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RIGHTS

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News Letter

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Good Wishes to NUSAS

The 46th Congress of the National Union of South African Students is to take place in Natal this month, and is to be one of reassessment. From the preliminary agenda it is clear that much hard thinking has already been done and that far-reaching decisions will be arrived at. The students have a most important share in our national thinking, and we wish them all success in this courageous effort. As was commented in the "CapeTimes" recently, "A university worth its salt ... endeavours to induce in students the desire to weigh things up, make judgments and pursue the truth in all things"; it must "aim to produce competent and valuable citizens". We congratulate NUSAS on its long and honourable record in this respect.

Detention

The League, like other public bodies and individuals, continues to be concerned about the workings of the system of 180-day detention. In a statement to the press recently we pointed out that the re-detention of "the 22" after their acquittal in February would not have been known to the public were it not for the alertness of the press, and drew attention to the fact that for some time after the release of three of them (who are apparently to give evidence for the State), these people could not be traced. We hope that questions will be asked in Parliament, particularly about the circumstances that caused one of these three to be held for some time in a mental hospital, and that the Government will see its way to repealing these very undesirable measures.

Passports and Exit Permits

The refusal of a passport to Mr Athol Fugard on the occasion of his latest play, "Boesman and Lena", in New York has drawn vigorous protests from both English- and Afrikaans-speaking writers, and even from one Afrikaans newspaper, but to no avail. Mr Fugard himself has declared that he thinks the Government wants to force him into taking an exit permit, which he has so far not

decided to do, fortunately for the literary life of South Africa. The ironical side of the matter is that Mr Fugard's plays are acceptable to the government-sponsored body CAPAB. Says the "Cape Times", "The personal liberty of South Africa's foremost playwright is being grievously restricted, and his development as a writer perhaps seriously retarded, by a petty edict which remains unexplained."

But some people are not even allowed exit permits. Mr Robert Sobukwe, who has been restricted to Kimberley since his release from Robben Island more than a year ago, has been refused both a passport and an exit permit which he asked for in order to take up a research and lecturing fellowship at Wisconsin University. Since his release he has been subject to banning and house arrest, and is working for a firm of attorneys in Kimberley. He holds an M.A. degree, and also obtained the B.Econ. degree from London University by correspondence while on Robben Island. Here is another matter that calls for explanation.

Drought and starvation in the "homelands"

Those of us who have hailed the rains as a relief to our gardens and our attenuated water supply cannot begin to conceive the position in areas really drought-stricken. The "Cape Times" reported recently that in the Transkei crops have failed, cattle are dying and malnutrition and tuberculosis have reached alarming proportions, especially among children. Those who have been "endorsed out" and have no adequate source of income must be suffering more even than others. It is stated that thousands of children are being fed daily, but that this is quite inadequate. In one district twenty per cent of the population are reported to have contracted pulmonary tuberculosis.

Those who feel moved to help should send donations to the Quaker Service Relief Fund, c/o Mrs A. Pearce, Box 178, Milnerton.

"The World" (Johannesburg) reports that similar conditions are rife in Sekukuniland, where "ministers of religion and hospital authorities are fighting hunger, and food parcels are "sometimes prescribed to patients like medicine ..."

Making it worse

The new Administrator of the Free State, Mr Sampie Froneman, who distinguished himself during his Ministerial career by referring to the wives, children and aged dependants of African workers in urban areas as "surplus appendages", has now stirred up vigorous

correspondence in "Die Burger" by arguing that African family life is not disrupted by the migrant labour system because "the African concept of family life is not the same as that of White Christians". One correspondent asked how it was possible for Mr Froneman, himself a member of the Ned. Geref. (Dutch Reformed) Church, to remain in ignorance of that Church's pronouncements on migrant labour, which it has condemned as a "cancer" in the lives of Africans that will not, it says, leave the Whites unscathed.

Surely, mere humanity, apart from Christian principles, demands that Africans should at least be allowed to come to the towns in order to earn enough to feed their families at home, even if they are not allowed to bring those families with them?

The Director of Bantu Administration of the Cape Town Municipality, Mr A.H. Worrall, has said he is convinced that relaxation of the present irksome restrictions would bring about an improvement in race relations, would benefit employers and employees, and would aid economic development of the Western Cape. It would also without doubt relieve conditions in the Transkei.

That Coloured lido

Mr F.D. Conradie, M.E.C., has stated that, because of resistance from people living in neighbouring areas, there is "virtually no chance" of a Coloured swimming bath being built on state land just inside the Milnerton municipality. A projected nuclear power station makes another site impossible. It is "a pity" that no suitable place closer than Silverstream, opposite Mamre, can be found. He described the chances of a Coloured beach between Hout Bay and Silverstream as "very slim".

The City Council, which has been trying to get permission to develop the Milnerton site, points out that it would serve 150,000 to 200,000 Coloured people in the City and Northern Suburbs.

Says the "Argus": "It is a great deal more than a pity - it is an intolerable situation when some 200,000 Coloured people living in areas such as Schotsche Kloof, District Six and Woodstock are told that the nearest amenity the authorities can provide for them is at Strandfontein. What sort of community is this that can view with apparent equanimity the idea of Whites having a string of lovely beaches available while their Coloured fellow citizens are treated in this way?"

Conscientious objectors

In view of the interest recently taken by the League's

Committee in the rights of conscientious objectors to military service, it is interesting to note that the Supreme Court of the U.S.A. has recently exempted from military service all young men who have strong moral or ethical objections to military duty - so long as their beliefs are deeply held and are not based on expediency.

The League hopes shortly to arouse public interest in the creation of other forms of national service in which the genuine conscientious objectors could be enrolled.

Group areas and justice

Understandably vigorous protests have come from the Coloured community over the proposal of a Nationalist aspirant to the Cape Provincial Council that the area of Kensington and Factreton, a proclaimed Coloured group area, should be reproclaimed White.

As recently as 1967, the then Minister of Planning disavowed such an idea on behalf of his Department.

This is the sort of issue on which the Coloured Representative Council should take up the cudgels with the Government. It is interesting to note that they are concerning themselves also with other aspects of Coloured housing such as the question of tenants being allowed eventually to buy their own houses, and the provision of better houses in Coloured group areas. The Chairman of the Council, Mr Tom Swartz, said recently that his Party was trying to convene a conference between the Council and the various government departments concerned.

Criminal Procedure

The Minister of Justice announced recently the appointment of a one-man commission of inquiry into criminal procedure and evidence. While we would respectfully suggest that on a matter of such importance it would have been better to appoint a larger commission, we feel the inquiry is overdue. We hope that it will recommend the removal, and not the entrenching, of undesirable features of our present system.

"Docile battlers"

Women in South Africa will wait with interest to see if the women of Switzerland will be given voting rights. It seems extraordinary that an otherwise progressive country should have refused them for so long. Says the "Cape Times": "The woman's real case for a vote on the same terms as her man is simply that she, too, is a person. And her case is incontrovertible."