

JOHANNESBURG DIARY

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ANOTHER "emergent Africa" phase is at work in Johannesburg. White thoughts, where whites think, are again being directed beyond the African present of pass, prison and voetsak to the days when the non-white community will be granted rights as citizens.

On one day in January . . .

One hundred and fifty men and women, most of them educated Africans, sat in a military hall in Johannesburg, undergoing preparatory examination on allegations of treason. Outside the hall 500 policemen deployed, swung arrogant batons and in their more leisurely moments laughed and grinned together like the crowd of back-veld youngsters that they were. African spectators were dispersed whenever they knotted into a crowd.

Ten miles away and a few hours earlier, about 25,000 Africans had walked, cycled, ridden in taxis or private cars, cadged lifts on trucks or donkey carts, from their homes in steamy Alexandra Township, 10 miles from the heart of the city, to their work. They would not catch buses to work, and they would not catch them home again. A penny had been added to the single fare of 4d.—and the bus boycott was on. Within two days it was 100% effective. No reports of the intimidation of prospective passengers were made.

In a private home in Johannesburg an African "washgirl"—a woman engaged to spend a day a week washing and ironing the week's laundry—looked at the pile of sheets, shirts, serviettes and towels and almost scornfully asked, "Where's the washing machine?" There was none. So without apology—her action in tiny individual form a declaration of independence in her own life—she left the house. The white housewife did the week's washing herself.

And in Main Street, Johannesburg, a hatted, suede-shoed and smartly-dressed African man of perhaps 35 jive-stepped along the pavement singing to himself "Nuttin' But a Hound-Dog". He was an Elvis Presley fan and liked rock 'n roll.

In the melange of African growth, it is possible to spotlight an incident out of all proportion to its significance. But all over

the Reef such sparks of what can be called progress, some small and some big, are visible.

The leash which the whites feel so necessary for their own safety is again being felt as a restraint.

Dramatic interest has at least temporarily departed from a hearing which the spokesman for the defending counsel, Mr. V. C. Berrangé, likened to a political plot comparable with the period of the Inquisition or the Reichstag fire trial in Germany.

It was not an ordinary case, said Mr. Berrangé, in comment on "the crude and jackboot manner in which the arrests of the people before the court were effected".

Almost as if to point up his moral, the presiding magistrate, Mr. F. C. A. Wessel, asked, "What manner?" And Mr. Berrangé hammered home his point. "Jackboot methods, sir," he said.

It was outside the court that the jackboots had trodden hard on December 17 and 18.

A seasonal industrial shut-down over the few weeks of Christmas had left thousands of African men and women at a loose end for activity and entertainment. Some of them got it outside the Drill Hall where bullets zizzed, batons thudded, stones were flung, cops grinned and Africans got hit.

There has been a tendency to over-estimate the importance of December's events outside the Drill Hall. Subsequent quietness has shown that the police "demonstration of strength" was just another round in the old South African game of "police versus Africans" (albeit one of the games most threatening to future law and order in the country). Tempers on both sides rose only during the actual violence, not before and not afterwards.

The police won — but not without loss of dignity. The word picture of a beefy police officer dashing down the street shouting to his men, "Stop that firing," had its touch of humour. Equally telling was the incident of the young constables' being lined up after the unordered firing, the ones who had fired being asked to step forward to have their names taken — *and then the revolvers and ammunition of those who had not stepped forward being checked just in case everybody was not telling the truth.*

The police officers probably knew their men best; but suffice it to say that Pressmen who saw the violence were emphatic that the police were at fault in their handling of an admittedly difficult situation. There were few good words said for the way out that the police took.

From the "Treason Court", where politics are paramount, to Alexandra Township is a little more than 10 miles. But it must represent 1,000 miles of discouragement to supporters of the apartheid-minded Nationalist Government who have believed in the effectiveness of the "wither-away-the-African-leadership" tactic.

With, presumably, the "cream" of their leadership in the Treason Court or silenced by banning and other Government orders, including exile, the residents of Alexandra Township, Sophiatown (and also Lady Selborne Township in Pretoria), have organised, made effective and kept orderly a boycott of all Public Utility Transport Corporation passenger buses.

From the first mooted of the boycott — the issue being the one-penny rise in the fare of 4d. — the situation had serious overtones. Perhaps "serious" is not a strong enough word; "critical" perhaps described the potentialities of the boycott better.

For the Africans the boycott, once started, had to be won. If the boycott struggle were lost, it would be a perhaps decisive setback.

For the Nationalists the boycott had to be broken: there could be no concession — as indeed the whole apartheid philosophy of the Nationalists makes concession to African requests impossible.

That much was apparent from the first day that the Africans started walking instead of riding in PUTCO buses.

What was not so apparent was that on January 18 the Governor-General was to announce that legislation would be introduced during the January-June Parliamentary session to increase the poll tax paid by all male Africans.

If the bus boycott is protracted and eventually needs its scope enlarged so as not to get bogged down in sheer longevity, then a boycott of the new tax increase would be a logical field for the extension of the boycott movement.

And that would be major white-black show-down material.

Another lesson learned from the bus boycott, even in its early stages, is that it is on economic issues that the Africans of South Africa are able to secure that mass action which is the bad dream of the white baasskap (mastery) adherents.

One hundred per cent effectiveness was quickly achieved in the boycott. There *was* in the African mind a fear of reprisals for breaking the boycott, even though the threat may not have

been loudly proclaimed by the boycott leaders.

In other words, there *is* intimidation — but it is intimidation of the trade union type, the intimidation which makes a South Wales coal miner shy away from becoming a “black-leg” when his fellow unionists call a strike.

That in itself is an African step-forward towards what might be called an “industrial psychology”. It is a token of the future and another sign of developing African maturity.

There is one more factor in the boycott situation which (at the time of writing) deserves comment. With negotiations on issues such as this whittled down to nil, with other means of expression proved useless or disallowed, the boycott has become possibly the sole African weapon in the struggle of the Black community to have its voice heard and its wishes considered.

And if a boycott is started, as was the bus boycott, in the spirit of “We will not give up — we will walk for months if necessary”; and the automatic reaction of the Government authorities, as has been the Nationalist reaction, is “We will not be intimidated”, then there is little ground for compromise.

The whole picture presents a rather stormy prospect.

JOHANNESBURG MINES

LANGSTON HUGHES

In the Johannesburg mines
There are 240,000 natives working.

What kind of poem
Would you make out of that?

240,000 natives working
In the Johannesburg mines.