

DCT 45 (1)

26/8/1954

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE S.A. SOCIETY FOR  
PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION

Strong exception is taken by the South African Society for Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union to the tone of a letter from the Minister of Justice, Mr. Swart, in which he refused the Society's request for an explanation of police conduct at a public meeting it had called on February 9, and for an undertaking that there would be no repetition of such incidents.

Writing to the Minister on February 12, the Chairman of the Society, the Rev. D. C. Thompson ~~asked~~ drew attention to a police raid on a public meeting in which the names and addresses of all present were taken. "We respectfully request," he wrote, "that you furnish us with an immediate explanation of the reasons for the conduct of the police at our meeting, and an undertaking that in future the proceedings of our Society will not be subjected to interference by the police, least of all such rude and unwarranted interference as took place last Tuesday."

On June 10 the Minister replied that he had "caused exhaustive enquiries to be made into the circumstances," and that he was satisfied that the action of the police was "in the public interest." A further letter from the Society was replied to by the Minister's private secretary on July 26. He wrote:

"I am directed by the Minister to state that... he is definitely not prepared to furnish you with an explanation (immediate or otherwise) of the reasons for the conduct of the police, nor to give any undertaking whatever to your Society."

The strongest exception to the tone and nature <sup>of this communication</sup> is taken in a statement by the Rev. Mr. Thompson.

"Our Society is a completely non-partisan and non-party political organization," he says, "which has for very many years devoted itself to perfectly legal activities in favour of peaceful diplomatic, commercial and cultural relations with the Soviet Union: an objective shared today by nearly all the leading statesmen of the ~~Western~~ world, from Mr. Churchill to Dr. Malenkov."

"It is intolerable that in the course of these legal and laudable activities we should be subjected to such unprecedented and intimidatory actions by the police. It is still more intolerable that a request to the responsible Minister for information and an undertaking for the future should be met with a refusal, couched in such uncompromising and indeed shurlish terms."

"The Minister is, after all, a public servant, and I cannot allow his attitude to myself and our Society to pass without the strongest protest. We believe our work to be necessary and highly important; we have every right to expect that we shall be allowed to carry on without the interference and intimidation of the police."

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**TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

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