

OPPRESSION AND SUPPRESSION

A New Consolidation in South Africa

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THE WORLD CAPITALIST press is at present engaged in composing rival variations on an identical theme: the Vorster régime's 'new, outgoing and pragmatic approach' to politics. The result is a fantasia indeed. For, in fact, no 'softening' whatsoever has taken place. The process has rather been one of extremely rapid 'hardening'. During this past year, the South African régime has effected a major consolidation of its techniques of oppression and suppression. This overall consolidation can, for purposes of analysis, be considered under three main headings.

1. *Tightening of control over the masses through a programme clearly directed at the creation of a national slave labour force.*
2. *The assumption of total powers of punitive repression against all opponents and critics.*
3. *An intensified drive to reinforce the unity of the white ruling class.*

I. CONTROLLING THE MASSES

Here, the spearhead of the attack is the Physical Planning and Utilisation of Resources Act. Carel de Wet, former Ambassador to Britain, the new Minister of Planning (who has already achieved immortality by his remark in the House of Assembly that not enough Africans were shot at Sharpeville) expressed himself characteristically when interviewed by the Port Elizabeth *Evening Post* on the objectives of

the Bill. He declared: 'I say now to the Bantu: Go home—that is where you belong.' He insisted that, wherever it could be done, 'Bantu' would be 'sent back to their homelands' in the interests of apartheid. Another Government spokesman, Botha, chose this moment to reiterate that African presence in White areas must be 'for a limited purpose, of a casual nature'.

Of course, we have long been aware of the basic dichotomy in Nationalist theory and practice by which the regime has continually made pronouncements similar to these while, at the same time, the influx of Africans into urban areas has increased every year. We can find a typical example of the resulting evasion when, in January 1967, the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, A. H. Vosloo, replied to a question in Parliament from Mrs. Helen Suzman about the numbers of African males and females (a) admitted to, and (b) endorsed out of urban areas. He replied, with blatant false naïveté that 'such statistics are not kept'. However, the Planning Bill makes clear in a new way the manner in which the regime proposes to 'solve' this conflict. It has given rise to considerable protests from capitalist interests and Chambers of Commerce because of the powers it gives the Minister over industry as well as over labour.

Speaking for these interests, S. Waterson (United Party M.P.) declared that the key word of the Bill was 'compulsion' and that the Government was 'proclaiming martial law over the economic life of the country'. Another spokesman emotionally declared that, as a result of the Bill, the 'plans and blueprints of bureaucrats' would replace the 'decisions of free business men'.

What has led to this outcry from capitalist interests?

The Bill makes it compulsory for industry to seek the Minister's authority before building new factories or adding to existing ones. Coetzee, Deputy Minister of Planning, told the Federated Chamber of Industry that African labour would no longer be available on demand—and added that this fact would in future be as important in industrial planning as capital structure, cost structure, raw material, prices and markets. Behind such statements and, indeed, behind the Bill itself, lies the failure of the regime's attempts to 'soft-sell' border industries (industries on the fringes of the reserves) to capitalists. Legal powers to compel this development have therefore been assumed—provisions which will have profound effects on South African workers. For these powers enable the regime to *transform all African labour into migrant, contract labour*.

The Bill foresees the compulsory registration of every African in the 'homelands' (even if he was born and has always been resident in a White area) as a *workseeker in White areas*. In reply to a question

from a reporter as to whether established or contract labourers were more satisfactory workers, de Wet replied that the contract labourer works harder because 'he knows he can be kicked out from one day to the next'.

Light is shed on the methods by which these contract labourers will be recruited by an item in a recent bulletin of the International Commission of Jurists. The bulletin finds that 'the system of recruitment of African workers now operating in South-West Africa is unique in its organised and efficient application of conditions which amount to slavery'.

In levelling its 'slavery' charge, the bulletin says that African workers in South-West Africa are recruited by the Government-sponsored South-West Africa Native Labour Association (Swanla) which classifies male workers into various categories.

Once having been chosen by Swanla contractors, the men are transported from their tribal areas to their areas of work. There is no other way of obtaining work or earning a wage except through the Swanla contract system.

The initial term of contract for an African worker in the mines, says the report, is 309 working days with a minimum wage of 1s. 9d. for each of the first 155 days and 2s. for the remaining time. White miners in 1962 were earning an average of £1,250 per annum.

Labourers are not recruited again for the same work in the same area or factory 'in order that they may not acquire skills'. (*Anti-Apartheid News* (London), July-August 1967.)

This method of direction of labour provides a blueprint for the methods to be observed in border areas within the Republic—indeed where border industries have already been set up, this has been shown to be the case.

