



THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Gwendolen M. Carter

Behind the present tension in South Africa lies more than a century of intermittent protests against the steadily increasing social, political, and economic restrictions imposed on blacks by the dominant white minority. These protests have helped to forge an African nationalism that promises to transcend ethnic divisions. From the first, however, the blacks confronted a powerful white Afrikaner nationalism imbued with elitist Calvinism and a sense of white superiority. From the time of their arrival in the 17th century, the Dutch settlers were determined to dominate the heathen and build their own society in this new world.

The Dutch—and later the English—did not conquer South Africa without overcoming strong resistance, but by the late 19th century, even the best-organized African tribes had been crushed and scattered (see preceding article). Their members became farm laborers or squatters, or were driven into the limited territories long known as reserves and now called homelands.

Before the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand reef in 1886, some Africans, despite the disruption of tribal organization, continued to produce not only for their own needs but also for sale. Some did well in adopting new crops and techniques. Although their relations with Afrikaners were often marked by roughness, there was little calculated racial discrimination. As long as land was plentiful and the struggle was primarily for land, it was possible to accommodate both black and white. With the opening of the mines, the emphasis was on labor. The ever increasing demand for cheap manpower to service the mines led to the imposition of taxes and other measures that steadily squeezed out self-sufficient peasant economies and forced Africans into the wage system.

The plight of the blacks was not eased by the reconciliation of the Afrikaners and the English after the bitter Anglo-Boer (or South African) War of 1899–1902. Indeed, the political and economic price for this reconciliation, sealed in the 1910 Act of Union, was paid by the Africans, whose small gains toward civil rights and equal status were halted, then reversed.

The new constitution provided that only whites could be elected to Parliament. In the Cape, Africans had possessed the vote since 1853 on the basis of the same economic and educational qualifications as whites and colored, and in seven border constituencies in the Eastern Cape they exercised a strong political influence on the election of white candidates. Cape liberals sought in vain to extend this qualified franchise to Africans in the other provinces.

The whites designed the structure for an independent South Africa, but black Africans were not silent. Since 1882 their nascent political organizations had been reinforced by a widely read newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion) edited by John Tengo Jabavu. Educated Africans demanded that Africans share the status and rights of "civilized British subjects." On the eve of South African independence, the National Native Convention protested the exclusion of Africans from Parliament. In 1912, the South African Native Congress (subsequently African National Congress) was established through the efforts of four British- and American-trained African lawyers. The African National Congress long remained the chief voice of organized blacks.

Poor Whites, Poorer Blacks

There was much to protest. Late 19th century laws, framed to benefit mine owners, pushed Africans off the land, leaving them no alternative but to work in white-controlled mines, commerce, and agriculture. The Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911 and the Natives Land Act of 1913 ejected squatters from white farmlands. Other factors that pushed rural blacks—and whites—into the wage economy were growing population pressures, competitive food imports, local crop diseases, price fluctuations, and the worldwide trade depression of the 1890s.

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After World War I, persistent drought forced an increasing number of relatively unskilled Afrikaners off their farms into the cities, where they found that the better jobs were held by English-speaking workers and the unskilled jobs by Africans and colored. In the 1920s, South Africa faced the world's worst poor-white problem, with some 60 percent of all Afrikaners in or near poverty. Strong measures by the government were required to meet their needs.

In 1922, radical white miners on the Rand struck against a proposal by gold-mine owners that would allow Africans to assume some semiskilled jobs—at lower wages. In bloody fighting, the strike was put down by the government under General Jan Christiaan Smuts. Though temporarily defeated, white labor was victorious in the end. In 1924, General Smuts was turned out of office by General J.B.M. Hertzog at the head of a coalition of his Afrikaner National Party and the largely English-speaking Labour Party. The ultimate result was the enactment of what was known as “the civilized labour policy” that reserved all the better jobs for whites.

Besides protecting white labor against African competition, the Hertzog government was determined to eliminate the African vote in Cape Province, the one area where Africans shared voting rolls with whites. In 1934, during the crisis of the Great Depression, Hertzog joined with Smuts to form the new United Party, for the purpose of instituting the desired economic and political changes.

