

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JCB-19: The Underground War

February 1, 1963
1239 Arcadia Street
Pretoria, Transvaal
Republic of South Africa

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

South Africa is at war; an unique kind of war in which direct contact is limited and the faces of the enemy are not clear; a battle between the Government and the increasingly violent activities of the underground movements.

Even before the National Party became the Government it was fearful of the Communist menace and all those who advocated a multi-racial state. Not able to distinguish between the two it has acted to curb both. As a result, most African opportunities for political expression have been legally destroyed. And major non-European political groups have been forced away from moderate leadership into the hands of those who accept the use of violence.

There are three political underground organizations now active in the Republic. They have been formed since PAC and ANC were banned in April, 1960, but only in the past year have they shown signs of development and activity.

It is not easy to gather information about them. So-called "informed sources" either know little or are afraid to tell what they do know. Several people who have been actively involved in African politics explain that they know things are going on but they try not to find out what; it could be dangerous. Thus all sorts of theories and bits of information make the rounds, often contradicting each other, and accuracy is impossible to check. But from what I have been able to glean the following seems to be a relatively reliable picture:

Who make up the Underground?

The two best-organized groups, the Spear of the Nation (Umkonto we Sizwe) and the National Committee for Liberation (NCL) are both multi-racial. The third, Poqo, has a completely non-White, anti-White membership.

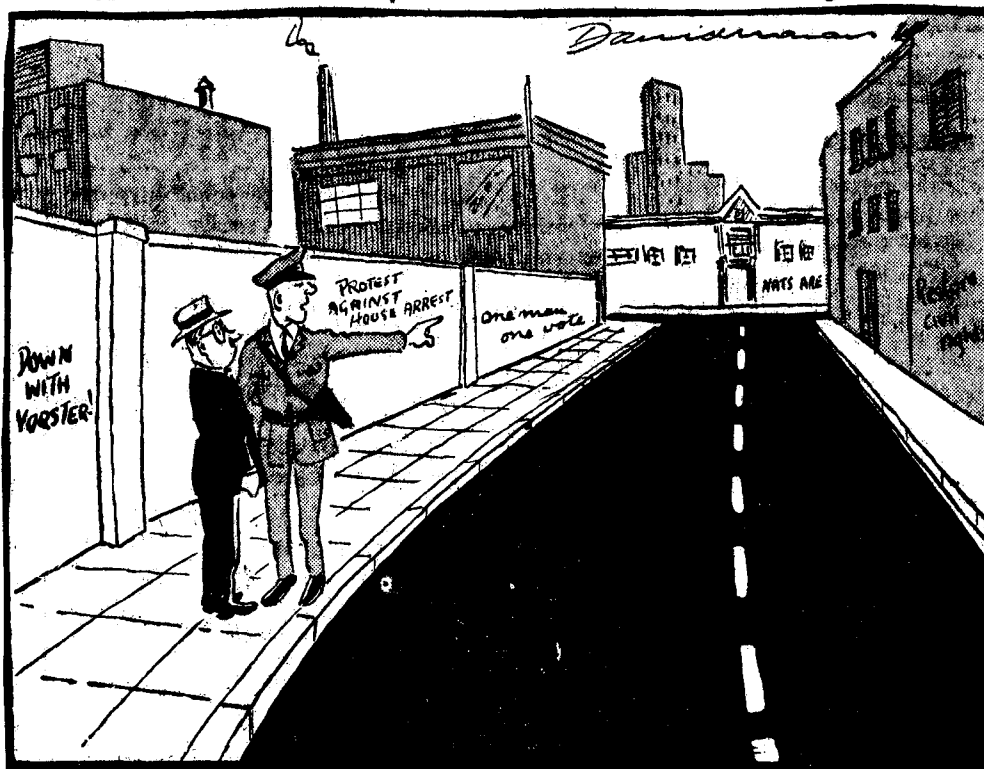
An African journalist stressed the importance of the first two groups. "It is important that Whites participate in the underground so that multi-racialism, the kind of society we want, can be maintained. Without them, hostility toward the Government would also become hostility toward the Whites."

