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A

The African Predicament

A STUDY IN THE PATHOLOGY OF MODERNISATION

~~BASICALLY RACIST & TELL-TALE~~

~~DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME.~~

HIDDEN ASPECTS OF
FOREIGN AID

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level of ability of holders of offices; secondly, it blocks the ascending movements and thus aggravates strife; thirdly, it fosters parasitism.

In non-Arabised Africa, especially on the West Coast, polygamy places few restrictions on women's freedom to move about, engage in economic activities and even own wealth. As is well known, market trading on the West Coast is predominantly in the hands of women. With the exception of rich chiefs, the men are glad to see their wives ply trade and bring money home. Men's inclinations run towards parasitism rather than tyrannous jealousy; and in consequence women have developed a spirit of initiative and make better and far more reliable workers than men. However, as we move northwards towards the centres of Islam, the position of women approaches more closely chattel slavery.

It might be worth mentioning in this connection that, contrary to the commonly held view, I do not believe that fatalism—which is often singled out as the most important obstacle to economic progress of the oriental lands—can be regarded as a direct product of religious teaching because there is as much fatalism in the tenets of Christianity (including its Calvinistic variant generally regarded as especially propitious to business enterprise) as in Islam. I am convinced that the most important explanatory factor is the subjection of women. A woman brought up for a life of inescapable slavery—in whom every impulse towards initiative and freedom or even rudimentary self-respect has been stamped out—cannot fail to transmit to her sons a fatalist outlook which, imbibed during the most impressionable years, cannot be erased by later education.

To come back to the position of women in West Africa: the undermining (in many cases a complete destruction) of the traditional pattern of family and marriage—a confusion about the rights and duties, accompanied by a striving towards emancipation on the part of the women and an inclination towards shirking of fatherly duties among the men—has given rise to a furious sex war which provides an inexhaustible topic for chatty newspaper columnists and forms an essential part of the Hobbesian situation.

Chapter 12 THE HIDDEN ASPECTS OF FOREIGN AID*

Only people with little knowledge of the indigent societies can imagine that simply by pumping funds or goods into them we can ensure economic progress. The most obvious obstacle is graft, and the clamour for aid without strings often amounts to little more than demanding freedom to embezzle. Simple misappropriation, however, could be (and to some extent has been) reduced to modest proportions by channelling the aid into concrete projects, such as dams or factories and making it available in the form of goods and services required for construction of these objects. Even in such cases there are considerable opportunities for graft in connection with awarding sub-contracts, but at least the subsidy cannot be entirely wasted, and something concrete will remain.

It is more difficult to avoid the waste occasioned by inefficiency and bureaucratic parasitism. In societies severely afflicted by parasitism the number of parasites seems to be governed by the amount of surplus (surplus being defined as the stock of goods in excess of the minimum subsistence requirements of the producers). An augmentation of the surplus tends to increase the number of parasites and, therefore, their force in relation to the productive elements of society. We have here another vicious circle: the more rampant the parasitism, the stronger are its powers of perpetuation and growth; and the more difficult it is to eradicate it.

An influx of funds from abroad usually stimulates the proliferation of superfluous administrative posts remunerated on a scale incongruous with the economic possibilities of the receiving country, which whets the appetites and fans the scramble for the spoils. This type of waste is seldom criticised because it brings commercial advantages to various interest groups in the donating

* Most of the statements made in this chapter apply equally to the problem of aid to poor countries outside Africa. Hence some repetition of what has been said in Parasitism and Subversion.

countries and direct benefits to the parasitic elements in the international bureaucracies.

Not everybody who advocates aid to the poorer countries is prompted by altruism: when speaking about starving children, he may be envisaging a new post with a large salary and an expense account, free trips, conferences in pleasant places, a pretty secretary and what not. Even in the best administered unilateral schemes of technical assistance a very substantial part of the funds is wasted on needless trips and conferences. In international organisations the waste assumes gigantic proportions.

One could fill a whole book with examples of wanton squandering but I shall mention one incident from my personal observation. When I was living in Port Harcourt, one day the local newspaper carried a notice of the arrival in the town of a photographer travelling on behalf of an international agency which is supposed to be helping the starving children. This institution saw fit to spend a sum which would suffice to feed hundreds of children for years on sending a good-looking woman photographer of twenty-two on a trip of thousands of miles, as if no local residents could be found who would supply photographs of starving children free of charge. In comparison with the international organisations the work of the British Council is wonderfully economic and productive.

