

The writer examines the new "Bantu Self-Government" Bill, and discloses behind it

VERWOERD'S GRIM PLOT

By NELSON MANDELA

"South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white."
— The Freedom Charter.

"All the Bantu have their permanent homes in the reserves and their entry into other areas and into the urban areas is merely of a temporary nature and for economic reasons. In other words they are admitted as work-seekers, not as settlers."
— Dr. W. W. M. Eiselen, Secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development.
(Article in "Optima", March 1959).

THE two statements quoted above contain diametrically opposite conceptions of this country, its future and its destiny. Obviously they cannot be reconciled. They have nothing in common, except that both of them look forward to a future state of affairs rather than that which prevails at present. At present South Africa does not "belong" — except in a moral sense — to all. 97 per cent. of the country is legally owned by members (a handful of them at that) of the dominant white minority. And at present by no means "all" Africans have their "permanent homes" in the Reserves. Millions of Africans were born and have their permanent homes in the towns and cities and elsewhere outside the reserves, have never seen the reserves and have no desire to go there.*

* According to the 1951 census, trust land locations and reserves accounted for only two and a half million out of a total African population of, at that time, eight and a half million. A further two and a half million, nearly, were on European-owned farms. The rest were mainly in urban areas, with the Witwatersrand alone accounting for over a million Africans. (Official Year Book 1956-57, p. 718).

It is necessary for the people of this country to choose between these two alternative paths. It is assumed that readers of "Liberation" are familiar with the detailed proposals contained in the Charter. Let us therefore, as calmly and objectively as we can, study the alternatives submitted by the Nationalist Party.

PARTITION

The newspapers have christened the Nationalists' plan as one for "Bantustans". The hybrid word is, in many ways, extremely misleading. It relates to the partitioning of India, after the reluctant departure of the British, and as a condition thereof, into two separate States, Hindustan and Pakistan. There is no real parallel with the Nationalists' proposals, for

- (a) India and Pakistan constitute two completely separate and politically independent States,
- (b) Muslims enjoy equal rights in India; Hindus enjoy equal rights in Pakistan,
- (c) Partition was submitted to and approved by both parties, or at any rate fairly widespread and influential sections of each.

The Government's plans do not envisage the partitioning of this country into separate, self-governing States. They do not envisage equal rights, or any rights at all, for Africans outside the reserves. Partition has never been approved of by Africans and never will be. For that matter it has never been really submitted to or approved of by the Whites. The term "Bantustan" is therefore a complete misnomer, and merely tends to help the Nationalists perpetrate a fraud.

Let us examine each of these aspects in detail.

"BANTU SELF-GOVERNMENT"

It is typical of the Nationalists' propaganda techniques that they describe their measures in misleading titles, which convey the opposite of what the measures contain. Verwoerd called his law greatly extending and intensifying the pass laws the "Abolition of Passes" Act. Similarly, he has introduced into the current Parliamentary session a measure called the "Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Bill." It starts off by decreeing the abolition of the tiny token representation of Africans (by Whites) in Parliament and the Cape Provincial Council.

It goes on to provide for the division of the African population into eight "ethnic units" (the so-called Bantustans.)* These units, it is declared, are to undergo a "gradual development to self-government."

* They are: North and South Sotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xosa and Zulu.

This measure was described by the Prime Minister, Dr. Verwoerd, as a "supremely positive step" towards placing Africans "on the road to self-government" (in his policy statement of January 27). Mr. De Wet Nel, B.A.D. Minister, said the people in the reserves "would gradually be given more powers to rule themselves."

THE WHITE PAPER

The scheme is elaborated in a White Paper, tabled in the House of Assembly, to "explain" the Bill. According to this document, immediate objects of the Bill are:—

- (a) The recognition of the so-called Bantu National Units and the appointment of Commissioners-General whose task will be to give guidance and advice to the units in order to promote their general development, with special reference to the administrative field;
- (b) The linking of Africans working in urban areas with territorial authorities established under the Bantu Authorities Act, by conferring powers on the Bantu Authorities to nominate persons as their representatives in urban areas;
- (c) The transfer to the Bantu Territorial Authorities, at the appropriate time, of land in their areas at present held by the Native Trust.
- (d) The vesting in territorial Bantu Authorities of legislative authority and the right to impose taxes, and to undertake works and give guidance to subordinate authorities;
- (e) The establishment of territorial boards for the purpose of temporary liaison through commissioners-general if during the transition period the administrative structure in any area has not yet reached the stage where a territorial authority has been established.
- (f) The abolition of representation in the highest European governing bodies.

