

THE VISION OF VERWOERD

SOME people ascribe the rise of Verwoerd to the top of the Nationalist hierarchy to his intelligence, efficiency and integrity. It is no doubt true that, in comparison with the dead level of petty mediocrity, blundering incompetence and unprincipled opportunism which surrounds him in the Nationalist Party, Verwoerd's ruthless and drastic handling of Native Affairs stands out. As Marx once said of a contemporary politician, he derives his eminence from the flatness of the surrounding scenery. Yet if Verwoerd has been able to overcome the disadvantages of alien birth, personal unpopularity and inability to handle human relationships, even in his own party, it is not really because of his rather limited talents, but because he has a purpose, a sense of direction, which his colleagues lack or have lost; because he drives towards this goal with grim, inflexible ruthlessness; because he knows, or thinks he knows, where he is going. And the rest of his Party does not.

The impetus of Afrikaner nationalism has run down. Most of its original goals have either been attained — such as equality of political and language rights — or have been bypassed and made meaningless in a world where other issues — the conquest of space, the potentials of nuclear energy for plenty or for destruction, the collapse of colonialism, the choice between capitalism and socialism — have come to dominate the minds of men. The nationalists are frightened and bewildered in this dynamic, new post-war world, so hostile and threatening towards those theories and practices of caste and race privilege which went down to shattering and irretrievable defeat with Hitler's Reich. They know how to win elections, according to formula (stimulate Afrikaner chauvinism and conditioned-reflex fears; rig the constituencies; pack the Senate; pack Parliament, pack the electorate) and the fruits of office are doubtless sweet to them.

THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND

But apart from clinging to office, what are they after? What is their blueprint for the future? The Republic? More and more that long-postponed and vaguely-defined goal (for a more detailed examination on this theme the reader is referred to an article in the current issue, which it is hoped will evoke further discussion in our columns) appears not as the answer to problems but as the source of new and more serious problems. For the rest, the nationalists are increasingly developing the lager mentality, digging in to preserve established conditions and unable to see

beyond the next koppie, not planning the future but placing their trust in providence that it will turn out all right for them. The so-called wave of prosperity during the past decade — which in reality has made the rich richer, while spelling only higher prices, at pegged wages to the poor — owes nothing to any nationalist foresight or skill. It arises out of two circumstances completely beyond their control: firstly, the wonderful windfall of a world demand for uranium (out of which the actual mine workers, black and white have not benefitted by a penny); secondly the new flood of American investment capital seeking outlets such as the Union which promise high rates of profit.

In these circumstances, turned cynical, opportunist, defensive, Afrikaner nationalism has lost its way. The sense of a mission, the appeal to idealism, the initiatives and wider goals, essential to provide a movement of this nature with the emotional spirit which fuels it, have departed. The rising Afrikaner youth, growing up into a world whose horizons have boundlessly been expanded, and from which they cannot possibly be insulated, must inevitably reject and turn away from a creed so intellectually poverty-stricken and morally indefensible. Even though the party hacks and ambitious careerists who make up the M.P.'s and Senators of the Nationalist Party may not be fully conscious of all these signs of decay, they cannot but be dimly aware of the profound inner sickness of their movement, and the utter impossibility of finding a remedy within the ranks of their own cynical opportunism. Among this crowd of disillusioned office-seekers, seekers for a bigger share in the imperialist cake for "Afrikaner" capital, higher prices for farm products, more and cheaper black labour, a man like Verwoerd, who seems to have some sort of plan, some ideology, some vision appears like a new Messiah. Even though the saner among them must recognise that the plan is a fantasy, the "ideology" a sorry patchwork of shreds from Calvinism and Hitlerism, and the vision defective and false, they have nevertheless plumped for Verwoerd with very much the same desperate recklessness that the French bourgeoisie have plumped for De Gaulle. And for very much the same reason — they have nowhere else to turn. In the country of the blind, it is said, the one-eyed man is king.

Indeed, the vision is one-eyed. "My dream may run ahead of the natural progress of events," Pisarev wrote, "or it may fly off at a tangent in a direction in which no natural progress of events will ever proceed. In the first case the dream will not cause any harm." Unfortunately, Verwoerd's dream is not of this kind; it is not the broad vision of the statesman, but the absurd phantasy of a crazed visionary. It bears no relationship to "the natural progress of events," or to the realities of South Africa and the continent and the world beyond; rather, it is fundamentally out of harmony with both. The more energetically and "efficiently" Verwoerd attempts to impose his romantic dream upon a situation which makes it impossible of realisation, the more damage he will do the country, and the more the people will suffer.

