

The Black Sash — Die Swart Serp

Seven Years After

SEVEN years ago, in May, 1955, 2,500 women marched silently through the streets of Johannesburg. They marched because they were filled with anger—and, as they marched, they realised that the thousands who lined the streets were angry too. In the weeks that followed, they found that over 100,000 women all over South Africa were angry enough to organize and sign a mass petition.

Those who marched, and those who watched; those who signed, and those who could not (since only women were eligible), were incensed at the Government's disgraceful proposal to violate the spirit and intention of the Constitution by "packing" the Senate, in order to remove a few thousand Coloured voters from the common Voters' Roll. This was the last and most shocking of a series of attempts to circumvent the entrenched clauses of the Constitution.

Every woman who could leave her home went to Pretoria to present the petition to the Prime Minister's deputy at the Union Buildings, and, as a protest against the Government's refusal of their just demands, they spent the two coldest nights of the winter in the grounds of Union Buildings. While they were there they learned, many of them for the first time, what the background to the Senate Bill was. They began to see that the Senate Bill was only a part of an appalling pattern, the pattern of enforced apartheid.

And so the Black Sash came into being, originally to uphold the South African Constitution as embodied in the Act of Union, but subsequently, when the enactment of the Senate Bill had destroyed the spirit of the Constitution, to uphold the principles of Parliamentary democracy and civil rights and liberties in South Africa. Inherent in this policy was opposition to enforced apartheid, with its denial of rights, and discrimination against individuals, on grounds of race and colour.

A rigid policy of colour "apartheid" enforced by law was enunciated by the Nationalist government immediately after they came to power in 1948. For many years, no definition of their policy could be obtained from them, the nearest approach being "separate development." This was vaguely understood as being total territorial separation of the races, a "moral" justification for progressively depriving non-Whites of rights and amenities in "White" areas on the understanding that they would in time enjoy full rights in their own areas.

Na Sewe Jaar

SEWE jaar gelede, in Mei 1955, het 2,500 vroue in stilte deur die strate van Johannesburg geloop. Hulle het geloop omdat hulle kwaad was — en terwyl hulle geloop het, het hulle besef dat duisende wat langs die strate gestaan het, ook kwaad was. In die daarop volgende weke het dit geblyk dat meer dan 100,000 vroue dwarsdeur Suid-Afrika kwaad genoeg was om 'n massa petisie te organiseer en te teken.

Diegene wat geloop het; diegene wat toeskouers was; diegene wat geteken het, en dié wat nie kon teken nie (want net vroue was gevra) was kwaad oor die Regering se skandelige voorstel om die gees en bedoeling van die Grondwet te verkrag deur die Senaat te „pak" en sodoende 'n paar duisend kleurling kiesers van die algemene Kieserslys te verwyder. Dit was die laaste en mees skokkende van 'n reeks pogings om die verskanste klousules van die Grondwet te omseil.

Elke vrou wat haar huis kon verlaat, het oorgegaan na Pretoria om die petisie aan die gemagtigde verteenwoordiger van die Eerste Minister in die Unie Geboue voor te lê, en, as protes teen die Regering se weiering van hulle regmatige versoeke, het hulle die twee koudste nagte van die winter in die gronde van die Unie Geboue deurgebring. Terwyl hulle daar was het hulle geleer, baie vir die eerste keer, wat die agtergrond van die Senaatwet was. Hulle het besef dat dit 'n deel was van 'n ontstellende patroon van gedwonge apartheid.

Op dié manier het die Swart Serp tot stand gekom, oorspronklik om die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet, soos dit in die Uniegrondwet vasgelê was, te verdedig, maar later, na die Senaatwet die gees van die Grondwet vernietig het, om die prinsipe van Parlementêre demokrasie en burger regte en vryhede in Suid-Afrika te handhaaf. Inherent in die beleid was opposisie teen gedwonge apartheid, met sy ontkenning van regte aan, en diskriminasie teen individue op grond van ras en kleur.

'n Onbuigsame beleid wat kleur „apartheid" deur wetgewing dwing, is onmiddelik na die Nasionale Party in 1948 aan bewind gekom het, verklaar. Vir baie jare het hulle geen definisie van hulle beleid gegee nie, en was „aparte ontwikkeling" die beste beskrywing. Hierdeur is meer of min verstaan totale territoriale skeiding van die rasse, 'n „morele" verdediging vir die toenemende neiging om inbreuk te maak op nie-Blanke regte en fasiliteite in die „Blanke" wyke.

Seven years passed, and, in the same year which saw the introduction of the Senate Bill and the birth of the Black Sash, came the report of the Tomlinson Commission, which had been appointed by the Government to inquire into the possibility of developing the Native Reserves to provide "homelands" for the Africans.

