

CHILDREN UNDER APARTHEID

It is not possible to cover a vast subject like the effects upon children of the apartheid system in one short paper. During 1981, however, various situations in which children were the direct or indirect victims of apartheid were particularly significant. We record these briefly in the hopes that they will serve to focus our attention more pertinently on some of the issues in the year ahead.

1. It is largely old folk, children and women who eke out an existence in the resettlement areas. These children may never know the security of family life, nor indeed ever know their fathers. They are often emotionally, physically, mentally, educationally, and sensorily deprived. Many suffer illness, particularly from extremely poor nutrition and lack of health facilities. They are hungry and isolated.

Margie Nash describes the alienation that these children experience as follows: they ". . . feel like outsiders and discards. They develop anti-social attitudes because they do not have a feeling that life is good and exciting, and that it is worth working hard in order to enjoy a successful future. They do not see many grown-ups as models to emulate: in fact, many adults - especially white officials, police and soldiers - are seen as enemies".

2. There are children still living in District 6. If they are 16 years or younger, they would only ever have known bull-dozing and destruction around and about them. Is it any surprise that many children and young people who have been subjected to group areas removals and the destruction of their homes have little respect for the property of others?

3. Children are subjected to the terror of pass raids by gestapo-like Administration Board officials. They are bundled into police vans, held in cells, appear in court and accompany their mothers to prison.

4. The housing crisis has reached the proportions of a national disaster in Cape Town. As a result of gross overcrowding, children are exposed to the realities of life from a very tender age - the intimacy of their parents' lives and that of their grandparents, the lack of privacy and space for study and homework, and the bickering and tension that comes from 20 or more people living in a two-roomed flat. Children whose parents live in distant resettlement areas like Atlantis may be cared for by an aunt or neighbour whilst their working parents board in the city during the week so as to save travelling expenses.

5. Due to extreme poverty, or perhaps just the economic pinch, children come home from school to empty houses, or are locked up at home all day whilst both parents work (the latch key children). There is a lack of creche and day care facilities everywhere.

6. The crime rate is high in many "townships" throughout the country, but is highest in Cape Town. Children subjected to a variety of deprivations are prone to linking up with gangs or becoming involved with anti-social behaviour at a young age.

The schools of industry and reformatories are very full. These institutions often serve as the training ground or junior school to prison. Apparently only some 15% of children who enter the reformatory are "rehabilitated". In 1980 there were eight prisoners on Robben Island under the age of 18 serving sentences for crimes other than those against the state. Children may be held in police and prison cells while awaiting trial. Corporal punishment with all its ramifications persists for children.

7. Child labour is exploited. Newspaper vendors were the focus during the year, as have been children from the platteland who are brought to Cape Town as domestic workers by people who promise their impoverished parents that they will receive schooling and care. The possible existence of a "slave servant racket" is being investigated by the police.

8. There is no specific mention of children and their rights in the "security legislation". This legislation therefore reduces the child's generally preferred position in law and has a universalizing effect upon its victims.

There is no recognition of the tender age of mind of those under 18 when e.g. section 6 of the Terrorism Act is imposed.

8. "In this country we have 100,000 black children dying annually from diseases directly related to not having enough food. These children continually feel the same kinds of things Bobby Sands was feeling and they certainly haven't inflicted it upon themselves." Professor Duncan Mitchell, Wits

9. Severe educational deprivation persists for black children. The "coloured" matriculation results were astounding. Only some 55% passed. Regulations to the Education and Training Act published in 1981 now preclude young students over certain ages from being admitted to certain standards. No student over the age of 20 may be admitted to Std 9 or 10; no student over 18 years may be admitted to Stds 6, 7, or 8, and no student over 16 years may be admitted to primary school. Members of COSAS claim that they have been prevented from returning to school because of "political activities", despite their qualifying age-wise. There is no understanding of the reasons for black school-going children being older than the average "white child". Black education continues to be dictated by the Verwoerdian explanation of his "Bantu education policy":

"There is no place for him (the African) in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour
... (The school system should not) mislead him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze."

10. Many children in South Africa know brutality from a young age. The photograph by Sam Nzima of a school student carrying his friend killed during the 16th June 1976 unrest will haunt us forever. Eleven of the eighteen people accused with Mr Oscar

Mpotha (72 years) for incidents resulting from the 1980 unrest were 18 years and younger when arrested in 1980. They are all still incarcerated while awaiting trial. The murder of a young black boy of 12 years by a S.A.D.F. platoon leader who was shooting at targets along the road near Klerksdorp with his R-1 rifle has many connotations. The parents of the deceased felt that the 15-year sentence imposed on the accused was too lenient.

11. Nyanga

A question and reply from HANSARD NO. 7, 14-18 Sept. 1981 confirmed the arrest of innocent children at Nyanga:

- (1) How many (a) men, (b) women and (c) children were arrested during the raid in Nyanga on the morning of 26 August 1981;
- (2) in terms of what statutory provisions were the arrests made;
- (3) how many such (a) men, (b) women and (c) children had further action taken against them in terms of the statutory provisions under which they were arrested?

THE MINISTER OF POLICE:

- (1), (2) and (3) In order to terminate their illegal sojourn in the Cape Peninsula, action in terms of Act 25 of 1945, Act 67 of 1952 and Act 59 of 1972 was taken against a number of persons at Nyanga.

18 men, 37 women and 14 minors were charged in terms of section 10(4) of Act 25 of 1945 and section 15(1) of Act 67 of 1952, and 95 men, 151 women and 103 minors were deported in terms of section 40(4) of Act 59 of 1972.

When families were living on the dunes at Nyanga, there was deep concern for their health and welfare. A mother is recorded as saying: "If it rains again tonight, we are afraid the children will suffer more" Concern was expressed by many about the effects of teargas upon the children. After their parents were deported, the Dept. of Foreign Affairs admitted that "a handful of children" were left behind after the raids. Community and church workers claim some 50 children were left behind. A father who escaped the raid and subsequent deportation from the Holy Cross camp told me proudly that when his children saw the police scaling the fence of the Holy Cross Church (where the International Red Cross was officially providing for the needs of the "squatters") in the early hours of the morning the older took the hands of the younger two and they ran to an aunt in nearby Crossroads.

Demolitions of the simple shelters of this brave and determined group of people have continued to date. Last week a mother and her two-week old daughter were photographed and interviewed by the Argus.

"They can come at any time to arrest us," she said, "we have nowhere to go."

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PERCENTAGE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION: 1975

Race	0 - 14 years	15 - 64 years	65 yrs+	TOTAL	Dependency ratio
White	31	62	7	100	60
Asian	38	59	3	100	69
"Coloured"	45	52	3	100	91
Black	44	52	4	100	91

PERCENTAGE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN CAPE PENINSULA: 1980

Race	0 - 14 years	15 - 64 years	65 yrs+	TOTAL
White	25	66	9	100
"Coloured"	38	59	3	100
Black	Figures not available. Presumed to be similar to 1975 figures. Age structure in resettlement areas likely to reflect high percentage of children.			

Statistics available from
Department of Statistics

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