

The other thing about Pisco is that it is a commission consisting entirely of politicians. What is important about this fact is that the commission is to enquire into the delicate and explosive subject of national security. National security is a topic which involves among other things the impact of political beliefs and activities of individuals and groups within the State. This means that such civil rights as freedom of belief, freedom of expression, freedom of association are drawn into the matter. Now this does not mean that it would be inappropriate or improper for the commission to make enquiries in relation to these interests, but it does mean that the individuals whose beliefs, activities and associations are to be investigated are entitled to have their legitimately claimed and exercised civil rights respected and protected. And here is the rub. Traditionally these rights are protected by the procedures of impartial courts of law. But as we have seen inquisitorial organs are not obliged to observe these procedures. And the

fact is that politicians are not, nor have they been trained to be, nor indeed can they reasonably be required to be, as independent as a judge. This is not said in any slighting sense. Politics is undoubtedly one of the most important activities in a democracy. The simple fact is that a politician, whatever his allegiance or policy, is a person engaged in the process of gaining support for his views and his party and must, by the nature of his function, always be aware and sensitive to this fact in whatever he does.

History and experience have shown that legislative investigations can and have been conducted conscientiously and fairly. But it has also shown that the powers of inquisition of these bodies can be abused. Senator McCarthy taught an old lesson that freedom—in this case, to investigate—can be debased into licence to denigrate, humiliate and destroy. It is a lesson that must not be forgotten. □

MAY YOU LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES

A speech delivered at the University of Cape Town, August, 1976

by David Welsh

Some eight years ago Senator Robert Kennedy began his speech in this very hall by quoting an ancient Chinese curse —“May you live in interesting times”. Our times, in the Southern Africa of 1976, are more than interesting—they are stirring, momentous and fraught with cataclysmic possibilities.

I am not here to protest solely against the recent detentions under the Terrorism Act or against the banning of my friend and colleague Fatima Meer in terms of the Internal Security Act. These laws are appalling instruments of tyranny. They will not bring real security to our country; only justice can do that.

For those of us who believe in the Rule of Law, law is above all things a protection against public and private predators. There is that wonderful speech in “A Man for All Seasons” where Sir Thomas More challenges his son-in-law: ‘And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you—where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country’s planted thick with laws from coast to coast—Man’s laws, not God’s—and if you cut them down—and you’re just the man to do it—d’you

really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow them?’

I want to say to you bluntly that laws like the Terrorism Act and the Internal Security Act are the inevitable concomitants of a misguided attempt to shore up racial privilege. I protest against that privilege and its dehumanizing effects on all who are part of it, whether they be white or black.

I cannot be fully human if I am enmeshed in an all-pervasive web of inequality; and I cannot be fully human if I am a member of the group that spins the web. I have long believed that the corrosive effects of racial discrimination are ultimately more destructive of those who practice it than of those who are its captives.

I recognise that for many of you these are troubling times, times when you may easily despair at the spate of violence that seems to be engulfing this sub-continent. It may seem to you to be futile to go on protesting or doing whatever thing you do.

Don’t despair; don’t be consumed by a sense of futility; and

don't be beguiled by Chinese who tell you that interesting times are necessarily a curse.

If your commitment to South Africa is real and strong, see this situation as a challenge to be surmounted. Don't allow yourself to be taken in by charlatans who promise instant solutions to our society's problems.

I don't often use the word 'patriotism': it has too often been invoked as a blanket endorsement for the actions of bungling politicians to leave it with much value as a negotiable currency. Nevertheless, like Camus, I would like to be able to love my country and to love justice.

For me personally, though, there is another sentiment which, if not the same as patriotism, is an equally compelling drive: and that is a recognition of my roots in this land; a recognition of how privileged I am to be part of so richly textured a society; and a recognition that for all the turbulence and conflict I have strong emotional bonds with all our people.

To put it at its simplest I cannot envisage living in a society that did not contain Africans, Afrikaners, Asians, Coloureds and English. For better or for worse they are part of me and I would not wish it any other way.

If, like Martin Luther King, I had a dream it would be a dream of a South Africa in which the creative talents and energies of all our people were unshackled and allowed to flourish.

It would be a South Africa whose Security Police had little to do—perhaps we could get them to start cataloguing that magnificent collection of political documents their predecessors had built up. It would be a South Africa in which all the dreary litany of Bosses, Schlebush/le Grange Commissions, Piscoms and the like had been banished to a dark part of our history.

Unfortunately, we cannot only dream. We must act as well. □

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