A further seven years has passed, and very little has been done to implement the recommendations of the commission. "Positive" apartheid—that is, the settlement of Africans in their own "ethnic homelands"—has moved very slowly; the borders of these areas are still undefined, and the "sacrifices" which the Whites, it is said, will have to make towards the attainment of the ideal, are still unspecified. It is true that this year, with a great fanfare of trumpets, a very limited form of self-government has been granted to the Transkei, the largest of the Reserves, an "independence" that will not be real independence for many generations to come. Yet, even in this area, nothing like the recommended expenditure has been laid out on development; and whilst economists point out that the territory is incapable of supporting even the present population, day by day thousands of Africans are being "endorsed out" of the urban areas and "repatriated" to the Transkei.

At the same time, the African population in the White urban areas has increased tremendously, and more and more housing has had to be provided for them; but they are to be regarded forever as "temporary sojourners" in the White areas, with civil rights and liberties only in their various "homelands", which most of them will probably never see.

On the other hand, those seven years have seen an acceleration of what is, ironically enough, called "petty" apartheid, the innumerable penalties, frustrations and humiliations heaped on non-Whites by means of the Pass Laws, the Group Areas Act, Race Classification, etc. Coloureds and Indians are not regarded by the Government as part of the South African nation—that is one of the many privileges reserved "for Whites only"; no "positive" apartheid provisions have been made for them, yet they, too, suffer the indignities and inhumanities of "petty" apartheid.

These inhumanities in the implementation of apartheid have drawn upon South Africa the censure of the world, yet in the face of mounting criticism at home and abroad, the Government have persisted in and intensified their policies. They alone have all the wisdom; they alone know all the answers. Criticism from within is called disloyalty; criticism from without is put down to ignorance of "the traditional South African way of life."

One restrictive law after another has been passed to ensure that there shall be no mixing across the colour line; stronger and stronger

Continued overleaf

met die verstandhouding dat hulle mettertyd volle regte in hulle eie gebiede sou geniet.

Sewe jaar het verby gegaan, en in dieselfde jaar wat die indiening van die Senaatwet en die totstandkoming van die Swart Serp geskied het, het die verslag van die Tomlinson Kommissie, wat deur die Regering aangestel is om 'n ondersoek in te stel oor die moontlikhede van die ontwikkeling van die Naturelle Reserwes die „tuislande” vir die Bantoe, ook verskyn.

In 'n verdere sewe jaar is baie min gedoen om uitvoering te gee aan die aanbevelings van die Kommissie. „Positiewe apartheid,” d.w.s. die medersetting van Bantoes in hulle „etniese tuislande” het maar baie stadig beweeg; die grense van die gebiede is nog nie vasgelê nie, en die „opofferings” wat die blankes sou moes maak om die ideaal te bereik, is nog nie omskryf nie.

Dit is waar dat in hierdie jaar, met groot trompet geskaal, 'n baie beperkte vorm van selfregering vir die Transkei, die grootste van die Reserwes, ingevoer is, 'n onafhanklikheid wat vir baie geslagte geen werklike onafhanklikheid sal wees nie. Maar selfs in die gebied is die aanbevole geldelike uitgawes vir die nodige ontwikkeling daarvan, nog verreweg nie bereik nie, en terwyl ekonomete daarop wys dat die gebied nie eens in staat is om sy huidige bevolking te dra nie, word daar daagliks duisende Bantoes uit die stedelike wyke teruggevoer na die Transkei.

Terselfdertyd was die Bantoe bevolking in die Bantoe stedelike gebiede geweldig aan, en meer en meer huise moet vir hulle aangebou word, maar hulle word al die tyd beskou as „tydelike besoekers” in die Blanke gebiede, met burger regte en vryhede alleen in hulle eie „tuisland”, wat meeste van hulle waarskynlik nooit sal sien nie.

Vervolg ommesý



"The glow of a new day's dawn".

SEVEN YEARS AFTER— (Contd.)

measures have been resorted to to stifle all opposition. Restrictions on the freedom of the individual have led inevitably to restrictions on the freedoms of all, culminating in the General Laws Amendment Bill which is now before Parliament, and which has brought the Black Sash once more into the forefront of the battle for civil rights and liberties in South Africa.

For seven years, the Black Sash has protested against laws which have curtailed the liberties of South Africans, often while purporting to extend them, for example, the Extension of University Education Act, which deprived non-Whites of the right to attend the "open" universities and the universities of the right to admit them; the Abolition of Passes and Consolidation of Documents Act, which actually intensified the Pass system, and extended it to include women. For the past weeks the women of the Black Sash have stood in protest against the General Laws Amendment Bill, undaunted by insult and abuse. This Bill has been called the Sabotage Bill, which is misleading, since only one of its twenty-one clauses deals with sabotage. Under the guise of a measure designed to deal with this abhorrent crime, it appears to threaten many of our democratic freedoms. If this Bill does not, in fact, seek "to end all liberty" as the Black Sash poster says, it places sufficient arbitrary power in the hands of the Minister to enable him to do so, should he so desire.

The "seven-year" pattern is remarkable. In May, 1948, the Nationalist Party scraped into power, a fact which filled many South Africans who were aware of their reactionary policies with foreboding. In May, 1955, after one constitutional crisis after another, the Senate Bill raised



Transkei Totem.