Somebody has described the British diplomatic service as a system of outdoor relief for the aristocracy—a diagnosis which fits most diplomatic services of the world. In no other region except Latin America, however, do diplomats weigh so heavily on the economy of their countries as in Africa where the multiplicity and smallness of the states make their cost exorbitant. As on the whole African states trade little with each other and cannot fight, the two chief normal concerns of diplomacy occupy little attention of their diplomats who are free to devote themselves to their purely decorative functions at exorbitant cost to their poor countries. Their proclivities to ostentation and to living beyond their means are further stimulated by the presence of numerous officials of various international agencies, many of whom do little useful work of any kind and devote much time to intrigues. In view of the growing interdependence of the nations, U.N.O. provides a needed forum for discussions but it can neither prevent wars nor rescue the poor nations from their plight. The sorry state

of the Congo in the aftermath of the United Nations intervention should dispel any illusions about the capacity of that body to save the poor countries which cannot save themselves.

An additional folly must be mentioned: for the sake of national status and private gain, countries which do not have enough qualified personnel to staff the most essential services delegate to various international bodies an absurdly high proportion of their educated men, who learn there the leisurely habits of a diplomatic existence, and get inveigled into high level intrigues. There is a story—no doubt allegorical—that when Khrushchev met Kennedy he jocularly proposed to draw a joint list of agents so as to avoid paying the same people from both ends.

Both the Americans and the Russian conveyors of diplomatic pressure seem to have found that 'buying' African politicians is very tiresome because (in contrast to similar people in Europe) they cannot be bought but only temporarily hired. Whereas a Dutchman or a Norwegian who has accepted money from a foreign diplomat or secret agent is very much concerned about concealing the fact, and therefore can be compelled to render further services by blackmail and without much further payment, an African politician (provided he shares the money with his kinsmen and friends) will be acclaimed by them as a hero, and may even boast about his cleverness in getting it out of the mean foreigners. Consequently, he cannot be blackmailed, will constantly ask for more, and may even repeatedly and almost openly hold a kind of auction.

To be effective, technical aid must comprise an element of moral education. This does not mean that the members of the less fortunate nations are less moral in private matters or in any absolute sense; but, the absence of customs conducive to efficient work and wise management constitutes at least as serious an impediment to economic progress as the lack of capital. For this reason, the aid can have good effects only if it is administered by people who can give a good example to the citizens of the receiving countries, and this condition rules out most of the agencies active at present in this field. People learn each other's vices much more readily than virtues and pressure groups operating under a cloak of spurious impartiality, and the divergence of values and ethical standards, leave their personnel with no common interest other than the vested interest in their positions and salaries.

The American Peace Corps, the British Voluntary Service Overseas and the equivalent bodies in other countries, provide a valuable education for the youthful volunteers; although even in this respect the outcome is by no means assured because a prolonged stay among people with different customs often stimulates antipathy and contempt instead of liking and understanding. As far as the countries in which these organisations operate are concerned, it is clear that the benefits are not very great and may well be outweighed by undesirable effects. This has little to do with the lack of good intentions on the part of the volunteers—although we must not imagine that they are all prompted by pure altruism rather than by a self-regarding though innocent desire to see the world—and seems to be an inevitable consequence of casting youngsters into the role of mentors of communities with strong traditions of gerontocracy; especially as they know little or nothing about the local conditions, mentality and manners. One does not need an excessive power of empathy to understand why an arrival of juvenile apostles is often felt as an insult which stimulates an ill-feeling towards their country of origin. The resentment is further stimulated by the apostles' adherence to the bland ethnocentric assumption that 'resistance to change'—that is to say the reluctance to adopt the American (or at least the European) Way of Life—can only stem from ignorance. Here we have another example of ideology masquerading as science, for if we study resistance closely enough, we can see that given the circumstances and the scale of preferences, most people do in fact behave more or less rationally so as to maximise their satisfaction. Adam Smith's conception of what makes a society tick was right up to a point: where he has erred was in postulating the ubiquity of the tendency towards a harmony conducive to progress, whereas in reality a trend towards stagnation, decadence or destruction is just as (if not more) likely to result from the interplay of individual interests.

