

THE FIERY CROSS OF JOB RESERVATION

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ON the 25th October, 1957, Senator Jan de Klerk, South Africa's Minister of Labour, exercising a new power invested in him under Section 77 of the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1956, decreed that four main categories of work in the clothing industry would henceforth be reserved for the employment of White persons only.

The jobs in question are at present occupied by 4,500 Whites and 35,000 non-Whites; and the Minister's decree meant that the 35,000 non-Whites were all to be dismissed and replaced by Whites. It was a preposterous demand upon employers and a cruel blow to non-White employees. The employers protested that 35,000 trained White workers could not be found, as a shortage of Whites already existed in the trade. The trade unions protested that they had not asked for this kind of protection, that they were not in need of it, and that they preferred to safeguard their members' interests through the organized strength of free trade unionism.

All this had been said before. It was said in Parliament, it was said to the Select Committee on the Industrial Conciliation Bill, and it was said in evidence to the Industrial Tribunal, the body of five Government appointees entrusted with the task of investigating the need for job reservation in the various industries. But the Government was determined to have its way.

The Economics of Racialism

A curious anomaly has arisen in South Africa during the ten years of Nationalist rule. The party which rode to power on the promise to "keep South Africa White," is seeing the country's industries going rapidly "Black." Industrial progress has radically changed the racial composition of the industrial labour force. New and expanding factories have absorbed many thousands of Africans from the rural areas, the Reserves, the Protectorates and the Rhodesias. The demand for labour has opened up great new opportunities for workers of all races. And as non-Whites have moved in, so Whites have moved up or out to better jobs, showing a strong preference for white-collar occupations.

Manufacturing establishments, which employed 210,000

White and 401,000 non-Whites in 1947-48, were employing 260,000 Whites and 560,000 non-Whites by 1952-53. Almost every industry suffered a shortage of White workers, who were enjoying full employment. Industrialists were forced to make greater use of non-Whites. This fact was commented upon by the Wage Board, which investigated the clothing industry in 1955-56 and reported that ". . . Owing to the shortage of European labour during the war and post-war years, (White) girls have been finding work in spheres of employment more congenial to them than industry. . . . The entry of non-Europeans into the industry has not led to the displacement of Europeans. . . ."

Practically all the new entrants into the clothing industry are non-Whites. In 1947-48, there were 13,813 White and 21,681 non-White workers in the clothing factories. In 1952-53, there were 13,083 Whites and 32,754 non-Whites; and since then the number of non-Whites has increased even further.

Defending the colour bar, Mr. B. J. Schoeman, Minister of Transport, told Parliament in 1954 that his party was primarily concerned with maintaining White domination, in spite of its conflict with "economic laws."

Job reservation in the clothing industry provides a good example of this conflict and its inevitable results. The Nationalists have legislated as though South Africa possessed an unchanging economy, with a fixed number of jobs to be shared out according to the dictates of their racial theories. They have brushed aside the important questions of fluctuating markets, individual preference, changing manufacturing processes, and the other factors which affect employment in a capitalist society.

On the other hand, manufacturers have concentrated upon the practical necessity of remaining in business in a highly competitive market. While they have no desire to cross swords with the Government over its racial policies, they naturally seek to escape the costly consequences of 'apartheid'. Some manufacturers (including ardent supporters of the Government) have, therefore, moved their factories from the urban industrial centres to rural areas, where there is a plentiful supply of cheap African labour and a comforting remoteness from the sore spots of racialism.

By going to the rural areas, such as Northern Natal, clothing manufacturers have gained many advantages. They are able to pay their African workers less than one-third the wages paid for similar work in the urban areas, experienced machinists in their

factories receiving 17/6 to 50/- per week as against the £6 14s. 2d. paid in Johannesburg and Germiston factories. Their labour force, being entirely African, is strictly disciplined under various Native laws, isolated from trade union protection by official Government policy, and repressed by the stringent provisions of the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act. With the imposition of job reservation, these rural factories will enjoy the further advantage of being exempted from the obligation to employ Whites or quotas of Whites.

In these circumstances, the urban establishments will be at a grave disadvantage. Their rural competitors will oust them from every market, and they will have to join the exodus to the country districts or go out of business. Inevitably, the industry will desert the towns and cease to be an avenue of employment for urban workers, whether they be White, Coloured or African.

Preparing for a Depression?

If it is impossible to apply job reservation without such dire consequences, why does the Government persist with it? The obvious reason is that the Government cannot be logical about racial matters. The beating of its blood calls the tune. Take, for example, the emotional outburst of Mr. J. du Pisanie, Nationalist M.P. for Germiston. When employers and employees objected to the Minister's decree, he attacked them furiously as "*an apparent conspiracy of capitalist, liberalist and communist, with the aim of destroying Christian White civilization in our wonderful fatherland.*" And so is all criticism regarded.

It has been suggested that Senator de Klerk acted with an eye to this year's General Election, delivering proof to the White working class electorate that the Nationalist Party was using legal compulsion to protect the jobs of White workers. But this is more than a political stunt. The Minister gave us one reason for job reservation when piloting the Industrial Conciliation Bill through Parliament. Speaking on Section 77, he said:

"The Department of Labour has always managed to find employment for these women who clear out of the clothing factories, but how long will it last? Now is the time to tackle this matter, because when a recession comes we will have the weapon."

This means that there is to be strict apartheid in unemployment, too. Unemployment is to be reserved for non-Whites. If a recession hits the clothing industry, employers will be compelled to lay off non-Whites and reserve all available jobs

for Whites. When that day comes, the industry will be ruled by the tyranny of Labour inspectors, who will have the power to decide who is to be hired and who is to be fired in every clothing factory. Unco-operative employers will be under constant harrassment.

