

SOUTH AFRICA: HISTORY OF OPPRESSION AND STRUGGLE*

(Journey to Soweto)

By

Kyalo Mativo

It is early morning, June 16, 1976. Some African School children can be heard singing an African national anthem and chanting anti-apartheid slogans. Soweto is still asleep; she has been for years. As the School children continue to sing and chant, a police force of machine-gun armed whites and curfew waving blacks appears on the scene and declares war on them. One policeman throws a tear gas cannister at the children. The children respond with rocks and debris. The white policemen open fire. Two children drop dead immediately. At the sound of gunfire, little children come out into the streets out of mere curiosity. They too are fired at with automatic weapons. The Soweto awakes. And now?

*Now let it work. Mischief, thou art aloof,
Take thou what course thou wilt.¹*

It is now 9.30 a.m. A wave of ten thousand fully unarmed black School children have taken to the streets of Soweto, and so has a countless number of fire-spitting policemen. The singing is accelerated, but for every one black child that the oppressors' bullets kill, one hundred adults spring up from the bowels of Soweto and take the place of the dead. And at the end of the day the *Johannesburg Star* is pleased to announce that at least 300 rounds of ammunition have been dumped into the African crowd killing 8 and wounding 70 others, 19 of the with bullet wounds.

Two days after the outbreak of violence in Soweto, the protests and demonstrations against the enemy have spread into Johannesburg's other black African townships. Serious clashes between the police and the people take place in Alexandria to the northeast of Johannesburg, in Daveytown, Tokosa, Natal Springs, Vosloorys, Kattlalong, Tembisa, and Kagiso. At the end of the week, the South African Minister of "Justice and Police," Jan T. Kruger, tells the Sowetan residents that they have no choice but to accept white racist regime's oppression. "This past week has been a lesson that whatever you wish to achieve must be done by peaceful means," he says. "You must accept the good faith of the government and of all whites." On June 21, 1976, the black residents of Mabopane, a black township in the outskirts

*The name "South Africa" is used here only in geographical sense

of Pretoria, reply to this empty arrogance by attacking buses and government shops. Residents of two other townships, Atteridgeville and Mamelodi, attack schools and other buildings. Meanwhile the official casualty figures are given as 140 dead and 1,112 wounded since the outbreak in Soweto. That's the news; until next time, this is your reliable witness press saying good night, good listeners.

The story of Soweto has been told in as many versions as the colour of the eyes and hair of the story-tellers. The questions asked and the premises assumed about the incident have been craftly designed to arrive at the conclusion that Soweto was an isolated case, as insignificant and remote as the township itself and its inhabitants. Given time, it will wither away, leaving apartheid and the forces behind it as intact as ever. Actually, if anything, the "riots" have confirmed the wisdom of the white government to create "independent homelands" for each ethnic group among the 18 million blacks, so goes the argument from Western quarters. The *Wall Street Journal* for one goes down as an unequivocal supporter of that policy. In a leading article appropriately stereotyped "Darkest Africa" we read soon after the uprisings:

One policy that might offer a glimmer of hope would be a sharp acceleration of the South African regime's "homelands" policy. Up to now the "Bantustans" have been little more than Indian reservations, but it is possible to conceive that they might evolve into real nations steadily gaining independence and territory until the white South Africans are reduced to "Boerstans."

But the true meaning of Soweto lies in the annals of the history of that country's bloody struggle against foreign rule. The history of South Africa is written in the precious blood of its black sons and daughters; and the end to the massacres of men and women fighting for their dignity and national independence is clearly nowhere in sight as long as the white fascist regime exists. The events therefore that led to the uprisings triggered by the Soweto incident must be traced back to their origin. But two points should be made beforehand. Firstly, the Soweto eruption was a mere tip of the iceberg. That was convincingly proved by the ease with which the demonstrations spread to other townships. Secondly, to say, as some commentators have done, that the cause of the outbreak was the regime's demand that Afrikaans be made the language of instruction in schools, is a classical case of bourgeois ignorance. For the language issue was a small spark that set a whole prairie on fire, a necessary point of departure. The real cause of the outbreak and the significance of that spark belong to the past and the present of the oppressed black masses of South Africa.

First, the past.

1.

