

# CONTINUING UNREST — A SMALL TOWN PERSPECTIVE

(A tentative and probably premature analysis from Grahamstown, where, at the time of writing, the schools' boycott was going into its fifth month and cars were being stoned on the main road from East London to Port Elizabeth where it passes through the town.)

Partly because of the regional focus of most South African newspapers, but also because of the vast scale of the Reef townships, the casual reader might well believe that the small platteland towns have been largely free from the "unrest" and boycotts of the past six months. Far from it, for the Eastern Cape at least has maintained its record of obstinate resistance throughout the months since the elections for the Coloured and Indian chambers of the new legislature. The modest Eastern Cape centres of Graaff Reinet, Cradock and Grahamstown have each seen the familiar cycle of detentions, school boycotts and spiralling violence over the past six months, with no clear indication about future developments. Schools have been boycotted, stoned and in some cases burned; motorists in Grahamstown risk running a gauntlet of stone-throwers; government offices, beer halls, community halls, a voluntary welfare centre complex and an historic church hall have been gutted by fire; police have been engaged in a crude form of urban guerilla warfare with stones and bottles hurled against shields, hippo trucks and the personnel who man them with their clubs, guns and gas grenades. And the familiar litany of culprits has been suggested by the authorities and, sometimes, the press — communists, A.N.C., students, vandals, "the youth" and the unemployed being variously blamed for being "behind" or in the thick of the troubles.

As with all "unrest", the reality is masked fortuitously through its complexity, and deliberately by the participants who seek to avoid becoming a target for one or other of the contending parties. In Grahamstown, where the white and black areas are contiguous and easily seen from the other side, the white residents may imagine that they have a clearer vision of events, but there as elsewhere each is likely to be deceived by the account of his favoured personal source (usually a domestic employee) whose own vision is partial and whose own interests are involved. And the black residents, more unwilling participants than impartial observers, are little better placed, as individuals, to understand the unfolding of events.

This said, there seem to be five inter-related elements involved in the present troubles, most of which are essentially national issues, but each of which possesses a particular local flavour mediated by unique incidents and the personalities of the individuals involved. The elements are:— (i) the new constitution, (ii) the crisis in local government, (iii) black educational issues, (iv) the drought and recession, (v) internal power struggles within the black communities. Where the scale of a town is too small for the leadership to be inconspicuous, troubles are less likely, but Graaff

Reinet, Cradock and Grahamstown, and even Port Alfred with its 12,000 black residents have reached that critical mass necessary to sustain unrest over months.

The new constitution, whatever its merits might have been in various right directions for some people, provides a perfect focus for black unity in opposition. The U.D.F. has responded by providing an organisational base for concerted protest against the new system, but it was scarcely necessary for any organisation to tell the people that for the mass of blacks, the 'new deal' means business as usual, with no more protection for their security of tenure outside the black 'homelands' and no appreciable change in their political rights. The 'Coloured' and Indian elections provided specific occasions for boycotts and the rhetoric of revolutionary change, especially in the small towns where black and brown areas are adjacent to each other and their residents closely related to each other. The simple demand for a common franchise and citizenship, unacceptable to the white authorities and their electorates, provides the basis for a united front, however divided the leadership might be about what sort of society would or should emerge as a result of a common franchise. The spacing of the elections a week apart, and the campaigns necessarily waged in every town, encouraged school students to take the intervening days off to promote their cause and, in Grahamstown at least, set in train the process of spiralling conflict. Until some constitutional accommodation is reached with at least the urban blacks, this underlying cause of conflict will persist.

Second, the crisis in local government has been brewing since the national government removed the black townships from the jurisdiction of the white local authorities by creating Administration Boards in 1970. Before 1970, the costs of black local government were met from three sources; the rates and levies from the townships themselves, the profits from the production and sale of alcoholic drink through the municipal beerhalls, and a certain amount of hidden subsidy in the form of services to the municipal area as a whole which were paid for out of 'white' rates. With the advent of Administration Boards, the costs of black local government rose, but the hidden contribution of the 'white' municipalities was lost, since they were no longer involved. Latterly, the liquor business has been privatised to an increasing degree, and as black tastes shift away from sorghum beer, the profits available to the Boards and the new black community councils have tended to shrink and in some cases have vanished. Thus, regardless of the political issues of apartheid and the continuing influence of white officials in black local government, themselves a major focus for opposition, the new black local councils faced by a constituency with rising expectations and little confidence in those rash enough to offer themselves for election, have to meet large and growing demands from a smaller revenue base. They can

only balance their budgets by raising rates and levies – which makes them even more unpopular in hard economic times. Regardless of venality and incompetence in its personnel, the new local government system is economically unviable and hence its executives find themselves both victims of the system and targets of the opposition. The council at Cradock has taken the logical step and dissolved itself on the grounds that its opponents outside the council (CRADORA) command the respect of the people; the Department of Co-operation and Development has not grasped the logic and proposes to hold new elections.