They both made their identities known in December of 1961. The NCL started off with telephone calls to newspapers. The Spear, not to be outdone, immediately circulated handbills on which its statement of purpose was spelled out. It said that it "marked a break with the past....We are striking out along a new road..."

Both of these groups receive financial aid, supplies and training facilities from sources in other countries. (Assistance from American organizations and individuals is negligible, I was told by a disgruntled NCL member).

The Spear has been centered on the Reef surrounding Johannesburg while the NCL, also on the Reef, has worked mostly in Natal and parts of the Eastern Cape. However they have now expanded into other areas. Their extent and the number of the membership is not even known by the members. Both groups seem to follow the "M" (Mandela) Plan, a system of cells communicating indirectly with each other, with each cell leader knowing the leader of only one other cell.

Why don't these two groups get together? The Spear includes members from the militant wing of the banned ANC, other groups of the Congress Alliance and the banned Communist Party. NCL, while having members from the ANC and nominally non-violent liberal organizations, has



"The railway station? You can't miss it. Just carry on past where it says 'One Man One Vote,' turn right at 'Nats Are Nazis,' straight on to 'Resist Police State,' then turn left at 'Down With The Vorster Bill'..."

no Communists. This difference is the greatest stumbling block to a united front. Non-Communists in the Spear are willing to work with Communists in common cause, but some NCL leaders see the Communists and the Government as equal enemies. While they have been in competition so far, each trying to gain publicity as the most successful sabotage organization, efforts have gone on to bridge the difference.

Starting the build-up

For over a year the writing of political slogans has been the most persistent means of protest. It has been only in the last five or six months that the two groups have taken decisively the step toward violence. After much talk and hesitation within ANC circles the argument for violent action has gained a wide but reluctant acceptance. (JCB-17) When the police picked up Duma Nokwe they found a document which listed the arguments "for" and "against" violence with the written verdict for violence. And Mandela, a strong advocate for non-violence, clearly pointed to the decision in a statement he made during his trial (JCB-20):

"We have warned repeatedly that the Government, by resorting to violence, will breed in this country a counter-violence.....Already there are indications that people, my people, Africans, are turning to deliberate acts of violence and of force against the Government in order to persuade in the only language which this Government shows by its actions that it understands."

The first stage of the over-all program of these groups is now in effect: the warm-up or try-out period, with attacks on Government buildings and minor power, railway, telephone and telegraph installations, to give the Government warning of their serious intent and to test the organization's effectiveness in discipline, security and the use of explosives. The second stage will be a prolonged attack on targets of major importance in many parts of the country at the same time, to disrupt communications and hurt the economy. If these are unsuccessful in changing Government policy then there would be no alternative to terrorism and attacks on human life.

The Government and these underground organizations used 1962 to prepare for the possibility of a guerrilla-terrorist kind of war. Whether or not it comes depends on many things: Government and European reaction and the potency of military-police preparations; other countries, how they help or oppose the Government; the policies and actions of the underground totality, how well they are able to discipline themselves for a long severe battle and whether they will be able to work together.

Meanwhile this Underground and the Government have each enlarged their trained personnel, gained knowledge of the Algerian War at first hand, have tightened security and formed special units to deal with sabotage more expertly. Both have tried to influence the public: one, primarily

the Europeans, the other, the non-Europeans.

But while the Government has successfully convinced the European electorate of the necessity of its actions and has been able to recruit needed members to the police and armed forces, underground groups have had more difficulty. They do not expect to be able to recruit additional Europeans and most non-Europeans are reluctant to get involved in something which might lose them those housing, income and educational improvements they have already received. They want conditions to be different but they don't want violence; they don't want to sacrifice themselves for the desired change. Some single, educated young men, who have felt especially frustrated over what the future has to offer them, have been recruited and the organizations hope that when the underground proves itself successful active support and recruitment will increase. Up to now their emphasis has been on quality, not quantity, on creating an elite core of well-trained, well-disciplined members.

When you tell them that their prospects of overwhelming or changing the Government's mind is impossible, they quickly point to Algeria and to Cuba. If Castro could overwhelm a regime supported by powerful interests in the United States and keep hold of power against the wishes of America, why can't they succeed with the help of other African countries? To them, Che Guevara's book about the Cuban revolution is a Bible. Members of Poqo, the third group, also think along these lines, but there the resemblance ends.

