

https://dspace.org/

The 1976 Soweto uprising

Gerhart, Gail M.

1994-05-02
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8713

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW 7003 SEMINAR ROOM
AT 4.00pm 2nd May 1994

Title: The 1976 Soweto Uprising.

: Gail M Gerhart

No 355

THE 1976 SOWETO UPRISING

Gail M. Gerhart
Visiting Fulbright Scholar
Dept. of Political Studies
University of the Witwatersrand

Presented to a seminar of the Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, May 2, 1994

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@

Draft chapter for Volume 5 of *From Protest to Challenge: a Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, eds. (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Please do not quote without permission of the author.

Chapter 6

THE 1976 SOWETO UPRISING

Like the rehearsal for revolution that shook Russia in 1905, the Soweto uprising took both rulers and ruled by surprise and, by the time its course was run, left both sides with as many unresolved political dilemmas as before. The uprising deepened existing disagreements in the National Party over how best to defend and legitimize Afrikaner rule, and ultimately set the party on an uncertain course of reform which led to its eventual fall from power two decades later. Blacks were forced by the uprising to confront their failure to find a strategy for liberation, but they emerged from the confrontations of 1976-77 with a much stronger sense of the vulnerability of white power, and a far deeper appreciation of the need for thorough political organization. The revolt raised the awareness of millions of young South Africans who thereafter dated their political coming of age in relation to its events. To an unprecedented degree, South Africa's Coloured minority made common cause with the African majority in demonstrating its rejection of the apartheid system. For older generations of Africans, 1976 marked the transition from a period of conservative political culture in which the young played a distinctly subordinate role, to a new era of struggle energized by the participation and leadership of thousands of youthful activists for whom the student uprising had been a political baptism by fire.

The Emergence of Youth Politics

Almost as soon as university students in SASO began reinventing the ideology of black nationalism in 1970-71, the tough language and idealistic principles of SASO's new credo began to attract attention among African high school students.[1] SASO cultivated this attention, and resolved at its 1972 annual conference to build links with school age youth and to extend SASO's leadership training methods to include them.[2] When the Tiro incident resulted in mass walk-outs by black university students in mid-1972, dozens of SASO activists found work as teachers in understaffed secondary schools, carrying the contagion of black consciousness out of one set of classrooms and into another.

The defiant mood of black consciousness and its emphasis on the assertion of a positive black identity appealed strongly to many young Africans growing up in a time of unsettling cultural changes and dissonance in intergenerational relationships. In and around Johannesburg, where *The World* and the *Rand Daily Mail* carried news on the university crisis and on statements made by black consciousness figures, high school students became avid consumers of press reports on their new idols. The East London *Daily Dispatch* came to fulfill a similar informational function for students in the eastern Cape after Biko's restriction to King William's Town in March 1973 and his subsequent friendship with the liberal editor of the *Dispatch*, Donald Woods. The growing popularity of Afro dress, and of music, poetry, and township theater with a black consciousness message, further broadened SASO's appeal until "thinking black" had assumed the proportions of an "in" thing among literate young Africans in the townships of the Reef and the eastern Cape. "We say it with all honesty," declared one student in a newsletter of the high school-based South African Students Movement(SASM) in 1973. "We idolize Black consciousness. It is our only defence against a . . . system that corrodes ones spirit" **(Document 1)**. A poem in the same newsletter hailed SASO's Bokwe Mafuna as a "deity of Africa" because of his defiant attitude in court when charged with a violation of his banning order.

SASO's aim in reaching out to a youth constituency was to lay the broadest possible foundation for future political organization. Emotional slogans and poems might capture the imagination of teenagers, but more important was the training of a cadre of committed and astute activists who, when the time was right, could guide future political action. High school students who might eventually be university students formed one pool of potential recruits; young school leavers, employed or unemployed, formed another. We saw in Chapter 5 how the creation of Black Community Programmes enabled Biko to take

up full time employment as BCP's "youth coordinator" in mid-1972. Criss-crossing the country to meet with church and YMCA groups, youth clubs, student societies, and informal township social gatherings, Biko, Harry Nengwekhulu, Bennie Khoapa, Tebogo Mafole and other movement organizers pushed for the formation of regional youth federations which could draw existing groups together into larger umbrella bodies geared principally to school leavers.

In August 1972, the Natal Youth Organisation was launched at Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre near Pietermaritzburg, followed in a matter of months by the formation of the Transvaal Youth Organisation (TRAYO), the eastern Cape Border Youth Union, and the Western Cape Youth Organisation. In early June 1973, in what SASO's annual conference report called "the culmination of a dream," representatives of these bodies met for four days at the Mount Coke Hotel near King William's Town and launched the National Youth Organisation (NAYO). The conference report from Mount Coke (**Document 2**) shows the strong guiding influence of SASO's ideology and personnel as well as its programmatic focus on spreading political awareness through cultural activities, literacy projects, and propaganda against homeland and system collaborators.

By the time NAYO moved onto the political stage, however, this repertoire of low-risk tactics was steadily losing appeal. The authorities were issuing bans and restrictions to high profile black consciousness leaders, and stepping up efforts to intimidate outspoken activists by rounding them up for questioning (and gratuitous beatings) at local police stations. The presence of informers was increasingly feared. Blacks who were suspected of spying at meetings faced being "workshopped" -- roughed up until they confessed. One result of the ever harsher political climate was that NAYO and its constituent bodies tended to attract only those who were already highly politicized. One TRAYO leader testified in a 1976 trial that TRAYO at its height had only about a hundred members.[3] Most people who were bold enough to attend meetings and leadership seminars of groups like NAYO and TRAYO already considered themselves "conscientized," and had moved on to thinking about "phase two," the physical liberation that was to follow the stage of psychological preparation.

Preoccupation with "phase two" dimmed the enthusiasm of youthful recruits for the patient tactics designed a few years earlier to spread the philosophy of black consciousness. Planning for armed revolt now seemed much more urgent, especially after Mozambique's independence in June 1975 opened up new prospects for guerrilla infiltration across South Africa's northeastern border. Within a year of NAYO's founding, many of its members were trying to organize secret cells and make contact with the older liberation movements in the hope of integrating themselves into what they imagined might be well-advanced underground plans for armed struggle. Some had left for exile or made forays to neighboring states to try to establish contact with the ANC or PAC, or with the Botswana-based representatives of the black consciousness movement. Other activists in the meantime were cultivating friendships with veterans of the older liberation movements, including ex-Robben Island prisoners, who in some cases were able by 1975 to facilitate links with the nascent and rudimentary ANC and PAC undergrounds.

A small number of participants in black consciousness youth organizations came from families with a background of involvement in the ANC, PAC, or the Unity Movement, but most had no knowledge of the older organizations and were eager to learn about them. In May 1974, a joint NAYO-TRAYO leadership seminar at Wilgespruit conference center in Roodepoort featured a speech by Zephania Mothopeng, a former national executive member of the banned PAC who at that moment was temporarily not under restriction orders. Using a PAC slogan that was later to reappear in the rhetoric of youth organizations, Mothopeng exhorted his audience to be prepared to "serve, suffer, and sacrifice" for the sake of Africa's future. But despite the close affinity between the ideology of black consciousness and the PAC's variant of blacks-only nationalism, it was the nonracial ANC with its longer historical tradition and better organized networks that from 1975 onwards achieved the greatest success in attracting young new adherents.

NAYO in particular provided a fertile field for ANC recruitment. Between June and October 1975, police swooped on dozens of young people suspected of subversive activities under cover of NAYO and its affiliates, and seven of those arrested were tried

for terrorism in what became known as the "NAYO trial" beginning in late 1975. The trial was frought with ominous signs of the militant mood building up among the younger generation of Africans. It showed that although very few young people were prepared to undertake high-risk political action, the number of such people was appreciably growing. Events in Mozambique had imbued blacks with optimism and the white security forces with new ruthlessness. Brutal police interrogation methods were becoming a fact of life. This reality is addressed in **Document 3**, "The System and You," an article that appeared in early 1976 in the *SASO Newsletter*. **Document 4**, an affidavit by a young woman detained as a potential witness in the NAYO trial, describes police methods in grim detail. Police succeeded in forcing some of those detained to sign false statements incriminating others; later, some detainees courageously recanted these statements in the witness box. At the NAYO trial the atmosphere among spectators became so charged that on March 18, 1976, a violent confrontation erupted between police and the large crowd gathered in the street outside the court building. **Document 5,** an eye-witness account of this incident by an unidentified friend of the defendants, offers striking evidence of the taut emotions ready to burst forth from beneath Johannesburg's surface calm.

In reaching for the generation immediately junior to themselves, SASO's strategists particularly targetted senior secondary school students as the segment of black society in which future political leadership had to be nurtured. Drop-out rates at every stage of South Africa's school system were high, with the result that Africans enrolled in the last two years of secondary school in the early 1970s comprised less than two percent of their age cohort.[4] These students, though predominantly working class in origin, formed an incipient intellectual and economic elite by virtue of their education. As potential university students, they were both SASO's constituency-to-be and the social group ultimately put most at risk politically by the state's long-term cooptive strategies. The physical concentration of high school students in institutional settings made them relatively easy to reach compared to working or unemployed youths, and their level of literacy made them recruitable through the written word as well as by verbal persuasion. The only barriers to their rapid conscientization were the fears induced by parents, and the hostility of most government-employed teachers and school principals to anything exuding even the faintest whiff of politics. But even in boarding school settings, school authorities were incapable of insulating their institutions against all black consciousness influences. Contacts with older siblings, the circulation of black consciousness publications, and the popularity of younger teachers infected with the SASO "virus," all ensured the fairly speedy dissemination of the new nationalism among secondary students. The bolder students in turn undertook to radicalize their more timid teachers, as **Document 1** attests.

Within two years of SASO's birth, secondary students had begun here and there to form small political clubs, often at the instigation of a teacher who was a closet radical. Organizing themselves as debating societies or community service clubs, these associations came and went as the friendship groups on which they were based formed or dissolved, or as school authorities interfered to restrain their activities. The principal of Inanda Girls Seminary near Durban shut down a political club which formed there in 1971, and in Cape Town a Coloured students' group called SABSA -- the South African Black Scholars' Association -- folded under pressure of police threats in 1973 after about two years of activity.[5] The most important of these high school groups was the Soweto-based African Students' Movement (ASM), which in January 1972 changed its name to the South African Students' Movement (SASM) as part of an ambitious plan, instigated by SASO, to convert itself into a national organization.

ASM was originally formed in 1969 by a weekend study group of Soweto students preparing for matriculation exams with the assistance of Tom Manthata, a young teacher at Sekano Ntoane High School who was also involved in the organization of church-based youth clubs. Manthata was a Catholic seminary drop-out who was disaffected with the church but drawn to the unconventional theology of the University Christian Movement in which his cousin, Justice Moloto, was a leading activist. Through Moloto and the UCM, Manthata became a friend of SASO's leaders and an adherent of its emerging philosophy.[6] ASM took shape around a handful of school debating societies that were nurtured by Manthata and several like-minded Soweto teachers, sometimes using the occasion of

sports tournaments to arrange interschool debates on topics likely to stimulate political discussion. In July 1971 the organization made its first tentative foray into the public consciousness by staging a noisy demonstration to protest the excessive amount of time students were required to spend practising for choir competitions at the expense of their studies. The day after placard-waving ASM members had disrupted a national choir competition with 4,000 participants at Springs, the tabloid headlines of *The World* warned that children were "running wild."[7] ASM's message on this occasion was ostensibly nonpolitical, but the protest was an effort by the organization to put itself forward as a voice for student complaints. Peter Lenkoe, a student at Madibane High School and the president of ASM, reported to a SASO national executive committee meeting in Pietermaritzburg five months later that the organization was attracting between 700 and 800 participants to its meetings, though not all were dues-paying.[8]

When ASM reorganized itself as SASM in January 1972 it aimed to build a national movement of high school students, but found the task more formidable than anticipated. After about a year, branches were functioning at nine Johannesburg schools and a roughly equivalent number of schools scattered throughout the rest of the country, but progress was slow. Branches would be launched only to fall dormant within a semester or two. Travelling beyond the area of the Reef required money and mobility that SASM organizers in Johannesburg did not have. Getting access to a typewriter or telephone usually required that a Soweto student travel to the city center where such equipment could be borrowed at the offices of the Christian Institute, the BPC, or REESO, SASO's Reef headquarters. Most students shied away from open participation in SASM meetings. Talk that was openly political provoked such stern reprimands from school authorities and parents that many students were fearful.[9] Bringing in outside speakers to give lectures to school clubs was one relatively safe activity; university students prominent in SASO found themselves frequently invited to address highschool debating societies. Cultural activities like concerts and plays were another way for SASM to draw an audience. The most interested students would then be invited to participate in weekend seminars at Wilgespruit or St. Ansgar's, church centers in Roodepoort which made their facilities available for student meetings. Here again it would be the leaders of SASO who usually made the principal input, organizing focussed political discussions, simulation exercises, and workshops on techniques of organization, from how to raise funds, keep minutes, and run a meeting, to how to teach adult literacy using Paulo Freire's method of "conscientization" (See Chapter 4).

