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ANNUAL REPORT of the Civil Rights League for the year 1967-68 (presented at the Annual General Meeting on October 14, 1968)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is just over twenty years since the first steps were taken out of which developed the Civil Rights League. It is obviously impossible for me to review these years in detail tonight, but it is interesting to recall some of the outstanding developments in the sphere of civil rights.

The League, as many of you know, was founded following on a meeting which packed the City Hall on September 14, 1948 to protest against the newly elected Government's declared intention of removing Coloured male voters from the common roll. It is an interesting coincidence that the first "members' meeting" was held on October 14, 1948! This meeting, like several of its successors, was under the chairmanship of Mr Leo Marquard, former Chairman and one of the present Patrons of the League.

The League's first action was to approach the new Prime Minister, Dr D.F. Malan, to receive a deputation bearing the resolution passed by the meeting of September 14. This the Prime Minister refused to do. A nation-wide petition to Parliament was subsequently organised against the removal of the Coloured voters, which was presented to Parliament in 1951 with over 100,000 names.

As a means of enlightening public opinion the League published a number of leaflets and pamphlets on civil rights issues, whose authors included J.H. Hofmeyr, Leo Marquard, L.M. Thompson, and Dr Sheila Van der Horst, on such subjects as "The Churches' Judgment on Apartheid", "Democracy in Peril" (in English and Afrikaans) and "The Coloured Man Speaks" (this in co-operation with Coloured leaders). Allied Leagues sprang up in Stellenbosch, East London, Grahamstown, Johannesburg and Durban, and for several years representatives of these centres met annually to co-ordinate policy. Gradually, however, their active members were drawn into new bodies such as the Torch Commando, the Liberal Party and the Black Sash until only the Cape Town League remained.

From its inception the League has operated through public meetings, often in co-operation with other like-minded bodies; by articles in the press, by memoranda presented to government commissions, or circulated to Members of Parliament or other interested bodies; and (since March, 1954) by the publication of its own news letter, which keeps members and others au fait with topical issues of civil rights.

Initially the League saw it as its function, by these means, to protect individual civil rights and to awake the public to the dangers of projected legislation. With the changing political climate it now lays more emphasis on keeping individual injustices of legislation and administration before the public, in the hope that sooner or later the public conscience will be stirred to insist on their removal.

Among issues actively dealt with by the League have been:

- "Christian National" education (1949)
- African school feeding (stopped 1949)
- The Citizenship Act (1949)
- The Group Areas Act (1950)
- The Unlawful Organisations and the Suppression of Communism Acts (1950, 1951)
- Banning of newspapers (e.g. the "Guardian", 1951)
- Restrictions on passports (1950)
- Police assaults and other complaints (1951)
- Post office censorship (1950)
- The Public Safety Act (1953)
- The Criminal Laws Amendment Act (1953)
- Bus apartheid (1954)
- The Natives (Prohibition of Interdicts) Act (1956)
- The Senate Act (1955)
- The Native Laws Amendment Act (1956) (especially the "Church clause")
- University apartheid (1956-7)
- Bantu Laws Amendment Acts (1957, 1963, 1964)
- Police powers (1957)
- "Endorsing out" of African women (1957)
- Separate use of municipal halls and proposed separate municipal rolls and franchise (1959)
- Bannings (from 1959)
- Control of press (1959)
- Removal of African parliamentary representation (1960)
- Transfer of Coloured education (1962)
- The 90-day clause of the General Laws Amendment Bill (1962 - suspended 1965)
- The Publications and Entertainment Acts (1962-63)
- Conditions of detainees (1963)
- Rights of arrested persons (1964)
- Proclamation R.26 on apartheid in audiences (1965)

Since 1957 the League has on several occasions, alone or

with other organisations, initiated celebrations of Human Rights Day (December 10). It hopes to co-operate this year in the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, being marked all over the world in Human Rights Year.

The Past Year

Beach apartheid

Since our last Annual Report there have been developments in various spheres of apartheid. A year ago an allocation of beaches to the White and Coloured people of the Cape was roundly condemned by many. This year it has been announced that the responsibility for this amenity is to be taken over by the Provincial Administration. There seems hope that the Administrator will produce a more equitable division.

Group Areas

The Coloured communities of Simon's Town and Glencairn are being moved to a new township at Slangkop. It is reported that conditions there are fairly good, except for the very high bus fares the people must pay to get to work. But - they have no choice whether to live there or not. Some have been uprooted from homes where their families have lived for generations, within easy distance of their work. The economic effect on Simon's Town (which is losing about half of its population against its will) remains to be seen.

Banning and Exit Permits

The incidence of banning orders seems to have diminished considerably this year. But Dr Raymond Hoffenberg, a brilliant member of the U.C.T. medical staff, left South Africa on an exit permit after being deprived of his post. Mr and Mrs John Daniel, twice refused passports for overseas study, have adopted British citizenship and left South Africa. The principle of no conviction (or penalty) without trial needs to be continually reaffirmed. It is regrettable that suggestions made during the year, in and out of Parliament, that such cases be handled by a panel of judges have been rejected by the Minister.

Legislation

The most notable legislation of the 1968 session was the Prohibition of Political Interference Act, by virtue of which the Liberal Party dissolved and the Progressive Party had to limit its membership to Whites. The representation of Coloured voters in Parliament is also to disappear in 1970.

The League, in protesting against these measures, pointed out that it was the removal of Coloured voters from the common roll which had made them possible.

Violence - cause and remedy

Concern is growing about the increase of violence, especially in the Cape, where knifing and stabbing cases are much more numerous than before. In this connection one calls to mind a statement by the late Dr Martin Luther King: "It is necessary to be as concerned about getting rid of the environmental conditions that caused (the riots) as it is to condemn the violence ... No greater tragedy can befall a nation than to leave millions of people with a feeling that they have no stake in their society." Lack of education, lack of amenities, the enforced removals of group areas, the sense of inferiority and bitterness - all these contribute to the growth of social evils.

The moral issue

It is heartening that some of our church leaders are ready to speak out more clearly on these matters. The recently formed Citizens' Action Committee, in which the League is co-operating, is bringing the magnitude of enforced removals to the notice of the public. Even SABRA is becoming concerned at the gap between Bantustan theory and practice.

Another encouraging aspect is the growing concern of our university students with human rights issues. The League has greatly appreciated the developing co-operation with NUSAS and the University of Cape Town.

The future

At intervals during the past twenty years your Committee has become concerned about the limited effectiveness of the League and has tried to find means of more active functioning. That these attempts have not been more successful has been due to our limited finances and to the climate of intimidation and frustration built up by government policy. That we have been able to continue so long must give us satisfaction and should spur us on to further efforts. Hou moed!

BARBARA M. GRIEVE
Acting Chairman

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