

— MESSAGE NOT RECEIVED

by Peter Brown

In early February the Government banned two documents issued by the Ministers' Fraternal of the three Cape Town African townships, Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu, The Fraternal represents Ministers from the American Episcopal Church, Catholic Church, Church of the Province of South Africa, Methodist Church of South Africa, Moravian Church, Presbyterian Church of Africa and the United Congregational Church of South Africa. In a supposedly Christian country it could hardly have better credentials.

The first document took the form of a message from the Fraternal to the Government, and White South Africa. REALITY had hoped to publish this message, not because it said anything new, but because it said again what has been said so often before and which continues to go unheeded by the Government of our country at its peril and ours. What the message said, quite simply, was — Black people want full citizenship here!

The second document was a statement by the Fraternal on the role of the Riot Police in the clashes which took place between permanent residents of Nyanga and migrant workers over Christmas. The clashes resulted in many deaths and much damage to property. REALITY had intended publishing a summary of this report and some extracts from it.

It would be impossible for anyone not directly involved in the incidents to which the report refers to vouch for their accuracy. All one can say about the report is that it carries the ring of truth, and that it is quite damning. It quotes details of the alleged experiences of eight unnamed residents of Nyanga at the hands of the Riot Police which are horrifying and convincing. The Ministers' Fraternal was certainly convinced that the stories were true, and its statement reveals a depth of distrust of the Riot Police amongst Cape Town's Black residents which is overwhelming. For, the statement makes it clear, the residents of Nyanga believe that the Riot Police not only supported the migrants in their attacks upon them, but that some of them provoked such attacks, and hampered the residents in their attempts to defend themselves.

The residents of Nyanga might be wrong in these assumptions, but the members of the Ministers' Fraternal clearly think they are not and that a group as responsible as this should hold such a view of what happened at Nyanga over Christmas is something White South Africa desperately needs to know. The Government ban ensures that it will not. Instead it will proceed blindfold a little further along the Nationalist-ordained road to ruin. □