

the land. We therefore have the right to determine what must be done and no court, even if it is the highest in the land, can take away the sovereign power that God gave to his people”.

This, then, is the typical Nationalist politician of the South African industrial age: a sophisticated townsman with the technique of power politics at his fingertips; a master of mass psychology; a white-collar representative of the working man; an intransigent authoritarian who claims his authority on spiritual grounds; a party official who has become a party boss.

The patriarchy has given place to an autocracy of party officials. And such is the trend of things in the Nationalist Party to-day that the king-maker could yet be king.

## THE EVATON RIOTS

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THE riots precipitated by the bus boycott at Evaton, the non-White township twenty-four miles south of Johannesburg, have been the strangest on record in this country. When the Evaton residents organized pickets last year to boycott the Italian-owned bus company running the Johannesburg route, they little suspected that they would find themselves split into two violently opposed groups—boycotters and anti-boycotters. And yet the boycott has hardly ever been an ideological one in the accepted sense. It has had none of the features of passive resistance such as characterized the Montgomery bus boycott in the United States or the recent short-lived one in Cape Town. It started because the bus company raised the fares. And since July of last year boycotters and anti-boycotters have been at war with each other, killing, assaulting each other, and burning down houses, making their township a hive of unrest and bitter civil strife. And the Government and the bus company have been watching, doing little or nothing about it.

The White Press has been at pains to try to prove that the Evaton riots were precipitated by a group of irresponsible young men who dared to start a boycott against the bus company. A reporter even wrote in the *Rand Daily Mail* that the boycott had been engineered by “hired political agitators” who wanted to use Evaton as a base for a mass political campaign.

A *Star* editorial said that the bus boycotters had no case because

they decided to live far out of town where they are not required to pay rates. This implied that the Evaton residents should not complain against the raised bus fares because they are free from handicaps which should, after all, be the Black man's cup of tea.

Now that we are far from the vortex of the disturbances in both time and place, let us examine the facts critically. Although an agreement has been made and concluded between the Evaton People's Transport Council and the Evaton Passengers' Service, there reigns only an unquiet peace. A dangerous one at that. The question that immediately arises is: if, as is the case, the Passengers' Service is under legal obligation to revert to the old fares as they stood before July 1955, why do the people not use the buses in full force?

Here is the answer. Many of Evaton's residents feel embittered against a company that has lasted the boycott distance, contrary to expectations. At least the Italian-owned bus company has had its licence renewed by the Transportation Board. The residents opposed the company's application on the following grounds: that the new fares were high; that the Passengers' Service was inefficient; that the company had failed to erect sheds in the township for passengers; that the bus conductors and drivers were rude and undisciplined; that hooliganism was going on unchecked in the buses. The counter-application was rejected by the Transportation Board as "frivolous". The people thus genuinely felt that once again they were powerless in the presence of a gigantic financial-political machine. This bitterness unleashed scalding wrath that made the people turn against themselves.

The leaders of the boycotters—the People's Transport Council—had first toyed with the idea of forming a people's bus company to take the place of the Evaton Passengers' Service. What had started as a mere suggestion caught fire with the people, and most of the boycotters, if not all, sustained the boycott in the hope that one day they would be served by a non-European bus company. But capital was not forthcoming. The leaders explained the whole problem of raising sufficient capital. But the feelings of the people had already been geared to prospects of a new era in their transport system.

Again, by May this year six men had been killed as a result of clashes between boycotters and anti-boycotters. By the end of July twelve more people had been killed as a result of further acts of violence. The residents argue that the bus company looked on while Evaton was on fire resulting from the company's insistence

on raising the fares on the Johannesburg route. The people feel they have had enough of the bus company and would be glad of a more sympathetic one, White or non-White. Whether or not the present company is White or not is irrelevant at the moment so far as the people are concerned.

The Evaton bus boycott, now seventeen months old, is certainly the strangest on record in this country. The big Sophiatown—Newclare boycott of a few years ago against municipal trams brought the service to a standstill. But there was little violence. The City Council removed the trams altogether and the service has not since been revived. And yet Evaton has a homogeneous population, at any rate it is not as cosmopolitan as Johannesburg townships.

These are the factors that contributed to the violent clashes, killings and widespread arson at Evaton:

(1) The bus company, on its own admission to the Transportation Board, employed six men to "protect the buses against pickets". These men happened to be blanketed Basotho whom people everywhere else have come to associate with "Russians", a gang of rough blanketed men which originated in Newclare about 1948. They arm themselves with sticks and their sole method is physical violence.

