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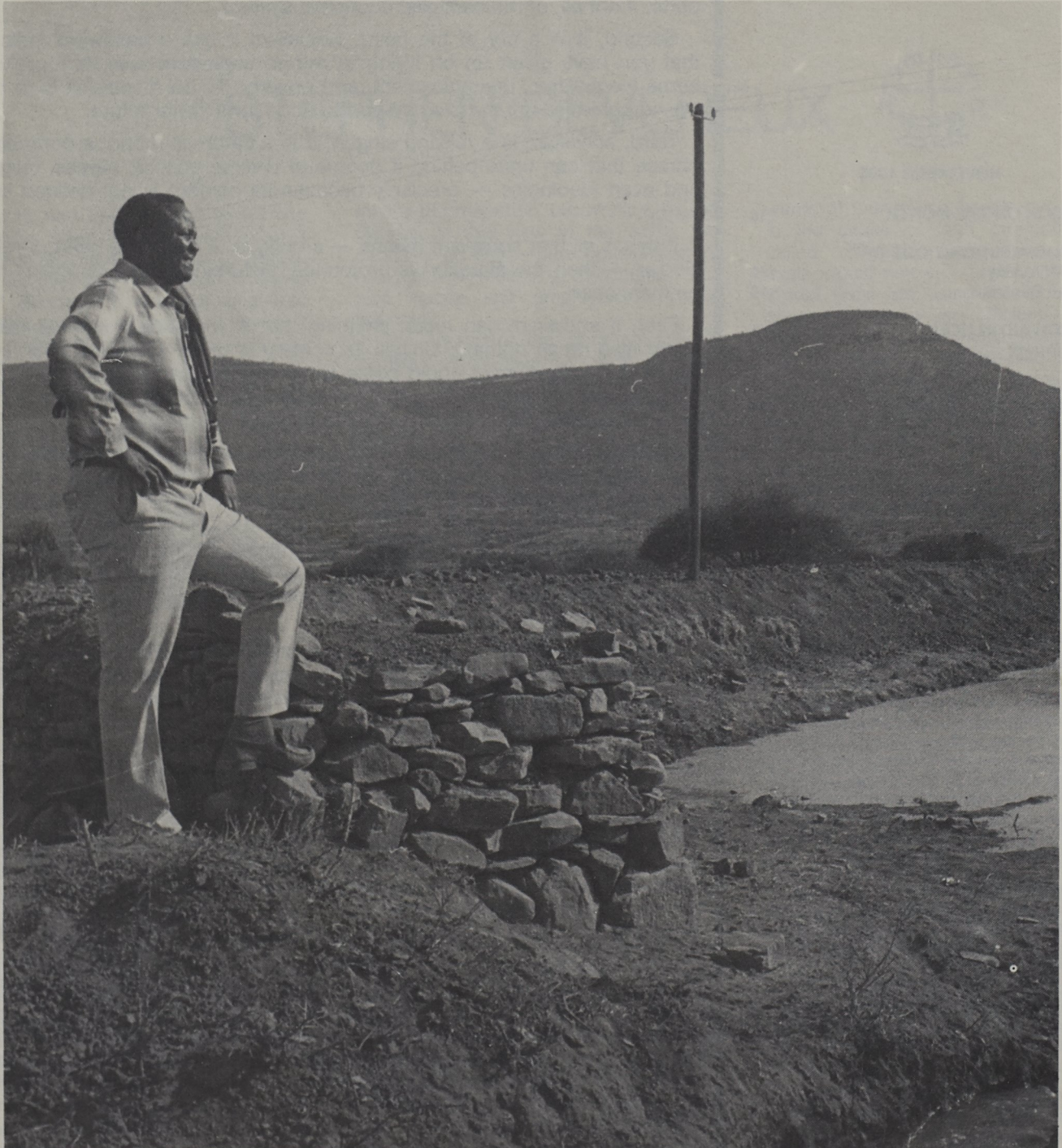
SOUTH AFRICAN OUTLOOK

Socialism

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Editor Francis Wilson
Assistant Editors Glyn Hewson
 Michael King
 Jeanelle de Gruchy
 Sarah-Anne Raynham
Review Editor Peter Moll
Secretary Ruth Samuels



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COVER:

Rev. Marais Maphoto, project leader of Church Aid in Need, looking at the completed dam at Rietfontein.

PICTURE CREDITS:

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South African Outlook is an Independent Journal dealing with ecumenical and racial affairs which, un-interruptedly since 1870, has sought to place its readers in possession of facts and opinion which bear upon the lives of all the people of the sub-continent. Without allegiance to any political party, but according to what it believes to be Christian standards, it seeks to give information and comment on measures suggested either for the regulation or the advancement of any section of the population, by whomsoever proposed.

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Outlook on the Month SOCIALISM

In this issue of the Outlook we broach again one of the most challenging intellectual and social controversies of our time: socialism.

A great many people and institutions involved in the struggle against apartheid have declared themselves in favour of socialism. This is true of all South African liberation movements and of many prominent South African Christians. If one examines statements by these people and institutions, socialism appears to be three things.

