

DR. HENDRIK FRENSCH VERWOERD, PRIME MINISTER OF SOUTH AFRICA

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LIKE so many racialists, Dr. Verwoerd had his early training in anti-Semitism. In the mid-1930's, when he was Professor of Applied Psychology at Stellenbosch University (Afrikanerdom's oldest seat of learning), he accompanied five fellow-professors on a deputation to the Hertzog-Smuts Government to protest against the admission into South Africa of Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany.

A year later, in 1937, when the high priests of Nationalist Afrikanerdom selected him for the editorship of the new Nationalist daily newspaper in Johannesburg, *The Transvaler*, Dr. Verwoerd wrote his first leading article—on the Jews. "The Nationalist does not hate the Jew," he said reassuringly; but, he added, there was a clash of interests between the Jew and the Afrikaner, and the Afrikaner had found that commercial and industrial undertakings were mostly in "foreign" hands, "latterly mostly Jews".

"This population group," wrote Dr. Verwoerd, "which always separates itself within the population as a separate unit, and which is somewhat unfeeling and even hostile towards the Nationalist aspirations of Afrikanerdom, has also been seen, therefore, as a group which stands in the way of the Afrikaner's economic welfare."

The "struggle" had sharpened as a result of Jewish immigration, stated Dr. Verwoerd, and the solution was that "by legislation it must be ensured, gradually but deliberately, that each White population group, as far as possible, has a share in each of the most important occupations, in accordance with the proportion it forms of the White population as a whole." Dr. Verwoerd proposed restrictions on trading licences, and other discriminatory measures.

Dr. Verwoerd's assurance that "the Nationalist does not hate the Jew" was contradicted, in his own case at least, by the string of anti-Semitic articles which appeared in the *Transvaler*, and which continued through the war years. This resulted, soon after the launching of the newspaper, in the Jewish community of Johannesburg boycotting the advertisement columns. This



promptly evoked a complaint from the hurt editor.

Nothing of this was recalled by the *Transvaler* when it celebrated its 21st anniversary during October this year. Jewish memories were stirred, however. An Israeli newspaper, *Yedioth Achranoth*, expressed the fear that South Africa's new Prime Minister would pursue an anti-Israel policy in international affairs and an anti-Semitic policy in domestic affairs. A Jewish member of the Nationalist Party approached Dr. Verwoerd for a repudiation of these fears, and Dr. Verwoerd told him briefly that he was "continuing the policy of Dr. Malan and Mr. Strydom". There was little comfort in this curt reply.

Some Jews thought it ironical that Mr. Max Melamet, chairman of the Jewish Board of Deputies in Cape Town, should describe the report in *Yedioth Achranoth* as "stupid and without foundation," because Mr. Melamet was one of the Board's principal lobbyists when the Nationalist Party, under Dr. Malan, introduced an Opposition Bill in Parliament aimed at prohibiting Jewish immigration. If anyone should have been aware of the Nationalist Government's anti-Semitic background, it was Mr. Melamet.

In the Parliamentary debate on January 14, 1937, the Nationalist Party called for: prohibition of Jewish immigration; deletion of Yiddish as a recognized European language for immigration purposes; no further naturalization of Jewish immigrants; closing of certain professions to Jews and other "non-assimilable" races; and prohibition of changing of names, retrospective from May 1, 1930.

Since assuming office in 1948, the Nationalist Government, for reasons of expediency, has professed a desire to be friendly with the Jews; yet anti-Semitism has never been far beneath the surface of Parliamentary debates. Dr. Verwoerd, himself, has not been able to conceal his anti-Semitism: recently, he suggested that he had been denied justice in a court case during World War II because the judge (Millin) was Jewish.

From this basic training in anti-Semitism, Dr. Verwoerd moved on to much more grandiose concepts of race "purity", involving the entire South African nation of 9,600,000 Africans, 3,011,000 Whites, 1,360,000 Coloureds (of mixed descent) and 441,000 Indians. Himself Hollander-born, he brought to the Nationalist Afrikaner's crude race theories stray refinements of ideology and presentation—the product, no doubt, of his

studies in the mid-1920's when Nazism was born at the universities of Leipzig, Hamburg and Berlin.