Poqo

According to one "expert", Poqo means PAC in Xhosa. Others explain that it stands for "Alone" (We stand alone). Both translations tell something about the group. It is violently anti-White and prefers to "go it alone", to be purely an African group (although they have allowed other non-Europeans to be associated with them).

It was initially formed from the extreme anti-White wing of the PAC in the Western Cape. They split from PAC at the time of riots at Langa, a Cape Town African Location, in 1960 when some PAC members were willing to work with liberal Whites. From time to time since then the split has been the cause of faction fights in some of the Cape urban locations where Poqo has become a violent and disturbing element.

Compared to the two other groups, Poqo has been poorly organized. PAC headquarters in Basutoland has attempted to give guidance, improve discipline and recruit men for training in underground warfare. Poqo has never been welcomed by the more educated, family-oriented urban Africans. But men in the location's so-called 'bachelor' quarters, separated from their families, have been more easily influenced by persuasion and threat. A younger generation which is growing increasingly anti-White provides a membership potential and anti-White groups among the Coloureds and Malays in the Cape work with Poqo.

Lately in search for greater support its focus has changed from the urban areas to the rural reserves. It has also started organizing on the Reef and in Natal.

It seeks to ally all Africans behind it and believes the Government and the Europeans will help. If Europeans panic and hit out at all dark skins, if the police react unthinkingly and violently against the innocent, then the Africans, as well as the other non-Europeans, will be forced to its side. Poqo's activities have always been terroristic. It has killed or tortured Africans and Coloureds who have collaborated with the Government or stood in its way. It has also killed a few Europeans.

A prominent African businessman in Johannesburg who has no use for violence as a way to settle political differences has been led recently to believe that "the Poqo mentality may well be the only answer to our problems. Only when an organization like Poqo becomes as strong as the Government and as ruthlessly anti-White as it is anti-non-White, will there be any change.

"At present members of Spear and the National Committee still make a distinction between the Government and the people. It blames the system and attacks it by bombing Government property. In time they may be forced to accept the Poqo attitude. Right now they can't be anti-White or violent toward people because they have to accommodate the liberal Whites. If all the Whites were to stand with Verwoerd the problem would be simple, the enemies would be clear. Since the White people and their Government have not been able to treat others justly out of respect, perhaps they may do so out of threat."

Violence against people

What this threat could mean was demonstrated on November 22nd in Paarl, a pretty little town in the heart of the Cape's wine area, 40 miles from Cape Town. Over 100 (there was no official count) Poqo-inspired Africans from Paarl's Mbekweni Native Township marched into the city. While one group attacked the police station, ostensibly after the release of several Africans from the township who had been detained on a suspicion of murder, another group started breaking their way into European homes. During the terror-filled pre-dawn hours a young European teen age girl and a young man were clubbed to death. Three other Europeans were injured. Five of the attacking Africans were shot and killed by the police and irate house-owners, while four more were wounded.

Riots like the one at Sharpeville had been spontaneous but European residents of Paarl quickly realized that this one was well planned and deliberate. The group had marched three and a half miles into town without being heard or stopped (it later came out that some police did see the Africans, had in fact been stoned by them, but had thought it more important to protect the police station with its store of guns and ammunition than to protect the homes of civilians along the route). Reaction among the Europeans in Paarl wavered between anger

at the police for leaving them unprotected, determination to have the Government speed up the removal of all Africans from the Western Cape, and intentions to mount an attack against the Native township.

While the police kept insisting that the riot was a criminal matter and not a political one, the subsequent inquiry into the causes revealed that much of the unrest which Poqo exploited was due to the Government's racial policy. Before the inquiry was finished, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development had each conceded some political basis for the riot when they blamed "White agitators" and "enemies of the State" who "appeared in the garb of the cleric, in the gown of the law, in the office of the business executive.." for the unrest at Paarl and other places.