First, it is an intellectual critique of capitalism, implying a rejection of large parts, if not all, of the capitalist economic system.

Second, it is a cry of the heart. Socialism is like a password indicating that you have given up on trying to reform capitalism with its massive income inequalities, unemployment, and poverty. To be a socialist is to reject the compromises of the present and to hope for a better future.

Third, socialism is a rallying slogan. It is a catch-all rubric, a portmanteau phrase that can unite behind it people of diverse political parties, religions, and even ideologies — precisely because its content is not defined in advance.

If this is all that socialism means — a critique, a cry of the heart, a rallying slogan — then the situation is profoundly disturbing. Three concerns might be mentioned.

First, if socialism can mean anything that is rhetorically anti-capitalist, it might also mean nothing. Unless its content is given some definition in advance, any government could come to power, declare its programme to be socialist and thereby deprive the movement for socialism of its force. Zimbabwe remains firmly capitalist despite its socialist rhetoric.

Second, the situation is disturbing because if socialists do not define what they mean publicly, reactionary governments will fill the vacuum with their perverted definitions of it. It is ironic that at this time when the international capitalist system is looking its worst since the 1930s Depression — with high unemployment, slow growth, and widening income disparities — world leaders are being persuaded that the way forward is through privatization, union-bashing and anti-communist rhetoric. The case for socialism has gone by default.

Third, the situation is disturbing because it reflects widespread ignorance of the moral ambiguities involved in socialist transformation. Just as there are vast differences between Chilean and Swedish capitalism, so there are important distinctions to be drawn between the Soviet and the Hungarian styles of socialism. There is no such thing as "socialism" in practice; there are only socialisms, with greatly varying degrees of achievement in the areas of personal and religious freedoms, democratic rights, and economic equality. Just as it is no coincidence that poverty persists in nearly all (rich) capitalist countries, so it is no coincidence that central government is not subject to democratic control in any Warsaw Pact or CMEA country. Ignorance of the ambiguities of "actually existing socialism" could lead to repetition of the horrors of Stalinism.

So it is with pleasure that we publish in this issue the first of several articles on socialism by Stephen Devereux. The author is a South African exile on account of refusing service in the SADF. He has just completed the exacting M.Phil. (Economics) programme at Oxford University, for part of which he studied socialist economics under the famous Professor Wlodimierz Brus. Stephen Devereux is a convinced socialist and intends taking his readers on a whistle-stop tour of the many different socialisms which exist around the world, in an attempt not only to deepen our understanding of what socialism might come to mean practically in South Africa but also to highlight critical issues that need to be debated as we think about restructuring a new South Africa.

The Socialist Critique of Capitalism

STEPHEN DEVEREUX

My elders and betters used to tell me two things about my 'socialism' when I was younger. First: "It's just a phase. You'll get over it when you start paying taxes." Second: "I was left-wing too, once. But you know what they say — if you're under 25 and not a socialist, you don't have any heart; if you're over 25 and still a socialist, you don't have any brains."

I am 26, going on 27. I recently started paying taxes. As a result, I write these articles in great haste, aware that at any moment my naivety may be consumed by the dreaded disease of self-interest, or the wisdom of middle age. Until that moment arrives, though, I write from a broadly 'left-wing' perspective. We socialists hate being labelled.

Of Markets, Classes and Kings

Capitalists see capitalist economies as characterised by a 'market equilibrium' between two groups of people — producers and consumers. Producers respond to consumer demands, as revealed through price signals in the marketplace. Consumers buy the goods they prefer, which pushes up the prices of those goods and increases their supply. Conversely, the prices of unpopular goods will fall to 'bargain basement' levels, when they will be phased out of production altogether. In this mythical world, the consumer is king — 'consumer sovereignty' rules, OK? — and the 'invisible hand' of the market regulates capitalist greed.

Socialists see capitalist economies as characterised by a 'class struggle' between two groups of people — the capitalist class, which owns the means of production (machinery, factories) but does not work it; and the industrial working class, which does not own the

means of production, but works it for the owners. In this view of the world, the capitalist is king — the bosses control not just the means of production, but also wages and employment in the economy.

The source of the class struggle in capitalist economies occurs in the production process, in the fight over the division of the spoils of the workers' labour. Wages reflect bosses' perceptions of how little they can get away with paying, rather than the value of the worker's output. The employer constantly strives to increase the 'surplus value' or profit extracted from the worker — by holding wages down as inflation rises, or by raising 'labour productivity' (by mechanisation or overtime work), so that the worker produces more for the same wage. The workers, conversely, try to force the employer to raise wages and improve their conditions of employment (safety standards, holidays, pensions), by forming trade unions, threatening strike action, and so on.

Efficiency versus Equity

An argument often used to justify capitalism is that the pressures of competition force firms to produce 'efficiently' — that is, at lowest possible cost — or more efficient firms will undercut their price and drive them out of business. Even if this is true for individual firms, however, it need not hold at the aggregate of national level. The UK under Margaret Thatcher, for example, is a highly efficient, productive economy. Those firms which have survived the austerity of 'monetarism' are, by definition, those which make the most effective use of inputs such as capital and labour.