"LIEUTENANT-GOVERNORS"

Sometimes the use of a revealing phrase, or even a single word, can expose and sum up for us the whole character and outlook of a man. One of these rare occasions happened during the closing stages of the 1958 Union Parliament. The former Rajah of Bantustan, Dr. Verwoerd, newly elevated to Prime Minister, was speculating on future relationships between the White South African State and its African subjects, after the three African representatives have been ejected from the House of Assembly, after the Advisory Boards and all other semi-representative institutions have gone the way of the Bunga, after all vestiges of the "Cape Liberal" period have been obliterated, to be replaced by the absolute autocratic rule (unknown in African history or tradition) of Chiefs ("Bantu Authorities")—themselves but paid tools and hirelings of the almighty Native Affairs Department.

The State, said the Prime Minister, would deal with these "Bantu Authorities" through the medium of Lieutenant-Governors.

In its context the phrase is infinitely evocative and illuminating: it casts a bright ray of light into the mysterious, obscure recesses of the Prime Minister's mentality. Lieutenant-Governor: what a picture it conjures up, of the palmy days of the British Empire! Waving over the well-kept lawns and wide, shady verandahs of the vice-regal mansion, the good doctor sees in this vision not the Union Jack (Heaven forbid!) but the Union Flag (or is it the Vierkleur?). As the great shiny car rolls up to the entrance, uniformed African sentries smartly present arms (assegais) and out steps — not a mere Native Commissioner, but a Lieutenant-Governor, the Representative in Vendaland (or wherever it is) of His Exalted Majesty, By the Grace of God, Hendrik the First, President of the Republic and Emperor of all the South Africa. This high personage, the Lieutenant-Governor, presiding over a whole separate "Colonial Civil Service" (the humble N.A.D., glorified and ennobled), dispenses justice, firmly but uprightly, collects taxes, receives Chief and Indunas in formal audience — carries in fact what Kipling and other Victorian apologists for imperialism used to call "the White Man's Burden."

THE END OF THE N.A.D.

With the announcement of Dr. Verwoerd's new Cabinet, we are witnessing the beginning of a new phase in Dr. Verwoerd's attempt to force South Africa into the strait-jacket of his lunatic conception. Among its most striking features is the disappearance of the Native Affairs Department, as we have known it since Union. For the first time, there is no Minister of Native Affairs. Instead we have two Ministers, a Minister of Bantu Administration, and a Minister of Bantu Education. There is also an "Under Minister" of Bantu Administration. All three, of course — Messrs. Nel, Maree and Mentz (of the notorious "Mentz plan" for Johannes-

burg) — are 100 per cent. Verwoerd men. There will be no tears for the N.A.D., which has never done anything good for South Africa. But, like Verwoerd's so-called "abolition of passes" the two new "Bantu" Departments really do not abolish something bad but merely change its name, greatly extend it and make it much worse.

The whole monstrous "Bantu affairs" structure will be co-ordinated and directed over by a Committee at Cabinet level, presided over by — guess whom? Right first time — the Prime Minister. Mrs. Ballinger once wrote a booklet called: "All South African Politics are Native Affairs." How right she was! No doubt Verwoerd's new sub-committee will be the real source and focus of power in the future — instead of the Cabinet taking over the N.A.D., the N.A.D. has taken over the Cabinet!

And with unlimited power and this vast new machinery at his disposal, there can be no doubt about what Verwoerd is going to do — he is going all out to enforce his idea of apartheid. Nor can there be any doubt what he means by apartheid. We have had it amply demonstrated already. It means: reaction, exploitation, repression.

Reaction: Sometimes people just use this word as a political insult, to describe the policy of those whom they disagree with. But the word has a specific meaning. It means going backward to a lower, outworn stage, instead of forward, to a higher level. It is in this exact sense that we use the expression about Verwoerdism. He wants to destroy the growing unity among the African people and force them back to tribalism. Hence Bantu Authorities and ethnic grouping and the move to abolish common African institutions of a representative character like the Cape African representatives in Parliament and even Advisory Boards. Hence all the empty chatter about "Bantu" development — in the Reserves. He wants to halt the urbanisation and industrialisation of the African people, and force them back from those levels of civilisation and culture which — so painfully and in the teeth of so much opposition — they have conquered. Hence job reservation and the petty persecution of African intellectuals and professional people: lawyers, nurses, doctors, teachers, skilled workers, businessmen. Hence vicious intensification of pass arrests and deportations, extension of passes to African women. He wants to indoctrinate the youth with a servile, backward-looking mentality. Hence Bantu Education and the plan for Bantu Universities.

