

# A QUESTION OF CLASS: THE WRITINGS OF KENNETH A. JORDAAN

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## The Quest for a New History

It is with regret that we record the passing of Kenneth (Kenny) Jordaan in Harare on 30 September 1988. We commemorate his continued belief that the struggle in South Africa would triumph and lead to the establishment of a socialist society: we remember him for his belief that it was necessary to understand the historical forces at work in a society if tyranny was to be overthrown.

It was his concern with such understanding that led Jordaan to his endless probing into the events that shaped South African society, and although much of his historical writing has been rediscovered by later researchers, his articles remain unacknowledged or unknown. It is time to set the record straight, and in making this claim for Jordaan it must also be acknowledged that he would have been the first to say that his early work was only exploratory, and needed correction and refinement. Over the past two decades he was engaged in writing a Marxist history of South Africa — but in his search for accuracy he found it necessary to revise his manuscript again and again to take account of new publications. Despite the urgings of friends he does not seem to have completed that work.

In reviewing his search for historical understanding the conditions under which he worked must be understood, and the nature of his quest be stated. For this I must start at the beginning.

Kenneth Jordaan was born in the Cape in 1924, and educated at the Livingstone High School — one of the premier secondary schools for Coloured students. He then read history for a Bachelor degree at the University of Cape Town, and dissatisfied with the content of the subject as taught at college, he devoted the rest of his intellectual life to rewriting the subject. While still at school he shone as a rugby player, and was later selected to play for the Western Province Coloureds' team. After completing his first degree he acquired a Secondary Teacher's Diploma and taught History and German at his old school. He was also the school coach in rugby and swimming.

Jordaan joined the New Era Fellowship, a discussion club which nurtured radical thought among Coloured students, and which provided many of the founders and leaders of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). In

1942 he joined the Fourth International Organization of South Africa (FIOSA), and deepened his knowledge of Marxist writings. FIOSA went out of existence in the aftermath of the Anti-Communist Act of 1950, and some of its members regrouped in the Forum Club. They hosted lectures, and printed transcripts in the journal *Discussion*, but the former FIOSA members did not stay together. M.N. Averbach (the main theoretician of the group) left South Africa, and Hosea Jaffe (its leading publicist) left the club to join the leadership of the NEUM. Jordaan continued to work in the Forum Club, and when this collapsed, a succession of discussion groups were formed. There are few records of the subsequent activities of this group of people, and only a handful were left together in 1960 during the state of emergency that followed the Sharpeville massacre.

### Jan van Riebeeck's Place in History

Jordaan achieved prominence among small groups of socialists in the early 1950s through his contributions in *Discussion*. It is these that will be discussed below, and although Jordaan was not a 'man of action', it must not be thought that he stayed aloof when vital decisions had to be made. He agreed with the break from the NEUM after its paper, the *Torch*, refused advertisements for Forum Club meetings; and he condemned the NEUM after it withdrew from the Trains' Apartheid Resistance Committee and refused to defy the new segregatory regulations.

In commending Jordaan's early articles it must be stated at the outset that he wrote them without consulting primary sources. It is not certain whether Coloureds were allowed to use such material in the late 1940s, but it was certainly unusual for any but whites to have access to the state archives. It was also the case that undergraduate students were not trained in the use of primary sources, and Jordaan only used state archives after he arrived in Britain in 1964. Consequently, he quoted only from published material, and given these limits, his historical insights were most impressive.

One of his earliest projects was an examination of the place of Jan van Riebeeck, the first Dutch commander of the Cape, in South African history. This led to two papers, one delivered at the Cape Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA) early in 1950, and then at the Modern Youth Society (a leftist club) in 1951. A revised version was presented at the Forum Club and appeared in *Discussion*, in June 1952. This was not an academic exercise, but was concerned with the call to boycott the official celebrations of the tercentenary of the landing of van Riebeeck at the Cape.

