

## MOVING AHEAD TO THE PAST

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN URBAN AFRICAN POLICY

By DR. ELLEN HELLMANN



**IF ANYONE** was still hopeful enough to believe that the Government's policy of separate development — the polite synonym for the now old-fashioned and discredited term "apartheid" — could be applied with a measure of justice and humanity, then the record of this session of Parliament, taken in conjunction with recently announced administrative measures, must have brought the final, and, surely, irrevocable disillusion. The design is now so clear that not even the most trusting could continue to trust without deliberately blindfolding themselves to avoid seeing the naked and ugly truth.

For the naked and ugly truth is that South Africa has been propelled, relentlessly and ruthlessly, along a road that has led the country straight back to where it stood in 1922. In that year the Stallard Commission recommended that "the Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the White man's creation, when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the White man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister". And now, after forty years, a world war, the transformation of whole continents, the explosive impact of a new age of technology, the transformation even of South Africa itself from a backward, under-developed to a highly industrialized nation, South Africa returns to the stand taken up by a Transvaal Commission in 1922. This is leadership indeed.

#### **The Bantu Laws Amendment Bill.**

But the Government goes even further than the Stallard Commission. Where the Commission recommended severe curbs on the entry of Africans into urban areas, the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill, now before Parliament in abridged form, will give the Government the power to impose the most far-reaching controls on the employment, occupation and residence of all Africans in the "White Area"; and the "White Area", in the

Government's vocabulary, means the whole of the Republic with the exclusion only of the scheduled and released areas, that is, the 13 per cent. of the Bantu Reserves. The fact that the whole Bill is not being proceeded with at this late stage of the session cannot, in my opinion, be regarded as indicating a change of policy. It seems more likely that the Abridged Bantu Laws Amendment Bill will prove to be only the first bite at the cherry.

In the representations the S.A. Institute of Race Relations made to the Government when the Bill was first published in draft form, the Institute said, "If the Bill is passed it will mean that all Africans throughout the area outside the Reserves are to be treated as foreigners and as interchangeable pawns, there solely to serve the interests of the White man, instead of as human beings with human aspirations, who have every moral right, equal to that of the White residents, to remain where they are". This applies with no less force to the Bill as first introduced in the House, for the changes made in it make no vital difference and do not affect the basic purpose of the Bill, which is to make all Africans outside the Reserves freely dislodgeable at the discretion of the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development and his deputed officials.

The departmental directive to local authorities

concerning African traders, the policy pronouncement on Alexandra, and the Better Administration of Designated Areas Act, passed this session to carry out certain aspects of the new measures to be applied to Alexandra and the few remaining similar freehold areas elsewhere, all flow naturally from this central intention: that Africans shall have no enforceable rights of occupation or domicile whatsoever outside the Reserves, and shall always be in a state of potential dislodgement.

### **Alexandra Township.**

The facts about Alexandra Township are familiar and not in dispute. Alexandra is a township adjoining the municipality of Johannesburg, about nine miles from the centre of the city. Established as a township in 1905, it was initially intended for White residents. Owing, however, to what were then its remoteness and inaccessibility, Whites were not attracted. So it became a Non-White township, mainly African, and was recognized as such under the 1913 Natives Land Act. Treated as a step-child by the Province, whose responsibility it was, and as an unwanted neighbour by the Johannesburg Municipality, its history has been characterized chiefly by neglect, with occasional traumatic interludes of threats of extinction.

Nevertheless it grew, at times prodigiously. During the war, when there was a cessation of building for Africans and greatly accelerated industrialization, Alexandra acted as the spill-over for Johannesburg. By 1943, its population was about 50,000 people, of whom 8 to 10% were Coloured. The Western Areas Removal Scheme, which left Alexandra as the sole remaining area on the entire Reef where Africans could hold land in freehold, gave a further impetus to growth. By 1958, the population had grown to approximately 98,000 — accommodated on an area one square mile in extent. With 2,537 stands about 140 x 50 feet each, and a density of some 236 people per morgen, the Township was clearly grossly overcrowded.

It was at this stage that the Peri-Urban Areas Health Board took over control of Alexandra, committed to reducing the population to about 30,000, eliminating the slum conditions that had developed, and creating "a township which can house its residents in reasonable comfort and under acceptable conditions". It was armed with an undertaking by the State to provide loans and also funds to cover the deficit on administration.

It is possibly worth noting, in passing, that the Health Committee which had existed prior to 1958 did not have this State assistance, which may well be one of the reasons for its admitted inadequacies.

