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A presumptuous threat

THE WESTERN Cape Administration Board's use of a proposed but as yet unapproved fine of R5 000 to threaten employers of black labour is presumptuous in the extreme. The Board distributed between 10 000 and 20 000 circulars citing the penalty in the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill for the employment of blacks without legal permission to work in the Western Cape. According to the chief director of the WCAB, Mr A Louw, the fine was mentioned "with the object of indicating that this is a serious matter". Just as serious, however, is a public servant's anticipation of the eventual outcome of legislation still being considered by a parliamentary select committee — legislation so obnoxious that several church leaders do not believe their members should feel obliged to obey it in the event of its being passed by Parliament. What right does Mr Louw have to threaten

employers with it, when the very penalty he quotes is the cause of the greatest opposition to the measure?

The wording of the circular is objectionable in other respects. It accuses employers of "illegal" blacks of helping to create "severe social and economic hardships" for all in the area. Apparently unemployment for such breadwinners is less of a social and economic hardship. Legal starvation of their families in some distant corner of a homeland is preferable, in the official mind, to unauthorized full stomachs. The circular lists the hardships as "illegal squatting areas, housing shortages and the lowering of wage and income levels". But what about the hardship of no income at all, which would face workers kicked out of their jobs by government decree? It is time Dr Piet Koornhof, who allegedly has the best interests of the black population at heart, curbed officials who exceed the bounds of their brief.