

Blacks' Story S. Africa-Frail Hopes Turn to Rage Series: A Family Portrait: A black family's reflections on life in South Africa.

MICHAEL PARKS. Los Angeles Times (pre-1997 Fulltext). Los Angeles, Calif.:Dec 8, 1985. p. 1 (Copyright, The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 1985all Rights reserved)

SOWETO, South Africa – Sibido Molekane cannot remember when life was not hard—a "struggle," as he says—but he can remember when he had hopes, ambitions, faith in the future.

"When I was at school 10 or 15 years ago, I used to put myself to sleep saying, 'I'll go to school, I'll get a good job, I'll make money, and our family will have a better life,' " Molekane, now 30, recalls.

"Oh, I had big, big ambitions. My life was going to be better, so much better than my father's; and then I found out it wasn't going to be, and couldn't be, because of the system, because of apartheid."

His father, Stephen, 64, smiles, sighs, shakes his head and sighs again, for he too has battled "the system," as blacks call South Africa's minority white government and its policy of apartheid-racial separation. The elder Molekane calculates that, over the years, he won a few victories, but in the end he found he could not beat the system.

"Seven children I've raised," he says. "Each has had his hopes—one was to be a nurse, two were to be teachers, now one wants to be a social worker—but each has found how hard a struggle life is under this system and how little you can do, whatever your efforts."

Gentleness, Good Humor

Still, Stephen Molekane, a milling machine operator in a Johannesburg furniture factory, is not a bitter man, though his sons say he has every right to be. Nor, as much as he wants to see apartheid ended and believes that blacks will have to fight to do so, is he a revolutionary. Even as he discusses a life of hardship and disappointment, his characteristic gentleness and good humor prevail.

'Just a Father'

"I am just a father who has tried to give these children more than I had," he said. "More than I had, but not as much as I wanted."

The Molekane family is an ordinary one in Soweto, the sprawling black satellite city of almost 2 million people outside Johannesburg, and its struggle to survive is the story of the 14 million blacks who live in South Africa's urban areas.

Frustration and Anger

"We have suffered a lot, but everyone suffers under apartheid," said Stephen Molekane's wife, Mary, 58, a strong and loving woman. "We have had great pain in this family because of the system, but probably not more than most. And among my children there is much frustration and anger, but today all young people seem determined to change this system, to overthrow it if necessary."

With seven children and nine grandchildren, the Molekane family, an extended family in an African tradition that continues even as blacks move to urban areas, stretches across three generations now, and the experiences of its members sum up "the traps that all blacks find themselves in," as Sibido Molekane put it.

"Look at us," he said, "and you will see what our people want to be—and what happens to turn all those beautiful hopes and ambitions into the rage you see on the streets all around the country today."

The oldest of the Molekane children is Johannes, 36, a truck driver, who is married to a schoolteacher and is the father of four. He dropped out of school after the eighth grade to help feed the family and finance his brothers' and sisters' education. Today, he fixes cars at night and reconditions scrapped auto parts to also support his mother-in-law, an invalid, and to put his wife's two brothers through school.

Ellen, 32, fled the country "in anger and despair," her mother says, after the 1976 uprising by black youths in Soweto and other urban ghettos to demand changes in the school system. She had finished high school, passing the difficult South African matriculation exam, and had become a medical clerk at Soweto's Baragwanath Hospital, where she had hoped to study nursing. She has one child, her family has heard, but her whereabouts are uncertain and only rarely does word come from her by way of travelers.

Organizer for Union

Sibido, 30, who was christened Andries but prefers his African name, was in his final year of secondary school in 1976 but, because of the unrest, was not able to take the matriculation exam-the door to better-paying clerical and technical jobs, as well as to a university. He had wanted to be a teacher. Now an organizer for a small new retail employees union, he has worked as a photographic assistant, as a warehouse clerk, as an apprentice lithographer and in a laboratory making artificial stones for the saws used in mining. He has two children.

Ivy, 26, now married with two children, was going into her final year of high school when more unrest erupted and she was unable to finish and take the matriculation exam. She sells records at a branch of a large chain of bookstores.

Sidney, 24, who is known as Rapu, is a final-year student at the Soweto College of Education, preparing to become a teacher, but he was detained without charge at the end of July under the state of emergency proclaimed to curb the continuing unrest and remains in detention. He is president of the Soweto Youth Congress and was detained a year ago, also without charge, for more than three months.

Joseph, 21, a warehouseman at Baragwanath Hospital, hopes to become a truck driver, one of the best-paying jobs that blacks can get. He dropped out of school after the ninth grade.

Dreams of College

And Miriam, 18, a 10th-grade student, wants to go to college and become a social worker. However, she sees the continuing unrest, particularly among students, as threatening her chances to complete high school, pass the matriculation exam and gain admission to college.

"A person wants to do things for himself, for his family, his children, the whole community," Sibido Molekane said, "but reality prevails over dreams. That's true for everyone, everywhere. But our reality is so harsh, man, so harsh that dreams turn into nightmares."

Neither Sibido nor Johannes has his own place to live. Sibido is separated from his wife, and he and his children live with the elder Molekanes. Johannes and his wife lodge with an elderly woman a mile and a half away, but their four children spend most of their time at the elder Molekanes' home, where Johannes parks his car at night because the other neighborhood is too rough.

Squeezed in a Matchbox

At night, there are usually 12 or 13 people squeezed into the four-room, "matchbox" home, giving each person about two and a half square yards of space.

"We have bodies everywhere," Mary Molekane said, laughing as she set about restoring order early one morning. "Some are on the floor, a few are curled up in the corners, a couple may even be in the kitchen. Real privilege in this house is sleeping in a proper bed."

The long wait for government housing, and the cramped living conditions that result, constitute a major black grievance on which action is only starting.

Housing Costs Soar

"A house of your own-it can take a lifetime," Johannes said.

