

PC16/21/4/17



CIVIL RIGHTS

News Letter (Box 3807, Cape Town) March, 1958

(All comment in this issue by Maggie Rodger, 527 C.T.C. Building, Cape Town)
Welcome and Thank You

Just over a month ago we sent out over 1,000 appeals to people who we considered should be interested in the work of the League. In some cases these were accompanied by personal notes from members of the Committee. To date we have had about fifty replies, and more are coming in daily.

We extend a very hearty welcome to the new members who have responded to this appeal. We appreciate their generous response because we know that they are all people who support many other good causes, but who appreciate the need for the work the League is doing.

This result confirms the Committee's conviction that there are many people in Cape Town and beyond who would support the League if they know about it - and particularly if it was recommended by their friends. The Committee cannot approach everybody - **SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT!** Copies of our appeal to send or give to your friends will be gladly sent to you by the Secretary on request.

Group Areas Conference

The Conference on Group Areas held on February 21 and 22 was a very worth-while occasion. It certainly opened the eyes of those White people present to the effects the Act will have on the social, economic and educational life of our Coloured and Indian fellow-citizens. It provided a valuable opportunity for personal contact and deeper understanding between leaders - and rank and file - of these sections and the representatives of the Churches and other organisations present. We believe it has laid the foundation for closer co-operation and more efficient working towards the repeal of this unjust and immoral legislation. The more the public learn of the working of the Group Areas Act, the sooner they will realise that what is morally wrong cannot be politically right.

Sanctity of Family Life

"Civic News" reports that the Mayor of Cape Town recently received a deputation of African women residents of all parts of the City asking him to make representations to the Central Government against their having to carry passes. The petition mentioned

(a) Their strong objection to the raids made in the early morning, with their disturbing influence on the peace and comfort of their children;

(b) the disability and restriction of freedom of movement created by the necessity for carrying passes at all times - even when fetching water in the locations;

(c) the complete disregard of the welfare of the children when arrests are made as a consequence of raids;

(d) the inhumanity attendant on deportations where children are left motherless; and

(e) the complete break up of family life due to these arrests, imprisonments and deportations.

At a meeting in Mowbray Dr Otto du Plessis, in reply to a question from one of our members, said the Nationalist Party believed in the sanctity of family life. How does this square with law that produce such results?

Again, the City Council, when it wished to increase Langa, was told that it might provide additional accommodation for bachelors only, and that even the families now living there must eventually be moved to Nyanga. This will mean ultimately that 75,000 "bachelors" will be housed in one community - five hundred yards away from Pine-lands! An essential condition for their living there is that they shall have no family life at all!

We do not blame the Council: but do we as citizens realise what is happening within our boundaries?

The Institute of Race Relations, when giving evidence at the Johannesburg inquiry into the Dube hostel riots, recently said that hostels in Africav / should not accommodate more than five hundred persons. locations/

We are glad that the Council is at least being firm about not demolishing shacks until alternative accommodation is found for the people living in them.

Population Register Inquiry

We need not add to the comments in our local Press about the misery and humiliation being caused by this inquiry. We hope it, too, is making people realise the inhumanity of apartheid and all its implications. But there are other points which should not be overlooked.

The Press has been excluded from these inquiries. The "Cape Times" comments: "Except in form this is a judicial proceeding. It is an exercise of the power of the State over the lives and liberties of the individual which civilised countries for centuries have demanded should be performed only by impartial judicial officers sitting in public and with provision for appeals to other judges and higher courts."

The Onus of Proof

We would also stress the seriousness of a provision of the Act that if a person is alleged to be non-white, the onus of proving otherwise rests on that person.

This is yet another departure from one of the fundamental principles of our tradition of justice - namely, that the burden of proof should rest with the prosecution, not with the defence.

Government speakers are now alleging that this principle no longer holds good in South Africa: but, as the "Daily News" says in another context, "there is the strongest possible prima facie case against the creation of new exceptions to it."

The "Boomerang"

"Ilanga lase Natal" recently applied this term to the recent legislation of the Government in various fields. The paper said:

"Though we have unfortunately no figures, it seems as if the incidence of immorality cases brought before the courts is disturbingly high. What shocks us is that in the coils of this net we find entangled some very prominent Europeans... We wonder if the framers of this law guessed that it would end up by having more Europeans sin against black women than black men sinning against white women ...

"Now for liquor. The law frowns severely on liquor being supplied to Africans... Does this, however, stop Africans getting their liquor - even if it is the hard way? And who are the chief suppliers of European liquor to Africans? Europeans.

"Turning to firearms ... some of these people who are licensed to have firearms pass them on to Africans who are debarred even from having gas pistols for their own protection. It seems the laws of the country are not concerned with law-abiding and decent Africans. (I call it ours) They are denied the buying of liquor and are cast into the unscrupulous hands of illicit liquor traffickers. They are denied the possession of firearms, even of gas pistols, no matter what qualifications they may have." And the paper adds: "We have always argued... that discriminatory laws have a boomerang effect on Europeans as well... They too find themselves embroiled in their meshes."

The Church and Politics

His Grace the Archbishop of Cape Town has been giving all South Africans "furiously to think" - and we hope and believe he will continue to do so. True, some of the things he has said have been

criticised as being inconvenient for the United Party. But if we do not at times find Christianity inconvenient, is it real Christianity at all? And if we consider convenience first, can we call ourselves Christians?

It should be noted that Dr de Blank has said that he was not attacking apartheid, but the way it was being worked at the moment. "Indeed, I have said there may be a solution on these lines, but only if it is by the acceptance and co-operation of all the races who are affected by it." Surely SABRA would agree?

But the Archbishop is, quite rightly, uncompromisingly frank on the question of the Church and politics. "It always astonishes an instructed Christian", he says, "when he is accused of interfering in politics or of stepping down into the political arena. Astonished - that after nearly two thousand years of Christianity there should still be people who think that the Church has nothing to do with politics... Inevitably the Church will be involved in politics, but the Church can never give herself unquestioningly into the hands of any political party." The Church was to-day being accused of political activity "because she dares to criticise current policies. But her accusers fail to recognise that an acceptance of the status quo, of things as they are, is just as much a political attitude as is a revolt against it. The fact that the Dutch Reformed Church on the whole does not criticise government racial legislation is no proof that that Church is not politically involved. On the contrary its failure to criticise is just as much a political activity as is the criticism voiced by the Anglican or any other Church."

Pertinent ...

Speaking of various "McCarthy" measures that have not yet been repealed, the "Open Forum" of the American Civil Liberties Union in S. California said recently:

"We have learned for the moment to live casually with outrageous sins against our most honoured principles... In the light of sputniks... the primary questions of the present are whether there will be any future at all, and if there is, whether it will demand, as officially suggested, the sacrifice of our 'marginal liberties'..."

"We assume that the answers to these ominous questions are LIFE and LIBERTY... Freedom and the future are, in our scheme of things, inseparable.

"But the way to such a future lies not in easy accommodation to the worst about us, and it will require the sacrifice of less essential things than the least of our liberties..."