

Sobukwe can now practise as attorney

By MARGARET SMITH

MR J. T. KRUGER, the Minister of Justice, Police and Prisons, has relaxed a clause in the banning order of Mr Robert Sobukwe, former leader of the banned Pan African Congress, to enable him to practise as an attorney.

The clause prohibited Mr Sobukwe from entering a court of law except as an accused or to act as a witness in a court case — but he was recently allowed to attend court as an article

Sobukwe applied to the Minister for permission to attend court as an attorney six weeks ago. The reply, granting permission, was received last week.

Mr Kruger told me this week that the lifting of further restrictions on Mr Sobukwe would be considered from time to time.

Mr Kruger was asked whether there was any chance of the banning order on Mr Sobukwe being totally lifted. Mr Kruger said this would depend on his behaviour. He received "certain reports" from time to time, and such a step might be considered if he was convinced that Mr Sobukwe's "conduct and frame of mind warranted it."

Significant

Asked whether Mr Sobukwe would be expected to renounce his past, Mr Kruger said: "No man can renounce his past." Some undertaking by Mr Sobukwe might, however, be considered necessary.

I asked whether the sentences of political prisoners on Robben Island would also come up for Ministerial review. Mr Kruger replied that this was not the case at this stage — but there might be some change in the future,

since "one cannot predict the future."

This could be regarded as a significant indication from the Government that restrictions on Mr Sobukwe might be lifted and the position of Robben Island prisoners reviewed in the future.

It is particularly interesting in view of the stand the Prime Minister has taken in his detente negotiations with Rhodesia regarding Rhodesian political detainees, and the part South Africa has played in pressing Mr Ian Smith to release the detained Zapu and Zanu leaders, Joshua Nkomo and the Rev Ndabaningi Sithole.

It can be seen as a shift from Mr Vorster's policy when he made the statement that Nelson Mandela, former leader of the African National Congress, would be released "over my dead body."

Robert Sobukwe will now give 30 days' notice to the Law Society of his intention to practise, and then will go through the formality of applying to the Supreme Court

in Kimberley, where he is restricted by the banning order imposed on him.

A lawyer pointed out that one of the difficulties Mr Sobukwe would face would be that much of the work would fall outside the area of Kimberley, in the district courts.

He is confined, by the banning order, to the magisterial district of Kimberley. To travel out of the city he would have to apply to the Minister of Justice for a further relaxation of the ban.

Shootings

Mr Kruger said that such a request would be considered when it became relevant.

Mr Sobukwe was president of the PAC during its anti-pass campaign which ended with the Sharpeville shooting in 1960. Jailed for three years for incitement, he was kept on Robben Island for a further six years without trial after Parliament had enacted special legislation.

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