SASM, like NAYO, was set back by the March 1973 banning of SASO's top leadership, followed by the banning in September of Mathe Diseko, who was both president of NAYO and national secretary of SASM. SASM in Johannesburg went into eclipse for the better part of a year until a new leadership could be assembled in mid-1974 with the encouragement of SASO and the BPC. In the meantime, Biko and his coterie of lieutenants in King William's Town's Ginsberg location had stimulated the formation of SASM branches in several nearby high schools in the eastern Cape.

The rejuvenated SASM, coming on the scene after the Lisbon coup of April 1974, was increasingly driven by the new fever of interest in armed struggle. The ANC's Radio Freedom was now broadcasting regularly into South Africa on shortwave, and ANC leaflets and literature were circulating more widely than earlier. Some students drawn to SASM were determined to become guerrilla fighters and sought to leave South Africa by hazardous routes; some succeeded, some were caught, and more than a few turned back when discretion became the better part of valor. **Document 6,** a letter describing one student's escape route to Botswana, was presented as evidence for the prosecution in the trial of five SASM members from Healdtown high school in the eastern Cape who were caught while making departure plans in 1975.[10] Bullets, wrote another Healdtown student with bravado, were "the only language that Vorster and his dogs understand. South Africa will be Africa's Vietnam."[11]

Intense debate and disagreement increasingly affected the once unreserved admiration of younger for older black consciousness activists as some who wanted to join

the exile armies took issue with others, usually older, who argued that guerrilla warfare would be fruitless until a stronger political foundation for revolution had been laid inside South Africa. At a conference for SASM leaders run by SASO and the staff of Black Community Programmes in King William's Town over Easter weekend in 1975, the emphasis was on building SASM as a body that would politicize high school students and make them agents for the organized radicalization of adult society in the future. **Document 7**, a paper prepared for the conference by Malusi Mpumlwana of the BCP, outlines behavioral do's and don't's appropriate for a growing cadre of political agitators working circumspectly "within the law but outside the system." It was still official policy in the senior black consciousness organizations to shun any identification with the illegal exile movements, even if individual members chose to associate with them privately, and even though Biko through his lieutenants was engaged in protracted secret talks with representatives of the ANC and PAC undergrounds in the hope of effecting a united front (See Chapter 5).

In SASM, would-be fighters outnumbered talkers, and counsels of caution from older activists often provoked resentment. "When we asked questions concerning the future programs of the people," Daniel Montsitsi, a militant SASM leader at Sekano Ntoane high school in Soweto, later recalled,

> we were told "We have to conscientise the black masses, as this will ensure understanding and support for us, then we shall be able to bargain from a position of strength." Unfortunately we were not in the mood to bargain or negotiate; we were impatient and militant, and rebellious of the black consciousness leadership. With puffed lips and closed eyes straight from [being beaten up by the police] . . . we did not feel like talking; we wanted to fight but did not know how. We made jokes about the leadership when our spirit was high, that they encourage us to conscientize the masses, until they reach a stage where they'll explode on their own.[12]

While abstract debates about the alternative merits of guerrilla warfare and mass insurrection continued unresolved, SASM through SASO received two donations from the International Universities Exchange Fund in Europe, one in late 1975 and the other in May 1976, totalling about $7000. This made it possible to finance travel expenses and to employ a full-time SASM organizer, Zweli Sizani. Participation picked up in Soweto, and in early 1976 branches were in existence or in the process of forming in schools in Mamelodi, Mabopane and Atteridgeville in Pretoria, as well as in KwaThema (Springs), Kagiso (Krugersdorp), Tembisa (Kempton Park), Thaba Nchu in the Orange Free State, Kwa Mashu in Durban, and Athlone High School in Cape Town.[13] On the last weekend of May, the organization held a three day conference in Roodepoort where a range of topics related to student and national life was debated (**Document 8**). Three senior black consciousness figures addressed the meeting, along with SASM's outgoing president, Vusi Tshabalala, who called on his audience to brace for further harassment from the state. A new executive was elected, while Sizani continued as full-time organizing secretary. Although it may be an overstatement to claim, as Brooks and Brickhill do in their very valuable history of the Soweto uprising, that by June 1976 "SASM was fully fledged as a national school student movement . . [with] a well-organized structure, [and] a vigorous program of activities,"[14] it was certainly true that the organization had survived through ups and downs and had established a measure of autonomy from adult influence. Some of its activists had acquired substantial organizing experience, and had a vision of SASM as a vehicle for the national mobilization of students, although even as late as May 1976 no one anticipated how such a mobilization might be triggered or what its outcome might be.

"This Burden is Heavy. . ."

According to the minutes of SASM's May 1976 conference, the first subject debated was the government's highly unpopular imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools on a 50-50 basis alongside English. Dual-medium instruction had officially been prescribed since the mid-1950s, but educationists had been publicly critical of the policy, and their objections, plus a dearth of African teachers proficient in Afrikaans, had resulted in most African schools being granted annual exemptions from the formal requirement up through 1974. In that year government policy shifted as part of a political effort by Vorster and National Party pragmatists to appease party*verkramptes* (ultra-conservatives) who were unhappy about what they saw as party moves toward "liberalization," including the acceptance of racially mixed sports and the government's long delayed decision to introduce television in South Africa -- a step that conservatives feared would strengthen the dominant position of English over Afrikaans in popular culture.[15] Hence it was announced by the Bantu Education department that from 1975, African schools in the southern Transvaal region would be required to phase in Afrikaans-medium instruction in mathematics and social studies starting in Standard 5 (the seventh grade). There were strong objections raised by African teachers and community school boards, but department officials were unbending. Students affected by the new policy showed poor exam results at the end of 1975. Fears of failure joined with political distaste for "the language of the oppressor" to fan student discontent as the next school year began.[16] Adding insult to injury just prior to the opening of the 1976 academic year, Vorster announced in January that Dr. Andries Treurnicht, the hard-line leader of the*verkramptes*, would become the new deputy minister of Bantu Education.

Top to bottom, South Africa's school system under National Party rule was a showcase for institutionalized racial discrimination. African schools ranked lowest in state expenditure per pupil, numbers of professionally trained teachers, and the quality of school facilities; they ranked highest in pupil-teacher ratios and drop-out rates. Schools for Indians and Coloureds fared somewhat better, while the system for whites consumed public resources out of all proportion to the number of students served.[17] These inequalities in no way reflected the level of demand for education in the respective racial communities. Educational achievement was one of the few paths out of poverty for Africans, and working class parents often struggled over many years to meet the costs of the books, uniforms, and fees necessary to keep their children in school.[18] During the early 1970s, this thirst for education was assuaged to some extent by a rapid expansion in the number of secondary and university level places for Africans, effected by the state in response to strong demands from industry and commerce that something be done about the country's severe skills shortage. Between 1970 and 1975, the number of Africans pupils admitted to Form I, the first year of secondary school, rocketed from 49,504 to 149,251.[19] One result was that many thousands of African teenagers began to reach levels of schooling far beyond those achieved by their parents, prompting growing intergenerational friction. At the same time, the unequal and inadequate commitment of resources to African schools meant that students struggled against deteriorating conditions in the classroom: double shifts, overcrowding, too few trained teachers, disappointing pass rates on all-important examinations -- and a continuing perception of the unclosable gap between their own life chances and the opportunities enjoyed by young whites.

Township communities might have eased their way through this combustible mixture of hopes, frustrations, and generational tensions had South Africa's economy been in a phase of robust expansion.[20] But the early 1970s were a period of retrenchment and slackening growth after South Africa's boom decade of the 1960s. Even before the country began to feel the effects of world recession and high inflation brought on by the soaring price of oil in 1973-74, its economy was beset by problems arising from technological change and the built-in biases of apartheid. Mining and agriculture -- the original foundations of modern South Africa's growth and of its super-exploitation of unskilled black labor -- now functioned alongside a large manufacturing sector that was increasingly constrained by the low productivity of labor and the meager buying

power of African consumers. Persistent efforts by the Vorster government to expand South Africa's export markets in independent Africa through an aggressive diplomatic strategy of "detente" were achieving only limited success. The shortage of skilled labor had been addressed through the expansion of school enrollments, but no sooner had expansion accelerated than the economic downturn of the mid-1970s resulted in an ever higher number of school-leavers entering a job market which had all but ceased to grow. The economic malaise created by rising unemployment and rapid inflation was made worse by a precipitous decline in the gold price through most of 1975, depriving the country of the surplus of foreign exchange with which it customarily maintained its level of imports and eliminated its balance of payments deficit. By late 1975, South Africa was in a recession of crisis proportions.

Given their monopoly of decision-making in business and government, whites were in a position to determine whose belts would be tightened the most as economic conditions worsened. The construction of schools and houses in black urban areas came to a near standstill, and all efforts were abandoned to keep pace with the needs of expanding township populations for such services as garbage collection, sewerage, and street lighting. Parsimony reached new extremes after 1973 when the National Party government removed African urban areas from the control of adjacent white municipalities and placed them under twenty-two newly established Bantu Affairs Administration Boards directly answerable to the Minister of Bantu Administration. The boards laid off African employees and replaced them with inexperienced whites whose salaries were paid out of board revenues from rents and township liquor sales, over which the government maintained a formal monopoly. Subsidies previously paid by white municipalities to maintain township services were discontinued, and instead a portion of township rent and beerhall revenues were redistributed to subsidize the administration of rural homelands.[21] In terms of both material living conditions and levels of public trust, township life was on a steady downward trajectory by the time violence erupted in June 1976.

Intensified government pressure to impose the grand design of ethnic homelands further compounded the deteriorating quality of black urban life. Most troubling were new legal conditions accompanying the independence of the Transkei scheduled to take place in late 1976, with that of Bophuthatswana to follow soon after. In pursuit of its dream of creating a South Africa with no African citizens, the Vorster government stiffened the definition of homeland citizenship originally set out in the Transkei Constitution Act of 1963, eliminating dual citizenship and the option that urban Africans might choose to remain South African when "their" homeland attained independence. As the details of the Transkei's impending independence were increasingly aired in parliament and discussed across the country, it became evident that as many as 1.3 million urban Xhosa and their descendants were threatened with loss of their South African citizenship, together with what narrow but precious legal rights to urban residence this citizenship conferred. As a concession to international and business pressures for South Africa to accord property rights to permanently urbanized blacks, renewable 30 year leasehold tenure on township plots had been introduced in 1975, raising the prospect that children would in future, as a matter of legal right, be able to inherit houses built, bought, or improved by their parents. Under the new homeland citizenship provisions, however, the security of this new "right" was nullified.[22] Applications for leasehold (like applications for business licenses) were to be accepted only from those who had taken out homeland citizenship certificates. Moreover, children born after the independence date of their parents' designated homeland automatically became citizens of that homeland, forfeiting any legal right to live in "white" South Africa as adults, or to inherit any fixed property acquired there by their parents.