A further significant statement by de Wet in connection with the Bill's focus on decentralisation was that the removal of workers from concentration in the urban areas would prevent 'the risk of disruption of services, such as power failures and transport strikes as had occurred in places like New York, London and Paris'. This clearly shows the regime's aim of halting the development of the skilled urban proletariat. By keeping the labour force scattered (and unskilled on the s.w.a. pattern), the regime hopes to prevent all types of working-class organisation and activity.

De Wet re-stated the regime's firm intention of reducing the African labour force in the Western Cape by 5 per cent per year. The means by which this reduction is to be achieved have been indicated by another piece of recent legislation—the so-called 'Coloured Cadets Bill'. This provides for the registration of all Coloured men between

the ages of eighteen and twenty-four and the 'training in employment' of those not at school and those who are unemployed.

The Bill sets up compulsory work training camps on para-military lines. Training 'can include any work done inside or outside the proposed training centres'. Penalties for disobeying orders are severe, ranging from fines to imprisonment—and even combining both.

The Bill removes all parental control over cadets except in so far as property transactions and consent to marriage are concerned—and vests this control in the committees that will run the camps.

While the selection board is empowered to exempt those engaged in full-time study at school or university, in permanent employment or serving apprenticeships, *they are not compelled to exempt anyone*.

Nationalist M.P., N. F. Treurnicht (Piketburg) declared that the Coloured Community would welcome the Bill as 'a measure that would prevent their children succumbing to bad habits and eventual delinquency . . . a good start to incorporating the Coloured youth in a positive labour plan'.

Just how 'positive' a 'labour plan' the Bill indeed supplies becomes plain when we note the provision that discretion as to how many 'cadets' are called up is not left to the selection board but to the Minister, who is empowered to tell the board *how many are required*. Coetzee himself merely dotted the i's and crossed the t's when he openly declared that this legislation was *intended as a means of filling the labour gap in the Western Cape caused by the Government's decision to expel 5 per cent of Africans from the area each year*.

It is clear that the government is extending to the Coloured people the methods of forced labour long employed against Africans by means of such mechanisms as the pass laws and the reserve system. Among Africans, compulsory labour is also being extended.

A further addition can be noted in the 'Transit Camps' recently set up, to which released prisoners are now being directed. Details are given in an International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa Special Report, *Transit Camps in South Africa*, May 1967, and *Welcome Valley* by Mahlubi Livingstone Mrwetyana, a supplementary document to the above, July 1967.

The Report reveals that there are at least twenty-four of these camps in the rural areas of South Africa, and the Government admitted in February that about 50,000 people—men, women and children—were living in them.

Four categories of people are drafted to the camps, there to live under appalling conditions, forced to work at whatever the Government orders—or starve.

Some are former political prisoners, freedom fighters who have served their sentence and, immediately on being released, banished from their homes to the camps, and there compelled to scratch out the miserable existence that the camps afford. As one ex-prisoner wrote: 'To me this has become tantamount to a second term of prison. . . .'

Relatives of freedom fighters, too, are subjected to similar persecution. The Report comments: 'As part of the campaign of terror and intimidation against non-White opponents of the regime, the police and the Department of Bantu Administration and Development are making full use of the stringent provisions of the Native Urban Areas Act to inflict further punishment on those who have engaged in politics, and even on their friends and relations. Many of those being endorsed out and sent to the rural townships (transit camps) are the dependants of jailed African politicians.'

Then, too, there are large numbers of aged or infirm men and women, thrown out of their homes on White farms or in the towns because the apartheid State had no more use for them, since their working life was over. They have to rely on the meagre bounty of charity organisations, because they cannot work.

But by far the largest group consists of ordinary South Africans, men and women who have fallen foul of the myriad impossible regulations governing the lives of Africans, who have been 'endorsed out' of the towns—a euphemism which seeks to hide the bestial chattel laws which are reality for the vast majority of South Africa's people.

The camps, in short, are a means of persecuting militant opponents of the regime and their dependants, forcing people to work for the very authority which has driven them from their homes and livelihood, and providing a place, conveniently hidden from the eyes of the world, for the old and sick victims of apartheid to die where none can see their final degradation.

2. REPRESSIVE POWERS

The new 'Terrorism Bill', recently enacted by the South African Parliament, gives the regime 'blanket' powers of repression hitherto unequalled.

First, as regards arrest, it enables any senior police officer to arrest any person without a warrant. The person so arrested can be held indefinitely in solitary confinement. The Minister refused to incorporate a provision in the Bill that the next-of-kin should be informed of the arrest—and the Bill specifically states that no person other than the Minister or an officer in the service of the State can have access or be entitled to any official information relating to or obtained from

a detainee. Even the visits from a Magistrate specified under the '90-day' and '180-day' clauses (though these visits were of little use to detainees) will now only be allowed 'if circumstances permit'. The freedom of the Special Branch to torture and bully detainees is now utterly unchecked. The courts have no jurisdiction over or access to detainees.

