

GUERRILLA WARFARE IN RHODESIA

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The moral aspect of the inevitable use of violence in the guerilla warfare in Rhodesia cannot be discussed without a clear perception of the institutionalised violence which marks the daily lives of Africans in that country. Given that all violence is to be deplored, there are, nevertheless, situations in which the passing phase of physical violence has to be regarded as less destructive to the human personality than that permanent violence which, disguised as lawful authority, systematically reduces 96% of the country's population to an inferior kind of existence. To appreciate this the following historical and social facts are relevant.

The Rhodesian government is an illegal government and hence its laws have no moral binding force. Immediately after the act of rebellion by the Rhodesian Prime Minister in November 1965, when he unilaterally declared the country to be independent, the British parliament asserted its authority under the Colonial Laws Validity Act of 1865 and passed the Southern Rhodesia Act of 1965 which gave the British government authority to make Orders in Council regarding Rhodesia. The Southern Rhodesia Order later that year declared void the rebel constitution of 1965, revoked the legislative power of the Southern Rhodesian Legislative Assembly and enabled the British government to legislate for Rhodesia. Unfortunately Britain never made use of its powers.

Only the Rhodesian courts recognised the validity of the new regime. In 1966 and 1968 the General Division and the Appellate Division of the High Court respectively, ruled that although the unilateral declaration of independence and the 1965 constitution were illegal, the revolution had achieved internal success and the government was therefore the only effective government in the country. In late 1968 the High Court gave the regime *de jure* recognition.¹

¹International Commission of Jurists: *Racial Discrimination and Repression in Southern Rhodesia*. Pub. by the Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1976 p. 7.

The international community, however, has never recognised the *de facto* government and continues denying it *de jure* status. Consequently there is no legal and no moral obligation on any citizen to co-operate with the present government. On the contrary, there are great moral imperatives compelling committed Christians to replace the illegal regime by one based on a new social order. The very illegality of the regime facilitates the Christians' response to conscience, to alter the social conditions of their country and to liberate its peoples.

The inequitable land distribution, the unfair educational opportunities and employment practices between the races have often been described. In a situation in which 96% of the population are confined to less than 50% of the land, where only 50% of the African children can go to school and where the government spends twelve times as much money on the education of each white child as it spends on that of each black child, in a situation in which the average white employee earns ten times as much money as a black employee, in a situation, moreover, in which only 14% of the African population are in paid employment and where petty apartheid practices constantly humiliate the African— in such a situation not only is a desire for change understandable, but the urgent need for change is beyond doubt.

Ideally change ought to be brought about by non-violent means. This has been amply tried in Rhodesia, but all attempts have failed because of the firm and ever growing determination of the white elite not to concede any effective social, economic and political rights to Africans. Best known are the African attempts at achieving equality through negotiation. ZAPU politicians in the early 1960s, and Muzorewa and Nkomo of the ANC in the 1970s have gone to great lengths to persuade white politicians to share power with the African people. Yet their long drawn-out meetings have had only one result: to buy time for the white population to build up its military strength and so to prolong the eventual struggle.

Strike action has also been used to draw attention to African complaints, but whenever successful strikes were staged, they were ruthlessly suppressed and strike leaders arrested. Moreover, the 1960 Law and Order (Maintenance) Act makes it a criminal offence punishable with up to five years' imprisonment for anyone to incite strike action in essential services, and the practice of boycotting strike breakers is punishable by up to ten years imprisonment. In 1972, after one of the most effective strikes in Rhodesia, a large number of strikers were dismissed, some were arrested and a mass arrest of leading trade unionists followed. This particular strike only ended when army drivers in military vehicles went into operation. Another strike at Shabani

mines was brutally broken when armed police and troops killed thirteen striking workers and forced the other workers back to work at gun point. (I.C.J. Report, p. 32.) These examples show that non-violent action on the part of Africans only calls forth violent retaliation by the government. Hence violence is perpetrated in any case. To condemn violence by the oppressed and to tolerate it by the oppressor is unjustifiable and highly hypocritical.

To these general reactions by the illegal government towards the African people must be added the recent additional provocations which are a response to African unrest under a yoke which the people are no longer willing to bear. Arrests without trial are frequent in Rhodesia. Legislation has been passed to review the continued detention of politicians arrested without trial: but such reviews take place in private, the detainees are not allowed legal representation and sometimes are not even personally present, and even if the review tribunal recommends a release, the Minister of Law and Order may overrule this decision.

