

Sizwe

-South African News-

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Editorial

Life goes on.

That could be a Black South African motto. Regardless of the current state of peace or violence, whether one is employed or not, whether one's house has recently been burned or one's son detained by police, life goes on.

Last year I witnessed a strange event when a refugee centre was being established for mothers and their children whose houses had been burnt in recent fighting. They arrived late Friday night with little energy, few belongings, and little idea where most of their family were. But next morning, by the time we started thinking about breakfast, all of the mothers had left! What would make them abandon their children so far from home? Easy - they were mostly maids working for white families and knew that if they didn't turn up for work they may well lose their jobs! Life goes on!

It could just as easily be the motto of any oppressed people throughout the world. When asked how he kept from giving in to despair, a South American scorned "Despair? That's a Western luxury!"

The essence of oppression is the removal of choice. When people are oppressed by law, oppressed by poverty, oppressed by traditions and socially enforced norms, oppressed by theology, and oppressed by lack of education, there is little left up to choice. Choice is a luxury. Even the choice to give up is "a Western luxury".

But life goes on.

Education

Over the past year SA schools have become less segregated. Laws preventing mixed schools have been repealed,

allowing each school to decide whether to become multi-racial or not.

It is still the case, however, that schooling is not compulsory for Blacks, though it is for children of other race groups between the ages of 6 and 16.

When I visited the Esingodine Primary School with the African Enterprise Bonginkosi program, the headmaster was so thrilled that he called the whole school out of classes to pose for photographs! The school had minimal resources (a very small library, one overhead projector, some rooms housed three classes) to service 1600 students. Average class size was 65 (maximum 82).

The Bonginkosi program (literally "Praise the Lord" in Zulu) seeks to form bonds between poor Black schools and sponsoring churches. The financial sponsorship is quite successful in terms of paying for food and educational resources. But whether real relationship bonds are formed between rich and poor is open to question.

I have been living with a young Zulu man called Christian who recently completed his high school matriculation. Unfortunately he did not do well enough to gain entry to any tertiary course and is still unemployed. This is fairly typical given that 60% of Blacks sitting for Matric exams failed last year and the current unemployment level in Natal among Blacks is roughly 19% (Indicator SA v8#2).

The interesting fact about Christian's education was that during primary school he and his brothers and sisters had to walk for over two hours to school each day and then two hours home again!

Regardless of the moves forward in desegregation, the average amount spent on education per student differs enormously between racial groups. You can imagine how long it will take to correct

the past imbalances when you look at the huge disparity in the 1988/89 figures showing rands spent per student (from the 89/90 Race Relations Survey) -

White	3,082
Indians	2,227
Coloureds	1,360
Blacks	765

Even this low number for Blacks is misleading since it only covers Blacks living in designated "white" areas (which means mostly urban). The rural Blacks in the so-called "homelands" are even worse off.

Currently, expenditure on education accounts for 6.5% of GNP. It is estimated that, in order to raise all education to the white standard, this would need to be raised to 20% - an impossible goal.

One major result of this disparity is that, although all races now follow basically the same examination structure for matriculation, the Blacks have an extremely high failure rate. In 1989 only 42.2% passed, and this fell in 1990 (largely due to increased township violence which disrupted study for much of the year) to 36.4% (Natal Witness).

Nevertheless, there is growing encouragement for Blacks to study at university. Though they struggle with study because of language difficulties and their poor secondary education, pass rates are reasonable. Out of 300,000 university students, 100,000 are Black and of these about 60-70% pass each year. This compares with 160,000 Whites of whom 80-90% pass.

Many Black university students also struggle with the high cost of tertiary education. Tuition fees for a full-time undergraduate course amount to roughly R5,000 per year. At Natal University, where most students live in uni residences, the cost of accommodation adds another R5,000 per year.

Sport

Friday the 31st of May was a public holiday celebrating the founding of the Republic 30 years ago. However, the biggest event of the day was the Comrades ultra-marathon from Pietermaritzburg to Durban.

This is an annual race with an entrance requirement that you must have run at least two marathons previously. This may be for health reasons since the distance is 89km. But more likely it's because without such a restriction they would get too many entrants!

This is no small, elite race - 15,000 entered this year! (although only 12,000 actually started and 9,000 made it to the finish).

Where else in the world would 12,000 people run an 89km race? I don't think you could find 15,000 people in Aus who had run two marathons!

Bruce Fordyce, who had won the race for the previous nine years, ran with some sort of viral infection and developed a hernia. Though he still completed the race, he didn't inspire the normal stiff competition and the winning time was a slow (?) 5 hours 40.

Conscription

Prior to 1990 all white males (one of the benefits of Apartheid for Blacks is that they are not conscripted) were required to serve for 2 years full time in the SADF (South African Defence Force). After that, they are be called up each year for a month or two until they complete another 720 days of camps. The full time component has now been reduced to one year.

Many people (Christians especially) have been troubled by conscription, since one of the main jobs allocated to the SADF is the control of Black township violence. This is more true now that Namibia has gained her rightful independence, since SA's involvement in conflict outside the country is virtually zero.

It's one thing for a Christian to fight on behalf of his country, but somewhat another issue if the fighting is in order to enforce the unjust laws of Apartheid.

In talking with an ex-officer, I discovered some interesting trivia about the SADF: all officers must belong to a recognised church denomination; a Bible is part of standard issue; Quiet Times are part of the daily schedule; Chaplains frequently preach anti-communist and anti-ANC propaganda.

Many will have heard of Charles Bester, a 19 year old who objected to his conscription and was sentenced to six years imprisonment. Fortunately he has now been released after serving two years. I've met several others who have had to spend two years in mindless "community service" such as assisting in a local library. And there are many others who have managed to remain safe at university (since students have their call-up postponed) or who have left the country.

Aus-Watch

Natal Witness 27 April

"Lightly sautéed kangaroo testicles are proving popular among women patrons of The Old Willows Brewery Restaurant in South Australia" - a plate of three for \$3. Why three?

Natal Witness May 14

Hundreds of dolphins trapped by killer whales rescued off the shore of Hobart. The whales were scared away by explosives.

The Daily News 22 May

An engine blew up on a Cathay Pacific Jet but there were no injuries.

CRA says the move away from Apartheid in SA will result in lost coal sales for Australia. Japan will probably buy 400,000 tons from SA rather than Aus because it's \$5/ton cheaper.

The Natal Mercury 3 June

(Front page) A 60 year old man with no flying experience flew and landed a plane when the pilot had a heart attack. The flight was "from Dubbo on the Queensland coast [sic]".

Bob Hawke survives leadership challenge by Keating. (This story, which probably required a week of front pages in Aus only rated 80 words on about page 6 plus a few seconds on Radio South Africa!)

10 June

Gareth Evans visits to re-establish diplomatic relationships, but assures Black groups that Australia is not abandoning it's support of their cause. Evans visited not only de Klerk by also the ANC National Executive Committee, Desmond Tutu, and Allan Boesak.

In a radio interview, he was questioned about our recent dealings with the Aboriginal people. He replied by pointing to the recently finished Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody. The Commission had studied 91 cases in detail (a staggering figure given the size of the Aboriginal population: in fact my information suggests that there have been less Black deaths in custody in SA!) and had found that there had been no systematic program leading to these deaths.

14 June - A final comment in the paper today said that the Evans' trip had been controversial but that the mishap where he swore at a Policeman should not be allowed to mar the whole tour!

PS

To whoever I loaned the book "Pacifism and War": could you *please* return it.