

THE BLACK SASH

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BY

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To-night I want to talk about the political scene.

I do not believe that the announcement of a general election changes anything materially, either by its disruption of the Parliamentary session or by its results, which are a foregone conclusion. In fact it is difficult to discern any necessity for it or to understand why the Prime Minister couldn't simply have shifted to the right, or even more simply have altered his rhetoric without subjecting the country to the expense and inconvenience of a general election.

But perhaps he wanted to give himself an opportunity to change his disguise. Having spent so much time and so many words building up what he hoped was a "verligte" image perhaps he finds it difficult to effect a change without first drawing a curtain of words across the political stage.

I shall therefore follow my original plan to talk about the theme song of total onslaught and total strategy, and about what I consider to be the great delusion - or is it illusion?

Dictionary definitions do not disclose all that much difference between the two words. Both imply deception and the creation of false impressions, and neither specifically differentiates between self-deception and the deception of others. My thesis is that the Government is deluding itself and others by creating illusions for itself and others?

It is easier to create illusions for willing subjects such as those who wish to retain the status quo or to change as little as possible. It is therefore not at all surprising that the Government has been so successful at deluding itself, its followers and its hangers-on. Its opponents cannot be so easily deluded for the vast majority of them have been on the receiving end of discrimination for far too long not to be able to recognise it, whatever guise it might assume.

By and large, and at the risk of being accused of generalising or of being simplistic, I would say that ^{white objectives are to change as little as is} consonant with the maintenance of white power and eupremacy, while at the same time hopefully convincing blacks that the changes are material and meaningful.

Black objectives are the achievement of black power or, possibly, shared power, by peaceful or reasonably peaceful or violent means. There is some white overlap into black objectives, but no black overlap into white, except for those relatively few blacks who co-operate with the establishment for whatever reason.

The enormous danger in present Government policy seems to be that the very success of the delusion blinds those in power to the realities of the situation, making them blissfully unaware of the anger their actions are arousing. Because they have apparently persuaded themselves that what they are offering in the way of change is adequate, reasonable and desirable, they are unable to perceive that other and larger sections of the community are not reacting in the same way and are totally dissatisfied by what is on offer.

In the meanwhile the black community seethes with frustration and anger at what it views as the great white illusion that whites will remain in power forevermore. and that they are therefore able to choose how they will act, what they will do, what concessions they will make, what concessions they consider non-negotiable.

The vast majority of white people appear to be totally unaware of the effects of Government statements and actions on black people. The ever recurring white euphoria is witness to this - whether it be the opening of each new session of Parliament which invariably has liberal expectations unfulfilled by the end of it; whether it be the positive reactions of much of the white electorate, and even of the English press, to Ministerial statements which cannot sustain the glare of detailed examination; whether it be the economic optimism. I believe that the whites in this country are living in a fools' paradise, having been willingly taken in by the great illusion, and that they should speedily remove their blinkers if they do not want a rude and probably painful awakening.

These are the bones of my thesis. Let me try to flesh them a little.

The Government's latest illusion-creating word games concern "Total

Onslaught" and "Total Strategy". These are in constant use to justify what the

Government is doing and why it is doing it, but what do they mean?

When the Government refers to "total onslaught" is it talking about the

so-called communist menace, another of its oft-used phrases which has lost a good

deal of its credibility, because of the wide interpretation given to the word,

"Communism". To which particular communist menace is it referring - that outside the

country in the shape of potential invaders - Cubans, Russians, Chinese, Blacks - or

that inside the country, if anything remains of it after years of administering the

Internal Security Act? Or is it the Russian spy, conveniently produced by

Government sleight of hand to announce this election?

Is the Government referring to total onslaught from the Press, or the

Opposition? What form is the onslaught taking? Is it dissidence inside the

country, or outside, or both or neither?

Is it the threat of sanctions as a result of the inability to reach a

solution to the Namibian issue, a threat which it professes is something it can

contain if it has to? If it is then the Government holds the solution in its own

hands. It has only to settle the Namibian issue, which it must surely wish to do

and which it surely has to do at some time or another.

