

# An innocent in South Africa

by David Wegenast

The concrete effects of Apartheid are noticeable immediately upon stepping off the plane in Johannesburg. There are separate washrooms, cafeterias and lounge areas for whites and non-whites. In the city beyond, this segregation reaches more ludicrous proportions, for there you'll notice separate taxi-cabs, phone booths and even Post Office wickets!

As a seaman, I was flown to South Africa in January of this year to join the crew of the Halifax ship "GOEL I". The ship struck a rock and went down one hour after leaving Capetown, but we managed to spend four days in that city and half a day in Durban before being flown back to Halifax.

On first entering the city, I was concerned that there might be real signs of racial tension on the streets. This was not so, however, and the races mixed freely in shops, restaurants and parks. The government classifies people as "white", "black" and a third categorical "coloured" this generally refers to Asians. It was soon apparent that while some black and coloured people held good responsible jobs in officers, etc., there were no whites doing any menial work as, for example, bell-boys, labourers or kitchen help. Walking the streets

by night was very safe and even on Saturday night there was hardly anyone about. The black people had to live in a separate part of the city and whether by law or not, they were very scarce at night.

Most whites whom we spoke to or otherwise dealt with acted rather aloof and formal. Even at leisure in the park they seemed very straight with carefully cultivated accents and outdated British manners. With scarcely an exception, they were well-dressed and appeared to be always on guard; the uneasy, artificial elite.

We met a guy from Ottawa who had been working in Capetown for a year as a representative of a shipping company. He told us there was lots of work for educated whites in the country, but he'd soon be leaving as he found both the government and the social life to rigid.

Our dealings with the black people of the country held far more warmth. This was surprising, for I had assumed they'd look at all whites through the same jaundiced eye. Actually they were genuinely interested in meeting us and asking about conditions in Canada. Our casual manners and dress marked us immediately as foreigners and thus not only approachable, but real allies from the free world.

It soon became clear that the coloured

society in South Africa lived by quite a different ethos than that of the whites. Because their jobs were such a waste of time financially, they had to live on very little money. As a result, they lived communally in over-crowded housing, raised much of their own food and helped each other a great deal within the community. Obvious parallels can be drawn with the North American "alternate" culture. In their oppression, they seemed to have developed a good sense of humour, strong patience and deep respect for each other. With our ship at the dock in Capetown, we had to be continually on guard against down-and-out coloured thieves who would sneak onto the vessel to raid the food lockers. I thought they might be pretty dangerous

characters, but a few encounters showed me that they were surprisingly meek. When caught, they would smile sheepishly, throw up their hands, then walk off the ship.

After such a short visit to South Africa, none of the generalizations I've drawn can stand firmly in my mind except for the overall injustice of Apartheid. The strain it imposes on both white and black people is highly visible.

Although the whites claim to be gradually relaxing the Apartheid policy, (Unsegregated washrooms in the new Jo'burg airport building!) they're certainly taking their sweet time about it. From what I saw, the natives down there are not wild bushmen who need tight control, but seem more human than the domineering whites. Understandably their patience has come to an end and I'm sure the recent gunplay is, to the common men of all races, not a cry for blood but a sad and desperate gesture.

## Student leader jailed

by Conie Douma

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL in its campaign for the abolition of torture publishes 2 specific cases in its monthly Bulletin and asks members to write to government officials requesting inquests and inquiries into police brutality.

This month a case is described which should especially interest students. It concerns Mapetla Mohape a 25 year old South African student leader who died in custody while being held at Kei Road Police station near East London. The official reason given for his death is that he committed suicide by hangin himself.

There is reason to believe that if Mr. Mohapi's death was indeed from suicide, the precipitating cause was torture. The death occurred 21 days after Mr. Mohapi was detained. He is the 24th known political detainee to have died in detention since 1963, and the second detainee to have died in the last six months.

His arrest in July was his second in two years. During his previous detention for 173 days without charge in 1974-75, he was allegedly seriously assaulted by security police. At that time he was arrested with other members of the S.A. Student Organization (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BCP). He

the strike continued. In early June the students of the Naledi High School set fire to a police car when police tried to detain a student.

On the morning of June 16th, students marched to Phefeni Junior Secondary School but when they got there, found their way blocked by some 300 police with dogs. According to Sophie Tebia, a reporter for the Johannesburg World, many of the police were black, but only the white officers were armed. Two of the white officers had sub-machine guns.