When detainees are charged under the Terrorism Act, a new provision is applied. The accused has to *prove his innocence*. And the charges which he will face are virtually unlimited. The Bill does not only apply to acts of sabotage. The Minister of Justice, when he said that 'everything which goes to sow disorder and anarchy falls within the framework of the planned activities of these people' (i.e. 'terrorists') was speaking all too accurately in terms of the Act. People can be charged under the Terrorism Bill with any action that had the effect, or was likely to have the effect of 'embarrassing the administration of the Affairs of the State'. It will be presumed that the action was committed to endanger the maintenance of law and order within the Republic unless the accused can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this was not so. It is not even necessary for the prosecution to show that the action was wilful—only that it was 'likely to have been wilful'.

The Minister specifically refused to exclude children from the Bill's provisions—saying that children who participate in 'terrorism' should be treated just like adults. To express the Bill's ultimate possibilities, a child who chalked a slogan on a wall could be sentenced to a minimum of five years' imprisonment—for this is the minimum sentence laid down by the Bill for anyone convicted under the Act. The death sentence can be imposed.

The Act is retrospective to 1962—enabling the regime to charge a group of South-West African freedom fighters under it. It is quite probable that it will be used also against released prisoners whom the regime is anxious to 'put away' for a further spell.

In terms of the total arbitrary powers conferred by the Bill, the new amendment to the Defence Act seems almost unnecessary. This amendment places a blanket ban on publication of news about the South African Defence Force or 'any auxiliary service', as well as 'any force of a country which is allied to the Republic'.

And so more patriots will be crammed into South Africa's crowded prisons, there to suffer, at best, humiliating and degrading conditions, to be kicked, beaten and deprived of food. Since Harold Strachan's courageous exposé of the appalling treatment meted out to prisoners, which was followed by some improvement in conditions, the white-washers of apartheid have pretended that all was now well in Robben

Island, Leeuwkop, Pretoria and the rest. Even the much-vaunted Red Cross investigation of prison conditions, which the Government long refused to publish, has been used to give the impression that South African prisons compared favourably with those in the rest of the world. The Red Cross report was, on the whole, uncritical and bore many signs that the investigator had been duped by the prison authorities into thinking that he was seeing everyday conditions in the prisons, instead of a farce carefully prepared by the warders; even so, where the report did make criticisms these were cleverly mixed up, in publication, with defensive comments by the South African Government, giving a generally favourable impression.

It is difficult to overstate the debt which South African freedom fighters, and all friends of the South African people, owe to the International Defence and Aid Fund. Not only has this charitable body worked tirelessly, collecting money for the defence of political trialists and for the support of their families. It has also relentlessly exposed the bestiality of apartheid in a long series of detailed, factual reports, answering the lies of Vorster and his apologists with incontrovertible facts, successfully smashing the cordon of censorship and silence about South Africa which the Government tries to impose. The latest of its publications concerns the Red Cross investigation of South African prisons, and the Fund painstakingly corrects or complements each inadequate aspect of the Red Cross report, exposes each blatant lie of the Government spokesman, with documented evidence by the people who really know about South African prisons—the ex-prisoners and detainees themselves.

3. 'WHITE UNIFICATION'

If the measures which the capitalist press allege to constitute a 'new approach', a 'liberalisation' and a 'softening' are critically scrutinised, it will be found that, actually, these measures are solely directed at achieving greater 'White unity' within the Republic—a self-contained structure prepared for monolithic racial confrontation.

The 'concessions' over international sporting events are not concessions to international opinion but a 'bonus' presented to the sports-mad members of both White language groups—a removal of the irritations caused in the sole area in which international pressure has, so far, affected them personally.

But the world is not so easily fooled. The (White) South African Olympic Association went to the International Olympic Committee's Teheran Congress in May this year, confident that the concessions would have hoodwinked the world's sports administrators. They could also count on support from the imperialist countries, anxious

as always to get South Africa off the hook. African, Asian and Socialist delegates, however, informed of the true nature of the 'new' sports policy by the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, refused to allow the immediate re-entry of South Africa to the Olympic games. It was quite clear that Vorster hoped that, by allowing a few non-White sportsmen to go to Mexico under the South African flag, he would divert the attention of the world from discrimination in sports *inside* South Africa, which he has no intention of abandoning. The ploy didn't work. South Africa remains an outcast, and a final decision on her exclusion will be made in Geneva next February. If the Western sports bodies persist in their 'salvage operation', hanging over their heads is the threat that no African country will take part in the Mexico Olympics if South Africa does.

