

BANTU AREAS—

the Machinery of Oppression

by DUMA NOKWE

WHEN the Nationalists came into power in 1948, they were faced with the 'grim reality' which threatened white supremacy — nay the very existence of the white race. The previous governments had mismanaged the country. Chaos was rapidly developing. Those who were only interested in lining their pockets with profits had allowed this serious situation to develop in the country. At least 85,000 Africans were trekking away from the farms, and reserves to the towns, leaving the farmers destitute without labour, and thus undermining South Africa's most basic and vital industry. Further this exodus from the farms and 'Bantu Areas' not merely created a concentration of a large recalcitrant group of Africans who were susceptible to agitation and upon whom the agitators preyed, but it also undermined that tribal discipline, which is the only type of authority the 'primitive native' knows and understands. That wonderful culture of the 'Bantu' was being destroyed by this artificial process of westernisation. The 'Bantu' were beginning to imitate the Europeans and had abandoned their traditions. They were now completely dependent upon Europeans for everything and were losing all sense of responsibility towards themselves. Many of them had adopted the European Areas, the towns as their homes and have abandoned their true homes the 'Bantu Areas'. They were even now beginning to demand rights in areas to which they did not belong.

This process must be stopped or else the traditional position of the white man as baas, the white man's identity, the white man's civilisation will be destroyed. The 'Bantu' will begin by invading the white man's territorial preserves, and end up by invading his political preserve. That will be the end of western civilisation in South Africa.

How to protect the traditional supremacy of the whites; maintain sufficient labour for the farms and mines; keep the 'Bantu' away from longing for the "green pastures of the Europeans, in which they are not allowed to graze"; keep the 'Bantu' contented with their present position in the country both economically and politically and maintain them under their traditional rigid tribal discipline away from the pernicious influence of agitators who clamour for democratic rights, were the problems which faced the theoreticians of the Nationalist Party.

If all these problems were created by the fact that the "Bantu" were beginning to regard the 'European Areas' as their homes and 'European development' as their development then surely reasoned the Nationalist theoreticians they can be resolved by defining the 'Bantu Areas' as the home of the 'Bantu' and insisting that the 'Bantu' develop "along their own lines". Residential, social and all the other traditional forms of segregation were not enough. The 'Bantu' must be taught that his 'roots were in the reserves', that in the towns — the European Areas, he was temporary and not permanent.

That was the problem as the Nationalists saw it and there was their solution. The Nationalists wasted no time in getting the legal, administrative, and the educational machinery set for their task of turning the clock of history back and redirecting it along the path of separate development.

The Bantu Education Commission was appointed in 1948 to investigate the suitability of Native Education for the Bantu. The Nationalists were of the opinion that 'Native Education', had ill effects on the Bantu and was responsible for the frustration and hostility amongst educated 'Bantu'. A formula for education had to be found which would be in line with the policy of binding the intellectuals to their community and its status and which will have its roots according to Verwoerd in "the Spirit and Being of Bantu Society".

In 1951 two commissions were appointed, one to investigate and recommend on Industrial Legislation, and the suitability of Trade Union Organisation for the 'Bantu' employment in Industrial Areas and the other was a commission for the Socio-Economic development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa. The latter commission was to present to Nationalists with the Blue Print for Separate development, and the enhancement of the National homes of the Bantu. During the same year, the Nationalists passed the Bantu Authorities Act, which as they would have the world believe was designed to give the 'Bantu' greater powers in the administration of their own affairs in their areas, and was a step in extending political rights, independence and responsibility to the Bantu under the Supervision of the Native Affairs Department. In terms of that Act the Governor-General may after consultation with the Native people establish Bantu tribal authority which shall consist of a chief and a number of councillors who are appointed by the chief and the Native Commissioner. Regional authorities may also be established which are empowered to make representations to the Minister on behalf of the people, establish schools, hospitals, construct roads, dams etc., suppress diseases of stock, improve farming methods and generally such matters as may be assigned to them by the Governor-General.

The Bantu Authorities Act is regarded by the Nationalists as the heart of their policy of apartheid and separate development.

