

TRANSKEI RE-VISITED

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THE Transkeian Territories cover an area of more than 4,000,000 morgen of land, exclusive of trading sites and towns, with an African population of over 3,000,000. In comparison with the other so-called Native Reserves, this area is by far the largest single Reserve in the Union and also the greatest single reservoir of cheap labour in the country. According to official estimates **more than one-third of the total number of Africans employed on the Witwatersrand gold mines come from the Transkei.**

It is thus clear that this area is the greatest single support of the most vicious system of exploitation—the gold mines. The continued growth and development of gold-mining in South Africa brought about by the discovery of gold in the Orange Free State calls for more and more of this labour at a time when the Union loses about 10,000 workers a year to the Central African Federation.

This labour problem compels South African mining circles to focus their attention more and more on the Reserves in a desperate effort to coerce every adult male African to seek employment on the mines. Recruiting agents are no longer content with discussing matters with chiefs and headmen only, as they have done in days gone by. Kraals, drinking parties and initiation ceremonies are given particular attention and kraal-heads and tribesmen told that fame and fortune await them if they sign up their mine contracts. Bioscopes portraying a rosy picture of conditions on the mines are shown free of charge in the villages and rural locations.

But just in case these somewhat peaceful methods of persuasion fail to induce enough recruits, the authorities have in reserve more draconian forms of coercion. The implementation of the so-called Rehabilitation Scheme, the enforcement of taxes and the foisting of tribal rule upon the people are resorted to in order to ensure a regular inflow of labour.

TO CREATE MIGRANT LABOUR

The Rehabilitation Scheme, which is the trump card of both the mining and the farming industries in this sordid game of coercion, was first outlined by Dr. D. L. Smit, then Secretary for Native Affairs, at a Special Session of the General Council of the Ciskei held at Kingwilliamstown on the 8th January, 1945. According to the Secretary's statement the Scheme had two important features, namely, the limitation of stock to the carrying capacity of the land and the replanning of the Reserves to enable the inhabitants to make the best possible use of the land.

The main object of replanning, the statement continued, would be to demarcate residential, arable and grazing areas in order that each portion of land should be used for the purpose to which it is best suited.

Rural villages would be established to provide suitable homes for the families of Africans regularly employed in industrial and other services and, therefore, unable to make efficient use of a normal allotment of land.

In point of fact, the real purpose of the Scheme is to increase land hunger for the masses of the peasants in the Reserves and to impoverish them. The main object is to create a huge army of migrant labourers, domiciled in rural locations in the Reserves far away from the cities. Through the implementation of the Scheme it is hoped that in course of time the inhabitants of the Reserves will be uprooted and completely severed from their land, cattle and sheep, to depend for their livelihood entirely on wage earnings.

By enclosing them in compounds at the centres of work and housing them in rural locations when they return home, it is hoped to prevent the emergence of a closely-knit, powerful, militant and articulate African industrial proletariat who might acquire the rudiments of political agitation and struggle. What is wanted by the ruling circles is a docile, spineless, unorganised and inarticulate army of workers.

Another method used to coerce African labour is the poll tax, also known as the general tax. When Cecil Rhodes introduced it in the old Cape Colony he openly and expressly declared that its main object would be to ensure cheap labour for industry, an object which has not changed since. In 1939, Parliament decided to make all African tax defaulters work for it and the then Minister of Finance expressed the view that farmers would benefit through this arrangement. The extent of this benefit is clearly revealed by reference to Statistics. According to the 1949 official Year Book for the Union, 21,381 Africans were arrested that year for general tax. Earlier John Burger had stated in "The Black Man's Burden" that something like 60,000 arrests were made each year for non-payment of this tax. **Since the Nationalist Party came to power these arrests have been intensified. In the Reserves, chiefs, headmen, mounted police and court messengers comb the countryside daily for tax defaulters and, fearing arrest, thousands of Africans are forced to trek to the mines and surrounding farms in search of work. Around the gaols in several parts of the country queues of farmers are to be observed waiting for convicts.**

REVERSION TO TRIBALISM

Much has been written already on the aims and objects of the Bantu Authorities Act and on the implications of its acceptance by the Transkeian Bunga. Here we need only reiterate that reversion to tribal rule might isolate the democratic leadership from the masses and bring about the destruction of that leadership as well as of the liberation organisations. It will also act as a delaying tactic. In course of time the wrath of the people will be directed, it is hoped, not at the oppressor but at the Bantu Authorities who will be burdened with the dirty work of manipulating the detestable Rehabilitation Scheme, the collection of taxes and the other measures which are designed to keep down the people.

It is clear, therefore, that the ruling circles attach the greatest importance to the Transkeian Territories. It is equally clear that the acceptance of tribal rule by the Bunga will henceforth be used by the Government to entice other tribal groups to accept the Act. As a matter of fact this is precisely what the chiefs were told by Government spokesmen at the Zululand and Rustenburg Indabas. **Yet by a strange paradox the Transkei is the least politically organised area in the Union.** The Transkeian Organised Bodies Association, once a powerful organisation, is for all practical purposes virtually defunct. The Cape African Teachers' Association is dominated by a group of intellectual snobs who derive their inspiration from the All-African Convention. They are completely isolated and have no influence whatsoever with the masses of the people.

Recently when the African National Congress declared for a boycott of Bantu Education and advocated the withdrawal of children from such schools, the A.A.C. fought against the withdrawal and placed itself in the ridiculous position of opposing a boycott it had pretended to preach all along. This somersault completely exposed their opportunism and bankruptcy and the volume of criticism now being directed against them has temporarily silenced even the verbal theatricals for which they are famous.

Nevertheless, it is perfectly clear that the people of the Transkei are indignant. Isolated and sporadic insurrections have occurred in certain areas directed mainly against the Rehabilitation Scheme. Chiefs and headmen have been beaten up by their tribesmen and court actions are being fought. The Chief Magistrate of the Transkei, Mr. J. J. Yates, in addressing the Bunga at Umtata on the 22nd April, 1952, referred to organised opposition to the Scheme. On page 32 of the Report of the Bunga for that year he said:

“Unfortunately, our rehabilitation work has not been free from difficulties, and I regret to say that organised opposition is being fostered by agitators in some of the districts. I wish to repeat what I said at an earlier session that the Administration is determined to carry out the Government's policy of rehabilitating the Reserves and will take whatever steps are necessary against agitators who attempt to lead their misguided followers into conflict with authority. We look to you as the real leaders to warn your people against those who seek to foster a spirit of non-co-operation.”

But in the absence of an organised peasant movement co-ordinating these isolated and sporadic outbursts the impact of this opposition will not be sharply felt by the authorities.

Once more, the problem of organisation in the countryside poses itself as one of major importance for the liberatory movement. Through the co-ordination of spontaneous and local demonstrations, and their raising to a political level, the beginnings will be found of opposition to the policy of oppressing and keeping backward the people of the Transkei. Then we can look forward to the day when the Transkei will be not a reserve of cheap labour, but a source of strength to build a free South Africa.