

The whole continent of Africa is today engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the Pretoria regime of racist Verwoerd. Since the advent of independence in Africa in 1957, the strong forces of African nationalism have been building up slowly against Verwoerd and his regime.

Whether it is at the United Nations, or at the Commonwealth conferences; whether it is at the International Labour Organisation or at the ECA conferences, the African countries have made it clear that they will not rest until Verwoerd has been brought down to his knees.

Very recently, unprecedented strides have been taken to crush and frustrate South Africa's regime. African states now talk the language which, I believe, is the only one which Verwoerd can understand. African states are now resolved to throw South Africa out of the UN including all its agencies. It would therefore not be wrong to say that Africa is just fed up with the Verwoerd regime.

IN THE LIGHT of this dynamic spirit which now rages in Africa against the racists of South Africa, it sounds most fantastic that Communist countries should at this stage be fishing for new markets and friendship with Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd. The Communist countries constantly speak our language of "anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and neo-colonialism", and, if it is true that some of them supply South Africa with arms, we will be shirking our duty if we do not challenge them.

If these Communist countries think that they can talk our language today and tomorrow support Verwoerd, we do not hesitate to tell them that, "those who are not with us are against us". It is with this background that we see the USSR vetoing a motion which aims at the ultimate expulsion of South Africa from the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

IT IS AT THIS JUNCTURE that Africa wants an answer to the following questions from East Germany, Poland, Hungary, USSR, The People's Republic of China, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia:

- (i) What types of arms and ammunition (if any) do you supply to South Africa?
- (ii) What quantity of arms and ammunition (if any) have you already supplied to or you intend to supply to South Africa?
- (iii) What types of agricultural and or manufactured goods do you import from or export to South Africa?
- (iv) What volume of trade, in these goods etc; do you have with South Africa?
- (v) When do you propose to break off diplomatic and trade relations if any, with South Africa?

I wish to make it very clear that, on the question of South Africa, there can be no middle-of-the-road or two-ways about it: Africa is engaged in a life-and-death struggle against Verwoerd and "those who are not with us are against us". That's all there is to it. ●

Into a Dim World

The Compound is a Meerkat Burrow

CARL MAFOKO

SOUTH AFRICAN INDUSTRIAL COMPOUNDS have a unique and quite unattractive architectural character.

From foundation to roof a compound building is one mass of a grotesque figure, cast in stark relief that defies the eye; stubbornly conveying to the outside world the unwelcoming mood of its inside. The ugliest compound will show an outline of brick and mortar for walls, and zinc or asbestos of a dull shade for roof. It will be about three hundred yards long, to be pouched into mass rooms. As it grows up, the wall bends into a shape as of a train, the impression of a train being pronounced more by the length. Here and there, a squat chimney stump pokes out from the solid monotony of roof. There may be several five-room, six-room structures in the middle, but the general hunched outline of the outer screen wall is the rule.

Thus finished, the compound is hardly noticed by the prosperous city dweller, always a passer-by here, always occupied with visions and ideas of cheerful home and society.

Only, as you hie past one, you need to have a curiosity and a hunger for facts that does not stop at generalisation, to have a sense of the reality of the seamy side of life to notice the compound. Its bleak, elephant appearance will sicken your eye, you will wish it was not there; you will wish that the Mrs van der V's could be down to earth enough to see this thing, thorn in their clay, cancer of an otherwise progressive State; to behold and be sickened also, so that they may cry for its replacement by something with the air of home; for their cries are always given a hearing.

The inmates of the compound prove to be of a mould different from that of their brothers in the townships, and it is easy to make them out when they descend into the streets of town. Lacking the city poise, extremely careful, discreet, drawn-in phenomenal beings out of some hole, eager to avoid the forward, fast city dwellers in mutual tenderness and sympathy for their simplicity. They halt, stagger, stutter. They have come from country places and never had a chance to adapt themselves to town and its people.

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The music of their women folk still in their ears, the feel of the horns they blew still on their cracked nether lips, the vibrations of the grating hoe and the bleat of goat still in their nerves, they leap from station to station in trains. From station the next home they know is the compound.