Following the riot many Poqo members appear to have fanned out into the Transkei and possibly the Ciskei. On December 12th, a group of 60 to 100 Xhosas were thwarted in their attempt to attack the home of Chief Kaiser Mantanzima, chairman of the Transkei Territorial Authority. In the battle Africans armed with axes and clubs fought police armed with .22 rifles. Six Africans were killed and numbers wounded. Police then began an extensive round-up, searching buses, cars and trains for those who had fled. In a search of a railway car filled with 35 Africans at the Queenstown station, violence exploded when the Africans rose to attack the police with old-fashioned knob-kerries and axes, killing one and wounding five others. In the resulting round-up through the residential area surrounding the station, six Africans were shot.

At first the police insisted, as they had done at Paarl, that there was nothing political in these riots. Later, to prove their contention that all was peaceful politically in the Transkei, they announced that Poqo had launched "an invasion" with "shock troupes" from the Cape Town area and that the headquarters of the organization was in Basutoland.

A letter which appeared in the December 27th issue of Contact seems to confirm the police announcement. Written by Potlako Leballo, the former national secretary of the banned PAC who fled to Basutoland when, after serving a jail sentence for his political activities, he was banished to Ubombo in Zululand. He writes:

"As a result of the ban on the Pan Africanist Congress which has been powerful in the Cape, there was no doubt that there would emerge a vigorous revolutionary underground movement to take its place. The Poqo organization therefore is a direct manifestation of the helplessness of striving for democratic demands without an open body such as the PAC was before it was banned. The present uprising in the Cape is only the beginning of a general ferment throughout South Africa. The reported growth of Poqo in the Cape and its apparent extension to other centers must be a warning to White South Africa to ...give way to a democratic rule of an African majority. The day of reckoning is now imminent...."

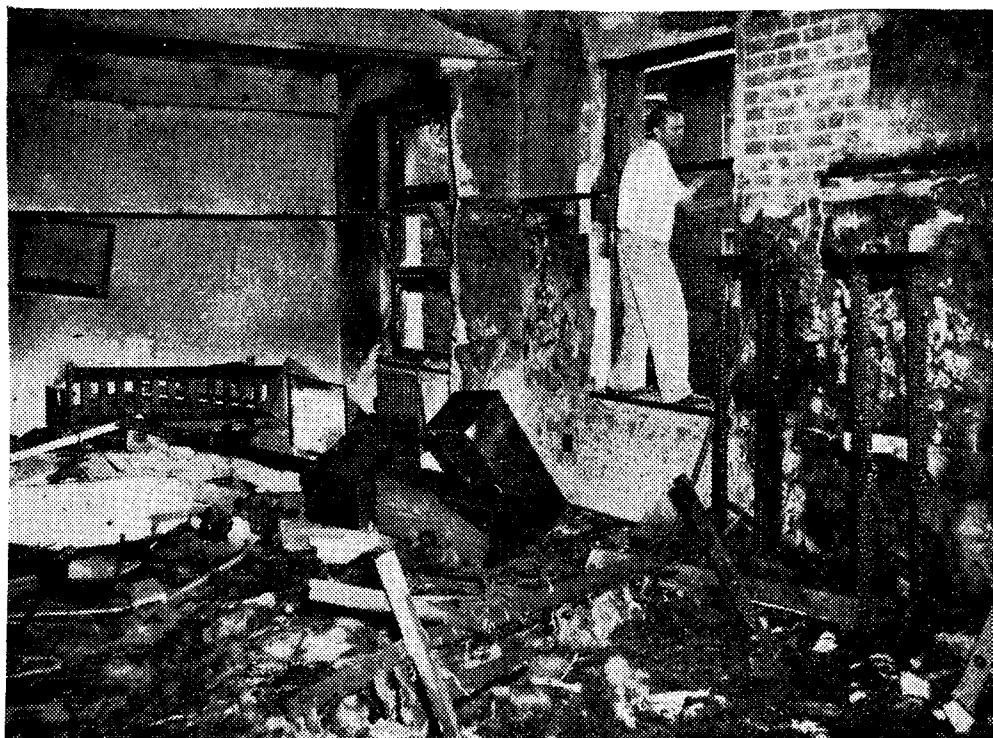
Sabotage today - slow but steady

While the events in Paarl, the Transkei and Queenstown were shocking to most South Africans, they are a part of the climate of sabotage and violence which has developed here in the last few months. There is no Algerian-type crisis. There is no panic. Most people feel that the police and the Government have everything well under control. But it is true that South Africans have become conditioned to the idea that bannings, house arrests, threats, raids and road blocks are a routine necessity and that the almost daily occurrence of sabotage is now as much a part of their lives as the morning newspaper or afternoon tea.