Since we are dealing with two main distinct peoples, namely the oppressors and the oppressed, who unfortunately happen to be white and black respectively, we are forced to ask a rather simple but uncomfortable question: In fact whose land is South Africa? Put that way, the question acquires an acrimonious posture vis-à-vis academic liberals and their African sucklings and leads to a motley of variegated answers which are so conflicting that a shoal of neo-colonialist ideologues has taken to the academic pulpits to preach the second coming of their redeemer, their saviour, the one who came not to destroy, but to create the law of racial harmony, the Almighty Racial Pluralism. According to the advocates of this myth, the canons of social cohesion are firmly grounded in political evolution. All the elements which constitute a political structure, must somehow find their own level, like flowing water, until they settle peacefully in a "non-violent" revolutionary pond. The idea of Pluralism is an updated outgrowth of one Emile Durkheim whose rabbinical family background led to his immaculate conception and begetting of the speculative notion that human thought consists of projections on to the external world, of the structure of human society. With this doctrine the French sociologist formulated a social recipe: Take all the antagonistic interests of the different classes and groups in a society, add to this mixture a cup of a common value system, heat it up to the evolutionary boiling point. The final result is internal social peace dressed in "collective representation." That was done back in 1900s. But in these United States of America, it was not until 1970s that Pluralism made the startling discovery that it could speak English, and moved closer to its world. Translated into everyday language, Pluralism attempts to create the impression that class differentiations are not inevitable where the interests of all the members of the society are identical and reflected in "collective representation." Marvelous, perfect! But just one moment; let us now transfer this concept as it stands to the contemporary South African scene. Here we are confronted with a "collective representation," which is visible only to those who wear academic magnifying sunglasses. Soweto then takes her pluralistic seat beside Johannes Balthazar Vorster, and the latter offers the former a truly pluralistic diamond ring. The two are now joined together in a nuptial bond of Pluralism. This pluralistic couple exchanges a few pluralistic smiles at one another and shares a pluralistic giggle. It is quite clear to the high priests of Pluralism that the only difference between these two pluralistic "collective representatives" is the colour of their skin, or to put it more pluralistically, their racial or ethnic origins. There is an aura of peace in this pluralistic wedding, which is why Johannes turns

to his bride and darts a few pluralistic questions: "If class conflict is the driving force in revolutionary change, then why do struggles in (our society) take on a racial or ethnic form? Why is racial identity the basis of organization, and why are the targets of revolutionary violence people of different race regardless of class situation?"² Soweto is supposed to nod her head in pluralistic accord and say, "there, Johannes, you are right. The culprit is our racial identity. And since we cannot abolish racial origins, 'justice' in this country can only be achieved through 'peaceful' means. I can see now why Jimmy told me the other day that I must accept the good faith of the government and of all the whites. It is the only way out."

But the reality of the matter is different. Soweto has dramatically demonstrated that she would rather die than break bread with Vorster. It is not the canons of Pluralism but the cannons of the armed forces of South African racist regime that are prolonging the life of that regime by containing African opposition to it. That is the inescapable fact.

Because of its directness and refusal to be hidden in academic verbosity, the question whose land South Africa is, is asked by no apologist of the white supremacy in South Africa, but every one of these white liberals never misses the opportunity to give an indirect answer to the question. There are two alternatives to tackle the problem. Alternative one consists in the confines of the concept of Western democracy, whereby, given a set of conflicting interests, the one that receives majority patronage determines the form (nominal in this case) of the political setup. In this case, those whose "wishes" are represented in the political structure in that society--who, by provision of the principle must be in the majority--are in actual fact the real "owners" of the country in question. When this concept is applied to South Africa specifically, the purveyors of this kind of thinking are amazed at its incompatibility with South Africa's political reality. So they undergo a Caesarean operation and are born again as pluralists. Alternative two constitutes historical evidence. This method aims at two conclusions: 1) That those parts of South Africa which were settled by white foreigners were not entirely and effectively populated by anybody else when the settlers moved in. 2) That in some cases actually the whites were the first to occupy an "empty" land, and only later did black people begin to arrive. Looked at this way, the black people who arrived at an area later than the whites were regarded as foreigners. Natal is a classical example of this situation where, after the defeat of King Dingane by the Boers in 1840, many blacks began to return to their homes only to find themselves branded "native foreigners" by the Boer invaders.

We are now standing at the crossroads of history, and

history must take sides here and now. Long before the Dutch pirate Jan van Riebeeck of the United Netherlands Chartered East India Company landed at what subsequently became Table Bay in 1652, that land had been populated by the Sana and the Khoi people.* The Khoi led a pastoral life occupying such habitable regions as the "Orange River," the Atlantic and the Indian coastal areas, and all the land stretching inland along river banks up to and including the Keiskama River. The Eastern regions of what later became "Cape Province," the so-called Transkei, was occupied by the Xhosa and the Thembu in the 14th century. Historical evidence also shows that the Nguni people of whom the Xhosa are an offshoot, had been living in this area as early as A.D. 1300; and in the 1620s we find the Xhosa grazing their cattle on the banks of Bashee River. The northeast Table Bay Peninsula and the west of the Xhosa land were accommodating a people of the Khoi-San extraction, the Ubigua and Gonaqua. Furthermore, Archaeology, biased as any "science" in the service of reaction and oppression must be, has nevertheless led us to say: Some black cultures classified as Uitkomst, Buispoort, Natal Coastal Pottery (NC₂ and NC₃) flourished in different parts in South Africa as early as A.D. 1055. The Uitkomst culture, for example, shows evidence of stone-built villages in the central part of Southern Transvaal, while a similar case is provided by the Buispoort culture at Steynsrus in the Orange Free State. And in the 8th century iron-smelting was already a social activity at Palabora in the Limpopo valley. Bourgeois archaeological scholarship admits, with characteristic reluctance that these cultures are black in origin. The Uitkomst culture, for example, relates directly to the ancestors of the Sotho, judging by the similarity between extant Sotho artifacts and distinct Uitkomst cultural elements such as potsherds and stone architectural remains. The hesitancy with which this fact is accommodated in archaeological literature is not surprising; some observers of the "pre-history" of South Africa have found it imperative to state "in general terms" that the stone structures found in different parts of the country are linked to the Sotho peoples. And since science must not take exception of speculation especially when social history is the subject matter we must submit to an ultimate archaeological apple pie: "The ultimate origins of the stone structures lie in the earlier Iron Age and may be associated with early Sotho chiefdoms."³ (Emphasis in the original.) Obviously the "ultimate origins" of the history of the black peoples of South Africa lie in the present chambers of academic commerce.

