

Pogroms are a legacy of colonialism

Sat, 30/04/1994 - 22:00

Jeremy Dewar explains the cause of the Rwandan masscare

According to Human Rights observers, 100,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda in the two weeks following the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana by a mortar attack that brought down the plane he was travelling in on 6 April.

The vast majority of those murdered were, or were believed to be, members of the minority Tutsi tribe. The army, the police and the elite Presidential Guard, all dominated by members of the majority Hutu tribe, have led the pogrom.

The UN's response is pure hypocrisy. Now that they have lost control, after decades of military and economic intervention in the region they have pulled out most of the 2,500 troops who had been overseeing the 'peace accords' designed to put an end to the three year civil war. Thousands of Rwandan UN employees are being targeted by Hutu extremists. The UN has 'atly refused to airlift a single Rwandan to safety' only whites are deemed worthy of protection.

The western media has portrayed the conflict in Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi, whose President was also killed in the plane crash, as the continuation of a centuries-old tribal rivalry. The region was originally inhabited by Hutu farmers. In the 'fteenth century, Tutsi migrants conquered the land and subjected the Hutus to feudal servitude.

When the Germans colonised the region in 1899, followed by the Belgians in 1917, the European imperialists continued to treat Tutsis as a relatively privileged minority. The armed forces were exclusively Tutsi. Tutsis also received better education, land and administrative jobs. In particular, the Belgians based their discrimination on the racist notion, imported from Europe, that the Tutsis were genetically more intelligent.

This is one side of the legacy of colonialism. The other, which has continued and even accelerated since Rwanda and Burundi gained independence in 1963, is the economic impoverishment of the region. Both countries are among the poorest and most densely populated in the world.

Over 90% of the population work on the land, which is dominated by coffee production for export. Debts to the imperialist banks mean that 'cash crops' have to come before food production, which is set to fall by 22% this year, in a land where one in 've children are already suffering from malnutrition.

Both Rwanda and Burundi are 85% Hutu and 15% Tutsi. In Rwanda, a Hutu chauvinist dictatorship has ruled for 25 years. Until last year Burundi was controlled by a Tutsi-dominated regime. Both regimes have, with the collusion of French and Belgian imperialism, periodically channelled anger over land-hunger into vicious pogroms. Some analysts estimate a million people have been massacred in riots and civil wars over the past 25 years. Many more have been displaced in neighbouring states.

In the present situation, it is vital that workers and peasants defend all communities from the pogromists. The army elite are apparently leading these pogroms (all Rwandans by law have to carry identity cards stating their 'tribal' status).

They have also targeted all politicians, religious and aid workers who are known to favour power-sharing with the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) for summary execution.

The elitist thugs of the army, not fellow workers and peasants, are the main enemy. They must be resisted by all means necessary.

This may involve fighting defensively alongside the RPF, who are nominally in favour of equal rights for Hutus and Tutsis and have called on all Rwandans to rise up 'against the clique of Hutu military'. However it would be wrong to see the RPF as the solution to the crisis or to back its attempted seizure of power. Not only have the RPF received funding from the Tutsi-chauvinist Burundi government, but they were instrumental in organising the Ugandan coup which placed the Muhima-chauvinist Yoweri Museveni in power in 1986.

Above all, the RPF are committed to a capitalist solution for Rwanda. But capitalism cannot deliver consistent democratic rights for the workers and peasants of central Africa. The whole history of the twentieth century proves that. In fact, imperialism's belated turn to supporting 'democracies' in Africa over the last few years has been motivated by economic self-interest, not humanitarian concern. As one analyst recently put it:

'Africa is in danger of falling off the map of world capitalism'.

If the struggle for democratic rights in central Africa begins to question the ownership of the land and the control of the IMF and the banks which it must if that struggle is to mean anything for the masses then we can expect the UN to patch up its differences with the dictators and declare Africans are 'not ready for democracy'.

Beginning with the armed struggle to defend all communities from the pogromists'Hutu and Tutsi alike'the workers and peasants of Rwanda and Burundi must chart a course towards the only lasting solution to ethnic strife in the region: a socialist federation of central African states.

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