

# South African Race Riots

By George Padmore

THE recent riots between two sections of the non-European population of the Union of South Africa—East Indians and Zulu Africans—were the logical outcome of the policy of jim crowism and racial oppression, known officially as "Apartheid," on the one hand, and the traditional British policy of "divide and rule" on the other.

"We are face to face with the fruits of the white man's policy of dividing the people of South Africa into kraals and denying them an equal say in how the problems created by their having to live together, pay the same taxes, and suffer from the same diseases, are to be solved," asserts *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, mouthpiece of the Africans. Commenting upon the socio-economic forces which provided the fuel for the sudden explosion, the paper says: "We witness the fruits of suspicion and hatred sown when the Union of South Africa came into being nearly forty years ago. At that time the white people decided to arrogate to themselves the sole right to guide the destinies of all the non-European peoples. How well they have guided the latter may be seen from what has happened. . . . Today we see this policy forcing the heavily and cruelly oppressed Africans to turn against a group which, though privileged, is none the less not among the rulers."

The Durban pogrom, the worst yet experienced in the history of South Africa, resulted in the death of 137 people, including one European, 53 Indians, and 83 Africans, most of whom were shot by white soldiers. The injured amounted to 1,883, of whom 30 were Europeans, 768 Indians, and 1,085 Africans. It is estimated that over \$1,500,000 worth of property belonging to wealthy Indian merchants and traders was destroyed. Over 20,000 Indians and Africans have been rendered permanently homeless, while 40,000 Indians, driven from their homes, are being cared for in emergency camps by the Red Cross and other relief organizations.

*Durban municipal authorities and white race-baiters cannot escape the moral responsibility for the explosive South African race riots of January*

Apart from the dead and the physical suffering endured, the most tragic consequence of this unprecedented outbreak of mob violence from the point of view of non-European race relations, is the hatred and bitterness which these communal conflicts invariably leave as their legacy. However, efforts which have already been made to restore friendship and cooperation between the two communities are meeting success. Immediately after the fighting subsided, the leaders of the Indian and African National Congresses, the two leading non-European political organizations in South Africa, issued a joint statement appealing to their respective followers to close ranks in face of the provocation and incitement to racial hatred from European politicians and other agents of the *Herrenvolk* government.

A joint commission from the two bodies has also been set up to inquire into the economic and social causes of the unrest and to take immediate steps to remove such grievances as may exist between the two racial groups, and thereby re-establish friendship and cooperation on a more permanent basis between the African and Indian communities in Natal. Representatives of other non-European progressive organizations, as well as outstanding Africans and Indians, have united to support this gesture of good will and statesmanship on the part of the leaders of the African and Indian National Congresses.

## Historical Background

The outbreak of the riots was spontaneous and took the leaders of the two racial communities completely by

surprise. "Several false culprits can be acquitted at the outset. This is perhaps the first serious riot of modern times for which the communists have not and cannot be blamed," says the *London Observer*. The causes have to be looked for elsewhere.

It is significant that Field Marshall Smuts, seeking to make political capital out of the suffering and tragedy of these dark-skinned folk whom he so ruthlessly oppressed when he was Prime Minister, hastened to fasten blame upon his political rival, Dr. Malan, the leader of the present Boer Nationalist government. But this clumsy maneuver does not deceive the Africans. They know that the difference between Smuts and Malan is that of degree rather than of kind—the difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee!

Repudiating the hypocrisy of "Janus" Smuts (this political Jekyll and Hyde, who, like his friend Churchill, poses to the outside world as a great liberal but is a reactionary tyrant to colored races), *Inkundla Ya Bantu* declares: "It is dishonest to accuse Dr. Malan or the Nationalists of being the main cause of the riots or to say that their rise to power has resulted in the Durban riots. A deep and festering sore has been developing in the body of the African people against oppression and its agents since Union. It is the sore caused by segregation. It was not Dr. Malan who advised the delegates to the National Convention in 1910 to leave giving the African a voice in the affairs of his country to the abler minds of the future; in other words who silenced the voice of liberalism to ensure that the point of view of the oppressors of the former Dutch Republic prevailed. It was General Smuts himself, who, today, would hold the Nationalists as surely responsible for the Durban disasters. The Durban riots are the fruit of fatal blunders of the men who drafted the Act of Union—leader among them was General Smuts who was prime minister of the Union for ten years, and in that time did nothing



to give the African new hope. The Nationalist rise to power merely accelerated a process already in motion. To hold the Nationalists alone responsible for these disasters is just cant."