*The Sana and the Khoi were the original names for the San and the Khoikhoi. "Bushmen" and "Hottentots" are the contemptuous European versions of the same people respectively, that we find in Anthropological textbooks today. (See for example, G.P. Murdock and J. L. Gibbs, Jr.)

The arrival of Europeans in South Africa had been precipitated by the development of mercantile-marine in Europe. The fifteenth century Europe was characterized by the spread of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the Spanish, and the French trade on the high seas. This economic development was necessarily accompanied by military struggle for political supremacy, not only in Europe but also elsewhere in the world. All Europe was up in arms in search and rob missions all over the face of the known and the unknown world. Competition was as ever always the specific feature of this economic activity. Competition therefore led to the grabbing of African lands by these ancient green berets in pursuit of profits and vain glory.

It was a foregone conclusion therefore that when on 7 April 1652 Jan van Riebeeck led an expedition of ninety men ashore at Table Bay the ultimate result would be to set up a colony. It all started in a half-hearted manner. The subjective initial intention of the Dutch East India Company being to establish a settlement for the procurement of fresh water, vegetables, meat, etc. for the ship crews on their trade errands. But the objective consequence of that establishment was as follows: In 1655 some Dutch and German married men were encouraged to settle and colonise the country provided that they agreed to stay at least for twenty years. In 1657 the Company "freed" nine of its servants and gave them thirteen and one-third acres free from taxation. In 1688 a group of about two-hundred Huguenots arrived from the Netherlands where they had fled from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.* Through marriage the Huguenots were assimilated into the predominantly Dutch community. This biological graft produced the first generation of the Boers, which was even then already tainted with the political graft of which the present generation is world renown. To cater for their needs the Boers began to expand inland, occupying African land by force of arms and establishing themselves as permanent residents. They engaged in stock raising, hunting, and cattle trading. In 1795 the Boers proclaimed two republics near the Cape, Graaff Reinet and Swellendam.

Meanwhile the struggle for economic supremacy had plunged the European countries into the Napoleonic wars. Between 1793

*The Edict of Nantes was a law promulgated in April 1598 by Henry IV of France giving the French Protestants known as the Huguenots freedom of conscience and other civil rights. This was recented by Roman Catholic clergy and the Parliament in Paris for religious, political, and private property reasons. A struggle ensued therefrom and ended in the revocation of the Edict on October 18, 1685, depriving that religious body of its religious and other liberties. Hence the flight.

and 1815 England and France were involved in a war of self-assertion before they discovered that actually their diverse interests could be better served by fighting it out in Africa. As a result, on September 1795 Britain captured the Cape, ostensibly on behalf of the Dutch prince of Orange who had fled to England from his hostile subjects. And when in 1803 the Cape was handed back to the Dutch government, the Dutch East India Company had passed away. But then in 1806 the British remembered that the Dutch were allies of the troublesome Napoleon. So they recaptured the Cape once more and decided to stay. This second coming of the British was an ill-omen for the Boers, for it set in motion a systematic British occupation of the country, which went counter to the interests of the Dutch descendants. With the arrival of more and more British subjects, the Boers cast off the chrysalis of stagnant settlements and acquired the more mature and mobile stage of voortrekkers. Between 1800 and 1870 the Boers penetrated further inland robbing Africans of their land and enslaving those they could.

The "interference" of the British government in the internal affairs of the Boers led to the so-called Great Trek. One of the reasons for the "Trek" was candidly given by the Boer leader Piet Retief as being "to preserve proper relations between master and servant," because the British, according to another of the Boer representatives, Anna Steenkamp, had committed the sacred sin of placing slaves "on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinctions of race and religion, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christians to bow down beneath such a yoke." Armed with these Christian sentiments, 1,200 voortrekkers left the Cape Colony between 1835 and 1843. Some succeeded in establishing themselves in Natal after bloody wars between them and the African peoples, in which the Boers emerged victorious. But fate was not on the Boers' side. On 8 August 1843 the British arrived and annexed Natal, triggering another trek to the "high veld." Once there, far away from the British authority, the Boers proceeded to create new republics for themselves. On 10 April 1854, for example, a constitution for a "volksraad" was promulgated.* It was the year the Orange Free State (so-called after the Dutch royal family) and the Transvaal joined into "South African Republic" which Britain recognized in the same year and then annexed in 1877. The struggle which followed thereafter between the Boer and the Briton led to acquisition of Self-Government of the Orange Free State in 1907 and eventually to the "Union of South Africa" on 31 May 1910, comprising Natal, Orange Free State, the Transvaal, and the Cape Colony.

*This constitution was appropriately based on the constitution of the USA, a copy of which was provided by a Boer by the name of J.G. Groenendaal. (Incidentally, in 1965 Ian Smith of Rhodesia was to use the US Declaration of Independence as a model for his UDI.)