From an early age, he had shown a preference for German institutions and a dislike of British ones. As late as his 55th birthday (1957), he had placed on record that the principal of the Milton Boys' High School in Bulawayo had "literally kicked" him down the corridor because he had expressed a desire to return to the Union, where the country's entry into World War I had provoked an armed rebellion among a section of the Boers. The headmaster was outraged at the thought of the young Verwoerd (by all accounts, a good scholar) wanting to return to "that nest of rebels".

Dr. Verwoerd's father (now 84, and running a small bookshop with the aid of his wife in the Free State village of Brandfort) had been a missionary. When they arrived in Cape Town from Amsterdam, the father established a grocery business in Wynberg, and in his spare time spread the gospel among the neighbouring Coloureds. Fifty years later, the Government, in which his son, Hendrik, was Minister of Native Affairs, took away the century-old voting rights of these Coloured people.

Perhaps the incident at the Milton Boys' High School brought a certain bitterness to the young Verwoerd's soul. Back in the Union, the family settled in Brandfort, where Hendrik matriculated. Then he went to Stellenbosch University. He obtained his M.A. degree in the young science of psychology (also sociology and logic), with distinctions, and became eligible for an Abe Bailey bursary of £400 a year. This would have meant going to Oxford, however. He turned it down. "I preferred to study psychology at a Continental university," he explained. Later, he took his doctorate in psychology, and this time he went abroad to the universities of Leipzig, Hamburg and Berlin—on a much smaller bursary than the Abe Bailey one. It was the last time Hendrik Verwoerd left South Africa.

Spurning the Abe Bailey bursary was not a casual act: Dr. Verwoerd's anti-Semitism was matched by his anti-British outlook. During the Royal visit to South Africa in 1947, he had refused to print a single word or picture of the event in the *Transvaler*. On the day the Royal family arrived in Johannesburg, he wrote a leading article on drought. (Even the *Burger*, the Cape Nationalist newspaper, recognized the news-worthiness of the occasion.)

By then, Dr. Verwoerd was well-known for his pro-Nazi

views. Mr. Justice Millin, in a judgment delivered in the Transvaal Supreme Court on July 13, 1943, had pronounced: "He (Verwoerd) did support Nazi propaganda, he did make his paper a tool of the Nazis in South Africa, and he knew it." The case arose out of an action, brought by Dr. Verwoerd (as editor of the *Transvaler*) against the *Johannesburg Star*, for publishing an article, entitled "Speaking Up for Hitler", in which the *Transvaler* was accused of falsifying news in support of Nazi propaganda and generally acting as a tool of the enemy. Dr. Verwoerd lost the case. In a lengthy judgment, extending to more than 25,000 words, the judge found that Dr. Verwoerd had in fact furthered Nazi propaganda. The defendants had proved, said the judge, that Dr. Verwoerd "caused to be published a large body of matter which was on the same general lines as matter coming to the Union in the Afrikaans transmissions from Zeesen and which was calculated to make the Germans look upon the *Transvaler* as a most useful adjunct to this propaganda service". On another point, the judge said: "This is a falsification of current news which was approved by the plaintiff. It was calculated to cause alarm and despondency, and it is not open to doubt that it was of great service to the enemy in the way of supporting his propaganda for the damaging of the war effort of the Union".

Here is a further extract from the court record:

MR. ROPER (for the defendants): "Here is a thoroughly defeatist article saying that the Germans are on the threshold of England, that it is imperative for Britain to make peace, and that these peace feelers are really inspired by her. Not a very comforting article for those not in your camp".

DR. VERWOERD: "It is not my business to comfort the English".

The judge concluded: "There have been proved two very grave cases of the publication of false news, in reckless disregard of whether these were true or false; six cases on the whole less serious, but still clear cases of falsification where news originally correctly reported was falsely restated for the purpose of editorial comment; and two cases in which news was falsified by means of misleading headlines".

