

# Racism, apartheid and a new world order

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The most senior leaders of the oppressed people of South Africa have been in prison for almost a quarter of a century now. They who would have contributed so enormously to the making of a prosperous, happy and peaceful society, whose leadership would have moved millions to strive for the achievement of this goal, these have been condemned to commune only with the prison guards for the rest of their natural lives.

While these titans of freedom pounded rocks and sewed mailbags behind prison walls, those who had issued the command that they should be jailed were busy imprisoning a whole society. They decreed that none shall speak of anything except what the gaolers permitted to be said; that none shall act according to their consciences except with the authorisation of the gendarme. They proclaimed that the truth shall not be told except that which the regime of repression deemed to be the truth. They, on the other hand, would have the right to designate oppression as liberty: those who are enslaved would be described as free men and women, while he or she that dared to fight for genuine freedom would be categorised and treated as a criminal.

We are meeting here today to honour two South Africans, Nelson and Winnie Mandela, who symbolise those prisoners, the first within the narrower and the second, the wider meaning of that term. We meet not to express sympathy either with them or with the millions of people of whom they are part, but rather, to salute and pay tribute to them for their resistance to tyranny. We have gathered here to honour them for their steadfastness in the struggle to give birth to a world in which those of us who are blessed with the skin colour you see on our hands and faces, will no longer be victims of oppression, exploitation and degradation.

The cause for which our people are paying the supreme sacrifice daily and for which Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Harry Gwala, Ahmed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi and others have been sentenced to life

imprisonment, has a significance which extends far beyond the borders of our country.

For, what they are fighting against is the pernicious ideology of racism, the accumulated refuse of centuries of an anti-human prejudice which seeks to define people as inferior, as not fully human, by virtue of their race. They are engaged in struggle to end the practice which gave birth to these ideas, the practice of racial discrimination, racial oppression, domination and exploitation.

Racism, one of the great evils of our time, bedevils human relations, between individuals, within and between nations and across continents. It brutalises entire peoples, destroys persons, warps the process of thought and injects into human society a foul air of tension, mutual antagonism and hatred. It demeans and dehumanises both victim and practitioner, locking them into the vile relationship of master race and *Untermenschen*, superior and underling, each with his position defined by race.

As black South Africans, we have lived within the entrails of the racist beast for many a long year. We have seen constructed a system of social organisation based on the premise and the practice that those who are white are inherently superior and those who are black must, in their own interests, be the objects of policies decided exclusively and solely by the white people.

Quite clearly, this edifice required some pseudo-theoretical precepts to underpin it and give it the appearance of rationality. The theoreticians of racism in our country drew on the gross perversions of science which assumed their clearest forms during the second half of the last century in Europe and the United States. In these centres of imperialist power, there grew up theories that biology and social anthropology provided the basis to justify the notion that all black people carried with them both an innate and a cultural inferiority to the white, giving the latter the right and the duty of guardianship over the former.

Implicit in this thesis is the idea that these higher human beings have a similar right and duty to maintain the purity of the human species up to the point and including the commission of the crime of genocide.

One of the earliest of these racist theoreticians in our country, this century, was none other than General Jan Smuts, who opposed Nazism only because it threatened British imperial power. Speaking amidst the splendour of the London Savoy Hotel in 1917, Smuts had this to say:

‘It has now become an accepted axiom on our dealings with the natives that it is dishonourable to mix white and black blood . . . We have felt more and more that if we are to solve our native question, it is useless to try to govern black and white in the same system to subject them to the same institutions of government and legislation. They are different not only in colour but in minds and in political capacity . . .’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Wilkins and Strydom, *The Broederbond*, London: Paddington Press, 1979.

More than forty years later, when these insulting racist ideas had been translated into the apartheid system, here is what two other theoreticians of this system wrote:

‘The three foundation stones of apartheid are Western culture, Christian morality and a specific racial identity. In the case of the Afrikaner, there is a powerful connecting link between these three elements. His own particular bio-genetic character is, for example, associated with a particular socio-cultural way-of-life and to give up either, through amalgamation with a more primitive culture or race must necessarily result in the destruction of the other.’<sup>2</sup>

Of course the inanities that were being conveyed as bio-genetic and socio-cultural theory, during the second halves of both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, were nothing but an attempt to justify a colonial relationship of the domination and exploitation of the black peoples by the whites. They had absolutely nothing to do with scientific truth.

