

THE ISLAND

Robben Island, off-shore from Cape Town, is a penal colony. ~~All the~~ ^{from all over South Africa & Namibia} Black political prisoners are sent there.

Mac Maharaj was on the island for 12 years, Indries Naidoo for ten. Recently they came to London, and talked about life on Robben Island.

Over the years conditions changed. Overt brutality, torture and mass assaults were a common feature of life on the island during the 60's. Pressure from the prisoners, and from people inside South Africa and in other countries, including the United Nations, brought changes. The prisoners used every means, including hunger strikes, when a number were charged with 'endangering their own health' and given additional months on their sentences.

MAC: There is now a less open, more damaging, form of cruelty. More and more we are cut off completely from the outside world, even from family and friends. I once received a letter where all that was left was the address of the sender and the words 'My dear Mac', and after that there were just windows where the writing had been cut away, the gaps between what had been paragraphs held the whole piece together, and at the end, there was the signature of the sender. The entire letter had been cut away. But that counted as a letter received when I was only allowed one every six months.

Letters that go out don't appear to have been censored. They make us re-write them leaving out certain sections and if after the second or third time they are not satisfied, they won't send it. But the letters we receive - they just use the scissors.

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Political prisoners are not allowed news of any kind, no newspapers, or magazines with news, no letters that contain anything other than family matters; no radio. Visits are harshly supervised and any remark other than purely family affairs will terminate the visit. A visitor may not say: There's been an earthquake in Iran, or an election in England, or a new President in the United States. The isolation from the world must be total.

The Prison Act places an obligation on the authorities to keep a prisoner in contact with his family and the Commandant has power to inform prisoners of what is happening to their families.

MAC: But they don't inform you. Nelson had a rough time when his wife Winnie was arrested. Last year Walter (Sisulu) went to the Commanding Officer and said he wanted permission to write to his wife to find out if his daughter had been detained. The answer was: You show me how you got news that your daughter was detained. They wouldn't let his letter go. This can be a killing kind of anxiety, you worry, what has happened to your wife, what has happened to your children. It builds up tremendous tensions.

When my wife Tim visited me she told me she was leaving the country on an exit permit. I asked the CO, as she is leaving, please let me combine my next three or four letters (each letter is limited to 500 words) so I can deal with all sorts of problems, misunderstandings, between us, and let it pass the censors. He said, Yes, it was OK. I wrote a 5-page letter and was assured it had been sent. All those years I believed she had received it - until I came here. Yes, she had received bits and pieces, all cut up. She never knew what I had written.

The prisoners are housed in different, separated sections. There are about 40 single-cell prisoners, including leading people like Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki; each cell is 7' x 7'6", opening onto a yard. Single-cell prisoners may never work near or speak to those kept in the communal cells. The communal cells are also divided into sections: one for general prisoners, a separate section for those convicted under the Terrorism Act; ^{another} ~~a separate~~ section for prisoners from Namibia; and now a fourth section, for those recently sentenced, obviously to prevent long-term prisoners from hearing any news from outside. Mac was in a single-cell, Indries in a communal cell.

INDRIES: We were 80 to 90 in one large cell that officially should only take 25. We tried to maintain the utmost discipline. We formed a committee, but this was declared

illegal. We were not allowed to speak on behalf of others. When we made complaints it had to be 'I', but still we said 'We.' They wouldn't listen to us.

We never forgot for one moment what was the purpose that had brought us to prison. We came from different organisations, but we had to learn to stand together as prisoners.

The long years of isolation on the island could be made endurable by work and study. But study was used as a weapon of punishment, and the work was in itself punishment.

MAC: In the single ~~xxxxxx~~ cells our first job was knapping stones with a 4-lb hammer. Every day we were taken from our cells into the enclosed yard, and there we sat in the same place week after week. We never saw the outside world, never a blade of grass, just the quadrangle into which our cells led and a patch of sky. We objected to the work, and eventually we were sent to work in the lime quarry, pick and shovel and wheel-barrows. We worked there for eight years, although we were told it would be only for a short while. In the end the Commissioner gave an undertaking to the Red Cross that he would stop this work, and the following year he solemnly informed them the work had stopped. That was in 1967 and 68, but we were in the quarries until 1973. Then they sent us to a selected place out of sight of the other prisoners to collect seaweed, and this alternated with spells in the quarry.

INDRIES: For the first five years the majority of us worked in the quarries. We had to break stones, and to fulfil a certain quantity of work each day; if not, we were punished at the weekend by the deprivation of three meals.