Exploitation: We do not know if there are political innocents in South Africa or abroad who still imagine that "apartheid" means that Africans should not work for Europeans. However unrealistic and up-in-the-clouds Verwoerd may be in other directions, one thing he understands perfectly well: the exploitation of cheap African labour is the foundation of the Union's present economy. His measures are meant to intensify this exploitation. He wants to see that the stream of African labour is directed especially towards sectors of the economy where the rate of exploitation is

highest, where wages and conditions are worst: the farms and the mines. Hence the ruthless expulsions of tens of thousands from the towns. Hence the new increased taxes for Africans, the labour bureaux, the farm jails, the ceaseless police raids. The raiding police are really man-hunters, like the pirates who used to descend upon the West Coast of Africa in search of slaves for the plantations of America.

Repression: Like all men with an obsession, Dr. Verwoerd cannot brook opposition. If such men are not humoured, they try to destroy everything that stands in their way. If a chief does not lick Verwoerd's boots, if he stands out against removal of his tribe from its traditional lands, or against passes for women, or against "Bantu Authorities", he is summarily sacked and dethroned and sent to starve in some wilderness — regardless of the fact that such a procedure makes obvious nonsense of the Government pretence that African Chiefs today represent their people. What is the good of telling the world that the Chiefs, the "genuine" spokesmen of the African people, support apartheid — when all the world knows that the Chiefs are terrified to do anything else? If there is one organisation which annoys Verwoerd more than any other it is the African National Congress. In place of the retribalisation of the African people into separate and hostile groups, turning backward to the primitive past, turned inward towards themselves, Congress stands for the unification of Africans marching forward to a modern enlightened future, turned toward the great world outside. In place of Verwoerd's vision of a permanent caste-society, divided by impenetrable barriers between South Africans of different origin which preclude all human contact, relegating Africans to an inferior position forever, Congress looks forward to a fraternal multi-racial democracy, affording equal rights and opportunities for all. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a man like Verwoerd, with his marked streak of intolerance, his wartime record of admiration for Hitler and the Nazis, and his deeply-rooted contempt for the African people, should seek to take repressive measures against the A.N.C. Already, when still in his position as the Union's last Minister of Native Affairs, Verwoerd used his powers to ban Congress outright by proclamation in certain areas, calling on his colleagues in the Cabinet to do likewise. We can have little doubt, then, that despite his assurances, on assuming the premiership, that he believed in free speech, democracy and so on, he means to continue the job begun by his predecessors, Malan and Strijdom, of transforming South Africa into a totalitarian state; and that Congress is first on his list of victims. The sinister Swart, who has already condemned countless people without trial, is retained as Minister of Justice and Leader of the House. And, as we write, we learn that Swart's chief policeman Rademeyer has announced that the mass protests of African women in Johannesburg against the beginning of the issue of women's passes is a dangerous Communist plot. As Rademeyer's usual procedure is first to announce the crime and then start looking for evidence, we may confidently predict a new rounds of raids upon those much-raided people who make up the special branch's list of "Communists."

IT CAN'T WORK

Yes, Verwoerd has a plan. And it's a plan not only for the next year, or for the next five years, until the next general election, but for decades, even generations ahead. (Like Hitler and his "Thousand Year Reich" — remember?) He's got it all worked out, down to the last detail.

There's only one defect in Verwoerd's plan — it can't possible work. With his defective, one-eyed vision he has failed to take into account, even to see, those factors in the situation which make his plans hopelessly unreal, futile and unworkable; which, even within the few short years ahead, will increasingly set at naught and frustrate all his actions; factors which in the end he will either have to recognise and concede to, or else get out and make way for others who will do so.

We are not saying it is impossible for men to plan and dream for the future, and see their plans made real and their dreams come true. It is indeed possible, and it has happened many times. But those plans and dreams have to take into account realities, the laws of historical development, the will of the people and the spirit of the times; and what Pisarev called "the natural progress of the events." If they do not, they must fail. That is precisely what is wrong with the plans of Verwoerd and the nationalists. They leave out the realities of this world and this era.

We are in 1958. In Africa. The spacious days of the British Empire, when it could prolong its rule by prating about "indirect rule" by bought Chiefs and Rajahs, by Lieutenant-Governors and big talk to simple people about "the Great White Queen over the seas," — those days have gone. The Empire has gone: but little remains of it, and that is fast disappearing as well. The French Empire has all but gone; De Gaulle battles to retain what is left of it by bloody repression in Algeria and by trickery and concessions elsewhere in Africa. The Dutch Empire is gone. The whole concept of the empires, of rule by self-proclaimed superior nations with fair skins over allegedly backward ones with darker skins is gone never to return, discredited past redemption. Practically every country in the world, sickened and angered by what the racial myth led to in Hitler's Europe, or bitterly recalling the limitless suffering and degradation it caused in former colonies of Asia and Africa, and still causes in the remaining ones, repudiates and opposes racialism. And all their disgust at racialism, and their determination to eradicate it, is concentrated, above all, on apartheid (which has become an international term of contempt) and in particular against its principal practitioner and high priest, Verwoerd.

