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Whites Only  
to

Train Congestion

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Above: In a train about to leave the Johannesburg Station during the evening rush. Between seats, men and women form another two rows of squatters while others stand on the back of seats. Top right: When every inch of space in coaches and on steps is taken, workers crowd on to the narrow platform between coaches, some perching on handrails. Bottom: Africans call this clinging to windowledges and doorways "washing."



# Overcrowded Reef trains still threat to African lives

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HIRTEEN months ago, the "Rand Daily Mail" spotlighted the risk to limb and life taken every day by thousands of African commuters because of overcrowded trains.

The tale was told in a page of pictures which caused comment and concern throughout South Africa.

The problem—and the risk—is as great as ever today, as these pictures by Ernest Levi, show.

During peak morning periods alone, more than 136,000 Africans come in to Johannesburg by train from the sprawling south-western townships. As many again go back by train at night.

Trains meant to carry 2,000 passengers a time regularly pull in and out of the Johannesburg station with as many as 5,000 people.

## SOME CLING

Men and women are crushed in the stampede to get into the trains, where they are pinned into their positions by a solid wall of bodies.

Some cling precariously to steps and doorways — others crowd on to the tiny platforms between coaches.

Railway headquarters say that

their great problem is not a shortage of trains, but the necessity of educating the commuters to wait "a matter of minutes" for the next train.

"During peak periods, 70 trains run at intervals of 15 minutes from and to the south-western townships," said a spokesman yesterday.

"An extra four trains come in from the Reef areas — which brings the total up to 74 trains in four hours.

"We have spent R30m trying to bring the number up to the suburban demand. We're doing our level best. We've double-tracked — even quadrupled the tracks — all along the line.

"In the last six months we've

put 12 extra sets of coaches—each set has 11 coaches—into operation."

Between the New Canada junction — the half-way mark — and Johannesburg, trains run at intervals of about three minutes during peak traffic hours, he said.

"But many passengers simply insist on riding in a certain train and will not wait for the next, or catch one a little earlier—in spite of the discomfort."

The Railways, he said, realised that many Africans had to start work at the same time.

"We intend trying to interest large concerns and employers in staggering working hours, so that there will not be this concentrated rush. This would certainly be a solution."

Some 340,000 African passengers commute by train every day between Johannesburg and the township complex of Soweto, about 8 miles outside the city.

The same coming and going - on a lesser scale, since Johannesburg has the largest urban African population - takes place each day in ~~all~~<sup>many</sup> the cities of South Africa.

Government policy demands that the non-white people should live as far away as possible from the "white" residential and business areas in which they work.

Far enough to satisfy the cherished belief that they are not an intergral part of "White" city life ... ~~but~~ not so far as to effect their efficiency as a labour force.

trains.....2

Almost 80 per cent of the commuters to and from Soweto travel during the peak hours. They stream into offices, warehouses, factories and white homes each morning, and then stream back out of the town at night.

Hundreds of them risk their lives each day to clock-in on time. They ~~sit~~ cling to the doors of speeding coaches, find "seats" on the couplings between coaches, race down platforms after trains to gain a foothold on a runner.

And every year, on these lines alone, 150 of them loose their lives.

mf

trains.....3

Over-packed trains hold another terror - they are the hunting ground of thugs.

Railway police and inspectors do their best to control violence and robbery on the trains, but nimble thieves may hop on at one point and off at the next before they can be reached through the human crush.

Only a first-class - and more expensive - ticket gives much hope of a terror-free journey. Recently, because so many second-class commuters were seeking the protection of first-class carriages, the railways introduced a squad of "ghost conductors" - railway police in civvies or boiler suits - to weed them out and send them back to their crowded second-class quarters .

mf

trains....4

The nicety of "ladies first" is unknown on the Soweto trains. Elderly washerwoman with great loads balanced on their heads, smart young office workers, mothers carrying babies/... brash and brawny factory workers all must elbow and claw to find themselves a place.

ends.

## TRAIN OVERCROWDING

ROLL NO. 1

### Frame 5

What is called the blue train is a symbol of easy transportation for the few Whites who have seven coaches to themselves, whilst only three coaches are reserved for non-Whites, more than thrice the number of Whites in all seven coaches.

