

## NEW BOOKS ON SOUTH AFRICA

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INCREASING WORLD INTEREST in South African affairs is evidenced by the spate of books on the country which flow in a continuous stream from the presses. In the month of September 1964 alone, five books were produced in England on South Africa, three examining the Transkei experiment and Bantustans in general as a possible solution to the race problem in South Africa; while two examine the prospect of applying economic sanctions to South Africa in the hope of breaking the present impasse between the government and the governed.

The three books which examine the partition theory are *Whither the Transkei?* by W. A. Bellwood, *Bantustans, the Fragmentation of South Africa* by Christopher R. Hill, and *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt* by Govan Mbeki.

The first need not detain us long. The author, correspondent of the *London Times* and on the staff of a Johannesburg newspaper, writes up the Transkei almost in the style of a travelogue, giving us details of the scenery and commenting on the personalities he meets during the course of a visit in November 1963 as a guest of the South African Department of Information. His observations are incredibly naive and he shows little true understanding of the nature of the problem presented by the Government's Bantustan experiment. Nor does he present adequate information to enable the reader to judge for himself what is happening in the Transkei. One must accept his value judgments more or less on trust. His book ends with the question posed in the title: 'The Transkei would have a better chance if it was allowed to develop with the full aid of white people who wish both it and South Africa well. It is the hobbling effect of restriction in this field, and the clash of African personalities and temperaments in the political sphere, which raise the question—whither the Transkei?' The restriction on the entry of white capital into the Transkei, he feels, makes it impossible for the territory to stand on its own feet economically. But that this exposes the true aims of the Nationalists in creating Bantustans he apparently fails to realize.

Christopher Hill's study of Bantustans is more scholarly and authoritative, perhaps spoilt only by the author's over-anxiety to appear impartial and judicious, with the result that he sometimes gives the impression of praising with faint damns because he is too timid to condemn the Bantustan policy for the fraud that it is. This, no doubt, is the explanation for the misapprehension under which some reviewers have laboured that Mr. Hill thinks the Bantustan experiment can work; in the South African press, indeed, the book has been written up as favourable to the viewpoint of the South African Government—a verdict which we have no doubt Mr. Hill finds highly embarrassing. But then, he has only himself to blame. In the South African set-up one must be prepared to call a spade a spade, and to take Bantustan at its face value and examine it as a serious contribution to the solution of the race problem is to ignore facts.

'It seems clear that South African statesmen are to be believed when they say that the goal (of the Transkei experiment) is independence,' says Mr. Hill, then going on to examine the implications of an independent Bantustan and its possibility for development. But it is by no means clear that the goal of the Nationalist Government is independence. In fact, both Verwoerd and de Wet Nel have made it clear that, far from desiring independence, they would concede it only under the most extreme pressure. And they have also made it clear that the sort of independence they would be prepared to grant the Transkei would make it impossible for the territory to develop along lines unacceptable to White South Africa. In fact, the Nationalists would be prepared to grant independence to the Transkei only on condition that the Transkei never acted independently of South Africa—which is no sort of independence at all. Even Mr. Hill notes that many Government officials 'seem to regard independence as a pipe-dream', while his own judgment is that 'in areas other than the Transkei the idea of independence seems fantastic'. His concluding paragraph reads:

Meanwhile South Africa proceeds with a policy which demands laws of incredible severity for its orderly application. However sincerely it is believed in, however genuinely White South Africans are convinced of the justice of their cause and of the rightness of their policy of racial separation, political and economic considerations both enforce the belief that they are bound to fail.

One argument which Mr. Hill advances in favour of the Bantustan 'homelands' and African townships in urban areas, is that they are the only areas in which Africans can enjoy freehold title to land. 'The importance of the sense of security which genuine ownership brings with it cannot be over-estimated', he says in relation to Umlazi township near Durban. True, but there is no such thing as freehold

title to land for an African—except in those few Black spots which it is the Government's intention to abolish. The most an African can expect is the granting of a title to land, either by a chief or a Government official, which can be withdrawn at any time. Ultimate land ownership continues to vest in the community, in the Native Trust or in the State. For an African, his home can never be his castle. He can be evicted at any time by the stroke of an official pen. The sense of security which derives from freehold land title in South Africa is strictly for 'Europeans only'—and even they can be, and some have been, dispossessed under the provisions of the Group Areas Act.

Mr. Hill's book contains plenty of useful facts and figures, and an interesting account of the way in which Chiefs Poto and Sabata were outmanoeuvred and the bid for power in the Transkei Assembly was settled in favour of Matanzima.

### **EFFECTIVE INDICTMENT**

By far the most effective indictment of the Bantustan bluff, however, is provided in the book by Govan Mbeki, Rivonia trialist now serving a life sentence on Robben Island for sabotage. Attractively produced and with a graphic cover design, this is one of the most interesting titles in the Penguin African Library, written from the inside by a man with an intimate knowledge of his subject and the people of the Transkei.