In order to stop the chaotic flow of the Africans to the towns — the European Areas—stricter control was necessary and so in 1952, Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act was passed which tightened the qualifications for the right to be in towns. And in 1952 the Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act was passed which extended the passes to women. In 1952 the Bantu Education Act, and the Settlement of Disputes Act were passed. The stage was now set for the great Opera of the Century, the most "unique composition, Apartheid" to get under way.

The Native Affairs Department with outstanding zeal geared its machinery to popularise all the apartheid laws. Pamphlets, booklets, sycophants, and all forms of broadcasting were employed throughout the country to win the loyalty of the Africans in the rural areas to the great benefits, unfettered advancement, and revolutionary self-government which was being bestowed upon the "Bantu" in their own areas through the Bantu Authorities and the Bantu Education Act. They dangled the Bantu Authorities Act in front of the Chiefs as a restoration of their ancient powers over their own tribes. To the tribes they said the Act was the key to self development, self realisation and the enrichment of their poverty-stricken areas. Poverty, ignorance, disease, and dependence on the Europeans

would be banished forever. To the Europeans they said that the Bantu Authorities would guarantee the safety of white supremacy forever, to the farmers they whispered confidentially that their labour problems would be solved. To the caustic and unsympathetic world the Nationalists said that separate development and the Bantu Authorities Act were clear evidence of the 'honest and Christian intentions' of Nationalists, an attempt not merely to confer upon the Africans human rights, but opportunities of developing their abilities to the full.

As a practical demonstration of the fact that the Africans have no home in the cities, the Nationalists ushered in an era of the most ruthless persecution of the Africans, mass arrests under Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act, and the pass laws, and forcibly deported people to farms. In towns therefore, there was and still is the most ruthless control of every aspect of the lives of the worker, and in the "Bantu Areas" the benevolent promise of self-government. In the towns the pitiless rubber stamps of the labour bureaux drive the Africans mercilessly to the farms; in the 'Bantu Areas' a promise that the Africans would be allowed to apply themselves to 'development along their own lines'. That was the intended contrast, designed to turn the clock back.

The difference in attitude of the Nationalists towards the African in the towns and in the "Bantu Areas" is more apparent than real. The fundamental policy of the Nationalists towards all Africans is one of rigid, stifling control. The Bantu Authorities Act does not mean a relaxation of that control, nor does the so-called policy of self-development usher in a period of independence for the Africans. The Bantu Areas are not intended to be the lands of Canaan for the Africans. Every aspect of the development of Nationalist Policy points towards more ruthless control, not merely of the Africans, their lives and thoughts, but the lives and thoughts of the people in South Africa. The Nationalists, have exerted themselves in an attempt to win the support of the chiefs for their policy. Evangelical missions have been sent by the Native Affairs Goebbels department, armed with sweet talk and threats to the chiefs. The Minister of Native Affairs has himself attended gatherings of chiefs throughout the country, and tried to explain the benevolence of his department in idioms and parables. When the chiefs and tribesmen have failed to respond to the coquettish smiles of the Native Affairs Department, the smiles vanish, leaving only the bare familiar wolf-teeth of the Department. Then follows the swift deportation of recalcitrant chiefs and "trouble-makers" of the tribe.

When Dr. Verwoerd declared that, "There is no place for him (the Bantu) in European communities above the level of certain forms of labour", he meant every word he used. The policy of the Nationalists of "keeping the native in his place", means simply keeping the "Bantu" at the level of those forms of labour that the Nationalists have determined for them. The "forms of labour" for which the Africans are required in European communities are primarily on the mines and on the farms. The reserves or "Bantu Areas" remain, even in the Nationalists elaborate schemes of "self-development", the primary source of cheap labour for the mines and the farms. In order, however, to solve the acute shortage of farm labour, caused by the attraction of secondary industry, the Nationalists have perfected a labour bureau system. The Native Affairs Department frankly admits that the function of the Labour Bureau is to divert labour from those places where there is a surplus to those places where there is a shortage. All over the towns secondary reservoirs of labour have been

created, and the pass offices, the Native Commissioners' Offices, and the so-called labour bureaux have become one vast machine to pump labour to the farms. Those Africans who try to avoid the machine ultimately find themselves in the hands of the farmers via the police and the farm jails — which are now growing in numbers. There is no way of escaping the insatiable lust of the farmers for serfs.

