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PUTTING THE SCREWS ON

"O, God, that men should be so cheap,
And bread should be so dear."

TWOPENCE extra on the price of a loaf of bread!

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Mr. Havenga was not primarily concerned with the relatively small extra revenue that the bread tax would produce. A small extra tax on luxury goods would have produced the same results. The fact is that bread has become the staple diet of the urban workers, Africans and others alike. And the urban worker is the main target of the Nationalists' new budget. He will be the chief victim of the 14 per cent increase in railway fares announced by Mr. Sauer. He is the chief victim of Dr. Verwoerd's new pass books, of the Western Areas plan in Johannesburg, of Schoeman's anti-African trade union Bill.

It is no accident that the African industrial worker has been the object of all these concerted attacks at the present time.

Many critics of *apartheid* take their stand on the arguments that "it won't work," it is merely election propaganda," "it is economically impossible," and similar themes. They assume that *apartheid* is a sort of fancy scheme for a "Bantustan," or some such nonsense: in this they are mistaken. True, the reality of *apartheid* is something far different from the fancy picture painted by Government propagandists, the gobbledygook of certain Stellenbosch professors, or the hypocritical pretences of D.R.C. predikants, attempting the impossible task of reconciling brute repression with the faith they profess.

By attacking these myths, these critics are demolishing straw men, leaving unscathed the savage reality of Nationalist policy towards non-white people as it has taken shape over the past five years, and continues to do so in one tyrannical legislative and administrative measure after another.

The true nature and purpose of *apartheid* will best be divined by an examination of some of the concrete measures being implemented and introduced by the Government.

Western Areas Plan

Dr. Verwoerd's "slim" talk in the Assembly about "home ownership on a leasehold basis" for the displaced people of the Western Areas will not hide the truth from any person who has made the slightest independent investigation of the facts about the Verwoerd Plan

Briefly, the plan is as follows :

Approximately eighty thousand non-European men, women and children are to be expelled piecemeal from their homes in Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare, Western Native Township and Coronationville. The non-white owners will not be compensated for their property (Verwoerd says they can sell to Europeans, or the N.A.D., so "the question of compensation does not arise.") There is no other land in Johannesburg where non-whites can acquire freehold rights, nor will such land be made available.

But this is no mere problem of the owners — "slum landlords" as the Minister sneeringly called them. (It is wonderful with what contempt Dr. Verwoerd regards a slum landlord — if he happens to be non-white!)

Above all, it is the problem and the tragedy of the thousands of African families, whom it is proposed to provide with little plots on the veld, near Orlando where they will be allowed and "assisted" to put up shanties — no doubt on the familiar Jabavu-Moroka pattern.

Of course, Sophiatown and Newclare are slums. Where else are Non-Europeans allowed to live but in slums? But at least these areas are provided with shops, schools, hospitals, churches, bioscopes, tarred roads, lights, water The dwellings are crowded and dirty, but at least they are weatherproof. These things are not perfect, but they are heaven, compared with the hell of Moroka! However imperfect the Sophiatown bus service, it is better than the Orlando-Pimville train service already forty per cent. overcrowded, and perpetually late

Also, Sophiatown and Newclare are not locations where people are fenced in like animals in the Zoo, with a superintendent at the gate to supervise comings and goings, to collect lodgers' fees and examine visitors' permits

These are some of the reasons why a mighty wave of opposition is developing to the Western Areas Plan.

The Pass Books

Several Witwatersrand pass offices have already started issuing the new books which are being sold by the Native Affairs Department under the "Abolition of Passes and Co-Ordination of Documents Act." Never was legislation misnamed with crueller irony. The abolition of passes has been the cherished dream of generations of African patriots, who recognised in the pass system a cornerstone of the structure of African subjugation and the cheap labour system; the badge of slavery; the ticket of admission to the pick-up van, the cells, the farm jails

Verwoerd's Pass Books retain all the evil features of the old passes, with which we believe most readers of *Liberation* will be familiar. They also add a number of new features, which will make the pass system even more objectionable and onerous. Unlike the old service contracts, which were cancelled and replaced upon a man's leaving one job for another, the Verwoerd Books are designed to be permanent. A spiteful employer or pass office official, to whom you do not say "abaas" quickly or often enough, can put a black mark in your book which you will have to carry around with you for the rest of your life

Simultaneously with the issue of Verwoerd Books (and under the pretext of dealing with tsotsi problem,) the police have launched a major series of drives to round up tax-defaulters, temporarily unemployed Africans and men who are "unable to give a good and satisfactory account of themselves." Countless families are being broken up, countless children made fatherless, as men are picked up in the police-N.A.D. net and deported from the towns.

