

EX 2.1.1
HB 68

S. A. SOCIETY FOR PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP
WITH THE SOVIET UNION

REPORT TO GENERAL MEETING 12TH NOVEMBER 1955

The last general meeting of the Society was held in February, 1953. During the period since then, though faced by very considerable difficulties, the Society has continued, in various ways, to place before the people its basic aim of cultivating improved relationships with the Soviet Union and our own country, an aim which we believe is in accord with the interests of all sections of the people of South Africa.

The difficulties which we have faced have arisen to a very large extent from the negative attitude adopted by the Government towards our Society and its aims. Following in the wake of the policy of the "cold war" instigated by the ruling circles in the U.S.A., the Nationalist Government has made no attempt to improve relations with the USSR. It has failed to reciprocate to the Soviet Government by establishing a Union Consulate in Moscow. It has made no attempt to establish more cordial commercial or cultural relations with the Soviet Union.

On the contrary, Cabinet Ministers have permitted themselves to make wild and unfounded charges against the Soviet Consulate. The Government has imposed a ban on Soviet publications such as "News", a magazine devoted to improving relations between the USSR and the English-speaking world, as well as upon a wide variety of cultural, literary and scientific publications issued in the USSR or even by the Soviet Embassy in London. Travel and passport restrictions - specifically announced as being intended to prevent free travel and intercourse between the two countries - have been imposed with increasing rigour.

In addition to such measures, which have hardly conduced to lessen world tension and foster world peace, the Government has made a number of totally unjustified attacks upon our own Society. We are not as a Society concerned with party politics. The S.A. Society for Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union is specifically limited to those objectives which are clearly defined in its name. Ignoring this, however, the Union Government has repeatedly made this Society the victim of attacks which are alleged to be directed against "Communism". A number of members of the Society's executive committee, including the former secretary, Mrs Molly Fischer, have been specifically prohibited from continued membership and activity by notices issued by the Minister of Justice under the Suppression of Communism Act. Many other banning notices issued under this law have ordered people to resign who have never been members of the Society. The premises of leading members of the Society, including the Chairman, the Reverend D. C. Thompson, and the acting Secretary, Mr H. Barsel, who has since been appointed Secretary, have been searched under warrants stating that the Society is "under investigation" in terms of the Suppression Act. In February 1954, a meeting at the Trades Hall, addressed by returned visitors from the Soviet Union under the auspices of the Society, was "invaded" by members of the special (political) branch of the police, who insisted on obtaining the names and addresses of all who were present, the first time such an attack had been made on a public meeting.

An attempt was made to intimidate Mr Barsel into providing the police with "information" and it was only after he had taken legal measures to assert his right to decline to provide information of the kind that was being demanded that this attempt was dropped.

Mr Barsel was again raided in September, 1955, during the massive Union-wide search of individuals under a warrant alleging suspected "sedition" and "Communism" against a long list of organisations in which the Society's name was included.

During these events and on other occasions a large quantity of literature and other property of the Society was seized, none of which has yet been returned.

The post office and the customs have also repeatedly seized books and magazines the property of the Society, often illegally, when no ban on them had been notified in the Government Gazette, and on a number of occasions without even the elementary courtesy of notifying the Society that its property had been taken.

These attacks have never had the effect of making the staunch core of members of the Society waver from their aims, which have become more all-important and vital than ever in view of the frightful danger of the alternative policy of extending the cold war and the armaments race until these culminated in a frightful world conflict employing the dreadful weapons evolved by modern science.

On the other hand they have had the effect of intimidating many people who may in the past have supported us. The Society has found it almost impossible to find halls for public meetings. Venues for exhibitions, such as the library foyer and the university vestibule, have been refused to us. The daily newspaper press has apparently closed its columns to statements by the Society's spokesmen. Many individual sympathisers have been intimidated.

Despite all these obstacles, which have naturally adversely affected our work, the Society has during the period under review, steadily pressed ahead with its work.

Annual public meetings have been held to commemorate the Soviet national day, on November 7, anniversary of the Revolution of 1917. A number of other well attended and important meetings were held, including a moving commemoration on the occasion of the death of Marshall Stalin, and several reports by South Africans who had returned from visits to the Soviet Union, including the Society's Chairman, Rev. Thompson, Adv. Berrange, and Messrs Walter Sisulu, Duma Nokwe and Paul Joseph. The most recent meetings held were a highly successful discussion of the Geneva Conference and its implications, held in the Trades Hall, and another on the same subject, held in the Vrede Hall - this one poorly attended, either because of insufficient preparation or, perhaps, because meetings of this type cannot at present be called successfully in European suburbs.

In addition to these relatively large hall gatherings, a great number of less ambitious, but often highly successful, meetings were held in private homes: a most rewarding form of Society activity that should be intensified by the incoming committee.

The Society also organised a photographic exhibition in the period under review, besides a number of successful film shows of great educational value.

In addition to publishing its periodical Bulletin "For Peace and Friendship", the Society also issued a pamphlet by Mr Brian Bunting "Life is More Joyous", and a number of printed leaflets, the latest of which "Why Friendship with Russia?" summarised the consequences and significance of the Geneva Conference. The Society also helped to distribute the fine pamphlet published by Miss Ruth First - - "South Africans in the Soviet Union", of which thousands of copies have been sold. The Society has also organised and sent a number of letters to the newspapers.

