

THE BLACK SASH

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OPENING ADDRESS

by

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The Vorster era is now over a year old. The year has been notable for the concentrated effort to change the personal image of Mr. John Vorster from the strong-armed Minister of Justice to a benevolent, approachable, golf-loving, fatherly Prime Minister who is the essence of reasonableness and good will. In this Mr. Vorster has succeeded. On the surface, tensions are more relaxed. The Prime Minister has been commended for his outward looking policy. South Africa's relations with the new African States on our borders and with Malawi are much improved and we appear to have come to an understanding with their governments. This indeed is a welcome development.

A more reasonable attitude to other countries in the field of sport has pleased sportsmen everywhere. The racially mixed crews of visiting warships have been treated with the greatest kindness and courtesy. These concessions are small, but important. They indicate a degree of relaxation of our previous granite like determination to force apartheid on visitors from other countries.

Here in South Africa Mr. Vorster's new image has induced a state of euphoria, at least among the English speaking section and there is a general feeling of relief that the political atmosphere is less tense.

In the Nationalist Party itself there appears to be a fear among certain of its followers, that Mr. Vorster's new image is a danger to Afrikanerdom - a fear that the image will be translated into a new policy. The Verkramptes realise full well that any concessions are the thin edge of the wedge. We all know that an ideology produces a chain reaction, that the chain must be kept intact and that any weakening of any link will lead to the breaking of the whole chain. There can be no deviations from policy, no matter how small or how unimportant.

This change in the political atmosphere is encouraging, in that the political situation, static for so long, is showing signs of change. The change however, is only in the top of the iceberg. There are no indications of a change in attitude in legislation. The laws passed this year were as authoritarian as ever. Acts such as the Suppression of Communism Amendment Act, the Coloured Cadets Employment Training Act, the Education Act, the Terrorism Act are all laws which should shame all South Africans. We have been threatened with further controls next year. Mr. Vorster's image was marred by his Koffiefontein speech when he threatened the Press with legislation to prevent the publication of "ascertainable lies". Mr. Blaar Coetzee, Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration, has promised to introduce a Bill to make influx control work. One wonders what further restrictions are possible and what more the government could do to control the lives of its citizens ever more stringently.

We do know that it is government intention to ensure that the entire labour force will consist of migratory workers. In the Western Cape this policy is presently being implemented. We in the Black Sash are opposed to the principle of migratory labour because of the hardships, the insecurity and the disruption of family life which is attendant upon the system.

When one makes this statement one is usually confronted with the rejoinder: "What is wrong with migratory labour? It is used all over the world". This is true. Migrant workers are extensively used in Europe, America, Latin America and elsewhere. But the conditions for migratory workers in the European Common Market, for instance, cannot compare with the conditions which prevail for our own citizens in South Africa. There are thousands of migrants in the E.E.C., but they are not relegated to a state of virtual serfdom.

In the first place the Treaty of Rome provides for the free movement of labour within the Community not later than 1970. "This means that workers can move freely with their families from one member state to another to accept offers of employment actually made to them (subject to limitations justified by public order, public safety and public health). They will have the right to transfer all their social security benefits and to settle permanently with their families." "All migrant workers within the E.E.C. will be entitled to equality of treatment with national workers in relation to tax, social insurance, housing and membership of trade unions and work councils." (Britain and the E.E.C. - The Economic Background. Published by Her Majesty's Stationary Office.)

Compare this with the conditions obtaining in South Africa. Migratory workers have no freedom of movement; they cannot bring their families with them to the industrial areas; they have no rights to settle permanently and they do not have equality of treatment in relation to tax, social insurance, housing and membership of trade unions and work councils. As migratory workers all these rights are denied them, nor do they even have the right to change their jobs or to sell their labour to their own best advantage in the area where they are migratory workers.

In South Africa if and when Separate Development is practical and becomes a reality it is accepted that millions of nationals of the Homelands will still be required to provide the unskilled labour for the White economy, both in the border industries and in the present industrial areas. If all the labour is to be migratory, it seems therefore, that the pass laws and influx control will be forever with us. This means that these laws are not a means to an end, as is often claimed, but an end in themselves.

