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Starts sixth year soon on Robben Island

NOBODY LIKES THE SOBUKWE CLAUSE, BUT...

Views unchanged, says Pelsers

From Our Parliamentary Correspondent

Cape Town, Friday.

THE DETENTION-WITHOUT-TRIAL CLAUSE of the General Law Amendment Bill went a stage further yesterday when the Assembly passed the committee stage of the Bill. The aim of the clause is to extend the detention of Robert Sobukwe on Robben Island until June 30, 1969.

In a short but heated debate, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Pelsers, firmly resisted Opposition attempts to have the clause scrapped.

He repeated that he believed that it would not, at present, be in the country's interests to withdraw the clause.

Mr. M. L. Mitchell (U.P., Durban North) said the Minister had powers under other laws to deal with Sobukwe.

The Native Administration Act gave him the power of banishment. The Suppression of Communism Act empowered him to restrict people. He could also grant one-way exit permits. In addition, he had a very efficient security service at his disposal.

ASTONISHING

With all these powers, it was astonishing that the Government was willing to allow one man to hold the law to ransom. The Government was in danger of making a martyr of Sobukwe among the Africans and his former followers, and a myth among the general public.

Mr. Mitchell said he did not believe that all the powers of the Government could not hold one African in some other way.

He pointed out that the then Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, now the Prime Minister, had in 1963, when the clause was introduced for the first time accepted the principle of coming to Parliament every year to have it renewed because he did not want to hold Sobukwe for ever. He also said that he did not want the clause to become a permanent feature of the law.

Now Parliament has been

Parliament yesterday

asked to renew it for the sixth year.

The present Minister himself had objections in principle to the clause.

Mr. Mitchell said it had previously been indicated that this clause was only meant for the case of Sobukwe. He wanted to know if the Minister had anyone else in mind.

Mr. G. F. van L. Froneman (N.P., Heilbron) acknowledged that no one on his side of the House liked the clause.

The time had arrived to ask soberly and sensibly if the circumstances had changed to such an extent that it could now be scrapped.

Sobukwe was still known as the leader of the P.A.C. and there were reports of P.A.C. and A.N.C. terrorists trying to enter South Africa.

REACTED

Mr. Froneman had also reacted to a challenge from Mrs. H. Suzman (P.P., Houghton) the previous night to prove that Sobukwe was a Communist.

He told the House how he, as chairman of the justice group of his party, had visited Sobukwe on Robben Island last year along with members of the justice group of the United Party.

In Sobukwe's quarters on Robben Island he had seen books on Communism and Marxism. When he asked Sobukwe about this, Sobukwe said that he liked reading Marxist literature—it was his ideology.

"Will you ever change your views," Mr. Froneman had asked. "Not until the day of resurrection," Sobukwe had said.

WRONG

Mr. Froneman said it would be wrong to release Sobukwe at a time when terrorists were poised on South Africa's border. It would also be wrong to release the acknowledged leader of the P.A.C. at a time when the present leader, Potlako Leballo, had been kicked out, and the P.A.C. was quarrelling about a new leader.

He repeated the argument of Mr. Pelsers that the test was the interests of one individual or the safety of a country. To grant Sobukwe an exit permit would mean that he would be allowed to cross the country's borders to accept the leadership of the P.A.C.

One day the legislation may be changed, but it would not be wise to do so at present.

SHOCKED

Mr. Froneman's revelations about the visit to Robben Island brought a shocked reaction from Mr. Mitchell, who is chairman of the Opposition justice group which went along on the same occasion.

He said that he had until now refrained from saying anything about the visit in public as this was not the purpose of the visit.

Mr. Froneman should remember that he was not Sobukwe's

judge. When he (Mr. Mitchell) had asked Sobukwe about the books of Marx and Engels on his book case, he told him that he was studying economics.

Mr. Mitchell said he thought that Mr. Froneman had put an unfair gloss on the whole episode.

Sobukwe might well be a Communist, but he himself could not make this deduction after having spoken to him.

DOUBTED

Mrs. Suzman said she very much doubted if Sobukwe had meant that he was a member of the Communist Party.

There was a great difference between Communism and old time Marxism.

When she had visited him on Robben Island, he was studying French and his Bible was very much in evidence. He was reading widely to keep himself sane.

He told her that he was forgetting how to talk, because he had been alone for so long. Soon he would start his ninth year—three years in prison and six years in detention under this clause.

It was not surprising to hear the Minister say that Sobukwe had not changed his views. He had always been a confirmed opponent of the Government and there was nothing wrong with this.

He had not been convicted of Communist activities or of sabotage, terrorism or treason, but for incitement against the pass laws. He was not responsible for the present resolutions of the P.A.C. in Dar es Salaam. They were passed by men over whom he had no control after all his years in jail.

NO RESEMBLANCE

These days the P.A.C. bore no resemblance to the organization which he had headed when it was still anti-Communist and non-violent. At present Sobukwe was the only one affected by the clause, but she was disturbed about the trend in South Africa. Already there was no remission for political prisoners.

She hoped this was not a train of thought developing further in South Africa, as the threshold of tolerance in the country was rising all the time. Gradually the people were becoming used to stricter and stricter measures.

The Minister said at the end of the debate that he did not say that Sobukwe was a Communist, but he did believe that he would commit deeds which would fan Communism.

He had visited Sobukwe himself on one occasion and had received more information before he had made up his mind this year. After the facts had been considered carefully he had come to the conclusion that Sobukwe had not changed his views at all.

Under present conditions he would be used as a tool of Communism if he was released.

He was a leader who had the country in uproar within a few months. Even now, while his fol-

lowers were fighting among each other, they still acknowledged him as their leader.

Mr. Pelsers told the House that he was very sorry that this had to be done. For this reason he had seen to it that the conditions under which Sobukwe were held were made as pleasant as possible.

He was at present being allowed to see his wife and family twice a year and, if necessary, they could visit him more often.

The clause was passed by 96 votes to 34.

LIQUOR

Discussing the liquor provisions of the Bill, which gives the power under certain circumstances to close Coloured and Asiatic consumption premises in White areas, Opposition members warned the Minister to be careful.

Mr. W. Vause Raw (U.P., Durban Point) said the closing of legitimate on-consumption premises could drive non-Whites to shebeens.

Mr. L. G. Murray (U.P., Green Point) said that many non-Whites would still work in undeclared areas like Cape Town.

It was unfair to expect them to go to their own outlying areas first before having a drink.

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