But can an economy which kicks up-

wards of four million people out of work in the cause of high productivity be called 'efficient'? Neoclassical economists would say yes, arguing that **individual** firms are using the labour they choose to employ very efficiently indeed. Most left-wing economists would argue that an economy characterised by mass unemployment is not just socially inequitable, it is also, by any **aggregate** measure, massively inefficient.

Socialists look for the **social** relations behind the apparently impartial **economic** relations in the market, processes of exploitation which in fact generate and perpetuate inequality. The essential feature of capitalism is production for profit (as opposed to production to meet needs). This produces the unfortunate conjunction which is capitalism's fatal flaw — it may result in **efficient production**, at least at the level of the firm, but it also results in **inequitable distribution** of resources. 'Free markets' respond to purchasing power, not to needs, so that those who have wealth are given plenty of opportunity to accumulate more wealth, while those who don't command sufficient power in the market or at their work have little chance of escaping poverty or even, in extreme cases, malnutrition, starvation and death.

There are numerous examples of affluence and poverty coexisting in 'free market' economies, South Africa being a prime case in point. The levels of malnutrition and infant mortality in the 'homelands' present an extreme (and obscene) contrast to the two-garage, swimming pool and sauna lifestyle of White employers.

Consumerism and Advertising

Greater efficiency is achieved by greater productivity — more output for the same

input of labour, capital and raw materials. As productivity increases, it becomes possible to reduce work and increase leisure, while producing the same output as before. But this is not the logic of the 'consumer society'. The engine of capitalist growth is material accumulation, and advertising is the mechanism whereby capitalists exhort consumers to accumulate.

So we have the paradox that as our living standards rise (thanks to capitalism), people work harder than ever before (thanks to capitalism), and new 'needs' are created to justify this. Micro-waves, PCs, VCRs and compact discs replace adequate food and shelter as 'basic necessities' for twentieth century living. We are transmogrified into permanent window-shoppers, drooling over the endless variety of new gadgets and fashions which capitalist firms churn out, not to meet **our** insatiable **needs**, but to meet **their** insatiable **greed**.

As wealth increases, needs change from being basic and physical to being psychological — and therefore manipulable. People buy Rolls-Royces, not for their speed or economy, but because they are expensive status symbols. The same people go home and watch Ethiopian children starving to death on TV News. A capitalist system geared only to production, profit and the accumulation of assets is incapable of educating us to orient our spending towards the alleviation of poverty. This is the perversity of affluence. Advertisers sell commodities, not compassion; they encourage selfishness, not altruism.

Advertising

Capitalists see advertising as fulfilling the free market ideal of conveying maximum information to consumers — helping consumers to choose what they want from what is available, and encouraging healthy price competition between companies vying with each other for the consumer's attention.

Socialists see advertising as having a more insidious objective — to manipulate and pressurise consumers into buying more and more, beyond what they really need. Constantly bombarded with "new improved" brands, "whiter than white" soap powders and toothpastes, or this year's model of motor car, consumers are encouraged to be socially competitive, and to measure their success in terms of the value and 'trendiness' of their possessions.

A classic example of manipulative advertising was an American campaign for television sets in the 1950s, which pictured a little boy sitting alone on the street corner, with the caption: "The loneliest kid on the block". (His friends were inside watching TV.) This is the sinister side of advertising, the side which turn luxuries into necessities, and creates rather than serves the consumer's

needs. This is why socialists see advertising as not just a wasteful expense, but as socially divisive and against the best interests of society at large.

The Contradictions of Capitalism

The capitalist system also gives rise to several 'internal contradictions' which create serious economic problems, labelled by socialists the 'crises of capitalism'. The first of these is that capitalism expands by the accumulation of capital, which is achieved by maximising profits and holding wages down. But if wages are too low, workers won't be able to buy all the goods they produce, so that production outruns consumption, or supply exceeds demand. A 'boom-slump' cycle is therefore a feature of all capitalist economies. Vigorous economic growth for a few years must be followed by a recession in which workers are laid off, factories and firms close down, and occasionally (as in 1929) a few capitalists even commit suicide.

But the brunt of the crisis is always borne by the working class, not only in the form of mass unemployment, but in the power unemployment confers on the capitalist class to cut wages and restrict trade union rights (as in Thatcher's Britain) — all in the name of "belt-tightening" and "good housekeeping". In reality, of course, it is the workers who tighten their belts, while the capitalists continue loosening theirs, as ever. Unemployment is a mechanism of control in capitalist economies, which thrive best when a 'reserve pool of labour' exists as a reminder to workers that there are others willing to take their place if they agitate too loudly for higher wages or better working conditions.

