

THE ABYSS OF BANTU EDUCATION

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WHEN the African people in the Union of South Africa opposed Bantu Education and rightly called it "Education for Slavery", they little thought that so much havoc would be wrought by it within so short a time. Most people thought that at least those children who had reached the fourth standard would escape the holocaust. But it was not enough to attack the people from below; and the Government soon opened its second front, from the top, with its Bantu Junior Certificate syllabus, the introduction of the mother-tongue as a medium of instruction, and—when the Bantu Matriculation syllabus was rejected as an entrance qualification to the free universities—the debased education of the new tribal colleges.

The mutilation of Fort Hare and the establishment of the tribal colleges are, of course, a logical conclusion of Bantu Education—a fact that was ignored or played down, if foreseen at all, by those universities in South Africa that claim to be guardians of education but which are only now awakening to the dangers of Nationalist education policy for the country as a whole.

On the 1st of April, 1955, the Department of Bantu Administration (BAD) took over African education from the Provinces, without any programme and without any trained administrative staff. As was to be expected, the immediate result was chaos. Teachers worked for months without pay, the salaries of teachers in one district were sent to teachers in another, teachers and principals never received any replies to urgent correspondence sent to the Department, and—without any regulations governing the conditions of service having been drawn up and promulgated—teachers were made to enter into contracts with their new employers. This confusion lasted two years, during which a number of teachers were dismissed for opposing Bantu Education, and many schools disestablished to be re-established in more pliable forms. At the end of the period, eight types of school emerged, claiming to provide:

- (a) Lower and Higher Primary Education;
- (b) Secondary Education;
- (c) Teacher Training at Secondary and post-Matriculation level;
- (d) Vocational Training;

(e) Night School and Continuation Classes.

(1) **Government Bantu Schools** are schools under the direct control and administration of the Bantu Education Department and are mainly concerned with teacher and vocational training, though they also number a few other schools situated on government property. The Mission Board Schools fall under this category and that is why they had to be disestablished, suffering drastic changes in the process of their re-establishment. Long-established co-education centres like Lovedale and St. Matthew's in the Cape were made single sex schools; important educational centres like St. Cuthbert's in the Transkei have had to close down their primary and secondary schools.

Lovedale was re-established as a school for boys only, for teacher-training and secondary schooling, while St. Matthew's was limited to girls only, for post Std. VI teacher-training and secondary schooling. This has meant the closing down of the different branches of learning that had been provided at both places. The whole of the Industrial Department at Lovedale for both boys and girls has had to close down, while teacher-training for girls at the post Std. VI and post Junior Certificate levels has been discontinued.

At Lovedale the fine collection of books in the Cuthbert Library, one of the biggest and best school libraries in the country, was put up for sale; and today the former Cuthbert Library building is used as a storeroom for BAD books. The whole character of Lovedale has been changed, Lovedale the fount and shrine of education for non-whites throughout Southern Africa, where the dreams of so many Africans have sprouted and flourished. If Bantu Education was ever to achieve its aims, it was imperative that Lovedale should be destroyed and all these dreams uprooted. And so today, Lovedale is no more, and only its shell still stands.

At St. Matthew's, teacher-training for boys and post Junior Certificate teacher-training for girls have been discontinued, together with the music courses. Teacher-training standards have thus been deliberately lowered, and Std. VI plus a three-year course of training made the normal qualification for African teachers throughout the Union. In sane education it is *quality* rather than *quantity* that counts, and if the education of the African child is going to be worth anything at all, the standard of the teaching profession has inevitably to be raised. But Bantu

Education is not sane education; its object is the lowering—and not the raising—of standards. In some schools teacher-training and secondary education have been merged into a single composite department under one principal and with the same staff.

Now what has happened to all these displaced girls and boys from Lovedale and St. Matthew's? Their parents were advised sometime in August 1956, five months before these changes were due, to find their sons and daughters accommodation either at Lovedale or Healdtown if they were boys, or at St. Matthew's or Healdtown if they were girls. But Healdtown, which has always had a surge of students clamouring for admission, could take only a limited number, and neither Lovedale nor St. Matthew's, which have also always had long waiting lists, could accommodate the new refugees. For most of the displaced, the streets have become the classroom.

The boarding schools have deteriorated beyond recognition. The maintenance staff, except for the cooks, have been dismissed and their work given to students to do. Compulsory manual work intrudes everywhere—before and after classes everyday; corporal punishment provides the only discipline and a whole 'gestapo' system has been introduced, by which—profiting from the poverty of the African people and their desire for education—the authorities are offering scholarships to some students on condition that they spy on their fellows. A letter published in *'New Age'* of May 21st, 1959, is a confession from one of these victims of careful corruption. It is not a unique case; in any one institution there are usually three, four or more of such paid spies.

Inevitably these boarding schools seethe with student discontent and staff repression. In 1957, some 30 senior girls in Shawbury in the Transkei were sent home, allegedly for inciting trouble; and towards the end of the same year, on the eve of their examinations, about 200 men students at St. John's College, Umtata (Transkei), were sent packing. Early in 1957, at the Ndamase Secondary School, Buntingville (near Umtata), a student was shot during a disturbance; and while the resultant student trial was still in progress, the principal, who in court had admitted firing shots to "frighten" the students, was found shot in his house. No foul play was suspected. At Adam's College (Natal), during the second session of the school year, over 200 students were sent home in 1958; and in February of 1959, over 300 students at Lovedale (Cape) chose to go home. Such mass

expulsions are not, of course, reported by the State Information Office in its circulars abroad.

