

CIVIL



RIGHTS

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News Letter the next 30 years ...

It was unkind of Mr Vorster to stage his resignation from the premiership so close to the date of our annual general meeting that the press had little notice to spare for us! Nevertheless, our meeting was enjoyable and worth while. Members old and new were grateful to Mr Robin Hallett for agreeing to speak at such short notice and for his thought-provoking address on "Wild Men and Cool Heads", and to Dr Oscar Wollheim for his reminiscences of the League's early days.

Our Chairman rightly emphasised the ever-increasing need for vigilance and for action to meet the growing threats to civil rights. The League must make a greater effort than ever to awaken public opinion on such issues and thus to bring more effective pressure on the government. We wait with keen interest to see the stand our new Prime Minister will take on such issues.

Valid criticism - but it's up to you!

At the meeting a member expressed disappointment at what he termed the "one-sided" character of this news letter, complaining that it consisted almost entirely of excerpts from the Cape Times.

Some years ago we invited our members to send us items from their local press that might be used in the news letter, and we repeat that invitation. We cannot promise that they would always be used, but they would be welcomed and considered. How about it?

One small step (Argus, 23/9/78)

We commend the decision of the Administrator of the Cape, Dr L.A.P.A. Munnik, to take down the "Whites Only" signs between Muizenberg's Sunrise Beach and the Zeekoevlei outlet. It is noteworthy, too, that a beach development committee representing both black and white local authorities is to be set up at Port Elizabeth, on which representatives of both coloured and Indian management committees have agreed to serve, is to be set up.

Similar steps regarding other public facilities - notably the railways in the Peninsula - are overdue. How about it?

Straws in the wind? (Rand Daily Mail 15/9/78; Pretoria News, 14/9/78; Star, 14/9/78)

A Pretoria city councillor and ex-mayor, Hr Hendrik Botha,

has told the Transvaal congress of the National Party that he supported opening the Breytenbach theatre in Pretoria to all races.

The first multi-racial S.A. Nursing Council (to include 5 white, 3 black, 1 Indian and 1 coloured nurses) is to be elected in December (the other 20 members being nominated by the Minister of Health). The Council holds office for five years.

Mr Schlebusch and civil liberties (Cape Times, 18-19/10/78)

Is it too much to hope that Mr P.W. Botha will rebuke his new Minister of Public Works and Tourism for his rash incursion into the field of civil rights? Mr Schlebusch says the public have "no right" to be informed: that the freedom of the press is not a right but a privilege. The Cape Times comments forthrightly that civil liberties are "an essential part of the democratic process. Without freedom of speech, of press, of conscience, the right of access to the courts (already a sadly eroded right), a country is not a democracy ... They are rights, not privileges ... A privilege can be withdrawn; a right is non-negotiable..."

It is significant that these sentiments were expressed by the paper on the anniversary of the October 19 bannings and detentions, and that so many organisations should have felt it their duty to remind the public of these. The Black, the Diocesan Board of So-Sashial Responsibility, the Civil Rights League have all expressed anew their condemnation of detention without trial and of banning as substitutes for bringing people to trial in open court, and have called on the government to abandon this system. We hope - though not with any strong expectancy of being right - that Mr Schlebusch's views do not represent those of his senior colleagues.

The president of the S.A. Society of Journalists has replied to the Minister that the press in South Africa has always accepted its responsibilities, one of which is to act as the guardian of civil liberty. Another is to act as a watchdog against abuse of power by the government, as well as maladministration, corruption or injustice in any level of society. The principle that in all matters involving the public interest the public has a right to be informed is, said Mr Patten, accepted in every democratic land.

To assert, as the Minister did, that the government has been "tolerant" of the press but "would not allow the creation of unrest and chaos in the name of press freedom", is to show either a lamentable ignorance or a complete disregard for the issues at stake. The Civil Rights League supports wholeheartedly the stand of the press on this matter.

ERRATUM: For "Schlebusch" read
"Le Grange" passim p.2

A voice in the wilderness? (Die Burger, 18/10/78 as reported in the Cape Times, 19/10/78)

It is pleasing to report that the Burger, while agreeing with the Minister (and all responsible newspapers) that press freedom does not mean absolute freedom in all circumstances, places itself on record as disagreeing with some of the Minister's other views. The paper says it believes that it is indeed the duty and task of a newspaper to inform the public, and in the public interest to "crack open things which could otherwise be covered up"; that the public has the right to be informed; and that the freedom of the press, as long as it is freedom with responsibility, should definitely be regarded as a "civic right".

Hoor, hoor!

Why not? (Star, 20/9/78)

A Transvaal representative on the Coloured Representative Council, Mr Jac Rabie, has called on the government to allow coloured people to occupy empty houses in "white" areas to alleviate the housing shortage. He mentioned "white" suburbs in Johannesburg and Cape Town where only a few houses were occupied. Mr Rabie was supported by other C.R.C. members. Apparently coloured and Indian people living in white areas are being prosecuted for ^hliving "illegally" in those areas, though the police are said to be reluctant to do this. The Star conducted a survey recently which showed that Hillbrow whites did not mind having coloured and Indian neighbours.

The same appears to be true of the Woodstock-Salt River area, at present being considered, whose inhabitants want it as an "open" area.

Is it not time that the government, in fulfilment of its avowed intention of moving away from racial discrimination, repealed the Group Areas Act and allowed natural forces to operate?

Candour on District Six (Cape Times, 7/10/78; Sunday Times (Extra), 8/10/78)

The Government's stated intention to provide in District Six a multi-million rand shopping centre which, initially at least, is to be for Indian business men only has produced forthright reactions from the Western Cape Traders' Association, which is to approach the Ministers concerned, and to hold a public meeting on the matter. Their spokesmen are definitely opposed to the proposed centre being for business men of one group only. Said one of the organisation's founders:

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"Why were black business men forced to leave District Six in the first place? Now the Department of Community Development wants some of them back again. It is wrong. The shopping centre must be open to everybody."

The Association represents 2000 black business men in the Peninsula, and whites are eligible to join.

It is also reported that the Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging (ACVV) is to take a lead in the replanned "all white" part of District Six by putting up a complex which would provide for about 300 people of all ages, and would include crèches at present operated by this body in Salt River and District Six, a working girls' hostel and a home for about 100 people.

But again, why only for whites?

This should, as City Councillor Tom Walters says, be an undetermined area where people of all races can benefit from the obvious advantages of development, particularly because of its close proximity to the central city.

One suspects that these two projects are being embarked on or encouraged by the government because private enterprise refuses to establish itself in the area.

And in the Transvaal ... (Rand Daily Mail, 21/9/78)

It was reported recently in the Rand Daily Mail that 2000-3000 Indian traders are to be allowed to trade in white areas, mainly in the Transvaal, in central business district shopping areas in Johannesburg and other Reef towns, and in specially built shopping complexes on the fringes of central business districts. The Indian Council has, not surprisingly, objected to this, saying that Indian business men should be free to trade anywhere in a central business district.

Trade unions to go non-racial (Star, 20/9/78) unanimously/

The TUCSA conference in Port Elizabeth recently resolved to work towards non-racial unions wherever possible and, as a first step, to organise black workers. TUCSA also resolved to ask employers, in their own interests, to recognise black unions.

It is noteworthy that the Secretary for Labour, who was present, said he had not heard anything at the conference which was not in the spirit of co-operation and dialogue.

The conference also voted unanimously for the abolition of legislation hindering the free and full utilisation of all South African manpower. (Whether in this case man embraces woman is not stated!)