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CIVIL RIGHTS

News Letter

(Box 3807, Cape Town)

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Treason Trials Defence Fund

We would again draw the attention of our readers to this Fund, which we mentioned last month, and which includes among its sponsors two ex-Judges, the Hon. Frank Lucas and the Hon. Richard Feetham, as well as many other prominent citizens from all sections of the people. In their appeal the sponsors say:

"It is not within our province to express an opinion on the guilt or innocence of the persons charged with committing this grave crime. We believe, however, in view of the unique significance of the impending trials, that all the accused should be able to secure the best legal representation available.

"We also believe that during the course of what probably will be lengthy proceedings, the families and dependants of the accused should be protected from hardship and suffering.

"We have decided, therefore, to sponsor a defence fund for the purpose of raising money to pay the legal costs of defence, to offer bail, and to support those dependants of the accused who may be in need.

"We believe that there are many people of good conscience who, knowing that every man is presumed innocent until proved guilty in a court of law, will respond to an appeal for this worthy cause."

We commend this appeal most heartily to our readers, and for their information the Cape Town address of the Fund is P.O. Box 339, Cape Town. Any who can send donations or, better still, collect them from others should get in touch with this address.

What Treason is

The "Digest of South African Affairs", issued by the Government Information Office, gives the following definition of treason from the authoritative work of Gardiner & Lansdowne:

"High treason is committed by those who, with hostile intention, disturb, impair or endanger the independence or safety of the State or attempt or actively prepare to do so." This includes holding meetings and inciting people, even by way of prayer, to join or continue hostilities against the State; and "conspiring

to overthrow the Government and establish a national socialist State under the auspices of the enemy".

We find it more difficult than ever to understand why the same (7-14 December, 1956) issue of the "Digest of South African Affairs" should say: "In the search warrants used by the police, mention was made of 50 organisations whose activities are under investigation" - including the Civil Rights League.

Well, well - and the Special Branch didn't even come to our Annual General Meeting last year!

The Bus Boycott

It is unfortunate that what began as an economic protest against the raising of bus fares should be turning into a political one, not least because of the "big stick" attitude of the Minister of Transport. Mr Brent, the Pretoria Municipal Manager of Non-European Affairs, has stated categorically that most of the Africans in Pretoria are not able to afford the increased fares. The "Pretoria News" reported Mr Brent as saying that the root of the boycott was economic; that the obligation to pay the increases was undoubtedly the employers'; and that a simple way to remedy the situation would be an increase in cost-of-living allowances.

The same paper has since commented: "We believe that if the Government had adopted a more sympathetic, less unyielding attitude earlier in the boycott, if it had indicated at least that the difficulties of these people were understood and were being considered, it would have been a great deal more difficult for ambitious agitators to convert the feelings that exist to their own ends."

It is interesting to note that in the early stages of the boycott "Die Transvaler" said: "... the quiet manner in which the boycotters are going to work is somewhat reassuring. Nothing has happened so far which has disturbed public order ..."

We would emphasise, in view of the Government's attitude, that so far there is no law in South Africa which (a) prevents people from walking, instead of using public transport, if they so desire, (b) prevents a motorist from giving lifts to pedestrians, provided that he does not charge fares and (curiously) that the passengers are not his own employees and (c) prohibits the Press from bringing all aspects of the matter before the public.

University Apartheid

Our readers will have noted the statement in the Speech from the Throne that legislation is to be introduced this session to provide separate university facilities for Non-Europeans.

The "Star" comments: "The fact that the universities affected are unanimous in their opposition will not affect the outcome ..."

The "Argus" says: "... it is the practice in the academic world for all universities to decide for themselves whom they shall admit to their courses, and to take this right away from them and place it in the hands of the Government is a revolutionary change which would mean that our universities would be placed on a different footing from those of the rest of the world, affecting their academic status and degrees."

Protests have been made by the Convocation of the University of Cape Town, by N.U.S.A.S. and by the Students' Representative Councils of the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, of the Maritzburg branch of the University of Natal, and of its Non-European section in Durban.

Inter-Racial Conference

At the Bloemfontein Conference held under the auspices of the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation the suggestion was made by African leaders that a further, inter-racial conference might be held at which the problems of our country could be discussed, and solutions sought, by all groups together. We understand that various bodies are exploring the possibilities of responding to this suggestion. In the meantime the idea is amply supported by "Imvo Zabantsundu", which feels that such a conference should be called without delay.

As a League, we are wholeheartedly in favour of such a conference, and await further developments with interest.

The CATA Case

In view of the fact that more than fifty African teachers had been dismissed from their posts since the passing of the Bantu Education Act, without any reasons being given (or of course any redress for the teachers concerned), the Cape African Teachers'

Association brought the matter of the dismissal of two of these teachers before the Supreme Court at Grahamstown. This Court has now ruled that these dismissals are null and void. The Cape African Teachers' Association has therefore instructed lawyers to apply for the reinstatement of the other fifty teachers who were similarly dismissed.

The two teachers in question have claimed a total of £875 arrear salaries for the period during which they were unlawfully dismissed. Should the other fifty do likewise, the amount to be paid to them might be more than £5,000.

We foresee another amendment to the Bantu Education Act!

Stop Press

As we go to press there has appeared in the "Cape Times" a letter from Dr O. D. Wollheim, a member of the League's Committee and Warden of Cafda, which is worth quoting. He says, inter alia:

"Of the 19 persons arrested in and around Cape Town and now appearing at the treason inquiry, 17 are at the moment without their usual sources of income, and careful investigation by an expert committee has indicated that a number of their families are suffering severely.... The majority are in no financial position to provide any sort of defence, and must be given the opportunity of stating their case as clearly as possible. The other object of the (Treason Trial Defence) fund is to see to it that, at least while the hearing lasts, the homes and family life of their dependants are not shattered... A substantial number are persons who have lived on a very low income level which has debarred them from saving. Such families find themselves at present without even a crust of bread to give their children while the guilt or innocence of the breadwinner is still being established...

"Some prospective donors have completely groundless fears about making donations to the fund. Some believe that the fund is illegal, and others fear that they may be in some way connected with certain political views and activities if they give to the fund. These fears are groundless. The fund is being registered under the Welfare Organizations Act, and in terms of the Act has been given the requisite permits issued by the magistrates legally authorizing the fund to collect and receive money."