

## IV

### THE LABOUR VIEW OF MIDDLE AFRICA

I was recently privileged to hear the views of one of those titled and influential ladies--with a general education at about the fifth standard level, plus a little French, German, Italian, and music--who do so much to make our England what it is at the present time, upon the Labour idea of an international control of "tropical" Africa. She was loud and derisive about the "ignorance" of Labour. "What can they know about foreign politics?" she said, with gestures to indicate her conception of them.

I was moved to ask her what she would do about Africa. "Leave it to Lord Robert!" she said, leaning forward impressively. "Leave it to the people who know."

Unhappily I share the evident opinion of Labour that we are not blessed with any profoundly wise class of people who have definite knowledge and clear intentions about Africa, that these "people who know" are mostly a pretentious bluff, and so, in spite of a very earnest desire to take refuge in my "ignorance" from the burthen of thinking about African problems, I find myself obliged, like most other people, to do so. In the interests of our country, our children, and the world, we common persons have to have opinions about these matters. A muddle-up in Africa this year may kill your son and mine in the course of the next

decade. I know this is not a claim to be interested in things African, such as the promoter of a tropical railway or an oil speculator has; still it is a claim. And for the life of me I cannot see what is wrong about the Labour proposals, or what alternative exists that can give even a hope of peace in and about Africa.

The gist of the Labour proposal is an international control of Africa between the Zambesi and the Sahara. This has been received with loud protests by men whose work one is obliged to respect, by Sir Harry, Johnston, for example, and Sir Alfred Sharpe, and with something approaching a shriek of hostility by Mr. Cunninghame Graham. But I think these gentlemen have not perhaps given the Labour proposal quite as much attention as they have spent upon the details of African conditions. I think they have jumped to conclusions at the mere sound of the word "international." There have been some gross failures in the past to set up international administrations in Africa and the Near East. And these gentlemen think at once of some new Congo administration and of nondescript police forces commanded by cosmopolitan adventurers. (See Joseph Conrad's "Out-post of Civilization.") They think of internationalism with greedy Great Powers in the background outside the internationalized area, intriguing to create disorder and mischief with ideas of an ultimate annexation. But I doubt if such nightmares do any sort of justice to the Labour intention.

And the essential thing I would like to point out to these authorities upon African questions is that not one of them even hints at any other formula which covers the broad essentials of the African riddle.

What are these broad essentials? What are the ends that must be achieved if Africa is not to continue a festering sore in the body of mankind?

The first most obvious danger of Africa is the militarization of the black. General Smuts has pointed this out plainly. The negro makes a good soldier; he is hardy, he stands the sea, and he stands cold. (There was a negro in the little party which reached the North Pole.) It is absolutely essential to the peace of the world that there should be no arming of the negroes beyond the minimum necessary for the policing of Africa. But how is this to be watched and prevented if there is no overriding body representing civilization to say "Stop" to the beginnings of any such militarization? I do not see how Sir Harry Johnston, Sir Alfred Sharpe, and the other authorities can object to at least an international African "Disarmament Commission" to watch, warn, and protest. At least they must concede that.

But in practice this involves something else. A practical consequence of this disarmament idea must be an effective control of the importation of arms into the "tutelage" areas of Africa. That rat at the dykes of civilization, that ultimate expression of political scoundrelism, the Gun-Runner, has to be kept under and stamped out in Africa as everywhere. A Disarmament Commission that has no forces available to prevent the arms trade will be just another Hague Convention, just another vague, well-intentioned, futile gesture.

And closely connected with this function of controlling the arms trade is another great necessity of Africa under "tutelage," and that is the necessity of a common collective agreement not to demoralize the native population. That demoralization, physical and moral, has already gone far. The whole negro population of Africa is now rotten with diseases introduced by Arabs and Europeans during the last century, and such African statesmen as Sir Harry Johnston are eloquent upon the necessity of saving the blacks--and the baser whites--from the effects of trade gin and similar alluring articles of commerce. Moreover, from Africa there is always something new in the way of tropical diseases, and presently Africa, if we let it continue to fester as it festers now, may produce an epidemic that will stand exportation to a temperate climate. A bacterium that may kill you or me in some novel and disgusting way may even now be developing in some Congo muck-heap. So here is the need for another Commission to look after the Health of Africa. That, too, should be of authority over all the area of "tutelage" Africa. It is no good stamping out infectious disease in Nyasaland while it is being bred in Portuguese East Africa. And if there is a Disarmament Commission already controlling the importation of arms, why should not that body also control at the same time the importation of trade gin and similar delicacies, and direct quarantine and such-like health regulations?

