

# Dr. HENDRIK VERWOERD A LIBERAL ASSESSMENT

By ALAN PATON

DR. VERWOERD detested Liberals and Liberalism, and said so publicly. Liberals detested the policy of apartheid, and said so publicly also. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister's death and the manner of it shocked us.

The killing of a public man and the suffering (for the second time) of his wife and family are not things that give pleasure to us, although there are people who suppose that they do.

In any event, what change could such an act bring about? Powerful and influential as Dr. Verwoerd was, neither his life nor his death could change the nature of the forces that moulded even him. He could guide them, he could manipulate them, but in a fundamental sense he was their creature.

I can remember well the first attempt at assassination, and the public reaction to it. To many people the news was exciting, to some even pleasing. To this last event the reaction was grave and solemn; neither political friends nor political foes regarded it as anything but useless and terrible, except, perhaps those of the latter who had come to hate him.

## Many reasons

Why is there this difference? One can think of many reasons. When Dr. Verwoerd died he commanded the support of a larger number of White South Africans than he had five years earlier. Not only had he changed, but the world had changed. And in particular, Africa had changed, so that many who had thought him dangerous now looked upon him as a bulwark against danger. The swing to the Right and the swing to Dr. Verwoerd were pretty much the same thing.

There is another reason why the reaction is different, and that is, I believe, a growing revulsion against the use of violence in our politics. I know that in some cases this revulsion is strongly motivated by a desire to preserve the status quo, which means to preserve White power and privilege.

## Exacerbates

But in other cases the revulsion is caused by the realisation that violence in our South African context only exacerbates the conflict.

It is generally conceded that the use of violence in Palestine led to the establishment of the state of Israel, but our situation cannot be compared with this. The position of the White people in South Africa and that of the British in Palestine are quite different. The White people of South Africa are to all intents and purposes indigenous; the British in Palestine were alien.

Of course there are some South Africans who feel so deeply and disturbedly about the injustice of the status quo that they declare that violence is the only solution left, and they declare that a person like myself secretly wishes to preserve his own state of privilege, or is simply a coward. I can well understand these views, but I have no intellectual trust in them. If a situation seems unchangeable, there is no reason to believe that violence will change it. One draws back from the prospect of an unending history of murders and assassinations.

## Third reason

There is I think, a third reason why the violent death of Dr. Verwoerd produced such a grave reaction. I ascribe this to the changes that took place in Dr. Verwoerd himself, particularly after he became Prime Minister. I would have no hesitation in describing the Dr. Verwoerd of the 'thirties and 'forties and early 'fifties as a racialist.

As editor of "Die Transvaler" he poured contempt on those organisations that held mixed conferences, he often wrote contemptuously of non-White people and published photographs of Black and White consulting together, with the intention of condemning Black and White and conference and all.

In a peculiar way he changed remarkably; in his later years he showed an impersonal geniality towards Black people which was entirely absent in his early life. But racial consultation remained for him a matter for group leaders, not for persons, and he expressly warned the students of Stellenbosch not to try to do in the field of race relations what was better done by officials. Indeed, the whole machinery of the Group Areas Act is designed to keep racial contact to a minimum.

Nevertheless, in the last few years the public impression deepened of a Prime Minister who, though certainly not to be trifled with, was essentially benign. Innumerable smiling photographs helped to confirm this impression.

## Greatest feat

In my opinion Dr. Verwoerd's greatest achievement was the way in which he took his

predecessor's concept of *baasskap* — that is, White supremacy — and replaced it with the concept of separate development, which is sometimes called, even more grandly, separate freedoms. By so doing he stilled many an uneasy Afrikaner conscience, and won back to his side the troubled Afrikaner intellectuals and churchmen. On the positive side he also gave opportunity to many idealistic Afrikaners to feel that in directing soil conservation in the reserves, in planning the new towns and villages, in directing the higher education of Coloured and Indian and African students, in working in the various departments of Bantu affairs, they were also serving their own country and people.

### **Liberated**

Dr. Verwoerd liberated Afrikaner idealism from the sterile narcissism in which it was captive, and by so doing strengthened Afrikaner progressivism, and weakened Afrikaner reaction. What had happened in himself, he was now able to let happen in others. The quality of leadership which he showed in this direction was considerable. I myself did not venerate Dr. Verwoerd, but I can understand why others did.

Is the concept of separate development really different from the concept of *baasskap*? To the Afrikaner Nationalist, and especially to the Afrikaner idealist, they are certainly different. But to the liberal South African, and to the politically-awakened non-White South African, the element of *baasskap* is an essential element in the concept of separate development.