"My firstborn is now 11," he went on, "and we applied for a house two months after she was born. Of course, if you have 80,000 rand (about \$32,000) you can build your own house now, but where does a truck driver get that kind of money?"

By Soweto standards, Johannes is not badly paid, taking home about \$76 a week, but that and his wife's small salary as a teacher must feed nine people. Sibido makes about \$35 a week, Joseph \$17 and their father, Stephen, who has worked for the same company for nearly 40 years, earns about \$40 a week, including overtime.

The University of Port Elizabeth calculated in September that the subsistence level for a family of six in Soweto, the minimum on which they could survive, was \$36.50 a week.

Inflation Climbing

The money goes quickly-food, rent, utilities, bus fares, gasoline for Johannes' car, school fees, clothing for the children-and pay increases do not make up for inflation, now estimated at almost 20% a year.

"Hand to mouth, hand to mouth," Johannes said. "A family budget is useless. It all goes the day I'm paid. I must kill myself to make a living that no one can call decent."

With more brothers working, there is more money in the house-not a lot, but enough so they can joke about the times that were really hard for the family.

"When we were little, we used to sleep on burlap sacking on the floor," Johannes recalled, "and in the winter it was so cold that we would wake up in the middle of the night and steal one another's blanket. There was only one apiece."

Cornmeal and Water

And Mary Molekane recalls the years when, for weeks on end, the family had only cornmeal and salt to eat and water to drink-and nothing but water on Thursday, the day before her husband was paid.

The only luxury the Molekanes allow themselves even now is the family lunch on Sunday afternoon when there is chicken, rice instead of cornmeal and half a dozen vegetables and salads that are missing from the table most of the week.

However, when Joseph turned 21 last month, he threw a big party that took a year of savings.

"I wanted to do it for Mama," he said. "I wanted there to be once when the house was full of people with a lot to eat and drink. We had never had a big occasion like this at home. That's how I wanted to celebrate my 21st birthday. It was for the family, not for me."

Intense Bidding for Jobs

The work is hard, and competition for jobs has rarely been more intense, with urban black unemployment estimated at 20% to 35% in various parts of the country and with still more black men wanting to leave South Africa's impoverished rural areas to earn whatever they can in the cities.

For his \$40 a week, Stephen Molekane leaves at 5:20 each morning to catch the bus for Johannesburg, 10 miles away; he returns about 7 p.m. All day he mills pieces of wood for household furniture in an atmosphere that Sibido, who worked at the furniture factory for three weeks, describes as "worse than anything you have seen in the Industrial Revolution in Europe."

"It's unsafe, unhealthy, noisy, with the supervisor all the time demanding, 'Work harder, work faster, work more,' " declared Sibido, now a fervent union man. "And if you say, 'No, boss, no way,' they just pay you off and bring in another poor black from a rural area who is desperate for a job and will work for a third of your wages. There may be some progressive companies in South Africa but, to most employers, black workers are disposable people. The bosses use them until they break, and then they get another off the street."

Postwar Industry Boom

Stephen Molekane, a slightly built man with graying hair, came to Johannesburg in 1946 during the postwar industrial boom in the city from Bloemfontein, 250 miles to the southwest in the Orange Free State, where he had been working as a domestic gardener.

"The jobs were here, the money was here," he said, recalling how he had quadrupled his pay from about \$4 a month to \$4 a week. "Men were coming into the cities by the thousands from all the rural areas in search of work; we had so little land and so many people. And with all the factories opening in Johannesburg, the best jobs were here if you could get one."

Although he has been in Johannesburg nearly 40 years, working for the same company all that time and living in Soweto, Molekane is still not regarded by the government as a true resident here. As a Tswana, one of the largest of South Africa's 10 black ethnic groups, he is considered to be a citizen of Bophuthatswana, a nominally independent tribal homeland that the Pretoria government created as part of the apartheid dream that all blacks could in time be resettled outside a totally white South Africa.

Government's Funny Ideas

"Half the people in this house are considered to be Bophuthatswanans-I can't even pronounce the word-and half of us are South Africans," Sibido Molekane said. "And even those of us who are South Africans don't necessarily have the right to live in Soweto, although we were born here and have never lived anywhere else. . . . You see, this government has the funny idea that we don't belong here and some day we will go back where we belong."

"This is an insult that truly angers us. Not only do the Boers (Afrikaners descended from Dutch, French and German colonists) take our land from us and exploit us terribly and oppress us without mercy, but then they say we shouldn't even be here-we should be in some funny place called Bophuthatswana."

Four years after coming to Johannesburg, Stephen Molekane married Mary, whom he had met while she was working as a nanny for a white family in Bloemfontein, and in 1951 he brought her to Johannesburg. Working as a domestic servant in the homes of whites, she earned the equivalent of about \$20 a month.

"I couldn't work steadily because I kept having babies," she said, "and my husband was very strict about not doing heavy work when I was pregnant. . . . Altogether, I had nine children-six boys and three girls, but two of the boys died when they were babies. What a family! What a family! Each child brings different joys, different problems. I love them all."

A Place for a Stranger

As if their house were not full enough, the Molekanes recently took in a young man from Mary Molekane's hometown of Thaba Nchu, near Bloemfontein. A friend of a friend, Mtupi Tsediso, turned up on the Molekanes' doorstep with no place to stay and counting on traditional African hospitality. An organizer for the National Union of Mineworkers, the country's biggest black labor union, Tsediso is also known in the neighborhood as "the Rasta" because of his membership in the Rastafarian cult.

"He's just like one of my kids now," Mary Molekane said. "I feed him and do his laundry and worry about him when the police come and get him in the middle of the night."

When they first came to Johannesburg, the Molekanes lived in a small shack of tin, wood and burlap sacking in a Soweto shantytown. They were allocated their house, then just two rooms with unfinished brick walls, a dirt floor, metal doors and corrugated asbestos roofing, in 1955, when they had three children. A few years later, the other two rooms were added, and Molekane finished the house, plastering and painting the inside and cementing the outside with his children's help. The toilet is in an outhouse in the backyard and the only water comes from a spigot there.

