

CIVIL RIGHTS

PC16/2/114/32



News Letter

(Box 3807, CAPE TOWN)

May, 1959

Our Vigilance Panels

It has been decided to re-christen our "vigilance committees" with the more appropriate title "vigilance panels". We are glad to report that these already have members in the Transvaal and the O.F.S. as well as in the Cape (what about it, Natal?); but obviously the more members they have everywhere, the more effective they - and the League - will become. The idea is that the individual members of each panel should keep a watch on events which are relevant to their panel in their area. Where necessary, local action should be taken and the convener of the panel informed. Such action could take the form of a letter to the press, representations to bodies concerned or advising local branches of other organisations such as the Black Sash, N.C.W. or the Institute of Race Relations of the event in question. The League office should be notified at the same time of the circumstances and the action taken. It is of course impossible for the head office of the League to know what is going on all over the Union of South Africa in the field of civil rights, and the appointment of these panels is an attempt to gather in such information and to keep everyone advised of what occurs in other parts of the country. So join up!

Vigilance about Apartheid

Recently it was brought to the notice of the League and other bodies that a certain Cape Town store had a "Europeans only" notice in one of its departments. Representations were made to the firm, and we understand that the notice has now been removed. We would ask all our members to keep a watchful eye open for occurrences of this sort and to report them to us, so that action may be taken.

A Plea for Legal Aid

Our readers have probably heard that the Legal Aid Bureau is being reopened. This is a venture of faith, as the Government has not yet made adequate financial arrangements for its support. The League Committee feels that it has a moral obligation to help, and has decided to make a donation of £5 a month for the next six months. As our income is not really large enough to allow of such a regular donation, we appeal to any of our readers who can to send us a special donation for this purpose. Any donations received will go to the Bureau, and even the smallest will be greatly appreciated.

Thinking in groups

The University of Stellenbosch has recently provided us with news, some of heartening, but some of it distinctly sinister. It is heartening to know that there are students at Stellenbosch who, even if they do believe in separate universities (as of course they are entitled to do), do not approve of their own S.R.C. subscribing to compulsory separation. It is sinister that the Chairman of that S.R.C. should declare of an ancient and (hitherto) honourable university that it and its students must identify themselves with the views and politics of the "Afrikanervolk" (i.e. in practice the Nationalist Party). It is sinister that a mass meeting of students should apparently wish dissenting students to resign from the S.R.C. It is disquieting that there should be rumours (even though these are denied) that the Chairman of the S.R.C. should have received instructions in the matter from Dr Verwoerd...

This disease is widespread in our national life. Take, for instance, the expulsion of Professor du Plessis (a convinced member of the Nationalist Party) from his Party because he has criticised the Prime Minister's and the Party's policy. Take the outburst of the Transvaal secretary of SABRA about the "so-called Afrikaner intellectuals" who "suffer from sickly sentimentality and a guilt complex" towards Africans. "We must learn", he says, "to distinguish these people from the true Afrikaners. Many are still in our ranks... Such people must be dismissed before much harm is done to Afrikanerdom."

Take the banning of Bertrand Russell's book, "Why I am not a Christian". The Minister said the book was banned because it "violated the principles of Christianity upheld in South Africa". The "Cape Times" comments: "it shows once again that a government that quakes before ideas can set no limit to its terror; from trying to enforce political orthodoxy it must pass on to sexual, cultural and religious orthodoxy as well."

Take, again, the absurdities of the new "tribal" colleges, with their circular "lapas" and other relics of "Bantu culture". As these are genuinely intended to benefit the African (and not merely to enforce apartheid), they are based on an utterly false premise, and, as Professor Pistorius recently pointed out, "will, at an exorbitant cost, subsidise leadership schools for Black nationalism".

But the disease is not confined to the Government. What of the theory of "white leadership with justice"? What of the refusal even to contemplate the possibility of Black professors - much less principals - at "open" universities? What of the people who regard residential separation as sacrosanct, even while fighting job reservation?