### **"Facelift",**

The Board moved in to Alexandra and started on what the Press head-lined as "a £120,000 'facelift' for Alexandra Township". It took a census, issued residential permits in an endeavour to prevent unauthorized residence, put in drainage, turned dongas into roads, built a beer-hall with what was described as a "Riviera touch", established schools, effected many other improvements and, of course, proceeded with its main task, which was to thin out the population. By the beginning of this year, the population was down to 52,000 — "about 120 per morgen", said the Minister of Bantu Affairs and Administration, who also complimented the Board on the facts that murders had decreased by 50%, armed robbery by 90% and assaults by 30%.

Naturally this whole process, especially the thinning out, could only be effected at a price. Many fell by the way: landlords who lost tenants and could consequently no longer meet bond repayments; women who married after 1958 or had failed to register, and who found their husbands directed to live in a hostel while they were "endorsed out"; and others. At first all resettlement was voluntary, but when the applicants for voluntary resettlement diminished, pressures were applied. Men working in Johannesburg who lost one job and took on another found they had lost their right to remain in the Township. But a facelift always hurts, and there seemed no doubt that the visage was becoming more comely.

### **Bombshell.**

Then, out of the blue, came the bombshell — an announcement at the end of March this year by the Minister in Cape Town that "accommodation on a family basis in Alexandra would gradually be eliminated". The Township would be re-planned for single African men and women legally employed in the surrounding area. A spokesman of the Board gave the further information that there were to be eight large hostels housing some 2,500 "single" Africans each. Buffer strips would be enlarged to isolate the Township more effectively, the residential area would be reduced, and there would be all manner of fine recreational and sporting facilities — so enticing that it was

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## THE CRIME — APARTHEID

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hoped they would draw off Africans who now spend Sunday afternoons at the Zoo Lake, and by their noisy cheerfulness disturb the Sunday afternoon slumbers of White householders in the vicinity.

Altogether, according to official spokesmen, it was a splendid plan. It would help solve "locations-in-the-sky" and the "problem of accommodating Bantu in the backyards of some of the northern suburbs of Johannesburg." Government M.P.'s waxed enthusiastic about it in the debate on the **Better Administration of Designated Areas Bill**, which developed into a debate on Alexandra in general and the deprivation of freehold rights in particular. This was a logical outcome, as the main purpose of the Bill is to "make it possible to regard a designated area . . . as an ordinary municipal location despite the fact that Bantu may have rights of ownership to the land there".

It should at this stage perhaps be mentioned that the Africans of Alexandra did not consider this a splendid plan at all. Dismay, initial unbelief, and then a despairing hopelessness allied with a growing realization of helplessness, and a quivering, suppressed anger, characterized the reactions of the established middle-class to whom the Township was home and community. What the younger, more militant, elements felt, I do not know. The present climate does not invite outspokenness.

### Migrant Labour.

Inevitably, basic principles of policy were vehemently disputed during the debate on the Better Administration of Designated Areas Bill — a title which competes with that of the **Abolition of Passes (and Co-ordination of Documents) Act** as a prize example of camouflage of intent. I believe that the award for the most unadorned definition of Government policy should be conferred on **Dr. C. P. Mulder**, who said, "The approach of the Nationalist Party is clearly that the Bantu have come here voluntarily to work, and that the Whites are prepared to give them work, but that they should not be here permanently or enjoy property rights. He (the Bantu) is and remains a migrant labourer who has come here to earn his daily bread and will never become a permanent inhabitant here."

The award for distortion of facts should surely go to **Mr. G. F. Froneman**, who nevertheless earned commendation from the Deputy Minister

for his stout denial that migrant labour is a "monstrosity". "No", said Mr. Froneman, "it is not a monstrosity when viewed in the perspective of the development of the Bantu homelands and the border industries". He continued, "Let us take it as a fact that the majority of the Bantu working in the cities are there on a single basis, and not on a family basis. The family basis has only developed during the past five or ten years, when increasingly more families came to the cities. Every Bantu female working in the kitchen is there on a single basis. The majority of the Bantu working in the cities are there on a single basis. That indicates only one thing to me, that here we are not concerned with the problem of families which are broken up, but with migratory labour. Now hon. members come along and accuse the Government of breaking up families. It is the Bantu himself who is doing that, because he seeks employment on a single basis".

It is almost a pity to dim the lustre of this gem of reasoning by referring to only a few of the relevant facts — for example, the 58,000 families in Johannesburg's Soweto; Johannesburg's total African population, which consists of 211,742 males, 178,825 females and 218,496 children; the Tomlinson Commission's estimate that of the total urban African population of 2.3 million in 1951, 1½ million were permanently urbanized. In Alexandra township itself there were in April of this year 10,611 families, according to the Minister's answer to a question put by Mrs. Helen Suzman.