The Nationalists are determined to keep African labour in a perpetual state of insecurity and flux. It must circulate through rigidly defined channels from the "Bantu Areas" to the farms and mines, and a small trickle into industry and commerce; from the Labour Bureau to the farms. Dr. Verwoerd says that the Africans are temporary in European Areas. The truth is that they are "temporary" wherever they are in the country. They are driven out by hunger and taxation; they are temporary on the farms where they are driven out by hunger and taxation; they are temporary on the farms where they are driven away by semi-feudal conditions of employment; they are temporary in towns from which they are hounded by the agents of the Labour Bureau. All this is by design. The Nationalist policy of self-development is a feeble attempt to cloak the operation of their fascist labour policy. And what is the place of their glorified "Bantu Areas" in the scheme? Apart from being the primary source of labour, these areas are also designed to be the cemetery or refuse bins for used and unwanted Africans. As Dr. Verwoerd stated when he opened the first Transkeian Territorial Authority: "There is a lot to do in other connections, for instance, Welfare Work and Health Services. Must the white men conduct these services, or should you serve your own people? In Bantu Areas it will be the duty of Bantu Authorities to look after their own people — the blind, old and poor. Control over one's own affairs is the roof over your building. The institution of Bantu Authorities gives you an opportunity to control your own affairs. To put the foundations and the walls and roof goes quickly, but furnishing takes a long time."

"The white man also has had his tree of separate development planted a long time ago. Already it has grown big and bears fruit. You have seen it. The white man knows what separate development means for his people. For progress the Bantu must also have that tree. They must not be jealous, when they look into another man's garden. While one leans over a fence and looks, one forgets to water one's own tree and the day of punishment must come. The man who tends his own tree becomes prosperous and has the trust of his own people. Tend your little tree, and it will become big."

If we escape the forest of words and parables in which Dr. Verwoerd wishes to plunge us, and we strip his tree of the artificial leaves and flowers, we are left with the bare trunk and branches of the South African cheap labour system. The statement that the white man has long planted his tree of separate development, and is enjoying its fruits, and the warning that the Bantu must not be jealous, confirms the view that the Nationalists have no intention of disturbing the conditions that have created the vast wealth of the mine magnates and farmers.

The Nationalists are attempting to perfect and make of general use the instruments of migratory labour that the mines have applied over the past half century.

When the Nationalist farmers and the rising Afrikaner capitalist class, therefore, endorse the policy of apartheid based on separate development, which envisages the Bantu developing along his own lines, they have in mind the traditional lines that have been imposed upon the Afri-

cans ever since labour became a problem in the country. These lines are the lines that guarantee an abundance of cheap labour. The farmers and mine magnates would revolt against any attempt to deprive them of their cheap labour by locking it up in "flourishing" reserves. "Keeping the native in his place" simply means to them, keeping him under such conditions that he is forced to accept work under their conditions.

The Bantu Authorities are charged with the task of collecting taxes, these Authorities will find themselves in the position of the Labour Bureaux — pumping labour to the farms and mines. That is the control the Nationalists invest in the Bantu Authorities. The propagandists of the Native Affairs Department are going to invent more idioms and parables for the imposition of this vicious duty on the Bantu Authorities.

The attempts to issue reference books to African women in the countryside is a clear sign of the future duties of the Bantu Authorities and Chiefs. The evangelists of the Native Affairs Department have already indicated that they expect the Bantu Authorities to exercise a rigid control over their people, *not only in the so-called "Bantu Areas", but wherever they might be.*

Dr. Verwoerd said in the Transkei: "The chiefs are the soul of Bantu Authorities, the source from which the river flows. The river which flows from the chiefs must not stop at the boundaries of the Bantu Areas. Its influence must spread wherever his children may be. They must all accept the leadership of the chief and abide by his authority." Mr. de Wet Nel, Chairman of the Native Affairs Commission, said in Tzaneen: "You must be careful of the wolves, because when they are hungry, they attack the weak goats. *Keep the wolves away from your areas because they will achieve nothing for you.*"

The Nationalists clearly contemplate using the Bantu Authorities not merely to implement their policies but to suppress all forms of resistance, to curb the 'agitators' and 'troublemakers', both within their own areas and in the secondary kraals which the Nationalists are creating in the urban areas through ethnic grouping.

