

36

THE BANTU EDUCATION ACT.  
Education for slaves.

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On April the 11th 1955, Dr. Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs, took full control of African education. It is on this day that the Bantu Education Act was put into effect.

It may appear on the surface that state control of education is a desirable thing. But here in South Africa state control means control by only one section - and a minority section at that of the population, i.e. by the European population. At no time were the African people, who are most effected by the Bantu Education Act, asked for their opinion. As far as they are concerned this is an enforced, and not a democratic policy. Nor were the churches who operated numerous mission schools asked for their views, they were given the choice between handing over their schools to the Government or closing them down.

The Bantu Education Act makes it a criminal offence to conduct a <sup>African</sup> school without a certificate of registration, and gives the Minister powers to withdraw a certificate of registration without cause assigned or chance of appeal to the courts. In short it gives the Minister of Native affairs unrestricted powers to decide for himself vital matters such as teachers conditions of service and the content of African education. By placing African education under the control of the Minister of Native affairs, instead of its rightful place the Department of Education the Nationalist Government aims to take one section of the population and divide it from the rest of the population, its aim is to ensure the continuence of white supremacy through the denial to the African people of the cultural heritage which is theirs by right.

In a statement to the Senate June 1954 the Minister of Native Affairs made the following points:-

"The General aims of the Bantu Education Act are to transform education for Natives into Bantu Education.

Native children will receive such fundamental educational facilities as can be provided with available funds, which will include education in Sub-standards A. and B. and probably up to Standard II, including reading, writing and arithmetic through mother-tongue instruction, as well as a knowledge of English and Afrikaans, and the cardinal principles of the Christian religion.

A Bantu pupil must obtain knowledge, skills and attitudes in the schools which will be useful and advantageous to him and at the same time beneficial to his community.... the school must equip him to meet the demands which the economic life of South Africa will impose of him.

These children are under the supervision of their teachers for a full school day of four and a half hours. I used the word 'supervision' because naturally during all these hours there cannot be talk of real instruction.... there cannot even be talk of organised recreation, because the schools are not equipped for this purpose.

It is therefore wrong to utilise expensive teaching staff to supervise large classes of bored pupils while thousands of children are kept out of school.

For the reason, school hours of pupils in sub-standards will every where be shortened to three hours per day. In this way both the teacher and the school will be able to serve two different groups of pupils every day. The same applies of the furniture, school requisites and class reading books.....

It is not the function of the school to keep the children off the streets or the veld by using well-paid teachers to supervise them..... Parents and children must be responsible for the care and cleaning and maintenance of class rooms and school grounds.....As far as possible all the work in t is connection must be carried out by the pupils themselves. The daily cleaning of the school buildings and grounds will naturally be the work of the pupils under the supervision of the teacher.

Pupils in post-primary schools will have to buy all the school books they need. All other school requisites including pens and exercise books, in both primary and second schools, must be provided either by the children, the Bantu authority, or the parents' association. Children without these school requisites will not be enrolled.

Education in the lower classes is seriously affected by what can be decribed as "the standard VI mentality" of the teachers (teachers educate as though the pupils are going to complete the primary course) The primary syllabus will, therefore, be devided into two self-sufficient parts. Only children who have completed their seventh year will be allowed to enrol in the first course, 'the fundamental course' and no urban children older than eleven and no rural children more than twelve years will be enrolled.

The end of the lower primary course the pupils will be carefully selected for promotion to the higher course, pupils who fail the final tests twice will have to leave school ot make place for more able children. The curriculum in the 'fundamental' of lower primary stage cannot go much further than the teaching of the 'three R's. through the medium of the mother-tongue, the beginning of the study of Afrikaans and English, religious education and singing".

The curriculum envisages a system of education which is based on the circumstances of the community and aims to satisfy the needs of that community.....besides the usual subjects already mentioned, religious instruction, handicrafts, singing and rhythm must come into their own, that is selfevident.

The economic structure of our country of course, results in large numbers of Natives having to earn their living in the service of Europeans...is it essential that Bantu pupils should receive instruction in both official languages from the earliest stages, so that even in the lower primary school they would develop an ability to speak and understand them.

In the new conditions of service for teachers.....there will appear new salary scales for newly-appointed teachers and these scales will be possibly less favourable than the existing scales.

The salaries which European teachers enjoy are in no way a fit or permissable criterion for the salaries of Bantu teachers.

But what of the African people! Their reply to Verwoerd has been of non-co-operation with a slave law, a law that will not educate the African children, but will teach them to be more efficient slaves. The African National Congress on the 9th April called on the people to boycott primary schools. This decision was supported by the South African Indian Congress, Coloured People's organisation and the Congress of Democrats. In the Transvaal province, in a town Benoni a group of children marched through the street of the Benoni African township flying the banner of the African National Congress, and in no time they were joined by thousands of men and women. In order to intimidate the demonstrators European and Non-European police, armed respectively with service rifles, revolvers and sticks were mobilized under the District commandant, these were later joined reinforced by a mounted detachment.

Of the ten African schools in this town 4,679 children stayed away from school, leaving the schools empty of children. Nor was this town alone in showing that the African people rejected this fascist education. In Johannesburg a number of schools remained completely closed while others had poor attendances.

All this took place in the face of terrific intimidation; numerous people were arrested, demonstrators were baton charged by police, the police went as far as to round up children in the streets and move them off to school in front of police vans.

Dr. Verwoerd's hysterical reply to the voice of the people was the threat that:-

1. Where children were kept away or wilfully stayed away from school, they usually attended after April 25th they would not be admitted to these or any other schools in the future.
2. Money which had been earmarked for educational facilities in these centres would be used for that purpose elsewhere, particularly in the Native areas. The object of this step was to maintain school attendance of Native children throughout the Union at its present high level.  
(1/3 of the African children attend school; my note)
3. Where schools are empty by enrolment declines the redundant teaching posts will be abolished from April 30th, 1955, after 30 days notice. Teachers will not be paid out of state funds or from contributions of the Native Communities when their services are not being used. (To date large numbers of teachers have been dismissed.

Nor are the people allowed to run their own schools. With much courage and self sacrifice parents in Alexandra Township and Germiston under the banner of the African National Congress build schools of their own for their children as an answer to Verwoerd's threat. Some brought blackboards, some benches, some tables, others chairs, all out of their hard earned wages and labour. But it is a criminal offense to run a school that does not have a certificate of registration so in Germiston the prosecution for running a private school is still to come before the court.

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**TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

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