To get back to the Peace Corps and similar bodies: the main point is that although their principal official task is to teach useful skills and organise self-help, the most conspicuous effect of their stay is the undermining of the traditional beliefs without replacing them by anything adapted to the local circumstances. Transmitting the values of an affluent and highly mechanised society to people living under very different customs and in the midst of poverty

can only sow confusion. Even if they live frugally by their own standards, the volunteers' habits of consumption appear as princely to the young native men and women and cannot fail to stimulate the latter's dissatisfaction with their lot.

True, there must be some dissatisfaction with one's present lot if any progress is to be made, but it is an error to imagine that this stimulant is wanting in contemporary Africa—apart perhaps from some very inaccessible and conservative (usually Moslem) areas. The stories about the Africans not desiring many material goods are thoroughly out-of-date; on the contrary, the present problem is how to canalise the pursuit of wealth into constructive rather than destructive channels.

Friction and hostility can arise out of all kinds of discrepancies and incompatibilities, and the following example provides an illustration of how good intentions unguided by the knowledge of local circumstances can lead to an unpleasant situation. In a certain town in West Africa an international student association organised a camp for volunteers from Europe and America who had offered to work without pay during their vacations to help to build a school. There were among the volunteers some troublesome individuals who misbehaved or found the work too hard or who simply wanted a trip and had no intention of requiting it, but most of those whom I met seemed quite genuine or even high-minded. Nonetheless, their presence caused a riot, and the police had to be called out to protect them from an angry crowd of local unemployed who felt that they were being robbed of an opportunity to earn something. The organisers conceived the idea—very good in principle—not only to foster international and inter-racial goodwill, but also to do something to enhance the regard for the dignity of labour and to counteract the pernicious association between high status (as indicated in the past by a pink skin) and the contempt for manual work. On the other hand, it is difficult to deny that the local unemployed had some justification when clamouring to do the work themselves when we see that the mere food for an overseas volunteer costs many times more than the normal wage of a native labourer, and that the money spent on transporting one volunteer to Africa and back would suffice to pay a local worker for several years.

The moral which emerges from this example is not that voluntary services can do no good, but only that they are not doing much

good as run at present. Let the donating countries not delude themselves: as things stand at present the cost of sending youthful volunteers overseas should be regarded as part of the expenditure on the education of their own people rather than as a cross-continental almonry. Moreover, no matter how operated, the voluntary services of foreigners must have important drawbacks which can be compensated only if their activities form a part of a well conceived and efficacious action aimed at removing the crucial factors of the present predicament. Vague good works benefit chiefly the souls of the benefactors but cannot make much difference to the fate of the sufferers.

On the whole, the aid administered directly by the more prosperous countries remains fruitless chiefly for two reasons. The first is sociological ignorance. Owing to the parlous state of the social sciences, the policy makers receive little guidance from them, and act (or at least have acted until quite recently) upon uncritically accepted and unwarranted assumptions such as the view that industrialisation must bring prosperity and social harmony, or that the rate of growth of an industry is governed solely by the supply of capital. These errors, however, appear trifling in comparison with the perversely obtuse determination to ignore the effects of the demographic explosion.

The faultiness of the aid is not surprising in view of the fact that the nations blessed with a relatively decent social order acquired it not through deliberate planning but in virtue of a fortunate and fortuitous confluence of circumstances. Naturally, many beneficial piecemeal reforms have been planned and carried out more or less systematically but the basic underlying conditions (such as, for instance, the decline in the birth rate or the spread of religious tolerance) did not come into existence as products of deliberate policies. The knowledge of how to engineer a good society does not exist and may very well be unattainable because of an ineradicable basic antinomy: social engineering requires power over human beings, which because of its dimensions is inevitably turned to evil ends.