### Destruction of a Community.

The Deputy Minister stated that there would be no break-up of the family life of these Alexandra residents because they would be rehoused in the location of the town where the breadwinner worked. This is understandable. (He did not answer the questions as to where the families of men working in the peri-urban area would be housed — possibly because there is no location in the peri-urban area.) But his flat denial that the Minister had ever given an undertaking that freehold rights would be preserved in Alexandra remains completely inexplicable. In reply to a question, the Minister said on 3rd February, 1959, "Owners of property who are lawfully entitled to remain there are not being disturbed". Yet on 1st May, 1963, the Deputy Minister claimed that he had the Opposition "zipped" and "that no guarantee was given that property ownership would remain vested in these Bantu". Perhaps the word

"disturbed", like others, has a special meaning in the vocabulary of the Government. But ordinary people are not aware of it, nor are the 1,972 standowners in Alexandra aware of it. Therefore ordinary people and the property-owners in Alexandra will continue to regard the Government's proposed elimination of family housing, and therefore of freehold title, as a broken pledge.

The question remains: Why must Alexandra go? Why must what is now a *slum* clearance scheme become a clearance scheme? For even though a place called Alexandra will exist, the Alexandra that was in the process of developing into a middle-class township will have been swept away and replaced by workers' hostels for "single" Africans only. One looks at Alexandra and grieves for the wanton wastage of effort and resources: 15 schools, the largest and most comprehensive African family welfare centre on the Reef, the medical centre developed to serve families, crèches and nursery schools, all to be rendered redundant; the hundreds of solid homes, all destined to be bulldozed. And one grieves even more at the destruction of a community and the network of associations established within it.

Why? Not because this is the only area where hostels can be established. The Johannesburg City Council is itself opposed to the present proposals and favours the erection of *some* hostel accommodation, chiefly for women, as part and parcel of the existing Alexandra, that is, retaining family housing there. Like others, it is aware of the dangers inherent in creating such a large concentration of "single" men and women. So why? The answer can only be the Government's determination to root out the last remaining pockets of freehold ownership in the so-called "White Area" and, in so doing, to root out the security of residence that goes with freehold rights.

### **Another Broken Pledge.**

The diminishing of the rights and opportunities of African traders is another example of the Government's determination to prevent Africans from developing vested interests in the urban areas. It is another example, too, of broken pledges.

The Natives (Urban Areas) Act provides that no African can occupy premises outside the locations without obtaining the approval of the Governor-General, which approval was in fact obtained by a number of traders in a city like Johannesburg. In 1955, the Government announced that no new applications by Africans to trade or carry on other activities in premises in the "White area"

would be granted, and that in due course all Africans who had obtained the necessary permission should transfer to the locations. The Institute of Race Relations protested against this ruling, maintaining that giving Africans the exclusive right to trade in their own urban townships did not compensate for the disadvantages flowing from their total exclusion from the remainder of the town, especially the commercial and industrial sections with their concentration of people of all races. To this the Secretary for Native Affairs, Dr. Eiselen, replied that "henceforth the Bantu will be obtaining an exclusive monopoly to cater for his own people in the separate self-contained areas set aside for them", emphasizing that "this has opened up to them a field of unlimited opportunity", making possible "practically every form of human activity". The definition of these "areas" included municipal locations, villages and hostels.

The forewarning of a complete reversal of policy was given in a speech the Minister made in October 1959 to the Vereeniging Sakekamer. He said he was considering the practical application of a policy to make it clear to African traders that their trading facilities were temporary; that they must carry on their businesses in their home areas; that the condition of their staying was that they were there only to build up capital and gain experience for which the opportunities in their home areas were "extremely slight". **The threat to White traders, the Minister is reported to have said, could be dealt with in two ways: restricting African traders to goods needed for daily existence, and making them realize that they were only temporarily in the locations.**

### **Restrictions on African Traders.**

The Government's directive to urban local authorities, dated 14th February, 1963, faithfully embodies the Minister's policy. In small locations not far removed from "White" towns, no African traders whatsoever will be permitted. If, however, "it proves necessary to provide trading facilities in Bantu residential areas", then only the establishment of Bantu businesses which confine themselves to the provision of the daily essential domestic necessities will be allowed. It is specifically stated that this prohibition includes dry cleaners, garages and petrol filling stations. Where these already exist, they will be allowed to continue "until the opportunity arises to close them, or to persuade the owners to transfer their business to a Bantu town in the Bantu homelands". No African may carry on more than one business.

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