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THE ORDEAL OF THE POLITICAL PRISONER.

In the last letter before he died, Julius Fucik wrote: "The winter braces a man as it braces a tree," the truth of which he proved by his own endurance under torture and the shadow of death.

Such a winter of endurance has now come to the political prisoner in South Africa. Indefinite imprisonment without trial has brought with it mental and physical torture to the hundreds in solitary confinement in cells all over the country.

White supremacists are fond of saying that their one concern is to preserve white civilisation in the face of the demand for democratic rights by Africans who <sup>are not</sup> civilised enough, developed enough, or educated enough to handle the responsibilities of government.

The inevitable question springs to mind: is any form of society worth preserving that must resort to extreme cruelty on a mass scale in order to maintain itself in power? And is this the meaning of Whites civilisation?

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In a recent trial as a result of which 23 Africans were sentenced to death for the murder of 5 Whites at a place called Bashee River, witness after witness alleged that they were made to squat, their arms were handcuffed in front of them, and a pole was then passed through the crook of their arms and behind their knees. Police then suspended them by means of the pole between two tables. They were wired to an electric circuit, and the current turned on. This sent shocks through their bodies.

Electric shock treatment appears to have become a common means of forcing prisoners to talk. Carefully used it proves most effective, as it leaves no tell-tale marks and permits judges to dismiss the allegations of the prisoners once they appear in an open court.

Another favourite form of assault is to cover the victim's head with a wet sack and apply electric shocks at the same time. The sack half suffocates the victim. This is thought to be a possible way in which one of the political detainees, <sup>died</sup> Looksmart Ngudle Solwandle, who, according to the police, committed suicide by hanging himself in his cell.

Solwandle, described by those who knew him as 'one of our best - strong, confident, courageous' was arrested in Cape Town one evening for interrogation, some time before the new law that permits indefinite imprisonment without trial was passed. Police then threatened that when the new law

came in they would again arrest him and that 'he would wish he had never been born.' When the new law was passed, he was again arrested and taken to a prison in Pretoria. At the time of his arrest he was in good health and spirits, a man of tremendous moral and physical strength who had withstood great hardship and persecution in the past without flinching. Friends in Pretoria left food parcels for him at the prison where he was held, and these were accepted by the authorities for him for two weeks after he was dead, when one day they were told that he had been sent back to Cape Town. After that the police announced he had committed suicide. Shocked friends and relatives and forced the State to hold an inquest, but fear that by the time his body is exhumed - if this is permitted - it will be too late to find out how he died.

Another case that shocked the country was that of an Indian, Ebrahim Sinyanvala, who had been detained and then released. On his way home from prison policemen stopped the car in which he was travelling in connection with a traffic offence. Sinyanvala jumped out of the car and ran away, and two days later his body was found floating in a near-by river. He had preferred suicide rather than facing a return to police cells.

While assaults and torture stories leak out through smuggled notes or secret messages, the conditions of solitary confinement now imposed on many political prisoners are well-known, and the effects are devastating. The prisoners who are thus cut off from all human contact for weeks and months on end reveal their ordeal in obvious physical deterioration, haggard and lined faces and excessive loss of weight. Many have been confined in small cells painted pitch black with no contact whatsoever with other human beings. One man, subsequently released, revealed that for 40 days and nights he was kept in a cell, his only contact with the outside world being a keyhole through which the warder instructed him when to open the door for a dish of food, and put out his sanitary pail. The cells have no chairs, the prisoners having to squat on the cement floors.

Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress leader who has served several months of his 6-year prison sentence, appeared in court with 10 others when he was joined with them in the Rivonia Trial. His physical appearance was shocking. For months on end he spends 23 hours a day in a cell that is about 17 feet by 12 feet. He is prohibited from talking to anyone, and not allowed any books or papers, except books for a course of study that he had been allowed to undertake. (He learned that he has passed his examination

and obtained an LL.B. law degree.) His food consists of mealie meal (a corn porridge) three times a day, with a little sugar for breakfast and either beans on the porridge, or a few cubes of meat, for lunch; that is all - no milk, tea, coffee, or any other food or drink except water. He sleeps on a concrete floor with a mat of either woven reeds, or thin compressed felt. As a concession, because he was studying, he was permitted a small table and a backless stool in his cell. All political prisoners, on instructions from the Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, may not receive any remission for their sentences, or any privileges.

While held under conditions of solitary confinement, the prisoners are subject to visits by the Security police for interrogation. They are bribed, threatened, bullied. One man, Harold Strachan, who is already serving a three-year sentence, was again brought out for questioning and told that he must give a statement implicating Govan Mbeki, one of the Rivonia-trial men. If he did not, the police told him, they would arrest his wife, who has a young baby, and hold her in solitary confinement ~~for~~ indefinitely. In other cases relatives who have never taken any part in politics, including children of 16, 17 and 18 years, have been arrested and held as hostages. Walter Sisulu's wife and son were detained in this way, as was the son of another man sought by the police, Julius First. Mrs. Sibeko, detained in the Cape, is the wife of a man for whom the police are looking, and she was told she may receive parcels of food - but only if brought to the jail by her husband.

