

THE GENERAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL — WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

By MARGARET ROBERTS

Speaking on behalf of the Black Sash at a Protest Meeting
in Cape Town.



IT SHOULD hardly be necessary to say that we in the Black Sash do not like violence, just as we do not like Communism. And the Minister of Justice tells us that this **evil** Bill, which outrages every concept of justice and freedom that illumines 2,000 years of Western Christendom, is necessary to stem violence and defeat Communism in South Africa.

Why? *If* it is necessary, *why* is it necessary? Why should putting vast and cruel powers into the hands of a policeman or a party politician or any fallible human being be needed to prop up the newborn Republic, to save it from chaos and demolition? Why have we reached this dreadful condition, in which innocent people may suffer indefinitely without even any contact with family or friends, with a lawyer or the courts of the land?

Why? — Because injustice, poverty, misery and despair breed violence and Communism as dirt breeds flies. And who is so mad as to hope to decrease the flies by increasing the dirt?

Are we so feeble that we cannot tackle the dirt, cannot clean up the source of our doom and damnation?

That source is the fundamental corruption of race discrimination: of laws that deny equality of opportunity to the great majority of our people; laws that condemn most of our fellow countrymen to murderous poverty, that refuse them the elementary right to move in search of the humblest livelihood, the right to a site for the humblest home, the right to family life wherever earning a living compels them to be.

This is an imperfect world. In many other countries the franchise, if any, is reduced to a farce, and critics of the rulers are thrown into gaol. But what other society penalizes millions of its members for the colour of the face with which they happen to be born, even if they are com-

pletely non-political, concerned only with going about their business of getting a living and bringing up their children in health and decency? Where else in the world is it a crime for a family to live together? Where else are populations of millions confined to backward areas, without land or jobs for their support, and allowed to work outside those areas only as temporary migrants on dictated terms? Where else are millions more denied the right to live anywhere at all except as the servants of masters of another race?

These are the conditions of South Africa, as every Black Sash woman who has had day-to-day experience among the victims of the pass laws well knows. For these victims are not the exceptions — they are many millions, representing practically every Black family in the Republic. The results in human misery have to be seen, as we see them, to be believed. And seeing these results it is not hard to understand how rich a recruitment to Poqo they can yield.