For people being forced to adjust to new levels of economic insecurity, the added uncertainty of the new homeland citizenship regulations deepened an already widespread sense of despair. "Do you want to make us really desperate?" asked Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Dean of Johannesburg, in a statement carried on the front page of the *Rand Daily*

Mail on May 1, 1976. "Desperate people will be compelled to use desperate means" to achieve redress, he concluded. "I speak with words I hope I have chosen carefully -- the issue of Transkeian citizenship is highly explosive."[23] A week later in a personal letter to Vorster, Tutu again tried to warn that African patience was running out. "A people can take only so much and no more," he wrote (**Document 9**). "The history of your own people [the Afrikaners] . . . has demonstrated this, Vietnam has shown this, the struggle against Portugal has shown this. I am frightened . . . that we may soon reach a point of no return, when events will generate a momentum of their own, when nothing will stop their reaching a bloody denouement."[24]

Tutu's passing reference to the collapse of Portuguese colonialism only hinted at the powerful emotions of hope and expectation that events in Mozambique and Angola had kindled among Africans. Not only had black guerrilla armies defeated Portugal, but South Africa's own invading army had been repulsed in its effort to prevent the Soviet and Cuban-backed Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA) from taking power in Luanda following Angolan independence in November 1975. "Winds of change" were blowing right on the country's borders, Gatsha Buthelezi told Sowetans packed into Jabulani Ampitheatre on March 14, 1976 (Chapter 9, **Document**); South Africa had "burnt her fingers" trying to stop the inevitable. "When we blacks look at Africa, and southern Africa in particular," Buthelezi declared, "we desire to take our place with our black brothers in their new world" -- the world of majority rule, not Pretoria's ethnic pseudo-independence. Equally bold references to the inevitability of majority rule were noted by West Rand Administration Board police constables sent to monitor a meeting of the homeland Lebowa Peoples Party held in Soweto on May 16 (**Document 10**). To all blacks, and especially to the young, one African student later recalled, the sudden and unexpected turn of events in Mozambique and Angola transformed the idea of liberation from something distant and abstract to "something *real*, something *possible*."[25]

When the 1976 school year commenced in January, overcrowding in African schools reached new levels nationwide. To reduce the number of school years from 13 to 12, the Bantu Education department had decided in 1975 to abolish standard 6 (the eighth grade) from the following year, enabling students to proceed directly from standard 5 into the five years of secondary school leading to matriculation. Although this change promised eventually to relieve pressure on classroom space, it meant that in 1976, pupils finishing both standard 5 and standard 6 proceeded together into the first year of secondary school, creating an unweildy bulge of numbers that meant yet more crowding and double shifts, more shortages of textbooks and qualified secondary teachers. In the southern Transvaal, moreover, protests by teachers and a few African school boards had failed to roll back the ruling that Afrikaans instruction in half of all subjects be phased in starting at junior secondary level. The language ruling most immediately affected the very students caught in the effects of the bulge. For most African parents, mired in the desperate daily reality of survival, these hardships were just one more burden to be borne. But for school children in their teens -- not yet faced with the full responsibilities of adulthood, but experienced enough to know how unfairly life's deck was stacked against them -- the injustices of "gutter education" suddenly seemed unbearable. White arrogance, suffered for so long by their parents and teachers, seemed intolerable, as did the very meekness of the adult generation.

The Uprising Begins

Had authorities in the Bantu Education department been willing to bend on the Afrikaans ruling while the bulge of junior secondary pupils in the Transvaal endured a few semesters of intense overcrowding, South Africa might have been spared the cataclysm of violence and confrontation that swept black schools and townships starting on June 16, 1976. Instead, a demonstration against Afrikaans, planned as a one-day protest in Soweto, escalated into a nationwide uprising after police shot dead a number of

student demonstrators, touching off a spiral of rioting and reprisal that rapidly spread to other areas. Fuelled by the anger and determination of a radicalized youth generation, the uprising confronted whites with an unprecedented challenge to their dominance. Older blacks likewise experienced a loss of authority as parents, teachers, urban councillors and even respected senior political notables found themselves deferring to the high school students whose initiative, courage and energy were the driving force of the revolt.

Events on June 16 resulted from the intersection of student tensions over the Afrikaans issue with SASM's renewed efforts to build a national following. Through most of early 1976 the two developments ran parallel in Soweto secondary schools, where SASM concentrated its efforts on senior students while the language problem directly affected only students in Forms 1 and 2 (eighth and ninth grades). As mid-year exams approached, a class boycott over Afrikaans erupted among Form 1 and 2 students at Orlando West Junior Secondary School, spreading within a few weeks to seven other schools. Seeing an opportunity to take a leadership role in the aftermath of their May 28-30 conference, several members of SASM's national executive called a meeting at the Orlando YMCA in Soweto on the afternoon of Sunday, June 13, ostensibly to form a SASM regional branch. An unexpectedly large number of students turned up, and a regional executive committee was chosen, headed by Tsietsi Mashinini, a final year student who was a leader in the SASM branch at Morris Isaacson High School in the Jabavu section of Soweto. After a heated discussion of the Afrikaans issue, Mashinini won unanimous approval for a proposal that students stage a mass demonstration on the following Wednesday. An Action Committee to organize the protest was formed by enlisting two representatives from each school under a leadership headed by Mashinini and Seth Mazibuko, a Form 2 student who had led the initial boycott at Orlando West Junior Secondary School.

By the time police tried to stop a singing column of children marching along Vilakazi Street toward Orlando stadium about 9 o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, June 16th, round-the-clock activity by the Action Committee had mobilized thousands of students to converge from every corner of Soweto, waving placards denouncing compulsory Afrikaans instruction. Police had made no preparations for the event, and their scattered early morning attempts to head off some of the large groups of demonstrators proved ineffective. Confronting the marchers on Vilakazi Street near the Orlando West school, a contingent of police fired tear gas canisters into the throng, but failed to dissuade the demonstrators, who responded by throwing stones. Rather than retreat, the police then shot into the crowd, killing 12 year old Zolile Hector Pieterson and wounding several other children.[26] This ignited the fury of the marchers, who began to rampage through the township, smashing windows and using petrol to set fire to schools, WRAB vehicles, municipal beerhalls, and other government buildings. By evening Soweto was a battle zone as roaming mobs of youths sought more symbols of apartheid to put to the torch, and police tried to curb the destruction by shooting at anyone who appeared to be involved in the rioting. Violence continued in Soweto on June 17, and spread to Krugersdorp on the West Rand and to downtown Johannesburg where police and white thugs broke up a protest march by students from the University of the Witwatersrand. While the dead piled up at city mortuaries and hospitals strained to treat the wounded, newspapers around the world ran a photo of two crying teenagers carrying the limp body of Hector Pieterson. "Soweto" stood poised to join Sharpeville in the lexicon of the international anti-apartheid movement.[27]

The uprising eventually affected more than a hundred urban areas of South Africa and took nearly a year to run its course, passing through a series of stages as student leaders changed tactics in an effort to sustain the protests, draw in adult participants, and respond to government repression. The system of Bantu education and the government's regional Administration Boards remained targets throughout, along with black collaborators in the Urban Bantu Councils and homeland governments. Starting in August, a series of experiments with economic pressure was launched in which students tried to use stay-ways and consumer boycotts to weaken the state through blows directed at white

business. Looking inward to the weaknesses of their own community, the students concentrated their reforming zeal on alcohol consumption, a problem afflicting many families and one for which a share of the blame could be laid on the system of municipal beerhalls. Pretoria's efforts to regain the initiative after June 16 were never wholly successful. A decision in early July to drop the Afrikaans requirement did little to diminish the momentum of the student crusade which by that time had begun to consolidate broad support because of the rising number of deaths and the government's callous displays of indifference towards the carnage. By early 1977, unrest deaths stood officially at 575.[28] As the "disturbances" continued month after month, funerals of the victims became the occasion for new displays of student militancy, provoking yet more applications of lethal force by the police. Attempts by the state to quell the uprising by detaining supposed agitators merely caused the cycle of response and counter-response to escalate. The deaths of several detainees subjected to torture by the security police further fed the angry flames of revolt.

To be or Not To Be . . .

Who were the young rebels of 1976, and what did they believe would be achieved by their sometimes suicidal defiance? No systematic survey of participants was made at the time, but impressionistic evidence supports the view that African and Coloured school pupils were joined in significant numbers by out-of-school youths, including *tsotsis* (juvenile delinquents) who were a perennial element in township society, and who used the anarchy of the opening days of the revolt in Soweto to loot liquor stores and rob township residents. Students at day schools were the prime movers, but upheavals also occurred at rural boarding institutions. University students staged protests at every black campus, and at the Universities of Zululand and the Western Cape, arsonists destroyed a number of campus buildings. Participants came from all social classes, ethnic groups, and ages. Children as young as ten were shot dead for raising a black power fist at the police, and hundreds of teenagers were held in police cells for extended periods, some for weeks at a time.[29]

Student thinking appears to have run the gamut from reformist to revolutionary, nonviolent to violent, and from naively emotional to tactically calculating. At the outset of the uprising, the conscious intent was simply to show whites how vehemently young blacks rejected the apartheid system of education, and also how frustrated they felt with the poverty and crowded conditions of township life. "If I die, that's one less person sleeping under the bed," a schoolgirl told a Soweto social worker who tried to persuade student demonstrators to go home on the morning of June 16.[30] During the rioting observers noted how common it was for groups of students to stop white motorists and force them to make the black power sign before allowing them to proceed, as if this fulfilled a deep desire to humble whites and make them show deference to black humanity. "As black parents," one Soweto resident observed, "we are forced to produce good sons and daughters who are passive, non-assertive, non-aggressive, good *Ja-baas* ("yes, boss") boys. If they are going to get anywhere they must not talk back. You may ask, why so much violence? One reason [is a] crying need to say 'Take notice of us - We are people.'"[31] Further nourishing the demand for respect and recognition was a growing sense of expectation among students that a successful revolution might soon occur in South Africa. "It happened at Angola - Why not here?" proclaimed a large banner hung in a classroom at Orlando West Junior Secondary School on June 16. The "revolutionary preparedness of the black masses" was evident, the radical diarist at the NAYO trial had concluded a few months earlier; all that was needed was "a powerful vanguard" prepared to "take up arms" (Document 5).

But in the absence of weapons that could be taken up, what were Soweto's would-be revolutionaries to do? One option was to concede the state's command of superior instruments of violence, and to try to sustain the insurrection through the use of

nonviolent tactics. This still left open the question of what targets were to be singled out, and what strategic aims pursued. Another option was to wait and hope that the exiled liberation movements were at work organizing to return in force. Such expectations were encouraged from the early days of the revolt by the appearance of ANC leaflets in major urban centers urging people to "act," "protest" and "hit back" at the Vorster government (**Document 11**) [redacted]. While clutching at the straw of possible external intervention, however, student leaders faced the responsibility of finding a course of action that could maintain the momentum of the uprising once the rioting of mid-June had subsided. Student courage during the days of violence had inspired an awed respect from black adults, but there were also critics who questioned whether the hundreds of dead and wounded was not too high a price for the meager achievement of a government climb-down on the Afrikaans issue.

It was not hard for the SASM students who constituted the core of the Soweto Action Committee to think back to the time before June 16 when the building of a constituency had been an uphill effort. Suddenly a constituency, even a potential national following, was standing ready; retreat would have been both ignoble and inconsistent with the precepts of the black consciousness movement, which had never ceased to impress upon young people their responsibility to analyze, organize, and act as if the future of the country was in their own hands. In any case, under the circumstances prevailing in mid-1976, no group of older decision-makers was available to whom leadership could readily be passed. SASO and the BPC had been severely weakened by bans and repression, and by mid-July two of their remaining activists in Johannesburg, Tom Manthata and Ken Rachidi, had been detained. Nor did students look for guidance to the Black Parents Association (BPA), a supportive group of Soweto professionals who had formed themselves into a welfare body to coordinate funeral arrangements and receive donations for the families of victims in the week following June 16. The BPA was willing to act as a mouthpiece for student demands, but it was not regarded by students as an ally in decision-making.[32] In the uncharted terrain of confrontation with the state, "black man, you are on your own" had become "black student, you are on your own."

