

method of obtaining redress leadership fell to seers and priests who offered a way out. Their promises were illusory — but they were believed; their defiance was unsustainable — but their followers did not waver. This was a recipe for disaster, and alongside any commendation for bravery it was necessary to spell out the futility of chiliasm and indicate that the way forward lay in very different directions. The communalism of this sect had nothing in common with the communism that Glass professed. Nonetheless the article stands as a landmark in the political development of the young Frank Glass.

THE COMMUNE OF BULHOEK

Frank Glass

An act of unprecedented and diabolical savagery was committed by the Capitalist government of South Africa, at Bulhoek, Queenstown, Cape Province, on May 24th., and as a result, the blood of 200 native workers who were slaughtered, cries out for the destruction of the murderous system which is responsible for their deaths. The following are the facts:

The 'Prophet' Enoch, an educated native, gathered round him a number of people who regard themselves as a Christian congregation — this took place several years ago. Their distinguishing belief revives what was an expectation of the primitive church that has reappeared many times in history — the expectation of the impending return to this earth in physical form of the Founder of Christianity. A certain hill at Bulhoek was marked out by the 'prophet' as the place whence the faithful will be caught up into a state of glory when the looked for return occurs. It happens that on this hill there lies a parcel of ground which belongs to the 'Prophet' as an allotment holder in the location near Queenstown, and that among his followers and fellow-worshippers are holders of neighbouring allotments.

The 'Prophet' with his few followers settled on their allotments, and started the church 'One God and the Saints of Christ'. They obtained special permission from the authorities for their outside adherents to visit Bulhoek at a certain time of the year, for the purpose of joining in a religious festival. The number of their adherents grew by leaps and bounds, and each year a very large proportion of those who joined in the festival, instead of returning to their homes when it was over, remained behind at Bulhoek. Rapidly, as a consequence, a village of fair dimensions soon came into being, which was recently estimated to contain about 350 small houses. It has been stated that a part of the commonage was annexed by these people, in order to extend their village, but this report has not been satisfactorily confirmed.

Let us see for a moment how the village was conducted. In the first place, they barred the health-officer and sanitary-inspector and set up sanitary arrangements of their own, which, by all reports, proved to be efficient and satisfactory. They blocked the road passing through the village, and build a dam on it. Their pursuits were purely agricultural, such as mealie growing etc.

They refused to pay taxes, or to obey any existing laws, but set up a code of laws of their own. Their actions were entirely peaceable, as the following extract from a report laid before the South African Native Congress shows. 'During the month that the congregation has been assembled at Bulhoek, no violence or theft or any breach of the common law has been committed by its members, and the neighbouring Europeans have been in no way molested.'

'Bolshevism in practice', do you say? Well, these are the very words with which the Secretary of Native Affairs designated the whole affair. And, leaving aside the religious fanaticism which has inspired their actions, is he not right? The land they have is held and worked in common, and the few head of cattle they possess are the common property of the village.

But, what sort of a reception did this wholly successful experiment in Communism receive at the hands of the land owning community of South Africa? The farmers in and around Queenstown were positively alarmed. A large number of native farm labourers had already left the farmers who employed them and migrated to the Bulhoek commune, and the latter could evidently foresee the day when there would be no farm labourers to exploit. Certain it is, that the natives prefer a thousand times to have their own native village, where they can work on their own land peaceably to being exploited as a farm 'hand' by a baas (master).

Ultimately, the Queenstown farmers sent a deputation to the Government, and demanded that these 'Israelites', as they were called, who said they were a lot of dangerous fanatics, should be evicted from Bulhoek without delay. The Government, which, of course represents the interests of the farmers and land-owning classes of South Africa, had no alternative but to obey orders. They informed the 'Israelites' that they had committed a breach of the law in annexing the commonage (this charge has not yet been verified), and in refusing to pay taxes, and in refusing to submit their village to inspection by official Sanitary and Health inspectors; on these grounds they ordered the unfortunate 'Israelites' to destroy their village and return to their homes, notwithstanding that the majority of them had no other homes to go to.

As was only natural in the circumstances, the 'Israelites' refused to destroy the work of years, and stated in reply that they would not shift from Bulhoek without express orders from 'Jehovah'. Needless to relate, 'Jehovah' did not reveal himself, and so, after further threats from the Police Authorities which were paid no attention to, preparations were made to evict the 'Israelites' from Bulhoek by force.

A force of a thousand Police was assembled at Queenstown, and on the morning of May 24th, armed with rifles and bayonets, and accompanied by a machine-gun detachment and some artillery, they set out for Bulhoek. On their arrival, their force was formed into fighting order, and a demand for surrender was sent into the village. The 'Israelites' were preparing for a defence and refused to surrender. Col Truter, who was in command of the Police Force, then gave the order to advance. The 'Israelites' blocked the entrance of the village, and attempted to stem the advance with assegais, knives and sticks, etc, but these crude weapons were no match for the weapons which the opposing force possessed. Nevertheless, the 'Israelites' put up a brave fight in

defence of their commune, but they were outnumbered almost three to one, and, in ten minutes 200 of them had been slaughtered and another 125 wounded as a result of a withering machine-gun fire. Seeing that it was futile to resist further, the village was surrendered and the work of demolition was commenced. Thus was suppressed in blood the commune of Bulhoek.

Oh, what an act of heroism my countrymen — machine-guns against sticks and assegais! Throw up your hats ye freedom-loving Britishers, and sing 'Britons never shall be slaves'. But, listen! The Johannesburg *Star* thinks that 'less expense would have been incurred if one or two bombing aeroplanes had been employed'. Ye Gods, and this in the year of our Lord 1921!

However, this brutal act of savagery is but indicative of the brutal methods of suppression to which the Capitalist class will resort in order to preserve their system intact. If ever proof were required of the cheapness of human life where the interests of private property are concerned, surely the cold-blooded butchery of those 200 natives at Bulhoek affords such proof.

The first practical demonstration of the success of Communism in South Africa has been destroyed, but the IDEA of Communism still remains, and CANNOT BE DESTROYED. The seed of Communism has been sown at Bulhoek, and has aroused the fierce hatred of the master-class of South Africa, who have attempted to kill it with the utmost ferocity.

But, long after the firing of the last shot, and long after the burial of the last corpse, the memory of the Bulhoek Commune will shine in the hearts of the native proletariat of South Africa, oppressed and downtrodden as they are in every corner of this vast continent. This memory will serve as a beacon, lighting the path which they must tread in their emancipation, and it will in some measure help to spur them on to unite with their white fellow-slaves for the destruction of the Capitalist system and the establishment of Communism, looking for inspiration and guidance, not to Jehovah, but in the justice of the workers' cause.

Michael Wade (1941–1990)

The editors regret to announce the death of Mike Wade, after a prolonged illness in Jerusalem at the age of 49. Mike was best known for his books and articles of literary criticism and book reviews. A friend and supporter of *Searchlight South Africa*, he had promised us a contribution, but ill-health stopped him writing this article.

He did not often speak about his political activity in South Africa, but any-one reading his reviews will have noticed that he was one of the few writers who referred knowingly to the National Committee of Liberation, a body involved in sabotage from 1961–64, when many of its leading members were arrested. Mike was a member and escaped arrest only because he was at that time on holiday in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

Those who knew him in the 1950s will remember that he was one of the few student activists who, at the time, condemned Stalinism.