THERE IS ONLY ONE ENTRANCE into a compound. From here stretch of it two walls in opposite directions. They curve or sharp-turn in their course to meet in the rear. Shut in like this, the compound is a small world with its own character. The air is close and damp. There is a permanent funny smell as of dirty linen in a long standing state of decay; and you wonder that people should be used to this fetid atmosphere. You sniff into your handkerchief as you pass near the reeking lavatories and massive cement wash stands. Fustiness hovers in all rooms.

The character hardly changes in any of the large rooms. The inside of one is tattered. I cannot compare it to the inside of an anthill, as this is neat, having been designed and cared for by its inmates to their own taste. Even mice, though given to destructive habits, still pile their offal in one place, and leave their bedrooms clean and dry and sufficiently ventilated. It would be fitting to say the room looks like a forgotten overcoat rescued from destruction by termites. Though the men launch a constant battle with the broom, the shuffling tired feet always bring in soil and dust; from a remote corner some accumulated loose ends of a once glossy garment sweep out at a shaking, from the roof a dangling soot flake falls at every slight creak and stir in the structure.

There is no privacy in the rooms. To each room there are about thirty men, sharing a common fire place (coal is supplied in winter). Bedding consists of cement stoeps built on to the walls. Even then, designs differ. In some cases they are so built that they lie parallel to the walls. In others they lie head-into wall, so that the room looks like a many mouthed furnace. In each case an upper bedding is provided above every lower one so as to accommodate many sleepers. These sleeping holes are dark and narrow to fit each one body. With an air of romantic mock pride, the men will remark how they live in burrows like meerkats! Ageing coats and shirts and trousers hang on the thin bedding partitions, involuntarily performing the duty of curtains.

For sitting when they partake of a meal, the compound men use self-made clumsy benches or they just squat. Everyone having brought a lump of hurriedly-prepared mealie husk porridge and a piece of meat all wallowing in a pool of soup often without vegetables, at times including beans or stamped mealies, friends and mates will sit in a circle to eat. This happens in the morning, noon and evening without variation. Those who choose go also for beer.

For a visitor they buy mealie-meal to cook decent porridge, and vegetables to enrich soup. Then they may also serve tea and cakes. One would feel that they recognise that theirs is not the feeding standard of an ideal society. There is also noticeable in their attitude towards visitors (only males are allowed) an embarrassing gentle regard such as men commonly hold women in. It

would be an embarrassment to them if a visitor elected to spend the night with them.

While the young men play football, the elder ones will be at a song party. They play local chess indoors if they are not too tired.

In conversation, reasonably considered the yard stick of a man's mental development, the average compound man reveals an unshakable belief in the mad injustice of so-called modern, advanced social and political systems. He betrays a distrustful trait, a complaint against some brute force that keeps him in this condition, an incurable grudge against the frowning power that stands between him and the free world of humans, the grudge engraved in him by the workings of the narrow scope to which his world restricts him.

INTO THIS DIM WORLD a young man is ushered; here to make a start in life; here to learn essentials of life, to build himself into a man with responsibilities; here to play a part in the shaping of industry, if aught he plays; to develop his talents, though to do so here invariably means to accustom himself to manual work and to the simple pastimes of the muscular men with befogged minds, to learn to forget what he was taught at school: that industry hires apprentices, and that such advance and become scientists, great world figures if they have the talent. Here the rough touches of experience will show him how merit is dashed on rocks and a white skin considered first.

THE RECRUITING OFFICER IS a typical example of the semi-literate South African "boss-boy" (first messenger), who has had this office thrust on him by dint of his servile attitude, and a readiness to sell his original principles and those of his people. Like most people without merit, he is vainly authoritative, supercilious in a vulgar manner.

Two boys, each carrying a small bundle in a blanket follow him into a "boss-boy" friend's compartment, in the compound. Though it is unnecessary, he shouts at them injunctions to sit and to greet. There is drinking and a lot of complacent talk in the men around, most of them long timers on the middle rungs of the ladder to "boss-

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boyship". The recruiter's friend does not even sit down (you cannot command from an obscure part of the platform). Besides a straggling of the usual ragged men you find in all rooms, there are three clerks sitting on benches, one yellow stockinged leg crossed over another, one red stockinged leg hooked over another. There is also a policeman who has come for a drink—a man with an erect, superior mien.