(2) **Community Schools** were formerly the day mission schools scattered throughout the rural and urban areas, built by the various communities and handed over to the churches for management. Even though they were under the management of the churches on whose glebes the schools stood, it was the communities, irrespective of faith or sect, that had constructed and maintained the buildings through various forms of fund-raising. Now, without consulting any of these people, not even the members of their congregations, some church leaders agreed to lease the schools to the Government. A number of such schools in a given area were now to fall under the administration and control of a School Board, with a School Board Secretary—some of its members to be elected by the community and others appointed by the local representative of the Government.

It is notable that, in most areas of the Cape Province, the people have been too hostile to Bantu Education to elect the School Boards, while many have refused to serve when appointed to them by the Government. Those who are to be found serving on these Boards are Government nominees and do not enjoy the confidence of the people—they know this, and the Government knows it too. In several places, however, ministers of the church broke the people's boycott of the BAD School Boards by agreeing to serve on them—forgetting no doubt that He whom they profess to follow and serve did not find it expedient to renounce the truth for which He stood when He was faced with death. Indignant at this betrayal, asserting their rights as communities and not as members of any religious denomination, the people turned quickly against them. In Peddie, in the Eastern Cape, they locked up the schools they had built with their own money and labour and told the minister-in-charge to build his own schools if he wished to hire them out to the Government. In Port Elizabeth, members of a certain church called upon their minister-in-charge, who had accepted the Chairmanship of the local Bantu School Board, to resign, reminding him that he depended on them for his livelihood. In Mt. Ayliff (East Griqualand, Cape) the people burned down the schools they had built rather than lease them to the Government, and then told the minister who had agreed to the lease to hire out his own schools. The hostility continues and grows.

(3) **Farm Schools** exist only on farms belonging to Europeans. Every farmer, with the permission of the BAD, may start a school on his farm for the children of his employees; he may not admit children from adjoining farms unless his neighbours have indicated in writing that they do not object to the attendance at his school of the children of their own employees. The managers of these schools are the farmers themselves or their deputies; and as a result of this comfortable and inexpensive arrangement, a large number of such schools has come into being. In the Free State, for example, there are today more farm schools than there are government and community schools put together—544 farm schools as against 312 government and community schools. The reason is obvious—such schools provide free child labour for the white farmers.

(4) **Mine and Factory Schools** are established by the owners of the mine or factory concerned, with the approval of the BAD. They must lie on the property of the mine- or factory-owner and are intended for the children of *bona fide* African employees of the mine or factory. The owners erect the buildings, and the BAD pays the teachers. As with farm schools, a mine or factory school may not admit children from adjoining mines or factories without the permission of their owners and the approval of the Government.

(5) **Unsubsidized Private Schools** are schools registered with the Department but receiving no subsidy. These include the remaining mission schools (mainly Roman Catholic) which follow the Bantu Education Syllabus and write the Bantu Education examinations, and the Seventh Day Adventist Schools, which have always been independent and conduct their own examinations.

A gloomy future faces the 600 odd Roman Catholic Church schools from which government subsidies have now been withdrawn and many of which have been refused registration. "Of the 662 schools, only about 150 have received definite registration—subject to restrictions and withdrawal", reports the *'Daily Dispatch'*, of 8th January, 1959. The newspaper then continues: "In the near future, only two of the Church's six teacher-training colleges will remain, and their degrees are not recognized by the State. The implementation of the Bantu Education Act has only just begun, but its stranglehold on teacher-

training institutions and secondary education will soon take its heavy toll. By the end of next year, there will scarcely be any of these institutions in the hands of the Church”.

(6) **Scheduled Schools** comprise a small number of schools which for some reason or other have not been classified—like hospital schools—and which, for purposes of administration, are managed by approved bodies or persons. This is not a new type of school; many big hospitals, for example, have for years been running schools to teach their young patients and those who wanted to improve their qualifications. These schools are run by groups of individuals or organizations who now and again appeal to the public for funds to continue their work.

(7) **Night Schools** (8) **Continuation Classes**—The BAD gives the figures for such schools as 6 in the Northern Transvaal, 75 in the Southern Transvaal, 5 in the Free State, 22 in Natal, 2 in the Transkei and 26 in the Ciskei, Cape. But these figures were compiled before the BAD banned private bodies from running Night Schools and Continuation Classes for Africans. In 1957, all those bodies running classes for Africans were required under the Bantu Education Act to obtain the permission of the Department in order to continue: many applied at once, but no reply was received until the middle of 1958. In the Western Province, the Cape Non-European Night Schools Association—which had been running night classes for Africans and other non-whites—lost four of its ten schools, all of which offered classes for Africans. When it at last resumed classes in 1958, only two managed to continue; the subsidy applied for through the “proper” channels was not granted, and no reasons were given.

The tendency throughout the country, of course, has been to ignore all those bodies and persons who have been at this work for a number of years and have learnt more or less all the problems involved: the School Boards which are now supposed to run the schools are not only unsympathetic, but generally ignorant; and the officers of the BAD are indifferent, where not actually hostile. Just how many of these schools still exist in the various Provinces—and how many have been unceremoniously banned—only the Government knows, and it has not published figures. It is improbable that the publications of the State Information Office will provide any enlightenment.