

# British Rule in South Africa

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With the tide of anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles rising ever higher, it is of importance to analyze British rule of South Africa, first for the lessons it will teach us in anti-imperialist struggle, and secondly because Africa is now the center of world attention as the fascist powers hungrily turn their eyes toward this continent with the object of capturing more spoils. Mr. George Padmore has just written a book on *How Britain Rules Africa* in which he takes up such problems, but our suspicions are aroused when we find Mr. Padmore hailed by that extremely influential and important organ of British colonial interests, *The Gold Coast Spectator*, for his "defense of the right of Africans".

From the beginning Mr. Padmore's thesis is contradictory. He condemns and repudiates any struggle for immediate demands in South Africa, asserting:

"There is no basis for a party advocating reforms among the natives. Reformism can only thrive where reforms can be won from the employing class and government, but under South African conditions this is entirely out of the question as far as the Blacks are concerned."

This is no judgment based upon a serious analysis of present class relationships in South Africa. Were the native masses, the colored peoples, or, for that matter, the "poor white" workers and peasants to accept such a conclusion it would be tantamount to their repudiation of all struggle for the alleviation of their present conditions. In practice acceptance of such a position could only lead to passive acceptance of the status quo. In countries where the movements of the workers and the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples have reached an infinitely higher level than in South Africa, programs advancing minimum demands and social reforms have become rallying points for almost all categories of the population. Just such programs have laid the basis for defeating specific reactionary measures and restrictions of democratic rights in European countries where the struggle is already highly developed.

In a country where the great mass of the population is almost wholly without economic, political or social rights of any kind, to advocate the repudiation of struggle for immediate measures such as the extension of the Cape franchise, abolition of the native pass system, etc., would constitute a betrayal, not a defense of Africans. Life does not present issues of struggle on the basis of “all or nothing” on all occasions. The infantile Leftist character of such an approach in this instance will soon be self-evident.

Less than a year ago the African National Congress meeting in Bloemfontaine passed a series of resolutions calling for a Native Representation Bill; the franchise to be granted to native people, as well as a demand for more land. These resolutions offer a very substantial basis for uniting native, colored and sympathetic groups among the Boers and English in a struggle for fundamentally important demands. They can become the starting point for a very broad united anti-imperialist front.

The South African trade union centers are advocating certain economic and political demands as well as organizational reforms of decisive importance within their own ranks, around which white, colored and native can be united in economic and political struggles for the defense of the day-to-day demands of all toilers. One who would in South Africa adopt the position proposed by Mr. Padmore would only succeed in isolating himself from all strata of the workers and toiling masses. British imperialism and its main allies, the Boer landlords, can welcome such a proposal with open arms.

#### THE WHITE DOMINATION MYTH

Regarding the contents of *How Britain Rules Africa*, the author himself informs us that his:

“...chief aim is to throw light into dark places, to discuss the present economic, political and social conditions of the native populations, as well as the *methods* and *administrative policies* adopted by the various British colonial governments to *facilitate* the economic exploitation of the territories, and *maintain white domination over the Blacks.*” (Emphasis mine – W.L.P.)

This is undoubtedly a very serious purpose. We are extremely interested in it as a whole and particularly in the last phase of it. Mr. Padmore’s desire to discuss “the methods and administrative poli-

cies adopted... to maintain white domination over the Blacks”, is of decisive importance. We are forced to believe that he consciously formulates the question of this domination as one of “white over black”. We are forced to this opinion because throughout the 416 pages of his book we find him reverting to this thesis continuously, broadening it, elaborating upon it, all in the face of irrefutable facts and events, some of which he mentions, which refute this dangerous thesis. This thesis is the more dangerous because of its seeming plausibility as presented by Mr. Padmore.

We want to quote him in confirmation of our conclusion. This is a fundamentally important question by no means having significance only for Africa. It cannot be confined to that continent. It follows the Negro. It has a direct bearing upon the development of the Negro people’s front in South Africa, America, Brazil, etc.; upon the role the Negro should play in the coming strike struggles in industrialized countries, and therefore upon the united front; upon the people’s front; and upon the attitude of the Negro peoples towards the struggle for peace.

Propagation of this bourgeois thesis, together with others equally false, have led Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, a leading spokesman of the American Negro bourgeoisie, logically and inevitably to his program of “voluntary segregation”. DuBois formulates his thesis thus: “The white workers are the Negro’s greatest enemy.” He is more crude and more honest than Mr. Padmore. Marcus Garvey has used it as an ideological weapon in his “Back to Africa”, a utopian petty-bourgeois movement. Neither of these movements offers a way out for the Negro people, as Mr. Padmore himself has stated many times before.

