of fear and prompted them to call for phalanxes of Peace Corps volunteers or military training missions to nullify the hostile presence. This sort of ambassadorial paranoia was well-expressed by Ambassador William Atwood, our envoy in Guinea and later Kenya, whose frenzied activity seemed to be aimed at smiting Communist influence root and branch in the two countries to which he was accredited. Our ambassador in Gabon, Charles Darlington, saw himself as fulfilling much the same role in regard to the residual French presence in their former colony. Somehow, exclusivity of assistance was seen as the principal American goal in countries which could well have profited by aid from all developed countries.

Our early perceptions of Africa were also conditioned by a kind of amused annoyance toward African leaders who spent their money the way they wanted to spend it rather than in a manner deemed suitable by the United States. Much of the alleged wrongheadedness of African leaders in misdirecting their expenditures stemmed from an inclination to lavish money on "prestige projects." Although it is true that a great deal was spent on what Westerners would regard as non-economic and symbolic projects, the pathetic lack of national symbols made it necessary for the African leaders to invest in the trappings of national pride and provide objects of reverence other than those left behind by the Europeans. Some of these symbolic projects were foisted upon African leaders by predatory Europeans sensing a chance to make a quick killing. Much of the capital construction at Tema Harbor in Ghana, for example, is evidence of this lamentable practice. Nonetheless, a few costly public buildings are small enough price to pay for countries desperately trying to create a relatively cohesive nationality in the face of the most incredible ethnic particularism.

It is pre-eminently ethnic particularism that has caused so much grief for Africa in its first independent decade, and it is also Europe's most per-

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sistent legacy. Ethnic particularism brought Nigeria to the brink of disaster; it compounded the agony of the Congo; it pits Arab against Black in the Sudan, and in Chad it divides Muslim from Christian and animist. Lack of resources and poverty are only a small part of the problems that bedevil Africa. If all African states were richly endowed with natural resources, the conflict of ethnic groups could still drive them apart. There is no better example of this than Nigeria, one of the most wealthy states in Africa, whose two-year civil war was, if anything, exacerbated by the quest of competing ethnic groups for the enormous oil reserves of the former Eastern region. Neither Nigeria's travail nor, essentially, that of the Congo, was precipitated by cold war rivalries, although they served in both cases to exacerbate it.

It would be foolish, moreover, to read into the clash of peoples in Africa a strong ideological bias. This regrettably occurred in the case of the Nigerian Civil War, in which Biafra was depicted all too often as the repository of Christian values and democratic inclinations and the Nigerian Federation was presented as an unholy alliance of feudal Moslem emirs, pro-Soviet politicians and opportunistic army officers. This may comport with our quasi-Manichaeic view of Africa but it most surely does not comport with reality. It is not inconceivable that we could have become involved militarily in Nigeria if we were not otherwise distracted in Vietnam. Indeed, much of the recent decline in our interest in Africa can be attributed to our Asian involvement. Where we formerly saw Africa as a possible realm of cold war conflict, we now tend to reduce its political saliency across the board and revert to a posture of disengagement and retrenchment. Rather than merely detaching our ideological proclivities from our overall perceptions of the continent, we have tended to pull out altogether. Using such justifications as the Korry and Petersen Reports to mitigate our prior commitment, the U.S. can rationalize its limited assistance through a condemnation of bilateral aid.

What is even more disturbing about America's ten years of experience with independent Africa is that we have probably never gotten to the heart of the issues which affect Africans deeply. Foremost among these issues is the continuance of overbearing and defiant white minority rule in Southern Africa. The Department of State is afflicted by unusual complacency in this matter and, unaccountably, there is a widely held belief that we are doing all that we can to combat the excesses of white rule. Although we have acceded to the various embargoes placed on

Rhodesia and claim to deny defense support to South Africa, we tend to believe that somehow the repressive and minoritarian societies south of the Zambesi River will in the future roll over and play dead and allow biracial politics to emerge. We take our cues from those African leaders who are most vulnerable to the white governments and eagerly seize upon any evidence of Black African accommodation with Pretoria and Salisbury.

A classic example of this grasping at straws is the effusive acclaim by Secretary of State Rogers for the Lusaka Manifesto. Issued in 1969 by heads of East and Central-African states, the Manifesto called for the independence of the Portuguese "overseas territories" and for racial equality in South Africa and Rhodesia. The clear purpose of the document was to drive a wedge between the Portuguese on the one hand and the Rhodesians and South Africans on the other. It was clearly a tactic to divide the opposition, but Mr. Rogers chose to interpret its accommodating tone as a tempering of African militancy on the subject. If there were any realistic hope that the rigors of *apartheid* would be mitigated by the manifesto, some American optimism might have been justified. Unfortunately, the Smith and Vorster Governments prefer to play their own double game of attempting to split off vulnerable African states such as Malawi and, to a diminishing extent, Zambia. The former continues to live at the mercy of the white governments and the latter is well on its way to achieving some relief from its vulnerable geographic location by the construction of the Tanzam railroad and the attainment of hydro-electric facilities not tied to Rhodesia's power grid.

