

The Marabastad Riot, 1942

J.E.H. Grobler

*Department of History and Cultural History
University of Pretoria*

Preface

The decade of the 1940s stand out in South African history as a period of sporadic confrontations between white and black - be it as a result of labour disputes, of political action, of pure interracial clashes or a combination of various factors. Amongst the better known of those numerous incidents were the African miners' strike of 1946, the Moroka riot of 1947 and the Indian passive resistance campaign of 1946-48. The riot which occurred in Pretoria in December 1942 probably represents the best example of a confrontation in which all factors were involved. Its origin was a wage dispute; it developed into a conflict between the black labourers and the police and then into a showdown between them and a military unit, culminating in violence on inter-racial lines. It resulted in the loss of seventeen lives, lively press reports and an investigation by a judicial commission of inquiry. However, in the public mind the riot was soon virtually forgotten.

Very little has been published on the Pretoria riot. Naboth Mokgatle, who lived in Pretoria in those years and achieved prominence as trade union organiser and member of the then legal Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), provided a brief and, factually considered, rather indifferent account of the event in his autobiography.¹ Baruch Hirson used only two pages of his lengthy study on community struggles in South Africa between 1930 and 1947 to discuss the riot.² And in his essay on political organisations in Pretoria's African townships, 1940-1963, Tom Lodge mentions the Marabastad riot in only two sentences.³ One can therefore justifiably question the significance of this seemingly obscure event.

In this article it is argued that the riot and the way in which it was quelled certainly deserves more attention. At the time of its occurrence, it must be remembered, white public opinion focused largely on the Second World War, which went through a decisive phase during 1942. Domestically, the *Ossewa Brandwag* and its political battle with both the Government and the *Herenigde Nasionale Party*, seemed to whites much more important than a local riot of short duration by a few hundred blacks. Africans had a completely different experience of the event. They generally considered the riot to have been an expression of the grievances prevalent in large sections of the African working community. Whereas white public opinion seemed to adopt an indifferent attitude towards the rioters, most blacks felt gravely concerned. Indeed, the totally unprovoked and unjustifiable massacre of sixteen rioters by a military unit can never be regarded as an incidental occurrence.

Prelude

By the fourth quarter of 1942 the Pretoria Municipality had 4 469 unskilled African labourers in its employment. The majority of those labourers resided in three municipal buildings situated in Proes Street, between Cowie Street and Von Wielligh Street, in Pretoria West. Those buildings were the Municipal Hostel, the Main Municipal Compound or Tin Town. Some 560 Africans resided in the hostel and 2 300 in the two compounds.⁴ According to reports compiled in 1942 those Africans lived in unattractive surroundings. Their sleeping quarters were hopelessly overcrowded and very few additional amenities were provided. Tin Town consisted of semi-circular



Municipal Hostel.

corrugated iron huts, called tanks. Each hut was intended to house eight people. In practice twelve to a hut were often accommodated. Extreme variations in temperature were experienced in those tanks.⁵

In addition to the residents of the Municipal Compound, Marabastad in 1942 accommodated approximately 500 black families.⁶ With the exception of a handful of individuals who became involved against their will (generally speaking), those Africans are hardly mentioned in connection with the riots and were, as a group, not affected at all.

Although there were active branches of both the African National Congress (ANC) and the CPSA in Pretoria in 1942, neither seemed interested in politicising the African municipal workers. However, from about August 1942 a young but prominent member of the Pretoria-CPSA, Mike Muller, started organising the municipal workers into a trade union. The result was the establishment of the Pretoria Non-European Municipal Workers' Union, which had some 400 members by November 1942.⁷ Muller served as secretary of the Union.

