

POLICE DOGS AND THE INDIAN COMMUNITY

ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, December 10th, 1963, several hundred Indian women from all over the Transvaal travelled to Pretoria to present a letter to the Prime Minister, protesting about the Group Areas Act and its effects upon the South African Indian community. Wearing white saris as a sign of mourning, they gathered at an Indian temple in the Asiatic bazaar for prayers, after which buses carried them to the Union Buildings.

They did not see the Prime Minister. Instead, according to Press reports, after various attempts had been made by the police to prevent them from reaching the Union Buildings, they were dispersed by police dogs.

Their letter to the Prime Minister, a copy of which was carried by each woman, read as follows:

"The ruthless application of the policy of apartheid is causing grave concern to our people. Its implementation in the form of group areas, job reservation and other measures involves loss of homes, impoverishment, and assault on our dignity and self-respect.

"As a woman I request you to take steps that will restore security to a people whose only 'crime' is colour and race.

"Significantly, my representation to you is on December 10th, which is Human Rights Day. A change of policy on your part might even restore confidence and respect for our country throughout the world."

This was not the first occasion upon which police dogs had been used against the Indian community. About a week previously, dogs were used to disperse a crowd of friends and relatives of people arrested at an Indian theatre under the Sunday Observance Act.

The "Rand Daily Mail" commented on these two incidents as follows:

Why bully them?

"THERE are indications that, since the shock of Sharpeville, the police have tried hard to put their relations with Africans on a better footing. Our racial laws make it certain that there will always be a kind of "cold war" between the African and the authorities, but on the whole conditions have improved. The change in the liquor laws has made a big difference, raiding for passes has been reduced and official directives to bear down less severely on the law-abiding African have had some effect.

"But the Indian seems to have gained little benefit from this more reasonable policy. Ten days ago the police swooped on an Indian cinema and arrested the promoters of the performance and the entire audience on charges under the Sunday

Observance Act of 1896. It is inconceivable that the police would have taken such drastic action against an audience of Whites and they certainly would not have used dogs in the affair. After all this the charges have been dropped and the hundred or so Indians who had paid admission-of-guilt fines have had their money returned to them, but apparently without a word of apology or explanation.

"Another unpleasant incident occurred at the Union Buildings last week when Indian women, making an orderly march with the object of delivering a protest to the Prime Minister, were dispersed by police dogs. Is the Minister for Indian Affairs happy about this sort of treatment at a time when he is supposed to be trying to win Indian support for his Advisory Council? Could he not see to it that Indians, too, receive a little more consideration?"

"This cavalier attitude on the part of the authorities will be viewed by Indians against the background of persecution to which they are subjected under a Group Areas Act that is driving them from long-established homes and businesses. They form a most law-abiding group which seeks nothing but peaceful co-existence and yet they are treated with disdain as a voiceless minority with few rights and even fewer feelings."

Black Sash protest.

ON the 18th December, a deputation of fourteen members of the Black Sash visited the Union Buildings to lodge a protest against the treatment meted out to the Indian women. In a statement to the Press, Mrs. Jean Sinclair, the National President of the Black Sash, said:

"Indian women came in peace and in orderly fashion on Human Rights Day to make their orderly protest to the Government. They were met by police dogs and roadblocks, and subjected to treatment undeserved by any woman."

After handing the following letter, addressed to the Prime Minister, who was away on holiday, to

a clerk in his office, the fourteen women stood in silence at the entrance to the Union Buildings, the scene of many earlier Black Sash vigils and protests.

Presenting legitimate grievances.

THE BLACK SASH read with dismay the Press reports of the reception given to Indian women who went to Pretoria to deliver a letter of protest to a member of the Cabinet.

"It is traditional for South African citizens to go to the Union Buildings to present their legitimate grievances to the Government. We regard it as a sad commentary on the South African situation that the Government sees a peaceful protest by women as a serious threat to law and order. These women who had started by praying for the success of their mission, were met by road blocks, armed police and trained police dogs.

"We have been given to understand that our police force use these animals for the apprehension of criminals and the breaking up of unruly crowds. Are we to assume that this group of women, elegantly dressed in white saris, (a sign of mourning), presented such a physical threat that they had to be confronted by unsympathetic police and their dogs? Were all these precautions necessary to prevent women from delivering a letter to a member of your Cabinet?

"The Government believes that its policy of Apartheid is the only way to preserve White civilization in this country. Methods such as the police used in Pretoria on Human Rights Day may

BROWN BREAD

by Bob Connolly



(Rand Daily Mail)

REDUCED TO FEAR AND TEARS

I READ with amazement and anger of the action taken by the police in Fordsburg on Sunday when they rounded up Indian men, women and children for attending a cinema show given in the aid of a good cause. The women and children in the audience were reduced to fear and tears by being bundled into pick-up vans and by the presence of police dogs at the police station.