The major problem for the oppressed and exploited peoples of the world today is the question of unity. The development of fascism everywhere raises this in its sharpest form. Let us keep this in the center of our attention. What is one of the major questions confronting a people engaged in a life and death struggle? Undoubtedly the question of allies. To a people situated as the South African native and colored peoples are, this is for them of decisive importance. They must analyze the alignment of class forces with the greatest care. They must take advantage of every breach, however slight, in the front of the forces aligned against them, to widen it and to weaken those forces. They must seek everywhere to win new forces to the struggle against the enemy even on the basis of unity around

issues which do not obviously affect them, for example, support of strike struggles of white workers, no scabbing, no black-legging of any kind. They must try to neutralize those elements which cannot, at the moment, be won. Only such a policy systematically carried out with the greatest persistency can assure hope of success in the national liberation struggles.

The white workers, the “poor whites”, who constitute more than one-third of the Boer population, for whose problems capitalism has no practical solution, are the natural allies of the native and colored South Africans. British imperialism and its ally, the Boer landlords, have directed the anger of these elements against the native and colored peoples. They rule because they have divided and pitted against each other the toiling masses: native against native, colored against native, Boer against colored and native, European against African, native and colored, the English against the field.

But the effects of the crisis have been to undermine and continue to undermine, the barriers separating one group of exploited from the other. The most profound changes in class relationship are taking place on the basis of the fall of diamond prices on the world market, and the fall of prices for agricultural products. The once more or less secure position of the white worker is becoming jeopardized by rationalization in industry and speed-up on the job.

Mr. Padmore, however, cites as an example in support of his premise of white against black the attitude of the white workers towards the natives expressed in the 1925 Resolution of the South African Trades and Labor Council:

“The industrial policy of the labor movement is the ‘civilized labor policy’ which means in practice the substitution of European workers for native and colored wherever and whenever possible.”

He cites the refusal of the Trade Union Coordinating Committee, of the Trade Union Congress, and the Cape Federation of Labor Unions in 1928 to the appeal of Mr. Kadalie, of the Industrial and Commercial Union, better known as the I.C.U., for unity. But 1928 is not 1936. There is nothing static about the labor movement. Conditions change; attitudes toward forces change in conformity to new interests, greater clarity, etc.

Even in 1928 the rejection of the unity appeal was not an unqualified one. It read:

“The Committee, however, comes to the conclusion that it would be desirable if *periodical meetings* between the two organizations could be arranged or *consultations* on matters of common interest. These meetings would tend to inform both sections of their mutual difficulties and problems and *would pave the way for more formal relations in the future.*” (Emphasis mine – W.L.P.)

Mr. Padmore “misses” this, and glorifies the unqualified rejection by the I.C.U. of this compromise proposal which he terms an “impudent chauvinist memorandum”. This is wrong. The I.C.U. was extremely hasty in its answer due largely to ideological weaknesses, we believe. There were mistakes on both sides. But the united front is won in struggle. It does not drop like a leaf into one’s lap. It is won through struggle, much patience, much understanding of the difficulties and great ability and flexibility in taking advantage of changing conditions. Particularly is this true where it involves solidarity actions of members of oppressing and oppressed nations. The lessons should be carefully drawn from the past mistakes of all groups.

What can we say, however, of a man who cites 1925 and 1928 and “overlooks” the already greatly changed situation of 1936? What kind of leadership is this? What kind of aid is this in achieving the united front of “the working and middle classes, whose future, whether they realize it or not, is inseparably bound up with that of hundreds of millions of colored peoples in India, Africa, and other colonial lands”?

It becomes mere demagogy to talk of this abstract larger solidarity, this world united front and to ignore and deride concrete factors making for the creation of the united front in South Africa. There is nothing of leadership or “defense of the rights of Africans” in such an attitude. The emphasis belongs on the positive side of the question. The negative side should be exposed and constructively criticized. One should help make history as well as read it.

Today the Cape Federation includes among its members a large body of colored workers. In the Trades and Labor Council, the largest trade union center in South Africa, there are 35 affiliated unions, of which only two do not admit non-European workers to membership. The remainder of the unions affiliated to the Council have no color bar. In fact a large number of them include non-Europeans

and the Council has one affiliated body composed entirely of native workers. The Council supported the principle of native territory being included in a scheme of national insurance which would provide them with medical attention. All is not as one who fights for unity would have it. But this is a far cry from 1925-28 and one who fails to acknowledge the progress made and to seriously and constructively deal with it gives objective aid to the enemy.

