



AFRICA'S ORPHANS – THE SHATTERED PEOPLE OF ZIMBABWE

Forty years ago, a man called Robert Mugabe won an election in what had been a very-well run British colony called Rhodesia, in south-central Africa. He had come to power through sheer terror, mostly against the rural poor in his country, with assistance from the Chinese and Soviet communist regimes. Yet he appeared to be eminently acceptable to some in the West. After the newly-named Zimbabwe gained its independence from Britain in 1980, British residents and other whites living there were encouraged to grasp the nettle, move forward with confidence and even buy up farms to turn the new Zimbabwe into what was predicted to be one of Africa's more progressive post-independence nations.

In his book "All for Nothing?", liberal activist C.G. Tracey recounted how the new president Robert Mugabe and one Emmerson Mnangagwa had asked Tracey to put together the best available team of people to discuss all aspects of the then productive Zimbabwe's economy. "We grasped the challenge", said Tracey. "We brought together representatives of finance, banking, mining, tourism, transport." Denis Norman, then president of the Rhodesia National Farmers' Union, spoke to Mugabe about the important role of agriculture and he was subsequently made Mugabe's Minister of Agriculture. He later became Minister of Transport.

A Zimbabwe Promotion Council was formed with an enthusiastic private sector and a Mr. David Lewis, an interested party, said that Mugabe was, inter alia, "an outstanding person who had a complete capacity for statesmanship, with a reasonable approach to problems." Mr. Tracey's pro-African activities included his pre-independence history of battling "the colonial regime" in order to get black representation onto the Cotton Marketing Board and other entities. He proved to be unusually starry-eyed – the 1980's "Gukurahundi" massacre by Mugabe's North Korean trained soldiers of 20 000 Matabele's is not mentioned in his ruminations, and Mugabe's subsequent metamorphosis into savagery of a particularly barbaric kind when he saw he was losing the 2000 election, soured the relationship. In his epilogue, Tracey declared that

“Zimbabwe is in danger of joining the ranks of derelict African countries, and its tobacco and food sectors have been mortally wounded.”

He lamented the “eight decades of progress” single-handedly destroyed by this African tyrant who had a “complete capacity for statesmanship”. Sic transit gloria! Tracey decided on the title of his book “All for Nothing?” after completing it. It was an apt title. It reflected the history of Britain’s obsession with its own skewed version of racial tolerance, particularly in Africa, and its ignominious haste to exit the dark continent, at the same time throwing its own people in Zimbabwe to the wolves.

The price paid for Perfidious Albion’s betrayal of Zimbabwe’s citizens to the clutches of Mugabe and his successor Mnangagwa was high indeed. The harrowing daily existence of millions in that blighted country is spasmodically reported upon by British and other overseas media, but the British government remains silent about their political orphan in central Africa. News emanating from Zimbabwe is left to residual residents who take it upon themselves to inform the world of the grinding daily existence of millions of poor people who were sucked into the dream of independence from “colonialists” and so-called racial oppressors. Those left to pick up the pieces in the hot African sun now do what they can to survive.

Regular Zimbabwean correspondent Cathy Buckle wrote in August of this year that “it’s sugar cane cutting time in the lowveld and the enormous trucks are overloaded with blackened sugar cane sticks being taken to the processing plants. As you get closer to town it’s not just kids sitting by the roads’ potholes but also teenagers and young men with ox and donkey carts. As the trucks go through each pothole some of the cane gets dislodged and falls to the tarmac where it is pounced upon by the youngsters.” Ms. Buckle talks of these unfortunate human scavengers as a lost generation. “ This is the ongoing trauma in Zimbabwe where nothing is normal or predictable in these frightening times”, says Buckle.

FEAR RUNS DOWN THE SPINE

Irony is on every corner. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, that bastion of resistance to the Smith government whose churches sheltered the terrorists who preyed upon their own people, is now lamenting the “dire situation” prevailing in the country. In a Pastoral Letter the Conference declared that “some of our people continue to live in hideouts, some incarcerated while others are on the run. Fear runs down the spine of many of our people today. Our government automatically labels anyone thinking differently as an enemy of the country”. Another irony is that Peter Hain, that

very busy anti-apartheid activist who never let up with his war against the “Pretoria regime” and the Smith government, is now calling for more sanctions against Zimbabwe! In the meantime Zimbabwe pensioners are currently receiving the equivalent of six US dollar a month – the cost of six loaves of bread. The inflation rate is now officially quoted at 837% and an August 2020 report by Bloomberg said that “should government fail to bring inflation under control, bread will cost Z\$600 by this time next year”. At the time the WFP said 60% of Zimbabweans, 8.6 million people, would be “food insecure” by December 2020.