Mr. Mbeki has no illusions.

'The Transkei,' he says, 'is as firmly subject to the demands of White supremacy as ever it was. The people of the Transkei had no say in the drafting of their constitution. The elections held in 1963 took place under a state of emergency which imposed a ban on all meetings of more than ten persons, laid down severe penalties for "statements disrespectful to chiefs", and permitted the indefinite detention, without warrant or trial, of political opponents.'

It is a measure of the political consciousness of the African people that in spite of these disabilities, they elected a majority of anti-apartheid candidates to the Assembly. That they were unable to prevent Matanzima from coming to power is only due to the fact that the elected forty-five members are in the minority, the majority of the Assembly consisting of the sixty-four chiefs who sit *ex officio* and who are, with few exceptions, Government men, paid and manipulated by the officials.

The first part of Mr. Mbeki's book deals with the way in which successive South African Governments, United Party as well as Nationalist, have gradually whittled away the political rights of the African people until finally, under the Promotion of Bantu Self-

Government Act of 1959, the last vestige of African representation in the White man's Parliament was eliminated and the myth of 'Bantu self-government in the Reserves' substituted.

Mr. Mbeki quotes the words of the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei after the special session of the Bunga had decided to accept Bantu Authorities:

We are now giving you the horse to ride (when I say 'we' I mean the Government); but do not forget while you are riding it that the Government will be behind with a big sjambok, to see that it goes, and you must not think or let the people think they can just get on that horse and go to sleep.

Today the Government still sits behind the Transkei Legislative Assembly with 'a big sjambok', and has reserved for itself all the necessary powers to wield it whenever necessary.

Mbeki analyses the economic situation in the Reserves, showing with facts and figures that they are designed purely as reservoirs of cheap labour for the White man's farms and industries and are completely unable to sustain the population that is expected to live in them. There is not enough land for the people, the production per acre is too small and there is no possibility of improvement in the foreseeable future so long as the territories are developed according to the policies of apartheid. Mbeki contrasts the yield per acre in the African reserves with that on the White man's farms—roughly about one-third—revealing that it is stark poverty that drives the African into the White man's areas to seek the supplementary income which he needs to keep himself and his family alive.

The consequences of African poverty in the Reserves extend into the sphere of health. African expectation of life, unlike that for Whites, is higher in the urban areas, where wages are higher, than in the rural areas. The fertility of African women in the Reserves is lower than that of women in the towns. Overall, the net rate of population increase among the Africans is lower than for any of the other racial groups in South Africa.

A study of population increase rates points, thus, to a terrifying trend. It is fixed government policy to drive Africans from areas where higher standards of living prevail to those in which it is difficult to eke out even the barest necessities of life . . . The trend among Africans is therefore: *a high death rate among children; a low rate of increase in population; a low life expectancy among adults.*

In the light of long-term prospects, is this not tantamount to genocide?

How then has it been possible to get any section of the African people to accept the Bantustan bluff? Mbeki shows that the Government has relied on bribing the African chiefs and headmen with increased pay and power. Not all the chiefs have succumbed to these

lures, and many have been jailed and exiled for standing with their people in opposition to government schemes. But the Matanzimas and their likes have been content to grab what they could for themselves, even trying to justify their actions by mouthing the slogans of African nationalism as if by helping themselves they were also helping their people.

Of all the studies of Bantustan, it is only in Mbeki's book that one is presented with the picture from the point of view of the African peasants who suffer under it, who have their stock limited by government decree, who are driven from their homes by the *diktat* of some petty tyrant, who are haled before a bush court and fined for some fancied slight to a government hireling, who are deprived of access to the land and herded as cheap labour into the new African towns and villages planned to serve the border industries.

And it is only in Mbeki's book that one is presented with the picture of African resistance, the peasant struggles from the Witzieshoek 'disturbances' of 1950 to the Pondoland revolt of 1960. Fascinating pages show how in some areas the popular revolt led to the complete destruction of Government authority and the establishment, even if only for a short while, of people's power. A people's parliament took decisions, people's courts dispensed justice. The Nationalist Government had to declare a state of emergency and mobilize the police and the army before it was able to restore 'order'. Ever concerned with the needs of revolutionary change in South Africa, Mbeki comments that peasant struggle offers in many ways a greater challenge to Nationalist rule than any with which it has been confronted so far. 'A proper blending of the peasant and worker struggles, therefore, coupled with skilful timing of joint action, is a matter which must engage the serious thinking of the leadership'.

