

CIVIL



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News Letter

"Family Day" and the urban African

We support wholeheartedly the appeal of the Justice and Reconciliation Committee of the Western Province Council of Churches to all religious denominations to arrange that sermons be preached on the breakdown of African family life caused by the system of migrant labour, with special reference to the plight of women and children. The Committee's secretary urges that talks and seminars should also be arranged and offers to supply the names of qualified Black clergy and lay speakers from the Committee's office at 1 Long Street, Mowbray (phone 6-8970). A special Mass is be offered in all Catholic parishes on July 8, the day before Family Day, and there will be a multi-racial ecumenical service, to be held in St George's Cathedral, the same day.

In this connection it is disappointing to have so flat a denial from the Minister of Labour that the provisions of the Bantu Labour Relations Regulations Amendment Act can (as the Opposition hopefully suggested) be regarded as ending the treatment of African workers as "temporary sejourners" in cities. The Minister's excuses for this can hardly be called convincing.

Just over a month ago, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education said in an interview that ways were being sought "within the framework of government policy" to achieve a "closer contact and a better understanding of the problems with which the Africans in the White areas to contend... While they are there they must be made happy," he said.

His predecessor as Deputy Minister, who said "there will be no more Sadas", was shortly afterwards moved to the relatively harmless post of Minister of Sport. We wonder what will happen to Mr Janson ...

More stirrings at Stellenbosch

Six student leaders have contributed articles to the student paper Matie calling for drastic changes in Coloured policy, for closer co-operation with the Coloured people and for an end to hurtful discrimination. They are highly critical of the wage

gap, petty apartheid, paternalism, church apartheid and the "White Nico" opera house, says the "Cape Times". The Chairman of the Students' Representative Council has said that as a starting point Whites must be prepared to share political power with "the Brown people", and has urged the commission of inquiry into the Coloured people to recommend "penetrating adjustments".

Another writer pleaded for the lifting of all legislative barriers restricting the Coloured people's advancement, described petty apartheid as indefensible and an insult to human dignity, and race classification as leading to "grief and absurdity".

While these men may still have reservations and a reluctance to condemn government policy too strongly, this frank criticism is heartening and we hope it will continue, and stimulate the thinking and the consciences of their fellow students.

Kommetjie's steel curtain

On the other hand, it is depressing to learn that the suburb of Kommetjie, in the Peninsula, has persuaded the Cape Divisional Council to erect a 2.4m. barbed wire fence, with a padlocked gate and steel spikes, to separate it from the neighbouring Coloured seaside resort of Soetwater. The excuse for this is that Coloured people have caused trouble by "swearing and leaving litter" in the streets of Kommetjie.

This is the kind of hurtful step that is so much easier to take than dealing fittingly with offenders, and is likely to antagonise the law-abiding Coloured citizen. It is of course cheaper and easier than providing an adequate police force, but there is no excuse for it. And what of the Coloured people who want to shop in Kommetjie? Will they have to pay an expensive bus fare to Fish Hoek?

"South Africa's Political Alternatives"

After nearly three years of work, the SPRO-CAS Political Commission has produced its report. This is a monumental work and cannot be adequately reviewed in our limited space. In a statement its Chairman, Professor A.S. Mathews of the School of Law in the University of Natal, says that "the criteria which have guided the investigation are ethical acceptability and practical feasibility". It starts from the present situation in South Africa and tries to present ways of possible change. It

stands by such primary ethical principles as equality, freedom, justice and responsibility, and derives from them such concepts as the Rule of Law, Guaranteed Civil Rights and Effective Participation in Government. A few quotations will show the quality of its thinking:

* South Africa, says the Commission, is "a racial oligarchy in which all significant political power is vested in white hands", and it traces the steady erosion of black rights and the growth of white power and privilege.

* "Order of a kind and of a questionable permanence", says the report, "has indeed maintained in our society, but it has extracted a high toll in terms of freedom. Over wide areas civil liberties have been eclipsed and the Rule of Law put in abeyance. The Security Police and the Bureau for State Security operate with what appears to outsiders as an infinite scope. Informers are believed to be at work in every corner of society; it is widely believed that telephones are tapped and that mail is interfered with. All these activities create a widespread fear in our society that these security agencies are steadily becoming a law unto themselves."

* The real issue, says the Commission, is not the supposed antithesis between order and freedom: "It is the real conflict between supporting the existing social structure and ideas and actions that strive to change it". The real aim of much security legislation and action is, it says, "to shore up the existing unequal order and to frustrate the evolution of a more just order".

* "... unless structural changes are made in the political system, there are grave dangers facing South Africa, says the commission: "it may degenerate into a 'garrison-state', a type of totalitarian society in which all the liberties of all the citizens are stifled; or there may be violence".

The Commission makes a very thorough criticism of "the traditional liberal-constitutional approach" as suitable to South African conditions, and concludes this criticism by saying: "... the fundamental problem cannot be limited to curbing government power alone, nor to the protection of individual rights as against the state as the liberal approach tends to suggest. Fundamentally, the problem is that of an effective sharing of power, involving groups as much as individuals." It goes on to make certain practical suggestions which cannot be adequately evaluated here.

We wholeheartedly urge any of our readers who have the future of South Africa at heart to obtain and study this volume -

SPRO-CAS (Box 31134, Braamfontein) or the Christian Institute at a price of R1.50 per copy.

It is interesting to note that, of the distinguished members of the Commission, Dr Edgar H. Brookes and Dr Denis Worrall did not sign the Report (though for quite different reasons) and our own Chairman, Dr Oscar Wollheim, noted certain reservations.

Five members of the Commission are members of the Civil Rights League. So is the Editor!

Where do we begin?

Some of us may feel that, under our present laws, any action to reduce apartheid is almost impossible. It is cheering therefore to find that Mr Theo Gerdener's organisation, ASASA (Action South and Southern Africa) is putting forward practical suggestions which do not infringe the law. Its chairman, Dr Louis van Oudenhove, says:

"Our prime objective is to unify that large body of public opinion which believes that offensive discrimination is unnecessary and wants to do something about it. Most grievances are not directly brought about by the laws of the land but by the attitudes of the people. If you can't change the laws you must change these attitudes." His Committee is to make a survey of the major grievances and points of friction which do not fall within government legislation and will then tackle them in order of priority and attempt to put them right.

Project targets are:

* The establishment of an information and advice bureau to handle problems encountered at a personal level. (N.B. Cape Town already has a Citizens' Advice Bureau whose scope no doubt would include this.)

* The supply of "food power packets" containing the necessary proteins and vitamins to factory workers.

* The convening of "dialogue meetings" to improve communication between races;

* The improvement of employer-employee relations;

* The setting up of training centres for people of colour.

ASASA will also ask for the removal of "offensive race signs" from buildings and then publish the names of owners who refuse. There is, they say, no law making the use of "White" and "Non-White" signs on lifts and entrances compulsory.

More power to ASASA!