The four small rooms are crowded with furniture-chairs and tables, beds and wardrobes, a large coal-burning stove in the kitchen-with religious pictures, African scenes and a paper company's calendar on the

walls. The Molekanes' wedding portrait, he in a dark suit and she in bridal white, stands on a buffet in the living room. A brown-and-green vase, a gift from Ellen, is on the table in the center of the room.

No TV, Refrigerator

Several years ago, the family bought a small stereo, but most of the music comes from a large radio-tape recorder. There is no refrigerator, no television.

"We have very little, almost nothing," Stephen Molekane said, "and we will never have much more."

Nonetheless, his steadfast devotion to his family has earned Molekane the deep respect as well as the love of his children.

"Unlike other families where the father has deserted when the going has been tough," Sibido said, "he has always been here. And today they are still standing by us. For all this, we are grateful." House Was Firebombed

Because of the current civil strife, the Molekanes put long sheets of metal roofing in front of each window every evening to deflect tear-gas canisters and firebombs. Earlier this year, the house was attacked with firebombs made from gasoline-filled bottles with lighted wicks; no damage was done, but the family learned to take precautions. Asked who they believe was responsible for the attack, they replied, "The system."

The attack was one of a series of such arson attempts on the homes of political activists in Soweto. Other families in the area complain that policemen and soldiers have been firing tear-gas grenades into houses randomly during the night.

"These times are bad," Stephen Molekane said, remarking on the civil unrest of the past 15 months in which more than 850 people, most of them blacks, have been killed, largely by the police and army but about a third by other blacks. "There have been bad times before, but these are the worst."

Twice Considered Leaving

Twice, the Molekanes considered leaving the turmoil of Soweto and returning to Bloemfontein, a quieter place, or even to the rural areas around Thaba Nchu. The first time was during the "Defiance Campaign" mounted in the early 1950s against laws restricting the migration of blacks to urban areas and requiring them to carry permits authorizing them to be there. The second time was in the midst of the 1976-77 Soweto uprising.

"We tried to think what would be best for the children, where could they get the best education," Mary Molekane said. "Both times we decided to stay in Soweto, . . . but I wonder still whether we were right."

For the Molekanes, the key to that elusive "better life" and to the changes they would like to see in South Africa has always been education.

Stephen Molekane started school at the age of 18 after he moved to Bloemfontein from the village where he grew up and worked as a herdsman.

"Fifty years ago, there were no schools for blacks in rural areas in the Orange Free State," he said, "and there still aren't too many now."

Despite the late start, he finished eighth grade, a respectable level for blacks then. "I would have liked to have become a teacher, but there was no money for that."

Sons Stay in School

Even when times have been hardest for the family and the temptation greatest to have his sons quit school and go to work, he has insisted that his children remain in school as long as possible.

"The problem is this Bantu (black) education system teaches children how to be stupid," he said. "They teach them very little, they teach that badly, and when the kids fail, they throw them out. If this country is going to solve its problems, it must start with education."

Ivy, who despite hours of additional study failed to win a place in the crowded matriculation class for what would have been her final year of high school, shares this same strong feeling about the importance of education.

"We are trying to give our kids a better future, just like our parents did for us," she said. "We want them to have more than we have, and not just more materially but a better, fuller, happier life. We don't want our kids to grow up the way we did. For all this, the children must get a good education."

Problems Fundamental

The trouble is, as Sibido Molekane argues, "Education is not going to solve problems that are, fundamentally, economic and political; that is to say, a better education for us is not, of itself, going to bring apartheid to an end."

He perhaps does not go as far as many militant black youths do now when they chant, "Liberation now, education later!" to justify their continuing school boycotts. However, he says, "It is a real problem-what you can do with your education, particularly Bantu education that teaches us to be good little blacks and little else.

"What kind of job can a black matric (graduate) get?" he said. "Jobs are hard to get, and so many positions are still closed to us-that is, reserved for whites-and advancement beyond entry level is so slow. I worked at companies where there were whites who were directors and general managers after 25 years, while the blacks they joined with were doing night security to avoid being pensioned off.

Salaries Unbalanced

"Will the black matric get the same pay as a white matric, half as much even? I used to get raises that were not even 10 cents an hour and saw the whites I worked with get increases that were nearly as large as my whole salary. And what can he (the black graduate) buy with the money he does get? Not a house in one of the northern suburbs (of Johannesburg, where wealthy whites live), not a lot of things that still are the privileges of whites only in this country."

As he moved from job to job, weathering several long periods of unemployment over the last decade, Sibido Molekane became convinced that unionization was the only way that black workers would advance.

"I don't subscribe to a particular ideology-I look at practical problems," he said. "My experience is that either you become a union member and fight or you become an impimpi (collaborator) and sell out."

'Logic of Experience'

Such "logic of experience," as Rapu Molekane put it during a discussion with several foreign journalists earlier this year after he was released from another period of detention without trial, "makes activists out of ordinary men."

"The conviction is widespread among blacks now that apartheid cannot be tolerated any longer, that this system must be brought to an end," he said, as fellow activists from the Soweto Youth Congress nodded in agreement.

"The day has passed when we could more or less shrug things off because we believed that our lives were going to get better. We recognize they have not improved very much-we think they are getting worse, in fact-and can never improve very much under this system."

Concerns for Family

Stephen Molekane does not disagree with those sentiments, but the militancy of his three activist children—Sibido the union organizer, Rapu the youth leader and Ellen the exile—concerns him, "worries him sick," as his wife put it, and "makes him scared for the whole family."