On 6 November 1942 the Minister of Labour, Walter Madeley, issued a wage determination in terms of the Wage Act (Act 44 of 1937), which brought a new scale of minimum wages into operation as from 30 November 1942.⁸ In terms of the announcement the new wage scale was to apply *inter alia* to the unskilled Africans employed by the Pretoria Municipality. The Municipality, however, attempted to obtain the postponement of the prescribed date of the coming into operation of the increased wages.⁹ At least some if not the majority of the African employees of the Municipality knew about these in the daily press, but during a meeting held on 21 November, the Municipal Workers' Union read and explained the wage determination to the workers. They were assured that it would come into operation the end of that month.¹⁰ On the negative side they were told that a part of their wages would be deducted for their food and accommodation in the municipal compound. Mokgatle later recalled that the workers looked forward to the implementation of the wage determination with great excitement.¹¹ It can safely be assumed that the main objective of the single male Africans who lived in the compound, working for the municipality, was to earn as much money as they could in the shortest time. Each penny seemed to count.

In Johannesburg African employees of the Municipality went on strike on 8 December when the City Council failed to implement the wage determination when it came into effect on 30 November. That Council had also applied for exemption, but in the face of the strike withdrew its application and announced that the provisions of the wage determination would be applied immediately.¹² This was also widely reported on in the press. Not surprisingly, Africans considered it as a victory over the intransigence and parsimoniousness of white employers. From Pretoria Muller immediately wrote to the Minister

of Labour on behalf of the Non-European Municipal Workers' Union, requesting him to refuse the application for exemption of the Pretoria City Council.¹³ He also issued a leaflet announcing a public meeting in Marabastad on 12 December to discuss the exemption issue.¹⁴ At the meeting, which was eventually held on 16 December, he warned the approximately 300 black municipal employees in attendance that the "bloody bosses" (the city council) were, in effect, out to rob them of their increased wages to which they were legally entitled.¹⁵

That same evening Muller received an official letter from the office of the Minister of Labour informing him that the Minister had refused to grant the exemption requested by the City Council.¹⁶ The Non-European Municipal Workers' Union thereupon issued a leaflet claiming victory over the City Council and informing the black municipal workers that the minimum wage of 24 shillings per week had to be paid to them at once. Muller obviously expected no further trouble - on 21 December he went on vacation.¹⁷ The workers were keenly anticipating actually receiving the promised higher wages.

The Pretoria City Council was officially informed of the Minister's refusal to grant exemption only on 19 December.¹⁸ With singular obstinacy the Council persevered for another three days in its attempts to evade the wage determination. The situation remained muddled, but on 22 December the Council finally conceded defeat on the issue and decided to pay the increased minimum wages with effect from the prescribed date of 30 November.¹⁹ However, their African employees were not forthwith informed of the decision. It was only on Monday, 28 December, that J.S. Hardy, the Superintendent of Municipal Locations - who was at that time also acting manager of the Council's Native Affairs Department - instructed the Municipal Compound Manager, J.F. Botes, to call a meeting of African employees of the Municipality at the Municipal Compound for 19:00 that evening. Hardy intended to use the meeting to explain the Council's decision to the Africans. Botes duly called the meeting and that evening some 1 500 to 2 000 Africans gathered in the New Compound, situated in Proes Street opposite the Main Compound.²⁰

When Hardy did not arrive at the appointed hour, Botes sensed an irritable mood amongst the assembled Africans. In an attempt to defuse the situation, he proceeded at 19:05 to address them. His remarks were interpreted into three African languages. He talked for about twenty minutes, explaining to the Africans that the wage increases would have effect retrospectively from 30 November. He added that it would be paid when they next received their wages, early on in January 1943. The assembly of workers remained embittered. Some got the impression from what Botes said, or were interpreted to have said, that the increase would only take effect the next November. They naturally felt deceived.²¹ They were angry about the delay in payment. Botes' assurance



Main Compound.

that they would eventually receive their money, did not satisfy them. To add to their resentment Botes failed, when answering questions, to explain precisely how large the deductions from their increased scale of pay would be. When individuals in the gathering commenced shouting “we want our money now” and “he is pulling a blanket over our eyes”, Botes left the meeting.²²