### **Accusation**

We critics of separate development are often thought churlish in our refusal to concede its ethical purity. We are often accused of doctrinaire criticism, but our criticism is based on harsh and unpleasant facts.

That there is an element of cruelty in *baasskap* apartheid and separate development, seems to us incontrovertible. I often used to wonder whether Dr. Verwoerd knew that, under the Group Areas Act, one could expropriate a man's house, one could make him pay rent and rates for it while withholding the purchase money from him, and that one could, while making him pay rent and rates, deny him the interest on the purchase price?

### **Wish granted**

I used to wonder whether Dr. Verwoerd had ever heard of a man like Mr. Abraham Ngwenya who, in 1911, at the persuasion of the

Town Board of Charlestown, bought a piece of land and a house in that village. He set up business as a blacksmith; most of his customers were the White farmers of the district. But 42 years later it was decided to move all African families to Buffalo Flats, 40 miles away, with no compensation for loss of livelihood. "I am 80 years old", said Mr. Ngwenya. "This move to Buffalo Flats has knocked me down, and I feel almost too old to get up again. I would rather die soon and escape this bitter ending to a hard but happy life." His wish was granted.

### **Intrinsic**

I believe that injustices are intrinsic in any programme of separate development, for the simple reason that separate development is something done by someone with power to someone without power.

I believe that the concept of separate development is there primarily to serve the purposes of Afrikaner nationalism, but that it serves another equally essential purpose, and that is to make it possible for Nationalists, and others, to reconcile their religion with their own self-interest.

### **Hypocrisy?**

Does that mean that separate development is an hypocrisy? It certainly has hypocritical elements. But it is rather a gigantic self-deception, so that if one believes in it one is also able to believe that the Transkei, the rags and tatters of Zululand, the rags and tatters of a dozen other places, are going in some way to duplicate the extraordinary industrial development that has taken place on the Witwatersrand, in Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town, that tremendous cities (not merely conglomerations of cheap houses) are going to rise there and that the African inhabitants of the "White areas" are going to return in increasing numbers to the homelands, until presumably White South Africa is completely White.

### **Not the same**

Did Dr. Verwoerd really believe in that kind of separate development that would lead to separate freedoms, that is, to independence? I am prepared to believe that he did, but I am also sure that he knew that such an independence could never be, for example, the kind of independence that White South Africa enjoys.

The independence of the Transkei was the price which Dr. Verwoerd persuaded White South Africa to pay for the right to deny the Transkeians and all other Africans any prospect of achieving permanent residence or of attain-

ing quite ordinary freedoms of movement, employment, and so on, in the so-called "White areas". The element of cruelty is readily apparent here, but it is less noticed than it used to be, because Dr. Verwoerd put the separate freedoms in the shop window, and kept the cruelties under the counters.

### **Whole purpose**

Indeed, the whole purpose of our information services is to hold the separate freedoms steadily before the eyes of the world and to keep quiet about the ordinary freedoms. Many overseas visitors who come to see me testify to the courteous and untiring attention rendered by information officials and to the warm and friendly relationship that grows up between them, and to the unhappiness and embarrassment that are caused when the visitors ask difficult questions about Black spots, group areas, job reservation, and restrictions on sport and entertainment.

Yet Dr. Verwoerd gave to the whole philosophy of apartheid an extra dimension, which gave its exponents more room for manoeuvre. He found a strong moral motive for a programme which most of the world found immoral, and convinced many by affirming the morality and denying the immorality. He — and the changing world — made it virtually impossible for any politician to return to the baaskap of Mr. Strijdom.

### **Profound effect**

This finding of a strong moral motive, which I contend Dr. Verwoerd did not have in his earlier career, had a profound effect on himself, and accounted for the growing benignity. He himself said he lived at peace because he knew he was right.

Does one judge him for this? I don't like answering this question, because all or most of us deceive ourselves in some way or other, but if one presumes to assess the life and work of a man, one cannot avoid answering it. I would say that he was both the child and the creator of this world of deception. He was the child of a race that wanted both to be just and to be boss.

### **Self-deception**

And I think that if you want to be both these things simultaneously, you must indulge in self-deception. If you make your security the supreme aim of your life, then it becomes your supreme moral value; but because you feel uneasy about doing that you must argue that it is only if you are boss that justice will be done to

all, and that, therefore, being boss is a kind of supreme moral value after all. That is the way General Hertzog reasoned 30 years before Dr. Verwoerd.

There is another important factor to be considered in any assessment of the late Prime Minister. I think history will say that he was ruthless (and by that I mean merciless) towards any South African who opposed vigorously the policy of separate development, and who believed in a common society and tried to propagate such an ideal. I think history will say he was ruthless to a degree not necessary even by his own standards. He permitted the banning of people whose only offence was that they had shown a courage and tenacity equal to his own.

