

BUS BOYCOTT TURNS INTO A HORROR STORY



Police road-block outside Mdantsane — set up to harass boycotters. (Picture courtesy of the Daily News)

'The buses smell of blood. We will not ride them even if the fares go back to normal'

EFFORTS to squash the four month-old bus boycott in the Ciskei township of Mdantsane have backfired.

The horrifying acts of violence being carried out by soldiers and Ciskei-backed vigilantes has merely strengthened people's resistance to boarding the buses.

The bus boycott got off to a slow start in July when the Ciskei Transport Corporation, which is virtually owned by the Ciskei government, announced it would increase its fares by 11 percent.

However, since then the Ciskei government has declared a state of emergency in the township, detained hundreds of people, brought in a 10.30 pm to 4 am curfew and is believed to have shot over 90 people.

All this was done in an attempt to force the residents of Mdantsane to use the buses.

Today the Ciskei Transport Corporation's buses run virtually empty and the company has reportedly lost over R6 million.

NEWS BLOCK

Although, the Ciskei government has tried to totally block any information about the atrocities being committed by the Ciskei authorities and Ciskei-backed vigilantes, news has leaked out.

FOSATU Worker News recently visited the Border area and although workers were scared to talk for fear of further violence, they were keen that other workers know what is happening in the Ciskei.

The situation is best illustrated in the tragic story of one of our members:

'I haven't seen my daughter for four months. The police took her from my house for being a member of COSAS. And my son was shot dead by police. I heard from an eyewitness that he and some friends were playing with a tennis ball at the back of a shop. She said that a police

van came and stopped and the boys ran away. The police got out and fired at them. My son was shot in the leg. He ran to a nearby house and hid next to a window. The police shot him again — dead. The owner of the shop came out and asked them why did they shoot him. They replied that the boys had been singing freedom songs. Now they are trying to say that my son and his friends had been trying to burn down the rent offices. But the rent offices are far from where they were and there is not even a scratch on the offices.'

HOUSES SEARCHED

This event is not unusual, most Mdantsane people have their own story to tell. But few understand why this is happening to them.

Another worker told FOSATU Worker News how police came to his house and in their search found a National Automobile and Allied Workers Union membership card.

'They never told me why they were searching the house they only said that whoever was a member of a union must be locked in. I was detained in a cell for two months and not once did they ask me anything. I wasn't assaulted but there were people in the cell who had been beaten up.'

CROWDED CELLS

Detained workers said they had been kept in crowded cells and for three days they had waited for blankets.

Whilst they were there people had come into their cell saying they had just come from 'the field'.

'The field' is the Siza Dukashe Sports stadium where the Ciskei-backed vigilantes would indiscriminately assault the people they had arrested.

The vigilantes are an unofficial police reserve consisting of loyal members of the Ciskei Nat-

ional Independence Party — Sebe's party. The vigilantes mostly come from the rural areas.

The vigilantes have been used to patrol the township streets where they 'arrested' people for breaking the curfew, not having the right documents or for wearing a union t-shirt.

The vigilantes also tried to stop people using the trains and when the boycott spread to the schools, they forced schoolchildren to go to school.

Those arrested were taken to 'the field' where they were sjamboked, the women were often raped and some reported that they had been hung up on a water pipe by the wrists and then thrashed.

However, the vigilantes are not alone in their torturing of people.

Detained workers said that students who were being interrogated had told them that the

police had taken the inner-tube of a tyre and pulled it across their faces until they couldn't breathe anymore.

Some said the police had handcuffed their hands to their feet and then made to swing for hours from a rod suspended between two tables — this method of torture is called the 'boeing' or 'helicopter' by Ciskei Security police.

Over the past few months hundreds of people have been detained including officials of a number of independent unions.

'We don't want any unions in the Ciskei,' a security policeman told one of our members.

And recently the Ciskei authorities went as far as to ban the South African Allied Workers Union.

It seems the Ciskei will go to any lengths to try and stamp out the bus boycott including shooting people.

POLICE FORM BLOCKADE

On August 4 the police formed a blockade to stop commuters from reaching Mount Ruth and Edgeton stations.

The commuters tried to go round the blockade but the pol-

ice drew their firearms and fired without warning at the people.

It is not known how many people were killed or wounded in this incident. Official figures say that 30 patients were admitted to the 'disaster ward' of the local hospital and 15 were in the intensive care unit. More than 5 were killed.

NEVER ENDING HORROR

The horror stories of the Ciskei 'war' are never ending.

But what has been the South African employers' response to this attack on their workers.

At a meeting with FOSATU representatives, the Border Chamber of Industries said they had 'on public record' condemned the banning of SAAWU and had called for the lifting of the curfew but they have had no 'direct' communications with the Ciskei government.

They said they had raised the issue with South African government officials but their response had been that South Africa could not interfere in the affairs of an 'independent' state.

FOSATU now plans to take the Ciskei issue up with the Federated Chamber of Industries, which represents the majority of South African employers.



The Field — behind these walls people were beaten and tortured.