In the years following this Union the British authority slowly waned until it was permanently crippled by the coming into political power of the Boers in 1948. But here we must break off and begin once again at the beginning. We must follow the Boer closely as he advances upcountry rampaging, killing, raping, and enslaving African people in search for his prodigal son, racial superiority.

3.

When the Boers began to expand inland from the Cape, they met little resistance from the San and the Khoikhoi. Their guns exterminated most of these African people, and the rest were claimed by such European biological weapons as venereal diseases and smallpox.⁴ But as the Boers moved further inland they met more serious resistance by the better organized Xhosa, the Zulu, and the Ndebele people. The cup of the African resistance, which was thus filled with foreign invasion, overflowed and trickled all the way down to the present. For we are dealing here not with a record of dead facts of an accomplished past or with a history of a conquered people, but rather with a process of permanent struggle against oppression, a struggle bound to continue until the African people have freed themselves from imperialist and other forms of enslavement. But before that story can be told, and in order to appreciate its historical relevance to the present African struggle in South Africa, there is yet another story to be told first. The story of Shaka can only be sketched here in frustrating brevity.

In about 1787 a Langeni girl called Nandi gave birth to a baby boy. Senzangakona, the father of the boy, was the chief of the Zulu at the time. (Western historians, drawing from their ignorance of the moral values of other peoples, were later to describe Shaka as an "illegitimate" child, by virtue of the fact that Nandi and Senzangakona were not "married" in the European Christian sense of the word. The specific relationship between the chief and the girl can only be judged by *the moral values of these African people at that time*, and should therefore not delay us any further.) Shaka grew up among the Langeni, and later joined relatives among the Mthethwa (Mtetwa). In 1810, when he was twenty-two, he was enrolled in the Mthethwa army under Chief Dingiswayo. These people, a branch of the Nguni, were later to prove troublesome to the Boers in the northeastern Natal, as will be shown below. At any rate, Shaka distinguished himself as a military genius and soon replaced Dingiswayo after that chief's death in action which was followed by the disintegration of the Mthethwa kingdom. Later Shaka became chief of the Zulu, after he had had his father's successor assassinated. He then proceeded to conquer other kingdoms and absorbed them in his fast growing empire. Conscripted into his army were men and women under the age of forty, all of whom lived under strict

military discipline in barracks. Here he subjected them to vigorous military training and taught them the newest military tactics such as surprise attack, high mobility, reconnaissance, and hand-to-hand fighting instead of the conventional spear-throwing. He is credited with inventing the short assegai which was very effective in close combat. It is written in the scrolls of classroom history that Shaka acknowledged no children of his own for fear of being ousted by them. The same sources also add a sensational grain of salt: apart from political considerations, they say, Shaka was either impotent or "a latent homosexual."⁵

Shaka was able to conquer and rule other kingdoms irresistibly until September 24, 1828, when Dingane and Mhlangana, two of his half-brothers, assassinated him. Dingane became the new chief of the Zulu at a time when the voortrekkers were arriving from the Cape Colony. At first he accommodated them in his kingdom and even tried to make use of them. But later he became suspicious of their intentions and decided to do away with them. So, early Tuesday morning, February 6, 1838, the Boer leader Piet Retief and seventy other Boers, together with thirty of their African servants, visited Dingane in his kraal to "negotiate" for a cession of land. There Dingane staged what at first appeared to be a harmless war dance for the entertainment of the "guests." But as Retief and his followers watched the dance, obviously enjoying every minute of it, the dancers suddenly turned on them and mauled them to death in such a lightning speed that some of the victims' heads were still applauding after they had been chopped off!

There followed a series of attacks and counter-attacks involving the Boers and the Zulus, which proved inconclusive until 16 December 1838 when a Boer commando, answering to the name Andries Pretorius, led an army reported to have been 500 men strong and fifty-seven wagons, against a Zulu army of 10,000 strong--according to Western historical accounts. The battle took place on the banks of Ncome River, and cannon fire dictated the final outcome of it. Western historians were there: "In the entire engagement no white people were killed and only three, including Pretorius, were wounded; whereas some 3,000 Zulu died."⁶ Then the Boers baptized Ncome River "Blood River" in a pool of the African blood.

Dingane's downfall was assured when in October 1839 Mpande, his half-brother, led a regiment of 17,000 Zulu into Natal bringing to the Boers 25,000 head of cattle and an offer to join forces against Dingane. Therefore, in January 1840, two forces advanced north against the Zulu kingdom. A combined campaign of the Boers and the traitors under the command of Pretorius himself, managed to finish off Dingane on 30 January 1840. Pretorius then made Mpande, the opportunistic Judas, king of the Zulu, a toothless and timid running dog of the Natal Republic. It was a dangerous

precedent as events were to prove later. Anyway, Pretorius helped himself to 36,000 head of cattle and made off to Natal to a thunderous triumphal entry, only this time not on a slow and worthless donkey's, but on a potent bull's back. The success of this raid encouraged further campaigns on other African chiefs in the area. In December 1840, for example, Pretorius attacked Ncapayi, the chief of the Bhaca, allegedly for being responsible for the theft of white people's cattle. At this attack thirty African people were killed and once again Pretorius took off with three-thousand head of cattle and seventeen children to be distributed as "apprentices" (slaves) among the Boers.