The reopening of schools in the last week of July was marked by high absenteeism and outbreaks of arson at schools around the country. During the winter recess in July it had become evident to the Action Committee that nothing could be organized until a return to school was effected. Burning schools was no solution. Political awareness was at fever pitch, but constructive action required the strengthening of communication networks that could only operate if students were congregating in schools on a daily basis. Moreover, the committee itself needed to be expanded from its original complement of about a dozen students into a broader body with lines of contact into every Soweto secondary school, not just the ones that had been represented at the meeting of June 13. It was the consensus of the Action Committee that after widening the base of organization, a protest should be organized around the demand that detained students be released. As a means of drawing in parents, students would call on all Soweto adults to stay at home for a three-day period to back up the student demand.

Soweto's Urban Bantu Councillors held a public meeting at Jabulani Ampitheatre on Sunday morning, August 1, to report on a series of consultations between their members and government representatives regarding community grievances. There was a high turnout of students, who jeered the councillors' appeals for moderation and called for the release of detainees and a continued assault on Bantu education (**Document 12**). That afternoon at a smaller meeting of several hundred parents and students convened by the BPA at Regina Mundi church, further appeals were made for students to return to school. Tsietsi Mashinini addressed the meeting, endorsed the call for a return to schools, and announced that student leaders would meet the following morning at the Morris Isaacson High School.[33] When that meeting in turn convened on August 2, the Action Committee renamed itself the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC), reconfirmed Mashinini as chairman, and arranged that each of Soweto's 40 junior and senior secondary schools be represented on the SSRC by two students. Murphy Morobe,

another senior student at Morris Isaacson, became vice-chairman, replacing Seth Mazibuko who had been detained. It was agreed that a list of demands regarding Bantu education would be compiled and forwarded to the government through the BPA, and that on Wednesday, August 4, students would march to John Vorster Square security police headquarters in downtown Johannesburg to demonstrate for the release of detained students and other leaders. Parents were to be urged by their children to support student demands by not going to work between Wednesday and Friday.

Thus was launched a new confrontational phase of the revolt, centered on the stay-away. Like a black power fist thrust in the faces of white motorists, the 1976 stay-aways were primarily a demonstration of resolve and a vague threat that there could be worse to come if black demands were not met. Students imagined at the outset that prolonged work stoppages would cut into the profits of white business to such an extent that the economy might be faced with collapse. In due course it became evident that without strong labor unions, workers involved in stay-aways had no protection against victimization by employers, and thus worker commitment to political strikes was likely to be fragile and short-lived. Before pushing their newfound tactic beyond its limits, however, students in August and September organized three relatively successful stay-aways in Johannesburg, each of several days duration, plus one lasting two days in Cape Town, and another of two days in Tembisa (Kempton Park). Each of the stay-aways was preceded by leafletting, and in some areas, particularly in Soweto during the first stay-away, by intimidatory actions aimed by students at strike breakers.

Azikhwelwa! ("We don't ride," i.e. we don't travel to work), a slogan from the 1940s and '50s that students had discovered in Edward Roux's banned but popular book *Time Longer Than Rope*, was adopted as the stay-away rallying cry.[34] Early on August 4, thousands of students converged on Soweto's train stations and bus stops to prevent commuters leaving for the city. Eyewitnesses subsequently testified to the government-appointed Cillie Commission of inquiry that stone-throwing occurred at the stations, and that workers who managed to slip into the city were accosted by angry bands of students when they returned to the township that evening. Late on the morning of August 4, the student march on John Vorster Square, estimated by police at 15,000 strong, was thwarted by a blockade of police vehicles when it reached New Canada at the northeastern boundary of Soweto. After being dispersed with teargas, the demonstrators retaliated with further arson attacks on buildings and vehicles, continuing the mayhem into the next two days amidst crude police efforts at riot control which left many new victims dead. The Minister of Police and Justice, James Kruger, vacillating between trying to cool the violence with conciliation or quell it by brute force, appears briefly to have entertained the idea of meeting with the BPA at the height of the destruction, but then reverted to basic National Party instincts by arresting the BPA members instead. By the third week of August, a surface calm had returned to Soweto, but violence had erupted elsewhere along the Reef and was spreading to the townships of the eastern and western Cape. In Johannesburg, Tsietsi Mashinini from hiding issued a blunt press statement condemning the heavy handed actions of the police (**Document 13**).

The second Soweto stay-away, called by the SSRC for August 23-25, was marked by lower levels of intimidation and a stronger public response than the one three weeks earlier. White shops, offices and industries reported 70-80% absenteeism by African workers. In a startling development on the afternoon of the second day, however, the burgeoning sense of student power was challenged when an enraged mob of Zulu workers from the huge Mzimhlope hostel in the Meadowlands area of Soweto stormed through adjacent sections of the township attacking houses and murdering and terrorizing their residents.[35] As families fled from the path of the armed marauders, men in the affected neighborhoods organized themselves for defense of their homes, and by nightfall and into the following week street battles took place pitting residents against hostel-dwellers, reportedly as police looked on or stayed clear of the trouble zones. Strong evidence soon emerged that this unforeseen backlash was in fact incited by the police after a mysterious fire the morning of the 24th had damaged three blocks of the hostel.[36] It was probably

These incidents were confined to Coloured and African townships until September 1, when African students staged a peaceful placard march in downtown Cape Town. On the following two mornings, police were prepared when more students, this time both Coloureds and Africans, massed in the city's central business district. Tear-gas and baton charges dispersed the demonstrators on September 2, but on Friday, September 3, police fired both tear-gas and birdshot into startled crowds on Adderley Street as hundreds of fleeing protesters mingled into throngs of lunchtime onlookers. Offices and shops closed early, and gun shops sold out as panicky whites got their first close-up look at the uprising. As some units of the riot police quelled protests in the central city, other units fanned out to try to restore order in the townships. Reporting on one incident which by this time had become part of a familiar pattern, a correspondent for the *Rand Daily Mail* wrote that at about noon on September 3,

> the riot squad charged into the Alexander Sinton High School [in the Coloured township of Athlone] for the second time after cars had been stoned in the area. When pupils saw the police coming, they quickly locked themselves in classrooms. Police tried to kick down the doors but failed. They then broke windows in upper classrooms and tossed tear-gas canisters inside. Terrified children rushed out and were met with a hail of blows from police batons. Shotgun blasts reverberated through the quadrangle and screaming pupils ran in all directions. . . Two schoolboys [were] hit by birdshot. . . . Girls were crying from the effects of tear-gas and some had fainted. Others were sobbing hysterically while teachers tried to comfort them. One schoolboy was rugby tackled by a policeman as he attempted to escape across the front lawn, and then kicked. The pupils dispersed soon afterwards, but within minutes cars in Thornton Road - which runs past the school - were [again] being stoned.[43]

Ten days later, Soweto students launched the third and most successful Johannesburg stay-away, calling on workers to strike for three days in support of the "student-worker alliance" for the "overthrowal of oppression" (**Document 16**). With absentee rates running as high as 80 percent in Johannesburg industry and commerce, Coloured and African workers in Cape Town joined in the work stoppage on September 15, sustaining their protest through the following day and making the combined September 13-16 stay-away, as Brooks and Brickhill have judged it, the high-water mark of the uprising and the most impressive political action ever to have been staged by black workers in South Africa.[44] *Momentum was maintained the following week when Tembisa* workers stayed home for two days, bringing production in the industrial complex of Isando northeast of Johannesburg to a halt. Two days later, inspired by the success of their counterparts in Cape Town and referring to themselves as revolutionaries who would rock the racist order (**Document 17**), Soweto students organised a brief but dramatic "invasion" of the central city on the morning of Thursday, September 23. Reponding to what the white press described as central Johannesburg's "first taste of terror," camouflage-clad riot police arrested several hundred of the young invaders, sealing off downtown streets to traffic in order to better pursue their quarry.[45] A 16 year old Soweto student arrested in the "invasion," Dumisani Mbatha, died in police custody two days later. At his funeral and those of several other student victims in October, thousands of mourners congregated singing freedom songs, only to be met by police determined to disperse what they saw as political demonstrations being held in defiance of a ban on outdoor meetings. What would otherwise have been emotional but nonviolent events turned into bloody confrontations as police fired on funeral crowds, provoking new outbursts of rioting. By the last week of October, the toll of those killed in the unrest since June 16 stood officially at 377.[46]

The Tide Ebbs

At the height of September's confrontations in Cape Town, police began

not difficult for police to convince the hostel dwellers that young troublemakers needed to be taught a lesson. Students had made no attempt to explain or justify the stay-aways or the campaign against Bantu education to the largely migrant "bachelor" population of the Soweto hostels, nor had any apologies been made to them for the destruction of the municipal beerhalls which were a center of their social life. Even in the best of times, there were class tensions between the settled urban residents of South African townships and the less sophisticated semi-urbanised contract workers who made up the majority of inmates in the dreary barrack-like hostels of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town. Once confrontations had occurred between student strike enforcers and unsympathetic hostel-dwellers trying to go to work during the first stay-away, the events of August 24 were simply a case of tinder waiting for a spark.

The student leadership, braced for transition after a secret dash over the Botswana border by Mashinini on August 23, now also faced the urgent need to improve communications with Soweto's adult population. By shifting its venue from school to school, the SSRC was managing to convene a quorum approximately once a week and thus to keep its lines of contact open to students, and through them, by verbal means, to parents.[37] After the hostel clashes, however, leaflet communication assumed both a new importance and tone. The sometimes didactic language of earlier SSRC strike flyers (for example, **Document 14**) shifted to a more straightforward appeal for unity and cooperation from all workers, including hostel dwellers (**Document 15**). Through older allies in SASO and the BPC, indirect contact was made with representatives of Inkatha who at that stage also opposed the manipulation of Zulu migrants by the police.[38] Meetings in several Soweto hostels were convened, and the reasoning behind work stoppages explained. By September 13-15 when the SSRC staged a third well supported three day stay-away, most hostel dwellers joined in the strike, even taking it upon themselves in some cases to beat up their fellow hostel-dwellers who declined to participate.

Just when black students in Johannesburg began successfully drawing older generations into the uprising, unrest was also spreading spontaneously to new regions of the country. Diffused more by media coverage and word of mouth than by any coordinated effort on the part of students, news of the events of mid-June in Soweto had touched off sporadic demonstrations and arson attacks on schools and government buildings in townships scattered across all four provinces.[39] The country remained largely calm through July, but by early August when schools reopened after the winter break, many students had resolved to add their voices to the Johannesburg protests, generally imitating the tactics of placard marches, targetted vandalism, and school boycotts to express rejection of Bantu education. Secondary school students formed local SRCs to lead the protests. On August 2, students at the University of the Western Cape launched a class boycott campaign which threw the campus into turmoil for several months and helped to ignite a spirit of revolt in Coloured secondary schools throughout the Cape peninsula.[40] African secondary students, who were far fewer than Coloureds in the Cape Town area, also began mobilizing, and on August 11 they staged marches in the townships of Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu, the last of which ended in disorder and a police assault in which 16 demonstrators died. By late August, arson attacks, the stoning of buildings and vehicles, school disruptions and police shootings were occurring on an almost daily basis in both African and Coloured townships around Cape Town, as well as in towns scattered through the eastern and northern Cape, Transkei, the Orange Free State, and Transvaal. The only major region that remained relatively unaffected was Natal, where those protests and incidents that did occur were not met with the violent police responses which were the principal cause of bloodshed and escalating confrontation elsewhere.[41] In rural areas countrywide, police reported a rising incidence of unexplained fires on white farms and at sawmills, while a mysterious veld fire in mid-September touched off an explosion at a dynamite factory in Modderfontein.[42]

Once militant protests gathered momentum in the western Cape in early August, schooling was disrupted and dozens of confrontations occured between students and police.

experimenting with a strategy of mass arrests to break the momentum of the uprising. On a single day, September 10, police detained almost 200 people in the simmering African and Coloured townships of the eastern Cape, and four days later, a house-to-house sweep in Alexandra township in northern Johannesburg netted more than 800 alleged "agitators" and helped to break Alexandra's support for the stay-away of September 13-15. By October similar methods were being applied in Soweto as police sought to intimidate members of the SSRC and capture its leadership core. In a raid on Morris Isaacson High School the morning of October 22, police detained all the teachers and students present -- a mere 78 people under the irregular conditions then prevailing in Soweto's schools -- purportedly as suspects in connection with petrol bomb attacks on the houses of black policemen. The number of trials of students on charges of public violence rose steadily, while others who were suspected of being ringleaders or of having connections to political organizations were detained for interrogation under provisions of the newly enacted Internal Security Act. As the repression intensified, what in the early stages of the uprising had been a mere trickle of young people fleeing to sanctuary in neighboring countries by November had become a flood.