"FURTHER OBJECTS"

According to the same White Paper the Bill has the following further objects:—

- (a) The creation of homogeneous administrative areas for Africans by uniting the members of each so-called national group in the national unit, concentrated in one coherent homeland where possible;
- (b) The education of Africans to a sound understanding of the problems of soil conservation and agriculture so that all rights over and responsibilities in respect of soil in African areas may be assigned to them. This includes the gradual replacement of European agricultural officers of all grades by qualified and competent Africans;
- (c) The systematic promotion of diverse economy in the African areas, acceptable to Africans and to be developed by them;

- (d) The education of the African to a sound understanding of the problems and aims of Bantu Education so that by decentralisation of powers, responsibility for the different grades of education may be vested in them;
- (e) The training of Africans with a view to effectively extending their own judicial system and their education to a sound understanding of the common law with a view to transferring to them responsibility for the administration of justice in their areas;
- (f) The gradual replacement of European administrative officers by qualified and competent Africans;
- (g) The exercise of legislative powers by Africans in respect of their areas, at first on a limited scale, but with every intention of gradually extending this power.

A HEAVY PRICE

It will be seen that the African people are asked to pay a very heavy price for this so-called "self-government" in the Reserves. Urban Africans — the workers, business men and professional men and women, who are the pride of our people in their stubborn and victorious march towards modernisation and progress — are to be treated as outcasts: not even "settlers" like Dr. Verwoerd. Every vestige of rights and opportunities will be ruthlessly destroyed. Everywhere outside the reserves an African will be tolerated only on condition that it is for the convenience of the Whites.

There will be forcible uprooting and mass removals of millions of people ("homogeneous administrative areas" — see (a) under "Further Objects" above.) The reserves, already intolerably overcrowded, will be crammed with hundreds of thousands more people evicted by the Government.

In return for all these hardships, in return for Africans abandoning their birthright as citizens, pioneers and inhabitants of South Africa, the Government promises them "self-government" in the tiny 13 per cent. that their greed and miserliness "allocates" to us. But what sort of self-government is this that is promised?

WHAT SORT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT?

There are two essential elements to self-government, as the term is used and understood all over the modern world. They are:

1. **Democracy.** The organs of Government must be representative. That is to say they must be the freely-chosen leaders and representatives of the people, whose mandate must be renewed at periodic democratic elections.
2. **Sovereignty.** The Government thus chosen must be free to legislate and act as it deems fit on behalf of the people, not subject to any limitations upon its powers by any alien or internal authority.

Now neither of these two essentials are present in the Nationalist plan. The "Bantu National Units" will be ruled in effect by the Commissioners-General appointed by the Union Government, and administered by the B.A.D. officials under his control. When the Government says it plans gradually increasing self-government, it merely means that more powers in future will be exercised by appointed councils of Chiefs and headmen. No provision is made for elections. The Nationalists say that Chiefs, not elected legislatures, are "the Bantu tradition."

There was a time when, like all peoples on earth, Africans conducted their simple communities through Chiefs, advised by tribal councils and mass meetings of the people. In those times the Chiefs were indeed representative governors. Nowhere, however, have such institutions survived the complexities of modern industrial civilisation. Moreover, in South Africa, we all know full well that no Chief can retain his post unless he submits to Verwoerd, and many Chiefs who sought the interest of their people before position and self-advancement have, like President Lutuli, been deposed.

Thus, the proposed Bantu Authorities will not be, in any sense of the term, representative or democratic.

The point is made with pride by the B.A.D. itself in an official publication:

"The councillors will perform their task without fear or prejudice, because they are not elected by the majority of votes, and they will be able to lead their people onwards . . . even though . . . it may demand hardships and sacrifices."*

A strange paean to autocracy, from a department of a Government which claims to be democratic!

NO SOVEREIGNTY

In spite of all their precautions to see that their "Territorial Authorities" — appointed by themselves, subject to dismissal by themselves, under constant control by their Commissioners-General and their B.A.D. — never become authentic voices of the people, the Nationalists are determined to see that even these puppet bodies never enjoy any real power of sovereignty.

In his notorious (and thoroughly dishonest) article in "Optima" Dr. Eise-len draws a far-fetched comparison between the relations between the future "Bantustans" and the Union Government, on the one hand; and those between Britain and the self-governing Dominions on the other. He foresees:

"a co-operative South African system based on the Commonwealth conception, with the Union Government gradually changing its position from guardian and trustee to become instead the senior member of a group of separate communities."

