

THE GHETTO ACT

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THE purpose of the Group Areas Act is to provide for the establishment of separate areas for the different races in South Africa. Theoretically, it empowers the authorities to deal with all the races on the same basis. In practice, it exists for the purpose of removing the non-White people from their places of occupation in cities, towns, villages and farms. All plans for segregation, particularly those affecting the Indian people, show the desire on the part of the upholders of apartheid to rob them of their properties and other economic interests. In all cases the plans involve uprooting of settled populations and the deprivation of their means of livelihood.

Segregation is not a new factor in South Africa. It has been practised for many years. For the Africans it has meant congestion in the over-populated reserves, confinement in barbed-wire locations, and rigid control. In the midst of vast expanses of unoccupied land it has brought about acute shortage, resulting in forced squatting, and the creation of hovels and slums, with concomitant hardships and misery.

Under the Nationalists the policy of segregation has been taken to its logical conclusion. No longer is it to be applied in half-measures, for such application would fail to achieve the aims of apartheid. The African people in the so-called White areas may only remain as migratory labourers with no roots in cities, towns and farms. The Indian people, considered to be "a foreign and an outlandish element", must be uprooted and expatriated. They must be isolated in ghettos, their wealth destroyed, properties confiscated and means of livelihood taken away. The Coloured people must be kept in their place and made to live under rigid controls. The Group Areas Act is capable of bringing about these changes and as such is the pivot of apartheid. By relegating the non-White people to ghettos and by subjecting them to rigid control, it would be able to swell the ranks of cheap labour.

At the time of passing the Group Areas Act in 1950, the Government believed that five years would be sufficient to complete the framework of dividing the country into racial zones and therefore laid down that no group area could be proclaimed

after a period of five years from 1950 without the prior approval of Parliament. But the opposition of the non-Europeans, particularly the Indian Congress, bogged down their work. When opposition showed that the government could not act in contradiction to the legal code of South Africa, which, to some extent, still gives the people the protection of the rule of law, the Minister of the Interior made efforts to remedy the "difficiencies" found in the "smooth running" of the Act by introducing amendments in 1952 and 1956. The period of five years has now been extended to fifteen years, and the trend of events shows that the Government is determined to carry out its apartheid aims, though it may take longer to do so, regardless of consequences.

The proclamation of "group areas" in the western suburbs of Johannesburg is as yet the most important instalment in terms of the Act and marks the beginning of the culmination of the aims contained in it. An analysis of this proclamation reveals the true nature of this pernicious measure, which is clearly calculated to uproot and ruin the non-White people in order to force them into ghettos. It affects 78,000 Africans, Indians, Coloureds, Malays and Chinese living in the townships of Pageview (Vrededorp), Sophiatown, Newclare, Newlands, Newlands Extension, Albertsville, Albertskroon and Greymont. In terms of a notice appearing in the Government Gazette of August 3rd, 1956, all the non-Whites living in these areas will have to vacate them within a specified period of time.

The following facts about the affected townships speak for themselves:

(a) Pageview

The township of Pageview is occupied exclusively by about 10,000 non-Europeans. Among them there are 5,000 Indians and Chinese (mostly Indians), 3,000 Coloureds and Malays, and 2,000 Africans. Originally, it was declared a location in terms of Law 3 of 1885, and the non-Europeans have occupied it for over fifty years. They were given the right to freehold title by a resolution of Parliament in 1937.

The township has been declared a group area for White occupation. The portion to the south of 22nd Street is to be vacated by the non-Whites before August 3rd, 1957, and the remaining portion is defined as a proposed group area for the Whites. The Group Areas Development Act is made applicable to the portion south of 22nd Street, which means that properties

in that sector are now controlled by the Group Areas Development Board and are liable for expropriation.

The township comprises 476 stands, almost all of which are owned by Indians. The valuation of these properties is well over one and a half million pounds. In addition, it supports over 200 Indian traders, who, together with their dependents, engage in commerce for their livelihood. Their investment in stocks and goodwill amounts to a million pounds.

The declaration of Pageview as a group area and a proposed group area for the Whites, apart from other serious considerations, clearly means depreciation of at least 85 per cent. in the value of fixed properties, total ruination of the 200 Indian traders and their dependents, and the total loss of goodwill built up over a period of many years' hard work.

(b) Sophiatown

The township of Sophiatown is almost entirely owned and occupied by non-Europeans. Just prior to the removal of the African people from it under the Resettlement Scheme, it contained over 50,000 persons. Among them there are about 2,500 Indians and 1,000 Coloureds and Malays.

Under the proclamation it is declared a White group area. The so-called buffer zones on the eastern and western sides of the township are defined as immediate group areas, and the non-Whites living in these zones will have to leave before August 3rd, 1957. The portion between Good and Best Streets is declared a proposed group area, and the provisions of the Group Areas Development Act are applied to the whole township. All the properties in the area, therefore, are now liable for expropriation.

Sophiatown comprises 1,600 stands, and their total value is over £2,000,000. Of this amount properties belonging to the Indians, Malays and Chinese (mostly Indians) are worth approximately £750,000. In addition, there are more than 200 Indian and 50 Chinese traders in the area, and their investment in goodwill and stocks is equal to the above figure.

The removal of the African people from this area is complemented by the proclamation of the township as a White group area in terms of the Group Areas Act. The application of the Group Areas Development Act will hasten the forced disposal of all non-White properties, and tens of thousands of people—Africans, Indians, Malays, Coloureds and Chinese—will be uprooted and displaced and their life-time's earnings sacrificed.

