

WINDHOEK DIARY

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I HAVE known Head Constable Sauermann, of the Cape Town Special Branch, for almost as long as I have lived in the city—going on for 15 years now. Our acquaintance, I may say, is purely professional, and we meet only when we are compelled to. Yet so great is his interest in me that, despite his fundamental opposition to my views, he frequently comes to meetings to hear what I have to say, and from time to time visits my home without an invitation. The ripening of time, however, has made us understand one another, so that when I saw him at D. F. Malan airport on the day I left for Windhoek, I was immediately filled with misgivings. He wore a pair of dark glasses and a broad-brimmed hat and was armed with a pair of binoculars as though setting out for a day at the races. But the purposeful air with which he went about his business belied the casualness.

He was on my plane, of course, and when we touched down at Alexander Bay he came up to me and entered into conversation.

"Have you come all this way merely for my sake?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "To tell the truth, I didn't even know you were on the plane until I saw you walking out onto the tarmac".

"Oh", I probed, "are you going up to Windhoek for a holiday?"

"No", he replied, offering no further explanation. The conversation wilted in the intense heat and we resumed our seats in the plane.

On arrival at Windhoek airport, Sauermann was met by some of his local colleagues, and they all had a good look at me while we were waiting for our baggage. We were to see a great deal of one another during the next few days.

In truth, the attention devoted to me by the Special Branch while I was in Windhoek was quite fantastic. I had been sent up by my paper, 'New Age,' to investigate the situation resulting from the riots on December 10, when 11 people had been killed and over 40 injured in a clash between Africans and the police in the Windhoek location.

My hotel was overrun by Special Branch men. One was almost

always drinking beer in the pub, another on the stoep, a third sitting outside in a motor car, while African plain-clothes men drifted about aimlessly and obviously on the pavements. A shop down the road seemed to be used as a rendezvous, and people were constantly scurrying back and forth.

The hotel manager knew all about it, the guests knew all about it, in fact before long a large part of the town knew all about it. Windhoek is quite a big place these days, but still small enough for most people to know most other people's business. And there isn't a great deal for them to talk about.

The riots, of course, had given everybody plenty to talk about. Nothing like this had happened for a long, long time, though it should have been obvious to everybody for a long, long time that something like this was bound to happen. It's the very old South African story. Authority, which is all-white, keeps on issuing orders to the voteless blacks and flies into rage and panic when its orders are resisted.

How, after all, do you get agreement between people who disagree? In a democracy, you argue the point, put the issue to the vote, and the minority abides by the decision of the majority. In South Africa, where the very principle of black-white discussion is anathema to authority, you eventually have to shoot it out. Only the people haven't got guns, so they use stones—and stones are no sort of answer to sten guns and armoured cars.

Yet the clashes break out more and more often. In the last two years, we have had the disasters of Sekhukhuleni and Zeerust, Natal and Rustenburg, Paarl and Windhoek. Hundreds, no, thousands of people have offered active resistance to authority, have braved the worst that guns and batons can inflict upon them, have gone unflinchingly to jail or into exile. Men and women have been sentenced to death in our courts, but the stubborn spirit of resistance in them does not die, can never die, for it is fed by life itself.

When I made this point to the Mayor, Mr. Jaap Snyman, after he had taken me on a conducted tour of the old and new locations, he said:

"I know the mentality of these Natives. I grew up with them. It is not in their nature to oppose law and order. It was only when the agitators started telling the people not to move that the trouble began."

The Mayor and his officials perhaps believe this. It is hard for them to think that they are spending £1,500,000 building decent

brick homes for the Africans, and that the Africans appear not to be grateful. They ask you to look at the houses in the old location—the typical tin shanties you can find in any location anywhere in the Union, in Alexandra or Windermere or Cato Manor—and compare them with the neat-looking brick homes that are springing up on the hot sands to the north of Windhoek where the new township of Katutura is situated. They tell you about water pipes, electric street lights, water-borne sewerage.

They brush aside your reports that the Africans object to the enforced apartheid, to the higher rents and bus fares. And, in truth, some of the African leaders brush them aside too.

“Even if we were moving to Paradise”, they told me, “it is we who must decide to move, not they who must decide for us”.

There is a new wind blowing amongst the people of South West Africa, and many of the whites are frightened by it.

And yet it is an old wind too, and the people have been toughened by its rasping breath. The Africans of South West have not had an easy time at the hands of their white overlords. In fact, the South West story is in some ways far worse than anything experienced in the Union.

Under the Germans it was really an era of blood and terror, the scars of which have not yet been erased from the memory or conscience of its inhabitants. “Granted” the territory by the notorious Berlin Conference of 1885, at which, of course, the voice of the inhabitants was not even heard, the German imperialists were involved in a series of protracted and costly wars with the various indigenous tribes who quite naturally resented and resisted the foreign invasion.

