

NON-EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

No

Document

C 190

Crime in Soweto

NON-EUROPEAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

CRIME IN SOWETO.

The Non-European Affairs Committee at its meeting held on the 16th March, 1967, instructed me to report on the underlying causes of crime in Soweto.

I advised the Committee that this was a controversial subject, and that while I would be glad to put forward my opinions on the subject, they would be my own opinions, and that I expect that many people will disagree with my assessment of the position.

The Committee accepted this and asked me to submit my personal opinion. The following report was prepared by me on this understanding.

FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

NON-EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

NON-EUROPEAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

CRIME IN SOWETO.

Crime has unfortunately been a feature of human society since Cain slew Abel, and is not confined to the Johannesburg Bantu population.

I do not propose going into the manifestations of crime as witnessed among the European community here and overseas, save to remind that drug addiction by teenagers, gang membership and warfare; serious crime such as murder, large scale robberies including the pillaging of bullion trains and mailships, poses almost insoluble problems in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Continent.

This is emphatically not to say that crime is not a serious and disturbing feature of life in all the larger urban Bantu centres throughout the country.

There are many different opinions and suggested reasons for the recurring crime waves which sully Bantu life from time to time and nothing is new. In a book published in 1937 called "The Bantu in the City" the author Dr. R. E. Phillips, a well known social worker, devoted a chapter to "Crime and Delinquency" in which he analysed crime under the headings of the Mental, Economic and Social factors involved.

From time to time various opinions have been expressed on the subject during the holdings of Commissions of Enquiries into riots in different parts of the country, e.g. The Urban Juvenile Native Delinquency Report of 1938; The Report of the Common Crime on the Reef and Pretoria 1942; The Diemont Commission of Enquiry into the Langa Riots 1963; The Snyman Report on the Paarl Riots 1962; The Wessels Commission of Enquiry into the Sharpville Occurrences 1960; etc., etc.

Local Newspapers have run feature articles on crime in the Bantu Areas over the years and two such series have just appeared in the Rand Daily Mail during February, 1967, and in The World during March, 1967. In addition, the local Bantu press report all serious current crime as the events occur, so that from all this there is a fairly full documentation on this aspect of Bantu life.

Aspects which, in my opinion have a bearing on the high incidence of crime are :-

The local Bantu population exceeds 730,000 persons as compared with 442,500 Whites, 67,000 Coloureds and 39,000 Asiatics.

A substantial percentage of the first group are relatively primitive people, many illiterate, and still on large measure in thrall to

tribal superstitions. The sanctions against anti-social behaviour patterns were enforced in tribal society in ways which cannot operate in urban areas and as a result such restraints are absent in Soweto.

They are descendants of warrior races who were accustomed to settle disputes in blood. Regard for human(or animal) life was not of great importance and a stoical acceptance of pain and death was characteristic of such people.

The transition of such people to a modern industrial economy poses the same sort of problems as faced the illiterate Irish and Polish immigrants to the United States of America in the 1870's.

A rurally oriented people was caught up in the web of industrial life. No urban background, no education, no training and an absence of the standards which normally made them observe the code of living in their accustomed environment often resulted in the brutish elements throwing off restraints and ignoring the rights of weaker members. The absence of women in normal numbers here in the past, accentuated the evil process. The behaviour of the Chinese Mine Labourers in the 80's is a good illustration of this sort of abnormal behaviour.

When such a social upheaval occurs, it is nearly always accompanied by a lack of housing, and those social amenities which have such an important bearing on people's conduct.

Slum dwellers whether in the Gorbals of Glasgow, the West side of New York, Nottinghill Gate in London or Pimville in Soweto, have much in common. The children shun the horrible ill lit overcrowded "homes" and live in the streets where the formation of gangs start.

The parents, if weak, are sometimes overwhelmed by the struggle and succumb to drink and degradation. In the process, they lose control of their children and the whole evil cycle follows. Inefficiency, instability, drunkenness, violence, thieving, prostitution, desertion of homes and families mark the lives of such people.

In an attempt to be more specific, the causes of crime are considered in relation to the following factors :-

1. MENTAL ATTITUDE:
2. SOCIAL AND MORAL CONDITIONS:
3. EDUCATION:
4. ECONOMIC POSITION:
5. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND PROHIBITIONS:
6. POLITICAL:
7. TRANSPORT:
8. ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. MENTAL ATTITUDE:

In considering the mental attitude of the average Soweto dweller towards crime, one is struck by the fact that, in general, the people will not co-operate with the authorities in fighting crime, even to the extent of not providing the police with essential information which they know of, and which may result in the arrest of criminals.