Once implanted, and despite their exposure as fraudulent and bankrupt, these ideas seemed to take on an independent existence, nurtured by the continued practice of white supremacy in many parts of the globe. Originating from practice, they served to encourage the entrenchment, perpetuation and extension of this practice. To emphasise the point that they reflected an immutable natural order of things, the fertile human mind goes further to enrobe these racist ideas and practices with the cloak of religion.

It is indeed in this way that it becomes possible for racism to give those who believe themselves to be superior, the power to challenge the very God they dragoon to serve their interests and whom they claim to worship. Thus, whereas the Christian Scriptures, for instance, see all human beings as having been created in God’s image, all racists will, for reasons that are perfectly obvious to them, retort that this cannot be so. And so it is that the foulest of crimes, against life itself, are perpetrated in the name of religion, as is the case in our own country. The idea of a civilising mission, so dear to the earlier missionaries, derived exactly from this view that the European was a higher being deposited on this planet to play God over ‘the natives.’

From what we have said so far, it is self-evident that the practical relationship that characterised the interaction between Europe and the colonised world, today’s Third World, could not be but a hothouse of ideas justifying this relationship. In its essence, racism is therefore about domination and works both to justify existing domination and to prescribe domination as the *sine qua non* for the solution of all future problems.

Among the objectives pursued by our illustrious host here today, the Third World Foundation, are ‘to assist in the evolution of a fundamentally just and

<sup>2</sup> Pierre van den Berghe, *South Africa—a Study in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967 quoting N J Rhoadie and H J Venter.

equitable relationship between the Third World and the developed countries' as well as 'to create greater awareness of the problems of poverty, hunger and ignorance in the Third World.'

That it is necessary to address these issues, as indeed it is, attests to the fact that the imbalance of strength, the inequality of power and the incompatibility of objectives that marked the relations between the imperialist powers and the colonised peoples remain to this day. It is not necessary for us to elaborate further on this to those who are gathered here and have to contend with its disastrous consequences daily.

The point we must however emphasise is that it is exactly in these conditions that racism thrives, as it did during the colonial period. Hence we still find current notions that at the base of the 'North-South' dichotomy lies the difference between white peoples in the North who are inventive, industrious and disciplined and the blacks in the South who are innately indolent, imitative and happy-go-lucky.

Western Europe has large numbers of so-called *Gastarbeiter* who are mainly non-European workers from the South. The jobs they do, the squalor in which many of them live, the ghettos in which they are concentrated, once more emphasise the distinction between black and white as well as the lowly position of the former and the superiority and domination of the latter.

Similarly, in the United States, one has only to see the statistics of unemployment, drug addiction, homelessness, single-parent families and so on, to realise the extent to which the black population is marginalised and serves as a living example for the most backward elements to 'prove' the assertion that to be black is to belong to a category of the human species that is less than human and which must be used as befits its status.

All of us present here know that the causes that account for the relationship between black and white, North and South, that we have been talking about, are neither bio-genetic nor socio-cultural. Rather, they are socio-economic and are therefore capable of being changed or removed. Indeed, it is the resolve to bring about 'a fundamentally just and equitable relationship between the Third World and the developed countries' that led to the emergence of such important groupings as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77.

Those who are interested in an end to racism must necessarily be concerned that these organisations should succeed. In as much as the huge nuclear arms expenditures are incompatible with development, so is the growing relative and absolute underdevelopment of millions upon millions of black people incompatible with the objective of ridding the world of racial arrogance, discrimination and tyranny.