Is it the antagonism of almost the entire world to its policy of

discrimination? If so it has only to institute change which the rest of the world

is able to recognise as a genuine intention to do away with racial discrimination and

the threat will disappear. Here again the solution is in its own hands.

"Total Onslaught" is a useful, all-embracing term. It becomes a simple matter to equate what should be justifiable dissent within a democratic framework with lack of patriotism enabling the authorities to accuse all political opponents of being ^{traitors} to their country and part of the total onslaught upon it. This is a very convenient and emotive weapon for stifling all dissent while contriving to appear righteous.

The government appears to be totally incapable of recognising that the total onslaught, if indeed there is one, is a direct result of its own policies, and that it has only to change them to disarm that onslaught. It is towards this end that its "total strategy" should be directed.

Instead "Total Strategy" is that which in the opinion of the Government, // will contain "Total Onslaught" and covers the entire gamut of Government action, inside and outside the country.

The Government's ultimate objectives remain shrouded in considerable ambiguity. Deeds frequently contradict statements. The words are the illusion, the deeds are the facts. But confusion is created in the minds of the people, many of whom then opt for taking the words at their face value, ignoring the deeds, and castigating those who point out the inconsistencies. Thus is the great illusion nurtured.

Take, for instance, the Prime Minister's twelve points which he presented as his blueprint for the future and on which he is purportedly fighting this election.

When initially propagated these points were received with euphoria in many quarters as an indication of the liberalising of National Party policy under a new Prime Minister and a new deal for all the people of our country. A more careful assessment led some observers to the conclusion that these points merely cloaked the old National Party policy of separation and the retention of power in different words. Each successive Prime Minister has found it necessary to make some adjustments and alter some labels, but the mixture remains very much as it was before, and undoubtedly tastes as bitter to those who are forced to swallow it.

Let us look at Mr. Botha's deeds within the context of his 12 points. This should give us a good idea of what he meant by his words.

Multi-nationalism, vertical differentiation and self-determination, points 1 and 2 are, to my mind, merely euphemisms for homelands, *nee* bantustans. The Government may well be planning to allocate more powers to homeland governments, though its motivation for doing so is questionable. The end result could be to separate from the mainstream of South Africa even those homelands which are resisting independence and the fracturing of our country.

1980 has shown no deviation from long-established policy. On 1st September, 1980, Dr. Koornhof told a National Party Congress that during the 1978/79 financial year the Government/---Page Four/

financial year the Government spent R1,108, 700,000 trying to make separate development work, and that the report by Benso, exposing the economic failure of the homelands, would not deter the Government from pressing ahead with its homeland development programme. (R.D.M 2/9/80).

The Van Der Walt Commission is presently sitting to investigate the consolidation of the "Homelands".

In 1979 4,818 blacks were removed to the black states from Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and East London (Hansard 3/80) R29,406.590 was spent on buying land in terms of the Development Trust and Land Act in 1979 (Hansard 8/80) The Trust also bought property in the Transkei for R24,994,859 (Hansard, 12/80).

The costs of the Homelands policy continue to escalate. These are not incurred to feed the starving women and children and old men in the homelands, or to provide jobs for those endorsed out of urban areas, removed under the Government's removal scheme or prevented from seeking work. Only R133,745 of all those millions was spent by the Development Corporation in creating 11,206 jobs for blacks in 1978/79 in the so-called black states. (Hansard 12/90).

The costs are incurred in order to create so-called national states which are non-viable, geographically scattered, over-populated and under-nourished, but which conform to the Government's unchanged policy of separation and the creation of labour reserves for the white economy.

The blacks concerned were given no voice whatsoever in their formation. They have had them thrust upon them. Presumably they are expected to be satisfied with these scattered, fragmented little parcels of land.

As for the so-called Independent Black States, the Government feels justified in affirming that blacks were consulted by way of free and fair elections or referenda. However a study done by Professor Lawrence Schlemmer at the behest of the Quail Commission into the desirability of independence for the Ciskei, found that 90 percent of all Xhosa-speaking blacks want a one-man-one-vote unitary system with black and white people voting together for one parliament. 70 percent would accept as second-best, but as worthwhile, a federal system of government. (R.D.M 13/2/80).

