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EDITORIALS

1. THE PRICE OF PROCRASTINATION

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the failure of the Geneva talks on Namibian independence is that hardly anyone in South Africa seems particularly concerned. Yet, as far as we can see, unless the negotiating process can soon be got going again, and successfully concluded, the long-term results for South Africa will be disastrous. And not only for her. The long-term interests in this part of the world of South Africa's western 'friends' could also be in jeopardy.

It is a long way from the antiseptic atmosphere of Geneva to the squalor of Cape Town's Guguletu, but there is a relevance between the collapse of the talks and what happened in Guguletu a few hours later. That night, in Guguletu, a mob of hundreds of black school-children besieged the home of Gerry Magobolo, a nineteen-year-old schoolboy, and frightened the wits out of him and his family, threatening to burn their home down and kill them.

The reason for their terrifying experience? Gerry had been offered, and was on the point of accepting, an athletics scholarship to the United States – something which, not long ago, would have won him the approval and envy of his peers.

Why the change?

There are probably two reasons for it, both of which have to do with procrastination.

The first is local and concerns the dilatory manner in which the people who run black education in our country have responded to the mood and demands of black school-children since 1976. In 1976 the substance of those demands was for full integration into the same education system as that provided for white children, and no discrimination within it. Nothing has been done to meet that basic demand, in what is now going on for five years. And now the

emphasis of the demand is beginning to change, in some quarters at least. Where swift action five years ago might have left us with much of the anger of black educational protest defused, there are signs now that, by the time white South Africa gets round to thinking about an integrated educational system, black children may no longer want it. For, if the reports are correct, what that Guguletu mob was asking Gerry Magobolo to do was to turn down his scholarship and, by so doing, dissociate himself from a "white" education, even if it was in the United States.

During this past year of the Cape school boycotts a growing number of black children and educationists seemed to be bent on rejecting even an integrated education system if it was to be one committed to the inculcation of the "white man's values" and to what they see as an education which prepares them for willing absorption into an economic system primarily designed to serve white interests and not theirs.

Would the fury of the Guguletu demonstration have been so intense if Gerry had won a scholarship to Moscow, 'white' though the education there might also be? We suspect not. Which brings us back to the failure in Geneva.

The West, through its historical and economic ties with the South African 'establishment' has allowed itself to be manoeuvred into a position where it is seen by radical black South Africa as a prop to and an extension of the system which dehumanises and exploits them here. When it comes to taking a stand on apartheid it will invariably procrastinate, its critics say.

This assessment may not be altogether fair but if it is to change the West will have to do something dramatic to

convince radical black South Africans that they are wrong. One way to start such a reassessment would be for the West to be seen to have been a decisive influence in bringing about acceptable elections in Namibia. For the moment they have failed to do so. They will have to try harder than ever in 1981. In particular the Western Europeans must try to ensure that the conservative instincts of the Reagan administration do not persuade it to do as little as possible about Namibia, hoping the problem will solve itself. It won't. Violent conflict will escalate and spread.

In our view the major obstacle to an agreement in Geneva, although it was never publicly stated, was the ill-founded belief in South African circles that their military capacity meant that there was no need to hurry over a settlement. This was an illusion shared by the Rhodesian Front for many years. The trouble with this reliance on force of arms to keep oneself in power is that it eventually persuades one's opponents that violence is their only answer to it, the only thing which brings results. It is an insidious doctrine which it is not easy to refute because it does often seem to work. It seemed to work in Guguletu. There the threat of violence made Gerry Magobolo abandon his American scholarship.

The price of procrastination in Zimbabwe was increasing violence. The price of procrastination in the black education system has been increasing violence. The price of procrastination in Namibia will be increasing violence there.

If the West wants to arrest the continuing decline in its credibility in many black South African eyes, of which the Guguletu demonstration was such a vivid illustration, a Namibian settlement should be a top priority for 1981. □

2. PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKES

The South African army's attack on a group of ANC houses near Maputo was spectacular and very dangerous for those who took part in it. It was also extremely dangerous for the rest of us who didn't.

Officially, the strike was designed to forestall possible attacks on South Africa. Unofficially it was designed to dissuade unfriendly neighbours from harbouring people who might be contemplating such attacks.

If the Rhodesian experience means anything it is that pre-emptive strikes achieve hardly anything at all. They may delay for a few moments the march of history, but no more than that.

Maybe the Maputo raid will delay the march of history for a few moments too, but at what cost? How can South Africa's relations with Mocambique not be badly damaged by it? And with Zimbabwe? And with the other frontline states? And what about black/white relations inside South Africa, which Chief Buthelezi so rightly told a Soweto meeting on the day after the raid, could only be made

worse by such an adventure? Acts of retaliation, like the Durban bomb blast, will multiply, each side determined to outdo the other.

An increasingly hostile set of neighbours beyond her borders and deteriorating relations within them are the two things South Africa can least afford. It is a grim thought that the people who planned and authorised the Maputo raid seem either unaware of or unconcerned about its long-term consequences, for they have told us that, if they think it necessary, they will do it again.

What we need now is not military adventurers in the seats of power but men with calm heads, a sense of history and a willingness to talk to black South Africans and our black neighbours about how to bring about acceptable peaceful change here. The mere act of starting to talk would eliminate the threat of urban terrorism overnight.

But that kind of leader, in the seats of power, we greatly fear we have not got. □