REVOLUTION IS NOW

THE prospect of revolution is agitating South Africa as never before. With Parliament reduced by the psychosis of apartheid to the functions and status of a Government Gazette, and all constitutional opposition restricted to the fumbling futilities that a race-frenzied electorate will allow, change and revolution have become finally inseparable. Government spokesmen make sporadic allusions to a showdown, sometimes with nostalgic asides on the frontier wars, as though rebellion and repression are to constitute a series of open battles, where white supremacy will once again shoot its way through assegaais to decisive survival. The non-white political movements meanwhile engage in convulsive campaigns, their leaders for the most part as fluid in their conceptions of how to accomplish power as their opponents are rigid in their own of how to retain it. And in between, the ill-assorted political middlemen frighten themselves and each other with the approach of an explosion they are unwilling to advance and cannot postpone, consoling themselves instead with the possibilities of jumping off the train just before it enters the tunnel.

Those who talk most of an explosion are least able to define the form such an explosion might successfully take. In a society where revolt walks always in the shadow of massacre, a Bastille-storming type of upheaval is unlikely to occur and unlikely to achieve any fundamental change if it does. It is far more rewarding to examine the functions of government, and the way they are rapidly decomposing in South Africa, if the anatomy of revolution is not to remain a mystique, the loose consolation of the oppressors and the formless hope of the oppressed.

For a government can exist just as long as it is capable of governing, as long as it fulfills its fundamental function of maintaining law and order. While it does so, society can be coerced into sustaining it, because the alternative is that very lawlessness, with its sacrifice of life and property, that government exists to prevent. It is when a government ceases to be capable of governing that society is forced to find an alternative in order to survive, and it submits to revolution as the only escape from the suicide of chaos.

It is in the context of this definition that revolution in South Africa may be seen as a pulsating reality. The society is being stretched slowly on a rack of lawlessness, and survival itself is marked

by the teeth of the wheel. The 1957 Report of the South African Commissioner of Police reflects this in the ice of statistics. And a comparison with the annual report of London's Police Commissioner makes interpretation unequivocal. The metropolitan area of London, with a population of more than 8,000,000 and all the complex conflicts of a cosmopolitan culture, registered 30,097 arrests during 1957, or an average of 82 arrests a day. During the same year, 1,525,612 people were committed for trial in South Africa, of whom 1,448,582 were convicted. Every day of the year, therefore, some 4,200 South Africans are arrested and tried, out of a population of 14,500,000; every year, one out of every ten inhabitants—women and children included—is convicted of a crime.

Even more significant are the figures for crimes of violence. During 1957, there were 11 convictions for murder in the metropolitan area of London. The number of convictions for murder in South Africa rose from 390 in 1953 to 798 in 1957. (Australia, with a population of 9,000,000, has some 30 convictions a year; and New Zealand, with a population of 2,200,000, only 4.) Where London in 1957 registered 96 cases of criminal violence resulting in death, numbering in the total all deaths directly caused by dangerous driving, South Africa during the same year recorded 4,654, of which 1,992 were murders. Some 12 people, therefore, die every day of the year in South Africa as a result of violence. And of these, 5 are murdered. Surely this is a society slithering into anarchy.

The police force itself has succumbed to the general decay. In 1958, some 2.77 per cent of the white police force of 12,000 were convicted of crime, in comparison with 10 cases of misconduct registered during 1957 within the force of metropolitan London, or .06 per cent of a total of 16,345 men. And the lawlessness within the very fortress of the law mounts tumultuously. Between the years 1946 and 1948, 223 policemen were charged with crimes and 174 convicted. Between 1956 and 1958, the number charged had risen to 1,263, of whom 840 were convicted.

