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South Africa's Day of Blood

ALTHOUGH the South African pass laws and their defiance by the followers of the Pan-African Congress were only the immediate cause of the riots which broke out in the neighbourhood of Johannesburg and Cape Town last Monday, they were a very compelling immediate cause. It is difficult for anyone who has never been personally acquainted with the operation of these thoroughly notorious laws to visualise, even approximately, the plight of the urban African community under them. It is not only a sad plight and a humiliating one, it is exasperating. The irritation and tyranny the laws cause are continuous. There is absolutely no letting up. Only the most uptodate of Johannesburg or Cape Town lawyers can say with any degree of certainty as to how many passes an African in a township is expected at all times to have on his person. The passes are too numerous and their form is amended and altered too frequently for anyone but an obsessively law-abiding and law-know*ing person to keep track of them.

An African cannot go out into the street without a particular type of pass; he cannot stay at home without another. His place of employment demands a third type of card; and the police expects him to carry with him at all times an uptodate record of his employment, wages, tribe, location, residence, thumb-impression and a dozen other things which no one outside the iron walls of South Africa can even think of. The result of all these laws is simply this: that any policeman can, as a rule, pick up any African he chooses and be sure to find him short of one or more passes. Indeed it does not seem unfair to suggest that this; is in all probability the precise purpose of the passes—to have a perfectly legal excuse handy at all times to arrest any particular African and throw him behind bars.

The havoc the operation of these laws plays with the daily life of the average African in a South African city or township is serious. Since the same African may be picked up again and again for the absence of the same pass, it means his working life and family life is constantly disrupted. Terrible as that is, there is worse to come. Being picked up for a pass offence means being given a criminal record, which the Government never hesitates to use politically against the African concerned, should the need for doing so arise. Seeing that on an average, about 100,000 Africans are charged every year under the pass laws, the Government has a political handle against almost every urban African in the country.

The sheer inhumanity of the system is horrible. Yet this is the system which lies at the very foundation of white rule in South Africa. The pass laws are the means whereby the African is kept constantly under the eye of the police, and therefore under political control. So, in a pense, when the Africans rise up and challenge the pass laws, they strike a blow at the very base upon which white South Africa stands. This explains why the Pan-African Congress a new political group, hardly a year old—chose the pass laws, as the first target for their assault. It also explains why the Government took the challenge so seriously as to consider it worthy of instant and brutal suppression.

The riots themselves show the Government in the worst possible light, of course. The Pan-African Congress had taken special pains to emphasise its intention of keeping the defiance of the pass laws, completely non-violent and peaceful. Volunteers lined up before the police stations in their townships and reported that they were carrying no pusses, and offered to be arrested. The Government, however, was frightened by the very magnitude of the crowds gathered outside the police stations. Quite early in the morning the volunteers in the township of Sharpeville, outside Johannesburg, numbered as many as 20,000; and the authorities were probably right if they feared that the number would grow much larger unless immediately checked. It was evidently for this reason that the decision to disperse the crowd was taken. Later events show that the decision, *once* taken, was implemented brutally. As if tear-gas and batons were not enough to discourage the crowd from growing any larger, sabre jets were pressed into service. They flew overhead and dipped on the crowds to scatter them with fright. But even that was not considered enough. Rifle

shots were fired at the Crowd without any apparent provocation. This killed a leader of the demonstrators and infuriated the Africans, who (naturally under the circumstances) forgot all about the Congress injunction about non-violence, and started retaliating with stones and sticks. When the police and the troops brought out sten guns, the demonstrators mustered the few arms they had and shot back. But how terribly unequal the fight was is, clear from the fact that while not a single policeman or soldier lost his life, 72 African men, women and children were mowed down and perhaps another 200 were injured.

The performance of savage force was repealed a few hours later at Langa, outside Cape Town, where a very much smaller crowd had gathered to court peaceful arrest. Some more Africans were killed and injured here.

Nothing that the South African Government can say will convince the outside world that this inhuman massacre of unarmed men was either justified or unavoidable. Two inquiries have, under pressure from the Opposition, been ordered by the

Government. But what will these investigations seek to show? That the crowd had attacked first and the police merely retaliated in self-defence? That the trouble would have developed much further if the police had not acted at once in the way it did? Even if the inquiries show that the first stone came from the demonstrators, nothing will have been proved of any material value. Not only does it still remain defensible that a stone-throwing crowd should have been mowed down by gunfire, it is also immaterial who was immediately to blame for the tragedy. In a situation where explosive material is lying all around and where the air is thick with inflammable emotions, it is futile to try and discover exactly who flung the match which set oil the fire. The real culprits are the ones who loaded the atmosphere with explosiveness. The roots of Monday's tragic happenings lie deep in the *apartheid* policy of the South African Government. If Dr Verwoerd and his associates (or should one say accomplices) are really interested in investigating the cause of this week's riots, let them lay bare the anatomy of *apartheid*.

To Which Gods?

WHEN visiting a temple, none of the deities, big or small, whose images lie scattered about in the court-yard of the temple, or which line up the temple path, can be ignored. Kach has to be propitiated according to his or her respective status or place in the pantheon. For some, the choicest offerings, flowers dipped in *saudal pa Me*, handful of rice well soaked in water, coconuts, sweets. Deities lower down in the hierarchy have to do with less but even a single grain of rice will do. Our gods are compassionate and long suffering, as long as they are taken notice of, with a token offering, be it only a single grain of rice.

To which gods did they offer oblations, when the highest body in the land met in Delhi to discuss, the Third-Five-Year War Man? Did they instal some strange new gods in the place of the old, trusted ones? There was nothing dramatic like that, though the public had been led to believe something of the sort. In fact agriculture gets first priority and

larger allocation. To quote from the IMB handout "... In its discussion of priorities for the Third Plan, the Council agreed that the first priority should be given to agriculture. There had also to be necessarily considerable emphasis on the development of basic industries, especially steel, machine-building, fuel and power, on which the capacity of the economy to develop in future largely depended." Basic industries, especially steel, are not new. But the emphasis on machine building, fuel and power is, despite a lower than expected target for steel. And this we have all along been told would be the key to the Third Plan, the highest priority. The Council has ruled that out.

To repeat, if one looks at the allocations, one does not see much of a change unless one is prepared to read something like that into the combined allocation for power, industry and transport which is higher than in the Second Plan. The hard core of the Third Plan is supposed

to be its steel-machinery-power-complex. This part of the Plan is also believed to have been carefully studied, properly coordinated and generally handled on a high level of technical competence. But none of the gods has been neglected. Pandit Nehru defined the basic object of planning as that of pulling out the country from 'the rut of traditional ways of production and distribution' and held up scientific planning using modern technology as the only means for it.

Besides science, the other gods also got their offerings. Panditji also covered the human factor in progress and applauded institutional changes like the revival (*sic*) of the Panchayats system; others stressed equality of incomes, utilisation of idle labour and balanced regional development. There were not only the priorities of planning, the pre-conditions of a large Plan were not left out — the necessity of holding the price line and of putting a ceiling on non-develop-