

lier. There people were so oppressed and depressed that there was seemingly no spark on which to build. Here there is spirit and hope and determination, however new and untested, because people can see the way up and out.

There is also considerable anger and resentment. Neil believes that it is absolutely essen-

tial that white South Africans be made to understand the inevitable and terrible white fate if we continue to sleep. He believes that this is the only way to overcome white resistance to knowing the truth, that whites will continue to close their eyes and ears if the stress continues to be put only on the everyday tragedy of Black existence.

## The Soweto eleven

**T**HE Soweto 11 are on trial for sedition, a common law crime, but with terrorism as an alternative. They are presently being tried at Kempton Park, a fact which reflects the Government's habit of holding contentious political trials in out-of-the-way places.

Jill Wentzel, wife of Ernie, the senior defence advocate, had been so taken with the force of these youngsters' personalities, that she offered to introduce me to them. I agreed, a trifle apprehensively lest they should suspect patronage which I didn't feel. Such are the inner knots which one tends to make for oneself in this bizarre country.

Thus it was that I found myself in a courtroom at Kempton Park one Friday morning early in November. The room was clean and modern with desks and benches of clear, light wood. The spectators' benches were crowded with parents and relatives of the accused. There were several uniformed and plain-clothes policemen. I felt deep unease when I saw more than one of the former playing with the machine-guns slung over their shoulders — these in addition to the revolvers they carry routinely. It made the situation scarcely less threatening to be told that initially they had had dogs at the court as well.

Just before 10.00 the 11, whose ages range from 19 to 23, came into the dock. They looked fit, slim, shingly clean, almost unreally like the sort of advertisement in 'Post' which projects a sophisticated, affluent image of black youth. Some wore track suits with stripes of white, enhancing the basic maroon or navy. Bongie, the only girl, wore a mohair jersey over a pleated skirt, made even more elegant by an ivory pendant. Some of them had wanted to wear Afro clothes, but their parents had forbidden it. Such is the cohesion of their family life that they had simply obeyed.

They exuded, collectively and individually, a feeling of youth, but a curiously mature, highly disciplined youth. They all carried thick files, in which they made notes as witnesses gave evidence. They missed nothing: as each witness entered they exchanged whispered queries, comments, sometimes merely a raised eyebrow. The combination of high intelligence, drive, sensitivity and toughness impressed itself on me again and again as I watched their successive changes of expression during the proceedings: scepticism,

potential dislike, humour and impassivity.

At tea-break the policeman in charge, George, stood near the dock, but did nothing to prevent contact between the children and their parents and friends. The other police stood close enough to the dock to hear what was said but were not obtrusive.

The tremendous affection between parents and children was manifest. Little Montsitsi, slightly built, with gold-rimmed glasses, listened to his father respectfully and lovingly. The 'Chief' cuddled his eight month old niece with the exclamation 'You're so ugly!', and then handed her round for all to dandle. Another young man talked fluently to his plump little girlfriend, and although they never touched their physical longing was painfully visible.

We were not ignored. Some of the 11 came up to greet us, obviously delighted to see bubbly Jill. In conversation my initial impression of alertness and high intelligence was confirmed. The youngsters are hungry for books on philosophy, psychology and education. One is impatient for Plato's 'Republic'. They relish dispute on anything. Jill had to acknowledge herself out of her depth when they wanted to discuss the drifting of continents. They are understandably cagey about their personal philosophies, which probably vary enormously. For instance, the Special Branch have confiscated from Bongie Bibles, prayer-books and religious tracts.

They were curiously reticent about the torture many of them have suffered at police hands, accepting it as something to be expected. Little Montsisi was smilingly unsurprised when Ernie told him what the hospital records had revealed about the 'extensive bruising' (to use a newspaper euphemism) he had undergone. Another young man said that when he was held under Section 6 he learnt that 'that's when you really get courage; it's the only thing left to do. All you can do is meditate'.

Whatever the ultimate verdict — and the presiding judge gives the impression of having painstaking patience — it is a tragedy that our country does not use people like these to their full potential. To make them second-class citizens, to destine them for citizenship of a homeland or to drive them to militancy is our scandal and our sorrow.

**Janet Sahli**