Thus when the Government pats itself on the back at the results of the referendum over independence for the Ciskei it should remind itself that the people, or most of them, were voting only for their second option, the first having been categorically denied them and, this being the case, might well have opted for so-called independence as being the best of a bad job once involuntary separation had been imposed upon them.

These are some of the facts. How, then, has Mr. Botha been able to create the myth of a more liberal, more progressive, more humane policy?

Point three, which calls for/---Page Five'

Point three, which calls for the creation by black nations of constitutional structures to give them the greatest possible degree of self-government, has a reverse side to its coin, which is that it provides the Government with a self-created loophole to justify the denial of all political rights to blacks, both in the so-called white areas and in the totality of South Africa. In addition the degree of self-government has to be extremely limited for as long as the South African Government controls the purse-strings, which it will inevitably do for the foreseeable future.

The Homelands are totally incapable of financing themselves - they have insufficient land, natural resources, infra-structures, job opportunities, trained personnel - and calling them the Black National States does not make them so. The Black National States, in their present form, are a figment of the Government's imagination, as is the 'independence' of the so-called Independent States.

The division of power among white South Africans, Coloureds and Indians - point four - has been given effect, according to the Government, through the formation of the President's Council, which also includes representatives of the Chinese people. Members of this Council have been appointed by the Government, the National Party is in the majority, and the powers of the Council are purely advisory.

The concept was roundly slated by the Coloured and Indian communities when it was first mooted, and the Official Opposition, the Progressive Federal Party, refused to have anything to do with it. It is probably fair comment to say that those members of their communities who are serving on the Council cannot be considered to be representative of them.

An appointed advisory council may not talk authoritatively on behalf of the people it purports to represent, and is in an invidious position vis-a-vis those who have appointed it, who are the very people it is supposed to advise. Its ability to shoulder joint responsibility is extremely limited. In the no-Confidence debate on 26th January, Mr. Botha replied "No" to Dr. Slabbert's question whether he would accept a President's Council recommendation that blacks be included on the same basis as other groups (RDM 27/1/81). Its estimated cost for the 1981-82 financial year is R4,284,500 (Hansard 2/81) P. 30.

Point five, the acceptance of the principle that each group should have its own schools and communities, shows no deviation from long accepted Government policy. Neither do the repercussions to this policy. A dispassionate observer would be hard-pressed to find any significant difference between the scenario of 1976, when black children demonstrated over their educational grievances, and that of 1980 when so-called coloured children demonstrated over theirs.

Grievances have not been satisfactorily redressed. The figures speak for themselves, with an annual per capita expenditure of R640 on each white child, R297 on each Asian child, R197 on each so-called coloured child and R68 on each black child. (Hansard 2/80, 3/80, 4/80). And white education is precarious enough.

The same inequalities.../-

The same inequalities still exist in facilities provided for the different racial groups.

The Government has finally introduced compulsory education for blacks in certain limited areas, but this is being resisted by black spokesmen, despite the fact that blacks have campaigned for it in the past, because it is being introduced under a system that still differentiates between the racial groups and still provides for a separate educational policy, both of which are anathema to blacks. In addition this move is seen by many of them as being a Government ruse to make black parents carry the responsibility for breaking the schools boycott, thus aggravating the generation gap and sowing dissention in the black community.

The Government is apparently determined to stay with its policy of separation in education, despite the discontent it has caused. The only inference to be drawn is that a unitary system of education does not conform with its 'total strategy'. It remains convinced that it, and it only, knows what is best for everyone.

Point six stresses the willingness to work together as equals and consult on issues of common concern while maintaining a healthy balance between the rights of the individual and those of the community and the removal of unnecessary hurtful forms of discrimination. This is a very strange commitment indeed.

The use of terms such as "unnecessary" and "hurtful" forms of discrimination implies that some discrimination is both necessary and un hurtful. I defy anyone who has ever been discriminated against in any way whatsoever to find such action un hurtful. All discrimination is hurtful. And if some discrimination is necessary, according to Government thinking, and if this necessary discrimination is always to be directed against the black people, as must be tacitly understood though it is not explicitly stated, then how will it ever be possible to "work together as equals"?

This is a typical example of the web of words the Government weaves in order to create the illusion that it is seriously contemplating change, and that it is liberalising its attitudes towards the black people of our country.