A second contradiction reflects the real nature of capitalist competition. In its pure, idealised form, capitalism is seen as a fair fight between honest and equal entrepreneurs, slugging it out in the village high street for the consumer's favours. In reality, the cut and thrust of competition causes some firms (usually the smallest) to be driven out of business or swallowed up by others (usually the largest). Thus another contradiction — capitalist competition, by its very nature, breeds its opposite — monopolies. Small firms become large corporations which set their own prices, mould consumer tastes, and dominate their economic and political environments.

Capitalism evolved from its classical phase — the individual capitalist-entrepreneur — into corporate capitalism — large, privately-owned firms which control the working lives of hundreds or thousands of employees. Alongside this growth in corporations has been a growth in the public sector — another contradiction.

Liberal philosophy demands a 'laissez-faire' economy, with a minimum of state intervention. Yet a large, costly bureaucracy is developing in Western in-

dustrial economies, either to protect their citizens from the worst effects of capitalism's callousness (unemployment benefit, state pensions), or to regulate the profiteering of the large corporations and their high-flying fatcat directors (Monopoly and Mergers Commissions, tax evasion officials).

These instruments of state control are paid for by taxes. In his classic study, "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy", Schumpeter comments: "in order to wrench ever-increasing amounts from an unwilling organism, a huge administrative apparatus has come into existence that does nothing but struggle with the bourgeoisie for every dollar of its revenue... Modern capitalism relies on the profit principle for its daily bread yet refuses to allow it to prevail."

Imperialism

A fourth problem with capitalism arises as a consequence of the previous three — namely, imperialism. Imperialism can be seen as a reaction to the tendency for profits and markets within capitalist economies to decline over time. If low wages are both a precondition for and a constraint on capitalist expansion, and if industrial workers are increasingly able to raise their wages, then the solution to both problems is to find new markets and new sources of cheap labour elsewhere.

So monopoly firms become multinational corporations, and expand their activities abroad, to 'undeveloped' societies, where they find not just new supplies of exploitable labour, but new consumers of Coke and Camels, and new sources of raw materials and minerals, just waiting to be taken in return for bringing the benefits of Christianity and 'civilisation' to the savages. This was the economic rationale for imperialism — the colonisation of Africa, Latin America and South Asia by the European and North American capitalist 'democracies' in a most **undemocratic** way.

But imperialism only reproduces internationally the contradictions existing within national economies. In 1876, only 11% of Africa 'belonged' to the European powers; by 1900, only 10% didn't. This orgy of land-grabbing eventually gave way to competition between capitalist states over the few remaining territories. Both World Wars this century have been a product of territorial disputes, which socialists interpret as reflecting the capitalist imperative for expansion.

Economics and politics are inextricable in imperialism. The concentration of economic power in the hands of a few capitalists gives them greater control over the state, so that national policies closely reflect the interests of the large corporations. Some 90% of world trade is now controlled by 500 multinationals. Not much 'free and equal competition'

there. Little wonder that the West is so paranoid about the mythical 'Communist threat'.

Capitalism is not entirely 'evil' or regressive. It did replace feudalism, after all, and the economic progress made within capitalist countries, though unequally shared, is undeniable. Political progress has also occurred, though whether because of or despite the capitalist system is debatable. Slavery has been abolished, and the vote has been extended to women. The UK, Europe and the USA can at least call themselves **political** democracies, even if they are not yet **economic** democracies.

South Africa, sadly, is neither a political nor an economic democracy, despite the assertion by most Whites that they live in a "free enterprise democracy"

(well, perhaps **they** do); or P.W. Botha's (illogical) claim that the government is busy "extending democracy to Blacks".