After the "Blood River" battle the Boers established themselves in Natal where they proclaimed a republic in 1839 and instituted a political structure they called "volksraad." A community of "super" human beings sprang up and availed itself to the free labour of the black people who, to the Boers, comprised a subspecies stratum they designated "skepsels" (creatures other than human) as opposed to "mense" (human beings). This God-ordained super race had the Bible to prove it was indeed super, and the Calvinist religion as embodied later by the Dutch Reformed Church was the sanctity of it. In the last half of the nineteenth century the white community lived, as they still do today in South Africa, practically like ticks sucking the blood of the black man, woman, and child, paying no direct taxes at all, where Africans paid a hut tax amounting to £5,000 a year, plus other indirect taxes such as those on blankets and other "consumer" goods, as the law required of them. The white government made good use of African chiefs too. It made them administrative instruments over their own people without pay, and it was the chiefs who, as demanded of them, provided Africans for manual labour for the white community on farms, villages, and in homes. Since slave trade and slavery had nominally been abolished, free African labour could only be procured through "apprenticeship," a euphemism for post-slavery. This method was applied to the Khoikhoi and the San children in the Cape Colony between 1812 and 1828, and in the Natal Republic to the former slaves between 1834 and 1838. When the Boers invaded and routed an African kingdom the victims' children were kidnaped and "apprenticed" to the Boers until the age of twenty-one for girls, and twenty-five for boys. The same system was practised by the same Boers later in the high veld, where they went hunting for African children solely for the procurement of "apprentices." This was done by capturing children and forcing parents to part with their young ones at gunpoint.

Mpande died in 1872 and was succeeded by his son Cetshwayo. Then events took a sharp turn.

Britain annexed Natal in 1843 from the Boers and introduced Dutch-Roman civil law, whose effect was to subject the African

community to the capitalist laws of private property. This led to further alienation of the African land, and with, and corresponding to it, a growing discontent on the part of the African population. Most of the Boers had trekked away to the high veld and created their "South African Republic," which Britain annexed in 1877, as already pointed out. Like the camel and the Arab in the old adage, once they had placed their first colonial hoof in the African tent--which was by no means empty--both the British and the Boer invaders were determined to squeeze themselves in, hump, tail, and all. The two robber barons were not only contending among themselves for supremacy, they sought to co-operate for the purpose of fighting a far more formidable enemy, the African people. This is one aspect of the history of South Africa that bourgeois historians suppress, and must be stressed here. The Boers refused to co-operate with the Britons as long as the former felt threatened by the African kingdoms; the Britons on their part would offer no protection for the Boers as long as the latter refused to co-operate. The vicious circle turned into vicious fury which was vented on the Africans. Therefore, on 11 January 1879 three British columns under Lord Chelmsford invaded the Zulu kingdom of Chief Cetshwayo and camped at Isandhlawana. Eleven days later, on January 22, 1879, the Zulu impi staged a classical surprise attack on the British force, wiping out, in one afternoon, 1,400 of the 1,800 British invaders. It was a serious psychological knockout on the British, and as expected they refused to take it. They unleashed a fragrant war of aggression against the Zulu, and in February 1887 Britain annexed the Zulu kingdom "to make South Africa safe for federation under the British flag."⁷ Voilà.

The Zulu kingdom was split up into thirteen small kingdoms with no military organization, to be administered by chiefs nominated by the British government. Chief Cetshwayo was to be exiled forever and his royal family rendered ordinary commoners. With the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, the military power created by Shaka seventy years earlier also came to an end. Having thus fragmented the African kingdom of the Zulu, and propelled by the necessity to enlist the co-operation of the Boers for the establishment of its empire on the African soil, the British authority created laws and regulations which gave the white people all the advantages of being white. They drank of the myrrh of colonial power, were intoxicated by it, dozed off, and took a political nap. "Peace and quietness" prevailed. And then, in 1906, they received a rude awakening. The road to Soweto begins here.

In the beginning of 1906 two policemen who had been trying to arrest a group of Africans at Trewirgie (a farm near the village of Byrnetown) were shot and killed. On 15 February two people were killed by the police in connection with the police killing incident. On 2 April another twelve Africans were

murdered by the government for the same reason, after a court-martial at Richmond. But on 3 April a certain chief named Bambatha engaged in a series of shooting with the police, following and involving a case in which the government had deposed him and appointed a regent to replace him. At the shooting Bambatha killed three policemen and took to the mountains of Nkandla to raise an army. He was subsequently hunted down and killed on 10 June along with countless other Africans at the battle of Mome Gorge. The government believed that it had quenched this African bush fire only to be disproved by another flare at Tugela and Mapumulo, followed by another shooting. It was not until September 1906 that martial law, imposed on 9 February, finally came to an end. But in searching for the reasons behind the "disturbances," the British suddenly realized that one of the chiefs of the subdivisions of the former Zulu kingdom was actually the son of the late Chief Cetshwayo whom the British had deposed and exiled in disgrace. Martial law was once again declared and Dimuzulu was arrested early September 1907 and charged with twenty-three counts of high treason. They tried him in 1908 and found him guilty of hiding Bambatha's family, sheltering rebels, and possessing unregistered firearms. They sentenced him to four-years' imprisonment plus a fine, and eventually exiled him from Natal until 1910 when the "Union" granted him amnesty.