Third, the simmering crisis in black education is always likely to produce boycotts, which in turn release on to the streets a large number of angry and frustrated young people. The causes of that crisis have been endlessly rehearsed and are readily tabulated:—

a) the traditional inequity in resource allocation to black and white education such that to even up expenditure it would be necessary to transfer the entire defence budget to black education.

b) The lack of training and professionalism in a substantial proportion of the black teachers – to some extent reflected in the demands for student councils and an end to corporal punishment i.e. greater control by the pupils over their schools at the local level.

c) Consequential poor results – which mean that families may sacrifice much for many years, only to find their children have a largely useless scrap of paper, while the varying age of starting school exacerbated by high failure rates means that men with little chance of success sit in the secondary schools with children whose studies are on course and whose prognosis is reasonable but who cannot resist the orders of their stronger, academically demoralised classmates.

d) Low standards in black tertiary institutions, such that employers are compelled to discount qualifications earned in them when they are seeking staff.

e) Shortage of secondary school places and properly equipped libraries and laboratories.

Proclamations of good intentions by the Minister and the substantial output of school places and teachers in recent years have done little more than encourage some students in the belief that they must protest more vigorously than ever in order to achieve their ultimate goal of free and equal education for all. A paradox of improved education is that it makes those who are being educated very much more aware of the inadequacies in their education.

The drought and recession have aggravated the economic problems associated with local government and education, particularly in the small towns in the drought stricken Eastern Cape. There has been a rapid influx of families from the white-owned farms to the platteland towns, as workers have been laid off. This has put additional pressure on housing, education and welfare resources in towns which are themselves suffering from the decline in farm incomes and the demand for goods and services which the farms generate. In particular the kinsmen of the immigrants suffer as they have to share the meagre fruits of their labour with the unemployed newcomers.

Established black families in the small towns are finding that as the recession bites, there are fewer jobs available,

even on a casual basis, and the people whose resourcefulness has kept them going as petty traders and providers of services within the black communities are suffering as the workers have less to spend. The recession also exacerbates the devaluation of educational qualifications and the days when a Junior Certificate was a passport to a clerical job or technical training are virtually gone. Even a senior certificate will be examined carefully by a prospective employer for the maths and language symbols.

The mix is thus highly inflammable and needs only the spark provided by a small incident or some revolutionary charisma to ignite it. Koornhof's brave new deal turns out to be the old stacked deck, with a few new names and titles; the bright lights of town are not worth the candle when one cannot afford the matches to light it; the promise of education as the gateway to economic emancipation lies in the dust of well-trodden streets past the NO VACANCIES signs; the old despair, the young rebel. A popular teacher is transferred to a distant place, or an unpopular one promoted; a teacher thrashes a popular pupil or is believed to have favourites; a youngster gets hurt in a brush with the law, or an inexperienced and frightened young policeman panics when confronted by a group of marchers far more sophisticated in the ways of protest than himself; a councillor, elected on a 5% poll, is seen to be abusing his office; an official, socialised in the context of a docile rural black population, decides that the schoolchildren need only to be shown who is the baas for their boycotts to cease. Then come the stones, the birdshot and rubber bullets, the settling of old scores with venal councillors, and young leaders, whether or not they are associated with national organisations such as COSAS or AZAPO, have their first taste of power.

A basis for competition between the various organisations is soon established. A local organisation such as GRACA (the Grahamstown Community Organisation) or CRADORA (its counterpart in Cradock) may claim broad based support on the basis of the very low poll in council elections following its call for a boycott. Its goals will tend to be defined in local terms, such as better services, lower levies, greater public accountability and a unified municipal government. Being an organisation which includes older people with children at school, as well as younger activists, it tends to be ambivalent on the schools' boycott issue and is soon outflanked by a student organisation such as COSAS which seeks a national or regional schools' boycott until its broader educational demands have been met. COSAS in turn may be outflanked by AZAPO or a similarly exclusive black political body which seeks to unite the people primarily on the basis of colour in order to press for its national goals. Jockeying for leadership or control at the local level can readily degenerate into name calling, thuggery and vandalism such as that which led to the destruction of an historic Methodist hall and the headquarters of several welfare organisations in Grahamstown. The shadowy leadership accepts no responsibility for the destruction of government property, houses or communal institutions, although some people both in and out of the community see in the destruction an organised pattern of revolutionary violence against the authorities and of intimidation of the local population – if the church is not sacrosanct, then what chance do the homes or ordinary opponents of violence stand? Some people suspect the use of **agents provocateur** from the authorities or their right wing associates, as premises which

