

was unheard of, the rational discussion of principles and issued involved appeared to be regarded as a deadly sin. The principal would normally issue instructions, preach, and say that he had decided. He had so many years of experience as a teacher and principal that he knew best. If anyone dared to question him or query something, he would either rave about disloyalty and impertinence, or tell us that there were other schools for those who did not like conditions at *his* school. At other times he would threaten that he had only to lift the telephone receiver and he would be in direct contact with higher authority. And this was no idle boast, either. As quite a few victimised teachers can testify . . .

AT THIS PARTICULAR SCHOOL, weekly assembly was held every Thursday morning. After the normal religious ceremony, the principal would address the assembled pupils and staff. At times he would rave and shout at the children as though they were dogs. Apparently he had first hand evidence that many of them never washed regularly, some never told the truth, and that others just stayed away from school as their fancies dictated. He could not understand them, could not fathom their curious behaviour. They were unlike "White" children, whom he idealised.

The manner in which the principal addressed his fellow-teachers in front of the students could only be described as uncouth and downright boorish. It sometimes seemed as though teachers were *his* teachers to be ordered and bullied about as his principalship pleased. He had the despicable habit of divulging staff secrets or misdemeanours to the pupils. For example, if some unfortunate teacher had come a few minutes late one morning, he would broach the subject at assembly as follows. He would start off by reprimanding the pupils who had come late that particular week. And just for good measure he would acquit himself of the following gem as well:

"And don't think that I only deprecate late-coming amongst you pupils. Oh, no! If you think that, you are completely mistaken. Yes, my teachers must also be punctual. Oh, I detest unpunctuality in a teacher. What example can be set in that manner? And don't think I am just

speaking generally. Oh, no! Only yesterday morning I had to haul Mr. Y over the coals for arriving a few minutes late. Yes, I am strict with everybody, including and especially my teachers."

By this time about 700 heads would have turned in the direction of Mr. Y whose gaze could only be directed downwards. If Mr. Y was brave enough to walk off to a classroom, the question of impertinence and disrespect towards the principal would have been the main issue at a forthcoming staff meeting. And if Mr. Y or any other teacher got up at such a meeting to express his disgust at the principal's behaviour, he would receive the answer that once he, the principal, had spoken he considered the matter closed, or, as was the case more than once, he would announce abruptly that the meeting was over and storm out towards the shelter and comfort of his office.

PERHAPS THE STRANGEST ASPECT of conditions at this school was the principal's habit of encouraging spying by pupils on teachers. At assemblies at the beginning of the year the principal would stress the fact that he was the head of the school, that he was in command, that ultimately he had to take responsibility for whatever happened at the school. And because he was the head, he had to know everything that went on at school, whether in the classroom or outside. Then he would continue in the following vein:

"Children, you must listen very carefully in the classroom. If the teacher says anything you consider to be unbecoming

Requiem for Aunt Lizzie

"CANDIDUS"

AUNTIE LIZZIE SITS on a hard chair in her small, crowded front parlour. The door is open—it is always open—and from it she watches the children splashing in the slime which trickles down the street, the taxis which race along with a bump and a splash, the men and women who pass unceasingly.

Auntie Lizzie is fat and jolly. Her thighs bulge over the sides of the chair, and when she shares a joke with a passing friend (and she has many friends), the mountainous flesh wobbles.

A simple woman, this Lizzie, you might say: Just a fat "coloured" woman living in one of those festering slums which persist here and there where they haven't yet got around to moving the people to the new ethnic areas.

Do not be misled by appearances: Auntie Lizzie is a

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or irregular, please report to me. If the teacher tries to influence you in any way, come and see me promptly. If the matter is very serious, you may leave the classroom without permission." So much for distilling into pupils a respect for their teachers or discipline. Luckily, many students rejected such advice with the contempt it deserved.