The Germans adopted towards the non-white inhabitants of South West Africa an attitude of racial superiority and contempt which would not appear at all strange to the eyes of Dr. Verwoerd. Paul Rohrbach, of the German Colonial Office, wrote, about 1890:

“The decision to colonise in South West Africa could after all mean nothing else but this; namely, that the native tribes would have to give up their land on which they had previously grazed their stock in order that the white man might have the land for the grazing of his stock. By no argument whatsoever can it be shown that the preservation of any degree of national independence, national property, and political organization by the races of South West Africa would be of greater or even of an equal advantage for the development of mankind in general, or of

the German people in particular, than the making of such races serviceable in the enjoyment of their former possessions by the white race”.

Toughest of all those who opposed the Germans were the Hereros, who fought back with such determination that after four years of indecisive warfare the German commander, von Trotha, decided on a policy of total extermination. No prisoners were to be taken, von Trotha issuing a proclamation that “every Herero with or without rifle, with or without cattle, will be shot”.

A German soldier serving in the 1907 campaign, Peter Moor, describes the fate of the defeated enemy: “We led the men away to one side and shot them. The women and children, who looked pitifully starved, we hunted into the bush.”

Many of the Hereros fled into Bechuanaland, many died in utter misery on the battlefield. Here is a description of a village surrounded and destroyed:

“How deeply the wild proud sorrowful people had humbled themselves in the terror of death! Wherever I turned my eyes their goods lay in quantities, oxen and horses, goats and dogs, blankets and skins. A number of babies lay helplessly languishing by mothers whose breasts hung down long and flabby. Others were lying alone, still living, with eyes and nose full of flies. Somebody sent out our black drivers and I think they helped them to die. All this life lay scattered there, both men and beasts, broken in the knees, helpless, still in agony, or already motionless. It looked as if it had all been thrown out of the air.

“At noon we halted by water holes which were filled to the very brim with corpses. We pulled them out by means of the ox teams from the field pieces, but there was only a little stinking, bloody water in the depths . . . In the last frenzy of despair man and beast will plunge wildly into the bush somewhere, anywhere, to find water, and in the bush they will die of thirst”.

The numbers of the Herero people were reduced by this process from 80,000 to 15,000, before an international outcry compelled the Germans to call a halt to the slaughter.

But lest there be those who think this treatment of the subject races of South West Africa was meted out only by the Germans, the bombing from the air of the Bondelswarts on the orders of General Smuts (a good 13 years before the Italians committed similar if more notorious atrocities in Abyssinia) should be borne in mind.

To-day the Hereros total only about 30,000 out of a total population in South West Africa of approximately 450,000 (between 60 and 70,000 of whom are whites). They are a handsome, proud and dignified people; and, despite all that they have been through, their spirit is unbroken. The white racialists of South West Africa never stop complaining about them, and blame them for all the troubles that have occurred in the territory recently.

The location superintendent, Mr. De Wet, told the commission of inquiry into the riots that "mainly Hereros were against the move to Katutura. They comprised less than a quarter of the present location's population. The disturbances were caused by the Hereros". (*Cape Times*, January 12, 1960).

A leading Nationalist of South West Africa, in an off-the-record conversation with me on the stoep of my hotel one afternoon, found fault with the morals of the Hereros.

"Give me the Ovambos any time", he said. "With the Hereros you never know who is the father of their children. They are completely degenerate".

The Mayor of Windhoek, Mr. Snyman, during our drive through the location, confessed to a somewhat different view.

"They think they're too good for everybody", he said. "They regard themselves as the herrenvolk of South West Africa".

Which, coming from the Mayor of Windhoek, might almost be interpreted as praise.

Actually, the Africans are united over the location removal. Hereros, Ovambos, Damaras, Namas—all have joined to protest against it. At the big meeting held in the location in October, 1959, to discuss the removal, not a single African of the 3 to 4,000 present could be found to speak in favour of it—not an Ovambo, Damara or Nama, never mind any Herero. All the praise for Katutura came from the white officials.

In fact, one of the main objections to the new location is that ethnic grouping is to be enforced there. Authority believes firmly in the policy of divide and rule, but the people realise clearly that unity is their only strength and refuse to be set one against the other.

There are two main political organizations among the African people—the South West Africa National Union and the Ovamboland People's Organization, both formed within the last year or so. There is no rivalry between them, since they were intended to serve different functions. S.W.A.N.U. aims to unite all the

peoples of the territory in political action, whereas the O.P.O. caters mainly for the needs of the 250,000 Ovambos, who constitute the bulk of unskilled migratory, contract labour on the farms and in the towns. The President of O.P.O., Mr. Sam Nujoma, is a member of the executive of S.W.A.N.U.

The people that you meet in the streets of Windhoek are a fascinating mixture. Among the Africans there are the four main groups I have mentioned, and the experts claim you can recognise any of them at a glance. The Herero is supposed to be sharp of feature; the Ovambo has hair of a different texture and broader features; the Nama (or Hottentot) is light-skinned and might be taken for Coloured if his language were not so full of clicks; the Damara women wear their long, Victorian skirts slightly shorter than the others and have a different form of headgear.