A list of some of the reported acts of violence and sabotage attempts in a 2½ month period is quite staggering:

In October:

- Deliberately ignited sugar cane fires in Natal.
- An incendiary bomb was thrown into the home of an African policeman in Port Elizabeth's Native Township of New Brighton.



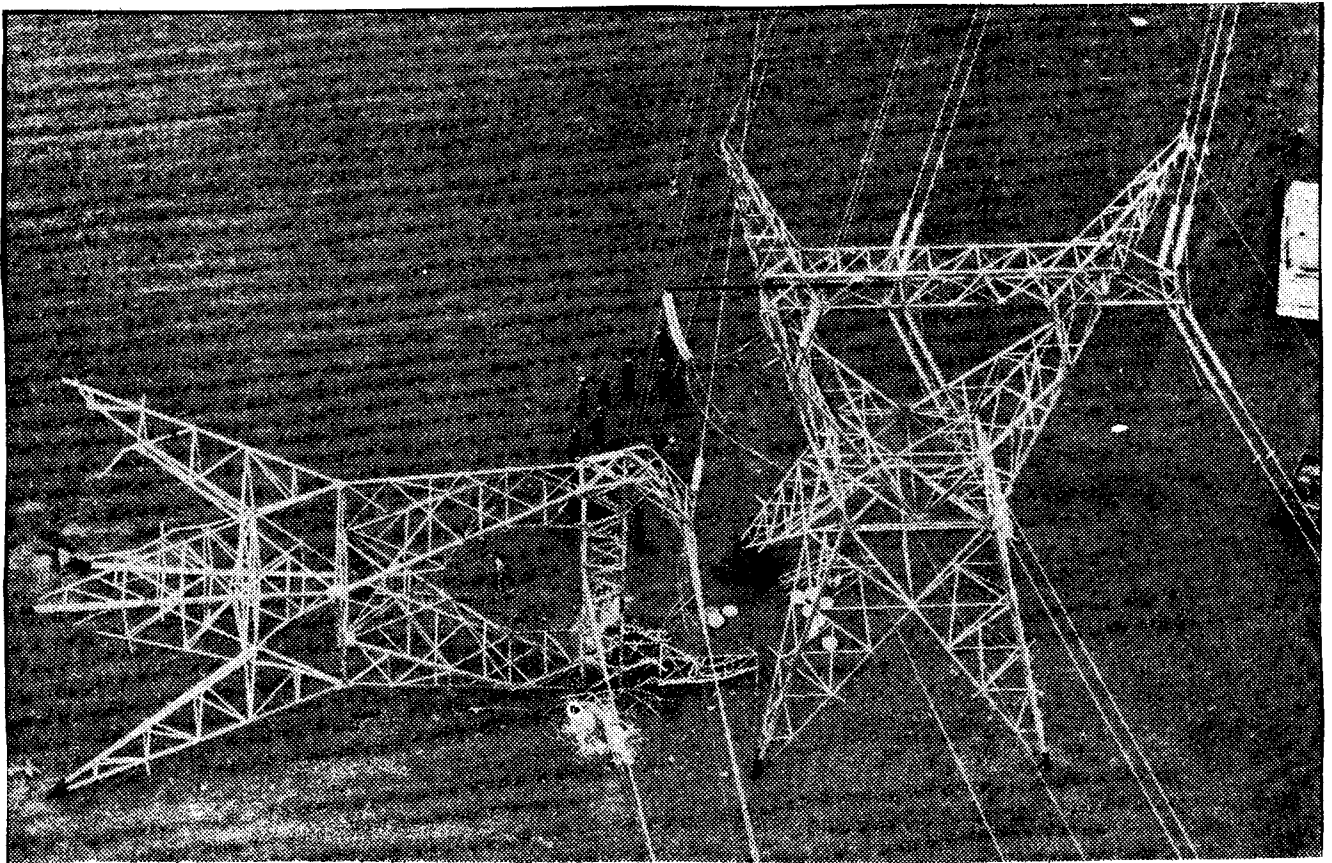
- Offices of Mr. D.C.H. Uys, Minister of Agricultural Economics and Marketing in Pretoria, were bombed (above) with resultant damage of about \$100,000.

