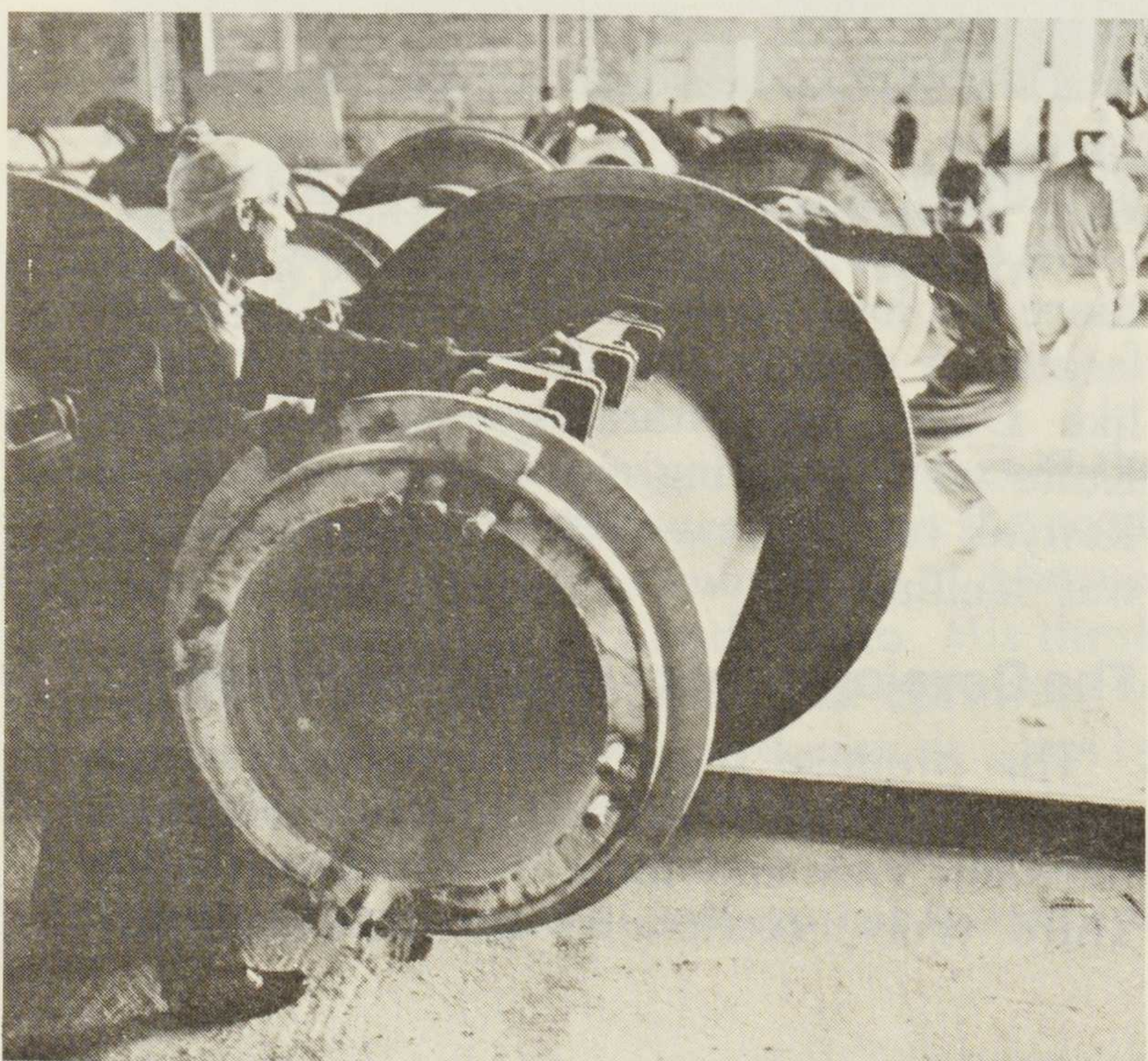




A Weekly Digest of African Affairs

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'Dark Continent' Image Revived

[AN] There are indications that a late-twentieth-century version of the "dark continent" myth is in the making. Essays and novels of V.S. Naipul and his brother Shiva, the acclaimed fiction of such authors as John Updike and Philip Caputo, and recent coverage by prominent journalists share a perception of Africa as a continent of failed experiments and hopeless problems, brought on by its own unreadiness to rule itself.

Cover stories appearing the same week in *Time* magazine and *The New Republic* illustrate the trend. Both take the debate about underdevelopment and its causes—an issue that has generated thousands of books and articles and been the topic of hundreds of studies—and reduce it to a popularized tale of corruption, incompetence and tribalism.

"Only quite recently," writes Geoffrey Wheatcroft in *The New Republic* (Jan. 9 and 16) "has it become possible to talk openly of the failure of independent Africa. The old excuses—of European indifference or 'neo-colonialism'—are less frequently trotted out. It is even possible to discuss in respectable, liberal publications, as it was not a few years back, whether this failure might not say something about Africa itself."

And *Time* (Jan. 16) approvingly quotes a similar sentiment of British journalist Xan Smiley writing last year in the *Atlantic*: "The years of [African] freedom have mounted up, mocking the plausibility of the excuses for failure. Africa is back where it was 50 years ago."

That Africa is in desperate circumstances is undeniable. Indeed, there are ways in which the continent is in *worse* shape than half a century ago, when countries now facing famine were feeding themselves.

Furthermore, while social conditions deteriorated
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Workers at a pipe factory in Rharb, Morocco: African states pay dearly for the parts and materials needed to inch towards industrial development.
United Nations/Bill Graham