
DEATH IN BOIPATONG

The Dead of Boipatong

More than forty people were massacred at Boipatong on Wednesday 17 June. Men, women and children, and even those in their mother's womb were hacked to death. Life, which hitherto offered only suffering, was snuffed out by men so low, that they could only attack at the dead of night when the shadows concealed their identity.

Even though the evidence is hidden and might never be established there is little doubt about who is guilty. This killing must be laid at the door of the Intelligence Department and their allies in the Inkatha Freedom Party. It is clearly the work of men who are out to destabilize the townships, destroy all movements of opposition and reimpose the state of emergency. Addressing this issue, John Carlin said in *The Independent* (24 June 1992):

In Boipatong, as in the majority of other massacres, the people who actually do the killing are blacks linked to the Inkatha Freedom Party...Those who direct them are whites operating within the intelligence structures of the police and army.

The only issue in doubt is how high up does the authority come from? Does it stop at the 'securocrats', the generals and colonels who effectively ran the country during the Eighties? Or does it go right up to F W de Klerk, as Nelson Mandela claims? These questions have not been conclusively answered.

The argument that this event was the result of previous shootings in the area is beside the point. The townships and squatter camps are witness to violence and murders week after week. Some are the work of criminal gangs, others are political. To trace causal connections between the events is sometimes possible and, where the connections can be shown, the roots of the violence must be exposed. But seeking these connections is usually fruitless and must not obscure the basic problem: the decline of township life and descent into blood feuds that can only stop the transformation of the country.

In its attempts to muddy the picture, the government and its allies have turned on the ANC and claimed that the violence at Boipatong was a direct result of the call for a mass action campaign. While the campaign is open to criticism, the government's response is blatant nonsense. It has sought to hide behind a smokescreen of disinformation aimed at hiding its own complicity. If there was a direct cause it was the National Party's new campaign that described the ANC as 'enemy number one'. How else can we explain the failure of the police to send its force into the camp after receiving a warning of the imminence of the attack?

That was not the end. Mr de Klerk had to see the scene for himself. He said he came to offer sympathy — the sympathy of the hangman in the house of the dead.

Did he really believe that people would stand by and hear his honeyed words? Did he not know that his presence would act as a provocation? If he did not, he must go, because he showed himself to be a fool. If he did know he is even more culpable: his tour could only provoke the people of Boipatong. The people who assembled had no doubt about what had happened. Their anger boiled over as they crowded round the president's car. The banners they carried said it all: '*To Hell with De Klerk and your Inkatha Murderers*'. The residents of this squatter camp turned on de Klerk. Yet, although this was an unarmed crowd the police opened fire. When a man was shot dead and the people nearby sought to retrieve the body, the police pumped bullets into unarmed bodies. Even as the crowd turned and ran the police continued firing. All they had demanded was the right to remove the corpse and pay it the respect the living normally show to their dead.

The number killed, mutilated or maimed is not yet clear. The count is still rising. Fifty-four are known to have died in these three days and over two hundred and twenty were injured: two hundred and seventy-four innocent people who sheltered in the squatters camp. We believe this to be a deed as dastardly as that of any shooting in the past: of Bulhoek, Bondelzwarts, Marabastad, Sharpeville and Soweto. The list of names is endless and they merge into one another. Boipatong is one more place name to be added to the towns that have added their inhabitants to the list of martyrs.

The Living in Boipatong

In answer to the anguish of a people, Nelson Mandela went to Boipatong. Unlike what took place during the visit of de Klerk, the people sat and listened. They wanted protection and the right to self-defence. This was their most urgent demand, added to the many urgent needs in their daily lives.

It was a forlorn hope: Mr Mandela did not respond to the call for arms. This is a problem that the ANC and its allies have not been able to confront, despite their claim that their armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, remains intact. Joe Slovo, the chairman of the Communist Party, in an act of bravado, said a year ago that the ANC would arm the people if the massacres did not stop, but the ANC and SACP have no arms to give and can no longer obtain them from eastern Europe. Mr Slovo was guilty of offering assistance that could not be delivered. However, there is a problem that goes far beyond the offer to arm the people: this is an issue over which he dare not respond. The guns that have found their way into the townships have been used by criminals and thugs to terrorize those who now call for arms. The ANC is too disorganized and too weak to conduct an extended campaign in the streets against the army and the police. If there were arms available, and if they could be distributed, it would not be politic to hand them out indiscriminately. Besides the fact that new violence would merely provide the police with the excuse to shoot on an even bigger scale. The way to self defence would have to be through an organized guard that does not exist and could not be formed in the near future.