The Indian and Chinese traders and their dependents will be deprived of their only means of livelihood.

(c) Newlands and Newlands Extension

These townships have a European population of approximately 6,000 and a non-European population of about 2,000. In terms of the proclamation declaring them White group areas, all the non-Whites living there will have to vacate their homes and places of business before August 3rd, 1958. Among the 800 Indians in the townships there are families that have been there for 20, 30, 40 and 50 years.

There are about 40 Indian traders, and as many properties are owned by them. Their investment in properties, stocks and goodwill is worth at least a million pounds. The application of the Group Areas Development Act and the general uprooting of the settled communities will add to the misery of the people. Hundreds more will join the ranks of those with no means of livelihood.

(d) Newclare

The township of Newclare is occupied by about 1,500 Indians, 100 Malays, 1,000 Coloureds and 13,000 Africans. Non-Europeans, particularly Indians, have occupied this area since the turn of the century and were indeed encouraged to do so by the Johannesburg City Council.

It has been declared a group area for the members of the Coloured group, and, in terms of the notice, all non-Coloureds, i.e., Indians, Chinese, and Africans, will be forced to vacate it before August 3rd, 1958. Newclare consists of 600 odd stands, and the members of the Indian community own over 75 per cent. of the property. Indian investment in property and improvements exceeds £750,000.

In Newclare there are about 100 Indian and 50 Chinese traders, and their investment in goodwill and stocks runs into many thousands of pounds. The owners of these businesses, together with their dependents, are threatened with economic extinction.

(e) Albertsville

There are 1,497 stands in the township of Albertsville, and it is exclusively owned and occupied by the members of the Coloured community. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been invested there by the members of the Coloured community, and they have built a considerable number of good homes.

The area is now declared a proposed White group area, and the Coloured people will have to leave it sooner or later. They

will have to leave behind them the homes they have built and made beautiful. Over 4,000 persons will be uprooted, the earnings of their hands expropriated as the Group Areas Development Act is applied.

(f) Lenasia and Farm Rietfontein No. 48

About 1,600 morgen of land is set aside as group area and proposed group area for the members of the Indian community on Farm Rietfontein No. 48, which includes the township of Lenasia. This area is about 22 miles from Johannesburg and is the only land made available to the members of the Indian group.

The township of Lenasia was established long before the area was declared a group area for the members of the Indian group. The Minister of the Interior at that stage granted an open permit to the township company to sell land to Indians. Although the value of the stands there is not more than £10 each, they are sold at the colossal figure of £350! A high school was built there as early as 1953 for Indian children living in Johannesburg and other centres. An offer of the Indian community to provide buildings for a high school in Johannesburg was turned down by the Department of Education.

Although it is the task of the Group Areas Board to inquire into the question of the desirability or otherwise of establishing a group area before an area is so declared, the steps taken at Lenasia show that the minds of the authorities were made up long before the enquiry actually took place. Their using of the Indian children as hostages in the creation of a ghetto is an indication of the length to which the Department of the Interior is prepared to go in accomplishing the ruin of the Indian people.

It has now emerged that this area is to be used as the only group area for all the Indians living in Johannesburg, Kliptown, Maraisburg, Roodepoort, Krugersdorp, Randfontein and adjacent places. This would mean the segregation of two-thirds of the Indian population of the Transvaal into the barren veld of Lenasia and Farm Rietfontein No. 48. Thus we see that by the stroke of a pen thousands have been thrown into confusion. Within one, two or more years, 10,000 Indians living in the western suburbs of Johannesburg must move. They must witness the destruction of their economic interests. With homes uprooted and destroyed they must go to special Indian areas, there to starve in their isolation. The fate of the others, outside the western suburbs, is just the same. They live in perpetual fear,

waiting for the sword to fall. This is a grim prospect for any people.

But the Indian people are opposing the creation of this ghetto. They have decided not to fall into the trap. A school is being run in Johannesburg by the community, and persistent agitation is carried on against the scheme. The Indian people have a rich tradition of resistance to tyranny and oppression in this country; they will have to use all of their resources to meet this challenge.

The Nationalists began to rule with the aid of a section of the White population which they were able to dupe with the misleading slogan of "Afrikanerdom". So forceful was their appeal of subjugating the non-White people that even those Whites who feared and abhorred sectional domination supported them, and in so doing, helped the minority of a minority to entrench itself securely in power. In the course of office they made use of race prejudice to further their aim of establishing one-party rule.

Today, they are entrenched to such an extent that there is widespread dismay and despair within the ranks of the parliamentary opposition. The United Party, the strongest element in this opposition, is content to fulfil its functions as the opposition by trying to "out-Nat" the Nationalists.

The weaknesses of the parliamentary opposition flow from the undemocratic basis of the South African Constitution. Divided between loyalty to a cause and political expediency, a parliamentary party suffers from a dilemma which none has yet been able to solve. It sees the whittling away of rights and the imposition of terror yet does nothing to overcome it.

In this dark period of abject surrender, the democratic alliances of the non-White people emerged as beacons of hope and kept burning the light of liberty in the hearts of men and women throughout the length and breadth of the country. Their dedication to the cause of justice and democracy enabled those progressive Whites who had become aware of the issues to join hands with them. And this great alliance has been strengthened in the course of time, making the political struggle between the Nationalist Party and the liberation movement straightforward. The hand of Nationalism might continue to strike at the most sacred rights of man, may try to terrorise the people in its fury, but it will not be able finally to hold back men from the rights to which as men and forever they were born entitled.