

WSWS correspondence on the Congo

28 July 2000

The World Socialist Web Site received the following letter in response to articles on the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). See: <http://www.wsws.org/sections/category/news/af-congo.shtml>

Dear Editor:

I found Chris Talbot's analysis of the war in DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo] very insightful. Western treatment of Kabila does indeed reveal a double standard where human rights are concerned. Had Kabila succeeded in complying with Western demands, as well as the security demands of Kampala and Kigali, he could have been embraced by Washington as the next "new African". The scuppering of the Garreton investigation into atrocities against Rwandan refugees in places like Tingi Tingi can be attributed to Kabila's obstructions that were motivated by a desire to prevent the details coming out. These would have implicated the Rwandan forces as well as Kabila.

My only disagreement is about the idea of the Congo being a distraction from the failure of imperialism to deal with genocide in Rwanda. The Interahamwe militia, and those state officials who supported them, are certainly responsible for the atrocities they committed. What has not been written about, an omission that I am presently aiming to fill, is the way in which US backing for the RPF throughout the so-called Arusha Peace Process contributed to the slaughter that followed. The West has found it very convenient to lay the failure of this peace process at the door of Hutu extremism. A more critical investigation of Arusha would reveal that it had nothing to do with peace or democratisation and plenty to do with using a (highly politicised) human rights discourse to legitimise a power transfer from Habyarimana to Kagame. The US was anticipating escalating violence and used Rwandan government atrocities to make RPF offensives appear as defensive reactions.

It now seems clear that Habyarimana was assassinated by RPF forces (Pierre Mugabo's statement is not being seriously challenged), the resulting carnage was expected, the genocide label—and its attendant obligation for immediate intervention—was not. The US was wrong-footed over this because although it was happy to support an RPF take-over, it had no interest in direct military intervention. The accusation that the US did nothing while a genocide raged is therefore not quite true. On 18 May (I may not have this date precisely right) the RPF declared that there was no need for outside intervention because the genocide was over. Its claim to legitimate government, and excuse for the denial of democratic rights (already part of the new constitution of mid-1990) is based on its claim to have been the sole reliever of the Rwandan genocide.

What emerges from this is the criminalisation of Rwandan Hutus and an apology for some sort of benevolent RPF dictatorship that will re-educate the majority before entrusting them with the vote. This criminalisation (every dissident Rwandan is an Interahamwe determined to finish off the last Rwandan Tutsi) legitimises Rwandan (and Ugandan) intervention in DRC. The New African status of these leaders permits them to seek military solutions to their domestic political problems. Note how this contrasts with the great concern the US and Britain displayed over the democratic rights of Zimbabweans recently.

I look forward to your thoughts on this.

BC

21 July 2000

Dear BC,

Thank you for your interest in my articles on the Congo war. The point you are raising concerns the article of May 14 1999 (Congo War Drags On—Uganda and Chad pull out <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/may1999/cong-m14.shtml>), where I state that "the UN and Western governments had stood by in the full knowledge that the Rwandan Hutu government, which

based itself on the ethnic division between Hutu and Tutsi institutionalised by the Belgian colonial regime, was carrying out a genocidal massacre.”

This follows my point that the UN report into atrocities committed by Rwandan army forces in the Congo (i.e., the forces of the present Rwandan regime, formerly the RPF) after the 1994 genocide was intended “to divert attention from imperialist responsibility for the Rwandan genocide and to cultivate the impression that it was a purely African problem of ethnic conflict.”

There was no intention to give the impression that the Western governments, particularly France, Belgium and the United States, were not responsible for the genocide, and that it was, as you say, all due to Hutu extremism. In our articles on the Rwandan genocide (Suppressed report raises question of US role in Rwandan civil war <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/mar2000/rwan-m23.shtml>, New evidence on the role of the US and France: Who is responsible for the genocide in Rwanda? <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/apr1998/rwan-a29.shtml>) we have stressed the Western involvement and brought out all the evidence which has been made available.

I certainly agree with you that the US wanted to transfer power from Habyarimana to Kagame and the recent evidence of RPF involvement in Habyarimana's assassination backs this up. The Arusha negotiations were part of the drive to institute governments answerable to the dictates of the World Bank and IMF in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War. How the IMF privatisation programme had previously devastated the Rwandan economy is detailed in Michel Chossudovsky's book *The Globalisation of Poverty*.

There certainly has been a concerted attempt in the US to portray both the Museveni and Kagame regimes in glowing colours, though the fact that they are both looting the Congo's gold and diamonds, as well as fighting each other, has clearly become an embarrassment. The impact of their pro-market policies on their respective populations, the growth of poverty and unemployment, has received little attention.

I look forward to reading your investigation of US involvement in the Rwandan genocide.

Sincerely,
Chris Talbot



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