

SOWETAN - 21 NOV. 1984



G NTLATLENG: SABTA vice-president.

## SABTA's out to help you

SIR — Please allow me, as vice president of the South African Black Taxi Association to answer the letter received by you from "Concerned Commuter," Sebokeng, on Page 8 of the Friday edition of *The SOWETAN*, November 2.

As you are no doubt aware, SABTA has elected a new executive committee, and one of the provisions of the new SABTA is to improve the service that we provide to the commuter. Without the commuter there would be no taxi business, and SABTA is well aware of this. We will be endeavouring, in the coming months, to greatly improve the image of the taxi business through such means as driver awareness campaigns, driver of the year contests, and disciplinary meetings to deal with reckless and discourteous drivers.

May I call upon "Concerned Commuter" to please take particulars of time, date and the registration numbers in instances where they feel they have been badly treated and refer these to the SABTA Head Committee, PO Box 26311, Arcadia, Pretoria, to enable us to deal effectively with these matters.

On the second point that you mention, of government plans to introduce minibuses, SABTA is without doubt opposed to these moves and I would call upon you and all black commuters to stand solidly behind SABTA in its attempts to improve the black taxi business as well as to maintain our right to commute our own people.

G NTLATLENG, Vice Pres SABTA

Pretoria

# COMMENT

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A FORECAST by the National Manpower Commission that more black than white students will be passing their matriculation examinations and launching themselves towards top careers within the next few years, leaves us, at the best, with mixed feelings.

The commission reports that the number of new black matriculants will almost be doubled in the next decade as blacks race ahead of white pupils in education. The surge of black school successes will come as the number of new white matriculants goes into dramatic decline caused by a shrinkage in the size of average white families.

According to Dr Hennie Reynders, chairman of the commission, the radical swing in traditional patterns should be regarded by employers as an early alert to changes in thinking that will be needed about recruitment and training in commerce and industry.

While the Manpower Commission supplies useful information and figures about this, we do not think it needed expert investigation to reach its conclusion. We believe the obvious disparity between the two populations, spurred in a way by the black man's eagerness in getting an education so as to improve his lot, tells the story quite plainly.

The situation, on the surface, looks encouraging and we would imagine that employers and planners in general would be opening up new avenues for black youths just matriculating. The fact that fewer whites will be matriculating as the years roll by should, under normal circumstances, mean better and bigger opportunities for blacks.

But there are serious problems that all but cloud an otherwise rosy picture.

While their number is on the increase, more blacks fail matric. What with one thing or the other they become dropouts who cannot fit into the economic and social strata of the society. As it happens, even those who have matriculation these days have enormous problems getting jobs and it will take time for employers to throw the doors wider.

But perhaps the most serious problem about this scenario is the type of education that blacks have been getting since the inception of Bantu Education. Whatever may be said to the contrary, the average black graduate these days is almost illiterate. We have too many examples of graduates applying for jobs here and elsewhere, who are simply half literate and heaven alone knows what their other skills are like.

The chickens have come to roost for the planners of black education. Whereas those who introduced Bantu Education believed the black man would be the hewer of wood and the drawer of water indefinitely, and that this country would have no use for any skills from them, in the next century the black man, with his limited skills, will be faced with manning the country's various skilled jobs. Naturally they will not have the skills to sustain a highly industrialised country such as this, and this will lead to the economy collapsing bit by bit. Already a whole generation of illiterates is going through matriculation and we will rue the day that we introduced different education departments for different people.

# Foolish move politicises the black trade unions

THE STAR - 21 NOV. 1984

Mr Louis le Grange has described the current wave of unrest in the black townships as more serious than the 1976 Soweto disturbances. For once I agree with him.

The unrest is not yet as widespread as it was in 1976 and the casualty figure is still lower: Mr le Grange said last Thursday that 130 people had been killed (another three have died since then), while the official death toll for eight months of unrest in 1976 was 575.

But the conflict this time is more the result of pointed political action, less the spontaneous outburst of rage which erupted in the Soweto schools eight years ago.

Many of the protests have been planned and there is a basis of political organisation in the form of co-ordinating committees which have brought together a wide range of organisations in the black community, the most important being the United Democratic Front.

As Mr le Grange has noted, there are many more adults involved this time. It is not just a youth rebellion.

There are several other important differences as well.

One is that the black trade union movement has become involved for the first time, which could lead to the political mobilisation of our racially defined working class.

Until now the most important unions have resisted repeated attempts by black political organisations to draw them into the political struggle. They seemed determined to concentrate on improving the wages and working conditions of their members instead.

Now, by its heavy-handed actions against the unions, the Government has gratuitously done what the black politicians could not. By detaining leaders like Mr Chris Dlamini, the president of Fosatu, and Mr Piroshaw Camay, the general secretary of Cusa, the Government has politicised the black union movement at a stroke. It is something it will live to regret. Future historians may well record it as the single most foolish action in 36 years of nationalist rule.

The protest strike of November 5 and 6, which prompted these detentions, was itself enormously significant. Prompted itself by the heavy-handed Sebokeng raid of October 23,



it was by far the most successful action of its kind that has been staged in this country.

This shows that, with unionisation, blacks now have the ability, and the willingness, to inflict serious damage on the economy to further their struggle for political rights.

The unrest also has the makings of a constitutional crisis. With the new constitution barely in place, it has been stripped of legitimacy by the massive boycott of the coloured and Indian elections in August and now by the evidence that it has accelerated the alienation of the Africans.

It has virtually wiped out the system of black local authorities which the Government has established in the townships, and which were to have formed the basis of the next phase of its constitutional development.

The Government has been working towards the idea of creating a national council for urban blacks, based on these township councils, which could be given authority over urban black "own affairs" and also be slotted in beside the "homeland" governments in the confederal framework of the envisaged "contellation of Southern African states."

This would complete the "neo-apartheid" constitutional structure.

But the township councillors, who are despised as "collaborators" in their communities and often live in conspicuous luxury, have been pri-

mary targets during the unrest. Seven have been killed. Their houses and businesses have been put to the torch. Many have resigned and others have fled. According to one authoritative source, only four of the 22 councils in the affected township are still functioning.

I do not know how the Government can restore that structure. There will be no takers for these jobs. Only a few days ago elections to replace Heidelberg's Ratanda Council, which resigned en masse, had to be postponed because there were no candidates.

The only alternative would seem to be to go back to direct rule by the white administration boards, but if the Government does that it will block its own constitutional plans.

Has the unrest reached the level of a revolution? No. It is still too directionless to be called that, but it has more direction to it than the 1976 upheavals, and if the Government continues to refuse to give blacks a role in the central government, so that their grievances and aspirations can be democratically expressed, then the next outbreak will doubtless have more direction still.

● Allister Sparks, a former editor of the Rand Daily Mail, writes this regular column and reports for several overseas newspapers.