In the first few years many of us had this punishment. I for one was never able to fulfil my quota, it was impossible. Others helped, or I stole from yesterday's stones.

By 1971 the quarries were flooding, they were now below sea-level. So we were employed bringing stones from the quarries to the-prison yard itself. Now quarry work is supposed to be only a form of punishment.

Study became almost more necessary than food. By a ruling of Justice Diemont in 1973, study, together with smoking, games and sport were regarded as 'comforts' or 'mere privileges' and not necessities. They were absolutely in the discretion of the authorities.

For the better-educated in particular and for the single-cell men who spent long hours alone in their cells, study was a total necessity, a means of keeping sane.

But there ~~were~~^{are} arbitrary rules. No post-graduate studies ~~were~~^{are} permitted - a tantalising restriction on professional men. In the field of under-graduate studies, all law subjects ~~were~~^{are} prohibited, science and political science, all foreign languages, even some South African languages. There ~~were~~^{are} prohibitions on various types of diplomas, restrictions on some specific colleges, only prescribed (and not 'recommended') books permitted, and these often held back for weeks or months or totally. And money for studies may only come from the next-of-kin - from nobody else.

All prisoners are graded A,B,C, or D. D is the lowest category, with fewest privileges, one letter and one visit every six months. It becomes every three months in C, and so on up the scale. Only the political prisoners go inevitably into D and stay there for years. Eventually after years of protest and struggle, the authorities began to promote prisoners. But this in itself became a means of punishment. The disciplinary rules are complex, but there are more than 20 categories of insubordination including disrespect, negligence at work, conversing without permission, singing, whistling, lodging a false or frivolous complaint, acting in any way contrary to good order and discipline. Punishment could be solitary confinement, spare diet, corporal punishment, together with demotion into a lower category. But if you were demoted for any reason, then you lost the right to study.

MAC: They knew how important our studies were to us. There seemed always to be an excuse - some trivial offence, you were charged, sentenced, then you would be deprived of your studies

for the rest of the year. Particularly when it came to examination time, this seemed to happen. So you lost 200 to 300 rand in fees, and couldn't write your exam.

There were always tremendous difficulties in getting prescribed books. Sometimes a book would arrive, was approved and passed by the censor, but just held back. Then another year would pass before you could write your exam.

One chap had the Oxford Dictionary taken from him because he could not prove it was a prescribed book for his course.

South Africa's prison regulations lay down different scales of rations for the various racial groups, and between males and females in each category. Coloured and Indian prisoners had a ration of bread each day. Before 1972 Africans were not given any bread, and after that the total ration was 112g twice a week. Indians had a ration of jam or syrup and 60g of sugar each day; Africans, no jam or syrup and a sugar ration of 45g.

MAC: Racial discrimination in the prison is its most humiliating aspect. They give you different clothes, different diet. But on the island we were all blacks, we lived together, we suffered together, we worked together, we were even in the same cells together - but still there is discrimination. We sit in the quadrangle eating the same meal, side by side, but I have a full tablespoon of sugar on my porridge, and the African next to me only a half. I am given bread every day, he is given only a soft, watery pap - for years the Africans were not permitted to have bread. But it was illegal for me to share one speck of sugar or my piece of bread with my African comrade.

In winter we were given long trousers, shoes and socks and a felt hat. The Africans had open sandals, no socks and shorts all the year round (NB. Long trousers are now being issued to them.)

You are there, side by side. You come under the same lash. But then there is this terrible discrimination - no one can conceive how bitter it is. I felt that prison was a mirror of South African society. It was like a miniature sculpture -

the pores and minor blemishes are no longer visible, but the bone structure remains. A person can't go to prison without getting a greater insight into our society as a whole.

I regard it as a privilege to have been in prison. I never knew our rulers and people before. Every warder, every official is white. This was the first time for me, as a black man, that I had whites with me day in and day out, on an ordinary level. I came to understand our enemy. In prison I had to learn Afrikaans to understand what they said. I realised the importance of learning Afrikaans history, of reading Afrikaans literature, of trying to understand the ordinary young men, the warders, the white elite - all whites are elite in South Africa, - with whom we were dealing; how they are indoctrinated, how they react. They all have a blank wall in their minds. They could not see the black man as a human being.

I saw that we had to fight to overthrow this system, and that it cannot be done by peaceful means, That you cannot ~~modify~~ humanize apartheid by ~~small~~ modifications. It must be overthrown by force of arms. Not one organisation whose members have passed through prison believe that change can come by peaceful means.

