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Sketch of Life in Soweto.



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A Sketch of Life in Soweto

BY
CR. PATRICK R. B. LEWIS
JOHANNESBURG

EIGHT short years ago the approach to Johannesburg from the Cape by rail was a hideous experience: miles and acres of shantied slums capable of shocking even someone familiar with the East End of London. And now? In place of the shanties, Soweto — thousands of acres of orderly dwellings in their gardens, mile upon mile of tarred roads, hospitals, churches, schools, amenities of all kinds and administrative buildings.

The full story has been told with pictures in "Municipal Affairs" and in brochures issued by the Non-European affairs department of Johannesburg City Council. It was A. J. Archibald, the creator of Kwa Thema when he was Town Engineer of Springs, who, as Johannesburg City Council's Director of Housing, taught the Bantu to build his own homes, and was the moving spirit behind the launch-

ing of the Bantu city south west of Johannesburg.

But the work has still gone on since his departure to rebuild Mauritius. All these years Mr. W. J. P. Carr has been the humane and enlightened manager of the city council's Non-European affairs department, and Mr. Patrick Lewis has been the councillor in charge of Non-European Affairs. It is as an altruist that Cr. Lewis has interested himself in this field: it has not been for him a means to any other end. He is thus particularly well qualified to speak with sympathy and understanding of the inhabitants of Soweto who enjoy there a standard of life unknown to the inhabitants of any of the African communities outside South Africa and Rhodesia.

Soweto is one of the sights of the Southern Hemisphere. No visitor, whencesoever he may come to it as a stranger, can fail

to leave it without acquiring a changed attitude to South Africa.

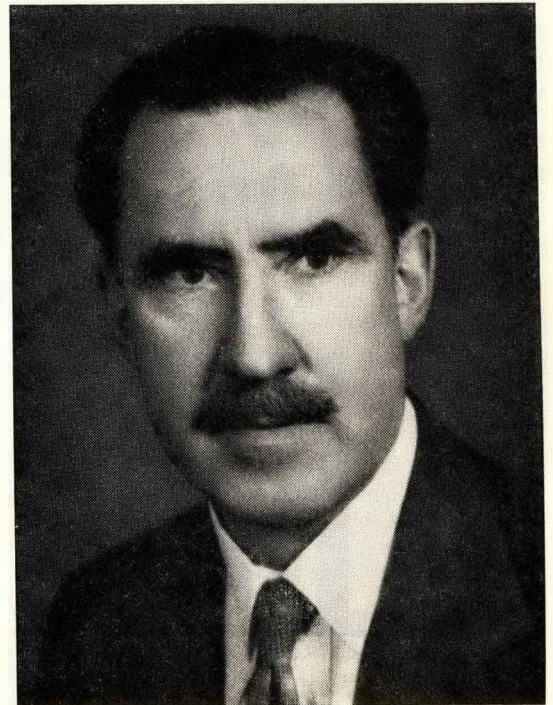
But urban life carries with it problems for the Bantu. It is of these, too, that Cr. Lewis writes in this article based on an address which he delivered recently to the Insurance Institute of the Transvaal. The problems to which he refers have no political undertones: they are the human problems consequent upon the urbanisation of a rural community. Soweto is not the only fine Bantu town created by local government in South Africa, with the aid and encouragement of the Central Government. In all those Bantu towns the problems arise which Cr. Lewis describes. Non-European affairs departments everywhere will be interested in what he says.

WHAT is it like to live in Soweto? The canvas is so large, and there is so little scientific information available, that one can only etch some facets, and then only give a glimpse of the way of life of the hundreds of thousands of people who have moved to the cities from the rural areas.

It is a story of social upheaval on a vast scale in which traditional patterns of behaviour, developed over a long period, have been suddenly undermined while a new social code



On the left, Cr. Patrick Lewis, deputy chairman of Johannesburg City Council's management committee and still after many years chairman of its Non-European affairs committee. On the right, Mr. W. J. P. Carr, the manager of the council's Non-European affairs department.



has still to be evolved to substitute suitable norms of conduct in place of those which have been destroyed.

