



Rising voices of protest: student demonstration at the University of Cape Town

SOUTH AFRICA

Bashing Heads Before Balloting

The government cracks down hard on the eve of elections

"Go to blazes!" That was South African Defense Minister Magnus Malan's response last week to those who criticized his army's latest commando raid into black-ruled Zambia. The soldiers had allegedly attacked installations of the outlawed African National Congress, South Africa's largest black political movement. But Malan's angry words, uttered only days before South Africa's white voters were set to go to the polls this week, epitomized the attitude of State President P.W. Botha's government toward all opposition, both domestic and international.

The raid into Zambia, where South African soldiers killed five people in the town of Livingstone, near Victoria Falls, undoubtedly strengthened the Botha government's standing among its right-wing supporters. So did a crackdown on demonstrations by students in Cape Town and Johannesburg. At the University of Cape Town, where some 300 white, black and mixed-race students gathered to protest the commando raid, police used tear gas, leather whips and bird shot to break up the meeting. On May Day, fearing another wave of unrest, the government banned rallies called by 20 black unions.

In Soweto, the huge black township outside Johannesburg, at least five firebomb attacks took place last week against commuter trains, and an explosion ripped apart the rail line at Soweto's Nancefield Station, preventing thousands of black office workers from reaching their jobs in Johannesburg. The violence grew out of a six-week-long strike by 16,000 black transport workers.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions, the black labor organization whose offices had previously been raided by police, last week won a court

order against such harassment. But the next day police found the bodies of four black railway workers, who had been stabbed and burned, in the Johannesburg rail yards. A fifth body was discovered in Tembisa township, to the east of the city. White officials charged that the five had been killed by blacks for refusing to join the strike. Police once again raided the COSATU offices, this time armed with search warrants, and arrested twelve people.

The Botha government was also having troubles last week with the country's independent judiciary. Court rulings in Natal struck down two emergency regulations, one that prohibited campaigning for the release of detainees and another that restricted press reporting and public comment on unrest. The government is certain to appeal the rulings.

But despite the violence and legal challenges to Botha's policies, the results of this week's parliamentary elections were not in serious doubt. The National Party, which has ruled the country since 1948, was expected to win again, and perhaps even register a slight increase in its 116-seat majority in the 166-member House of Assembly. The opposition Progressive Federal Party, in league with the small New Republic Party, could not hope to add more than a handful of seats to its present 30. P.F.P. Leader Colin Eglin said he saw "the emergence among upwardly mobile city Afrikaners of a new spirit demanding new deals and moving away from the old shibboleths of Nationalist apartheid." That may be true, but such a spirit does not necessarily translate itself into immediate parliamentary victories.

—By William E. Smith.