The second reason for the scant fruitfulness of the external aid is that, in spite of the noble phrases it remains subordinated to the goals of buying allies and cajoling customers. The subsidies given to the international organisations, with the aid of which numerous sinecures are created for well-connected persons from countries

with exiguous resources, serve the same purpose. It seldom matters to the donors whether their gifts do any good so long as they secure compliance in diplomatic or commercial matters. On the negative side of the balance of aid as operating at present must also be put its tendency to undermine the self-confidence and the spirit of self-reliance, and in the extreme cases to foster a beggar mentality anxious to evade difficult tasks. For this reason, measures designed to help the needy countries to sell their products would have a healthier psychological effect than outright gifts. In any case, what determines the wealth of nations is efficient organisation and hard work, whereas aid from outside can play only a very subsidiary role.*

As misery and strife cannot be eliminated without a slowing down of the growth of the population enlightened aid would necessarily comprise a contribution to the spread of birth control. Nevertheless, although the donors are ready to spend vast sums on measures conducive to multiplication of the sufferers, they refuse to do anything about the factor which makes widespread misery inevitable. One reason for this inaction is that aid in the form of free supply of contraceptive appliances, though more effective in reducing misery than steel mills and highways, could not be

* The fourfold increase in foreign students' fees, recently decreed by the British cabinet in spite of protests from the universities, casts a serious doubt upon the sincerity of their professions of good will towards the poorer countries of the Commonwealth. When the Labour Party came to power it set up with great fanfare the Ministry of Overseas Development which has been endowed with a budget of about 200 million and, it must be added, has created a considerable number of rather pleasant jobs. Now the prophets of aid to the developing countries have decided to try to save a couple of million pounds by shutting the door on the poorer students who lack the connections and money which are becoming increasingly necessary for securing a place at an African or South-Asian university, and who are already handicapped by immigration regulations which make it difficult for them to pay for their studies by part-time work. It is precisely the type of student who gets his education the hard way that is likely to do most for his country, but our socialists obviously prefer the idle sons of sheiks and kleptocrats.

Since it requires no great perspicacity to see that no other form of aid can be more beneficial than helping people to learn useful skills, and that to debar potential future leaders from getting education in this country is the best way of ruining what remains of British cultural, political and even commercial influence, what can we surmise about the background of this decision?

equally spectacular. Moreover, as it concerns topics under a taboo, a discussion of this deadly serious matter often provokes levity which reflects on any reformer active in this field, who runs the danger of being cast into a comic role. And many people would rather risk death than ridicule. In addition to other deterrents, the very finality of this form of aid diminishes its attraction: for if children destined to starvation ceased to come into the world, the fortunate would lose the opportunity of making themselves feel virtuous by giving alms.

On the receiving side the preoccupation with economic development and the desire for foreign aid stems not so much from the concern for the fate of the poor as from the lust for the paraphernalia of power and glory. With a few honourable exceptions, what the rulers want are cars and aeroplanes, wide roads, elegant airports, big buildings and arms. Apart from the lack of altruism, sheer ignorance plays an important role. The connection between overpopulation and poverty cannot be seen in the literal sense, but only understood through moderately abstract reasoning which requires a certain amount of intelligence and the ability to free oneself from mental blinkers; and which is, therefore, beyond the capacity of many politicians and their followers. When the majority is plunged in deep ignorance, only an authoritarian government (provided that it is sufficiently enlightened) can push through a sensible demographic policy, because the voters lack the foresight to support it.

If aid were really designed to alleviate suffering and injustice, the rational policy would be for the donors not only to include an abundant supply of goods and services needed for birth control, but also to make the rest of the aid conditional upon the adoption on the part of the receiving governments of adequate measures of encouragement and propaganda. The concern for the susceptibilities of the receiving nations is overridden easily enough when commercial, military or diplomatic concessions are at stake, and therefore should not be used as an excuse for inaction in this grave matter.

A common excuse for inaction is the claim that the traditional social structures present insurmountable obstacles to the spread of birth control. But if this is the case then we might as well stop pouring money down the drain, suspend all aid and prepare ourselves for the inevitable racial war of extermination. Above all,

let us refrain from any attempts at peace-keeping and allow the unfortunates to dispatch one another to the grave—for surely it is preferable to fall in battle than slowly starve to death.

Some benighted demographers have been issuing warnings that we must not foist birth control upon traditional societies before studying its possible deleterious social and psychological effects. That such effects are possible or even probable I would not deny. I would go even further and say that a suspension of natural selection—that is to say, of elimination of the unfit—must bring about a biological degeneration unless it is replaced by some artificial technique performing the same function. The eugenic problems are very important in the long run but the most urgent task is to avoid a global starvation and holocaust. To delay pressing for birth control because of its possible dislocating effects upon the structure of agrarian societies (which in any case are being shattered by the population pressure, apart from other cultural forces) is like dilly-dallying about calling the fire brigade when the house is on fire because squirting water might ruin the furniture.

