

PC16/2/2/1/45

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS LEAGUE FOR THE YEAR 1980-81  
(presented to the Annual General Meeting, September 14, 1981)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to welcome you to our annual general meeting of 1981.

As many of you will remember, this is a historic date for the League. On September 14, 1948, a City Hall filled to capacity protested against the decision of the newly elected National Party Government to remove coloured men from the parliamentary voters' roll. It was out of this meeting that the League was born.

It is with regret that we record the death during the year of one of our Patrons, Mrs Nell Marquard. We are grateful for all that she and her husband, Leo, meant to the League.

#### Events during the year

During this year we have seen a parliamentary election, with suggestions, particularly from the Prime Minister, that reform in some respects might be on the way. So far, however, there is little sign of practical steps in the right direction.

#### The "keys" ordinance

At the end of last year the Cape Provincial Council passed an Ordinance forcing employers in any designated area in the Cape to keep a duplicate key to their servants' quarters, to be made available on demand to police or municipal inspectors between midnight and 8 a.m. in any area in which the ordinance applied. We have not so far heard of the ordinance being applied to any specific area (it was originally said to be aimed at Sea Point), but it is certainly a shocking infringement of the right of privacy, and we hope it will become a dead letter.

#### The Koornhof Bills

Published towards the end of last year, these three Bills have not yet been brought before Parliament, and we do not know what changes may have been introduced. But the recent drastic action against squatters at Nyanga suggests the worst. The Minister himself defined their aim both as removing "hurtful discrimination" and as introducing "more effective influx control". Judging by recent events, the latter idea predominates. We have yet to see how the Minister proposes to give blacks "just as much freedom as whites" (his own phrase).

Meanwhile the Athlone Advice Office continues to help those who fall foul of the influx control system, and public interest and help has been a heartening feature of the recent Nyanga troubles, where the League has also played a part.



It was officially stated that the drafting committee for the Bills included two blacks ...

During the past year the League made representations to the Committee set up to revise these Bills.

#### Towards better race relations

An encouraging feature in our schools over the past year has been the introduction of a compulsory black language in white primary schools in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, to be extended to high schools, and as an option in Natal and the Cape, where we hope it will become compulsory also.

#### Press freedom

The Steyn Commission on the Press has not yet presented its report, and meanwhile, through the medium of the S.A. Transport Services Bill, the Government is tightening its control over the Press with regard to police matters. It will be interesting to learn the Steyn Commission's recommendations. No less a person than Mr Joel Mervis, giving evidence to the Commission, described the Commission as a "watershed" in press affairs and considered that the Government regarded it as "part of the total onslaught" on the Press.

Several black journalists have been banned during the year. Early in 1981 the Government brought about the closing of two Johannesburg newspapers, Post Transvaal and Sunday Post, which action was condemned by its own press, including the Burger, Beeld, Transvaler and Volksblad.

#### Conscientious objection

The stand made previously by Mr Peter Moll and Mr Richard Steele, and more recently by Mr Charles Yeats, for freedom of conscience in respect of military service is one which the League considers any citizen has the right to make. The League in 1972 brought the issue to public notice by holding a conference on conscientious objection, and we still urge that the law should be amended to allow of such freedom of conscience.

The Churches are pressing for recognition of the granting of alternative forms of service on conscientious grounds.

#### Our pamphlet

During the year the League published a pamphlet on "The responsibility of judges in applying unjust laws in South Africa", which has aroused considerable interest from both the legal profession and the general public. Naturally there has been some criticism, but on the whole we feel the pamphlet has performed a use

ful purpose. Copies of the second edition are now available, and names of possible interested recipients would be welcome. If sufficiently interested, such people might well join the League.

#### Group areas

One area of policy where the Prime Minister seemed to be contemplating possible action after the election was the Group Areas Act. So far, the only action we have noticed was in connection with sport! There are other areas where change is even more necessary.

A government commission has been looking into District Six in Cape Town and Pageview in Johannesburg. Its report - and possible legislation flowing therefrom - will be awaited with interest. In group areas, change is long overdue.

#### President's Council

This body is reported to be occupied with the question of constitutional change. Its usefulness, however, is severely limited by the fact that the possibility of black representation in any suggested parliament has been ruled out in advance by the Prime Minister - and also black representation on the Council itself. Apart from the question of justice, it is highly probable that coloured and Indian people would refuse to accept a franchise that excluded blacks.

#### Municipal franchise

The City of Cape Town has come out in favour of giving back to all local owners and occupiers of landed property the municipal franchise, irrespective of race. Not surprisingly, there has been both support and opposition in the Cape Provincial Council to such a move. In particular the Province's Member of the Executive Committee in charge of local government, Mr Hernus Kriel, is determined to make sure that National Party policies are applied by local authorities, and the Cape Town City Council in particular. An ordinance has been introduced giving the Administrator effective control of the appointments of senior municipal officials, and another to enable him to change any names given to streets of which he disapproves. In the light of this it seems hardly likely that the City of Cape Town will be allowed to reintroduce a non-racial municipal franchise. But we hope the City Council will make its intentions in this regard quite clear, even if at present it is blocked from implementing them.

### Banning and detention

The system of banning and of detention without trial continues unabated. The one gleam of light in the darkness is the fact that newspapers like Rapport and Die Vaderland, though still supporting the Government, have criticised such actions as being "unacceptable in a democracy". Considering the conditions under which banned and detained people live, this is almost the understatement of the year.

### The League and the Press.

During the past year there has been a welcome improvement in our relationship with the Press. Particularly in regard to the recent events at Nyanga, the Press has given considerable publicity to the League's views. We welcome this because it helps to bring civil rights issues before the public and to give them cause for thought about such issues. Though public opinion works slowly, it must have some effect, and the press is one of the main channels in forming such opinion. It is unfortunate that its effect is probably counteracted by the government-inspired - and probably more widespread - influence of television. We would again encourage our members to write to the Press - as indeed some of them do - on such issues, and to draw their friends' attention to them. One of the League's main functions is to encourage the growth of a healthy public opinion on matters of civil and human rights, and this can be done on a far wider scale through our members than through the limited resources the League has.

### Our Committee and us

Most of our members know little of the inner workings of the League, being only conscious that behind its news letter and its public statements there must be a committee! This committee meets monthly and deals with civil rights issues and possible action about them. It would welcome the nomination of more people prepared to help in this task. It would be helpful if the rank and file membership made more use of their annual privileges of nomination and election of committee members.

The Committee wishes again, however, to express its gratitude for the loyal support of our members during the past years, without which the League could not survive.

BRIAN BISHOP,  
Chairman