By choosing to read moderation and accommodation into the statements of African leaders, American foreign policy leadership seems to feel secure in pursuing two basically contradictory goals: maintaining a highly lucrative relationship with white Southern Africa and keeping the good will of the states of Black Africa. As the Black states begin to sort themselves out and find themselves increasingly able to pursue a more actively militant stance toward the white-ruled governments, the incompatibility of American goals will become more manifest. In the long run, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot have both Nyerere and Smith nor can we have Kaunda and Vorster. We must decide which men are more important to our long-term political goals.

As our material assistance to Black Africa diminishes and becomes more politically diffuse through multilateralization and internationalization of grants, and our trade with South Africa reaches the one billion dollar mark, the discrepancy between profes-

CUBA: A NEW CHURCH IN A NEW SOCIETY

Few reports by Northern observers of the churches and Christians in Cuba appear as objective and forthright as that which appeared in New World Outlook's special October issue on Latin America and the Caribbean. The author, Thomas Anthony, is a Canadian clergyman who has recently visited the island.

sion and performance in American diplomacy becomes more patent. There appears also to be little recognition of an emerging constituency among black Americans which is becoming increasingly aware not only of Africa in general but of American policy in particular. As cohesion and awareness develop within this group, the desirability of our being South Africa's second largest trading partner might have to be reassessed. This reappraisal, however, seems unlikely. U.S. policy towards the area seems more inclined to respond to African sensitivity and black American awareness by empty symbolic gestures, such as closing our consulate in Salisbury, and by hollow platitudes, such as vain appeals for tolerance. We are, it appears, far from attempting to disengage foreign investment from racist regimes.

Although it is sad to contemplate, we appear to have learned little from our decade of experience with independent Africa. We have even failed to manipulate symbols satisfactorily. Our abstention last December on a United Nations resolution condemning the Portuguese bombardment of Senegalese villages may have done more to show where we stand than our approbation for the Lusaka Manifesto which we manifestly failed to comprehend. We pay far more deference to a moribund NATO alliance and its self-serving constituency than we do to all of Africa. The primacy of Europe goes unchallenged at the State Department and, indeed, it sometimes seems that we continue to defer to the former colonial powers on matters concerning Africa.

The United States has legitimate interests in Africa which are not served by disengagement and retrenchment. Nor are they served by making U.S. foreign policy the handmaiden of American corporations who value profit over principle. Although it may well be true that a massive black-white cataclysm is years off in Africa, it is the prudent state which assesses its options beforehand. Our present policy, if pursued, will probably result in a closing off of many of the possible options. In that event, we may contemplate the prospect of facing an implacably hostile Africa with all that implies in regard to our position in the world.

There is surely an intermediate area between the frenzied bargaining for cold war allegiances which characterized the early 1960's and the "benign neglect" which marks the present policy. Failure to support black, independent African states in their period of consolidation is an abdication of a necessary and legitimate American role. This abdication is compounded when we make it appear that our only abiding interests in Africa are directed at sustaining the reactionary governments of the South.

"Cuba is a socialist country. This is historical fact. We, believers in Jesus Christ, parishioners and pastors of the Church, live in Cuba, and we will continue to live in this beautiful land. These are two real facts."

"Like it or not, the Revolution is here and the building of the New Society involves us as the Christian Church. The Church, despite the desire of many both from the Marxist side and from the Christian side to 'dis-incarnate' or 'de-secularize' it, is a Church which is in the world. It cannot separate itself from the intimate relation it has with the world, because the world is the reason for the existence of the Church."

These statements by two leaders of the Church in Cuba today epitomize the honest dialectic within which Christians in Cuba are living their faith today. It is at once an inspiring and a profoundly sobering experience to observe that tension.

Church life in Cuba continues in most of the traditional ways: Sunday morning worship, Sunday school or Bible classes, and young people and adult groups meeting in church buildings or in smaller groups in homes. Because of the general Cuban austerity in non-essential items (every effort is directed at basic national economic development), church publications are fewer in number and made of lower quality materials; but they are published and circulated regularly. There is complete freedom of worship.

There was nothing particularly inspiring about any of this—the Church functions were not unlike those in the U.S.A. or elsewhere in the Caribbean. Indeed my recurring thought was, how foreign, traditional and unsuitable to the new Cuban revolutionary society so much of Western Church tradition and organization seems.

In a still-developing Marxist society whose gospel