Yet in a sense I became more tolerant of people. I came to realise we each have our weak points. When you work as a collective then you must cultivate your strong points, but it doesn't happen on its own, it happens because of your colleagues.

This is what I personally treasure about my twelve years on the island. I have no regrets for those twelve years. It was a privilege to spend it with men I respect and who helped me. That is the secret of our survival.

ends

THE ISLAND

Hilda Bernstein

'It was cold in winter, with the fog low over the island, and the south-easter blowing across the bay.'

Cape Town's winter south-easter can make you cling to railings, can toss cabs across streets. Robben Island, a rocky outcrop at the entrance to Cape Town's beautiful harbour, is a penal colony. Black political prisoners from all over South Africa and from Namibia are sent there.

Mac Maharaj was on the island for twelve years, Indries Naidoo for ten. I knew them both before they went to jail. Recently they were in London and talked of life on the island.

Over the years conditions changed. Overt brutality, torture and mass assaults were a common feature of life on the island during the 60's. But protests and action from the prisoners themselves, from people inside South Africa and in other countries, including the United Nations and the Red Cross, brought changes. The prisoners even used hunger strikes to try and end brutal treatment; a number were charged with 'endangering their own health' and given additional sentences.

MAC: Physical conditions improved, but in other respects there is increased severity and deprivation, and intensified efforts to demoralise the men. More and more we are cut off completely from the outside world, even from family and friends. I once received a letter where all that was left was the address of the sender. The entire letter had been cut away, the gaps between what had been paragraphs held the whole piece together, and at the end there was the signature of the sender. But that counted as a letter received, when I was only allowed one every six months.

At first they cut letters going out of Robben Island in the same way. But now they make it seem as though they have not been censored. They make us re-write them leaving out certain

sections, and if after the second or thrid time they are not satisfied, they won't send it. But the letters we receive - they just use the scissors.

In South African jails political prisoners are not permitted to have news of any kind - no newspapers or magazines with news, no letters that contain anything other than persobal family matters; no radio. Visits are harshly supervised and any remark other than purely family affairs will terminate the visit. A visitor may not say: There's been an earthquake in Iran, for an election in England, or a new President in the United States. The isolation from the world must be total. INDRIES: It is being deprived of all news, the isolation from world events, that we on the Island find very hard to take. And when you're not even allowed to know what is happening to members of your own family we had years of time to worry. Indres' sister Shanti was detained in solitary confinement for more than a year, deprived of sleep and interrogated continuously for three days and nights until she suffered hallucinations then brought to court as a witness in a case involving Winnie Mandela and others. Shanti refused to testify against her friends, was sent back to jail, but eventually was released and now she lives in London.

The Naidoo home in Johannesburg, a rambling old house, was crammed with extended family and political activists. T.N. Naidoo, the father of Indres and Shanti, was an adopted son of Mahatma Gandh. Ama Naidoo, the other, looked after young and old, the celebrated, the unknown, of all races. Hospitality was extended to all. Now the house is silent, the family is scattered.

The Prisons Act places an obligation on the authorities to keep a prisoner in contact with his family, and the Commandant has power to inform prisoners of what is happening to the ir families.

MAC: But they don't inform you. Nelson (Mandela) had a rough

time when his wife Winnie was arrested. He knew nothing of the trials; it was nearly two years before she was permitted to visit him again. Last year Walter (Sisulu) asked the Commanding Officer for permission to write to his wife to find out if his daughter had been detained. (This was during the children's revolt in Soweto). The answer was: You show me how you got news that your daughter was detained. They wouldn't let the letter go. This can be a killing kind of anxiety, you worry, what has happened to your wife, what has happened to your children. It builds up tremendous tensions.

When my wife Tim visited me she told me she was leaving the country on an exit permit. I then asked the CO, as she is leaving, please let me combine my next three or four letters (each letter is limited to 500 words) so I can deal with all sorts of problems, misunderstandings, between us. He said Yes, it was OK. I wrote a 5-page letter and was assured it had been sent. All those years I believed she had received it and perhaps understood . . . until I came here. Yes, she had received bits and pieces of my letter, all cut up. She never knew what I had really wanted her to know.

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The prisoners are on the island are housed in different, separate sections. There are about 40~~x~~ single-cell prisoners, including all the leading people like Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki; each cell is 7' x 7'6", opening onto a yard. Single-cell prisoners may never work near or speak to those kept in the communal cells. These large cells are in turn divided into sections: One for general prisoners; a separate section for those convicted under the Terrorism Act; another section for prisoners from Namibia, who are not allowed to have any contact with South African prisoners; and now a fourth communal section, for those recently sentenced (there has been a spate of political trials) obviously to prevent the long-term prisoners from hearing news from outside. Mac was in a single-cell, Indries in a communal cell.

