

# FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN FARMER

By Jean van Riet

I am sure ever so many white people have no idea of the uphill fight a black child has to get educated, nor what a struggle it is for the parents financially nor of the impediments and obstacles purposefully (I cannot call it otherwise) placed there by one or other Bantu Administration Department.

We privileged whites simply take education for granted and due to the "apartheid policy" there is practically no contact and many do not know and do not care what the position is regarding education for the blacks, especially in the rural area is the position critical.

I am a farmer and care for the interests of my employees, especially regarding the education and welfare of their children. We have 150 pupils in the school on my farm. Allow me to tell you of my personal experiences over the last 40 years, leaving out difficulties like the long distances (often 7, 8 and more km) many children have to walk (there is no transport) to the nearest school, which, as you can imagine, is especially difficult in winter time for undernourished and scantily-clad children. In December 1961 I was prohibited from personally giving prizes for encouragement to the Excelsior Bantu School children which I had been doing for the previous twenty-five years. The correspondence, which I still have, between me and the authorities regarding the issue is a revelation. Again in 1962 the small rental paid for the building I erected for the school was withdrawn and after correspondence (also still in my possession) I was advised that I could use the said building for a farm shed on the closing down of the school. This of course did not happen as I had no intention at all of closing down the school; my aim was merely to test the attitude of the department which shows clearly the don't-care and inhuman approach of the department regarding the education of the black children. To read the correspondence regarding this issue is truly sad,

especially when one considers the selfish, inhuman and short-sighted attitude when so much brain power is required in our developing country.

This year we have experienced another senseless and provocative attitude. Children can only go to Standard IV at farm schools, in spite of there being all the facilities required at the Excelsior Location Bantu school these children are prohibited from staying on boarding in the location to further their studies. As the parents simply cannot afford to send their children to the larger boarding schools in the homelands these youngsters just float around to become cheap labour. Imagine if white children from the farms were prohibited from going to a town school under similar circumstances!

Now there is a new obstacle to keep children from their natural citizenship rights and probably later of their free education and even old age pension rights! Children going to a Bantu school for the first time must produce a birth certificate and these certificates declare them to be citizens of one or other of the homelands in spite of the fact that their parents were born in the white area and lived there all their lives. These children now become foreigners in their own country and you can guess what discrimination will probably be their lot in the future. Naturally many parents do not want to register their children under these circumstances but of course NO birth certificate NO education!

We are living in a highly competitive world and we cannot afford to withhold adequate education from any section of our community. There is no question that South Africa can probably utilize its material resources and increase its prosperity only if the intelligence and skill of the whole population is fully developed. It is a crying shame to see how we go about it. •

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