Bantu Authorities and chiefs are going to be increasingly answerable for the activities of their unruly subjects. Dr. Verwoerd said in the Transkei: "Now there are big plans to build houses for the Bantu Authorities outside there (in the towns) where your representatives can stay, and where the heads of the tribe can go so that the leaders at home can maintain the bonds with the children there, in order that they should not be misled by incorrect ideas." The incorrect ideas Dr. Verwoerd fears are: "jealousy of the white man's tree" and the desire "to graze in the green pastures of the European", democratic rights, the right to decent conditions of work and a fair wage.

The chiefs and their councillors, therefore, will not only be required to enforce Nationalist policy, but will be expected to suppress any resistance and growth of "wolves". The power of the chiefs is the power to carry out the will of the Native Affairs Department. The control of their own affairs is really the control of those affairs which are regarded by the Native Affairs as essential to maintain a docile cheap labour force.

The success of Dr. Eiselen's campaign to win the confidence of the African in the "Bantu Areas" can now be assessed. Despite the self-adulation which is so characteristic of the Native Affairs Department, the Department has met with considerable opposition to the acceptance of Bantu

Authorities. The Africans in the 'Bantu Areas' have been seething with discontent caused by cattle-culling, the rehabilitation scheme and the land-hunger which has been their plight. The Nationalists adhere faithfully to the theory that this discontent and resistance amongst the tribes is caused by outside influence. The N.A.D. does all in its powers to deport the "trouble-makers", depose chiefs and to insulate the tribes by throwing a barbed wire of police around the tribal settlements to deny even legal advisers access to the tribes. But still the discontent continues and the resistance grows fiercer. Even amongst those Chiefs who pledge loyalty to apartheid, or coerce their people to accept passes for women, the facade of loyalty crumbles after a short while, and the passes go up in smoke.

The sustained resistance of the Mamathola tribe against their removal from their land is an instance of the growing determination of the peasants to struggle against nationalist tyranny. Dr. Verwoerd has attempted to use all forms of intimidation to compel the tribe to move, he has removed the school, the post office, and refuses to pay our pensions in their area. In spite of all this, the Mamathola remain. The situation in Zeerust, Lichtenburg, Ventersdorp, Sekhukuniland etc. confirm the growing restlessness in the countryside.

There are very clear reasons why the Nationalists' plans are bound to fail and to inflame the people. The Nationalists regard the people with scornful contempt, as inferior beings, incapable of seeing through a fraudulent scheme. That is their most serious mistake — their warped conception of the people. Secondly, after the sugar-coating on all their schemes and laws has dissolved there remains the bitter inhumanity which the people feel and revolt against. Finally the Nationalists cannot have their cake and eat it, the vast masses of the people in the rural areas must and do come to the urban areas to work as designed. Thousands of the so-called tribesmen who appear in the rural areas in primitive garb are in fact semi-urbanised men, who may have been involved in the Mine Workers' Strike, or have been members of the Railway Workers' Union or the African National Congress and so have shed their peasant backwardness. Then, of course, there is the message of the Liberatory Movement which overshadows the little Goebbels and sycophants of Dr. Verwoerd, and is penetrating the rural areas, even though this could be done more rapidly and systematically than is the case now. The rural areas are vitally important and there is no room for complacency in the Liberatory Movement the control of the rural areas by Congress must yet be taken as seriously as Dr. Verwoerd has taken it.

The Nationalists are in a dilemma. Their attempt to keep the Africans in a state of flux and backwardness by driving them back to the "Bantu Areas" has the opposite effect of raising the political consciousness of the people and creating a unity of outlook and purpose between the rural Africans and the urban African, not for the purpose of abiding by the dictates of fascism, but to conduct a vigorous and determined struggle against it. The destruction of all democratic principles through the Bantu Authorities Act, has sharpened the demand for democratic rights among even the most backward peasants. They can never resolve this dilemma, even with their latest dreams of transplanting industries to the borders of the reserves. The clock moves on inexorably.