

CIVIL



RIGHTS



Box 3807

Cape Town

News Letter

Vol. XXV No. 1
January 16, 1978

Subscriptions

With this we enclose our annual sub. reminder, to which we are sure our members will respond with their usual promptitude. If you have any queries, please let the Secretary know (phone 22-7020 during office hours). We might be wrong!

It would be a help for our records if any members who do not get receipts with the news letter following their payment would let us know, giving approximate date and form of payment. (One lonely little rand is at present looking for a receipt number!). Check on your receipts, please!

Help us grow

Last year the League acquired a number of new members through sending literature to friends recommended by you. This is an easy way of growing, and we appeal to you to help us in this way again by returning the slips attached to sub. reminders. We are sure many of your friends would support us if they had such an introduction.

Other nations ...? (Cape Times, 17/12/77)

There seems to be considerable confusion among Afrikaners as to the purpose and significance of the Day of the Covenant (ci-devant Dingaans Day). So Dr Connie Mulder, Minister of the Interior, told a gathering at Krugersdorp that while he did not wish to "discriminate against other nations in South Africa" (!), he felt it would be "wrong to involve English-speaking people and other nations" (sic) in the celebrations.

Where do we come in?

Professor Gerrit Viljoen of RAU described Blood River as "a victory for timeless cultural values" which, politically, were apparent in the foresight of Afrikaner leaders ... Afrikaners would continue to develop solutions based on consultation ... The humanitarian approach which came down from Blood River (!) was manifested in respect for the other man's life style and a live-and-let-live attitude to other race groups and nations ...

As evidence of this he instanced "government rethinking on job reservation, aspects of the Group Areas Act, the questioning

of the migrant labour system and the quality of black urban life, and the handling of political prisoners. The "nation", he said, was firmly committed to a nationalism based on Christian principle.

It will be interesting to see what progress is made in these directions during the forthcoming session of Parliament. With its increased majority the Government could, if it wished to, speed up progress in all these directions.

"Western democracy"? (cf. Cape Times 11/1/78, 13/1/78)

A few days ago two political scientists from the University of Cape Town, in a lengthy and detailed argument, set forth their conviction that "Western democracy" was not suited to South Africa.

The term Western democracy is misleading. Democracy is not particularly (or exclusively) Western (whatever that may mean). It is, fundamentally, a state in which the men and women who pay the taxes have a say in how they are governed; in which the representatives of the people are accountable to the governed and can be removed from power if the majority are against them. By these standards South Africa is certainly not a democracy.

There are, however, several important points which the learned authors have omitted to deal with. In the first place, they seem to assume that democracy can be imposed on a people. To us one of the essential points in Democracy is consultation. No government can say to its subjects, in effect, 'This is democracy: take it or leave it'. Agreement based on consultation and, if necessary, on concessions by both sides is the only basis for democracy. This fact has been accepted in South West Africa and (though tardily) in Rhodesia, but certainly not by the Government or its supporters in South Africa.

So the authors, while supporting "the same political and legal status" for coloured and Indian citizens, make no proposals for consultation with these people. Apparently they are expected to accept as equality what, to them, is patently discriminatory - a differentiation that allows for no individual freedom of choice in elementary things like choice of a home for one's family, a school for one's children, a beach for them to enjoy; the choice of a marriage partner ...

Perhaps even more significant is the fact that, like the Government, the authors find no place in their "democracy" for urban Africans. One wonders what they feel about the disruption of Unibell, which could not be justified even in the unlikely event of the homelands having space and gainful occupation for the unfortunate squatters. A system that depends on such compulsions, even on the specious assumption that the people concerned are the responsibility of the homelands, is certainly no democracy.

It was interesting to find our first reaction to the article confirmed editorially in such detail by the Cape Times (13/1/78) and supported (16/1/78) by a colleague of the two authors. The Cape Times concludes its leading article thus: "The real need remains to secure government by consent ... The alternative to government by consent is government by coercion."

We await with interest the comments of the learned authors on this point.

Censorship and the student press (Cape Times, 13/1/78)

Censorship has always called forth a wide diversity of views, ranging from the belief that there should be no restrictions at all to the view that, in effect, what we ourselves disapprove of should be banned. The League has never taken a specific stand on this matter. But recent developments suggest that the censors are tending to make decisions more on the fact that complaints have been received than on an impartial weighing of the public attitude and the merits of the publication concerned. The case of "Magersfontein, O Magersfontein" and the recent bannings of "Fair Lady" are illustrations of this.

But to our mind an even more serious phenomenon is the increased banning during the past year of student publications, which, says the Co-ordinating Editor of "National Student", was in 1977 more than double that in 1976. In this activity the Security Branch has apparently played a considerable part. Local committees of censors have only to report that a student publication is considered "prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order" (sic) for such a publication to be banned and, probably, confiscated. Moreover, such action can be retroactive. Sean Mcronev, a former editor of Wits Student, was last year convicted in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court of producing two editions of the paper in mid-1975 which the Publications Directorate subsequently found to be "undesirable", and fined R200 or fifty days.

"The precedent is set, then," says Mr Cramb, the Co-ordinating Editor, "for the conviction under this retroactive legislation of any number of student editors who at some stage have had an edition banned - and most of them have."

It is natural that student newspapers should be more forthright than the daily press. It is not surprising that on occasion they should express views which more sober-minded liberals might even vigorously disagree with. But we - and, we suggest, with due respect, the Government, the Security Police and the Publications Directorate - should remember the saying of Voltaire,

"I disagree with every word you say, but I will fight to the death for your right to say it." We ought to be grateful for the challenge to our thinking.

In the words of Mr Cramb, "It remains important that the vision of an alternative South Africa be kept alive, and within the limits of its small circulation the student press is one of the few channels left for doing so."

More power to it!

Race relations depend on individuals

During the past year the Women's Movement (address Box 394, Claremont) has been increasingly active in the Peninsula and also, we believe, in Johannesburg. It works by bringing people together not at political meetings, but at informal gatherings of people of all races and all ages with common interests.

The Movement also works for the abolition of hurtful forms of apartheid such as separate queues at post offices and at bus stops. This has no doubt contributed to the gradual disappearance of these regulations - although such government-enforced measures as beach apartheid are, unfortunately, still being enforced in some places.

A member of ours in Port Elizabeth has drawn our attention to a similar movement, People for Peace (PEPE) in that city. PEPE is not confined to women, and has a very wide range of organised activities. Membership is free (as also, we think, in the Women's Movement), but donations are welcomed. PEPE's address is Box 12333, Centrahil 6006. Any interested, especially in that area, should write there for further particulars.

Doing good by stealth?

We congratulate the University of Stellenbosch on opening its academic gates to students other than whites, albeit with a minimum of publicity. We hope that they will have the courage of their convictions even if they meet with some criticism from their non-academic supporters.

Such a move should have real moral force in the fight against discrimination which, we understand, the Government approves of. We hope that there will increasingly be similar open doors in our other Universities. Few moves could contribute more to understanding between members of all racial groups in South Africa.