

Crime

1 February The Alexandra Chronicle reported statistics of crime in the township for 1981. There were over 1000 cases of violence, including 89 murders and 111 cases of rape. Several responses are recorded in The Chronicle: the editor advises people to control themselves and not behave like hooligans. Somebody writes to the editor saying that 'the whole family whose child is involved' should be reported; this person also recommends reading the Gospel, and getting home early after dark.

Of course there is nothing wrong with recommending restraint; but it doesn't throw much light on the problem of crime. Crime is related to social disruption. When social conditions are bad, the rate of crime is high. What are social conditions like in Alexandra? Even before we point a finger at individual criminals, or seek solutions to the problem of crime, we have to ask why social conditions are bad. That is where we will find the roots of crime.

The plague of liquor

Perhaps more than anything else, drink contributes to crimes of violence. In this connection it is interesting to note that:

In South Africa, more sorghum beer is drunk than any other alcoholic drink. The main brewers and suppliers of this beer are the governments of South Africa, Bophuthatswana, Transkei, KwaZulu and Ciskei.

Locations are financed largely from liquor profits. In 1982 a surplus of nearly R4 million is expected from liquor sales, and this money will be allocated to WRAB and various Community Councils.

Liquor outlets are provided and looked after by authorities. Whatever else may be lacking in the township, liquor is provided in abundance. It might be said that the consumption of liquor is encouraged and stimulated by the state. Police found that in some areas in Soweto 88% of murder victims had excessive alcohol in their blood.



— There are no less than 4 official liquor outlets in Alexandra itself. The main bar is possibly the best built structure in the township, and was the first building reconstructed after 1976 (whereas the Secondary School is still an old, broken decrepit building, without adequate facilities for pupils)

HOSTELS

Another factor contributing to violence is the widespread disruption of normal family life, caused by the migrant labour system, and the single-sex hostels. There is a long history showing the tensions, frustrations and troubles caused by hostel life.

A memorandum was prepared in 1972 drawing Koomhof's attention to the dangers of hostels. This memo pointed out that "These hostels are potential universities of crime. An environment of this sort could be detrimental to the safety of the individual. The rule of lawlessness could well spread beyond the walls of the hostel to embrace heterosexual sex crimes and violence." Nevertheless, hostels and the system of migrant labour remain central to the policies of the government and the economic system in this country. Instead of dismantling hostels, since 1972 the government and private businesses have built many more.

Only recently a particular hostel in Alexandra was the scene of violence, which left people dead and wounded. The ALC denounced these hostels at the time, and promised to close this one. But it has since been occupied by a business called Fidelity Guards.

POLICE VIOLENCE

A third cause of violence in the community is violence from the state. A few weeks ago a family was evicted from their house in 10th Avenue. "WRAB officials came to the house at about 8 pm and ordered us to get out. Our belongings were thrown out and my furniture was damaged", Mrs Ndlovu said. (RDM 1.4.82) This sort of thing has been going on for many years. It is unlikely to be recorded in the police records as a crime of violence, but it is in fact violence committed by the state against the people.

Of course these are not the only things that breed criminal violence. We must add unemployment, overcrowding, bad education, poverty.

It is reported that campaigns have recently been organised to counter the high rate of knife attacks. Meetings in Johannesburg have included NICRO (National Institute of Crime Prevention) and AZAPO. The Soweto Police favour this community action (it also cuts down on their work) In Pretoria the initiative apparently comes from the Atteridgeville/Saulsville Community Council, and from the Atteridgeville branch of COSAS.

But how is one to stop the use of the knife, when from top to bottom society in this country has been laid waste. It is a disaster area.