

The State's whole repressive machinery

Barbara Creecy

In the last 18 months we have witnessed ever-increasing repression in our country — to the point where we now have soldiers and their military equipment permanently occupying many townships across the land. We have indeed reached a state of civil war.

As a result of this repression and the unrest that it brings, over 400 people have been killed since August 1984, the majority shot by the police. Thousands more have been injured; some 10 000 have been arrested and charged with violence; another 649 were detained and charged under security laws. Since September last year 11 people have died in police custody; five have disappeared without trace and 11 have been abducted.

In this updated conference report, BARBARA CREECY gives an overview of the 'whole repressive machinery' that the National Party Government is using to combat its opponents and to quell black communities. The report also describes the effect of these measures in fermenting a vicious circle of death and destruction in African communities.

● DEPLOYMENT OF POLICE AND TROOPS IN TOWNSHIPS

Recent evidence before the Kannemeyer Commission of Enquiry into the shooting of at least 21 people by the SAP in Lange Township laid bare some of the horrific facts of police conduct in the townships.

But the report dealt with only one township. A further frightening thought is that Lange is *one*, albeit more extreme, example of what is going on every day throughout the land. As early as November 1984, the Catholic Bishops Conference, in their report *Police conduct during township protests* (August — November 1984), noted:

'In a number of cases the very presence, and especially the attitude of the police has provoked public violence. We regret to say that, instead of being accepted as the protectors of the people, the police are now regarded by many people in the black townships as disturbers of the peace and perpetrators of violent crime.'

Events documented in the SACBC report and elsewhere paint a picture of a systematic campaign to terrorise whole communities. For example, the DPSC and the UDF collected the following information about police deployment in the townships:

* Police use of guns

At least 400 people have been killed since August last year. The majority were shot by the police.

* Police in streets and houses

Townships around the country, in the Eastern Cape, East Rand, Free State and northern Cape are continu-

ally patrolled by both police and the SADF.

On many occasions the SADF has assisted the SAP with their house-to-house searches in the townships. For example, in October '84, 7 000 SADF troops backed up police searches in Sebokeng. The army was similarly used in Kwathema (Springs), Ratanda (Heidelberg) and Duduza (Nigel). In the latter township, males between the ages of 10 and 20 were arrested.

* Police in hospitals

Community leaders throughout the country report that many victims of indiscriminate shootings are arrested when they arrive at hospitals for treatment. Victims allege they are arrested as they leave casualty wards or if seriously injured are placed under police guard in hospital wards.

As a result, hundreds of people now remove bullets and buckshot with razor blades and kitchen knives in dangerous backyard operations. Hundreds of others who are unable to remove pellets and shot themselves risk lead poisoning and sepsis.

* Police as agents provocateurs

UDF and Azapo have both accused 'agents of the system' of being behind a campaign to promote inter-organisational conflict (*City Press*, May 12, 85)

The SABC and the commercial press have played a mischievous role in promoting this conflict: they have reported the distribution of fake pamphlets without mentioning that the organisations concerned denied issuing these pamphlets; they have distorted reports of UDF/Azapo clashes and they have focussed attention on 'black-on-black' violence.

This has had the effect of hiding the role that the SAP and SADF have been playing in the townships. Even further, they emerge as protectors of the people against conflicting groups. The press has thus been able to ignore the real causes of unrest in the townships: right wing groups can petrol bomb UDF and Azapo homes under the cover of inter-organisational rivalry.

The national executive of the UDF has pinpointed a reason for this — the Government is trying to weaken all organisations based in African areas by frightening away entire communities from oppositional activities. In this way they hope to allow oppositional organisations to exist, but in such a weakened form that they pose no real threat to apartheid. The Government will then be able to claim that it is democratic and allows for public opposition to its policies.

● INFORMAL REPRESSION AND RIGHTWING VIOLENCE

The Government is also either using or tolerating a number of informal measures to harass organisations:

A survey conducted by Descom and DPSC in the PWV area found the following trends among organisations they interviewed:

- Organisations reported that they had trouble obtaining venues for meetings. Town councils refused the use of halls or threatened churches that allowed it. Meetings were often banned or fake pamphlets were distributed claiming the postponement of a meeting.

For example, in Galeshewe (Kimberley) the UDF and its affiliates may not hold meetings. At least half a dozen of their rallies have been banned. Condemnatory fake pamphlets are distributed every three days.

- Those campaigning in opposition to the Tricameral elections were harassed while doing house-to-house visits, distributing newsletters or putting up posters. Many were escorted to police stations, questioned and sometimes charged with breaking municipal bye-laws.