To-day the pass laws and influx control are bitterly resented. They cause hardship and misery and their implementation is responsible for destroying hundreds of families; for reducing the contract worker to a state of virtual serfdom; for keeping wages depressed; for keeping the wages of the White worker artificially high; for a misuse of manpower.

In its Advice Offices the Black Sash has had practical experience of what influx control means to every urban African. His life is governed by the stamps in his reference book and the possession of permits and documents. The stamp in his reference book determines his way of life. Any African living in an urban area has his life controlled by such a welter of restrictions and prohibitions that he must have permits to

have a home, to live with his wife, to earn his living, to have his children with him, to remain where he is, in fact almost to breathe the hallowed air. And for this dubious privilege the onus rests on him to substantiate every statement he ever makes.

To illustrate only one aspect of this, there is the case of Mrs. X. Mrs. X. has been endorsed out of Johannesburg where her home is, and told to go to Queenstown.

Mrs. X. was born in Queenstown because her mother went there for the birth of her child. She was brought back to Johannesburg as a small baby and has lived here all her life except for a period of four years when she was sent back to Queenstown to finish her schooling. After she left school she came back to Johannesburg and was in employment until her marriage in 1963.

Her husband was born in Alexandra Township and grew up there. In 1959 he and his mother were moved by the Resettlement Board to a house in Meadowlands and they have been there ever since. Mr. X. has always worked in Johannesburg and is in steady employment.

When Mrs. X. moved into her husband's house after her marriage the authorities would not put her name on the housing permit, and she was told that she would have to go back to Queenstown. Mrs. X. appealed against the decision and was given a temporary permit to remain while her appeal was pending. Two years later she was told that the appeal had failed and she was endorsed out of Johannesburg.

This is a particularly devoted couple and their only crime is that they want to live together and bring up their two children. They have done their best to comply with the law and cannot understand why they should be denied the right to live together. By law Mr. X. qualifies to remain in Johannesburg and to have his wife living with him. His wife, in her own right should qualify too, to stay here, but she must have been deemed to have broken her domicile by spending four years at school in Queenstown.

While one has to try to be completely objective and dispassionate when attending to these cases, one cannot help but be emotionally affected when one sees both a man and his wife weeping in their distress.

It is difficult to imagine how any civilised country, and an avowedly Christian one at that, could possibly have so little regard for the sanctity of marriage and so little compassion. It is intolerable that any man should firstly, have to earn a right to live with his wife and secondly, that the wife should have to prove that she has a right not only to live with her husband, but that she "ordinarily" resides with him in the place where he works. The fact that she is the mother of his children is no proof of "ordinary" residence with him in town. This basic human right is denied purely on the grounds of skin colour.

There are many other families where the wife is living lawfully with her husband, but where there are difficulties over their teenage children. This is yet another obstruction to stable, secure family life.

Take the story of young K. He is 17 years old. Although his parents were residents of Alexandra Township, K. was born in Pretoria. He spent his early childhood living with his grandfather there. He only came home to live with his family when they were moved by the Resettlement Board from Alexandra to Diepkloof in 1964. After his return home he was sent to the local school in Diepkloof and his name was put on the family housing permit.

In June this year he applied for his reference book. The Department refused to issue him with a book in Johannesburg and he was told to go to Pretoria to get it. On investigation by the authorities it was found that he only had a permit to be in Diepkloof for the purpose of schooling. The fact that that is where his home is seems to be of no consequence.

His parents appealed against the decision. He was given a week to find a job. He found a job, but he could not be employed pending the outcome of the appeal. The employer could not wait and the job lapsed.

At the beginning of August he was told that the appeal had failed. He was arrested in the middle of August. At the beginning of September he was given his reference book, but, as issued from Pretoria. He was then sent to the Superintendent at Diepkloof where he was again arrested. He was subsequently released without charge. He and his mother then went to consult a lawyer who sent him to the Superintendent at Diepkloof, who sent him to the Superintendent at Meadowlands, who sent him to Orlando West, where the clerk would not permit him to see the Superintendent. He returned to his lawyer who gave him yet another letter to the Superintendent at Diepkloof. He was turned away with the unopened letter. The lawyer is still dealing with the matter. And this youth, 17 years of age, was born of parents legally living in Johannesburg.

