

# CRISIS IN EDUCATION —

## A BLACK MAN'S VIEW

by Nthato Motlana

Throughout history education (and therefore knowledge) has been used by the ruling élite, whether this was the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church who used Latin to confuse the masses or the slave owners of America who made it a criminal offence to teach a slave to read and write.

It is not by accident that the churches of the ruling white elite in South Africa, the churches of the men in direct conflict with us blacks for the control of this, our common fatherland, were conspicuous by their determination not to be associated with the grand missionary endeavour of the Methodists, the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics to educate South Africa's indigenous peoples.

It is indeed common knowledge that there is a crisis in education. It is not caused by lack of funds — a diversion of a mere 10% of the millions wasted in arming against an imaginary Russian threat — wasted because the Russians have no intention of attacking South Africa, and if they did the war would be over in less than an hour! That 10% — amounting to well over R100 million — would go a very long way to improving the appallingly poor state of black education.

The crisis is not because of the lack of teachers. There are thousands of black teachers now in commerce and industry because of the intolerable conditions in the classrooms, the discrimination in salaries and conditions of service. There are also many people of other races here and overseas who would be only too willing, given the right conditions, to come to the rescue of black education. In fact the story goes that one of the so-called Homelands opted for so-called independence because it could not get entry visas for the many teachers it had recruited overseas.

The crisis is not because of lack of classrooms. Geniuses have been nurtured from backyards and under marsela trees. Jews of the Diaspora and the ghettos of Europe and Russia produced Einsteins taught in their living rooms.

No. The crisis is because the essential ingredient is missing —. This is the will and determination to so educate the black child that he may realise his full human potential. On the contrary there is an obvious will and determination actually to deny the black that education which permits the realisation of his human potential. And when Dr Verwoerd gave us that masterpiece — the Bantu Education Act — it was immediately dubbed Education for Ignorance. And when the said act went further to state that "It is a criminal offence for one Bantu to teach another," it became a Recipe for Disaster.

Intrinsic to this crisis is the dilemma of South Africa's ruling white elite. They have always looked upon us blacks as a colonised people, have exploited us just as Britain exploited India and the Indians, used them as sources of cheap raw materials and as markets for their over-priced goods.

To maintain this type of relationship, it was necessary to prohibit industries and other meaningful commercial activities among the colonised people. That is why poor Mr Sam Matsuemyame pleads in vain for the liberalisation of policies that decree the exclusion of the black man from the so-called free enterprise system. It would contradict the basic South African political beliefs enshrined in the statement "There shall be no equality in Church or State."

To educate the black man fully is to raise him to realise his full humanity, on a par with other races, especially the ruling white elite, to raise expectations that must lead to his demanding full equality in the land of his fathers.

This, of course, is heresy! Our rulers are, therefore, forced to compound the dilemma by conning us with devices such as the Bantu Education Act — a system scientifically tailored in the immortal words of Dr Verwoerd to remind us blacks always of our inferior position in the body politic.

And to black parents and students who over the years have cried out for a uniform, universal, national system of education, the dilemma is how could the colonised, the servants, the maids, the petrol attendants, fated never to rise above those stations in our apartheid society, how could you ask that these people have the same educational system as the ruling white elite? Ridiculous!

And where in the aftermath of Soweto 1976 when even the white elite is willing to concede that the late Dr Verwoerd might just have overstated his case, though refusing to repudiate his basic stand, the new Minister of Bantu Education insists on coming up with another Bantu Education Act, for whatever name he gives the new act, that is what it will be called. After all will it not like Bantu Education 1 be specially designed to cater for the peculiar and unique needs of the so-called Bantus?

My brief, Mr Chairman, was to share with you a black South African's thoughts on the crisis in our education system. It is not to suggest solutions. But may I point out the very obvious solution staring us all in the face? Let us all work hard to convince this short-sighted white ruling elite that their salvation lies in a common fatherland — that their "pie in the sky" unattainable policy of separate development, separate educational systems etc., etc., is a sure recipe for disaster — that this crisis as far as we blacks are concerned will only be solved when all our countrymen, black or white, are regarded and treated as South Africans, equal before the law, and all equally entitled to the best educational system available. There is still a tremendous fund of goodwill in this land waiting for a true statesman to exploit it in the interests of all, not for the benefit of one tribe fortuitously in power and who may, just as fortuitously, lose that power. □