Jordaan declared in his talks, and repeated in *Discussion*,<sup>1</sup> his belief that the celebrations should be boycotted, in order to educate the people, and 'organize them against their rulers.' This was necessary because the

majority of the people were exploited by a 'political dictatorship.' However, he cautioned:

We do not boycott because van Riebeeck was white or because he began the white colonization of South Africa. We are not chauvinists or racialists nor do we wish to wage a war against the historical record.

Paraphrasing Marx he said that 'primitive societies' were bound to be conquered to 'make progress possible', and in anticipation of the publication of Marx's *Grundrisse* in English, he continued:

In this case, however, history presents us with a gain as well as a loss; a gain in the sense that the dissolution of primitive tribal society makes possible the free untrammelled development of the productive forces, the spread of civilized habits, customs, and of human knowledge; but a loss in the sense that such developments in human evolution take place only on the basis of the expropriation of the land and goods, the destruction of the liberties and equalitarian relations of primitive people.

In a future emancipated society, he said, when capitalism had been destroyed, all the people might mark together, with the 'white and Coloured progeny of van Riebeeck' the man who had 'no inkling of the strange historic mission Herrenvolkism and black racialists alike were to assign to him three hundred years after his arrival.' He elaborated on this theme, drawing the lesson again and again, that van Riebeeck was neither the 'great agent of civilization', nor the bearer of 'coloured hatred and racialism.' Such ideas could only appeal to those who

cannot see race as an economic factor, that is, as the ideological reflex of basic contradictions in the productive processes of a heterogeneous society. Thus they invest race and racialism with the *raison d'être* of history.

To make his point explicit, he delineated four 'social systems' in (white) South African history, coinciding with distinctive productive processes. These, he said, were the period of the Dutch East Indian Company's rule (1652-1795); the British occupation (1795-1872); the control of the north by 'petty Boer Republics' (1836-1870) and the period of industrialization following the discovery of diamonds and gold (1870 onwards). Racism in South Africa, he said, was not a product of the first three periods, but was 'the outcome of a new set of historical conditions which arose after 1870.'

Much of the article was devoted to a discussion of van Riebeeck's brief

from the DEIC, the development of this policy, the social composition of the men assigned to the Cape as servants of the Company, and the use and misuse of the Khoi people by the Governor and his men. It was a story of 'friendly overtures' and force and rapine, and of the 'irreconcilable conflict between two mutually antagonistic communities which could not come to any *modus vivendi*.' The contact led to emotional conflict and alienation, and Jordaan illustrated this in the case of the Khoi woman Krotoa (or 'Eva'). Krotoa was raised as a servant in the van Riebeeck home, was an interpreter at the age of 15 and, encouraged by the commander, married the surgeon Baron von Meerhof. Such marriages were seen by van Riebeeck as 'promoting goodwill between the two races', but for the women the story was often one of misery. Both before the marriage, when she was used as an intermediary to take possession of Khoi cattle, and after the death of her husband, Krotoa oscillated between the customs of her people, and that of the society in which she had been partly reared. She never reconciled herself to either society, torn between two irreconcilable social systems with conflicting values and mores.

Jordaan had to cut his way through the one-sided historical texts he read, and was one of the first to bring Marxist analysis to bear on the complexities of South African development. He also turned to Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*,<sup>2</sup> accepting, albeit critically, her belief that capital would absorb the pre-capitalist societies in the colonies, in order to continue the process of capital accumulation. This led him to the conclusion, incorrectly, that pre-colonial African institutions had been effectively destroyed and that only a facade remained.

Much that appeared in this early article has been superseded by contemporary historians using archival material in Europe and South Africa, but Jordaan's insights have stood the test of time. He declared unequivocally that the Coloureds were neither a race or a nation. They were, he said, 'a disinherited group of people, a statutory category', and he linked the liberation of Coloureds with that of the Africans. Without the emancipation of the latter, the Coloureds would continue,

an oppressed and disheartened group of people. It is this inescapable political fact, and not such anthropological nonsense as the racial affinity of the Coloureds and the Africans, that justifies the political unity of all oppressed sections.

