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EDITORIALS

CURTIS NKONDO AND THE 1. SCHOOL BOYCOTT

In this issue of REALITY we had intended publishing a message from Curtis Nkondo, amongst other things Chairman of the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee, first President of the Azanian People's Organisation and executive member of the Solidarity Front. We cannot publish that message now because Mr Nkondo has been banned.

The message was not to REALITY it was to members of AZAPO, and it was published in Post earlier this year. We have been waiting for an appropriate moment to carry it in REALITY because we thought that what Mr Nkondo had to say was something that white South Africans ought to hear. The school boycott provided the appropriate moment but the ban has made publication impossible. All we can tell you now is our impression of what Mr Nkondo was saying.

Our first impression is that although the names of the organisations in which Mr Nkondo was prominent may send shivers down the backs of most white South Africans, they needn't. It is quite clear from his message that this was no

racist monster speaking, but a tough and uncompromising opponent of apartheid who wants what most people of any sensitivity want—the freedom to decide for themselves how they should be governed and what they should do with their lives. He does not only want this for himself, he wants it for everybody else too. Which seems to us very reasonable.

His second message, if we understood him right, was that time for peaceful change was running out.

This second message has been underlined dramatically by the school boycott, and its wildfire sweep across the country.

As in June 1976 it is the black schools which have set in motion a campaign which has shaken all South Africa. It is easy to see why. Schools are where intelligent young people gather in an organised manner. It would be odd indeed if an intelligent young black schoolboy in 1980 hadn't noticed that his school and what it provides him with are greatly inferior to what any white school he passes in the bus any day provides for the children who go to it. And

having observed that it is one short step to noticing other things—that his home, his neighbourhood, his prospects, are all inferior to what that white child can expect.

So it is not surprising that school protests are only initially about education and that they soon become concerned about the whole quality of black life in South Africa. Increasingly, too, adults give them support. And the government appears to have no idea of what to do about this swelling tide of rejection of its policies. In 1976 a lot of people were shot. What did that help? Only four years later, the country is in turmoil again . . . eruptions breaking out in places scarcely touched before—Bloemfontein, KwaMashu, the Indian schools . . .

Will beatings and baton-charges in 1980 do any more to resolve the situation the Government faces than did bullets in 1976? Of course not.

The predictions of those Nationalist theorists who persuaded Afrikanerdom that its salvation lay in apartheid are coming apart at the seams. The policy was supposed to turn out "Bantu", Coloured and Indian children, all happy in their separateness, docile and obedient. Instead it has produced a

radical black youth movement, its members far more conscious of the bond of the inferior quality of their education and their lives than they are of any differences between them. They see their destinies as one. How else can one explain that what started off as a Coloured school boycott should eventually attract such massive support from African and Indian students? Nationalist planners have no answers to the demands being expressed by black urban youth. Nor are they likely to find any while they keep banning people like Curtis Nkondo. They should instead be listening to what people like him have to say, for they are the ones who can tell them what will have to be done to come to terms with the urban mood of the 1980s. Nationalists and white South Africans generally won't much like what they hear, because the message from Mr Nkondo and the boycott movement is that what they want is an end to all discrimination and full and equal rights for everyone in South Africa. Obviously such vast change can't come between one day and the next but it is increasingly clear that until those who hold power in South Africa state this as their aim, upheavals like those of 1976 and 1980 will continue and become more frequent and more widespread. □

2. CONSTITUTIONS FOR STABILITY

Elsewhere we publish an article on the Schlebusch Commission's constitutional proposals. We doubt if they will have a positive impact on our future for the sound reason that they are irrelevant to what black South Africans want.

White South African political commentators, not least those who write for English-language opposition papers, have done their best to see cracks in the Nationalist Party in the proposals. The Council of State with its Indian and Coloured representation is the beginning of power-sharing they say hopefully. We hope they are right. What we fear, however, is that the whole thing is a device to engineer support from comparatively prosperous blacks—coloured and Indian first, African later—while most black Africans rot it out in contract labour queues in Bantustans and Administration Board Labour Exchanges.

Chief Buthelezi's Commission to consider constitutional proposals for Natal has much more to commend it. Its terms of reference are imaginative and broad and so is its composition. The fact that it has, inevitably at this early stage, to confine itself to dealing only with Natal, is of course a handicap. It will also need to try to convince that body of black opinion which is now forced to express itself through strikes and boycotts that there is a place for it in its deliberations and that the kind of future it is looking for can come relatively peacefully and quickly from its proposals.

We wish the Commission luck in its demanding task. Not much inspiring has come out of Natal's political past. Now perhaps something might. □

CRISIS

by Vortex

Armed hippos patrolled the streets.
Schoolchildren were marching with placards.
Most workers had stayed away.
Everything was tense.
Then the evening papers arrived.
What did they say?
"Lions Test Match Tomorrow."