

RECENT RIOTS

The Institute is very gravely alarmed by the recent outbursts of rioting and violence along the Reef, and is afraid a situation which may have disastrous consequences for human relations in South Africa is developing. The Institute condemns the use of violence and wishes to point out that the riots are symptomatic of a grave social situation.

While there undoubtedly are criminal elements in the African locations and townships, the Institute considers that a distinction must be drawn between such persons and the normal law-abiding African citizen. The former must be dealt with, and the authorities will have the full support of the law-abiding African people in doing so. It is to be realised that the African people generally are no longer willing to tolerate passively the administration of laws which are obnoxious in themselves. This latter calls for social measures of a remedial nature.

The chief causes which have contributed to the recent disturbances appear to be :-

- (a) The existence of the pass laws and the administration of them.
- (b) The liquor problem of which kaffir beer brewing is only one aspect.
- (c) Bad and inadequate housing which prevents the development of a stable family life, and has had its effect on the discipline of youth.
- (d) The high cost of living which bears especially hard on lower income groups.
- (e) Most of all the attitude to Africans of officials and particularly of the police. Neither the police nor officials are responsible for the laws they have to administer but they are responsible for the way in which they are administered. The very nature of such laws tends to engender a spirit of arrogance in the official.
- (f) The lack of educational facilities for African children.
- (g) The lack of employment opportunities for African youth.

The laws referred to have existed for years, but they are now more stringently applied. While Africans have acquiesced in them in the past, the position has so developed that they are no longer willing to do so. Opposition to such laws and their administration has become a focal point for a general and very deep-rooted feeling of frustration.

The Institute considers that the situation which has now arisen is of such seriousness and importance that a new independent judicial commission of enquiry on which there would sit at least one African, is called for.

In the meantime, the Institute urges that raids for beer and passes should be stopped and a public announcement made to this effect; that the Government call together a meeting of the Reef Advisory Boards immediately to discuss the new situation; that the municipality take steps to call into being a Board of Consultation consisting of representatives of African residents in Newclare, Sophiatown and Martindale: (that discussions on the removal of Western Native Township, Newclare, and Martindale cease).



The Institute further commends to the Government the following measures :-

That materials be provided at cost price to Africans for building their own houses. It is understood that lands for such buildings are available in the Johannesburg area, and that funds be made available for the necessary services and for other housing projects.

That plans be immediately set on foot to provide vocational and technical training facilities for African youth, and that investigations be made as to ways and means whereby the field of employment for African youths be widened.

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SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (INC.)  
SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VIR RASSEVERHOUDINGS (INGELYF)

The South African Institute of Race Relations, in common with all responsible bodies, was gravely perturbed by the disturbances which took place in the latter part of 1949 and the early months of 1950 in Johannesburg and on the Reef. At the time it condemned the use of violence and pointed out that the riots were symptomatic of a grave social situation.

It welcomed the appointment of a Commission to Inquire into Acts of Violence Committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare.

Representatives of the Institute attended the public sittings of the Commission.

The Institute has now considered the Report of the Commission and, in an endeavour to be of assistance to the authorities and to bring about the wiser handling of difficult situations which may from time to time arise, submits the following comments.

1. It regrets that the personnel of the Commission did not include an African member who, by reason of his knowledge of the African people, might have been of considerable assistance to the Commission.
2. The Institute is of opinion that while the Commission has overrated the importance of certain factors as causes of the riots, as, for instance, the influence of individual leaders, it has not attributed sufficient significance to others. It is not a question of omissions, but of emphasis. The Commission's statement that the "large-scale uncontrolled influx brought in its train chaotic housing conditions" is an inadequate reflection of the acuteness of the housing shortage and of its effect in causing unrest. The Institute considers that the failure of local authorities to meet housing needs must be linked with assertions concerning the "growing antagonism to authority and especially European authority". The Institute does not dispute that there is this growing antagonism. It agrees with the Commission that the endeavour to suppress the manufacture and supply of liquor and the consequent indiscriminate raids, the manifest futility of the Advisory Boards, the provocative insistence on lodgers' permits for sons over 18 years are potent reasons for this antagonism. Continuous raids to check passes also feed this antagonism. But it considers that no listing of causes can overlook the housing question, all the more crucial because this is an area where the Africans look to the local authority not only to control or to prohibit but actually to provide. The failure of local authorities to measure up to their obligations in this regard should figure prominently in any picture of the background to the disturbances.
3. Likewise the Report, though it shows in its "narrative of events" that some of the local authorities concerned displayed considerable ineptitude in their dealings with the African communities involved - such as failure to explain adequately proposed administrative changes and to make announcements of changes not only in English but also in the vernacular, persistence in a course of action against the advice of the police - nevertheless makes only an indirect reference to these deficiencies in the findings. There also appears to have been lack of liaison between the local authorities and the police which led to an intensification of raids at a time when feelings were running high and further provocation should have been avoided.