* "Bantu Authorities and Tribal Administration." Issued by the N.A.D. Information Service, Pretoria, 1958.

To appreciate the full hypocrisy of this statement, it must be remembered that Dr. Eiselen is an official of a Nationalist Party Government, a member of a Party which has built its fortune for the past half-century on its cry that it stands for full and untrammelled sovereignty within the Commonwealth, that claims credit for Hertzog's achievements in winning the Statute of Westminster, which proclaims such sovereignty, and which even now wants complete independence and a Republic outside the Commonwealth.

It cannot be claimed therefore that Eiselen and Verwoerd do not understand the nature of a Commonwealth, or sovereignty or federation.

What are we to think, then, in the same article, when Dr. Eiselen, comes right out into the open, and declares:

"The utmost degree of autonomy in administrative matters which the Union Parliament is likely to be prepared to concede to these areas will stop short of actual surrender of sovereignty by the European trustee, and there is therefore no prospect of a federal system with eventual equality among members taking the place of the South African Commonwealth . . ."

There is no sovereignty, then. No autonomy. No democracy. No self-government. Nothing but a crude, empty fraud, to bluff the people at home and abroad, and to serve as a pretext for heaping yet more hardships and injustices upon the African people.

THE ECONOMIC ASPECT

Politically, the talk about self-government for the reserves is a swindle. Economically, it is an absurdity.

The few scattered African reserves in various parts of the Union, comprising about 13 per cent. of the least desirable land area, represent the last shreds of land ownership left to the African people of their original ancestral home. After the encroachments and deprivations of generations of European land-sharks, achieved by force and by cunning, and culminating the outrageous Land Acts from 1913 onwards, had turned the once free and independent Tswana, Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu and other peasant farmers of this country into a nation of landless outcasts and roving beggars, humble "work-seekers" on the mines and the farms where yesterday they had been masters of the land, the new White masters of the country generously "presented" the few miserable areas that were left to remain as reservoirs and breeding-grounds for black labour. These are the reserves.

It was never claimed or remotely considered by the previous Governments of the Union that these reserves could become economically self-sufficient "national homes" for 9,600,000 African people of this country. That final lunacy was left to Dr. Verwoerd, Dr. Eiselen and the Nationalist Party.

The facts are — as every reader who remembers M. Mbeki's brilliant series of articles on the Transkei in "Liberation" will be aware — that the reserves are congested distressed areas, completely unable to sustain their present populations. The majority of the adult males are always away from home working in the towns, mines or European-owned farms. The people are on the verge of starvation.

The White Paper speaks of teaching Africans soil conservation and agriculture and replacing European Agricultural Officers by Africans. This is merely trifling with the problem. The root problem of the reserves is the intolerable congestion which already exists. No amount of agricultural instruction will ever enable 13 per cent. of the land to sustain 66 per cent. of the population.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT.

The Government is, of course, fully aware of this fact. They have no intention of creating African areas which are genuinely self-supporting (and which could therefore create a genuine possibility for self-government). If such areas were indeed self-supporting, where would the Chamber of Mines and the Nationalist farmers get their supplies of cheap labour?

In the article to which I have already referred, Dr. Eiselen bluntly admits:

"In fact not much more than a quarter of the community (on the reserves) can be farmers, the others seeking their livelihood in industrial, commercial, professional or administrative employment."

Where are they to find such employment? In the Reserves? To anyone who knows these poverty-stricken areas, sadly lacking in modern communications, power-resources and other needed facilities, the idea of industrial development seems far-fetched indeed. The beggarly £500,000 voted to the so-called "Bantu Investment Corporation" by Parliament is mere eyewash and window-dressing: it would not suffice to build a single decent road, railway line or power station.

"RURAL LOCATIONS"

The Government has already established a number of "rural locations" — townships in the reserves. The Eiselen article says a number more are planned: he mentions a total of no less than 96. Since the residents will not farm, how will they manage to keep alive, still less pay rent and taxes, and support the traders, professional classes and civil servants whom the optimistic Eiselen envisages as making a living there?