In Soweto, where Khotso Seatlholo, an 18 year old final year student at Naledi High School, had replaced Mashinini as head of the SSRC, October was a month of shifting tactics as three new national campaigns were promoted to mark a period of mourning for the dead. The squandering of money on liquor was the first new target; consumer spending during the Christmas holidays was the second. Shebeens--illegal township bars--were ordered to close or face student wrath, and adults were asked to forego holiday festivities and gift-giving as a sign of solidarity with those who had suffered death, detention, or victimization during the year (**Document 18**). Soweto shebeen proprietors tried bargaining with the SSRC for a compromise, but most fell into line. One establishment that refused to shut down was partially destroyed in a dynamite blast in late November. Cape Town shebeens proved less cooperative, and dozens were wrecked in early October by squads of youthful enforcers who smashed their merchandise in the streets. An SSRC call for a November 1-5 stay-away in Johannesburg (**Document 19**) was largely ignored by workers, but as Christmas approached the consumer boycott was widely observed, and even the National Professional Soccer League agreed to limit its schedule of games as a gesture of mourning. In Cape Town, student determination to destroy beerhalls and shebeens had angered African migrant workers in the townships' huge single-sex hostel complexes, and in the holiday season, tensions rose and eventually boiled over as migrants, abetted by the police, attacked residents and their houses, leaving 26 dead over Christmas weekend. In a statement that was quickly banned, the Ministers' Fraternal of Langa, Gugulethu and Nyanga enumerated the injustices which had led to the confrontations in Cape Town, and invoked the subversive biblical injunction for Christians to "obey God rather than men" (**Document 20**).[47]

The third national campaign initiated by the SSRC was a boycott of all end-of-year exams as a gesture of mourning and a symbol of the rejection of Bantu education (see Documents 16 and 17). Student opinion was far from unanimously in favor of a boycott, and in many parts of the country exams proceeded on schedule, despite scattered disruptions as some students used intimidation tactics to force others to comply with the protest. But in the core regions of organized student militance -- the Reef, Pretoria, Cape Town and the eastern Cape -- the boycott was widely observed, leaving the heavily overburdened African school system with the prospect of record numbers of students having to repeat a year in 1977. When school officials proposed that those who had boycotted in November 1976 be allowed to sit make-up exams in February and March 1977, the SSRC was caught in the dilemma embodied in so many aspects of African life: to accept the hated "half loaf" dispensed by the apartheid system, or proudly starve. For each individual, the choice lay between sacrificing personal ambitions and disappointing the expectations of parents on the one hand, or living with the guilt of being declared a sell-out by one's peers on the other. After a confusing period of sending out conflicting signals, the SSRC left the decision to individuals, and retreated to a low-profile position for the early months of the new year. In January, Seatlholo fled to Botswana after being

wounded by police gunfire in a car chase, and was succeeded as SSRC chairman by Daniel Montsitsi, who had been a final year student at Sekano Ntoane High School.

The sense of defeat and division surrounding the exams boycott marked the low point of student prestige in a year which had otherwise witnessed an extraordinary inversion of past patterns of black leadership as parents deferred to their children for political guidance and motivation. Combined with the poor popular response to the November 1-5 stay-away, the exam debacle suggested a clear need for student leaders to revise their tactics and search for more achievable goals lest the momentum of the revolt continue to ebb. Student spirits were still high, and as a collective force, students remained potentially mobilizable countrywide since most had returned to school by early 1977 despite the lack of any substantive improvements. The government changed the name of the Bantu Education Department to the Department of Education and Training in 1977, and announced that textbooks would become free by 1979. In most immediate respects, however, school conditions had become worse because of the resignation of many teachers, the high number of students repeating, and the widespread damage to school buildings. In Soweto and to varying degrees in other townships where SRCs had formed during 1976, student organization remained intact despite the removal or flight of many individual student leaders. In Soweto, a rudimentary structure of SSRC subcommittees functioned to deal with transport, "conscientising," the production of leaflets, and the forging of links with other regions. Dreams of quick revolutionary solutions had faded and been replaced with a working list of "major priorities" that included the scrapping of Bantu education, the release of students still in detention, the abolition of all government controlled "puppet bodies" such as Urban Bantu Councils and ethnic school boards, and the initiation of a national convention to negotiate South Africa's future.[48] This last aim, poignantly discussed in **Document 21**, was regularly dismissed with contempt by the Vorster government, but had been proposed over many years by liberals as a solution for the country's problems .

Where collaborators were concerned, the SSRC had fought a long, low-intensity campaign of insult and criticism aimed at the ineffectual Soweto Urban Bantu Council, a body already held in low esteem by the public at the time the uprising began (See Chapter 8). Rioters had targetted the pretentious UBC office building from the first day of the revolt, and by September a number of UBC members were threatening to resign out of frustration at the council's unpopularity, which they attributed to the fact that its powers were purely advisory, and its advice was usually ignored.[49] The SSRC took the view that the entire UBC should resign and be replaced by a legitimate representative body -- one more like the BPA -- chosen by Soweto residents. Disregarding the debates between the UBC and its critics, the West Rand Administration Board decided in April 1977 that from May 1, Soweto rents would go up, and that the rises would be unusually large due to WRAB's loss of revenues from the burnt-out municipal beerhalls. The decision came as a gift to the SSRC, which was looking for a way to breathe life into its campaign against collaborators. It soon became evident that the UBC members had known of the coming rent hikes and had done nothing to inform residents or mobilize them to fight the increases; the UBC could thus be blamed for the hikes, and given an ultimatum to resign (**Document 22**). On April 27, what started as a peaceful and police-sanctioned march through Soweto by several thousand students protesting the rent increases, turned into a melee when marchers began stoning the UBC headquarters. The Administration Board nervously suspended the increases, and the SSRC scored a victory which restored its earlier prestige. Further demonstrating its power to muscle opponents aside, the SSRC through a combination of public shaming and anonymous threats, succeeded by the first week of June 1977 in forcing all leading members of the UBC to resign, leaving the government no choice but to officially suspend the already defunct body. Soweto's 26 ethnic school boards were targetted next, and plans laid for a campaign to force the resignation of black policemen.

But the flame of the revolt was sputtering out. The possibilities for mass action by unarmed crowds had become constrained by a combination of police controls and a

growing realism among students about the costs and benefits of such tactics. As the emotional first anniversary of June 16 approached, police swoops netted Montsitsi and several dozen other Soweto student activists. Plans for the commemoration proceeded nationwide, and despite a spate of violent incidents, including two days of police-student confrontation in Uitenhage in the eastern Cape which left ten dead, most black communities held relatively peaceful memorial services, supported by a partial closure of schools, shops and offices. ANC underground pamphleteers exploded a pamphlet bomb in downtown Johannesburg on the evening of June 15. Eight days later, the SSRC, now under the leadership of Trofomo Sono, an eleventh grader at Madibane High School, staged a second successful "invasion" of central Johannesburg, massing about 500 protesters at John Vorster Square security police headquarters to demand the release of student detainees. Police baton-charged the demonstrators and arrested 146; one youth was shot dead in simultaneous demonstrations in Soweto. On the same day, June 23, parliament put old wine in new bottles by approving legislation to replace Urban Bantu Councils with new-look Community Councils. The demise of the Soweto UBC -- the uprising's last major shock to the apartheid system -- had left the government undeterred in its resolve to operate through bureaucracies of black collaborators; there was simply no other practical method to administer the country's huge rightless majority. But the prospect that blacks would eventually come to accept this "indirect rule" arrangement was as dead as the uprising's martyred children.

Protest or Challenge?

It is not inconceivable that the uprising might have caused the entire ediface of apartheid to crumble had the white government been more deeply divided about what to do in the face of its deteriorating legitimacy, and had blacks been better organized to sustain pressure on the system. In the event, the balance of forces, though inching towards parity, still firmly favored the white state, buttressed as it was by a loyal and well financed military and police establishment, a supportive electorate and business class, and a bloc of international trading partners less concerned about South Africa's domestic politics than about its significance as a minor outpost in the Cold War.

Nevertheless, the uprising created the most acute political crisis faced by the government since the 1960 Sharpeville emergency. Realizing that the revolt posed no short run threat to its control of the state, the National Party adopted a hardline stance from the outset, never publicly conceding that the crisis might require any reconsideration of the fundamentals of its policy. There was in fact "no crisis" at all, Vorster declared in a widely quoted speech at Springs in late August 1976. Although occasional adjustments might be needed in the implementation of particular policies, he said, no South African should have any doubt about the moral or practical soundness of the course the government was pursuing. According to National Party cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and sundry pro-government experts who came forward to offer explanations to the Cillie Commission and elsewhere, the township disturbances were not the result of government policies, but were caused by agitators, *tsotsis*, unpatriotic elements in the English press who sought to incite discontent, and "confusion" regarding the school language issue caused by "poor communication." One Nationalist MP accused the parliamentary opposition of complicity in the revolt on the grounds that they claimed to have known that an explosion was imminent but did not make their information available. Vorster in a parliamentary address hinted darkly about a conspiracy of "certain organizations and persons, working together to achieve . . . obvious objectives."[50]

Behind the rhetorical facade of righteousness and unanimity, however, the uprising dramatically sharpened the festering conflicts within the National Party regarding the direction of "separate development." The party's rightwing favored making no concessions to liberal or foreign opinion, regardless of the country's growing isolation

from international trade, investment, and sport. Party realists, backed to varying degrees by the Afrikaner establishment in big business, the media, academia and the Broederbond, recognized that if the country's isolation were to persist and worsen, the economy would eventually collapse from the combined forces of population growth, unemployment, and a failure to attract new capital and technology. To prevent the further erosion of the country's international position, particularly after the calamitous publicity generated by the uprising, it was obvious to the realists that major repairs to South Africa's battered image would be necessary. Inevitably, reforms in the apartheid system would be required to achieve this as well as to cool black discontent. Coloured solidarity with Africans, however fleeting in its manifestations during the uprising, was worrisome and clearly required tactical concessions that would reinforce fragmentation along racial lines. The problem for the National Party was how to garb reforms and concessions so that the conservative all-white electorate would see them as cost-free, *verkrampte* leaders in the party would accept them as consistent with past policy, and enough blacks would be seduced by them to enable South Africa to project a new international image of itself as ruled by a legitimate government standing for democratic principles and opportunity for all.

