

THE BLACK SASH - NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1980

Fact Paper from Cape Western Region :

THE WESTERN CAPE - COLOURED AND WHITE LABOUR
PREFERENCE AREA - SOME IMPLICATIONS

Until 1950 the coloured population was largely governed by the same laws that applied to whites, only the franchise and access to schools being unequal. With the introduction of apartheid coloureds were deemed separate. A wide variety of legislative measures were passed to enforce their separation. Once classified as coloured they were excluded from the common society to which they had belonged. They were provided with separate but not equal rights, facilities and services. They were not consulted.

As the Theron Commission Report pointed out, specific legislation now "affects their political power, marriage and sexual intercourse, job opportunities and settlement of disputes, wages and taxes, residential ownership, education, administration of justice, criminal offences and public amenities."

The political future of the coloured people has been a central problem to Nationalist politicians. In 1973, so acute had the problem become, that the Prime Minister, Mr B.J. Vorster publicly admitted that the coloured problem was a dilemma and that the ideal relationship between coloured and white groups would be found only "in our children's time."

Coloureds have become increasingly alienated from whites and a growing tendency for coloured leadership is to throw in its lot with blacks. The 1976 riots in the Western Cape provided the final confirmation of how far the process of coloured alienation had advanced. Bound to Blacks and Indians by their common oppression and to whites by their common culture, the coloureds are continually under pressure to take sides. In 1976 their young people clearly made their choice.

The white and coloured preference policy was first outlined by Dr Eiselen in 1955. As the country's laws are structured to white advantage in the widest sense, the policy has had little additional effect on whites, certainly not the detrimental moral and psychological repercussions shown in coloured society. The policy laid down a boundary for the preferential area running south from the Orange River to George, pushing further east in 1963 and 1967 to include the industrial complex of Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage (last two subsequently released).

In terms of the 1965 regulations all employers in this area have to apply for coloured labour. If unable to obtain it then they may use local Black workers. If local blacks are unavailable they may use contract workers. A conscious policy has been pursued of removing 'foreign' blacks and freezing the number of black families allowed. Also, contracts are not renewed, the ultimate aim being to remove them entirely.

Ostensibly this is done for the protection of coloured workers, but it can be postulated that it is to fulfil the long-cherished dream of Dr Verwoerd and Mr Blaar Coetzee and other Nationalists, of ridding the Western Cape of Africans. Dr Verwoerd's statement of 1955 referring to the Western Province was "the area where ... the policy of apartheid in regard to the Bantu can be applied with the greatest ease". Perhaps it was the dream of maintaining a last white stronghold in South Africa?

The Theron Commission report of April 1976 reflected this thinking. The only exception in the voting on the coloured preferential policy being Professor R.E. v d Ross, then a prominent coloured leader and educationist.

Then in October of 1979 Professor S.P. Cilliers, Professor of Sociology at Stellenbosch University and a colleague of Dr Theron, recommended the abolition of the coloured preferential policy, commenting that economic and sociological studies showed conclusively that the policy had an ideological political base with no relevance to human or economic reality. Later in October, Dr Theron herself and Professor J.B. du Toit, also a member of the commission, concurred in the light of Professor Cilliers' findings and also the new labour policy (Wiehahn & Riekert) in the country, which excludes the Western Cape because of the coloured preference policy.

Other members of the commission and coloured leaders welcomed their stand but Nationalist politicians expressed their determination to fight for the retention of the policy. The Black Sash Office (W. Cape) received a long statement to this effect in August when we requested an interview with regard to black domestics in the Western Cape.

What are the implications of this policy? We can examine them with respect to two groups, black and coloured. Blacks have, in practical terms, been most affected. The ultimate aim of removing all blacks from the Western Cape has resulted in 24 years of active endorsing out, large scale conversion of African urban workers into migrant workers, numerous restrictions, the refusal to build houses, schools and tertiary educational institutions, the freezing of African labour complements to the employment figures of August 1966 and the deliberate reduction of the number of Africans in employment in the area at the rate of 5% per annum.