- Rumours about oppositional leaders or prominent members of organisations often emanate from the security police who inform detainees that their leaders are employed by the police.

- Organisations reported police surveillance through telephones, visits to homes and offices and the confiscation of books and records.

- More sinister are the so-called 'right wing' attacks — anything from bricks through windows, dead cats wired to door handles, to gunshots fired through doors — on anti-apartheid activists. The murder of Brian Mazibuko and Norman Monyepote remain as yet unresolved.

(*Hidden Repression*; A report resulting from a Survey of Transvaal organisations September 1983 to July 1984 Descom).

- At least five people have disappeared without trace. A further seven Port Elizabeth Cosas members and two members of the Tumahole Civic Association are also feared to have been abducted. Three of these people are executive members of the P E black civic organisation who went to the airport on the night of May 8 this year. They never returned.

Another missing person is Soweto Cosas member, Eddie Mahleke who, together with a friend was returning to Soweto by train from a journey to town. The two were separated in the crowded train. When the friend arrived at their destination he found that Mahleke was missing. He reports seeing plain clothes policemen searching passengers on the train. Two Cosas members held by police allege that they saw them in police cells. The police denied the allegations.

- In an affidavit, a detainee swore that during her 11-month detention, security police had twice told her that her father was behind the Eastern Cape unrest. He was inviting trouble and would 'get what he was asking for' (*Weekly Mail* June 14, 85).

No culprit has yet been arrested for the attacks on Johannesburg activists' homes. Similarly the police have shown little interest in the exposure of a hit list for the assassination of 20 leading UDF and Azapo members.

● CRIMINAL CHARGES AND TRIALS

In an attempt to white-wash its image abroad, the government has placed increasing emphasis on charging detainees for political activities.

For instance, the DPSC notes that 15% (that is, 69) of that year's 459 detainees were charged. By the end of January 1985, 58% of 1002 detained until then had been charged. Of these 403 were acquitted, 16 convicted and 167 were awaiting trial.

An analysis of political trials during 1984 revealed the following:

	No of Trials	Persons Charged	Acquitted or Charges withdrawn
Treason	5	13	NIL
Terrorism	8	16	5
Furthering aims of banned organisations	10	17	4
Subversion	1	1	1
Possession of banned articles	24	24	16
Breaking banning order	1	1	NIL
Quoting listed person	1	1	1
Attending illegal gathering	15	320	249
Public violence	18	450	395
Disturbing the peace	1	42	42
Intimidation	7	19	17
Malicious damage to property	4	32	3
Arson	1	2	NIL
Miscellaneous	9	18	9
Transkei State of Emergency	2	384	384
	107	1340	1126

(*DPSC Report*, February 1985)

This analysis shows that few of the charges were for serious political offenses, such as terrorism and many were for fairly trivial political offences. This gives the impression that the reasons for detention had little to do with the 'crimes' themselves.

In a recent *Our View* the DPSC noted the following functions which the indiscriminate charging of political activists serves:

- to attach a criminal tag to those who oppose apartheid
- to imprison political activists for long periods of time as awaiting trial prisoners thereby acting as a disguised form of detention. (This has been achieved by refusing bail or setting bail so high that most families cannot afford to bail out a family member).
- to meet, in a distorted way, the 'charge or release' demand by charging a higher proportion of detainees.
- to obtain information about the person's opposition to activities for those of their organisation.

So charging people can be used as another way of detaining them for lengthy periods.

The laws under which Government opponents are often charged make criminal the very activities which they, the majority of South Africans, and virtually the

entire international community, regard as legitimate (*Our View, Star Feb 4, 85*).

Conversely, in many countries apartheid has been declared a punishable crime!

Our statute law is so broad that many acts of opposition can be converted into serious crime.

A lawyer quoted by DPSC in *Our View* wrote of Section 54 of the Internal Security Act:

'Any person protesting against any facet of the system whether constitutional, political, industrial, social, or economic, even in an entirely passive and peaceful manner, can be arrested and tried for the offences of sabotage and subversion (Section 54) casts the net so wide as to include as criminal and subversive conduct regarded as perfectly legitimate and lawful in normal societies. It provides the authorities with a useful device to prosecute selectively with no effective safeguards'

(*Our View, Feb 4, 85*)

There will be a number of important political trials in 1985. Leading opponents of apartheid will be tried for their activities.

— 16 leaders of the UDF and its affiliates are facing charges of high treason in the Durban Supreme Court.

— 22 civic leaders of the Vaal have been charged with treason after spending up to nine months in detention.

In expressing doubt that those on trial in Durban will be given a fair and just trial before an impartial court the UDF executive noted:

'The courts will be applying laws which decree that opposition, even peaceful opposition such as UDF is involved in, may be construed as treasonable behaviour and, therefore a punishable crime.'