This was an impossible mission, but it was to take another decade of decline and another uprising -- broader, more sustained, and more economically catastrophic -- for its futility finally to be impressed on the inner core of the National Party leadership. In the meantime, despite the shedding of its rightwing which broke away to form the Conservative Party in 1982, the party continued to cohere around the fundamentals of "grand apartheid" first conceived by Verwoerd: the creation of "independent" black ethnic mini-states, the eventual designation of all Africans as "foreign," the continued relegation of Coloureds and Indians to subordinate political status (despite their incorporation in 1984 into a tricameral parliament under a new constitution), and most importantly, the granite determination never to accede to the principle of one-person-one-vote in a unified South Africa. The uprising of 1976-1977 made no appreciable dent in the regime's pursuit of this basic blueprint. Instead, its response to the revolt was to intensify the search for new divide-and-rule tactics at home, and new maneuvers to improve its image abroad. The revolt, as Kane-Berman observed at the time, was a turning point at which no turn was made--at least not by the government.[51]

It was among blacks that the revolt decisively altered both the pace and the direction of change in South Africa. In the decade preceding the uprising, Africans had registered enormous gains in potential power. Their economic leverage as consumers and skilled workers had grown tremendously, although it remained unrealised because of a lack of organization and the unrecognized status of African trade unions. In terms of international public opinion, the National Party government had already lost the moral high ground to the worldwide anti-apartheid movement, to the point where all that stood between Pretoria and the onset of a serious drive for economic sanctions in the West was a delicately nurtured public relations campaign, aimed at conservative opinion and designed to project an image of South Africa as a stable society earnestly seeking just solutions to its difficult problems. Politically, as we have seen, thousands of members of the youth and student generation had already been touched to one degree or another by the psychological and semantic transformations introduced by black consciousness. Among them was a small but very militant element who had distanced themselves totally from the fear and defeatism afflicting the adult generation, and were primed for action. Though weak when measured against the task of ousting the National Party government, these youthful activists had acquired a level of self-confidence and organizational and leadership skill that put them a quantum leap beyond their parents' generation. Their ability to disseminate propaganda and to repeatedly bring large crowds of demonstrators into the streets was impressive; so was their physical courage in the face of brutal police methods. Yet their inexperience, and the superficiality of their knowledge about mass struggles of the past, meant that their ability to strategize was underdeveloped. They were a daring cadre of lieutenants without senior officers, a Red Guard without a Mao Zedong. Their energies could not be poured into any existing legal organizations where a

more seasoned and strategically sophisticated leadership was already in place, because by 1976 the government's campaign of repression had insured that no such organizations were free to operate. For these young militants and the thousands of their peers who became highly politicized during the events of 1976-77, the uprising itself became a crash course in political reality, a harsh lesson in confrontation which, while failing to topple South Africa's rulers, vitally strengthened the forces challenging the established order.

Had the exiled liberation movements been far more advanced in the development of underground networks and military capabilities before 1976, they might have been able to ride the wave of student anger to create a level of chaos and bloodshed sufficient to prompt either foreign intervention or a move by whites toward negotiation. But their operations inside South Africa were still in an embryonic stage when the violence of June 16 erupted. A handful of white members were producing the ANC leaflets that began appearing in 1970. A small number of older activists who had been released from Robben Island in the early 1970s were starting to organize underground ANC and PAC units. Both of the older movements tried to insert members from their own fledgling undergrounds into the black consciousness movement, and to recruit people who were already active in its constituent organizations (see Chapter 2).[52] By 1975, the leadership of NAYO and SASO had become ANC-oriented, while PAC had made inroads into the BPC. The steady exodus continued of young people crossing into the neighboring states with the goal of joining the movements outside (see Document 6), but the number of new recruits involved in underground activities within South Africa was small, probably numbering no more than 200 countrywide.[53] By June 1976, guerrilla attacks had not yet begun, nor had caches of weapons been accumulated.

The outbreak of violence in Soweto took the leaders of the underground liberation movements by surprise. Despite the restrictions under which they lived and their need to exercise extreme caution, the leaders of the ANC in Johannesburg--Joe Gqabi, Martin Ramokgadi, and Elliot Shabangu--were able to establish contact with members of the Soweto student leadership fairly early in the uprising. Shabangu's nephew, Super Moloi, was one of a number of highly politicized students close to the nerve center of the SSRC. Once contact had been made, however, the material resources which the underground ANC could offer to the SSRC's would-be revolutionaries were disappointingly meager. The students were developing their own contacts for the printing and distribution of leaflets, the borrowing of automobiles, and the collection of funds; the Black Parents Association and later the South African Council of Churches were taking charge of welfare functions for families affected by the violence. The ANC had little to contribute beyond a measure of logistical support for students wishing to leave the country. On a non-material level, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the SSRC leadership may have been influenced in its tactics, targets, or ideas by discussions with ANC veterans. The language of SSRC leaflets strongly reflects black consciousness influence and no obvious effort to project the ANC's particular type of nonracial nationalism. Montsitsi in later years recalled being urged to target the UBC by Gqabi, Shabangu, and Winnie Mandela (who had been unbanned in 1975 and had established herself as a supporter of student activists, and of black consciousness, even before becoming a leader of the Black Parents Association in the week after June 16). It was unlikely that students needed urging in this direction, however, because they had already spontaneously demonstrated their rage against state-sponsored institutions from the first day of the June rioting. Perhaps more significant was Montsitsi's recollection that ANC veterans advised that once UBC members agreed to resign, the SSRC should be conciliatory toward them, rather than adopting a vindictive attitude.[54] Such tactical moves added to the SSRC's reputation for maturity and moderation.

There is no evidence, however, that the opinions of the ANC exterted any more influence on the SSRC leadership than the advice and assistance offered by other allies, including Drake Koka of BAWU (who assisted in producing the SSRC's stay-away leaflets) and Beyers Naude, Cedric Mayson and other whites in the Christian Institute and the South

African Council of Churches (who assisted the SSRC financially). So large was the mass of Soweto's student population, and so coherent and effective its leadership by comparison with other organized black groups, it was only a matter of time before popular adulation led to the SSRC being spoken of as Soweto's "shadow government" -- a self-image its leaders were not inclined to trade in for the status of junior partner in an alliance with any other group, particularly one whose capability to take on the enemy had turned out to be considerably less impressive than students had initially hoped or imagined. Witnesses testified at the trial of Gqabi and Ramokgadi in 1977 that at a December 1976 meeting between Khotso Seatlholo and Naledi Tsiki, a member of the ANC who had been trained as a guerrilla in the Soviet Union, Tsiki invited the SSRC to form a working relationship with the ANC, but that Seatlholo refused on the grounds that the SSRC wanted to retain its autonomy.[55] It was agreed, however, that SSRC members were free to join the ANC as individuals, which indeed some by that time had already done. For several months before his arrest on December 31, 1976, Gqabi conducted classes in Marxist-Leninist philosophy for an intellectual sub-group within the SSRC, some of whom were recruited to the SACP as well as to the ANC. A second SSRC grouping -- the so-called "suicide squad" -- which initially specialized in petrol bomb attacks, late in 1976 converted itself into an ANC unit, carried out a number of acts of sabotage including the bombing of the defiant Soweto shebeen mentioned earlier, and was becoming involved in the recruitment of fighters to leave the country when its members were arrested on the same night as Gqabi.[56]

Post mortem analyses of the uprising, particularly from critics on the left, faulted the Soweto student leaders, and by implication other urban SRCs, for their inability to liaise collectively with black workers in any way other than through pamphleteering. Even in their stay-away leaflets, critics noted, students made little reference to concerns specifically affecting workers. If ANC or Communist Party veterans advised students to make contact with working class leaders or place a more pointed emphasis on worker grievances, it appears to have made little or no impact on the SSRC's strategists. Reflecting on the uprising in later years, Morobe agreed that students had no notion of how to organize workers, but he also pointed out that given the conservatism of the Trade Union Council of South Africa to which almost all existing black unions were then affiliated, black workers themselves had no identifiable vanguard of politically progressive leaders with whom students could have established a working relationship.[57] It could perhaps be argued that the students' use of the stay-away as a tactic in 1976 was deficient because, unlike general strikes of indefinite duration, the stay-away serves a revolutionary purpose only if it is used as a device for the long term building of worker organization and worker consciousness -- purposes not encompassed in the SSRC's thinking.[58] In the end, however, the political consciousness of black workers, like that of all blacks, sharpened significantly as a result of the drama and the traumas of the uprising, such that in its aftermath the pace of organization among workers accelerated rapidly (see Chapter 7).

Just as it is ahistorical to argue that students missed an available opportunity to forge a worker-student alliance in 1976, it is also inaccurate to characterize the uprising as merely focussed around grievances relating to education, important as these were in initiating and fuelling the rebellion.[59] Attacks, both planned and spontaneous, against government facilities and collaborators, demonstrations against the September 1976 visit of American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and the political language of most student leaflets and statements, all indicate that student leaders saw their activities as political and as directed toward fundamental and not merely reformist changes in the apartheid system, and that they hoped to direct the sometimes unfocussed anger of their peers at political targets. The tactics they chose tended to be limited in imagination, and did not reflect any sophisticated revolutionary drive to build alternative institutions, create "liberated zones," or subvert the security forces -- objectives which in any case would have required far more time and greater capability than students could muster acting alone in 1976. Nevertheless, there was a clear insurrectionary spirit to the revolt as it unfolded following the unplanned rioting of June, and this spirit fanned

diffuse hopes and expectations of greater revolutionary action to come, attitudes which contributed to intense racial polarization in the aftermath of the uprising.[60]

In the short run, it was evident by mid-1977 that the government had come out on top in the township confrontations. The school system did not appreciably improve, and amelioration of township conditions occurred very slowly where it occurred at all.[61] Urban Bantu Councils were scrapped but replaced with similar bodies called Community Councils. Rent hikes were postponed in Soweto but eventually imposed. The term "separate development" was replaced in official discourse by "plural development" and the Department of Bantu Affairs changed its name to the Department of Plural Relations, a ploy long familiar to Africans (**Document 23**). Despite the obvious discomfort which the revolt had inspired in high places, day to day existence in the townships, with all its deprivations, controls and indignities, continued much as before.

At the subjective level, however, the uprising brought momentous developments in popular awareness. It created heroes, martyrs, and -- most significantly -- prison graduates for a new generation, and with them a new political consciousness and sophistication. Students in every major urban area and even in remote communities, and parents through their children, were affected by the revolt and drawn to reflect on the reasons for its ups and downs, the tactics of its leaders, and the responses of the authorities and of whites generally to the challenges it posed. Why did so many die? Why did the uprising fail to change the government's approach? What could have made it succeed? Could South Africa achieve change only through war like Mozambique, Angola, and Rhodesia, or could the system be brought down through unarmed action like the uprising but on a larger scale? For many activists the obvious solution was to take up arms; others put priority on political organization. Some in the former group held to a belief in quick and apocalyptic scenarios of revolution, but many who had become seasoned in the events of 1976-77 recognized the possibility that their political commitment might have to carry them through a long and taxing war of attrition fought on multiple fronts.

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates a document which is not reproduced in this volume but can be found in the Karis-Gerhart Collection

[1] Information for this section has been drawn from the documentary records of the organizations mentioned, and from conversations with Biko (October 1972), Tebogo Mafole (March 1992), Tom Manthata (June 1990), Amos Masondo (July 1989), Daniel Montsitsi (July 1989), Murphy Morobe (May 1991), Kehla Mthembu (March 1989), Marti Mueller (November 1971), Gugile Nkwinti (July 1989), Jackie Selebi (March 1989), Victor Sifora (October 1972), Stone Sizani (July 1989 and May 1990), and interviews conducted by Victoria Butler in February 1988 with Bheki Langa, Billy Masetlha, and "Lerumo Feta" [Thula Nkosi?]. Inter-generational relationships among urban Africans are discussed in Ellen Hellmann, "Social Change Among Urban Africans" in Heribert Adam, ed., *South Africa: Sociological Perspectives* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), Mia Brandel-Syrier, *"Coming Through": The Search for a New Cultural Identity* (Johannesburg: McGraw Hill, 1978), and Beryl A. Geber and S. P. Newman, *Soweto's Children: the Development of Attitudes* (New York: Academic Press, 1980). Jonathan Hyslop, "Food, Authority and Politics: Student Riots in South Africa, 1945-1976," *Africa Perspective*, 1, 3/4, June 1987, pp. 3-42, considers the tradition of rebellions against authoritarianism in black schools.

