

(November 1st, 1937)

Conflicting Interest in Africa and Possible Adjustments.

MAX YERGAN,

Secretary of the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A.

CHAIRMAN T. D'ARCY LEONARD: — Gentlemen, we welcome to-day as our guest-speaker Mr. Max Yergan, who has just returned after seventeen years in Africa, during which time he held the position of secretary of the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A.

Mr. Yergan's subject is Conflicting Interests in Africa and Possible Adjustments.

In the present troubled state of the world African problems are major issues—the Ethiopian situation during the last two years, and within the last two weeks, the question of German colonization has become more important and more acute. So well versed is Mr. Yergan in these problems, and in the conditions of life among the African people, and so capable is he of interpreting them that he has recently been appointed director of the International Committee of African Affairs. I am sure we are going to hear a most interesting address.

MR. YERGAN:—Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen: may I express my appreciation of the privilege of speaking here to-day on a subject of importance. I find myself in full agreement with the remarks of the Chairman when he pointed out that Africa is important because of what is happening there in relation to Europe, and I would add that Africa is important also because of what has already happened there.

My responsibilities to this international committee as well as other responsibilities as lecturer at City College are

concerned with affairs in Africa and race relationships in the United States.

Conflicts of interest in Africa are to be seen in the light of what has happened during the last two generations, characterized by three significant forms of penetration which have changed the fundamental basis of African life.

The first of these is of a political nature and goes back in part to 1884, the year that marked the beginning of the modern partitioning of Africa. This has brought about the changes whereby the control of the continent has passed from the hands of its natural inhabitants into the hands of five great European powers — Great Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Italy. Whereas two generations ago it was possible to say that hardly ten per cent of African Territory was controlled by outside powers, the fact to-day is, that less than ten per cent of Africa is in the political control of the peoples of Africa.

The most recent example of European invasion is to be seen in the occupation of Ethiopia by Fascist Italy. The facts that led up to the invasion are well known. The methods of that invasion and the problems, that are now presenting themselves as the result, are also fairly well known. We may, then, turn with profit, to consider the effects of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia upon peoples living in other parts of the continent.

First of all it is important to remember that South Africa expressed herself, officially and otherwise, in no uncertain terms against the act of invasion, and, in doing so, pointed out the possible harmful consequences to the already existing situation in Africa with regard to the relationship between Africans and Europeans.

I was in widely separated parts of the continent during the campaign, and I found that in South, East, and in French West Africa the impression made upon Africans was more or less the same. In the first place there was great resentment both of the fact of the invasion and the ruthlessness and brutality practiced by the invading forces.

In the second place the fact of the Italian Fascist invasion served in a retro-active manner. It served to make Africans aware of the changes that have taken place as the

result of the general invasion of Africa by European Powers. It may be said that the invasion of fascist Italy has served to direct the thoughts of Africans to the fact of Europeans' control of the continent, and their troubles and fears are in no way allayed by current references to the desires of Germany to regain control of her former colonies. Indeed it may be questioned, if anything in the period of European occupancy has caused as much alarm as the present encroachment and further designs of Fascist Europe have caused during the past three or four years. While there is a real difference between Italy and Germany, on the one hand, and the other European powers which have occupied Africa, on the other, it nevertheless remains true that the powerful position of the Fascists in Africa to-day and its possible extension has served to dramatize and call attention to the historical fact to which we are now referring, namely, the change in the political control of Africa which has taken place within the last two generations.

The second characteristic of development is to be seen in the increased extent of the exploitation of the continent's material resources. Nearly fifty years ago Jules Ferrie gave three reasons why European countries desired to colonize in Africa:

First, access to the raw materials of the colonies; second in order that they might have a sale in them for manufactured goods; third, in order that they might have a field for the investment of surplus capital. We see now that these reasons have been abundantly proved and justified. For proof look at the yield of gold in South Africa. In 1936 the output was 352,596 fine kilograms, or 395,765,000 in terms of dollars.