"The plaintiff (Dr. Verwoerd) appeals to the principles of free speech and a free Press in a democratic country in justifying him in writing as he did in support of his policy of neutrality and a separate peace between the Union and Germany, as a means

towards a republic in South Africa. He argues that if he has to consider whether what he says would be useful to the Germans, the effect would be to silence him; and the law does not compel him to be silent. But the question in this case is not whether the plaintiff should be silenced. His legal right to publish what he did is not in question. The question is whether, when he exercises his legal right in the way he does, he is entitled to complain when it is said of him that what he writes supports Nazi propaganda and makes his paper a tool of the Nazis. On the evidence he is not entitled to complain. He did support Nazi propaganda.”

An Afrikaner Nationalist by adoption, instead of birth, Dr. Verwoerd became the first South African Prime Minister with no claim to a traditional Boer upbringing. The Boer War and its bitter aftermath left no scars on him; when Strydom was bumping across the Transvaal platteland in an old red Ford, he was strolling under Stellenbosch's shady oaks; when other party stalwarts were fighting their way grimly to the top, he was plucked from his professor's chair and given control of the *Transvaal*. In his first election contest (Albertyn, in the 1948 general election), he was beaten by the United Party. Subsequently, he entered Parliament as a nominated Senator. Only in the April, 1958, general election was the safe Heidelberg seat vacated for him, and he took his seat in the Assembly for the first time as an M.P. Four-and-a-half months later, he became Prime Minister.

Even then his election as Prime Minister was curiously violent. It was the first time the Nationalist Party had voted for its leader, instead of selecting him “automatically”. Until the last moment, the country was kept guessing as to whether it would be the senior Cabinet Minister and Acting Prime Minister, Charles Robberts Swart, who had set his heart on this ultimate honour; or the suave Dr. Eben Dönges, Minister of the Interior and leader of the Cape Nationalists, on whom the mantle of ex-Premier Malan had fallen; or the turbulent newcomer from the north. The Nationalist Parliamentary caucus went to extraordinary lengths to ensure secrecy at the balloting for the new *hoofleier**, who would automatically become Prime Minister. The windows of the caucus room in the Parliamentary buildings were pasted up with cardboard. Ballot papers were issued, specially stamped with the letters “N.P.” (*Nasionale Party*)†

* Chief leader. (Afrikaans)

† Nationalist Party

to avoid forgeries. Only the party whips knew about the secret "N.P." stamp before the balloting began. The 173 members of the caucus (excluding the three candidates) voted in groups of four at specially-erected cubicles to ensure secrecy. In this "democratic" atmosphere, the caucus chose its new leader. At the first ballot, Swart polled 41 votes, Dönges 52, and Verwoerd 80. At the second ballot, after Swart had been eliminated, Dönges polled 75 votes and Verwoerd 98, giving the latter a majority of 23 votes.

Of the 173 members of the caucus who voted, more than 70 came from the "enlarged" Senate, which in 1955 had been increased in size from 48 to 90 members to give the Nationalist Government the two-thirds majority required to remove the Coloured voters from the common roll. From 1950 to 1958, Dr. Verwoerd was leader of the Government side of the Senate, assiduously cultivating the support of the Government Senators. Therefore, when the time came to elect a successor to Strydom, the "enlarged" Senate, the epitome of the undemocratic spirit in South Africa, played a decisive role.

Although Dr. Verwoerd could not command the support either of all the senior members of the Cabinet, or of the rank and file of the Nationalist Party, nevertheless, he was the obvious choice for the post. As one commentator put it: "He is the key man in the Nationalist Government, and to have denied him the Premiership would have been both illogical and evasive".

Dr. Verwoerd was brought in to lead the Nationalist Party almost as an act of desperation. After 10 years of Nationalist rule, during which it had become increasingly urgent to find an answer to the question "What is Apartheid?", the Government had come to the crossroads: only Dr. Verwoerd stood out as the man who claimed to know the answer. He confessed once to an interviewer that he never suffered the qualms of doubt: he always *knew* he was right. It was just someone like this that the Nationalist Party wanted—someone who would face the future with absolute confidence and banish the gnawing anxiety over the fate of apartheid.