Since the guerilla war has begun in earnest, new legislation has been passed which makes it a criminal offence for a tribesman not to report the presence of guerillas. Many men, including very old headmen and mere youths, have been sentenced to long term imprisonment. Abducted Africans, who were forced to join the guerillas and on returning surrendered themselves to the security forces, after having found government leaflets urging them to do so and promising them immunity, have invariably been sentenced to long term imprisonment or even to death by hanging.

In the combat areas people have been moved from their villages into fenced-in camps in order to isolate them from the insurgents. In these camps, called euphemistically "protected villages", they live in overcrowded and humanly degrading conditions. A curfew has been imposed and tribesmen breaking the curfew are shot on sight. The Minister of Defence declared: "As far as I am concerned, the more curfew-breakers that are shot the better." As a consequence of these conditions thousands of young people, not only from the combat areas, but also from the cities, especially from Salisbury, have in 1975 and 1976 crossed over into Mozambique to fight with the guerillas for the liberation of their country. Ordinary refugees are also arriving in Mozambique at the rate of over a hundred a day. (I.C.J. Report, p. 70.)

To these hardships of the civilian population must be added the constant atrocities committed by the security forces and the falsified reports appearing in the local press exaggerating atrocities committed by guerillas and even attributing to guerillas atrocities committed by government agents in order to arouse ill-feeling in the population against their liberators.

It is against this background that Rhodesian guerilla warfare

must be evaluated. A committed Christian must ask himself whether the cause of justice and peace is better served by force of arms or by the continuation of present oppression. Christ said: "I have come so that men may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10). It is clear that the life lived by Rhodesian Africans has nothing to do with that fullness of life promised by Christ.

Since the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the final period of history has begun and we are living in the hope, and with the vision, of the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. We shall have to give an account to Christ at his second coming on how we have guarded this hope among the oppressed of our time. Hence we are bound by our religion to reflect theologically about the necessity for revolutionary change. The New Testament gives us no concrete instruction on this point, which, most vital to our time, was irrelevant to the New Testament church, because the contemporaries of Christ believed in his immediate return and so were little concerned with conditions in this world. We, who no longer share this expectation, cannot afford to sit and wait.

In the Old Testament, whose people were conscious of an evolving history, stretching far into the future, there is worked out in great depth a theology of liberation of the oppressed. The prophets constantly focus on this theme. But it goes back to the Exodus, the book which states most explicitly God's will to liberate his people from oppression. According to its author, Yahweh said to Moses: "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow. For myself, knowing that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless he is forced by a mighty hand, I shall show my power and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I am going to work there. After this he will let you go. You will plunder the Egyptians." (Ex. 3:7, 8, 20, 22) Here, in brief, is the source of salvation history, of the liberation of God's people, an event which is still celebrated year by year all over the world wherever the Pascal mystery is re-enacted.

The Exodus account ought to be studied carefully before condemning the efforts of the African people to liberate themselves, for according to the Bible God is on their side. In an exact parallel to the present Rhodesian situation, where negotiations and appeals to white politicians have failed, we read: "I myself will make Pharaoh's heart stubborn. Pharaoh will not listen to you and so I will lay my hand on Egypt and with a stroke of power lead out my armies, my people, the sons of Israel. And all the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out my

hand against Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." (Ex.7: 3-6).

Traditional Christian doctrine about the right to resist an oppressive government was developed under very different circumstances, but it is still partly relevant to our situation today. According to this doctrine it is necessary that resistance be successful, for if it fails it will merely strengthen the *status quo* and lead to even worse conditions. As stated above, Christians in the early Church expected the immediate coming of Christ and so were relatively unconcerned about social conditions; it is therefore understandable that the apostles exhorted their followers to civil obedience since this was to their advantage.

Once the Church gained power and became the ruling authority of the Christian world, there was a natural eagerness to equate the *status quo* with the will of God and so a theology of authority was worked out which, even if it was adequate in the middle ages, is totally out of touch with present day realities and so has become reactionary. Modern man no longer believes in the immediate end of the world, the powers which rule Rhodesia can no longer by any stretch of the imagination be seen as being of divine right. It is clear to the suffering people that their government represents a selfseeking, exploitative small minority of over-privileged people who can only maintain their affluent position by resisting all social change. In this situation anyone who wants to remain faithful to his Christian calling must search himself in prayer to discover how best he can contribute to the creation of a new and just social order.

The present arguments by Christians in favour of non-violence are of recent origin, roughly coinciding with the arrival of modern warfare and applicable mainly to super-power politics. Applied to African liberation movements they are nothing but an ideological means whereby those who after heart searching have become involved in the liberation struggle, have their weapons snatched from their hands. This is the more reprehensible since for almost 2000 years, while the Church had great power, it blessed the weapons of the so-called Christian nations of Europe. It is only now, when Third World nations begin to fight for their freedom that what was considered heroism in Europe is called terrorism.