Rural and urban Africans protested. Under a new umbrella organization, the All African Convention, more than 400 black delegates meeting in Bloemfontein in December 1935 drafted a comprehensive charter of African grievances and urged that the African franchise be extended, not reduced. The whites—English and Afrikaner—refused. A constitutional amendment was passed by the necessary two-thirds parliamentary majority, taking Cape Africans off the common roll. After 1936, they could qualify for a direct vote only on a separate roll and then only to elect three whites to the House of Assembly to represent their interests (indirectly, they were represented with all other Africans by four white senators). In 1959, even this small degree of representation was abolished.

Although the blacks were defeated on the issue of the Cape African vote, the ferment in the late 1930s and 1940s brought rural and urban Africans closer together. Aside from sporadic anti-pass demonstrations and strikes, the African leadership until then had depended largely on verbal and written protests and

appeals to white authority. Now mass strikes, boycotts, and other forms of pressure were discussed—but not yet used.

While Afrikaner groups competed with each other for dominance, new African leaders and programs were arising within the African National Congress. In 1943, the Youth League was officially established. The names of its members were to become household words—names like Anton Lembede, A. P. Mda, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, and Nelson Mandela, a lawyer who, although imprisoned since 1961, is still the most widely acclaimed leader of black South Africans. In the same year, the African National Congress issued "Africans' Claims in South Africa," which not only emphasized African opposition to racial discrimination but also appeared to endorse the universal franchise without qualifications.

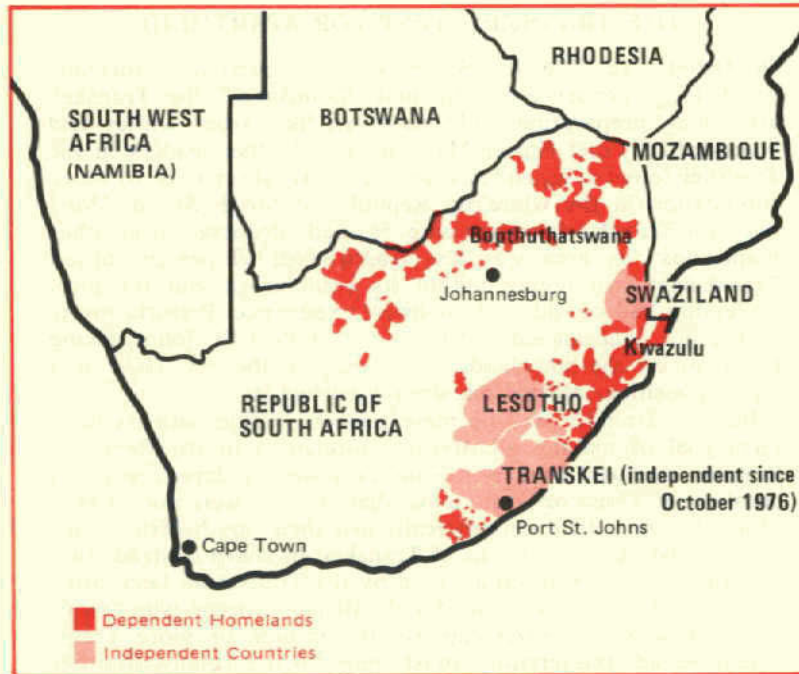
Separate and Unequal

In 1946, some 50,000 African gold-mine workers on the Witwatersrand, protesting low wages and discriminatory conditions, staged a walkout at the call of the African Mine Workers' Union. Also in 1946, the Natal Indian Congress began a massive resistance campaign in Durban against restrictions on Indian land ownership and occupation. Stimulated by these examples of protest, and despite the harsh official response, the African National Congress in 1952 started its own passive resistance campaign against "unjust laws." Most of these were laws passed by the Afrikaner Nationalist government after 1948 to enforce more rigid racial separation.

