

Sizwe

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Attention!

South Africa continues to gain worldwide attention. The gradual releasing of power by the white government has made the country "acceptable" to the world: sporting tours are becoming frequent, academics are again accepted at international conferences, the tourist trade is winding itself up again and big-name Christian leaders pop in for visits (we've recently seen Yonghi-Cho, Ron Sider, Terry Virgo, Adrian Plass and Robert Schuller.

Nevertheless, war in the Persian Gulf and the needs of Eastern Europe have turned world focus away from the needs of Africa. Natural and political disasters still cause vast human suffering here, but the attention of human rights organisations and development agencies is elsewhere. The flow of funds has slowed and it is becoming harder for local projects to find funding.

Hani, Truernicht and Tambo

The deaths of three significant leaders has distressed the country. Dr Truernicht, a Dutch Reformed minister and leader of the Conservative Party died from heart problems, leaving the CP in some disarray. He was a clear spokesperson for not only the CP but for much of the Afrikaner right-wing and without his unifying leadership the whole right-wing will become even more divided.

Oliver Tambo, previously president of the ANC, also died of natural causes. He has been out of the limelight for several years, but a highly respected pioneer of change.

More drastic than these was the murder of Chris Hani. Hani was head of the ANC's military wing (Mkonto we Sizwe) and seen as a tough-minded revolutionary, though recently he had been speaking more strongly on the need for peace. He was possibly the only national leader with

the full respect of the radical youth and without his influence it is unclear who such youth will turn to.

(Just for interest, compare these statistics on youth to the situation in Australia: Of all those who matriculated from high-school last year, only 1% (that's right - one percent!) have found employment. No wonder there is so much anger among youth. A recent study found that 15% of youth belong to political parties -- this may seem very high when viewed against Australia's apathy, but everyone here thought that the politically active youth (the trouble makers!) would constitute a much higher proportion. The same study found that 70% of youth attend church at least once a week. What a challenge and an opportunity for the church!)

Violence in Pietermaritzburg

In the wake of Hani's assassination, there has been numerous reports of violence around the country. The ANC called for a stayaway (ie requested people not to go to work) on the Wednesday after Hani's death in order to hold memorial rallies for him. Fairly typically, the Inkatha leaders told their supporters not to go along with the stayaway, and so there was a degree of tension between those blacks trying to get to work and those who thought that no-one should go to work.

We attended the memorial rally in Pietermaritzburg and the crowd seem controlled and peaceful. We didn't join in the march afterwards, and it was then that sections of the crowd became violent. Several cars were burnt and for about 100m along one street every shop window was broken.

There has been plenty of violence on the outskirts of PMB for some years, but virtually always in black areas. Most of this has been faction-fighting and revenge killing by black groups jostling for power and this has rarely affected white areas. You can imagine then how much more fearful the white population has become now that violence is closer to home.

from the police side of the story: so far this year 40 police officer have been killed (the total for last 1992 was 96), and over the past two years there have been 132 suicides. Though the police in SA always get bad press and have little credibility with anyone, it is tragic to read such statistics

More Fame

Violence is not the only reason for Pietermaritzburg being on the map however.

Our City Hall was recently the venue for the very first performance of The Messiah in Zulu. Unfortunately, I was too late to get tickets, but saw an edited version on TV some weeks later. They did an excellent job - and I write as an expert, having sung in The Messiah myself. (Not just any old Messiah performance mind you, but in the Sydney Opera House no less, along with my Dad. And we only had to pay the choirmaster \$18 each to let us do it!)

Pietermaritzburg is also famous as the place where Gandhi was thrown off a train. There was a full program last weekend to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the event! A statue of Gandhi was erected, Nelson Mandela spoke, one of Gandhi's grand-daughters gave the annual Desmond Tutu Lecture, there was a conference on Gandhi's life and philosophy and an Indian classical music evening starring my colleague Vevek Ram on sitar.

Muti and Witchcraft

One of the more outrageous news items I've read here was headed "Love-knot binds Swazi couple for three days". The article claimed that while her husband was away a woman had a "wild get-together" with another man and ended up "in an inextricable embrace that lasted three days".

Details were lacking, but Phindile (a black lady living with us) explained -- the

husband had apparently bought some muti (medicine) from a sangoma (witchdoctor) and secretly given it to his wife. This particular muti has no effect, unless the woman has sex. And then, ... well ...this is hard to explain in polite company, but then the muti has some glue-like effect and the couple become very much "one flesh"!

The only remedy is to wait for the husband to return and convince him that he should perform the necessary ritual to reverse the effect.

Substantiating such reports is probably a very difficult job, but the conviction that they are true pervades the African culture, even among the Christians and even among the educated.

Taking advice and medicine from a sangoma are common practices for non-

Christian Africans. Sangomas can be paid to heal you, give you strength in battle, curse someone, or appease your ancestors.

Some Personal Bits

Some of you will know that Rosalee was starting a Master's course this year studying the potential role of Christian and African Independent Churches in South Africa's social development. In April she also started a job with the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) in which she is researching a similar topic. We hoped that the two would work together well, but it hasn't worked out so well and so she has dropped the Masters (at least for the moment).

I'm still enjoying lecturing at the university, and engaging in as little

research as possible. An idea I had on a novel way to teach logic eventually turned into a paper which was accepted at a conference in the USA.

So we both spent three cold weeks in the States - one around Boston, one at the Reba Place Fellowship in Chicago and the third at the conference in Indianapolis for me while Rosalee visited Washington.

For some time we have been planning a six-month trip back to Australia and now we are considering returning for a full year. So you may see us both in early '94.