### **Defining Racism**

In the lectures on van Riebeeck, Jordaan touched on the origins of modern racism in the late nineteenth century, but the effects of industrialization on

racism begged further exposition. A discussion of the problem followed the publication of a pamphlet by W. P. van Schoor, based on a lecture delivered at the TLSA in October 1950.<sup>3</sup> Van Schoor was a leading member of the NEUM and no apologist for the ruling class and the status quo in South Africa, and Jordaan began by stressing the importance of this departure from the work of 'official historians' who served the system. He recognized that a pioneer work would have shortcomings, and set out to explore the factors that led to 'the process of our enslavement.' In so doing he discounted the belief that South Africa's historical and political problems could be understood 'in terms of race, racialism and colour.'

One facet of Jordaan's essay was concerned with the criticism of van Schoor's arguments. He rejected the replacement of white 'heroes' by 'heroic' black chiefs, and dismissed as crudities van Schoor's failure to distinguish between Dutch and British administration, or between capital and the white workers. He also devoted some space to the erroneous belief that feudalism had been imported into South Africa — a social system for which he could find no evidence in South Africa, and he denied van Schoor's contention that labour tenants or squatters were 'serfs.' This was not a matter of academic interest, but central to the criticism of the thesis of the Workers Party (of the mid-30s) and their contention that the rural situation was at the centre of the South African struggle.

He dismissed van Schoor's contention that the Act of Union in 1909 was a 'mere move for white unity to crush the Africans.' Union, he said, was a move 'by the mining magnates to create a centralized authority which could protect and legislate in the interests of the capitalist economy.'

In contrast to van Schoor, Jordaan's purpose was to show that the modern colour bar was qualitatively different from any differentiation that had existed previously. In the Boer republics, for example, there had been mutual economic antagonism between Boer and Bantu 'that expressed itself, first of all, in the separation of the two groups on territorial lines.'<sup>4</sup> The modern colour bar (with its social and political segregation) was the product of the *integration* of blacks and whites to provide the needs of industrial capitalism. Two societies were brought together by the needs of capital, assimilating and integrating them on the one hand, and yet erecting within the new society social barriers to separate the races. South Africa had developed from 'a slow tempo under commercial capitalism' in which 'the tribal mode of life' could survive, to modern industrialism in which they were needed as wage earners:

The dependence of the mines on cheap labour made the task of expropriating the Africans from their tribal lands the unpostponable demand of the incipient capitalists. The disintegration of African tribal

life was accordingly effected by taxation and wars and the subsequent need for European coinage and goods. In the course of a few decades after 1870, the Africans were violently hurled into the streams of capitalism by sword and fire. The Industrial revolution in South Africa gave them no opportunity, no breathing space to settle down with the dissolution of tribal life as private landholders. Under the tremendous impact of capitalism, they were forced and absorbed into the economic veins of capitalism, bearing heavily the scars of tribalism. The Africans knew of no stage between tribalism and the cash nexus.

Nonetheless, he said, capitalism had not destroyed every vestige of tribal society:

Imperialism, for social and political reasons, has found it expedient to assiduously preserve and even revivify the relics of the old society it had destroyed. In South Africa the industrialists have judiciously preserved the outer forms of chieftainship, tribal categories and combined and integrated these with modern industrial forms. But the preservation of the shells, of the relics of the past are not the fundamental characteristics, the essence of the social order. They are mere incidentals, mere remainders of the past.

The industrial revolution had made it impossible for an African peasantry to emerge in the future, said Jordaan, cutting across any argument for the redivision of the land, and the creation of a stable black peasantry. Modern South Africa had come into existence when precious gems and metals had been discovered, and a new capitalist class, a white labour aristocracy, and a black (unsettled) proletariat had been formed. Racialism, he said, was the outcome of

the peculiar conditions and circumstances under which the industrial revolution developed in the country ... The peculiar disposition of black labour, on the one hand, and white labour on the other hand, produced the idea that the division between skilled and unskilled labour and high and low rates of pay was a natural, permanent and immutable one ...