In 1948, when Daniel F. Malan's Afrikaner Nationalists came into office, whites were startled to learn that the number of Africans who had been forced to move off the rural reserves onto white farms and into urban townships was greater than the number remaining in the reserves. Moreover, the government's Fagan Commission disclosed that white dependence on black labor for the country's growing industrialization had led to "a settled, permanent Native population" in the urban areas. To Afrikanerdom this was seen as a new crisis.

Prime Minister Malan's National Party had campaigned on a platform of apartheid (racial apartness) without specifying how it was to be achieved. Once in power with overwhelming Afrikaner support, the National Party successfully increased its parliamentary majority at almost every election. This majority was used to push through progressively more restrictive racial segregation in so-called white areas. These programs not only

PRETORIA'S SOLUTION: THE HOMELANDS



Adapted from map by John Ray, Utah State University.

The homelands presently consist of 110 separate pieces of land, scattered around the periphery of South Africa (the Transkei still consists of 3). Government plans for further consolidation would eventually bring the number to 36 (the Transkei would end up with 2). Kwa-Zulu, for example, would be reduced from 48 to 10 separate pieces of land, and Bophuthatswana from 19 to 6. This "final" settlement is based on the 1936 Native Land and Trust Act, which promised to increase African-held land from 7 percent of the country's land area to roughly 13 percent.

Within these 110 fragmented areas live some 45 percent of the black population—more than 7 million in 1970, substantially more in 1977. Since agriculture is rudimentary, and exploitable mineral resources are virtually lacking, a high proportion of all adult males are forced into migratory labor; the Transkei alone "exported" nearly a quarter of a million laborers in 1972. The South African government will provide 80 percent of the Transkei's budget in its first year of independence; any reduction in such funding to homelands is likely to throw still more migrant workers into "white" South Africa, from which the homeland policy is supposed to remove them.

THE TRANSKEI: TEST FOR APARTHEID

On October 26, 1976, the South African Government formally granted independence to the first "homeland," the Transkei, after long preparation and much criticism from whites and blacks alike. Chief Kaiser Matanzima and other leaders in the Transkei found independence an attractive alternative to black subjugation in the white-run Republic of South Africa. Moreover, the Transkei [see map on p. 55] had advantages over other homelands: its area was less fragmented; 60 percent of all Transkeians had homes within its boundaries; and the local leadership had considerable political experience. Pretoria promised major financial aid and handed over Port St. Johns, giving the Transkei the homelands' only outlet to the sea. There was local opposition; Matanzima sharply curbed it.

But the Transkei was no mere puppet. In line with its long-term goal of making all Africans foreigners in the Republic, Pretoria declared that, with the Transkei's independence, all speakers of Xhosa or Sotho tribal dialects who were not citizens of another homeland automatically lost their South African citizenship and became citizens of Transkei. In sharp contradiction was the new constitution adopted by the Transkeian Legislative Assembly. It said that those South African citizens who "may" desire Transkeian citizenship, i.e. the million or more Transkeians outside the territory, must apply for it formally. In other words, the Transkei Government, supported by leaders of other homelands and urban black spokesmen, insisted that no black could be *forced* to give up his South African citizenship rights. The issue remains unresolved. For Pretoria to accept the Transkei's voluntary citizenship policy would mean giving up the basic tenet of "separate development" for blacks.

affected all nonwhite groups—African, colored, and Asians—but ultimately, and more significantly, inspired a corollary drive for separate *territorial* development for Africans.

The government's first real target was the colored, whom Hertzog had earlier called "an appendage to the whites" because of their long and close association. The 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and a 1950 amendment to the 1927 Immorality Act struck at colored-white marital and extramarital relations. After a long constitutional struggle, the Representation of Voters Bill in 1956 removed the colored from the voting roll in Cape Province, just as the Africans had been removed in 1936. These

measures have remained sources of intense bitterness; the government's own Theron Commission recommended in mid-1976 that they be rescinded. Nonetheless, despite other efforts to conciliate the colored and despite considerable white sympathy for sharing the vote, the government immediately rejected the commission's proposals.

Two other far-reaching pieces of legislation in the early 1950s laid the cornerstone of the urban segregation policy: the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act, aimed at restricting each population group—as far as ownership, occupancy, and trading are concerned—to well-defined places in or near urban areas.

