

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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PC16/2/2/1/8

News Letter

Vol. XXIV No. 8
Oct. 6, 1977

Our A.G.M.

The subject of Dr André du Toit's address is to be "Some thoughts on the Politics of Civil Rights in South Africa".

With an election almost upon us and a new constitution looming ahead, this will be timely and interesting. We remind you that the meeting is to be held on Monday, October 17 in the Claremont Congregational Church Hall, Main Road, Claremont (next to Arderne Gardens) at 8 p.m.

If any members cannot get there without a lift, please let us know and we shall try to arrange one. Phone (office hours) 22-7020.

A Loss to South Africa

In these uneasy days all who hope and work for a peaceful South Africa must mourn the death of Steve Biko, who, according to those who knew him, certainly shared their hopes and their determination. The League extends its deep sympathy to his family and friends, and again calls, not only for a thorough investigation into Mr Biko's death, but for the repeal of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, the restoration of the right to legal assistance and access to the courts, and the right of visits by authorised family and others to all detained persons.

N.G.K. giving a lead to "a new nationalism"? (Cape Times, 24/9/77)

The Ned. Geref. Kerk, in a statement in the Kerkbode, has set out principles for the Church and its members in a changing South Africa, including the following:

- * All church members, including state officials, must be clearly warned against practising any form of race discrimination.
 - * The Church should point out and insist on changes to all laws which give offence.
 - * In the preaching of the Church all attitudes and actions which offend human dignity should be pointed out and repudiated.
- The statement said that the daughter churches of the N.G.K.

- its coloured and black branches - could be asked to help, "as their members felt the effect of the offending laws".

Government moving? (Sunday Times, 18/9/77)

At the Transvaal National Party congress recently Mr M.C. Botha, Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, said that the Government had decided to look into "the possible desirable revision and adjustment of all existing practices, measures and policy application in respect of the black man in the white area ... within the framework and flexibility (our italics) of N.P. policy and principles". He mentioned the Group Areas Act, the pass laws, the Urban Areas Consolidation Act, the new Community Councils Act and black labour legislation. All this, says the Sunday Times, could mean the removal of much government-entrenched discrimination at the social, job and legal level, "taking the social sting out of separate development".

The Daily News comments: "High among the priorities must be far greater control by urban blacks of their own affairs, together with freehold of land in some form ..."

We await developments with interest, and hope they will include the Cape Peninsula.

Have they seen this? (Cape Times, 19/9/77)

The Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town has embarked on a project called "Constructive programme for sound intergroup relations", which aims "to provide the facts of our racial discrimination, to put them in perspective and to show the way to a saner society". Bulletin No. 1 of the Centre, says the Cape Times, analyses direct legislative discrimination like the prohibition of political interference; the exclusion of Africans from effective trade unions; the compulsory separation of white, coloured and Asian trade unions; separate controlling bodies for nurses and teachers; indirect statutory power (group areas in all its implications for entertainment, restaurants, etc. and the need for permits; and finally, customary practice - "a conscious or unwitting extension of the government's apartheid dogmas".

The survey points out that many people practise discrimination under the impression that the law requires them to do so, and the survey makes clear how and where government policy and customary practice are not mandatory.

The Bulletin can be obtained free of charge from the Centre of Intergroup Studies, U.C.T.

Non-discrimination in business (Argus, 10/9/77)

The Argus, too, emphasises that though the Government controls the dispensation of political rights, there is much that can be done in other fields. Last December, says the paper, Cape Town Chamber of Commerce launched a manifesto committing member firms to a policy of non-discrimination. Now the Johannesburg Chamber proposes to urge at ASSOCOM's national congress this month the drafting of a sweeping socio-economic plan.

C.R.C. speaks out (Cape Times, 16/9/77)

Reports of proceedings in the Coloured Persons Representative Council these days make interesting reading. The Council is becoming a frank and fearless commentator on aspects of government policy, and not only as it affects the coloured people.

Recently it adopted a motion calling on the Government to abolish all forms of discrimination spread by "the media", including the use of terms such as "baas", "missus", "hotnot" and "aia" on SABC-TV; what a speaker called "the biased presentation of religion", and "misleading reports" of C.R.C. debates.

Such frankness is healthy and democratic. Let us have more of it, whatever reservations we may have about the C.R.C. as an institution.

Demands rejected (Argus, 10/9/77)

Although the Government has shown willingness to give consideration to some C.R.C. requests (e.g. changing the law to allow the C.R.C. Executive chairman to be elected by the Council instead of appointed by the authorities, and the opening of theatres, sports facilities, cinemas, halls and libraries to all race groups), it has rejected such decisions of the Council as

- * The staging of a national convention to formulate a new non-racial constitution for South Africa;
- * The repeal of the Group Areas Act;
- * The repeal of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act;
- * The paying to coloured people of old age and war veterans' pensions and disability grants equal to that of the whites;
- * The rejection of the main recommendations of the Theron Commission.

Constitutional issues

In October 1960, after the referendum on the establishment of a republic, the Committee of the League considered the possibility of a move being made asking for minimum constitutional

guarantees, before the republic was actually proclaimed, on such matters as the powers of the President, the powers of the provinces, the power relation between the provinces and the central government, and the question of human rights.

These matters are at least equally important in relation to the proposed new constitution, and we hope that the idea will be pursued.

Soothing noises? (Cape Times, 22/9/77)

Senator Denis Worrall is reported as having told the Press Club in Cape Town that the president in the new dispensation will exercise his powers "with prudence and a politician's judgment. If he did not the thing would not work". The new proposals, he says, are based not on conflict (as, says he, is the present system "inherited from the British"), but on consensus. The division of functions between the three "parliaments" is "an inherent check on power". The new constitution "assumes a politics of reconciliation and bridgebuilding ..."

This is not very convincing. More significant is his last reported remark - that "the coming change offered South Africa a chance to adopt a bill of rights but he felt this should take the form of a statement on the rights of citizens rather than an entrenched law". He is not reported to have given any explanation of this curious view. Of course, the Nationalist Government in its early days did find entrenched clauses a distinct nuisance ...

To us, Senator Worrall's view seems not only unconvincing but sinister.

"QUOTE" (Cape Times, 22/9/77)

"I am very glad that newspapers take the philosophical analysis of political concepts seriously. This is going to be the difficult task of all persons concerned with politics in the future"

"I agree with Voltaire - men will continue to commit atrocities as long as they believe in absurdities ..."

"If we want to create an honest rational society then conceptual clarification should be high on our list of priorities."

"In this way politics becomes an education process. All individuals and groups in South Africa will have to go through this process - there is no easy way out."

(Professor Johannes Degenaar, Head of the Department of Political Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, in "Standpunte", an Afrikaans literary journal)