

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

Wise clemency

Mr Robert Sobukwe, who has for six years been detained on Robben Island after serving a three years' sentence for incitement to contravene the pass laws in 1960, has recently been told by the Minister of Justice that he is to be released as soon as "certain administrative arrangements" are completed, and "subject to such restrictions as are deemed necessary for the safety of the State".

Mr Sobukwe's detention, renewed annually by special legislation, must have shocked the outside world - and thinking South Africans - almost more than any other act of the Government. To keep a man in prison (even in reasonable comfort) after he has served the sentence imposed on him by the Court is contrary to the principles of law and justice. To do so when the Government is continually assuring us of the peaceful state of our country is even less defensible. We understand that, while he was in prison, Mr Sobukwe's wife appealed in vain for him to be granted an exit permit from South Africa. We hope the conditions to be imposed on him will not be such as to make him feel this is the only way to happiness.

That manpower shortage ...

Government spokesmen frequently refer to the shortage of manpower in South Africa and suggest such remedies as immigration and the raising of the (White) birthrate. They have not yet reached the stage of turning to non-White manpower (except, of course, Mr Schoeman on the Railways, and other instances of which we do not hear); but recently there have been developments in another direction. A Minister has stated that the women (White) are to be trained (in special institutions) for civil defence; and the head of the Department of Criminology at the University of South Africa has made a strong plea for the appointment of women police. He instanced a number of spheres (including the Special Branch) in which they could be used "without imperilling their femininity".

A "Cape Times" columnist says that women police are " commonplace" in Europe, and especially in Britain, where they deal

mainly with juvenile delinquents, prostitutes and clerical and technical duties.

The "Cape Times" reminds us that a similar appeal was made with no result by Mrs Bertha Solomon eleven years ago, and adds: "What a pity the South African woman's right to be considered as an intelligent member of the human race still has to be argued piecemeal! ... Prejudice against giving women equal treatment and opportunity is nowadays usually rationalised, sometimes masquerading as a manly desire to protect them. But what is really being protected? Is it not perhaps the male ego?"

We hope that the Government will consider the learned Professor's suggestion favourably.

Academic freedom and student protest

The students of the English-speaking Universities have conducted a period of protest recently to commemorate the closing of their Universities to non-White students (except by permit) in 1959. In spite of the forebodings of the Minister of Justice, the protests have been conducted in an orderly and dignified way, and have been remarkable for the co-operation of staff and students (except for the Principal of the University of Natal, who refused to sign the petition addressed to the Government for the somewhat inadequate reason that there was "more academic freedom in South Africa than in some of the Western countries"). It was, in fact, the Universities and not merely the students who protested. Certain points are significant.

* The petition to the Government to "re-open" the Universities carried 10,000 signatures, although no organised attempt was made to get the signatures of sympathetic members of the general public.

* The Police in Cape Town did not find it necessary to take any measures against the students who conducted a vigil on the steps of the Cathedral. Indeed, they had to discourage counter-demonstrators (apparently from the Defence Force), which they did firmly and efficiently. The President of the U.C.T. Students' Representative Council expressed the students' appreciation for this.

* Police in Johannesburg were apparently less judicious. Six students standing (apparently in innocence) on an island in the middle of a street were arrested by about 30 police, accompanied by police dogs.

* The subjects of the students' protest were the "closing" of the "open" Universities, and the drastic disciplinary measures apparently being applied to students at Fort Hare. In justifi-

cation of this latter point Mr Duncan Innes, President of NUSAS, mentioned some of the rules enforced at Fort Hare, which he challenged the Rector of that College to deny:

- * No student may leave the campus without permission from the Rector or his deputies.
- * No student organisation can be set up without prior approval of the Rector.
- * No student meeting may be held on the campus without the permission of the Rector.
- * No magazine, pamphlet or publication for which students are responsible can be circulated without permission from the Rector.
- * No statement can be given to the Press on behalf of the students without the Rector's permission.
- * No outsider "may be upon the College grounds as a visitor" and no Fort Hare student may visit any other institution without the permission of the Rector, and then only on certain conditions

Says Mr Innes, "These regulations do not exist at our White universities ..."

Students at both U.C.T. and Wits applied for permission to hold orderly processions through the streets. Both these requests were turned down, on the grounds that the police "could not guarantee them police protection", and that "they might incite other people to attack them".

Confrontation or conversion?

Students were urged by staff speakers to continue their fight for the reopening of their Universities. They were told that the conversion of public opinion, though a slow process, was more effective than a confrontation with the Government. The President of the U.C.T. Students' Representative Council said protest was a means "to awaken a spirit of inquiry in an insensitive society". Certainly the week of protest must have made many members of the public, as well as students, think more deeply about the matter than they had previously done.

"Die Burger"'s reaction

Significant, too, was the reaction of the Cape Nationalist newspaper, which must have taken the protests seriously, for it went to great pains to "play them down" in an editorial in which it described them as "relatively tame" compared with student protests overseas, and as being concentrated on "such an undangerous, almost academic question" as the closing of the univer-

sities to non-White students. It suggested that the senior members of those Universities joined in the protests because they knew they "had not an earthly chance of succeeding", and even that they "and the political forces behind them" wanted to use the openness of the English-language universities "as a weapon against universities for the non-White peoples" - a malicious and completely ungrounded accusation which only their docile readers would believe.

Leadership

The Chancellor of U.C.T., Mr Harry Oppenheimer, told the students that while no protest or demonstration was going to change things, as long as universities continued to turn out courageous young men and women who devoted themselves to humanity, "we will not be defeated and in the long run we will have victory".

Sir Richard Luyt, the University's Principal and Vice-Chancellor, recalled that in 1959 the University had "dedicated itself with high solemnity and resolute purpose to strive to regain its loss". The activities of the week, he said, had three clear purposes: to remind themselves that there had been loss of academic freedom; to remind others of these very same things; and "to achieve progress towards change, towards restoration of the fullness of university autonomy within the limits that we believe to be right. Inside these limits do we see the right to admit students of due academic merit without regard to colour".

"It is so easy", said Sir Richard, "to lapse into a way of life - a comfortable way of life - in which one does not recognise that there is any loss from the fullness of how a university should be constituted, to accept the restricted situation as the normal, the easy as the right ...

"We here, today, believe in the clear, simple, unadorned truth that this University and South Africa as a whole will be better able to go forward wisely and happily - even if needing special courage and character - if the right is restored to us to allow entry to our University on academic merit alone without regard to race.

"I, as your Principal, am proud of this University's resolution in this cause. With you as fellow members of UCT I stand resolved to pursue our rightful aim, in right ways to the right end."

So say all of us.

MOYA