Today, under these laws, Africans outside the reserves, now called homelands, are closely controlled in their movements and living places by "influx control." They must at all times carry a pass (a document including information on ethnic origin, birthplace, age, employment, etc.) under penalty of summary arrest, and secure official permission to accept or change jobs. Indians have been prohibited from living in the Orange Free State since 1891 and have long been subject to varying restrictions on property rights, occupancy, and trading in the Transvaal and Natal. The ultimate goal of the Group Areas Act was to establish residential "racial purity" by shifting groups from one place to another. In the process, colored and Asians have been moved out of long established communities in Cape Town and Johannesburg to far less desirable sites. Africans have lost their limited urban freehold areas, and a few whites have had to move.

Still more far-reaching has been the insistent pressure, formalized in 1967, to force all urban Africans who were not born or have not been long domiciled or employed in urban areas to return to the rural areas, notably the Bantustans, or homelands. Once settled in the homelands, most male Africans must become migratory workers to make a living. As many critics have noted, this type of labor means that officials in the homeland send Africans to particular jobs away from home for a specified period of time, usually a year, at the end of which workers are forced to return to the homelands.

The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was designed to re-establish the authority of government-appointed chiefs, the lowest tier of what was to become the political structure of the ethnic homelands. The second Bantu Education Act (1953) moved African education from provincial to central government control, reduced the role of churches in education, and threatened to make education a handmaiden of apartheid by training Africans

only for inferior roles in South African society. Subsequently, African higher education was also brought under central government control. With rare exceptions, the relatively few Africans, colored, and Asians who attend colleges and universities do so in segregated institutions.

No Right to Strike

Working conditions have not improved for Africans. Though far outnumbering all other industrial and commercial workers, they are legally omitted from the definition of "employee" and thus lack official union representation. Nor can they participate directly in negotiations over wages; their pay is low, often below subsistence levels. Although African trade unions, contrary to the common view, exist legally, they have never had any assured rights. The 1942 ban on strikes by Africans continued to

URBAN BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Some 9 million Africans, nearly twice the total white population, live in the so-called "white" area, many of them far away from the homelands. Nearly 4 million Africans work and live on white farms. The remaining 5 million live in dormitory townships near towns and cities. Except for Pretoria, where the number of government workers swells the total white population, and Cape Town, where the colored are more numerous, Africans outnumber whites in virtually all urban areas. The white population of Johannesburg is less than half a million; about 15 miles away, Soweto (or South Western Township) houses well over a million blacks, making it the fifth largest city in Africa south of the Sahara. A quarter of a million blacks commute by train, bus, or other means from Soweto alone.

Elsewhere, the mines and complexes like ISCOR, the state-financed iron and steel corporation, and SASOL, which produces oil from coal, have their own black dormitory compounds. Four largely urban centers of industrial concentration exist within the country—the southern Transvaal, the Western Cape, Durban-Pinetown, and Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage. Of these, the southern Transvaal, particularly the commercial capital of Johannesburg and the PWV (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging) triangle with its spreading gold-mine complex and heavy industry, has accumulated the greatest concentration of black labor and the greatest potential for unrest.

exist until the spring of 1973, but the modifications made in the ban at that time were so hedged about with restrictions that any improvements were more theoretical than practical.

All this did not come about without further black protest. In January 1952, leaders of the African National Congress demanded as "an inherent right" both the abolition of "differentiating laws" and direct representation in Parliament and in provincial and municipal councils. Later that year, as white South Africa celebrated the tercentenary of Jan Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape on April 6, 1652, Africans boycotted many of the celebrations and at one mass counter-rally, Professor Z. K. Matthews of Fort Hare College, President of the Cape ANC, declared that "only the African people themselves will ever rid themselves [of] political subjugation, economic exploitation and social degradation." On June 26, 1952, a passive resistance campaign began. Using tactics later employed by the civil rights movement in the American South, batches of volunteers courted arrest by open violations of apartheid regulations, such as entering African locations without permits, sitting on benches marked "for whites only," or using white entrances to post offices. More than 8,000 volunteers had been arrested by December 1952, most of them in the eastern parts of Cape Province and in the Transvaal. The membership of the ANC swelled to 100,000, and the passive resistance movement spread to the reserves.