### **One answer**

Why was this so? Why was Liberalism, and why were Liberals, the victims of an oppression that went beyond all reason? There can be only one answer to that question, and that is that the fear of them went beyond all reason also. The danger of subversion and revolution was exaggerated to a tremendous degree, partly because of this fear, partly because of vindictiveness, partly because it helped to have another enemy at hand now that Communism, according to the Minister, had been crippled.

In all this Dr. Verwoerd's role is remarkable. More and more he became the benign figure, more and more Mr. Vorster became the terrifying one, each role being congenial to the player. But it was not Mr. Vorster who shook the foundations of the rule of law, it was his master.

### **Great man?**

Was Dr. Verwoerd a great man? In the eyes of Afrikaner nationalism and White South Africa, he certainly was. Will the outside world ever so regard him? This seems to me to be highly improbable. He may be recognised as a man who, within the confines of his narrow philosophy and narrow loyalty, was of considerable stature, and possessed considerable intellectual and administrative gifts. Whatever he was, he was not small or small-minded, and there can be no doubt that his rise to power and a high place in the esteem of White South Africa enabled him to shed much of the narrowness of his earlier career.

### **Opposite true**

I cannot help reflecting that had Dr. Verwoerd been born into a wider world, where his gifts could have been used for the wider benefit of mankind, he might have achieved more than

this limited greatness. Cassius found in himself, not in his stars, the fault that limited him. But of Hendrik Verwoerd the opposite was true. He could have been great under different stars, but he was born into a society whose definition of greatness is not accepted anywhere else, except in those societies and those minds dedicated to the same ideals of White security, White survival, and, inescapably, White supremacy, by whatever grand name they may be called.

(With acknowledgements to "The Daily News" and its associated newspapers.)

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## Dr. EDWARD ROUX SCHOLARSHIP

THE LATE PROFESSOR EDDIE ROUX was an active member of the Liberal Party for many years. At the same time he served as Chairman of the Rationalist Association of South Africa. He was active in other spheres as well, and was a popular public speaker. His academic achievements in the field of botany are well known and at least one of his books on this subject is a standard university textbook. His political history, banned in South Africa, was entitled "Time Longer than Rope — the struggle of the black man for freedom in South Africa".

Professor Roux was listed as a Communist and as a result had to resign from the Liberal Party in the early '60's. At the end of 1964 he was banned, and prohibited from teaching in or entering a university. This edict of the Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, forced Eddie Roux to relinquish his position as Professor of Botany at the University of the Witwatersrand. He retired to his home in Melville, Johannesburg, where he died a year later.

A scholarship has been set up to honour Dr. Roux's service to his university and his country. Administered by the Students' Representative Council of the University of the Witwatersrand, it is called the "Dr. Edward R. Roux Scholarship in Bio-Ecology". Contributions are requested from Liberal Party members and the general public.

This is a constructive way to remember a man who contributed a great deal to his coun-

try and made many sacrifices for his beliefs. Please make out cheques and postal orders to the "Dr. E. R. Roux Scholarship" and address all contributions to:—

The Dr. Roux Scholarship Committee,  
Students' Representative Council,  
University of the Witwatersrand,  
Milner Park, Johannesburg.

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## THAT BILL AGAIN

(some disrespectful comments by a member)

EXIT THE IMPROPER INTERFERERS . . .  
ENTER THE PROPER INTERFERERS

TIDINESS is one virtue we have learnt to expect in those who, like our rulers, are authoritarian-minded. How they love to cross the "t's" and dot the "i's"! We Liberals, who are improper interferers par excellence, were perhaps less astonished than others at the Prohibition of Improper Interference Bill.

We have come to recognise and expect the psychopathic logic this Bill represents. In its high-sounding moments it postulates a South Africa which does not exist; a South Africa of four distinct population groups merrily developing along their own lines, without let or hindrance to one another. How justified to frustrate those who would upset this chain of order, peace and tidiness!

Under this froth of words, however, we see this Bill for what it really is — not a chain of orderly, peaceful coexistence, but a shackle to contain those who question the political controllers of South Africa.

### Liberals refused

Many observers believed that the Government would deal with its radical opponents less directly. The bannings and propaganda onslaughts on the Liberal Party had set it reeling, and, so these observers reasoned, a knock-out blow was unnecessary: Liberals would limp from the encounter. These observers misjudged the situation because their analysis was too sophisticated.

This interference Bill is aimed as a knock-out partly because the Liberals have refused to leave the field and partly because the Govern-