Her family is "not really so political," said Mary Molekane, "just average, like any Soweto family. But I think that they have seen they couldn't change the little things, so they decided to change the big ones. They grew up struggling, trying to make ends meet, going hungry, doing without so many things, and now they want to make sure that their kids have it better. They all feel that way.

"However, these two, Ellen and Rapu, they were my best kids. These were the kids I trusted the most, they are the two who learned the most, these were the ones I had the most hope in," she said, her voice cracking with emotion and tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, I loved Ellen so much, my first daughter, and she loved me. And Rapu, always so generous. He never cared about money—if he had sixpence he would come and share it. And they have both done the same thing. . . . Now where do I put my hopes? All I can do is ask God to be with my children wherever they are and keep them safe."

Lawsuit Dismissed

Rapu Molekane can be held indefinitely without charge and in solitary confinement under the emergency regulations. A lawsuit brought against the government by the Molekanes, the families of other detainees and former political prisoners to prevent the police from torturing those currently held was dismissed recently by a judge who saw no need for urgent court action.

Little is known of Ellen, gone more than eight years now. She reportedly works with women's groups affiliated with the outlawed African National Congress in Zambia or Tanzania, and some of the South African delegates to the recent international women's congress met her in Nairobi, Kenya.

"One child has left, one is in prison, and this makes one feel terrible," Stephen Molekane said. "Mama and I grieve each day, every day. . . . But I tried to raise them to live honestly and without fear.

"It is the situation, their lives, that makes them so angry," he continued. "They want change, and they want to hurry it up. I don't blame them, but I don't know if they will succeed.

"We will never have liberation given to us. The whites own so much they will never give any of it up. We won't get the smallest piece given to us willingly. We will have to fight for everything, and I am afraid there will be bloodshed that neither we nor the whites want. As a father, that grieves me. It truly grieves me."

S. Africa Blacks Now Strive to Overthrow White Rule

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JOHANNESBURG, South Africa – The protests that have kept many of South Africa's black ghettos in flames for a year and a half are now starting to focus on the overthrow of white rule.

What was largely a spontaneous outpouring of anger within the country's black communities has in recent weeks been directed increasingly toward whites, whose cars, businesses and homes are being attacked with growing frequency.

Last year, black youths tried to fight the police with stones and sometimes firebombs. Now, guerrillas trained by the outlawed African National Congress and armed with guns, grenades, rockets and mines are beginning to bring their war to urban areas.

Black policemen and local officials seen as collaborators continue to be targets for rioters, but a range of government institutions from post offices to police stations, many in white areas, are also being hit with bombs. It is an offensive apparently meant to give whites the feeling that they are under siege.

The strife continues to spread, with three or four people killed each day on the average.

Last week, the government lifted a state of emergency imposed in July to give the police broader powers to curb unrest around Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and, later, Cape Town. Yet, rioting spread last week to other towns-some in remote farming areas, some around gold and coal mines, areas that had been largely free of trouble.

Although most incidents are small, many white South Africans have grown fearful.

In the last three months, 18 whites have been killed in riots, bombings or clashes with black guerrillas, compared with six in the preceding year. Although this is a small fraction of the more than 1,300 people who have died in the unrest since it began in September, 1984, whites see their deaths as the start of a racial civil war.

Armed vigilante groups are being formed in many parts of the country to protect white neighborhoods. Guards with rifles and shotguns ride public buses in Pretoria, the capital, and school buses in some troubled areas around Johannesburg. And an extreme right-wing political organization is recruiting members for what amounts to a private army.

Nearly 30 people were killed in the past week, including seven suspected African National Congress guerrillas shot to death in a gun battle outside Cape Town. And a bomb blew a large hole in police headquarters here.

New Legislation Promised

But President Pieter W. Botha, in lifting the state of emergency, said the measure has reduced the violence to "sporadic and isolated incidents." He added that the government will soon introduce legislation to give the police stronger powers, such as those they had under the state of emergency, to deal with any further unrest.

Botha also renewed his appeal to moderate blacks to participate in a political dialogue on the country's future. Imposition of the state of emergency, along with the heavy police and military presence that it brought to black townships and the indefinite detention without charges of hundreds of black activists, had made any sort of negotiations impossible.

The state of emergency also left Botha and his National Party open to criticism at home and abroad that they were able to govern only through what amounted to martial law.

Political Costs Too High

"The state of emergency was not as effective as the government had hoped," a senior National Party member of Parliament said in Cape Town, asking not to be quoted by name. "The political costs of shifting it around the country, imposing it on new areas as the unrest shifted, were too high. Concern was growing, too, about the abuse of their powers by the police.

"And the whole reform effort, which requires a dialogue between whites and blacks, was going nowhere. After all, who wants to negotiate with a gun to his head? So (the president) lifted the state of emergency . . . with the hope that this will break the cycle of violence and counterviolence we seem to be caught in."

In this analysis, shared by many white political observers here, Botha is engaged in an almost desperate gamble that his overture will succeed in drawing some black moderates into enough of a dialogue to persuade their communities that negotiations will pay off faster than violence.

Black leaders, however, view the lifting of the state of emergency as a government retreat and a significant, albeit limited, victory.

Political Solution Needed

The Rev. Frank Chikane, a top official of the United Democratic Front, the broad coalition of anti-apartheid groups, said that Botha has been shown that South Africa's problems require "a political, not a military solution."

"Our problems cannot be solved by guns," Chikane said recently at a mass funeral for 17 riot victims in Alexandra township. "There is no way, just no way, that the Botha regime can continue ruling this country. . . . As long as we are here, they will not rule peacefully . . . because the peace they talk about is oppression in peace, oppression without resistance, and the people in the (black) townships across this country are determined to resist and are prepared to die doing so if it is necessary."

This resolve, increasingly evident among many of South Africa's urban blacks, has changed the character of the country's racial strife in five key ways in recent months:

-Black attacks on white civilians have become almost daily occurrences. No longer are the violence, destruction and casualties confined to the black townships. Whites are coming to realize that the security forces cannot prevent their spread, that they will be at risk even in their own homes.