Apart from costing 3,000 African lives, the 1906 Natal-Zululand uprisings proved to be economically very advantageous for the mining business. When the uprisings began in February there were 17,900 Africans working in the mines. In 1910 when all was quiet on the fronts this number had risen to 34,200. It was then announced from government quarters that the "rebellion" was "the last tribal revolt on South African soil."

We are still thousands of miles away from Soweto, but let us pause here and consult the oracles on the questions posed in relation to both the 1906 uprisings in Zululand and those of Soweto. What are the causes of the uprisings and what could have been done to avoid them? The identity and the political equality of these questions surely presuppose an identity and a political equality of the causes of the outbreaks. In Soweto the palpable cause was the imposition of the Afrikaans language on the African School children. In Zululand it was the imposition in September 1905 of a Poll Tax on the African population, so that when the uprisings erupted early the following year they were immediately christened "Poll Tax Rebellion." It is very much in keeping with bourgeois scholarship to substitute a mere illusion for the reality behind it. The wider aspect of a problem is given a metaphysical shove behind high sounding academic phrases, which in USA always end with the sacred suffix "-OLOGY." To an unpolluted eye there is only one root cause for the Zululand and Soweto uprisings, and indeed for any other that has taken

place and may take place in South Africa in future, namely, the political and economic oppression of the majority black natives of that country by the white foreign fascists. The specific character of this root cause of course differs with the place and time of the outbreak, so that it can be said with certainty that in time future uprisings will be more and more effective in smashing the racist regime. We shall return to this point when we consider the historical significance of Soweto proper.

4.

With the colonial conquest of South Africa complete and petrified into a political unity known as the Union of South Africa, it became necessary to consolidate this achievement by ensuring white supremacy over the blacks. In 1910, the year of the metamorphosis into the "Union of South Africa," there were about 6 million inhabitants in the country composed of 21½% whites, 67% Africans, and 9% people of mixed blood. The 21½% whites, comprising the Boers and the Britons, possessed 93% of the votes, and had dedicated their lives to "the maintenance of white supremacy." The disturbing problem was, however, how a numerically inferior race could preserve supremacy over a turbulent sea of black masses who were then no less unwilling to play the underdog than they were three centuries previously. The search for a solution to this problem led to the development of apartheid.

The word "apartheid" means literally "apart-ness" and was used for the first time in an article in *Die Burger* on 26 March 1943, and then again on 9 September the same year. On January 25, 1944, Dr. Malan, the then prime minister, speaking in the Parliament gave the political meaning of the word and its application in South Africa. The point, he said, was "to ensure the safety of the white race and of the Christian civilization by the honest maintenance of the principles of apartheid and guardianship." This would be done by "separate development" best suited to each race in South Africa according to "its own nature and abilities." By so doing, friction between the races would be eliminated. This point was further stressed by Verwoerd, another Boer prime minister, in London in March 1961: "We want each of our population groups to control and govern itself as is the case with other nations"; and again by Vorster, the next prime minister, on 14 September 1966, after he had been elected prime minister following the assassination of Verwoerd: "I believe in the policy of separate development, not only as a philosophy but also as the only practical solution in the interests of everyone (bravo, precisely the girth of Pluralism with its "collective representation"), to eliminate frictions and to do justice to every population group as well as every individual It (apartheid) is not a denial of the human dignity of anyone (of course not, because those against whom it is directed

are not human, let alone dignified) nor is it so intended(!).
But what of the obvious contradictory fact that your economic survival depends entirely on the black people's labour whom you have decided to keep away from "white areas"? Wouldn't this frustrate your intention of maintaining white supremacy? Not at all, says Vorster in Parliament on April 24, 1968. "It is true that there are Blacks working for us. They will continue to work for us for generations, in spite of the ideal, we have to separate them completely. . . . But the fact that they work for us can never entitle them to claim political rights. Not now nor in the future. . . (and) under no circumstances can we grant them those political rights in our own territory, neither now nor ever."

There were no angels singing, therefore, and no guiding star when the holy mother apartheid gave birth to a doll: "Bantustans." The doleful policy of Bantustans is the practical application of apartheid. Bantustans equals apartheid incarnate and has as its ultimate aims, 1) to designate 87% of the best land as "White areas," leaving 13% of poor and inferior land to the blacks who constitute 70% of the population, 2) to grant "self-government" to the Africans in their own "Homelands," not as one people, but in separate groups, 3) to drive all Africans to these Bantustans, even those born in "white areas."

The policy grew from an earlier version, "Native" or "Bantu Reserves," very much reminiscent of, and in keeping with such terms as "Game and Native Reserves," thus putting the Africans on the same level as animals, which can be brought out of the reserves occasionally for human entertainment, and then sent back, by force if necessary, when no longer required. The word "Bantu" itself, which like the words "Kaffir" and "Native" carries a derogatory meaning as regards Africans, stands in opposition to the word "Afrikaner" (African) by which the Boers know themselves. It goes without saying that in this sense the black people are regarded as non-African; they are "Bantu," "Kaffir," etc.

