

living — maybe it is a court appearance because of some infringement of their order — but as time goes on, the references become shorter, the interest less.

“One of the conditions attached to permission for Mr Jones to attend his own wedding by a Somerset West magistrate was that there be no political reference. His banning order prohibits him from attending gatherings and at the reception, Mr Jones sat in a separate room. The long queue of guests — some from as far as King William’s Town, waited in turn to congratulate the groom.” The report is from the Rand Daily Mail of 30th April this year. The man is Peter Jones who was served with a banning order soon after release from detention in February. He was held with Steve Biko in August 1977. In March, David Gaza, a former director of the Umlazi Residents’ Association was found guilty of contravening his banning order, and ordered to be detained until the rising of the court. However, he had already been convicted on four other contraventions of his ban, for which he had received a suspended sentence. The magistrate’s leniency was not popular, and Mr Gaza is now in prison serving a twenty month sentence on the other count.

It is a most effective law. The conspiracy of silence is just as apparent in the so-called liberal press, the English language papers, as it is in the Nationalist press. The trial of a person of the importance of Fatima Meer should have been headline news. It didn’t rate more than a handful of paragraphs

on some inside page. Some papers shunned it completely. One cannot escape the conclusion that despite their avowed dedication to the cause of freedom and justice, the English press here has other priorities, the first being to sell papers, other issues being peripheral to this. Arguments, however compelling, about the right of the individual to disagree in what purports to be a democratic society, are not news, and do not sell papers. That the questions that these arguments raise affect every single person in this country and not merely the two unfortunate victims in the dock, is conveniently ignored. When the press willingly censors itself, it is obvious that the suggestion that it needs enactments from above to keep it in line is superfluous. It is sad but true that after thirty years of Nationalist Party rule, the very foundations on which democracy is based have become so affected and enervated that they have all but ceased to function, except in name. We witness an opposition in parliament offering near identical policies as the government but framed in different words, a judiciary overseeing laws that are the antithesis of justice, and a press paying lipservice to its role as custodian of the right to free speech, whilst in fact supporting the status quo, that is, white supremacy for ever. South Africa is acting out a play, written and staged by the Nationalist Party, for the benefit not of South Africa but of the Nationalist Party. So clever is the direction that everyone has a part, however unwilling they might seem to learn their lines. □

Diakonia Council

Statement on Prisoners’ Right to Study

The Diakonia Council, which consists of official representatives of the African Methodist Episcopal, African Presbyterian, Anglican, Congregational, Evangelical Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches, meeting in Durban on 29th May, 1979, unanimously approved the following statement on the prisoners’ right to study:

“The Diakonia Council **believing** in the God-given right of all people to read and study, and **noting** that in terms of the Regulations to Prisons Act of 1959 (as amended) the Commissioner exercises his discretion as to which prisoners may study and at what levels, and **recalling** Our Lord’s words that what is done to those in prison is done to him (Matt 25), and the instruction of the Letter to the Hebrews that we should “Remember those in prison as though in prison with them” (Heb. 13:3) **urges** all members of our member churches:

1. to support the campaign for amendment to the legislation so that all prisoners will have a legally-recognised right to study, and
2. to give whatever practical support they can to prisoners wishing to study e.g. by making contributions towards the costs of studies by correspondence or for the purchase of texts.” □