- Telephone cable was cut behind the rent board offices in Cape Town, eliminating about 12 telephones.
- Thick underground cable serving the electric power station at Athlone, Cape Town, was severed.
- An attempt to set fire to Madoline building next to the police station in Durban.
- A home made bomb exploded in a rail coach of Natal's north coast railway line.
- An attempt to explode a fire bomb at the entrance of the Government's Bantu Administration and Development office in Durban.
- An attempt to burn down Heideveld railway station in the Cape Peninsula.
- A petrol bomb was thrown into the Bantu Administrative building in Nyanga West Native Township in Cape Town.
- An attempt to set fire to a post office in Southern Paarl.
- A similar attempt was made at the post office in Langa Native Township in Cape Town.

In November:

- An attack was launched on police barracks in New Brighton Native Township, Port Elizabeth.
- Four supports of a 60 foot steel pylon near Alexandra Native Township in Johannesburg which carries electricity to the northern part of the city were cut by a dynamite explosion.
- A second attempt was made against a similar power pylon nearby.
- Attempts to blow up four high-tension electric pylons at Noordgesig on the Rand.
- An attempt to destroy a petrol tank at Industria, Johannesburg.
- A mystery explosion blasted a Villiage Main factory in Johannesburg. Two were injured.
- 22 telephone and telegraph wires were cut near Port Elizabeth.
- An attempt was made to derail a train near Port Elizabeth by changing the inner mechanism of a switchbox.
- A petrol incendiary bomb was thrown into the hostel room of a European teacher at Lovedale African secondary school in the Ciskei.