Whites are given first preference and the luxury of comfortable travelling despite their poor support for the railways.

### Frames 6 and 7

What is the duty of a train conductor? Is it not to see that everything is well before the train pulls off? Conductors do not care a damn for non-Whites. He just gives them a glance (Frame 6) and then looks away, nonchalantly blows the whistle and then the train moves off. Those not yet inside can wait for yet another overcrowded train.

### Frames 15, 16, 40- 43

After a long, long wait, the train arrives and there is a stampede by these thousands of Africans into the train. There are moans, groans, as the passengers push each other to get into the already overcrowded train and many are left behind. This is a typical sight at all Johannesburg stations and all other large cities where non-Whites have to ~~rely~~ <sup>depend</sup> on train transport.

### Frame 18

Safe inside. Well, let's see how the others are shaping on outside on the platform. "Will my friend be safe or my mother or my sister?" Let's hope they will.

### Frame 19

With an overcrowded train, there is nothing indecent about your making yourself comfortable in the lavatory.

The train pulls off and a batch of youngsters cling to the door handle while others crowd in the train lavatory.

### Frames 20 - 23.

The train is pulling out and the younger generation still rushing at it while others hang outside perilously. Quite a feat, yet they must get to work in good time, to earn their living.

### Frames 24, 29, 32 - 34

Heave-ho!! Press on! There is no time for gracious entrance to these trains. They only stop for a minute and then they are off.

Frame 25/.....

Sequence  
See Roll 4  
Frame 5, 6

Train overcrowding contd.

Frame 25

Oh no! I'll never get a chance to get in here. Perhaps I'd better try the other doors and if there is no luck, I guess I'll have to come back to this one again. But will there be enough time and will the train stop long enough?

Frames 26 - 28

Indeed, Non-Europeans Only! Thousands of them who have to suffer the inconvenience, irritation and fatigue forced on them by Government policy. These thousands of non-Whites are the mainstay of the South African Railways, but they are the ones who have to crowd in, in the trains in their nightmare journeys to and from work. They have no alternative but to use the trains - the South African Railways does not allow competition from private bus companies.

Frames 30 - 31

If you can't get into the coach, then stand on the couplings between coaches and you'll get to work in time. But take really good care lest you slip and .....

Frame 35

The older generation looks on in despair. They don't have enough energy to hustle amongst the younger ones. Theirs is to wait and wait and wait - But when do they get home to start preparing supper for their overstarved kids?

Frames 36 - 37

" And there was no room for them at the inn," from door to door they run, trying to get in; but it seems there will be no luck, its packed everywhere. How far will they still run and will they ever get into the train? Yet they must be at work in time.

Frame 38

Perched on the window frame of the door the young man is conducting an interesting conversation with his friend who is also seated on another window frame. There is no other way of conversing, seeing that the train is packed to capacity. The danger of the door swinging open is disregarded whilst the young man's life swings in the balance.

ROLL NO. 2

Frame 11

The train is bulging with human loads in so much that the doors can't even be closed, as there are people standing right at them. Whilst outside, some are clinging to the handles and windows.

Train overcrowding contd.

Frame 5, 6, 39 - 41

Mothers with babies on their backs have just to put up with the overcrowded train set-up. The men are just not interested in their plight. Its everybody for himself and God for us all. 6 tying the baby tight lest it falls off in the struggle.

Frames 19 - 23

Only the fittest and the strongest manage to squeeze through, the weakest pushed aside. That's the way Johannesburg's African workers board their trains from the townships to the city and from the city to the townships every morning and evening, for more than ten years now. Third Class passengers and yet first class customers.

Frame 24 - 32

Because of the rush, to get to work in the mornings and home in the evenings, respect for ladies is disregarded as both men and women have to struggle to get into the already overcrowded trains, as they only stop for a minute and then they are off again.

Frame 35 - 37

Graceful entrance into the train is a thing unknown to Africans as they press-on through the narrow doors of the overcrowded train.