The urgent need for a New International Economic Order has been dramatically illustrated by the famine in Africa, the international debt crisis and the collapse of the price of oil and other raw materials. The hard and continuing struggle for the New Order is fundamentally about the

redistribution of the world means of production, to bring about the economic independence of the Third World and enable its peoples to banish hunger, disease and ignorance for ever, to assert their dignity as human beings and bring fulfilment to their lives. The accomplishment of this objective would itself redress the political imbalance which threatens the independence of many nations, thanks to the extension of the infamous Monroe Doctrine by the present US Administration to cover the entire Third World.

We, the peoples who were objects of imperialist expansionism, for ever the infantile dwarfs who required the benign or brutal patronage of the white superman, in earlier times had to be liberated from the state of noble savagery. Whether this resulted in our transportation across the seas as slaves or in enslavement in our own countries, as subject peoples, was but the unfolding of the manifest destiny.

Today, still the infantile dwarfs as of yore, unable to think for ourselves, inanimate fruit ready for the picking by whosoever has sufficient strength to rule the garden patch, we are being taken under the protective wing of the United States, to save us from falling victim to an alleged communist expansionism.

Angola and Mozambique, Nicaragua and Libya, Grenada, El Salvador and Namibia are the victims of this eminently racist policy which asserts the supremacy of the interests of the United States over those of the peoples of the Third World, which presumes, as General Smuts put it, that we have neither the minds nor the political capacity to exercise the right to self-determination.

It is clear that the fate that has befallen these countries will be visited on even more of us. Over the last few years, we have seen a discernible swing to the right in all the major Western countries, with the dominant social groups infusing public consciousness with the notion that might is right. And, in good measure, we have seen the exercise of white against the black people, be it in street brawls in British or French towns or in the invasion of countries.

Apartheid in South Africa exists as the concentrated expression of the worldwide cancer of racism that we have been talking about. In our country, the ideas and practices of racism reign supreme, as they did in Nazi Germany—the essence and the purpose of state policy, the instrument to effect and guarantee the domination and exploitation of the black majority by the white minority.

Because of its high pedigree in reactionary political thought and praxis throughout the world, the apartheid system serves also as the nursery for the cultivation and propagation of the same man-hating policies which the United Nations Organisation was formed to stamp out. It is because there is today widespread recognition of this reality that there exists that important instrument of international law—the Convention for the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, which defines apartheid as a crime against humanity.

We assert it as an incontrovertible truth that mankind is under an obligation to suppress and punish this crime against humanity. On the basis of the experience of our own people of the horrendous practice of racism, we can categorically state it here that this crime cannot be suppressed by means of words or by persuading its perpetrators to desist from the commission of a crime.

Racism, the theory and practice of the domination of one race by another, and specifically its apartheid expression, cannot be reformed. Like Nazism, its antecedent and sister crime against humanity, it must be overthrown and uprooted forcibly, in its totality. Those who argue to the contrary and even claim that the Pretoria regime has embarked on reform, are either grossly misled or are bent on protecting the regime of racial tyranny by seeking to refurbish its image to make it more acceptable.

In any case, a cancer cannot be its own cure. The fanatical racists who have spent more than half-a-century drawing up the blueprints of the apartheid system and transforming those theoretical constructions into the South African society we know today, cannot, at the same time, be the agents for the abolition of that system.

All they know and will ever know, is the need to maintain the system of white supremacy, and to maintain it by the use of all the violence that they can muster. Today our people are dying in large numbers, murdered on the orders of Pretoria's army and police generals. The blood-letting continues without reserve because, after all, those that are being killed are, in the eyes of the generals, lesser beings who can be disposed of without compunction, because they are less than human. Some Western governments are pleased to describe this as the maintenance of law and order!

The same mentality and objective of the defence of white minority domination, has instructed and continues to inform the attitude and policy of the Pretoria regime toward the frontline and other independent countries of Southern Africa. Its regular forces as well as its armed puppet formations have wrought untold damage especially on the peoples of Angola and Mozambique, with an enormous loss in human lives. Racism cannot accept any relationship between black and white except that between servant and master. Southern Africa will know no peace until the apartheid regime in South Africa is defeated and the system it upholds destroyed.