("In 1966 there were about 35,000 contract workers in the Western Cape as against more than 88,000 in 1970. By 1975 there were 160,000 Blacks registered in work in the Western Cape, 94,000 of whom were contract workers and 66,000 of whom had Section 10 rights. Since then the State has reduced the number of contract workers in the Peninsula to 18,000. Many of these workers are in Crossroads where they have brought their families. Koornhof's promises offer these men temporary residence, but no security to remain." - Wages Commission UCT report on the Riekert Commission. (These figures refer to legal blacks).

There have been massive pass book and influx control arrests. In the Peninsula during 1978 11,823 black men and 4,525 black women were arrested for such offences (Minister Koornhof's figures given on 2nd March 1979). The attempt to reverse the stream from country to city has brought untold misery to thousands and thousands of blacks, not only those legally in the area who have been shockingly overcrowded and inadequately housed with extremely limited educational facilities and few job opportunities, but also to those who have been forced to seek illegal employment with the grim prospect of squatting and harrassment.

The Athlone Advice Office knows well the agonies in every sphere of life for blacks - no houses for those legally here, no chance of legal men getting permission for wives and families to join them, few jobs, none for school leavers, few new contracts for job seekers, and always the threat of arrests and fines for those illegally employed. For black domestic workers working illegally, it is bitter to know that coloured women and legal blacks do not want 'living in' jobs. Yet they, in a time of acute unemployment, are forbidden to work and their employers frightened off with the R500 fine.

Dr Koornhof's ministry's statement to us that coloureds of the Western Cape are resultingly better off is not borne out by the statements of coloured leaders. Dr R.E. v d Ross, now Rector of the University of the Western Cape, has said that Coloured people did not regard the blacks as a threat. Everyone, he says, should have the right to sell their labour in a free and open market. Mr David Curry, deputy leader of the Labour Party, said that blacks were an indispensable part of the economy everywhere in the country. If they were removed from the Western Cape it would mean economic retardation for all race groups.

Professor S.P. Cilliers said that black people have lived in the Western Cape for at least 6 generations and it was a source of deep bitterness to them that they were prevented from reaching their full potential. He continued, saying that the labour needs of commerce and industry cancelled out the effectiveness of the policy and the numbers of black people in the Cape had not decreased (the official figures are for legal blacks which have decreased). If population succession, the upward movement in jobs, were to be artificially stopped by the removal of blacks from the area, it could, economically, be to the detriment of the advancement of the coloured population.

He ended by saying that the inability of black people to own their own houses was a major frustration to them, inexplicable considering the recent decision to grant leasehold titles to black people in other urban areas.

The general opposition to the policy is extensive, including such bodies as the Cape Employers' Association, the Cape Chamber of Commerce, the Cape Chamber of Industries, the Urban Foundation, the homelands black leadership group, the Labour Party, the Master Builders Association, many academics, the Stellenbosch branch of the National Party (the only Nat body?) and not least, the Black Sash.

Lastly the effect on the coloured population itself is subtle and demoralising. In the Athlone Advice Office annual report we stated that it was dangerous and unhealthy to protect one group at the expense of another for the benefit of a third it was economically, socially and morally harmful - above all its perpetrators are being dishonest.

Coloureds, though "they have a de jure position of privilege, their de facto position in terms of working conditions and wages is only marginally better than that of the African worker". (Wages Commission UCT report on Riekert Commission.)

Dr Jakes Gerwel, lecturer in Afrikaans & Nederlands at the University of the Western Cape, believes the Western Cape preferential policy shows a cynical disregard for coloured opinion. As the Coloured Teachers Educational and Professional Association said in June 1955: "What the coloureds wanted was economic opportunity not economic protection". Opposition has been long standing and fruitless. No group can tolerate such "protection" when the motives are so questionable. We can spell out what they are and can clearly see that the implications of this coloured labour area policy spell disaster.

S. PHILCOX

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