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CIVIL RIGHTS

News Letter

(Box 3807, CAPE TOWN)

December, 1958

Human Rights Day

At the time of going to press, preparations for our meeting on December 9 (to be held in the City Hall in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations Assembly) are going well. We are glad so many of our members have asked for tickets for themselves and their friends (and greatly appreciate the thoughtfulness of those who sent stamps for postage!). Some tickets are still available at the office (527 C.T.C. Building) or by post if asked for NOW.

Who is Professor Pistorius?

To help you to interest your friends, we give some personal details about our distinguished guest speaker, whose subject is to be "Human Rights in the South African Situation".

Professor P. V. Pistorius was born in the Transvaal in 1907. He has been on the staff of Pretoria University (where he is Professor of Greek) since 1940. Although a convinced and lifelong Nationalist, he initiated the protest of the famous "thirteen professors" against the Senate Bill in 1955. In the same year he visited the United States under a U.S.A. State grant.

In 1957 he published the book "No Further Trek". In 1958 he organised the Church Commission of inquiry (supported by practically all the churches in Pretoria except the Dutch Reformed Churches) regarding the proposals for Indians in Pretoria under the Group Areas Act, which he regarded as unjust and unchristian.

He is at present busy on a book dealing with the philosophical implications of the concept of the brotherhood of man.

Apartheid and Nazism

Recently in Pretoria Professor Pistorius has likened the apartheid policy to fascism and communism as "anti-Christian and anti-humanitarian". Apartheid, he said, could be explained logically as the application of nazism or fascism in a multi-racial society. It gave to some and took away from others. It was interesting that "two ideological partners", Russia and South Africa, had not accepted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"In apartheid", he told an "Argus" correspondent, "South Africa has given the world a new ideology. Like Communism and Nazism, it

deprives the individual of his basic rights, whether intellectual, economic or political.

"It goes even further than Nazism or Communism since it affects social rights also - the right of movement and of association. It is Nazism applied in a multi-racial society where the nation is limited to a group and other groups are graded in a descending scale.

"These group evaluations have been legalised and constitute the pattern for education, political life, industry and economy, residence and social life. Individual worth is of no account. Individual rights depend on the group to which the individual belongs.

"This is done in the name of Nationalism and, on its appeal to religion and in its insistence that its aim is to preserve Christian values and a Christian way of life, it has found its strongest propaganda machine.

"It is ironical that the ideology of apartheid, which is a complete denial of Christian ethics and a complete reversal of the social trends of history that have found their origins in Christianity, should have succeeded in adapting that same Christianity to its own unchristian ends.

"This is not a pattern created or maintained by the Nationalist Party alone. It is the pattern accepted by the vast majority of Whites in South Africa.

"The dispute between the United Party and the Nationalist Party is not one of principle. Their only quarrel is the relative grades of the two White sections. That is why we are so emotional on the republican issue and so calm about the Group Areas Act and similar legislation.

"I believe that unless the trend is reversed - if it is not too late already - we have no hope of survival. The privileged and under-privileged alike will go under."

Rights and Responsibilities

Professor Pistorius, however, is no mere sentimentalist. He says that the extreme ideology of apartheid "has brought about its antithesis in the unrealistic demand for equality without any indication of what equality means". He believes in the brotherhood and basic rights of man, but also in man's responsibilities. "Equality in our time", he says, "is a noble sentiment, but at the most it can mean equality of opportunity. There is a long, long,

hard and dreary struggle ahead" for those who are at present under-privileged - and it will be all the harder because they will be impatient to reap the fruits of privilege before they have obtained "the capabilities to enjoy them".

"Transvaal barbarism" in municipal affairs

The Administrator of the Cape has announced that on December 10 (does he realise it is Human Rights Day?) the Provincial Executive will consider a proposal which would deprive nearly 11,000 Coloured voters in the municipal area of Cape Town of direct representation on the City Council - and incidentally remove from that Council the six non-white Councillors.

It is proposed to put the Coloured people on separate municipal rolls and to establish local boards in Coloured areas. These local boards, says the Administrator, would probably act in an advisory capacity to begin with, and would gradually be given greater responsibilities in their own communities (we seem to have heard something like this before!). "The basic policy is that the local boards will serve under the 'parent' municipalities." After the establishment of the local boards, the Coloured electorate would vote for representation on them, and not, as at present, for direct representation on town and city councils.

It has been pointed out by Senator Leslie Rubin that if the system envisaged for the Coloured people is the counterpart of the Native Advisory Boards, the Coloured people can expect to be in for a very hard time. "The history of the Native advisory boards", says Senator Rubin, "is that they are continually under pressure from the Government to prevent them from playing any part in effectively conveying the views to the authorities of those they represent in the locations."

The reaction of the Coloured people themselves - who, needless to say, have not been consulted about this proposal - has been prompt and uncompromising. A petition has already been presented to the Mayor of Cape Town by a deputation of leading Coloured citizens asking him to call a meeting of protest. The S.A. Coloured People's Organisation has called on other organisations, of which the League is one, to join it in opposing this move. The Coloured citizens' memorandum to the Mayor stated that any attempt to impose separate voters' rolls would lead only to frustration and bitterness, and would cause a deterioration of racial goodwill and harmony in Cape Town. "The Coloured people", it says, "view this new

threat as an insult to their dignity and self-respect, and refuse to let it go unchallenged."

Cape Town's Coloured city councillors, like others before them, have played their part in the affairs of the City with dignity and responsibility, and there is no possible justification whatever for depriving the Coloured community of their share in local government. Moreover, this would mean in effect taxation without representation for more than half the City's population.

We are glad that the City Council has also taken a firm stand on this matter, and that it intends to make representations to the Provincial authorities.

In Defence of Municipal Autonomy

A number of prominent citizens, led by the Ex-Chief Justice, Mr A. van de Sandt Centlivres, have also lodged with the Mayor a protest against the "government interference" in municipal affairs, especially in regard to job reservation in the City's traffic, fire and ambulance services, and has asked His Worship to call a special meeting to discuss "the threat to municipal authority and civic freedom" which such measures constitute.

The League will undoubtedly do all it can to mobilise public opinion effectively on these grave issues, and we look to our members to do their part by talking to their friends and by giving their support to the stand taken by the City Council, and to any public protests that are organised.

More Autocracy!

Mr B. J. Schoeman, Minister of Transport, said recently that if the Pietermaritzburg City Council, which had previously rejected bus apartheid, did not introduce this system, its certificates would be withdrawn, and there would be no bus transport in the city!

Essential ...?

"There cannot be any disagreement on the basic principle that indoctrination is essential in the building of national life", said the Free State Administrator recently. Free State policy, he said, was to build up "first of all a Christian people and secondly a nationally-minded people"!

Worth Hearing! (A report from one who was there)

In the Metropolitan Hall, Burg Street at 8.15 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 17 - Patrick Duncan on the Pan-African Conference in Ghana. Under the auspices of the Liberal Party.