

July 1964

Memorandum to W.C.C. Colleagues
re: Policy on South Africa

1. South Africa is too critical a topic for us to leave the matter in the unresolved condition in which it remained after the C.C.I.A. Executive. Normally the C.C.I.A. Officers can be expected to come forward to their colleagues in the W.C.C. with some agreed proposals; but in this case, it is inevitable and right that the process of hammering out ideas should be shared with a number of members of the W.C.C. Secretariat who are themselves deeply concerned and involved. What went wrong in Geneva was the result perhaps of a failure to communicate ideas beforehand in sufficient fulness - a task I shrank from partly for lack of time to do it, partly because it is bound to be lengthy and may therefore be tedious to my colleagues. I have now however concluded that the task cannot be avoided and I ask you therefore to bear with a lengthy expose.

2. In my judgement, the practical problem boils down to this - How can political power be most quickly conferred upon the African in South Africa? The host of apparent injustices, the mounting repressive legislation, economic discrimination and all the rest will yield only to the African having effective political power. I think it extremely important therefore to keep this objective clearly and tersely in mind.

3. African leaders in South Africa are becoming convinced that the only political method available to them to achieve this end involves the use of violence. I must say that I believe they are right. (All the same, as one whose boyhood was entirely spent in such a situation of violence, I tremble because I doubt if anyone without that experience will foresee adequately the misery involved). We found at Windolo how hard it is for Christians to face this fact, and perhaps how impossible for churches to give it any public support. But as a fact it remains, and we must at least acknowledge it to one another. Internationally the consequence is that those Africans who begin realistically to accept this reality, and who at the same time do not blind themselves to the relative impotence of the forces at their own disposal, look for international support of a kind which will make up for their own lack of military, economic or political power. They naturally try to create on the international scene a situation where nations who possess power will bring it to bear compulsively on the South African Government, in line with the objectives of the African leaders themselves. The whole strategy is a logical expression of the conviction that the situation will yield only to force. (Incidentally, talk of parallels with Algeria, Kenya or Viet-Nam needs to be treated with reserve. The problem in South Africa is infinitely graver. You have a highly developed, independent, indigenised society, with all the modern resources of government at

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its command, on the spot. The situation is not comparable to a "colonial" one, but is akin to the problem facing European revolutionaries at the turn of the century - in Russia or Germany etc - planning to overthrow an entire social system. It is a very much bigger job than Algeria was.)

4. The fact that this international policy is the natural one for Africans to support does not however absolve the rest of the world from deciding whether it is the best policy for achieving the objective defined in para.2 above. In practical terms, the policy boils down to the application of effective and paralysing economic sanctions backed by naval blockade if necessary. The questions to be answered about this are twofold - could it be organised efficiently, and would it have the desired result?

5. Could it be organised efficiently? A number of calculations have emerged, not least from the conference in London on the subject of which Noel Salter has given me a verbal report (the documents are not yet printed, I think, so I have not been able to study them). Oil is the critical commodity but it is in surplus supply in the world so that sellers are searching for markets. South Africa has 6 months supply which could be increased on sign of impending action, and her rate of use could be reduced by emergency measures. Meantime she has the resources to extend her domestic production from coal on a crash basis. From another angle, any blockade measures to stop oil supplies would be taken, not directly against South Africa, but against the ships of supplying countries. In addition, forceful action would have to be initiated by the blockaders who would need to be strong enough to withstand land based air attacks in response. The naval facilities for such a blockade are very expensive, hard to arrange so far from base, and would need to cover the Port of Lorenzo Marques as well as South African ports. So many difficulties invite the question whether a full scale invasion would not be a more efficient and equally justifiable action - itself of course a very considerable undertaking.

6. Why not have at least the courage to attempt a policy of sanctions and see what happens? two serious arguments can be raised against this. A policy of sanctions which failed would leave the power situation in South Africa far more intractable. Secondly, the fragile existing system of international order might suffer a mortal blow if, in a matter of this consequence, a U.N. policy ended in ridicule.

7. Suppose, however, all these arguments were effectively countered, would a policy of sanctions bring about the required result? I find it hard in principle to conceive how the relations between two communities in South Africa could be restored and put on a co-operative basis by outside force. But aside from such a priori difficulties,

no one has clearly indicated what the precise goal of the pressure would be. The U.N. Experts Group suggests a "Convention", but apparently one in which political power remained in the hands of one party at the table. Such an outcome would surely be a meagre thing, without any guarantee of the transfer of political power at the end of it. In my view, we do not yet have a thought-out plan as to how economic sanctions can in fact be made to lead to the transfer of political power.- there is a whole heap of woolly thinking there.

8. If force, and even violence, is the only path open to Africans in South Africa, the same may not be true of the international community. It was in the light of this thought, and the apparent vanity of a policy of sanctions, that I began to develop ideas which I won't repeat here because they are outlined in the paper presented to our Executive. I am impatient with those who try to combine doubts about economic sanctions with a posture of hostility and merely verbal assault on South Africa. This does not seem to me to hold promise of liberating a single African, but merely relieving our feelings and keeping a good position for ourselves on the record. If sanctions and pressure won't work, what will? My own visit to South Africa was intended both to keep open a diplomatic possibility until we had time to assess it, and to discover whether there were any conceivable chinks of light which we should concentrate on trying to enlarge. I therefore commend the ideas in para 7. and following of my memo to our Executive, not as an easy going way of avoiding issues, but as perhaps the most hopeful general line for getting political power over to Africans in South Africa as quickly as possible. These ideas seem to my far mind more efficient than others being aired just now.