[2] For example, see Document 5, Chapter 5 (SASO 1972 GSC minutes), Resolution 24/72

[3] Joseph Molokeng in *S v Molokeng* (the NAYO trial), as reported in the *Rand Daily Mail*, May 6,

1976.

[4] This figure is derived from data in Sue Blignaut, *Statistics on Education in South Africa, 1968-79* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1981), and *A Survey of Race Relations 1975* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1976), p. 220.

[5] See Document 5, chap 5 (SASO 1972 GSC minutes), Resolution 43/72 regarding the banning of the Junior African Students Council (JASC) at Inanda Seminary.

[6] Manthata later became a part-time degree student at the University of South Africa and was elected vice president of SASO in January 1974. He was among the founders of the Black People's Convention in 1972, and later served on the Committee of Ten in Soweto. Many activists of the 1970s and 1980s were among his former students at Sekano Ntoane, including Cyril Ramaphosa, Ishmael Mkhabela, Lybon Mabasa, Daniel Montsitsi, George Wauchope, Amos Masondo and Faith Matloapane.

[7] *Weekend World*, July 4, 1971

[8] Report on SASO's Executive Council meeting, Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre, 1-8 December, 1971*. It was reported that Harry Nengwekhulu had given a talk at Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto in late 1971, and that efforts were being made, still unsuccessfully, to enroll Indian and Coloured high school students in ASM.

[9] Of course many young Africans shied away from politics not necessarily out of fear, but because their lives were focussed on other pursuits. In the April 1973 *SASM Newsletter*, for example, two SASM activists describe attending a "hippie gig" at Mofolo Hall in Soweto for the purpose of studying how the black hippie sub-culture of the time, in which peace, drugs, and love, including interracial sex, were central, might be infiltrated and politicized. The SASM students were outraged that some male hippies bartered their girlfriends to white university students in exchange for hard drugs, a practice SASM vowed to "exterminate." The hardcore hippies might be unreachable, the SASM researchers concluded, but their larger following of hangers-on were not beyond redemption because notwithstanding their "love" ethos, their dislike for whites was as great as the next person's. Nthanyane Maaga and Xola Nuse, "Report on a Hippie Fact-Finding Mission," *SASM Newsletter*, April 1973, pp. 5-8*.

[10] The Healdtown trial, *S v Ndukwana and others*, took place in the Grahamstown Supreme Court between June and September 1976. The five defendants, aged 19 to 22, were sentenced to terms ranging from five to ten years for "terrorism." Stone Sizani, later a leader of the United Democratic Front, was one of the five convicted students and served five years on Robben Island.

[11] From a short statement, "Whites in South Africa as Oppressors"* by a student forced to testify for the state in the Healdtown trial.

[12] [Daniel] Sechaba Montsitsi, "Lessons From 1976," in *Beyond Reform: The Challenge of Change. Speeches presented at the NUSAS July Festival held at UCT, July 1983*, p. 40*.

[13] Brooks and Brickhill in *Whirlwind Before the Storm* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1980), p. 88, and conversation with Morobe (May 1991) who mentioned Kwa Mashu. Morobe, who was a key activist in SASM in Soweto at this time, said that SASM aspired to be national, but never actually succeeded in operating nationally, mainly because of lack of money.

[14] Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 88

[15] Government-controlled channels using English and Afrikaans began operation in January 1976; programs in African languages were introduced subsequently. In the early 1980s, broadcasting began from "independent" Bophuthatswana ("Bop TV"), introducing material unsanitized by the

censorship of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The language issue aside, it is possible that the advent of television -- like the introduction of the popular picture magazines *Drum* and *Zonk* a quarter of a century earlier -- may have stimulated a sense of relative deprivation among Africans by accentuating their tendency to compare their own status and life styles to those of people depicted in the mass media.

[16] Background on the controversy over Afrikaans-medium instruction, as well as on the Soweto uprising more generally, can be found in Brooks and Brickhill; Baruch Hirson, "Language in Control and Resistance in South Africa," *African Affairs,* 80, 319, April 1981; Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash, the Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1979); Jonathan Hyslop, "State Education Policy and the Social Reproduction of the Urban African Working Class: the Case of the Southern Transvaal 1955-1976," *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 14, 3, April 1988, pp. 472-75; John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978); and South African Institute of Race Relations, Annual Surveys and *South Africa in Travail: The Disturbances of 1976/77* (Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1978). In exploring the linguistic foundations of African nationalism in South Africa, it is important to note the absence of a single unifying indigenous language around which Africans (three-quarters of the country's population) could rally. Tsietsi Mashinini, the most prominent of the student leaders of the 1976 uprising, is said to have whipped up audiences by reciting from Wordsworth's [CHECK. . . Tennyson?] "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (Cillie Commission testimony, p. 4962). The use of a foreign language (English) as a lingua franca among politicized Africans helps in part to explain the underdeveloped cultural dimension of African nationalism, as well as the tendency for African leadership to be disproportionately drawn from the most educated strata of society. Hirson's 1981 article looks at the historical debates within the South African left about whether promotion of South Africa's Bantu languages should be considered politically desirable, particularly in light of the National Party's use of these languages as a means to fragment the black majority.

[17] Average annual state expenditure per pupil in 1975-76 was R42 for Africans and R644 for whites. In 1972, African teachers earned "46 per cent of the salaries paid to whites in similar posts with similar qualifications." Kane-Berman, *Soweto,* p. 187

[18] In early 1976, one school uniform cost about 35 rand ($40) and a domestic servant's monthly wage in Johannesburg was about 30 rand ($34). *Rand Daily Mail,* Feb. 14, 1976.

[19] Hirson, *Year of Fire,* p. 98

[20] Economic and social conditions prior to the Soweto uprising are discussed in Kane-Berman, *Soweto,* Hirson, *Year of Fire* and Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind.*

[21] Kane-Berman, *Soweto,* pp. 66-67. The strong opinions of township residents about these injustices are revealed in detail in the collection of police notes made at 87 public meetings in Soweto between 1970 and 1979, acquired by David Welsh.*

[22] 30 year leasehold rights were not extended to Africans in the western Cape, where the Nationalists clung to the objective of arresting, even reversing, permanent African settlement.

[23] Desmond Tutu, "Destroying a Birthright," *Rand Daily Mail,* May 1, 1976*

[24] Tutu's letter was dated May 8, and was reproduced in full in the English press on May 23 and in *EcuNews,* a publication of the South African Council of Churches, on May 26, 1976.

[25] Conversation with Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, (June 1988). Zuma, a medical student in 1975-76, recalls that her fellow students at Wentworth took little interest in the residence's newly installed TV set, except when there was coverage of South Africa's retreat in Angola, when there would be a scramble to watch and to cheer for the Angolans. Details of South Africa's military failure in Angola in 1975-76 did not emerge until early 1977, but enough had become public by March 1976

to confirm that the South African army had been repulsed by MPLA forces. The specter of communist armies advancing southward prompted wide debate among whites about whether blacks would help defend South Africa in the event of a Soviet invasion, a debate which is alluded to in Document 17. An informal poll taken by *The World* in March found black opinion running almost 5 to 1 for a "no" response, according to *Ecunews*, March 17, 1976. The debate first surfaced in the *Rand Daily Mail*, February 18, and the *Sunday Times*, February 22, 1976.

[26] Eyewitnesses later gave conflicting testimony regarding the sequence of events at the Vilakazi Street encounter. The majority saw stones thrown after the teargas and before the shots; some claimed warning shots were fired in the air, while others denied this. Testimony to the *Commission of Inquiry Into the Riots at Soweto and Other Places in South Africa* (the Cillie Commission), passim. The Cillie Commission was appointed by the government in June 1976 to investigate the causes of the violence. It heard testimony in 1976 and 1977, but did not present its findings until 1980.

[27] Brooks and Brickhill provide the most detailed account of the early days of the uprising and its course through December 1976.

[28] The Cillie Commission estimated that this number had died as a result of the unrest between June 16, 1976 and February 28, 1977. In May 1977, the Institute of Race Relations published a report which estimated that 618 had died up to that time (*Rand Daily Mail*, May 11, 1977).

[29] The May 1977 report of the Institute of Race Relations reported that at least 16 children aged ten or under were among the dead.

[30] Conversation with Deborah Mabiletsa (July 1980). A 1975 survey of the Diepkloof area adjacent to Soweto found "slightly more than one bed for every three people." (Kane-Berman, p. 53)

[31] Khuzine Ntshona (?), "Soweto," undated and unsigned draft manuscript [mid-1970s] , p. 28* The consistency of this mindset with the precepts of black consciousness is obvious. Though often characterized as "philosophical" or "ideological," black consciousness was more fundamentally a simple matter of attitude. Its aim, as put by a young witness in a 1975 political trial, was to influence both its adherents and non-adherents "so that wherever they go they should accept their blackness. . . . And that if the white people have openly demonstrated a feeling of superiority, that they should be ready to reprimand them and tell them that they are also human beings" (Xola Nuse testifying in *S v Molobi*, pp. 98-99).

[32] Of the detainees and awaiting-trial prisoners who, under one or another degree of duress, testified *in camera* before the Cillie Commission in early 1977, several made statements which implicated Winnie Mandela, a member of the Black Parents Association, in the planning of student actions. It was suggested, for example, that Tsietsi Mashinini sought her advice during his period of leadership, and that she encouraged him to favor the use violence against collaborators and the police. One witness testified that he had been tortured until he made a statement implicating Mrs. Mandela in the violence. From a legal standpoint, had the police been able to make a convincing case that she was the mastermind behind the revolt, all who participated in it might have been charged with the crime of "furthering the aims of a banned organization," the ANC.

[33] Notes of West Rand police attending "Rockville Roman Catholic Church's Meeting," August 1, 1976*

[34] Conversation with Morobe (May 1991)

[35] Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 113, and Glenn Moss, in a 1982 MA thesis on the Soweto uprising, have questioned the press characterization of the attackers as "Zulu," since only about 15% of the roughly 10,000 inmates of Mzimhlope were Zulu-speakers in 1976. However, one eyewitness

quoted in the *Rand Daily Mail* on August 25 estimated the size of the mob at 1,500, which could lend credence to the theory that the police who orchestrated the killing called for the formation of a specifically Zulu *impi* (Zulu fighting formation) to deal with the "upstart" youth of the township. Eyewitness accounts by other Africans including journalists corroborated the label, as did numerous statements by the police referring to the just grievances of the "Zulus" against their victims. The weight of evidence thus seems to favor the view that most, if not all, of the attackers were Zulu. The relatively low toll of 70 dead in the fighting (Kane-Berman, p. 113) may reflect the fact that the hostel men were armed with traditional weapons like clubs and pangas (machetes) but not guns.

[36] Gatsha Buthelezi made explicit accusations to this effect after visiting Mzimhlope hostel on August 27. Two black journalists, Peter Magubane and Gabu Tugwana, witnessed and overheard policemen interacting with the the attackers. The almost gleeful attitude of Kruger and top police chiefs following the attacks was also suggestive, as was the fact, cited in the October 1976 issue of *Drum*, that a police disinformation leaflet had been distributed in Soweto on August 22 urging workers to ignore the stay-away and to "take kieries (clubs) and sticks" to fight anybody who stopped them from going to work.

[37] The judge in the 1978-79 trial of the SSRC leadership found that "after the SSRC came into being, strategy and planning gatherings took place according to the evidence, on a regular basis approximately once a week and sometimes twice a week if a demonstration was to be planned." Judgment of J. Van Dyk in *S v Twala*, p. 95

[38] Conversation with Jackie Selebi (March 1989), who noted that serious debates preceded these efforts to work with people who were regarded as part of the "system." Buthelezi addressed a mass meeting of Soweto hostel dwellers on August 28 during which he accused police of inciting the attacks. See *Rand Daily Mail* August 29, 1976.

