

The ugly face of Portugal

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354

THERE is as much evidence today for the massacre at Wiriyamu as can possibly be expected for any such event within a Police State. It can now be taken as established that on 16 December 1972 more than 400 inhabitants, mainly women and children, of Wiriyamu, Chawola and Juwau, a group of villages south of Tete, were systematically wiped out by a body of soldiers descending on them by helicopter.

The significance of an atrocity clearly lies less in the event than in the attitudes towards it. No one would deny that in guerrilla warfare the innocent are bound to get hurt at times and that even well-disciplined soldiers under the most enlightened orders can 'over-react' in situations of great strain, and that officers can give commands not in accord with higher policy. This being so, the attitude of authority to allegations of serious atrocity becomes very significant.

Instant facile denial, a refusal of any public inquiry, the failure to send a single senior official out from Lisbon to Tete to investigate in four weeks of international debate, the expulsion of journalists from Tete as soon as they seemed to be getting near crucial witnesses—all this involves the highest Portuguese authority in a cover-up which necessarily identifies it with the original event: not indeed a very efficient cover-up, but that is another matter.

In consequence one is bound to judge the event not as an aberration from official Portuguese policy but as a consistent part of a larger whole, and such I believe it to be. Indeed, involving as it did the use of a number of helicopters coming directly from Tete, it is certain that the expedition was ordered by a senior official there.

How does such a conclusion relate to one's wider knowledge of Portuguese aims and methods? It has been argued that it is so wholly inconsistent with Portuguese policy and its 'non-racial' character that it is simply incredible. Such a conclusion derives, I believe, from a series of misunderstandings about the nature of Portuguese policy.

It is perfectly true that Portuguese policy has never embraced the legal racialism of South Africa, rejecting in particular the strict social apartheid and that it has become in law still more non-racialistic during the last few years. It is also true that at a number of levels there is in practice some racial intermingling of a kind at present unthinkable in South Africa, that educational facilities for Africans have greatly improved over the last decade, that a few Africans who identify culturally and politically with Portugal can be and are promoted to fairly senior posts.

FATHER ADRIAN HASTINGS, the British priest who first revealed the Mozambique massacre, explains the real significance of the atrocity.

It is true, too, that a number of Frelimo deserters are received and well treated in the Portuguese Army. Frelimo has indeed its own difficulties: the life of its members is a desperate one and there are inevitably conflicts within such bodies. It is not surprising that some of its members forsake it for the relative security and regular pay of a soldier, and not surprising either that the Army finds this toleration well worth while.

All of this must be seen in the wider context of the quite extraordinary economic and educational backwardness of Portuguese Africa up to about 1960 in comparison with neighbouring countries, the growth of international investment since then, and the essential need in face of the challenge of Frelimo to reacquire some African support.

But none of this negates the reality of other, less attractive, features. And they, too, have a long background. The Portuguese treatment of Africans was in the past extraordinarily brutal, and that brutality has not been lost today in any situation where Africans come up against authority. The development of the modern Portuguese political system, with the immense power within it of the secret police (the DGS, Directorate General of Security, formerly the PIDE), has made the brutality something still more systematic than before. This is universally present, but one detects that in areas of real threat—and that has certainly been the condition of the Tete district these last years—the ruthlessness of the worst sides of the Portuguese government machine is at once greatly reinforced.

Further, there is a very strong racialism at work within the system. It is this point which is most likely to be challenged, as it is constantly reiterated that there is no racialism in Portuguese Africa, and some examples of it must be given.

First of all, it is to be recalled that General Kaulza de Arriaga, Commander-in-Chief of Portuguese forces in Mozambique, has publicly declared the maintenance of 'white supremacy' to be 'a national objective.' In Mozambique, where the white population is less than five per cent of the whole, if such an objective will not result in some form of very decisive racial discrimination against the other 95 per cent it is difficult to see what words can mean.

One could consider first the treatment of distinguished dissidents: Domingos Arouca, the first black Mozambican doctor of law, has now been in prison and detention for over eight years, charged with 'psychological subversion.' There is no comparable case of detention of a white lawyer. Father Pinto de Andrade, the best-known black Angolan Catholic priest, has been in prison and detention since May 1960. He was given no trial at all until 1971—there is no example of a white priest being detained 11 years without trial.

Still more serious is the case of a whole group of pastors of the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique, arrested in June 1972. Zedequias Manganhela, president of the synod and well known as a cheerful family man, was found hanged in Machava prison, Lourenco Marques, on the night of 10-11 December last year. The authorities announced that he had killed himself. If so, it was after prolonged torture. White priests and pastors are not treated thus. I find it amazing that there has been so little reaction from the Presbyterian Church in Britain to the terrible treatment of the Church in Mozambique.

