

# JOB RESERVATION (II) THE ACHILLES HEEL

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IN spite of protests from organized industry and commerce, leading economists and trade unions, the Government of South Africa is sweeping onward with job reservation. The Minister of Labour, in what may prove to be his first determination fulfilled without complications, has ordered the Durban Corporation to employ only White drivers on the vehicles used to remove night soil and refuse.

He ran into trouble, however, with the recommendation of the Industrial Tribunal that the Cape Town Tramways should be ordered to reserve 84 per cent. of its running staff jobs for Whites. The Industrial Conciliation Act does not allow him to apply racial quotas, although it permits the total reservation of industries, trades or occupations for the employment of workers of a particular race.

But Senator de Klerk is not dismayed at the setbacks that hamper the speedy enforcement of his plan to reserve the cream of employment for Whites. He has ordered the Industrial Tribunal to investigate the building trade in the Transvaal and the O. F. S., the tea and coffee packing trade in Pretoria, liftmen's jobs in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein, jam and food processing, leather goods making and tanning, and the manufacture of electric stoves, refrigerators, water heaters and metal kitchen furniture.

## **The Clothing Industry.**

Meanwhile, the situation in the clothing industry (the Minister's first target) is becoming more complicated. First, there was the consternation when the Minister declared that the industry's main categories of employment would be reserved for Whites; then there was the confusion when he upset his order by issuing a general exemption; now there is widespread fear.

It seems that the clash between apartheid and industrial progress has come sooner than expected. The Tomlinson Plan (and its variations) for the development of the Native Reserves quickly whetted the appetites of entrepreneurs, who are now establishing factories where African labour is plentiful and cheap. This development has struck a mean blow at job reservation.

At dawn on the 25th March, 1958, two specially chartered railway buses left Johannesburg for Natal, carrying eighty-five White garment workers, most of them ardent believers in apartheid and firm supporters of the colour bar. They were on a "See for Yourself" tour of the new clothing factories that have been established in and around the African townships of Natal country towns.

At Charlestown, two miles beyond the Transvaal border, the sightseers visited three factories set amidst the mud and straw huts of the Native Location, the 'reserve' for the African people of Charlestown. The visitors were greeted by crowds of bare-footed, ragged African children, who excitedly chased the buses down the dusty location streets, until they stopped at the factories. It was the lunch hour, and the factory workers sprawled in mealtime comfort about the open square facing one factory. This was their novel rest room, providing all the joys of location life right outside the factory doors. There, the White garment workers from the Rand were able to ply their Black fellow workers of Charlestown with all sorts of questions about wages and conditions of work. They also spoke to managers and supervisors at the factories.

From Charlestown the sightseers went on to Ladysmith, one hundred miles away, where they saw two more clothing factories. Here the buses parted, one turning off to the Free State towns of Villiers and Parys. The other continued down the Durban main road to Camperdown, a village between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, where a new factory, larger than all the others, had gone into production.

The establishment of this factory is a model of the Tomlinson Plan applied in the correct Verwoerd manner. The undertaking is White owned; it has a prominent Nationalist Member of Parliament on its Board of Directors; it is neatly situated on the border of a Native Reserve. It has other features which must appeal to any ambitious industrialist. A large slice of the capital has been provided by the Industrial Development Corporation, the body set up by the Smuts Government in 1940 to assist in the development of South African industry. The premises were erected by Africans, at wages less than one-third the standard White rates, and they worked every day of the week, including Sundays.

In the course of their tour, the White garment workers saw eight rural factories and came away wondering how Senator

de Klerk could ever enforce his job reservation order of October, 1957. The rural factories all operate on a similar basis. Most of them are situated inside African locations. The owners, managers, administrative staff and supervisors, comprising less than four per cent. of those engaged in these undertakings, are White persons. The other 96 per cent., the factory workers, are African men and women.

Many of these factory hands are children between the ages of ten and fifteen; a large number of them work barefooted and in tattered clothes. Their working day begins at 6.30 a.m. The Whites earn far more in these rural factories than they could in the cities. On the other hand, the Blacks earn a mere one-third (and sometimes as little as one-fifth) of the wages paid for similar work in Witwatersrand factories.

