

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

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We wish all our readers a peaceful and constructive New Year - and hope they will help the League to contribute to that end. Inter alia, attention to the enclosed sub. reminder will help!

That weather forecast! (Cape Times, 4/1/77)

The Cape Times recently published a cartoon of a couple listening to the Prime Minister's new year broadcast with the caption "Turn that off. I want his plan for the future, not a weather forecast!"

To those who are hoping for constructive change, Mr Vorster's speech was certainly a disappointment. Judging by press reports it was addressed mainly to the white population (referred to as 'we') except for condemnation of (coloured) violence in the Cape. His statement that "all doors are open" to those with "real or imagined" grievances (for none of which he proposed a positive remedy) must have been cold comfort for law-abiding coloured and African citizens who are the worst sufferers from the unrest.

We wonder whether Mr Ivor Richard will be able to exert any influence on Mr Vorster's domestic policy. How long will our problems be blandly ignored? Must they produce a Rhodesian situation before any real change is made?

Local autonomy (Cape Times, 5/1/77)

Amid the variety of issues considered by the Committee under Mr Justice J.F. Marais one of the less spectacular, but certainly most far-reaching, is that of greater powers for local authorities - a cornerstone of democracy.

The Cape Times has listed a number of controversial issues on which this important principle has been ignored by our Provincial authorities during the past eight years. The latest and most egregious is the closing down of the Rondebosch Cottage Hospital in face of vigorous and reasoned public protest, including a unanimous request by the Cape Town City Council to the Administrator to receive a deputation and a petition signed by 5,000 citizens within a few days.

There has been an increasing tendency under the present Government to ignore the wishes of the communities most deeply

concerned in such matters which can only be deplored. With all due respect, the authorities of the Province may almost be said to personify this authoritarian tendency, which grows by what it feeds on. We hope that the Marais Committee and those who take action on its recommendations will regard increased local autonomy as one of the most fundamental needs in a new South African constitution.

Back to education (Sunday Times, 12/12/76, 2/1/77)

We welcome the call by the Soweto Students' Representative Council to students to return to school. "We realise", says the appeal, "that education is the cornerstone of every nation. If we aspire for future leadership, then we should acquire the best education available - not the inferior Bantu education..." This call has been supported by many Soweto parents. - The SRC has also condemned the burning of three Soweto schools. "We are not the advocates of destruction. We demonstrated that we have the interest of our community at heart a few weeks ago when we cleaned up the filthy streets of Soweto neglected since June..."

Contact and communication (Sunday Times, 12/12/76)

Professor R E van der Ross, Principal of the University of the Western Cape, said at a graduation ceremony of the University of the Witwatersrand recently that of 23,000 coloured pupils registered in Peninsula primary and secondary schools, none were at school. "If this catastrophe had threatened to fall on the whites," he said, "the effect would be so enormous that such a breakdown is not only unthinkable, but would not be allowed to occur."

Professor van der Ross wondered whether the violence that students had turned to was not largely "the result of a deep desire to reach out to other South Africans". He urged the provision of "community" schools serving people of all races in a particular geographical area "if the people concerned want it that way ... I think the legal strictures should be relieved so that people can decide for themselves..." He also strongly urged integration at university level.

Worth having (Cape Times, 29/12/76)

The Institute of Race Relations has published a summary in English (the full document, as far as we know, still not being available in that language) of the findings and recommendations of the Theron Commission under the editorship of our Patron, Dr Sheila Van der Horst. (The Afrikaans version of the Report was tabled in Parliament on June 18, 1976, and the English version was promised

within a few months.)

The summary is obtainable from the Institute of Race Relations, Box 97, Johannesburg at a cost of R2.10. Dr Van der Horst emphasises that the document is neither a commentary on, nor a critique of, the report.

Detention and release (Cape Times, 31/12/76; Argus, 1/1/77)

The Under Secretary for Justice has formally announced that all detainees held under the Internal Security Act were released by December 31, 1976. As far as we know, no charge has been brought against the 139 people concerned.

It is estimated by the Institute of Race Relations that about 300 people are still detained under the Terrorism Act (Section 6, which provides for indefinite detention, incommunicado, with no necessary bringing to trial).

... and deaths (Cape Times, 17/12/76, Sunday Times, 19/12/76)

We support wholeheartedly the call by the Institute of Race Relations for a judicial inquiry into deaths (? suicides) in detention, at least thirteen of which occurred during 1976. Says the Sunday Times, "People held in custody by the authorities should be entirely beyond the reach of any harm which others may wish to inflict upon them, or even of harm that they wish to inflict on themselves. In most countries it is a black mark against a policeman or a prison warden if a prisoner is allowed to commit suicide. One way or another, it means that justice has been cheated."

The Minister's argument that the Institute "called to the press" and not to him is of course completely unconvincing.

Not for the first time, many people must wonder whether it is really desirable for the same Minister to be responsible for Justice, Police and Prisons

Detention of an editor (Cape Times, 17/12/76, Sunday Times, 19/12/76)

Mr Percy Qoboza, editor of the World newspaper, was taken from his home in the early hours of the morning by eight policemen, held and questioned for eight hours at police headquarters and then released with, apparently, no explanation, much less apology.

The editors of the country's main English-language newspapers and the South African Society of Journalists protested strongly against this high-handed and ham-handed behaviour, and even two Afrikaans papers (Beeld and Die Vaderland), while criticising

this as over-reaction and dismissing the suggestion that it was a threat to the freedom of the press, criticised the police action as unnecessarily "ostentatious".

The Sunday Times, under the heading "Ominous, muddled Qoboza affair", comments editorially:

"It is highly desirable that the authorities should interview Mr Percy Qoboza, editor of the World newspaper.

"The Cabinet should invite him (courteously, and at a reasonable hour) to visit the Union Buildings. There this man with his unique knowledge of conditions in the black community, his special understanding of the frustrations that sear the souls of people in the townships, and his sensitive grasp of politics, could advise them on sensible steps to relieve the tensions in Soweto.

"From this outspoken but level-headed, internationally respected editor they would learn many truths that would be to their and to South Africa's advantage...

"... if someone in Pretoria had actually sat down to devise a way of obtaining maximum bad publicity for this country abroad, he could not have done better than this.

"Worse still, it is the effect that such outrageous behaviour can have on the dwindling band of black leaders who still believe in moderation that does South Africa most damage. Our rulers should be seeking the counsel of men like Mr Qoboza, not alienating them."

"Ostentatious"?

It would be charitable to suppose that this is not a good translation of the word used by the Afrikaans papers. If not, it represents a deplorable point of view. It suggests that the papers do not mind the police detaining people without trial (or excuse) provided it is done quietly!

Help for Nyanga

The Institute of Race Relations, the Christian Institute and the Red Cross would, we imagine, be delighted to receive any contributions, in cash or in kind, to help the people of Nyanga East whose homes were burned and whose possessions were destroyed in the recent disturbances - for no crime of their own. Address of the Red Cross is Box 32, Wynberg 7800 and they have one of several depots for contributed goods. (office, Broad Street, Wynberg).