Through apartheid and its sequel, the Bantustans, the white fascist regime in South Africa wants to create the illusion that there are many distinct "nations" in that country, each occupying a distinct area, possessing a distinct social structure true to a distinct way of life. In the same token therefore, the whites can appear to constitute a "nation." The minister of "Bantu Administration and Development" continues the story more authentically: In 1966 he said, ". . . As regards all the various nations we have here, the White Nation, the Coloured Nation, the Indian Nation, the *various Bantu Nations* something to which we have given little regard, is the fact that *numerically the White Nation is superior to all other nations in South Africa.*" (Emphasis added.) To be able to see the deformed absurdity in this

assertion we must turn to the minister of Statistics and Planning for help. J.J. Loots tells us that in 1970 the white racist regime held these truths to be self-evident: South Africa's other "nations" constitute:

Zulu	3,970,000
Xhosa	3,907,000
Tswana	1,702,000
Northern Sotho	1,596,000
Southern Sotho	1,416,000
Shangaan	731,000
Swazi	487,000
Venda	360,000
Southern Ndebele	230,000
Northern Ndebele	180,000
Other	314,000*

And with the whites amounting to 3,800,000, the "numerical superiority" of the white "nation" becomes clear! But to challenge the regime this way is to accept its basic premise. One cannot fight a fascist bull by hanging onto its racist tail, but by grabbing its decadent horns and giving it a revolutionary wrench.

The policy of Bantustans has undergone several stages. Once the racist egg had been laid it was quickly incubated and hatched. In 1913 there was the enactment of the Native Land Act bringing into effect territorial segregation between the whites and the Africans. The act limited the areas within which Africans could buy land, so as to reserve the best parts for the whites. The 1922 Apprenticeship Act imposed wage rates and educational qualifications on industrial workers, thus securing a privileged position for the white workers. The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 had the desirable effect of controlling black people in urban areas. The regime took a giant leap forward in 1926 when it passed the Mines and Works Act (an Amendment to its 1911 predecessor), which shut Africans out from skilled jobs altogether, thereby establishing practical racism. The Native Administration Act of 1927, and the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1930 gave the government complete power over Africans and other non-whites. The Franchise Acts, 1930-31, restricted voting to white men and women.

With the foundation stone for the construction of apartheid all but laid, we have now crossed the bridge joining Soweto directly to the past, and now we are in the last leg of our journey. Soweto lies just around the corner.

*Quoted from R. Gibson, *African Liberation Movements*, p. 23.

Before we place Soweto in its historical context, one or two preliminary remarks concerning employment of African labour in South Africa seems to be quite in order here. This is done through 1) regular monthly wages and payment in kind, 2) labour tenancy involving no cash payment. Here the African works for a given amount of time per year in exchange for the right to live and cultivate the land, i.e., classical serfdom of the thirteenth century Europe. In the mining industry Africans are herded in barracks known as "compounds," away from their families for the entire duration of their contracts--which run from nine to eighteen months. Those African workers employed in commerce and industry are also piled up in "compounds" in Bantu townships. The workers rent the "compounds" from the government or Urban Councils, and occupation of these "compounds" ends with the loss of employment or death of the family supporter. This then is Soweto. How did we arrive here? Let us quickly glance over our shoulders and survey once more the road we have been following.

In October 1920 the South African police shot and killed 24 Africans and wounded 50 others at Port Elizabeth. The incident had been provoked by a gathering of Africans at the Baakens Street police station to protest the arrest of Samuel Masabala, the local leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). Masabala had been jailed for calling a strike in support for a demand of a minimum wage of 10 shillings a day for Africans. In 1925 a group of whites and their police killed 5 Africans and wounded 25 in a terror campaign in Bloemfontein against ICU. To tighten their oppressive grip on Africans the racists passed the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951. The aim was to establish "Bantu tribal, regional, and territorial authorities." That is how the Transkei, the regime's first "Bantu Homeland," came into being. There followed a series of protests and uprisings against the act. In the Orange Free State the peasants of the Witzieshoek "homeland" clashed with the police over the Bantu Authorities. In the course of the clash 14 Africans were shot dead at the loss of two policemen. Chief Paulus Mopeli and other leaders of the people were deported. In 1957, in the Transvaal, the people of Sekhukhuniland rose up against the same hateful act. Many people, including the chief and relatives, were expelled to Natal and the Transkei. More and more riots broke out when the regime deposed the chief for his opposition to the Bantu Authorities. This resulted in some government supporters' death. Many arrests were made, in one incident as many as 200, and in the trial which followed 11 people were sentenced to death. Mindful of the possibility of more uprisings, the regime reduced the sentence to life imprisonment. In Zululand the Boers tried and failed to win the support of Paramount Chief King Cyprian Bhekuzulu ka Solomon and the subchiefs. The minister of Native Affairs called a meeting in 1957 at Nougama and attempted to sell the idea of

