

The Voice That Defies De Klerk and Mandela

By BILL KELLER

WHAT white South Africans know best about the Pan Africanist Congress is its blood-curdling slogan -- "One settler, one bullet" -- and its secretive guerrilla brigade, the Azanian People's Liberation Army, which has managed with just a few clumsy terrorist attacks to awaken white nightmares of a race war.

To assuage those white anxieties, President F.W. de Klerk last week dispatched soldiers to set up roadblocks along the border of Transkei, a nominally independent black homeland suspected of providing haven for the guerrillas.

The more serious challenge of the Pan Africanist militants, however, is not to the tranquility of the white minority but to the cohesion of the black mainstream, and especially to the aspirations of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. In townships like this one, infamous for the 1960 massacre of 69 blacks by police officers, the Pan Africanist Congress is making unmeasurable but unmistakable gains with a message that is only partly about war on whites.

Ask the young Pan Africanists of Sharpeville what sets them apart from the African National Congress and the answer that comes first to their lips is not their willingness to sow disorder among whites, but their avowed devotion to order among blacks.

"High discipline!" they chant at their gatherings, and "Revolutionary discipline!" and "Serve! Suffer! Sacrifice!"

Young Pan Africanists point out that their youth affiliate has not joined A.N.C. student groups in disruptive boycotts of the public schools because, they say, education is essential to black betterment. They point out that much of the harassment of township dwellers is carried out by hoodlums claiming allegiance to the African National Congress; this includes forcing older residents to dig anti-police trenches, commandeering cars for revolutionary joy rides and extorting donations for "the struggle."

"The A.N.C. is always acting out of order," declared Peter Morake, a Sharpeville high school student loyal to the Pan Africanists. "They stop the schools for no legitimate reason. They beat people."

The refrain strikes a responsive chord in the townships, where Mr. Mandela's commitment to peace has been obscured by his inability to control his followers or to call off the street war between congress loyalists and

those of the conservative Inlitha Freedom Party.

The African National Congress is aware of its image problem. There was a telling moment two weeks ago when the congress assembled about 3,000 of its faithful here to launch a door-to-door election drive in the industrial region that holds 5 million of the country's 20 million voters.

Obed Bapela, one of the region's most savvy young organizers, began his speech in English for the benefit of reporters. Then he slipped into Zulu for the heart of his message. When you go door to door, he scolded the followers gathered on the bank of an industrial pond, don't dress like a hoodlum, don't terrify people with hoodlum slang, don't drink.

"Make sure you aren't selling the A.N.C. of the hoodlums, but the A.N.C. that is respected," he admonished.

The Pan Africanists, to be sure, have not been wholly innocent of factional carnage, nor has discipline been a hallmark of their guerrilla army. The recent attacks on innocent whites have been sloppy and indiscriminate, and the explanations for them have been contradictory and incoherent. The organization has never found a leader as compelling as their charismatic founder, Robert Sobukwe, who broke with the African National Congress in 1958 to pursue a more aggressive, black nationalist course, was arrested the following year and banned from public speaking until his death in 1978.

Enthusiasm for Blood

All the same, many young and disaffected blacks are frankly thrilled by the attacks. The graffiti sprayed along the ruined streets of Sharpeville and the T-shirts worn by the Pan Africanist faithful celebrate the wavelike terror: "Arm the students for the people's war." "Each bullet takes us forward." "Kill them."

At a Pan Africanist rally, the bombing of a crowded family steak restaurant last November is hailed as "the battle of Queenstown" and young men coolly articulate their enthusiasm for recent unsolved machine-gun attacks on white commuters driving their children to school south of Johannesburg.

"Every white in South Africa is a shareholder in the oppressors' company," reasoned Jabulani Mlotshwa, 21,



Pan Africanist Congress supporters saluting last month in Sharpeville, South Africa, on the anniversary of the massacre of 69 blacks in 1960.

one of many young blacks who are fluent in the rationalization of ruthlessness.

By comparison, they argue, the African National Congress has been too soft on whites, with its forsaking of armed struggle during negotiations, its talk of sharing power with the white minority, and its emphasis on economic stability over economic retribution.

"We don't want to be co-partners in apartheid," said one Pan Africanist here of the compromise now taking shape. "We don't want a democracy that is half-baked."

According to common wisdom and the crude evidence of pollsters, the African National Congress has a substantial head start in the elections, which are not yet scheduled but expected in about a year. The congress has a long tradition as the premier, multiracial anti-apartheid group. It has the bigger organization. It has a war chest built with foreign donations. It has an early start on voter education, focusing as much on how to vote as for whom. And it has the revered figure of its president, Nelson Mandela, whose face smiles from countless freshly mounted posters announcing: "A.N.C. is visiting your house soon."

But if the Pan Africanists can transform their black-pride message into votes, they can erode the A.N.C.'s margin of victory sufficiently to dilute its power to govern. And in the longer run, if an African National Congress victory fails to meet the expectations of blacks, the Pan Africanists will remain, a nucleus of discontents that can be turned as surely against a new black government as it is now against white "settlers."

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