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CIVIL



RIGHTS

News Letter

Box 3807

Cape Town

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Human Rights Day

While the attendance at our meeting on December 12 was disappointing, those of our members and their friends who braved the steamy heat and withstood the lure of other attractions were amply rewarded. Mr [redacted]'s subject, "Democracy", may have seemed to the man in the street unduly academic, but his challenging and thought-provoking address certainly was not. Space forbids an adequate report of it, but we quote a brief extract:

"Democracy cannot be truly developed unless there are opportunities for all peoples of a country to advance and develop. Where we limit people because of their race, and where we do not provide opportunities for them, we deny to ourselves the safety which can come from democracy ... There must be freedom for the individual to judge for himself what is good for himself, to choose what he wants, to go where he wants to go within his own country and to associate with whom he wants. Only such freedoms will allow people to grow to maturity and make a person a democratic man."

In a forthright article in the "Cape Times" the next day, Ralph Hurwitz voiced similar sentiments, which he claimed - we think, justly - had always been characteristic of the Cape's way of life:

"There can only be happiness and progress", he said, "if all of us are true citizens bound together by recognition of the inalienable dignity of individual beings, of the human right of men of whatever colour to live and work together in whatever manner they as individuals choose ..."

It may be said that there is nothing new in all this. But it is essential that it be reaffirmed in these days when those who wish to shape our thinking are imposing on us such diametrically opposite ways.

Human Rights and the Churches

The outstanding event of the past month has undoubtedly been the conference called in Johannesburg by the World Council of Churches. Eight South African Churches sent delegates to meet with leading overseas churchmen, and they included three Dutch Reformed Churches. The resolutions adopted by the conference were agreed to by at least eighty

per cent of the delegates; and they included one which stated that "a policy which permanently denies to non-White people the right of collaboration in the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified".

Here are some of the major decisions of the Conference as summarised by a Johannesburg newspaper:-

1. The right to own land and to participate in the government of the country is "part of the dignity of the adult man".
2. There are no scriptural grounds for the prohibition of mixed marriages, although certain factors may make such marriages inadvisable.
3. There can be no objection in principle to the direct representation of Coloureds in Parliament. (At a Press conference it was explained that this question had been considered because it was topical, and that it did not mean that the delegates were by implication against direct representation for Africans and Asians as well.)
4. The migrant labour system has "disintegrating effects" on African life.
5. The wages of the vast majority of non-Whites are far too low.
6. The "same measure of justice" claimed for other racial groups should also apply to Asians.
7. There is not sufficient consultation and communication between the various racial groups.

The Conference rejected "all unjust discrimination". It said that "no stable society is possible unless the cardinal importance of family life is recognised"; that "opportunities must be provided for the inhabitants of the Bantu areas in conformity with human dignity"; and that "the present system of job reservation must give way to a more equitable system of labour which safeguards the interests of all concerned".

Mr Alan Paton, one of the delegates, commented that the Conference "moved very gingerly through the minefield of South African history, but in the end it clearly concluded that history may explain, but it cannot justify present injustice ... There were some remarkable speeches by non-White delegates who spoke the truth without rancour, and struck home time after time at the consciences of their White hearers .. I have never heard so much plain speaking and seen so little offence taken."

The reactions to this Conference have been highly significant. One (the smallest) of the three Afrikaans churches has hastened to declare that it regards separate development as the only just policy.

The D.R. Church of the Free State (not at the Conference) has told its people that it disagrees with much that was decided there, and that they must not be disturbed, as "your church will in its own time give clear guidance". The D.R. Churches of the Cape and the Transvaal have declared that they do not consider the decisions of the Conference (to which they subscribed) as in conflict with a just policy of separate development. The "Kerkbode" and other Afrikaans newspapers have hastened to emphasise that the representatives of their churches at the Conference did not necessarily speak for the Churches as a whole. Dr Verwoerd has made a lengthy statement in which he declares that the statements made are by individuals and are not the voice of the Churches.

On the other hand, the "Burger", both editorially and in "Dawie"'s column, has (while obviously anxious to please both sides) pleaded for full and free discussion and vindicated the right and duty of the D.R. Churches to examine these questions in the light of moral principles. It is clear that all are seriously concerned whether a real conflict may arise between the Churches and the leaders (and rank and file) of the Nationalist Party.

The delegates from the Cape and Transvaal D.R. Churches who associated themselves with the decision of the Conference that political rights could not be indefinitely withheld from Africans living in "White" areas have said: "Those who do not agree with this must now give definite moral grounds for their point of view. This responsibility must not be evaded. It is not a question of a political formula ... but of justice. The repudiation of this cannot, in our opinion, be reconciled with the Christian conscience ... Our delegates - in so far as the N.G. Kerke are concerned - and not the World Council, must accept responsibility for findings which, in the main, flowed from memoranda of the two N.G. Kerke concerned, which they compiled independently of each other. The agreement between the memoranda (prepared by about 50 professors, ministers and missionaries of the two churches before the Conference) was particularly noteworthy".

This stirring of the Afrikaner conscience is the most hopeful portent for 1961, and its development will be watched with interest.

Progress in Rhodesia

Another significant development which cannot fail to have repercussions in South Africa is the multi-racial Indaba held in Salisbury in November. It is reported that the unanimous verdict of the convention was that unfair racial discrimination must be removed in all walks of life; colour bars must come down by law (though schools are

not yet included); there must be early and substantial African participation in national and local government; steps must be taken immediately to narrow the economic gap between the races. Practical recommendations for implementing these proposals were made. There was a "virtually unanimous" call for a specific and precise Bill of Rights, with final appeal to the Privy Council.

Bills have already been introduced into the Southern Rhodesian Parliament virtually abolishing the pass laws and providing for African land ownership in African townships.

There is also the campaign initiated by the "Ten Quiet Women" to bring the racial groups closer together through courtesy, stated to have about 36,000 helpers. The Public Service of Southern Rhodesia is now open to all races, and there is a proposal in Northern Rhodesia to amend the liquor laws to allow Africans access to hotel bars and cocktail lounges (they can already enter cafés and cinemas). Northern Rhodesia, it is said, is "settling down perceptibly to integration".

The "sit-in" campaigns initiated in several of our own cities may be a different approach to the same result.

The "Glut" of bannings

It is reported that since September, 1956, the Board of Censors in Cape Town has banned 3,500 publications of widely varying character. The "Cape Times" points out that the threatened Publications and Entertainments Bill would make this process much more efficient, and that if the present tendency persists, "no writer of a novel or political treatise even moderately critical of South African affairs will see his book on sale here, and information about developments in the rest of Africa will be gravely curtailed", and rightly points out that "every citizen with a public conscience has a duty to care" and to protest. "Since individual voices are unheeded", says the paper, "the desirability of forming a national body for the promotion and defence of this freedom might be considered."

With respect, we would point out that there are already several bodies concerned about this matter, most of them national in character, and that it would surely be better for citizens to support them and strengthen their hands than to form another body which would be the same people under a different label. These ad hoc bodies too often "peter out" when the immediate cause of their formation is past. If your friends are as concerned about censorship as they ought to be, get them to join the League and help us to rouse public opinion effectively to the threat to our intellectual freedom.

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