4. The Institute considers that the findings of the Commission place exaggerated and unjustified emphasis on the extent of Communist influence. The Commission investigated disturbances in four different areas, which occurred at different times, and it could find nothing to indicate that there was any relationship between them. It found evidence of Communist Party support and the participation of avowed Communists in the events leading up to disturbances in only one of the four cases, namely in the boycott against increased tram fares, which precipitated the outbreaks in the Western Native Township and Newlands. Even in this instance, the evidence concerning the alleged Communist Party membership of a prominent Advisory Board member is extremely conflicting, and the Commission appears to have attached undue significance to the evidence of one witness, who was an unsuccessful candidate in the Advisory Board elections and had for years attempted to oust the elected members. Further, the fact that certain documents were published and certain individuals were known to work at Market Street "which is said to be a Communist Centre" cannot be regarded as evidence that the publications and activities in fact emanated from the Communist Party.

Nevertheless, the Commissioners express themselves as "satisfied that there were strong Communist influences at work in the Johannesburg area". They find that "several of these leaders and others contended that the Native people should not be governed by laws framed by Europeans. This doctrine is consonant with Communist ideology, which seeks to upset all law and order in the community with the object of achieving its own ends". (173)... "The masses are made to feel that they are oppressed by European-made laws, which consequently need not be obeyed". (174)

The impression created by these findings is that the African people are not aware of any disabilities, that a sense of grievance which they can be provoked into expressing is spurious, and that antagonism to laws imposed by Europeans, in the framing of which the Africans had no part, is a manifestation of Communist doctrine.

The Institute must reject this interpretation. It believes that by ascribing the deep sense of grievance which pervades the African peoples to Communism - against whose doctrines groups of otherwise the most diverse opinions are united - camouflages the true position and can only lead to a self-deception which must ultimately be disastrous.

The Institute in its evidence to the Commission summarized the background which must be borne in mind in these words: "a bewildered people with little sense of security increasingly conscious of their disabilities, suffering more and more from poverty and overcrowding and malnutrition. Bitterness and resentment are increasing, talk of 'apartheid' heightens the tension, minor irritants such as discourtesy on the part of the European officials make matters worse, and explosions are perilously near the surface".

It is not Communists or individual leaders who were driving the African people to a consciousness of hardship. Obviously Communists, as also non-Communist groups, made the grievances of the people articulate. But the grievances exist. Over the past few years repeated warnings have been given, both by Europeans and Non-Europeans, that the African people were no longer prepared to acquiesce in the imposition of laws obnoxious to them, and that increasingly they demanded some voice in the government of the country.

Because this is the existing situation, the Institute finds itself compelled to disagree with findings which seek to saddle individual leaders and the now dissolved Communist Party with the responsibility for a general spirit of unrest which is the result of a number of different factors.



5. The Institute considers that the Commission has laid the gravest charges against African leaders on contradictory evidence: for the charge that the leaders voiced repugnance to violence from the platform but surreptitiously instigated their followers to violence is one of utmost gravity. Reliance was placed on evidence relating to statements made by 21 youths at their trial for assaulting tram passengers. The Commission was told that these youths stated at their trial that they had been incited to violence by an Advisory Board member. When four of these youths appeared before the Commission, they stated that they had been beaten by the police till they made the statement. See their evidence to the Commission regarding incitement. They denied that there had been incitement.

Following the arrest of the youths, the Advisory Board member concerned was himself arrested. But no charge was laid and he was subsequently released. In general, the Institute's representatives gained the impression that the evidence was too contradictory and inconclusive to justify definite allegations.

Further, the Institute considers that the Report should not have omitted all reference to evidence which showed that these same leaders made attempts, some successful, to quieten hostile groups and had made offers - not accepted as it happens - to co-operate with the police in attempting to disperse threatening crowds.