house community youth programmes, the Black Sash Advice Office and a clinic have been damaged or destroyed. The more optimistic see a settling of private scores at the root of at least a part of the destruction, and argue that some of the trouble over the festive season can be attributed to migrants coming home for their annual holidays and the demon drink.

Much of the preceding paragraph is speculation — a summary of the beliefs of people in and near the black community. Whether the broad outlines or the details are true may never be known until some crucial survivors record

their memoirs — what is significant is that the people believe certain things to be true and act accordingly. Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the beliefs is the despair and the paralysis that they engender. The police are seen as the agents of the oppressive power and hence are unavailable as a source of protection or help, while the shadowy local groups, be they criminal gangs or agents of the known organisations, cannot be resisted, no matter what sacrifices they demand of the workers or pupils in the townships. And the good people **can** do nothing.□

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by DOT CLEMINSHAW

## FROM CROSSROADS TO KHAYELITSHA TO . . . ?

White settlement at the Cape has always relied on an industrious black labour force. By 1900 some 10 000 blacks resided in Cape Town, some renting, others owning their homes. They married local women, or brought their wives and families from the rural areas. In 1900 Africans (blacks) could still qualify as voters in the old Cape Colony legislature. But over the years they have lost what few rights they possessed, and to-day there are no blacks in Cape Town who are not legally foreigners or aliens, even 2nd and 3rd generations born here. They have been made citizens of Ciskei or Transkei.

Black people, whose forebears resided in the centre of Cape Town, have steadily been pushed further from the city. With the advent of the Afrikaner Nationalist government in 1948 their physical control has been tightened by pass laws and influx control, and categories of "legal" and "illegal" imposed, the latter being forced back to rural areas. From Cape Town they were moved to Ndabeni, to Langa in 1923, to Nyanga site-and-service in 1946, to Guguletu in 1959.

A disastrous social experiment began with the Eiselen line in 1955, creating a Coloured Labour Preference area in the Western Cape. In August 1984 the University of Western Cape held a seminar calling for an end to this policy, and later Prof. Sampie Terreblanche (of the Theron Commission) concurred, saying of his original support for the Coloured Preference policy "I was wrong". Recently the decision to withdraw this policy was announced by Mr P.W. Botha.

Increasing emphasis has been placed on migrant labour (one-year renewable contracts) for black males in W. Cape, and it was deliberate official policy not to build family housing. Employers were permitted to build men-only hostels in the townships, but the State built no family

units from the mid-60's for a period of 10 years while the black population increased by over 60%

Pressures of rural poverty brought many workseekers illegally to Cape Town, and combined with the natural increase among the legal residents, overcrowding soon created many squatter camps the best known being Crossroads. The saga of its survival in the face of sustained attempts by the Government to wipe it out by means of demolitions, arrests, night raids with armed officials and police, dogs and tear gas (and the fencing of empty sites with barbed wire), made of Crossroads an international issue.

### POPULATION

Official estimates of Cape Town's total population (all races) are 2 million in six years' time, and 3 million by 2000 AD. The Department of Co-operation and Development estimated the black population in Western Cape in January 1984 to be 229 000, of which 169 687 were legally here. So over 59 000 or 26% (but probably many more) were here illegally. Meantime the official estimate of the maximum number that could be accommodated in the existing townships of Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga without overcrowding was 87 214 (mostly in houses, but 25 030 in single quarters). So by official admission, available housing could accommodate only half the "legal" blacks here, demonstrating a major factor in the growth of squatter communities. Mr J. Gunter, Chief Director of the W. Cape Development Board, was quoted in the **Argus** on 8 Aug. 84 as saying that statistics proved influx control had failed to stem the tide of black urbanisation, with the result that there might be up to 100 000 blacks illegally in the Cape, with possibly half of these living in Crossroads. On 10 Jan. 85 Prof. S.P. Cilliers called for the ending of