

South African capitalism today

In 1979 the 4.5 million whites in South Africa had an average income per head of \$7340, rather higher than the UK's. The 21 million Africans had an average income of \$610 each, rather lower than Nicaragua's.

The 2.6 million Coloureds (mixed race) and the 0.8 million Indians are closer to the poverty of the Africans than to the wealth of the whites.

In the gold mines — the foundation of South Africa's wealth — black miners' real wages did not increase from 1915 to 1970. The gap between their wages and the white miners' increased from 9:1 in 1911 to 21:1 in 1970.

Since 1970 the black miners have narrowed the gap, but it was still 5½:1 in 1982. For the whole economy the white:African wage gap was 4:1 in 1981.

Of the value added in gold-mining, in 1973, 34% went in dividends to (white) shareholders, 25% in tax to the white-ruled state, and only 16% in wages to the black miners who produced the wealth. Of the value added in manufacturing (1970) 54% went to rent and profits, 18% to white wages, and 18% to the wages of the black majority of the workforce.

The whites own industry, finance and most of commerce, and monopolise the managerial, supervisory, and highly-skilled jobs. The blacks — Africans, Coloureds, and Indians — produce the wealth and are paid miserable wages.

Many skilled jobs used to be reserved for whites by law; some, in the gold mines, still are. A law prohibits blacks supervising whites.

The vicious economic exploitation is not the worst of it, though. South Africa has a vast, elaborate structure of explicit official racism, designed to ensure that black people live not as people but as racial categories.

Schools, hospitals, buses, cafes, bars, toilets, libraries, sports fields, are all segregated, though with some exceptions now. Cities are divided into black and white areas, with Africans bundled off into squalid townships outside the main city. Until very recently sex between people of different 'races' was a criminal offence.

Since 1950 every person in South Africa has been officially branded 'Black' (or 'Bantu'), 'Coloured', 'Asian', or 'White'.

Economically, this system is designed to ensure that black people participate fully in South African society as regards producing the wealth, but not at all as regards enjoying the benefits of that wealth.

The small Coloured and Asian populations are segregated into particular areas in the cities. The African majority are supposed to live in reserves or bantustans, and to appear in the white areas only when required for work. That, at least, is the official theory, though it is not 100% effective.

As one minister put it in 1976: "The basis on which the Bantu is present in the white areas is to sell their labour here and

for nothing else".

In laws of 1913 and 1936, some 13.7% of the land area of South Africa was set aside for 'Native Reserves' (now called bantustans). About 11.9% has actually been allocated to the ten bantustans. They form a 'crazy patchwork, KwaZulu bantustan alone being made up of 44 separate bits of land.

As of 1970, every African is officially a citizen of one or another bantustan, even if he or she has never been there and has no connection with the area. Between 1976 and 1981 four of the bantustans were declared 'independent', and 7.7 million blacks — most of them living outside those four areas and allocated to them



Gold

only by South African government decree — lost their South African citizenship.

Millions of Africans have been forcibly moved into the bantustans from so-called "black spots".

Production in the bantustans is minimal, mostly confined to subsistence agriculture on badly eroded and overcrowded land. Most of their income comes from workers commuting to the 'white' areas or sending remittances back from those areas. Even with that addition, the income of Africans in the bantustans is much lower than that of urban Africans — indeed, lower than the average income for most countries in Africa.

The official theory is that all African unemployed, housewives, old people and children should live in the bantustans, and only workers — without their families — should come into the white areas. Exemptions are given only to the families of the longest-established African urban workers.

It does not entirely work, because millions of Africans — up to five million now, according to the Financial Times (March 26, 1985) — come to the 'white' areas illegally, risking police harassment and deportation. But as of 1980 official figures showed 11.35 million Africans living in bantustans and 9.65 million outside.

5.4 million Africans were wage-workers. 1.6 million of them lived in the bantustans, either commuting daily (0.7

million) or working in the bantustans (0.9 million). 1.05 million were migrants from the bantustans working in 'white' areas; 0.25 million were migrants from other countries (mostly gold-miners). 2.5 million were resident and working outside the bantustans.

Every African over the age of 16 outside the bantustans must carry a pass book, containing not only their address and resident permit but also details of their employer. If they are breaking apartheid restrictions in any way, or are unemployed ('idle Bantu'), they can be jailed or sent to the bantustan. Between 1948 and 1981 there were over 12.5 million arrests or prosecutions under the Pass Laws.

To further enforce the migrant labour system, the regime deliberately restricts the construction of family housing in the black townships outside the bantustans. Houses are massively overcrowded. In Soweto people live on average five to a room. Many workers, especially gold-miners, are housed in jail-like single-sex hostels.

The education and health systems are geared to the same philosophy. Both are racially segregated. Black education is deliberately limited to maintain the whites' monopoly of highly-qualified jobs. 5½ times as much is spent per head on education for whites as for Africans, and 48% of Africans over the age of 15 were illiterate in the early '80s — a figure similar to Zaire or Uganda.

There are six times as many hospital beds per head for whites as for blacks. Infant mortality for whites is at West European levels; for Africans, at a level similar to India and higher than Kenya.

50,000 African children die of hunger each year.

Employers are utterly reckless of black workers' safety. The death rate among black miners is six times as high as among miners in the UK.

To sustain this structure of injustice, the regime is brutally undemocratic. Only the whites, 15.5% of the population, can vote. (Coloureds and Indians were offered powerless elected assemblies last year, but most boycotted the polls). The government has wide powers to declare organisations illegal (as it has done with the ANC, the South African Communist Party, many black consciousness organisations, and most recently the black students' union COSAS); to 'ban' individuals (i.e. put them effectively under house arrest, like Winnie Mandela); to ban newspapers and meetings; and to detain people without charge.

Police torture of prisoners is common. At least 57 political detainees died in detention in 1963-83, Steve Biko and Neil Aggett only being the best-known. There were 161 other deaths (not of political detainees) in police custody in 1978 alone. Between 1974 and 1979 946 people were killed by police 'in the execution of their duties', in addition to maybe 1000 killed by police in the uprisings of 1976-7.