

# RELATIVE AFRICAN POVERTY

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**DR. VERWOERD**, at the first and last Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference he ever attended, boasted that South Africa's Black population enjoyed the highest material standards in Africa. This was his way of defending the system that denies Black South Africans any voice in the making of the laws governing them, equal protection of the laws, and the most elementary civil liberties, such as the right of acquiring or occupying private property, or seeking and performing such work as they are fitted for. Whether Dr. Verwoerd actually attributed the alleged affluence of his Black compatriots to this system of helotry for the benefit of a White master class is not clear. But whatever he meant, it sounded good, apparently, to the many apologists for "the South African way of life", who have been smugly quoting it ever since.

## Desperate poverty

It is my object to inquire into the substance of this boast; and I suggest that such inquiry reveals that (1), desperate poverty is the lot of the vast majority of Black South Africans; (2), poor as most of Africa is, there is no reliable evidence of the relative affluence of Black South Africans; and (3), most important of all, poverty in the rest of Africa is due largely to economic conditions that are extremely difficult to combat, whereas in South Africa it is largely the result of deliberate official policy.

Little space need be wasted on the first of these propositions. Figures are hardly necessary to confirm the evidence of our own eyes if we care — or can bear — to keep them open. Pot-bellied, spindle-legged, naked Black children, ragged and half-starved adults, miserable shacks and hovels — these are familiar sights, especially in the country areas.

## Revealing figures

*Nor do the figures, if insisted upon, belie the evidence of our eyes.* For more than a dozen years after the last war, the real wages of Africans employed in industry and commerce rose not at all, despite an annual rise in the national income of nearly 4% and an overall rise in these years in White wages of nearly 36%. Since 1958, and particularly since 1960, there has been some increase in African wages, but on the whole they remain deplorably low — in the neighbourhood of

an average of R31 per month, as against a minimum requirement of about R50 per month to maintain a family of five in health on the barest necessities.

These figures relate to the *best-paid* African workers, whose minimum wages are regulated by wage determinations or industrial agreements (to which, of course, they are excluded by law from being parties). But what of the vast majority, whose wages, whether in cash or kind, are not regulated by law? On the gold mines, for instance, average **cash** wages are about R9 to R12 per month. The worker himself, of course, receives compound accommodation, medical attention and food; but it is from the cash wage that he must feed his family, and, having regard to soaring living costs, it is safe to assume that this is no higher than before the war.

Figures of farm earnings are difficult to obtain, but a survey conducted on behalf of the Institute of Race Relations in 1957-1958 in the Albany and Bathurst districts disclosed an average of some R18 in **cash and kind** for a family of six. This included *everything*, such as the casual earnings of women and children and even casual gifts of cast-off clothing. Miserable as this level is, it is almost certainly considerably above what the great majority of farm-labour families receive.

Infant mortality rates, especially in the rural areas, can be described only as murderous. The high incidence of deficiency diseases such as kwashiorkor, gastro-enteritis and tuberculosis is the constant theme of health officers everywhere in South Africa.

*(Continued overleaf)*

## "Disinherited majority" of the human race

It is, of course, a commonplace that grinding poverty has been the lot of the vast majority of humankind throughout the ages. As a result of the industrial revolution — although not really until our own generation — a significant minority of mankind, inhabiting North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, have achieved minimum standards of living that are reasonably adequate in terms of nutrition, clothing, shelter, medical attention and modest amenities for recreation and entertainment. Other considerable minorities, inhabiting South America and Eastern and Southern Europe, are at least within sight of the achievement of comparable standards, though still lagging far behind. But some two-thirds of humanity — the inhabitants of Africa and the teeming millions of Asia — as yet little benefitted by the economic results of the Industrial Revolution, yet experiencing a "population explosion" prevented by modern science and a civilized world order from being neutralized by the age-old "correctives" of famine and epidemic and wars of extermination, continue to live in conditions of primordial poverty.

It is impossible to give a thumb-nail impression of the poverty, degradation and misery of this disinherited majority of the human race. It must suffice to indicate that their average *per capita* income is 40 dollars per annum, which means less than R11 per month for a family of five.

### Two important factors

Now it is quite true that this average figure *does fall below such rough estimates as can be made for the Africans in South Africa.* But in this connection there are two extremely important factors to be borne in mind. The first is that, in addition to the inherent infirmity of averages as a true index of the actual living standards of hundreds of millions of people, an attempt to reduce such averages to monetary terms necessarily leaves out of account important factors in the needs of the peoples concerned. Take, for instance, the need for clothing. On this item alone, the necessary expenditure of an African fisherman on the shores of Lake Tanganyika is likely to be far less than that of an African industrial worker in Cape Town, especially an inhabitant of a winter-flooded area on the Cape Flats. Expenditure on shelter clearly varies with the same factor of climate. And whatever the world price of coconuts or bananas, the basic food needs of a Central African peasant, upon whose homestead allotment these commodities grow in natural profusion, are likely to present somewhat different obstacles to their satisfaction from those confronting a landless peasant in the Transkei, dependent on cash remittances from a migrant labourer in far-off Johannesburg.



