

De-colonisation and neo-colonialism

by

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The origins of colonialism

Modern colonialism started with the discovery of the sea routes round Africa and to the new world during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Europeans. The southern coast of Africa was 'discovered' in 1488 and America in 1492. Hitherto, colonialism had centered around the Mediterranean. With these historical 'discoveries' sea power, trade routes and colonialism were diverted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and to the emerging nation-states of France, England, Portugal, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Portugal took the lead in the new thrust into the Americas and Africa, followed by Spain, and by the sixteenth century had built up colonial empires in the Americas. Other European powers followed. The emigration of peoples from Europe in all directions opened more areas of colonisation to the East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and south of

the Sahara.

As usual colonial wars followed. It has often been observed that Empires, colonialism and oppression of man by man in any form, result in wars and massive destruction of lives and civilizations.

De-colonisation after 1945

Early in February of 1945 the leaders of the USSR, USA and Britain in early February 1945 met in Yalta, Crimea. A declaration, popularly known as the Yalta Declaration was announced, which laid the foundations of the United Nations Organisation. Here is part of the declaration, Clause IV:

We are resolved upon the earliest possible establishment with our allies of a general international organisation to maintain peace and security. We believe that this is essential, both to prevent aggression and to remove the political, economic and social causes of war through the close and continuing collaboration of all peace loving peoples.

This declaration was duly signed by Winston Churchill for Britain, Franklin Roosevelt for the USA and Josef Stalin for the USSR. However one judges the sincerity of these nations in their attempts to remove the political, economic and social causes of war, 1945 marked the beginning of a bold step towards de-colonisation. In this year the United Nations came into being.

De-colonisation: America and Britain

America

The series of events that lead to American independence was a great contribution to de-colonisation. Other European colonies in the Western hemisphere became conscious, and many of them were assisted by the United States of America to gain independence. And the doctrine enunciated by James Monroe, (president 1817-1825) systematically phased European colonialists out of the Americas.

The main import of the doctrine was 'America for the Americans'. This was after more states had been acquired either by conquest or by purchase and recognition of newly free Latin American countries which were former Spanish colonies in Central and South America. The doctrine stated that any future attempt by European powers to gain influence in any part of the American continents would be considered 'dangerous to our peace and security'. This doctrine was re-affirmed in 1845 and 1848. It was invoked in the dispute with France about Mexico in 1866 and with Britain about Venezualan boundary in 1895. The foregoing was to serve as inspiration to people struggling for independence in later years. Ironically the United States has more recently become a supporter of colonialism. For example, when the Vietnamese defeated French colonialism the US took over and fought the Vietnamese for thirty years.

Britain

At the time of the Yalta declaration, Britain was the leading colonial power in the world. So the process of de-colonisation rested mostly on her. She was in consultation with America. They saw an obstacle in the Soviet position regarding colonialism, right from the time the Bolsheviki took over from Czarist Russia. It started when the Bolsheviki set free all the former Russian colonies and went up to the time of the Yalta Declaration.

If colonialism and imperialism are causes of war, clearly the removal or abolition of the 'political, economic and social causes of war' is incompatible with presiding over an empire on which the sun never sets. Many British colonies had started calling for independence. They had borrowed a lot from the American experience. Even in the author's country, Nigeria, 'taxation without representation' had surfaced in the grievances about colonialism, which was one of the slogans used by the American colonies.

World opinion was mounting against colonialism. The different colonised countries were going restless.

Britain's favoured method of colonialism was to 'divide and rule' which often left the eventual ex-colony in a state of disunity.