This attitude to crime, the Police and the criminals, has been described by many as being the normal way of life in Bantu Townships today, and is brought about, they claim, by the inter-play of the factors dealt with in this report; there is a cynical disregard of any stigma being attached to imprisonment, because of the thousands of people who are imprisoned for purely technical and non-criminal offences. This in turn, breeds resentment of and indifference towards officialdom, and at its worst, results in the rejection of respect for life, property and law.

Contributing factors towards non-co-operation with the authorities, and more particularly the Police in Soweto, are the facts that:

- i) Police Stations are difficult to reach; (there are only three Police Stations in Soweto i.e. Orlando East, Moroka and Meadowlands, while a new one is being planned in Jabulani).
- ii) It is almost impossible to get through by telephone to the Police in cases of emergency.
- iii) Often in the event of it being possible to get in touch with the Police Station, the officials there are immobilized by lack of transport.

The mental acceptance of crime and criminals as a way of life, with the consequential rejection of co-operating with the authorities, is considered to be one of the most important factors in relation to the crime situation and probably one of the most difficult to remedy.

A factor of importance in conditioning the mental attitude of the people is the way in which the coverage of crime and attempts to obtain "easy money" is handled by the Press, the cinema and many magazines. Criminals are often projected as semi-heroes, and the life of ease, violence and the absence of all moral restraints as depicted, is of irresistible fascination to the youngsters.

Instead of acceptance of the need for prominent people to set an example in their personal lives, there is frequently a lack of leadership,

and very often evidence of personal motives appear to be upper-most in the minds of those who do accept public office in one form or another.

This statement must not be construed as implying that it is all-embracing, there are obvious exceptions of Bantu men and women in official positions who lead exemplary lives and who do all in their power to set a good example and to provide firm moral and spiritual leadership, but unfortunately they are in the minority.

2. SOCIAL AND MORAL CONDITIONS:

These two aspects have been grouped together because it is difficult sometimes to draw the line as to whether a social deficiency results in a moral aberration. The loss of, or disregard for traditional tribal standards and sanctions among the urban Bantu population throughout the country is important, and until it can be replaced by either an acceptance of Western European Standards of behaviour and restraint, or a return to and re-acceptance of tribal standards, some of the factors causing crime will continue.

There is, for example, a lack of a sense of public duty among very many Soweto residents, and this is accompanied by such specific moral ills as corruption of officials and the public; the very high illegitimate rate; the disappearance in many cases of honesty in relation to an employer and respect for his private property; the break-down of marriage in the townships, accompanied by neglect of women and children, desertion of wives, the wasting of wages in shebeens and attendance at Gumba-Gumba parties.

In so far as this latter aspect is concerned, a distressing feature of life in Soweto is the excessive drinking, gambling and drug taking which is indulged in. This in turn leads to severe stress being placed on family life and often results in a poor relationship developing between parents and their children. In very many cases, the family as a cohesive unit is not really functioning at all.

Another aspect, is that the men want to continue to domineer their wives and children as a carry-over from the former patriarchal tradition, but do not want to accept the responsibility for supporting, controlling and disciplining their family unit.

Family life in very many cases is so bad that there is a deep spiritual impoverishment and this gap in the moral life of the community has regrettably not been filled by the churches, nor by a respect for law and authority.

Excessively large families contribute towards crime, because the parents are unable to provide the children with the necessary food, clothing and pocket money all children desire, and often the only way for such children to make good the deficiencies, is by petty thieving, which in turn leads to more serious crime.

The lack of restraint on the part of parents in having such large families is very serious and the only remedy for this is general acceptance of the need for birth control, which is, however, vehemently opposed by the men, who see this as a reflection on their virility. Education to combat this wrong attitude is likely to be a slow process and cannot succeed without State approval and support.

An aspect which must not be forgotten, is the serious social consequences under urban conditions flowing from the break-up of a family on the death or prolonged serious illness of one or other of the parents. Often such families have struggled for years to preserve respectable standards but on the death of the father, the family is often faced with poverty and no clear future, so that the remaining parent finds it very difficult to control and keep the children together as a family unit; disintegration often sets in, and from then on the drift into bad company and crime is swift.

In discussing these issues with the Joint Advisory Board Members and prominent local Bantu personalities, it was interesting to hear a very prominent local figure say in relation to the high incidence of stabbings which occur in the Townships,

"We Africans still like to see the flash of the knife".