As students approached the school they were singing black nationalist songs. The police arrived provoking taunts from the students. No warnings were given to the students to disperse. Then some tear gas was thrown to which the students responded by throwing stones. According to the World reporter, a white policeman drew his gun, pointed it, and fired. The other white police followed suit. A student was fatally wounded. Students started running and throwing stones as they went, while police continued to fire killing several children including a boy of about seven. As the uprising grew the police quickly surrounded the township. Shadrack Kaunsel told David Barritt of the London Observer about his experience after his arrest. He was kept in a small room with the dead and injured:

"There was blood everywhere. I saw the bodies of small children with gaping bullet wounds and I even saw old grannies lying dead on the floor. Some of the injured were groaning and covered in blood, but the police who came into the room just laughed and kicked those who were lying on the floor.

(Reprinted from Southern Africa)

## Background to Soweto

Students in Soweto had been protesting the use of Afrikaans in the schools since mid-May. Afrikaans is the language of the white settlers of Dutch descent or Boers (Afrikaners) and, along with English, is one of the two official languages of South Africa.

Soweto is the name for a township in South Africa. It was created miles outside of Johannesburg and designed for non-whites. Townships have no running water, electricity or industry. Residents must work in the adjacent white-dominated cities. The creation of

ruling Nationalist Party, the issue of Afrikaans is important ideologically. While English and Afrikaans have equal status, many Whites or English descent do not speak Afrikaans. Virtually all Blacks speak English. Few Blacks know any Afrikaans except that learned from the police when they ask demandingly "Waar's jou pas" - "Where's your pass?" To Africans, Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor. To Afrikaners it is at the base of their cultural / political identity and a rejection of it by Blacks represents a rejection of apartheid.



'Ignore them. If they won't speak to us in Afrikaans, we just won't speak to them.'

townships furthers the interests of the government's apartheid policy.

Government regulations require half of the instruction given to Africans to be done in Afrikaans. In the past this regulation has been strictly enforced due largely to the fact that few African teachers could speak the language. In 1975 the Transvaal Bantu Education Department decided to start enforcing the regulations. Many liberals warned the Government that it would "cause trouble". In May of 1975, former Deputy Minister for Bantu Education Punt Jason was asked if he had consulted "the black people" about his ruling. He replied: "No, I have not consulted them and I am not going to consult them." More recently, his successor Dr. Treurnicht said, "the government provides the buildings, gives the subsidies and pays the teachers, it is surely our right to determine the language divisions."

For Afrikaners, who dominate the

For students there is also another aspect besides the insult of having to "learn" the white man's view of history in Afrikaans. Since they do not know Afrikaans it is very difficult for them to suddenly have to learn complicated technical subjects in this language. It greatly slows what little education they are allowed.

The Soweto students' response to the enforcement of the language rule was to launch a strike. The strike started at the Phefeni Junior Secondary School in the middle of May. It grew quickly to involve more than 2,000 students at seven Soweto schools. By June 16th, over 10,000 school children were demonstrating against the use of Afrikaans. It appears that the strike was organized by the South African Student Movement, the junior wing of the South African Students Organization (SASO), which is very active in the black universities.

The level of tension in Soweto rose as

was released and subsequently "banned" under the suppression of Communism Act. Until his arrest this July, he had been working as an administrator with the Zimeli Trust Fund, a black organization which helps to rehabilitate newly released political prisoners.

Mr. Mohapi's more recent arrest is believed to have been connected with the unrest following the disturbances in June and July in the African townships of Soweto near Johannesburg; he was detained under section 6 of the Terrorism Act. This act and the newly introduced Internal Security Amendment Act empower the Minister of Justice to detain a person **incommunicado** and for an indefinite period without charge.

Over the years there have been consistent allegations of torture of detainees in South Africa by the security police during interrogation. In March of this year Joseph Mdluli, former member of the banned African National Congress, died less than 24 hours after being detained by Durban Security Police under the Terrorism Act. Four security policemen have since been charged with culpable homicide over the death of Mr. Mdluli. In view of the death of these people there are fears for the safety of those detained in the aftermath of the township disturbances.

Members and friends of Amnesty International are asked to write to the Hon. J.B. Vorster, the Prime Minister, Union Buildings, Pretoria, S.A. requesting, in courteous language, an immediate inquest into the death in detention of Mapetla Mohapi, a full and independent inquiry into the activities of the security police, and a full and independent inquiry into and review of the South African detention regulations.

It is important to put pressure on governments which sanction, officially or unofficially, torture - and pressure is one of Amnesty's methods to work for the abolition of torture. We know that as many as 20,000 people take part in these monthly campaigns and that is pressure.

We are a long way from our aim, and some may despair and not become involved, or give up, but consider this question: **Can we afford to be silent bystanders?**

In the near future the Halifax Group will organize a letter writing workshop in the SUB for those who wish to become involved, but want some information and direction. Also, keep in mind our Bread and Cheese lunch on **Friday, October 22 at the Dept. of Education, 1460 Oxford St. at 13:30 p.m.**

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