"Soweto"

Soweto acquired its name in these circumstances. Early in 1930 Johannesburg City Council purchased 1,300 morgen to the south-west of the city adjacent to the main road to Potchefstroom. In 1932 it started building houses in a township called Orlando named after Mr. Orlando Leake, then a city councillor. One of the primary purposes was to rehouse Natives living in appalling slums at a place in the city called Prospect Township, which was situated on part of the ground now occupied by the new Kazerne Goods Yards. By the outbreak of World War II, in 1939, 5,800 houses had been built by the city council at Orlando. During the war no additional houses were built even though rapid industrialization called for many more workers, and it was then that a veritable flood of people moved into the areas adjacent to Orlando, and the notorious squatter camps of Shantytown and Moroka were established. Those were days of degradation, crime and



Homes and Gardens.

and Maletsane. For years this large area of 7,900 morgen or 25 square miles was referred to as the South-Western Bantu Townships. It was a city without a name and with no corporate entity. A competition was then held to choose a name. Many of the suggestions had to be turned down because the Zulu would not accept a Sotho name and vice versa. Eventually, a compromise was reached: and the name of this unique town is derived from the first letters of "South-Western Townships".

A Unique Town

Why unique? Because within a period of less than 35 years what had been veld has now become the home of nearly half a million Bantu. It is a city without industries, and the working population has to commute to work in the White areas of Johannesburg some 12 to 20 miles away according to the station at which the train is boarded. It is unique in that there is only one landlord—the city council. Unique, too, in that that landlord has been prepared, year in and year out, to subsidise many of his tenants by providing houses at sub-economic rents, by providing medical care, recreational facilities, social welfare services, swimming baths, recreation halls and vocational training—thereby incurring losses which for the last 12 years have amounted to R6½m. The employers of the tenants have contributed R21m. by means of the Bantu Transport Levy for subsidising transport and the Bantu Services

Levy contributing towards the capital costs of providing services, thus enabling the rents to be lowered.

But who are the people who live at Soweto and where did they come from? Why did they come? What manner of persons are they?

The People

Who are the people? Where did they come from? The Xhosa came from the Transkei, the Basuto from Basutoland, the Shangaan from Portuguese East Africa, the Zulu from Zululand, the Bapedi from Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal, the Tswana from the Western Transvaal, the Nyasa from Malawi, the Bechuana from Bechuanaland, the Mashona and Mandabele from Rhodesia. There are also Swazi, Fingo, Pondo, Makwena, Barolong, Bakgatla, Venda and Griqua. Johannesburg is the magnet for people from all over Southern Africa.

They came to the cities to work, for in their homes in the rural areas the land available was limited and the agricultural methods were primitive. They had no means of supporting their families when the crops failed. They needed cash to pay taxes. Their wants increased and the bright lights of the cities lured them to come to E-Goli—the City of Gold—to seek the cash they needed. With the industrial expansion in the cities their labour was required to enable the factories and industries to function. The services provided in the towns, the educational and medical facilities



Happy children

appalling misery. Then, after a hesitant start, the seemingly impossible was achieved. Today we have some 65,000 houses accommodating 306,000 men, women and children, and three hostels accommodating 14,000 men. So to Orlando were added townships such as Dube, Naledi, Moroka, Chiawelo, Jabavu, Jabulani, Emdeni, Mapetla, Mofolo, Zolo, Zondi, Phiri, Senaoane

available and the generally better living conditions drew the people to the cities from the rural areas.

The Men First

At one time it was only the men who came. In 1900, of the 60,000 Bantu the ratio of males to females was 12:1; by 1927, with a population of 136,000, the ratio was 6:1; at the outbreak of war the ratio was 3:1; and now it is equal.

At first the men worked for short spells, returning home to join their families and returning to the cities again when their funds gave out. What a different pattern it is today. Now that the women folk have moved to town the vast majority are permanent urban dwellers.

