DURBAN EXPLODES

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CATO MANOR beerhall, like most South African beerhalls designed for Africans, looks like an overgrown lavatory. It is a long brick and concrete box, sitting squatly in the lap of the place called Jeepcoat Hill and cut off from the tin and sack shanty life by the thin Umkhanbane stream. The day I visited it, the day after the June riots when 3,000 African women were beaten into temporary submission by Durban police batons and bullets, the beerhall had been turned into a police fort.

It was in an excellent position for the police. From the dusty plain around it, they could see clearly out to Booth Road where the rioters had been most active: there all municipal buildings, including the administrative headquarters, a crèche, and the quarters of the municipal police—commonly called "Black-jacks" because of their black uniforms—had been reduced to muck and ash. From the beerhall, too, the police could get a reasonable all-round view of any demonstrators who might dare to advance on them again.

The hall was surrounded by armed police when I got there. They sat in dishevelled clumps after an all-night vigil, eating rolls in the sun. Sten guns, batons and steel assegaais lay in piles about them.

"How many police have you got here?" I asked an officer.

"Thirty."

"Is that all?" I asked. There seemed many more to me.

"Yes, we have thirty men here. And, of course, seventy natives."

I went to the opening of the hall. It cannot be called a door, because one side is completely open; a few chickens paddled in the puddles of beer around it.

Normally about a thousand African men would have been crowded at the pale concrete tables drinking the watery municipal beer from mugs or large black kambas—calabashes; most would be sitting under the economical roofs that just barely cover the benches and tables (there is nothing covering the spaces between); and a few would be gathered round identical concrete slabs on the bare open ground outside, which someone cheerfully described as the open-air beer garden. But the day

after the riots the rows and rows of tables were utterly deserted. A few empty kambas lay about like charred pumpkins. There was a tense, barracks atmosphere inside, and one felt driven out to investigate the front-line.

The police outside were confident that they had the situation under control. After all, apart from their sten-guns, tear gas and batons, they had small armoured cars and three big Saracen armoured cars, a few patrolling planes and the promise of the local Command against—what? Women with sticks.

The African women were raging with quiet but volcanic fury in most of the African townships in and near Durban by then. But it was in Cato Manor, one of the largest and most horrifying slums on the Continent, that the trouble started—with thousands of African women marching and dancing and shaking sticks in dazzling defiance at the whole edifice of white apartheid authority. Local and overseas papers dubbed picturesque headlines onto the story: "SHEBEEN QUEEN RIOTS", "BEERHALL BRAWL", and "MOONSHINE RIOTS". That, of course, is all plain moonshine.

The sparks that set off this blaze in Durban were far from frivolous. The details might seem irrelevant in South Africa, where any new pressure by the all-white rulers often has a last-straw look about it which might produce, at last, the final performance of this staggering show; the Africans have had about as much baasskap as they can bear, and almost anything can set off the accumulated blast of resentment and despair. The case of Cato Manor, however, is full of extraordinary and significant things. The way so many of the authorities sprang in to describe it all as merely a brawl of shebeen queens is, therefore, particularly cocky and contemptible.

Cato Manor lies in a heap of hills about four miles from Durban's Marine Parade, that grotesquely rich and indolent white playground which was at the height of its fashionable winter holiday season during the riots. Cato, named originally after a local manor estate, was long ago declared a black spot which would have to yield to the pressure of white residential expansion. The 80,000 or so Africans who are crowded into the cardboard and paraffin tin hovels of Cato like the area, though not the ghastly bits and pieces that constitute their homes, for several reasons: it is only a fourpenny bus ride from town and work; the hills and stream give it a rural air that is essential for the goats, pigs, donkeys, cattle and chickens which wander

around freely. Proud of this rare privilege in a South African shanty-town, almost everyone seems to keep some livestock. The people don't want to move, though naturally they would be delighted to have decent homes—in Cato.

Under the Group Areas Act, Cato Africans, like so many non-whites throughout the Union, are being forcibly moved to wherever the authorities think fit. As one African told me, "This is not slum clearance. It is human clearance."

