

ALBANY BLACK SASH

REPORT ON REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

AUGUST 1990 - FEBRUARY 1991

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CONFERENCE : FEBRUARY 1990

Introduction

The Eastern Cape regarded by many as a political battlefield during the various States of Emergency has subsequently become an area of relative calm in the tumultuous period that followed February 2nd. This calm should not be mistaken for a sign that the area is politically or materially placid. Consciousness in fact remains high, poverty and unemployment abound, expectations have escalated way ahead of De Klerk's reform program and the surviving apartheid structures are if anything more insulated against the forces of change than in other regions. All of this would seem to be a recipe for violent conflict to rival that of Sebokeng, Phola Park, Umlazi or Kayelitsha. However with the exception of the northern areas of Port Elizabeth for a brief period in August 1990 the region has not seen large scale eruptions of violence. Why?

The simple explanation for this is that the Eastern Cape is ethnically and politically homogenous. There are no Inkatha impis to provoke what is often portrayed as Zulu-Xhosa clashes. The lack of clearly defined divisions also denies any third force the opportunity to initiate the smoke screen violence that is often used to conceal a more defined reactionary objective. This should not be construed as a sign of unqualified support for the ANC, in fact pockets of grassroots support for the PAC and AZAPO exist throughout the region.

There is also no culture or tradition of tolerance for other political affiliations in the Eastern Cape and unfortunately few signs that one is emerging. The continued peace between the major political competitors is therefore a fragile situation and is seriously threatened when, for example councillors attempt to bolster their own credibility by posing as PAC members. This was the case in Fort Beaufort, according to the staff of the local Advice Office.

The other incidents of violence that effect the Albany area are invariably linked to local government issues and again the stubbornly maintained system of councillors. The authorities in the smaller towns are not well disposed to mass action directed against apartheid and activists from different areas frequently report cases of harassment and assault arising out of a backlash reaction to consumer boycotts. Some of the fairly minor but typical cases in the country areas are mentioned briefly in this report.

A small town named Barkly East poses a huge problem in terms of repression and violence and has accordingly been allocated more attention. Barkly East is a frightening example of confrontation

between two intractable forces, the one for liberation the other for the maintenance of the status quo. The people of Nkululeko township in Barkly, see no indication that the local police are committed to the enforcement of law and order let alone the process of reform.

#### Adelaide

In November 1990 police allegedly assaulted two comrades in their homes. The community linked the incident to the prevailing consumer boycott but one of the attacks apparently resulted from a case of mistaken identity after an alleged theft case. One of the victims was hospitalized as a result of the attack and the Grahamstown Legal Resources Centre is looking into the matter.

#### Alexandria

The intimidation and attacks on local community leaders, particularly Rev Dan Nkomo who suffered prolonged and serious harassment two years ago, seem to have stopped.

#### Alicedale

On the 16th December 1990 rallies were held throughout the region to commemorate Hero's Day. Toyi-Toying youth and residents on their way to a rally in Alicedale were dispersed by the police using teargas and rubber bullets. Six people were injured. The police in Alicedale are known to act against anything that looks like a gathering of comrades. They have informed the community (unofficially) that they consider toyi-toyis and even small gatherings of activists to be illegal. The local Advice Office wrote a letter to Vlok's office and were informed that the matter would be investigated.

#### Grahamstown

In Grahamstown itself the last outbreak of serious violence occurred in September 1990 when the Rini Town Council decided to act against those who had invaded land and built their own structures. By mid September the threatened demolitions had taken place and evoked a violent response from township youth and residents. In Fingo Village and part of the 'coloured' township balaclava clad men, some allegedly private contractors tore down shacks and damaged or confiscated building materials to prevent rebuilding. Despite a heavy police presence the reaction of incensed youth and residents was almost immediate. Police and private vehicles were attacked and Grahamstown Management Committee offices and a clinic were petrol bombed. A truce eventually prevailed after the Ministers Fraternal intervened and the Rini Town Council agreed to a moratorium on demolitions.







