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APARTHEID MEANS SLAVERY

by Michael Paul McCusker

"The South African Government is an insult to humanity and deserves the contempt of all civilized beings."

— The Progressive

"Don't expect the other son of a bitch to know he's a son of a bitch."

— Popular Saying

The irresistible press of history is upon the apartheid government of South Africa which has spent most of this century resisting it with a system of slavery that, with brief but periodic exceptions, became repulsive to civilization in the last century. South Africa has imposed itself too long on the world and on its captive people, and now it is finished, although the suffering of its people will not be over for a long time.

South Africa is itself an anachronism, a lost colony left behind by the crumbling empires of Europe, and isolated. It is a final vestige of a colonial system that began five centuries ago when Europe started its surge across the planet. Much of Africa was emptied to provide slaves for European colonies in the western hemisphere, and most of Africa was itself colonized by European nations. For centuries, Africans who were not sent across the oceans as slaves were enslaved at home.

The two great wars of the Twentieth Century devastated European power and broke up its empires into independent states, most of which reverted to some form of home rule. The African colonies collapsed in the same manner until, almost alone on the continent and in the world, the white dominated government of South Africa remained.

From the start the draconian concept of apartheid, which means separation, was South Africa's defense against cultural extinction, a final entrenchment by an embattled political system struggling to survive awhile longer. The entire brutal state apparatus that was designed to deny any political identity or power to the black majority could only be a stall against the inevitable tide of their disquiet, and has served as a final laceration that ensures their rise to crush it. The systematic arrests and murders of emerging black leaders spawns the appearance of others: the killing and detention of children is the same final desperation that sent ten year old German children against allied armies forty years ago. Each step to maintain the regime is a greater atrocity which creates a proportionate response. By the time reforms are offered to appease revolt they are long past the needs or wishes of those in revolt and too late to stop them. Once their power is recognized by acts of reform they are too powerful to resist. All of the terrible crippling pain, fear and hatred that has been stifled and stored up for so long explodes into rage, and the death dance between oppressor and oppressed speeds up, ruthlessness and reaction evolve swiftly toward denouement.

Survival has been the major object of apartheid, and the question of why South Africa would want to survive in its present form is as irrelevant as why any organism should wish to survive. South Africa cannot afford to compromise or its history will be lost. Its white culture, however much it repulses most of the rest of the world, considers itself vital and historically legitimate and is reluctant to disappear. That its memory will probably be a legacy of intolerance and contempt is not necessarily apparent to itself. Nations like persons are not greatly noted for their honest self appraisal.

A more bitter tragedy could occur after white rule is dismantled. Then the antipathy between the black factions and between them and blacks who worked for the whites might erupt into a civil war or into an immense pogrom. If history is any precedent, a tyranny as harsh and ruthless as the white rule could prevail, and although the process eventually might painfully evolve toward political freedom, the current tendency of governments in the world is in the opposite direction. The people of Africa have not fared especially well under the home rules that replaced European dominance but the possibility of change is at least within their own borders.

The response of most of the world to the South African government has been critical and supportive of the revolt of the black masses. The U.S. government has conducted itself shamefully, and so also has the Soviet Union. Each in its own manner subverts or openly enforces its will upon vast populations throughout the world, and each engages in the subversion of other governments. Each criticizes the deplorable behavior of regimes that are in alliance with the other and defends the same ruthlessness of its own allies.

As in most civil wars or insurgencies that have occurred since World War II, that in Africa is a miniature cold war. Rejected by the United States, South Africa's black liberation movement turns to the Soviet Union for weapons and equipment. What the U.S. never seems to realize is that by siding with oppressors it pushes the oppressed toward Moscow, and once the USSR provides aid to the insurgents the U.S. claims it as an excuse to overtly or clandestinely pump more aid to the ruling powers to destroy the revolt while exaggerating its threat to U.S. interests.

And as it has been with all such disputes in the past forty years, the escalating trouble in South Africa threatens to be an incipient cause of nuclear war. Nuclear weapons might be used as a final defense by the regime or the Soviet Union might use them if the United States bulwarks the collapsing state with its own troops. Or the USSR and U.S. might exchange whichever way it goes.

The way it will probably go is that South Africa will disappear as a final European enclave in the third world. To assist in its disappearance the rest of the world ought to follow advice given in The Progressive: "Sanctions need to be imposed, trade halted, investments withdrawn, loans cancelled, ambassadors recalled, and relations severed."