These short extracts do not do full justice to the strength of Jordaan's analysis. He made it clear that the Chamber of Mines viewed the claims of the white workers with ambivalence, and he also indicated that the white workers had fought bitter struggles to maintain their privileged position. But even where his arguments were open to criticism, the article was a *tour de force*. There was an excited response from dissident members of the Communist Party, (as indicated by the exchange between Jordaan and the

writer who signed herself Dr Sanders)<sup>5</sup> and the formation of the Johannesburg Discussion Club, in imitation of the Forum Club. The project failed because those invited, including the Progressive Forum (affiliated to the NEUM) rejected an invitation to collaborate, and orthodox members of the SACP had little interest in exploring new ideas. But, in the mid-50s, Jordaan's ideas influenced the newly formed Socialist League of Africa, a small group of Trotskyists in Johannesburg and Cape Town, who established close contact with him.<sup>6</sup>

### **The 'National Question'**

In June 1954 a liaison committee of the Forum Club and the South African Club (consisting mainly of former members of the CPSA in Cape Town) convened a meeting to discuss the 'national question.' The speakers were L. Forman, T. Ngwenya, Jordaan, and Dr H.J. Simons.<sup>7</sup> Forman, who had spent some time in Prague, and returned to South Africa as editor of *New Age*, opened the discussion. He took as his point of departure the ideas of Professor I.I. Potekhin, director of the Africa Institute in Moscow, who maintained that local peoples (like the Zulus) would demand the right to self determination, and it was the task of politicians to accept such claims. Forman was a protagonist of Potekhin's ideas and was criticized by Dr Simons on the grounds that the oppressed peoples of South Africa looked askance at any suggestion of separateness, because this was the slogan used by the government to impose segregation. What was needed, was a unified liberation movement, and with this Ngwenya concurred.

Jordaan's contribution followed somewhat different lines. He discussed the two forms of modern nationalism, the one emerging in Europe and representing the aspirations of oppressed nationalities (Poland, the Slav peoples), and the other stemming from the demands by colonial people (as in India) for independence from imperialist powers. Both these movements were bourgeois democratic, and when political independence was acquired, new capitalist states emerged in which the workers were exploited by their own bourgeoisie. South Africa was engaged in a different struggle, because the question was not independence, but the freeing of people of colour from race discrimination. This struggle would be led, inevitably, by the largest class — the proletariat, and the revolution would become 'permanent': that is, the democratic revolution (which did not require a restructuring of society) would grow over to a socialist revolution in which new social institutions would be needed. Once again Jordaan maintained that the old societies had been swept away by colonialism, and there would be no demand for separate cultural development. If at the end of the day there were such demands, they could be satisfied, but in 1954 such ideas were not

relevant to the political struggle. In a brief rejoinder Forman said that it was not his intention to raise the idea of national self-determination as an immediate demand — but this was a possibility after the consummation of the revolution.

The liaison committee did not seem to have met again, and the debate was not resumed, but it had helped Jordaan establish a Marxist position against his erstwhile friends in the NEUM. He was a firm proponent of the theory of uneven and combined development, and he believed that this opened the way for an 'uninterrupted revolution', in which talk of national liberation could only act against the interests of social restructuring in South Africa, and the need to overthrow capitalism.

### **The Land Question**

The next printed contribution from Kenneth Jordaan appeared in the journal *Points of View*, Vol.1, No.1. published by the Cape Debating Society in October 1959. By this time the Forum Club had disbanded, and many of its members had formed the 'Citizen' group, which was involved mainly in community politics, and was to join the Liberal Party at a later date. Jordaan disassociated himself from this group, and continued to argue for the position he had formulated over the past decade. He joined with a small group in a new society, and it was here that he presented his article on 'The Land Question in South Africa', an investigation of land holdings in South Africa comparing local conditions with those in Mexico and Czarist Russia. The arguments presented in this article, despite its length (43 typed foolscap sized pages), added little conceptually to the previously published articles.

