

BRITAIN, SOUTH AFRICA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

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'To arm South Africa is to arm racialism. It is to side with racialism—to have it as an ally.'

PRESIDENT JULIUS NYERERE, November 1970.

PRIME Minister Heath and Foreign Secretary Douglas-Home are trying to eat their cake and have it—hand on heart, they express their detestation of apartheid; in the same breath they insist they are obliged to carry out their legal obligations under the Simonstown Agreement. 'Britain's vital interests are at stake,' they maintain.

When the Simonstown Agreement was first signed in 1955 (in fact it is not even an agreement, merely an exchange of letters), Britain had a whole clutch of colonies in Africa for which she was responsible. Today these colonies are independent, and it is precisely these countries (with the exception of Malawi) which are most strongly opposing the sale of arms to South Africa. Why? President Nyerere said:

There is a conflict going on in Africa now. It is not a conflict between communism and freedom, or communism and democracy. It is a conflict between the apartheid policies of South Africa and the colonialism of Portugal on the one hand, and the African peoples of southern Africa with the support of the independent African states on the other hand. It's a conflict about racialism and colonialism.

By deciding to sell seven Westland Wasp helicopters to South Africa, the Tory Government has indicated quite clearly where it stands. This is not a legal but a political commitment, and has been interpreted as such by the whole world.

The announcement was greeted in the South African parliament with loud cheering from both sides of the house. The correspondent of the London *Economist* reported that in the lobbies afterwards government supporters expressed their delight and their

quite firm belief that the Wasps marked not only the beginning of the end of the arms boycott but also a breakthrough in South Africa's long campaign to win acceptance in the western world . . . other arms sales will surely have to follow. And, what is most important, it also establishes South Africa's acceptability as an ally: the way has been opened for South Africa to remain an accepted partner in western defence arrangements.

The pro-Government Afrikaans paper in Cape Town, *Die Burger* greeted the news with banner headlines, a front-page portrait of

Edward Heath, and the editorial opinion 'that this step will be seen as, and indeed is intended to be, the start of fuller military co-operation between Britain and South Africa.'

This still leaves open the question—military co-operation against whom? The only open challenge to British vital interests in the area has come from the Smith Government, and so far nobody has suggested the possibility of South Africa's joining with Britain to put down the rebellion and re-establish the authority of the Crown in the area. On the contrary, the Salisbury correspondent of the Johannesburg *Star* reported on March 2, 1971: 'There is no doubt that Mr Heath's firm stand over arms sales to South Africa has heartened Rhodesians.' The Rhodesian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence, Mr Howman, welcomed Britain's stand and appealed to Rhodesians 'during this dangerous period not to embarrass her friends and associates.' Rhodesia's Chief of Air Staff, Air Vice Marshal A. O. G. Wilson, called on the major western powers to get their perspectives right and support the countries in southern Africa who are prepared to fight 'Communist infiltration'. Heath's deal with Vorster may be followed sooner than most people think by a deal with Smith as well. It is known that talks are secretly in progress. Of their direction there can be little doubt; only the details and the timing remain to be settled.

Britain's vital interests in South Africa are investments totalling £2,000 million, investments from which she draws a rate of interest almost double that she gets from the rest of the world. These investments are threatened, not by a handful of Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean, but by the liberation struggle of the African peoples throughout southern Africa. Everybody knows of the 'unholy alliance' between South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal to maintain white supremacy in southern Africa. This alliance has now openly been joined by the British Government.

The South Africans themselves make no bones about the function of their army. 'The first task of the Defence Force,' said the Minister of Defence in 1963, 'is to help the police maintain law and order'—as they did, helicopters and all, during the state of emergency which followed the Sharpeville shooting in 1960. In March 1970, the Commandant-General of the South African Defence Force, General R. C. Hiemstra (who resigned from the South African forces in 1941 because he refused to take the oath to fight the Nazis outside South Africa's borders) said: 'We are experiencing one of the great periods of revolution in the history of mankind.' This required, he said, the maintenance of maximum unity amongst

white South Africans, and the establishment of relations with 'Non-White nations' which 'would not endanger the maintenance of our White heritage in any way.' Significantly, he added: 'The will of the people to maintain their White heritage and sovereignty should come to fruition in a powerful defence force.'