When the day dawns, only then will the full horror of the genocide being carried out in the Bantustans become visible for all to see. Whereas the Nazis resorted to the gas chamber to annihilate peoples they considered superfluous and no better than vermin, the Pretoria regime has used the method of death by starvation to carry out its mission of purifying the human race. The destruction of a system that has as one of its corner-stones such deliberate mass murder, is surely long overdue.

Yet the reality of the perpetration of racism in South Africa is that the

apartheid regime is supported by the same forces which, during the last century, deemed that the perspectives held out by the French and the American Revolutions were not for the colonised. The dominant forces in the major Western countries do this not despite the system of apartheid, but because of it.

They support racism because it expresses the imperative of the systems they represent, namely, to dominate, and serves their purposes as an instrument for the extreme exploitation of those who are dominated. For these reasons, they spurn our appeals for comprehensive sanctions against apartheid in South Africa, which we repeat today and urge upon the world community as the most effective means to bring about change in our country with the minimum of violence and destruction.

It was not a slip of the tongue but a frank admission of the truth when Ronald Reagan characterised the apartheid regime as an ally of long standing. His policy of constructive engagement with apartheid represents an engagement with racism that arises from the nature of imperialism—an engagement which, in the context of his goal to dominate the Third World, is constructive because it helps to strengthen the allied apartheid regime.

True to character, the Reagan Administration and others in the West, make certain whenever they address the question of negotiations to resolve the conflict in our country, that they put the supposed interests and aspirations of the white minority first. They turn their own national experiences of political change on their heads in order to serve the cause of racism in South Africa.

For example, it is argued forcefully that it is inappropriate and unreasonable for us to demand that all South Africans, both black and white, should have an equal right to elect the government of their choice—in other words, to have a system of one person one vote in a unitary state. Similarly, it is argued that it is we, the victims of the violence inherent in the apartheid system we who have to bury murdered children every day, who must lay down arms and cease our armed struggle to make negotiations possible. Countries which are proud of the armed revolutions which brought their peoples democracy are, because of their support for the racists, equally fervent in their denunciation of our armed combatants as terrorists.

Likewise, we must renounce all claims to the national wealth of our country, which we have created with our labour, because, by some queer logic, to say that the wealth of the country must be shared by all the people is, in the South African context, to threaten the human rights of the white minority.

From Washington, London, Bonn and Paris issues the call that it will be absolutely vital to safeguard the rights of the white minority. And yet from all these, which pride themselves as the centres of democracy, there is never a word about the rights of the majority—the non-racial majority! Instead, these centres of democracy are engaged in a desperate bid to find flunkeys and collaborators from among the black people who will be imposed on us as our

true representatives and paid for their services, in order to preserve white privilege.

But certainly, no amount of political manoeuvring or killing of our people will blunt or stop the offensive of our masses, under the leadership of the African National Congress, to destroy racism in our country. Already the realisation is abroad among our people that victory is in sight.

It is a victory that we will use to build a truly democratic South Africa, one in which we shall abolish racism once and for all, and end the unjust and unequal relations of domination and exploitation that exist between black and white in our country today and which are expressed in the concept and the practice of apartheid.

By that means, we shall also make our contribution to the struggle for a just and equitable international political, economic and social order and add as much as we can to the construction of a new world, free from racial discrimination and oppression, free from hunger and poverty and free from the threat of the termination of life itself through the use of nuclear weapons in a Third World War.

We count ourselves fortunate that we have among our people such outstanding humanists as Nelson and Winnie Mandela, as well as others such as Albertina Sisulu, Greta Ncapai, Dorothy Nyembe, Thandi Modise, Frances Baard, Vesta Smith, Amanda Kwadi, Barbara Hogan and Marion Sparg, people who hate racism and love all humanity enough to be prepared to die in the defence of liberty of all persons, regardless of their colour or race.

We are proud that we come of a people that, like all others, is not prepared to tolerate evil and acquiesce in the perpetuation of tyranny. In their names, we are happy to receive this eminent prize. We thank the Third World Foundation and all who are associated with it for having so honoured us. This prize will serve as a further spur for us and, we are certain, for the rest of humanity, to redouble our efforts to free all the political prisoners in our country and to liberate the millions of our people who are held hostage by a racist clique.