

# CONTACT

APRIL 1957

## NO TIME FOR RELIEF

**I**T has become very difficult to keep abreast of Dr. Verwoerd and Mr. Viljoen and their frequent alterations to the Native Laws Amendment Bill and the Separate Universities Bill. A month ago we published articles on each of these two Bills which were out of date almost before the printer's ink had dried on them. Since these articles were written the original Separate Universities Bill has been withdrawn and replaced by a new Bill. Dr. Verwoerd has amended Section 29 of the Native Laws Amendment Bill and then amended that amendment. There may be more changes to come. All one can do is comment on the situation as it is at a particular moment.

As far as the Universities are concerned it is quite clear that the new measure introduced by Mr. Viljoen in no way departs from the principles contained in the one it replaces. The new Bill excludes reference to the Durban Medical School and Fort Hare, not because the Government has relented in its attitude towards these two institutions, but because it has discovered that its original Bill affected "private interests" and could not therefore be dealt with by Parliament unless certain preliminary steps had been taken. This point should be made quite clear. The Government's intentions remain exactly the same as they always were. It intends to exclude all non-Europeans from the open universities as soon as those at present there have completed their courses. Its new non-White Colleges, when they are established, will bear little relation to a university as it is known in the Western World. Teachers will be unable to teach what the Government does not want them to teach. If they should depart from the prescribed rut they will be liable to an impressive list of penalties ranging from transfer with demotion, to fining and dismissal. Criticism of *ANY* aspect of Government policy or administration will be taboo. Offences committed before the Bill was passed and which were quite legal at the time may be punished in retrospect. Any self-respecting person accepting an appointment to such a place will lead an existence precarious indeed. Only the most cautious and hard-pressed of non-Nationalist supporters would take on such a job. The students will have to step warily too. They will have to start their wary stepping at an early age as well. The Government will decide whether they are to be admitted to these colleges. No amount of academic brilliance will wipe out past anti-Government indiscretion on the part of a student seeking admission to the new colleges. Universities are well known for their adventurous spirit and their challenging mottoes. The motto of Mr. Viljoen's new colleges might appropriately be "Be Careful". And, in case anyone should be under the mistaken impression that the Government has retreated on the issue of the Durban Medical School, Mr. Viljoen's announcement that the School is still to be divorced from Natal University control should make it quite clear that this is not so. The Government has not changed its mind. It happens to have struck a snag.

The amendments to Dr. Verwoerd's Bill *do* introduce certain safeguards which were not contained in the original, particularly in so far as Churches are concerned. But the threat remains. In areas where church services and functions are held to be a nuisance and where the local authority concurs, the Minister will be able to prohibit the attendance of Africans at such functions. Schools, hospitals, clubs and similar institutions will be unable to carry on without the Minister's and the local authority's approval. African attendance at places of entertainment is threatened. As far as the Liberal Party is concerned the provisions relating to the holding of meetings attended by Africans are vitally important. Unless the local authority objects the Minister will be able to ban such meetings and prohibit certain people from holding them, if he feels they constitute a nuisance. The new provisions mark a definite retreat from the position under the original Bill. The danger is that, in relief at what seems to be an easier situation, we should overlook the fact that the present Bill places in the hands of the Minister vast powers which he did not possess a month ago and which can be used to make inter-racial

activity impossible. There are countless local authorities in the country who would be only too glad to concur with the Minister in his prohibition of mixed meetings. They would by no means all be Nationalist-controlled. There are a great many others which would probably not take the trouble to object to a Ministerial suggestion that such meetings should be banned—and without their objection within the specified time the Minister's hand is free. Even if a local authority felt strongly on the matter, events on the Rand in recent years have shown the Government to have scant scruple in bringing pressure to bear on municipalities who do not toe the "party line".

The dangers are very real, make no mistake. Government policy remains unchanged. If it has received a set-back, how long is it for? The remarks thrown across the floor by Nationalist back-benchers show what they think about the matter. They would like to see no mixing between White and non-White on any basis other than the one they approve so heartily—that of a master with his servant. The plans for separate universities go on. The power to interfere with the fundamental right of individuals to associate with whom they please is in the Minister's grasp. The fact that this power is not as extensive as he and his supporters would have liked it to be is a small mercy—but no more than that. If he finds this power inadequate he will look for more. Vigilance, not a feeling of relief, is the only safeguard against his taking it.

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## A TURN OF THE SCREW

WHEN Dr. Verwoerd first hinted last September at his plans to increase direct taxation on Africans we pointed out in *Contact* the very strong case which could be made out against any such increase. The passage of time has done nothing to modify the strength of this case. If anything, it has produced more data to add to its power.

Those who know best are well aware that the origins of the Alexandra boycott were economic. Time and Mr. Schoeman added a political flavour to it but the fact remains that most Africans in the areas affected by the fare increases felt that they simply could not afford to pay the extra twopence a day for which they were being asked. They preferred to walk, and proceeded to do so for over three months. As time went on the admission was made by the Chamber of Commerce, and other responsible opinion, that vast numbers of Africans on the Rand were not being paid a living wage. It is of interest that this admission was only made when the boycott had been continuing for some time. But the facts of the economic position of urban Africans on the Rand had been available for a long time. As long ago as 1954 the Institute of Race Relations carried out an investigation and published figures which showed only too clearly how far African incomes lagged behind the minimum required for a reasonable standard of living. These findings were fairly widely publicised. As far as we are aware nobody took any notice of them.

But the last few weeks have brought forth an even more damning indictment of the economic position of Africans in Johannesburg than the Race Relations survey. A cost consultant, conducting an investigation on behalf of the Johannesburg City Council, has found that the "absolute barest minimum" for *subsistence* for an African family in Johannesburg is £21 per month. This is what is needed to subsist, no more. The consultant tells us that "a much higher income is necessary to provide a fair and adequate living". The average total family income for an African family in Johannesburg lies between £10 16s. 8d. and £15 3s. 3d. according to statistics compiled by the non-European Affairs Department of the Johannesburg Municipality. These, as near as can be gauged, are the shocking facts of life—if one can use such a word—for Africans in Johannesburg. Many families earn barely *half* of what they would need to subsist at the lowest level. Many more fall hopelessly short of earning enough to maintain themselves in health, let alone to enjoy "a fair and adequate living". And what is true of Johannesburg is true to a lesser or greater extent of the other large urban centres of the Union. The yawning gap is everywhere. Employers have known about it for years but have conveniently looked the other way.

It is into this horrifying state of affairs that Dr. Verwoerd, the benevolent father of the African people, will once more intrude his smiling presence, distributing blessings to his admiring children. At his suggestion the Minister of Finance will raise the "poll tax" on every African over the age of 18 by 50 per cent. People earning £15 to £20 a month—just on the verge of pulling their families out of the slough of malnutrition—will have to pay more.