(2) After fifty years of existence, Evaton, a sprawling, peri-urban freehold area, has as its only authority the Native Commissioner and a very small police force. For many years now the residents have been asking the Government to allow them to set up a peri-urban authority. In 1947 the Native Affairs Commission conducted an inquiry into a number of grievances put to them by Evaton residents. Among them were: (a) property-owners could not obtain their deeds of transfer; (b) bad roads; (c) primitive sanitary and water systems such as pits and a handful of windmills; (d) the rising incidence of hooliganism caused partly by the fact that Johannesburg criminals have found a good hiding place in Evaton; (e) the section of Evaton called Small Farms, although under the Peri-urban Health Board, enjoys no substantial services. For the rest of Evaton, it is "pay your poll tax and take care of yourself", as Africans there say.

The Commission did nothing about the residents' resolution to reject Government peri-urban and health committees such as places like Kliptown and Alexandra possess. The people wanted to constitute a local committee composed of six elected Africans and three Government nominees. In short, Evaton was saying it

wants to govern itself untrammelled by municipal controls, bee raids and so on.

(3) The third factor grows out of the second. Soon after the bus company had posted six men to guard the buses, a small group formed around them and began to work against the boycotters. It became obvious that most of them were "Russians" who came from the Small Farms sector: they were people who were not using the buses anyway. For "Russians" do not work. They live in semi-rustic ease and indifference, loafing about and often sprawling in the sun. A man called Ralekeke Rantuba, self-styled chief of the Evaton Basotho living at Small Farms, led a number of his people against the boycotters. He was seen at every scene of trouble between the boycotters on the one side and the people hired to look after the buses and those who owe allegiance to Ralekeke on the other. It also became obvious that the small group was asserting itself as some authority over Evaton, and that they were cashing in on the state of unrest. A great number of cases of extortion followed. Residents at Small Farms were being bullied into paying "protection fees" and forming a "chief's army". "Russians" were imported from Johannesburg as reinforcements. Forty of them were arrested on their way from Evaton for trespassing on mine premises in the city. They told the magistrate that they had been hired to fight against bus-boycotters at Evaton.

These, then, are the factors that set the stage for a boycott which developed into open war over seventeen painful months, and turned a once peaceful township into a terror-stricken, violent little town like a lawless outpost of the Wild West. To make things worse the police were failing to make arrests and to prosecute. Up to October this year there had been only one conviction—that of a man who had been seen in possession of a revolver.

To-day, even although the township has just emerged from a self-destructive fire, people still shout, "Azikwelwa!"—"Don't ride them!" (buses). And as before, the cry is relayed from street to street. The same tension, suspicion and mistrust prevail that made the late Bishop Sims one of the most frightened men in Evaton and finally led to his murder.

It all began on the cold morning of 25 July 1955. The Evaton Passengers' Service, which has been doing business on the Evaton-Johannesburg route for thirteen years, had raised the fares. Mr. Vusimusi Make and Mr. Joseph Molefi, who were born and bred

in Evaton, got up a group of leading men in the township and they called themselves the Evaton People's Transport Council. Make became chairman and Molefi secretary. They decided to call the residents together and to put before them a plan to boycott the buses. Most of the people resolved to carry it out. Pickets were organized. Feelings ran high and in September one of the buses was set on fire.

The bus company hired men to look after the buses. This angered the people and a trail of assaults and arson followed. In August three men were arrested and charged with common assault. Would-be passengers had been beaten up. The men were later acquitted. Six men had already appeared in court on a charge of malicious damage to property after the destruction of the bus. Five of these men were boycotters. They were later acquitted.

24 October came to be known at Evaton as "Black Monday". On this day boycotters marched up and down the streets singing and shouting: "Azikwelwa! Hadipalangoe!"—"Don't ride them!" "Russians" suddenly appeared on the scene in a counter-demonstration. In the hazy light of the spring afternoon both groups clashed. Two boycotters were killed on the spot. Seven men, all boycotters, were arrested and charged with public violence. The leaders of the Transport Council were also included in the group. They were acquitted early this year. In December of the same year another major clash followed between boycotters and anti-boycotters, who again consisted of "Russians". No prosecution followed.

