

THE BLACK SASH

THE GROUP AREAS ACT.

S.A. 79

TALK TO STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND BY JOYCE HARRIS

I have been asked to talk on the Group Areas Act, why it exists and how it fits into the framework of Apartheid.

The Nationalists came into power in 1948. By 1950 they had enacted the Group Areas, which is a sure indication of its importance in their scheme of things.

It has cut its swathe of economic, psychological and social destruction through large sections of the population of our country ever since. It is presently making its ugly presence felt again in Johannesburg, with the eviction of Coloured and Indian families from their illegal accommodation in 'white' areas, despite the fact that they have nowhere else to live and despite the fact that the houses and flats they are occupying would, in all probability, otherwise be standing empty.

If there is any logic to be found in this anachronism it is to the Group Areas Act that we must turn to seek it.

This Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950, subsequently consolidated by numerous amendments and by Act No. 77 of 1957 and Act No. 36 of 1966, was designed to impose control throughout South Africa over inter-racial property transactions and inter-racial changes in occupation of property.

Its fundamental purpose was to impose residential segregation.

There had been measures prior to 1950 which provided for the segregation of Africans and Indians, but this Act brought the Coloured people of the Cape under its control.

It provided in essence for the creation of group areas throughout the country, and the prohibition on the acquisition or occupation of property in one area by persons who do not racially qualify within that area.

Briefly the Act made provision for the proclamation of specified and controlled areas - in specified areas the basis for controlling occupation was the race group of the occupier, and in controlled areas it was the owner.

In controlled areas defined areas could be proclaimed in which permit control was imposed over the occupation of buildings which were erected, extended or altered, thus effectively freezing all development in such an area.

In the final stage a full Group Area was proclaimed.

The Act imposed immediate control throughout the country except for African townships and Reserves and Coloured Mission Stations and Reserves.

A Group Areas Board was appointed to administer permits and to report to the Minister on the demarcation of full Group Areas. When a Group Areas was proclaimed the Minister determined the date when disqualified persons must move out, which had to be less than a year after the determined date with at least three full months' notice to be given, and, for business premises, at least 12 months' notice after the initial year.

Disqualified owners/---

Disqualified owners could continue to own, but not occupy their property, and disqualified heirs to such property are required to sell it. Amendments to the Act allowed for the lawful occupier, in certain circumstances, to trade, but not to live in his property, except under permit.

Act No. 67 of 1957 dealt with the determination of the racial group to which people belong, for instance a wife would be obliged to adopt her husband's race classification.

Act No. 69 of 1955 provided for the basic values of affected properties of disqualified persons to be determined and gave the Group Areas Board 30 days' pre-emptive right to purchase, after which the owner could sell to a racially qualified person. This Act provided for the payment to the Group Areas Board of 50 percent of any selling price obtained over and above the valuation, but this pernicious clause has since been amended, and if the property is sold within five years no appreciation contribution need be paid by the owner.

Proclamation 34 of Government Notice No. 386 of 1961 established the Department of Community Development, and Act No. 49 of 1962 placed the Group Areas Board, the Community Development Board and the Housing Commission under the Minister of Community Development.

Act 56 of 1965 made the Minister of Planning responsible for the demarcation of Group Areas, while the development of these areas and permit control for them became the responsibility of the Minister of Community Development, after proclamation. Africans were to fall under the then Department of Bantu Administration and Development, now the Department of Plural Relations.

So much for the complicated Group Areas Act and its Amendments, all of which were designed to consolidate the fundamental divisive objectives of the original Act.

If you feel that this does not provide a logical explanation of the anachronism of the present evictions during an acute housing shortage you are absolutely right!

For the Group Areas Act must be viewed within its context, the context of the broad policy of Apartheid. Whether Apartheid be termed Separate Development or Pluralism or Plural Relations it remains true to its basic principle of separation.

Within the concept of Apartheid the Group Areas Act makes frightening and irrefutable sense for there is a terrible logic about this policy, which the Government has pursued with undeviating and unrelenting persistence from the moment it came into power in 1948.

Everything the Nationalist Government has done in its nearly 31 years in office - every piece of legislation it has passed - falls within the framework of Apartheid. Every law has its part to play. Every bit falls neatly into place.

