

South Africa: for your information # 2 August 1965

The South African Defence and Aid Fund is under severe Government attack. The Fund, which provides legal defense to persons accused of political crimes and aid to their dependents, is the last effective organization to give aid to opponents of apartheid internally. Its paralysis would give the thousands annually accused of opposing racism little chance of obtaining lawyers, and thus place them at the complete mercy of the police.

The attack is timed to a general Nationalist Party drive to erase all opposition, even that of the apartheid-minded United Party.

The Fund, which now depends primarily on external gifts for its operation is not being attacked directly. Instead, the Government is banning staff members individually.

The US Government, which voted in favor of a UN resolution to support defense and aid work in South Africa has neither given to the International D&A nor protested the attacks.

Attacks on the Fund

Attacks on South African Defense and Aid began rather quietly at the end of 1963 when, during the Rivonia trial, State Prosecutor Dr. Percy Yutar suggested the Fund was a tool of saboteurs and political agitators. The attacks received some publicity in the press. In Feb. 1964, the Secretary of the Johannesburg D&A Committee received a "warning" from a Magistrate to discontinue her activities which "furthered the aims of Communism." In July 1964, the Cape Town office of D&A was raided. Then in mid-May 1965, Jo'burg Fund Chairman David Craighead, a well-known Catholic layman, was banned (ie forbidden to work for the Fund). Three weeks later Cape Town Fund Chairman John Blundell, an Englishman in the country since the early '50's, was deported. At this point, the Dutch gift was announced.

Dutch Gift

At least two UN resolutions, one coming out of the General Assembly (16 December 1963) and the other out of the Security Council (June 18, 64) called for international assistance to persons persecuted by the Government. When the Netherlands Government announced, in June this year that it would contribute \$28,000 to D&A, the full fury of the Verwoerd administration was aroused. Dagbreek, a Nationalist newspaper whose Chairman is Dr. Verwoerd, called this "the most severe blow which the mother country has ever given the Republic." The Foreign Minister called the gift a slight, accused the Fund of associating with saboteurs and Communists. The Government promptly cancelled negotiations to give KLM Royal Dutch Airline additional landing rights in South Africa.

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Renewed
Attack &
Response

- * On July 11, a third D&A person was banned, this time an elderly African messenger in the Jo'burg office. His banning order included house arrest at night, on weekends and holidays. Three days later, the Secretary of the same office, a young mother of five children, was banned for the next five years.
- * On July 17, 1965, South African D&A issued a statement concluding: "We feel that we cannot continue to submit, in silence, to a course of action which we cannot oppose in courts of law and against which we have no recourse. We say - if we are doing wrong, then tell us so. If we are not, then let us continue our work as responsible persons, within the framework of the law."
- * The Fund has been remarkably effective in securing acquittals of persons accused of political crimes. According to a Minister of Justice Statement (April 21, 1965), some 3,000 persons were held for political reasons between Jan. 1963 and Dec. 1964. Of these, half were released without charge or acquitted - largely as the result of the work of D&A paid and appointed lawyers. The Fund has also paid for cases in which political prisoners sued the Minister of Justice for assault. The many affidavits on police torture were collected through D&A efforts. Again - the political views of the accused are aired in court simply because adequate legal defense has been provided.

International
Responsibility

- * The work of the Fund, which has enormous importance to the thousands failed annually, now depends almost completely on outside support. The large amount of cash needed, however, has grown beyond the power of private groups to raise; that is why the UN asked for international governmental contributions.
- * An International Fund, presided by Canon John Collins of Great Britain, was recently established. In the US, a division of the American Committee on Africa is affiliated to the Fund.
- * Holland is by no means the first nation to make a contribution to International D&A. In January 1965, Sweden made \$200,000 available, half of which went to the British D&A movement (thence to South Africa), and the balance to the World Council of Churches for their work in helping families of political prisoners as well as political refugees. Other nations contributing smaller amounts are: Pakistan, India, Denmark.
- * But the United States, which voted in favor of the UN resolutions calling for official help, has contributed no funds. To be sure, a program of scholarship assistance to students from southern Africa is supported by AID and the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. In the meanwhile, profits from US private investments in South Africa are approaching \$100 million annually.

For 18 years, the screw of apartheid has been turned tighter and tighter. Defense and Aid work remains virtually the last effective act of opposition which can be made legally within the country. The International D&A Committee makes it possible for official and unofficial American organizations to show support for the work of the Fund. Appropriate US Government agencies are urged to take action on this question.