Bantustans to the people. He received in return a demand by the Zulu people that the Boers return King Cetshwayo's crown which had been taken away when the Zulu were defeated in 1879. The message was clear. And even when the paramount chief then decided to accept the Bantu Authorities in his capacity as the chief of the Usutu tribe of the Zulus, he met a resounding opposition from the people. Clashes took place in the district of Tokazi between those who accepted and those who rejected Bantu Authorities. As a result two people were killed. The police arrested 29 people and charged them with murder, 14 of whom were found guilty and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

In 1960 the peasants of Pondoland rose up. In response, the regime created the Emergency Proclamation 400, giving the police authority to detain anybody indefinitely. As the revolt of the peasants grew popular the regime picked up 4,769 men, women, and children and poured them into prisons. The movement had been started by a committee known as the Mountain Committee in the district of Bizana. Eventually, it spread to other districts in Pondoland. Homes of government servants and chiefs were burned down and some government errand-boys had their necks wrung up. At one point the peasants held a meeting at Ngquza Hill between Bizana and Lusikisiki. There, two aircraft and a helicopter appeared and dropped tear gas and smoke bombs on the peasants. At the same time the police emerged and surrounded the meeting. In spite of the white flag which the peasants raised to show that the meeting was peaceful, the police opened fire and killed eleven people on the spot. That was also the year of the infamous Sharpeville massacre in which, by official reports, 67 people were officially murdered while demonstrating against pass laws. This was followed by more legal killings of the Africans. Between July 1963 and June 1965, 194 black people were handed to the hangman's noose. This comes to 8 executions every month of the year.

That is how we have arrived in Soweto. We need not ask, therefore, the "why" and the "wherefore" and the "whence" of Soweto, do we? For Soweto is one of the many cases in which Africans have risen up against oppression in the long tortuous path of their torture. And the Boers can rest assured that it is not the last.

Soweto, the place, is like any other black African township in South Africa, a dung house for African workers and their families in the outskirts of white Johannesburg. The artificiality of it is embodied in the name itself, which is nothing but a political misnomer standing for "Southwestern Township." Like the apartheid system of which it is a direct product, it has absolutely no roots in the African people, no matter how much "African" it may try to sound. The third largest city in South Africa, 35 square miles and with a population approaching one

million, it has no street lights and no sewerage, to say the least.

Clearly then, one of the immediate causes of the uprisings in Soweto was Soweto itself. It was a revolt against the system which created Soweto. It was an open rejection once again of the "Homelands." Thirteen years ago, on the 25th of that same fateful month of June 1963, the assassinated fascist leader Hendrik Verwoerd stood in the "House of Assembly" and said: "Reduced to its simplest form, the problem is nothing else than (sic) this: we want to keep South Africa white, . . . 'keeping it white' can only mean one thing, namely white domination, not 'leadership,' not 'guidance' but 'control,' 'supremacy.'" In Soweto, and in other such cases, the African masses gave their reply to that arrogant boorish utterance of the ill-fated Boer. In Soweto the African people reminded the white South African racists yet again that even though Shaka, Dingane, and Cetshwayo are dead, their fighting spirit lives in the new black South African man, woman, and child. There is no power on earth which can extinguish that flame.

But the Soweto uprising has a specific meaning. A new generation, courageous and ready for action, is beginning to assert its power and drive the political nail home. The Soweto mother said it better: "Our children have wanted to know why we haven't done anything about the unjust society in which we have lived and why we have allowed things to drag on and on. It is terrible to know that your children hate and blame you."⁸ The uprising was yet another demonstration that apartheid is necessarily doomed to ignominious failure. The elements of its destruction are now ripe after almost 300 years of fermentation. Under the present political conditions in South Africa the final explosion is not far off. It will follow as inevitably and naturally as the orderly succession of the seasons of the year.

And to those who want to tell us that the explanation to Soweto and parallel cases lies only in the apartheid system or in the "evil of man," the South African black poet A.C. Jordan has this to say:

*Tell the winter not to give birth to spring.
Tell the spring not to flower into summer.
Tell the summer not to mellow into autumn.
Tell the morning star not to herald the day.
Tell the darkness
Never to flee
when smitten at dawn
by the shafts of the sun.⁹*

The regime gave 176 as the final figure of those who died in that June week of uprisings. By the slip of the tongue, the

American NBC news broadcast gave 476. But we now know, as the United Nations Commission on Apartheid revealed, that as many as 1,000 sons and daughters of Africa had fallen by the sword of the bloody dinosaur. On their graves, posterity has inscribed the eternal words of the countryman Socwetskata, as it did on those of the other African people who lost their lives in the defence of Africa: "Happy are those who fought and are dead." For they died so that Africa may live--free.

NOTES

¹ Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, scene 1.

² Leo Kuper, *Race, Class and Power* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.), p. 213.

³ Brain Fagan in *African Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Leonard Thompson (Praeger Publishers), p. 60.

⁴ See Gerrit Harinck in *African Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Leonard Thompson.

⁵ Leonard Thompson in *The Oxford History of South Africa*, ed. Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, V. 1, p. 344.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁷ Colin Webb in *African Societies in Southern Africa*, ed. Leonard Thompson, p. 305.

⁸ Quoted from *African Confidential* 17, #13 (25 June 1976).

⁹ Quoted from *The Guardian* (USA), 30 June 1976.