All the white politicians, British as well as Boer (Dutch), are equally responsible. Their hands are stained with the blood of Africans and Indians. By their incitement to racial hatred they hope to divert the attention of the non-Europeans from their real oppressors, the white overlords, just as the American Dixiecrats exploit racism for political ends. In South Africa, the quickest and surest way to election in Durban is to stand on an Asiatic platform. "Over the last three years anti-Asiatic propaganda has been preached by prominent men in Durban," reports the South African correspondent of the liberal *Manchester Guardian*. "They have made Durban a city of hate. It was in this atmosphere of racial strain and tension that a small incident precipitated the bloodiest riots on the night of January 13th last."

### How the Trouble Started

The trouble started about 9 o'clock, when some Africans queueing up for buses operated by wealthy Asiatics, saw an Indian fruit vendor strike a Zulu child, George Madondo. The crowd remonstrated with the man and a palaver ensued. Words led to blows. Then someone raised the false alarm that the boy had been killed by the Indian. Fighting spread in the wake of the rumor.

According to an eye-witness: "The incensed Africans turned on Indians in the vicinity with sticks, stones, and broken bottles, which they hurled at passing buses and cars operated by Indians. Fighting spread quickly as Africans pursued the vehicles. Vegetable carts were overturned and shop windows shattered. Indians attempting to make a getaway in buses, cars, and taxis were met with a hail of missiles."

As the situation was assuming ugly proportions a storm broke over the city and a heavy downpour of rain drove the rioters off the streets. Thanks to this timely intervention of Providence, calm was restored temporarily. On the following day, however, renewed fighting broke out in various parts of the city. The agents-provocateurs had gone to work. In order to eliminate business rivals, Europeans incited the Africans to attack the stores of Indian merchants. It was not difficult to arouse the resentment of the unsophisticated Zulu against Indian shopkeepers, who habitually overcharge natives, and Indian landlords, who exact the maxi-



**DURBAN RACE RIOT**—Natives race through Durban's Pine Street, seeking new victims, at the height of the three-day race riot between Africans and Indians. Africans, angered by rumors that an adolescent African boy, George Madondo, had been murdered by an Indian, swarmed down upon Indian shops and homes, rolling up a casualty list of 137 dead and 1,883 injured.

mum rents for pitiable tin-roofed shacks, and who are merciless in ejections.

While there are many poor Indians belonging to the working class of Durban, it is the luxurious suburban villas and sleek American high-powered limousines of the wealthy Indian merchant class that arouse the envy and jealousy of the under-privileged Africans. And since their white oppressors are armed, it is easier for the Africans to release their frustration against defenceless Indians. When such communal outbursts occur it is the poor who suffer far more than the rich.

At the height of the shopping period on Friday, January 14, bands of Zulus, chanting their traditional war songs, stormed through the Indian quarters, looting shops and setting houses on fire. As the Indians deserted their shops and stores, white hooligans joined the mobs in looting, which went on all day. "Though after Friday the police made every effort to quell the riot, there is evidence to show that many lives and properties could have been saved had not many European policemen encouraged Africans to attack Indians," reports the *Cape Town Guardian*.

The same report says: "The Natal Indian Congress has also received the car numbers of European-owned cars the occupants of which were seen help-

ing Africans to loot shops and houses. Many reports have been received from Africans, Indians, and Europeans to the effect that European-driven trucks transported Africans to fighting zones during the riots. One African has admitted in court that he was told to attack the Indians by a European."

It was only when the situation threatened to get out of hand and the Africans might have attacked the European business section that the Government declared a state of emergency and flew troops into the city. These white soldiers (for only Europeans are allowed to bear arms in South Africa) immediately turned their guns upon the unarmed natives. This accounts for the large number of African casualties. Bullets took the place of tear gas and batons in restoring "the majesty of the white man's authority."

To silence his critics, Dr. Malan has announced the setting up of a judicial commission of inquiry [consisting of Justice F. P. van der Heever, chairman, Ryle Masson, chief magistrate of Johannesburg, and H. F. W. Schultz, chief magistrate of Durban. Ed.], which makes the affair *sub judice*. "Evidence will be given before this commission by both Indians and Natives. Among the leaders of both races who will testify before it we doubt whether there will be

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the slave who became known in history as the founder of Haitian Independence. Dessalines defeated and expelled the French from Haiti, thereby blocking Napoleon's invasion of our country through Louisiana.

Heading the distinguished cast was Robert Weede, the American baritone, heard in the role of the Haitian liberator, Marie Powers, contralto, created the role of Azelia, his faithful slave wife, and Helena Bliss, soprano, that of Claire, the glamorous mistress whom he made his Empress. Oscar Natzka sang the role of Martel, confidante and good friend of Dessalines. His traitorous generals, Vuvio and Steno, were performed by Richard Charles and Arthur Newman. Helena Bliss and Richard Charles made their New York City Opera debuts in this performance.

The ballets in "Troubled Island" were supplied by the New York City Ballet Company under the artistic direction of George Balanchine.

