

THE PONDOLAND MASSACRE

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IN January 1958, four people were sten-gunned to death at Gopane village in the Bafurutse reserve, near Zeerust. A month later all pressmen were barred from the area.

In May 1958, an unknown number of people were killed in Sekhukhuneland. A week later the press was barred from the area.

In June 1960, about thirty people were shot to death at Nqusa's Hill in Pondoland. The press had been barred from the area already.

Clearly, the Nationalists have become more efficient, but the basic pattern remains much the same. The pattern is dictated by Dr. Verwoerd's racial theories, which are in turn partly the result of divine inspiration (as he himself has revealed to us) and partly a survival of those race theories which so calamitously set Hitler's armies and concentration camps in motion. For their successful application they need above all a comfortable darkness, undisturbed by flash-bulbs or the movements of prying reporters.

Thus, when I arrived in fear-ridden Gopane (nearly 200 refugees from the area are living in Lobatsi, British Bechuanaland Protectorate, to this day) in January 1958, I had to work fast to piece together the grisly story of what had been done before the police discovered I was there. Together with the Rev. Charles Hooper, Anglican priest for the whole territory, and his wife (subsequently banned from the area), I questioned men, women and children. They described how the four people, including a ten-year-old boy, had been shot after a police search.

Two boys showed me where their father, Tiro Montsho, had been shot dead, and I had the chilling experience of picking up from the middle of the blood-splash on the grass a piece of human intestine, from which it was a reasonable guess that he had been shot at fairly close range.

Minutes later, two riot-vehicles of police arrived on the scene and, unlimbering their sten-guns, the police barked at us all to leave the area at once. What would have happened to myself and my non-white photographer if the Rev. Hooper had not been there, it is not pleasant to imagine.

The reason for the Zeerust killings was basically that the Bantu Affairs Department had ordered the Bafurutse women to carry "passes" like their men. They were to carry them at all costs, and the Government-nominated chiefs were instructed to see that they did. When the inevitable tribal disturbances followed, a 270-lb. police sergeant, Jan van Rooyen, was put in charge of operations, with a squad of mobile sten-gun police under his command. The horrors that followed have been sufficiently chronicled by the Rev. Hooper in his book 'Brief Authority'.

In Sekhukhuneland, mass opposition gathered to a head during May 1958, after Chiefs Arthur and Godfrey Sekhukhune had been banned from the area (they are still exiles) for refusing to enforce Nationalist policy upon their people. Pro-Government chiefs were appointed, villages were broken up for purposes of "ethnic grouping" and better control by the chiefs, and presently the riots began.

It was a time of agony for the people of Sekhukhuneland, hounded as they were by mobs seeking Government supporters on one hand and police squads seeking the mob leaders on the other. Chief Kholane of Malibong and an ex-policeman called Bob Nkadameng had their throats cut by tribesmen, and at least seven other people were killed. Sergeant Jan van Rooyen was transferred from Zeerust to Sekhukhuneland, and the press was barred from the area while the police hunted for the "instigators".

In Pondoland and the neighbouring Transkei, fear and violence have spread steadily ever since the Nationalists decided to turn the area into the first great Bantustan and set about appointing chiefs who would carry out their policies and sacking those who would not.

Some of their policies—notably soil reclamation—were perfectly ordinary administrative measures. Others—like the move to make the Dutch Reformed Church the "official" church for the whole territory—were not so ordinary. All measures, however, were enforced as rapidly as possible and with a minimum of consultation, while the Government repeatedly maintained—as it still does—that it is prepared to discuss objections only with the chiefs, who are of course its own paid and manageable servants.

The inspiration for this policy is summed up in an answer given by the dedicated young information officer for the Transkeian territories when I asked him: "Have you ever considered, even for a moment, that some solution other than apartheid may be

necessary in South Africa?" With pity and with contempt he told me: "I can see you have never studied the laws of genetics. . . ."

It is these "laws of genetics", then, which are being put into effect in the "Bantu Homelands" of Pondoland and the Transkei.

The tribesmen themselves have recently formed an "Anti Bantu Authorities Act Committee" in the Lusikisiki district of Eastern Pondoland, and have submitted a memorandum to the Department of Bantu Administration. They make these points:

- Their Paramount Chief, Botha Sigcau, is pro-Nationalist and unpopular. They claim he should never have succeeded to the title, and that his brother, Nelson, is the rightful chief.

- Taxes under Bantu Authorities are higher, and tribesmen feel that the taxes are only used to pay the salaries of the unwanted Government-appointed chiefs.

- They object to the new Bantu Education Levy, which taxes them to pay for the indoctrination of their children and their training for more efficient servitude.

- They resent being grouped into villages under the new land scheme; traditionally their huts have always been scattered.

- They detest the land rehabilitation schemes, particularly cattle culling and dipping.

- They claim that bribery and corruption are commonplace, and that only those who can afford bribes get fair treatment at the new "tribal courts".

- They complain that consultation is the basic rule of Xhosa society, but that the newly-appointed chiefs do not consult the people and the Government officials consult only the chiefs. They were not consulted over the whole scheme for "Bantustan", they have never accepted it and they will not have it forced upon them.

