

# The Argus

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## Why were the warning signals ignored?

ONE of the tragedies of the Soweto riots is that responsible African leaders in the township have been desperately trying to warn the Government for some time that trouble would come unless certain action was taken. But the Government either took no notice, or not enough notice. Now there has been a sickening confrontation in which more than 20 people died and more than 250 were injured.

Even if the riot grew out of something the pupils considered was a legitimate demonstration, the consequences have already been outrageous, and there can be no excusing the pillage and arson of yesterday and last night, nor the continuing violence today, with gangsters apparently now taking an increasing part.

There were people who did know that danger was in the air. Just the day before in the Soweto Urban Bantu Council, Mr Leonard Mosala warned that 'very ugly scenes will come through our children, who are tired of being made to accept what they don't like. This House should know that we are fighting a very difficult battle with our children. They think we have neglected them. We have failed to help them in their struggle for change in schools. They are now angry and prepared to fight, and we are afraid the situation may become chaotic at any time.'

It was a prophetic warning but it was not the first indication of trouble. This has been brewing for a long time. It started in 1974 when the Government decreed that English and Afrikaans should be used

equally as mediums of instruction in the senior classes of African schools, a policy that was a contradiction apparently even of that stated by a previous Secretary of Bantu Education. The new policy was opposed by teachers and a string of school boards.

There were several meetings with Government officials, but the Education Department would not budge. Several school boards instructed their teachers to ignore the ruling. There were heated meetings. Some school board chairmen were sacked. Then the pupils at Phefeni Junior Secondary School went on strike in the middle of last month, and three more schools joined in within a few days. By the end of May, seven schools were on strike. A special committee from the Urban Bantu Council saw the Director of Bantu Education last week, but they came away dissatisfied. 'It was the most difficult and frustrating' meeting one of the councillors said he had ever had. Plans were in hand to take the matter up with the Minister himself when the riot exploded.

While renewed rioting is reported today, the first objective must be to stop it, the second to try to nurse back to health the wounds the trouble has caused physically and to the fabric of our society. But the country cannot allow this sort of thing to happen again. The causes must be thoroughly investigated, and this means the whole situation of the Black man in the urban areas. Proper bridges of communication must be built. There must be better safety devices.