We have selected but two concrete items of current apartheid policy for analysis above. There are many others. There is Mr. Schoeman's "Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Bill," described on another page by Mr. Weinberg. There are the proposed "tsotsi

camps designed to herd African youth into compulsory labour at cut rates. There are the innumerable legislative and administrative acts designed to stifle free speech, to silence popular leaders, terrify the opposition and suppress the people's resistance.

Behind It All.

What's behind it all? Race prejudice and the *apartheid* ideology? No doubt, Dr. Malan and his Ministers are filled with the spirit of racial arrogance and contempt for the non-white peoples. But it is more than ideology and prejudice that lies behind the vicious new *apartheid* measures.

In his annual report, Dr. M. H. de Kock, Governor of the Reserve Bank complained bitterly of the shortage of cheap labour.

Our main problem ... is the persistent shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour, which shortage has seriously handicapped the gold mining industry and some of our vital industrial enterprises and has also retarded the scope of farming and public services generally."

Dr. de Kock customarily speaks with the voice of the great financial and mining interests who dominate South Africa's economy and are the real masters of the country. They want labour diverted towards the mines and the farms, and such essential supplementary services as heavy engineering and the railways. Now, if you examine these industries, you will find that they are precisely those in which the lowest wages and worst conditions are offered for labour, particularly African labour.

There is no labour shortage in industries which manufacture consumer goods, and offer wages rather higher than those which the mines and farms provide. Go to any factory making clothes, furniture, footwear, where wages for labourers and semi-skilled workers range from £3 to £5 per week. You will find men outside looking for work. Dr. de Kock and the employers for whom he speaks know perfectly well that if they were prepared to offer living wages and tolerable conditions there would be no "labour shortage." The fact is that, against a background of steep increases in the cost of living, real wages have fallen to the extent where it is no longer possible for the mine or engineering labourer to support his family on his earnings.

Making It Compulsory.

But, to offer a decent wage to labour is the last thing South Africa's imperialistic Randlords and feudalistic farmers are prepared to do. Their attitude has not changed one whit since 1897, when the gold mines asked the Kruger Government to introduce taxation and other measures to coerce African labour on to the mines. A Commission was set up, and the mine-owners' spokesman was asked by a Commissioner:

"Would you be in favour of asking the Government to enforce

labour?"

Albu: "Certainly. A Kaffir cannot live on nothing."

Commissioner: "You would make it compulsory?"

Albu: "I would make it compulsory, and without using force. A tax would be levied."

Here, we have the crude reality behind the Nationalist "ideological" legislation backed up in all its essentials by the United Party. Catch the "Kaffirs" in the remorseless pincers of economic pressure and police terror. Tax their bread. ("If the effect of the budget was to get the Natives once again to eat mealie meal porridge ... it would have achieved one useful purpose" — Nat. M.P., van den Heever, 28.7.53) Drive them from their homes. Raid them and harry them and hunt them into the compounds and out to the farms.

This Is 1953

But this is 1953, not 1897. The Government is dealing today not with the scattered and leaderless tribes of Kruger's day, but with an awakened and fast-uniting African nation, spearheaded by a working class that has been disciplined and educated by half a century of industrial development, organised in such a formidable organisation as the African National Congress, and allied with progressive elements among other groups such as the S.A. Indian Congress and the newly-formed Congress of Democrats speaking for a growing and determined minority among the whites who seek a democratic South Africa. Despite Schoeman's anti-trade union Bill, the time is ripe for a rapid and militant growth of African trade unions. And as increasing sections of the white middle and working classes get caught in the crossfire of the Nationalists' economic drive to cheapen labour, this alliance is bound to be joined by more advanced elements from such bodies as the Trades and Labour Council, the Labour Party and the Liberal Party in resistance to specific aspects of the Government's Nazi plans.

We may expect the Malanites to resort to more dictatorial methods. "Putting the screws on" is not merely an economic and police matter as it was yesterday. More and more political measures are resorted to, in an effort to batter down the structure of a new, democratic South Africa, that is arising within the crumbling shell of the old. Police raids, bans on literature, proscription of leaders, expulsion of elected trade union officials become the order of the day. Brian Bunting, elected by an overwhelming majority, who has proved himself as staunch a fighter for people's rights in Parliament as he has been in journalism, is given his marching orders from the House of Assembly. Malan and Strauss are bargaining over the price of the Coloured vote. A huge and extravagantly costly machinery of State repression is growing up.

All to no avail.

The fresh breeze of peace and freedom is blowing through the world. We South Africans have caught a breath of its sweet, life-giving savour. And there is no force that can stop us breaking down the suffocating dungeon walls of oppression.