For some, this translates into pressure on the government to accelerate the pace of reforms, to "give more, much more, before it is too late and they want everything," as a suburban Cape Town matron said. For others, however, it means that the government has not been tough enough and is endangering the country with its attempts at compromise.

-Despite the success of the police crackdown under the state of emergency in many places, black protests have continued to spread. The pattern typically has been a minor incident, perhaps a traffic accident, a community protest over it, and then tough police measures to suppress it, giving militants a better issue around which to organize local residents for strikes, consumer boycotts and other actions.

Black Radicalization

"The radicalization of the black communities in outlying areas has been spurred by government actions and the police in the past three months," a field worker for the South African Council of Churches remarked. "Many blacks who have always been quite conservative are now as militant as any you find in the big cities."

-Many of the black and Colored (mixed race) townships around Port Elizabeth and Cape Town are quiet now because community leaders there have been able to impose a strong measure of discipline on local youths with a pledge that the community as a whole will now confront the government, not just the youths.

Similarly, black students went back to school in January, ending class boycotts that had continued on and off for two years, on a commitment from community leaders to take firm action if the government does not meet their demands by the end of this month.

Some black townships, particularly around Port Elizabeth, are now run by "people's governments," made up of street committees and other local groups allied with the United Democratic Front and no longer by the discredited town councils. The African National Congress is widely believed to be fostering this movement, creating "urban base areas" for itself.

-Blacks, who four months ago had few weapons aside from rocks and gasoline-filled bottles, have begun shooting regularly at police patrols in the townships and using grenades to attack the homes of black policemen and local officials.

Infiltrating Urban Areas

Louis le Grange, the law and order minister, told Parliament last month that the African National Congress has begun infiltrating guerrillas into urban areas in substantial numbers. Other blacks, he said, have undergone military training in South Africa and neighboring countries and returned to their homes, where they were provided with arms from caches established earlier.

In recent days, the police killed seven blacks, suspected African National Congress guerrillas, in Guguletu, outside Cape Town, using handguns but also heavier weapons. There have been similar gunfights in the last six weeks in Port Elizabeth, East London and Soweto. In Mamelodi, outside Pretoria, the rear wheels of a police armored personnel carrier were blown off by a landmine, and caches of similar mines have been found in East London and eastern Cape province.

-Alarmed by these developments, particularly the black attacks on white civilians, many whites are starting to shoot at any sign of trouble, and the police warned earlier this month that they would not tolerate vigilante groups taking over the role of the security forces.

"You can't defend yourself with a catapult (slingshot), and we whites do need to defend ourselves," Eugene Terre'Blanche, the leader of the extreme right-wing Afrikaner Resistance Movement, said in explaining the reason for the recent establishment of the group's new Sentry militia. "Our people already have their own guns, and they know how to use them."

Half a dozen incidents also have been reported over the last month in which whites riding in cars and pickup trucks have shot at blacks, wounding at least eight. In one instance, whites attacked a black on a main road and, after beating him, set him on fire. He was burned severely but did not die.

Backlash Is Main Worry

Members of the Botha Cabinet are warning privately that this armed white backlash is the most worrisome development, for only a few serious incidents could quickly propel the country into a racial conflict that the security forces could not contain.

With the lifting of the state of emergency and the release from detention of many key black leaders who had been held for seven months and longer, the United Democratic Front and other anti-apartheid groups are expected to reassess their strategy and modify their tactics.

"The kids have done their job and they have done it well," Mike Beea, president of the Alexandra Civic Assn., said.

"They have put us on the offensive against the regime and in some ways even given us just a little bit of an edge. . . . What we need now are discipline and unity to make the most of this. I can't say yet what we will do—there may be new mass actions, perhaps new school boycotts, a consumer boycott, a general strike even—but the goal is not more of these so-called reforms but ending apartheid and bringing this government down."

Outlawed Black S. Africa Group Gains Impetus

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JOHANNESBURG, South Africa – Siphso calls himself a "human radio." Each morning, he gets on the train near his home deep in Soweto, the sprawling black satellite city outside Johannesburg, and begins to repeat the news from the Radio Freedom broadcasts of the African National Congress.

As the crowded train rattles on toward downtown Johannesburg, Siphso, a brokerage clerk in his mid-30s, gives a detailed rundown on the growing unrest around the country; recounts the latest exploits of "our fighters" in the Spear of the Nation, the congress's military wing, and reports on the activities of the group's exiled leadership. Then he starts a discussion based on Radio Freedom's latest commentaries.

"Man, do I have an audience today!" he said. "Two years ago, people weren't interested, not at all, and I might have been talking to myself most mornings. Today, they want me to shout out the news, and they leave the train not just talking about the ANC but ready to work for it, to fight for it. . . . They know the ANC is going to lead us to freedom."

Outlawed in 1960

The fortunes of the African National Congress, outlawed here in 1960, have indeed soared in the last two years. Today, the group can probably claim the allegiance of more of South Africa's 25 million blacks than any other organization, and this makes it a major political force here.

The congress's black, green and gold flag is now seen at virtually every funeral for those killed in the country's civil strife. Its leaders, though just names to most blacks after years in exile or prison, are hailed at protest meetings with reverberating shouts of "Viva!" and "Long live!" Songs are sung praising the Spear of the Nation-Umkhonto we Sizwe, in Bantu- and its guerrillas and calling on the congress to give the people guns to fight the government. And hundreds of black youths, joined by a few whites, have left the country to enroll in the organization's military wing in recent months.

For an organization long criticized as an exile group out of touch with events inside the country, this recognition is a major achievement-and an index of its strength within South Africa.

'People Lifted Ban'

"The people have lifted the ban on the ANC themselves," said Oliver Tambo, the president of the African National Congress since the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela in 1962. "They recognize us as their organization, as the vanguard of their struggle for liberation. According to the government, we are supposed to be illegal and nonexistent, but our support among the people grows daily."

