

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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Cape Town

News Letter

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"Man's inhumanity to man ..."

The Parliamentary correspondent of the "Cape Times" headed his article last week "An impression of callousness", and went on to quote utterances of Ministers and Nationalist M.P.'s in Parliament during the previous week which gave rise to such an impression. Like that writer, we would not like "to think that South Africans are devoid of ordinary human sensitivity to the suffering of the weak, the under-privileged and those who have lost loved ones in tragic circumstances"; but we realise how easy it is to get used to such situations until they no longer touch us. For that reason we make no apology for quoting instances that have appeared in the Press during the past few weeks. We would strongly urge that our readers keep such things in mind and talk about them to people who, for one reason or another, are untouched by them; and also take every opportunity of ventilating them in the correspondence columns of the Press.

Race classification

The misery this policy has caused, particularly in Cape Town, is incalculable. It has split families, caused suicides, hung like a sword of Damocles above the heads of many who fear that they may be "re-classified" as Coloured. The case quoted by Mr. David Marais, M.P., in Parliament was one where reconsideration seemed possible; but what of those who have no such hope? What of the 140 cases of appeal mentioned by Mrs Catherine Taylor as still awaiting consideration? What of the families that have left South Africa for ever because of actual or possible trouble under this Act? Said Mr Marais: "I believe that members in this House should be reminded from time to time of the havoc that race classification can play and does play in the lives of ordinary, good hard-working citizens of South Africa". The article comments: "The plain fact is that no system of race classification is workable without a chain reaction of human tragedy ... Ironically enough ... the Nationalist Government does not really

require statutory race classification to carry out its policy.

"But the abolition of this vicious system would bring peace of mind to many thousands of unhappy South Africans trapped on the racial border line."

"Endorsing out"

We hear comparatively little of this - to the press, it is no longer "news". But occasionally a particularly tragic case is mentioned - for instance, that of Mrs Caroline Mafeje, a widow who has five children, and who has now - after living in Cape Town since the 1930's, been convicted of "being in a proscribed area without permission" and ordered to leave. Says the "Cape Times": "Where do such people go? Is accommodation provided? Are means of earning a livelihood available?"

Mrs Jean Sinclair of the Blach Sash (Johannesburg) has written a letter to the Minister of Bantu Administration (Mr M.C. Botha) in which she asks him to withdraw the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Bill and the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill. She points out that under the latter law the Minister would assume "complete mastery over the movement, dwelling place and labour of all the Africans in the Republic ... the law makes specific provision for the control and use of a human being as though he were a mere cipher, and for the denial of his right to the exercise of his free will or the expression of his free choice throughout his life".

Mrs Sinclair further points out that this Bill gives the Minister power "to control industry, commerce, the service industries and agriculture by either permitting or denying them labour". It makes provision for the use of unused profits from the sale of "Bantu beer" in the urban townships for developing services in the "homeland", thereby denying urban Africans the amenities for which these profits have previously been used. It entitles the Minister to prohibit, by simple notice in the Government Gazette, "the performance of work by, or the employment of any African anywhere, in any job by any employer". The Minister can "abolish or retard the growth of whole towns and communities ... without any reference to Parliament". With justification she describes the Bill as "the end of security in South Africa - the end of security for the African people, the end of security for any employers of African labour, be they housewives, industrialists, business men ..."

No wonder Mrs Sinclair describes the Bill as "monstrous" and says it "has no place in our country". We hope that when it comes

before Parliament, humane as well as practical considerations may be given more weight, and that public opinion outside Parliament will not accept such legislation lightly.

Job reservation

The Minister of Labour, Mr Marais Viljoen, recently in the House of Assembly described job reservation as "absolutely essential to ensure continued labour peace". Government labour policy, he said, was "aimed at protecting the traditional life of the Whites, while also giving as many labour opportunities as possible to the non-Whites" (!), and proceeded to give statistics to prove that non-White workers were getting increasing scope (in an expanding economy, not even job reservation can prevent that!).

The Minister was, of course, referring to White "labour peace". As Dr G.F. Jacobs, an Opposition member from Johannesburg, pointed out on the same day, non-White labour was not allowed to go on strike and therefore the absence of strikes proved nothing.

A Nationalist M.P. recently urged the Minister to introduce job reservation in shops and offices, alleging that there was friction between employees in shops. The National Union of Commercial and Allied Workers at its recent annual conference passed a motion (which it has sent to the Minister) rejecting this contention and condemning the proposal as "completely unjustified and impractical, and added: "With the growth of the economy, and the increasing shortage of labour, the imposition of job reservation in shops and offices will severely hamper the development of the distributive trade". We hope that other trade unions will support this attitude.

A crack in apartheid?

The Minister of Health recently announced to Parliament that "in cases of emergency", the Government was "willing to waive the apartheid regulations at present applying to ambulance services", although he said there were "very good reasons" why the provincial administrations and local authorities had separate ambulances for separate race groups. The Minister asked police to take note of this ruling.

The "Cape Times" points out that ambulances of the Cape Peninsula Local Authority are not run on an apartheid basis.

Perhaps this is the first step towards government recognition of the fact - obvious enough, no doubt, to the patients - that any occasion when an ambulance has to be called is an "emergency".

No amenities for servants in Sea Point

The Deputy Minister of Planning, Mr G.F. Froneman, said in the Assembly recently that "he could see no reason why recreational facilities for non-Whites living in White areas should be established in those areas", and asserted that "Whites also had to travel long distances for their recreation".

Every employer, said Mr Froneman, should "allow his servants enough time off during the week to use recreational facilities in his own group area". This in response by the demand by an Opposition speaker that the Minister should say what the Government had in mind for "the provision of recreation for non-Whites in areas such as Sea Point which were far removed from their homes on the Cape Flats", and the control of servants' visitors. The speaker (Mr L.G. Murray) pointed out that no matter what regulations were made regarding visitors, "the existence of non-Whites in White group areas had to be faced realistically".

Judging by the Minister's reply, he has not yet done that. But what about the White inhabitants of places like Sea Point? Have they no concern for their servants?

"Immorality ..."

There have been numerous protests against the shame and degradation imposed on those prosecuted under the Immorality Act, which of course became ridiculous in the recent case where a married couple (immigrants) were prosecuted because the husband, a Lebanese, was classified in South Africa as Coloured and the wife was White. Valid criticisms have been voiced against the degrading measures which have to be taken by the police in their attempts to secure a conviction under the Act. It has also been pointed out frequently that to limit "immorality" to cases where the people concerned are of different racial groups is to deny the principles of morality. But the ultimate absurdity was surely reached when a policeman was recently fined R100 for dereliction of duty because he had not peered through a window or broken down a door in order to investigate a case.

A voice from the past

We recently came across part of the message sent by Emily Hobhouse to the unveiling of the Bloemfontein Vrouemonument in 1911. She said: "Liberty is the equal right and heritage of every child of man, without distinction of race, colour or sex. A community that lacks the courage to found its citizenship on this broad base, becomes 'a city divided against itself, which cannot stand'." MOYA