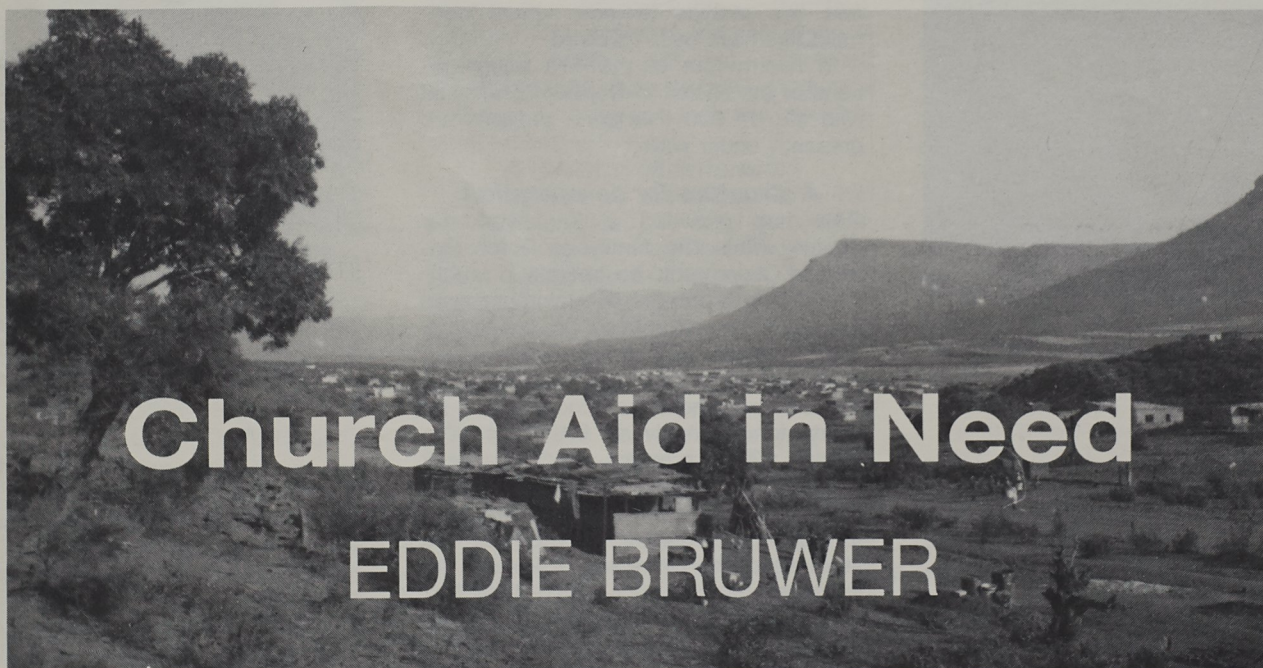
Just as the idea of political democracy would have seemed improbable 100 years ago (and remains impossible in a White-ruled South Africa), so the notion of an economic democracy — in which resources are shared much more equally among everyone — seems a utopian ideal now, even in the UK. Gerry Cohen, an Oxford political scientist, is optimistic, though. "Society won't always be divided into those who control its resources and those who have only their own labour to sell... The obstacles to economic democracy are considerable. But just as no one, now, would defend slavery, I believe that a day will come

when no one will be able to defend a form of society in which a minority profit from the dispossession of the majority."

For the sake of the Black population of South Africa, I for one hope that this prediction is more than ideological wishful thinking, and that capitalist/apartheid oppression in my country will someday be superseded by a genuine, socialist democracy.

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E. Burns. *Introduction to Marxism*. 1939.
G. Cohen. *Against Capitalism*. "The Listener." 4 September 1986.
P. Donaldson. *Market Magic*. "New Internationalist." November 1985.
J. Schumpeter. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. 1943. □



The author is Executive/Secretary of Church Aid in Need (CAN) Northern Transvaal.

"This is a sign of hope to my people", said Rev. Marcus Maphoto, minister at Rietfontein Ohrigstad and moderator of the black NGKA in Northern Transvaal. The occasion was August 1986 on a walk through the community project at Rietfontein. At the dam, a tractor, a gift from a farmer, was pumping water from one dam to another to supply water to the garden project. A group of women are the new owners of the garden. Next to the garden another group of women were busy preparing the plot for the well-planned chicken farm while men were doing the fencing. At the same place a community centre is part of the new dream of the community. They need a place to prepare meals for the children and at the same time a place to help meet the community's many needs. The CAN-project enabled this community to

open the door for a future of which they themselves are the planners and participants.

This is Hope: dreams become true.

The typical scenario

Rietfontein in Lebowa is typical of so many areas on the periphery in Northern Transvaal: Its features include: Unemployment (Rev. Maphoto has the names of 300 men on his list, and there are more)

Drought

Poor water supply

Children attending overcrowded schools

Malnutrition and often hunger

Disrupted family life, mainly because of the absence of fathers who have to work away from home

Illiteracy

Bad communication systems

Poor energy supply — women spend much of their time collecting fire wood.

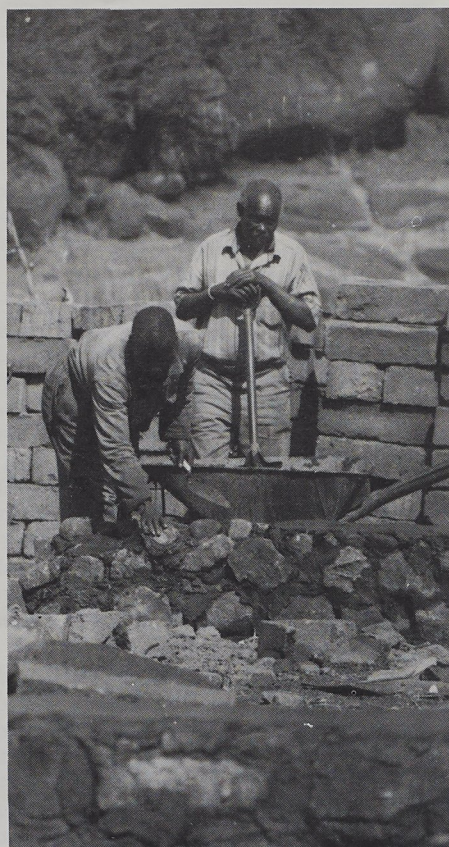
It is in situations like this that ministers like the Rev. Maphoto and other community leaders often feel frustrated and

humiliated because of so little support from outside and on the other hand so much unwanted interference.

