

Fighting Words: Toward Freedom in Africa

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Global Research, March 27, 2013

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*In September 1955 an editorial column in *Toward Freedom*, titled “Consent of the Governed,” criticized “the tendency to make the communist issue so big that it obscured all others.” During the recent Bandung conference, which had launched the non-aligned movement, the editor noted that the US press had focused hard on public criticisms of Soviet subversion. But it had ignored other statements by world leaders that “urged the third way of emphasizing democracy and the consent of the governed.”*

The following month Bill Lloyd took up the urgent need for timetables leading to self-government:

“The fiction of France’s ‘domestic jurisdiction’ in Indochina 10,000 miles away brought the United States to the verge of war in April, 1954. The extreme version of this concept shelters both colonialism and communist totalitarianism, and promotes their interaction to undermine orderly, peaceful progress.”

Six former colonial areas – Jordan, Ceylon, Nepal, Libya, Cambodia and Laos – joined the UN in 1955. Lloyd said it was a time “when national freedom again was recognized as a logical, acceptable goal for all peoples.” The call issued in Bandung had helped power the drive for UN membership. He also acknowledged that the US maintained an air base in Libya and that the removal of Algeria from the UN agenda represented a setback. However, for the first time a UN visiting mission had proposed a timetable for independence in Tanganyika (Tanzania) – although it was just “within 25 years.”

Other countries were edging toward freedom. Ghana was preparing for full independence, Sudan’s parliament had declared it independent, Malaysia was preparing to vote, and Morocco was making slow progress. But thousands of lives were being lost in Algeria, nationalists were defying the British military occupation of Cyprus, and violence persisted in Kenya.

In the midst of the 1956 elections Lloyd addressed the connection between politics and morality. European powers had “milked the colonial people for all they could get,” he charged in an editorial with the pointed title, “Wrongs Must Be Righted.” Too many people forgot “the simple moral fact that the wrongdoer must make restitution before his good intentions can be given full confidence.” That meant restitution for descendants of “grievously wronged” Native Americans and the African people:

“... a full balancing would require colonial governments to spend more for the education of each African child than for each European child, and more for African than for European agricultural development, rather than the lesser amounts that actually are spent in both cases.”

If Europe’s governments claim that can’t afford it, Lloyd added, the US should handle a big part of the cost by shifting some money from military spending to a “huge and dramatic

educational and development program through the United Nations.”

The Conference on Independent African States

When Ghana became a sovereign nation on March 6, 1957, Homer Jack represented the *TF* executive board at the independence celebrations and filed a report in the April issue. The British union jack had been replaced with Ghana’s flag of red, green and gold, he wrote, but economic colonialism lingered.

Jack met with Prime Minister Nkrumah and saw promise in some of his bold ideas. For instance, he liked Nkrumah’s idea for a conference of independent African states – including the Union of South Africa – “to “achieve an African personality in international affairs.” A year later he covered that event, as well as the Sixth Pan-African Conference, both held in Accra.

Although a few participants at the Conference of Independent African States, notably Tunisia and Ethiopia, were cautiously pro-Western the majority leaned toward neutralism, Jack reported. But there were various types – the positive neutralism of the United Arab Republic, Ghana’s positive non-alignment, and Morocco’s non-dependence. The final resolutions talked about “non-entanglement with the big power blocs.”

Asserting that the African states had a distinctive personality which would speak to the cause of peace, the conference called on the great powers to stop producing nuclear weapons and suspend all testing. In particular, they condemned France’s provocative intentions to test nukes in the Sahara. They urged more African representation in disarmament talks and more consultation generally on global affairs.

There was no anti-Israel rhetoric, by the way, only a call for a “just solution of the Palestinian question.” Part of the reason was that Ghana, which hosted the event, was becoming one of Israel’s closest friends on the continent. The other friend was the Union of South Africa.

Regional Federalism and Atomic Colonialism

Bill Lloyd frequently focused on the challenges of independence and the tension between centralization vs. federal states rights. In an April 1955 commentary he said that, taken to an extreme, self-determination could lead to fragmentation. On the other hand, new countries had a perfect right to suspect the colonial powers of trying to use divide and conquer tactics.

The ideal was sovereignty of the people. But based on his Swiss research Lloyd argued pragmatically for the potential of “regional federalism under democratic guarantees.” This involved authority for the central government in the areas of defense, foreign relations, and trade but also suggested flexibility; for example, states and regions should be able to negotiate trade agreements with foreign governments subject to federal approval.



William B. Lloyd, Jr.

In matters like smuggling and piracy, on the other hand, the help of the world community should be welcomed. He also proposed an novel trade off: In return for aid, Lloyd suggested that new nations ought to allow their dissatisfied minorities “to appeal to public opinion through the world organization for a peaceful settlement of their claims.”

The continued testing of hydrogen bombs by the US, USSR and UK led to another idea – expanding the definition of colonialism. It needed to go beyond denial of basic rights of self-determination, he said, “to include the forceful imposition of radioactive fallout upon the citizens of unwilling and protesting nations.”

Foreign planes were prevented from violating the recognized air sovereignty of nations. Invasion by radioactive fallout was an even greater violation, he charged. It was atomic colonialism, the ultimate form of environmental racism.

In a follow up editorial TF Board member Robert Pickus discussed the “engineering of consent,” particularly by the Atomic Energy Commission. “We cannot trust our government to give us adequate information because we have given it a prior command: Secure us, by preparing for war,” Pickus wrote.

He identified a profound conundrum; Americans wanted democracy, which meant access to information, but they also wanted to be prepared to wage atomic war – which meant secrecy and ultimately loss of control over the government.

On the Road Toward Freedom: A Cold War Story, part three of six.

Next: Continent in Crisis

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