If Mr Mandela did not respond to the call for arms, what did he come to say? Speaking to an audience that was in mourning, all he could say was that the peace negotiations lay in tatters and the ANC would no longer speak to the government. The people came to hear what the ANC, the movement they support, had to say and Mr Mandela could only talk about the end of talks. Is he so far removed from the plight of the people that he has nothing to say about the misery of their lives or the conditions of the camps in which they are forced to live? Nothing about the iniquity of hostels that house migrant workers? Nothing about the internal fighting that is reducing South Africa to conditions that have come to be associated with Lebanon a few years back and Yugoslavia today.

Yet, in one respect he was correct. The talks that had been dragging on, and had been at the centre of 20 months of endeavour by the ANC, had reached a dead end. To continue them in the same way, even if there had been no massacres, would have been counter productive, leaving the government in a position of power. The talking shop known as Codesa had to be closed. However, was Boipatong the appropriate place to make this announcement?

Mandela in his address also dared the government to call a state of emergency, saying that he would lead the defiance. These words, coming from the man who had served a prison sentence of 27 years, sounded brave, but they can achieve nothing. The time for token defiance is gone. What the people need and want is change in their living conditions. Yet, in the 18 months since it has been unbanned the ANC has conducted no campaign to alter conditions in South Africa. That is why people are tired of talks about talks.

There have been no campaigns for housing, the end of hostels and squatter camps, health care, schooling, or public transport. And because squatter camps must go, how is it possible to call for running water, electricity, roads, sewage, sports fields, shopping centres, or the many amenities wanted by the people? The issue, which Mr Mandela did not address, is that people cannot live this way any longer. It is this situation that invites the formation of killer gangs, and that allows the police to terrorize the population, with or without the assistance of Inkatha.

Where were the other voices? Archbishop Tutu, expressing his anger, demanded that South Africa be expelled from the Olympic Games. Stop the rugby tours by Australia and New Zealand, he called. He was followed in Britain by Peter Hain, the Labour MP who once organized boycotts of South African touring teams. The chorus will grow. Anything rather than face up to the basic problem in South Africa: that cheap labour requires cheap housing, and it is easier to kill people than to provide the facilities required for a meaningful life.

The Time For Mourning Is Over

The people of Boipatong buried their dead in the glare of world attention. A number of men were arrested at the nearby hostel which was said to harbour the killers. Whether charges will be proffered is not known, but even if the

perpetrators are brought to book it is doubtful whether they will ever be punished. The records indicate that those who work for the state can usually expect to go free, or expect release after a very short period in prison.

The demand that the guilty be caught is part of the larger demand that justice be seen to prevail in a new South Africa. In itself, that is only a small part of what is required. The list of demands are so extensive that it might be more fruitful to set out the requirements of the coming period and divide the list into two.

Firstly there are the demands of people who have to exist in the twilight world where the main planks of apartheid have been abolished, but where conditions of life have not improved for most and have even deteriorated.

That the massacre occurred in a squatter's camp was not exceptional. The vast bulk of the people live either as squatters or in townships that are insufferably bad. The continued existence of these miserable 'high density' areas is an indictment of the society that has locked people into these custom-built slums. The living conditions of the better off are barely tolerable; those of the poorer, sub-human. Yet, in the past two years, few steps have been taken to reverse the situation. To speak of a better society under these conditions is absurd. Nor have there been steps to alter other basic living conditions. It is not necessary to spell out the conditions that need urgent change: sanitation, housing, water and lighting, roads and transport, schooling, health care are only the beginning. There are no equitable pension schemes, no social welfare, no mental health care, and no facilities for the handicapped. The list is endless and grass root movements must be revived to take these issues in hand.

Not that such groups can expect an easy passage. The authorities will plead a shortage of money, a lack of professional men and women, a dearth of suitable buildings, a shortage of equipment. The local authorities will block progress or temporize. Only agitation followed by real campaigns can force a way through the delaying tactics of those that rule and, we expect, the inertia of liberation movements that should have initiated campaigns of this kind years ago.

The choice of campaigns can be decided at local level, and these can be linked through regional movements. The tactics used will vary from passive resistance to occupations; boycotts and expropriations; strikes and go-slows. There can be marches and there can be stay at homes: the methods chosen to suit the situation and the occasion. All these will also need the mobilization of taxi drivers and others to counter the opposition that is bound to be provoked by the ruling class. Above all methods must be found to protect the residents through self-aid groups.