#### CLASS DIFFERENTIATIONS IN THE WHITE GROUPS

Mr. Padmore consistently fails to make any differentiation between the white ruling class and the exploited and oppressed white masses. If white and black exploited cannot win *without* each other's help, why not talk about their *common interests*? Where a distinction is made by Padmore it is for the purpose of emphasizing the "common" attitude of all whites on the question of the position of the natives. Take for example:

"No appeal to reason, no persuasion can wean the Boer away from his color obsession; to hate the black man is as much his religion as are the dogmas of Calvin."

"The relationship between white and black labor in South Africa is aggravated by the fact that white workers form an alien racial minority, who are determined to maintain their domination over the majority of the people who belong to a different race."

Domination in this sense is a question of state power. Have the white workers in South Africa state power?

Who are the dominant whites? If it were true that all white workers in South Africa accepted the bourgeois canard that they fit into this category of dominant whites, the task would be to expose the ruling class myth of white supremacy and white domination and the role that it plays in the policy of divide and rule. One should not fall into the trap of the white bourgeoisie. One only strengthens tendencies towards indiscriminate national hatred by so doing. Of course the Negro bourgeoisie does this consciously for the purpose of extending its markets among the Negro masses.

White chauvinism is fought in part by clearly exposing the true relationship of white rulers and the white oppressed masses on the basis of the concrete position of the oppressed, *i.e.*, unemployment, poor whites, strikes, wage-cuts, mass hunger, etc. It is aggravated

by appealing to the national hatred of the black masses and seeking to direct this against all whites. There is no Chinese Wall between white chauvinism and national narrowness. They are the reverse sides of one and the same shield. The hatred of the oppressed Negro peoples must be turned against those who formulate, develop and nurture the idea of superior and inferior races, the pseudo-scientific theories of Anglo-Saxon superiority, Aryan superiority, Japanese superiority or any of the other racial superiorities that are propagated in order to keep one group of exploited from entering into an alliance with others for struggle against the exploiters.

But Padmore has placed the onus, the responsibility, for the Negro's desperate position, upon the exploited white masses, because white misleaders and reactionary elements within the labor movement have been able to infect it with the germ of white chauvinism. We ask him: who then is responsible for the desperateness of the plight of the poor whites? After pitting "white against black" he poses the question: What is to be done? Here the book comes to its climax. He offers the solution.

"The united mass action of all the Africans under a popular, democratic slogan capable of drawing the widest sections of the non-European workers, peasants, intellectuals and youth into a common anti-imperialist people's front. This is the immediate task which stands before Africans throughout the continent today." (My emphasis – W.L.P.)

He continues:

"In our opinion the slogan 'Africa for the Africans' is the most appropriate one under the present conditions. Furthermore, it is something that *can be easily understood*, by even the most *backward black* and at the same time *it resolves* all the economic, political and social *demands* of the natives *into a national revolutionary synthesis*." (My emphasis – W.L.P.)

#### WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

"Black against white" can be easily understood by even the most backward black! Yes, it is a simple formula. A perfect formula for British imperialism. The reverse of the imperialist formula, the

supplementing formula to “white against black”. But it does not “resolve all economic, political and social demands of the natives into a national revolutionary synthesis”. It is as “national revolutionary”, to use Mr. Padmore’s words, a formula as any yet formulated by the Nazis.

Mr. Padmore has attained his objective. The strategy of his whole campaign is revealed. The major slogan and the tactical course are launched. Only one thing remains – forward to the salvation of British imperialism in Africa. He has marshaled the army for imperialism and the Boer landlords. It is the white workers, the poor whites, the landless Boers who are to be thrown into a bloody fratricidal war of extermination against the blacks. This is no longer only an African question. Why, we ask, is this program not good for America? American imperialism will endorse it. So too will the spokesman of the American Negro bourgeoisie, Mr. DuBois.

Let us deal with this, however, primarily from the South African angle. The anti-imperialist people’s front must be created. Time is the essence of importance. *The main line for the exploited, masses of South Africa, the leading idea for them, is the creation of a united anti-imperialist front of the natives, the colored people, the proletariat, white and black, and the toiling white masses against British imperialism, supported by and connected with the Boer landlords.* The struggle before us is one to shift the burden of the crisis onto the backs of the ruling class. This is the way in which we place the question in its broad aspects.

We ask Padmore: what in general are the tactics and policy of British imperialism in South Africa, in all of British Africa for that matter? It is to deepen and sharpen the belief in nationalism among all of the various peoples and to ferment and foster the hatred of one nationality against another. Its main tactical line is under guise of the solidarity of whites – white supremacy – to tie the white workers and toilers to the white ruling class. But the white workers and toilers, the landless white peasants cannot win without the aid of their natural allies, the native and colored peoples. The reverse is equally true.