Often political prisoners are moved secretly from jail to jail, so that distressed relatives cannot find out where they are. An 18-year-old girl who disappeared this way was found after more than three months in a jail hundreds of miles from the place where she was arrested. When prisoners cannot be found for weeks and months, it means they are unable to obtain a change of clothing, and facilities are not given to them to wash their clothes.

Some political prisoners smuggled out a note saying that they did not even get sufficient water to drink. One prisoner was given excellent food for two weeks, when Security Police came to him and gave him a mirror. "You see how fat and well you look," they told him, "and while you've been eating like this, your children and wife are starving. But if you will answer a few questions, we will see that your family eats well always."

White political prisoners have been offered fantastic bribes of money and freedom in return for answering questions. Dennis Goldberg was told that he could name any sum he wanted, and would be guaranteed safe conduct over the

border if he would only give a statement. After he had tried to escape from the prison where he was held, he was recaptured and assaulted, two ribs being broken. He was then manacled in chains that went from his waist down both legs and were attached to an iron weight. He wore these chains, day and night, for a month. When he appeared in court, however, the prosecutor, Mr. Yutar, 73 indignantly denied that any of the prisoners were ever subject to bribes, threats or pressures of any kind.

Timid and cautious little reports of such treatment do occasionally appear in some of the papers, but stringent laws have terrorised even the more outspoken editors into almost complete silence, and despite repeated allegations of physical and mental torture of political prisoners, no public protest has been made. Those who feel uneasy like to think they are the result of individual acts and not actual policy. But this is not so. When an oppressive regime is no longer able to maintain oppression by so-called civilised means, it must resort to such brutal methods. There are Whites who dislike and repudiate such methods while still desiring to maintain White supremacy in South Africa. They are, in a simile of Berthold Brecht's, like those who 'want to enjoy their slice of roast veal but not to see the calf killed and who like the butcher to wash his hands before he serves them.'

And still, to their fury, it has not been possible to stamp out resistance to the government in South Africa. Only this week hundreds of thousands of leaflets appeared in homes and townships all over the country, issued by the illegal African National Congress. They called on the people to continue resistance, ridiculed the Government's claim to have destroyed the underground resistance, and warned White South Africans of the desperate consequences should the State try to inflict the death penalty on the men in the Rivonia trial.

Evidence at this trial may depend almost entirely on informers, for apart from police agents, there are some who have yielded under the treatment they have received. But for others the words of Fucik prove true. And as fire tempers steel, so they are becoming strengthened and hardened. The winter of their endurance will hasten the end of brutality and oppression in South Africa.

ends

The first is a story of apartheid love in South Africa.

Thirty years ago, Alfred John de Lange was a married man who owned a sugar cane farm. Then his wife died, things went wrong at the farm, and he lost everything. He got a job as a labourer on the railways.

Five years after the death of his first wife, Alfred de Lange met Dora Bhengu, a girl in her early twenties. One day, he said, he mustered up some courage and told her that he was a widower, and that he would be happy if she would look after him.

"Look after me she did," he said. "She seemed to understand me .... an abiding friendship grew into love."

They lived together as man and wife for twentyfive years, and they had six children, then grandchildren. Then one day someone reported them to the police and they were brought before a court, charged under the Immorality Act, which prohibits sexual intercourse between people of different races. They had been guilty of a peculiar South African crime - because Alfred de Lange is a White man, and Dora Bhengu is an African woman.

When they married a quarter of a century ago, de Lange paid lobola - a bride-price - to Dora's parents in accordance with African custom. Then they were married according to African tradition, but not according to White law.

They appeared before a magistrate, to whom Mr. de Lange said: "We have children and grandchildren. I am a grandfather and she is a grandmother. We have lived as man and wife for 25 years. I did not know I was committing an offence."

Pathetically, he told the court of his intimate life. "We do not have sexual intercourse now . . . I am too old," he said.

The magistrate found them not guilty, stating "It is the court's opinion that no indecent or immoral act has taken place in terms of the Immorality Act."

But the couple were not to be permitted to go on living together.

A lawyer wrote to the Minister of Justice on their behalf asking that they should be given permission to live together. The Minister's secretary replied that he was 'unable to assist in this matter.'

"O God, no!" protested Mr. de Lange, who is nearly 70, when he heard the news, and he buried his face in his hands. "What are we going to do now? Is there anybody who has any sympathy left for us?"

Dora wept and said "Don't they realise that we have already had enough trouble, and we can't take any more? As it is, we are having a very hard time; and as you can see, Alfred and I are always sickly. Now, at his age, what is he going to do? And as for myself, I haven't a clue as to what is going to be my fate.