Actually, if only the leaders of the few richest countries—perhaps even of the United States alone—were enlightened and courageous enough it would be quite feasible to stabilise the world's population by applying the following policy. Firstly, the amount of aid offered should be substantially increased but the actual granting thereof should be made conditional upon the willingness of the receiving governments to allow the donors to organise extensive family planning networks in the receiving countries, just as the oil companies are allowed to set up their distribution services. Such birth control stations would not only dispense the requisite devices and services free of charge, but would also make a payment to every woman who had undergone the treatment as well as to her husband. Subsequently a small yearly or even monthly payment would be made to them for retaining the device, or simply for not being pregnant, and medical assistance would be offered to their living children. Some arrangements could also be made to induce people who have not yet had any children to space them out. Naturally, the details would have to be adapted to local circumstances.

Of course such a scheme would require a tremendous effort and expense if it were to be applied on an adequate scale. Apart

from providing the money, it would be necessary to train more than a million medical assistants, to build thousands of clinics, to set up an administrative machine capable of keeping check on millions of women, taking their fingerprints and ensuring that the funds and the equipment are not misappropriated. Nonetheless, all this would in all likelihood cost less than what is spent on the useless or even harmful gadgets like supersonic airliners and telstars, not to speak of the crazy race to the moon. It would certainly cost less than the weapons and soldiers employed, or about to be employed, in keeping at bay the proliferating and increasingly desperate multitudes.

Concentrating the aid on those who are willing to help themselves (and whose rulers will allow them to do so) may seem a cruel policy, but it is the only one which holds out a hope of a real and permanent improvement. Indiscriminate charity may help the lucky few—although even that is not certain because one extra meal per year may not make much difference—but it is mainly good for the soul of the donors, and is like trying to stop a flood with a bucket.

Forcing birth control upon starving peoples, however, will be regarded as proof of hostility so long as the donating governments do not adopt a more enlightened outlook at home; because encouraging one's compatriots to multiply, while telling another race not to, can easily be interpreted as (or even really amount to) a form of aggression which calls for a retaliation.

So long as the birth rate remains at the level prevalent in Africa at present the choice is not between democracy and social justice on one side and despotism and exploitation on the other, but between hostile and friendly tyrannies; and the only attainable goal of foreign aid can be the purchase of allies and customers. Hospitals and schools cannot do much good if people have to starve as soon as they leave these laudable institutions. And simple arithmetic suffices to show that they must starve so long as they multiply so fast.

Chapter 13 NEO-COLONIALISM

In contrast to imperialism pure and simple—that is to say, the tendency to expand the area of political control by force of arms, neo-colonialism (or economic imperialism as it is called in Latin America) is an elusive phenomenon. A conquest is normally a deliberate act, but control over a country's economic life may pass into the hands of foreigners without any concerted endeavour on the part of the latter, and simply because the foreigners are more willing to engage in commercial and industrial pursuits or possess greater skill. In such a case the outcome may be economic domination but we can hardly describe the spontaneous process which led to it as imperialism. We must remember, however, that a process of economic penetration which began as an unintended product of uncoordinated activities of many traders becomes deliberate and concerted when control over economic activities comes to be concentrated in a few hands.

Strictly speaking we could apply the term economic imperialism (of which neo-colonialism is a variant) to all cases of concerted striving on the part of the nationals of one country to extend their control over the economic life of another country, without attempting to become its official rulers. If fully successful, however, economic imperialism ceases to be merely economic because if all the wealth is in the hands of foreigners the national government can hardly avoid being a puppet. And as the history of the British East India and Dutch East Indies Companies shows, commercial penetration may lead to an outright conquest. Conversely, every conquest or extension of a sphere of influence, even if it is motivated by purely strategic or diplomatic considerations, affects the distribution of wealth, and therefore there can be no purely political imperialism, although the importance of the economic aspect varies greatly. For these reasons, the concept of economic imperialism is not easy to employ, particularly as it carries pejorative undertones which imply that extension of economic control across political frontiers is always evil.