The congress's guerrillas have doubled their attacks in the last 18 months so there are now two or three a week, according to both ANC and police sources, and with their AK-47 rifles and hand grenades, they have begun joining some of the fighting in the country's black townships.

They are also training more local recruits in the use of grenades, mines and various other weapons, these sources say. The huge arms caches found by police in recent months show greatly increased military capability despite the closure over the last three years of the easiest infiltration routes from neighboring countries.

Political cadres, most of whom work separately from the congress's military wing, are building up the group's underground organization in black communities and making some inroads among whites as well, according to senior officials at the organization's headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia.

Veteran leaders, who remained inside the country after the African National Congress was banned, often serving 12- and 15-year prison sentences in the notorious Robben Island penal colony, have helped organize the United Democratic Front, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and other new groups opposed to apartheid, the country's system of racial separation and minority white rule.

At Top Levels

Younger congress members, many of them graduates of the 1970s' black consciousness movement and trained by Mandela while they were imprisoned on Robben Island, are at top levels of labor unions and working throughout a broad range of anti-apartheid groups.

Underground cells of the congress are now helping to organize the fast-growing networks of street committees taking over the leadership in many black townships.

Propaganda efforts, once confined to radio-listening groups such as Sipho's and clandestine distribution of smuggled leaflets, are expanding with videotapes on the life of Mandela, the history of the African National Congress and its guerrilla campaign.

"We are there, though the government pretends we are not," Tambo said in a recent interview on the organization, its current strategy and policies. "Our organizing work has been stepped up with good, loyal cadres, many more units and a network that is very alive now. . . . I can't tell you how much longer it will take, but we think that, at last, long last, victory is within sight."

Recognition of the African National Congress as a key player in shaping South Africa's future has come in recent months from a wide cross-section of the country's business, labor, student, church and political groups. Despite strenuous objections from the government of President Pieter W. Botha that the ANC is a terrorist group that should be shunned, many South African organizations have sent delegations to Lusaka and elsewhere for in-depth discussions with congress leaders.

"The ANC is undoubtedly the most popular organization among the oppressed masses of this country," Jan van Eck, a member of the Cape province council from the liberal white opposition Progressive Federal Party, told fellow legislators in Cape Town last month as he called for legalization of the congress. "It is the height of stupidity to ban an organization that commands the sort of mass support the ANC enjoys."

The African National Congress, once lumped by many Western diplomats with other exile groups still fighting for lost causes, has won increasing international acceptance as well.

As the South African government's international isolation grows, the group's leaders are warmly received on visits around the world. Tambo testified before a British parliamentary committee in London, held discussions with the West German foreign minister and is now planning a trip to the United States, his second in two years.

A special Commonwealth commission made up of "eminent persons" from Britain and six other countries last month urged negotiations between the Pretoria govt.

And in Washington, the State Department, rejecting South African assertions that the African National Congress is primarily a terrorist organization, said last month that the United States believes the group must participate in determining the country's future.

To Tambo, all this affirms "the centrality of the ANC's role in resolving South Africa's problems, a centrality that we believe has always been there but which has been considerably enhanced and is now being recognized."

"There is a growing realization, a conviction even, that the ANC has everything to do with the solution of South Africa's problems, and without the ANC there can be no solution," Tambo, 69, a former Johannesburg lawyer, said while on his visit to Bonn. "This is what our people are saying, and the world and many white South Africans now see the truth of it, though not yet the Botha government."

Much of this recognition has come, Tambo and other congress leaders readily acknowledge, from the spreading anti-apartheid protests of the last two years here—protests whose origins were largely spontaneous and that still do not appear orchestrated by the group's underground network of guerrillas and political cadres here.

"We don't claim responsibility for every protest, every development, but the felt presence of the ANC in South Africa is a powerful force that propels people into action," Tambo said.

"We gave the people a strategic objective in 1984—simply to make the apartheid system unworkable, to make the whole country incapable of government—and that is what they are doing. We have now set another strategic task—preparing and launching a people's war—and that is what we are moving toward."

The group's critics, such as Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, the Zulu leader, contend that it is trying to profit from a situation it did not create and cannot control.

Its own efforts at armed struggle over the last 25 years have failed, the critics say, and the congress, as a result, had become almost irrelevant before the anti-apartheid violence began nearly two years ago.

"What is happening on the streets, it's true, is largely due to the people's anger over the (ruling) National Party's refusal to meet their demands," said Steve Tshwete, a graduate of Mandela's so-called "Robben Island University" and a regional president of the United Democratic Front.

"People do not need the ANC to tell them they are hungry, that they are homeless, that they are unemployed, that they are oppressed," he added.

"What the ANC does tell them is what they can do about it," he said. "Without a vanguard on the ground, it is not likely that our people would have risen to their present level of militancy. People needed to develop their political consciousness; they needed to know how to organize, how to draw up action programs. They also needed to know there was a big brother (the congress' military wing) to protect them.

"For years, the ANC has been the only organization on the ground; as a result, we suffered huge losses in casualties, but these did show people the ANC's commitment. If we have the people's allegiance today, we earned it."

Sipho—who uses that *nom de guerre* to protect himself from the security police and their informers—explained from his work as a "human radio" doing propaganda that blacks here see two qualities that they admire in the organization, now into its 75th year.

"The ANC has never sold us out like many black leaders have, compromised on its principles or given up the fight when it was toughest," he said. "If we are to have talks with the government, we want the ANC to represent us, not some sellout picked by the government.

"ANC policies are realistic and pragmatic and reflect the people's true aspirations for the country," he said. "The ANC is not dogmatic or ideological; it has Christians and Communists as members and there is even room for whites in it."

A third and increasingly important factor in its popular support, however, is the organization's armed struggle against the Pretoria government.

