

THE SUICIDE OF GROUP AREAS

DR. O. D. WOLLHEIM

Warden of the Cape Flats Distress Association

THE policy of apartheid is based upon the theory that where groups of differing culture and background meet in close contact, friction arises! Many examples are given, such as the tension between the English Raj and the Indians before independence, the Notting Hill difficulties, the Little Rock riot, and others.

The apartheid remedy for this friction is to prevent such points of contact except where they are well understood, with the relationship between the differing groups an established one. The very simplicity of this sort of solution is staggering, but it is also indicative of the fundamental immaturity of Afrikaner Nationalist thinking.

When two surfaces rubbing together generate heat, then the answer is to stop the two surfaces rubbing together. Lubricating the surfaces is too complicated a process; whether the two surfaces *must* rub together in order to make the machine work, is irrelevant. Undesirable heat is generated, so the two surfaces are removed from contact with one another, regardless of the consequences.

The Group Areas Act and the development of Bantustans are the main instrument in bringing about such a separation of the surfaces within the Union of the future. Whites (we are told) will eventually have no rights in the Bantustans, and the Group Areas Act will deal with the polyglot remainder of South Africa.

The Act seeks to create a situation in the future in which separate areas on a sort of chequer-board pattern will have been created in every one of the urban areas of the Union. Each area will have been designated for the occupation of a specific racial group; and in these areas the respective groups will not only be expected to reside, but also to provide all the services, such as the police, the hospitals, education, and the running of all industry and commerce as well as the local councils.

In this way the apologists for apartheid imagine that they will be preventing the generation of heat by removing the rubbing surfaces from one another. Frustration will have been eliminated, because in the separate areas there will be no restrictions upon the ambitions of the inhabitants for whom the area has been reserved.

In very many areas of the Union of South Africa it is possible to apply the Group Areas Act with a minimum of dislocation. Such parts are as yet comparatively new and were only developed under a policy of strict segregation. In the larger urban areas of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban, however, in spite of a strong segregatory practice over all the years, there has been such enormous industrial, commercial and economic development that the towns have become integrated residentially and economically.

What used to be an out-lying location, such as Sophiatown, has been swallowed up by the expansion of white businesses and houses in that region, so that it has become what the Government terms a "black spot"; the percentage of non-white people employed in industry has risen till to-day it is rather more than two-thirds of the whole; trade has become so integrated that it would be almost impossible to determine exactly how much of it is controlled by any one or other racial group.

The greatest difficulty of all, though, is being—and will increasingly be—created in the older towns of the Western Cape Province and the City of Cape Town. For hundreds of years there was no more than the normal sort of voluntary segregation of one social group from another. There has always been the ordinary, normal and natural flow from one group to another group, which the community has absorbed with no difficulty whatsoever.

This process has been going on since 1652 and a compulsory form of segregation has only made its appearance in the last twenty to thirty years. The first difficulty is, therefore, one of definition. Who is white, and who is black, who is Coloured, who is Malay? The normal migration from one social group to another has been going on in the Cape for nearly 300 years, and it is impossible for any old-established white Cape family to claim with 100% certainty that there is no non-white blood in its ancestry. There are accepted white families who have up to 25% of non-white blood in their veins. A clear dividing line between white and Coloured in Cape Town does not exist, and any definition and separation of these two groups from one another must be by *ad hoc* definition based on empirical criteria. Similarly there is no clear dividing line between Coloured and African.

In the residential areas of Cape Town up to shortly before 1939, there were many groups of Coloured people living dotted

about the Cape Peninsula in areas which had been determined largely by historical factors.

Three small groups of Coloured people went to live in Sea Point close on a century ago. They started as coachmen and stable hands of the old Cape Town Tramway Company when it instituted a horse-drawn service between the City and Sea Point; and they have since become an integral part of that community, performing essential services within it.

Other groups in the southern suburbs have been there for centuries. Shortly after 1652 farms were handed out to 'free burghers' in what are the present-day suburbs of Rondebosch, Newlands, Claremont and Wynberg. Simon van der Stel, the second Governor of the Cape (and, incidentally, a Coloured man), developed a large and beautiful estate in the Constantia Valley. These farms were provided with slave labour, and these communities developed around the original slave quarters.

Areas such as these developed where they did at the behest of white people, in order to provide services for white people. If to-day they have become "black spots", it is not the fault of non-white people; and the full responsibility for the consequences, social, political and economic, of any tampering with these communities must be accepted solely by those white people who have demanded group areas.

When a group area is proclaimed, a certain period of time is set at the end of which all persons from the other groups must move out. The Minister may, in his discretion, issue extensions of time if he can be satisfied that no alternative accommodation exists. The proclamation of group areas in a city like Cape Town is therefore destined eventually to interfere basically with the lives of tens of thousands of people, to uproot and displace very many large and old-established communities from areas which have become their traditional homes over three centuries.

Communities develop in particular areas because the conditions are fertile for such development there. Their speed of growth, their size and function are determined by the social climate, the economic need and the law of supply and demand. There is a social and economic ecology within each community as well as between one community and another. Man is a social being and cannot live except in relation to other men and their institutions and organizations. For this reason a community develops interlocking mutual interests, and the social scientist realizes that it is extremely dangerous to tamper with such

dynamic processes.