This statement, linked with the widely held belief that a measure of brutality is inherent in the Bantu make-up, is interesting, but it must be noted that leading educationalists claim that this statement is fallacious, and that such a tendency is dependent on environment and is not hereditary.

Boardmembers and Senior Bantu Staff are all strongly of the opinion that shebeens are one of the most important breeding grounds of crime. It is there that criminals hang about and prey on other shebeen frequenters or attack people in the vicinity.

It is clear that shebeens are a serious social nuisance, but because of the profits made and the fact that they give credit to known customers, stay open long after official Municipal bars and bottle stores have closed, and provide complaisant female company, their total eradication is almost impossible.

The operation of shebeens would be made more difficult if some effective prohibitions could be placed on the delivery of liquor to them, and this is being followed up.

Shebeen keepers are social parasites and should be removed from urban areas.

3. EDUCATION:

Education and the availability and adequacy of schools in urban

Bantu townships with all its attendant problems, is obviously of major significance in any consideration of life among the Bantu population.

In the first place, there is no compulsory education for Bantu children, and this results in large numbers of children not receiving any training in discipline at school.

This is particularly bad among the 9 to 14 year age group, in which large numbers of children get no schooling at all.

Secondly, the existing schools, in which there are at the moment approx. 78,000 children in 114 schools, are all overcrowded and the teachers and staff are faced with real problems in trying to cope with the numbers and to preserve basic educational standards.

Fantastic improvements have marked the educational position in Soweto over the past decade, but there are still a number of unsatisfactory features, among the most important of which is the fact that those who fail Std. 2; 6 or Form 3 in a given time, or who cannot go on after a 3rd class pass in Std. 6 or Form 3, are in consequence out of school, and in so far as the younger children are concerned, this constitutes one of the most serious problems in Soweto, namely, the gap between school and employment.

Many children cannot go on in school for the reasons stated, at a fairly early age which can be anywhere between 11 and about 15 years, and since few employers are prepared to engage such boys and girls before they are 17 years, this gap of time during which the children roam the streets and get into trouble is obviously of the utmost significance.

It is easy to direct attention to this deficiency, but the economic consequences of trying to introduce compulsory education or keeping more children at school for a longer time, are so serious that it is doubtful whether the issue can be faced at the moment. Certainly, the Bantu community itself cannot bear the cost. Possibly a partial answer lies in the creation of more vocational training schools rather than conventional academical schools, so as to equip young people for suitable employment, after they have acquired the necessary skills. Unfortunately, vocational education is just as expensive an amenity as any other, and the bottleneck in this case lies in the general poverty of the Bantu population, coupled with the lack of trained teachers in all fields of education.

It may be of interest to the Committee if the results of a survey carried out in Soweto at the end of 1965 among 77,364 school children, are set out :-

STANDARD OF EDUCATION:

| | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| No Schooling | 39.2 |
| Evening School only | .4 |
| Day School 1 - 3 years | 7.2 |
| " " 4 - 6 " | 27.5 |
| Standard 6 | 19.2 |
| " 8 | 4.1 |
| Matric | 1.1 |
| University Degree | .1 |
| Teachers' and other Diplomas | 1.2 |
| | <hr/> |
| | 100.00 |
| | <hr/> |

4. ECONOMIC POSITION:

It is not proposed to go into any great detail under this heading since the position is well known and the salient facts are common knowledge.

It is merely desired to again draw attention to the fact that approx. 60% of the heads of families of the local Bantu population are in receipt of an income of less than R40.00 per month and although there is a slow but steady improvement in the wages being paid to the local Bantu population, the majority of wage earners still find it difficult to balance essential expenditure against income.

The detailed reports which are submitted to Committee at six monthly intervals analysing the wage structure of the local male Bantu population makes this clear. Subsidiary effects are the gap between the cost of living and average income coupled with the restrictions on the use of Bantu labour in certain specific fields.

Account must also be taken of the fact that in most urban communities, the social desires of the people exceed their ability to pay, in so far as the broad mass of the working class population is concerned. This often results in buying things they cannot afford with debt piling up.

Reference has already been made to the excessively large families common among the local Bantu community and this regrettable feature in conjunction with wide-spread poverty is of course, an important factor in considering the causes of crime. Family size must be reduced within the capacity of the parents to support the numbers involved.

5. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND PROHIBITIONS:

Under this heading, the effect of legislative requirements must very briefly be considered. Certain aspects of what is commonly called the

"Pass Laws", Influx Control, Labour Bureau Regulations, etc., have a severe restrictive effect on employment, the mobility of labour and wage rates.

The temptation of people who have been refused official permission to enter an urban area for employment to resort to illegal means of gaining entry and employment are obvious, and such people may resort to crime because they find it impossible to live lawfully in an urban area or to take up employment. In this connection, it is important to explain and to stress that it is impossible for Bantu who are illegally in the City to obtain lawful employment or to be housed in a Municipal township or hostel. Many such people refuse to accept the order to return to their place of origin, and go underground in the Cities, and because they cannot obtain lawful employment, resort to crime in order to live.

There is, however, a more serious aspect to this and that is that there is a definite criminal class preying on the local community; people who are not in lawful employment and who are not entitled to be living in Johannesburg.

Constant efforts are made by the authorities to apprehend and bring to trial such persons, but it is an extremely difficult matter because many of them are in possession of forged documents of identification, work permits, contracts of service, etc. Such criminals form the hard core of the gangs which terrorise many parts of the City and are the people responsible for the planned large scale burglaries, car thieving, assaults, murders, etc., which constitute such a grave blot on the Bantu community.

The authorities are severely handicapped in attempting to cope with the situation because of insufficient numbers, and both the South African Police and the Municipal Bantu Police in Soweto are often short of personnel to cope with the incidence of crime.

This Department is on the point of expanding its mobile Municipal Police security guards operating in Soweto and 10 additional vehicles are being purchased this financial year.

These existing mobile squads of men have been specially trained to combat the crime situation and much success has been obtained in this connection. Virtual elimination of the mass burglaries which plagued the Department's Liquor outlets a year ago, is proof of this fact.

The most important single factor is the Ministerial announcement that the local Bantu population can now be enrolled as a police reserve. This step follows on representations which the Department has made to the Police over a period of many years and is most heartily welcome. If the response is good from the respectable element among the Soweto population, there is no doubt that much of the gangsterism and assaults in Soweto will be stamped out in the near future.

6. POLITICAL:

No trouble is being experienced under this heading at the moment, since the suppression and elimination of the ANC, Poqo and PAC.

7. TRANSPORT:

The gross overcrowding on all forms of Bantu transport has been, and continues to be a worrying factor and is likely to become worse in the future. Continual representations have been and are being made to the Railway authorities for the improvement of the transport service to Soweto. It is hoped that the construction of the new access road (Project 6) under the Services Levy Programme will permit an augmented transport service to be provided.

The overcrowded trains and buses provide convenient hide-outs for petty criminals, and the high incidence of thefts of pay packets which occur on Friday nights is common knowledge.

Because of the overcrowding on the trains, it is virtually impossible for the authorities to "police" the moving trains and gangsters find it easy to prey on passengers under such circumstances.

A contributing factor is the operation of "pirate" taxis from rail termini to suburbs in Soweto and elsewhere, and Boardmembers alleged that respectable taxi drivers are intimidated from operating after about 8.30 p.m., after which time gangsters move in and take over the operation of these taxi services. At such times, it is dangerous to make use of these vehicles, but in the absence of other transport, people sometimes have no alternative; the allegation is also made that after 9 p.m. buses are terrorised by hooligans.

8. ADMINISTRATION:

In considering the crime position in Soweto, I am of the opinion that in seeking a solution to the problems which have been briefly sketched in this report, two different aspects must be considered :-

- a) Those things which can be done by the authorities to improve the position.
- b) Those remedies which can only lie in the hands of the Bantu people themselves.

The division is fairly obvious, but in so far as the authorities are concerned, I suggest that if proper attention is devoted to :-

Housing
Welfare
Medical Services
Electric Lighting
Transport
Recreation
Employment
Adequate Wages, and a
Protection Service

as adequate as is possible, within the limits of manpower^{and finance} available; then, if these things are attended to, the remedy for the remaining ills largely lies in the hands of the people themselves. The Council, itself does in fact, continue to give attention to all the above aspects and the improvements which are evident in Soweto is proof of this. Continued attention will, of course, be given in the future to the improvement of those aspects which lie within our scope and power.

