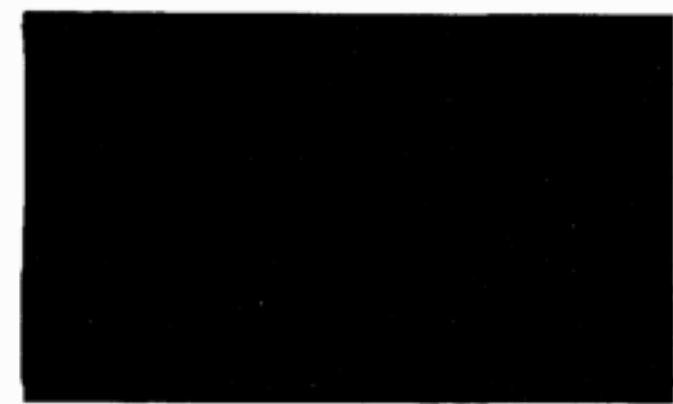


# HOW EUROPE LOOKS AT SOUTH AFRICA

Mrs Reina Steenwijk, who acts as Chief M G Buthelezi's personal representative in Europe, recently briefed the South African Institute of Race Relations on Europe's perspective on Black politics in SA.

Based in Amsterdam, Mrs Steenwijk was touring South Africa after attending the 10th Inkatha Conference at Ulundi. She has been a frequent visitor to Southern Africa for several years and is well-known in Europe for her political interest in Africa and support for Inkatha.

A large audience at the Johannesburg headquarters of the Institute heard Mrs Steenwijk talk of the "one-sided" viewpoint of many Europeans.



*"When we talk about people in Europe and South Africans who inform each other and attempt to influence each other's opinions, we are talking about an elite on both sides," she said.*

*"It is mainly an elitist framework which shapes opinions and it is not the perspective of the average European or the average Black worker and peasant which does so."*

*Mrs Steenwijk added that European groups were mainly influenced by selected South Africans who had the same outlook and interests. Pressure groups, churches, industries, trade unions and politicians were primarily interested in the assessments of their counterparts.*

*As a result Europeans held a one-sided view of the developments in South Africa and were rarely aware of political nuances. In many European countries and organisations, the debate on South Africa had become deadlocked and it often reflected views determined by European internal pol-*

icy rather than analysis and in-depth insights.

"One of the things that Europe does not understand is that the main characteristic of all South Africans is their national pride," Mrs Steenwijk added.

"European culture today makes little provision for national pride — it is more fashionable to denigrate one's country than to praise it.

"A European will therefore have difficulty in understanding that a Black person or a White person is deeply proud of South Africa and that he or she makes the distinction between the country itself and the policy of the Government.

"Another European error is the assumption that South Africa is heading towards a final crisis out of which a new order will rise. Even if one could understand such expectations in the seventies after the liberation of the Portuguese colonies and during the euphoria of the Black Consciousness organisations, the harsh reality of the eighties leave no excuse for such a fallacy.

"The bizarre thing is that even when people admit privately that evolutionary change might be more likely — and definitely more preferable — than a sudden break-down, they continue to base their opinions and tactics on bringing about a final crisis.

"While all European countries have acquired their present standards of living through an evolutionary process and through the building up of a bargaining system, this model it seems is not applied to South Africa. This error is to me always the most incomprehensible element in the South African debate in Europe.

"In short, the European perspective of developments in South Africa is more often coloured by emotions than it is the result of analysis. On the other hand, the totally unemotional analysis which prefers South African minerals to those from the Soviet Union, makes in my view the fatal error of overlooking the decisive human factor in this country.

"Both soulless commercial decision-making and callous decisions to pursue strategies regardless of consequences for ordinary South Africans are dangerous. There is hope, because it in part rests on the fact that Black South Africans may suffer but they have not been dehumanised.

"The humanism in South Africa dis-



Mrs Reina Steenwijk. Picture: The Daily News.

tinguishes them from the products of impersonal European society. The world may yet see that bloody-minded clashes between White and Black South Africans do dramatise real human values."

**Mrs Steenwijk then dealt with what she called "the important opinion-makers" in the South African debate in Europe.**

"Left-wing pressure groups over the past decades argued that sanctions against this country are the only options which will force the Government to negotiate with the liberation movements and other Black leaders.

