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CIVIL RIGHTS



News Letter

(Box 3807, CAPE TOWN)

February, 1959

Thanks - to you?

Our sincere thanks to those who, since receiving our January number, have sent in their subscriptions, and a welcome to several new members. We especially commend the example of two of our members who have sent in gift subscriptions for friends. We would point out to those kind folk who send us more than the minimum five shillings that they can, if they wish, send us the names of friends or family to receive the News Letter (at 5/- per annum each) without making any extra payment. So we could help you to interest your friends and also strengthen our numbers. Please do something about this!

One-sided ...?

We are grateful for the courage and honesty of Dr Ben Marais and his appeal to "every responsible Christian" to investigate the effects of the Group Areas Act on the Indian community in Pretoria and elsewhere. In an article in "Die Kerkode" he says: "During the past few months I have attempted to see the matter from all angles, but I can come to only one conclusion: On the grounds of common humanity, without even talking of Christian ethics based on love of God and love of fellow men, the proposals as they affect many urban and country areas are altogether unacceptable.... the proposals like those which for example affect a city like Pretoria - and not only Pretoria - cannot in my opinion be defended on Christian grounds (and)... may not be accepted thus by the Christian Church ... After months of investigation I believe that the present proposals will mean for a very large number of Indians - to whom many other avenues are closed - great losses, and even poverty and even starvation. Does the Christian Church remain silent in the face of something like this? ... Put yourself in the place of this group ..."

During the discussion on group areas at the recent Race Relations Council meeting ex-Justice Richard Feetham quoted an assurance given by General Smuts (then Minister of the Interior) to Manilal Gandhi in 1914: "It always has been and will continue to be the Minister's policy to see that laws are administered with due regard to vested rights ... otherwise there could be no security for anyone."

The Council was informed by Miss Muriel Horrall that representatives of the Group Areas Board had told Pretoria churchmen that it was clear that the Indians had too large a share of trade, and that they

would have to submit to some curtailment of their trade in the interests of other groups, mostly non-White (!) - thus openly admitting "a fact that has long been evident; that in practice the Government is going far beyond the aims of the Act as expressed in its long title. It is using the machinery of this Act, not only to re-arrange the residential areas of the various racial groups, but also to control their occupational distribution".

Miss Horrall concluded by saying: "The way in which this legislation is being implemented is quite indefensible. In practically every town of the Union the White group is being left undisturbed, while the non-White groups are being called upon to make disastrous sacrifices. One trembles to think of the grievous resentment, bitterness and, indeed, hatred that is being engendered."

No wonder the Institute again condemned "the spirit, intent and application" of the Group Areas Act.

The editor of "Die Kerkbode" described Professor Marais's interpretation of the situation as "very one-sided", and expressed a desire to "hear the other side also". Is there another side?

Progress in Pretoria

We welcome the news in "Contact" (January 24) of the formation in Pretoria of an "Action Council for Human Rights" on which all racial groups and classes are represented. This body intends to mobilise public opinion against apartheid in general and group areas in particular, and as a first step is sending a deputation to the Pretoria City Council on behalf of the local Coloured community, who were apparently given only eleven days in which to apply for houses in their new group area, Derdepoort.

We hope so!

One of the members of the Commission set up by the Administrator of the Cape to go into the question whether there are adequate amenities in the Peninsula for all racial groups has stated that he believes this is a real attempt by the Administrator to provide a just and non-political solution of the problems concerned.

We would respectfully suggest to His Honour that, on the principle that justice must not only be done, but must be seen to be done, it is highly desirable that a member of the Coloured community should be included in the personnel of the Commission.

Vox Populi ...

An estimated two thousand Capetonians attended the meeting called by the Mayor (in response to a petition from a number of leading citizens) and recorded a unanimous protest against "the increasing tendency of the Government to override decisions of our City Council on matters of local concern, in regard to which it is responsible to the municipal voters". It called upon the Government "to desist from such interference in the domestic affairs of Cape Town, and more particularly

(1) to withdraw the recent determination under the Industrial Conciliation Act reserving employment in the City traffic police, fire brigade and ambulance departments for white persons;

(2) to restore to the City Council its freedom to formulate and carry out municipal policy in regard to the entry of Africans into the Cape Peninsula, and the housing, employment and general local administration of our African population".

The meeting also passed a resolution supporting the stand made by the City Council against the Administrator's proposal to set up local boards and separate voters' rolls for Coloured areas.

Intelligent Anticipation?

On the eve of the meeting the Administrator had announced the appointment of a commission of inquiry to report on "the desirability or otherwise" of establishing the suggested boards, and the manner of their working. He added that this was part of a "positive policy of goodwill towards Europeans and Coloureds", and that "no action of a negative nature is contemplated".

We would remind His Honour that that blessed phrase "or otherwise" is also included in the directive to the Group Areas Board - but so far with no visible result! We would also again suggest emphatically that such a Commission, if it is deemed necessary at all, should include at least one representative of the Coloured majority of Cape Town's citizens.

Mixed Gatherings

We hope the Johannesburg City Council will abide by its decision to oppose a proposal submitted to them by Mr De Wet Nel to ban all inter-racial meetings and social gatherings "attended by a Native" on the Rand (except those of a church, school, club or hospital, apparently!). Mr Nel (who expressed himself as shocked

at the Council's lack of "appreciation of its statutory relation to the central Government"), subsequently stated that "his intention was to ban only gatherings which could result in mixed drinking parties". There is, however, we are glad to learn from the "Star", strong opposition in the Johannesburg City Council to any form of official ban on mixed gatherings of any kind.

The "Cape Times" comments: "A person holding a party has the obligation to his neighbours of ensuring that his guests do not disturb their peace and comfort; he must also respect the laws against supplying liquor to Africans and against 'immorality'. If he fails in these respects he can be prosecuted. For the rest, it is none of the State's business who his guests may be."

We couldn't agree more.

Undermining Roman-Dutch Law

Ex-Chief Justice Centlivres, at the opening of the Institute of Race Relations Council meeting, said that the system of Roman-Dutch law handed down by Western civilisation drew no distinction on the ground of colour. "Any distinctions that exist to-day are the result of legislation which is steadily undermining the great principles of Roman-Dutch law. It not infrequently happens that when the courts apply those principles to a particular case, Parliament forthwith passes legislation to destroy those principles.

"We have reached a stage in the history of our country", said Mr Centlivres, "when it is the duty of every citizen who is not satisfied with the trend of things to speak his mind openly and with candour.

"We cannot, in the interests of our country, afford to be silent when we sincerely think that policies are being pursued which will eventually destroy Western civilisation in our country."

We couldn't have a better motto for 1959.

Tailpieces

Dr Verwoerd: "What do you mean by the people of South Africa?"

Sir De Villiers Graaff: "The electerate, of course."

(Including - of course - the Coloured and African electorate?)

Mr De Wet Nel's latest reason for removing African representatives from the Assembly: "It is not fair that the Cape Africans should have representatives there and those of the other Provinces should not."! (We've thought that for a long time: but ...)
Presumably he won't remove the Senators?

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