

The Black Sash Die Swart Serp

WHERE do we go from here?

The chickens which the Government has been hatching for the past 29 years, aided and abetted by a politically apathetic and materially comfortable white public, are coming home to roost. The country is in disarray internally and threatened externally.

The townships are seething with a discontent which sporadically erupts — a situation which is becoming endemic and will remain so until the causes have been eradicated. The longer they are either ignored or responded to with such unsatisfactory half-measures as the Community Councils Bill the more radical will the demands become and the more strident their expression.

The economic restrictions imposed upon black people — in terms of mobility, job availability, training, trading, advancement — combined with restrictions on the siting and labour content of industry imposed on white entrepreneurs through the Industrial Planning Act have all contributed towards the declining economy and the growing unemployment, which further fans the fires of discontent.

Government policy of viewing urban Africans as 'temporary sojourners' has resulted in a colossal housing backlog, gross overcrowding, the mushrooming of squatter camps and an ever-deteriorating quality of life for urban blacks.

The continuing stringent application of the Pass Laws consistently undermines African family life and creates havoc with the structure of black society.

Restrictions on the acquisition of land by the homelands, lack of consolidation and the forced removals of hundreds of thousands of people to non-viable and inadequate tribal areas from the so-called white areas have considerably aggravated the poverty in the homelands. People are starving there.

Independence for the homelands — the Government's moral justification for its policy and its response to the needs of black people for some form of political representation — is back-firing. Black people are having to sacrifice their citizenship of the Republic of South Africa, with all its growth possibilities and technological development to which they have contributed, for citizenship of small and impoverished homelands from which large numbers of them have been divorced for a generation or more.

Bophutatswana has been forewarned by what is happening to the citizens of the Transkei, many of whom are embittered and angry, and is stalling on taking its independence until its land and citizenship demands have been met, demands which do not fit tidily into Government plans.

For the entire population, white and black, rights and liberties have been curtailed with ever more citizens held in indefinite detention, banned, banished, house arrested; restrictions on outdoor gatherings and protest demonstrations; increased restrictions on the freedom of the Press with the threat of the re-introduction of the Press Bill inevitably acting as a curb; a Lower Courts Act designed to streamline and demote from the higher courts some of the administration of justice to cope with the increasing numbers of political trials; and a general and pervasive atmosphere of unease and insecurity.

This is further aggravated by the problems of Rhodesia and SWA/Namibia, Russian intrusion into Southern Africa, the belated concern of the Western world with its demands for shared power made to a Government which is intransigently opposed to this, and the surfacing of South and Southern Africa as power-political pawns.

With a disproportionately large budget allocation to defence and the maintenance of law and order, a Government hell-bent on pursuing its blinkered path, a futilely fragmented opposition, a patently dissatisfied black majority and increasing pressures from outside the country where, indeed, do we go from here?

Time is fast running out. Only a totally representative and concerted determination to scrap failed policies and get together with open minds to co-operate in the formulation of a dispensation acceptable to all can prevent an eventual bloody confrontation and provide the conditions in which the wonderful potential of our diversely cultured and richly endowed land can be fulfilled. But the Government rejects this.

It will require leadership of a very special and dynamic quality, generating a compelling and irresistible momentum, to release the forces for peace which still exist in all sections of the community from the bondage of the past and weld them into the nucleus from which a hopeful future for all could still emerge. But where is it?