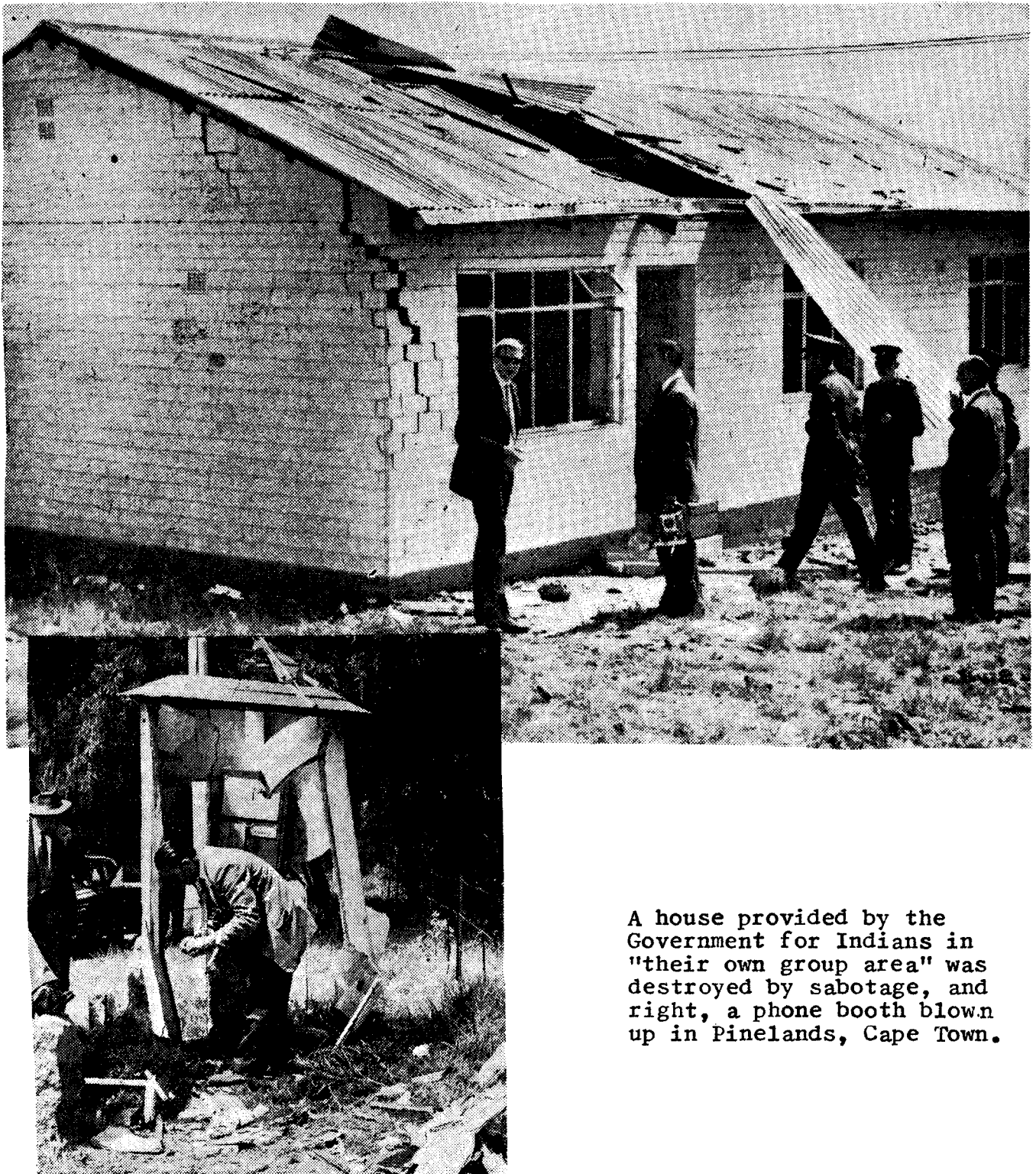
- Four power-carrying pylons were shaken by dynamite explosions resulting in a power blackout for half of Durban.
- Explosions damaged a power-carrying railway mast on the main railway line between Durban and Pietermaritzburg.
- A power pylon was knocked over by a dynamite explosion disrupting train service in Germiston, Johannesburg and Pretoria.
- Four classrooms, two coatrooms and a tearoom of the Vasco Coloured High School were burned, with resultant \$15,000 damage.
- An attempt was also made to set fire to the Vasco Coloured Primary School.
- Telephone cables were cut in Goodwood, Cape Town.
- Telephone cables were cut in Salt River, Cape Town.
- An electric power pylon was damaged by dynamite between Benoni and Bapsfontein in the Rand. (below)



- 600 feet of phone wire was cut away at Pienaar's Rivier, cutting off some towns in the Northern Transvaal.
- Railway signal installations exploded near Johannesburg with resultant damage of about \$3000.

And during the first half of December:

- Sabotage was suspected in the derailment of a passenger-goods train carrying two tons of dynamite in the Eastern Cape. Two engineers were injured and 17 cars derailed.
- 19 telephone and telegraph cables were cut in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth.
- 30 telephone and telegraph cables were cut near Port Elizabeth.
- A home-made bomb exploded a telephone booth in Claremont, Cape Town.
- A municipal electric cable box exploded and injured a boy as well as extinguishing lights in Worcester, Cape Peninsula.
- A phone booth exploded in Pineland, Cape Town. (see opposite page)
- The office of A.S. Kajee, vice president of the Natal Indian Organization, was bombed. (He was the only Indian from Natal to attend the investiture of the State President on May 31st, 1961).
- A multi-telephone cable was cut in Woodstock, Cape Town.
- The unoccupied house allocated to Mr. Nana Sita in Laudium, the Pretoria Indian township, was dynamited. Mr. Sita had refused to move into the township from his present home in the city. He had been found guilty of contravening the Group Areas Act.
- The windows of five homes, occupied by members of the Township and School Committees, were broken in Kwa Mashu, Durban.
- Six Africans and one White policeman were killed in a Transkei skirmish when 60 police stopped a group of 60 to 100 Africans from attacking the home of Paramount Chief Mantanzima.
- Seven Africans and one White policeman were killed at Queenstown.
- There was a fight between 30 armed Africans and 5 White policemen when the latter went to arrest a murder suspect at Tugela Ferry, Natal.
- An attempt to damage an electric power-pole near Durban.