In such campaigning, which must advance from objective to objective there must be no deception, no false bravado, and no self appointed leaders who terrorize the factories, the hospitals, the schools, or the townships. The one lesson to be learnt from the formation of trade unions and community organizations since the 1970s, is that real campaigning people's organizations can only develop where bureaucratic political interference from high is absent.

Advancing in tandem with local campaigns, and obviously co-ordinated with local initiatives, it is possible to take up the larger question: creating the appropriate institution to resolve the crisis. This has become even more urgent now that all talks between the government of Mr de Klerk and the ANC have been suspended. Perhaps this halt has even pointed to a way forward that has been previously neglected. It was Pallo Jordan who said at one stage that the government was acting as player and as referee. His answer then was to call on international bodies to intervene. Other members of the ANC have joined him in looking to international bodies. That way lies frustration. If there is to be any meaningful change, it must come from the strength of the people. We believe there is a way, as proposed once before in a little known paper, *Umlilo — The Flame*.

That paper appeared in 1935 when the All African Convention was summoned by the African leaders to stop the Hertzog Bills which intended removing Cape Africans from the franchise and finally demarcating the land that Africans could own. Writing in *Umlilo*, C B I Dladla and Ralph Lee, both formerly in the Communist Party but now members of the Workers Party of South Africa, proposed to those who were to meet that they convert the All African Convention into a National Convention. That is, that the Convention declare that it was the representative body of the people of South Africa and, as such, able to express the views of the majority. Here, gathered in assembly, were the men and women who alone had the right to decide the fate of the nation.

The time was not ripe for that move. The Convention that was convened was composed largely of a timid petty bourgeoisie, most without a mandate and without any backing from their communities. They had come to protest, not to fight. Furthermore the Convention was controlled by a cabal that would not even allow a radical motion to be put. There might have been more hope if the workers had been organized and represented. However, the trade union movement was still in its infancy and the strength of the workers limited by its small size and lack of experience.

There have been considerable changes since 1935. There is in existence a strong and consolidated trade union movement; workers in the factories and the townships have well defined demands; youth and women are militant; and the liberation movements, despite organizational weakness have a large supportive constituency. If it is not possible to get the government to take negotiations seriously then the opposition movement must take the next step and call an assembly. Even more urgently, if such negotiations are not initiated by the majority, and if the initiative is left in the hands of the government, there can only be a reversion to cycles of violence that must cripple each and every opposition party.

It is not for us to say what the next step should be. The precise details must be decided in South Africa and there are several possibilities. A meeting of interested parties can be summoned to discuss the calling of a Convention and the method of appointing delegates. The agenda can be determined in advance by a working party. Interested parties, including the National Party should be invited. Interna-

tional observers (and only observers) can be invited from among jurists or international bodies. We repeat: the mechanism for calling the Convention and its scope can be determined, democratically, by local representatives and can be made fully representative. Our only demand would be that the trade unions and community bodies, excluded from Codesa under the fiction that they were represented by the ANC be directly involved. They are needed, both to participate in the deliberations and to provide the defence of the assembly.

Although we believe that this is a way forward and is possible, we doubt whether the ANC and its allies will take this step. They will be only too willing to accept token concessions and crawl back to the talking table if they can only get some token concession from Mr de Klerk. They will not participate in an operation in which they will have to take responsibility for action and possible confrontation with the government. Yet, such is our belief that a new initiative is called for, that we must urge the members of the ANC to press their leaders to take such a step. If they do not, then the initiative must be taken by the other liberation movements, working in tandem with the trade union bodies Cosatu and Nactu. To fail to do this can only leave the country in the hands of warring factions that must tear the country apart. It is either forward to a new society, or a retreat to chaos.

DOCUMENTS OF THE DAY

The Massacre

Allister Sparks, who was present at the shooting the day before wrote: A young man had been shot and the crowd wanted to retrieve the body

The crowd was boiling with rage. They were trying to reach the body to take it away for their own community funeral, while a cordon of about thirty policemen, dressed in camouflage uniform and with their shotguns held across their chests, strained to keep them back. It must be said that the provocation was great...

I was standing alongside the end policeman, less than a yard from the front of a crowd, when moments later I heard a shot ring out from the end of the police line, followed quickly by another. Instantly the whole line opened fire, pumping their heavy-gauge 12-bore shot into the crowd at point-blank range.

There was no order to shoot, nor was there any warning to the crowd...

When the shooting stopped there was an eerie silence. I lifted my head and saw a field of carnage ahead of me. A pile of bodies lay in a tangle about 20 feet away. Beyond them were more, strewn haphazardly across the field up to about 100 yards away. They lay dead still for a moment, then some of them moved. Then there were groans, and screams from the shocked crowd...

