

Introduction to Africa

Indira Nath

Which Way Africa by Basil Davidson; Penguin Books, London, 1964; 215 pp, 4s,

MOST people in the West still believe in the myth of colonial rule rescuing the African from savagery, civilising and educating him, giving him democratic institutions, and leaving him economically much better off than it found him. It is refreshing, therefore to find a book about Africa written by a European who is without any illusions about the 'colonial heritage'. In contrast to the general self-congratulation of the colonial powers, the author sums up the position in most countries on achieving independence as one of "acute and worsening poverty*"; he holds the colonial powers largely responsible for it. The destruction of the old ways of life, together with the introduction of the terrible system of migrant labour, reduced the villages to starvation level by depriving them of their labour force; it also produced large insanitary slums in the continually expanding cities. Poverty, famine, disease, illiteracy, a general lowering of the standard of living were the true colonial heritage in Africa. As late as 1951, 51 per cent of the children in Nigeria's Northern Region (a relatively prosperous area) died before the age of six. In 1959, after 40 years of colonial rule, among the 24 million inhabitants of British East Africa there were only 2,000 who would qualify for a school certificate.

None of these appalling conditions could be ascribed to a lack of resources, for the colonial powers there roughly exploited the continent's wealth, particularly its mineral wealth, while denying the African any share in the benefits. The author bears out this contention by quoting figures, gathered by U N in 1958, comparing the actual benefits with those which had been promised from the formation of the Federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland. In 1945 gross mining profits were £ 5,500,000 and African wages were £ 1,400,000 (about 25 per cent of the profits); in 1956 gross profits amounted to £ 80,000,000 while African wages accounted for £6,400,000 (about 8 per cent of the profits). "Federation was evidently rather more beneficial to mining shareholders than to the African miners themselves."

In Africa, then, as in India in 1947, the -challenges to be faced on achieving independence were social and economic. Poverty and disease were rampant and not enough food was grown. The author's view is that the colonial powers — in addition to exploiting the mineral resources of Africa — did further harm by enforcing on the African farmer cash crops such as wine, cotton and cocoa for export to the mother country in place of subsistence farming. In Algeria, for instance, the French increased the vineyard acreage from 4,000 acres in 1830 to 750,000 acres in 1953. The production of cereals there remained stationary after 1880 while population almost trebled, so that although in 1871 the average Algerian had 5 quintals of grain a year by 1940 he had only 2½. Similar instances can be found all over the continent: in Southern Rhodesia much good land went into tobacco farming.

Independence and After

Along with the neglect of food production for the African went the system of cheap African labour. In 1954 a Committee on African Wages in Kenya reported that "approximately one half of the urban workers in private industry, and approximately one quarter of those in the public services, are in receipt of wages insufficient to provide for their basic, essential needs of health, decency and working efficiency". In South Africa, miners received roughly 100s per month in 1951, compared with 63s per month in 1890. Given the fall in the purchasing power of the pound since 1890, "it is obvious that the real wages earned by these hundreds of thousands of men fell steeply during the period".

Besides the massive economic problems, there were other serious problems too. Since the colonial powers had generally worked on the principle of divide and rule, when it came to granting independence some federal system usually had to be devised to satisfy the ambitions of the various factions — usually divided on tribal lines — which had been carefully nurtured by the foreign ruler. In consequence, a country like Kenya with

heavy unemployment and poor resources had to bear the cost of maintaining eight parliaments and governments along with all their inevitable paraphernalia. In Dahomey 60 per cent of the total budget receipts are spent on civil service salaries. The author comes down firmly on the side of a unitary constitution and cites Ghana as an example to be emulated. When Ghana, achieved independence in 1957 her constitution permitted the formation of strong regional governments similar to India's state governments. The author feels that it is to Nkrumah's great credit that he crushed the power of the chiefs who wanted regional autonomy. There is no doubt in the author's mind that had Ghana been allowed to lapse into regionalism, as happened in the Congo, no meaningful economic and social progress could have occurred.

After mentioning some of the main ideas in modern African political thought, including nationalism, neo-colonialism, neutralism and pan-Africanism, the author gives due prominence to the two most important of these, pan-Africanism and neutralism. Far from being a creation of Nkrumah the idea of pan-Africanism originated in America at the turn of the century. The first pan-African Congress was held in 1900; the sixth was held in 1945 in England, attended by many then unknown young Africans, including Kenyatta and Nkrumah. Yet the ideal of Pan-Africanism seemed to have been forgotten by the fifties. It was then revived by Nkrumah and greeted with scepticism by most other leaders. In 1963 the first African Unity Conference was held in Addis Ababa, attended by 32 independent nations who agreed to co-operate politically, economically and socially and to endeavour to secure greater African representation in the various United Nations bodies including the Security Council.

