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Article — Digitized Version

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Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Reisener, Wolfgang (1970) : Cabora bassa-Dispute about a dam, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 05, Iss. 11, pp. 350-, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02928935>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/138410>

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Cabora Bassa—Dispute about a Dam

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The giant that will change the scene of Southern Africa—this enthusiastic description of the Cabora Bassa reservoir was to be heard at Johannesburg. Others simply call the planned Zambesi-dam in Portuguese Mozambique a "cornerstone of colonialism". Five German firms participate in this project within the framework of an international syndicate.

Kaunda's Good Will Tour

They, and with them the Federal Republic of Germany, are now hit by the wrath of the Black Africans and of all those that fight with them for an independent Africa. The Organisation for African Unity (OAU) sent a delegation led by Zambesia's President Kaunda to several West European capitals, among them Bonn, for the sole purpose of explaining to the German Federal Government the position of the involved African countries on the political and above all economic German engagement in South Africa. During these talks the Federal Government appears to have succeeded in convincing its African partners that at least part of the reproaches heaped time and again on the Federal Republic are not valid. This applies mainly to the allegations that the Federal Republic supplies arms to the Union of South Africa and supports the military actions of the NATO-ally Portugal in Mozambique.

No Project of Development Aid

As regards the Cabora Bassa project President Kaunda stated at a press conference that the OAU delegation anyhow had come to Bonn with the conviction that the Federal Republic cannot change its attitude overnight. Indeed, the Federal Government's chances of exercising its influence in the case of the disputed dam-project are negligible today. Cabora Bassa is not a German development project. The Zambeze Consorcio Hidro-Electrico (Zamco), to which South African, Portuguese, French, Italian and German firms belong, in summer 1969 against keen competition obtained from the Portuguese Government the

final award of the contract for the work on the first stage of the giant dam and power station.

It is above all the export credits, or more accurately the public Hermes export credit guarantees and a loan at a reduced rate of interest due to public contributions, that involved the Federal Republic in the trouble about the Zambesi-project. In particular these government subsidies reducing the rate of interest—so it is maintained—make Germany an "accessory" to the suppressions of the Black Africans in Mozambique and the whole of South Africa. Such arguments cannot be simply ignored as being insignificant. Nevertheless it looks rather strange that also quarters which are normally front-rank advocates of the postulate of development aid, in the case of Cabora Bassa oppose so eagerly a project which creates jobs in a development area—by no means for the white man only. A project that brings modern techniques to partly archaic social structures and thus might possibly be suited to contribute to the emancipation also of the black man.

More Cooperation in Future

The results of President Kaunda's talks materially will hardly be measurable. Kaunda's friends will scarcely have expected that. But the fact that he was acting as the official speaker of the states joined in OAU and of the Conference of Block-free States lends particular weight to the objections and reproaches advanced by him. The problem of the Cabora Bassa project cannot be dismissed after this visit by making reference to the fact that commercial interests cannot always be separated from their political implications. The African delegation at any rate appears to feel convinced that the Federal Government in Bonn is not happy about the German participation in the Cabora Bassa project and regarding future economic projects will consider the political objections of the Africans.