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The African Reparations Movement

'A Call as old as Justice' — by Dorothy Kuya

THE case for reparations for African peoples is not new, it has been debated throughout the centuries, whenever African peoples have met together to discuss their rights. I remember being at a Black community conference in the early seventies, when a resolution was put demanding reparations for all people of African descent. Then, as now, it was not just a demand for money, but for a recognition of the injustices, the indignities and the brutality experienced by people of African descent, throughout slavery and colonialism and in present times under neo-colonialism and racism.

Reparations was an issue when Britain abolished slavery. The then British parliament voted £20 million compensation to be paid to the Slave Owners, but not a penny for those who had been slaves. Owners of slaves in Brazil were also rewarded. In the United States, at the time of emancipation in the 1860's each freed slave was promised '40 acres and a mule'. The promise was not kept. In New York in 1969, James Foreman of the Students Non-Violent Coordination Committee, called upon the white churches to pay \$500 million in reparation for slavery and racism. That demand has been ignored. In 1989 the Congressional Black Caucus instituted a bill in the US Congress for Reparations. This was unsuccessful. Clearly a new strategy was needed if African peoples were to be successful in their righteous demands.

Research has been done into the success of other groups of oppressed peoples in seeking and obtaining reparations. Japanese Americans were successful in obtaining compensation from the US government for the victimisation they experienced during World War II (WWII). The US Government paid reparations to the government of Colombia because they excised the territory of Panama from that country. There are also claims in the pipelines by the Sioux Peoples to the Black Lands of Dakota, as well as by other native American groups, against the US government.

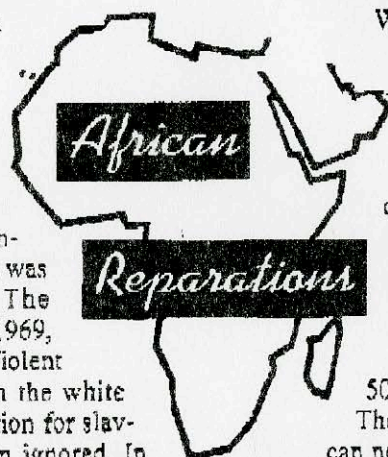
After the First World War, German liability for the damage they caused, was fixed at 132 billion gold marks. Following WWII, the European Allies filed claims against Germany for \$320 billion. Italy and Finland have also had claims made against them for the same period. The basis of these claims were that, as a result of the wartime activities of these countries there was: bodily loss, loss of liberty and of property, injury to professional careers, dislocation and forced

emigration. Time was spent in concentration camps because of racial, religious and political persecution. Other burdens were caused by loss of life of family members and sometimes whole communities, as well as social and institutional disorder. There was also the economic cost of war, value of civilian goods and services lost because of the war. Payments have been made to individuals, institutions and states, in cash and kind, goods and services, capital equipment, land, farm and forest products. All of the above terms could apply to African peoples and their terrible experiences throughout the centuries.

West Germany has made large reparations to the Jewish people, e.g. it has paid to Israel \$2 billion to make amends to victims of Nazi persecution, \$952 million in personal indemnities, \$37.70 in monthly pensions to each inmate of a concentration camp. Israel was given \$820 million to settle 50,000 Jewish emigrants from lands formerly controlled by Hitler. Since then more has been given to individuals and institutions. The latest being \$63 million to 50,000 Jewish people from East Germany.

These may be large sums of money but they can never fully replace the suffering and losses experienced by millions of Jews during World War II. In recent cases Iraq had to pay reparations for its invasion of Kuwait. A few years ago land and money was made over to some of the Maori people of New Zealand, as well as a formal and public apology by Queen Elizabeth II, for past deeds. There are other steps being taken to restore to other native peoples in Canada and Australia, their land and wealth which was plundered. There has been recent publicity about the plight of Aborigine people who were forcibly removed from their families and put out to adoption to white families. They are to sue the Australian government. In relation to art and cultural objects, there are many demands being made by European governments for the return of significant items which were stolen by other Europeans. The Elgin Marbles in the British Museum are a case in point. A recent dispute has arisen about the Trojan Treasure currently on display in Moscow. The Germans claim it as theirs, and was stolen by the Russian Army when they defeated the Germans after WWII. The Greek government has now stepped in to claim the treasure as it was stolen by a German who dug it up in the last century.

The right to reparations has strong legal underpinning and was recognised in international law as far back as



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1928 (Chorzow Factory Case, Germany v Poland). There is also recognition that the descendants of the original victims of war and all its attendant acts can continue to suffer the consequences of the original crimes which were committed against their forbears. The case of Israel successfully claiming reparations from West Germany is particularly interesting as Israel did not exist until after World War II. All of these precedents provide a basis for people in Africa and the African diaspora to begin to develop the structures which will enable them to mount the necessary claims. Developments are already taking place to expedite these.

At a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) held in Nigeria in December 1991, the OAU endorsed and adopted the 'crusade for reparations' from those countries involved in the enslavement and colonisation of African peoples. A Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) were enpanelled at the Dakar summit of the OAU in 1992. Their task is to continuously monitor the issue, to take action and advise. The First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, sponsored by M.K.O. Abiola and hosted by the Nigerian government, was held in Abuja in 1993. In attendance were delegates from thirty African countries, members from the Diplomatic Corps of European countries. Scholars, journalists and representatives from major organisations in the African diaspora met to discuss and co-ordinate 'a Pan-African Crusade' to demand 'reparations for enslavement, colonisation and neo-colonialism', and to carry it into every area of international politics. The conference endorsed and adopted a declaration to take the issue forward (see Abuja Declaration at the end of article).