Reported by Peter Hawthorne/Johannesburg

MIDDLE EAST

Showdown

At war over a peace conference

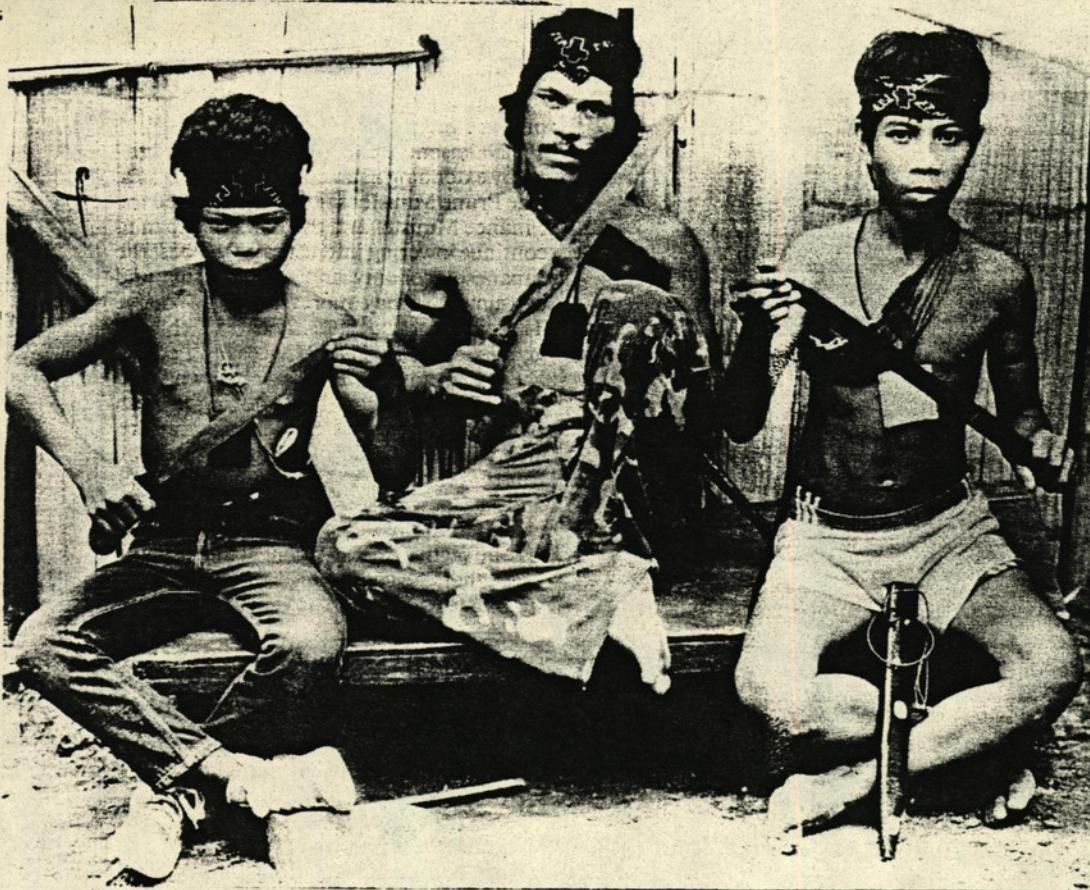
Israel's national unity government appeared to work smoothly enough during its first 31 months. But by last week its two leaders, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, seemed increasingly destined to tangle in a bitter clash of wills. The reason: Peres wants Israel to cooperate with Jordan, the U.S. and probably Egypt in the convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East, but Shamir is dead set against the idea. When Peres left on a recent trip to Western Europe to pursue the plan, Shamir declared testily, "I hope he fails." Last week the Prime Minister himself made a quick visit to Paris. His stated mission: "to undermine European support for an international conference."

What was going on? A few weeks ago, Peres reportedly held secret talks with Jordan's King Hussein. Peres apparently found a ready partner in Hussein, who has long advocated a peace conference at which he could deal directly with Israel without being branded a traitor to the Arab cause. His efforts to form a negotiating partnership with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat failed a year ago.

For his part, Peres has evidently concluded that the time is right for a peace initiative. In the interests of Palestinian unity, the P.L.O. recently cut itself off from Jordan and Egypt, and remains estranged from Syria. Hussein was known to be impatient over the prevailing stalemate. Furthermore, the U.S. has been conferring with Israel, Jordan and Egypt about the possibility of a redefined peace conference. Unresolved were the questions of how the Palestinians would be represented and under what conditions the Soviet Union would be invited.

If such a conference should take place, many believe it would quickly disintegrate into a dust storm of irreconcilable differences. No matter. It has already become a political issue that could break up Israel's national unity government. Peres is convinced that he has enough of a commitment from Hussein to justify asking the Israeli Cabinet to endorse the idea of a conference. If it refuses, he seems determined to keep the issue alive by bringing down the government and pushing for early elections.

Thus the lines are drawn for a fierce political battle. The Likud fears that Peres has already made a deal with Hussein, committing the Labor Party to a territorial compromise over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the price of Jordan's participation. Peres will travel to Washington next week to see Secretary of State George Shultz. The Reagan Administration has been lukewarm about an international conference, but American diplomats in the region have sought dutifully to mediate a workable plan. The last thing Washington wants is to be pitched into the midst of a political battle royal.