At a Special Meeting of the Joint Advisory Boards held on the 13th. April, 1967, the following points were made by Boardmembers on the Crime position :-

- a) The provision of electric lighting throughout all streets and houses is an important factor in combatting crime.
- b) Prohibit sale of dangerous knives.
- c) Close shebeens, they harbour hooligans.
- d) Gaol without fine for violent crimes.
- e) Superintendents should be empowered to eject shebeen keepers (even if rent is up to date).
- f) Black Police Reserve will fail, only White police will succeed because people will prevent Bantu Reservists from dealing with their delinquent children.
- g) Deport all liquor sellers.
- h) Prohibit teaching of Karate.
- i) Introduce evening schools.
- j) Close Beerhalls at 7.30 p.m. (Note: Present hours are:-
10.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. Weekdays
12.00 noon to 5.00 p.m. Saturdays
2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. Sundays).
- k) Youth Clubs for children not in school.
- l) Prohibit those under 16 years from bars and bottle stores.
- m) Parents who separate should both leave area.

The various factors dealt with in this report indicate that crime is due to many causes, and that it is no simple or quick matter to eradicate the causative factors. It is equally clear that unless and until there is a marked change in the mental attitude of the ordinary Bantu man and woman to crime and criminals, with an acceptance of civic responsibility, firstly to other individual citizens and neighbours being attacked and molested, and secondly, to the community at large, not much progress is going to be made by the authorities in stamping out crime.

How can a sense of civic responsibility be inculcated? Firstly by the normal process of improved education, and secondly by refraining from imprisoning thousands of people for purely technical contraventions of one of many complicated laws. If only genuine criminals stood in peril of imprisonment, then the stigma of gaol and fear of its consequences may slowly be restored to the ordinary people.

Thirdly, authority must clearly demonstrate its determination to protect people and their property, and to be relentless in tracking down and bringing to justice all gangsters and criminals. This will reinforce public confidence and trust in the forces of law and order and as soon as it becomes clear that "Crime does not pay" people will regard the police in quite a different light.

In this connection, the latest announcement by the Chief of Police about the formation of a Bantu Police Reserve is of the utmost importance as it now makes it possible for ordinary law abiding citizens in Soweto to play their part on a properly organised and disciplined basis, in doing something positive about crime in their area. This is something many have yearned for and the opportunity is now there.

The Non-European Affairs Department is particularly gratified at this news, because the Police authorities have been urged for years to take this step. Many discussions have been held with the Police and memoranda submitted by me on the subject. The fear has always been that the disastrous experiences of the old Civilian Guard movement would be repeated when hooligans and criminals infiltrated and wreaked the movement.

Discussions should be held with the Chief of Police soon, to offer the Department's full co-operation to make this proposal enjoy the maximum success.

The Department has itself planned, in consultation with the Organisation and Methods Division, a radical re-organisation of its Bantu Police Force in Soweto, so as to create a strong mobile Security Guard which will be able to rush to any point in the Soweto complex with speed and will be strong enough to cope with most situations. This security guard will be in constant

radio contact with the South African Police and will work in the closest co-operation with it. A full report on the proposal will be submitted soon. An expression of opinion from the Committee on the principle outlined will however, be of value at this stage.

Finally, it is felt that an important intangible aspect of the crime position is the uncertainty about the future role of the Bantu in urban areas. Over 250,000 men and 110,000 Bantu women are employed in Johannesburg and more than 70,000 families are resident in the Council's housing schemes. The total Bantu population in Johannesburg is now 733,339 persons. These people and the Council should have a clearer picture of their future role in the employment, economic and administrative fields of the City's life, as these are envisaged by the Government, than is currently available. For this reason, it is most sincerely suggested that the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development should be respectfully asked to give serious consideration to the setting up of an official Government Commission of Enquiry where all interested parties can give evidence, in an attempt to formulate the future role of the Urban Bantu.

IT IS RECOMMENDED:

- a) That the Manager, Non-European Affairs Department, be authorised to co-operate to the full with the South African Police in the formation and operation of a Bantu Police Reserve.
- b) That the principle of the Non-European Affairs Department's proposals for a Mobile Security Force working in conjunction with the South African Police, as proposed by the Organisation and Methods Division, be approved.
- c) That the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development be respectfully requested to consider appointing a Government Commission of Enquiry to determine the role of the Bantu in Urban Areas in regard to Employment, Housing, Transport, Education and related matters.

WJPC/MH

N9

20.4.67

(N.E.A.D.

/67)

Collection Number: A1132

Collection Name: Patrick LEWIS Papers, 1949-1987

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Location: Johannesburg

©2016

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

This collection forms part of a collection, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.