Council houses are being built at a cubic African township much further out called Kwa Mashu, named after an English sugar baron called Marshall; but not all the Africans in Cato qualify to live there, even if they could afford it. The rents are comparatively high, and it is a 9d. bus ride from town, a considerable increase for the average £2 10s. 0d. a week income. Starvation is so commonplace in Cato that a recent survey revealed figures—shocking even for South Africa—of children suffering from malignant malnutrition. In the first six months of this year, 1,147 African children were admitted into a Durban hospital suffering from malnutrition; of those, 755 had kwashiorkor, a West African name for malignant malnutrition, caused specifically by lack of protein in their diets. The hospital pediatrician, who showed a reporter round the children's wards where babies with distended bellies, withered limbs and scaling bodies lay two to a cot, said, "One pint of milk a day would save them." In Durban generally, 95 *per cent* of the Africans are authoritatively reported ('Natal Mercury') to live well below the breadline. Therefore an extra 10d. a day in bus fares caused by the white authorities' pathological urge to move black housing further and further away from the lush white suburbs is quite insupportable to Africans.

In addition, this sort of mass clearance brings with it a deeply detested and humiliating personal inquisition. Under the notorious Section Ten of the Urban Areas Act, only Africans who have been with one employer continuously for ten years or lived in Durban continuously for 15 years can be allowed in the Durban magisterial area at all. The others must go. No matter about their jobs, their ambitions for their children's advancement in a prosperous city. They must go, back to impoverished, overcrowded "Native Reserves" which they originally left because they could not even earn their Durban £2 10s. 0d. a week there. So the Native Administration officials of Durban spent three years completing, until the time

of the riots, 70,000 dossiers on the people there: details of their jobs, their marital status, their political beliefs, their criminal records, their earnings and "general habits".

Now the African men have long been used to this sort of personal purity test, as all such details are taken from them before they can get their pass, the document every African man must carry if he wants to avoid arrest. But the women smarted sorely over this. Those whose marital status did not suit the authorities, those who were not married under strict Christian law, those old women who had come to look after grandchildren while their daughters worked, and those generally who did not find favour, were being "endorsed out", ordered back to the Reserves by the hundred. Any family life they were trying to build up, any stable future they might have cherished, was smashed in the moment the official's pen endorsed them out of the area.

About two months before the June riots, the Native Administration officials began to step up the clearance programme. While many people were at work, they broke down shanties. Families came home from their white employers to find the only home and shelter they had lying in mess and rubble on the ground. Most of them had absolutely nowhere else to go. Some of the women camped for two days outside the office of Mr. S. St. J. de Bellelay-Bourquin, head of the Native Administration offices that sprawl in a pack near the Old Fort Road. It was reported that they tore the shirt off his back when he finally made an appearance.

The shanty clearance, however, was intensified. At the same time, Mr. Bourquin issued a leaflet in Zulu to all Cato residents saying that proper, hygienic, concrete housing of specified measurements had to be provided for all animals or they would be impounded by June 30. There was a typhoid danger, he said, probably quite rightly. "But we have no proper houses for ourselves," one old woman told me. "Where will we find money for the sort of compounds they suddenly order for our animals?"

While the shanties were being cleared away, many of the home brewing stills were discovered by Council workers on the job. Under local liquor laws, the women were allowed to brew ten gallons of home beer each week for family consumption alone. That meant that any visitor who called while the family was drinking and joined in a glass could be—and often was—arrested

by the police on their frequent "illicit drink raids". This had long been a festering grievance. As spirits are prohibited to all Africans, in the country's way of telling Africans how to run every detail of their lives, it is natural that illegal drinking places, 'shebeens', have multiplied rapidly, incidentally helping African women to supplement the starvation wages of their husbands.

When the Council's demolition workers in Cato discovered the stills, they smashed them. Beer and concoctions spilled into the dusty lanes that pass for streets. The women watched, helpless and furious.

On Wednesday, June 17, they sent a deputation to Mr. Bourquin to say: We want the forced removals stopped. We want the Council beerhalls closed.

The Council runs nine beerhalls in Durban, for men only, where the very weak brew makes the Council an annual profit of £107,000. This, the mayor told me, was used for "native welfare".

The African women of Cato didn't see it that way. They said that the Council beerhalls were taking their men and their desperately needed money from them. No other community in the country has to pay for its schools and crèches by the men's drunkenness.