It is not only this imponderable, but irresistibly potent spirit of the age, a spirit of change which has already swept far the greater part of the world's population in its train in an incredibly short period of historical time, which the nationalists seek to defy. They are also running counter

to the stern and implacable imperatives of economic necessity. Capitalist industrialisation knows no laws except its own expansion; invariably it sweeps aside older forms of economy and artificial barriers; it had already gone far towards transforming South Africa before 1948, and has proceeded apace under the Nats. in spite of their attempted restrictions, at an ever greater speed. Tribalism belonged to and suited a pre-capitalist form of economy, it can no more survive or be revived in modern South Africa than can the hand loom or the wooden plough. Verwoerd may bring chiefs and indunas into the urban townships: they will be no more than African location superintendents, utterly out of place in a society of modern factory workers, teachers, business and professional people. The progress of South Africa demands a settled, well-adjusted urban labour force; enjoying a return for their labour sufficient to make them an effective and expanding consumer public for the products of industry. Verwoerd's plans impede such development. They impose a ruinously expensive administration on the country; they stress economic relations between employer and employee to breaking point; they swallow up the fabulous advantages of the country — its abundant natural resources and capable labour force — in fundamentally uneconomic and wasteful ways. In the long run Verwoerdism will no more be able to resist the overwhelming needs of the economy, expressed by a capitalist class which itself includes an ever-increasing proportion of Afrikaner nationalists — for a society corresponding to its own needs, than was Paul Kruger sixty years ago.

THE PEOPLE

Above all, Verwoerd has reckoned without his main host: the people of South Africa. To the philistine it may seem that, armed with the might of the State, a loyal civil service, police force and military machine, the South African government can do anything it likes, that it can go along its present road unchecked for an indefinite period of time, that disarmed, terrorised, increasingly forbidden the rights of political expression and organisation, the people can do nothing about their position. But the philistine is mistaken. Within the people resides tremendous, unconquerable strength. More and more, with every year that passes, with every new imposition the Government loads upon them, they are moulding, harnessing and realising that strength in organisation and unity.

It was not "Communist agitators" that brought out the women of Johannesburg into the streets day after day, to face arrest with such unbelievable courage, even enthusiasm. It was Verwoerd's pass laws. Rademeyer need not send his special branch men into their routine raids to look for agitators. Never in any country have there been such effective and systematic agitators as the members of the South African Police, or the laws of the Nationalist Party. They thrust their way into the peaceful countryside, upsetting long-established practices, dispossessing honest folks, awakening and provoking the "sleeping" masses into fierce, even violent, opposition.

And that awakening of the people, stimulated by constant experiences within the country and the news of far-reaching changes in the world beyond — now even as close as Basutoland, the resistance of the people, the unity of the people, is a force which Verwoerd cannot withstand, any more than the great empires of Western Europe, with infinitely greater resources than the nationalists can ever hope to command, were able to withstand the awakening of Asia and the Middle East and other parts of this continent itself.

In the months since the General Election of 1958, there has been a wave of pessimism in South Africa among opponents of the Nationalist Party, extending from the United Party to sections even among the liberation movement itself.

The United Party, seeing that it cannot win the game of parliamentary elections, in which its opponent makes the rules and keeps changing them to its advantage, and keeps on cheating into the bargain, is tending to lose heart and throw in the towel. They spread abroad a spirit of defeatism, try to come to terms with the Nats., haul down the Union Jack (which hardly arouses any enthusiasm in the country any more) and replace it with the White Flag.

Even well-wishers of democracy have been infected by the prevailing defeatism. The election victory of the Nats came as a disappointing shock; the stay-at-home in April did not come up to expectations; and now comes Verwoerd with all his outward appearance of strength, confidence and determination.

And so these "pessimists" give way to despair. They forget all about the great mass demonstrations of 1957; they ignore the fundamental weaknesses and contradictions and flaws beneath the surface of Nat. confidence and apparent success; they tell us that the struggle is in vain.

But they are wrong. Every day life confirms the truth of the lesson that the Nats. and all their works are doomed. Apartheid cannot succeed because it sets false, unattainable goals, and because the people will not permit it.

There is a vision of the future of our country that is true, in accordance with our needs and our destiny, and therefore bound to prevail. But it is not that of Verwoerd. It is the vision of the Freedom Charter.