Then, too, there are the Coloureds. Politically they can be differentiated from the Africans because on the whole they did not stand with them on the location issue, having been promised a "township" of their own where they would enjoy home ownership. Racially you are asked to distinguish between the Union Coloureds and the South West variety, the Rehoboth "Bastards", to use the offensive name which has been given them by their white masters.

"When I hear that word I get sick up to here", a Coloured man muttered, drawing his finger across his throat. I notice that a recent State Information Office pamphlet on South West Africa has had the grace, or the shame, to drop the word, using instead the term "Rehobothers."

Not that there is much unity amongst the 70,000 whites who occupy the territory. The Afrikaans-speaking group is numerically the strongest, roughly about 40,000; next come the Germans, about 20,000; and then the English, some 10,000.

During the last war, the German community was strongly infected with Nazism; and after the war, as a reply to General Smuts's proposal to deport the worst of them back to Germany, they voted solidly with the Nationalists. To-day, however, I was told by a prominent figure in the German community who ought to know what he is talking about, a third of the Germans who voted for the Nationalists have already swung away from them, and the swing is still continuing.

"Why?" I asked, interested. "Do you think they will vote for the United Party in future?"

"Maybe not", was the answer. "But there is a definite feeling

that the Nationalist Government is making a mess of things. Then too, don't forget South West is going through a terrible drought. In some parts we have not had rain for three years. Cattle die off like flies and many people have had crippling losses. Economically the territory has been in the doldrums, except for mining, and when times are bad people blame the government".

The German influence is very strong in Windhoek. The community has retained its national characteristics and forced the other sections to respect them. You can drink beer in the pubs on Sundays, and tables are laid out on the pavements in the Continental fashion. Your German, even when he is a Nazi, is "civilized" and very conscious of his heritage.

But though they patronise him for his vote, the other sections do not love the German. I was in the office of an official of the City Council when he happened to be speaking on the telephone to an assistant in a German shop. The Council official was an Afrikaner, but he spoke in English, not for my benefit, but because, he told me with his hand over the receiver, "I'm damned if I'm going to speak German to these people".

On the other hand, some non-whites told me they found the Germans on the whole less arrogant, less abusive than the Afrikaners. "They don't feel the need to impress you", one man said, "so they behave more naturally".

And so the various groups live together in hostile symbiosis. For those at the top, the struggle is worthwhile, for the pickings are lush. One farmer who shared a table with me at my hotel had come into Windhoek to get his car serviced. It was a special model, made to his own specifications at a cost of £5,000, and a mechanic was being brought out specially from Germany to give it the once over. My farmer had four other vehicles at his disposal. He had lived in the country for 30 years. "We have our bad times and our good times", he mused over his soup. "We have had these droughts before. A South-Westerner knows how to survive them. I would not like to live anywhere else".

There is probably nowhere else where he would get such a good return for his efforts. And his contract labourers from Ovamboland get only 1s. 3d. a day, plus rations and what is loosely described as "accommodation"

Here are a few more points of contrast between the level of black and white, culled from the latest Year Book:

In 1955 there were 9,934 white scholars in government schools in the Police Zone, each pupil costing the Administra-

tion £46, excluding hostel expenses. But there were only 7,413 African scholars, each one costing the Administration only £12. In the Reserves there were a further 18,867 African 'scholars', but the standard of their education can be gauged by the fact that they cost the magnificent sum of £1 8s. 5d. each.

There is not a single high school in Windhoek for the population of some 18,000 non-whites and only one in the whole territory. Until last year an African who wanted to matriculate had to proceed to the Union. Last year the Rhenish mission training school at Okahandja took a matriculation class for the first time. Windhoek has no high school for Coloureds either. Coloured matriculants must proceed either to Rehoboth or to the Union for their secondary education.

Just one last figure: total direct expenditure on Africans in 1955-56 was £404,741—out of a total budget expenditure of £10,720,000. This is the fashion in which the white man fulfils his 'civilizing' mission.

My visit ended as it had begun—with a visitation from the police. On the morning I was due to leave by air for Cape Town, I was roused from my bed in the hotel at 5 a.m. by two detectives, who, armed with a warrant from the Chief Magistrate, went through all my papers searching for something to do with "incitement to public violence". They apparently found nothing, for they went away with nothing—save the identity and views of many of the people I had interviewed, some of them not for publication. Thus do our masters safeguard the freedom of the press.

I came away from Windhoek with one abiding impression—that the whites of Windhoek, and probably of all South West Africa, will have no security until they learn to live in peace with their non-white neighbours. The use of force on December 10, 1959, has solved none of the problems of Windhoek. On the contrary, it has aggravated them, for the sense of grievance and resentment among the non-whites has been intensified by the losses they have suffered.

We live in the era of African liberation. If the whites who live on this continent refuse to come to terms with historical reality, they will have merited the dreadful fate which threatens them. For a seed has been planted and has started growing, and not all the stratagems of a tyrannical government will succeed in rooting it out.