Padmore rails against the slogan of “socialism” for the whites in South Africa advanced by the Labor Party of South Africa and parallels it with a sort of “socialism” for the blacks. He forgets realities. The Boers constitute a subject race, fighting against a dominant and privileged minority. They were beaten in 1899-1902. They were



beaten in the Rand strike in 1914. They were beaten because they were alone and weak. These are historical facts which we cannot ignore and from which we must draw conclusions. To recognize them does not mean to endorse the policy of the Boers toward the native peoples. To recognize them is, however, to see the Boers as an anti-imperialist force – a force against the common enemy. To ignore these facts and not to utilize them in the development of the anti-imperialist front is to weaken immeasurably that front and give objective aid to British imperialism.

#### SITUATION RIPE FOR UNITED STRUGGLE

The South African situation is a complex one. We have various nationalities there. The natives are not a compact homogeneous mass. They have a number of different dialects and languages. Then there are the colored peoples, the Indians, the Boers, the English and the Europeans. This is the national stage. There are great contradictions among them all. There is a great contrast between the conditions of whites and blacks. Within the working class the standard of living of the whites is many times higher than that of the blacks. They have economic and political rights denied the natives. The cultural differences between them are vast. But the struggle of the white masses against reaction, the growing trend toward fascism, and the danger of war is only assured of success when it moves along the lines of defense of the economic and political demands of the native population.

There are great possibilities for developing the united front of struggle against imperialism. A number of movements are growing. There are the growing strike struggles. A struggle has been waged by the tramway and bus workers in Fort Elizabeth since 1929. The white furniture workers average a wage of £1 a week. The building workers are unemployed most of the time. For the year they average about 3 to 6 shillings a day. White girls are getting around 14 shillings a week. The conditions for economic struggle are good.

There is a republican movement around the Boer farmers led by Malan. In the sense that it is against the natives it is reactionary. But there are two tendencies here: One against British imperialism for a free and independent South Africa; the other to make South Africa a land in control of the reactionary Boer elements with black slaves. The progressive anti-imperialist side must be supported.

It is for those who are practical revolutionary politicians to bring the native peoples to support the first while they reject and lead the Boer masses to repudiate the second. Behind this republican movement are the broad masses of poor whites, and petty-bourgeois elements – one-third of the Boers are poor whites. In the struggle white and native will grow closer together (witness the growing unity of Negroes and whites in the Southern states of America) as a result of joint activity against the common enemy. In this joint struggle the demagogy of a Malan can be exposed.

There is the national emancipation movement of the native people. Even the native chiefs are ready to struggle for more land. Already a National Emancipation League has been formed. The I.C.U. is being revived. The influence of the African National Congress is growing. Everywhere there is renewed political activity.

A Workers and Farmers Party is being formed. The Labor Party is beginning to change its tactics toward the native peoples. The trend toward unity in the labor movement is growing and natives are being accepted into the unions of the Trade and Labor Councils, as well as the Cape Federation. A movement is developing among the unemployed; an Anti-Fascist League of 45,000, not all white, exists. Every one of these movements arises out of the worsening of the conditions of workers, farmers, poor whites or native oppressed; they are directed against imperialism.

#### AFRICA FOR WHOM?

How can one say a man writes in the interests of the natives who does not understand or ignores these facts? What can be said of one who, surveying this developing realignment of class forces, sees no potentialities for creating an anti-imperialist movement, who cannot see the possibilities of the united front of white and black on many specific issues, and who calls for so abstract a slogan as “Africa for the Africans”?

“Africa for the Africans.” What does it mean? There are white Africans as well as black. There is an African bourgeoisie, African landlords as well as an African proletariat, toilers, farmers, etc. What Africans is Africa to be for? If, as the author states, it is only the natives or the natives and colored at the expense of the white masses, then it is a reactionary slogan. *How Britain Rules Africa* was not written in defense of Africans. If subjectively the writer

desired to defend the oppressed African peoples the objective result is quite the contrary.

There can be no denying that the interests of the native people, who constitute the majority of the population, are paramount. To hold the masses in check British imperialism pays lip-service to this fact. The naivete with which Mr. Padmore accepts the illusions of imperialist well-meaning is indeed touching. In dealing with a forced labor order for private purposes he says very feelingly:

“We say that this was an unfortunate document, for while we believe that Sir Donald *had no intention to sanction forced labor for private purposes*, instructions of such a character to district offices only serve to create the impression that the doctrine of ‘paramountcy of native interests’ *is really to be respected.*” (Emphasis mine – W.L.P.)