The Pass Laws, the Migrant Labour System, the Removal Schemes, the Homelands, Race Classification, the Bantu Land and Trust Act, the Bantu Resettlement Act, the Native Prohibition of Interdicts Act, the Bantu Urban Areas Act, the Group Areas Act, all mesh neatly into each other, providing a

colossal machine geared /---

colossal machine geared to achieve the Government's final aim, which is to have its cake and eat it - to give it the opportunity to deny blacks all political rights in 'white' areas in exchange for political rights in their own areas ; to deny them citizenship of South Africa ; to create a vast labour pool ; to separate in order to divide and rule ; and to present what it considers to be an ethical justification for its policy. It disavows its responsibilities for black people by making them non-citizens.

Its proposed new Constitution, with its three separate ethnic Parliaments, and the total exclusion of the African people falls tidily into the total concept of Apartheid. After all, how could a Government, which has evolved its entire policy upon the separation of people, and whose most prominent representatives have stated publicly and categorically on innumerable occasions an absolute determination never to share power, be expected to devise a scheme wherein power is actually shared?

Unless the National Party has undergone a very real reversal of the principles and beliefs which have governed it since its inception, it is reasonable to assume that its built-in numerical control of the Council of Cabinets which is to initiate legislation, combined with the powers of the Executive President, will be sufficient to ensure that the real power wielded by the three ethnic Parliaments will be marginal, except for the white Parliament which is to have the power of legislation vested in it, and that they will be little better equipped than the existing Advisory Councils to exercise meaningful control over matters affecting the lives of the people they represent.

The Group Areas Act is, of course, an essential element in this Constitutional plan, because its implementation has ensured that the Coloured and Indian people are neatly tucked away in their own Group Areas where, presumably, their Parliaments will be able to legislate for matters concerning them.

It is interesting to speculate that these Parliaments will not have sovereignty over consolidated geographical areas, but rather over small areas dotted all over the country. ^{The fact that there are Group Areas} /obviously gives more credibility to the Government's ethnic Parliaments than if the people they are to govern were to be entirely lost in an indistinguishable racial mixture. Nevertheless it is difficult to imagine how such so-called Parliaments can be expected to function.

From the Government's point of view, however, the Group Areas Act has served an extremely useful purpose, helping to pave the way for its new Constitution.

So perhaps a certain logic has now emerged and we can begin to understand why the Government is determined to continue to enforce these heartless evictions. The Group Areas Act and its administration is one of the cornerstones of Government policy, which we can expect to be pursued with unwavering determination.

This, however, does not alter the fact that it is an iniquitous piece of legislation, which has caused and continues to cause immense suffering.

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Up to May, 1967, there were 1000 proclaimed Group Areas, and removals such as those from Sophiatown, District Six, Pageview, Lady Selborne, Somerset West, Simonstown etc., have taken place. Senator Winchester said more recently that 1960 Group Areas had been proclaimed.

Coloured and Asian dwellers within many towns throughout the Republic have been removed to their own Group Areas, often on the outskirts of the town. Many lost their livelihoods in the process, and their rights to trade in the central districts were taken away.

For instance Pageview in Johannesburg was a settled, stable community of Indian people serving the needs of their own people and of the wider community and asking nothing except to be left in peace.

But despite years of protest ; despite a deteriorating economy which should have given cause for satisfaction that people were working and earning a livelihood ; despite Minister Marais Steyn's expressed hope that there would be limited opportunity for Indians to trade in white areas ; despite Councillor Oberholzer's notice of intention to try to create a multi-racial trading area in adjacent Fordsburg - despite all this the Indians of Pageview were moved, and the goods and shopfittings of some of them were dumped on the pavement, open to the elements and petty pilfering. A stable, established community was destroyed.

Eldorado Park for Coloured people is far enough away for white Johannesburg to be largely ignorant of its existence.

It has some positive features such as the improved quality of some of the houses and plans for the erection of civic facilities, but it still presents a bleak picture - shrouded in smog, untarred roads, a monotonous sameness of houses, outside toilets, gross overcrowding, and people simply thrown together by the Group Areas Act, having then to try to establish themselves as a community.

The Coloured area of Protea has been conducting a long-standing battle to prevent being proclaimed an African area, to fit neatly into the Government's jig-saw puzzle. The people of Protea want to remain where they are.