Potions and amulets: Commander Blackie, a Tadtad leader, flanked by members of his self-defense unit



The order: "Go forth and multiply"



Taking over: a roadblock in Davao

THE PHILIPPINES

Rise of the Vigilantes

New anti-Communist groups present prickly political problems

They go by names like Soldiers of Christ, Nation Watchers and the People's Movement Against Communism. Some of their members are menacing-looking young men and women with headbands and bolo knives stuck in their belts or automatic weapons slung over their shoulders. The more bizarre groups are called Tadtad, or Chop, because they ritually slash their bodies during initiation. They believe in potions and amulets that they say make them invisible to their enemies.

The groups are collectively known as vigilantes, anti-Communist self-defense bands that have proved so strong a bulwark against subversion by the insurgent New People's Army that they have gained immense popular support. They present a unique and prickly political problem for the government of President Corazon Aquino. Now firmly established on the large southern island of Mindanao, they are beginning to spread to other parts of the country. Though separate from the renegade warlords and private armies that still plague areas of the Philippines, the vigilantes are part of a tradition that Aquino's government would like to stamp out. The new constitution calls for disbandment of all paramilitary groups not sanctioned by the government.

But the groups' popularity has resulted in official ambivalence. In mid-March, Aquino announced that all paramilitary groups would henceforth be banned.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Fidel Ramos strongly protested. "If there's any group that should be dissolved, it's the N.P.A.," he said. Aquino backtracked, saying there would be "no immediate dismantling" of the groups.

As on many issues, Aquino is caught between the right and left wings of her fractious government. Her liberal advisers charge that the vigilantes threaten to become the Philippine equivalents of Latin American death squads. Says Haydee Yurac, a former member of Aquino's Presidential Commission on Human Rights: "It's a dangerous phenomenon that can easily get out of hand." Conservatives, including many officials of the Roman Catholic Church, counter that the people have a right to self-protection. The vigilantes, says Jaime Cardinal Sin, the outspoken Archbishop of Manila, represent the "people reacting to the violence of the rebels." Says Army Commanding General Rodolfo A. Canieso: "It is the inherent right of a citizen to defend himself. Everything else is politics."

The vigilantes have proved an effective tool for counterinsurgency alongside the still ill-equipped and poorly paid Philippine armed forces. Nowhere is that clearer than in Davao City, the sprawling city-state in southeastern Mindanao. A year ago Davao City and its 1.4 million people were so firmly in the control of the insurgents that Manila officials called the

city a Communist "urban laboratory." But in the past eight months the N.P.A. has fled into the hills, and the city has been transformed into a government stronghold. The main agent of change: the vigilante group Alsa Masa, or Uprising of the Masses.

As late as last summer, when Lieut. Colonel Franco Calida took over as military commander and police superintendent in Davao City, Alsa Masa had only seven members. "I told this group to go forth and multiply," recalls the colorful Calida, whose office is a veritable arsenal of guns and grenades. "In a week there were 22, then 40, then 70, then 100..." Alsa Masa, now several thousand strong, imposed a system of checkpoints, armed patrols, covert neighborhood surveillance, "tax donations" and more than a little intimidation. N.P.A. members who have failed to present identification quickly at Alsa Masa checkpoints have been shot on the spot. Calida insists that Alsa Masa is law-abiding. He says he gives guns only to those who belong to the Civilian Home Defense Force.

President Aquino is believed to support a gradual phaseout of the vigilantes in favor of a citizens' army based on the Israeli model. Says she: "The challenge is to mobilize people in the defense of their communities but with all the safeguards that will prevent the abuse of this great power." The problem is that Alsa Masa and its counterparts have been effective in the battle against the Communists. Vigilante supporters say Aquino cannot afford to ignore their successes, whatever the long-term risks.

—By Michael S. Serrill.
Reported by William Stewart/Manila