The police made no move, either then or later to go to [the wounded] and offer assistance. They stayed in their line, guns at the ready..I counted 20 people lying there. Most had gaping body wounds. One had half his face shot away. A young woman press photographer was kneeling next to him...

Observer, 21 June 1992

The Secret Policeman

Lieutenant-Colonel John Horak whose story appeared in *The Independent* on 24 June 1992 is a defector from the security services after 32 years, during which he was a journalist on the liberal *Daily Mail*, and later manager of the Morning Group of the South African Associated Newspapers. Included in his interview is the following:

The system of national security operates from the State President to local town clerks...

The Chairman in each area is the senior police officer. He's left to do the job and if he's an arrogant sort, he takes all the decisions. The police only feed up the line problems they can't cope with. They could have someone killed locally — the phrase is usually something like 'permanently removed from society' — and the only thing which reaches the committee is a note to say the problem has been solved. They don't explain anything so the people at the top can always say they never knew.

Asked about co-operation between the police and Inkatha at the Boipatong massacre, Horak said:

This is credible. The Local Joint Management Committee conducts its own affairs. It would be down to the local man.

You will not find any document showing an agreement between the SAP [South African Police] and the Inkatha movement but they do work together. The general view is to let them fight it out, turn a blind eye.

In a moment of doubt Horak sought the advice from a church minister. It appears that it's 'your Christian duty to spy on the Communists'. The minister 'prayed to God that I would have the courage to carry on with my duty'.

The Curse of State Terrorism

Extract from a report by David Beresford on the spreading violence in South Africa. Starting with a gruesome story of the mutilation and killing of a young man accused by ANC supporters of being a member of Inkatha, Beresford also referred to a journalist who was on a military hit-list but survived because the assassin bungled the job. He said there was a temptation to call down *Mercurio's* curse on the parties in South Africa taken from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: 'A plague on both your houses, for they have indeed made worm's meat'. He continued:

Exactly where the dividing line lies between civil strife and civil war is a moot point, but it is certainly a line which South Africa is fast approaching. As ever in a conflict of its type, viciousness of an extreme order is being exercised increasingly by both sides...

Beresford then referred to stories that were current about the necklacing of an Inkatha supporter prior to the massacre in Boipatong. However these accounts overlooked the assassination of white police commander by black gunmen in the area. A more persuasive measure of responsibility, he said, lay in the recently published account by the Human Rights Commission of 49 massacres, claiming

1,250 lives over the past two years. Then referring to 'a thread of history which provides perhaps the most telling perspective', Beresford continued:

It is a thread which can be picked up as distantly as the Rhodesian bush war, when the South African military were involved in activities truly worthy of Nazi war criminals. They included experimentation (with black human guinea pigs) in the use of poison and the subsequent application as a weapon of war against Zanu and Zapu — episodes of infamy reported by at least two veterans of the Rhodesian conflict...The thread can be pursued to Mozambique with the development on an almost unprecedented scale of the strategy of destabilisation through the training, equipping and promotion of Renamo by the South African security services. The blatant use of state terrorism and murder are extended to the domestic front...It is a history that has bred an extreme and justifiable prejudice against the South African authorities in both the international and black, domestic, communities...

In his conclusion Beresford stated that the government in Pretoria had to exorcise the curse of Mercurio by 'a sustained demonstration of its claimed newfound principles'. It was also a curse, he said, which the ANC and its supporters would do well to bear in mind when faced with the necklacing and killings perpetrated by its members in the townships. With this we concur.

Guardian 3 July 1992

BONGANI NTSHANGASE

Bongani Ntshangase, a former teacher in South Africa and at the ANC school Somafco at Mazimbu in Tanzania, where he was highly respected, was shot dead in Natal on the 21st of May.

Mr Ntshangase had been in South Africa for a short time after being repatriated from Kenya, where he had fled with his wife Linda after being released from an ANC prison in Tanzania on 1 August 1991. He and four others were released after a campaign by Mrs Ntshangase and the pressure group Justice for Southern Africa. A press release concerning Mr Ntshangase and a suspected purge of Zulu-speaking members of the ANC in Tanzania was reported in January 1992 in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 8 (pp 29-32).

In a letter to Justice for Southern Africa of 14 August 1991, Mrs Ntshangase wrote that fellow Zulu speakers in Tanzania were 'in peril ...both from the ANC and the Tanzanian government'. She felt 'absolutely insecure' and thought that she 'might be assassinated'. She felt the same fear for her husband and his colleagues.

Our sympathy goes out to Linda and the family of Bongani. The grief they feel makes us even more determined to campaign for Justice in South Africa