When Mr. Bourquin dismissed the women's demands—"They were both quite impossible," he told me later—the deputation's spokeswomen felt that as his replies were "unsatisfactory", they would picket the beerhalls and so prevent their men from using them. (They said they had already sent 25 deputations to Mr. Bourquin since 1955 without any of their grievances having been settled.)

Police were used to disperse them on Wednesday, June 17. But the following day the women turned up in even greater numbers outside the Cato Manor beerhall. They carried stout, four-foot long sticks and danced and sang and chanted bitterly. They set up that continuous wailing cry of women which sounds like the piercing death screech of thousands of birds. They chanted, "The Boers are using us as a ladder to climb on"—"When you strike the women, you have struck a rock"—"Luthuli, give us Luthuli. His is the only voice we will hear."

The police, called in by Council officials, gave the women five minutes to disperse. The minutes were counted dramatically over a loudspeaker. Then suddenly the rushing of feet, the thin, high screams of women, the hard fall of bodies. The

police baton charge had begun. Shoes, some very down-and-out at the heel, made bumpy trails in the dust as the women threw them off in order to run more quickly from the clubbing batons. About 3,000 women were fleeing from the police fury; tear gas bombs exploded all around them. All at once, they heard the unmistakable rattle of sten guns firing.

Police even smashed into the women's municipal lavatory, and sent the one woman inside running out nursing a hurt head. A man, who knew nothing of all the fuss, was leading two goats through the stream when police bullets hit his arm. The doctor later said it would have to be amputated.

"It was when our men saw the police firing and beating on our women so mercilessly," one woman who was there told me, "that all control was lost."

Everyone went for the Council buildings. When they had set fire to these, they attacked a municipal bus, asked everyone inside to get out, then burnt it to uselessness. They burnt down a shop owned by an African with Council sponsorship; they destroyed three churches. Afterwards it was found that almost thirty buildings valued at £250,000 had been ruined. All the personal dossiers needed for the mass removals, with a solitary survivor, also went up in smoke.

The rage of the rioters spread to other African townships throughout that Thursday night. The official casualties were one white policeman shot, four Africans killed, 24 wounded. Unofficial figures were much higher. But finally the people submitted to police force; and when reinforcements and extra armoured cars were called in on Friday, the atmosphere in Cato Manor was tense and smouldering in the ruins, 'all quiet'.

The police seemed pleased as punch and were amazingly helpful to correspondents. Whenever I visited the smoky Cato on Friday or over the weekend, they volunteered information and begged to peek through the telescopic lens on the camera belonging to the non-white photographer with me.

Twice when I phoned Col. R. D. Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner of Police, for a routine round-up of the day's events, he began his statement with robust good humour: "Now I wouldn't like to tell you what I'd do to *my* wife if she picketed my favourite pub. She wouldn't be able to sit down for a week . . ."

A key figure in the Durban drama is Mr. Bourquin, chief of Native Administration for the Council. I saw him in his soft-carpeted office, where he sat under a huge Zulu shield which he

said was presented to his department by Zulu chiefs in gratitude for the good done to their people. He is a medium sort of man whom one would not notice in a crowded street. His brown hair is curly, his lips thin, and he wore grey flannels and a pale green shirt. He is a son of missionaries, and he told me he did his work because he was "interested in natives". There was no doubt in his mind that the shooting was necessary. "They would have skinned me alive if they could have caught me," he said. "Our office staff were evacuated in the nick of time."

"The women, I think, only dislike me in my official capacity. But I have to carry out the law. Privately, when they talk to me, they call me father."

To be frank, that was not how the women described him when talking to me. However, even if his sort of paternalism were acceptable to adult Africans, Mr. Bourquin must admit he is a stern father. It was he who later proposed that nine African men and women whom he regarded as "agitators" should be summarily banished from Durban without trial. If that was accepted, he had a further list of 20 whom he wanted similarly banished. The Council voted against his proposal by 11 votes to 10. It was Mr. Bourquin, too, though, who proposed that the Council immediately raise the miserable wages of their African employees, because he felt that poverty was a real factor in the riots. And it was Mr. Bourquin who subsequently went to consult African National Congress officials about this.

But the heroines of the whole affair are undoubtedly the women, those magnificently-built Zulu warriors of 1959. I stopped for a time with about 300 of them while they picketed the Lamontville beerhall on the Saturday afternoon after the Thursday terror. Police, black and white, heavily armed, lined the road for about a hundred yards.