It is Mbeki's close ties with the people, his years of experience of their problems and their struggles, which make his book so valuable. If the book as a whole is a bit disjointed and patchy, this is probably due to the circumstances under which it was produced, explained by Ruth First in her preface.

This manuscript was written in fits and starts on deal tables in the kitchens of several African homes in Port Elizabeth townships; its progress was frequently interrupted by police raids, when the sheets of paper had to be hurriedly secreted, or moved away from where their writer lived and worked, for his and their safe-keeping. A great slice of this book was written on rolls of toilet paper when Mbeki served a two-month spell of solitary confinement, awaiting trial on a charge of making explosives . . . Some final portions of the book were written from Govan's last hiding-place in Johannesburg, where he was moved from Port Elizabeth after he was drafted by the African National Congress National Executive to direct A.N.C. campaigns from underground.

Mbeki was captured at Rivonia and is now serving his life sentence on Robben Island. What a commentary on South Africa, that the only place for the author of such a book, a man with so much to give to his country, should be in jail. It must be one of the resolutions to which the whole democratic movement pledges itself to see that that sentence is terminated for Mbeki and his colleagues as soon as possible.

## **SANCTIONS**

The two books on South Africa and sanctions are *South Africa, Crisis for the West* by Colin and Margaret Legum, and *Sanctions Against South Africa*, a Penguin Special.

Part one of the Legums' book covers familiar ground—the power structure of Afrikanerdom, the nature of English-speaking society, the position and attitudes of the Africans and other Non-White groups, the failure of apartheid, the preparations of the Government for war. There is much new and interesting material, particularly on the workings of the South African lobby in London and America; also much thumb-sucking (such as in the chapter on 'African Nationalism and the Communists') and a few errors (the Indian Congress is *not* banned—page 202; the illegal Communist Party announced its existence in 1960, not 1963, and its leadership was not 'mainly in exile'—page 183; Matanzima's secretary is not Tshungwa but Tshunungwa—page 151; the protest strike against the inauguration of the Nationalist Republic was in 1961, not 1962—page 177).

The Legums write:

The deadlock is clear. Neither side can break it. The white society can rule, but it cannot create the conditions it regards as essential to its own security. The Africans can challenge this rule, but they cannot break it. How solve the impasse?

It is the argument of this book that the racial crisis in the Republic of South Africa cannot be resolved without international intervention. It is no longer a question of whether such intervention will take place, or even whether it should. It is already happening.

Intervention cannot be halted, it can only mount. The only relevant question is what form it takes. The wrong kind can cast deep shadows over the Republic, over Africa and over the world. The right kind can prevent what in any event is likely to be an unhappy situation from becoming a tragedy: possibly one of the worst in this already violent century.

Why, one may ask, is South Africa a crisis only for the West? Why not for the East as well, or for the Afro-Asian countries? The very loading of the question reveals the Legums' interest in the situation—it is to keep South Africa within the imperialist sphere of influence. Failure by 'the West' to intervene now, either directly or through the United Nations, may mean the loss of South Africa to neutralism or even, horror of horrors, to 'the East'.

However, while one may disagree profoundly with the Legums' motives, one cannot disagree with their call for sanctions, which has also been voiced by the African National Congress and the leading Afro-Asian powers as well as the socialist countries and, indeed, the United Nations General Assembly itself. And perhaps the most valuable part of the Legums' book is that section of part two which answers one by one the usual arguments raised by the opponents of sanctions and shows clearly that only blind self-interest on the part of investors and White Supremacists stands in the way of effective international action.

Whether sanctions are feasible and practicable is a question most adequately answered by the Penguin *Sanctions Against South Africa*, which consists of the papers and resolutions presented at the international conference on economic sanctions against South Africa which took place in London in April 1964. In the words of the convenor of the conference, Ronald Segal, who also writes the introduction to the book:

The conference has shown sanctions to be necessary, urgent, legal and practical, but likely to succeed only with the full co-operation of Britain and the United States. How the Governments of those two countries are to be drawn from their present policy of profitable neglect—under which they do nothing calculated to disturb white supremacy while allowing their trade and the investments of their citizens in South Africa to grow—must be the subject of not only sustained effort by African and Asian Governments, but of public pressure in Britain and the United States themselves.

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*The Books Reviewed:*

*Whither the Transkei?* by W. A. Bellwood, Bailey Bros & Swinfen Ltd., 21s.

*Bantustans: the Fragmentation of South Africa*, by Christopher R. Hill. Oxford University Press, for the Institute of Race Relations, London, 9s. 6d.

*South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt*, by Govan Mbeki, Penguin Africa Library, 3s. 6d.

*South Africa: Crisis for the West*, by Colin and Margaret Legum, Pall Mall Press, (Paperback, 12s. 6d.).

*Sanctions Against South Africa*, Penguin Special, 4s. 6d.