

'Starvation wages' in tribal homelands

AT A TIME when South Africa is trying to counter the foreign 'disinvestment' campaign with arguments that business is working for the betterment of the country's blacks, industrialists in this tribal 'homeland' of Qwa Qwa are paying factory labourers as little as £5.54 a week.

That is less than one-fifth of the minimum wage laid down for such workers in industrial agreements in the rest of South Africa.

The 'homelands' — the 13 per cent of South Africa allocated to the blacks to justify denying them political rights in the country as a whole — are exempted from the laws governing industrial relations and trade unions are not permitted in most of them,

which means employers can pay what they like.

With massive unemployment distorting the law of supply and demand, because millions of people have been dumped in these undeveloped regions under the apartheid system, industrialists are seizing the opportunity to pay what black unionists bluntly call 'starvation wages.'

The industrialists are themselves paying only a fraction of these paltry sums. The South African Government foots most of the bill with a staggering 95 per cent wage subsidy, together with 75 per cent of the rent for factory premises plus other subsidies paid to industrialists who go to the 'homelands.'

Because of the exemption from the industrialised laws, businessmen are able to exploit the system to include even their

SOUTH AFRICA



by
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top-paid white managers, who earn around £1,200 a month, in the subsidies, so that some may be paying as little as £1,000 a month for a labour force of 500.

They do this by depressing the uncontrolled lower end of the wage scale to half the subsidy level of £44 per worker per month, so that the entire wage bill falls within the amount for which subsidies will be paid.

This means in effect that the black labourers are subsidising their white bosses' wages.

The South African Govern-

ment says the 'homelands' are self-governing regions responsible for their own affairs. 'It is up to the homeland governments to decide whether they want to lay down minimum wages or allow trade unions. It is impossible for us to interfere because we have no jurisdiction or *locus standi* there,' the Director-General of the Department of Manpower, Pieter van der Merve, said in an interview.

Qwa Qwa is the smallest of South Africa's 10 tribal 'homelands.' It is less than one-fifth the size of the Duchy of Luxembourg and has more than six times its population density.

It is situated on the northern border of Lesotho, in the foothills of the towering Drakensberg mountains. Farming is impossible in this

steep and overcrowded place, and it is 200 miles from the centres of industrial employment.

About 9,000 people have found work in the nearby country towns of Harrismith and Bethlehem. Hundreds of others gather daily at the labour bureau in the capital of Phuthaditjaba, hoping to be recruited as migrant workers in distant cities, for which they can earn £24 a week.

Last Wednesday I met Johannes Sibanda, 57, at the labour bureau. He had walked from his village five miles away, as he has done every day for two years.

Sibanda missed out again that day, although the director of the bureau said it was an unusually good day: he managed to find jobs for 65 people. The average is 400 a month,

and he currently has 4,550 work-seekers on his register.

There was a brief eruption of anger among Qwa Qwa's unemployed last October. A crowd of men from the labour bureau stormed the factories and drove out the workers.

The 'homeland' administration of Chief Minister Kenneth Mopeli appointed a commission to examine the wage levels. It found some factories were paying £3.18 a week.

'The industrialists have now agreed to match the minimum wage paid by the Qwa Qwa Government and they are committed to an improvement of wages as productivity increases,' the managing director of the QDC, Louw du Toit, said.

That minimum wage is £6 a week.

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L'AFRIQUE DU SUD POUBELLE NUCLÉAIRE!