The recognition of economic interdependence and the properly planned utilisation of manpower are the objectives of point seven. I have always been under the impression that economic interdependence is self-evident - the white economy could never have reached its present state of sophistication and wealth without the black labour force - so the recognition is somewhat belated.

Certainly there should be planned utilisation of manpower if this means optimum use of manpower's talent potential to the mutual satisfaction of entrepreneurs and workers.

But in the context of Mr. Botha's twelve points what does it mean? Admittedly the Wiehahn Commission has recommended, inter alia, vocational training and the absorption/---Page Seven/

and the absorption of the black work force into the negotiating machinery for wages, conditions of service and so on. And the Rieckert Commission has recommended the protection of the established urban black work force with more, though still limited geographical mobility and more security of tenure, family life and so on.

In practice the conversion of these recommendations into reality has removed even some of the gilt envisaged, while imposing the proposed countervailing restrictions with full severity. Black Trade Unions are having to fight every inch of the way for non-racial unions, for registration which will not limit their activities, and for recognition from employers and already existing Unions. Vocational Training and Education are to remain separate and probably therefore unequal.

Worker's dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions is indicated by the Department of Manpower Utilization's disclosure in Parliament on 26th January, of this year that more than 130,000 man-hours were lost in 100 labour disputes involving 15,771 black workers during 1979. The number of man-hours lost rocketed to 62,5 percent, and there was an increase of 11,3 percent in the number of black workers involved. In 1971 there were 51 strikes involving 10,515 black workers and causing a loss of 110,511 man-hours. (RDM 27/1/81)

The Pass Laws are an essential weapon in the control of manpower. On 31st October, 1980, Dr. Koornhof, Minister of Co-Operation and Development, launched his three Bills at a Press Conference, stating, "It is a genuine attempt to remove hurtful discrimination as far as it is possible in present times..... a genuine attempt to reform". (Natal Witness, 1/10/80).

Following an avalanche of protest from those who saw the Bills as inflicting even more arduous restrictions than before he has withdrawn them for re-drafting.

Of these Bills Mr. Stove Kgame, president of the Urban Councillors Association, which is accused in some black quarters of being a Government stooge, said "Our critics have the right to say : 'We told you so'.....The Government hit us below the belt because it did not take us into its confidence before the Bills were formulated." (Star 12/1/81)

In introducing the Bills did Dr. Koornhof fail to understand their implications ; or was he genuinely able to delude himself into believing that he was delivering the goods that the oppressed people of our country had been anxiously awaiting as a result of his promises of reform ; or was he simply creating illusions for the general public? We shall never know the answers, but this game of delusions and illusions is a dangerous one to play. The stakes are high - peace and justice in our country - and the frustrations of inevitable disillusionment will become increasingly difficult to contain.

The peaceful constellation of states of Southern Africa with respect for one another's cultural heritage, traditions and ideals is point number eight. It was interesting to note in the speech of the State President at the opening of Parliament in January that he referred constantly to Southern Africa rather than South Africa.

It would seem that states such as Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda, and soon Ciskei, having been amputated from the body politic of the Republic of South Africa, have now become separate states in Southern Africa which are then incorporated into the constellation of states. Admittedly the intention of the Prime Minister has been to include in this constellation the Front Line States but at present this remains a pipe-dream, so that the constellation of States as of now consists of states which used to be an integral part of South Africa until they were excised by Government policy. Why, one wonders, is it so impossible to respect the cultural heritage, traditions and ideals of people while they are citizens of the same country, enriching it by their diversity? Why must they first be hived off into their 'states' so that they can be drawn back into a constellation of states within which they can then be respected?

It all seems to be such a complicated way of achieving economic interdependence, consultation over matters of common concern, respect for each others' cultures and ideas, co-operation to the mutual benefit of all concerned. All these people who are presently being drawn into the constellation are in fact bona fide citizens of the Republic of South Africa, who lost their citizenship when their states became independent, only to be subsequently encouraged to become inter-dependent.

