

## CHAOS REVISITED?

THE pattern is familiar, but more ominous now. The crucial question is: how are we going to break out of the vicious circle this time?

Surely not by glibly blaming agitators and trouble-makers, like Mr Marais Steyn has done. Nor by arresting clerics marching in peaceful protest and singing hymns, or detaining "responsible Black leaders", as the Minister of Police reportedly acknowledges the Government is doing.

All that smacks much too much of 1976, and lessons unlearned. And the waste of a Government Commission which took three years to investigate and report on the causes of that traumatic period and finally fingered race discrimination as the San Andreas Fault of South African society.

So this year's unrest is fundamentally linked to that of 1976, and not just through an unequal educational system. And, in spite of some few positive signs, the overall situation this time is more serious and the solutions harder to find.

In fact many of the seemingly brighter aspects of the current situation have their dark side. Look at them.

Indubitably Mr Botha is taking overall a more verligte racial line than his predecessors, but it has not prevented the current unrest. The reason is simple: enlightened stances are not nearly enough to soothe Black grievances; if anything they arouse expectations which, so far, are largely unfulfilled.

Equally, one may be encouraged by the stress that the demonstrators have laid so far on peaceful, if disruptive, tactics and from the Government side on the need for police restraint. Yet in the past week we saw the tragic increase in violence that culminated in the death of two children, shot by police at Elsie's River in the Cape. Could the course of events ever have been expected to be different?

There are additional danger signs. One of the most disturbing is the question: who are the leaders of the demonstrators this time? In 1976 some of them, at least, were known and could be reached. But since then the organisations have gone underground, precisely as the Government was warned would happen, and we get the uneasy feeling that the authorities may be as much in the dark about who they should be dealing with as we are. It is not easy talking to faceless opponents.

The unrest continues in spite of the Government's more flexible attitude, its stated willingness this time to make concessions. The implication is clear: the protestors are no longer prepared to accept promises and undertakings at face value — if at all.

And this time the atmosphere overall is much more inflammable. There is serious unemployment among Blacks. Inflation is eating into family food budgets. Many of the Black youths who themselves took part in the 1976 unrest are now young adults, much more politicised than were the adults in their day. Already there are indisputable signs of greater community of purpose between the young demonstrators and their elders.

All these factors add up to a problem of much greater proportions than the country faced in 1976. No doubt it will eventually be dealt with — but at what cost? And how many more times must we revisit chaos before we come to grips with the core of our troubles?

What would one say of a doctor who tries to treat measles by painting out the red spots on the patient's chest?

Why do we persist in trying to cure our own national malaise like that when there is so much more at stake?

## The Star The police behind an iron curtain

THIS country has many splendid policemen. They are dedicated, courteous, helpful, efficient crime-busters. We have said before—and Mr Ray Swart, the PFP's spokesman on police affairs, affirms it in an article on this page—they have an unenviable task, taking enormous risks for minimal rewards.

Yet the image of the force as a whole is, to put it bluntly, appalling. The unfortunate reputation is partly due to the bully boys who make free use of fists, batons or guns. Deaths in police hands and assault accusations in courts, whether false or true, all tarnish the police name.

But the factor that categorises all police as villains in the eyes of the majority of the population is their political role. They constitute, as Mr Swart says, a law enforcement agent of the political bosses. Statutory violations (200 000 arrests for pass and influx control offences last year) make criminals of the innocent and it is the policeman who bears the brunt of public odium.

When there is confrontation, as there has been over the last few weeks, there is an even greater need for a low police

profile. Police behaviour could make the difference between containing the situation and inciting a widespread flare-up. Opposition spokesmen have conceded that the police have shown more awareness of their responsibility, but there have been glaring instances of apparent vindictive behaviour. The reported invasion of a Cape school to beat children who had not been throwing stones, if substantiated, deserves severe punishment. It will have done incalculable harm to relationships and will make the task of the police infinitely more difficult, besides violating the elementary principle of justice.

What the police need is good public relations, to be seen to be working at crime prevention (rather than punishment), to be upholding standards of fair play and justice on which Western civilisation prides itself. Instead, under the Police Amendment Bill which has now been taken through Parliament, they are to act beyond reproach behind a sinister iron curtain. The ominous development is that nobody can monitor the behaviour of a force which can polarise the races irrevocably and put the stability of the nation at risk.

## Mr Smit's re-think

IT has taken six days for Mr Hennie Smit to re-think his outrageous "blacks think slowly" remark in Parliament. Whether or not his thought processes were assisted by the Prime Minister is not clear, yet it makes a change from the Nationalist style of a few years back . . . which was never to admit to any error. To this extent Mr Smit and the Government are to be commended.

Whether the climb-down will undo the damage, however, is another question. The Thoughts of Minister Smit will continue to

provide food for thought. If one member of the Cabinet can choose these crude racial terms to explain a key aspect of constitutional policy, what are the real thoughts of the rest of them? And what is the real value of a belated apology made under pressure?

It is hard to forget that Mr Smit's first reaction was to rephrase his remarks in a way that was equally offensive, and that Mr Botha's first reaction was to stand by him. Third thoughts may be better thoughts, but they may not be good enough.

## Too many laws

EVERY year brings the same unseemly rush to legislate at the end of a session. Late night sittings, early morning starts, bills (some highly contentious)

## Give us this day . . .

THERE are no bread queues in South Africa, we were told recently by the Minister of Agriculture. And that is true. But, as the deaths of three children who ate poisoned food from

crashed through the legislative process. And South Africa has too many laws anyway. What the nation needs from Parliament is more deliberation and less law.

an Eikenhof rubbish dump have revealed, there are people so poverty-stricken they have to scavenge for food. We cannot be proud of the absence of bread queues when there are people who have no money to buy bread.