

PC16/2/115/6

CIVIL RIGHTS



News Letter

(Box 3007, CAPE TOWN)

June, 1960

The Spirit of Union

To those who took part and, we believe, to many others also it was a heartening thing that, on a public holiday, an estimated ten thousand of the citizens of Cape Town, of all colours, should have come into the city in order to take part in the march and ceremony of re-dedication organised by the Archbishop's Conference Committee for Union Day. We quote the latter part of the dedication pledge:

"... however dark the clouds that hang over our country at the present time, we declare our faith in the unconquerable spirit of man, in the values of Western Civilization, and in the future of South Africa as a civilized land. Inspired by that faith, we solemnly dedicate ourselves to the tasks

- * of ridding our country of the scourge of poverty;
- * of guaranteeing to all South Africans those civil liberties that are regarded throughout the civilized world as inalienable human rights, and
- * of achieving inter-racial justice on the basis of government by consent, equal protection of the laws and equality of opportunity for all, irrespective of race or birth, class or creed.

We pledge ourselves not to be dismayed at the difficulties of these tasks and to strive, through their successful accomplishment, to bring greatness, dignity and peace to our fatherland."

Succouring the innocent

We commend to all our readers and their friends the State of Emergency Relief Fund, originally started by a number of organisations and now being conducted under the aegis of the Red Cross. It is at present helping about 330 families (Argus, May 31) whose breadwinners have been removed or incapacitated during the present emergency. Such a cause speaks for itself.

Indemnity and Responsibility

By proclamation on May 10 the Government has given itself indemnity for any acts done during the emergency which might have led to civil or criminal proceedings, provided these were done "in good faith under the emergency regulations".

This increases the responsibility of the Government to make a thorough investigation into any alleged abuse of power brought to its notice. We hope in particular that the Minister of Justice will go

promptly and thoroughly into the cases of the sons of five widows in Langa, who were arrested and sent away to the Eastern Province, as reported in the House by Mr Walter Stanford. Enthusiasm for getting rid of "vagrants and agitators" can go too far.

We hope too that the Government is doing all in its power to "investigate" those who have been detained, to release those against whom no charge is to be brought and to bring charges against the rest. There must be many more than a hundred and fifty-three in the former category. Such releases should be unconditional. It is presumably too much to expect that the Government will in any way compensate the people who have been unnecessarily detained, but the least it can do is to let them get back to ordinary life as soon as possible. This is the merest justice - quite apart from its effect on South Africa's reputation in the wider world and on our economic stability.

Migratory labour

We are glad that the Cape Town City Council has followed up its resolution regarding the changing of the migratory labour system by sending a deputation to interview Mr de Wet Nel, and we hope that his "sympathetic" attitude will bear fruit.

Days of Crisis

We draw our readers' attention to a survey of the emergency which has been drawn up by Miss Mariel Horrand and published by the Institute of Race Relations, which puts the situation in perspective. It is entitled "Days of Crisis in South Africa".

Press Freedom

The International Press Institute in Zurich has expressed its "grave concern" at the situation of the Press in South Africa, as follows:

"Because of the wide terms of the emergency regulations, newspapers in South Africa find themselves, under threat of suppression, unable to give their readers an accurate picture of what is happening in the Union or to comment freely on events.

"Moreover, newspapermen in the Union are now working in constant danger of summary arrest. Some have fled the country or gone into hiding. At least five others are in gaol.

"All those journalists who are now under arrest without any charges having been made against them should be brought on trial at the earliest possible date. Only thus can the Union Government dispel the widespread belief that certain of those at present in gaol are being despitely used simply because they are journalists."

Such comment is hardly surprising when we find Dr C. de Wet stating in the House that "the English-language Press is the greatest of all agitators and inciters. There is no legislation yet under which action can be taken against it, but it will have to come, and come soon", and Mr Froneman talking of the "sobering effect" of the emergency on the press.

Nevertheless we would pay tribute to the courageous comment of our own local papers in these difficult circumstances.

The "Emergency duty" of the S.A.B.C.

Fresh light on the attitude of the S.A.B.C. to politics and the emergency has been thrown by its Director-General, Mr Gideon Roos, in reply to questions put to the Board of Governors by the Rand Daily Mail about the "South African Scene" broadcasts by Mr J. J. Kruger. The Corporation, Mr Roos says, believes that in abnormal times "the duty to support authority transcends the confines of party politics. In times of stress the Corporation must help to calm disturbed feelings, and at the same time support the duly-elected authorities in the maintenance of law and order". Mr Roos does not explain why this attitude justifies Mr Kruger's support of the idea of a republic, his deriding of the suggestions for consultation with the leaders of the non-whites (made by leaders of mining, business and industry) as "childish and superficial", or his defence of apartheid.

Judging by the widespread criticism it has evoked, the "South African Scene" has certainly not helped to calm disturbed feelings.

We hope that many listeners will follow the example of Mr J. P. Durnin and make similar protests when necessary to their local S.A.B.C. advisory boards.

Perhaps the Government may be brought to realise that, in the words of Professor Pistorius, "South Africans do not like open indoctrination, and anything which even remotely resembles it will defeat its own purpose."

Business and the Government

It has been well said that, although there has never been such a serious deprivation of civil liberties in South Africa as the present crisis, there has also never been more evidence of concern from all classes of people about the causes of the unrest, or more effort to help the Government to find a really constructive answer to it. In particular we are struck by the unanimity with which the leaders of commerce and industry have spoken about the need to deal with the legislative and economic burden which is pressing on the Africans.

It is a noteworthy event when such a paper as the Financial Mail calls for (1) consultation between the Government and urban Africans; (2) consultation between industry and its workers, including the Africans; (3) recognition of African trade unions; (4) a national minimum wage as a first step in raising African wages; (5) withdrawal of job reservation, and (6) re-interpretation of the pass laws. Similar proposals have been put forward, not only by the Cape Town Chambers of Commerce and Industry, but by the Association of Chambers of Commerce in Johannesburg, including the Afrikaanse Sakekamer and the Handelsinstituut. That the Prime Minister in his statement to Parliament answered every point made by these bodies with a blunt "no", and virtually told them that it was not their business to advise the Government, does not alter the fact that the pressure of public opinion is growing. To some extent this is merely hard-headed business common sense: but we believe that slowly people's consciences are being stirred as well. If this is so, the tragedies of Sharpeville, Langa and Nyanga have not been wholly in vain. But we would urge that no one should allow himself to be satisfied (as the Prime Minister apparently is) with the mere prospect of accelerated Bantustans. Perhaps even this is doing Dr Verwoerd an injustice, since he has just stated that "the policy of apartheid has never meant moving the non-white people into non-white areas". This, in our view, makes apartheid even more unjustifiable than Bantustans, for which some moral basis has in the past been claimed: but at least it does begin to face reality.

UN and "domestic affairs"

In the Security Council debate on our emergency the United States representative said, inter alia:

"Under Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter, all members of the United Nations have pledged themselves to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion", and quoted a previous American statement that "no member of this organisation could justifiably seek purposely to escape its pledge. No member could justifiably be excused from endeavouring to fulfil it. We believe that the United Nations can legitimately call attention to policies of Member Governments that appear to be inconsistent with obligations under the Charter and earnestly ask members to abide by the undertakings that they have accepted in signing the Charter". He said, "We think there is an important distinction between situations where governments are actively promoting human rights... and situations where governmental policy runs counter to this..."