The drought made it start

In 1983 Africa was struck by drought. It also had detrimental effects on the rural parts of the Republic of South Africa. At the same time however it was like a magnifying glass over the rural black communities of the Northern Transvaal: making the many needs distinctly visible. What was suspected for many years, namely the deteriorating situation of many black people in the homelands, caught the attention of all. The Church, and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) for that matter, could not remain inactive. Church Aid in Need (CAN) was started as a joint venture of mainly the DRC (White) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKA).

At that stage the DRC had in this region some 13 mission hospitals which had to be handed over to the Government party because they had become



The farm school at Draaikraal had to be rebuilt

too big for the church to handle. This made the church careful not to be over-optimistic and take on itself tasks too big to handle. Christian responsibility and knowledge of the seriousness of the situation however required the church to act. With the advice of academics and experts one of the most significant programmes in the DRC in this decade was started as a voluntary organisation: making it possible for christians to contribute in such a way that needy people could work towards self reliance.

No handouts

Handouts have no chance of changing the situation of people captured in a culture of poverty. What people need is not to be fed but to stand up and walk and become respected participants in the working out of a new future. This road however starts with the filling of basic needs. The generous giving by individuals and congregations of some R350 000,00 during the first three years made it possible that:

Bore-holes could be sunk and water pumps put up
Community gardens started
Food made available, and in some instances work opportunities
Club started
Poultry farming initiated
Work shops held: and
A joinery started.

It is a surprise

CAN is not part of the formal budget of the DRC. All the funds for projects have come from individuals and free gifts of congregations. This creates a sense of freedom, spontaneity and surprise which stimulate growth, hope and joy.

The initiative is with the NGKA

Contrary to all previous programmes of this kind, the initiative has gone over to the church which represents the needy community. Help from the white sister church made it possible that the Synod of Northern Transvaal of the NGKA could appoint (roep) an official to take responsibility for the program. At the same time every project was under the care of the local church. No new project had been started without the total co-operation and consent of the church concerned and this include projects where non-members have been involved.

In twenty-four of the 118 congregations of the NGKA in Northern Transvaal with it's 80 000 members, projects are presently under way.

A structure for co-operation

CAN has provided a framework for people within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches to co-operate in practical matters which are of vital importance to the black community. In cases e.g. where unemployed people were given work, a congregation like Lynnwood in Pretoria provided a daily food packet for every family involved. CAN has also started with a program which makes it possible for young people to make themselves available for a year of voluntary service in one of the projects. The students of the University of Pretoria for instance are supporting one of their final year students to work in the Pretoria CAN Project during 1987. The intention is that this student will organize links of contact and co-operation between black and white Pretoria.

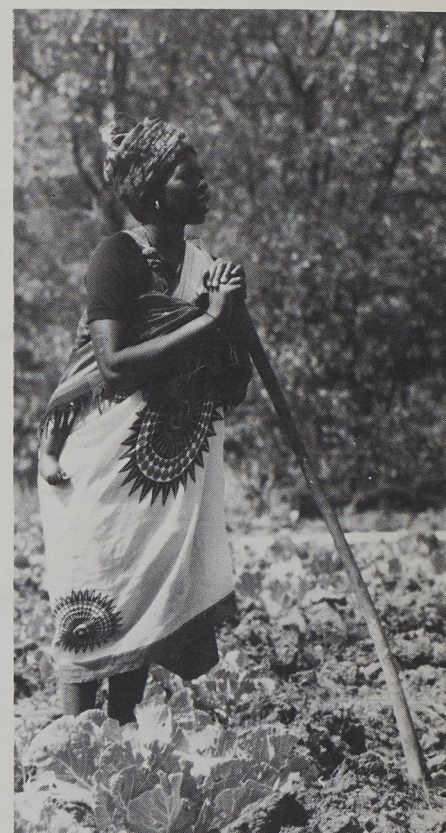
What makes it tick?

The CAN-program is a process in which the process is an important as the end result. The initiative and the responsibility for the program is with the group of people who asked for help, but the program is a process which has to be taken step by step in the loving presence of fellow christian enablers.

In this process giving and receiving become interchangeable.

There are some aspects which have to do with a view of man which are of importance to CAN:

The image of God is in man, and this has to be discovered in every person. He therefore deserves respect irrespective of his position, colour, education and poverty. No program intended to help the poor can overrule, overrun and control them. Every facet has to be adapted in such a way that it is understood and accepted by the people who



The freedom to produce your own food: working in a community garden at Mahlati in Gazankulu

are the primary participants in the project. It also implies that those offering help can be on the receiving end of essential things which have to be learned and accepted, not known and acceptable before.

CAN has the intention of enabling people to become more caring, creative and free.

— Care is of importance not in the sense of animals cared for in a den but just the opposite: to create open spaces which make choice possible. This also implies that to make space for others you may have to sacrifice some of your own. Rhetoric is not enough.

— Creativity is of importance because every situation needs it's own solution. There is no blueprint for the solving of human problems. There is always another option. It is this sense of creativity which enables people captured in a culture of poverty to make a new start.

