

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

Can you help? (Cape Times, 30/4/77)

We would again bring to the notice of our readers the needs which the Bantu Scholars' Fund (Box 294, Rondebosch) is trying to meet. In a letter to the "Cape Times" Dr Margaret Elsworth has said that, in spite of generous help from the people of the African townships (unfortunately reduced by the troubles of last year), the Fund has overspent by R3 000 and is unable to meet the needs of scholars who apply for help with books or uniforms. We would wholeheartedly commend this good cause to our members.

Group areas (Cape Times, 17-20-22-30/4/77 , 23/5/77)

In spite of the recommendation of the Theron Commission, the Government has apparently "dug in its heels" on the restoring of District Six to the coloured people. But the Minister has ordered an investigation into the possible rezoning of residential Salt River and part of Woodstock for coloured occupation, and the possible declaration of certain (mainly business) areas as "controlled" and open to all.

We hope that all groups concerned will make representations to the proposed investigating body and that unless there are overwhelming arguments against it, the area still open to all groups will be left as it is.

Africans at work (Cape Times, 5/5/77)

The Board of Social Responsibility of the (Anglican) Diocese of Cape Town has issued two valuable pamphlets regarding the problems of urban Africans and the possibility of help from their employers.

1) "Africans at work - communication or conflict?" deals with the question of communication between employers and their African staff and the relative advantages of "liaison committees" (partly appointed by employers) and "works committees" (all elected by the workers). Both these bodies are provided for under the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act.

The pamphlet commends the works committees as more likely to convey the real needs and concerns of the workers to manage-

ment, and urges that African workers should be encouraged to hold regular meetings under the auspices of the works committee.

2) "Africans at work - low productivity, absenteeism - Why?" deals with the problems of urban Africans in connection with passes, place of residence and the question of having their families with them in an urban area. It gives facts about these matters which all employers of Africans should know about and thus be equipped to help their employees when necessary, to obtain legal aid.

We commend both these pamphlets warmly. Make them known to your friends. They are obtainable from the Board of Social Responsibility, c/o 1 Long Street, Mowbray or the Athlone Advice Office, 5 Princess Street, Mowbray. No price is given, so we suggest a small donation towards cost and postage.

The "Naked Yoga Bill" (Cape Times, 27/4/77; Argus, 21/5/77)

The League's Committee is concerned about section 6 of the Publications Amendment Bill, which repeals an exemption previously applicable to professional, scientific and religious publications in the Act of 1974.

Academic opposition (Argus, 21/5/77)

Since our Chairman's letter was published in the Cape Times (27/4/77), the Senate of the University of Cape Town and several prominent staff members individually have voiced their concern about this provision, which they, like the League, regard as a serious interference with the public's right to know and with freedom of speech and conscience. The Minister's assurance that books of a technical, scientific and religious nature would continue to receive a blanket exemption from the censorship machine (except for books on communism) is not satisfactory.

Professor David Welsh has called the Bill "a serious threat to intellectual freedom", which will strengthen the existing trend for academics in the social sciences to avoid "sensitive" areas.

Professor George Ellis has pointed out that "anything which tends to inhibit the free discussion of the social and economic situation" makes it less likely that South Africa will come to a proper solution of her problems.

As Dr Francis Wilson has put it, "What one wants is protection by the law, not protection by the whim of the Minister."

A welcome gesture - but ... (Cape Times, 2-7-12-14-27-28/4/77; Sunday Times, 1/5/77)

The Minister of Justice has taken a wise step in allowing journalists to visit Robben Island. But this is only a small concession. As the "Cape Times" has pointed out, the real area of public concern, here and overseas, is the "physical and mental health" of detainees under interrogation by the security police. Such people are held incommunicado, not even being visited (as convicted prisoners may be) by a judge. (The fortnightly visits by a magistrate "should circumstances permit" are no substitute for the independent, unscheduled access of judges.) The reports that have reached the newspapers of torture and suicide are extremely disquieting, and judges in court have also expressed concern.

The Minister could to some extent have countered these allegations by allowing the representatives of the International Red Cross to see detainees privately, which he refused to do.

Nor are matters improved by the decision of the Publications Appeal Board to ban both circulation and possession of the Christian Institute's recent pamphlet "Torture in South Africa?" - a document consisting entirely of items which have already appeared in the daily Press, Hansard or S.A. Institute of Race Relations surveys. Are these items, then, in their original form also "banned"?

Censorship is undesirable in any case, and can do nothing but harm to South Africa's reputation in this instance.

It would be of benefit to our good name if, instead of trying to stifle the publication of such details, the Minister were to accede to the numerous calls to institute a judicial commission of inquiry into deaths in detention and the rôle of the police in our society. In this connection, we commend the decision that the Cillié Commission is to return to Cape Town in June to go further into the disturbances in our African townships.

How we grow

We have gained a number of new members lately who became interested through receiving specimen news letters, sent on the suggestion of members. We would welcome more of these - the greater our membership, the more effective we can become.

A good beginning (Cape Times, 22-23-25/4/77)

It is cheering to note that a manifesto issued by the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce, committing firms to a policy of non-discrimination within the law in business, has been signed by 641 of the 1400 member firms of the Chamber.

This manifesto calls on members to:

- * Select, employ, train and promote staff without regard to race or colour.
- * Determine salaries and wages in accordance with the principle of equal pay for equal work.
- * Do all things possible to promote understanding and harmonious relations between employer and employees, and individual employees, irrespective of their race, colour or employment status.

We hope that the firms (more than half the Chamber's membership) which for any reason have not signed the manifesto will do so shortly.

Says the "Cape Times": "Clearly the time is not far off when the rejection (of these principles) will be a black mark against an employer's name."

Self-help (Cape Times, 5/5/77)

Some years ago there was formed in Cape Town's African townships a body called the Co-ordinating Civic Council, but for various reasons it never really got into action. It is now reported that this Council is being revitalised and is to act as a link between urban township residents and the recently established Urban Foundation, with which it hopes to co-operate on housing and education. The Council is to aim at the establishment of training centres for teachers and nurses, who at present cannot receive these training facilities in Cape Town and have to travel "hundreds of kilometres", according to an African spokesman, to obtain them.

The Council sounds a valuable development, and we wish it well.

Subscription up to date?

The League's Committee greatly appreciates the promptitude and generosity with which most of its members pay their subscriptions. Those who have not covered themselves for 1977 will find a reminder with this news letter. Our financial year ends on June 30!

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