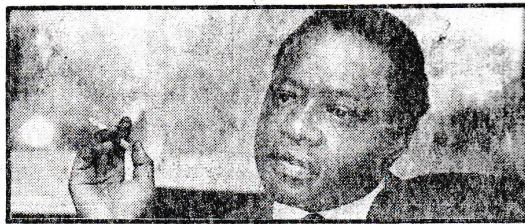


In the hearts of our children, and our children's children, the sense of bitterness grows

By

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GEORGE ORWELL'S year is mercifully behind us. South Africans, however, are far from able to heave a sigh of relief. If anything, 1985 may yet turn out to be our most painful and tragic experience.

The mood of the people in the townships is very ugly.

I am by nature an optimist. Nothing has happened to temper my faith that some day we will come to terms with our national political problems.

Yet, spending the festive season in the Vaal complex seriously challenged that faith. The cost of reaching that accommodation is accumulating at a frightening rate.

I have had a close relationship with the Vaal for 21 years. I know those people well. I have been part of their daily experiences.

They are, basically, a simple and hard-working community. They do not want trouble.

Since the events of Sharpeville 24 years ago, when defenceless men and women were cruelly gunned down, the older generation have been praying that they never go through the same experience again.

But they had children. And their children now have children.

The bitterness of 24 years ago is rearing its ugly face. Rarely have I seen them so angry, so frustrated.

And, once again, it is insensitive officialdom that has provoked the crisis, which has left people dead and injured, seen property destroyed and communities filled with rage.

I am not writing this piece to intimidate anybody, but do so as a duty to my country and my own conscience.

Unless white South Africans wake up and soon, the Vaal complex is a threat to peace and stability in 1985. All of us, wherever you may be in the corners of South Africa, are endangered.

Throwing in the might of the police and the army, as we have recently witnessed, only escalates the anger.

Pretoria's bureaucrats, in the main, show no understanding for the feelings of those people. But it does not have to be that way.

It is significant that the crisis arose after the departure of the former Administration Board chairman, John Knoetze, who moved to Soweto in the wake of the 1976 unrest.

John Knoetze's style is different from most bureaucrats you meet.

One of his first actions when he came to Soweto was to meet with the leaders of the community. I mean the real leaders of the community.

He asked me to arrange meetings with a wide spectrum of them: Dr Nthatho Motlana, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the rest.

It is a measure of the personal warmth he developed that when Bishop Tutu's daughter recently married John was an invited guest.

From what the various people in the Vaal told me over the past days, that style of personal contact evaporated when John left. His successor has ignored the real voices of the people.

The authorities have depended on the voices of discredited town councillors who bore the brunt of the community's anger. It all started with rent increases.

When members of my staff gave me an analysis of the situation in the area, I was alarmed.

I phoned the director of the board to appeal to him to suspend the increases and make a statement to that effect.

His attitude was depressing. I was not surprised. It simply followed the pattern of 1976.

At that time, after personal appeals to Dr Andries Treurnicht (then Deputy Minister of Education and Training) and the then Prime Minister, Mr John Vorster, to stop enforcing Afrikaans medium education, I got a similar response.

Law and order would be maintained at all costs. And everyone knows what those costs were.

The present Administration in the Vaal Complex believes in the power of rubber bullets, teargas and *kragdagtheid*. And that will not work.

From a moderate black of the older generation, a grave warning

The kids there have a spine-chilling message to all of this: "Better be dead a free man than alive as an oppressed person."

What is happening in the Vaal is a microcosm of what I fear is going to happen all over the country. And the crisis could start in a few days when schools reopen.

It is utterly naive to believe, as so many do, that rent increases have nothing to do with education, or that "outside forces" are using school-children to advance their aims.

The black kid in the township classroom bears very little resemblance to the kids at white classrooms in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

Black kids are politicised — not by dark-hearted people in the dingy alleys of Soweto and Sharpeville — but by the inherent injustices that have bedevilled their fathers.

Their fathers had the patience to take it. They do not.

If, indeed, we have this situation, what is the solution?

For the Vaal, I suggest the rent increases be immediately revoked. In fact, the entire rental system should be reviewed.

What we should be paying is rates for essential services like water, electricity, garbage removal and environmental improvements.

Rents on properties that in reality have been paid off many times over should not be used as instruments to pay needless bureaucracies.

The Government must get away from the idea that our communities can only be made viable by continuously raising rents.

We are part and parcel of an economic system and it is ridiculous to even think — as Pretoria does — that we must be treated differently.

The fact that I am paying the same tax as anybody else infuriates me when I do not have the same right as anybody else to influence how my own money is used by the State.

Taxation without representation, as the British found generations ago, is tyranny.

I, as a citizen of South Africa — and I insist that that is what I am — resent the idea that my citizenship only goes as far as fattening the coffers of the State.

The way out — and the only way out — is for the Government to give a statement of intent.

And that statement does not lie in Mr Chris Heunis's safaris to Umtata, Bophutha/Tswana, Venda, to hold discussions about the political future of blacks they perceive to be "outside the national states".

Talk to Nelson Mandela instead of trying to throw him to the Transkei.

Lift the bans on the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress, the South African Students' Organisation, the Black Peoples' Convention.

Negotiate with them. Let us go forward to a situation where we can talk together, using our brains and mouths instead of bombs, teargas and rubber bullets.

Violence is endemic in our country because the Government has given it a credibility it does not deserve.

John Vorster Square's ninth and tenth floors are not going to solve our political problems; they must be solved in the political arena.

Iwould seriously offer the following schedule to lead up to a normalisation of our situation:

- Release all political prisoners and allow the unconditional return of political exiles;

- Abolish differential educational systems and place education under one department;

- Abolish rentals in the case of houses older than 20 years and grant freehold rights whereby normal rates will provide the infrastructure for local authorities;

- Establish a joint security commission to monitor the activities of the security forces which are largely responsible for the polarisation among our people;

- Abolish the pass laws and influx control and grant the right of all people to sell their labour at the market of their choice; and

- Establish merit — and not colour — as the criterion by which human value must be judged.

It may have become clichéd, but the words of the late civil rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King, remain as valid today as they ever were:

"Unless we learn to live together as brothers, we will all perish together as fools."

