

The Dalhousie International

SPECIAL ISSUE
SOUTH AFRICA

Volume 3 Number 1 December 1977

Minority rule: the way it is

by Laurel Fujimajari

Today, in South Africa, there are approximately 20 million non-whites and approximately 4.5 million whites. The political, legal, and economic system of apartheid maintains the supremacy of less than 19 per cent of the population. A mass of laws and institutions embodied in the apartheid policy functions to maintain the system.

The *Population Registration Act* is central to the apartheid system. Passed in 1950, the act categorizes every South African as white, Asian, Bantu (the South African Government's term for black Africans) or mixed colored. Blacks are further divided into tribes, regardless of whether they maintain tribal affiliation.

Race Classification Boards officiate in the determination of a person's status. Coloreds trying to obtain white status must go through a series of tests, which range from interrogation of family and neighbors to pushing a pencil through the hair to determine the degree of kinky hair.

Interracial marriage is forbidden. Any minister performing such a wedding faces criminal prosecution. Mixed sexual intercourse is also a crime.

Passed in 1950, the *Group Areas Act* divides areas of residence and

"'Communism' for example, includes any doctrine aimed against the South African status quo."

business, for blacks and whites. It was preceded by other acts which enforced segregation and the herding together of blacks into specific locations (Bantustans). Included in the other acts, were laws requiring that blacks use separate elevators, separate time clocks, eat in separate dining rooms, use separate washrooms, eat off separate dishes, go to separate churches, attend separate schools and so on. The *Group Areas Act*, however, forced the removal of hundreds of thousands of blacks out of urban homes and businesses to miles beyond any city limits.

The results of the act are giant townships, of which the most infamous is Soweto (an acronym for South West Township). Officially, over 700,000 blacks live there but must be bused each day to and from work. Houses are about the size of a large modern living room with up to 14 people living inside. They are cheaply built and few have electricity, hot water, or toilets. The crime rate of Soweto is high. Each weekend 10-30 murders are committed.

Enacted in 1952, the "pass" laws require that every Black African over 16 must carry a registration book or "pass". Resembling a passport, the

pass contains the individual's name, tribal origin, where he or she is allowed to live, and what sort of work that person is allowed to do. It is illegal to go anywhere without a pass. Blacks cannot be in a city area for over 72 hours without special permission. Failure to produce a pass on demand without an official stamp entitling the person to be where she or he is, results in immediate arrest. Violation of pass laws account for 500,000 prosecutions a year or 42% of short term imprisonments. An unknown number of blacks live in townships like Soweto without permission and are in constant danger of arrest. Estimates of illegal residents in Soweto run as high as over 300,000.

The contrast with the white population is immense. Whites live in homes with modern facilities and even the poorer whites have two or more black servants. Some families have black servants living in backrooms, although blacks are not allowed to live on their own in the suburbs.

Blacks working in the city in white owned factories, shops, offices, and homes are treated as migrant workers. Men must leave their families behind and live in giant concrete hostels where prostitution, homosexuality, venereal disease, malnutrition, and alcoholism are widespread. Pay disparity between white skilled workers and black unskilled workers, who are not allowed to hold skilled jobs, range from 1/4 at the best to 1/20 at the worst.

Schooling is under two completely different systems. For whites, school is free and compulsory with first class facilities. For blacks, schooling is a privilege. Over 60% of those who start school drop out by grade four and are left functionally illiterate. Without a question, facilities are poor and inadequate. The few who make it to university must attend universities divided on tribal lines. Unless they are lucky enough to obtain government permission, blacks cannot go to white universities inside or outside of the country.

The list of inequities, as a result of apartheid, go on but the picture is apparent. Why, one might ask, are there no changes? The answer again is—apartheid. Acts of the African Nationalist governments, in particular, have kept political control, not only over blacks, but also over dissident whites and even foreign journalists.

Originally enacted in 1950 against the rising Communist Party of South Africa and trade union communists, the *Suppression of Communism Act*, because of its vague wording and government twisting has become one of the most effective methods of political emasculation.



Youth raises fists in black power salute during funeral services for Stephen Biko. The courts have absolved the police from any guilt despite evidence showing police torture. Meanwhile, Canadian companies and banks continue to invest in South Africa, helping to maintain the system which is becoming increasingly repressive.

The government has extensive powers; most notably "banning". The Minister of Justice, acting on advice from the security police, can serve an order placing a person under restrictions for the next five years. Restrictions include: not being with more than one person at a time; not entering any university, school, factory, or trade union office; remain in designated area e.g. suburb, township, city; nothing a person says or writes can be published. There are many variations of "banning", including house arrest, which crimes are retroactive: Thus any past over weekends. For blacks, "banning" can be banishment to remote, lonely areas. Other acts include the *Sabotage Act*, *Terrorism Act*, *Internal Security Act*, *Riotous Assemblies Act*, *Public Safety Act*. These laws

These puppet states would allow white South Africans to continue to exploit the blacks for labor without providing them any of the benefits of social welfare nor any political rights.

together with the BOSS law (an acronym for the Bureau of State Security, which is a secret police force that operates beyond the jurisdiction of the courts) allow the South African government to arrest whoever it wishes, imprison such person incommunicado, deny all access by or to lawyers, family, and friends, and prevent courts from issuing writs of habeas corpus.

Forty-one well known political prisoners have died in prison since

1950 as well as an unknown amount of others who were less well known.

"Normal" criminals (murderers, robbers) are entitled to a one third remission of sentence but political prisoners, many of whom are serving life sentences, are denied this privilege. Death is the maximum sentence for most political crimes.

The laws are vague and include blanket provisions. "Communism" for example, includes any doctrine aimed against the South African status quo.

An accused can be sentenced for more than one offense for the same action.

Penalties are severe with no allowance made for juveniles.

The accused must prove his or her innocence.

Crimes are retroactive: Thus any past act committed between 1950 and 1963 which was not illegal then, can now make the offender liable to the death penalty.

The fact that the blacks in South Africa cannot vote seems trivial to the concern of political change. The South African government's power is inescapable. The 236 prisons in South Africa (compared with the U.K.'s 55 million population and 70 prisons) are filled with political prisoners.

There is also the case of Robert Sobukwe, university lecturer and former president of the Pan Africanist Congress, who was so feared by the government officials they enacted special legislation to imprison him without trial from 1963-1969. After his release they immediately placed him under "banning", house arrest, and restriction orders.

continued on page 4