For the first time since the beginning of violence, a man was arrested and convicted on a charge of pointing a gun at an anti-boycotter. His plea was self-defence. He was fined £30. There was now free and wanton use of firearms. Both sides suspected every person who drove into Evaton in a Johannesburg car of smuggling in revolvers and selling them to the opposite camp. Night after night torches ripped through the dark in the unlit streets. Men were taking turns in patrolling the streets until daybreak in the boycott section of the township. Various members of the Transport Council reported to the local police that they were being threatened with murder. The police were not enthusiastic.

In May, John Appolis, an elderly Coloured man whose son is a boycotter, was smoked out of his house after unknown thugs had set it on fire and smashed windows with clubs and firearms. No arrest followed. In the same month bus inspector Johnson Choko, aged 55, a trusted member of the company's staff for

twenty years, was found battered under a tree one rainy Sunday afternoon. He died the next day from a fractured skull and a bullet wound.

Bishop Sims of the National Church of Africa, who had openly declared himself against the bus boycott, woke up one night to hear people smash into his house and shoot. From then, up to the time of his murder, he lived a life of perpetual fear.

Still the police did not intensify their patrols. The writer went to Evaton one week-end to investigate the riots. He and his colleague got out of their car to see how many passengers were going to board a stopping bus. Immediately blanketed men emerged from the dark, armed with sticks, and surrounded the two men, spitting threats of violence all the time. Just behind the two men a White constable was sitting in his van during all this, laughing heartily. The armed men sent the writer and his friend off in a hurry, poking their sticks into them.

In the meantime the buses were moving between Evaton and the city quite empty. The company reduced the fleet from seventeen to eight buses and the staff by half. The fares had been raised as follows:

Monthly ticket:	£2 15s. od. from £2 5s. (excluding Sun.).
Weekly ticket:	18s. from 15s. (excluding Sun.).
Week-end ticket:	2s. 6d. per day from 2s.
Daily ticket	2s. od. as before (single journey).

Train fares are as follows:

Monthly:	£2 18s. 6d. (including Sundays).
Weekly:	17s. od. (including Sundays).
Daily:	5s. 11d. return fare.

Thus the passenger has been losing 3s. 6d. on the monthly and gaining 1s. on the weekly ticket by using the train. Again, the worker who buys a daily train ticket and who takes the bus controlled by another company to the station—charge, 6d. each way—pays no less than 7s. a day for transport. If he cannot take a bus he has to walk five miles to and from Evaton station. The first train to Johannesburg leaves at 4.30 a.m., the only other one being at 6.10 a.m. There are only two afternoon trains from the city: 5.17 and 6.10.

The boycott, which involves 2,500 workers, has been 95% successful. Ordinarily the workers are said to spend 25% of their income on bus transport. If they work on Sundays as well, the figure rises to 40%. The people are prevented by influx control measures from working at Vereeniging or Vanderbijl Park,

which are the nearest towns to Evaton. So they are forced to work in Johannesburg.

Before the agreement was signed between the bus company and the Transport Council, the residents used to meet regularly every Sunday to hear reports about the boycott and victims of assault. Then the Native Commissioner banned any public meeting convened by the Transport Council. The people moved on to a private vacant stand in the European section of Evaton. This meant that they were not obliged to ask for permission to hold meetings. But they had to walk five to six miles each way to and from the venue. The Special Branch of the C.I.D. has been attending every meeting of the residents, thus giving the impression that the boycott has a political orientation—in the orthodox sense.

The leaders of the boycott movement continued to preach non-violence throughout the whole period, but things reached a stage where the "Russians" were not interested in the boycott as such any more. For them it became a fight for ascendancy and power. They continually provoked the other side, and gloried in the use of sticks, battle-axes and guns. The other residents complained that the "Russians" loaded and unloaded their guns in the presence of the police, "unchecked and with impudence". The situation assumed the same characteristics as those of the Newclare riots in Johannesburg a few years ago, when the "Russians" were first heard of. There again, it was a fight for power and, as Father Trevor Huddleston writes in his book, *Naught for your Comfort*, the police always disarmed the victims of the "Russian" menace while the thugs retained their lethal weapons. There was a mass exodus of people from Newclare, who squatted on an empty plot outside the township.

On the day of the funeral of bus inspector Johnson Choko the "Russians" marched through the streets and brandished their sticks and battle-axes and later assembled at the grave—"to protect anti-boycotters" as they said. The manager of the bus company told the writer that he had employed only six men and that he was not responsible for the faction war.