His mother is distraught with worry. She feels that the boy should be at home as there is now no-one in Pretoria with whom he can live.

Then there is the case of poor J. He is 18 and has also been refused the issue of his reference book in Johannesburg. He claims he was born in Newclare, Johannesburg and states that he has never left the area, but he has no proof either of his birth or of his continuous residence here. When a small child his father deserted his mother and subsequently his mother too, left him. He was taken in by his aunt and uncle. The uncle died later and the aunt lost her house in Newclare. However, she subsequently remarried and went with J. to live with her husband in Soweto. Although J. has lived with his aunt since his mother disappeared, his name has never been on the housing permit. There is no other place where he can apply for a reference book. By law he has to possess one. He wants to go on living with his aunt, she wants to have him, but the powers-that-be say no. Where is he to go? He seems to belong nowhere.

In recent months there have been one or two of these young men coming every day to our Advice Office in Johannesburg. The anxiety and misery of both the boys and their parents is most distressing. We feel that the implications of this policy are grave for the young generation of Africans and for the whole of our society. Every one of these youngsters, denied the right to live with his family, is a potential criminal. Many of them do not leave the area, but go into hiding. They cannot work because they cannot be registered; they know of nowhere they can lawfully be; they do not wish to be sent to work on a farm and they are afraid to go to the authorities lest they be arrested. They are displaced persons in their own homeland.

In this modern world life for the teenager is difficult enough even if he has the security of his home, parental discipline and guidance. Can any of us imagine how we would feel if our own young sons were forced to leave home at the age of 18 to fend for themselves in a place where they may be a stranger, have no home and possibly no work? I wonder how many of them would turn out to be satisfactory citizens? Legislation which has such an outcome cannot be in the interests of anyone.

The cases mentioned above are those who supposedly have rights of residence in an urban area. But there are many thousands of Africans who have not earned any right to remain in a prescribed area and can only come to town to work if they are recruited by a licenced recruiting agent or by an individual employer. They can only stay in the area as long

as they remain with the employer for whom they were recruited. If they leave their jobs or are fired they cannot accept other employment, but must go home to their tribal area. In Johannesburg these conditions apply to men. Women who are not already legally in the area may not be recruited, neither may they enter Johannesburg to seek work.

The men who work under these conditions cannot live with their wives unless they marry women who have themselves established a right to remain in the area. Even if this is the case, they cannot rent a house, but must acquire a lodger's permit to reside with another family. Those men whose wives are in the country must live in a hostel or on the premises of their employers.

These conditions for contract workers are iniquitous. They imply a state of virtual serfdom. A man knows that if he leaves his job because he wants more money, or the work is uncongenial, or because he does not like his employer, he will be endorsed out. This system keeps wages depressed; it means that the labour is not efficient and the men are discontented. Neither is it desirable for such large numbers of men, many of them married, to be living in single accommodation. 148,911 single Africans are housed in single quarters, in hostels, compounds and on the premises of their employers. It must encourage homosexuality, promiscuity, illegitimacy and crime.

Another hazard of life for the African is the constant fear of arrest. By law they must carry their reference books on their person at all times. For the first six months of 1966, on the Witwatersrand alone, 38,391 people were arrested for being in the area for more than 72 hours without permission or for non-possession of identity documents. This means that practically all of those arrested spent at least one night in gaol before being brought to trial and if they were arrested on Friday they would be in the cells from Friday until Monday morning when the Court sits. Of those who were arrested 30,666 were convicted and either had to pay a fine or serve a gaol sentence. It is to be noted that this punishment is for technical offences and not for serious crime.

In 1965, the last year for which figures are available, 49,499 people were endorsed out of the Witwatersrand area. In the same year, to satisfy the needs of the economy, 91,655 people were admitted to the same area. The total number of Africans living in Johannesburg in 1966, including the mines, Alexandra Township and the peri-urban areas to the north and south of Johannesburg, the townships of Meadowlands and Diepkloof controlled by the Resettlement Board, Soweto and Eastern Native Township controlled by the Johannesburg City Council was 717,207. Of these 584,428 are living in houses under family conditions.