— Freedom has many faces just as poverty has them. Political freedom is crucial but the ability to read and write, own your own home or grow your own food are also just as important aspects of freedom.

In Short: CAN is a new lifestyle which has been introduced, but there are covered roots which still have to grow to bring about the new world that we all hope for. □

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KAIROS DOCUMENT

Jim Cochrane

This essay-in-two-parts briefly assesses the significance of the now well-known Kairos Document. Whether or not one agrees with the Document, its significance can be measured objectively in terms of its impact, reception and method. The first part (last issue) dealt with the contemporary crisis in South Africa, and with South African church history. The second deals with theology and Christian experience.

PART TWO

Theology

"Of particular interest is the way the theological material was produced." So the preface to the Kairos Document itself.¹ Given the major endemic crisis which South Africa has witnessed since Sebokeng, 4th September, 1984 the process which led to the Kairos Document is of special significance for theology.

About fifty pastors, theologians and church-workers met together on several occasions. They all faced a pastoral crisis in their daily encounters, and they had little to support them in the face of massive repression and death. The agony of personally traumatic choices is clear in one sentence from the Kairos Document:

"There we sit in the same Church while outside Christian policemen and soldiers are beating up and killing Christian children or torturing Christian prisoners to death while yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace."²

This, then, is no academic treatise. It is not the painstaking work of one theologian demonstrating his or her skill, insight and special training. It is a piece of missionary, even evangelical reflection

on a horrible crisis for faith and the church. It is the work of a committed, engaged and spiritually tortured group of Christians with sufficient combined knowledge and experience to produce a theological statement that has reverberated around the world.

A communal enterprise

The significance of the process is this: here is a practical, profound demonstration of a central characteristic of Christian theology down the ages, namely, that theology is a *communal enterprise* in the Body of Christ rather than the genius of one gifted intellectual.

Secondly, equally importantly, theology is shown to be intimately *connected with Christian practice* in a particular context. Removed from such connection, theology must be regarded as mental game-playing.

Thirdly, the reflection contained in the end product is a *necessary response to the demands of faith*, one the participants could not have avoided. They did not at all expect the statement to be widely published, let alone acquire such significance; but it was and it did so because their seriousness is evident in all respects.

Finally, an ecumenical product such as this certainly shows the tensions and disparities between different confessional traditions. But that such ecumenical theologising is possible when *praxis rather than dogma becomes the touch stone* is highly significant and instructive. Even Latin American liberation theology at its best, because of the primarily Roman Catholic context, has not seen such a piece of ecumenical writing.

Two other aspects are worth pointing out in respect of the theological significance of the Kairos Document. One arises out of its nature, and the other concerns a specific thrust of part of its content.

Deliberately incomplete

The Kairos Document confesses to be incomplete, and even proceeds to make this a special characteristic of its production. The Rev. Peter Storey, immediate past president of the Methodist

Church of Southern Africa, in a letter to the authors, criticises the fact that the document is unfinished. He argues that had serious concern been given to the Document by the Churches beforehand (it was not submitted at the level) then it would not have been unfinished. He writes: "I need to be convinced about the sense of responsibility involved in distributing world-wide a document which acknowledges that it is incomplete."³

I would strongly argue, to the contrary, that this courage to write and make known an incomplete document is part of its impact. It is not the carefully deliberated, skillfully debated and finely compromised result of the courts of the Church, but a powerful statement on a pastoral and theological crisis about which the authors could not remain silent.

Even more importantly, precisely because of its openness and the weaknesses attached to this, it has in truth become a people's document — for many it is an occasion to struggle with the truth of the gospel, and the demands of faith and discipleship in a deathly environment. It provokes discussion of the best kind. In many places it has become the focus of deep spiritual searching. It is in itself a debate rather than a tightly knit ecclesiastical proclamation. The Kairos Document's openness is therefore of theological significance for the necessary and much needed dialogue of the community of Christians at large.

Destruction of human language

Finally, let me comment on the Kairos Document's attack, both direct and implicit, on the misuse of language. The great concepts by which a people hold on to meaning and communality through time are essential to the health of human society. Theologically speaking, they are part of the fabric of the soul (psyche) of communal life.

These concepts — such as justice, peace, good, beauty, etc. — are expressed differently in different traditions and contexts. Yet much is common. For

example, it would be hard to argue in almost any tradition other than a perverted one that oppression is consistent with justice.

When, therefore, such concepts become distorted to the point where they begin to mean the opposite of what is originally intended, then there one finds the practice of tyranny at the level of the soul, at the level of the foundation of human communality. This kind of destruction of human language is a sin against the Spirit. All standards of communal judgement for a whole society are removed when war against the townships is called peace, when a law and order that produces profound disorder in South Africa is called justice. When concepts like the one of reconciliation lose touch with these things, muddying their original intention, then the theological life of the Body of Christ is also in danger.

