

PC16/2/1/4/19

CIVIL RIGHTS



News Letter

(Box 3807, Cape Town)

May, 1958

What we stand for

Civil liberty has been defined by Dr Edgar Brookes as "the possession by the individual, within a political community, of those rights essential to the free development of personality, under the guarantee of law".

Does Mr Strijdom, we wonder, even remotely envisage such a condition of affairs in what he recently described to a press conference as his "democratic republic"?

What doest thou here, Elijah?

We make no apology for touching on a subject that must be very much in the minds of our readers - namely, the election. While the result was hardly unexpected, it was undoubtedly depressing: and many of us must have been tempted to wonder, "What can we do now?" Or even, "Can we do anything?"

To us the answer, in principle at least, is simple. We must go on bringing our principles to the notice of as many people as we can, and stand uncompromisingly by them ourselves. One thing is certain: the need for such a stand will be greater than ever.

The Other Side

At the same time we must seek every opportunity of bridging the gulf between English- and Afrikaans-speaking people, especially those whose consciences are uneasy. The influence of people like the Sabra leaders may not yet be widespread, but it will grow; and contact with them - and even with the rank and file of both white groups who are still complacent about apartheid - is of great value. We must not fall into the error of believing that all Nationalists favour apartheid and all United Party supporters are against it. All too many English-speaking people are just as selfish, just as fearful, just as apathetic or complacent as any platteland voter. It is easy to ignore or stifle the voice of conscience when it interferes with comfort: it is our task to keep that voice alive.

We must at all costs avoid withdrawing into an ivory tower of liberalism, comfortable and - at times like these - tempting though it might be. Rather let us rely on what the "Cape Times" has called "the slow upwelling of fortitude from our reserves of faith in the ultimate triumph of truth and right".

One Bright Spot

To us the one bright spot in the election was the fact that Mr Gerald Gordon succeeded in persuading 1,644 people to vote for Liberal principles in Sea Point. We offer him and his team of workers our sincere congratulations on what, under all the circumstances, was a considerable moral victory. It proves - if proof were needed - that an uncompromising stand on principle does win the support of honest and thinking people.

The Republican Bogey

The Government, after soft-pedalling the republican issue during the election, is now doing all it can to beguile the English-speaking voter into accepting it as "just a minor constitutional change" - like one of Dr Dönges's "simple little Bills".

The "Cape Times" comments pertinently: "If the change is so small, why worry to make it? The answer is easy: so that, having got consent to the principle, they can mould the republic at their leisure to the shape doubtless already decided upon. Beware a salesman without samples or specifications!"

The fear of a republic has in the past ten years lost us thousands of our own valuable citizens and, no doubt, frightened away thousands of potential immigrants. But there is one point which the Government press wilfully ignores and which the Opposition press, for some reason, seems reluctant to emphasise, but which seems to us fundamental.

It may be possible to bring about a republic against the will - or with the reluctant acquiescence - of nearly half the white electorate: but who can imagine that it will be possible permanently to impose on four-fifths of the population a régime which is unacceptable to them, in which they have no voice and no rights?

The Institute of Race Relations, in a statement after the election, referring to the whole apartheid pattern, said what is equally true in this connection:

"... as long as there exists no adequate machinery by which Non-Europeans can express their wishes and participate in government, they will increasingly be driven to adopt extra-parliamentary action - public demonstration, passive resistance and strikes - in an attempt to secure redress of their grievances.

"Armed force and constant threat cannot be used permanently to enforce an unacceptable policy. This method of government not only generates violence. It must finally fail. No people can

for ever be kept in a state of subjection.

"The Institute holds to its belief that no reasonable adjustments of race relations in South Africa will be obtained until all its citizens have fair economic opportunity and enjoy the rights of a common citizenship with a common loyalty to South Africa."

Sabra, too!

The recent conference of Sabra has shown that its leaders are also recognising this. They therefore urge territorial apartheid as the ultimate ideal, and even a modifying of baasskap in the interim period. They urge, too, the need for securing the goodwill and co-operation of the non-white elements in our population towards an agreed territorial apartheid, although they are very vague as to how this is to be achieved or what amount of agreement they consider necessary.

The Fundamental Need

This attitude is, we believe, sincere, though we may - and do - disagree with Sabra about both the practicability and the desirability of complete territorial apartheid. To us, "the process is the end" - the essentials are, first, to strive for the recognition of the human and civil rights of every South African citizen; and, secondly, to build up friendship, trust and co-operation across the colour line so that, while there is yet time, the widening gulf may be bridged and the resentment and fear may be broken down.

This process may be slow, but we can see no other way. History will decide the details, but we must lay the foundation. And the first step is to realise that any decision on the future of South Africa which is taken without even any pretence of consulting four-fifths of its population is wrong morally and doomed to failure practically.

A Matter of Conscience

Professor Pistorius of the University of Pretoria (author of "No Further Trek"), said after the election:

"The last hope of the white man lies in the conscience of the individual in that he is called upon to question the justice not only of his own actions and behaviour towards the Native but also of any law or regulation either existing or to be made in connection with the Native.

"We have reached the stage in South Africa where we have divorced our attitude towards the Native problem from our ordinary moral and religious codes...

"The logic and conscience of every individual, Bantu or European, is our only ultimate hope."

Our Part

We, as a League, have always held these views, and it is our responsibility still to spread them as much as we can. How can we do it more effectively? Much of the answer rests with our rank-and-file members, who in their ordinary daily contacts can start other people thinking, and enlist the support of those who think as we do. The need is urgent. As they say in America, "Liberty is always unfinished business."

Practical Ways You Can Help

1. If you haven't yet paid your sub., DO IT NOW!
2. Got new members for us.
3. Give us the names of any friends you have who might be interested to receive our News Letter.
4. (this in all seriousness) Pray for our country, for those who feel as we do and for those who don't - especially for the Government and M.P.'s, that they may seek God's will honestly...
5. Bring to our notice any cases of infringement of civil rights which need to be laid before the public.

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* S. O. S. Race Relations Street Collection, Saturday, *

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* May 24. Please help, and get your friends to do likewise.*

* (Phone 3-2318: write 203 Bree Street, Cape Town) *

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