

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

What's the hurry? (Argus, 26/2/77; Cape Times, 24/3/77)

We support wholeheartedly the petition organised by the Cape Town Branch of the National Council of Women, the Black Sash and the Women's Movement, among others, to the Prime Minister to stop the demolition of squatters' homes until alternative accommodation is available, and to establish emergency camps. It is unfortunate that the National Housing Commission should have come out so strongly against the provision of temporary squatter camps and site-and-service schemes, on the ground that "such controlled squatter camps lend themselves eventually to uncontrolled squatting without the provision of proper services, to overcrowding and to inadequate control measures".

What is the alternative for the people who cannot be otherwise accommodated? The problem will not go away.

SHELTER (Cape Times, 8-11-16-21/3/77)

The League commends very highly the response of the citizens of Cape Town - and of people elsewhere in South Africa - towards housing as many as possible of the Peninsula's squatter population. Since the appeal was launched (mentioned in our last issue) the fund has, to date, reached over R186 000. A board of trustees, acting as a sub-committee of CAFDA, has been working out plans for low-cost housing and is taking steps to obtain the necessary land. There is hope therefore that, before winter sets in, at least a fair proportion of the squatters who are legally in the Peninsula (said to be about 70% of the total) will be rehoused.

It is encouraging also to learn that the Department of Community Development is embarking on an experimental scheme for emergency housing and that housing is to be made available in Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu for "legal" squatters by converting single quarters into family units. The Department of Bantu Affairs is also setting up a temporary site-and-service scheme at Nyanga.

The Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner of the Western Cape has said that African families living illegally with their menfolk

will "probably" be allowed to stay if themen are here legally.

The Government, however, is firm in its stand that "people who enter the Peninsula illegally and who also squat illegally on land belonging to others will have to return to their places of origin. Their actions cannot be condoned".

Judging by past experience, this attitude is not likely to solve the problem. Men desperate for work to support their families, who cannot find employment in their "places of origin", will continue to come to the cities; and their families will continue to follow them. The whole basis of control of migrant labour needs to be reconsidered.

It appears that the Government is now willing to involve commerce and industry in the rehousing of African squatter families. This can only do good, and we await details with interest. The new Urban Foundation, which aims at self-help and the development of a community spirit, will no doubt be involved in this.

Places of origin? (Cape Times, 15/3/77)

It is interesting that, according to a recent survey, only 1.2% of the coloured households at Modderdam and 12.3% of the Africans come from outside the Peninsula. Nevertheless the offers of work and accommodation reported to be coming from country areas will help to a certain extent.

The right to a pension (Argus, 19/3/77, Sunday Times, 20/3/77)

It is reported that the Department of Bantu Administration and Development in Pretoria has withdrawn 315 pensions from Africans in Grahamstown for review because (1) the Government - or its officials - feels the proportion of pensioners to population is too high, and (2) these Africans have no documentary proof of their age. The same thing, says the local Bantu Affairs Commissioner, could happen to another 358 at any time. (To do him justice, the local Commissioner is most concerned about the situation, which developed while he was on leave.)

We hope that more humane counsels will prevail and that all who are judged, on any grounds, to be old enough to qualify for pensions will have them restored with the least possible delay. Even in uncertain cases we might say to the Government, "'Twere good you do so much for charity".

Prisons and pass laws (Cape Times, 11/3/77)

It is reported that the Department of Bantu Administration has (apparently by administrative action) doubled the fine for pass law offences from R50 to R100. As the "Cape Times"

points out, it has ignored the views of the recent Viljoen Commission which, concerned at the increase in our prison population (doubled since 1947, and now apparently approaching a hundred thousand a day), saw the pass laws as a contributory cause of this increase and advocated decriminalisation of offenders.

Says the "Cape Times", "No inflammatory pamphlet could be more effective at stirring up further resentment than a R100 fine for the "crime" of being in an area where employment was available. Massive fines will do nothing to convince an African that it is better to starve legally than to eat in defiance of the law. Certainly he will now spend more time in prison..."

The Viljoen Commission has, inter alia, recommended the setting up of a permanent commission on penal reform. This would be invaluable if the Government acted on its recommendations ...

Freedom of speech? (Sunday Times, 27/3/77)

The "Sunday Times", commenting on the welcome withdrawal of the Newspaper Bill by the Government, raises a serious point when it says:

"No Press has, or can demand, more freedom than its own society wishes to give it.

"The most troubling aspect of the Newspaper Bill, therefore, was its apparent popularity with the public. Too many people seem to have rejoiced, implying that they see their Press as an enemy rather than as a champion of their rights ..."

The paper suggests various explanations for this including "the deep divisions of language, culture and political tradition", and commends the defence by Afrikaans editors of the public's right to know.

Do we want liberty?

Has the idea of liberty, as the "Sunday Times" suggests, become enfeebled among South Africans? Twenty-nine years of political opposition has undoubtedly dulled the edge of public awareness among readers of the English-language press, and conditioned Afrikaans readers into accepting their own newspapers uncritically. We appreciate the fact that a number of Afrikaners editors are trying to remedy this, and wish all newspapers well in their task of keeping the public alert to its rights and duties.

Changes in interrogation? (Argus, 26/3/77)

The "Argus" reports that "important changes in police methods for taking confessions from accused people" may follow

comments made by a judge in the Transvaal recently on this subject.

The Minister of Justice, Mr J.T. Kruger, has said he would consider the judge's request when he received "the full motivation" for it.

In a sabotage trial in Pretoria recently the state decided not to lead further evidence on the admissibility of confessions made by the accused after it had been alleged that a police officer had tricked them into making them (Rand Daily Mail, 17/3/77).

There has long been a feeling that the whole system of interrogation needs thorough investigation; we hope the Minister will decide to do this with the least possible delay, and that it will include the interrogation of "detained" persons under the Terrorism and Internal Security Acts.

Distasteful (Cape Times, 21-24/3/77)

The list of offices of churches and other allied organisations being raided by the Security Police is growing rapidly. Within recent months raids have been reported on, among others, the offices of the S.A. Council of Churches and of certain black organisations in Johannesburg; on the Christian Institute, the Athlone Advice Office, the Black Sash, the South African Outlook and the Dependents' Conference, and the homes of Bishop Patrick Matolengwe and his Chaplain, Rev. David Russell, at Cape Town. Apparently in the latter cases the police had instructions from headquarters to look for certain BPC pamphlets.

Archbishop Bill Burnett has said that Bishop Matolengwe and Mr Russell "are suffering the consequences of seeking to represent the feeling of very many voiceless people" and "to make white South Africans aware of the sense of outrage in the minds of many black people among whom they live. To refuse to hear it because it is distasteful to us is not only foolish but dangerous." He has called again for a "thoroughgoing and frank investigation" of what happened in Nyanga at the end of last year by "a commission of inquiry prepared to meet and hear evidence in Cape Town".

We agree entirely with the Archbishop about the urgency of this matter.

MOYA APOLOGIES for delay in sending this issue - due to mechanical difficulties in office.