INDRIES: We were 80 or 90 in a cell built for no more than 25. We tried to maintain the utmost discipline. We formed a committee but this was declared illegal. We were never allowed to speak on behalf of others. When we made a complaint it had to be 'I', but still we said 'We'. Then they wouldn't listen to us. We never forgot for one moment what was the purpose that had brought us to prison. We came from different organisations, but we had to learn to stand together as prisoners.

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Long years of isolation on the island could be made endurable only by work and study. But the work in itself was a punishment, and study became a weapon used wilfully by the prison authorities.

MAC: In the single cells our first job was knapping stones with a 4-lb hammer. Every day we were taken from our cells into the enclosed yard, and there we sat in the same place week after week. We never saw the outside world, never a blade of grass, just the quadrangle into which our cells led, and a patch of sky. We were spaced out, never permitted to speak.

We objected to the work, and eventually we were sent to work in the lime quarry, pick and shovel and wheelbarrows. We worked there for eight years, although we had been told it was only for a short time. In the end, the Commissioner gave an undertaking to the Red Cross that he would stop this work; the following year he solemnly informed them it had been stopped. That was in 1967 and 68 - but we were in the quarries until 1973. Then they sent us to a selected place, out of sight of the other prisoners, to collect seaweed, and this alternated with spells in the quarry.

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only a form of punishment.

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Study became almost more necessary than food. By a court ruling in 1973, study, together with smoking, games and sport, were regarded as 'comforts' or 'mere privileges', and not as necessities. This meant they were absolutely at the discretion of the authorities who soon understood the importance of study to their literate prisoners.

For the single-cell men in particular, and the better-educated, study was a total necessity, a means of keeping sane.

But there are arbitrary rules. No post-graduate studies are permitted - a tantalising restriction on professional men. In the field of under-graduate studies, all law subjects are prohibited, as ~~xx~~^{are} science and political science, all foreign languages, even some South African languages. There are prohibitions on various types of diplomas, restrictions on some specific colleges, only prescribed (and not 'recommended') books permitted, and these often held back for weeks or months or totally. And money for studies may not come from friends in South Africa or abroad, only from the next-of-kin.

All prisoners are in one of four grades, A being the highest, D the lowest category. In D there are few privileges and one letter may be received and written and one visit, every six months. In C it becomes three months, and so on up the scale. Even murderers are not automatically graded D - but all political prisoners are 'D'; they stay there for years - some for their whole time in prison. Eventually, after years of protest and struggle, the authorities began to promote them, but then this became a new punishment. The disciplinary rules are complex but there are more than 20 categories of insubordination including disrespect, negligence at work, conversing without permission, singing, whistling, lodging a false or frivolous complaint, acting in a way contrary to good order and discipline. Punishment can be solitary confinement, spare diet, corporal punishment, together with demotion into a lower category. But if demoted, for any reason, you lost the right to study.

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seemed to be an excuse - some trivial offence; you were charged, sentenced, then deprived of studies for the rest of the year. Particularly when it came to examination time this seemed to happen. So you lost 200 to 300 rand in fees and couldn't write your exams.

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South African prison regulations lay down different scales of rations for the various racial groups, and between males and females in each category. Coloured and Indian prisoners have a ration of bread each day. Before 1972, Africans were not given any bread, and now their total bread ration is 112g twice weekly. Indians have a ration of jam or syrup and 60g of sugar each day; Africans, no jam or syrup, and a sugar ration of 45g.

MAC: Racial discrimination in the prison is its most humiliating aspect. They give you different clothes, different diet. But on the island we were all blacks, we lived together, we worked together, we suffered together, we were even in the same cells together - but still there is this discrimination. We sit in the quadrangle eating the same meal, side by side; but I have a full tablespoon of sugar on my porridge and the African next to me only a half; I am given bread every day, he is given only a soft, watery pap (a porridge made from cornmeal) - for years the Africans were not permitted even a scrap of bread. But it was illegal for me to share one speck of sugar or my piece of bread with my African comrade.

In winter we were given long trousers, shoes and socks and a felt hat. The Africans had open sandals, no socks and shorts all the year round. (NB: Long trousers are now being issued to them.) You are there, side by side. You come under the same lash. But then there is this terrible discrimination - no one can conceive

how bitter it is, no one. I felt that prison was a mirror of South African society. It was like a miniature sculpture - the pores and minor blemishes are no longer visible, but the bone structure remains. A person can't go to prison without getting a greater insight into our society as a whole.

