
Words

Words

Words

SOMETHING MUST BE SAVED from the wreck of the Press Commission whose final report has made a laughing stock of the Commissioners and the Government. The Nationalist right wing is typified by Mr. Greyling, MP, who, according to *Die Burger*, told a Sea Point Nat. audience that everyone who interfered with White Unity should be liquidated (*gelikwideer*). The Press Commission Report has set them bay-ing, and if there is any liquidating to be done (always supposing that Greyling used the word metaphorically) the main targets for the Press Commissioners' abuse will be dealt with first. These are Stanley Uys of the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* and London *Observer*, and Anthony Delius of the *Cape Times* and Manchester *Guardian*, both of whom are also read in newspapers in other parts of the world. Perhaps the Nat. right-wing will be satisfied with the gagging of Uys and Delius: it is unlikely that a Press Council will be set up to tarnish our Free Press reputation abroad.

The outcry will last a few weeks, loyal leader-writers will keep the incident alive with occasional references, and the victims will find other employment for their considerable talents. No doubt they will be told commiseratingly that their proscription has cost the Government R355,000 and 14 years work by a full-scale Commission, headed by a Supreme Court judge, who had no other duties all those years. No other concrete results may be expected from the Report.

But though these writers may well merit the time and money the Government has spent on gagging them, the Press Report may have other unhappy results for which no legislation will be needed. Journalists have mouths to feed and few are as talented and employable as Messrs Uys and Delius.

Soon, every press cable going out of the country may have been pre-censored by its sender, in his anxiety to escape a future public pillorying with its possible ill effects on his career, as the situation worsens here. If Uys and Delius are gagged, the self-censoring will be all the more likely to take the sting out of any news unfavourable to apartheid and the Verwoerd Government.

Internal news will also be affected by the growing apprehensiveness. Many South African editors and proprietors will continue to claim that we have a free press, while that monument to the liberal tradition and to the work of Pringle, Fairbairn and Greig nearly a century and a half ago, is dragged further into the dust.

STANLEY TRAPIDO'S ARTICLE on "The Origins of the Cape Franchise Qualifications of 1853" in the current *Journal of African History* casts rare light on the now shadowy figure of William Porter, one of the few truly Liberal advocates of the non-racial franchise in the old Cape House. Porter, whom a contemporary called "the most admirable orator I ever listened to in the Colony or in England", was Attorney-General from 1839 to 1866, and championed the non-white vote when the Cape Franchise of 1853 was being decided upon. He argued that the only way to learn political responsibility was to exercise such responsibility, refused to concede that a mass electorate was necessarily more gullible than one of elitist origins, and condoned the ignorance of the new electorate, Coloured and Dutch, thus: "White men and Coloured men alike choose members who feel for them, and who will look after their interests, and more knowledge than this I do not look for in the first instance."

Trapido writes: "As for those who argued that the Coloureds were a politically dangerous group, Porter claimed

that if this were so, then the best way to disarm them politically would be to give them the opportunity for exercising the franchise, because, he observed, 'I would rather meet the Hottentot at the hustings voting for his representative than meet the Hottentot in the wilds with his gun upon his shoulder.'"

Some of Porter's speeches were published in 1886—thirteen years after he had left the Colony, but they covered only the first six years of his time here, ending in 1845. The rest must be scattered in Blue Books and contemporary newspapers, awaiting the biographer who must one day redeem the half-forgotten Porter.

Although he and his radical colleagues were looking far into the future when they drafted the £25 property qualification clause in the 1853 constitution, they can scarcely have seen that the passing of time would have brought in the colour bar that they rejected. By 1936, their non-racial franchise was finally routed out of the Union constitution, and is now only a memory. But it established a principle in South Africa, one that must return.

AFRICA DIARY

A WEEKLY RECORD OF
EVENTS IN AFRICA

Published by
Africa Publications (India)

AIRMAIL WITH BINDER
PER YEAR R20 (£10)

from South African Agents
INSIGHT PUBLICATIONS (PTY) LTD
P.O. BOX 2068 CAPE TOWN