The outbreak

Botes had hardly left the meeting when Hardy arrived in Proes Street at about 19:30. He met Botes and Native Sergeant Klass Baloyi of the municipal police and hastily discussed developments with them. Next he called the African workers out into the street in front of the Main Compound. Although he was a relative stranger to the workers and had no information to convey to them in addition to that already communicated by Botes, Hardy mounted a bench and attempted to address the gathering. He was frequently interrupted. There were shouts of “do not believe him, he is a liar”, and “he has come to tell us the same nonsense - they are disguising their crook-like methods”. Hardy, assisted by Botes and some six African members of the municipal police, vainly attempted to restore order. He ordered one of the policemen to blow his whistle, but this made no impression on the gathering. He instructed Botes, who was well known to the Africans of the compound, to address the gathering, but he failed to obtain a hearing. Indeed, the disorder increased rather than subsided. When shouts of “catch him, he has our money” and “tshaya” (catch) rang out, Hardy and Botes decided to retreat, thus abandoning the meeting. While the municipal police used their sticks on the crowd to clear a way to Hardy’s car, the workers started throwing stones indiscriminately. Hardy managed to reach his car uninjured and drove off. Botes and Corporal Piet Modeba of the municipal police took refuge in the Hostel. Botes eventually escaped through the back door of that building²³.

From this time onwards the overwhelming majority of the assembled Africans ran amuck. The first target of their wrath seems to have been the windows of the Main Compound building as well as those of the adjoining kitchen building and offices. They threw stones at the windows and used poles (removed from the palisade

fence surrounding the nearby clinic) or the trunks of young trees (lining Proes Street for ornamental purposes) as additional weapons. The police later alleged that some of the rioters armed themselves with axes or pieces of iron. A total of some 1 700 windowpanes were broken. The rioters furthermore assaulted other African passers-by and threw stones at the growing number of whites who, attracted by the din of shouting and breaking glass, gathered at both the Cowie Street and the Von Wielligh Street intersections with Proes Street. They even stoned motor cars passing in Von Wielligh Street and white occupied dwellings to the west of that street. Some of the whites retaliated by throwing stones at the rioters.²⁴ It is indeed possible that in some instances the whites were the first to throw stones. What is certain is that most of the whites armed themselves with sticks. There is little evidence of whites carrying fire-arms (the government having previously collected all privately-owned fire-arms as a war-measure) and there is no evidence of fire-arms being used by white civilians.²⁵

Role of the SAP

The South African Police were soon involved in the riot. Hardy, who assumed that Botes was trapped in the Compound, drove from Proes Street straight to the police station in Marabastad, where he met Detective Sergeant Otto. The latter jumped on a motorcycle and raced to the Compound, but was driven back by the rioting Africans in Proes Street who saw he was a policeman and shouted “kill the dog and go and kill the other dogs in Marabastad”. Otto returned to the Marabastad police station and phoned through a report to his superiors. A senior officer at the Central Charge Office in downtown Pretoria dispatched a detachment of eight men armed with revolvers to the scene of the riot. Immediately on their arrival at about 20:30 they moved on foot down Proes Street.

However, the stone throwing Africans drove them back too. Reinforcements arrived and the police again attempted but again failed to clear the street. Some of the policemen feared for their lives and fired their revolvers into the air and at the rioting mob. A few policemen sustained bodily injuries.²⁶ Soon after 21:00 another eight policemen armed with rifles arrived. They made a third

attempt to clear the street, and again failed. The rioters, in their anger, attacked and damaged a motorcycle left behind by the retreating policemen.²⁷

The Deputy Commissioner of Police for the Transvaal, Lt. Col. Verster, now decided to disperse the crowd by force. A detachment of some forty policemen was collected and three armoured cars were requested and arrived from the Defence Force.²⁸ Each car was boarded by a police officer who took command of that car. The crews of the cars as well as the policemen were instructed to open fire only when ordered to do so by a senior police officer.²⁹

Verster's plan of action was to disperse the crowd by a baton charge. The police would advance behind the armoured cars, which would move in first to open up a path through the crowd. There were no machine guns mounted on the armoured cars and no intention of using live ammunition. The convoy left the Central Charge Office for the intersection of Cowie and Proes Streets at about 22:00. However, things went wrong. Verster and most of the policemen arrived safely at the rendezvous, but the armoured cars drove round the scene of the rioting and ended up at the intersection of Von Wielligh and Proes Streets. By then a new element, namely a military unit, had become involved in the attempts to end the rioting - without Verster being aware of it. He and his men were, while waiting for their three armoured cars, busy ensuring that a crowd of white civilians, which had through the course of the evening congregated in Cowie Street, would refrain from joining the planned baton charge. The rioting crowd of Africans still seemed to Verster to be in an ugly mood and he saw no reason to change his tactics.³⁰