● DETENTIONS

Indefinite detention in solitary confinement under either Section 28, 29 or 50 of the Internal Security Act remains an important measure for withdrawing activists from oppositional activities.

In 1984 the following people were held under these Sections of the Internal Security Act:

Section 28:
providing for 'preventive' detention 28 persons
Section 29:
providing for interrogatory detention 280 persons
Section 31:
providing for detention on instructions from
the Attorney General as a potential state
witness 18 persons
Section 50;
providing for short-term preventive detention
(2 — 14 days) 72 persons
These figures do not include some 300 people detained
by the Security Police under the Criminal Procedures
Act, or simply taken for questioning under no legislation
at all, for periods less than 48 hours.

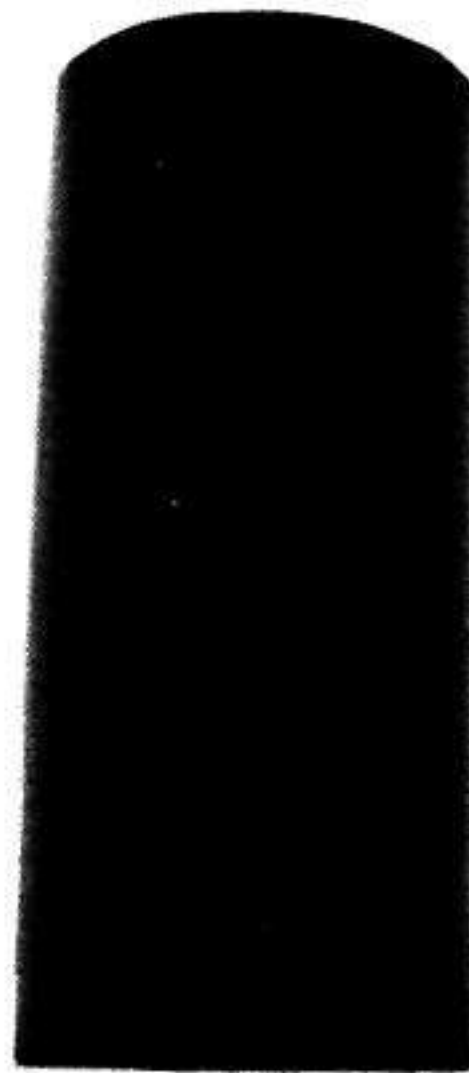
(*DPSC Report January 1985*)

According to the DPSC figures a total of 1149 people were detained during 1984, 420 of whom were detained



The army in the townships

photo: Gill de Vlieg



Actual size of a rubber bullet



photo: Gill de Vlieg

in Transvaal, 407 in Transkei and 123 in Ciskei. This figure is more than double the number detained in 1983.

Over 500 of those detained were students, youth and teachers.

High as this figure appears to be, a number of factors point to the possibility of it being an underestimation. The first is the announcement by Minister Le Grange in Parliament that there were 70 people in detention at the end of June 1984.

At this point, the DPSC had no idea of the identity of 24 of these detainees. Prior to the announcement, DPSC had noted in its June 1984 report that the SAP had invoked Section 4 of the Protection of Information Act, warning both the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *City Press* not to publish any information on detainees, or face a fine of up to R10 000 or a 10-year jail sentence.

Subsequent figures released by Minister Le Grange



Hippo in Tembisa blocking the way of mourners at a funeral

photo: Gill de Vlieg

indicate that there are 46 unknown detainees in police custody.

(DPSC February 28 1985)

Conditions under which detainees are held

Two disturbing trends emerged during the last year in relation to the conditions under which detainees are held.

The first is the introduction in June last year of closed circuit television into detention cells at John Vorster Square.

Detainees held at John Vorster Square report that lights were kept on in their cells for 24 hours a day to enable the monitors to function. They had no privacy to wash, dress, sleep or go to the toilet. Any unusual movement was videoed and the detainee questioned about this activity later on.

The second trend has been attempts by Special Branch to reverse the victories won by detainees and their relatives in regard to receiving food parcels and visits during 1981/1982.

Since 1982, when the security police granted detainees the right to receive food parcels, they have been trying to erode this victory. They randomly refuse parcels, trying to force friends and relatives to negotiate for these concessions on an individual basis.

Deaths in detention

Over the last year, since August 1984, 11 people have died in police custody whilst having been arrested for politically related reasons. This is a dramatic increase in police custody deaths over such a short period.