The native dances were performed by Jean Leon Destiné, distinguished Haitian dancer-singer-lecturer, and his troupe of six dancers and two drummers. The choreography was by Destiné, in collaboration with Balanchine and Eugene Bryden, the stage director for the production. Destiné is known to New York audiences for his work as soloist in Katherine Dunham's revue "Bal Nègre," and his appearances at several large New York night clubs. He has toured the country with Dunham and has appeared as soloist with Pearl Primus.

Laszlo conducted the performance, and production was staged by Eugene Bryden, who returned to the company after an absence of two and a half years. The settings and costumes were executed by H. A. Condell.

### CIVIL RIGHTS BILLS IN THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Nine bills designed to outlaw various types of discrimination and one to require human relations courses in the schools have been introduced in the current session of the Connecticut General Assembly. Four of these bills have been introduced in both houses. Dates of the public hearings on the bills will be announced in the Legislative Bulletin issued at the State Capitol which lists committee hearings each Tuesday.

### Filmstrips & Discussion

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ing pot idea and emphasizes the advantages of our differences.

*Man—One Family* 40 frames. Cartoons and Photographs. Adapted from

Professor Julian Huxley's film of the same name. A popular anthropological approach to the fact that there is no such thing as a pure race—that every nation and even every individual has many mixed bloods—that abilities cannot be measured by comparing mythical group "averages." Poses questions for discussion on opportunity in housing, jobs, health facilities in each community; calls for equal opportunities for all Americans so that the best of their individual abilities may be brought out.

*Forward All Together* 82 frames. Photographs and cartoons. Council Against Intolerance in America. Investigates the forms of discrimination in America such as Jim Crow practices, white supremacy, lynchings, etc. and the reasons behind them: ignorance, indifference, greed, fear, the desire to feel superior. Shows how such practices lead to the destruction of democracy and gives examples of what we can do about eradicating them.

*The American Negro* 49 frames. Photographs. Pictures the specific results of the South's "White Supremacy" policy; the northern migration; limitations in the North on living conditions, jobs, etc.; examples of Negro achievement in all fields; poses question of how the vast reservoir of Negro skills and intelligence can be used to their fullest, and the challenge to American ideals of freedom and equality.

No matter what type of visual aid is employed, it has failed to achieve its purpose if the subject is considered settled when the end-title appears. The highly dramatic movie, for instance, may fail to have any lasting effect if the audience sees its characters as personalities who have no relationship or identification with themselves and their actions. "That may work *there*, but our town is different," sums up this attitude. A great deal of research and study is still needed on how concepts of brotherhood, tolerance, and other positive attitudes can be visualized most effectively.

Furthermore it is up to the discussion leader to take up where the film-strip or film leaves off. No visual medium can do the job by itself. We need more wholesale training clinics for discussion leaders such as the Adult Education Council of New York City provides. As an aid to this goal a film-strip illustrating the most widely accepted discussion techniques is now in preparation in cooperation with the League of Women Voters.

Whether we are furthering better race relations or freer world trade, nation wide problem-solving discussion groups are an important step toward achieving our aim.

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found a single friend of the white man," says the influential Cape Town *Argus*. "The white man no longer enjoys the confidence of the races over whom he rules."

#### Europeans to Blame

Whatever may be the findings of the official commission of inquiry, the Durban municipal authorities cannot escape moral responsibility for the conditions which provided the social explosive to the riots. They have done less than any other South African city authorities to provide housing and other social amenities for their black population. According to the Broome Commission Report, published in March 1948, there were 23,000 Africans living in shacks under conditions that, in the words of the report, constitute "to the health of all races in and around Durban, a deadly menace which must be removed at once."

The Commission also reported that the infant mortality rate among Africans is about the highest in the world. The Africans are riddled with T.B., Amoebic dysentery, and V.D. Not a house has been built, not a clinic opened for the blacks since the publication of the Broome report. Social conditions such as those exposed by the Commission are turning the Africans into a nation of Bigger Thomases.

The South African Color bar system, the most cruel caste system in all the world, permeates every aspect of life. It gives rise to the most cruel forms of political oppression, social repression, and economic exploitation. It enables a white minority of two million British and Dutch settlers to exercise dominion over eight million unarmed Africans.

The black man in South Africa is a slave in his own country. He is the helot of the helots. The tragedy of the human race. He is deprived of any possibility of developing his potentialities, has no scope for his energies. He is doomed to be a hewer of wood and drawer of water for others. His children are without a future. His whole life is one of thwarted emotions which find relief in drink. It is not surprising, therefore, that his pent-up frustrations, seeking an outlet, should burst out in riots directed against another suppressed group. But why should Africans hate Indians when they, too, suffer many of the same indignities?