Once limited to bombings of government buildings and economic targets such as power substations, the group's offensive has been broadened in the last three years to include rocket attacks on oil-from-coal plants, land mines planted on farm roads, assassinations of black policemen and politicians seen as collaborating with the government and wider use of bombs and limpet mines in urban areas.

Despite government charges that these attacks, particularly those that have killed nearly 20 white civilians in recent months, have "confirmed the terrorist character" of the congress, its leaders argue that their use of violence remains selective, quite limited and "a response to the violence of apartheid."

"The armed struggle is very popular among the oppressed, who see it as a reply to the violence they suffer under apartheid and as a way to hasten their liberation," Tambo said. "And we, in fact, are expected to do more."

At a policy conference last June in the Zambian mining town of Kabwe, the African National Congress

decided to expand and intensify its guerrilla efforts as a prelude to what it calls "people's war" and the eventual toppling of the white-minority government.

Ronnie Kasrils, one of the first members of the Spear of the Nation, explained in an interview in Lusaka that "the seizure of state power is our goal, and we must not stop short of that; otherwise, we won't be able to bring about fundamental changes in South Africa."

"With the transformation of the situation at home, our base is once more inside our country, among our people," Kasrils, who is also a South African Communist Party theoretician, said in the current issue of the congress's magazine *Sechaba*. "What has been a low-intensity war over 25 years is now taking off into fully fledged armed struggle and people's war involving our people in their hundreds of thousands."

Kasrils explained that guerrillas can now operate more freely than ever in the many black townships that have become virtual no-go areas for the police. In addition, he said, the government's informer network has been reduced considerably by the murders of many of those suspected of cooperating with authorities.

The "central task" of the Spear of the Nation now, Kasrils said, is to begin arming the congress's supporters in large numbers. "That army of stone-throwers (in the townships) has to be transformed into an army with weapons," he said. "Our people have the mood and spirit: Every stone-thrower wants a gun. We have to put guns in their hands."

The need for the full "armed insurrection" that Kasrils envisions is still debated within the African National Congress. But even those who hope for a negotiated "transfer of power" by the present government to minimize the loss of life argue for increased guerrilla efforts as essential pressure to break the white resistance to majority rule.

But the congress' current military capability is sharply disputed.

Police here say that ANC guerrillas, lacking bases inside South Africa, are stretched almost to the limit of their operational capacity. The congress resorts to terrorist attacks, such as the bomb that killed five Christmas shoppers south of Durban last year, out of its inability to attack the security forces.

"When their men come back into South Africa for a mission, we know very quickly, often before they start to operate, sometimes even within 15 minutes," a senior police officer said recently. "We have a sophisticated intelligence system that alerts us to any movement of their men and that ensures we find at least three-quarters of their weapons, explosives and other materials before they are used."

"The African National Congress is a terrorist threat, a very dangerous one, but not a true guerrilla or military threat to the state," added the police official, who asked not to be identified. "They are competent at hit-and-run tactics, but pose no credible threat to our security forces."

Over the last decade, about 500 guerrillas have been arrested or killed, he added. To limit its losses, the congress rarely has more than 10 to 20 trained military operatives inside the country at a time, he said. Even the increased level of two or three incidents a week represents no real threat to the state, government officials have said.

At its military camps in Angola and Tanzania, the African National Congress has trained between 2,500 and 3,000 guerrillas since 1976, according to Col. Jan Buchner, a police intelligence specialist on the organization, but about half of these are now in other jobs.

When political cadres, administrative personnel, students and other exiles are included, Buchner said, the congress has a total strength of about 10,000 outside the country.

The group's internal strength is largely a matter of speculation.

"We know that 80% to 90% of their effort goes into political work, but we don't really know how successful it is," Buchner said. "We see the flags at funerals, we know their use of front organizations, we are aware of the expansion of their cell network in the townships, but whether this would translate into real support in, say,

an armed insurrection if we ever got to that is quite a different matter."

In pressing its military campaign, the congress, other analysts say, may also be underestimating the white-led government's determination to retain power, whether through gradual and limited political reforms, sheer military might or the present combination of the two.

Tom Lodge, a political scientist at Johannesburg's University of the Witwatersrand, who has studied the African National Congress closely for many years, predicts that a full-scale ANC offensive would bring an all-out government effort to destroy the organization, both within the country and abroad.

"We are not in a revolutionary situation here yet, and in terms of revolutionary theory itself, that makes any armed insurrection premature," Lodge said. "The ANC could also lose the support it is now cultivating among whites if it increased the level of violence considerably or launched attacks indiscriminately."

But the congress's leadership is under strong pressure from younger militants in the organization and from its supporters inside the country to "hit the government a lot harder and accept that many more white casualties will be necessary if we are to win," as one senior ANC official in Lusaka put it recently.

A younger ANC cadreman, Pappie Kubu, who left South Africa after the Soweto uprising 10 years ago, explained: "Youth, especially in the townships but also in our (military training) camps, want to do more. They want to rush in and destroy the whole apartheid system."

"The leadership has to hold them back and say, 'Not so fast, because destroying the system that way may destroy . . . the economy, many people's homes, the whole country even,'" Kubu said.

Another ANC cadre member who joined after Soweto, Susan Mnumzana, recalled that "we in the Soweto generation thought we were the revolution and would just push ahead and return home as great liberators in a couple of years."

"We were more angry than politically conscious, and . . . the ANC's contacts with the country were not very dynamic," Mnumzana said. "Today, the young people who come to join us understand what the struggle is, and they identify with the ANC because they know what it stands for. . . . But that does not reduce the impatience of youth or the anger and bitterness of those who experience apartheid every day."

Under these pressures, the organization's conference at Kabwe last June decided to step up its military attacks, expanding the range of targets to those that might also mean civilian as well as military casualties.