Bernie Grant MP, was invited to the conference and returned to the UK, determined to raise the issue here. He called together a group of like-minded people. This led to the setting up of the African Reparations Movement UK (ARM, UK). The organisation convened a national conference in Birmingham in 1994. The ARM UK has since been consolidating its position, developing a constitution and creating a strategy. There is now a small committee of founder members. A body of sponsors of national and internationally known figures is being assembled, and financial backing is being sought.

In 1993, Bernie Grant also put down a motion in the House of Commons, which was signed by 85 members of parliament. In March 1996, Lord Gifford opened a debate in the House of Lords, which gave further publicity to the issue. There is also a site on the internet, the address is:

<http://the.arc.co.uk/arm/home.html>.

This has elicited tremendous interest world-wide and thousands of enquiries are pouring into Bernie Grant's office.

We as African people need to have a complete understanding of our history if we are to understand why we are owed reparations, how we assess the damages, count the costs and identify those responsible. Chinwezu, an author as well as the editor and publisher of *Black Renaissance*, and a member of the GEP, dates the beginning of the destruction of Africa from the 'millennia before 525BC, when Black Egypt fell permanently to white invaders', leaving Africa open to continuous invasion since. A pre-requisite to restitution must be 'apologies for ancient wrongs', from all those countries responsible for the African holocaust. An example of what is meant by reparations is the cancellation of debts which have developed in African states since independence. These should have been gifts from the very beginning. The spiralling debt burdens are strangling the development in those countries, e.g. Uganda spends 17 dollars per person on debt for every 3 dollars it is able to spend on health. Zambia spent 37 million dollars on primary education from 1990 to 1993, while it spent 1.3 million dollars on debt repayment. One African health official said, every time World Bank people visit our country hundreds more of our children die. Cancelling all debts and interest on those debts has to be the beginning of reparations. Dudley Thompson, a Jamaican QC, states that it is not too late for reparations to be made to African peoples, as there is 'no law of limitations... on murder and genocide'. Reparations must not only be to the people and states of Africa but also to those people of African descent in the Diaspora. Reparations means also that we must rehabilitate ourselves, only then can we make a real contribution to the future of African peoples.

Reference

The meaning of African Reparations by Dr Kimani Nehusi. Information sheet no.1, ARM.UK.

Reparations and a new global order: A comparative overview. A paper presented by Professor Chinwezu at the 2nd plenary session of the 1st Pan-African Conference on Reparations, Abuja, Nigeria. 27.4.1993.

Debate: Slavery Legacy, House of Lords, Palace of Westminster, London. 14.3.1996. ref.586LD62-PAG1/50-1/60.

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Reparations and Pan-Africanism. Presented to the Seventh P.A.C. in Kampala, by H.E. Hon. D. Thompson, O.J., Q.C. and Professor Chinwezu, on behalf of the International Committee on Reparations (ICR) Lagos, Nigeria.

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SUMMARY OF CV.

MAY 6th 1999.

MAIN CAREER TRAINING.

Trained as a Secretary on leaving school. Qualified as a Nursery Nurse and later as a General Hospital Nurse. Trained and qualified as a Junior teacher and specialised in Arts and Crafts.

EMPLOYMENT.

From the age of 16 worked firstly in officers then in both residential and day Childrens Nurseries. Later in a variety of Hospitals, dealing with surgical and medical care.

COMMUNITY AND RACE RELATIONS.

Became the first Community Relations Officer for Merseyside and developed major anti-racist policies over a period of 7 years. e.g. Initiated the Campaign on Racism in childrens Books, and edited the anti-racist magazine 'The Dragons teeth'. Set up Ujima in Liverpool, one of the first Hostels for homeless Black Youth. As well as cultural and employment programmes. My later work in Adult education in West London I organised literacy and community language classes. Arts workshops, and programmes to assist the Nottingham Carnival costume makers.

As the Principal Race Relations Adviser in the London Borough of Haringey, I was responsible for advising all the Council Departments and its Officers on the promotion of good anti-racist policies and equality of opportunity in its employment and customers services.

Became Director of Affirmata, a training agency, which specialised in Anti-Racist and Equality training, all over the United Kingdom. Later worked in a European agency assisting with the allocation of funding to local community groups.

COMMITTEE AND ORGANISATION MEMBERSHIP.

Have served on local radio councils, many types of education committees dealing mainly with race relations issues in both Liverpool and London. Was chair of a committee Advising on Racism in the Catholic Church. Chair of a number of Housing Associations. A member of the Broadwater Farm Inquiry, and of the Committee on Race Relations and the YMCA. A member of the Home Office Police Race Training Working Party. As well as being as a members of the Board of Visitors to Brixton prison. I was also a founder members of the Racism Awareness Training Programme Unit and of the African Reparations Movement (UK). I am also a member of the Women of the Year Association Council and of the Board of the Granby Toxteth Partnership.

PUBLICATIONS.

I've written for many publications. Among major books is a chapter in the Penguin publication 'Education For Equality' and in the 'Slant of the Pen' the latter published by the World Council of churches. Both in 1978.