Strange Surroundings

How different they found the city from their rural areas. How strange they felt in their new surroundings. How ill equipped their tribal beliefs and training had made them for their new life. Instead of the sun being their time-piece, they now had to work to the inelastic and unsympathetic clock of the White man. Instead of working in the circle of their clan, where everyone was known to them and to each other, they were now among strangers, strangers to them and strangers to one another. They heard tongues they could not understand. Because they could not understand they were thought to be stupid: some called them momparas and worse. Whereas at home they had a sense of kinship, and could consult their kinsmen, they were now on their own and had to make decisions for themselves. Their food was different, as were their mealtimes; and the White man's medicine was different. Instead of a barter economy, ready cash was necessary. Instead of leisurely walks along country paths, 170,000 persons each day rise early to throng the crowded trains carrying them to work, only to repeat the same tortured travel in the late afternoon. No longer were cattle the symbol of wealth. In the city the material goods of the West and a flashy car were the aim.

Development of Individuality

Whereas in the clan initiative was not encouraged and could lead to jealousy, now they were judged on their own merits and were encouraged to develop individuality. At home there was respect for one's elders. The daily battle to secure a place

on the crowded trains destroyed any attitude other than looking after oneself. In the city they were on their own and free from the restraints of the tribe, but at the same time they had lost the security of the assured help of kinsmen. The ancestral spirits seemed far away; some people in the towns even cast doubt on their very existence. It is difficult enough for a rural dweller of any race to adjust himself to the hustle and bustle of the city: for the Bantu it also meant adjustment to a totally different way of life.

What an upheaval—what an adaptation to make. The migratory worker away from his kith and kin, away from his women folk, could not be expected to observe the tribal sanc-

living under single conditions in hostels, compounds or flats or on their employer's private property. There is no means of estimating how many of these men and women are in fact single and how many are involuntarily parted from their spouses.

Marriage Customs

In the early days of contact between White and Black many well-meaning people, looking through the eyes of one civilization and not knowing the customs and traditions of the other, condemned polygamy and other marriage customs such as the lobolo system, interpreting that system as the purchase of the wife by the bridegroom. How wrong they were.

In days gone by, while customs



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tions and restraints. For a man is a man and needs his desires fulfilled. And so began the process which has caused a most heart-rending upheaval in the structure of African society, particularly in family life. Sadly enough both marriage and family life are very unstable and it is to be feared that it will be a long process to rebuild secure and stable families again.

Inevitable Maladjustments

But other societies, notably England during the Industrial Revolution, have experienced the same maladjustments inevitable in such a drastic transition, and have readjusted themselves. While large numbers are living normal family lives, there are still 85,000 men and 55,000 women

varied from tribe to tribe, pre-marital pregnancies would have had serious consequences for both parties. In the towns no such sanctions existed and illegitimate children became accepted without eyebrows being so much as raised. The transfer of wife by the kinsmen of the bridegroom to the kinsmen of the bride was a symbol of the alliance of the clans, and many consequences flowed from those transactions. One important one was that if the husband died his clan would care for his wife and children. There were no uncared for widows or orphans.

How different in the towns. A man was away from the close-knit community where everyone knew his actions. He was among strangers who did not care what he did, and

that caused a breakdown in tribal sanctions.

In the cities the lobolo system lost its old meaning for there were no cattle. Yet it persists today in the form of money in circumstances which destroy its original purpose. It is often the earning capacity of the bride which determines the lobolo demanded. In days gone by it was the parents and the clan who assisted with the payment of lobolo. Now it is the groom who has to find it. If the amount demanded is too high the man and maid often live together until lobolo can be found.

Women's Role

In Bantu society in rural areas polygamy was the accepted form. The women tilled the fields and were responsible for providing the meals. In the cities there were no fields to till and the only means of providing the food was to get out and work for cash. Then who looked after the children while the parents were at work in the city? No wonder many of the youngsters have grown up without discipline or the desire to have regular employment, seeking rather to live by their wits.

The role of the women in the tribe was well defined, and very different from that of women in the Western societies. What a profound change has resulted from their coming to the city. Today in Soweto the women play an increasingly important role in their own society and are potent agents of stability. Books such as "A Black Woman in Search of God" illustrate the stabilising force of the Manyano women. It is often the women who provide the stimulus in educating the children. In many households the women scrimp and scrape to find the funds to enable the children to acquire the knowledge they themselves never had. And what problems that often creates where the children may scorn the parents because of their illiteracy.