"How hard to hit is one of the major policy issues within the ANC," Lodge said, "and there is a continuing debate over the merits of ruthlessness versus restraint. . . . It does not divide them, but it does preoccupy them."

Despite the Kabwe decision and the popularity of military actions among many blacks, the African National Congress remains notably cautious, more concerned at present with strengthening its underground organization than launching major offensives.

"We have always needed a compound strategy, not a simple, one-dimensional one," Pallo Jordan, the group's director of research and a member of its executive committee, said in an interview in Lusaka.

Jordan, an American- and British-trained historian, sees three likely scenarios for an ANC victory: a "protracted war" that shifts increasingly to the offensive until the government is defeated; "partial insurrections" combined with general strikes in key areas of the country, and a negotiated "transfer of power" by a weakened, isolated government "when it realizes that it has exhausted all possibilities except this-and fighting to the death."

"We are more interested than anyone else in a peaceful transfer of power, in reducing the violence," Jordan continued. "We know that our people will suffer the most casualties. We do not want to destroy the country-it is our country, too. And we do not want the bitter aftermath of a war."

"Yet even a negotiated outcome will be the result of a successful compound strategy. The element of armed struggle, of people's war, might not be of such a high profile, but it is essential, even decisive. The Botha government is not, quite obviously, going to give up power willingly and accept majority rule. It has to be forced to do so."

Despite the congress's hope for what Jordan called "a negotiated transfer of power" and its extensive talks over the last nine months with a wide range of South African groups and individuals to promote this, among blacks as well as the nation's 5 million whites, the organization does not feel the time has yet come for such negotiations.

"If the regime seriously, genuinely wanted to resolve the South African situation by negotiations, talks could begin very quickly, tomorrow, even while hostilities are in progress," Tambo said. "But the truth is that there is no readiness, no seriousness about ending apartheid. That is why we feel we must intensify our struggle, even if it means stepping up our armed attacks with the tragic loss of life that this may involve, tragic because it is unnecessary."

The main barrier to such negotiations, Tambo said, is Pretoria's insistence that the congress renounce violence as a precondition for negotiations.

"This is really laughable, for it is the violence of apartheid that gave rise to our violence, our very limited violence," he continued. "But we are prepared to renounce violence if this were a reciprocal action. . . . But they really can't, as violence is inherent in the apartheid system. They would have to end apartheid, abandon it entirely, dismantle it. Then there would be no further violence against our people, and we would have no cause to continue our armed struggle."

A second obstacle to negotiations, ANC officials acknowledge, is their insistence that they concern the "transfer of power," not further reforms of the present system or the government's offer of power sharing.

"Political power, not simply ending racial discrimination, is the central issue, and anything short of that will be greeted with suspicion and probably rejection," Mac Maharaj, another member of the executive committee, commented during an interview in Lusaka.

"The government, we believe, is now in a crisis of such dimensions that there is no way out for it. However, like a cornered beast, it will use all its cunning to try and escape and, if it can't, to strike out madly. These are times to be cautious. . . .

"Many of the reforms Pretoria has undertaken are just shifts to maintain the system of minority rule, and we are talking about fundamental changes that can only come with a transfer of power," Maharaj said.

Although many whites interpret this as "discussing terms for our surrender and nothing less," as one National Party politician put it, the African National Congress has explained to the many South African delegations that have visited its Lusaka headquarters that transfer of power need not mean simply white capitulation but, rather, the establishment through negotiation of a new constitutional system for the country.

Majority rule, they similarly explain, should not be equated with black rule, but with a democratic political system in which all would have a voice.

"We are committed, and have been for decades, to a multiparty democracy with a constitution ensuring human rights and civil liberties for everyone," Jordan said. "The only thing we intend to declare illegal is the advocacy of racism and other forms of discrimination. There are many other aspects to our program in terms of the country's development, a new educational system, health care and the present monopolistic concentration of economic power, but these are all matters for discussion and democratic decisions."

For many whites and some blacks as well, the prominence of so many South African Communist Party members in the top ANC leadership-and their apparently much tougher line on military action, on negotiations, on the country's future-diminishes the value of such pledges.

Tambo, regarded as an African nationalist by even the Pretoria government, for many years fought what he himself saw as a Communist takeover of the African National Congress but eventually changed his mind. "I have been in the ANC leadership since 1949, and I have found that the members of the South African Communist Party behave exactly as any other ANC person would behave," he said. "I know that Communist parties are normally credited with being able to influence everything and anything they come in contact with, but with us the experience has been that the Communists are very loyal, very committed members of the ANC. We are happy to have them on that basis."

Tony Bloom, a leading South African businessman, who was in one of the first groups to go from here to meet the ANC leadership, said later, "It is difficult to view the group as hard-line Marxists or bloodthirsty terrorists who are interested in reducing South Africa to anarchy. . . .

"They are people with whom serious negotiations can be undertaken," Bloom said, "and with whom a certain amount of common ground can be found."

In fact, the congress, founded in 1912, has become an omnibus liberation movement that seems to have room for a broad range of political persuasions, ranging from Christian activists to Communist Party members who still praise the leadership qualities of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. "We do not want a one-party, everyone-think-alike state, and so it seemed wrong to turn this organization into that sort of thing," Jordan said. "So people will have to accept we do have Communists as members of our ranks and our leadership along with devout Christians who say grace before meals."

The previous height of ANC influence in South Africa came during the 1950s, when it led protests against the Nationalist government's new apartheid laws, which instituted the system of strict racial separation.

But the organization was decimated by a police crackdown on its activities and members after it was outlawed in 1960 along with the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, an ANC offshoot opposed to white involvement in the liberation movement and any subsequent government.

"We went through very, very rough years," Tambo recalled, "with the government tracking down hundreds and hundreds of our people, killing them, putting them into prison, driving them into exile. We struggled just to stay alive. If we are strong now, we developed much of that strength through those hard years."

Majority rule, the ANC says, should not be equated with black rule but a democratic system.