Preventive detention

Last year also witnessed the extensive use of Section 28 of the Internal Security Act to detain political activists. The 28 people held included members of Cradock Residents' Association, UDF, Release Mandela Committee, TIC and NIC.

Detention under Section 28 can result in the listing of former detainees, a provision which can have the effect of preventing them from being quoted until their names are received from the consolidated lists.

Black Sash work on repression in 1984

The Black Sash worked with other organisations and people concerned with human rights to oppose repression. For instance, some members participated in a campaign against preventive detention and also assisted in compiling information printed in *Repression in a time of reform*.

The Black Sash continues to assist victims of repression who arrive at the advice offices.

The publicity given to repression plays an important part in the campaign to expose the government's claims of reform for the sham they really are.

Responses to repression in the future

The events in Uitenhage, Thabong, Kimberley, Vaal, Tembisa, Duduza and Crossroads all make it increasingly necessary that the Sash continue to expose repression in this country. The Sash also needs to embark on a campaign to educate its members and the public in general about the increasing use of the courts to silence opposition. The Sash needs to reiterate its call for the 'unconditional release of all detainees'.

Victims of that 'Repressive Machinery' ?

Extracts from the Johannesburg Advice Office Report 1984.

● Another person missing under mysterious circumstances

Mrs M M lives in Sebokeng. On September 15 her 18-year-old son was on his way home from work when he was hit by two rubber bullets. He was arrested and was treated for his injuries while in prison. On October 12 he appeared in Court and was remanded on bail of R500 paid by Mrs M's brother and her son's employer. He was told to appear in Court again on November 16.

On October 23 the SADF and the police surrounded and sealed off Sebokeng and conducted a house to house search. Young Buti was in the house with his mother and after the search was completed his hand was marked with the indelible red dye and he was free to leave Sebokeng and to go to work. He and his mother travelled together by train to their respective places of employment. She has never seen him again.

When she came to the office on January 9 she had established that he had been at work on October 23 but had not been back since then. She found fellow workers who had been on the same train with him travelling home to Sebokeng from work on 23rd. He got off the train with them in Sebokeng. There was a good deal of police activity near the station. Many people were being arrested. It is not known what happened to Buti but he never got home.

Phone calls to police stations, prisons, security police, hospitals, failed to uncover any trace of him. His mother went to Court on November 16 to explain to the magistrate what had happened. Charges against him and his three co-accused were withdrawn. His bail was returned to her but he never came home.

Police in the hospitals

A young man came in one morning and showed us a bullet-shaped object lodged under the skin on his head. He said he had been X-rayed at his firm's clinic and had been told that it was a bullet. He was referred to the Sebokeng hospital. When he got there he ran away because he says that many police were at the hospital and were arresting all those who were reporting for treatment of such wounds. He didn't know where he could go for treatment without risking arrest.

SASH MOURNS THE DEATH OF TWO NATAL MEMBERS



SUSAN FRANCIS died in April 1985 at her home in Hillcrest Natal. As an early Natal coastal member she took part in the memorable convoy of 150 cars that travelled to Cape Town from 140 towns in South Africa to protest against the disenfranchisement of the coloured voters.

At that time Susan, a mother of two with a strong commitment to justice, and who had only been in the country for eight years, was also a member of the Liberal Party.

In the Black Sash she was soon recognised as an efficient and dedicated person. She became treasurer of the Highway Branch and later secretary of Natal Coastal. Then followed two years as chairman and later vice-chairman to Doris Wallice.

My first involvement in Sash came as Susan's secretary. It was a wonderful introduction, not only to Sash affairs and South African politics but to Susan as a person and a friend. She was totally honest, committed to equal opportunity for all and always keen to help those discriminated against. As a result she was also a founder member of the Enolweni Schools Feeding Scheme and provided the guidance for the establishment of the first Advice Office in Umgeni Rd, Durban.

In the 1970's, after her children had grown-up, she fulfilled an old dream when she went to University to study for a BA degree. Sadly, her husband who had been ill, died before she graduated in 1978. Thereafter she became a lecturer at the University of Durban-Westville.

We miss Susan. She was a person of great charm and integrity. A lover of books and art, she had a refreshing mind and a dry sense of humour.

We will remember her as one of the most dedicated Sash members during her active years.

Mary Grice

DOROTHY ANDERSON a founder member of the Midlands Region of the Black Sash.

I first had the privilege of meeting her during the 1950's when I came from East Griqualand to attend Sash gatherings in Pietermaritzburg.

Always a keen member, she attended meetings, and took part in poster stands at considerable inconvenience, as she lived in the country.

She could always be relied on to make a useful contribution to any discussion that she attended.

She was loved and respected by us all. May she rest in peace.

Gwen Allday