Here too the Kairos Document does Christians in South Africa a great service in its exposure of our captivity to the structures placed upon our language at present. This challenge to come clean with our use of language in its crucial depths of meaning is vital. (The document does not as adequately challenge the material interests that lie behind the misuse of the important social language, but that is not my point now).

Christian experience

I have already alluded at some points to the significance of the Kairos Document for Christian experience in South Africa. Here I will build on this, beginning with a brief reflection of an experience in another time and place: the torment of Job.

Job was faced with the unjust loss of all he held dear and of all he possessed. On his ash-heap he ranted and raved with seeming futility against his fate and the God who allowed such things to happen to a faithful servant. His three close friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, alternatively spoke about the situation he found himself in, all with varying theological arguments about sin and evil.

Once it would be a moral theology: "even though you might not know it, you must have sinned somewhere, and this is the price." Then it would be a philosophical theology, arguing that "all have sinned, in general, even if you specifically are a good man. You share with all humankind in the burden." Finally it would be a mystical theology: "You don't know, and I don't know, why this is happening to you, but God does, and that should be sufficient."

With scorn, with contempt for their arguments and with harsh words Job reacts repeatedly, saying such things:

*"I have heard many things like these;
miserable comforters are you all!
Will your long-winded speeches never
end?
What ails you that you keep on argu-
ing?"*

LIBERATING CLIFF SAUNDERS

It seems unfair and cruel that Cliff Saunders is kept locked up in a box. I am no great friend of his, and I haven't even met him, but I believe it is wrong for him to be locked up in any little box. Being so confined it is almost inevitable that he repeats himself, and then he is increasingly paranoid about the world around him. He rarely — if ever — is allowed to talk to real people, always to 'talking heads' who, by agreeing with him, only increase his sad sense of isolation and confinement.

The other night he ran a programme on something called 'Liberation Theology', but he had no liberation theologians to play with. He conjured up strange and largely unknown talking heads who were not liberation theologians, but who said what it was. No liberation theologians appeared, so his tendency to be repetitive was encouraged for far too long. This man must be let out of his box — and immediately. He should be allowed to meet liberation theologians, real people. There are many in this country, many in South America, and the Pope himself, who have re-

cently given encouragement and support to the questions that liberation theology asks. Why doesn't someone tell Cliff this? It would free him from the night-mares that occupy him and the weird visions his loneliness conjures up. So let us have SPIC — the Society for the Prevention of the Incarceration of Cliff. When he gets out — and get out he will and must — we must help him to adjust. He has been the shocking victim of propaganda; he has been conditioned in the most appalling way. Here we see a man who needs friends, psychologists, theologians, people of prayer, warm and friendly Archbishops, conversion, sedation, gentle correction, facts, comforting — and a broad smile. So I say to Cliff in there — hold on — liberation is coming one day, then you will be free. Your strange confined life will be over — and we will await you, the new Cliff, the Cliff who talks sense, the Cliff who knows what he's talking about, the Cliff of our dreams, and we will be able to announce proudly and on a different circuit 'Cliff rules — OK?'

E.L. King

St George's Parish Newsletter, Nov. 1986

*I could also speak like you if you
were in my place;*

*I could make fine speeches against
you*

and shake my head at you.

...

*Yet if I speak, my pain is not relieved;
and if I refrain, it does not go away."*

(Job 16: 1-6)

This also is the great challenge to Christian experience in South Africa of the Kairos Document. The authors are not indulging in theological arguments per se with the intent of trying to explain suffering to the sufferers or to those who inflict it. Rather they have been forced to respond to those who cry out in pain, hurt and anger at the brutal futility of it all, and who demand a more serious response than finely wrought theological dogmas can provide.

Ash-heaps of Apartheid

Thus the authors require first of all an understanding of what it is they are facing in the cauldron of the black townships, on the ash-heaps of Apartheid. To that extent the Kairos Document goes to the root of Christian experience in the demand that the Body of Christ *feel* the pain, the humiliation, the struggle and the hopes of so many of its members.

In the second place they demand that this pain not just be felt in the abstract,

nor these hopes be relegated to utopian speculation, but that the Body of Christ *carry* these marks in itself: in its proclamation, in its reflection and especially in its practice.

For these reasons, those who read the Kairos Document may respond in a variety of ways, from uncritical enthusiasm to outright rejection, from a critical and self-critical acceptance to an attacking distance, from indifference to profound disturbance. But all will have to come to terms, one way or another, with the issues it addresses. Indeed, nothing could be less significant in contemporary South Africa.

In the end, each of us will have to deal with ourselves and Christians will have to face the core of their claim to being Christian. "For," to quote José Míguez Bonino's response to the Document, "we are not now faced by an academic essay but by a proclamation which demands a response. Do we or do we not discern here the voice of the Spirit? This is, in the final analysis, the only decisive issue."⁴ □

¹ Kairos Document, page (i)

² Kairos Document, page 2

³ 22 Nov 1985

⁴ "Challenge to the Church: A Comment on the Kairos Document", J M Bonino, WCC publication, January 1986