"Their supporting strategy is to strengthen the Frontline States in the stand against South Africa. This naivety was greatly shocked by a

signing of the Nkomati Accord and some spokesmen even declared that it was "treason to the struggle for liberation."

"These pressure groups give unqualified support to the External Mission of the African National Congress and — more conditionally and selectively — to the former BCM organisations or the present UDF. The criteria employed is that these former organisations do not speak against sanctions and do not work "within the system."

"In private, people tell me that the strategy of sanctions and violence will win and if people happen to die as a result — like those in the homelands — that is just too bad.

"They are honest enough though to tell me that they could never go and discuss this view with the people here. One cannot but sadly conclude that the decades of campaigning for sanctions have only wasted time and energy. It has not been helpful for the oppressed."

## CHURCHES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

"One has to distinguish between churches in the reformed tradition and others. The former are by far the most outspoken on injustice in South Africa. One finds them in the Netherlands, Switzerland, the US and also in Germany.

"My country's Dutch Reformed Churches (talking about the two major ones) can claim to have taken the toughest stand. They would only be prepared to re-open discussions with the White Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa in specific circumstances and under certain conditions.

"Some years ago they chose to have the Belijdende Kring (Broederkring), the SACC and Black Churches as their partners. They are in favour of sanctions and amongst the organisations which they feel deserve support, the trade unions and the ANC are mentioned.

"Their emotional involvement is striking; it is in my view a clear result of guilty consciences about the past. A spokesman once said to me: "We did not support Frelimo, nor the

MPLA, nor Zanu. Mocambique, Angola and Zimbabwe elected radical Governments. We want to be sure now that we support the same radicalism in South Africa.

"Other churches in Europe, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, take a more distant attitude towards human rights in South Africa. Their involvement is comparable to their dealings with Chile and the Philippines.

"In addition to wielding their influences as Churches, they are able to employ power in granting or withholding finance to specific organisations. Often, those organisations which are more outspoken in the South African debate take on the attributes of an action group.

## INDUSTRIES AND TRADE UNIONS

"European industries and trade unions demonstrate how their opinions do change. They are influenced by developments when positions become crystallised. European industries rarely participate in initiating changes but attempt to profit from the changes by adapting to circumstances in the pursuit of commercial gains.

"Management in Europe generally reacts positively to the development of Black trade unions here as a prerequisite for a stable collective bargaining system which they see fundamental to increasing trade.

"The growth of trade unions in South Africa put an end to the dispute about whether or not the registration of a union amounted to "working within the labour system created by the Government." Mass support for trade unions and the decision by the trade unions to seek registration within the new framework of labour legislation, made selective support for only unregistered unions who were not so-called working within the system a thing of the past.

"The most surprising phenomena is, however, that advocates of sanctions do not regard it necessary to consult trade unions and Inkatha as a mass organisation, even though workers will be the first to be affected by it."

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

"From what I have said, it must be realised that European Governments and politicians do not have an easy task determining their South African policy.

"Apart from it being a complicated matter, they have to deal with numerous lobbies. The lobby of the South African Government and its supporting organisations has not been discussed here, but it plays a significant role, particularly at the level of the European Economic Community.

"In my country, the Netherlands, the Government finds itself in an impossible position; it cannot implement the strategy it would like to implement. Left-wing action groups and church organisations are too powerful, even to such an extent that the thought of a visit of Mr P W Botha to the Netherlands during his unsuccessful European trip was dismissed as unfeasible.

"The South African debate in Europe is hypocritical and superficial. Those who are deeply involved either support the ANC and the so-called radicals, or they give unconditional support to the South African Government.

"Europeans always have difficulty in coming to grips with the essence of Africa, which is portrayed in organisations like Inkatha. Few people in Europe are prepared to suffer personally for change in this country.

"This is a highly unsatisfactory situation for Blacks and Whites alike. It does not assist in creating the atmosphere in which South Africans can really sit together and plan together for the future.

"The South African situation has already been internationalised. Apartheid is no longer a domestic situation for Southern Africa or for the international community. The South African Government itself has participated in the internationalisation of apartheid.

"Major and positive influences which should be brought to bear on the South African situation are inhibited from playing a positive role. The consequences of distorted views could yet be sorely felt by millions of Black South Africans."