Fifty-seven towns on the borders of the reserves have been designated as centres where White capitalists can set up industries. Perhaps some will migrate, and thus "export" their capital to sources of cheap labour and land. Certainly, unlike the reserves (which are a monument to the callous indifference of the Union Parliament to the needs of the non-voting African

tax-payers) these towns have power, water, transport, railways, etc. The Nationalist Government, while it remains in office will probably subsidise capitalists who migrate in this way. It is already doing so in various ways, thus creating unemployment in the cities. But it is unlikely that any large-scale voluntary movement will take place away from the big, established industrial centres, with their well-developed facilities, available materials and markets.

Even if many industries moved, or were forced to move, to the border areas around the reserves it would not make one iota of difference to the economic viability of the reserves themselves. The fundamental picture of the Union's economy would remain fundamentally the same as at present: a single integrated system based upon the exploitation of African labour by White capitalists.

Economically, the "Bantustan" concept is just as big a swindle as it is politically.

SELF-DETERMINATION

Thus we find, if we really look into it that this grandiose "partition" scheme, this "supremely positive step" of Dr. Verwoerd, is — like all apartheid schemes — merely a lot of high-sounding double-talk to conceal a policy of ruthless oppression of the non-Whites and of buttressing the unwarranted privileges of the White minority, especially the farming, mining and financial circles.

Even if it were not so, however; even if the schemes envisaged a genuine sharing-out of the country on the basis of population figures, and a genuine transfer of power to elected representatives of the people, it would remain fundamentally unjust and dangerously unstable unless it were submitted to, accepted and endorsed by all parties to the agreement. To think otherwise is to fly in the face of the principle of self-determination, which is upheld by all countries and confirmed in the United Nations Charter, to which this country is pledged.

Now even Dr. Eiselen recognises, to some extent, this difficulty. He pays lip-service to the Atlantic Charter and appeals to "Western democracy." He mentions the argument that apartheid would only be acceptable "provided that the parties concerned agreed to this of their own free will." And then he most dishonestly evades the whole issue. "There is no reason for ruling out apartheid on the grounds that the vast majority of the population opposes it," he writes. "The Bantu as a whole do not demand "integration, a single society. This is the ideal . . . merely of a small minority."

Even Dr. Eiselen, however, has not got the audacity to claim that the African people actually favour apartheid or partition.

Let us state clearly the facts of the matter, with the greatest possible clarity and emphasis.

NO SERIOUS OR RESPONSIBLE LEADER, GATHERING OR ORGANISATION OF THE AFRICAN PEOPLE HAS EVER ACCEPTED SEGREGATION, SEPARATION OR THE PARTITION OF THIS COUNTRY IN ANY SHAPE OR FORM.

At Bloemfontein in 1956, under the auspices of the United African clergy, perhaps the most widely-attended and representative gathering of African representatives, of every shade of political opinion ever held, unanimously and uncompromisingly rejected the Tomlinson Report, on which the Verwoerd plan is based, and voted in favour of a single society.

Even in the rural areas, where dwell the "good" (i.e., simple and ignorant) "Bantu" of the imagination of Dr. Verwoerd and Dr. Eiselen, attempts to impose apartheid have met, time after time, with furious, often violent resistance. Chief after Chief has been deposed or deported for resisting "Bantu Authorities" plans. Those who, out of shortsightedness, cowardice or corruption, have accepted these plans have earned nothing but the contempt of their own people.

SERIOUS MISSTATEMENTS

It is a pity that, on such a serious subject, and at such a crucial period, serious misstatements should have been made by some people who purport to speak on behalf of the Africans. For example, Mrs. Margaret Ballinger, the Liberal Party M.P. is reported as saying in the Assembly "no confidence" debate on March 2:

"The Africans have given their answer to this apartheid proposition, but of course, no one ever listens to them. They have said: 'If you want separation then let us have it. Give us half of South Africa. Give us the Eastern half of South Africa. Give us some of the developed resources because we have helped to develop them.'" (S.A. Outlook, March 1959).

It is most regrettable that Mrs. Ballinger should have made such a silly and irresponsible statement, right towards, one fears, the end of a distinguished Parliamentary career. For, in this instance she has put herself in the company of those who do not listen to the Africans. No Africans of any standing have ever made the proposals put forward by her.

The leading organisation of the African people is the African National Congress. Congress has repeatedly denounced apartheid. It has repeatedly endorsed the Freedom Charter, which claims South Africa "for all its people." It is true that, occasionally individual Africans become so depressed and desperate at Nationalist misrule that they tend to clutch at any straw, that they tend to say: give us any little corner where we may be free to run our own affairs; but Congress has always firmly rejected such momentary tendencies and refused to barter our birthright, which is South Africa, for such illusory "Bantustans."