To quote again the commentator mentioned above: "Nationalist Afrikanerdom, for the first time, perhaps, is beginning to feel the pressure of history on its shoulders, and the immense implications of the apartheid task. It has discovered, too, that

apartheid cannot be checked and released at will, like water in an irrigation furrow: it has its own irresistible momentum . . . Nationalist Afrikanerdom's whole future has been entrusted to one man, Dr. Verwoerd. If Dr. Verwoerd fails, Afrikanerdom fails. Dr. Verwoerd is only 58, and apparently in excellent health. He is tireless, dedicated and determined. The circumstances are classic in their perfection. Nationalist Afrikanerdom is on the march to its final destiny. This is the last lap."

An aloof, academic man, Dr. Verwoerd has compensated for his lack of ability to rouse passions by practising the art of mass psychology. As the fledgling Professor of Applied Psychology at Stellenbosch University, he contributed a paper to the *S.A. Journal of Science* (1928) on the psychology of newspaper advertisements. He gave, as an example, an advertisement for a stomach medicine. It showed a dog, with a child gripped firmly in its jaws, standing sturdily in the middle of a rushing stream. The caption read "Saved!" By the same technique—the simple association of ideas—Dr. Verwoerd has persuaded Afrikanerdom, presumably, that he is its saviour.

With the crude, but effective, art of the mass propagandist, he has almost succeeded in convincing Afrikaners (and perhaps others, too) that to criticize him is tantamount to heresy. Minutes after the result of the leadership ballot had been announced to the caucus, he was staking his claim to divine rule: "I believe that the will of God was revealed in the ballot." Two days later, in a national broadcast, he repeated: "In accordance with His will, it was determined who should assume the leadership of the Government in this new period of the life of the people of South Africa".

Again and again, Dr. Verwoerd has returned to this theme; and to two or three other selected themes, namely, that he is "democratic", that the "unity" of the Nationalist Party is paramount ("unity" and criticism of the new Prime Minister being mutually exclusive), and that a "new era" has begun. Skilfully, and speedily, Dr. Verwoerd has conveyed to Nationalist Afrikaners that they swim or sink with him. In these circumstances, the chances of a revolt against his leadership (the Opposition's last dream) are remote, indeed.

Even the White Opposition in South Africa, always ready to avoid the realities of life, was obliged to accept the implications of Dr. Verwoerd's election. The Johannesburg *Star* commented shrewdly: "In an important sense, Dr. Verwoerd's election

might be called the triumph of a lost cause. If there is any meaning in his selection above so stalwart a republican as Mr. Swart or so skilful a politician as Dr. Dönges it can only be that Dr. Verwoerd stands for the 'ultimate' solution of South Africa's race problem through separation. It is astonishing that there are still enough Nationalists who believe that that such a solution is possible that they have voluntarily submitted to the yoke that Dr. Verwoerd will assuredly place upon them . . . The new Prime Minister embodies the great illusion. His progress will be strewn with discarded liberties, of White men as well as Black, but it is a foregone conclusion that it will get no nearer the goal." The *Cape Times*, characteristically forthright, declared: "Dr. Verwoerd is dedicated to a fantastic and fanatical conception of apartheid, to a lunatic attempt to unscramble the South African racial omelette at any cost in human privation and dignity . . . Unless his wider powers and direct responsibility change him, Dr. Verwoerd's appointment may mark the transition in South Africa from an easy-going, elastic, more-or-less democratic parliamentarianism to a rigid regimentation backed by a tyrannical party machine on the lines of the regimes which brought some European countries to ruin. If this happens Dr. Verwoerd will wreck the Nationalist Party. The danger is that the country will be wrecked first." The *Cape Argus* observed, aptly, that "South Africa sets out on his (Dr. Verwoerd's) road with alarm bells sounding and warning signals flashing."

