

child to master his distorted schemes easily, and to fan the spirit of tribalism to divide the African people.

"Bantu education" is a reactionary scheme which very nearly destroys education for the African in South Africa. It is reactionary because it is designed to satisfy the needs of a reactionary and heartless class of exploiters. Whilst the Nationalists disregard the needs and interests of the masses of the people, and subject the people to a more ruthless oppression and exploitation in the interests of solving the contradictions of their society they do not take into account the sharpening conflict they are creating between themselves and the people, which will ultimately break their artificial political and economic structure.

DAN TILCOTE, writes on

RENT INCREASES

AN enthusiastic campaign is being conducted by the Non-Europeans throughout the country in opposition to rent increases recently introduced by the Government for African Townships, locations, and hostels, falling within the jurisdiction of the local authorities. Of all the outstanding issues which have provoked intense protest and resentment among the African people, the question of increase in rentals stands out as the most callous and a direct assault upon the ever-worsening economic position of the lowest income group of the community — the Africans.

The circular letter circulated to tenants of various Townships by the Johannesburg local authority states: inter alia:

"In terms of the Government Notice No. 1516 of the 23rd July, 1954, the Minister of Native Affairs has ruled that as from the 1st October of this year tenants in the African houses shall pay an economic rental if their family income exceeds £15 per month, and a sub-economic rental if their family income falls below £15 per month. The Minister has further ruled that all tenants will be regarded as belonging to the economic group and be required to pay an economic rental unless and until they are able to prove to the satisfaction of their respective Superintendents that their income was less than £15 per month on an average over the period 1st July, 1953 to 30th June, 1954."

The Chief information officer of the Department of Native Affairs, Mr. C. W. Prinsloo, explaining the specified directive issued to Urban Local authorities on this question stated, inter alia, "that the Government has issued this directive after receiving continued and justified representations from local authorities about the excessive

losses they had to bear on sub-economic housing every year." He further stated that the Pretoria City Council and the Native Housing Commission have to subsidise a scheme of 150 houses to the extent of more than £50,000 a year, and many of the houses for which the average rent is less than £1.10 a month are occupied by Bantu Traders and Clerks with incomes ranging from £25 to £70 a month (Daily Mail 27 9 54).

The impression given in this directive is that only those whose earnings are above £15 a month will pay economic rentals. The position is that there are going to be increases in rentals for all tenants irrespective of whether or not they earn an economic wage. What is an economic wage? Who determines the standard? The fact that Mr. Prinsloo quotes people whose earnings range from £25 to £70 a month, is an indication that the standard of £15 as a borderline wage group is unrealistic, as will be revealed by the facts showing the present economic position of the people. The increase in rentals will mean an average increase of 90% to all whose earnings are above £15 per month, and an average of 30% increase to all tenants irrespective of what their earnings are as long as they prove that their wages are below £15 per month. In short there is going to be increase in rentals of all tenants who live in Municipal Townships, locations and hostels.

Think of the state in which tenants find some of the houses erected under the sub-economic scheme it is common knowledge that houses without ceilings, unplastered walls and uneven floors have been offered to tenants during the last 15 years. In most cases tenants have had to pay not less than £50 on improvements before the house is ready for occupation. Yet these are the same people who are today called upon to pay increases in rentals.

Cannot Afford 1d. More

The major question to be considered is whether the average African labourer, living in Townships and locations can afford to meet the proposed increase in rentals? To answer this question, it would be helpful to examine some of the facts brought out by careful investigations conducted by some well-known institutions like the South African Institute of Race Relations, as well as Government Commissions of Inquiry.

According to information available, the minimum expenditures in 1944 for an African family of five living in municipal townships, to cover essential requirements which include only food, cleaning materials, fuel, clothing and transport was estimated to be £12. 18. 6 per month as compared with an average minimum income of £9. 18. 1 per month, whilst the average minimum expenditure for 1950 was £17. 14. 4 as against the average minimum income of £12. 6. 6. It is estimated that in 1954 the minimum expenditure

would be £23. 10. 4 a month as against the average minimum income of £15. 18. 11 a month.

It will be noted that during the period covered by the survey (1944-1954) the difference between the expenditure and the income is cash deficit which must be met by the families concerned. The result is that the vast majority of African families have to live from crisis to crisis in their struggle for existence.

Bearing these facts in mind, coupled with the recent increase in rail fares, it is undoubtedly obvious that the overwhelming majority of the African urban families cannot pay a penny more without great sacrifices of the minimum requirements for subsistence, health and decency, and disastrous dislocation in family life.

Take the report of the Non-European Bus Service Commission in 1944 and the investigation and survey conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1950. They all come to the same conclusion:

1. That the vast majority of African urban workers are paid wages wholly inadequate to meet the minimum expenditure necessary for healthy existence.
2. That even where the husband's earnings are supplemented by contributions from other members of the family, the essential minimum expenditure still cannot be met.
3. That there has been no increase in the basic wage in the occupations employing the largest numbers of Africans at least in the last six years, and the cost of living is inadequate to meet the increased cost of essential commodities.
4. That the steep rise in the cost of food in recent years has had a telling effect on the expenditure of Africans, who must spend the major portion (87%) of their earnings on this item alone.
5. The rise in the cost of clothing, especially women's clothing has also greatly affected African expenditure.

As could be expected, as soon as the proposed rent increases were brought to the notice of the tenants in the various townships, the African people lost no time in registering their resentment and indignation and labelling them as the most callous attack upon the appalling economic standard of a people, the vast majority of whom is on the verge of starvation. The unanimous opposition against this wicked scheme was clearly demonstrated at the various meetings, convened by the officials of the local authorities to place it before the residents. At all these meetings the effective reply of "NO" by the people left no room for doubt.

Coming so closely after the recent increase of rail fares the increase in rentals will undoubtedly cause great hardships and dislikes to the overwhelming majority of the African people.

As Africans are restricted by numerous legislations to seek employment in the best market; to operate trades which offer economic advantages and to utilise the effective machinery of collective bargaining available to other sections of the community, it is most unjust to expect them to pay economic rentals on sub-economic houses and specifically and with the full realisation of the economic position of those who are to occupy them. In any case, if the authorities have now come to realise that sub-economic housing schemes are bad business, and that economic housing schemes will put them in a better position, it behoves the Government to enact legislation fixing an economic minimum wage for all citizens to ensure that the people will afford economic rentals. But it is certainly absurd and highly unreasonable to call upon people to pay economic rentals on sub-economic houses.

Admittedly that it is the African who will be hardest hit by the increases, one should not overlook the fact that the new regulations will affect workers of all sections of the community, Europeans, Indians and Africans and others, and if ever there was an issue which all sections of the community should present an united front to that issue is RENT INCREASES.

LIBERATION

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