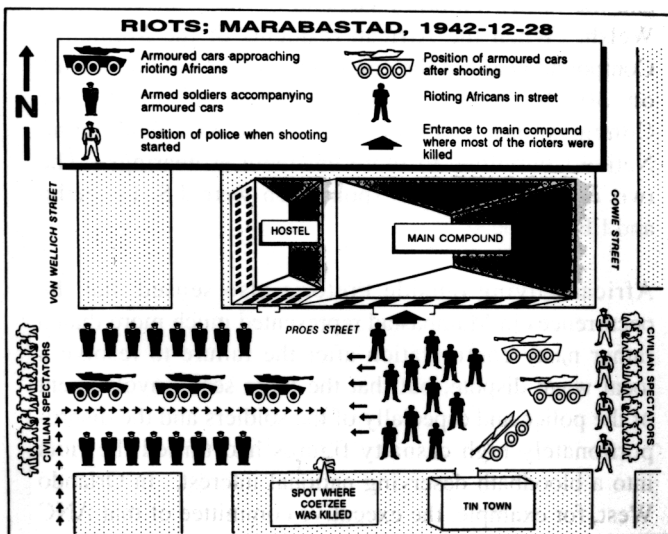
Role of the Army unit

Meanwhile at about 21:30 a white civilian, who had witnessed the rioting from Von Wielligh Street, felt so alarmed that he rushed to the Central Army Transit Depot, situated on the Pretoria Show Grounds south of Church Street less than a kilometre from Marabastad, to ask for help.³¹ He stated that he was a special policeman

and informed the officer on duty that the South African Policy urgently required the assistance of 100 armed soldiers to quell the rioting. Major Reeves, the second in command of the Depot, believed the civilian's tale and made no effort to contact the South African Police headquarters in Pretoria to ensure that military intervention was officially called for or justified. He assembled a force of four officers and eighty men, issued with service rifles, and conveyed them by troop carriers to Von Wielligh Street.

Upon arrival just before 22:00, Reeves was told by a police officer on the scene that a number of policemen were locked up in the Compound by the rioting mob, that they had run out of ammunition and were probably murdered. He believed that tale too. He could clearly see the rioting workers and by then had no doubt that intervention was justified. He lined up his men, ordered them to fix bayonets and issued them with live ammunition.³² The officers were armed with revolvers. They were preparing to advance on the rioting Africans when the three armoured cars which was supposed to be with Verster, suddenly appeared. The cars halted for approximately one minute. Although Reeves was, by his own admission, not sure what he was supposed to do, and the senior military police officer with the armoured cars was very surprised to see armed troops at the scene, no consultation took place between Reeves and the officers in the armoured cars. The latter then drove out of Von Wielligh Street into Proes Street, and while keeping to the centre of the street, moved slowly towards the rioting Africans. Reeves and his officers hastily decided to let their men move in with and on both sides parallel to the armoured cars. The soldiers were instructed not to fire unless ordered to do so by a senior officer. As they moved in, a soldier towards the rear of the force accidentally fired his rifle. Reeves moved back from the head of the force to investigate. As a result he was not at the front when contact was made with the rioting Africans, who were still in a hostile mood.³³ However, they neither threw stones at the cars and the soldiers, nor attempted to block the road bodily.³⁴

When the leading armoured car reached a point in the street approximately opposite the entrance of the Main Compound, a decisive incident took place. Corporal J.P. Coetzee, who belonged to the Central Army Transit Depot, but was off duty and coincidentally on the scene, had attached himself to the military force. He was armed only with a stick but nevertheless moved down Proes Street at virtually the head of the force. When they came into contact with the Africans, he attacked a group rioters, who were also armed with sticks. They fought back. Two officers opened fire to protect Coetzee, who himself went down. As a result general firing commenced. Some of the soldiers who joined in the firing on the Africans later admitted that they never heard an order to fire, but just fired away because the others were firing.³⁵ At least one of the police constables who were approaching the riot from the west joined in the firing.