The important point, however, is to express that interest in terms not only “which can be easily understood by the most backward native”, but in terms which can be easily understood by the most backward white and accepted by him as being also in his interest. The social base of the Hertzog-Smuts-British imperialist-Boer-landlord regime must be undermined. This is our task.

As opposed to Padmore’s “Africa for the Africans”, the Chamber of Mines “for a White South Africa”; Malan’s “Independent African Republic”, we propose the slogan of an “Independent Native Republic”, at the same time making it clear that there is no intention that the position of whites and blacks should be reversed. The white minority will receive full rights, the power of British imperialism will be broken and the privileges of the landlords destroyed. The cultural level of the blacks will be raised to that of the whites, not that of the whites brought down to the level of the blacks, as capitalism is today doing. This program can bring all forces now in opposition to imperialism into joint action even though around different issues.

This slogan links the national liberation struggle of the natives, which is in essence anti-imperialist, with the anti-imperialist struggle of the Boers, the Indians, British and Europeans, with the program of all anti-imperialist elements. It takes nothing from the whites, but gives equality to the blacks.

Mr. Padmore says of British imperialism and its Boer landlord allies:

“They realize that a patchwork social organism such as theirs, *which is not even the normal capitalist system* but a hothouse plant artificially maintained by all sorts of contrivances, cannot last.... The crash is on the way.”

This is truly profound, worthy of the best traditions of Mr. Padmore. But just the contrary is true. The abnormalities of the South African situation are normal for capitalism under such conditions as we have depicted. And the crash will not come of itself. To place the question as Padmore has is to lull the exploited of South Africa into a false sense of security and lead them to believe that capitalism will fall of its own rottenness. It creates passivity where it is necessary to galvanize the masses into action.

#### SLOGANS OF THE STRUGGLE

Action should be developed around the slogans of “bread and freedom”, “equal pay for equal labor” – which must be interpreted as raising the pay up to the level of the whites, not dropping it down to the level of the blacks – “right of natives to be skilled workers”, “social insurance against unemployment at the expense of the state and the employers”.

On the issue of land, about which both imperialists and the oppressed masses are today talking in South Africa, we will use such slogans as “confiscation of the land of the big landlords, the land companies, and the religious missions and its distribution to the native peoples and the landless poor whites”. This will not endanger the position of the small and middle farmers. On the contrary, they will keep what they have and get more.

“The abolition of the pass law system”, “extension of the franchise to native and colored people”, “the annulment of all restrictions which now disfranchise thousands of poor and unemployed whites”. This is the way out for exploited and oppressed black and white Africa, the road to a united front of struggle against British imperialism and its allies, the Boer landlords; the road by which the burdens of the crisis will be shifted from the backs of the exploited. This is a program “firmly based upon economic realities of the relationship between financial interests and colonial policy”. This is a “defense of the rights of the African”.

Mr. Padmore’s position on the question of “indirect rule” would rob the African peoples of the last vestige of self-government. Per-

haps this is what British imperialism has placed on the order of the day and Mr. Padmore's comments are made in the nature of a trial balloon to test the strength of possible opposition. Truly Padmore has once again shown by selection and analysis of facts and events not only his bankruptcy and lack of understanding of political theory but much more clearly that his sympathies in the clash between capitalism and socialism are with the ruling class.

#### AFRICANS AND THE SOVIET UNION

We should like to close on a point of vital interest to the Africans. Mr. Padmore has virtually forgotten the existence of the Soviet Union. Its importance, particularly when we are dealing with the national question, the danger of war, etc., cannot be overestimated. Such "forgetfulness" should make British imperialism smile. As to how some other Britons feel on this question, just recently Mr. Leonard Barnes, a former British Colonial officer, speaking at the National Peace Conference, said: "Soviet Russia has done more effective work with the backward peoples in twelve years than Britain has done in five centuries".

The imperialist powers in the League of Nations should have been ruthlessly exposed if Mr. Padmore had written in the interests of the native peoples. Especially is this true of the point in which the question of the mandates is dealt with. How the Soviet Union aids backward peoples to govern themselves, offering them aid and support, could have been clearly brought forward by using the minor nationalities as an example. The contrast between this attitude and Britain's attitude in South Africa presents a pretty picture. The cultural and material growth of such formerly backward people as the Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Armenians, Tajiks, etc., is an epoch in the history of human relations and developments. The right of self-determination is synonymous with the term the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.