Chapter 16

Modification and Backfire, 1964–78

16.1 Living with the Tomlinson Report: industrial licensing and rural resettlement

The credibility of the Nationalist Government among its honest ideological supporters depended on its ability to find a workable solution to its demographic problem which would enable whites to survive as a distinct community, and at the same time permit other communities to live in a manner acceptable to themselves. The publication of Tomlinson’s long-term plan was a source of confidence to it, though Verwoerd was not enthusiastic about the Tomlinson Commission, which had been appointed by his predecessor, Jansen. The Commission’s chairman knew this well; but by the time the Commission had completed its work in 1955, it was able to make recommendations confirming the broad direction of government policy, while dissenting from it in key details. The main objections of the Government to the Report were set out in a White Paper in 1956. With regard to land policy, it rejected Tomlinson’s proposal to allow individual tenure in tribal areas, or give preference to it in the released areas, or to allow the purchase of more than one lot by an individual, because it was not anxious to encourage commercial farming by individual Africans at the cost of ‘the proper settlement of many’. It also held its hand over the immediate development of mining enterprise, and over the immediate setting up of a development corporation for the Reserves, but saw these as long-term projects. It strongly supported the principle of labour-intensive industries outside the borders of the Reserves, but rejected absolutely the idea of allowing white-owned capital into the Reserves, thus siding with Young and Prinsloo, two of the commissioners, against the majority. But what was accepted by Strijdom’s Government and by Verwoerd’s was the recommendation to diversify the economy so as to enable the Reserves to house the ‘surplus’ black population of the white urban areas and the white farms. Verwoerd accordingly took the first hesitant steps towards the implementation of the Tomlinson Report.
The Tomlinson Commission thought that industrialists could be attracted to the neighbourhood of the Reserves to provide work for Africans taken off the land, by the lure of cheaper transport, power, water and African housing. It took the Verwoerd Government until 1964 to realise that Tomlinson had underrated the difficulty. The Government therefore tried to speed up industrial decentralisation by offering significant tax concessions, help over the erection of factories, and exemptions from minimum wage determinations and the statutory protection of public against private transport, to those industrialists who were willing to move to the border areas. But by the end of 1966, rather less than 45,000 new jobs for Africans had been created in the border areas and the Reserves, a slower rate of progress in ten years than the Tomlinson Commission required in one. This was in spite of the passage of a Bantu Investment Corporation Act in 1959 and a Bantu Homelands Development Corporations Act in 1965, enabling the Government to set up and capitalise individual entrepreneurs and a Development Corporation in each of the Bantu homelands. By prohibiting white-owned risk capital, in opposition to the recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission, the Government prevented the rapid diversification of the economy within the Reserves, and therefore their capacity to absorb more people.

To win the propaganda battle, Verwoerd had needed to be able to demonstrate that his policies could be effective in turning the flow of African migration back from the urban areas; but on his own statements it was too early for this to have happened. On the eve of his assumption of the premiership, he said in Parliament that it would take twenty years before the urban African population started to decrease. He did little before 1966 to help bring about that result, though an attempt was made in the Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1964 to extend influx control beyond the urban areas to include peri-urban districts, (now known collectively as ‘prescribed areas’), in order to plug gaps in the system of controls. His Urban Bantu Councils Act of 1961, which replaced the Advisory Boards and gave some administrative duties to these new bodies chaired by elected Africans, was a measure curiously at variance with the terms of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, which aimed to give authority in urban locations to representatives of Homeland chiefs. Because the Urban Bantu Councils Act seemed likely to promote rather than undermine the Africans’ sense of belonging to the urban area, it tended to lose favour with the white and essentially conformist Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs, which had a growing voice in the detailed formulation of policy.