The economy requires the presence of many thousands of Africans in urban areas. In fact, on the Reef nearly twice as many are entering the area as are being endorsed out. What then is the purpose of disrupting the lives of nearly 50,000 people or approximately 7% of the urban African population?

Time does not allow me to go into all the problems which confront foreign Africans, widows, deserted wives, the aged, the orphans, the physically and mentally handicapped. I assure you that the hardships endured by many of them are considerable and their problems are often insuperable.

The story of the effects of the application of the pass laws is one of anxiety, sorrow and human suffering. White South Africans think of the African people as "The Bantu" - a kind of sub-human species. They do not think of them as human beings with feelings, aspirations, desires and ambitions and all the human instincts of love, hate, fear. They think of the Africans as labour units, temporary sojourners in the White area, there to provide the labour for our industry and to keep their White masters in a state of privilege and comfort. If we could think of all our non-White citizens as people, as individuals, not as an inferior group which if treated with common decency, will be a threat to White survival. I am sure that if we could do this we would not give our consent to laws which are so cruel and unjust. The pass laws cannot be justified for economic reasons and certainly not on moral or humanitarian grounds.

Mr. Vorster was reported as saying in Windhoek a few weeks ago - "I want to say to the world: You can push people around, you can fight them and you can insult them. They will take all this to a certain point, but you must not try to take away a man's home from him. You must not even think that you will go unpunished if you estrange a man's fatherland from him." This is the very thing that the world has been saying to Mr. Vorster and the South African Government all these years. We wonder how many homes have been taken away from people through the implementation of the pass laws and the Group Areas Act and how many have been estranged from their fatherland? All our non-White people have been pushed around for years.

When Mr. Vorster and other government spokesmen boast about the "peace and quiet" which exists in South Africa, they do not say how this state of affairs has come about. In order to enforce the dogma of apartheid a mass of legislation has been passed by Parliament. Much of it is an erosion of the rule of law. Habeas Corpus has disappeared from our judicial system. Potential leaders of all races have been banished, banned, put under house arrest, detained in prison without charge or trial, kept in prison after they have served their sentences. A number of organisations which opposed government policy have been declared unlawful; individual rights and liberties have been removed; academic freedom has been curtailed and many other limitations have been imposed on personal freedom. If South Africa were a happy and peaceful country there would be no need to be defending ourselves against terrorists in South West Africa and on the Rhodesian border, nor would there be need of an army of informers, a security force out of all proportion to the size of the population, and a mass of totalitarian laws.

The Pass Laws are a cornerstone of apartheid which is no more popular to-day with the majority of the South African population and with the outside world than it was previously. As long as we pursue this policy, so long will we be the "polecat" of the Western world.

To the African and particularly to the urban African, apartheid means injustice, discrimination, a struggle for existence against obstruction to his aspirations, his employment, his family life, the education of his children, his housing and his opportunities. The laws are so complicated and contain so many restrictions and prohibitions that almost all Africans are forced to break the law at some time of their lives because they cannot comply with all the details of the plethora of laws that govern them. The burden of proof weighs heavily on them and is often responsible for endorsement out of urban areas, or for punishment by fine or gaol of many innocent people. The insecurity of tenure and the instability of family life is causing untold misery. Millions of rand are spent on administering these laws and millions of manhours are being wasted in trying to enforce unenforceable laws. The real cost is to be counted in terms of human sorrow, bitterness and frustration on a vast scale. How can we maintain our privilege and our prosperity at the expense of the wellbeing and advancement of the African people? We do so at our peril.

We of the Black Sash will go on raising our voices in protest, doing what we believe to be right. We ask White South Africans to make Dr. Amado Yuzon's Good Citizen's Rule their yardstick and their traditional way of life:

"Revive in yourself, before men  
Fight at all times and in all places  
The brutish ills of human prejudice,  
Totalitarianism and all its forces,  
And fight intolerance in all its courses  
In defence of human liberties."