WHEN THE PRO-GOVERNMENT *Die Banier* came out a few years ago, the progressive teachers on the staff decided to boycott this Coloured Affairs Department newspaper. However, one such teacher was also library assistant and had amongst other things to see to the filing of back copies of this paper. But he had decided that he would not soil his hands in this way. After a while the inevitable "staff" meeting was held. Said the principal:

"*Mnr. X, ek moet seker eers jou stert lek, voordat jy Die Banier wil regpak.*" And that vile and vulgar expression was quite a favourite of his . . .

I SUPPOSE THAT in a modern high school with about thirty classrooms an intercommunication system is quite a convenient device. But at this school I soon came to regard it as a positive curse.

One would have thought that announcements that could be heard in most of the rooms would be restricted to a minimum. One would have thought that any statement over the inter-com. would be preceded by a polite apology.

But not so here. Announcements, requests, the lot, would come barging in on the lessons at any time.

Perhaps the most distasteful feature of the abuse of the intercom. was the off-handed manner in which teachers were addressed over it. If one was in the staff room one could not hear announcements over the intercom. If something important had been announced in the meantime, one was obviously in the dark about it. But this would not prevent the principal from barking at one perhaps later in the day.

Sometimes a list of special duties was put up in the staff room. If you had a free period, you would most probably have to go and supervise somewhere in the absence of the regular teacher who was perhaps away temporarily or ill. More often than not there would be no prior announcement about such a list. And you might be free but decide not to go to the staff room. After a few minutes the whole school would vibrate with an indignant:

"Mr. Z, the Std. — class is waiting. Where are you hiding yourself?" or

"Mr. Z, see that you go to Std. — immediately," or just the blunt

"Mr. Z. where on earth are you then?"

The whole school would have been hearing this and the pupils could not do otherwise but smile. You, of course, would be red with embarrassment and rage.

(To be continued)

very remarkable woman. She is remarkable for several things, and I would put them in this order of importance:

First, a heart of the purest gold. She has an all-embracing humanity which takes no cognisance of race, colour or creed, wealth or poverty. Secondly, she is a militant opponent of all forms of injustice (and this means apartheid in all its manifestations).

Lizzie is a fighter, one who is known as a champion of every "dangerous" cause, a protester of protesters, a demonstrator to outshine all demonstrators.

She is a formidable person when roused and the Government of South Africa knows it. Not for nothing was Lizzie among the first to be locked up in the 1960 Emergency. (She was inside for four months). And inevitably Lizzie is now banned, confined to the small town where she lives, forbidden to enter a factory (and therefore unable to work) and forbidden to attend social gatherings.

FORBIDDEN TO ATTEND social gatherings: This is a farce where Lizzie is concerned. There are 14 people living in the small home she rents. She has a large brood of children, but there are others in the house, uncles, cousins, orphans, hangers-on whom I have never been able to sort out. And all these people have friends who pass in and out in a never-ending stream. There are more often than not three or four draped around the stoep, and children playing in the few square yards of garden. And Aunt Lizzie, banned from social gatherings, sits and watches it all from her chair in the sittingroom and enjoys it all

hugely, and wobbles energetically into the kitchen to make tea for a visitor. If Auntie Lizzie were to keep to the letter of her banning order, she would have to spend her days and nights sitting in the "*kleinhuisie*" in the backyard. And so the Special Branch, who are human beings (Auntie Liz says some of them are) turn a judicious blind eye. In any case, a judge failed to decide the other day what a social gathering is and said the law is vague and embarrassing.

WHAT REALLY DOES IRK LIZZIE is the clause which says banned people may not talk to other banned people. This is the bitterest blow, because through it she has been cut off from her dearest friends and comrades in the struggle. She sometimes waves to them in the streets and when she does there is a half smile on her lips and tears in her eyes.

She who would leave her children to travel 20 or 30 miles by train or bus to attend a meeting or a political trial is restricted for five years to a small town.

In the old militant days before restrictions, Auntie Lizzie was the first person everybody turned to for practical help and comfort in very kind of trouble or sadness. An old blind African was not getting his pension; Auntie Liz would worry and nag the authorities until he got it. An Indian was sacked from his job because he was suspected of being an "agitator"; Auntie would collect money to feed his family while he was jobless. She settled quarrels between man and wife, helped a girl with an illegitimate

child. She collected money, food and clothes—and gave generously herself—for people who had been banished for life to remote parts of the country for “political activities.”

