

St Paul's. 9 March 1970

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I have been asked to say a few words at this Memorial Service for Robert Mangalico Sobakwe "on behalf of the British public". This invitation means a very great deal to me. Especially I treasure the fact that I am speaking in St. Paul's Cathedral. For Robert Sobakwe was one of the most Christian men I have ever met. By this I mean that he showed in his life and words qualities which seem to me essentially Christian and these were based on his Christian faith. To this I shall refer again. But let us not forget today that he had been a Methodist Lay Preacher and that he came from a deeply Christian family. His political activities,

and then his imprisonment and then his "banishing the order" prevented him from continuing to work as a lay preacher, but it did not mean any weakening of his Christian faith. It is very right that we should think of him in this great centre of that faith.

Robert Sobukwe was, of course, a revolutionary, that is, he worked for revolutionary change. There are certain points which should, I think, be made clear at once. First, he was a very able man academically. He was a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg - and you certainly do not find many Africans among

its lecturers. But he did not allow his academic eminence to cut him off from ordinary people. He deliberately lived among some of the poorest people of Swets, travelling into Johannesburg each day in unbelievably crowded trains along with the African workers in that fantastically divided city. (For me those trains became a kind of symbol of apartheid.)

Second, although he was a revolutionary he was wholly opposed to the use of violence. When he led the great demonstration against the <sup>in Swets</sup> Pass Laws eighteen years ago, when the Africans <sup>in Swets</sup> burnt their pass books and then surrendered voluntarily to the police, he insisted repeatedly that violence was not to be used.

I am reminded of one of the strangest passages  
 in the New Testament, that tremendous description  
 given by St Paul of the "whole armour of  
 God", the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet  
 of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and - in the  
 middle of this, surely the most remarkable  
 paradox - "your feet shod with the preparation  
 of the gospel of peace". Robert Schenk's feet  
 were certainly shod like this, and he was at the  
 same time a revolutionist, fully armed.

He believed, of course, that the Officers must

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produce and fight for their own solution, what they believed to be honourable future for their country. They could not - and here I quote what was said to me once by Steve Biko, who will remain for me for the rest of my life a companion to Robert Sobukwe in the inspiration they have given me - "They could not come in under the umbrella of the white liberals, because, if they did, the contribution they would make to the future of South Africa would be a white one and not a black one. But this did not mean that he wanted to drive the whites out of South

Africa. In an article he wrote once, he said,  
 "I have said before and I still say so now,  
 that I see no reason why, in a free democratic  
 Africa, a predominantly black electorate should not  
 return a white man to Parliament, for colour will  
 count for nothing in a free free Africa." And in ~~the~~ a  
 great speech he made at the Inaugural Convention  
 of the Africanist Movement he said, "We ~~do~~ write  
 emphatically that the freedom of the Africans ~~must~~  
 means the freedom of all in South Africa, the  
 European included, because only the African  
 can guarantee the establishment of a genuine

democracy in which all men will be citizens in a common state and will live and be governed as individuals and not as distinctive

sectional groups."

This led him to adopt what may seem to be a very strange position. He was entirely opposed to the idea of specific minority rights, very possibly guaranteed by the constitution of the country. For this meant accepting the fact that there are minority groups who need to be protected.

The ideal he aimed at is the complete disappearance of the idea of a minority in society.

All are members of one race, the human race, and equal members of one society. Since I read what he said about this and discussed it with him I ~~have~~ have found that it has haunted me. I am, I may say, a member of the Committee of the Trinity Rights Group in this country. Perhaps Robert Soluke was being too idealistic. If any man ever was an idealist he was. But I cannot forget it as the statement of a great principle.

Do not think that this was merely philosophizing. He really meant it; he praised to me the attitude of the NUSAS, the National Union of South African Students, the organization of the students of the English speaking Universities in



their opposition to the Government's racial policies,  
and, in particular, their tenacity in spite of the  
fact that they made no impression on the  
Government's activities. "But", he added,  
don't forget the White Lash. They are remarkable.  
They go on and on with their protests and get  
nowhere, but it makes no difference to them. They  
still go on and on. "7 Unusual praise of  
White from a Black.