A Piece of History

The application of job reservation in the clothing industry scores a personal victory for Senator de Klerk on a battleground where he has always suffered defeat. A decade and more ago, the Minister of Labour was a busy backroom boy of the Nationalist Party and close adviser to the present Prime Minister (his brother-in-law), Mr. J. G. Strijdom. In those days of bitter, frustrating struggle for the "Purified" Nationalist Party, Senator de Klerk's field of political endeavour was Germiston, an important centre of the clothing industry. He found the trade unions well organized and the workers unresponsive to his enticements. Despite his untiring efforts, it was disappointingly difficult to coax the White workers in the clothing factories away from the Garment Workers' Union, which was then under the dynamic leadership of Mr. E. S. (Solly) Sachs.

Senator de Klerk, together with Mr. J. du Pisanie, directed a relentless but usually fruitless campaign against the unions and their leaders. Making naked appeals to racial prejudice and lavish use of the communist bogey, they urged White workers to demand apartheid in the unions and in the factories. Church, cultural and other organizations were induced to join in this Nationalist crusade, of which Senator de Klerk said in Parliament (Vol. 90, Col. 1076):

"In 1938 . . . the Nationalist Party in this House reached its all-time low with 28 members. The struggle could not be waged on this front. In the political sphere the Nationalist Party was practically paralyzed, and we had this wild flow of communism engulfing the workers on the Rand. Then the Afrikaner people, in its broad mass, got up in arms and stepped in with all the organizational power at its disposal That is why one found the three Afrikaans churches, the R.D.B.¹ the F.A.K.² and the Blanke Werkersbeskermingsbond (B.W.B.B.)³ co-operating. . . ."

1. R.D.B. (Reddingsdaadbond)—originally dedicated to rescue Afrikaners from poor whiteism but subsequently devoted to building Afrikaner capitalism and attacking trade unionism.

2. F.A.K. (Federasie van Afrikaans Kultuurverenigings)—Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies.

3. B.W.B.B. (Blanke Werkersbeskermingsbond)—White Workers' Protection Society.

Senator de Klerk modestly omitted to add that it was he who contrived this alliance. He was a diligent member of all the organizations involved. They were not independent, unrelated bodies. The "three Afrikaans churches" to which Senator de Klerk refers was in fact the Breë Kerklike Komitee, an organization formed in 1944 in Germiston from among members of the three Dutch Reformed Churches, with the object of campaigning among Afrikaner factory workers "to preserve Christianity and White civilization." The other organizations mentioned were closely linked and inspired to serve the interests of the Nationalist Party.

The B.W.B.B. took over the work of the Breë Kerklike Komitee in 1945. It described itself as a "*Society founded on the Christian-National traditions of the people of South Africa*"; it confined its membership to "*White persons only, who are members of the Protestant Church*"; and its constitution declared its chief aims to be the securing of job reservation on a racial basis, apartheid in all places of employment, and apartheid in the trade unions. One of the founders of this organization was Senator Jan de Klerk. Its first secretary was Mr. Frans Mentz, now Nationalist M.P. for Westdene. Senator de Klerk was the second secretary. And among the first executive members were Mr. B. J. Schoeman (now Minister of Transport), Mr. J. du Pisanie (now M.P. for Germiston), and Mr. N. Diederichs (now M.P. for Randfontein and one-time leader of the R.D.B.)

Time has passed. Once the R.D.B. was crusading "*to rescue the Afrikaner nation from the claws of this un-national power—the trade unions.*" Now the Nationalist Government is busy on the job. The three objectives of the B.W.B.B. are being fulfilled with a vengeance. The first, apartheid in the trade unions, is in the process of being enforced through special provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1956. The second, job reservation, is being attempted through Section 77 of the same law. There is little doubt that the third, "*that no undesirable contact between European and non-European workers should be tolerated in their employment,*" will also be tackled by the Government in due course.

This historical background is necessary to remove the mistaken idea that job reservation is being applied because of a demand from White workers or because Whites are losing their employment to non-Whites. The conservative, agrarian approach of the Nationalists to industrial and trade union

problems is narrowed by deep racial prejudice, which must be served at all costs.

What Next?

In face of considerable opposition, it was to be expected that the Government would shift its ground. This it has done—but merely as a temporary measure, while it decides upon the next step. The chaos which might have resulted from the Minister's decree was avoided because of a proviso in Section 77, which states that job reservation cannot be applied in areas where Industrial Council agreements are in operation without the consent of such Industrial Councils. Agreements existed in the Transvaal, Natal and the Cape, and all the Industrial Councils concerned refused to agree to the Minister's Determination. Consequently, he was unable to enforce it. He must now wait until the agreements expire, which will be March, 1958, in the Transvaal, and October, 1959, in the Cape and Natal.

In preparation for his next step, the Minister has asked the Wage Board to investigate the clothing industry, with a view to making a new Wage Determination, generally applicable throughout the country. The Minister could then refuse to renew the Industrial Council agreements, saying that adequate protection of workers is afforded by the new Wage Determination, and thus free himself to apply job reservation. As a sufficient number of White workers would not be available, the decree would be applied with great flexibility and large-scale exemptions, creating a situation where inspectors would wield greater power than the factory managers.

The Minister has also declared that he will ask Parliament to amend Section 77, so that racial quotas can be applied in any or all establishments. Obviously labour turnover is bound to rise to damaging heights.

The worst of it all will be the plight of the non-White workers. They will exist under the shadow of summary dismissal, not because of their incompetence or misbehaviour, but because of the colour of their skin.

This is the fiery cross of job reservation, lighted many years ago, which the Nationalists are carrying through the clothing industry to-day and which they are determined to carry through many other industries to-morrow.