- Tribesmen are not allowed to hold meetings of more than ten people to discuss grievances, unless the local Native Commissioner gives permission.

To all this the Pondo tribesmen—and their cousins the other Xhosa—have reacted by holding illegal meetings to thrash out their problems, and by murdering the pro-Government chiefs and burning their huts.

As word of the Nqusa's Hill massacre spread through the forests and rolling hills of Pondoland, flames could be seen rising up almost every night at different points. Police, military

vehicles and aircraft searched the wild countryside for "instigators", and hundreds took refuge in the forests and caves of the remote hills.

The shooting at Nqusa's Hill (a large double-humped hill, the name of which in Xhosa means "Backside Hill") was not entirely unexpected, it would seem. An Afrikaans-speaking trader living nearby said: "They had had this coming for a long time—it should have happened two years ago".

A missionary who has lived in the area for many years said that the meetings at Nqusa's Hill had been going on for weeks and, though they were illegal, the police had been attending them and making no effort to stop them.

The wounded, lying in the Holy Cross Mission hospital after the shooting, said that on the day of the big meeting they had all been warned by the organizers not to bring even their ordinary fighting sticks—though no Pondo likes to move about without one. They were told: "We are going to talk, not to fight."

On their way to the meeting they saw police trucks parked on the neighbouring hills, but they did not turn back. Mr. Mlothwana Ngxambane, who was lying in the hospital with both legs amputated after the shooting, said that aeroplanes had dived low over the meeting so often that the audience could not hear what the speakers were saying. A helicopter landed sten-gun police, and the police fanned out around them, reinforced by others who arrived at the same time in trucks.

No eye-witness we spoke to knew of any resistance offered to the police. They all said that they had thrown up their hands and shouted: "We are not fighting." But the police opened fire, and they continued to fire until there was nobody left to shoot.

They used rifles, revolvers and sub-machine guns at close range, and the tribesmen said that 30 died. The wounded were left where they lay until villagers with wooden sledges came and dragged them to the hospital seven miles away. Some of the wounded died when they tried to escape across a nearby river, some died in the bushes. After two days vultures showed the way to the bodies; and many were buried where they were found.

The police occupied themselves with raids on the tribal huts, looking for "instigators" as always, and with patrols in helicopters to prevent the press from reaching the scene. A police helicopter followed a car-load of African journalists until a police van caught up and took them into the nearest town—Bizana.

An African reporter who was 'phoning through a story from Bizana two weeks after the massacre was surrounded and arrested by no less than seven policemen, who cursed and manhandled him on their way to the police station, where they charged him with "failing to produce a reference book". He was acquitted.

In spite of the desperate efforts by officials and police to keep pressmen from getting at the news, word has now leaked out that Botha Sigcau, the controversial Paramount Chief, has attempted to resign.

He announced at a tribal meeting at Tabankulu that he wanted to resign in favour of his brother Nelson, but—according to Mlugwana Xolo, a spokesman for the local tribesmen—his speech was cut short by the local Native Commissioner and he was immediately whisked away by officials under heavily-armed police escort.

"The officials were unable to hide their shock," Mr. Xolo said, "but we have not seen Botha or any of his closest attendants since that day. We think the officials are trying to persuade him not to resign."

Meanwhile, brother Nelson said in Lusikisiki that he did not want the £1,400-a-year (and perqs.) Paramount Chieftaincy either. His brother, he said, would have to "sort out the mess first".

"The mess", however, seems to be taking the form of increasingly organized opposition by the tribesmen. Latest reports from the area say that regular meetings are once again being held by the "insurgents"—this time at Ndlovu's Hill, ten miles south-east of Bizana.

A "Committee" has been organized for the area, and systematic pressure put on clerks, schoolteachers and others who are classed as "literate", to pledge that they will not support Bantu Authorities.

They have been invited to attend the meetings, and those who have refused have been threatened with having their homes burnt. It is said that those who have been threatened are now paying "fines" to the Committee.

Typical of what happens to unpopular headmen is the fate of Dideni Rababa, a 45-year-old petty chief from the Umtata District. He went to the hut of a woman called Nomoto Mtsako one night—without his bodyguard. In the middle of the night the hut was surrounded by tribesmen, who poured petrol on it and set it alight.

When Rababa and Nomoto tried to escape they were forced back by tribesmen with assegais. He was burnt to charcoal on the spot; she died in the Sir Henry Elliot hospital at Umtata.

Men who have pledged themselves to fighting Bantu Authorities have handed over the responsibility for caring for their families to the womenfolk. Many "wanted" men still visit their families for a few hours each day or night and then disappear into the plantations again, tribesmen say. Each time the police helicopters land in Bizana, anxious women look at the weird machines to see if any of their menfolk have been captured.

Amusingly enough, the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr. C. W. Prinsloo, has stated: "We are convinced that the disturbances are of the same nature as those which occurred in Zeerust and Sekhukhuneland a few years ago—the work of outside agitators."

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