A house provided by the Government for Indians in "their own group area" was destroyed by sabotage, and right, a phone booth blown up in Pinelands, Cape Town.

- A Tembu tribal chief was injured and his uncle killed when 40 Africans attacked in a dawn raid.
- A petrol bomb was thrown in the home of an urban representative of the Rarabe tribe in Duncan Village, East London, injuring a man and two children.

What is the cost?

At the beginning of December, Abraham Theodore Spengler, head of the Security Branch on the Witwatersrand, told a reporter: "We will shortly be arresting the small group of people who carry out acts of sabotage. There are not many and once we have them the whole movement will collapse.

"There is little reason to support talk that South Africa will be liberated by 1963. I know the facts, and people who say we are on the threshold of a large scale revolution do not know what they are talking about. They are often out to harm South Africa's name abroad.

"There is no widespread national movement among the non-Whites to overthrow the State. The "Underground" consists of a few misguided people. I feel this country has a rosy future - notwithstanding the plots and propaganda of little groups."

But contrary to the expectations of the Colonel sabotage has not yet decreased. There was a temporary lull over Christmas and New Years when special police security measures were in force on an emergency basis and the army was on stand-by. Then last week the office and plant of the National Party's newspaper in Natal, Die Nataller, was successfully bombed and the attempts to blow up a half-million gallon petrol tank in Cape Town's harbour was a near miss, as was the attempt on the Old Synagogue where Mandela's trial and the Treason Trials were held.

To date very few people have been brought to trial for sabotage and only a few announcements of arrests have been made. The police seem to be everywhere and roadblocks are customary sights. Large rewards have been offered to the public for any information in regard to sabotage or attempted sabotage. The Justice Department has created a sub-department for Citizens Protective groups. In Pretoria leading citizens have gone ahead on their own to organize a Citizen Protection Association which will have armed neighborhood units equipped to help the police combat sabotage. When a former local ANC official was banned in January the police told him he had been banned because he had done nothing political for the past year so he must be up to something. (Until the banning he was in line for a loan from the Bantu Investment Corporation). All of this leads one to wonder just how much the police are on top of the situation.

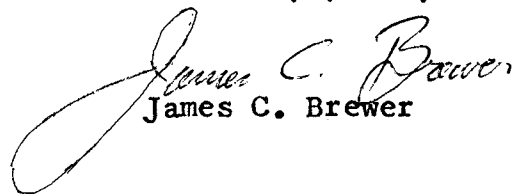
It is the general opinion of many of the politically conscious in Johannesburg that the police are running scared. Government has picked up the information that plans are afoot for the underground to go into high gear about June 4th. My information leads me to believe that they are a month off. Poqo is planning big things around May 4th when Robert Sobukwe, President of the banned PAC, completes his prison term. The other organizations will probably reach full activity before the next Republic Day on May 31st. At this moment no one seems to know the full extent of the underground or how much potential for violence it really has.

In the meantime, what is the cost of South Africa's new way of life? It is already expensive, not only in money needed for repair of damage done by fires and bombs, for maintaining larger and special branches of police, but in the cost of human lives ---and in the cost of sensitivity and decency which has become lost more and more as people accept what is happening as "routine".

The Government continues on its way trying to keep the underground, the Communists and the liberals in their place while it pushes ahead the Bantustan ideal which it hopes will capture the imagination of the African, enough at least to prevent any serious discontinuity to the European South African way of life. If the Transkei plan fails, the Government may revise its Bantustan policy but not its basic "apartheid" racial policy. If the Government succeeds in making Africans happy in the Bantustans it will still have a large group of urban-educated Africans in the cities whose discontent can be used by violent extremists. In either case the basic problem of racial discrimination will not have been removed.

Violence will hardly solve this problem. But what can be the outcome if forces opposed to each other are neither willing to give in?

Sincerely yours,



James C. Brewer