He was, of course, opposed to Communism. This  
does not ~~not~~ mean that he supported the  
capitalist system. He believed in a society with  
social and economic equality. In the ad dem

from which I have already quoted he said,  
"Opponents reject totalitarianism in any  
form and accept political democracy as  
understood in the West. We also reject the  
economic exploitation of the many for the  
benefit of the few. We accept as policy the  
equitable distribution of wealth aiming,  
as far as I am concerned, to equality of  
incomes which to me is the only basis on  
which the slogan of "equal opportunities"  
can be founded." Borrowing then the best from the  
East and the best from the West, we none the less

retain and maintain our distinctive personality and refuse to be the satellites or stooges of any power block."

It had a wonderful discussion with him once on the differences between Russian and Chinese Communism. "But we do not want either," he said. "They are both opposed to what is essentially African. We must have our own solution."

"Ex Africa semper aliquid novi," as the Roman writer said, "Out of Africa there always comes something new." I cannot help feeling that the twenty-first century will learn from

offer a new approach to industrial relations and that when that day comes the name of Hans Robert Lohse, along with others, of course, will be remembered.

Perhaps I might add that the day before we had this discussion, in which he so firmly repudiated Communism, his banishment had been extended for five years on the grounds that he was furthering the aims of ~~Communist~~ Communism -

TRAVELLERS' CLUB  
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He has been muzzled, of course, for a long time. He was arrested in March 1960 and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. When ~~he was~~ his time in prison was ended an Act of Parliament was passed keeping him for a year a prisoner on Robben Island. It was renewed <sup>each</sup> every year for six years. He was then banned and confined to the police district of Kimberley and nothing that a banned

went to St. James Anglican Church which was holding a fund raising bazaar and moved from stall to stall buying things he didn't really want as he chatted and exchanged grips with the women in charge of the stalls.

"Although he is a Methodist and not an Anglican he is always ready to help when we ask him," one of the women said. "He is always trying to make other people happy and that is why we all love Sobukwe in Kimberley."

It was this kindness and generosity <sup>and friendliness</sup> which were the foundation stones of the great social principle he stood for. As he said in his statement at his trial, "We believe in one race only - the human race to which we belong." It is the only answer to the evil of racialism which besets the world today - this country as much as others. The British people, in whose behalf I have been asked to speak, may find as well as the Africans, an inspiration in the man we remember today.

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here for whites as well as blacks. ~~When at a meeting~~

Above all let us remember him as he was. I quote from an  
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Second, although he was a revolutionary he was wholly opposed to the use of violence. When he led the great demonstrations against the pass laws eighteen years ago, when the Africans in Soweto burnt their pass books and then surrendered voluntarily to the police, he insisted repeatedly that violence was not to be used. I am reminded of one of the strangest passages in the New Testament, that tremendous description by St. Paul of the "whole armour of God": the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and - in the middle of this, surely the most remarkable paradox - "your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." Robert Sobukwe's feet were certainly shod like this, and he was at the same time a revolutionary, fully armed.

He believed, of course, that the Africans must produce and fight for their own solution, what they believed to be an honourable future for their country. They could not - and here I



quote what was said to me once by Steve Biko, who will remain for me for the rest of my life a companion to Robert Sobukwe in the inspiration they have given me - "they could not come in under the umbrella of the white liberals, because, if they did, the contribution they would make to the future of South Africa would be a white one and not a black one." But this did not mean that he wanted to drive the whites out of South Africa. In an article he wrote once, Robert said, "I have said before and I still say so now, that I see no reason why, in a free democratic Africa, a predominant black majority should not return a white man to Parliament, for colour will count for nothing in a Free Africa." And in a great speech he made at the Inaugural Convention of the Africanist Movement he said, "We wish to emphasize that the freedom of the Africans means the freedom of all in South Africa, the European included, because only the African can guarantee the establishment of a genuine democracy in which all men will be citizens in a common state and will live and be governed as individuals and not as distinctive sectional groups."