The Road to Sharpeville

Soon there were nationwide arrests of ANC and South African Indian Congress leaders. More serious were the sporadic outbreaks of violence in East London and Port Elizabeth in which a few whites and many more Africans were killed. When Parliament reassembled in January 1953, the government reacted by introducing the Public Safety Bill and Criminal Laws Amendment Bill. The former made provision for proclaiming a state of emergency and was used in 1960 after the Sharpeville shootings. The latter instituted heavy penalties, including the lash, for supporting a campaign of passive resistance, or for soliciting or accepting help for such a campaign.

Shifting from disobedience to demonstration, and from an African to a multiracial popular front, the ANC and its allied Indian, colored, and white organizations formed the Congress Alliance and held a massive Congress of the People at Kliptown near Johannesburg. A Freedom Charter was adopted by voice vote of the 3,000 persons present. The charter began: "South

Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and no Government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people."

The government's answer was to arrest 156 leaders of the Congress Alliance in December 1956 and put them on trial for high treason. In proceedings lasting over four years, all the accused were discharged a few at a time or finally held to be not guilty. As the trial went on, a split appeared in the ANC leadership. One faction upheld the multiracial sentiments of the Freedom Charter. The other identified with the tide of black nationalism then rising through most of Africa. The latter group under Robert Sobukwe broke away in 1959 to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). It was the PAC that organized demonstrations against carrying passes. On March 21, 1960, before the demonstrations were over, the police had fired into an unarmed crowd at Sharpeville in the Transvaal, wounding 186 African men, women, and children and killing 72—and creating a new level of interracial tension.

The government declared a state of emergency, outlawed the ANC and PAC, arrested and detained some 1,900 people, including, for the first time, members of the predominantly white Liberal Party which stood for a universal franchise under its leader, the internationally known author, Alan Paton. Thousands of African "idlers" were imprisoned. International censure on the killings was followed by an outflow of foreign capital. Only very gradually did the situation return to a semblance of normality.

The Resistance Ebbs

Despite internal dissension and the banning of their organizations, Africans made one last effort to construct a wide public front for mass protest. The "All-In Conference," with more than a thousand Africans in attendance, met in Pietermaritzburg in Natal in March 1961. Raids and arrests frustrated its call for a three-day work boycott. This was the last effort by Africans to organize such public demonstrations.

A few terrorist acts in 1962 by the PAC-inspired "Poqo" group spurred government counteraction, which systematically destroyed virtually all effective African organization in the country. Nelson Mandela, already in prison, was put on trial again in 1964 and sentenced to life imprisonment, together with Walter Sisulu. Sobukwe was already in prison on Robben Island off Cape Town and, although subsequently released, has remained under restrictions. The politically organized internal African struggle for

AMERICAN INVESTMENTS

The South African economy has long been buttressed by substantial Western investment, much of it from Great Britain, but a growing percentage from the United States, Japan, West Germany, and France. By 1974, the value of American private investment in South Africa was estimated at \$1.46 billion, over 20 percent more than in 1972, representing 16 percent of all the private foreign investment in that country (the British share is 58 percent). The 480 American firms reported by the South African *Financial Mail* in August 1975 included 136 of the concerns on the 1971 *Fortune* "500" list; 55 of these firms were among the top 100 on the *Fortune* list, and 12 among the top-ranking 15. A large portion (45 percent) of U.S. private investment is in manufacturing, e.g., automobiles and electronics, to which American technology is as essential as U.S. capital.

rights was crushed. The ANC exile leadership, under Oliver Tambo and Duma Nokwe, and PAC's exiles, under Potlako Leballo, sought support outside the country, but their contacts with colleagues within the country were tenuous, and their plan to employ infiltration tactics was frustrated (until the liberation of Mozambique in 1974) by the great distances between independent African-controlled countries and South Africa.