Says Cathy Buckle in her latest bulletin: "Covid did not ravage Zimbabwe-corruption and greed did. Zimbabwe has again had a year dominated by stories of corruption, greed and horrific abuses inflicted on those daring to differ, daring to speak out, daring to expose wrongdoing, inequity and injustice. It's been a year of outrage and disbelief, with Covid funds looted, gold bars smuggled out, mining rights granted in National Parks, soldiers on our streets and highways”.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2020. It declares that global food insecurity means there will likely be 265 million starving people within a year. (UN Headquarters 9.10.20). Included in that figure will be Zimbabwe. The country produces around 1,8 million tons of maize every year. This year that figure is less than half the usual. Zimbabwe will need to import at least one million tons from South Africa to meet its needs. By contrast, during the 2019/2020 season, South Africa had the second largest maize harvest on record, around 15,5 million tons, and the third-largest soya bean harvest on record at 1,26 million tons. The wheat harvest is expected to be over 2,1 million tons

The difference in agricultural performance between the two countries can be laid at the door of Britain's hasty ushering to power of Robert Mugabe who proceeded to terrorise his country's white farming community, one of the best in the world. He kicked them out of the country. Many were born there. Who can forget the assaults on these productive farms as their owners and workers were beaten and tortured, their animals destroyed and their houses vandalised? Now there is nothing – the Haiti scenario!

ONE OF THE BEST

What is even more tragic is that Zimbabwe under the Smith government was one of the best, if not the best, agricultural producers in the world. From a primitive base, Western-style agriculture developed faster than it had anywhere else in the world. First settled in 1888, the old Rhodesia progressed to

such a degree that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Year Book of 1975 ranked the country second in the world in terms of yields of maize, wheat, soya beans and groundnuts, and third for cotton. In the combined ranking for all these crops, Rhodesia ranked first in the world. Well before 1975, the old Rhodesia was consistently placed in the first three places in world championships.

The planet's largest single citrus producer was developed early in Rhodesia's history. Agriculture contributed more to the country's gross domestic product than any other industry. It was the largest employer of labour, providing employment for more than a third of the country's total labour force. Rhodesia earned the title of the breadbasket of Central Africa. Farmers contributed to the leadership, fabric and welfare of society out of all proportion to their numbers. Each farm was, to a greater or lesser extent, an outpost of civilization. Many farms established schools for the children of their workers. Every farm was a clinic and a dispensary and an ambulance service for the surrounding areas. All of these contributions to the growth of the economy and the welfare of the country emanated from fewer than five thousand farmers, on less than half of the country's land.

Foreign aid to fill today's empty stomachs? Not this time. "The European Union will not waste taxpayers' money in Zimbabwe: it will not reinstate budgetary support for that country because of the country's opaque public financial management systems". (TimesLive 6.9.20). South Africa's portly politicians may rue the day when SA's store shelves are bare and the international Christmas fathers will have vanished into the mist. It is ironic that while SA's white commercial farmers keep the country's supermarket shelves stocked, certain mentally-challenged members of parliament exhort all of us to "kill the boer, kill the farmer". These strange aberrations should prepare to sharpen their agricultural skills because they may have to one day provide food for nearly 60 million people. Perhaps they haven't thought that far ahead, given their tradition of living for the day and to heck with the morrow. This obtuseness goes even further – SA's deputy president tells us his party's policy of land expropriation without compensation will return SA's productive land to "its rightful owners". (Beeld 27.11.20). Who may they be and where are their title deeds?

The similarities between the new South Africa and Zimbabwe are horrifyingly similar – jubilation and enthusiasm at a new black governments supported by "the world", then the ignominious descent into function chaos, then the excuses, then the blame, then the grim holding on to power at any cost. Either regression or collapse follows, while the definition "failed state" is bandied

about. Will the ANC government take us with them to the bottom of the barrel, or can we outwit them as citizens' groups grasp the nettle and set the country on to an even keel? Surely we will reject the Zimbabwe option with all our might.