I regard it as a privilege to have been in prison. I never knew our rulers and people before. Every warder, every official is white. This was the first time for me, as a black man, that I had whites with me day in and day out, on an ordinary level. I came to understand our enemy. In prison I had to learn Afrikaans to understand what they said. I realised the importance of learning Afrikaans history, of reading Afrikaans literature, of trying to understand these ordinary young men, the warders, the white elite - all whites are elite in South Africa - with whom we were dealing; how they are indoctrinated, how they react. They all have a blank wall in their minds. They just could not see the black man as a human being.

I saw that we had to fight to overthrow this system, and that it cannot be done by peaceful means, that you cannot humanize apartheid by modifications or by cosmetic changes. It must be overthrown by force of arms. Not one of us who passed through prison, whatever our previous beliefs, came out believing that change can come by peaceful means.

Yet in a sense I also became more tolerant. I came to realise that we each have our weak points. When you work as a collective then you must cultivate your strong points, but it doesn't happen on its own, it happens because of your colleagues.

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ends.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RHODESIA - CAN THEY WORK?

by Hilda Bernstein.

What is happening in Rhodesia? It is fifteen months since Ian Smith, leader of the Rhodesia Front, made his unilateral declaration of independence - UDI. For months, Rhodesia was headline news in the British press. After the meeting between Smith and Harold Wilson on HMS Tiger, there were debates in the British Parliament, two Government White Papers, plus millions of words of speculation and comment. Then the storm died down. The Security Council has ordered member nations of the United Nations to state what they are doing about mandatory sanctions. Yet majority rule in Rhodesia looks as far away as it has ever been.

The United States, Japan and Italy have each taken action to comply with the UN resolution. Zambian imports from Rhodesia have been cut by a third and petroleum completely. France is drafting a decree to make sanctions compulsory, although the French firm of Boussac has just concluded ^{£2m} a barter deal involving the exchange of textiles for Rhodesian tobacco, and further barter deals with France are probably being negotiated. Switzerland (although not a member nation) has told the UN that because of its traditional neutrality it could not impose mandatory economic sanctions against Rhodesia. However, the Berne Government has stated it will maintain and strengthen economic measures taken in December, 1965, aimed at preventing Rhodesia from using Switzerland to tunnel its exports into Western Europe. They will see that Rhodesian imports do not exceed the average for the past three years.

Apart from South Africa and Mozambique, West Germany is the only other major trading partner still offering a sizeable crack in the imposition of sanctions. For West Germany has breached the sanctions barrier with a decision not to cancel existing trade contracts between Germany and Rhodesia. The decision, announced at the beginning of February, will save Rhodesia's ~~vital~~ chrome, asbestos and base minerals industries and provide up to £10m. a year in vital foreign exchange for several years (the existing contracts are for five years).

Not only does this decision given the base metal mining industry a most valuable trade pipeline through the sanctions ring, but it also goes far to destroy the confidence of other countries in the imposition of sanctions, and to encourage international business generally to seek ways of continuing trade with Rhodesia.

It is on South Africa, however, that the maintenance of the existence of the Smith regime depends. And South Africa's stability and prosperity is dependent upon Britain and the United States. By examining the relationship between Rhodesia and South Africa the ambivalent role of Britain and the US is exposed.

During the first 11 months of 1966 although South Africa's imports fell by an overall figure of about 8 per cent, those from African territories (including Rhodesia - there is no breakdown of African countries) rose by nearly 19 per cent. An examination of South Africa's trade figures strongly suggests that at least £15m extra was spent on imports from Rhodesia during 1966. South Africa's motive is not only political; it is sound business. The Republic has certainly been buying Rhodesian goods at keen prices and absorbing them into the home market, thus freeing a larger slice of her own domestic production for export at rather better price levels.

For example, South Africa's own tobacco crop fell slightly short of ~~and~~domestic demand in 1966, yet the country exported far more than usual under the classification 'tobacco and beverages.' The inference is that South Africans are smoking a larger percentage of Rhodesian tobacco than in previous years, while much of South Africa's own crop has been earning foreign exchange. Probably a similar situation has taken place with asbestos and copper.

During the first 9 months of 1966, South Africa's trade with all African countries was running at a rate 30 per cent higher than the previous year. Although some of this undoubtedly reflects expanding trade with some African countries (Malawi is one), the big increase is believed to reflect South African support for Rhodesia.

