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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS LEAGUE FOR THE YEAR 1981-82
(presented to the Annual General Meeting, September 15, 1982)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to welcome you to our annual general meeting, and to present a brief review of our operations. I apologise for having to use racial adjectives when referring to the people of South Africa, but the civil rights we enjoy often depend on our skin colour.

Another unfortunate expression, encouraged by SATV, is to talk of supporters or opponents of South Africa, when one is referring to supporters or opponents of the present government. The government has the support of approximately 50% of the voters, and the voters represent only 20% of the population. The non-representative status of the government makes its actions even more deplorable.

WEEK OF THE INNOCENT: The last week of May again marked the week in which volunteers lived the life of a banned person for one week. One becomes very aware of the suffering incurred by those who are not unbanned after a week, but one also feels the strength that inspires so many of those formerly banned or detained.

The League has been approached by the South African Council of Churches, which is setting up a commission on Human Rights, and we have been asked to act as a consultant for this.

LEGISLATION: The League has lodged objections to the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill, which is worse than any apartheid legislation during the Verwoerd or Vorster eras. It is clearly aimed at creating a "there's no going back" situation. The Bill will finally destroy family life for those affected. It is not without cause that it has been called the Genocide Bill.

BANNING AND THE RULE OF LAW: The Steyn Commission in its report to Parliament early this year suggested that all detentions and bannings carried out by the government should be subject to judicial review by a judge of the Supreme Court, to counter accusations that the system was in breach of the rule of law.

This would also - which is far more important - promote justice.

DETENTIONS; We commend the activities of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, and also the concern of the Association of Law Societies.

that these rights should apply equally to citizens of "independent" homelands.

The League has made representations about this Bill, as have churches and trade union bodies. The Anglican Church has made such representations and has condemned the proposed laws as "unchristian". The Bill has also been condemned by the Roman Catholic Church and the Ned. Geref. Sendingkerk, and by the South African Council of Churches.

The Cape Times says it is estimated that 42 per cent of Cape Town's black population is "illegal".

A particularly sinister power given to the Minister by the proposed bill is that of altering by regulation, nullifying or applying the law as he sees fit.

An interesting point arises. If the proposed high fines on employers of "illegal" labour are enforced, how will any further blacks be able to achieve "legal" status?

The whole question of squatters is tied up with this proposed legislation. We agree with Mrs Di Bishop, Progressive Party candidate in the forthcoming parliamentary bye-election at Stellenbosch, that the only answer to the squatter problem is to accept and plan for the inevitability of urbanisation, while also spending the necessary money on large-scale rural development which would, presumably, help to reduce the drift to the cities.

Permanent residence? (Cape Times, 29/9/82)

In the meantime, it is reported that thousands of black workers in the Western Cape have applied for permanent residence (known as Section 10(i)(b) rights) on the basis of having worked continuously for one employer for ten years in terms of a Cape Supreme Court decision granting such rights to Mr Stanford Booie in May, 1982.

The other side of the coin? (Cape Times, 20/9/82)

Dr Willem de Klerk, former editor of the Transvaler, has called for black people to be given "a meaningful say" in the "four decisive years" before the next election, and has urged the government to "adopt an unashamedly reformist attitude" towards their representation in the proposed confederation of South Africa and the independent homelands. "The path of homeland representation and local government as the only solution, he said, "is doomed to failure". During these four years the

government must "make demonstrable progress" not only towards a settlement between white, coloured and Indian people, but also towards a settlement offer towards black people.

"Improper political interference"? (Cape Times, 16/9/82)

Commenting on her experiences in the early stages of the current Stellenbosch bye-election, Mrs Di Bishop said recently that Stellenbosch people had asked her about the attitudes of black people, but she should not have been the one to answer their questions. There were "thousands" of black people with enough goodwill and longing for peace to be willing to talk to white people. But in terms of the Prohibition of Improper Political Interference Act, it would have been an offence for blacks to accompany her to Stellenbosch to discuss their viewpoints. "Many people do not realise that they are being oppressed by being denied access to black opinion," said Mrs Bishop.

It might be added that, prior to the advent of the present government in 1948, coloured people at least might have expressed their opinion in the only really effective way - at the polling booth.