The South African Minister of Community Development, Mr Blaar Coetzee, in a speech in Bloemfontein in November 1970, said 'law and order' in South Africa would be maintained at all costs under the Nationalist Government, and people would be detained for 90, 180 or even 1,000 days if necessary. Mr Coetzee said South Africa did not need weapons for aggression or to defend itself against its neighbours but 'to make the United Nations realise that it would have a tough nut to crack when it started to consider armed intervention in this country.'

To all these racialist objectives Heath is now making his contribution. True, helicopters costing only £1 million to start with, but with the prospect of a lot more in the offing. South Africa budgeted £150 million for its Defence Force in 1970-71 and spent over £30 million on armaments alone during the 1969-70 financial year. Heath and the British arms manufacturers want their share of the loot. Hawker Siddeley have shown a fine sense of anticipation. In September 1970, they clinched a £1 million order from South Africa for three HS 748 'feeder airliners'—a short-haul turbo-prop aircraft. Although used mainly as a passenger plane, it has a military potential, and 31 transport versions, known as the Andover, are in service with the RAF.

Two months later, in November 1970, it was announced that the Director of Operations of the South African Air Force, Brigadier Servaas van Breda Theron, had retired at the early age of 51 to become managing director of the South African operations of Hawker Siddeley. He replaced Air Vice-Marshal Jacklin, the former head of the Rhodesian Air Force, who died in 1969. Asked if he had been employed as a sort of super-salesman to sell aircraft to the South African Air Force, Brigadier Theron said: 'I would rather not talk about that.' But the Johannesburg *Star* commented:

The appointment of Brigadier Theron by Hawker Siddeley will considerably strengthen the firm's position if the ban is lifted as it is obviously keen to get back into this military market which is worth many millions of rands.

Hawker Siddeley have in the past supplied South Africa with Buccaneers, and were advertising their new Nimrod reconnaissance aircraft in Afrikaans newspapers and the Defence Force magazine even before the last British general election.

In his letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury last November, Heath said:

It would totally negate the stand I and my colleagues took over racial issues in the recent general election if we were to endorse or support a political system based on racial discrimination. . . . We reject and condemn the system of apartheid.

How does that statement look now, after the arms deal and the new Immigration Bill? And if Heath is mealy-mouthed or inhibited, perhaps Mr George Pole, leader of a group of Monday Club members who toured South Africa and Rhodesia last January, expressed more of what goes on in Tory minds when he said that 'such humbug as the United Nations' call for a world ban on arms to South Africa had no place in Conservative philosophy.' Mr Pole praised the policy of 'separate development' for sparing South Africa the racial disturbances that had marred countries from Tanzania to the United States. As for the Commonwealth, Mr Pole said:

In my view the Commonwealth has had its day. . . . Britain's freedom of action is being affected by the present structure of the Commonwealth. We no longer enjoy the fruits of Empire and cannot be expected to carry the burdens any longer.

By his cavalier treatment of the delegates to the Singapore Commonwealth conference, and by announcing the decision to sell the Wasp before the study group set up at Singapore had even had a chance to meet, Heath has placed his own interpretation on the value of the Commonwealth. Is it any different from that of Mr Pole? The diplomatic correspondent of the *Johannesburg Sunday Times* cabled from Singapore that Commonwealth delegates flew out after the conference 'stunned' by reports of Heath's anti-African behaviour and attitudes in off-the-record conversations with selected newsmen.

Asked why he thought Africans had displayed such emotion over the arms issue, Mr. Heath's reply, according to several versions, was that it was because they were Africans According to some who heard him, his views seemed to be so rigid and his attitude so tough that several were highly dismayed

Another impression was that about the only enjoyable occasion he attended was a dinner with the Premiers of Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore, who are his partners in the emerging five-power defence pact in South-East Asia.

From all this it is clear that the Heath administration is reverting to the worst pattern of Tory rule—a combination of anti-working class and anti-colour legislation at home, and the vicious foreign policies of the most dangerous periods of the cold war. If Heath today finds he has more in common with Vorster than with Kaunda,

it is because he is faithfully reflecting the interests of the British ruling class, for whom profits always have and always will come before principles.

Nor is the British Government alone in this attitude. The western imperialist states are all involved in the South African profit machinery, and all regard South Africa, like Israel, as an indispensable ally in their drive to retain the countries of Africa and the Middle East within their orbit.

The British Government's resumption of arms sales has demonstrated afresh that the fight against apartheid cannot be separated from the world-wide struggle of all peoples against imperialism and neo-colonialism. Will the British labour movement draw the necessary conclusions?