Davidson does not claim that the ideal of pan-Africanism, with its concept of continental integration, has been accepted all over Africa. Many African countries have formed themselves into "blocs" — the notable division being between the ex-French colonies and the ex-British colonies. Yet there is a growing awareness of the benefits

of co-operation. One thing at least unites all the 32 countries, and that is determined opposition to South Africa and Portugal and their practice of *apartheid*. Most of them also follow non-alignment to a greater or lesser degree. The non-alignment was inspired by India. If India could, why not Africa? It is a tribute to India that so many African States have openly acknowledged their debt to the Indian example. Now it is India's turn; if so many 'un-committed' African countries can practise non-alignment with success, cannot also India? Or have our circumstances changed so fundamentally?

To many people, including Indians (if they think about Africa), the general swing to one-party states in Africa is alarming. The author is sympathetic to it, but his arguments remain unconvincing. He says that in each country there was a single political party demanding independence; since no opposition party existed, there was, therefore, no need for one after independence. Julius Nyerere has summed up the justification for one-party rule thus, 'There is no remaining division between 'rulers' and 'ruled', no monopoly of political power by any sectional group, which could give rise to conflicting parties. A multi-party system would, at best, lead to the trivial manoeuvring; of 'opposing* groups whose time is spent in the inflation of artificial differences into some semblance of reality, 'for the sake of preserving democracy''. It may be that the only opposition now is merely a reactionary, secessionist minority in Africa and that *at present* all governments command the full support of all their people, but the denial of the right to form opposition parties can lead eventually only to some kind of totalitarianism. To say "... while Ghana has political prisoners today, she has yet to have her first political execution" hardly provides reasonable support for the author's view that the one-party State in Africa is a democratic institution.

This book is not for those who seek to know anything of the impact of communist powers on Africa. There is scant reference to communism as such and no mention of the involvement of communist powers in the affairs of any African country. It is a fact that no African country had a strong communist party before independence; but it does not follow that there is no communist interest now in the continent. By barely mentioning the

communist powers, the author implies that only America and the ex-colonial powers are in any way interested in what happens in the continent which is certainly not the case.

What is there for Indians to learn from this book? In both India and Africa, there was a failure to realise that political independence was far from being an end in itself, resulting in the lack of a widely shared sense of mission regarding social and economic problems. Some kind of a political elite had emerged under colonial rule, but under the heady influence of freedom, far too many members of this elite — in Africa as in India — sought to take the white man's place and enjoy his privileges. One author wrote in 1963 of "the appalling mismanagement of our public affairs, the lack of sense of direction on the national level, the moral depravity of our society...". This could have been an Indian writ-

ing about India; in fact it is a Nigerian (Gabriel Faqbre) writing about Nigeria. Equally relevant is the eloquent comment of another Nigerian (Tai Solarin) about his country: "One thing is clear in the minds of the young elements in our country — Nigeria is not being effectively governed. Our government is a hydra-headed octopus that veers and backs, depending on the prevailing planetary and political winds, and that oscillates and flounders and hopes, whatever happens, for the best. It is not purposive; it is not logical; it is not disciplined."

Davidson wisely remains content with predicting very little for the future, the title of his book notwithstanding. He is certain that Africa will play an increasingly important role in world affairs — a conclusion that is unexceptionable. This is a well-written little book. Unfortunately its usefulness is somewhat reduced by the absence of a reading list.

The Psychiatry of War

Prabhakar Ghate

Psychiatric Aspects of the Prevention of Nuclear War Report No 57
Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry; New York; 94 pp.

IT is possible to classify, as Kenneth Waltz in his "Man, the State and War" did, the seminal thinkers on the problem of war into three main groups. There were those, like Thomas Hobbes, who regarded war as arising inevitably out of the nature of man. Others attributed war to the intrinsic nature of particular types of state, such as Karl Marx's capitalist-industrial state which had to expand overseas in search of markets, raw materials and investment opportunities, or, to take a more recent example, C Wright Mills' state dominated by the militaristic 'power elite'. A third group regarded war as an inexorable consequence of the nature of 'international society', a society which lacked a common authority with a monopoly of force superior to its constituent units. These diagnoses of the causes of war led to three corresponding sets of solutions. Until fairly recently a book by a psychiatrist would more likely than not have seen the solution to the problem of war as lying exclusively in the rectification of human nature.

The "Psychiatric Aspects of the Prevention of Nuclear War", one of a series of booklets published by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry and prepared by its Commit-

tee on Social Issues, does not fall into this error. It recognizes that the problem of war is multi-faceted. It regards conflict between groups as inevitable, while recognizing that conflict is not synonymous with war. If conflict is to be prevented from taking the shape of war, what is needed instead is a continuing process of non-violent resolution of conflict. This, the report points out, rejecting the uni-dimensional fallacy, will entail profound developments in diplomacy, law, politics, technology, and ideology, *as well as* the modification "of many entrenched complexities of human nature and behaviour ;it both individual and societal levels'.

Having recognized the limitations imposed on psychiatry's contribution by the very nature of the subject and "the need to stay within the limits of psychiatry when seeking to apply its insights and methodologies to broad problem areas", the report goes on to staunchly defend the value of that contribution on these grounds: "the complex nature of these issues requires a pooling of knowledge, collaborative effort, and better communication at various levels between psychiatrists and other behavioural scientists, between behavioural and natural scientists...