This led him to adopt what may seem to be a very strange position. He was entirely opposed to the idea of specific minority-rights, very possibly guaranteed by the constitution of the country. For this meant accepting the fact that there are minority groups who need to be protected. The ideal to be aimed at is the complete disappearance of the idea of a minority in society. All are members of one race, the human race, and equal members of one society. Since I read what he said about this and discussed it with him I have found that it has haunted me. I am, I may say, a member of the Committee of the Minority Rights Group in this country; perhaps Robert Sobukwe was being too idealistic. If any man ever was an idealist he was. But I cannot forget it as the statement of a great principle.

Do not think that this was merely philosophising. He really meant it. He praised to me the attitude of NUSAS, the National Union of South African Students, the organization of the students of the English speaking Universities, in their opposition to the Government's racial policies, and, in particular, their tenacity in spite of the fact that they made no impression on the Government's activities. "But," he added, "don't forget the Black Sash. They are remarkable. They go on and on with their protests and get nowhere, but it makes no difference to them. They still go on and on." Unusual praise of Whites from a Black.

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mean time he supported the capitalist system. He believed in a society with social and economic equality. In the address from which I have already quoted he said, "Africans reject totalitarianism in any form and accept political democracy as understood in the West. We also reject the economic exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few. We accept as policy the equitable distribution of wealth, aiming, as far as I am concerned, to equality of incomes which to me is the only basis on which the slogan of "equal opportunities" can be founded". (Perhaps I might add that the day before we had this discussion, in which he so firmly repudiated Communism, his banning order had been extended for five years on the grounds that he was furthering the aims of Communism.) "Borrowing, then, the best from the East and the best from the West, we none the less retain and maintain our distinctive personality and refuse to be the satraps or stooges of any power block".

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"Ex Africa semper aliquid novi," as the Roman writer said. "Out of Africa there always comes something new." I cannot help feeling that the twenty-first century will learn from Africa a new approach to industrial relations and that when that day comes the name of Robert Sobukwe, along with others of course, will be remembered.

He has been mislaid, of course, for a long time. He was arrested in March 1960 and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. His time in prison was ended an Act of Parliament was passed keeping him for a year a prisoner on Robben Island. It was renewed each year for six years. He was later banned and confined to the police district of Kimberley and nothing that a banned person says or writes may be published. But he has not been forgotten and I know that I can say that I speak here for whites as well as blacks.

Above all let us remember him as he was. I quote from an article written about him five years ago. "Sobukwe took us out to lunch, but not to his home because he is not allowed to. We went to St. James Anglican Church which was holding a fund raising bazaar and moved from stall to stall buying things he didnt really want as he chatted and exchanged guips with the women in charge of the stalls. "although he is a Methodist and not an Anglican he is always ready to help when we ask him," one of the women said.

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It was this kindness and generosity and friendliness which were the foundation stones of the great social principle he stood for. As he said in his statement at his trial, "We believe in one race only - the human race to which we belong." It is the only answer to the evil of racialism which besets the world today - this country as much as others. The British people, on whose behalf I have been asked to speak, may find as well as the Africans, an inspiration in the man we remember today.

*Robert Miles*

~~THE NAMIBIA SUPPORT COMMITTEE 188 North Gower Street London NW1~~

~~from the President, Randolph Vigne, 53 Cornwall Gardens, London SW7 tel 01-937 1402~~

2/2/84

Dear Benji

I hope this may be of use to your  
book. Please let me know if  
you decide to use it so that I  
can tell Lady Biles.

Have you seen Sir Robert's biography

later published? Called "Red Robert" by  
Arthur Harrold, → not (I didn't  
much like) the SA chapters in MS & can't  
remember if there were Forebaker  
references - probably not as Harrold's  
main informant seemed to be Norman  
O'Donnell of Ango. Haven't seen the  
book yet.

Any hope of seeing you here?  
Tommy Fardol

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*Author:- Sir Robert Birley*

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