H. WINDER

(Sunday Times)

### Rough comparisons

No doubt the learned statisticians who deal in "averages" affecting two-thirds of living humanity attempt to take all factors such as these into account. Yet they would be the first to admit the intrinsic inadequacy of the data at their disposal for this purpose. Indeed, nothing more than a rough comparison of relative general living standards as between developed and undeveloped countries can be deduced from estimates of this kind, and they certainly provide no scientific basis for the claims of Dr. Verwoerd in enlarging upon the high living standards, which, according to him, his Government is responsible for affording the Black people of our own country.

Even if there were reliable evidence to support a boast of the comparative affluence of Black South Africans, its fundamental premise is a bogus one. The true test of the adequacy of the living standards of *any* people is not comparison with those of the populations of lands less favourably endowed by nature, or whose historic legacy is less rich, but the use made of concrete resources, in terms of natural endowment and the industry and accumulations of preceding generations, of the country which such a people inhabit.

### South Africa richly endowed

That South Africa is richly endowed, both by nature and by the application, over many generations, of the skill and enterprise of its White population and the labour of its patient and conscientious non-White people, there can be no



doubt. It is now more than twenty years since the Van Eck Commission reported that South Africa "ranks with the limited number of countries in which the essential minerals for heavy industry are present in large quantities", in which "in many respects a natural basis exists for manufacturing industries", and which "possesses a considerable labour force suitable for industrial work provided proper training is made available".

It is the deliberate policy of this Government to waste and dissipate these resources by refusing to make "available" the "proper training" of the vast majority of our people — those with Black skins. The last thing Dr. Verwoerd and his Government are concerned about is the development of the matchless resources of our motherland by the joint efforts and for the joint benefit of White and Black alike. So long as the White — especially the "Afrikaner" in this regime's special exclusive meaning of the word — can remain "baas", and the Black an alien helot, that is all that matters.

### United Nations' measures

Contrast this with the rest of Africa and with the civilized nations of Western Christendom in their attitude to its difficulties. The problem of poverty is a terrible one and is recognized as such throughout the Christian West, and in the councils of the United Nations.

That problem has been closely investigated and faced, and measures are being formulated to deal with it. Briefly it is that the *per capita* income of the backward countries of Africa and Asia is less than a tenth of that of the developed countries of the West. But this is only the beginning of the problem. In Africa, for instance, the population is growing at the rate of about 2% per annum. It has been calculated that a minimum of saving and investment of 3% of the annual national income is needed to raise such income by 1%. Hence at least 6% of the national income must be saved and invested annually to secure even the existing very low standard of living. But a poor country with a largely subsistence economy has great difficulty in achieving this. And if the standard of living is to be raised, obviously a considerably higher rate of investment must be achieved.

At present, some 4,000 million dollars represents the total of Western aid to and investment in backward countries. Mr. Paul Hoffman, director of the United Nations Special Fund for this purpose, estimates that a further 3,000 million is needed to increase the *per capita* income by two per cent. per annum. It is along these lines that civilization is proceeding. It will involve astronomical sums representing not only investment expenditure on which a return can be expected, but, to a greater extent still, outright aid, as a means to the survival of the majority of mankind.

### South Africa's "manifest destiny"

What part is Dr. Verwoerd, with his colleagues in government, playing this great enterprise of humanity, world co-operation, and, ultimately, world peace? The answer, of course, is precisely **nothing**. Not only is he strangling the productive resources of our own country, but — and perhaps this is a concomitant — he is deliberately abstaining from committing our country to the fulfillment of its "manifest destiny": the raising up of the African continent and its integration into the civilization of the West. This would be to the great benefit of South Africa, both directly in terms of markets and new fields of investment, and, more important still, by way of contribution to the cause of "peace on earth and goodwill towards men".

Essentially Africa is, and must increasingly develop as, an economic unit. Dr. Verwoerd ill serves his own country when he seeks to draw contrasts — especially highly doubtful ones — between the local and the external standards of living. For it is a reality of economics no less than it is a reality of any civilized way of life, that we are indeed "members one of another". Here in Africa we are witnessing a continent in labour. A young giant, still half confined in the womb of history, is struggling to be born. Our own country is suited by every qualification — geographical, economic, ethnic — to serve as midwife at that birth.

But if we turn away from this historic task in pettiness and bitterness and fear, we shall indeed incur the wrath of the gods who have called us to so high a destiny. We shall find that in shrinking from participation in the splendid agony of birth, we shall have chosen for ourselves the agony of inglorious death.

#### INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

**T**HE Minister of Finance, Dr. Dönges, deprecates the granting of higher wages unless they are accompanied by an increase in productivity.

I should like to know if Members of Parliament, when they voted themselves an increase in salary (largely untaxable), were concerned about their increased productivity. Or do they consider that their higher salary was justified because the passing of such laws as the 90-day detainee fell under "increased productivity?"

And then there are the provincial councillors. They increase their salaries, but sit on fewer occasions each year. How does this square with increased productivity?

(From a letter in the "Rand Daily Mail")