



ANNUAL REPORT of the Civil Rights League for the year 1970-71 (presented at the Annual General Meeting, 31/8/71)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past year the League has been active in a number of fields. You will remember that our last annual meeting, addressed by Sir Robert Birley, was very successful. About 300 people heard his address on "Challenges to a Free Society". This also had the distinction of being published, in full, in two magazines, "Reality" and the "Sash". It was referred to in two leading articles and had several other mentions in local papers.

Conscientious Objection

Our symposium on this subject, though smaller, was also very successful. A resolution was sent to the Minister of Defence and as instructed by the Conference, we sought an interview with the Minister to discuss possible alternative forms of national service. Unfortunately so far the Minister has straitly refused either to meet us or to consider introducing amending legislation. The matter has created considerable interest and we shall continue to take any possible steps to alter a situation in which South Africa is "out of step" with most Western countries. We have referred to this matter in greater detail in recent news letters.

Tape recordings

Tape recordings of the main speeches at both these meetings were offered on loan to any interested, but each was borrowed only twice, which suggests this is not a successful form of publicity.

Press and memoranda

We made statements in the press on such infringements of civil rights as detention without trial, the re-arrest of the acquitted "19" and the death of Imam Haron, in which case we called for a judicial commission. A memorandum on detention was also circulated to Members of Parliament, and aroused considerable interest.

BOSS Commission

The report of this Commission (to which the League made representations) is still awaited; but reports in the Press indicated that some of the more objectionable features of the Act were to be amended. We await developments with interest.

Legal Aid

The League has continued its efforts to obtain clarification of the workings of the Legal Aid Act (passed in 1969); but although we have been informed in detail of the machinery set up

under the Act, we have so far found no evidence that it is actually in operation, even after this long lapse of time. This seems to us a matter of real public importance, and we shall continue to pursue it.

#### "Helping" the urban African

During this year's parliamentary session a Bantu Affairs Administration Act was passed which, it was claimed, would help Africans to find suitable employment in urban areas. The formation of larger administrative units and the establishment of aid centres would, it was said, contribute to this end. It remains to be seen whether the new arrangements will noticeably reduce the number of arrests for "pass" offences (commented on with concern recently by legal authorities) and of "endorsement out". The League approached the various local authorities urging them not to acquiesce without protest in the diminution of their local powers involved in this legislation, and found that on the whole these bodies were alive to this issue.

Generally speaking, we would say that what Africans need is not help in finding jobs (though they would benefit by training), but security in the jobs after they have found them, and the "privilege" of having their wives and children with them in decent houses.

#### Co-operation with other organisations

The League has co-operated with several other bodies during this year by keeping its members informed of activities it considered interesting or important. Thus, we circulated a memorandum on the proposed formation of a society for the abolition of the death penalty (this has since been formed with branches in several centres). When the Censorship Bill was before Parliament we circulated a petition originating from the Pasquino Society. We sent out order forms for the series of booklets being published by SPRO-CAS, a research branch of the South African Council of Churches. We supported the Mayor of Cape Town in his public meeting on the removal of Coloured voters from the municipal voters' roll. At the time of the Republican Festival a number of our members helped with a "Questioning" in Cape Town at which the realities of the South African situation were honestly faced. In June our Chairman and

another senior member attended, along with representatives of 22 other organisations, a Consultation, organised by the Institute of Race Relations, on peaceful social change in South Africa.

### Winds of change

There are several respects in which the political situation in South Africa is - slowly but surely - becoming more hopeful. These are, to our mind, the increasingly frank facing of controversial issues, especially as regards the future of the Coloured people, by intellectuals at the Afrikaans Universities; the growing vitality of Coloured political thinking; and the increasing interest of youth, including Afrikaans-speaking youth, in questions of human rights and race relations.

It is striking that, especially of late, Coloured and African opinion is moving rapidly in the direction of standing on their own feet and working out their own salvation. This is a healthy development, and one long overdue. Perhaps it could not come until the Government, in its dogged implementation of separate development, had provided platforms from which Coloured and African leaders could make, on behalf of their own people, claims which White liberals have been making, though with little result, for over twenty years. Perhaps we may claim that we have kept the flame alive. It is to be hoped that, in their new-found independence of thought, Coloured and African leaders will not "write off" those who have fought - with little encouragement of achievement, and in some cases at heavy cost - the same battle. Apartheid in reverse is no improvement on the present creed of apartheid.

### Signs of progress

The realities of our labour shortage are forcing the Government to make concessions in practice (though not in theory) on such issues as job reservation. Trade union leaders, too, are coming to accept the need for recognising African trade unions. The Government has declared that it accepts the principle of equal pay for equal work in the Civil Service. And once again the formation of a trade union for domestic servants is being planned. All these signs point to a gradually increasing realisation of human and civil rights which is encouraging. Such matters as censorship, conscientious objection, the mass fluoridation of water supplies, the death penalty, detention without

trial are arousing more public interest. Concern for the plight of "resettled" Africans is growing. All these are matters of public conscience and are, we hope, straws in a wind of change. We hope that they will multiply and intensify. In a changing world, time is not on the side of conservatism.

The future ...

It is sometimes suggested - and with reason - that there are too many organisations in South Africa whose interests and activities - not to mention their membership - overlap, and that we should aim at combining these into one larger, more effective body. It is by no means the first time in the last twenty years that such a suggestion has been made.

It goes without saying that any development which made for the more effective maintenance and extension of civil rights would be welcomed by your Committee. But so far the way for this has not opened, and meanwhile we feel that the League has a very necessary task to do. The more effectively we can do it, the better prospect of a larger organisation in future. Whatever government is in power, vigilance on such issues will be necessary. Our present duty is to strengthen our own, at present all too inadequate, resources by winning more public support.

Last year we appealed to our members to help us increase our public support, and thereby our usefulness. We would again urge the importance of this matter. Our expenses for such things as printing and postage have increased heavily during the past year. But for the generosity of many of our members, we could not carry on even our very limited work. There is far more we could and should be doing. Your Committee would welcome suggestions and offers of service.

Over these twenty-three years we can, I think, claim to have gained growing respect from thinking South Africans. But if our resources were greater, we could achieve more. We are a vital part of South Africa's conscience. Let us not lag behind in this period of challenge to a free society.

OSCAR D. WOLLHEIM,  
CHAIRMAN