Then there is the matter of copper. Deposits of that metal are so vast that experts have hardly been able to make an estimate of their value, and we might mention in passing the tremendously increased demand for copper and the consequent rise in price which is the result of the enormously expanded armament programs of Europe. Other items of mineral and agricultural importance on which European countries have their eyes are manganese, rubber, cotton, coffee, wool and hides, not to mention those things, of secondary importance so far as armaments are concerned

but of vital importance as exports: tobacco, sisal, palm oil nuts, cocoa and ground-nuts (peanuts).

Manufacturers of cotton goods in Lancashire are looking forward to the time when it will be possible to obtain all, or at any rate, a large part of their supply of cotton from British possessions in Africa and there is a strong basis on which they build their hopes in view of the fact that it is now possible to travel from Cape Town to Egypt and remain on British Territory the whole way.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of these developments which have resulted from this exploitation of resources during the past generation, not only to Africa itself but to the world at large. Whereas there was a time when only a few small steamers plied their trade in a few unimportant ports of Africa, now huge ships come and go from America and Europe, and there is, in addition, a direct Japanese line that plies from Japan to Melbourne, down to Cape Town and then across to South America. Thus has this continent been linked up with the commercial interests of the entire world, and the development has been so recent and so swift that the growth in business has taken on the aspect of geometrical progression.

The third aspect of this general invasion that has changed the face of the continent is the penetration of settlers from Europe. The extent of this colonization in the Union of South Africa is amazing. In this area—about seven times the size of England and Wales—some two million Europeans have established themselves, and so firmly have they done so that it is now possible to travel all the way from Cape Town to Johannesburg by a first class railway.

In travelling on that railway we may observe the various forms of industrial development that have taken place in the past few years, which with the development of agriculture places the country on an equal footing with Canada and the United States. Cultural development has progressed at an equal rate. There are four first class universities and a number of allied University Colleges. There is a good system of elementary education, and there are available all the social institutions required by modern western peoples. Capetown, Pretoria, Durban, Johannesburg, East London,

Port Elizabeth, Lourenco Marques, Bulawayo, and Salisbury, all compare favorably with cities of their size in any part of North America.

But these towns and what they imply are a development of the European ideal and not the African, and in the relationships which have grown up between African and European as a consequence of their divergence of ideals is another conflict which will need adjustment. The development which has taken place is a natural development of the European heritage and it is difficult to see how it could have taken place along different lines from what it has, and whatever else may be said of the attitudes of Europeans in South Africa this at least must be said, that they have acted in a natural manner and have responded more or less to the dictates of their heritage and their circumstances.

But it is just in these things—their very presence and development, and what they considered necessary to perfect that development and hand it on to their children, that the nature of the conflict is to be seen.

It is to be seen in South Africa in what may be regarded as the general policy of the government towards native Africans in legislative enactments, and reference to these will reveal the nature of the policy. There is, for example, the Color Bar Act of 1926 which makes it possible to close certain fields of labor to Africans because they are Africans. These are the "Master and servant" laws which operate to the disadvantage of Africans as parties to a labor contract. There is the Wages Act which exempts agriculture from its operations and so prevents Africans on farms from securing a uniform wage.

Again there is the Native Servants Contract Act of 1932 which, in effect, makes every adult native male liable to render unpaid services, and which further gives the head of any native family the right to enter into a contract on behalf of any of its members under 18, male or female with or without that member's consent.

There is also the Native Representation of 1925 which takes away from Africans the right to participate in regular parliamentary elections.

The South African influence extends far beyond the confines of the Union, and is effective in Rhodesia, East

and West Africa, the Belgian Congo and in Kenya. There is, to be seen in the legislation of all these countries an indication of the conflict between the interests of Europeans and the interests of Africans such as is to be seen in the Union of South Africa.

It should be pointed out that what has been said has not been said as a severe criticism, but that it is, rather, a statement the purpose of which is to call attention to the forces which have, within quite a recent period, manifested themselves, and to the fact that the African Continent is no longer the "Dark Continent," but is in every sense part of a modern moving world. It is no longer unconnected with the thought and development of other parts of the world, for the influence of African affairs is felt abroad, as is the influence of foreign affairs in Africa, which, in comparatively recent history, have been effective in changing the face of that continent.