Without entering into the legal question as to whether or not any offence was committed by any of them, was this the way to handle the situation? Would they have dared to do this with a White audience on a Sunday in a Johannesburg cinema?

Is this good race relations?—QUINTIN WHYTE, Director, South African Institute of Race Relations (Inc.).

(Rand Daily Mail)

preserve White supremacy for a time but they will surely sacrifice the ideals of Western Civilization.

"As an organization of women with a deep concern for the welfare of the Republic of South Africa and all its people, we lodge a strenuous protest against such inhuman and unjust treatment meted out to South African citizens."

Preserving White Civilization.

AN official letter from the Black Sash on similar lines, signed by Mrs. Sinclair, was subsequently published by the "Star". The letter concluded:

"To what extent was this group of women . . . belonging to a race which believes implicitly in passive resistance, such a physical threat they they had to be controlled by dogs held on long leashes by the police?

"The Government believes that its policy of apartheid is the only way to preserve White civilization in this country. If means such as the police used in Pretoria on December 10th are to be employed to this end, one cannot but ask whether such a civilization is worthy of preservation.

"The late Mr. Jan Hofmeyr said many years ago that he feared that in the effort to preserve White civilization in this country we would sacrifice the ideals of Western civilization. The time is long overdue when White South Africans should ask themselves whether this is not exactly what is happening to us."

(Continued overleaf)

for its complaint; a public-spirited group of women who could scarcely conduct their activities more fully in the open encounter what looks very much like indifference.

The horror pictures and their crude message are no doubt the work of some lunatic fringe Right-wing body of which there are several in existence. They seem quite free to pursue their deplorable activities, sending through the postal system scurrilous material of a race-baiting nature. By way of contrast, it is the liberal organizations dedicated to race harmony and the elimination of discrimination that are liable to attract the notice of the authorities.

This, of course, is part of the main sickness from which South Africa suffers to-day and which the Black Sash letters illustrate — the attitude that those who stand for social justice and the upholding of Western moral values are really working for the collapse of our society in an orgy of violence and bloodshed. This is a simple-minded view indeed, a pathetic excuse for resistance to change, but alas, it is close to becoming our official national outlook. Such are the straits in which South Africa finds herself to-day.

The "Natal Mercury" says:

SICK SYMPTOMS

The sending through the post of hideous Congo and Mau Mau atrocity pictures to the members of the Black Sash could normally be ignored as the work of misguided cranks.

But the incident, about which the Black Sash movement is rightly protesting, has . . . unsatisfactory features which ought not to pass unnoticed.

. . . The despicable imputation behind the despatch of these gruesome pictures to members of what the senders no doubt consider to be a "liberal" organization is in itself an inevitable outgrowth, and an extremely distasteful one, from the extremist thinking which is manifesting itself in various forms in the Transvaal.

In a healthy society sick political minds can be ignored. The danger occurs when society does not recognize the cause of the sickness.

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A reader of the "Star" replied to this letter, which he described as "arrogant", and put the following questions to "this arch-champion of rights and liberty":

Three questions

- Since when has it become traditional to stage protest gatherings at the Union Buildings?
- Why is it wrong for the majority of White South Africans to preserve their heritage?
- Is the writer contemplating a note of protest to the Minister of Justice about the commendable way in which a lone policeman and his dog kept a crowd at a Johannesburg cinema in check on Boxing Day?

. . . and three answers.

MR S SINCLAIR replied:

- It has been traditional for many years for protests, petitions and letters to be taken to Cabinet Ministers at the Union Buildings. The Union Buildings are the administrative seat of Government and in them are the offices of some of the Cabinet Ministers. Your reader may remember that on June 22, 1940, 9,800 Afrikaner women, dressed in Voortrekker costume, marched

from Church Square to the Union Buildings with a petition to the Prime Minister, General Smuts, begging the Government to come to terms with Adolf Hitler. On many occasions since then petitions, protests and letters to the Government have been taken to the Union Buildings.

- It is not wrong for the majority of White South Africans to preserve their heritage. The Indian women too are South Africans, who went in an orderly manner to present a letter to the Prime Minister protesting against the Group Areas Act.

At this time the Minister of Indian Affairs, Mr. Maree, on behalf of the Government, was assuring representatives of the Indian people that they are regarded as South African citizens and that he wished them to express their views. I fail to understand the connection between White South Africans preserving their heritage and Indian women voicing their grievances to the proper authority.

- I stand by the statement made in my original letter in the "Star": "We have been given to understand that the police use these trained dogs for the apprehension of criminals and the breaking up of unruly crowds." The crowd outside the cinema on Boxing Day was presumably unruly.