The Africans immediately scattered. Most of them attempted to gain entry to the Main Compound. The fact that none of the Africans who were shot were found in the street itself, indicates how hasty the retreat was. Still the firing was kept up in a sporadic fashion for about two minutes. The armoured cars meanwhile drove past the entrance to the Main Compound and then turned back. All the officers, including police officers moving in post-haste from the intersection of Proes and Cowie Streets in the east, then joined forces in getting the soldiers, some of whom were standing in a half moon in front of the entrance firing into the Compound at escaping Africans, to cease firing. Although most Africans had by then scattered, a few individuals were still putting up resistance.³⁶

The round-up

The police still believed that Botes was trapped inside the compound. They were concerned about his safety and desperate to find him as quickly as possible. In order to force their entry into the compound, they used tear gas in and about the entrance and dispersed small crowds of Africans by means of baton charges. The police also cleared the streets of Africans. Their main problem at that stage was the presence of white civilians, some of whom took advantage of the fluid situation to commit assaults on Africans. Both the police and the military had their hands full to restrain the appreciable number of hooligans amongst the whites present. Many of the latter were armed with sticks and similar weapons with which they now attacked the Africans.³⁷ No white civilians were arrested, but three black soldiers were, for assaults committed on Africans near the hostel. The military unit left the scene shortly after 23:00 and the police some two hours later, after restoring order, clearing up the compound and disarming the Africans. They took possession of a variety of weapons, but no fire-arms were found.³⁸ It was never alleged that any African made use of fire-arms.

The police found a large number of dead or wounded Africans on the northern side of Proes Street, on the pavement but especially in the entrance to the Main Compound, where the bodies formed a heap. On the southern side they found the dead body of Coetzee, the dead body of an African nearby and a number of wounded Africans. Ten Africans had died instantly and six later on as a result of their wounds. At least another 59 were wounded, of whom 29 were treated in hospital. Coetzee was the only white killed. One soldier and about seven policemen received wounds - none of a serious nature.³⁹

According to post mortem reports all the Africans killed died as a result of being hit by .303 bullets similar to those fired by the standard military rifles. Seven of the injured were also hit by .303 bullets, but the rest received wounds inflicted by a variety of instruments, including bayonets. The third significant finding was that, of the 16 Africans killed, ten received their fatal wounds in the back. The fourth was that Coetzee also died as a result of



Tin Town

being hit by a bullet in the back; and the fifth that the bullet which struck him was of about .38 calibre, which was the calibre of the service revolvers the UDF officers carried and which a number of them fired during the riots that fatal evening.⁴⁰ It is almost certain that he was accidentally shot by one of those officers.

Reaction

Anger in the South African black community over the events in Marabastad immediately flared up over a wide front. Dr. A.B. Xuma, the president general of the ANC, felt justified to express his horror at the highest level. On the day after the events he wrote to the Prime Minister's Office, requesting Smuts to receive a joint deputation of the ANC and the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) for a discussion of the riots against the background of the series of strikes during that time. Smuts refused, but added that he deplored the events and that he was appointing a judicial commission of enquiry.⁴¹ That commission had to enquire into both the event and the factors leading up to it. Smuts next issued a statement in which he expressed "to the Native people on his behalf and on behalf of the Government, his deep sorrow at the tragic occurrences" of 28 December 1942.⁴²

The chairman of the commission of enquiry was Judge J.M. Murray. He was assisted by Senator W.T. Welsh and the former Attorney General of the Transvaal, A.S. Welsh. When the African residents of the Municipal Compound heard of the commission, they held a meeting on 30 December at the instance of the Native Commissioner of Pretoria, and elected a Compound Native Committee to represent them at hearings. The two Africans elected as spokesmen were J.S. Lekgetho and I.B. Moroe.⁴³

