

The Single Cells Section

ROBBEN ISLAND

19 May 1977

The Head of Prison
ROBBEN ISLAND

We strongly protest against the purpose for and manner in which the visit to this prison of the local and overseas press and television men on the 25th April was organised and conducted by the Department of Prisons. We resent the deliberate violation of our right of privacy by taking our photographs without our permission, and regard this as concrete evidence of the contempt with which the Department continues to treat us.

On the 26th April fellow-prisoner Nelson Mandela was informed by Major Zandberg that the Minister of Prisons had finally agreed to the repeated requests by the press over the years to visit Robben Island. We also learnt that the minister had authorised the visit provided no communication whatsoever would take place between pressmen and prisoners.

The Minister planned the visit in the hope that it would whitewash the Prisons Department, pacify public criticism of the Department here and abroad, and counteract any adverse publicity that might arise in the future. To ensure the success of the plan we were not given prior notice of the visit, on that particular day the span from our Section was given the special work of "gardening" instead of pulling out bamboo from the sea as we normally do when we go to work. Some 30 litres of milk was placed at the entrance to our Section, quite obviously to give the impression that it was all meant for us, whereas in truth we receive only 6½ litres a day.

Most of us know that a section of the press here and abroad is sympathetic to our cause, and that they would have preferred to handle the operation in a dignified manner. Nevertheless, the Minister's disregard for our feelings has led to the situation where total strangers are now in possession of photographs and films of ourselves. The impropriety of the Minister's action is sharpened by the Department's persistent refusal to allow us to

*Not true
I didn't even
see the
milk.
J.M.*

take and send our photographs to our own families.

We stress the fact that the way in which the Minister planned this visit in no way differs from previous ones. IN August 1964 reporters from "The Daily Telegraph" found those of us who were here at the time "mending clothes" instead of our normal work at the time of knapping stones with 5 lb. hammers. As soon as the reporters left we were ordered to crush stones as usual. At the end of August 1965 Mrs. I. da Parker from "The Sunday Tribune" found us wearing raincoats on our way back from the lime quarry - raincoats which were hurriedly issued to us at work on the very day of her visit, and which were immediately taken away when she left. The rain coats were not issued to us again until a year or so later.

We emphatically state that under no circumstances are we willing to cooperate with the Department in any manoeuvre on its part to distort the true state of affairs obtaining on this island. With few exceptions our span has been kept inside for several months now, but our normal work is still that of pulling sea-weed, and the Department has given no assurance that we will never be sent out to the quarry again.

We also cite the example of the cupboards we have in our cells. Any television-viewer is likely to be impressed with this furniture and would naturally give all the credit to the Department. It is unlikely that such television-viewers and newspaper readers would be aware that the cupboards have been painstakingly built with crude tools in a crude "workshop" from cardboard cartons and from driftwood picked up on the beaches by prisoners, that the costs for beautifying them have been borne by the prisoners themselves, and that they have been built by a talented fellow prisoner, Jafta Masemola, working approximately 8 hours a day on weekdays at the rate of R1,50 (One Rand fifty Cents) a month.

subsid!
The same for other prisoners

All at times we are willing to have press and television interviews, provided that the aim is to present to the public a balanced picture of our living conditions. This means that we would be allowed to express our grievances and demands freely, and to make comments whether such comments are favourable or otherwise to the Department.

We are fully aware that the Department desires to protect a favourable

image to the world of its policies, We can think of no better way of doing so than by abolishing all forms of racial discrimination in the administration by keeping abreast of enlightened penal reforms, by granting us the status of political prisoners, and by introducing a non-racial administration through-out the country's prisons. With few or no skeletons to hide the Department will then no longer stand in any need for resorting to stratagems.

Very interesting

The actual execution of the plan was entrusted to Gen. Roux and in his presence, the reporters and cameramen stormed down upon us like excited visitors to an agricultural show. From all that we have seen of Gen. Roux, we are convinced that he has no respect whatsoever for our feelings and dignity. The way he handled the visit is no different from his conduct when he visited this prison on the 15th November 1976. On that occasion he conducted his interviews with us individually in a cloak-and-dagger fashion in the hope of finding us at a complete loss when confronted with the unexpected. That there were no ugly incidents as a result of the provocative action on the 25th April was due solely to our sense of responsibility.

We are fully aware that we cannot prevent the publication of such articles on prison conditions here as the Minister might authorize. But we are equally aware that, whatever the law might be, the taking of our photographs by the press for publication purposes or otherwise without our consent, constitutes an invasion of our privacy. That privacy has been blatantly violated by the very people who, within the framework of the law, are considered to be its guardians. And, having violated that privacy, the Department had the temerity to ask us for permission to make us objects of public scrutiny.

I suppose all other S.A. citizens are also entitled to protection against them

We stress that we are not chattels of the Prisons Department. That we happen to be prisoners in no way detracts from the fact that we are, nevertheless, South African and Namibian citizens, entitled to protection against any abuses by the Department

Finally, we place on record that we cannot tolerate indefinitely any treatment we consider degrading and provocative and, should the Minister continue to do so, we reserve to ourselves the right to take such action as we deem appropriate.

F. Anthony
J.E. April
L. Chiba
T.T. Cholo
E.J. Daniele
T.L. Daweti
M.K. Dingake
M.S. Essop
J. Fuzile
K. Hassim
T.H. Ja-Toivo
A.M. Kathrada
N.R. Mandela
J. Masemola
G. Mbeki
R. Mhlaba
K. Mkalipi
W.Z. Mkwazi
A. Mlangeni
E. Motsaedi
J. Npanza
P. Mthembu
B. Nair
J.N. Pokela
S. Sijake
W.U. Sisulu
M.M. Siyothula
J.B. Vusani
R.C. Wilcox

to be prisoners in no way detracts from the fact that we are, nevertheless, South African and Namibian citizens, entitled to protection against any abuses by the Department.

Finally, we place on record that we can not tolerate indefinitely any treatment we consider degrading and oppressive and, should the Minister continue to do so, we reserve to ourselves the right to take such action as we deem appropriate.

ANTHONY, F.
APRIL, J. E.
CHIBA, L.
CHOLO, T. T.

J. Auth. sup.
J. E. Chibha
K. T. Cholo

DANIELS, F. J.
DANATI, T. Z.
DINGAKA, M. K.
ESSOP, M. S.
FUZIKI, J.
HASSIM, K.
JA-TOINO, T. H.
KATHRADA, A. M.
MANGAHO, N. R.
MASAMOKA, J.
MBEKI, G.
MHLABA, R.
MKALIPI, K.
MKWAYI, W. Z.
MLANGENI, A.
MOTSOALEDI, E.
MPANZA, J.
MTHAMBU, P.
NAIR, B.
POKHA, J. N.
SIJAKE, S.
SISUHU, W. U.
SIYOTHULA, M. M.
VENKATATHNAM, S. K.
VUSANI, J. B.
WILCOX, R. C.

E. J. Daniels.
T. Danati
M. K. Dingaka
M. S. Essop
J. Fuziki
K. Hassim
T. H. Ja-Toino
A. M. Kathrada
N. R. Mangahe
J. Masamoka
G. Mbeki
R. Mhlaba
K. Mkalipi
W. Z. Mkwazi
A. Mlangeni
E. Motsoaledi
J. Mpanza
P. Mthambu
B. Nair
J. N. Pokha
S. Sijake
W. U. Sisuhu
M. M. Siyothula
S. K. Venkathnam
J. B. Vusani
R. C. Wilcox