As for Dr. Verwoerd himself, he had endorsed these predictions in advance, in an article in the Nationalist Sunday newspaper, *Dagbreek-en-Sondagnuus*, written just before the fateful caucus meeting to elect a new leader. In the article, he stated the requirements for an Afrikaner leader: "Sincere conviction and firm action command the confidence and esteem of friends and foe, while weak leadership divides and alienates. The Afrikaner leader . . . is never a tyrant, never dishonest, self-centred, a power-greedy ruler." Tyrant, self-centred, power-greedy . . . At that precise moment, Dr. Verwoerd's extremist supporters were campaigning vigorously for a "strong man" as leader. The Nationalist Party, they said, could not afford a "weak, interim" leader like the ageing Mr. Swart.

As yet, I have said nothing about Dr. Verwoerd's most important achievements—as the architect of apartheid, or, as one of his M.P.s phrased it so picturesquely, as "the greatest

*induna** of all times". What, in fact, are the achievements of this chubby-faced man, who summons vast *indabas*, or assemblies, of Africans, and speaks in curious, half-forgotten parables, trying to revive an age and a spirit that are passing away? Who speaks no African language, but prides himself on an understanding of the "Native mind"? Who received (allegedly) a congratulatory message on his election as Prime Minister from the African residents of Pokwani village, reading: "The White Bull's herd is lowing at the kraal. Even the calves are looking for him. Please throw out a mouthful of feed to quiet their hearts"?

Half of the pages of *Africa South*, since the inception of the journal, have been given over to discussion of Verwoerd's apartheid, and yet only half the story has been told. For eight years, since he became Minister of Native Affairs in 1950, Dr. Verwoerd has literally not stopped talking—

But words, like alcohol with other men,
 Are his compulsion, theories, words, and schemes,
 Poured in dull rivers from his tongue and pen
 To sail his paper argosies of dreams . . .
 Statistics, numbers, races fill his vision,
 Ransacked from Europe, Africa and Asia
 And patched together with a schooled precision
 To form a bold, methodical fantasia,
 His Hundred Year Design, His Master Plan,
 To keep the Neths the masters—and their clan.

(Anthony Delius "Judgment Day").

Where does one begin with this man who, after becoming Prime Minister, boasted that instead of "mellowing", he would remain a "devil"? His speeches teem with remarks like this one: "It is in no way a pleasant duty to have people, even though they are Natives, imprisoned". He has closed the doors of more schools and opened the doors of more gaols than any other South African in history. Once, surprisingly, he bowed to public opinion: he abandoned (temporarily?) a scheme to establish a labour camp (a concentration camp, in fact) for African political offenders. It was the method, not the principle, that worried him: "The policy of the department has always been to

* African leader

scatter rather than to concentrate the deportees."

One advantage of his verbosity is that, ultimately, he blurts out the truth. When he introduced the Bantu Authorities Act, he presented it solicitously as a plan to revive the wilting flower of tribalism. Then he let slip: "The tribal authority is the natural ally of the government against such rebellious movements (Mau-Mau). It was the chiefs with their authorities who sided with the forces of law and order and who assisted European authority. . . . We are dealing with a restoration of a natural Native democracy." With Sekhukhuneland in flames, with chiefs and headmen banned and banished, as they refuse to accept the total capitulation prescribed for them in the fake "Bantu Authorities" system—this is Verwoerd's simple view.

"Bantu Education" is another example: "I believe that racial relations will be improved when Bantu education is handled in the manner proposed by us. Racial relations cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of a frustrated people who, as a result of the education they receive, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled . . . when it creates people who are trained for professions not open to them . . . good racial relations cannot exist when the education is given under the supervision of people who . . . believe in a policy of equality. Such a person will by the very nature of the education he gives, both as regards the content of that education and the spirit, create expectations in the mind of the Bantu which clash with the possibilities in this country. It is therefore necessary that Native education should be controlled in such a way that it should be in accord with the policy of the State."

When one writes about Dr. Verwoerd, one is afflicted with his verbosity. The subject of apartheid is never-ending; the misery interminable. That it will end in catastrophe, now seems certain. Dr. Verwoerd himself has prophesied the future: "It is easy to sit back. I have decided, even at the risk of becoming unpopular, or even if I made mistakes, to attempt to find a solution. It is better to have fought and lost, than never to have fought at all."