

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN AFRICA

By J. Shields

What is to be the position of Africa in world affairs? Its large colonial territories have for years been the object of sharp imperialist rivalries, and there is need for a decisive change in this respect if the world family of free and peace-loving nations is to become a reality.

It was to this aspect of the African question and to the outlining of ways and means whereby African progress and welfare can be promoted and advanced in the interest of world security, that an important Conference on Africa convened by the Council on African Affairs in New York in April this year, devoted its attention.

There participated in this conference Negro and white leaders of labour, civic, and women's organisations in the United States of America, representatives of the church, education, and the press, and representatives of the peoples of British West Africa, the Caribbean and India. Representatives of Foreign Governments in attendance included the Consul General for Liberia, the Counsellor for the Belgian Congo Government, the Commissioner of Information for Belgium, a member of the Staff of the French Press and Information Service, and a member of the Staff of the New York Consulate of the Soviet Union. The conference was opened by Paul Robeson, world-famous son of the great Negro peoples.

Dr. Max Yergan, Executive Director of the Council on African Affairs gave the main address. This covered four main points: 1. Increasing Africa's contribution toward victory; 2. Settlement of

Jurisdictional problems; 3. Planning for post-war Africa; 4. Urgency of International Collaboration on behalf of dependent peoples.

Referring to the African's contribution to allied victory, he pointed out that while it has not been insignificant it has been made very largely in the face of harsh and wasteful labour practices, archaic productive methods, and barriers of every type, all of which characterise European domination of the African. He drew attention to the fact that under the excuse of war emergency, forced labour for mining and agricultural enterprises had been reintroduced in Kenya, Tanganyika, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Rhodesia.

Giving other instances of measures such as the colour bar, the pass systems, restrictions upon trade union recognition, etc., which hindered Africans from making their maximum potential contribution to victory, he declared that the U. S. Government and the American Labour movement working in cooperation with the British and other progressive Labour forces of the world, can and must aid the African people to become our full and equal ally in the struggle against fascism.

On the second point, the solution of territorial and jurisdictional problems, regarding which questions are being raised in many quarters concerning the future of the former Italian-African Empire, the African mandated areas, the sovereign status of Ethiopia and Liberia, and the projected regional grouping of African territories, Dr. Yergan stated that the Atlantic Charter and the Moscow and Teheran declarations with their guarantees of international justice and democracy, must be the instruments for solving these and other similar questions. The exigencies of war had been breaking down isolationist barriers between various colonies in Africa. This had made for economic progress, and in British West Africa, for example, a new outlook for the unification of African peoples.

The danger that these regional economic units might develop into instruments for furthering European domination can be avoided only by (a) making sure that the dependent peoples themselves, and not merely their governors, have a voice in making decisions in these regional councils, wherever formed; (b) that these regional bodies are subordinate and responsible to a world-embracing international authority which shall establish economic and political goals and enforce minimum labour and social standards for all dependent areas of the world.

On the question of planning for the social, economic and political progress of the African people, the Council's view, said Dr. Yergan, was that the future of Africa and of other colonial areas must be worked out on the plane of world-wide international agreements and action. He visualised an international agency comparable to the U. N. R. R. A.

This international agency, he said, could establish, in co-operation with the representatives of the peoples affected, labour, social and civil standards and rights for the indigenous population of every dependent territory. It would have the authority to hold the governments of such territories strictly accountable for the maintenance of these standards and rights.

The agency would have central responsibility for planning, financing (from a pool of public subsidy and private investment funds), and supervising the development of mass education, health services, housing, etc., together with industrial progress and general social

advancement in all dependent territories. It would guard against monopolistic restrictions and controls and would encourage public, co-operative and collective enterprise among the indigenous population.

The agency would have the further responsibility of certifying and guaranteeing self-government and the right of self-determination to the people of any dependent area, and of promoting development of all such peoples toward self-government according to a specific time schedule.

He believed that such an organisation could be set up despite British official reluctance and, if grounded in the people and with Africans in on the ground floor, it could help Africa to take its place in the new post-war world.

These ideas put forward by Dr. Yergan seem worth discussion in Africa and in this and other countries.