At the same time sanctions have severely harmed the Rhodesian economy, although it is not easy to determine to what extent.

Commerce remains in reasonably good shape, reports one South African newspaper, the property market is bouyant, industry is patchy and mining is weathering sanctions. Agriculture is the tender spot. A South African newspaper displayed a banner headline: WHERE THE TOBACCO WENT - Bulk of crop still in the country; with a story from Bulawayo that the Smith regime, while assuring the world that sanctions were not working, was hiding about 160 million pounds of tobacco in stores throughout the country. One pictured was at Belvedere, a disused airfield near Salisbury, where the tobacco was secreted in a hangar. Rhodesia's tobacco crop last year was 240 million pounds, of which only 80 million were sold. The real trouble will come when the new crop comes on to the market. There are about 5,000 white farmers in Rhodesia, half in tobacco, the rest in beef and maize. The farmers form the backbone of the Smith regime, and continue to back the Smith regime, although three quarters of them are irretrievably in debt. Mandatory sanctions will worsen their position, but the immediate result is likely to be an increasing migration from Rhodesia southwards. After all, the white farmer and his family need only drive 400 miles to safeguard his ideas of White civilisation and his high standard of living - the two things that matter most to him. For many it is even easier - they are Afrikaners, returning to their fatherland. As conditions of life become less attractive this draining away of Whites to South Africa will increase. The Rhodesian Front leaders are aware of this and have estimated that an exodus of up to 25 per cent would be tolerable.

But it was on oil sanctions that the British Government pinned its expression of belief in the downfall of the Smith regime, and oil ^sanctions have proved the most ineffective of all. Rhodesia's oil consumption is only 5 per cent of South Africa's, there should not be much difficulty in maintaining the supply. South Africa is taking spectacular steps to ensure an adequate ^a supply of oil, regardless of how sanctions are applied. The programme, given highest priority, was originally designed in response to the general threat of possible sanctions to South Africa over such questions as South West Africa. It involves the expansion of South Africa's own tanker fleet to make it independent of foreign carriers; coupled with a

massive project for vast storage tanks and the building of a new £18m. oil refinery. The signing of a contract with Iran for the supply of 1½-million tons of crude oil was reported in December. In addition, British and American oil companies with refineries in South Africa are reported to be importing 5.6 million gallons of crude oil a day , well in excess of consumption.

There is also the possibility of importing oil from Angola, where Petrofina of Belgium is in partnership with the Portuguese Government, and where oil production is rising; and in the longer term, South Africa's search for oil on its own territory which has attracted the British, American and French oil giants.

If Britain could crush the Smith rebellion without clashing with her interests in South Africa, she would. But it cannot be done. Thus the British Government is verbally pledged to bring the illegal regime down, while unable to take the necessary steps against the country that is virtually an economic dependency of South Africa. White supremacy has consolidated itself in Southern Africa. Majority rule for Rhodesia can now only be achieved when the whole area is liberated. Mandatory sanctions may cause the Rhodesian economy to bleed, but South Africa can supply enough transfusions to keep the Smith regime alive.

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THE BREACH IN THE APARTHEID WALL

South Africa's colour-bar laws crumble on the economic front.

By Hilda Bernstein

The doctrine of apartheid in South Africa is shattering itself in the one field where hard facts and the basic laws of life apply -- in the economic field. Socially, culturally, in education, administration and justice, apartheid flourishes as never before. But when the theories of apartheid come up against the functioning of economic laws, then theories must give way. This is exactly what is happening today.

An industrial boom has brought full employment with a shortage of skilled labour in many sectors, highlighting the contradictions and absurdities of the whole apartheid structure. With the labour shortage comes the realisation that the government policy of job reservation -- a kingpin in the apartheid structure -- is collapsing completely.

Job reservation is the reserving of certain jobs in various industries for particular races; in practice it reserves skilled and semi-skilled jobs for Whites only, to the exclusion of other racial groups, meaning in fact that the positions left open for non-Whites are those that the Whites do not want: the unskilled, unpleasant tasks.

With the industrial boom it has long been obvious that there are not enough skilled White workers to fill the available jobs in either the public or the private sectors of the economy. The critical labour shortage is illustrated by unemployment figures among Whites; at the end of last October there were 5,572 unemployed Whites, but at the same time there were more than 35,000 vacant jobs for White workers. The Transvaal Chamber of Industries estimates there will be a shortfall of 50,000 workers in manufacturing, engineering and building industries this year; the building industry estimates

a 10 per cent shortage. In the public service the shortage is more acute; the Post Office is threatened with a breakdown as its experienced workers leave to take more lucrative jobs in private industry. The retarding effects of chronic shortage of labour are not peculiar to South Africa; what is peculiar is the colour-bar structure in industry that intensifies the shortage.

