

COMMENT

From the Coffin of Apartheid

FOLLOWING the attempt of the Botha government to give limited voting rights to Coloureds and Indians and thus divide the non-white majority in the country, the people of South Africa have been in a state of continuous revolt. At first the South African government thought this uprising to be similar in scale to the ones in Sharpeville and Soweto. As such they thought a strong show of force would quieten things down.

However, despite hundreds of fatalities, the revolt has not only not subsided but seems to be gaining momentum everyday. The display of brutalities of the South African police force on the screens of millions viewers in the country's key trading partners - Britain, USA, France and Germany - has led to a build up of popular pressure 'to do something' to redeem their conscience. This has crystallised into the demand to impose sanctions on trade with South Africa. The demand has so far been rebuffed by the usual excuses about the futility of sanctions.

It is to be noted that white settlers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries invaded South Africa, North America and Australasia. In Australasia and North America they managed to liquidate the native populations - namely the Aborigines and the Red Indians. In South Africa, despite repeated attempts, the local people were able to hold out. As a result the desired solution of white settlers to clear the land for their exclusive use - became unattainable. They, therefore, devised the next best alternative - namely separate and subjugated existence for the non-white peoples. This extreme manifestation of white racism has come to be known as apartheid.

Apartheid gives the white racists the best of both worlds - it enables them to exploit non-white labour whilst keeping them in a permanent state of servitude. As such apartheid conjures up much warm sentimentality in the hearts of white racists across the western world. The inaction of the western world in the face of brutalities in South Africa is thus rooted in deeply engrained attitudes about white supremacy.

The whole debate is summed up by the attitude of the US. Its whole policy of 'constructive engagement' is geared towards

persuading the Botha government to ditch the outward signs of apartheid while keeping intact the system of crass exploitation of the non-white peoples of South Africa. There is no suggestion that the system of exploitation be dismantled.

This is further confirmed by the fact that whilst condemning apartheid the US is engaged in providing South Africa with the military capability to hold the whole of Africa to ransom. Through its Zionist ally, the US has enabled South Africa to develop a nuclear capability. Thus, whilst apartheid in its outward manifestations may disappear white hegemony over the continent would stay put. The fate of Namibia, Angola and Mozambique is only a foretaste of the kind of hegemony to be visited upon Africa once the 'stigma' of apartheid is expunged.

The fear of the 'white' world - particularly Britain and the US - is that the intransigence of the Botha government may unleash forces which may not be able to be tamed and channelled into the direction of the desired solution for South Africa - namely apartheid in all but name. Already there are signs that black moderates - including most of the Church leaders - are no longer being heeded. If their repeated arrests do not result in the enhancement of their credibility, then the movement would have definitely passed into the hands of radicals seeking more fundamental transformations in the political economy of the country. This 'danger' explains the anxiety of the 'white' world about not forcing the Botha government into a 'Laager' mentality by a hasty imposition of sanctions. The whole future of white control of the tip of Africa is at stake.

For the majority people of South Africa, the lessons of Vietnam, Iran and Lebanon are heart-warming. Despite possession of megatonnes of all instruments of mass destruction - including nuclear weapons - the will of the people is ultimately bound to triumph. The determination with which they have pursued the latest round of the struggle, against all odds, shows that these lessons are not lost on the people of South Africa. ■

M Iqbal Asaria