But, as in other contributions, Jordaan was responding to political trends in the Cape. In this case, the acrimonious debate that had torn the NEUM apart. One of its constituent parts, the All African Convention, led by I.B. Tabata, declared that the struggle in South Africa was bourgeois democratic, and that after 'liberation' land would be open to private appropriation, and there would be no imposition of collectivization. Ben Kies and Hosea Jaffe, the leading members of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD), the other major arm of the organization, condemned this 'departure' from previous declarations, and said that the NEUM's programme provided that the land would be equally redistributed after liberation.

Jordaan rejected both arguments. The question for South Africa was not one of land, and he did not believe that after a revolution people would leave the towns in large droves to return to the (impoverished) countryside. Such a move would mean the end of an industrialized South Africa, which he deemed impossible. The struggle in South Africa, he repeated, was one that would be led by the black working class, and their demands were rooted in



the modern means of production. He went further. The demands by both sections of the NEUM were reactionary because the land question was viewed in racial terms, with demands that the Reserves be extended and redivided. A democratic society would have to be shaped without reference to outmoded racial boundaries, and to suggest otherwise was to set the political struggle back. Jordaan's conclusion (couched in language to by-pass the Anti-Red Act) was that:

Social democracy must necessarily distinguish between the two phases of the same struggle: the democratic and the non-exploitative, each of which call for a different solution to the land question ...

Social democracy is the most resolute ally of the peasants in their struggle against the old order. It will therefore support their demand for land and the security of tenure in so far as this calls into question the extant political arrangements and the existence of the land barons and the 'morgenheimers.' But social democracy cannot support such demands as the fragmentation of the land or the unfettered ownership rights as a solution to the land question. The illusory nature of such solutions must be pointed out in advance. In a word, we support the peasantry only in relation to the capitalists and the State.

### **Call for a Revolutionary Party**

On 21 March 1960, 69 Africans were killed and 180 injured at Sharpeville when police fired on a peaceful crowd that had gathered to protest against the pass laws. For seventeen days thereafter strikes, demonstrations and pass burning shook the country. There was shooting at Langa, and attempts at self-administration at Langa and Nyanga (both in Cape Town) leading to blockades by the armed forces. The initiative throughout the country was in the hands of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and in Cape Town, where Phillip Kgosane of the PAC led a march from the township to the centre of Cape Town, the Liberal Party emerged as a more effective political body than the SACP or the Congress Alliance. The trade union movement SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions) failed to fulfil its promise that it would call the workers out in the event of a governmental assault. Other groups, like the NEUM, played no effective part in the events that followed.

In Cape Town, Jordaan and his friends were isolated, and stood by powerlessly during the entire period. For them, as for similar small groups elsewhere, this was a period of frustration. They had ideas of what should be done, but there was nobody to listen to them. The Socialist League issued a long document, 'Ten Years of the Stay at Home' which discussed the

ineffectiveness of ANC policy during the 1950s. After the ANC and the PAC had been banned, and when the state of emergency was lifted, an organization calling itself the Workers Democratic League emerged in Cape Town, and issued a Bulletin summing up the lessons of the 'March Days.' Jordaan was the main contributor to this mimeographed publication, but as important as it was in analyzing the situation, it reached only a few hands, and its impact was limited. Despite the insights in the document, the authors had no obvious allies, and the Bulletin disappeared from sight, leaving no ripple on the political surface. Yet, whatever reservations the reader might have today on some of its pronouncements, and the phrasing of some of its analyses, it was one of the few attempts at analyzing the situation, and stands shoulders high above most other statements on the events of 1960.

