

SOUTH AFRICA

The Dingaans' Day Demonstrations

THE frantic efforts of the "Nationalist" Government to preserve the Colour Bar system, involving the exploitation on imperialist lines of six million black folk in South Africa, are becoming so difficult that cabinet ministers are breaking down under the strain and exhibiting a sort of political hysteria. This is particularly the case with Mr. Oswald Pirow, the young Minister of Justice, who has been responsible for two astounding pieces of proposed legislation and for the "Durban Raid," all within six weeks.

The Durban raid involved "secret" movements of large bodies of police from Johannesburg to Durban, a staged aeroplane flight by the Minister to the scene of action, the rounding up of thousands of natives, and the imprisonment of those who had not paid their poll-tax for the current year. Tear gas bombs (with which the police have lately equipped themselves and which they were apparently anxious to test under "field" conditions) were exploded amongst amazed and harmless groups of native onlookers. Natives were compelled to take off their hats and say "Nkos" ("Master") to individual policemen. Thus did the white man demonstrate his superiority and Mr. Pirow his new-found powers as Minister of "Justice."

Actually the whole affair was merely a magnified example of incidents which are of daily occurrence in this country. The Poll Tax forms part of the forced labour system prevailing here, where natives are heavily taxed in order to compel them to work for the white farmers, industrialists and householders. It is notorious that in many cases the poll-tax of £1 per year is greater than a month's wages. In general, police are always cuffing, kicking and insulting natives while examining passes, collecting taxes and maintaining the white man's hegemony in South Africa.

The two bits of legislation which Mr. Pirow has recently drafted and which he intends to submit to Parliament when it re-opens in January are :—

- (a) An amendment to the Riotous Assemblies Act, giving him power as Minister of Justice to deport any person, native or European, not born in South Africa, who carries on political agitation among natives; to prohibit any agitator from entering any specified area; to restrain any person from attending any meeting; to prohibit any meeting; to ban any paper or other printed document circulating among natives.

(b) An amendment to the Master and Servants Act (one of the pillars of South African society) so that it will in future include the following provisions :—

- (1) a tax of £5 to be imposed on any native male between the ages of eighteen and sixty in the Transvaal and Natal who fails to do a minimum of three months' work per year (for a white employer, of course, it is understood) ; chiefs, headmen and ministers of religion are among those exempted ;
- (2) any contravention of the numerous provisions of the master and servants law in the two northern provinces may be punished by a whipping not exceeding five strokes, in addition to, or in substitution for, any punishment already provided.

Pirow's bills and his Durban raid roused a storm of fury among the native people. Numerous meetings of protest led up to mass demonstrations on Dingaan's Day (December 16).

This day is celebrated by the Dutch (Afrikaans-speaking) population, and latterly too, though to a less extent, by the British, as the anniversary of the Battle of Blood River (1838), when a small Dutch commando of Voortrekkers defeated with great slaughter, and with the loss of only a few men wounded on the white side, a Zulu army many thousands strong, thus destroying the power of the Zulu chief, Dingaan, and opening up the country to white colonisation.

As a counterblast to the "white South Africa" celebrations which are held on this day, native organisations have in a small way in recent years held rival demonstrations of their own. The League of African Rights (an organisation recently formed by the joint efforts of Communists, members of the African National Congress, I.C.U., and other native bodies, with the object of forming a common platform of minimum demands and of initiating a united struggle of the African masses against the disabilities under which they now suffer) declared Dingaan's Day to be a day of National Liberation and called for demonstrations throughout the country to popularise the demands of the League and particularly to protest against the Pirow bills.

The response of South African natives this year to the Dingaan's Day call has been excellent. Mass demonstrations were held in the towns and in the rural areas on a larger scale than ever before in the history of the native national movement. In Johannesburg over the week-end the League of African Rights held its first national conference. Delegates were present from all over the Union and plans for the liberation of the Black people of South Africa were drawn up and discussed. The mass meeting and procession in Johannesburg was attended by thousands of natives. The African National Congress and the Independent I.C.U. (Kadalie) joined forces with the Communist Party, but the Ballinger organisation held aloof—not that this made any difference, for Ballinger has no rank and file behind him.

At Durban, where Communist influence is weak and where the native leaders appear to be still suffering from the effects of Pirow's police bombs, a huge prayer meeting was held but no other form of demonstration.

In Capetown the procession was prohibited by the authorities. The natives, however, under the leadership of the African National Congress and the Communist Party, held a meeting at which effigies of Hertzog and Smuts

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were burnt. They then defied the prohibition and marched through the main streets according to programme. A clash occurred at Potchefstroom in the Transvaal, where a meeting, organised by the local branch of the Communist Party, was attacked by an armed band of Europeans. Four natives were wounded, one of whom lies at present in a serious condition. It remains to be seen what white justice will mete out to the two European "citizens" who have been arrested in connection with this affair.

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