Against the express wish of the citizens and the local Council, group areas in the City of Cape Town have been proclaimed for white occupation in the Table Mountain, Sea Point, Woodstock, Brooklyn, Maitland, Goodwood, Parow and Bellville suburbs. The proclamations set time limits for the various areas, and these expired early in 1959 for Sea Point and Table Mountain. The period of grace for the other areas will expire at varying times between now and January, 1963. At this moment the Act only affects a few hundred people living in one part of Newlands and in Sea Point, but by 1963 the number of persons affected might exceed 10,000. No reliable figures are available.

With these proclamations the Group Areas Act has not even properly started on its task. The Cape Peninsula has a Coloured population of approximately 350,000. Even if two-thirds of the existing population already live in what are likely to be Coloured group areas, there will still be in excess of 20,000 families (over 100,000 persons) who will have to be uprooted and displaced, to say nothing of the number of white people who will also have to move.

One can, however, be reasonably certain that the number of white persons to be affected by the Group Areas Act will be small. In Kimberley, for instance, the Group Areas Proclamation 157/59 will effect approximately 1.5% of the white people (300 persons), approximately 50% of the Coloured people (over 10,000 persons), and the entire Indian and Chinese populations.

Industrial expansion in any country has always brought about heavy voluntary migration of people from rural areas to the towns. Many studies have shown the resultant social dislocation of this process. To take people out of an environment to which they have become accustomed over the centuries and to place them at short notice in a completely new one is to upset the nature of man's being, because he no longer exists in relation to other men and men's institutions. He must now start the difficult process of developing new relationships in an area where he feels like a stranger.

The stresses resultant upon such environment changes inevitably bring with them psychological difficulties and aberrated forms of behaviour. Marital relations are upset and the divorce rate rises; parent-child relationships are made difficult because of the father's sense of inadequacy in his new environment; there

is a rise in juvenile delinquency; the feeling of social inadequacy leads to compensating activities and there is an increase in sexual promiscuity, the abuse of alcohol and illicit narcotic traffic.

These consequences flow from the natural and voluntary migration of people responding to the law of supply and demand in an era of economic expansion. If the migration is involuntary and legally enforced against their will, with no basis in economic necessity but only in a completely blind prejudice, then the consequences will necessarily be much graver. One can therefore look forward, in the Union of South Africa, to a period of increasing social dislocation which will have its roots in no other causes but in the application of this Act. There have already been two Coloured suicides recorded in Cape Town during the past six months as a direct result of the recent group area proclamations.

But the Act is not only socially self-destructive, it is also economically crazy. The enormous industrial expansion of our larger cities has resulted in a very severe shortage of housing. All the major cities have slums where people live in unbelievably over-crowded conditions. It is common for social workers to report on a small house of five rooms, a passage and a verandah occupied by five different families representing some 35 people.

There is a shortage of at least 12,000 houses for Coloured families in Cape Town; to this should be added the housing required by approximately 75,000 Africans, the majority of whom are migrant male unskilled workers. To overtake this backlog in, say, 10 years, would mean building at the rate of 2,000 houses per year or seven per day in Cape Town alone. If the houses, together with services such as water, light, roads, sanitation, etc., and land, cost only £500 each, the expenditure would be in the region of £1,000,000 per year for the next ten years.

This would only overtake the backlog and would take no care of the present-day expansion of Cape Town. This has been anything but normal, for the total population has been trebled in less than twenty years. This economic expansion continues and the need for increased man-power has never stopped. If the city wishes to face a reasonably normal housing position in ten years' time, it would have to build at double the suggested rate, viz., 4,000 houses per year at an estimated cost of £2,000,000 every year for the next ten years.

The Group Areas Act would displace not less than 100,000

people. Admittedly some of them live in slums and would in any case have to be rehoused, but a very large percentage live in good, durable houses of modest size. The final application of the Group Areas Act could very easily result in the need for yet another 10,000 houses for the displaced people.

There is no shortage of housing for white people, so that the proclaimed white group areas would end up with large numbers of derelict properties of good quality previously occupied by Coloured people. It would be many years before the present development of Cape Town would cause all such vacated areas to be taken over for use by white people. The net result could easily be the building of 10,000 unnecessary houses with another 10,000 standing derelict elsewhere.

Other economic implications are as crazy. In the case of Kimberley quoted above, there are 250 Indian families who hold 440 trading licences (including hawkers' licences). These businesses are mainly small family concerns, handed down from father to son for varying periods of up to 90 years. In Johannesburg and the other Reef cities, in Pretoria, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, Indians have not only developed small businesses but also control enormous wholesale concerns.

The Group Areas Act will in due course not only cause the Indians to live in an Indian group area, but will also eventually force them to close down these established places of business and find other occupations since they cannot all trade on each other. The area set aside for Indians in Johannesburg is at Lenasia, over 20 miles from the centre of Johannesburg and geographically completely isolated from the economic vortex of activities between Johannesburg and Springs. Apart from the serious consequences within the community of tampering with and eliminating a completely integrated sector of its economy, it is economic murder for the whole Indian community. Apart from all the other adjustments they will have to make, they will have to start to learn new ways of subsisting.

It is no wonder that Alan Paton has described the Group Areas Act as the greatest sin which the white people of South Africa have committed. It is the social and economic ruination of millions of people who have helped to build South Africa by a selfish white group; and it blandly ignores the rights, the wishes and the humanity of the people it will affect.