But there is another question in Africa upon which our "ignorant" Labour class is far better informed than our dear old eighteenth-century upper class which still squats so firmly in our Foreign and Colonial Offices, and that is the question of forced labour. We cannot tolerate any possibilities of the enslavement of black Africa. Long ago the United

States found out the impossibility of having slave labour working in the same system with white. To cure that anomaly cost the United States a long and bloody war. The slave-owner, the exploiter of the black, becomes a threat and a nuisance to any white democracy. He brings back his loot to corrupt Press and life at home. What happened in America in the midst of the last century between Federals and Confederates must not happen again on a larger scale between white Europe and middle Africa. Slavery in Africa, open or disguised, whether enforced by the lash or brought about by iniquitous land-stealing, strikes at the home and freedom of every European worker--and Labour knows this.

But how are we to prevent the enslavement and economic exploitation of the blacks if we have no general watcher of African conditions? We want a common law for Africa, a general Declaration of Rights, of certain elementary rights, and we want a common authority to which the black man and the native tribe may appeal for justice. What is the good of trying to elevate the population of Uganda and to give it a free and hopeful life if some other population close at hand is competing against the Baganda worker under lash and tax? So here is a third aspect of our international Commission, as a native protectorate and court of appeal!

There is still a fourth aspect of the African question in which every mother's son in Europe is closely interested, and that is the trade question. Africa is the great source of many of the most necessary raw materials upon which our modern comforts and conveniences depend; more particularly is it the source of cheap fat in the form of palm oil. One of the most powerful levers in the hands of the Allied democracies at

the present time in their struggle against the imperial brigands of Potsdam is the complete control we have now obtained over these essential supplies. We can, if we choose, cut off Germany altogether from these vital economic necessities, if she does not consent to abandon militant imperialism for some more civilized form of government. We hope that this war will end in that renunciation, and that Germany will re-enter the community of nations. But whether that is so or not, whether Germany is or is not to be one of the interested parties in the African solution, the fact remains that it is impossible to contemplate a continuing struggle for the African raw material supply between the interested Powers. Sooner or later that means a renewal of war. International trade rivalry is, indeed, only war--smouldering. We need, and Labour demands, a fair, frank treatment of African trade, and that can only be done by some overriding regulative power, a Commission which, so far as I can see, might also be the same Commission as that we have already hypothesized as being necessary to control the Customs in order to prevent gun-running and the gin trade. That Commission might very conveniently have a voice in the administration of the great waterways of Africa (which often run through the possessions of several Powers) and in the regulation of the big railway lines and air routes that will speedily follow the conclusion of peace.

Now this I take it is the gist of the Labour proposal. This--and no more than this--is what is intended by the "international control of tropical Africa." I do not read that phrase as abrogating existing sovereignties in Africa. What is contemplated is a delegation of authority. Every one should know, though unhappily the badness of our history teaching makes

it doubtful if every one does know, that the Federal Government of the United States of America did not begin as a sovereign Government, and has now only a very questionable sovereignty. Each State was sovereign, and each State delegated certain powers to Washington. That was the initial idea of the union. Only later did the idea of a people of the States as a whole emerge. In the same way I understand the Labour proposal as meaning that we should delegate to an African Commission the middle African Customs, the regulation of inter-State trade, inter-State railways and waterways, quarantine and health generally, and the establishment of a Supreme Court for middle African affairs. One or two minor matters, such as the preservation of rare animals, might very well fall under the same authority.

Upon that Commission the interested nations, that is to say--putting them in alphabetical order--the Africander, the Briton, the Belgian, the Egyptian, the Frenchman, the Italian, the Indian the Portuguese--might all be represented in proportion to their interest. Whether the German would come in is really a question for the German to consider; he can come in as a good European, he cannot come in as an imperialist brigand. Whether, too, any other nations can claim to have an interest in African affairs, whether the Commission would not be better appointed by a League of Free Nations than directly by the interested Governments, and a number of other such questions, need not be considered here. Here we are discussing only the main idea of the Labour proposal.

Now beneath the supervision and restraint of such a delegated Commission I do not see why the existing administrations of tutelage

Africa should not continue. I do not believe that the Labour proposal contemplates any humiliating cession of European sovereignty. Under that international Commission the French flag may still wave in Senegal and the British over the protected State of Uganda. Given a new spirit in Germany I do not see why the German flag should not presently be restored in German East Africa. But over all, standing for righteousness, patience, fair play for the black, and the common welfare of mankind would wave a new flag, the Sun of Africa representing the Central African Commission of the League of Free Nations.

That is my vision of the Labour project. It is something very different, I know, from the nightmare of an international police of cosmopolitan scoundrels in nondescript uniforms, hastening to loot and ravish his dear Uganda and his beloved Nigeria, which distresses the crumpled pillow of Sir Harry Johnston. But if it is not the solution, then it is up to him and his fellow authorities to tell us what is the solution of the African riddle.