The document set out to ask why the events of March, which visibly shook the state, and even secured the temporary removal of the pass system, failed to achieve any of their demands. In their discussion the authors reviewed the conditions (as stated by Lenin) necessary for a successful revolution. Firstly, they said, the masses had to be in a state of ferment because of the intolerable conditions in which they lived. This existed. Secondly the ruling class had to experience a failure of nerves, and find that it could not continue in the old way. This was not the case in 1960, and it could have been added that the forces of coercion (the police and the army) stood solidly behind the government. Thirdly, they said, there had to be a revolutionary party behind which the workers could be mobilized, and this was nowhere in sight.

The crisis in the country, they said, was 'the crisis in the relations between capital and labour.' The unfree working class had moved against the laws curbing their freedom of motion and restrictions on the labour market. This was a

struggle for economic integration and hence also for political and legal equality by the labouring masses ... [this] had shattered the idea that the national struggle [was] the demand by certain non-class racial groups for democracy ... The national struggle is rather the form in which the class struggle is expressing itself.

Throughout the document the authors stressed the class nature of the struggle because: 'The colour bar is, in sum, both the mode of operation and mode of domination of capitalism in South Africa.' Consequently, it was the rootless workers, harried by the authorities, and facing eviction from the towns, who showed the most tenacious resistance to the administration. It was for this reason that the western Cape was the centre

of the struggle, and it was the landless men who could survive only by staying in the towns who were the most intransigent and sided with the PAC.

The African workers of Cape Town had fought courageously, but to succeed they needed the support of the Coloured worker — and except for one region, this had not been forthcoming. Yet everything had worked against such support. The PAC had spurned the assistance of any other ethnic group; the Cape trade unions had made no effort to assist; and the political parties to which Coloureds belonged, including those mouthing the most radical phrases (namely, the NEUM) had avoided action.

There were no parties that escaped the wrath of the authors. The PAC had courted arrest, ignoring other means of struggle; had played the nationalist card, and had accepted without analysis the false slogan of the United States of Africa, without asking how states at different stages of industrialization, different levels of dependence on the metropolitan powers, and different class formations could unite together. Nonetheless, the PAC had at least given a lead in the struggle. The other parties, the Liberals and the ANC, had either misled the people or served as intermediaries for the ruling class. A sweeping set of condemnations, supported by arguments that were current at the time (many with justification), but requiring further comment today. The central point made by Jordaan, that remains beyond doubt, is that none of the political groups placed the working class at the centre of the struggle, and in this they paved the way for the defeat in March 1960.

Despite the massive strike action, and the many demonstrations, the workers had been defeated. Nonetheless the authors believed that out of the action could come a new understanding by the working class of its strength, and its ability to take over and reconstruct the state. If there had been a revolutionary movement, to which the working class responded, an analysis such as that offered by the Workers Democratic League might have speeded the reconstruction of the political movements. But there was no such party, and the Bulletin reached only a small group of intellectuals — most of whom had long been converted to Jordaan's views.

## **Into Exile**

In 1964, Jordaan was arrested in connection with a case against Neville Alexander and others. To avoid being called as a witness by the state against his comrades he left South Africa covertly, and travelled through Zambia and Tanzania, arriving ultimately with his wife Erna in London. He taught history and geography at schools in London, and worked on the history of South Africa, which had long been his ambition. Initially he hoped to take the history up till the 1960s, but when he realized that the project was far

too large, decided to take the work through to 1870, but even this proved too big a task. His manuscript grew ever longer, and was rewritten several times, but does not seem to have reached completion.

He wrote several reviews and articles, including an account of the CPSA in South African history (*Tricontinental Press*, 1966); on the plunder of the Third World, and on class and race in South Africa (*Africa and the World*, 1967); on the origins of the Afrikaners and their language (*Race*, 1974); on the 'Bushmen' (*Race and Class*, 1975); on industrialism and racism (*Nation*, 1973); and on the new trade unions in South Africa (*Race Today*, 1974).