To summarize, the first conflict is in the political control of Africa, between Africa and Europe, the most recent evidence of which is the invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini; the second, the change that is to be seen in the extensive development and exploitation of the material resources of the continent; and the third is to be seen in the presence of some two millions of Europeans permanently domiciled in the Union of South Africa and the two million others who occupy areas controlled by France and other European powers.

It is in terms of the effect of these changes that we must give our attention to consideration of the actual conflict which is to be observed to-day.

First of all there is to be seen a conflict of an international nature, a struggle amongst the powers for the control of Africa. This conflict is to be seen, and will be seen in increasing measure, between the fascist and democratic powers of Europe, and within this it is impossible to avoid seeing the extension to Africa of the struggle between the owning and working classes. It is characteristic in Europe and it is bound to interject itself into the European policy in Africa. Europe to-day is full of the effects of this class struggle and in the conflicts of Africa this aspect of the European scene is bound to make itself felt.

Secondly there is to be seen the conflict that exists between the peoples of Europe and the peoples who live in Africa, and the most revealing aspect of that conflict is that to which we have already referred in the Union of South Africa, and in these other parts of Africa where Europeans are.

With regard to the International struggle it is a struggle between Fascism and Democracy and with regard to the internal conflict it is only superficially a racial question and actually a conflict of a political and economic nature.

That, then, is the real nature of the existing and potential conflict in regard to Africa. The conflict and tension are there because the European is there, with his background and heritage, and because he believes, quite naturally, that it is his business to preserve what he has achieved. That on the one hand, and on the other those eight or ten million of Africans in the Union and the thirty-eight or forty millions in areas contiguous to the Union who likewise believe in themselves and refuse to give up the racial and cultural qualities which have made possible a life for themselves, and so, as they express themselves with great conviction, they desire a new place, an improved place, in the community where they are living, and in the business and policies which govern that place. In this direction the conflict is steadily increasing.

There is a large international school of thought which sees the whole question only a conflict between Fascism and democracy, and it really does seem impossible to think of Africa to-day, and of this conflict without having in mind and contrasting the philosophy and methods of democratic countries, with the Fascist countries and their philosophies and methods, and in view of the claims of these conflicting forces we are justified in asking ourselves what possible adjustments are there that can be brought to bear to lessen the struggle.

With regard to the conflict with Fascism it is my belief that in terms of Fascist philosophy it is hardly possible to envisage any amicable adjustment. The ruthlessness of Fascism serves to make one extremely doubtful of Fascism lending itself to any adjustment other than one which would be in the sole interests of Fascism.

That is not quite the case with democratic philosophy which ostensibly regards the holding of control in Africa as a Trusteeship, though in actual practice it cannot be said to have worked out in accordance with the general acceptance of the meaning of that term, but as between Fascism and democracy we do know where the greater hope lies.

Democracy, however, must be called upon to give evidence that its claim to Trusteeship is an effective claim, and to show that the benefits of democratic institutions may be made increasingly available to the native populations.

Between the African and the European, particularly in South Africa, one believes that adjustments are possible along these lines, but there must first of all be a recognition by the European of the common citizenship of the African. So long as this recognition is refused conflict will inevitably follow and the Africans will continue to fight for it. It is essential that Europeans should give some concrete evidence that they do not regard the Africans as beings to be exploited as they exploit the material resources of the continent.

If these things are done then the forces of democracy will be greatly strengthened, if and when the "show-down" comes with Fascism in Africa, and for this reason alone it would seem desirable that some adjustment should be quickly made that will give satisfaction to both parties. In any adjustment the democratic powers must give effect to the principle of trusteeship and thereby make possible the extension, to what are now in effect subject peoples, of those institutions on which democracy is itself founded, so that the African may have a share in the resources and government of his own land such as will enable him to hold up his head as a free man in a free and democratic community. If that is done the conflicts of to-day will break down and become the co-operations of to-morrow.