

NATIONAL REGISTRATION.

1. INTRODUCTION.

I have been asked to address the Institute on National Registration. It is difficult to do so on the fully scientific and factual lines which the Institute rightly expects from such papers. The difficulties arise from the fact that at the time of preparing this paper (late December) no Bill has been published. One therefore has to rely on the public statements that have been made from time to time by Ministers and others as to the contents and objects of such a Bill. At the time of preparing this paper we do not even know with any certainty that the Bill will be introduced in the Session of 1950. The proposed legislation to tamper with the Coloured People's franchise was promised with at least equal positiveness and is now not to be introduced. I think we may regard it as probable, however, that the Government will come forward with a National Registration Bill and that the assumptions made in this paper as to its content will be generally correct.

The case for a National Registration Bill is plausible. Similar legislation has been introduced in other countries and has not been regarded as repressive. The sponsors of the National Registration Bill have been able to whip up support from sections of the public such as those represented in the Institute. One of the most plausible arguments for the Bill has been that it will simplify the Pass Laws by substituting a single identification certificate for a multiplicity of passes, and that it will remove the stigma of carrying a pass by extending a kind of pass system to all sections. We shall analyse these points later. There is no doubt that the arguments mentioned have beaten up a certain amount of support for the Bill, or at any rate a measure of acquiescence which might otherwise not have been forthcoming.

2. HOW THE BILL MIGHT WORK.

Owing to the non-publication of the Bill it is impossible to

head this section of our discussion, "How the Bill will Work". We assume, however, that National Registration would be integrated with other personal and statistical information required by Government departments. It would be integrated with the voters rolls for the Union Parliament, for the Provincial Councils and for local authorities. Presumably voters rolls could then be prepared centrally where and when required. It would also be linked up with vital statistics and closely correlated with the registration of births and deaths. It could be, and probably would be, linked up with such social security measures as unemployment, relief and old age pensions, and it might be of value to the Inland Revenue Department. It is claimed that such a central register would make impossible double registration for voting or social security purposes and also evasion of military service or tax assessment. General administration would be facilitated as numerical identification is more positive than identification by name. For instance, employers' returns to the Inland Revenue Department in respect of employees' earnings would presumably show the individual's registration number, thus facilitating the work of the Inland Revenue Department. Presumably the ~~official~~^{initial} registration would coincide with the population census, the additional cost for the initial enumeration being thus reduced. The actual cost of setting up the central registration after enumeration and of keeping it up to date would be fairly large. Alterations to records would be required in respect of marital status, the number of children, nationality and presumably address. It is difficult to estimate the amount of work involved in these alterations, but it seems that a special Department of State employing many hundreds of officials would probably be required. Presumably it would be the duty of the individual under penalty to call at the nearest registration office, which might be the Magistrate's Office, to notify the authorities of any alteration. It would probably take a five-yearly census period and a second census

to correlate the central register completely with census returns and to be sure of the maximum correctness of the central register.

An important question which arises is whether the whole of the population of the Union will be registered. Dr. Malan's statement can only be interpreted in this way, but there have been suggestions that registration should be confined to Europeans Coloureds, Indians and urban Natives. It will roughly be a choice between registering 5,500,000 people or 11,000,000 people. If the larger figure is taken, the cost and complexity of the scheme will be much increased and it may take a longer time to get it fully into operation. If the smaller figure is taken a complete correlation between the register and the census returns will be quite impossible. Further, even if there were no other difficulties in the way, the decision to register only the small number would completely remove the argument that registration would be a substitute for the pass system as it would be impossible to see at a glance whether a Native was an urban Native or not. The question of the number of people to be registered is then a very important one.

3. THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SCHEME

These have been briefly indicated in the course of endeavouring to explain how the scheme would work. From the point of view of public departments it would have much to recommend it. From the standpoint of the Institute it would link up with two things for which the Institute has pressed for many years - the complete registration of Native births and deaths and the simplification of the pass system. It should be mentioned here, however, that the introduction of proper registration of Native births and deaths is not necessarily bound up with this system.

4. BETTER STATISTICAL INFORMATION

It is claimed by some supporters of the scheme that it will give us more reliable statistics, and should be welcomed

by scientific students of population problems for this reason. It is difficult to see how the national register will give us better or fuller information than is obtainable from a full five-yearly census. ~~Assume that the census is taken in 1951 and that it covers from 11,000,000 to 12,000,000. It is claimed by some supporters of the national register that it would enable the research worker to get, in 1954, for example, a correct picture of the position at that date, and that he need not wait until ^{the} 1956 census to get it. (I am assuming, in this paragraph, that each five-yearly census will be a full census of all races.) Reflection will show that the national register will change every day. Assuming - and it is a big assumption - that all changes will be registered at once on the cards and that there will never be any accumulation of work in the office, the fact remains, to put it crudely, that a research worker would only be able to get more reliable figures than he does under the present system if he could handle the whole eleven million or twelve million cards in one day. Assume that in his anxiety to get the true position before the census of 1956 he begins going through the cards. Unless the whole machinery of the department is held up to tabulate information for his research he will hardly be able to do more than deal with about 500 cards a day. To deal with them all would take him 22,000 days or almost sixty years. If he began in 1952 as an ardent research worker aged twenty, he would, at the age of eighty in 2012, be able to produce a set of figures which would mean nothing because they would all have been taken out on different days. It would seem almost simpler to wait for the 1956 census.~~

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5. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BILL

(a) General. The biggest difficulty that has to be overcome as regards national registration in South Africa is ^{the} lackadaisical attitude towards paper work and authorities shown by the average European and the reluctance of any Government

to apply penalties sanctions or extensive police interference to Europeans for statutory offences like failing to fill in forms. It is difficult for anyone who knows South Africa today to believe either that Europeans will be harried by the police and rounded up for not having their identification certificates or for not keeping them up to date, or that non-Europeans will not be so harried. Much of the claim made therefore that the Bill will extend to all races falls away as a serious argument. If the Europeans are to be rounded up for passes so to speak, the system will be killed ^{overnight} outright. If neither they nor the non-Europeans are to be rounded up the whole scheme will be completely ineffective and a useless expense.

6. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BILL

(b) Europeans. It follows then that the national register as regards Europeans will either be ineffective, incomplete and inaccurate - and this will undoubtedly in effect be the position - or it will be extremely vexatious, with political results which can readily be imagined.

7. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BILL

(c) Africans. We have already faced the question whether the Bill is likely to be equally administered as between Europeans and non-Europeans. We have already mentioned the question as to whether all Africans or only some are to be dealt with. If only some, the system cannot be a substitute for the pass system. I will, however, waive the question of whether there will be equal treatment or not, and I will assume that the system will be applied to all Africans. I then ask the following questions:

- (i) Will the Government abolish the curfew and night passes?
- (ii) Will the Government abolish contracts of service?
- (iii) Will the Government abolish passes as they affect farm Natives going to work in towns?
- (iv) Will the Government repeal the law which makes it an

offence not to be able to produce a tax receipt on demand?

- (v) Will the Government abolish the passes or other documents required to enable an African to enter a controlled urban area?

I press these questions. I am quite sure that the present Government will not answer all of them in the affirmative and I shall be very considerably surprised to find that it will answer any of them in the affirmative. And unless they are all answered in the affirmative, ^{it claim} that national registration will lead to a simplification of the pass system and is to be welcomed as such is simply a gigantic fraud. On the contrary this will add an additional pass to those which the African has to carry.

8. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BILL

(d) The Coloured People. A document which I was allowed to see the other day and which handled the Bill fairly sympathetically, said this:

"To determine the race of the individual is a problem only at the outset. Once the register is set up, new entries are immigrants and people born. In neither case should determination present difficulties as an immigrant's race can nearly always be established by the Immigration Officer and that of a baby born from the identification card of the parent. The problem of initially classifying the race of an individual has to be faced in any case if it is decided to put Coloureds on a separate voters roll."

I draw your attention again to the words, "the race of a baby can be established from the identification card of the parent". We mitigate the present hardships of the colour bar, particularly in the Western Cape, by leaving a back door open out of which a Coloured person, able to pass as white, may still unobtrusively escape to such freedom as is possible under a system where falsehood and fear would be his daily companions.

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If he succeeds in carrying it through, his children will have escaped completely from the stigma of Colour.

But under the new system now proposed, that back-door is locked. There will be no escape, once one has been classified as Coloured on an identification card, for one's self or for all of one's descendants into the remote future. It is possible that the Government has in contemplation a law which will direct officials to register a person with only one Coloured grand-parent as white. In certain circumstances our Courts have taken this line. Does the Government in fact intend to include such a provision? I think it very unlikely. In passing a National Registration Bill in a country like ours, we are, therefore, with our eyes open, introducing a caste system, a system by which in much less than a century there will be many blue-eyed blondes inescapably classified as Coloured and dark-eyed, olive-skinned persons with black crinkly hair whose cards show them to be Europeans. Cape Town experienced in 1949 the acute humiliation and distress caused by an inquisition into people's ancestry from the point of view of the voters roll. The document from which I have quoted earlier suggests quite rightly that national registration is a necessary and useful preliminary to separate voters rolls. If the Institute does not want separate voters rolls, it should consider twice and thrice before accepting national registration.

9. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BILL

(e) Indians. In the present delicate state of our relations with India, it seems an unfortunate moment to introduce any document which would seem like a pass for Indians. I fear that there may well be a passive resistance movement if this is tried. And here comes a great difficulty in the administration of the Bill. It may be assumed that the police will not enforce it rigorously upon Europeans. If at the same time it does enforce it rigorously upon Indians, there will be a first rate

grievance of international dimensions. If it does not enforce the system upon Indians but does enforce it upon Africans, there will be the material for another of those grievances which helped to produce the Durban riots and there will be strong resentment among the Africans at the unequal administration of the law. If the police enforce it neither upon Indians nor upon Africans, the whole scheme will be ineffective and a useless expense.

10. CONCLUSION.

We have now surveyed the position from the point of view of the European, the Coloured man, the African and the Indian. It only remains to draw attention to the ^{for social and administrative} political aspects of national registration. The expense is likely to be terrific and that expense must be taken out of productive work and social services. Another department of public service, perhaps the largest of all, will have to be created. The population will have to be "educated to regimentation". We shall have advanced a stage further towards turning this free country into a regimented state: a state where even among the European population, one-third of the workers will have to be employed in keeping check of and controlling the other two-thirds. National registration will be an apotheosis of government by filling up forms. Irksome to most countries, this will be particularly irksome to freedom-loving South Africa. My hope, therefore, is that bodies such as our own will not support national registration.

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