Jordaan was never completely happy in Britain, and he did not find a political group in which he could find a home. He rejected the South African exile groups — of the ANC/SACP, or NEUM variety, but at one stage, when the PAC flirted with Maoism, he joined with them. There is little information about this alliance which was contrary to all his previous political commitments — but it did not last. Unfortunately he did not speak about that period, and there appears to be no record of what led to the growing gap between him and the PAC. He found companionship among members of the Institute of Race Relations, and was a member of the editorial board of *Race and Class*. But he pined for Africa, and finally went to Harare in 1981, where he returned to teaching history. There, he also found persons active in the South African struggle, with whom he could discuss political problems.

In an interview with Al Richardson and C. Chrysostom (attributed at the time to 'comrade "D"' and printed in *International Bulletin of the Revolutionary Communist League*, No.3, Spring 1971) he restated his basic thesis on racism, namely that: 'The whole evolution of South Africa shows that racism is an essential component of capitalism, that it has been the driving force of intensive industrialization, and that it was the actual means whereby the South African working class was formed', and from this he was to conclude that:

This shows that a neo-colonial solution, the handing over of the country to an administration of the Kaunda variety, is out of the question in South Africa. The whole state and economic structure must be destroyed, as racism is so crucial to the continued existence of South African capitalism, and is its chief generator.

In his comments on South African politics he turned to the question of the NEUM and disputed the claims made in exile by Tabata and his followers, that any section of that organization was Marxist in orientation. They all worked inside the framework of the 'national liberation' movement, he said, and they denied the central role of the black working

class in the struggle. He might have added that in their public statements in South Africa they had vigorously denied any connection with Marxism or Trotskyism.

Jordaan rejected the path of guerilla warfare, as well as the path of reform. He condemned the call to boycott South African goods as an illusion, initiated by members of the SACP and by liberals, who hoped to avoid a revolutionary situation by spreading the illusion that such action would precipitate a crisis and bring down the Nationalist government. In so far as a boycott helped highlight the situation in South Africa, it had a part to play, but the only really effective step would be an organized campaign by workers to refuse to unload South African goods at ports of entry.

In discussing his ideas on racism, Jordaan was less clear than was usual in his pronouncements — and for his most considered discussion of the subject it is necessary to turn to his article on 'Class and Race in South Africa' in two parts in *Africa and the World*, August and September 1969. A summary can do scant justice to Jordaan's insights on the subject, and at a later date it might be possible to reprint the entire piece.

In his article Jordaan traced the development of racism in the country. He repeated his previous contention that racism was not the creation of 17th century mercantilism. However he found in slavery and the master-servant relationship the origins of racism, and quoted from Eric Williams' work, *Capitalism and Slavery*: 'A racist twist has been given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism; rather racism was the consequence.' Furthermore, Jordaan found the origins of segregation in the need to justify the seizure of land and goods as the whites drove back the blacks. The defeated blacks were not incorporated as a dispossessed social class, partly because the labour requirements of the Boer economy were too small, and partly because the rudimentary social structure of the Boer community was too small to assimilate another people.

The emergence of capitalism after the discovery of diamonds and gold brought together two labour forces: the small body of skilled white artisans from abroad, and the cheap unskilled labour that was near at hand. The conjunction of these two forces, one highly paid, and the other at low rates of pay established the industrial colour bar, and this 'coincided remarkably well with the country's race traditions that had come to equate black labour with manual work which the whites despised.' The white miners were the most 'voracious champions of the colour bar' struggling to maintain the differential in pay. The mining magnates' aim was to cut the costs of labour, and to shed white labour. They also wanted to push blacks off the land while maintaining a migratory base to keep wages low. In this they found allies (and adversaries) among the land owners who wanted their quota of labour for the farms. For the new capitalists the industrial colour bar

played 'a crucial role in the primitive accumulation of capital.' This led Jordaan to conclude that Africans suffered

from a double exploitation: as workers who produce surplus value; and as blacks from whom an additional surplus is extracted by special race legislation ...