Making Ends Meet

On of the ever-present problems is that of making ends meet. Poverty in the rural areas was one thing because in the rural areas one shared what there was to share. In the city where cash is required to meet the month's rent—for with only one landlord one can find oneself on the street with nowhere else to go if the rent is in arrears—where food and clothing have to be bought at ever-increasing

prices, poverty is a nightmare, especially for the aged, the unemployed, the sick, the deserted wives with a crop of children to care for. These days of full employment and more adequate wages have helped enormously in relieving the hardships of a large part of the Soweto population, but it is a constant struggle, especially if the men spend their wages on clothes or gambling or at the municipal beerhalls or on their girl friends, without measuring up to their responsibility for the family they helped to create.

I have endeavoured to put to you

this melting pot into which people of varying tribal backgrounds, various levels of education, varying stages of civilization, have been thrown. What has been the outcome of this melting-pot process? The visitor to Soweto is impressed by the manner in which the houses are kept, by the gardens that have been made and by how neat the homes are inside. I can only marvel at the resilience, the good humour, the philosophical attitude and the good sense of the people in adapting themselves to what has happened.

(Continued on page 35)

The Newcastle Experiment

The appointment of a senior Ford executive as City Manager of Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, a post embracing the position of town clerk, while a new chief officer for the legal department is appointed to fill a role corresponding more or less with that of the clerk of the council in the Transvaal's new system, is as revolutionary in its sphere as was the appointment some years ago as headmaster of Rugby, one of England's greatest public schools, of Sir Arthur fforde, an attorney. The Newcastle appointment constitutes a break with tradition which is more than likely to have repercussions in South Africa and other Western countries with a broadly similar form of local government.

THE decision of Newcastle-on-Tyne (England) Corporation to appoint a chief officer at £8,000 (R16,000) a year, already referred to in these columns, has been the subject of interesting American comment. The Newcastle experiment puts into practical effect the role proposed for the town clerk of a city by the Treasury O. & M. team which reviewed the organization of Coventry Corporation (see "The Town Clerk at the Crossroads", a paper delivered to the 1962 conference of the Institute of Town Clerks).

Mr. Mark Keane, the City Manager of Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A., with a population of 250,000, recently visited Britain. He has the training typical of most U.S. city managers—public-administration qualifications followed by experience as an assistant manager. Mr. Keane, commenting on the Newcastle appointment, emphasised that the manager is essentially a co-ordinator. He feels that, from the standpoint of the city council and of the administrative staff, there is an obvious need for a co-ordinator who can say more than "let us sit down in Room 116 and have a

meeting to discuss a problem".

A local authority must have some officer who was vested with sufficient authority to require co-ordination at the administrative level. It was extremely difficult to get co-ordinated administration. Under the American system departmental heads are appointed by the city manager. He works in a team with the departmental heads. Normally he alone deals with the council and attends its meetings, though the specialists may be called in from time to time to report to the meeting. Officers who transfer to city manager towns welcome the time saved from attendance at meetings, Mr. Keane said.

Mr. Keane is this year's President of the International City Managers' Association (I.C.M.A.) whose executive director is Mr. Orin F. Nolting. He said that a recent I.C.M.A. survey had shown that 1,407 out of 1,783 managers had prior governmental experience of various kinds, and that a large proportion of these—880—had worked exclusively in local government, usually after taking a university degree in political science or public administration. Some two-

LIFE IN SOWETO

(Continued from page 23)

Skills Acquired

Who could have visualized some 30, 20, even 10 years ago the skills that would be acquired by these country folk? Who could have envisaged that there would be Bantu matrons at Baragwanath Hospital and a Hospital staffed with Bantu nurses? Who could have believed that municipal treasury officials would be Bantu; that the builders of houses, the bricklayers, the carpenters, the electrical wiremen, the plumbers and the drainlayers would be Black; that there would be Black building contractors; that they would be driving bulldozers; that they would acquire the skills for industry; that there would be elegant owner-built homes in a middle-class suburb; that there would be choirs who could sing Handel's Messiah in the City Hall; that there would be artists trained in the city's art centre in Polly Street capable of exhibiting works of art in London, Paris and New York?