And still people and the Press in many parts of the country continued to ask: Why don't the police take action? Why does not the Government institute an inquiry, in reply to a request from the boycott leaders? Is Ralekeke Rantuba recognized by the Government as a chief? What have the "Russians" to gain by resisting a boycott when they are generally won't-works?

In November last year Mrs. S. Muller, an attorney acting

on behalf of the Transport Council, wrote a letter to the District Commandant of the South African Police at Vereeniging, expressing the Council's complaints and requesting him to receive a deputation from her clients. Among other things the Council's case was that whenever there was a clash between boycotters and anti-boycotters, i.e. the "Russians", the latter were left untouched by the police, even although *they* provoked a fight. The boycotters, it was alleged, were invariably arrested and detained and often charged. The Council had cited a number of instances to prove this. The police had replied that each person should lay a charge, and they had declined to prosecute.

The attorney further related the story of Bob Asmal, an Indian skopkeeper at Evaton and the only Indian member of the Transport Council. Asmal had been arrested for allegedly attempting to defeat the ends of justice and inciting to public violence. The only witness for the Crown was himself. Asmal stated in court that the statement alleged to have been given by him to the police had been elicited from him by force and was not true. He was discharged, but nothing was done to inquire into the conduct of the police.

A copy of this letter was sent to the Attorney-General. The District Commandant replied that the police had done everything to investigate every charge made. He refused to receive a deputation.

The Council and the bus company met several times in an attempt to come to an agreement, but every time the talks broke down. The bus company dismissed the Council's demands as "impossible", e.g. that the company appoint full-time dispatchers; that the service keep to strict schedule; that Africans should replace European inspectors; that scholars be given concessions, all this in addition to the demand that the company revert to the old fares.

The Council then asked the Transportation Board for a Government subsidy on bus fares, such as the people of Sophiatown, Alexandra, etc., enjoy. The application was unsuccessful. An official of the Public Utility Transport Corporation, the biggest bus service operating among non-Europeans, says that the subsidy between Alexandra and Johannesburg was granted for three main reasons: (a) Johannesburg is the only town adjacent to Alexandra offering opportunities for employment to its residents; there are between 15,000 and 20,000 workers travelling daily from Alexandra to Johannesburg. (b) If such large numbers of workers were affected by a dislocation of bus transport the city's industries



would suffer tremendous loss. (c) There is no convenient train service between the two places.

The argument is that none of these reasons can be applied in the case of Evaton. But then Evaton people have influx control regulations to contend with when they try to seek work in Vereeniging and Vanderbijl Park. The people are in effect being told to pay the penalty for choosing to live in a peri-urban area which no municipality or central government department is interested in adopting. The ugly thought that naturally comes to one in these circumstances is that, because there is no big White population near Evaton, any disturbances that occur inside the township are not serious: only Blacks are affected. If the same thing happened in, say, Sophiatown or Newclare or Alexandra, a commission of inquiry would likely have been instituted immediately. Whenever there is a riot as domestic as any that can occur in a municipal beer hall, police are quick to stand by with sten guns. But of course there is the safety of municipal property involved, and there is nothing like municipal assets in Evaton!

But it is inane to suggest that Evaton, secluded as it is and without a concourse where Black and White have to chafe against one another, could be the political hive or base the *Rand Daily Mail* reporter divined.

## PRESS IN DANGER?

LEGISLATION for internal censorship of printed matter published in the Union is to be introduced at the next session of Parliament, I learnt from a reliable source last week. At present the Government can only prevent literature from overseas coming into the country. It has no power to ban books printed and published within the Union although anyone publishing obscene literature could be charged in the law courts.

The Government does not, however, consider this to be a satisfactory means of controlling the type of book that South Africa reads. It wants control not only over obscene literature, but over anything that it considers to be "objectionable". And it does not want to have to go to court to prove its case.

I understand, too, that it wants power to deal with "troublesome" periodicals and newspapers—although, because of the opposition of the Nationalist Press, it is not likely to make its controls of the daily Press too rigid.

I believe it has been disturbed, however, by the effect of exposé articles published in magazines such as *Drum* (the concentration camp story, the Bethal "forced labour" story), and by the outspoken comment of such liberally orientated publications as *Africa South*, a new quarterly published in Cape Town.