

AMANDLA ONSTAGE

VYACHESLAV TETYOKHIN

Late in 1981, the racist South African authorities suddenly introduced additional measures for guarding the borders of the Republic of South Africa with Mozambique. What alarmed the racists so much? South Africans got the answer to this question several days later when it became known that performances of the Amandla ensemble formed by the African National Congress (South Africa) had been a tremendous success in Mozambique. There should have been nothing out of the ordinary in the performance of a musical company for South African musical culture has long enjoyed a well-deserved high reputation on the continent. In South Africa itself there are many groups and ensembles with really gifted musicians. So what had compelled thousands of black South Africans to ignore the possible grave consequences and cross the border into Mozambique in hopes of attending a performance of the Amandla ensemble?

The importance of this ensemble transcends customary notions of ordinary commercial groups which, even though well known, do not introduce anything new into musical events. Even specialists find it difficult to precisely define the phenomenon of Amandla. Those terms that are closest to expressing its essence include "political theatre" and "revolutionary song-and-dance ensemble". Indeed, this group is an example of revolutionary art, and in South Africa, engulfed by a mounting revolutionary movement, its performers give the black inhabitants of South Africa, continuously subjected to racial discrimination and oppression for hundreds of years, not so much aesthetic pleasure as answers to the questions they ask themselves daily, be it students or workers, farm labourers or clerks, for all of them are oppressed. What can be more convincing evidence of the popularity



of both the ensemble and the ideas which it reflects in its performances than the alarm that gripped the racists on learning of Amandla's appearance near the borders of South Africa? More than that, the impact of its ideas is strengthened by the skill of the performers. The press of countries standing thousands of kilometres apart—Norway and Mozambique, Bulgaria and Zambia—revealed a similar enchantment when reporting Amandla's concerts. The *Zambia Daily News* wrote: "Those who saw the two-hour performance narrating the history of struggle by the people of South Africa, expressed in song, dance, poetry and drama, will agree that this performance was one of the most outstanding ever given by a visiting group." A Swedish newspaper noted: "To see and hear Amandla, the ANC cultural group, is like being present at an explosion of aesthetical emotions."

This ensemble, whose fame is spreading throughout Africa and Europe, did not appear from nowhere. Among its predecessors, for instance, were such groups as Mayibuyi which the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa formed to represent the country's art at various regional musical contests and festivals. The new ensemble used the cultural traditions of the various ethnic groups populating South Africa as a basis, the sound traditions created over several centuries of struggle against the colonialists. It is these age-old traditions of national culture and songs of resistance that enabled the ensemble to determine its identity and to use its position as a vehicle for the ideas and aspirations of the oppressed people of South Africa whose liberation struggle has been headed for 70 years by its acknowledged and tested vanguard—the African National Congress.

The Zulu word *amandla* means "Power to the People". This word is one of the militant slogans of the ANC which appears on the pages of all the publications of this liberation movement and is heard at all meetings and gatherings held by the ANC and its followers.

Preparations for participation in the World Festival of Youth and Students in Havana in 1978 served as the immediate reason for the formation of the permanent company. A group of musicians representing the ANC took part in the African Culture Festival in Nigeria in 1977 but most of the members who subsequently formed the nucleus of Amandla joined during the preparations for the 1978 World Festival.

The ensemble was a great success in Cuba. In fact the ensemble, consisting of only 12 members, had to split into groups to meet the tremendous demand for concerts. And this at a time when the best youth ensembles of many countries of the world gathered in Havana, not to mention that the Cuban national ensembles have always enjoyed a very high reputation themselves.

After the Havana festival, the ANC leadership decided to retain the ensemble on a permanent basis. This decision reflected the ANC's desire to use the greatest possible spectrum of forms and methods of struggle against the racist regime, including art.

Virtually all members of the group are former students who took part in the uprising that flared up in Soweto in 1976. And the political intensity of the ensemble's performances is explained to a considerable extent by the fact that most of Amandla's members not only took part in demonstrations and protest marches in 1976 but also actively engaged in organising these activities. All of them were on the police "wanted" lists, and only the threat of imminent lengthy imprisonment compelled them to leave the country. It is not by mere hearsay that these young men and women know about political and armed struggle. For example, how can Kehla Notola

The company was given a hearty welcome in Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine

Pretoria to tighten pass laws

THE South African Government is planning to impose a nationwide urban curfew for blacks — its most drastic attempt to tighten the pass laws in 30 years. Greatly increased penalties for pass-law infringements are also being planned in an effort to drive "unauthorised" blacks out of the "white" areas by depriving them of jobs and shelter.

In a memorandum released last week, the Black Sash organisation — which assists pass-law victims — says that the proposed measures "will be the most efficient form of influx control this country has ever experienced". Contained in an "Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill", tabled in Parliament at the end of the recent session, the drastic new pass laws are now being processed by a parliamentary committee.

