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News Letter

"Questioning" - was it un-South African?

It is a hopeful sign that, during the Republic Festival, people of all racial groups were prepared to spend time together considering the things in South Africa which are no cause for celebration, and accepting their responsibility for putting these things right. It was also a moving and heartening experience for those who took part. We commend, especially, the concern of students and other young people about these matters, and hope there will be many more such gatherings.

Fewer "technical offenders"?

On May 25 the Minister of Justice stated that 42% of short-term prisoners in South Africa were gaoled for pass offences (175,000 annually). The Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration later told Parliament that a scheme for urban "aid centres" and homeland "rehabilitation centres", provided for by law in 1964, is now to be implemented; this, if successful, should substantially reduce the prison population. The urban "aid centres", said the Minister, would do all in their power to help Africans to take up legal employment, and give them training in "useful skills". There would also be a "screening out" process which would prevent Africans being sent to court or to prison merely because they could not produce their reference books on demand.

Few things have caused more misery and bitterness than the rigid operation of the pass system and "endorsing out". We hope that, after the long delay said to have been necessary for the sorting out of inter-departmental problems, this scheme will be put into prompt and effective operation.

The "Happy Valley"

But the rigidity of the "endorsing out" policy continues to cause upheaval - and must cause bitterness - in African communities. Take the case of Bonnievale, recently inquired into by the Black Sash. This was a community in which Africans and Coloured people had been living happily together for more than twenty years. In 1967 it was declared a Coloured group area, and no alternative accommodation was provided for the Africans. Since then, the

African families have been forced to leave the area. The municipality informed local employers in January that "a switch-over to single male contract labour is taking place ... workers currently employed by you can be taken into service again on a contract basis, on condition that you provide them with accommodation. The wives and children of Bantu will if possible be resettled before March 31, 1971 ..." (Italics ours).

One can imagine how much human misery is involved in this "resettlement". It makes Dr Koornhof's "urban-aid-centres" rather unconvincing ...

Stanley Uys comments: "South Africa, surely, must be the only country in the world whose official policy it is to create a rightless, rootless proletariat that outnumbers its White masters by two to one." (Sunday Times, May 23, 1971)

Resettlement areas

Rev. David Russell's 90-hour vigil on the steps of St George's Cathedral has brought Dimbaza and its fellow settlements to the public notice. The Widows' Information Service of the National Council of Women of South Africa launched an appeal for clothing which has met with a good response. Our local newspapers have sent representatives to visit these townships and have published very frank and informative articles. From these it is clear that local officials are doing their best. But a crash programme is obviously needed, and we hope the public conscience will not let the matter rest. We suggest the following as urgently needed: weatherproof houses, employment, adequate rations for those who need them, and amenities such as schools and clinics, sports fields and recreation halls.

The Successors of Liberalism

In a recent leading article "Die Burger" remarked that the White "liberalists" who had in the past championed the cause of "downtrodden non-Whites" were now "busy losing their job", because, as a result of separate development, Coloured and African people were now in a position to speak for themselves.

This is, in fact, one of the most interesting aspects of political life in South Africa at the present time, but we should imagine that it brings scant comfort to "Die Burger". Coloured and African leaders are increasingly taking the Government at its word. They can make demands on behalf of their people, speaking from the unassailable platforms of "homelands" and the Coloured Representative Council, which ten or even five years ago might have earned them banning orders. Mr David Curry, for example,

deputy leader of the Labour Party in the C.R.C., already claims that, as a result of separate development, the Whites have lost the political initiative and will have to "bargain" with the Bantu homelands and with the political situation created by the establishment of the C.R.C.

Liberals will be the last people to mourn over such a development. We hope that "Die Burger"'s readers will face it realistically and that the paper will accept the responsibility of helping them to do so. It might, for example, support the proposal of Professor S.P. Cilliers, of Stellenbosch, that Coloured people and urban Africans should be granted full and equal citizenship...

Ungenerous Justice

While we welcome the decision of the Government to "suspend" the 8½-year-old restrictions on Mrs Helen Joseph, we regret that this is only "until further notice". Is this just face-saving? Or are the restrictions to be reimposed if Mrs Joseph - an invalid of 66 - does anything the Government disapproves of? It should be remembered that she was "restricted" for 8½ years with no crime proved against her.

Kragdadigheid

The Minister of Defence, Mr P.W. Botha, recently told Parliament that he "would not give way" to the objection of members of the sect "Jehovah's Witnesses" to doing national (i.e. military) service. The Minister declared that once he gave way, the sect would "become a shelter for all who do not want to do national service".

Nobody seems to have pointed out to the Minister that it is not only members of Jehovah's Witnesses who, for religious or ethical reasons, are unwilling to do military service; and that by amending the Defence Act to allow of other forms of national service he would not be "giving in" to anybody. This is now the position in a number of the "Western" countries whose experience Mr Botha rejects. (He did not mention Great Britain, which has no compulsory military service.) It seems to us that such an amendment would be preferable, on both ethical and economic grounds, to the repeated sentencing of individuals for the same offence which is provided for, and carried out, at present. Why waste the energy of our youth in prison when they could be serving the country in constructive ways outside it?

"Security Police Integrity"

The Civil Rights League supports wholeheartedly the appeal

of the "Cape Times", Mrs Catherine Taylor, M.P., and others for a judicial commission of inquiry into the death of Imam Haron, to whose widow the Minister of Police recently made an ex-gratia payment of R5000.

There have been several similar (though lesser) payments by the State in recent years where cases were brought against it by ex-detainees. Mrs Taylor says: "By this means publicity is avoided, the police are not called to give evidence, and the country is forced into silence and acceptance as a result." The Minister's statement that this payment was made because of the "legal risks" facing the police department is, in itself, sufficient reason why a judicial commission should be appointed.

Equal Pay ...

We commend the Minister of Coloured Affairs for his announcement that the Government accepts the principle of equal pay for equal work as between Coloured and White, and the Minister of the Interior for having referred the whole question to the Public Service Commission.

We hope no technicalities, such as the plea of insufficient available funds, will be allowed to impede this minimum requirement of economic justice; and that it will soon be applied to Africans in the Public Service also. The moral effect of such a step by the Government will be far greater than a mere appeal to the public to "pay better wages to our Coloured people". Moreover, it would undoubtedly make for better race relations.

Passports - and "alien" clergy

We support the suggestion recently made in Parliament that a tribunal should be set up to hear appeals on the refusal of passports.

In particular, we would urge that the Government be less drastic in its dealings with "foreign" clergy. The Minister's statement that during the past ten years "only" six clergymen have been deported from South Africa and seventeen had their temporary permits withdrawn (they are granted temporary renewable permits only) is unsatisfactory. (The Minister says that there are at present 1,440 "aliens" working for the Churches in South Africa.) Such drastic action against clergy and other religious workers calls for more detailed explanation. Mr Gerdener says they "do not always understand the South African mode of living". Perhaps they understand it too well. And didn't the Dutch Reformed Church import "aliens" 150 years ago? MOYA