The need for South Africa to defend itself against outside intervention and to follow a policy of neutrality in the confrontation between the super-powers (points nine and ten) may never have arisen at all had National Party policy not been such as to arouse the anger of neighbouring states and lose it the friendship support of the Western world. On the international scene it is persona non grata with almost the entire world.

Point eleven, the maintenance of effective decision-making by the State, founded on a strong defence force and police force to ensure orderly government as well as a sound and efficient administration says nothing new. This is a totally no-change strategy. The Government has always demonstrated its determination to retain all decision-making power in its own hands, and its major concession, the President's Council, does nothing to undermine this.

Disproportionate amounts of the country's resources have been spent in maintaining a strong defence force. It is to cost R2,050 million this year. (RDM 18/2/81). While the police force remains underpaid and under-strength, it is yet a force to be reckoned with particularly by our black brethren, who are subjected to raids and road blocks - manned by the army as well as the police.

The police have an unenviable task administering harsh and discriminatory laws.

It is interesting to note that this point, number eleven, makes no reference to justice or the Rule of Law or the restoration of habeas corpus but only to 'orderly government' and 'sound administration'. These can and do thrive in the most unjust of societies.

The Government's track record in this regard speaks for itself and shows no significant change in direction. At least 956 people were detained by security police and 14 people were issued with banning orders in South African and the independent homelands last year. Those detained included 341 pupils, 117 college and university students, 32 lecturers, school principals and teachers, 67 political leaders, 39 community workers, 10 journalists and 21 trade unionists. (I.R.R.D.M. 12/1/81).

35,912 people were tried, 29,861 of these were convicted of offences relating to influx control and identity documents and 143 cases were heard per day in the Commissioner's Court, Market Street, Johannesburg, in 1979. (Hansard 15/80) In the same year there were 203,000 pass law prosecutions.

150 persons are presently detained in terms of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, Sections 10 and 12B of the Internal Security Act and Section 22 of the General Law Amendment Act (Hansard 1/81)

All this may conceivably be in the interests of 'orderly government' and may even, at a very broad stretch of the imagination, be the result of 'sound administration', but it is certainly not in the interests of GOOD government or justice.

The final point, twelve, supports the maintenance of free enterprise as the basis of our economic policy. The Government has not yet been able to find a satisfactory answer to the question of how it can equate adherence to the free enterprise system with the total control it exercises over the mobility and use of labour. There can be no free enterprise economy for as long as the rural areas remain reservoirs of cheap labour from which no black may escape unless his labour is requisitioned. Free enterprise is not about control. It is about freedom - freedom to develop full potential, freedom to operate in business, in industry, in the professions, freedom to sell labour on the best market.

Simply saying that the Government is dedicated to the free enterprise system does not make it a participant in it. Here is just one more, glaring example of the discrepancy between words and deeds.

These, then, are the twelve points which gained for Mr. Botha the reputation of being an enlightened reformist - reality or illusion?

It might be a salutary exercise to examine some of the further actions and legislation of Mr. Botha's Government during 1980, which do not fall directly within the ambit of his 12 points but which must surely be part of his 'total strategy'.

Constitutionally, in addition/ P.Ten./---

Constitutionally, in addition to creating the President's Council, the Government abolished the Senate - thus removing a check on the House of Assembly without replacing it. The President's Council is not an alternative. As the Government has an unassailable majority in the Assembly it has given itself a total mandate to govern as it sees fit.

It has also introduced appointed members of Parliament - something totally alien to the whole concept of a Parliamentary democracy and the principle of elected responsible representation, and their term of office is now to be extended beyond the dissolution of Parliament (Star 19/2/81). Democratic government has received a blow which could eventually prove to be fatal. Once the principal of nominated membership has been accepted the day could easily dawn when there will be no more elections.

The Press has been increasingly controlled. Post and Sunday Post have been silenced. Black journalists have been banned. Black people have been still further denied a medium for the expression of their views and blacks and whites have been denied access to these views. Thus is dissent muzzled.

This has actually been done while the Government-appointed Steyn Commission into the Mass Media has been hearing evidence.