NA SEWE JAAR— (Verv.)

Terselfdertyd het die sewe jaar 'n vermeerdering gesien van wat, ironies genoeg, „klein apartheid" genoem word: die ontelbare strawwe, dwarsboming en vernederings wat die nie-Blankes bywyse van die Paswette, Groepewet en Rasseklassifikasie te beurt val. Kleurlinge en Indiërs word nie deur die Regering as deel van die Suid-Afrikaanse nasie beskou nie — dis een van die vele voorregte wat „slegs vir Blankes" voorbehou is. Geen „positiewe" apartheid-reëlins is nog vir hulle getref toe, en tog ly hulle ook onder die vernederings en onmenslikhede van „klein" apartheid.

Hierdie onmenslikhede in die uitvoering van apartheid het vir Suid-Afrika die sensuur van die wêreld op die hals gehaal, maar tenspyte van die stygende kritiek in ons eie land en oorsee, hou die Regering vol met sy beleid, en brei dit selfs uit. Net hulle het alle wysheid in pag — net aan hulle is al die antwoorde bekend. Kritiek van binne word as verraad bestempel; kritiek van buite word toegeskryf aan gebrek aan kennis van die „tradisionele Suid-Afrikaanse lewenswyse".

Beperkende wette word die een na die ander aangeneem om te verhoed dat daar mengery oor die kleurling geskeid. Kragdadiger en steeds kragdadiger stappe word geneem om alle opposisie te onderdruk. Beperkings op die vryheid van die individu lei onvermydelik tot beperkings op die vryhede van almal, en in die Algemene Regswysigingswetsontwerp, wat nou voor die Parlement is, bereik dit sy hoogtepunt, en het dit weereens die Swart Serp in die voorgrond van die stryd vir burger regte en vryhede in Suid-Afrika gebring.

Vir sewe jaar het die Swart Serp protes aangeteken teen wette wat vryhede van Suid-Afrikaners inkort, baie maal onder die voorwensel dat die wette uitbreiding regte is: b.v., die wet oor Uitbreiding van Universiteitsopvoeding wat nie-Blankes die reg om die „oop" Universiteite by te woon ontsê het, en die Universiteite die reg om hulle aan te neem beneem het; die wette oor die Afskaffing van Passe en Konsolidasie van Dokumente het in werklikheid die paswette uitgebrei deur vroue ook in te sluit. Gedurende die afgelope weke het die Swart Serp vroue geprotesteer teen die Algemene Regswysigingswetsontwerp, sonder om afgeskrik te word deur beleidigings en skeldtaal. Die wetsontwerp word die „Sabotasie" wetsontwerp genoem, 'n misleidende titel, aangesien net een van sy een-en-twintig klousules oor sabotasie handel. Onder die dekmantel dat die maatregel teen 'n veragtelike misdaad gemik is, syn dit asof baie van ons demokratiese vryhede daarin bedreig word. As die wetsontwerp nie in werklikheid mik om 'n end te maak aan „alle vryhede" nie, soos ons plakkaat sê nie, plaas dit heeltemaal genoeg mag in die hande van die Minister om dit te doen as hy wil.

Die sewe jaar patroon is treffend. In Mei 1948, het die Nasionale Party naëlskraap aan die bewind gekom, iets wat baie Suid-Afrikaners, wat bewus was van hulle reaksionele beleiderigting, beswaar het. In Mei 1955, na 'n reeks konstitusionele krisiese, het die Senaatsontwerp 'n storm van

storms of protest throughout the country, which continued until the Senate Act was finally declared valid by the Supreme Court. And now, in May, 1962, the "Sabotage" Bill has again thrown the whole country into a turmoil. How will it end? What will the next seven years bring forth?

Events in Africa, and in the world, are moving rapidly. Can they pass us by? In the midst of change, can South Africa, even in the isolation she has brought upon herself, remain unchanged? We are groping in the semi-dark, and the "flame of freedom" is flickering. God grant that it be not extinguished utterly, that we may guard it bravely, until we emerge once more into the light!

protes deur die land verwek — 'n protes wat aangehou het tot die Senaatswet eindelijk deur die Hoëregeshof bekragtig is. En nou in Mei 1962, het die „Sabotasie" wetsontwerp die hele land in rep en roer gebring. Hoe gaan dit eindig? Wat sal die volgende sewe jaar voortbring?

Gebeurtenisse in Afrika en in die wêreld volg vinnig opmekaar. Sal ons onaangeraak bly daardeur? Te midde van veranderings, kon Suid-Afrika, self in die toestand van isolasie wat sy op sal bewaar tot ons weer in die lig staan! haarself gehaal het, onveranderd bly?

Ons tas in die donker — die „vlam van vryheid" brand laag. Mag God gee dat dit nie heeltemal geblus word nie — dat ons dit moedig sal bewaar tot ons weer in die lig staan!

No Jesting