Africans living outside Pretoria also sensed that the occurrences in Marabastad represented much more than a rather nasty confrontation after the failure to resolve a local wage dispute, but that the large scale involvement of the police and especially of the soldiers and the disproportionately high casualty figures had turned the riots into a bloodbath deserving national interest. In Orlando West, for example, the executive committee of that ANC

branch discussed events and decided that it was essential for the black community to be officially represented at sittings of the commission of inquiry.⁴⁴ The ANC president general, Dr. A.B. Xuma, felt the same and commissioned Advocate Festenstein and V.C. Berrange to represent the ANC at the commission.⁴⁵ Even Dr. J.S. Moroka, member of the Natives Representative Council, drove all the way from Thaba 'Nchu to Pretoria to be present at the proceedings of the commission.⁴⁶

A number of other political organisations and trade unions were also represented at the commission hearings. Those included the Pretoria Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) and CNETU. These organisations were even given the opportunity to call witnesses before the commission.⁴⁷

The commission commenced its sittings on 4 January 1943. It heard evidence and argument and conducted inspections until 22 February and issued its report in May 1942. The Pretoria Municipality attempted to convince the commission that the riot was occasioned by Communist agitation and propaganda - probably hoping to dodge the burden of responsibility by clouding the issue. Trade union representatives, on the other hand, attempted to convince the commission that the occurrence of the riot could largely be blamed on the absence of officially recognised collective bargaining machinery, which made it almost impossible for the African labourers to approach the Municipality with their grievances, thus avoiding dispute.⁴⁸ It eventually became clear that, although the Pretoria Municipality certainly preferred the unorganised state of its African workers,⁴⁹ the issues at stake were infinitely more complex.

Causes

In a memorandum jointly compiled by three members of the Natives Representative Council (J.S. Moroka, R.V.S. Thema and P.R. Mosaka) and a number of spokesmen of the Pretoria African municipal workers, it was alleged that the riot was not premeditated, but spontaneous; that there were no ring leaders who planned and inspired the riot, but a muddling city council which caused dissatisfaction leading to an outbursts of indignation.⁵⁰ The CPSA, for its part, denied any involvement in the riot. It blamed the "attempt of the wealthy City Council to wriggle out of their obligations ..."⁵¹

The official commission of enquiry into the riots seemed to agree. It could find no evidence of any concerted plan of action, any leadership amongst the rioters, or any precise objective in the perpetration of damage.⁵²

The success of the Johannesburg municipal workers' strike of 8 December 1942 in forcing that city's Council to accept the wage determination without further ado, certainly had an effect on events in Pretoria. The latter city's African workers regarded that strike as the perfect example of how united action could ultimately force the council to accept the determination too.⁵³

The African inhabitants of the compound nursed numerous grievances against the municipality. Their perception of J.S. Hardy, the Location Superintendent, was that he was unsympathetic in his attitude towards Africans.⁵⁴ They were dissatisfied with their food and quarters. And when they heard that in future a part of their wages would be deducted for the unacceptable food and quarters, the dissatisfaction changed into a severe grievance. The coalescence of all those grievances obviously contributed to their eventual willingness to vent their anger against the City Council by throwing stones at the closest symbol of the Municipality: the compound building.⁵⁵

Senator Hyman Basner and others argued that the events could have been avoided for it was the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding. It would not have occurred had the explanation of the wage determination to the municipal workers been done by the representative of an official body such as a trade union rather than by the compound manager, who was unable to express himself in an African language. As a result some workers believed that the correct wages, which they demanded, would only be paid from the next November onwards (ten months in the future), whereas the message actually was that the correct wages would be paid retrospectively from the previous November. The workers' anger and stone throwing resulted from that misunderstanding.⁵⁶ These allegations contained a part of the truth. The Johannesburg newspaper *Star* correctly summed up the causes of the original outbreak of rioting by stating that the outburst "was due more to a growing sense of cumulative injustice than to any one specific wrong remaining unredressed."⁵⁷

The primary cause of the violence which followed the outbreak of rioting is not easy to pinpoint. Had the Africans not started throwing stones, it is probable that nothing would have happened. By that deed they triggered the chain of events which ended in tragedy. It would however be unfair to burden them with the major share of the blame.