On the organisational front the Society has made, especially in the most recent period, a determined effort to break with certain wrong principles of the past. The S.A. Society for Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union (formerly the S.A. Friends of the Soviet Union) has existed for over a quarter of a century, and has at all times attempted to bring about a true understanding of this aspect of world affairs home to the public. The Society has had its "ups" and its "downs" according to the circumstances of the particular period of its existence. During the height of the war against Hitlerism, the Society enjoyed unprecedented popularity, support and influence.

It is to be regretted that too often, in the past, the leaders of the Society concentrated on big "spectacular" events, and neglected the basic organisational task of building solid membership units. Another serious weakness was the failure in the past to extend the work of the Society among the ordinary people of our country, who are so largely Non-European. There was a tendency to appeal exclusively to the European minority of the population.

The committee has worked hard over the past year to correct these failings of the past, and to build a well-balanced organised membership representative of all sections of the people. As a result a number of functioning branches have been established including several in African townships, which hold monthly discussion meetings and promise to be a solid basis of strength in the future.

The difficulties we have referred to above have compelled the Committee to give up its office premises and to dispense altogether with paid personnel. Although this meant a far greater burden of work on the committee members, and particularly upon the Secretary, it has enabled the Society to maintain a fundamentally sound financial position, and this will be reflected in the balance sheet and statement before the meeting.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE.

It cannot be claimed that the Society has maintained a very high level of activity during the period under review. No doubt more could have been done; but the possibilities were greatly limited by the prevailing difficult situation that has been referred to above.

We are confident, however, that very sweeping changes can be expected in that situation in the future, opening prospects to the Society of more successful and widespread activities than ever before.

The past year has seen the beginnings of a very great transformation of the international situation in the direction of peaceful co-existence of all countries, and a great broadening out of friendly relations in all fields between "East" and "West". No doubt, ill-disposed forces are still at work attempting to bedevil relations between great Powers of divergent outlook and different systems. But we are firmly convinced that the series of events culminating in the present series of "Big Four" conferences have opened the way to a new era of international relations in which the dread spectre of atomic war will be banished and a new spirit of friendship and confidence engendered. This situation which is bound to affect South Africa as well by no means eliminates the urgency of our Society's work, but it will we are sure vastly facilitate it. When we learn of the frequent cultural, sporting, diplomatic, commercial and other fruitful exchanges that are now taking place, we cannot but believe that at last the grim and perilous period of the cold war is ending and the dawn of a greater friendliness and normality is at hand.

The incoming committee must seize these possibilities with vigour and imagination. It must awaken the great majority of the people to the need for peace and friendship and give effective expression to the peoples desire for an opening of the doors to world friendship. We trust that the policy of strengthening the organisational basis of the Society will be endorsed and continued in the coming period, more branches should be formed, and a drive for membership made. The work of the committee itself should be greatly improved and rationalised. Far too great a burden has been imposed on the secretary - without whose devoted work the Society could never have continued - and it is strongly recommended that the incoming committee should appoint a secretariat to give him regular assistance, as well as appropriate sub-committees, not necessarily consisting exclusively of executive members, to organise the work of propaganda, fund-raising, literature distribution, etc.

We are also of the opinion that strenuous efforts should be made to revive the Society in centres such as Cape Town and Durban, where it has been allowed to become defunct, as well as in Reef centres.

The committee should not allow its work to become, as ours has sometimes been, too deeply involved in daily routine to allow a proper analysis and discussion of the changing picture of events at home and abroad, and their relation to our work.

Our Society has continued its work, stoutly undeterred and refusing to be intimidated by prejudice and hostility. We are convinced that provided we continue in the same spirit winning new forces to our cause and with an understanding of the possibilities that exist in the period ahead, we shall make notable advances in the next year towards our aim of building peace and friendship between the peoples of our country and those of the USSR.

(4)

H B 68

S.A. SOCIETY FOR PEACE & FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION.

P.O. Box 2920,

Johannesburg.

24th Oct. 1955.

Dear Friend,

A General Meeting of the Society will be held on Saturday, 12th November, at Kholvad House, Market Street, at 2 p.m.

The past year has seen the beginning of a great transformation in the international situation in the direction of peaceful co-existence between all countries and a great broadening out of friendly relations in all fields, between East and West. This situation which is bound to affect South Africa, by no means eliminates the urgency of our work, but it will vastly facilitate it.

Urgent problems face us, which can only be solved by the united voice of the entire membership and you are therefore asked to make every effort to be present at this important General Meeting.

Yours sincerely,

H. BARSEL
SECRETARY.

Bewysstuk No.
 Geleë by: *H. B. Barseel*
 deur: *H. B. Barseel*
 Te: *29 August 1955*
 Datum: *13. 10. 55*
 Verwagings No. *4*

Collection Number: AD1812

RECORDS RELATING TO THE 'TREASON TRIAL' (REGINA vs F. ADAMS AND OTHERS ON CHARGE OF HIGH TREASON, ETC.), 1956 1961

TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

©2012

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of the collection records and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a private collection deposited with Historical Papers at The University of the Witwatersrand.