Consequently in the private sector employers have for a long time been failing to comply with job reservation. To avoid serious economic breakdown, industrialists are employing Africans in 'reserved' jobs, and this infiltration of Africans into semi-skilled and skilled jobs is mounting steadily. A leading industrialist stated that he could not stick rigidly to government legislation. "We have no option but to relax it. However, we are not keen to reveal just what we are doing in this regard. Official statistics bear this out; in a period of 6 months there were 78,000 new jobs available; of these, 60,000 were filled by Africans, 9,000 by other non-Whites, and 9,000 by Whites.

About two-thirds of all workers in the six main employment categories are Africans. According to the Bureau of Statistics in Pretoria, there was an all-race total of 1,900,000 persons employed last September in mining, manufacturing, construction, railways, Post Office and quarrying. Of these about 1,200,000 were Africans, 460,000 Whites, and 233,000 were Asians and half-castes. In manufacturing, Africans outnumber Whites by 2 to 1, in construction by 3 to 1, and in mining by about 8 to 1.

Thus the apartheid wall has been increasingly breached over a considerable period. But the biggest break came recently when the powerful all-White Artisans Staff Association of the South African Railways announced that it had accepted the principle that non-Whites would have to do

certain jobs at present reserved for Whites in order to meet the manpower shortage -- a fact long recognised in practice in the private sector of the economy. In the public service the colour barrier has in fact already been breached in several places. Coloured postmen are employed in Pretoria -- the very citadel of White supremacy. The colour barrier is crumbling in those places where White supremacists hold complete sway; the electricity department of the reactionary municipality of the town of Paarl is the latest. And rivet-heating and coach-washing on the railways (formerly jobs for Whites only) are now being done by non-Whites.

Commenting on this, a Johannesburg newspaper, the Star, states: "By consenting to the employment of non-Whites to do work hitherto reserved for Whites . . . the Artisan Staff Association is bowing to the inevitable and inexorable laws of economics." As more Africans move up to skilled and better-paid jobs, they call it 'bowing to the inevitable'. But before bowing, desperate efforts have been made to obtain White workers from overseas, at all costs and at absurd lengths. The Railways decided to fly White shunters from Britain to alleviate the critical labour position at Durban harbour, at the same time that an estimated 15,000 Indians in Durban are in need of work. The absurdities and cruelties of apartheid and job reservation have never been more clearly shown than through this. Durban harbour handles more traffic than all the other South African ports put together; it is on the verge of a breakdown through labour shortage; thousands of Durban Indians are poverty-stricken and desperately in need of work, and perfectly capable of doing the work -- yet the job of shunting is closed to them. Indians are employed on the Railways in Natal and can go as high as a 'shunter's assistant', but the Minister of Labour is adamant in refusing to let them become shunters! The point is that if

you admit Indians or Africans to such a job, at some stage they have to give order to White engine-drivers, and in the absurd world of colour-bar in South Africa, this would be considered 'subversive'.

Private industrialists are naturally more realistic. "Political issues cannot hold back economic progress," states the president of the Natal Chamber of Industries, and industrialists quietly lower colour barriers and hope the government will be tactful enough not to intervene.

The shortage goes all the way up to top levels. The search for professional and technical personnel for State and Provincial departments has become so urgent that the Transvaal and Cape are sending recruiting missions overseas, while Natal has decided to establish a permanent recruiting office in London.

Others have different methods of solving the labour problem. As a result of^a critical labour shortage in the Western Cape, farmers are clamouring for more farm jails. (African prisoners are sent to such jails, usually built by local farmers, and then hired out to work on the farms under prison supervision.) The value of farms which possess prison labour quotas -- the right to employ certain quotas of prisoners -- has soared to record levels. Those wishing to seel their farms now advertise their prison labour quota as an added inducement to the purchaser.

The farm labour shortage in the Western Cape used to be seasonal, but it has become chronic. Prison labour is brought from other Provinces. Yet at the same time, the Government is proceeding with its plan to remove all African labour from the Western Cape, so that the anomalous position has arisen that while Africans are being forced out of the Cape to the Transkei, farmers are travelling 1,000 miles in lorries to recruit and bring back labour from the Transvaal.