Elias Gordon, Chairman of the Pretoria Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, attempted to blame the spreading of the violence on the white civilians who appeared on the scene and allegedly assaulted the Africans. The original stone throwing by the Africans was caused by their feeling of frustration and impatience with the municipality. But then some whites interfered with something that was not essentially their quarrel and that, in Gordon's estimation, incensed the Africans more than anything else.⁵⁸ The actions of those whites decidedly contributed to the tragedy, but to blame them alone similarly constituted an oversimplification of the issue. The following unforeseen and unplanned for developments warrant attention: the fact that the armoured cars didn't follow Verster to the intersection of Proes and Cowie Streets; the acceptance by Reeves of the word of a civilian that he was officially needed to quell the disturbance; and the accidental death of Coetzee through a

bullet probably fired to defend him against attack; and the willingness and readiness of the soldiers to shoot at the Africans, even though they themselves were not at all in mortal danger. Everything considered, the latter was probably the major cause of the tragedy.

Significance

The Marabastad riot was quickly forgotten, even though the proceedings of the commission of enquiry were reported on in detail in the daily press. The CPSA attempted to mobilise public protest against the mass shooting by the army unit. It held meetings in inter alia Pretoria and Cape Town, but neither were particularly well attended.⁵⁹ Naboth Mokgatle, who was a prominent member of the CPSA in Pretoria in those years, wrote in his autobiography that, after the commission of enquiry reported, that was it. "That was all we heard of the Commission. The workers had lost their lives, Jan Christian Smuts was the ruler of South Africa, the second world war was raging, the children of those who lost their lives became orphans with no support ..."⁶⁰ The existing national African organisations - the ANC and the African Democratic Party didn't seem to care. Virtually the only people still involved by early 1944, were those wounded and the dependents of the victims; the Pretoria Non-European Municipal Workers' Union; the organisers of a Marabastad Riot Relief Fund Committee and the Natives' Representatives in parliament. The latter pressed the government to pay compensation to the dependents of the deceased and to those who were injured.⁶¹ The Union Native Affairs Department refused to be drawn into discussions or administration concerning the payment of compensation. The Union Defence Force was busy fighting a war and seems, in the absence in the South African Defence Force Archives of evidence pointing to the contrary, to have ignored demands and/or appeals for compensation. No action whatsoever was taken against military personnel involved in the riot or in the shooting of Africans involved in the riot. Major Reeves' superiors did not even agree with the findings of the commission of enquiry that he was guilty of a serious error of judgement.⁶² The Government eventually, in February 1944, agreed to compensate the victims. Of the sixteen deceased, four seemed to have no dependents. An amount of £690 was paid out to the dependents of the other 12 deceased, while £118 was divided between four Africans who were permanently disabled. In respect of the 26 other Africans seriously injured but not permanently incapacitated, an ex gratia payment of £3 each was made. In answer to a question in Parliament asked by Molteno, the Government agreed to this payment "as an act of grace and without admitting liability".⁶³

The conscience of the Pretoria City Council was certainly moved by the Commission report. It appointed a sub-committee to study the report and make recommendations on issues which required urgent attention. This committee proposed the immediate erection of a new

hostel building at Quagga-poort to accommodate the African employees of the Council, complete with updated recreational facilities, shops and improved transport arrangements.⁶⁴ The Council obviously wished to repair its tarnished image as soon as possible. Its adversaries in the riots, the CPSA and the Pretoria Non-European Municipal Workers' Union, seem to have been the only groupings to gain by the riots. Lodge asserts that their status was enhanced by the fact that the commission exonerated them from responsibility for the riot and that in the weeks following the riot, the membership of the Workers' Union swelled from 600 to 900.⁶⁵

In the final analysis the Marabastad riot resulted from an unfortunate sequence of errors initiated by the ill-considered attempts of the Pretoria City Council - the elected representatives of the white inhabitants of the South African capital - to pay their African labourers less wages they were legally and morally entitled to. By their indignant but irresponsible outburst against unjust treatment and an unsympathetic officialdom on 28 December 1942, those labourers threatened no lives and certainly did not deserve to be shot down. They were (as was Corporal Coetzee) the unfortunate victims of the ever-present malice generated by group-anxiety in racially stratified and class differentiated societies, which the South Africans community without doubt was in the 1940's.