The factory workers have no trade union; their working week is 46 hours, compared with 40 hours in the cities; they are granted no sick leave; they have no Sick Fund or Medical Benefit Society; because their low wages are less than the minimum qualification for African workers, they are excluded from the protection of the Unemployment Insurance Act; worst of all, they are subject to the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, which denies them the rights of other workers. It is this last factor which plays the important role in the rural pattern.

The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act not only makes it almost impossible for African workers to fight for improvements without falling foul of the law, but also makes it a crime to react in a normally human manner to bullying and unjust treatment at the hands of employers.

In a recent case at Charlestown, a strike occurred in one of the factories because a European supervisor, in a fit of anger, struck one of the workers, a girl of fifteen. Other workers were also threatened with assault and ran out of the factory. The police were called and sixteen workers were arrested. They were charged under the Native Labour (S. of D.) Act with striking illegally, found guilty and sentenced to £5 or one month's imprisonment each, suspended for three years.

Referring to this case, the *Garment Worker*, newspaper of the Garment Workers' Union, commented:

*"The Charlestown case shows that the manufacturers in the uncontrolled areas not only enjoy the advantage over their competitors that they can pay very much lower wages. In addition, their*

*employees are virtually prohibited from demanding living wages and proper treatment. . . . It is no wonder that factories are deserting the controlled areas and opening up in places like Charlestown, where they can make the fullest use of unorganized, unprotected Africans. . . .*"

### The Achilles Heel

The rural factories are manufacturing top grade articles of clothing, although some of the factories are specializing in cheaper qualities of men's wear. The standard of work done by the tribal Africans in these factories is generally high, once they have been trained. Some of the visiting workers from the Rand admitted that they saw work as good as that performed by White craftsmen, an admission borne out by the large slice of Government contracts captured by new rural factories. They make most of the blazers for White schoolchildren, the uniforms for the police, and for other officials.

Seeing all these things was a disturbing experience for the sightseers. They are now asking how the Minister of Labour came to declare the whole clothing industry reserved for White employment. If these rural factories, inside the African townships and on the border of the Native Reserves, attempted to comply with the Minister's order, they would have to import White workers into these non-White areas. This would not only be flagrant defiance of the professed policy of apartheid, but illegal into the bargain.

Fresh from the scenes of thriving industrial activity, the White garment workers returned home. There they were met with a different situation. The factories in which many of them worked were feeling the effects of a depression which had begun to creep over the Transvaal clothing industry. Several were working short-time.

Since then, the depression has worsened. Now, one-third of the Transvaal clothing factories are on short-time, some of them working only two days a week.

The manufacturers and the Garment Workers' Union attribute the slackness mainly to the loss of business to the factories in the uncontrolled areas. Usually at this time of the year the trade experiences a seasonal slackness, but nothing like that of the present time. In May 1957, there were 24 factories and 636 workers on short-time; this year there were 107 factories and 2,566 workers on short-time. By June last year

the slackness was over, and the factories were back to full production. This year the slackness has increased, and more workers are being put on short-time.

This should be Senator de Klerk's hour of triumph. This was the day for which he made his plans. Just over two years ago, when pushing his job reservation measure through Parliament, Senator de Klerk said that its purpose was to protect White workers when jobs became scarce. Referring to the very industry that is now in difficulties, he said: "Now is the time to tackle this matter, because when a recession comes, we will have the weapon." The Minister's recession has certainly come—but so have the rural factories.

On July 11 1958, the Wage Board began its investigation into the clothing factories in the uncontrolled areas. It will be some time before the Board is able to submit its report or before the Minister of Labour is likely to make a new wage determination. But whatever the Wage Board recommends, it is certain that Senator de Klerk will not raise the wages of rural African garment workers to the Witwatersrand levels. That would kill the main attraction of the rural factories, and frustrate the 'White man boss' plans of the Government.

The rural factories are an essential part of the Verwoerd pattern, as is his artificial tribal society, where needs must be simple and discipline strong. Job reservation in the clothing industry may yet prove to be the Achilles Heel of economic apartheid.