Will they be rebanned? (Cape Times, 23,25/9/82)

On October 19, 1977, says the Cape Times, the government declared eighteen organisations, including the Christian Institute, unlawful; detained about 50 individuals and served banning orders on seven people. (Two of the banning orders have been lifted in June of this year.) None of the people concerned have been brought to trial.

The Minister can of course renew any bannings without giving reasons.

Is it too much to hope that he will see fit to lift them?

Detention (Cape Times, 25/9/82)

The general synod of the Ned. Geref. Sendingkerk recently called for the release of all detainees and the lifting of all banning orders, and in particular called on the government not to renew the banning order on its former minister, Rev. Beyers Naudé. The Synod has called for the repeal of certain "unchristian" measures relating to security legislation.

The right to vote (Cape Times, 22/9/82)

In line with its traditions, the Council of the City of Cape Town has flatly rejected proposals by the President's Council for

the government is wedded to separate departments for the various racial groups, as insisted upon by its conservative elements in the Transvaal, and no doubt elsewhere. We support the view of the S.A. Teachers' Association that the governing body of each institution should be free to decide on its policy regarding admissions.

The president of UTASA says that the rejection of one open education system "re-establishes apartheid education and puts us back where we started".

GROUP AREAS AND REMOVALS: In spite of strong pressure from the President's Council and many other sources, District Six remains for white occupation and a new Technikon. Mass removals of Africans from the Eastern Cape into the Ciskei, as well as other removals in the Transvaal, have continued.

VERLIGTHEID AT STELLENBOSCH: A year ago we noted with regret that a proposed student referendum on the idea of making Stellenbosch an "open" university had been abandoned. Now, a year later, a motion has been passed in that University's student parliament calling for 80% of its student membership to be Afrikaans and the balance admitted on a basis purely of academic merit - i.e., open to black and/or English-speaking students. And, moreover, that universities should have the right to determine their own requirements for admission.

LEGAL AID: The General Council of the Bar of South Africa has declared that legal aid to people charged with capital offences is "essential". They should not, says the Council, have to rely on a pro deo defence. We agree with the Council that this should be a civil right.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESS: Periodically the Prime Minister or one of his colleagues issues a more or less avuncular warning to the Press to "put its house in order".

This is a more serious matter than the banning of specific publications. It is some consolation to know that both the Afrikaans and the English press opposed the Press Bill this year. It would seem, so far, that the government is stepping cautiously and is not willing to incur the odium of imposing "a fugitive and cloistered virtue" if it can achieve its ends in a less obvious way. We must hope, however, that it will change the ends!

The League has made a number of press statements during the past year on more or less controversial issues, and would encourage its members to make more use of the correspondence columns of our papers on civil rights matters.

As regards the general principle it is mildly encouraging that, from time to time, the ban on particular publications is lifted.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION AND NATIONAL SERVICE: The League has been concerned with this issue since 1970, and still maintains that genuine conscientious objectors should be given the option of community service rather than be clapped into jail. It seems that the government is at last considering this line of action.

IN CONCLUSION: The League does not seek a more activist rôle. Our membership includes people who devote a great deal of time and energy to other organizations that contribute more actively to the cause of peaceful change. It would be unthinkable to divert their energies to the League.

There is a great need for an organization that keeps in touch with legislation and developments, and that reminds legislators and the public of the eternal values of civil rights, which are the basis of civilization. Our membership reflects a picture of those who care in South Africa, and it has been a great honour to have been chairman for two years.

I wish that success could be reported, or even that the League had seen some progress in its 34 years of existence. All we can hope is that we avoid the new dark age that looms ahead.

The real tragedy is that the solution is so clear, and so easy. There is a tremendous amount of goodwill among ordinary South Africans. If only good sense could enter the portals of power. All that is needed to safeguard the peace of the State is to safeguard the civil rights of the Individual.

All South Africans are affected by the vagaries of "white politics", and the present appeasement of right-wingers is aggravating the suffering of those who are without a vote. While irrelevant party-political bickering on social, cultural and economic issues takes place, it remains impossible to evade the real issues of white-black relationships and the sharing of decision-making.

In closing I know I record the opinion of all our members in paying tribute to Maggie Rodger, who has kept the wheels of our League turning for 34 years.

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