[39] Pro-government witnesses who testified to the Cillie Commission made statements suggesting that the revolt spread through the activities of agitators. These witnesses were not subjected to cross-examination, yet their remarks were quoted in the press as evidence. One spoke of 51 Soweto students who travelled to Natal by train to spread the uprising, another of four ringleaders at UWC who travelled to Port Elizabeth with similar intent. Percy Yutar, a prominent National Party supporter, who led the questioning before the commission, made statements to the press during the inquiry stating that "27 men in three cars" had instigated violence throughout the Transvaal (*Rand Daily Mail*, December 4, 1976, January 18 and 25, 1977). Some mild credence is leant to the agitator thesis in a report by anthropologist Harriet Sibisi who visited Natal at the height of the uprising and noted that it was significant that "the Natal schools where there were disturbances were all boarding schools with substantial numbers of Soweto children. At other township schools in Natal and at country schools which take no boarders there were no disturbances" ("Report by Dr. Harriet Sibisi on a Visit to South Africa, July 20-August 11 , 1976*).

[40] An extended discussion of this period at UWC appears in an interview by George Fredrickson with Yvonne Muthien (May 1980)

[41] Other factors contributing to the lower level of political activity in Natal may have included the absence in Natal of the compulsory Afrikaans ruling, the lesser impact of the homeland citizenship rules in a province where homeland areas were in much closer proximity to jobs in the large towns and cities, the slight improvement in wages following the 1973 Durban strikes, and the prominence of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, who left no vacuum of adult leadership into which students could move. The role of Inkatha leaders in discouraging student militance is discussed in testimony before the Cillie Commission by Leon Mellet, then a crime reporter for the *Natal Mercury*, and later revealed to be an undercover policeman (Cillie Commission testimony, pp. 4199-4207). Hirson's view put forward in *Year of Fire* that the 1976 uprising was principally inspired by the labor militance of 1973 in Natal, seems implausible in light of the relative quiescence of Natal during the student

uprising.

[42] The *Sunday Times* of September 25, 1976, reported that the Minister of Agriculture and a son-in-law of Prime Minister Vorster were among the farmers who had suffered extensive losses from fires.

[43] *Rand Daily Mail*, September 4, 1976

[44] Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 32

[45] Starkly contrasting impressions of the student marchers of September 23 were presented by the liberal *Rand Daily Mail* on September 24, which painted them as a mob of violent thugs using terror tactics, and by George Bizos, one of the lawyers who represented the 159 eventually charged with public violence, who described them as disciplined, mature and exemplary young people (Conversation with Bizos, October 1989).

[46] *New York Times*, October 24, 1976. Kane-Berman describes the October funeral incidents and other unprovoked cases of police violence, pp. 32-36.

[47] Later in January 1977 the Ministers' Fraternal issued a second document, an indictment of the police, "The Role of Riot Police in the Burnings and Killings, Nyanga, Cape Town, Christmas 1976."* This statement was also banned, but not before Rev. David Russell had circulated it to members of parliament. According to the *Sunday Times* of January 2, 1977, a third of the combined population of Gugulethu, Langa and Nyanga of 100,000 people was migrant workers, the highest proportion being in Langa "where 24,000 of the 31,500 inhabitants are men living without their wives and families in single quarters." Also see the testimony of Oscar Mpetha to the Cillie Commission, pp. 8259 ff

[48] These are set forth in an undated SSRC document, "Major Priorities (and Other Projects)"*, drafted by Wilson Twala for chairman Daniel Montsitsi in early 1977. The subcommittees of the SSRC are listed in an undated SSRC document headed "Departments"*. Both documents were among the documentary exhibits presented in *S v Twala and others* (the "Kempton Park trial," 1978-79), the trial of the student leaders of the uprising.

[49] *Rand Daily Mail* , September 4, 1976. It is interesting to note in light of the hostile relationship between the SSRC and the UBC that Tsietsi Mashinini was the nephew of David Thebehali, a prominent UBC member.

[50] Hansard, June 18, 1976, quoted by Brooks and Brickhill, p. 27. The MP who blamed the Progressive Federal Party (H. J. van der Walt of Schweizer-Reinecke) was quoted in the *Sunday Tribune*, June 27, 1976. The English press was blamed by, inter alia, I. W. Ackermann, director of the Highveld Bantu Administration Board, in testimony to the Cillie Commission reported by the *Rand Daily Mail*, October 27, 1976. M. C. Botha, the minister of Bantu Education, attributed the blow-up over Afrikaans to "confusion," presumably on the part of Africans.

[51] Kane-Berman, *Soweto* , p. 232. Kane-Berman is particularly critical of big business for exerting no pressure on the government to make a fundamental change of course (pp. 155 ff). It should also be noted that the eruption of June 16 caught the Vorster government at a moment of intense preoccupation with the crisis in Rhodesia, where a simmering guerrilla war was heating up in the aftermath of Portugal's collapse in neighboring Mozambique. Fearful that the Soviet Union would take advantage of the fighting in Angola, Rhodesia and Namibia to extend its influence in the region, the United States was seeking Vorster's cooperation in ending the Rhodesian war and replacing the regime of Ian Smith with a moderate majority-rule government. Vorster was caught in a political riptide in the region as well as at home; from his perspective, all the options on Rhodesia were bad, but he decided to cooperate with American aims, perhaps in return for assurances that the United States would take no steps that might worsen South Africa's economic

recession.

[52] Information on the ANC underground in this period is drawn in part from conversations with Harry Gwala (December 1989), Sibusiso Ndebele (December 1989), Nkosazana Zuma (June 1989), Murphy Morobe (May 1991), Khehla Shubane (November 1990), Daniel Montsitsi (July 1989) and the interviews of Victoria Butler with Billy Masetlha (February 1988), Bheki Langa (February 1988) and Indres Naidoo (February 1988). Among those who joined the ANC before the uprising were Diliza Mji, Nkosazana Dlamini [Zuma] , Sibusiso Ndebele, Mosima "Tokyo" Sexwale, Naledi Tsiki, Paul Dikeledi, Khehla Shubane, Amos Masondo, Joseph Molokeng, Tebello Motapanyane, Elias "Roller" Masinga, and Billy Masetlha.

[53] Howard Barrell, *MK: the ANC's Armed Struggle* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 32

[54] Conversation with Daniel Montsitsi, (July 1989). Montsitsi also recalled being taught freedom songs from the 1950s by ANC veterans. Hirson states that "it was during the height of the Revolt that the clandestine ANC . . . was able to join the students in organising some of the most important activities of the Revolt," but he offers no substantiation for this except that one ANC leaflet supported the SSRC's August 23-25 stay-away call.

[55] *Rand Daily Mail*, July 16, 1977, and court record of *S v Sexwale* (trial of "the Pretoria 12"). According to Morobe, the SSRC, or at least its inner core, had debated at great length about whether or not to affiliate to the ANC or PAC, and had decided against it (Workshop presentation, Albert Einstein Institution, 2May 4, 1991). For Tsietsi Mashinini's criticisms of the ANC from exile, see Chapter 2 . Although Mashinini's most quoted remarks occurred in January 1977, it is possible that Seatlholo in December 1976 knew of his predecessor's attack on the ANC and PAC made in the British journal *Red Weekly* in mid-October, in which he said that the older liberation movements were "extinct internally" and "as far as the struggle is concerned . . . not doing anything." Quoted in Alex Callinicos and John Rogers, *Southern Africa After Soweto* , (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 162-3.

[56] Paul Langa, the senior member of the "suicide squad," was arrested in January 1977, tried for the attacks, and sentenced to 25 years in prison. The other members of the unit, all of whom were in the inner core of the SSRC leadership although they did not hold official positions, included Mafison "Murphy" Morobe, Super Moloi, Titi Mthenjane (??), Elias "Roller" Masinga, and Billy Masetlha. Interview of Victoria Butler with Billy Masetlha (Feb 1988).

[57] Conversation with Morobe (May 1991)

[58] Glenn Moss has borrowed this argument from Rosa Luxemburg and developed it in a master's dissertation, *Crisis and Conflict: Soweto 1976-1977* , Department of History, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1982. Curiously, he does not address the problems created by the state of African trade unionism in 1976-77.

[59] A June 16 anniversary feature in the Star, June 15, 1993, for example, reasserts a common but erroneous view that "the demands of the 'class of 1976' were largely confined to educational matters, mainly the scrapping of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and free and compulsory education. But this approach changed significantly in the years following 1976, largely because students realised that they had the capacity to force the Government to make social and political changes."

[60] Attitude studies based on survey data in the post-1976 period are discussed in Lawrence Schlemmer, "Build-up to Revolution or Impasse?," in Heribert Adam, ed., *South Africa: the Limits of Reform Politics*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), 60-82.

[61] Big business took the view that Africans would be less susceptible to politicization if their

material standards of living were rising and if those with middle class aspirations were abled to satisfy their ambitions in some measure. The Urban Foundation, which was sponsored by business and embraced a philosophy of amelioration, was established in the aftermath of the uprising. After 1976 the National Party also grudgingly came to accept this philosophy, once identified with the "English"-oriented parliamentary opposition (the United Party and later the Progressive Party). The government-appointed Riekert Commission, established in 1977 to review government options regarding the future of urban African, proposed in its 1979 report that Africans with permanent ("Section 10") urban status be accorded an increasingly more privileged position than homeland Africans, presumably with a view to fostering the assumed conservative tendencies of the former.

DOCUMENTS which will accompany Chapter 6: "The 1976 Soweto Uprising"

1. "To Be or Not to Be...?" calls on teachers not to collaborate, SASM Newsletter, April 1973, 1 p

2. Programme of National Youth Seminar held at Mt Coke Hotel, KWT, 31 May-3 June, 1973: Programme, statement of aims, conference report and proposed action, [9 printed pp]

3. "The System and You" SASO Newsletter, March/April 1976 [1-2 pp]

4. Affidavit of Belinda Martin, police torture of potential witnesses in NAYO trial, July 1975, 3 pp.

5. Notes by ? giving eye-witness account of fracas at Park Station, March 18, 1976, 2 pp.

6. Letter of Healdtown student re skipping the country, 1975, in Xhosa and English, 3-4 pp

7. [Malusi Mpumlwana] "Strategies of Operation", advice to high schoolers on how to treat parents and elders, distributed at Easter 1975 conf in KWT, 1-2 pp

8. Minutes of 3rd SASM GSC, Roodepoort, May 28-30, 1976, with programme, report, and presidential speech of Vusi Tshabalala, 6-7 pp

9. Desmond Tutu, "Letter to the Prime Minister", May 8, 1976, later reproduced in press, 4 pp

10. Police notes on Mofolo (Soweto) meeting of Lebowa People's Party representatives and UBC, May 16, 1976, 1 p

11. "People of SA - The ANC Calls on You. Amandla Soweto" [June 1976], half page. Flyer

12. Report by anon African [to CI?] on public meetiong of UBC and community, Jabulani Ampitheatre (Soweto), Aug 1, 1976, 4 pp.

13. Handwritten statement by Tsietsi Mashinini, Aug 8?, 1976, 3 pp.

14. "Bantu of Alexandra..." Aug 25-26, 1976, 1 p. Flyer

15. "To All Residents of Soweto, Hostels, Reef and Pretoria...", Sept 7, 1976 (English and Zulu), 2 pp. Flyer

16. "Azikhwelwa on Monday", Sept 13, 1976, 1 p. Flyer

17. "To Town!! To Eloff!!!", Sept 23, 1976, 1 p. Flyer

18. "To: All Fathers and Mothers, Brothers and Sisters, Friends and Workers...", Oct 15, 1976, (English and 2 vernaculars), 1 p. Flyer

19. "Students Representative Council. .. " press release by Seatlholo, Oct 29, 1976, 6 pp.

20. Ministers Fraternal of Langa, Guguletu, Nyanga "Message for 1977 - To those in Authority and to White SA", Jan 1, 1977, 3 pp

21. Student testimony re "peace plan", excerpt from testimony in *S v Twala*, Nov 1978, 2 pp.

22. "Boycott on Rent Increasement", SSRC flyer by Dan Montsitsi, April 1977, 2 pp.

23. World editorial "This Pointless Name Game," July 3, 1977, half page