The withdrawal of the two university apartheid Bills which were to have been sponsored by De Klerk, the Minister of Education, was attributed by him to the fact that the universities themselves had now taken sufficient action in implementing apartheid on the campus. However, such actions as have been taken by the universities in this connection would certainly not have satisfied the Minister in 'normal' circumstances, taking his past record into consideration.

The Government is quite obviously feeling the need to control and mollify important sections of academic and student opinion—Vorster knows very well that there is a strong, if normally latent, anti-apartheid current of feeling among students and university teachers. The visit of Senator Kennedy to South Africa provided the occasion for a demonstration of rebellious spirit which was made the more emphatic by the Government's ham-handed reaction to the tour of even such an equivocal critic. More importantly, the recent banning from his post of Dr. Raymond Hoffenberg, a noted medical researcher and teacher, has aroused a storm of anger in academic circles, and among South African White intellectuals in general. The banning of Hoffenberg may be seen as a misjudgment of the temper of the intellectual community—while it intends to isolate and crush the more 'extreme' critics of apartheid, the maniacal logic of apartheid demands that there must be more and more repression, extending even to comparatively mild critics of the regime.

The 'soft line' is also evident in recent actions on the part of others lower in the ranks of the Nationalist hierarchy: for instance, the rejection by the Afrikaanse Studentebond of an 'extremist' candidate for their leadership, who was opposed to all contact with N.U.S.A.S. except on rigid terms dictated by the A.S.B. Similar rejections have been occurring in other Afrikaans organisations. The Albert Herzog faction has been under attack from sources close to the centre of

power. Those who stress 'Afrikanerdom' as opposed to 'the White nation' are not at present regarded with favour. Indeed a Cabinet Minister recently described the Afrikaner people as in danger of becoming 'over-organised'.

The war in the Middle East was even seized on as a pretext for a *rapprochement* between the regime and the South African Jewish community. The regime is now careful to avoid anti-semitic pronouncements—hence the fall from grace of Mr. Brown, editor of the anti-semitic *South African Observer*. Special permission for large sums to be sent from the Republic as 'aid for Israel' developed into an exchange of courtesies between the Government and official Jewry.

But it would be naïve to interpret Vorster's support for Israeli aggression as evidence of an abandonment of the Nationalists' traditional anti-semitism. It is no accident that among the Zionists' most ardent apologists are the West German militarists and Nazis, and near-fascist newspapers and organisations throughout the West.

These 'concessions' are not concessions at all. As is shown by the banning of Hoffenberg, and even more clearly by the new Press Bill, which seeks to shut down newspapers and imprison journalists if they print 'lies' (i.e. the truth), the so-called changes of policy are merely ploys to absorb and silence critics, to gear the Whites for the death-struggle with the forces of freedom, a struggle which looms nearer and nearer. Truly progressive Whites, refusing to be taken in by the propaganda, will be and are being even more ruthlessly persecuted.

Resistance by the non-White masses, too, grows daily after the long period of quiet which followed the heavy blows struck against the national liberation movement by the police in 1963-5. The veteran Gandhian Nana Sita has struck a chord of defiance and hope in the people's hearts by his undaunted courage, at the age of sixty-nine, in going to prison for the third time, this time for six months, for refusing to leave his home as he had been ordered to do under the Group Areas Act. The funeral of our beloved Chief Lutuli, Isitwalandwe (wearer of the warrior's feathers), became the occasion for a massive demonstration against the regime. Soon afterwards, the African National Congress distributed thousands of copies of a militant leaflet all over South Africa, calling on the people to have courage and be ready to take up arms against the oppressors when the time came.

Although the public face of the apartheid regime is one of bland confidence, the recent incursion into Rhodesia of Zimbabwe and South African freedom soldiers has exposed South Africa's sense of security as being brittle and shallow. When the guerrillas started to shoot

down Smith's security forces, Vorster panicked; troops, police and helicopters were sent to aid the Smith regime, Radio South Africa openly admitted South African intervention in the fighting, and Government spokesmen talked of Rhodesia's borders being 'South Africa's front line'. This blatant admission that South Africa is Smith's master, and Rhodesia its client state was later, of course, denied, but the damage had been done. What is important is that, no sooner was Vorster confronted with determined men who repaid violence with violence, bullet with bullet, than the carefully-publicised stability of the 'White South' was seen to crumble, while the Government hit the panic button. Once again, the leadership of the African National Congress has been vindicated: careful planning and training, correct political leadership, and a comparative handful of guerillas make the racists quake in terror. As the liberation movement moves inexorably to the final showdown with the apartheid state, this is a salutary lesson for those who had been duped or terrified into believing that the White gangsters could turn justice and history back for ever.