We would do well to examine our own thinking honestly.

Farce ... and Tragedy

The "omnibus" guillotine motion of the Government to limit the time of discussion on four of the most crucial Bills ever introduced into the Union Parliament reduces Parliament to a farce, and is a tragic commentary on the contempt of the present Prime Minister and his colleagues for parliamentary institutions, the rights of the Opposition and the effect of such measures on public opinion. The Prime Minister has stated that the measure is to reduce to a minimum "the slander of South Africa abroad": one may conjecture that he is also afraid of the effect if even his own followers "daarbuite" learn the real truth about these measures.

The "Cape Times" has pointed out that under the time limit imposed only three of the forty-two clauses of the "Extension of University Education" (sic) Bill were debated at all in the committee stage. The paper comments: "39 clauses of the most drastic legislation to come before Parliament go on to the Statute Book without a word of detailed discussion or examination. These are the clauses which close the doors of the two finest universities in South Africa to Coloured men, Indians and Africans for no other reason than that they were born the wrong colour; which create tribal colleges that are utterly at the mercy of a group of politicians;... which provide for the teaching and indoctrination of the non-White peoples to an acceptance of racial inferiority and a status of servants; and which will have the result of virtually excluding the teaching or use of the English language in order more completely to isolate the non-Whites from the Western world and civilisation. To tighten the grip of the politicians and to make certain that the tribal college staff will peddle Nationalist ideology, the conscience clause is eliminated ... The 39 clauses are indefensible in terms of morals, statesmanship and expediency and they are put into law by a patent abuse of the spirit of parliamentary institutions ..."

Footnote from the "Cape Times"

Many who witness a Parliamentary debate for the first time come away with strong impressions. For instance, witness the scene that took place outside the public galleries to-day. Chief Albert Lutuli had just emerged from the non-Whites' bay when another Parliamentary visitor rushed up and shook his hand. "I am an Afrikaner from the Free State, Chief," he said, "and I want to say how ashamed I am for what they are doing in this place." The Bill under discussion at that moment was the University Apartheid Bill.

It is some small consolation to learn from the Salisbury correspondent of the "Cape Times" that in the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland the "partnership" idea is working out in practice.

"Self-government"?

The Institute of Race Relations has underlined the fact that the "Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Bill" does not even provide for a genuine system of African local self-government. "It adds a few minor powers to those of African territorial authorities established under the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, and empowers the Government to delegate others. But these territorial authorities can be established only for tribal areas in the reserves - comprising a mere 12 per cent of the area of the country where less than half the African people live.

"Approximately one-third reside on European-owned farms and about one-quarter, which comprise, generally speaking, the most advanced and developed Africans, in the urban areas. All these are not included in the scope of the system at all" (italics ours).

We commend to all our readers the latest Institute publication "The Betrayal of 'Natives Representation'", by Mr D. B. Molteno, Q.C.

The Government and African Trade Unions

The Government has never made any secret of its intention to strangle the African trade unions. It was to this end that the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act was passed. Both Mr Schoeman and Senator de Klerk have stated with obvious gusto that this Act would cause these unions to "bleed to death". In order to make assurance doubly sure, a clause has been inserted in the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill to prevent employers from making deductions from the wages of their African workers "in respect of contributions to any association of persons or body". One representative of the Africans in Parliament has already told the Minister that instead of killing African trade unions, this is consolidating them - although it is likely to turn them towards communism instead of "good trade unionism".

"Conciliation" ...?

The Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill is another shining example of the Government's genius for dishonest titles. It forbids employers to employ workers of any "Race" not permitted by the Minister, and allows the Minister to "reserve" jobs regardless both of any recommendations by his own Tribunal and of the availability or otherwise of labour of the "reserved" group. It bars workers from the work they have been trained for for no other reason than colour. And now the Minister talks of extending it from industry to commerce! The already growing unemployment shows which way things will go.

Civil Rights Library?

It has been suggested that the League should build up a library of books on civil rights. Any contributions will be welcome.