Well, Auntie Liz is still doing the same things, even more intensively. For such a woman, abounding with energy it would be impossible to be idle. Her heart is too full to care merely for the needs of her own large family; it embraces all who may be in sorrow or in need. Everybody calls her “Auntie.”

SHE WAS A STaunch church-goer, an Anglican, but may no longer attend church. An application for a relaxation of her banning order to enable her to go to church was rejected.

Aunt Lizzie's non-racialism is deep-seated and genuine. She is a “Coloured” person who does not have to carry a pass, but she has rejected firmly and utterly any idea of racial superiority over Africans. And this is something she has done in the face of strong psychological pressures and attitudes imbibed from infancy in a land where caste, based on skin colour, is a national disease filtering down from the Whites to every segment of society and particularly to those officially classified as “Coloured.”

Would that there were more like her.

Auntie Lizzie has a healthy contempt for those of her friends and relatives who will not cast their lot with their darker-skinned fellow citizens: those who cling to the pitiful “privileges” which their lighter skin confers on them.

Lizzie has always been “in the struggle” boots and all, and where those stout shoes stamped and that ready tongue lashed like a whiplash—for Lizzie is as vehement in her hates as she is strong in her loves and she can be magnificently angry—then even policemen trembled and looked the other way, deeply embarrassed. Like the night when Lizzie was “taken” three years ago, when she insisted on her “rights” loudly and firmly (and was told she had none)—when she wept and laughed and hugged her children and her husband and waved reassuringly to her family from the police car taking her to the Johannesburg Fort.

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Her home was always open to people of every race and religion under the South African sun; she was at her proudest and happiest on those numerous occasions when she had Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites at her table. When Whites came to her modest home in their cars, with their fine clothes, sharing a seat on the shabby couch, she was delighted. There is no trace of resentment at her own poverty, no spite in the woman.

OFTEN I HAVE ASKED myself the question: What has made Auntie Lizzie spit in the face of racialism, to be a uniter of our divided peoples? Above all I should say it is her natural humanity and generosity of spirit, but there is another important factor: Auntie Liz lives in an old area which has never been “ethnically” segregated. She has learnt to know Africans and Indians and among them are her dearest friends.

This state of affairs will not last much longer; Auntie Liz must join other “Coloureds” in a separate township “for Coloureds only.”

Auntie Liz indulges one big hate—against the vast impersonal machine of “the Government” on the shoulders of which she lays the blame for most of the ills which surround her—poor wages, job reservation, the deaths from malnutrition and gastro-enteritis of small children, the bannings and detentions and many other things. It is not a personal hate. I think she would bestow as much of her considerable personal charm on the signatory of her banning order, Mr. Vorster, if he visited her as she does on anybody who is “on our side.”

SHE DOES NOT RESENT poverty in itself: She resents being poor in an affluent society which has cast her and her kind in a role from which there is no escape. No amount of struggle and effort can lift her out of that mire.

She is determined to see that her children are well educated. She has taught herself to speak four languages—English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Sesotho—and to read and study carefully all the leading newspapers. Nothing of a political nature escapes her attention.

Once her home was a meeting place for every kind of political activity, ringing with laughter and argument and planning. Now, for the most part, only the voices of children are heard, and her husband's quiet voice when he returns after his day's work at the factory.

Why has the Government struck down this simple, hearty, pleasure-loving and pleasure-giving woman? The answer is not hard to find. Auntie Liz was an agitator, and proud of it. She never missed a protest or demonstration if she could help it and she was always in the forefront, arms akimbo, shouting, laughing, exhorting the faint-hearted, taunting the police and the “stooges”. When Dag Hammarskjöld came to Pretoria it was Auntie Liz who helped to hire buses to get the people there to demonstrate; it was she who led the singing of “Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika” and who led the crowd when it surged across the road to the hotel.

NOW AUNTIE LIZ is silenced, but in her heart there still burns a fierce desire for freedom and justice “for all the people of South Africa.” Nothing will destroy that. ●