ENDNOTES

1. N. Mokgatle, *Autobiography of an Unknown South African* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 235-238.
2. B. Hirson, *Yours for the Union, Class and Community Struggles in South Africa, 1930-1947* (Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 112-113.
3. T. Lodge, "Political Organisations in Pretoria's African Townships, 1940-1963", in B. Bozzoli, (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives* (Johannesburg, 1987), p.404.
4. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3 Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, pp. 3-4.
5. Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (CAD), K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 1, Report on an inspection of the Pretoria Urban Area carried out (in 1942 by C.A. Heald); exhibit 2, Memorandum on the subject of the Municipal Compound submitted to the Pretoria City Council on 16th September by a deputation of representatives of Pretoria Organisations.
6. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 1, Report on an inspection of the Pretoria Urban Area carried out [in 1942 by CA Heald].
7. B. Hirson, *Yours for the Union*, pp. 111-112.
8. *Government Gazette*, 1942-11-06.
9. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 3, Copy of letter from the Pretoria City Council to the Secretary of Labour, 1942-11-21.

10. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 67, Memorandum of evidence on the riot of the Pretoria municipal workers on 28 December 1942 by J.S. Moroka et al.
11. N. Mokgatle, *Autobiography of an Unknown South African*, p.236.
12. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 10, Memo on strikes in Johannesburg (by Mr. Brink).
13. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 19, copy of letter by M. Muller to Minister of Labour, 1942-12-10.
14. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 13, leaflet titled "Danger to Municipal Workers" issued by Municipal Workers Union.
15. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, pp. 32-33.
16. (CAD), K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 20, letter from Private Secretary, Minister of Labour to Asst. Secretary, Pretoria Non-European Municipal Workers' Union, 1942-12-15
17. SADF Archives, AG(2), box 75 etc. file 196/4328: Minutes of Proceedings, Judicial Commission of Inquiry, Pretoria Municipal Native Compound Riot, 1943, evidence of M.A. Muller, pp. 184-197; B. Hirson, *Yours for the Union*, p. 112.
18. CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 4, copy of letter from the Divisional Inspector of Labour to the Pretoria City Council, 1942-12-19.
19. SADF Archives, AG(2), box 75 etc, file 196/4328: Minutes of Proceedings, Judicial Commission of Inquiry, Pretoria Municipal Native Compound Riot, 1943, p.3.
20. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, p.3.
21. CAD. K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 16, letter from H.M. Basner to Secretary, South African Trades & Labour Council, 1942-12-30.
22. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, p.4.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, CAD, K172, file 1/133/42, vol. 1: Pretoria Riots 1942, exhibit 67, Memorandum of evidence on the riot of the Pretoria municipal workers on 28 December 1942 by J.S. Moroka et al.
24. SADF Archives, AG(2), box 75, file 196/4328: Numerous sworn statements, especially those of D.S.M. du Preez, dated 1943-01-05; by D.S. Grace, dated 1943-01-04 and by S.F. Prinsloo, dated 1942-12-31; SADF Archives, AG(2), box 75 etc, file 196/4328: Minutes of Proceedings, Judicial commission of Inquiry, Pretoria Municipal Native Compound Riot, 1943, evidence of P.W. Grobbelaar, pp. 381-411.
25. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, pp. 5-6.
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28. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, pp. 6-7.
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31. SADF Archives, AG(2), box 75, file 196/4328: Statement by S.F. Prinsloo, dated 1942-12-31, by C.J. van der Walt, dated 1943-01-06, and by F.J. Venter, dated 1942-01-05.
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33. *Ibid.*: Statement by F. Kirchman, 1942-12-31; University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, pp. 8-9.
34. *Ibid.*: Minutes of Proceedings, Judicial Commission of Inquiry, Pretoria Municipal Native Compound Riot, 1943, evidence by P.W. Grobbelaar, p.391.
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36. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, Report, pp. 13, 19.
37. SADF Archives, AG(2), box 75, file 196/4328: Letter from Lieut. F. Kurchmann to the Officer Commanding, 8 Garrison Provost Coy, 1942-12-29.
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 52. University of the Witwatersrand Library, Historical and Literary Papers, AD 843 SAIRR Collection, B95.3, Black Employment and Wages: Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28th December, 1942, p.5.
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