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CIVIL RIGHTS

News Letter

(Box 3807, CAPE TOWN)

July, 1959

Is this true of you?

"South Africans, on the whole, appear to have accepted a situation in which protests are unavailing. That is bad enough. It is far worse to have to conclude that the public conscience is nearly dead. We have become accustomed to the suppression of freedom in defence of the colour bar: we have sold our birthright as free people for a mess of apartheid pottage." ("Black Sash", May '59)

To quote Rabbi Dr Andre Ungar: "To say 'I am not interested' is tantamount to saying: 'As far as I am concerned, things may go on as they are now. They are not as bad as to warrant my personal participation'. It means tacitly appending one's own signature to the decree of race domination."

Don't relax because the parliamentary session has come to an end! Watch out for administrative infringements of civil rights, which get no publicity at all unless someone notices them!

Bannings

Lutuli - Bartman - Tambo - Nokwe - Beylerveld - the bannings go on. Mr Ben Bartman, a Xhosa, born in Moltene (Cape), has been banished from Worcester (where he has a wife and four children) to Mngomezulu, in Natal under the Native Administration Act. No reason has been given for this. He was chairman of the Worcester branch of the A.N.C.

Mr Oliver Tambo, deputy president-general of the A.N.C., a Johannesburg attorney, has been banned under the Suppression of Communism Act from attending meetings in the Union and South West Africa for five years. Like ex-Chief Lutuli, Mr Tambo had actually been discharged after the treason trial preparatory examination, and the charge against him withdrawn.

Mr Duma Nokwe, secretary-general of the A.N.C., has also been served with a banning order. Mr Piet Beylerveld, National Chairman of the Congress of Democrats, has been banned from attending meetings for five years.

The Government obviously wants to paralyse the Congress movement, and particularly the A.N.C. It looks as if the ground is being prepared for banning that organisation. One day's issue of the "Cape Times" carried three references (two of them ministerial) to this possibility, Mr Schoeman actually saying that it would be

done "if Southern Rhodesia's banning of the A.N.C. was successful". This could be done under the Suppression of Communism Act with no new legislation, as Opposition M.P.'s have pointed out.

Whether or not we agree with all the views of the individuals or organisations concerned is not the point. The methods the Government is using in its attempt to silence its opponents are unjust and undemocratic, and will in the end undoubtedly defeat themselves.

Thanking the Minister ...

It is with pleasure that we record that Mr Swart has issued instructions through Major-General Rademeyer that the Police cut down the number of African arrests for petty offences (even if they must emphasise that the privilege of appearing in court, or paying admissions of guilt, instead of going to gaol is a reward for having reference books!). Africans of any standing (i.e. those in permanent employment, or who own property or run their own businesses) are to get lower bail or be allowed out on their own recognisances. High time too, Mr Swart!

But it is a pity that Mr Swart should have gone back on one of his "second thoughts" and retained the clause extending to the Cape the rigorous Transvaal provisions against possible Coloured stock thieves in order to placate the Transvaal barbarians!

Mr Naudé, too ...

The Minister of the Interior has also had two second thoughts. He has announced that in future the Press will be able to get information from senior officials of his Department (perhaps because even the Afrikaans Press protested against his ban on this); and he has also decided to withdraw the clause in the Group Areas Development Amendment Bill which gave the Government power to usurp the powers of a local authority. The clause, he said, "was drastic and was intended only to warn municipalities (!) that if they were not prepared to abide by the law they would be compelled to do so"; but after discussions with the Executive of the Municipal Association "he had come to the conclusion that at this stage it was not an urgent necessity to make such provision". If, however, he found any municipalities "tried to obstruct the Government" he would again consider introducing the clause.

Mr A. H. Honikman had pointed out that, under this clause, a group township could be established on the borders of Cape Town and the Municipality forced to supply it with water, sewers and

electricity, irrespective of whether their services would bear the additional load or not, and the Board could even levy a special rate on the Cape Town ratepayers to make this possible!

We hope Mr Naudé will abide by his "second thought". Otherwise, as Mr Honikman pointed out, "the whole concept of democratically elected local government will be well-nigh destroyed, because the Government will be putting in the hands of a nominated Board powers which will be able to override the authority of the elected representatives of the people in local government".

We also hope Mr Naudé will think better of what seems to be the quite unreasonable rape of Mr Hans Beukes's passport.

The Cost of Group Areas

An Opposition M.P. has stated that in Durban alone there are 165,000 Indians to be moved under the Group Areas Act, and that to rehouse them, 35,000 houses will be needed. It is estimated that the cost of this would be about £50m. The Government, he said, was trying to place the burden of this on the towns and cities.

Quite apart, of course, from what a Cape Town ^{M.P.} calls "the element of humanity"!

Defence - against what?

Speaking in the Senate recently, Mr Erasmus said that "in the event of internal disturbances, the difficulty would be to have the necessary manpower available at short notice. Consideration, he said, was being given to some plans whereby certain members of the A.C.F. and the commandos could be available and mobilised in the early stages of any trouble (italics ours).

And Mr Swart orders 80 Saracens to "protect" the Police

Real Answer

We hope Dr Verwoerd has taken due note (in view of his complaints about the "false reports" of the Cato Manor riots) of the forthright statement of the Director of Durban's Bantu Administration Department. The cause, he says, of the riots is economic. "The slums of Cato Manor will remain as long as the average earnings of the African workers of Durban place decent living and permanent housing beyond their reach"- and the danger of an upheaval of violence, arson and bloodshed will remain also. The reasons so far given for the riots, he says, are purely superficial... "They have talked about Kafir beer and illicit liquor, transport and housing, shack removals and influx control, keeping of livestock and the keeping of husbands, gambling dens and

shebeens. They have talked about these subjects as if they mattered..

"Only here and there has the real, naked reason broken to the surface - money, or rather lack of it."

We might add that banning people like ex-Chief Lutuli - who even in this upheaval has counselled his people against violence - can hardly be expected to help matters.

Half a loaf ...

We are sorry that Mr de Wet Nel has decided only to hold a Commission of Inquiry and a departmental inquiry, instead of appointing a judicial commission to go into farm labour conditions. An independent body such as a judicial commission is the only means of getting at the real truth. Mr Nel's Department and the Agricultural Union are being asked to be judges in their own cause. Mr Justice de Wet has commented strongly on the procedure of policemen arresting Africans and handing them over to Native Commissioners (who offer them the chance of avoiding trial by electing to work on farms) instead of bringing them to court. We are glad that public opinion is beginning to realise the abuses of the system. The Institute of Race Relations has expressed grave doubts as to its legality.

Another unsatisfactory feature, of course, about a departmental inquiry is that the publication of all or any of its findings will be at the discretion of the Minister!

But at least the farm labour scheme has been temporarily stopped.

Lo, the poor Indian ...

Is this, perhaps, Dr Verwoerd's most outrageous statement of the session? "As far as (unemployed) Indians were concerned, it should be remembered that they were the responsibility not of the Union Government, but of those people who wanted to take the responsibility on their shoulders"!

This might be us!

"The American Civil Liberties Union is, or ought to be, the favourite watchdog of the American liberal. It is a hungry but faithful beast, unhappily dependent on middle class professional people, who are long on idealism and short on money..." (Alistair Cooke in the "Manchester Guardian")

Our thanks, again, to all who have sent in their subs! How about getting your friends to do likewise? There's nothing exclusive about us! Let 'em all come!