Here the last word in modern technology is combined with the most barbarous form of exploitation and oppression; traditional backwardness with the most sophisticated forms of life.

This 'uneven development' affected the political struggle. Advanced revolutionary and sluggish reformist methods were combined; tribal and proletarian ideologies were found side-by-side, because the 'level of political consciousness [was] spread very unevenly.'

Jordaan's article was continued in the September issue with a quotation from Cortez, conqueror of Mexico: 'The Spaniards are troubled with a disease of the heart for which gold is the specific remedy.' For Europe in the late nineteenth century the opening of the deep level mines coincided with the opening of the new imperialism. The war of 1899-1902 was part of the drive to carve up Africa, and more specifically to gain control of the gold deposits, and despite its archaic language, the Manifesto of the Transvaal Republic (as quoted in the article) saw the issue in modern terms:

If it is ordained that we, insignificant as we are, should be the first among all people to begin the struggle against the new-world tyranny of Capitalism, then we are ready to do so, even if that tyranny is reinforced by the power of Jingoism.

Despite the insights in this declaration, the Transvaal and Orange Free State republics stood in the way of capitalist development, and the entire force of British Imperialism was unleashed to pulverize them. Thereafter, a centralized state was established, in which mineowners and Boers could share in the exploitation of the black working class. Or, as Jordaan put it, when both 'agreed to the division of the yellow dust, the Africans were nailed to the cross of gold.'

Much of the remainder of the article deals with the emergence of the Afrikaner bourgeoisie, using the calls of republicanism and nationalism to promote its interests as a class. And it succeeded where later African groups failed in their 'independent' states — partly because it had the initial capital and technology, but mainly because the new South African state incorporated the emergent Afrikaner bourgeoisie, and part of the profits from the gold mines was used to subsidize less profitable white agriculture.

As always, Jordaan wrote with a political purpose, and if it were possible to situate his position in one short passage, it is to be found in the opening paragraph of the article just quoted:

Since World War II many revolutionary movements, based on people's war, have signally failed. Some are currently stagnating or being wiped out before they can get off the ground. One reason for these reverses is that a commitment to the armed struggle is no insurance against reformism. Another — and this is weightier — is that the leaders of these struggles lacked a clear grasp of the on-going historical process in their respective countries. For if men are to break the chains that bind them, they need to understand the forces which forged them.

Some of Kenny Jordaan's conclusions need further discussion, but it is not my purpose in this commemorative essay to point to places where I think he was wrong. Whatever his errors, they were small compared with the width of his vision, and his insights into the working of South Africa. His contributions were not matched, in breadth or in depth, by other South African revolutionaries. A reading of his works still illuminates areas that others have failed to explain, and it can only be hoped that future generations will seek out and read the articles he wrote, and find their way to continuing the work that he pioneered.

## References

1. 'Jan van Riebeeck: His Place in South African History', *Discussion*, Vol.1, No.5, June 1952.

2. The writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky were banned and could not be quoted in the early 1950s. However, Luxemburg was not banned, and he might have used her name to by-pass the censor.

3. 'A Critique of Mr W.P. van Schoor's "The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa"', *Discussion*, Vol.1, No.4, June 1951.

4. A quotation from 'A Reply to Dr Sanders' Historical Criticism', a rejoinder by Jordaan to a letter from a member of the SACP, writing under a pseudonym; *Discussion*, Vol.1, No.4, December 1951.

5. *Discussion*, Vol.1, No.4, December 1951.

6. Information from founding members of the Johannesburg Discussion Club, and personal recollections. The CPSA was dissolved formally in 1950, and later resurrected as the SACP.

7. 'Symposium on the National Question: What are the National Groups in South Africa?', published by the Liaison Committee of the South African Club and the Forum Club, June 1954.