At the invitation of the friend, the recruiting man retires into a recess behind an old wooden box (how unfortunate that they have no cosy, private room!) to have a meal. When he has finished, the recruiter emerges with two bones in his hands. He barks a peremptory call to his recruits, indicating the bones held to dangle from his fingers. That vulgar! That contemptuous! . . . One of the men jump for his bone. The other one hesitates a little, then, apparently remembering a previous lecture . . . "we all started there, myself and *poisa* and *mapalan* . . ." he darts glances at the men around, makes for the proffered relic of a meaty bone with the soft, crouching tread of a whining dog. The man has to sell his labour very cheap, yet he must first sell his manhood (soul and flesh) to gain a price to take him to market, where he may even not sell well.

A MACHINE HOOTS OUT at clocking time for a shift. The men file out like ants on trek, in all shapes of tattered, battered neglect. In their iron helmets, big boots and filthy clothes, they leave in one the impression of people embarking on an inhuman project, this clumsy uniform apparel to back them morally, to bolster their courage, to mark them out as different from the man in the street in flannels, to reinforce the limited human strength and endurance . . . They flow out for an hour—they are so many! it is necessary for the power needed. They do not even embarrass the industrial magnets: twenty men share the tit-bits of a man's ideal salary.

In some cases the industrial site will be a few miles from the compound, and a lorry will fetch the men there. The car filling up, some of the men will sit astraddle along the narrow edge, each knee hooked over that of the next behind, close together like packed chairs. Only a solitary whistle or yell from among the bunch of fearfully still men, tells of life.

You wondered to a police friend of yours: "But why will people thus abandon normal life? . . . And to think that they are human, that their mothers loved and kissed them with pride when they were babies! small, humble things drinking mother's milk just like any child! . . ."

Your police friend just frowned, tilted his helmet in front, played his fingers on the hair exposed behind and "Well, well!" he said.

"This is strange", you continued, "they look like some beings specially designed for such life. Really to think . . . and do they go home, and do they kiss and caress? . . ."

"It's shocking. I don't like it. Wild, wild! And they seem to know and accept it. Listen to their forlorn singing, how it touches the heart . . ." There was a slight tilt back of the helmet at the flow of this human feeling.

Yes, your friend had learnt some of the compound men's warrior songs and these he would sing to you. You

could never laugh. Their message appealed to your wrath, to your grim moods, even from the constable's untrained voice. They tell of castigation, of despair of life, of a trifling regard of death as their portion—Put in English, the words of one would sing: "Even if I die, I won't care!" They tell of a constant battle with authority, of a determination to defy, to break the chain. You have to hear it from their group: the mournful, drawn, drawling effect.

Your police friend took you to the police station to show you the weapons they carry: tomahawks and regular axes, kieres and sharp pointed iron bars. As a sample he showed you in the charge office wounded men, their faces cut and chopped in parts. He and his colleagues indicated them as much as to say "see them . . . criminals, of course!"

"They seem to like it", your friend had said. Seen on the surface they give this impression. Often we are not aware of the cruel hand that casts the men into inimical tribal groups, one side selling the other in a bid to lift the trodden head; one side charging at the other with impatience, in a desire to give vent to the suppressed cry. One day they will charge without quarter in another direction.

"But why will the State not stop such cruel life?" you asked.

"Well, we arrest them. But they come back and fight again."

"And is that enough? Isn't there some root source of this evil that needs to be dug out?"

There was another tilt to the front of the helmet, a deeper frown, a craned shoulder as "hm, hm!" he purred. Then, "Man, you never know. We arrest their ring leaders." That was the argument of your constable friend.

THE COMPOUND TAKES shape again as you pass by. Here and there drooping figures make slowly for their home. Into that compound a young recruit is led. His mother tossed and patted him, lovingly fed and grew him up, only to see harmless child changed into this bloody thing. While others see their children grow into gentlemen accomplished and liked in the world, she must be satisfied with this thing, packed in lorries, fed on coarse foodstuffs and beer, housed in meerkat holes. ●

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