For instance in Nigeria, the colonial conquest took different forms in different areas where the people had formed mini-empires and republican forms of government. In 1900 Nigeria was created and the Union Jack was unfurled

over it as a British colony with the North and South provinces administered through direct and indirect rules respectively. In 1914 there was an amalgamation. Though Islam dominated the North and Christianity in the South, the people lived peacefully together and inter-married. But when the time drew to relinquish their colonial control, they decided to create a three regional structure based on three major tribes. North for Hausa-Fulani, West for Yorubas and East for Ibos. This was the beginning of Nigerian sorrows. There was a civil war six and a half years after independence, which lasted for three and a half years. Still unity evades the country. In this confusion, the British are the largest trading "partners" of Nigeria up till now. The Soviet Union was undaunted in its condemnation of colonialism as one of the major causes of conflicts. It carried the battle to the United Nations and received so much support that when the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, attended the UN General Assembly and proposed a Declaration on "Granting Independence to Colonial Countries" on December 14, 1960, it was adopted by 89 votes in favour, none against with 9 abstentions. On November 2, 1972, a resolution was adopted to the effect that further "retention of colonialism constitutes a threat to peace and security". On the 20th anniversary of Declaration on decolonisation, the UN General Assembly held a special committee which adopted an Action Plan for Full Elimination of Colonialism. In all the foregoing processes,

the third world countries identified their aspirations with all what the Soviet Union stood for. This was reflected in the voting trend which was isolating the imperialist powers. The world wide struggle for political and economic independence was intensifying. It took different forms in different countries. Some peaceful, some in civil disobedience and some armed struggle. And there was ready favourable response from the Soviet Union whenever the nationalists asked for it in any form. And these led to intensified anti-Soviet and anti-Communist campaigns. Any nationalist agitations were dubbed Soviet or communist inspired.

Neo-colonialism and the US

Neo-colonialism can be described as a new form of colonialism devised by imperialist powers to grant their former colonies political freedom and continue economic and cultural domination. To perpetuate this, many forms of agreements are negotiated in fields of defense, "free" trade, "partnership" in progress and aid in many forms. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was created in 1947 as the centre for foreign intelligence. The CIA in South and Central America was (and still is) active in assisting Pro-US governments to stay in power by all means. It tried to prevent Salvador Allende becoming President of Chile because he was a believer in the Socialist system of independent

economic planning. His popularity defeated the CIA and he became the first Marxist in South America to be popularly elected President. The CIA organised (with financial assistance from US industrialists) a coup that killed him and his associates in government in 1973. Since then Chile has not been at peace or made any economic progress.

In 1960 the CIA was implicated in the Congo tragedy that led to the arrest, torture and brutal murder of the popular first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. Since then the CIA has been suspected of involvement in many coups and counter-coups, bloodless and bloody, successful and unsuccessful. It is well entrenched in every third world country, except, perhaps, Lybia, Iran, Cuba, Syria, North Korea and Ghana.

Successive US governments have either directly or indirectly intervened in domestic affairs of other countries. It was only during the presidency of Jimmy Carter that the wings of the CIA were clipped and many awful disclosures made. Jimmy Carter introduced non-violent methods in fighting the Soviet Union and the spread of anti-neocolonialism.

Another tool of neo-colonialism has been religion. Voodoo helped to keep the Davalier family in control in Haiti until abject poverty and suffering drove the Haitians to desperation. The Christian religion is now widespread in Africa. Different sects and their evangelists are all over the continent with massive financial support from American sources professing miracle healings. There are different

groups for businessmen, intellectuals, students and the poor masses. They are persuaded to believe that their individual problems, national and international problems can only be solved by God.

The early Christians in Armenia had a saying: "God made all men equal but the unequal distribution of water and soil makes them unequal!". Transportation, communication and space exploration have made the world a small place. The high development of science and technology, of agriculture and agricultural science and of human relations give hope of man being his brother's keeper and make the world his collective own.

If the foregoing are directed to providing human needs instead of weapons of destruction which never helped since man's appearance on earth, there will be peace and plenty.

"Although there may well be other Earths in the vast ex^banses of the universe, if they exist they are well beyond our reach. We must look after planet Earth; we have nowhere else to go". (UNESCO publication "The Courier" july 1986, part of last paragraph of the editorial).