9. I want at this point to summarise. CCIA has to develop some policy ideas in view of the grave situation in South Africa. It can speak fair words which mean little. It can support a policy of international pressure by means of sanctions. Apart from all the objections already listed, this would mean in particular trying to exercise influence on the thought of the Governments of the U.S.A. and U.K. The obstacles are indeed formidable and it would be really irresponsible of CCIA to seek a solution along these lines if it was at heart convinced that the U.S.A. and U.K. Governments were utterly adamant and not persuadable. I don't think this is quite the case. What I fear is something perhaps even more frustrating - that these governments would publicly bow to international pressure, but privately would see that they themselves were in no way involved in carrying the policy through. That would mean that the policy ended in mere words and nothing happened. Thirdly, CCIA could seek solutions in other directions. To do so would not be popular for it would call in question what sponsors hope to be a gathering world consensus. But our job is not primarily to be popular but to get political power into African

hands as speedily as possible (see para.2.). This leads to a last set of reflections - on our own relation to the U.N. Agencies in this matter.

10. I recognize the weight of the opinions of people like Sir Hugh Foot and Mrs. Myrdal. But let us be careful here. The Church in a nation must respect the professional skill, integrity and authority of wise men in government - but it is not thereby excused from reaching its own judgements as necessary. So the Ecumenical movement is not excused from reaching an opinion independently of its equivalent vis-à-vis, the organs of the U.N. The point of view is different and sometimes also the presuppositions. I may be allowed to illustrate by outlining my own differences of opinion with the two people mentioned above.

Sir Hugh Foot speaks of South Africa as being perhaps the trigger for a universal racial conflict. My job is always to try to assess what leads politicians to make certain statements. In this case I am aware that the right of the U.N. to interfere in any way in South Africa depends upon establishing the thesis that its internal affairs represent a danger to peace. I am therefore inclined to be on my guard - not necessarily assuming that Sir Hugh is in any way guilty of duplicity, but realising the pressures within the milieu where he works in favour of the thesis he propounds. On analysis, I understand his position to be that if the European Community in South Africa comes under African attack, it will expect help in defending itself from, e.g. the U.S. and U.K. Governments - in which case race feeling inside these countries and elsewhere in the world will explode. The theory may well be right. But the possibility that the Governments of the U.S. and U.K. would in fact come to the rescue of the Europeans in South Africa (apart perhaps from being prepared to evacuate refugees) seems to me remote, and one that would not be taken very seriously by anyone in close touch with the government machine in either country. I would say that the possibility which Sir Hugh speaks of is of exactly the same order of likelihood as the election of Goldwater. Only Goldwater is likely to embrace the policy Sir Hugh fears. I make the point to explain why, as an Officer of CCIA, I presume to hold opinions different from Sir Hugh's.

In conversation with Mrs. Myrdal, she expressed to me the view that an integrated and non-racial society in South Africa was an inevitable consequence of the development of modern industrial society. The remark struck me then, and strikes me now, as very typical of an intellectual, a member of a neutralist country and a secular humanist! It seems strangely remote from the earthy

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passions of men. One has only to watch the travail to bring to birth a united Western Europe, the deep-rooted attachment to cultural and traditional patterns, the long history of nationalism, to understand that the integration of two communities in South Africa is an infinitely complex and slow process. One has the feeling that our Ecumenical insights about human unity which include a transcendental and even eschatological understanding of our one-ness in Christ, will give a truer respect to real differences than do the presuppositions of the progressive humanist.

These examples are given solely to indicate that one does not lightly differ from worthy people, but at the same time, is very unwilling to see the Ecumenical Movement lose its critical capacity or independence of judgement.

11. I have deliberately exposed my thinking to the criticism of my colleagues - as fully as I can. My complaint in the past has not been that they criticised my papers, but rather that none of them appeared to notice them! I ask only two concessions - that the latter part of my paper to CCIA Executive be read carefully alongside this, and secondly, that we cease arguing about who understands the situation best, and give our minds rather to practical actions to remedy it.

July, 1964

ALAN R. BOOTH

P.S. Sir Kenneth Grubb's comments are as follows:-

All, or any, of the proposals in Nos. 7-9 of your paper of the 4th June are worth pursuing, and I would add the following. As I have often said, we of the W.C.C. and the C.C.I.A. want solutions on too cheap terms, namely the passage of resolutions and the holding of recognised conferences. Problems of the like of South Africa are not to be solved in this way, and I propose two other preliminary steps which would lead to further action:-

- (a) That a South Africa fund should be established by the W.C.C. which would finance the travel of a series of visitors, theologians, sociologists, lawyers, to South Africa, to confer

with individuals and people of all races there.

- (b) That the W.C.C. and/or the C.C.I.A. consider whether they should not establish a permanent agent in South Africa who would primarily be (a) a private reconciliator and (b) a reporter of intelligence. I have made this proposal before: I make it again because I think that the whole conception of solving a conflict of history and passion by a parade of intellectual and political assumptions is misleading. In a situation of persons, a person is necessary; and in a situation of passions - passion, yes, but also reason.