It is not denied that guerillas use force. They are soldiers and soldiers cannot operate without using force. But the most terrible and far-reaching use of force, force in a much more subtle and penetrating way, is used by those who try to maintain the unjust social system. It can therefore be argued that, since the oppressors already use force and through injustice and terror create more victims than the guerilla war will ever demand, every responsible person has the right and duty to resist in every possible way this

institutionalised but illegal exercise of force.

In this situation neutrality does not exist. Those who remain silent support through their silence those who cause the acute suffering of the oppressed, suffering that cries out for relief. Hence they share in the guilt of the oppressors. Involved Christians, however, can look to Christ who triumphed on the cross and ask him for forgiveness, should they in the heat of the struggle use more than the minimum of force necessary to obtain their aim, as well as for strength to carry through the struggle in which they are engaged. There is no doubt that Christ will hear them. In thus responding to the suffering around them they bear witness to Christ's demand of love for the poor, the *anawim* as they are called in the Bible, for they lay down their lives for them so that they may have a fuller life. This is true Christian sacrifice and a following of Christ crucified. African guerillas have repeatedly claimed that their blood is meant to water and fructify the soil of their land for the liberation of all.

The Christian involvement in the revolutionary struggle now taking place in Rhodesia is not easy. It requires each Christian to take a prophetic risk and demands from him clarity of vision and a resolve to implement the aims of the revolution, that is, the construction of a just society. The present revolution borne forward by the guerillas, must not slip out of the control of its initiators lest it be perverted and end in a flood of violence. This danger exists and must be combated. When Christians support guerilla warfare and revolution, their right to do so must be based on the Gospel and not on hatred. They must be inspired by a sense of oneness with the sufferers in whom they meet Christ and they must fight in the hope of a new and more just social order and with a readiness to forgive.

Once successful, the revolutionaries must act with constraint as well as with revolutionary fervour. It will be necessary for them to deprive the upholders of the former unjust social order for some time of their civil rights, but this deprivation may only be temporary and once stability has been achieved, the former offenders must be shown Christian forgiveness. This requires greatness from the new power holders.

Christian responsibility also demands that no false expectations be encouraged in the masses or a disillusionment will follow which, if it gains the upper hand, can lead to a counter-revolution and the establishment of a regime worse than the first.

After a successful guerilla warfare the real task of the revolutionaries begins, for now they have to reconstruct society and create a new social order which incorporates their ideals. This post-revolutionary society must concern itself with the problems

of the correct use of power and authority. It must avoid creating a new oppressive system and rather aim at creating a dynamic social structure which guarantees a continuing renewal. Hence it is necessary to allow for creative criticism so that the original revolutionary inspiration will be maintained and constantly renewed in a living and progressive way. A Christian must always remain open to the coming of Christ and aim at preparing for it by establishing his kingdom on earth. Christianity is an explosive religion, incarnate but always transcending the *status quo*.

A MARXIST'S JESUS

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Prague was once, and in time no doubt will be again, a cross-roads of ideas, a *carrefour* of cross-fertilisation between Christians and Marxists. The effect upon such theologians as J.B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann would not be difficult to demonstrate. In many respects now, so pervasive have a certain basic Marxist agenda and vocabulary become, Christians can no longer formulate their ideas or decide their course of action without more or less explicit reference to Marxism. This is particularly true in Latin America. It is noticeable also in Vatican documents on social policy—for example in the paragraphs on liberation in Pope Paul's lengthy statement "Evangelii nuntiandi", published some three weeks before the Declaration on Sexual Ethics, but, in contrast with the latter, destined to drop immediately into that oblivion of indifference reserved by conservatives and radicals in the Catholic Church for all utterances from Rome except those on sex. On a wider front, however, through the spread of sociology and allied disciplines as well as in response to urgent political situations, Christianity—and certainly Catholicism—has, willy nilly, absorbed a considerable amount from Marxism in the past twenty years, and sometimes even shown great critical resilience in the process. Doubt has remained, on the other hand as to how much a Marxist loyal to his atheism could learn from dialogue with Christians, or indeed as to how much serious work a Marxist would be ready to put into the study of Christian source-texts, in comparison anyway with the mushrooming industry of Catholic Marxologists.

In an important book, which leaves the ruck of paperback books on Jesus far behind (Muggeridge, Lord Longford, etc.), Milan Machoveč, a Marxist philosopher in Prague, now provides what Peter Hebblethwaite rightly describes in his introduction to it