Under the present pass laws, blacks may remain in the "white" areas for up to 72 hours without a permit. Under the new proposals, which are the responsibility of the Minister of Cooperation and Development, Dr Piet Koornhof, the 72-hour period will be reduced to an overnight prohibition. Unless they have official authorisation, no black people will be allowed to remain in "white" areas between ten at night and five o'clock the following morning.

The curfew will apply not only in white suburbia but also in black townships, since such townships outside the black "homelands" are regarded as being in the "white" area.

From the Government's point of view, the 72-hour limit has not worked satisfactorily, since there could always be disputes as to how long a person might have been present in a "white" area illegally. Under the system that Dr Koornhof now wants to introduce, the police will find it much easier to identify pass-law offenders. Anyone who cannot prove by producing his pass or reference-book that he has authorisation to be in the "white" area will automatically become illegal the moment the clock strikes ten.

Dr Koornhof's draft legislation flows from the report of a government commission of inquiry headed by Dr Piet Riekert, former economic adviser to the Prime Minister. Since the Riekert Report was published in 1979, Dr Koornhof's department has been implementing aspects of its recommendations on a piecemeal basis. The latest proposals are, however, the most comprehensive attempt to tighten the pass laws

since they were extended in the 1950s to include women.

Dr Riekert's main recommendation, which the government accepted, was that the pass laws be implemented more efficiently to achieve their aim of reducing the number of blacks in the "white" areas to the minimum compatible with the economy's labour requirements. Dr Riekert proposed that this should be done by concentrating the attack on "illegal" blacks at their places of work and residence.

Dr Koornhof's bill thus proposes raising from 500 Rands to 5,000 Rands (almost £2,500) the maximum fine payable by anyone caught employing an "unauthorised" black in the "white" area (in practice, the whole of South Africa outside the 14 per cent comprising the Homelands).

The fine may be imposed as an alternative, or in addition to a gaol sentence of up to one year. An earlier increase in the fine (from R100 to R500) has already had a major impact in compelling employers to dismiss "unauthorised" blacks, and the Black Sash believes the increase to R5,000 will be devastatingly effective in eliminating their

by John Kane-Berman
in Johannesburg

chances of getting work.

However, Dr Koornhof's bill wants to make doubly sure such people leave or keep out of the "white" areas. In addition to penalising anyone employing them, the minister proposes penalising anyone accommodating them. Anyone providing "unauthorised" blacks with shelter after ten at night will be liable in the first instance to a fine of R500 (or six months' imprisonment) and thereafter liable to a fine of R20 for each night that the offence continues.

This applies not only to black householders in townships like Soweto, many of whom sub-let rooms to "unauthorised" people or allow "unauthorised" relatives to live with them, but also to white householders in white suburbs, many of whom turn a blind eye to the "unauthorised" wives or husbands of domestic servants living in their backyards.

Mrs Sheena Duncan, leader of the Black Sash, points out that the bill will turn ordinary white householders and employers into willy-nilly enforcers of influx control.

Dr Nic Olivier, a former Stellenbosch University professor specialising in laws governing

blacks — and now an opposition MP — said in a 38-page analysis of the Koornhof bill that it would probably lead to "massive raids at night-time".

The bill proves that blacks authorised to live and work in the "white" areas under the present pass laws will retain these rights and also be regarded as "permanent urban residents". However, even they can be deprived of this permanent status if they do not have "approved accommodation". Given the severe shortage of black housing all over the country, some observers fear some of these "permanent" people could be in jeopardy.

The draft legislation also seeks to tighten influx control in the rural areas. Clause 15(1) (A) says: "No black person shall be resident in the rural area unless he has been authorised thereto by a designated officer" (ie the relevant government official). Provision is made for "farm tenement boards" to determine how many black people the farmers in each particular district may accommodate on their land.

A detailed memorandum on the bill which a large business organisation has drawn up for submission to the government says that the implication of the rural areas provisions is that "for the first time, blacks living in the rural area will be exposed to the possibility of pass raids".

In his outgoing chairman's statement recently, Mr Harry Oppenheimer of the Anglo-American De Beers group said the bill was "entirely unacceptable".

There are no official figures for the number of blacks likely to be "authorised" under the new bill to live and work in the 86 per cent of the country that is officially designated as the "white" area. However, 1970 statistics cited by the Riekert Commission suggest that it could be in the region of one in four adults.

This means that if the bill becomes law in its present form, something of the order of three out of every four black adults could find that the whole country outside the Homelands is forbidden territory to them at night (with exceptions for certain categories, such as hospital patients and hotel guests).

Dr Olivier said he was not optimistic the bill would be radically altered by the parliamentary committee since it contained ideological principles from which the ruling National Party was not prepared to deviate.