



OPEN TRIALS FOR BANNED PERSONS IN SOUTH AFRICA!

In January this year the UN Unit on Apartheid published a document containing the names of 404 South Africans, most but not all blacks, who were currently subject to banning orders under the "Suppression of Communism Act." The definition of Communism under the act is so broad as to include any active opposition to the Government's policy of absolute racial segregation known as Apartheid, or euphemistically as "separate development." Without judicial trial or appeal the Minister of Justice is empowered to issue such orders against any person he believes furthers the achievement of any of the objects of Communism, although many of the banned people are staunchly anti-Communist.

Banned persons generally are prohibited from entering certain places (such as their places of employment), leaving certain areas, sometimes even their own homes, from communicating with other people, from receiving visitors, from attending any gatherings and from doing specific acts (eg. teaching, writing).

Lillian Ngoyi is one such banned person. A 50-year-old widow, she was a skilled seamstress, member of the Garment Workers' Union, and a devout member of the Anglican Church. In the 1950's she found a way to visit Europe, where she saw the Nazi extermination camps among other things. After her return she became an even more outspoken opponent of racism, and she was known to hold African township audiences spellbound for two or three hours at a time with the accounts she gave. Under her banning order she is restricted to a one-mile radius of her home near Johannesburg. This prevents her from working. She takes in sewing to eke out an existence for her mother and at least two grandchildren dependent on her for support.

Helen Joseph, aged 64, was banned and placed under house arrest in 1962, the first person to be banned in that way. She was also the first white woman restricted under South Africa's Suppression of "Communism" Law. (continued over)



Lillian Ngoyi



Helen Joseph

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As Mrs. Joseph had been acquitted of all charges of communist sympathy or affiliation by a South African Court of law after minute questioning about her beliefs (!), it is difficult to be certain why the Government banned her. One effect of the banning order was to stop her employment with the Clothing Industry's Medical Aid Society, through which she conducted welfare work among Africans banished to concentration camps in remote rural areas of the country. It is understandable, of course, that the South African police state would be reluctant to admit that they are persecuting a woman for humanitarian undertakings. But the evidence points to that conclusion.

In spite of the fact that under her banning order Mrs. Joseph could be jailed if anything she wrote were to be published in her country or abroad (with or without her permission), she managed to forward a manuscript to the Nation (Sydney, Australia) which was reprinted in Atlas magazine (U. S.) in March 1964. In her article entitled "The Racist Dictatorship", Mrs. Joseph attacked the far-reaching censorship and related laws in South Africa that she believed were transforming her country into a totalitarian society. As if intent to prove her point, the South African Government extended her order -- no charges, no trial, no appeal, no process of law -- for an additional five years when it expired in the fall of 1967.

Torture in South African prisons? One of the most frequently made, and frequently denied, charges levelled against the South African Government is that it seriously mistreats prisoners, particularly political detainees, and especially black ones. In the spring of 1968 the South African Government claimed that a UN Human Rights Commission report alleging torture of African prisoners was "politically slanted." But the South African Government does precious little to reassure the outside world from which it takes its tourist dollars, investment capital, and the respect that can be accorded civilized men. At this time Laurence Gandar, courageous editor of the Rand Daily Mail (Johannesburg) is on trial for publishing material, after careful verification by the highest journalistic standards, that concerned the conditions under which political prisoners were kept and the ill-treatment accorded political political detainees, especially non-whites. Let us not be tempted to forget, it was not those who made exposures, but those who perpetrated atrocities who went on trial at Nuremberg.



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