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RIGHTS



Cape Town

News Letter

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Stop Press

Our affiliate, the Students' Representative Council of UCT, has invited all members of the League and other interested persons to a lecture on "Academic Freedom" by Mrs Helen Joseph. We hope many will be able to attend. The "Cape Times" has pointed out (28/2/72) that, because Mrs Joseph is still a "listed" person, her lecture cannot be reported, or even quoted. It is to be in the New Science Lecture Theatre of the University at 7.45 p.m. on Thursday, March 2.

Thanks

Our gratitude goes to all members who have responded to last month's reminder by sending subs. Receipts are enclosed with this issue. Our thanks also to those who have sent names and addresses of possible new members. We shall follow these up as soon as possible.

"Towards Social Change"

We are frequently told these days that change is in the air in South Africa. For those who wish to bring it down to earth we commend wholeheartedly the fifth SPRO-CAS publication, Towards Social Change, which appeared in December, 1971. It is a most thoughtful discussion of points which are appearing more and more frequently in newspaper comment, such as

- * steady improvement in the economic position of the majority of Africans;
- * the closing of the gap in average living standards between the Black and White groups;
- * steady improvements in regard to civil liberties, social benefits, and freedom under the law enjoyed by members of all groups in the population of South Africa;
- * a political arrangement in South Africa which will avoid the exploitation and control of any one group by another group;
- * steps to allow all members of all groups to enjoy self-esteem, pride, dignity and a release from factors which presently undermine the morale and self-respect of individual members of black groups.

As means towards an effective voice for all groups in the determination of their circumstances it mentions

- * effective bargaining power in the field of labour relations for workers of all races;
- * forms of political organisation for non-White communities which would allow them to acquire the influence necessary for participation in the determination of policies in South Africa;
- * the use of public money in such a way as to provide greatest support to those who need assistance most in the field of education, welfare, pensions and other social services.

Towards Social Change (also in Afrikaans, Maatskaplike Vooruitgang) is obtainable from SPRO-CAS at Box 31134, Braamfontein, for R1, and is commended to all thoughtful people.

Discussions in Durban

As we go to press comes a report of a convention of 1000 persons to be held in Durban in July (21st) to consider South Africa's political future. We hope to hear more of this.

Sweeping under the carpet?

Dr Piet Koornhof, Deputy Minister of Bantu Education and Development, has made two announcements recently which call for more specific information. One concerns the proposed introduction of "aid centres" to which Africans arrested for pass offences may be "referred" instead of being taken to a police station and gaol. The Deputy Minister apparently envisages such people possibly being helped to find work in towns and even given special permits to remain there instead of being "endorsed out". The Cape Times, however, has pointed out that unless the present laws are changed, only those legally entitled to be in (say) Cape Town will be given the benefit of this. Mrs R.N. Robb (Cape Times, 18/2/72) finds no evidence in the Bill of any such change. "Unless the law is changed", she says, "these aid centres may hide the effects of the rigid influx control legislation - sweep them under the carpet - but they will not be able to solve the problems of the Africans who are referred to them.

"They want to be allowed to accept work offered - they cannot legally be allowed to do so. They want to be allowed to live with their husbands or their parents - they cannot legally be allowed to do so."

Mrs Robb points out that under the present system, Africans arrested for contravening influx control laws are charged and

by the attorney of their choice and the public may attend the trial. Will they have legal representation at the aid centre? What will happen if they are found to be illegally in the area?

We agree with Mrs Robb that what is needed is a change in the law itself, not attempts to camouflage the effects of the law.

Dr Koornhof said in Parliament recently that the Government recognised the evils of the migrant labour system and hoped to eliminate them in time. But his main positive suggestion seemed to be the encouragement of "border industries" which would draw workers away from the towns. He has held out no hope of settled family life for urban African workers.

Under certain conditions ...?

Dr Koornhof also aroused considerable interest by announcing in Parliament (Cape Times, 4/2/72) "that if a Bantu (sic!) in White South Africa marries a Bantu woman from the homelands or platteland he may bring her with him if there is a house available". The Minister, Mr Botha, however, made haste to assure the House that this "would not drastically change the numbers" of Africans in "White" South Africa. Nevertheless, both African and White spokesmen in Johannesburg have hailed the announcement as an important breakthrough, and have stated that Dr Koornhof promised to consider the Johannesburg City Council's suggestions of home ownership and freehold title in African townships, as well as exemption from influx control regulations for African professional and business men, and extended powers for urban African councils. They recognised, however, that the biggest difficulty would be housing.

Dr W.F. Nkomo, President of the Institute of Race Relations, has pointed out that the concession apparently did not apply to African men and women in the townships who got married there. It has also been pointed out that one of the most urgent needs is for established married couples to be able to live together and bring up their children in their joint home. We hope Dr Koornhof's announcement is really the beginning of the necessary process of change.

Conscientious objection

It is at least a step in the right direction that conscientious objectors to military service are now, by a new Defence Amendment Bill, to be subjected only to one term of 12-18 months imprisonment and not, as has been the case with some individuals,

past, to recurring terms of detention, after which they were still liable for their service.

It will be remembered that at a Conference held under the auspices of the League in October 1970 it was decided to ask the Minister of Defence to introduce alternative, non-military forms of national service for persons with genuine religious or ethical objections to military training. So far he has refused to do so, but the matter is still being pursued. It was recently reported (Cape Times, 18/2/72) that members of the South African Council of Churches were to approach the Minister with a drafted request for an amendment to the Defence Act of 1957 to enable conscientious objectors to serve "in fields completely unrelated to the Defence Force". The League wholeheartedly supports this approach.

That Parliamentary Commission

The Prime Minister recently announced that a parliamentary commission of inquiry would be appointed to "investigate" the S.A. Institute of Race Relations, the Christian Institute, the University Christian Movement and NUSAS. The organisations concerned asked, instead, for a judicial commission, and their attitude was supported by the Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister, however, has refused to be moved.

It is to be noted that the Security Police themselves have told both the Christian Institute and the Institute of Race Relations that they have nothing against them. If they had, in fact, any serious charge to bring against any of the four organisations, they would no doubt have taken steps against them long ago.

The League wishes to emphasise that there are serious infringements of civil rights in the present procedure, namely

* No specific charge has been brought against the organisations.

* A select committee ordinarily functions behind closed doors. The four organisations will have no access to the evidence brought against them.

* The "accused" (of what?) will have no opportunity of confronting or cross-examining those who bring such evidence.

* The public will have no knowledge of what is going on, except for such a report of the commission's findings as the Government may, at a later stage, see fit to publish.

Will the parliamentary inquiry be able to find out more than the Security Police ever all these years?