

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

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"Plus ça change ..."

We are now a republic. For many of us this change has taken away something that we and our fathers cherished; for many more, it is a change made without giving four-fifths of our citizens the chance of expressing their will about it; and we doubt if any thinking Nationalist can really be happy about the way it was done, and the various legislative manoeuvres that led to it. But it is an accomplished fact, and fundamentally it has made little change. South Africa is still our country. And the fact that the republic has come into being has removed a powerful emotional "red herring" which has stopped the consciences of the Afrikaans-speaking people - and to some extent of the English-speaking people too - from responding to the challenge to the Christian conscience which is presented by the situation in South Africa, the inequality of rights and privileges based on race and colour. That is what must be faced in the years ahead by every South African, from the most triumphant to the most frustrated of us. And it is the task of the League and its members to bring this home to all our people.

The call for a National Convention

It is significant that at this time the call should be coming from so many quarters for a national convention which is representative of all sections of the community. Needless to say, to be really effective such a convention must be called by the Government: and we hope that the Government will respond to the growing demand. But, failing that, let us reach agreement as to our common aim. We give again the statement issued by the League (published in somewhat abbreviated form in the Press) of what we regard as the basic minimum programme:

"Every South African is entitled to

- (1) equality before the law, access to the courts, and the presumption of innocence until the contrary is proved.
- (2) An effective voice in central and local government through a non-racial franchise on a common roll.

- (3) Choice of employment, and wages which will allow of adequate nourishment, clothing, shelter and medical services.
- (4) A home and family life within reasonably easy reach of the breadwinner's work.
- (5) Educational facilities at all levels.
- (6) Freedom of movement.
- (7) Freedom of speech and publication.
- (8) Freedom of assembly and of economic and political association."

These are the minimum rights of citizenship. Is there any justification for denying any of them to any citizen?

The League has declared its willingness to initiate discussions on this basis, or to co-operate with and support others to this end.

A first step

Although a government-initiated convention is of course the ideal, it must not be thought that an unofficial one is of no value. The multi-racial "indaba" in Rhodesia probably has played a considerable part in moulding public opinion and even in stimulating government action towards the extension of civil rights in practice. Any such consultations in South Africa would undoubtedly help, at the very least, to create the climate for such an advance. It is reported that the Methodist Church in the Transvaal is to hold such a conference next month, and we hope that something similar will materialise in the Cape soon.

Our responsibility

In the meantime, it is the responsibility of all of us who accept the principles given above to weigh, sympathetically but critically, the proposals that come from political leaders & others. Any steps that are in the right direction will be welcomed: but we must see them from the point of view of all our citizens, and particularly of those specifically affected by them. We must abandon, once and for all, the idea that the White people of this country can decide what is good for the non-Whites and expect them to accept it. It is good that such leaders as Mr Fagan and Sir De Villiers Graaff have affirmed the need for consultation at all levels: but some of their proposals hardly bear the marks of such consultation.

That blessed word "Tradition"

This is, of course, especially true of the thorny question of the franchise. The Nationalists have long regarded it as

a conclusive argument against any policy they disapprove of that it is "not in accordance with the traditional South African way of life": But it is disappointing to find Sir De Villiers Graaff declaring in Durban that the United Party rejects the "one man, one vote" policy because "we are not prepared to sacrifice South African traditions".

There are, of course, arguments against the "one man, one vote" policy (especially as an immediate one) which are worthy of serious consideration: but this is not one of them. And what is the "traditional South African policy" regarding the franchise anyway? It has been one thing in the Transvaal and the Free State, another (though not very different in practice) in Natal and still another in the Cape. But apart from that, it is time we realised in South Africa that some of our "traditional policies" are wrong and unChristian and should be abandoned. We wonder if Sir De Villiers engaged in "consultation at all levels" with our Coloured, African and Indian fellow-citizens before suggesting that the Coloured (men?) voters be restored to the common roll "in the Cape and Natal". The old slogan of "no taxation without representation" might be brought up to date by "no representation without full consultation with the people to be represented". We appreciate that Sir De Villiers is making an advance in many respects: but it still seems suspiciously like "White thinking".

Saul among the prophets?

We agree with "Ilanga lase Natal" that it is heartening to find in "Die Transvaler" the statement that "the Whites of this country need a complete change of attitude on racial questions", and hope that this foreshadows a forward move. Says "Ilanga", "Die Transvaler' would do the country a great and lasting service if it would advise the Government to free those African leaders who are banned, so that they may initiate steps to have talks with the Government on how best to solve our inter-racial problem."

Back to normal?

The pseudo-emergency is over. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the presumption is strong that the Government imposed altogether unnecessary restrictions on the everyday life of the ordinary citizen. Whether there would have been any violence in the absence of such drastic military and police precautions, we do not know. The one encouraging feature of

the whole elaborate business is that the police apparently went out of their way to be courteous and considerate in their difficult task. Is it too much to hope that this will become permanent policy?

More censorship

Senator de Klerk has announced that a draft bill on publications is to be introduced before the end of the session and sent to a select committee before the second reading, so as to "bring in a bill acceptable to all sections of the House". He has also stated that the bill will not apply to press censorship and that instead of the previously proposed board of appeal appointed by the Minister, provision will be made "for appeal to the ordinary courts and eventually to the highest court".

This is a step in the right direction, on which we congratulate the Minister. But what of Mr Eric Louw's avuncular warning to the South African English-speaking Press to "exercise self-control" lest a worse thing befall them? He quotes a warning given by President Kennedy to the United States Press and says that this "applies even more so in South Africa, in respect of the incitement on the part of some English-language newspapers in the Union and the reports of correspondents of some overseas papers". "In my opinion," says Mr Louw, "the time has come that action will have to be taken against the latter ..." Apparently some of them have already been refused visas. And Mr De Wet Nel has joined in with the allegation that "the English-language Press is not a true reflection of the feelings of our fellow English-speaking citizens", but "to a great extent a foreign Press which does not serve the interests of South Africa".

This, of course, is nonsense: but it is dangerous nonsense. If it is an indication of what we may expect, it bodes ill for the new republic. Mr Louw should know by this time that no amount of malicious reporting can do South Africa as much harm overseas as press censorship: and he might reflect also that the most serious damage is done not by misrepresentation, but by an accurate picture of the actions of the Government. If we may be permitted to quote Karl Marx (via the "Cape Times"), "The censored press, a bad press, remains bad, even when giving good products. A free press remains good, even when giving bad products... The government hears only its own voice, and thus establishes itself in the illusion of hearing the voice of the nation ... And it reaches the point of not being aware of its lies..."