



CENTRAL EXECUTIVE

Estella House,
47a, Main Road,
Claremont,
Cape Town.

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A.C.P. H.

Dear Sir,

No citizen could fail to deplore the outbreaks of rioting, arson and other forms of violence that have recently occurred among African communities in parts of Natal. At the same time, any responsible citizen must recognise that outbreaks of this kind are, as they have always been, in all parts of the world, the result and the outward sign of deep-seated social and economic ills. These ills must be investigated and remedied. For this reason it is the usual practice of civilised governments to institute inquiries into emergency situations of this kind by impartial judicial commissions. We believe this should be done in this instance.

There is thus far no indication that the Government intend to institute such an enquiry into the unrest in Natal. But two of its officials, Brigadier Els, Assistant Commissioner of Police, and Dr. W.W.A. Eiselen, Secretary for Bantu Administration, have made public statements, apparently based on reports from police and other officials, which give cause for anxiety. Both maintain that the disturbances are aroused and led by the African National Congress, despite the fact (which is not sufficiently well-known) that the Congress itself has time and again affirmed a policy of non-violence. Its choice of the weapon of an economic boycott, a legal and non-violent one, against what it regards as injustice, is proof of the sincerity in this affirmation.

These allegations are entirely one-sided, and the ground for making them are, in Dr. Eiselen's case, that in the past various deputations that have voiced the grievances of the people have been led by A.N.C. leaders; in Brigadier Els's case, that some of the leaders of some disturbances have worn A.N.C. colours.

Dr. Eiselen's argument implies that to voice public grievances is to approve of violence if such grievances are not remedied, and obviously unjust assumption. Brigadier Els, equally unjustly, attributes to the organisation responsibility for the actions of every individual member.

The reasons for the unrest that are advanced by the African people themselves, Dr. Eiselen and Brigadier Els waive aside as mere pretexts with no real significance. They admit that these reasons are such matters as low wages, and deepening poverty, influx control with its consequent breaking up of family life and interference with opportunities of employment, increasing unemployment in urban areas, Municipal monopoly of beer-brewing, etc. Anyone with the slightest understanding of the needs of any human beings must realise that these are grave matters of the deepest concern to the individual because they affect the basic structure of their individual and family lives. They were not invented by the A.N.C. or any other political organisation, nor could political leaders of any kind have the power to induce ordinary men and

women to act in a lawless and violent manner (with the severe punishment which they risk) if there were not deep seated causes. But Dr. Eiselen apparently regards any expression of their grievances as malicious criticism of "the State", not as an outbreak of their extreme frustration at the poverty and wretchedness of their lives.

Has our public reached the stage where they are prepared to believe that anybody who informs the authorities of the deep-seated social economic and political difficulties of people in South Africa is responsible for organising outbreaks of violence when they occur. If so, there is indeed little hope for a peaceful solution to our problems.

The Black Sash appeals to the Government and all who are responsible for the welfare, employment and housing of Africans to take notice of the statistics that are so easily available on demoralisation consequent upon the break up of family life, poverty, lack of housing and unemployment among the Africans - and to take action to remedy the present state of affairs.

Yours faithfully,

National Vice-President