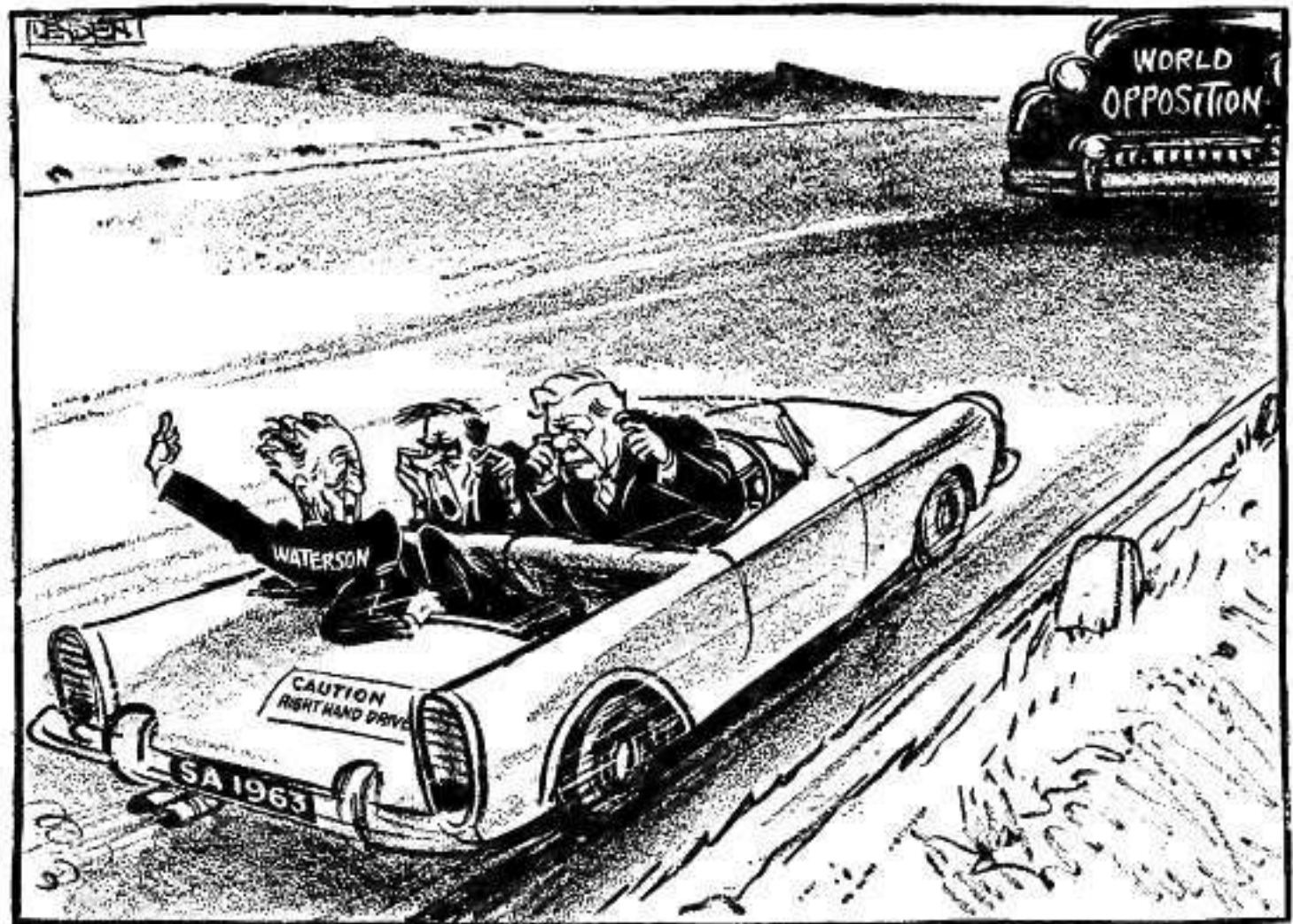


Ruins of South Africa. (Rand Daily Mail)

WATERSON:

"Dont keep saying, 'Relax, there's nothing we can do.'—You can move over, can't you?"

(J. Leyden,
Daily News)



Another Black Eye

No wonder such conditions have produced a ferment that brings sporadic upsurgings of frustration, and lately even of violence. It is not without significance that all the movements trying to canalize that ferment have aimed first and foremost at the pass laws — the lynch-pin of the whole oppressive situation. This applies alike to the Passive Resistance Movement of 1952 and the P.A.C campaign of 1960. And now, to judge by Robert Sobukwe's case, to lead a movement aimed at the pass laws — even if using strictly non-violent means — is to court imprisonment for life.

This is the White Supremacist's only answer — to resort to admittedly unrighteous means to uphold a demonstrably unrighteous system.

But it won't work. Naturally it is the duty of any government to ensure public safety. But it cannot do so without looking beneath symptoms to basic causes. This is the true lesson to be learnt from the Paarl rioting — and if we do not learn that lesson in time we will build only hate on horror and terror on hate, and we shall NOT escape the direst disaster for all our peoples.

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If you have ten thousand regulations you destroy all respect for the law.

Sir Winston Churchill.

SOUTH AFRICANS should be under no illusions about the impact the jail-without-trial Bill will make in London and Washington. (Its reception in the capitals of most of the Afro-Asian nations is not of significance: many of them live in glass houses and cannot afford to throw stones anyway.) The break with Western tradition and standards which the measure signifies cannot be explained away satisfactorily to people to whom *habeas corpus*, the cornerstone of individual liberty, is a sacred principle whose violation is never justified except in the midst of war.

South Africa's representatives abroad have always been able to make out a case of sorts for the policy of apartheid or separate development. But there is no case to be made for the more outrageous provisions in the Vorster Bill; and those voices periodically raised in this country's defence overseas by well-disposed Britons and Americans, will be stilled on this issue.

In other words the Republic's already bruised image will, we fear, collect another black eye.

To the extent that all this aggravates this country's isolation and embarrasses those in the Western world anxious to be our friends and to defend us from unfair attacks, this Bill cannot be too strongly condemned. South Africa is putting itself outside the pale of free-world standards.

(The Star)