"I have dreaded the very thought of it since we were arrested, and now I just do not have the strength, nor the will, to think about it."

Both are ill, and unable to work. De Lange gets a pension of £12 a month, Dora nothing. From now on he must live a lonely old man, separated from his wife. This is an apartheid love story. It is immoral and indecent to love someone whose skin is a different colour to yours.

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11/63

The second is the story of an apartheid town in South Africa.

Charlestown was a little village on the border of Natal. The people who lived there had built houses on land to which they or their parents came many decades ago. The land was bought legally, some of it before 1910, by Africans, and in buying the land, the people thought they were ensuring for themselves security for all time.

Today Charlestown looks as though it has been hit by a bomb. Houses lie in ruins, piles of bricks with crumpled straw that once was thatched roofs. Here and there a piece of wall stands, but most of the homes are shattered rubble lying in dusty streets.

For Charlestown was what the South African government calls a 'Black Spot' and it had to be razed to the ground, and its inhabitants moved away.

A 'Black Spot' is a place where Africans live in freehold in what has now been declared as White South Africa. No Africans may own land ~~or their house~~ outside the reserves, therefore where African homes stand on such land, whether it is in places such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg, or Charlestown in Natal, it is government policy to remove them. So far about 80,000 people have been removed from their homes in this way and re-settled in other areas. The removal schemes, it is estimated, will eventually affect 400,000 people in one Province alone - Natal. Hundreds of thousands more are to be moved in the Western Province and other places.

For the people of Charlestown, the removals mean that their homes have been destroyed physically, and with them, their families.

They are being moved to cramped, wooden huts, 16 feet by 10 feet, at a place called Duckspound. The rent of the huts is nearly three times as high as the rent they paid in their brick homes in Charlestown.

There is old Shadrack Sethebe, now over 80, who came to Charlestown twenty years ago. He rented a piece of ground for ten shillings a month, and built himself a house with his savings. He owns two cows and a horse. Now he has been told he must move to Duckspound. He will not be allowed to take his cows and horses, and his children cannot go with him. They are working in the White part of Charlestown, and have been permitted to stay. The old man must go. The children say their father is too old to live on his own.

Mr. Gamulake Mkwanazi, who is 74, has been in Charlestown for 34 years. He supports a wife and grandchild with money he earns as a herbalist among the people of Charlestown. Now he is told he must quit his home.

There is Jeneta Shabangu, a widow, who has lived in Charlestown for 25 years. She is too ill to work, and her youngest daughter supports her. The family must move - the daughter must quit her job, without any guarantee of obtaining ~~xxxxxxx~~ work at the new place.

Philemon Dube and his wife are too old to work. Their four children, who work at a local factory, support them. Now the children are told that they can stay at the new location at Charlestown, the old parents must move to Duckspound, leaving their children behind.

The homes at Charlestown were destroyed very easily. Heavy chains were tied around them, and they were pulled down by tractors.

The Minister of Bantu Administration, Mr. de Wet Nel, stated that the process of removing the 'Black Spots' and re-settling the people had been "executed in such a manner that no disruption resulted."

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The third is the story of an apartheid family in South Africa.

Robert Khanje was born in Nyasaland, but like thousands and tens of thousands of Africans from neighbouring countries, he migrated to the industrial mecca of Africa - South Africa; and to the industrial heart of South

Africa, Johannesburg, in search of work.

He worked as a cook in Johannesburg for 26 years, married, and had five small children. Three years ago, however, in a drive to remove Africans from the towns, Robert Khanje was ordered to return to the country of his origin.

A White immigrant can obtain citizenship in South Africa after a few years residence, a Black immigrant - never.

Leaving his family in their small house in a township called Phiri, Robert Khanje went to friends, where he sheltered, hiding from the police, and paying secret visits to the family that he could not bear to leave. A sixth child was born to them.

The family had no money at all, except the earnings of Mrs. Khanje's sister Agnes, who earned £5.10 a month and had two children of her own. Then she too became unemployed, and there were two adults and eight children living without any money. Mrw. Khanje wanted to work, but when her baby was old enough for her to leave, the child fell ill. Eventually she obtained some washing, earning 8/- a week, and welfare visitors helped the family with food parcels.

Robert Khanje also became ill and had to go to hospital. There he told the authorities that his troubles began when he lost his pass book. When he applied for a duplicate he was told to leave the country.

There is no ending to this story. Mrs. Khanje must try to work and earn enough to keep herself and all her children, and at the same time try to bring them up while she is working, in the townships where children run wild. The family may not have a father. For the authorities say Robert Khanje is a foreigner, and after giving the best years of his working life to South Africa, he must go.

He is not, of course, exceptional in this. Recently an African who has lived in South Africa for 49 years was ordered to leave his family and return to his original birthplace, Nyasalahd.

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These are only three out of hundreds and thousands of stories of love, homes and family life in South Africa, the apartheid state.

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