Mrs. Ntimkulu, the wife of banned journalist, Phil Mtimkulu, said, "My husband does not know, and may never know why he is being punished". (Sowetan 2/2/81), and Bishop Tutu said of the bannings that "it was clear the Government regarded black people as the enemy when it spoke of the total onslaught". (Sowetan 2/2/81)

In discussing the banning of Post and Sunday Post its acting editor, Mr. Joe Latakomo, said, "We at Post tried to reflect black society as we saw it. We believed in fighting for a just society for all and supported in our columns those black organisations which reasonably reflected the views of the majority..... The Government's so-called changes were not changes at all.In no way can we be party to the Prime Minister's total strategy. The Government seems to forget that we keep it informed as much as we do our black readers". (Star 23/1/81).

The Police Amendment Act and the Key Installations Amendment Act further restricted the right of the Press to publish the imposition of restrictions and the names of people on whom they are imposed, and information about police methods, together with any information about key installations.

A Labour Bill was introduced designed to control strike action and to allow for treaties with the Homeland governments to enable the repatriation of migrant workers.

The second Wiehahn Commission Report was tabled recommending inter alia that there should be no mixed apprenticeship training.

The Hoexter Commission sat to investigate the administration of justice and the possible introduction of Intermediate Courts. In his memorandum to the Commission Judge Didcott exposed the diminishment of the Supreme Court's functions and status over the years and was critical of appointments to the bench over the last three decades.

Prisons are an integral part of the administration of justice. Of those the Chief Deputy Commissioner of Prisons, Lieutenant-General M.C.P.Brink, in his submission to the Commission said that prisons were built to hold more than 70,000, but had a daily population of 102,000.... About a quarter of the prisoners awaiting trials returned to jail after the trials.....He could not account for the remainder.....Last year 14 to 18 percent of the daily prison population were prisoners awaiting trial. (Star 4/2/81).

Forced removals have continued. They may not have been of the front-end-loader type. The pressure exerted on people has been somewhat more subtle. But people continue to be uprooted and removed and dumped in overcrowded homelands, where poverty has escalated to an alarming degree. People are starving. Children are dying. And loopholes for illegal work in urban areas are rapidly closing.

In the Ciskei alone studies showed that about 50 percent of 2 - and 3 - year old children were malnourished, and more than 10 percent were found to be suffering from diseases such as kwashiorkor and merasmus. (Star 8/12/80)

The Group Areas Act continues to be administered with harshness. More than 500 cases under the Group Areas Act were expected to come up in one week in February in Johannesburg. So-called "non-whites" were being charged with occupying homes in so-called white areas (RDM 18/2/81). 3300 Coloured families still await removal in the Cape Peninsula (RDM 20/2/81).

There was a shortage of 41,300 houses for Coloured people and 15,300 for Asians at 31st December, 1979 (Hansard 8/80).

This year legislation was introduced proposing the issuing of a uniform identity document for all population groups, and for taking fingerprints of all new applicants. There is provision for identity documents to be produced immediately. In introducing the Bill Mr. Heunis said that the "total onslaught" made this Bill necessary. (Star 14/1/81) It would seem that the Government's idea of doing away with discrimination is to submit the entire population to the indignities previously suffered only by blacks - of extending restrictions rather than removing them.

One of the purposes of the Bill as set out in the preamble is "to set up a network controlling the identity of the holders of identity documents and registered residential and postal addresses"

There should be no surprise at this development. It is totally keeping with the Government's total strategy of concentrating more and more power and control in fewer and fewer hands. The administrative changes introduced by the Prime Minister - the Security Council, the Cabinet Committee system, the high-powered secretariat the appointed Members of Parliament, the inclusion of high level army personnel in the machinery of government - all these moves are specifically designed to entrench Mr. Botha and his henchmen in power.

This having been achieved the next move is to make control easier to exercise - through censorship, sanctions, silence, military and police strength and efficiency. Everywhere there has been an actual or intended tightening up process, in justice, in the Press, in Trade Unions, in Education, in the Constitution, in population control - all concealed behind a curtain of liberal-sounding rhetoric and all part of the total strategy.

When the chips are down there does not appear to be all that much difference between Mr. Botha's so-called reformist policies and those of the Nationalist diehards. Speaking in the No Confidence debate this year Mr. Botha made it clear he would not put his reform policy ahead of Nationalist unity. He said, "There are no differences of principle in this party" (RDM. 28/1/81).