Frame 43 - See Roll No. 1 Frame 5.

Frame 44 - 3

As there is no room for them, in the train youngsters jump through the lavatory window just to get that train to work.

ROLL NO. 3

Frame 1

An unfortunate lady finds herself sandwiched between two strongly built men. The one man sympathises with her, but then there is nothing that he can do. The train is simply overcrowded, and how she'll get off is only known to the devil.

Frames 2,40,41,43,35 - 39,23,24,10 - 14

A thick mass of humanity in the evening train. Morning or evening its all the same. The Minister of Transport calls them the best customers of the railways. But how does he treat his best customers? They are crowded like sardines.

Frames 28 - 32, 25 - 27/.....

Train overcrowding contd.

Frames 28 - 32, 25 - 27

Balancing is important - especially when you are, somewhat, hanging in the air. The old man with his coat, probably torn in all the struggles, clings to the ceiling, just to maintain balance. Otherwise he'll be trampled to death, should he lose his balance.

Frame 42.

These men have just got to hold tight and force the crowd back with their backs, lest they get squashed against the wall. They'll have to maintain that pose for balance, until they get off, if they still want to be alive.

ROLL NO. 4

Frame 5

3 A non-stop train roars past the station in terrific speed whilst young men hang outside and cling on to the sides. A young man hangs and actually taps his feet on the platform as the train is passing by. This is nothing unusual and the young men derive fun from this perilous feat. After all they are travelling it "The African way".

Frame 6

2 The train has gathered speed and the young men are still dangling outside. They hang on like this for 22 miles, right through Winter and Summer rains. Whilst the train travels at anything up to 60 m.p.h; hats, caps and shoes are lost, but it doesn't matter as long as they get home in one piece.

Frames 14 - 16

After a whole day's hard work, overcrowding in the trains, battling to get out, battling to queue in order to show your ticket at the gate which makes it all a nightmare, Africans still have to walk up to 3 miles to get home. The few that can afford it pay a threepence each way on the bus. But as the majority of Africans earn starving wages, they have to walk all that distance.

Frame 17 - 25

Seeing that the platform is so crowded that one hardly gets a chance to get to work in time, one can always attack the train from the wrong side of the platform and only hope there wont be any other train coming from the wrong direction.

Frames 13 - 15

The train has hardly stopped and the masses have already jumped off rushing towards the exit to show their tickets at the gates. Those who can't run fast enough, have to queue for about thirty minutes before they can reach the gate, where the barrier attendants are waiting to examine their train tickets - There are only four barrier attendants, two at each gate, hardly enough for these big crowds.

Sequence

Train overcrowding Contd.

Frame 16 - 17

A dense crowd of Africans moving slowly up the narrow bridge in order to show their tickets to the barrier attendants at the gate and because each barrier can only attend to one person at a time, the procession through the gates drags on very slowly and really taxes one's patience.

ROLL NO. 5

Frame 25 - 29

The plight of the passengers who managed to get into the train is not yet over. Inside the train one might get the impression that there are no seats, whereas seats are plentiful, save for the fact that they are overswamped by the milling crowd - men and women all stand on seats, as there is no room on the floor. The tall ones might alight with sore necks.

Frame 15 See Roll No. 1 20 - 23.

Frame 16 See Roll No. 1 30 - 31

Frame 17

You might think that the young men are circus acrobats, or a swarm of bees, whereas they are merely trying to get that particular train that gets them to work in good time.

Frame 7, 8, 9

The train is so crowded that you can hardly find a place to hold on to for balance. So many hands and everyone is just trying to reach that seat for a firm grip.

Frame 2

Mothers with babies on their backs just have to try and cope with the set-up. Their babies suffocate in the congestion, some babies die; many expectant mothers get miscarriages through all the battling - yet they cannot manage to stay home because the fathers earn a starving wage.

Frames 3 and 5

There is no room for luggage and the old lady has to carry the heavy suitcase on her head for the whole 22 miles journey home in the congested train. Then she has to battle to get off the train and walk three miles before she can get home - where her overstarved kids are waiting for her to prepare their supper.