The Institute regrets that the Report makes no mention of the activities of the Supreme Council, the evidence regarding which, even if not conclusive, suggested that the Supreme Council had an interest in creating unrest.

6. The Institute must express strong disagreement with the Commission's references to education. The Report states that "It is a sad reflection on the education imparted to present-day urban youth that 'tsotsi' gangs mostly consist of youths of school-going age, and those who had attended school - their ages ranging from 12-40 years". The implication of this ambiguously worded paragraph is that school attendance turns youths into "tsotsis". The Report further states that "the location youths who, on account of their education are not subject to any social bonds lead idle lives". Whether this is intended to mean school education is not clear. The content suggests that this is indeed the intended meaning. As no evidence was led regarding the actual composition of "tsotsi" gangs, the Institute is at a loss to understand on what basis this dogmatic conclusion is based.

The Institute agrees with the subsequent description of "tsotsi" gangs given in the Report. It has repeatedly drawn attention to the lack of suitable occupational outlets for African youths, and, in particular, to the lack of openings for educated youths. There is no reward for educational attainment, with the effect that educated youths are frequently the most frustrated. The Institute has noted with growing anxiety the demoralization of urban African youth, of which these gangs are the most organized and the most evil manifestation. For ten years and longer it has insistently warned that these evils would ensue unless urban African children were taken off the street into the school, rescued from their slum pastimes and given healthy recreational outlets. That these services were not provided is reprehensible enough. But to suggest, as the Report does, that schooling creates "tsotsis" cannot but be regarded as irresponsible.

7. While the Institute has found itself in disagreement with the Commission on the major matters discussed above, and on certain other matters not dealt with here, it welcomes the publication of the Report which records a painstaking attempt to deal with an infinitely complex set of circumstances and expresses its agreement with many of the Commission's findings. All the more does it regret that the terms of reference did not direct the Commission to frame recommendations.



STATEMENT DRAWN UP BY MR RHEINALLT JONES.

We deplore riots, not only for themselves, but because they are the symptoms of grave social situations.

There are many contributing causes chief of which are:

- a) Pass Laws and their administration.
- b) The liquor problem.
- c) Bad housing.
- d) High cost of living.
- e) Most of all the attitude of officials and particularly the police to Africans generally.

*not referred to when  
- official matters  
difficult*

The laws referred to have existed for years, but they are now more stringently applied and while the Africans have acquiesced with them in the past, they are no longer willing to do so today.

We do not consider that the present Government Commission is sufficiently equipped to probe the whole situation and urge that its scope should be ~~widened~~ to include charges against the police as well as the public and its personnel increased so as to include an African. ^

Meanwhile we urge that the raids for beer and Passes should be suspended and a public announcement to this effect made.

We also urge the Government to call together a meeting of the Reef Advisory Boards immediately for the purpose of discussing the new situation.

Other measures which we commend to the Government are:

- a) Housing which should provide for all people.
- b) Training and employment of adolescents.

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*Mr J Jones. (Name) - without volume  
+ concerns the use of violence. It does  
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The position which has developed on the Reef is very alarming and assurances must be given to both Europeans and Non-Europeans that the position will be taken in hand and that there be no further outbursts of lawlessness and destruction. All sections of the community are agreed that the rule of law must be maintained. I offer the following suggestions -

- (1) That no pass raids or beer raids be made pending other measures   
~~but that the affected areas be strongly patrolled in order to protect residents from lawless elements;~~
- (2) the Government at once call a conference of all the Advisory Boards on the Reef with the Secretary for Native Affairs in the Chair, to discuss the situation;
- (3) that the Municipality take steps to call into being a Board of Consultation consisting of representatives of African residents and taxpayers in Newclare and Sophiatown;
- (4) that the Government and Municipality agree to make available to Africans materials on loan and land for building their own houses and that the necessary funds for other services be also made available;
- (5) that the question of the removal of Western Native Township, Sophiatown and Newclare be not discussed at this juncture;
- (6) that the Commissioner of Police be asked to investigate the charges of ill-treatment and lack of consideration of law-abiding households by the police in the exercise of their duties.
- (7) that the Government consider the desirability of setting up training facilities for the training of African youth between the ages of 18 and 25 on the lines already in existence for European and Coloured youths.

The Institute condemns the use of violence.

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Quintin Whyte  
DIRECTOR

South African Institute of Race Relations,  
JOHANNESBURG.

20th February 1950.

*Municipal  
Committee  
all municipalities  
in town*



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