This is born out by black perspectives. Writing in the Race Relations News in December, 1980, Mr. Aggrey Klaaste, who was an assistant editor of Post, said "If whites wish to delude themselves that these principles (of opposition to government, the Rule of Law and a free press) are still part of the political reality, we blacks have seen through the artifice. We are especially apprehensive because intelligent people have been fooled into believing these things are still part of our heritage, where the truth is that the country is steeped in deceit and self-deceit". (R.R. News. December 1980)

In discussing the concept of a constellation of States Chief Mangope, President of Bophuthatswana said there was a real danger of South Africa acquiring a "sinister big brother image.....For any form of constellation to succeed the onus is on South Africa to prove that the structure is not a cloak under which is hidden a bid for South African dominance and hegemony". (RDM 9/12/80).

The attitude that Government policies has nurtured in black people, with or without the so-called reforms of Mr. Botha, is typified in a letter to the Press by Mr. Shadrack Lekotoko, who says "The hell with society, if it does not want me, I do not want it". Coupled with this goes a sense of helplessness, of "inability to influence the course of one's own life or of the world". (RDM 26/1/81)

The editorial in the first issue of the daily Sowetan said, "This Government has been a government of contradictions. While, on the one hand, the rest of the world was told that we are moving away from discrimination, the opposite was true back at home.....The Government consciously made every "new deal" so ambiguous that anybody could read into them whatever they wished". (Sowetan 2/2/81)

At the opposite end of the pole the Government has apparently deluded the Kappiekommando into believing that it is introducing such drastic changes as to be "going against every ideal and moral the true Afrikaner represents". They have received the "call of God to save South Africa against a government that was ready to give in to the blacks". (RDM 12/1/81).

The result of Government ambiguity is a confused electorate and an angry voteless majority, with an immense and growing chasm between black and white thinking. The Government has reneged on its promises to do away with discrimination thus fuelling the fires of black frustration, yet at the same time it has woven such a web of words as to convince large sections of the white community that it is intent on change.

It seems to me that total strategy means that within the non-negotiable confines of white privilege and power, the Government is prepared to concede only what it considers to be the minimum sufficient to satisfy its own view of black demands and aspirations - political, social and economic. Anything that is believed to threaten its total strategy is interpreted as part of the total onslaught, internal as well as external, and is to be suppressed and subjected to total control.

The Prime Minister seemed to recognise that something more than this was required when he spoke of "Adapt or die", but he has apparently lost sight of it in his determination not to rock the National Party boat, or perhaps he never really believed it.

In the event our country is presently embroiled in a general election which appears to have been called to mend the rifts within the National Party, with total disregard for the urgent problems facing us or the silent majority in the sidelines, who listen, who read, who recognise their consignment to apparent irrelevancy in white eyes, and who must wonder at the ability of whites to delude themselves and each other about the real relevancy of their own election and the political games they play.

Maybe members of the Government really believe in their constellation of states, in black national states, in a total onslaught, in their total strategy as a new deal, and maybe they have been able to convince the white electorate. If so they have done our country no favour. They have never come to grips with the actual problems. These have seemed to elude their grasp.

What ought to be concerning the country right now is the urgent necessity to find ways and means of enabling all the people of our country to get together to devise a constitutional plan which would be acceptable to all the various groups which comprise our society.

To achieve this it would have/---

To achieve this it would have to be devised by all the people enjoying equal bargaining power, a situation which should be implicit in such negotiations, though the actual process of bargaining would inevitably create its own power.

It will make little difference to the future of our country if the Nationalists are returned to power with a larger or a smaller majority. Either way they will continue to rule as they see fit. It is therefore over to the white opposition, and the far larger black opposition, to indicate to the Government its determination to participate, sooner or later, in a negotiating process, that the sooner this happens, the better, and that the longer it takes the more likelihood there is of escalating violence.

The Black Sash has always endorsed such a solution to the problems of our country. We shall continue to do so, to work towards it, to try to reinforce the tottering bridges between the various groups in our country, and hopefully to help to build a bridge into the future.

JOYCE HARRIS
NATIONAL PRESIDENT
THE BLACK SASH

MARCH 1981.