CORRECTING "THE WORLD"

In *The World* of April 4, 1959, Mr. Duma Nokwe, Secretary-General of the African National Congress, was made to appear to support the division of the country into African and European areas provided there is consultation. Under the heading "What leading Africans think of the Bantustan Proposal" he is reported to have said: "The Congress view is that if the Government desires a division of the country, it should be done in consultation with the African People."

Mr. Nokwe has denied making this statement. According to him he was asked by a reporter of this paper for his comments on suggestions made by Professor du Plessis that a federation of Bantustans be established. Mr. Nokwe totally rejected the plan put forward by Professor du Plessis as unacceptable.

He informed the reporter that the correct approach would be the extension of franchise rights to Africans. Thereafter a National Convention of all the people of South Africa could be summoned and numerous suggestions of the democratic changes, that should be brought about, including the suggestions of Professor du Plessis, could form the subject matter of the Convention. The reporter was then referred to a statement released by the Congress setting out its attitude in full on these proposals.

LET THE PEOPLE SPEAK!

Here, indeed, Mr. Nokwe has put his finger on the spot. There is no need for Dr. Eiselen, Mrs. Ballinger or *The World* to argue about "what the Africans think" about the future of this country. Let the people speak for themselves! Let us have a free vote and a free election of delegates to a national convention, irrespective of colour or nationality. Let the Nationalists submit their plan, and the Congress its Charter. If Verwoerd and Eiselen think the Africans support their scheme they need not fear such a procedure. If they are not prepared to submit to public opinion, then let them stop parading and pretending to the outside world that they are democrats, and talking revolting nonsense about "Bantu self-government."

Dr. Verwoerd may deceive the simple-minded Nationalist voters with his talk of Bantustans, but he will not deceive anyone else, neither the African people, nor the great world beyond the borders of this country. We have heard such talk before, and we know what it really means.

Like everything else that has come from the Nationalist Government it spells nothing but fresh hardships and sufferings to the masses of the people.

SINISTER DESIGN

Behind the fine talk of "self-government" is a sinister design.

The abolition of African representation in Parliament and the Cape Provincial Council shows that the real purpose of the scheme is not to

concede autonomy to Africans but to deprive them of all say in the government of the country in exchange for a system of local Government controlled by a Minister who is not responsible to them but to a Parliament in which they have no voice. This is not autonomy but autocracy.

Contact between the Minister and the Bantu Authorities will be maintained by five Commissioners-General. These officials will act as the watchdogs of the Minister to ensure that the "Authorities" strictly toe the line. Their duty will be to ensure that these authorities should not become the voice of the African people but that of the Nationalist Government.

In terms of the White Paper steps will be taken to "link" Africans working in urban areas with the territorial authorities established under the Bantu Authorities Act by conferring powers on these Authorities to nominate persons as their representatives in urban areas. This means in effect that efforts will be made to place Africans in the cities under the control of their tribal chiefs — a retrograde step.

Nowhere in the Bill or in the various Proclamations dealing with the creation of Bantu Authorities is there provision for democratic elections by Africans falling within the jurisdiction of the Authorities.

In the light of these facts it is sheer nonsense to talk of South Africa as being about to take a "supremely positive step towards placing Africans on the road to self-government" or of having given them more powers to rule themselves. As Dr. Eiselen clearly pointed out in his article in "Optima", the establishment of the Bantustans will not in any way affect white supremacy since even in such areas whites will stay supreme. The Bantustans are not intended to voice aspirations of the African people; they are instruments for their subjection. Under the pretext of giving them self-government the African people are being split up into tribal units in order to retard their growth and development into full nationhood.

THE CHIEF TARGET

The new Bantu Bill and the new policy behind it will bear heavily on the peasants in the reserves. But it is not they who are the chief target of Verwoerd's new policy.

His new measures are aimed, in the first place, at the millions of Africans in the great cities of this country, the factory workers and intellectuals who have raised the banner of freedom and democracy and human dignity, who have spoken forth boldly the message that is shaking imperialism to its foundations throughout this great Continent of Africa.

The Nationalists hate and fear that banner and that message. They will try to destroy them, by striking with all their might at the standard bearers and vanguard of the people, the working class.

Behind the "self-government" talk lies a grim programme of mass evictions, political persecution and police terror. It is the last desperate gamble of a hated and doomed fascist autocracy — which, fortunately, is soon due to make its exit from the stage of history.