White trade unionists are becoming concerned over the breaching of the economic labour barrier and are demanding the "rate for the job" to protect skilled wage standards, recognising the danger to White workers if different wages are paid to different races for doing the same job. An employer is not likely to want to replace an African doing skilled work at a lower rate of pay for a White skilled worker when he is looking for a job. This is precisely what job reservation is designed to do -- safeguard jobs for Whites. All it means is that when labour is plentiful no African can remain in a job if there is a White to replace him. It gives priority to Whites when jobs are scarce. Therefore the breach in the apartheid wall on the economic front is intended only as a temporary measure of expediency because of the current boom.

The Minister of Bantu Administration, Mr. De Wet Nel, describes African labour as 'borrowed' by the Whites, the basic principles of the labour pattern of apartheid being that "the White man must be secured and protected in his own area" (that is, in the 87 per cent of South Africa claimed by White supremacists as 'theirs'). The problem is not so easily dismissed. When Whites have, for example, finished with 107,000 Africans at present "borrowed" by the building industry, where will they go? To the overcrowded and impoverished reserves and Bantustans? And what happens to the industry when it returns its "borrowed" labour?

But the tragedy for South Africa is that the Government still enacts legislation on the assumption that its apartheid theories are valid. The stated intention of apartheid, its absolutely fundamental aim, is to separate completely the White and African sections of its population and to keep them apart in all fields. On a national scale, the Transkei is the first large area created for complete

residential segregation; on a local scale this is done through the Group Areas Act -- the definition of certain areas for different racial groups; and throughout the whole of South African life it is achieved by the provision of completely separate services and institutions for Africans in education, social welfare, transport, culture, and sport. And in the economic field through the operation of what was to have been a rigid barrier of job reservation.

To achieve such an aim, the White supremacists would have to end the dependence of South Africa's economy on African labour, something that can never be achieved, and which fundamentally they do not wish to achieve. 86 per cent of farm labour is African; 89 per cent of mine labour. Seven-and-a-half million Africans live and work outside the African reserves. At no stage since it came to power has the present government attempted to stop this complete integration of Africans and Whites in one economy, and at no stage is it becoming more complete than today, under the impact of the industrial boom.

When the boom slackens, the Government will hasten to repair these breaches in the apartheid wall on the economic front. But they can never push back tens of thousands of skilled workers to the Transkei or other reserves; they cannot make a skilled man unskilled. They cannot transform urbanised, industrial workers into peasants. The facts of life in South Africa reveal that apartheid is not only cruel and unjust; it is also nothing more than a fraud, designed to conceal its true purpose -- the control and use of African labour for the profit of White supremacists. Their greedy need of more and more skilled African labour for mine and industry may yet prove the very issue on which the whole structure will begin to crumble.

THE WOMAN OF THE TOWNSHIPS

Hilda Bernstein

For 25 cents (which is half-a-crown) you can spend a morning sight-seeing in a luxury bus in the ghettos outside Johannesburg. The tour is said to be one of the sights of the southern hemisphere, and visiting VIP's and guests of the South African Foundation are taken to view the houses, the schools, and the beer-gardens of Soweto. Soweto, where the black people who work in Johannesburg must live.

From the windows of the bus you will look out at places called Moroka, Dube, Phefeni, Jabavu, Nzimkulu, Naledi, Chiawelo, and many more - 22 in all, the townships of Soweto, the homes of, officially, half a million people. Unofficial estimates say there are nearly a million. Sprawling across the gentle swelling plains of the highveld the houses are like little boxes, row upon row upon row, over the hills and far away, a never-ending dormitory of hutments. Soweto.

The guided tourist, dazed by the extent of these treeless, characterless ~~townships~~ ^{wastes}, will not have a chance to meet the woman of the townships. Her house has no street name, only a number among thousands and thousands of numbers in a township of Soweto, which is in itself not a town, but a 'township'. Her street, unless it is one of the main routes, is not tarred or lighted. It is a dusty track among hundreds, a place where children play by day, but empty and silent at night. It is dangerous to walk the township streets at night.

One thousand people are murdered every year in Soweto - five times as many as in the whole of Britain with its population of 50 million. On a week-end as many as 20 people are shot, stabbed or battered to death. There are no figures for the maimed, but ~~xxx~~ Baragwanath Hospital is famed for its work among paraplegics; South Africa has the highest rate in the world. Every doctor at this huge hospital for Africans knows the thick blood-smear near the base of a man's spine as the mark of the ntshumentshu, a needle-sharp steel spoke, which is plunged

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