The women, prancing about with their sticks, sang and jeered at the men—particularly the African police. The women looked determined, deeply angry; but traditional good spirits sparkled to the surface every now and then. They exploded in derision when two African policemen insisted on accompanying one woman all the way to the toilet. They shook their fists at the few defiant youngsters who, with much swagger and bravado, thought they could get through the feminine picket-lines to the beer. Within seconds the men scuttled, sheepish and filled with awe.

The Council closed the beerhalls until June 29, much against the advice of the police, who thought the women would regard it as a triumph. Which it was. But even when they reopened them, not a man or boy went near the places for weeks; and at the time of writing, only a handful of men, said to be Council employees mostly, have returned to the halls.

The outstanding aspect of the women's demonstrations was the coherence and certainty of their battle: they knew whom they were fighting—Council and Government officials. This is quite different from the 1949 Cato Manor riots, when resentment and frustration burst out in passion against the Indians. Although a number of Indian shops were gutted during the latest riot, there was a great feeling of revulsion among the women about this. When I travelled with an Indian colleague in Cato Manor, several African women spontaneously came up to him to express regret at the damage done to Indian shops. There was no doubt that the main force of the women was directed against the authorities. There was also a good deal of general anti-white feeling that sometimes looked as if it might get out of hand. Some of the women shouted at us or refused to speak to us until my colleague explained that I was a correspondent for an overseas paper. On the night of the burnings and shootings, several white journalists said that their lives were threatened.

But that was incidental. Officials and Government-supporting newspapers instantly denounced the African National Congress as the instigators of all the trouble. This was quite absurd: every eyewitness was aware of the spontaneity of the outburst, which only grew to fiery proportions when the police charged and shot at the women. In fact, offers by the A.N.C. to go into Cato Manor to pacify the women were rejected; a request for officers of the non-political Institute of Race Relations to speak to the women was also refused.

However, Chief Luthuli, President of Congress, was at last officially asked to send a message to Cato Manor. He reminded the people that Congress was dedicated to non-violence and begged for calm. His statement, issued from Lower Tugela, the remote village to which he has been confined for five years, was immediately circulated in thousands of leaflets throughout the troubled areas of Durban, and probably had more than anything else to do with the restraint that followed.

Meanwhile, on the all-white beaches in Durban lapped by the warm Indian ocean, crowds of whites lay throughout the day,

slowly braising brown in the sun. "Aai," one woman told me in disgust, "they fiddle while Durban burns."

In the glass house that was my hotel, stridently chic with artificial pools and rockeries in the hall, not one holiday reservation was cancelled because of the riots. Lounging in the well-sprung beds, the sun-tanned holiday-makers, mostly from Johannesburg, had their eight course breakfasts sent up on trays carried by non-white waiters as usual.

So complete and blindly optimistic, in fact, was the world of fantasy in which the whites in Durban lived, that they joked at every effort I made to open a discussion on the riots and turned again to their paw-paw and peanuts.

A large, round businessman with a pink smile who generously gave me a lift from the airport to save me time, blinked in bewilderment at my interest. "But what are three thousand crazy kaffir girls going to do?" he asked. "I'll tell you when *I'll* call it serious. I'll call it serious when my girl brings my morning tea in late."

He guffawed and waved his plump hands in the air. But he could not give me any directions for getting to the tin terror of Cato Manor. He had never seen the place.

His ignorance and indifference, like that of most white South Africans at this stage, is more than extraordinary: it is criminal. His open contempt for the "kaffir girl", who makes his tea and runs his house and probably earns far from a living wage, is only part of his crime; he has rasied not a finger to protest against the apartheid Acts that are depriving the non-whites of their final shred of dignity. He, with all the balmy sand philanderers of the Durban beaches and cocktail sippers throughout the country, must share the blame with officialdom.

For it is not only in Durban that unrest has reached feverish heights. It is everywhere in the country where the triple alliance of Group Areas Act, Urban Areas Act and passes for African women is being ruthlessly enforced.

In Durban, violence has brought the immediate benefits of slightly increased wages and consultations with the A.N.C. Congress, with its non-violent policy, knows that in the long run, however, violence will harm their movement. But in spite of their opposition, these sort of outbursts will surely increase. You cannot stoke up the fires, sit on the safety valves, and still hope to avoid the explosion.