Next, we have the sad story of the last bishop of Beira, Mgr Albino Ribeiro de Saptana. He was the first non-white bishop in Mozambique, a Goan, appointed after much pressure from Rome to breach the white monopoly in the hierarchy. Appointed to Beira in February 1972, he died of a heart attack in February 1973, having suffered a vast quantity of abuse and even physical attacks on his house—its front door was covered with human excrement by white elements in Beira.

Finally, we may quote the decisive judgment of Bishop Felix Niza Ribeiro de João Belo, given a few months ago in evidence at the trial of the Portuguese priests, Fathers Sampaio and Mendes. Monsignor Niza declared that racialism in practice was simply a part of the Mozambique way of life. He added, 'Do you want an example of what I have stated? Together with these two priests a black man was accused of the same crime and imprisoned on the same day. Where is he now? Has he lawyers to defend him? What happened to him and, above all, why? Because he is black.'

The man in question was a

simple mission servant, Joao Chabuca. He was arrested on even slighter charges than the two priests—who were finally given very minor sentences by the court and immediately released—but he has completely disappeared, despite all the inquiries of the lawyers. White men are not so treated. There is indeed no legal racialism, but the practical racialism can be far worse.

All this and much more is unquestionable fact and it is against this background that we have to evaluate reports of what is going on in the war zone, where evidence is far more difficult to obtain.

Then there are both the Army and the secret police. To represent the latter we have men like Senhor Lontrao who, when PIDE inspector in the north, in Vila Cabral before 1969, had gained a terrible reputation. Working more recently in Beira, he has acquired exactly the same reputation there, appearing by name in the White Father dossier recently published. Or there is Chico Cachavi, a black DGS agent in Tete, whose special task it is to incite black troops when they have to carry out unpleasant tasks of one sort or another. It was his voice that was heard at Wiriyamu crying 'These are the orders of our chief: kill them all' when an Army officer suggested taking the survivors to an 'aldeamento' (armed camp).

There is no reason to believe that Wiriyamu was a wholly exceptional incident. Certainly, the massacre of several hundred people on a single day does not take place very often, but we have reliable reports that it has happened a number of times, and it is only too likely that there have been other incidents from which there have been no survivors.

Canon Houtart of Louvain, an internationally known sociologist, has stated that Mgr Eduardo Muaca, the auxiliary bishop of Luanda in Angola, informed him of the massacre of 300 villagers in Angola in 1970. We have similar reports from Major Ervedosa, formerly a Portuguese staff officer in Angola. Father Vic Nijs, a Belgian missionary formerly working in the far north of Mozambique—in whose interior nearly all missions were compulsorily closed some years ago—has reported the burning alive of an entire village there.

From the Tete district we have not only the rather smaller-scale massacres in the Mucumbura area, the truth of which has already been wit-

nessed to in court, but we also have the report of the massacre of some 200 people in the villages of Ngunda and Ncena on 21 or 22 March 1972. Ngunda and Ncena are some 50 miles from Tete near the road to Zobwe on the Malawian border, and the massacre was carried out as a combined operation by two groups of soldiers, one coming from Zobwe, the other from Capiri Janje.

In each of these examples the pattern of events appears similar: there has been an increase in revolutionary activity in the area, generally near an important main road,

and some Army casualties. In retaliation the Army wipes out a village or two in the area and nothing more is said about it.

Not everyone in authority has been happy with such ruthlessness. It was probably because of his growing protests on the subject that Bishop Niza Ribeiro was moved from Tete early in 1972 to João Belo in the more peaceful south of Mozambique. A few months later, in July, the civil governor was also removed and with him the administrator of Moatize. In his place was appointed a military governor, Colonel

Videira of the paratroops, charged with the re-establishment of Government control at any price.

By the end of last year Frelimo was thought, as is clear from Government communiqués, to be threatening even the town of Tete and particularly the strategic road passing south of the town to Beira. It was this that prompted the violent reprisal on 16 December in some villages a little off the road, whose story is now well known.

An adequate over-all assessment of the present situation and desirable future development of Portuguese Africa

can obviously not be based on a single event, be it even as dramatic as that of Wiryamu. At the same time, both its conformity with a wider pattern of events and its governmental cover-up greatly add to its significance. None of this shows that Frelimo is winning the war, nor does it show that Frelimo is a praiseworthy organisation—those are different questions—but what it must demonstrate to the unbiased is the oppression, the callousness and the sheer governmental incompetence of the present rulers of Mozambique.