Throughout most of the 1960s, such vocal opposition to discrimination as there was in South Africa came from the upper-middle-class white spokesmen of interracial organizations like NUSAS (National Union of South Africa Students), the Liberal and Progressive parties, Defense and Aid with its efforts on behalf of the dependents of political prisoners, and, from 1967 on, the University Christian Movement (UCM). These organizations' black members, under official suspicion by the mere fact of their membership, stayed in the background. Inevitably, the white leaders came to be regarded as the spokesmen for all dissent; and all too often pro forma protest took the place of hard-headed political planning.

The breakout from this state of dependence came first from some 2,000 black university students on their segregated campuses. In 1969 the black students organized the South African Students Organization (SASO) and shortly thereafter broke away entirely from the predominantly white NUSAS. In two ways, SASO was distinctive: it sought to unite Africans, Asians, and colored within a single organization; and its leaders made a calculated effort to instill a new black consciousness by openly

separating themselves from the liberal whites. In some ways, they were echoing the radical Africanism of the Pan Africanist Congress but with the larger aim of uniting all races that shared a common experience of discrimination. In their view, even formal relations with whites and the associated "multiracialism" philosophy diverted blacks from the reality that fundamental change in South Africa could come only through their own efforts; whites, no matter how sympathetic, inevitably formed part of the discriminatory system that blacks must ultimately transform. Student leaders saw the homeland system—with its African leaders—as a Trojan horse designed to undermine blacks' resolve to secure full rights in an undivided South Africa.

The government reacted with expulsions, bannings, and, from September 1974 on, with detentions and imprisonment of leading members of SASO, avowedly because of the students' proposed rally at Curries Fountain Stadium in Durban to express solidarity with the blacks of neighboring Mozambique in achieving independence. Thus, black-white confrontation was reinforced. That it now goes deep into the consciousness of urbanized youth has been demonstrated by the extended series of demonstrations and outbreaks of violence in Soweto and elsewhere since June 1976.

Labor's Latent Power

Less overtly organized but at least initially more effective in securing change have been the sporadic illegal strikes by black workers that have marked employer-employee relations since 1970. Of the more than 6 million Africans in the work force, at least 2 million are engaged in mining, construction, manufacturing, commerce, finance, and transport.

At the end of 1971, 13,000 Ovambo workers in Namibia (formerly South West Africa) went out on a long and partially successful strike that received international publicity. From January to March, 1973, workers struck approximately 150 firms in Natal. The strikes took place one after another without any apparent organization. Unlike earlier strikes, force was not used against the strikers, and they largely achieved their purpose of gaining appreciable wage increases. More far-reaching effects were the overseas publicity on low wages paid by foreign as well as South African firms, the establishment of negotiating machinery by many firms, and a new national awareness of African labor's latent power. When two three-day strikes kept most Soweto workers at home in September 1976, this awareness was reinforced.

In short, strong as South Africa appears, it is a state riddled with contradictions. This has always been the case, but it is increasingly so today. Every step taken by the white supremacy system to relieve the tensions within its boundaries creates another contradiction. Curbing the influx of job-seeking Africans into urban areas adds to the population pressures in the homelands, which it is government policy to develop into viable systems. Greater dependence by white industry on *migratory* labor means increasing the flow of relatively unskilled workers but rapid economic growth demands more skilled manpower. Providing the homelands with their own African political institutions as alternatives to a voice in white institutions creates a new challenge from a black power base—whether from the independent Transkei, or from Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of the Zulus and other black leaders—which may be reinforced by fresh protest in the black urban townships. As time goes on, the contradictions and tensions will surely grow.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

by Colin Legum

South Africa is completely different from any other country on the continent. It is rich and powerfully armed. Even more important, it is a country where the process of economic (if not yet social) integration of the races has already gone so far as to lock the races into interdependence. The refusal of the architects of apartheid to acknowledge the extent of this integration has resulted not only in a total failure to separate the races (except into residential zones) in the industrial cities and white rural areas but has also sharpened the internal contradictions to the point where they have now actually become a more serious threat to the present system than an armed struggle.

Another major difference between South Africa and the former African colonial territories is that it ceased being a colony almost 70 years ago; South Africa does not depend on decisions