Prosecutions resulting from serious assaults on prisoners have become so common as to merit publicity only for the most savage. And the assaults brought to the attention of the courts must constitute a very minor proportion of those actually committed. One detective sergeant, giving evidence under oath, claimed: "It is an everyday occurrence for prisoners to be

beaten by the police . . . usually a garden hose, but sometimes a stick . . . If I hit an African over the head with the kerrie it would cut open his head and injure his skull, but a hose will not do that.'' The Minister of Justice, attacked in the House of Assembly on the growing number of police assaults, countered that he had *often* warned the force against attempting to extract confessions in this way. The necessity for repeated warnings suggests how small is the control that the Minister himself is capable of exercising.

More chilling even than the records of the lawless are the visibly unrecorded. It is a serious criminal offence in South Africa for whites to supply liquor to Africans. Yet, at a recent agricultural conference, a farmer from the Transvaal announced that he had been serving liquor to his African labourers for years, and that it was established practice in his area. It was, he added, the only way that farmers were able to obtain a satisfactory and stable supply of African labour. No prosecutions have been instituted against him and his neighbours.

Farmers throughout the country operate a farm labour scheme which is as savage as it is shamelessly illegal. Africans arrested in the urban areas for technical offences—contraventions of the pass, tax and liquor laws—are sluiced into farm jails for indefinite periods as an alternative to prosecution. Many of those arrested, however, are never offered a choice; and many others are deliberately deceived into signing six-month labour contracts, as their only escape from several years in prison. Very few, it would seem from the 'habeas corpus' injunctions that have been cluttering up the courts, are properly informed that their offences entail a *maximum* penalty of £10 or two months' imprisonment. When it is remembered that labour conditions on the farms are notoriously the worst in the country, with violence so common a feature that only the sporadic prosecutions of farmers for murder excite any attention, the official character of the scheme must seem all the more horrible. For without the active participation of the police and the officials of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, farm labour would be deprived of the force and the fraud that keep the supply constant and undemanding. And so, to keep its rural electorate satisfied, the Government itself flouts the law, persistently and implacably. Small wonder then that its subjects pant after its example.

And yet revolution remains, for the most part, a shadow in

the mind. Men do not throw bombs into crowded cafés, and rioting is sporadic and largely restricted to the African areas beyond the hill or across the river. Speculators in London and New York continue to ogle the gold market; the country is still an overseas safe-deposit box. And the mail-boat sails every week for Europe and a periodic escape.

Yet, there has been a change, there is a twitch at the corner of the eyes. Congress campaigns gather headlines where hardly a handful of years ago they were sedulously spiked. The Government buys 80 armoured cars in England to protect the police in the course of their duties. And Durban's black slums smoulder with men and women driven over the edge of despair. A boycott of South African goods is launched by trade unions and governments in countries no longer willing to connive at the swelling savagery of apartheid. And an internal boycott by Congress of goods produced by Nationalist supporters rocks the economy further. Industrialists helplessly complain of the violence done to the economy, only too well aware that organized economic violence is still preferable to its only effective alternative, the organized political form.

A white terror organization sprouts up in Cape Town, wrecks offices, sets fire to a motor car, explodes a tear-gas bomb at a Congress rally, and threatens the more outspoken opponents of apartheid. Criticism mounts despite every gazetted attempt to level it, and the Government back-benches hiss and bubble with schemes to silence contradiction. Confidence in the capacity of the Government to maintain white supremacy is slowly collapsing, so the legislators are elbowed out of the way by the thugs. Young Afrikanerdom seethes with conspiracies to seal up the fissures, and the son of the Prime Minister himself joins one of the secret societies.

It can go on like this, getting just a little worse each day, for a few years more. And then it can go on no longer. For no one, white or black, will be able to endure it. Five murders a day. Then ten? Then twenty? Nearly five thousand deaths by violence every year. Then ten thousand? Then twenty? How much lawlessness can any society sustain? How many boycotts can any economy suffer and survive? It is temptingly easy to think of revolution in sudden terms, a storming and a surrender, lightening in the streets. But revolution is slow and persistent, a wearing away of resistance to the point of snap. Revolution is now.