

Robben Island hasn't altered him—Vorster

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3-2-66

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

PARLIAMENT decided by a 66-41 majority yesterday that the Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, be empowered to keep Robert Sobukwe, the former Pan-Africanist Congress leader, in captivity on Robben Island at least until June 30 next year.

Sobukwe has been held on the island — nine miles from the House of Assembly as the crow flies — since his three-year jail sentence for incitement against the pass laws expired in 1963.

Three cases concerning Sobukwe were argued in the Assembly by speakers representing the National, United and Progressive parties during the second reading of the enabling legislation — the Suppression of Communism Amendment Bill.

The National Party's view was put by Mr. Vorster, who said it was considered necessary in the interests of State security for Sobukwe to be detained for at least another year. Mr. Vorster claimed that there was nothing to indicate that Sobukwe had changed his views or intentions or that he would not, after his release, start where he had left off before his arrest.

Too sweeping

The United Party case was argued by Mr. T. Gray Hughes (Transkeian Territories), leader of the justice group in the party's parliamentary caucus.

Mr. Hughes said the United Party did not ask for Sobukwe's release but was opposed to the Bill, which extended the right of the Minister to detain people convicted of a wide range of offences after they had completed their sentences.

This law could apply to people other than Sobukwe.

He submitted that it was not beyond the wit of Mr. Vorster to think of other ways of isolating the former African leader.

Mr. Hughes said the United Party had emphasised last year that Sobukwe could be dealt with under numerous laws, "especially as he is a Bantu." The party did not want the law on the statute books and would oppose it.

Double sentence

The Progressive Party's attitude was given by Mrs. H. Suzman. She said Sobukwe had now, in effect, served double the sentence imposed on him by the court. This double sentence had been imposed by the Minister and was a "travesty of justice" and a "complete abrogation of the rule of law."

She wondered why the Government bothered to put cases through the courts seeing that, regardless of the sentences imposed, the Minister was enabled to keep people in jail.

Mr. Vorster that the International Red Cross had found Sobukwe's living conditions on Robben Island up to the standard enjoyed by a high-ranking officer, Mrs. Suzman said she did not care whether the accommodation was "similar to that of a four-star hotel."

Principle

The principle was not affected. He had served his sentence and was being kept in jail.

Mrs. Suzman asked: "Has he (Mr. Vorster) visited Sobukwe?"

When the Minister had replied that he had not, she said: "I think it's important that he interviews him."

Sobukwe had been jailed when the Pan-Africanist Congress had been fiercely anti-communist and before it had departed from its original policy of non-violence.

She moved that the Bill be read this day six months—the strongest parliamentary way of expressing disapproval.

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

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DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- A2618-Cp2-9-1

Document Title:- Rand Daily Mail: Robben Island hasn't altered him - Vorster

Author:- Rand Daily Mail

Document Date:- 3 February 1966