Mitchell's Plain, outside Cape Town, is a city in the making for a quarter of a million people. It is 27 km from the Cape Town central business district. It is an example of an humane environment planned with people and not for them, BUT it is a Group Area and therefore there has been no free choice of location. In this instance urban renewal would have been healthier and cheaper, and the people in District Six and other parts of Cape Town could have remained happily where they were and where they wanted to be.

According to Sunday Post on 1st April '79 the Coloured people of Athlone and Retreat, who have already been forced once under Group Areas to settle in these districts, who moved there under protest, but who have now succeeded in settling down and establishing stable communities, are again being threatened with forced removal to Mitchell's Plain. Naturally they are resisting this.

The Government's total disregard/

The Government's total disregard for people as people, with their rights and needs and aspirations; its utter subjugation of human beings to the demands of its minority policy; and the ruthless, callous and blinkered insistence with which it persists in following its chosen path truly make one wonder at the nature of those at the helm. What manner of people are they, who loudly profess their Christianity yet can find it consistent with such dehumanizing behaviour - treating people like so many cogs to be fitted into their monstrous machine? The implementation of the Group Areas Act typifies such behaviour.

245,000 Coloured people have been evicted in the Cape and 60,000 face the threat of removal. 75,000 Indians in the Transvaal have been removed to Benoni, Lenasia and Laudium, suffering untold hardships. 5,000 Coloured people were removed from their homes in Simonstown. They were first forbidden the use of the beaches, and eventually lost their livelihoods as fishermen, dockworkers and artisans.

The total number of people removed to date under the Group Areas Act, according to the latest available figure, is 554,445, with 132,041 still to be moved (Hansard 6/79) people like you and me, who have been uprooted from their homes.

The costs in rands and cents of all these removals is astronomical. For instance it is estimated that the past and future resettlement of the Indian people alone will cost R200 million by 1980.. R9 million has been set aside for the re-development of District Six. People who once lived there in habitable houses were removed to others which had to be built for them. What a colossal waste, and what an unnecessary aggravation of an already acute housing crisis!

Minister Marais Steyn has stated that 80 percent of newly completed housing stock for Coloureds and Indians has been allocated to Group Areas re-location. This stock could be more profitably employed to build homes for the homeless. Re-location does nothing to solve the housing shortage.

Group Areas removals continue despite the fact that there is a waiting list for Coloured houses of 44,900 throughout the country, and for Indian houses of 29,000. People who are housed are being moved to other accommodation while the unhoused remain unhoused.

Not only does this policy make no sense economically, but socially and psychologically it extorts a terrible cost.

When a particular Group Area is proclaimed fear of impending removal stops all development. Decaying buildings, and eventually gross overcrowding inevitably result, producing slum conditions and allowing for the introduction of the rationale of "Urban renewal" - a ploy consistently used in Group Areas removals. There is a timetable.... Proclamation. Development stops. The people are frightened. The Government waits... waits....waits.... The result is a demoralised community living in over-crowded, run-down conditions, in a state of total insecurity.

Established communities are broken up. Re-location wastes a great deal of money. Neighbourhoods deteriorate. Vast tracks of land must be found for new housing, and it must be cheap and is therefore far from the city core and from industry. High transport costs result for the people who are moved, and people from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds are indiscriminately dumped together. The whole fabric of communities is destroyed.

The result is a total dislocation of society, loss of stability, endemic insecurity, a breakdown of cultures and values, a deteriorating quality of life, all of which bode ill for the future peace and prosperity of our country.

To move from the general to the particular - the Group Areas Act results in the Naidu family living in a tent on the pavement outside an empty house. This says really all there is to be said about the Group Areas Act.

It is, and remains, an integral part of the total policy of Apartheid, which has brought South Africa nought for its comfort and which has created a society divided against itself, while bitterness, resentment and anger seethe beneath the surface waiting to erupt.

The abolition of the Group Areas Act would be a very real move towards the establishment of a just society in our country. As long as it remains on the Statute Book it presents a tangible instrument of discrimination for, by and large, it is the Coloured and Indian people in our midst who are forced to pay its price.

African people fall foul of innumerable other laws, all of which are designed to conform with the Nationalists' blueprint for South Africa - a fragmented country of separated and divided people in which the so-called identity of the Afrikaner people can remain inviolate.

This is what it is all about, and the Group Areas Act has its highly significant part to play in the total design, which takes little cognisance of the bitter suffering it causes. It is an inhuman Act, and it is one of the pillars of Apartheid.

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NATIONAL PRESIDENT

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