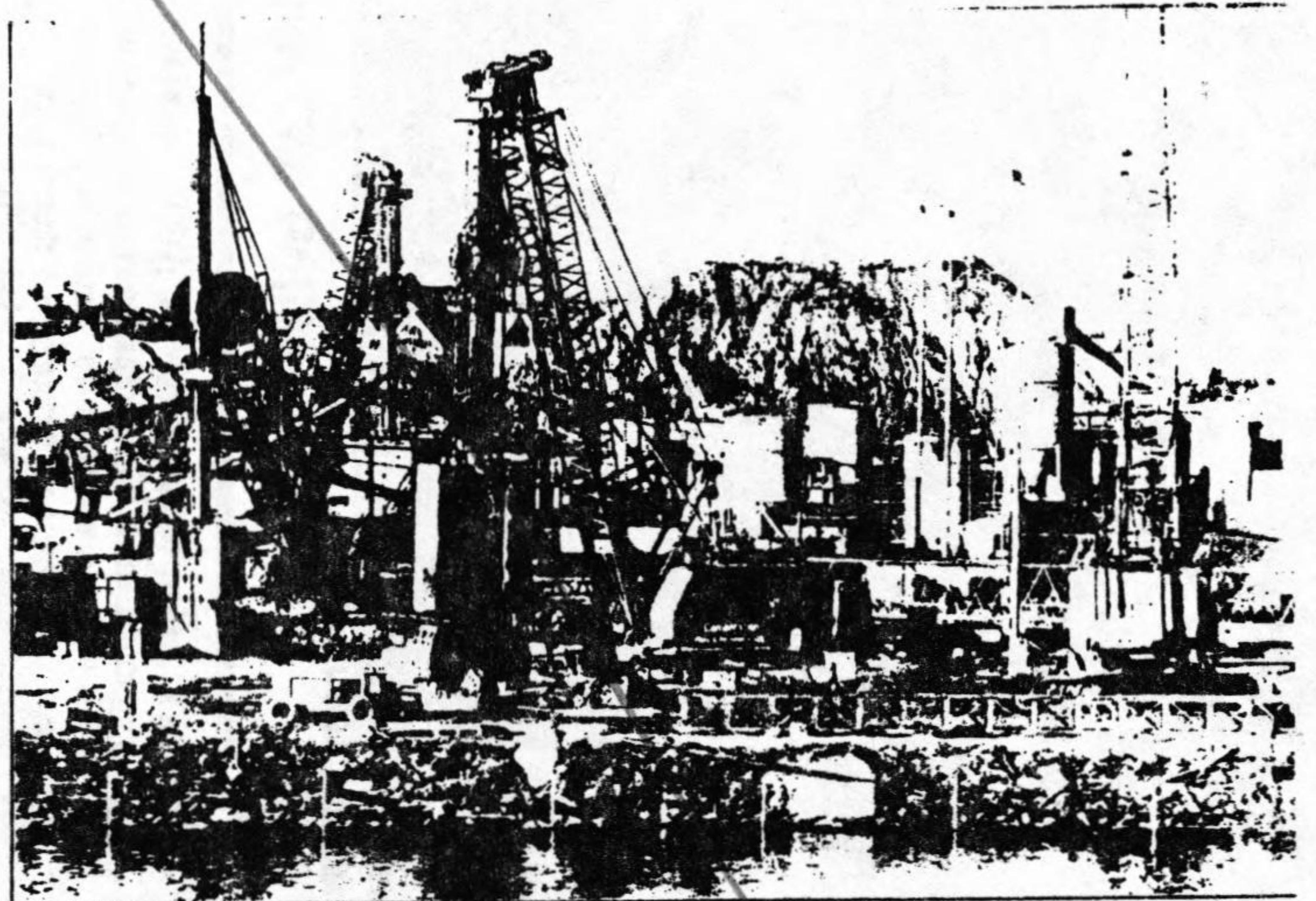
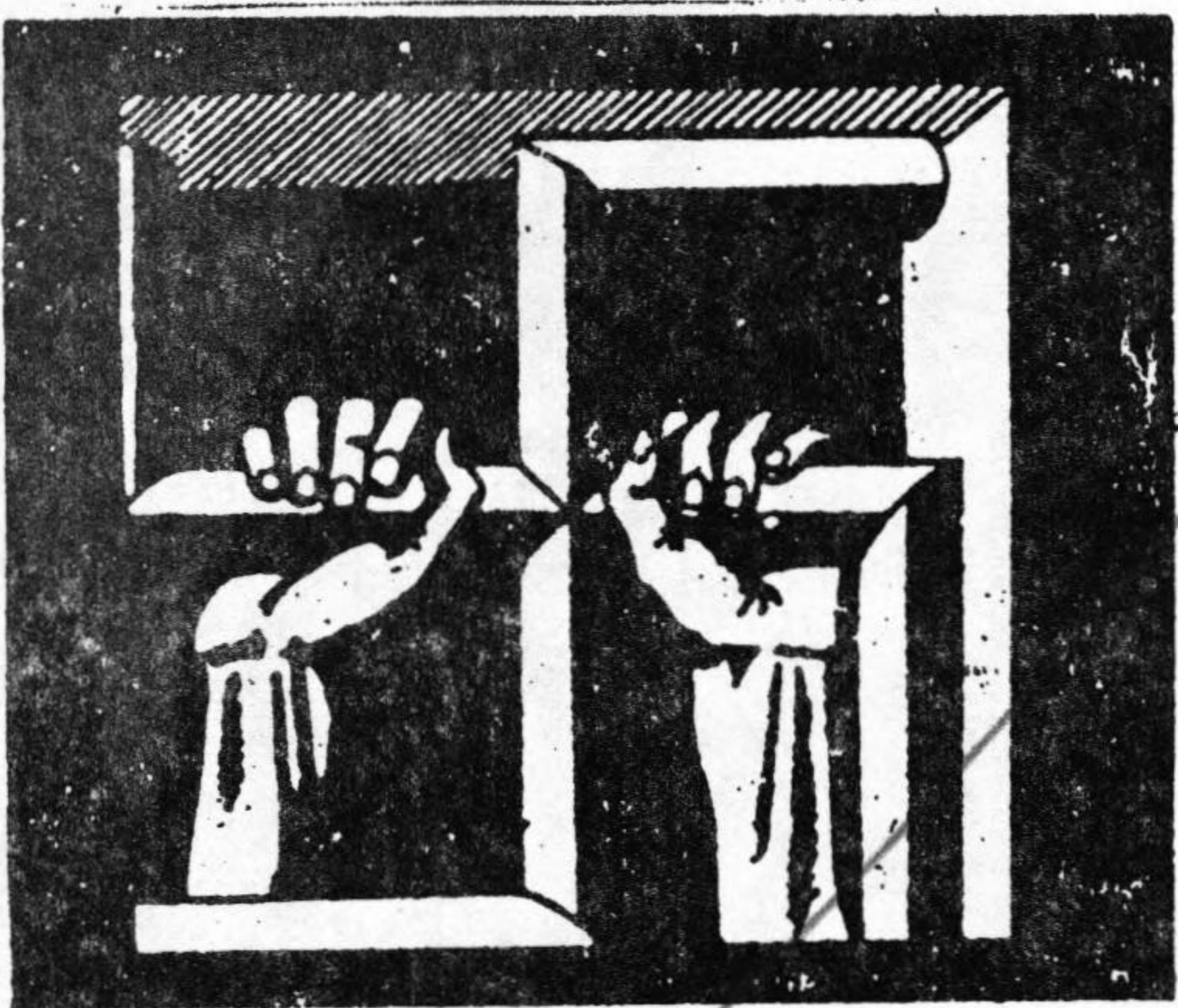
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Les autorités sud-africaines ont étudié la possibilité de faire des régions reculées du pays un site international d'enterrement des déchets radio-actifs. Ils estiment que les grands espaces ouverts et les conditions arides de la république sont idéaux pour un dépotoir atomique. Cette nouvelle a été annoncée lors d'une conférence de presse à Vaalputs, zone destinée à devenir le site d'enterrement des déchets atomiques de Koeberg - à 100 km environ de Sprinbok dans le Bushmanland.

Le docteur JP Hugo, directeur général de la "Nuclear development Corporation of South-Africa" (Nucor) a dit que la faible pluviosité et les grands espaces arides peu peuplés d'Afrique du Sud, lui épargnent les problèmes auxquels sont confrontés les autres pays utilisant l'énergie nucléaire, en ce qui concerne l'évacuation des déchets.

D'autres pays ont une forte population et doivent réserver la terre dont on a pourtant besoin à l'évacuation... On souligne que, si cette aventure risquée était entreprise, elle rapporterait des billions en devises étrangères au pays. Mais le Dr Hugo a dit que cela pourrait conduire à ce que l'on donne l'étiquette de poubelle nucléaire du monde à l'Afrique du sud, ce qui, pensait-il, ne pourrait-être accepté.

Aujourd'hui tous les sous-produits hautement radio-actifs de Koeberg sont exportés pour être retraités et le pays s'occupant du retraitement est responsable des déchets. Mais l'Afrique du Sud aurait éventuellement à s'occuper de l'évacuation de ses déchets hautement radio-actifs. On a dit que l'Afrique du Sud était capable, techniquement, de stocker les déchets atomiques aussi bien que les autres pays.



Construction site for Trident nuclear submarines at Barrow - Namibian uranium appears to play crucial role