Who would have believed, not 10 years ago, but three years ago, that the Central Government's action in making European liquor available to the Bantu would not result in an orgy of drunkenness and terror? The release of European liquor to the Bantu has improved the relationship with the police, who no longer have at all times to carry out the hated liquor raids.

Unacceptable and unenforceable laws breed disrespect for the law. The complicated pass laws and influx-control regulations impinge on the desired freedom of movement of most families in one way or another. In the minds of the Bantu the police are identified with the laws; and the niceties of difference between the makers of the law and those who have to carry them out are not recognised.

That all is not well we know. You cannot have a social upheaval such as we have had without somebody's being hurt; and it will take time and patience and understanding to heal the wounds caused by the destruction of one social order before another takes its place.

Bantu Beliefs

The beliefs of the Bantu: the concept of kinship; the belief in ancestral spirits; the belief in signs—in omens good and bad; the belief that one

can be bewitched and that one can bewitch one's enemy; the belief in the witch doctor's occult powers and in his medicines—these and many other beliefs are deeprooted and will be a part of Bantu thinking for a long time to come.

What have we tried to put in their place? Often the Natives' first contacts with White civilization were the missionaries. What dedicated men and women they were. To what extent have their sacrifices and self-dedication influenced Bantu life and morality today? A large proportion of the educated Bantu received their schooling at missions and church-affiliated institutions such as Lovedale, Fort Hare, Kilmerton, Adams College and Roma. While the churches have many hundreds of thousands of members and adherents, Christianity is by many regarded as the White man's religion and is therefore suspect. Was the behaviour of the White man towards them and were the laws of the White such as to create a desire to repose belief in the White man's God?

The Churches

Countless separatist churches—some put the number at over 2,000—have sprung up throughout South Africa. These vary from those having beliefs and a faith bearing a close resemblance to Christianity to those which are almost completely pagan. It is regrettable to have to say that the Christian church is finding it hard to penetrate to the core of the masses; and, among the more sophisticated, church affiliation is often for purposes of social status rather than for inherent belief backed by a standard of conduct.

A hopeful sign in a society where the class structure is emerging is that not only in South Africa, but in Africa as a whole, status is allied with the extent to which Western civilization has been attained. It was recently suggested that there should be an exhibition in Soweto at which tribal huts and impedimenta would be displayed and tribal costumes worn. The Bantu Advisory Boards would have none of it: they did not want the people to be reminded of their past.

In Soweto today various strata of society are emerging. These strata are based on the extent of education and the absorption of Western civilization. Possession of material goods is a symbol of success and status.

The better educated—the professional persons, the teachers, the shopkeepers, the nurses, the senior officials in administration, the entertainers—all these tend to form the uppercrust of society. Income and skills are important factors. In addition there are the labourers and the newcomers to town. There are church associations, choral societies, football clubs, school associations, chambers of commerce, advisory boards and many other organizations cutting right across ethnic grouping, and those activities determine a man's associates and place in the new society. Unfortunately, there are also the city slickers and spivs, the people who want to make money the easy way, not caring whom they rape or rob or how they maim. I often feel that today the greatest need in Soweto is to find some way of providing the law-abiding citizen with protection from the molestation of his fellows.

The urban dweller of today has travelled a long way on the path of material progress. His standard of living, his abilities, his outlook and that of his city-bred children are vastly different from those of yesterday. What of tomorrow? I see a further advance in that progress; but care must be taken that these abilities are given adequate outlets so that a mood of frustration is not allowed to develop. If that can be done then I have confidence in the future.

Round the Municipalities—2

(Continued from page 31)

Estcourt

THE following recommendations were recently adopted by Estcourt Town Council regarding capital expenditure for the financial year: sewerage, R21,000; road construction, R30,000; water reticulation R13,600; total spending R64,700.

Building plans to the value of R33,400 recently approved include a new hall for the Hindu community.

Naboomspruit

A COMMISSION of three under the chairmanship of Mr. Steyn van der Spuy, the chairman of the Transvaal's Local Government Advisory Board held a three-day enquiry into the affairs of the town at the beginning of this month.

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