

# SICK?

The quality of mercy is not one the South African Government is noted for, particularly when it comes to dealing with its more radical political opponents. It pursues them with an unrelenting vindictiveness. There have been two nasty examples of this recently. In a case brought before the Supreme Court in Pretoria it has been revealed that severe restrictions have recently been placed on the right of long term political prisoners to study by correspondence. In evidence submitted to the Court it has been stated that political prisoners have been told that, in future, they will not be permitted to study. The only exceptions to this will be people who need to study to complete their schooling and those who are already embarked on university courses, who will be given a "reasonable time" to complete them.

If this information is correct, and we cannot believe that it would have been brought before the Court if it were not, its implications are quite devastating. They are devastating not only for their effect on the people concerned, who are serving sentences of from five years to life for offences arising out of their political convictions, but also for what they reveal of the nature of their gaolers. For what kind of a person can it be who will go to such lengths to make intolerable the life of a political opponent whom he has every intention of keeping in prison for the rest of his natural life?

The other matter concerns the vendetta waged with such unending vigour and enthusiasm against Mrs Winnie Mandela. The security police are trying to establish that Mrs Mandela attended a "gathering" soon after her banishment to Brandfort, in that she was visited there by four white women friends from Johannesburg, who came to console her in her loneliness and isolation. The evidence of whether there was such a gathering are the four women concerned. They were sub-poenaed to give evidence which would, it was presumably hoped have incriminated Mrs Mandela. They refused to do so. All four were sentenced to prison sentences, the longest of which was a year. Appeals were lodged and two were discharged on a technicality while Mrs Helen Joseph had her sentence reduced to 2 weeks and Mrs Barbara Waite

had hers reduced from a year to 2 months. There, but for the insatiable appetite of the Security Police for persecuting the Government's opponents, the matter might have ended. Instead Mrs Ilona Kleinschmidt and Mrs Jackie Bosman, the two people whose original appeals were successful have been sub-poenaed again and have been asked the questions, again, they again refused to answer them, and have been sentenced to prison terms of three months and four months respectively. They have appealed again. Mrs Helen Joseph, too, having served her sentence for refusing to incriminate Winnie Mandela, probably her closest friend, was hardly home from gaol before a new sub-poena was served. We are glad to say the Attorney-General has now withdrawn it on the grounds of Mrs Joseph's age and ill-health, which is an action which we are sure the Security Police won't be pleased about. And Mrs Waite, will her welcome home from prison be a summons to appear in Court to answer the questions she has already refused to answer?

There was a time when it was regarded as despicable to "squeal" on one's friends. The Nationalists have turned that code of conduct upside-down. They have made it a criminal offence not to do so. That is bad enough. What is worse, in the case of Helen Joseph and her friends, is that what the Security Police are really trying to do is get them to help put Winnie Mandela in gaol again. As if it were not enough that she is separated from her husband for as long as the Government they represent remains in power; not enough that she should have been banned or detained or gaoled for almost the entire period of his imprisonment; not enough that she has been banished to the isolated dreariness of Brandfort, OFS, where she arrived over a year ago not knowing a single soul. No, for the Security Police and the Nationalist Government, all that is still not enough. They still will not leave Winnie Mandela alone.

No doubt the people who pursue with such unremitting zeal the quest to make the lives of political prisoners and Mrs Mandela and a great many others as unbearable as possible will tell you that they are doing it in order to preserve the Christian basis of our society. Is it Christian — or just sick? □