

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

A correction

We are grateful to one of our members for drawing our attention to an error, taken in all good faith from a Cape Times report. On page 2 of our April issue we referred to the debate on the ombudsman idea in Parliament, stated to have taken place in 1937. On investigation we find that this should have read 1973.

The death penalty

Recent court cases have revived the debate on whether the death penalty should be abolished. The Committee would be most interested to know the feeling of our members on this matter, and we invite any who feel strongly about it to send us their views.

Pensions - a human right

We have noted with admiration the determined efforts of Mr K. Ueckermann (ex-M.P. for Nigel) to bring this matter to the attention of Parliament during the past four years. He has sent a petition to Parliament on the matter and has collected more than 50,000 letters in support of it. The League is glad to lend its support also, and we would urge any of our members who have not yet written to Mr Ueckermann to do so promptly. His address is Longvale, Meent Street, George, 6530.

We would at the same time emphasise that the lower the rate of pay, the smaller the ultimate pension, and that there must be large numbers of African and Coloured workers who do not get a pension at all (other than, perhaps, the government old age pension which, for Africans at any rate, is quite inadequate. We hope this side of the matter will not be overlooked, though the people concerned may not be able to write letters about it.

The ever-rising cost of living makes this even more urgent.

Schlebusch and the Rule of Law

The report of the Schlebusch (Le Grange) Commission on the Christian Institute has two sinister aspects which call for repeated emphasis. First, the verdict has been given by a group of politicians, and not in a court of law. The leaders of the organisation have not been charged and brought to trial. The Commis-

sion refers to the possibility that the Institute's actions might lead to the violent overthrow of the State, and then alleges that "the activities of the Institute constitute a danger to the State". Not having seen the report, we do not know whether specific activities are referred to. But if the charge is well founded, why has action not been taken (during the past ten years!) against the individuals concerned under the Suppression of Communism Act? The Minister has blandly answered this question in Parliament (Cape Times, 5/6/75). It is not always possible, he says, to take people to Court because of the "cut and thrust" of the Courts. "This does not mean that there is no case." All the Commissioners have done is to "unmask the Christian Institute".

The Minister has said he will not hesitate to act against possible 'innocent organisations' which might attempt to channel foreign money to the Institute.

Even more sinister is the statement of a member of the Commission (Mr HJD van der Walt) in Parliament that the Suppression of Communism Act should be replaced by a new law dealing with "all dangers to the state". The existing Act, he said, was no longer adequate to safeguard the safety of the State. This perhaps is the attitude behind Mr Vorster's proposal to set up next year a permanent (parliamentary) security commission which, apparently, would also bypass the courts.

Says the Argus (5/6/75), "The Schlebusch (Le Grange) Commission has helped to erode our traditional democratic procedures, judicial and political, and nobody, not even those in power, can escape crucial damage when this happens. For the strength of a state depends on the freedom its citizens enjoy."

Not District Six

The first reaction of those who have been hoping and (like the Mayor of Cape Town) working for the return of District Six to the Coloured community, on seeing the map published in the Cape Times (24/5/75) must have been that of the Coloured people themselves. The area given to the Coloured people, though considerable and, of course, welcome, is one which had not been officially zoned "Coloured", and which does not include the Hanover Street area, rightly described by Mr D.G. Curry as "the heart of District Six". "If," says Mr Curry, "the Minister wants any credibility in the eyes of our community, he should return the areas that always belonged to us." The Coloured Representative Council and other

Coloured leaders are unanimous on the point. Mr Curry, with understandable cynicism, accuses the Government of "rocking chair politics"- it gives the impression that it is moving but stays on the same spot.

Furthermore, the declaration of Walmer Estate as Coloured may mean the uprooting of about 150 Indian families who were moved there after District Six was declared White; and there are 500 Coloured families still in flats in the "White" area.

To quote Mr Curry again, "Why couldn't they leave the area as it always was with Coloured people, Indians and a few Whites living happily together? There never was any trouble."

We hope that the Ministers of Planning and Community Development will change their minds about having "reached finality" (Cape Times, 29/5/75).

Who wants Africana?

Over the past twenty-six years the League has accumulated considerable quantities of surplus material, and we would like to put this at the disposal of interested readers. See enclosed leaflet. We suggest a minimum donation of 25c to cover postage and despatch, but for quantities a larger amount would be appreciated.

We shall have to dispose of unwanted material for space reasons, so this opportunity will not occur again.

Hurtful attitudes (Cape Times, 17/5/75)

Five Nationalist M.P.'s have indulged in some cautious egg-dancing on the question of opening the Port Elizabeth Opera House to all races. They have dismissed as "incorrect" suggestions that any of them had pleaded for this to be done, but added: "Some of us may have no objection in principle to sharing cultural institutions with Coloureds under certain circumstances." They then urged the construction of "a similar theatre for the Coloured community in Port Elizabeth within easier reach of the Coloured people" as serving "a broad educational and cultural purpose" and not merely benefiting "a few highly privileged Coloured people".

But why not have both?

One wonders if people who make such statements have any conception of how hurtful they are.

It is noteworthy that most of Port Elizabeth's theatre groups want the Opera House opened (Argus, 17/5/75).

Hotel telephone permission (Cape Times, 5/6/75)

Another hurtful and even more ridiculous provision is con-

tained in the Liquor Amendment Bill which allows Blacks to stay in "international" hotels (which must apply for permits to accommodate them), but requires "non-international" hotels to telephone Pretoria every time a Black seeks accommodation. No wonder Coloured spokesmen have objected to this as being an increase in discrimination. Said Mr Norman Daniels, "Hotels should be open to all decent people. It should not be left to an official in Pretoria to decide."

Another job for the Civil Service - twenty-four hours a day! And who pays for the phone call? How ridiculous can we get?

Left hand, right hand ... (Cape Times, 27-28/5/75)

On the other hand, we welcome the move of the Department of Coloured Affairs, calling on magistrates throughout South Africa to set up multi-racial committees to "investigate and eliminate race friction". The Secretary for Coloured Affairs sees these committees as "extending the hand of friendship at grassroots level". We agree with the Cape Times that the official level is at least equally important. Our own belief is that, if official apartheid were dismantled, the grassroots level would look after itself. The behaviour of the spectators at the first multiracial match at Newlands a few days ago is a striking confirmation of this.

And now, what about removing train apartheid - even if gradually?

A deliberate "degree of doubt"? (Cape Times, 3/6/75)

So we may now quote any formerly banned people whose restrictions have expired or been lifted! The amendment, we are told, "simply clarifies the situation", about which the Minister admitted "there had been a degree of doubt". Is it now legal to quote dead banned individuals too? We have not seen this "clarified" in the press. A total end to "gagging powers" would be both historically valuable and appropriate to the present atmosphere of détente. Like Mr Rene de Villiers, we are concerned about the public's right to know.

Wimpy at Sea Point (Cape Times, 30/5/75)

We welcome wholeheartedly the news that a restaurant is at last likely to be opened for Sea Point Blacks, and hope there will be a minimum of delay in bringing this about.