

CHURCH

c/o P.O.Box 1343,  
Pietermaritzburg,  
South Africa.

GREEN PRESS

Number One

24 June, 1970

Free at last.

At midnight on the 30th of April five years of banning ended. I had been called in by the Special Branch two days previously and told that the ban would not be re-imposed - and warned that I could be banned again. So I am free at last. It has been exhilarating doing simple things - going to Durban for a weekend, attending a dull and tedious protest meeting, driving through the Indian quarter of Pietermaritzburg, joining in a Christian Institute meeting - things which we normally take for granted transfigured into joys.

Though I am no longer banned I will in many ways never be free again. For one thing I doubt whether the Special Branch have forgotten me. But more important, as long as people in our country are deprived of freedom, none are free.

This is perhaps the time to say a very inadequate thank you to all those who gave me encouragement and support during five long years. There were many of you, both inside South Africa and out (of the latter the Amnesty group in New Zealand who espoused my case deserving special mention). Thank you.

The Green Press

This first edition of the Green Press has been produced by John and Jenny Aitchison. In future editions we hope that other people will also contribute, both from Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere. We will have news of what people in other places are thinking and doing. The name Green Press has no particular significance. Steve Hayes and Dave de Beer produce a similar newsletter in Windhoek and call it the Pink Press because it is printed on pink paper. The Christian Institute in Durban produces a Yellow Press. We joined this rainbow of communications and use the only colour duplicating paper left - green.

Zululand Pentecost

The Diocese of Zululand was to hold its centenary celebrations on the Sunday of Pentecost, the 17th of May. Originally we had hoped to go in our car, but it passed away with a broken piston a few days before the event, and we borrowed one from the Corrigall's - Helen Corrigall had been coming with us in any case. We left Pietermaritzburg shortly before midday on Saturday travelling in convey with another car containing Mike & Colleen Taylor, their daughter Robyn, and Mike's parents. We stopped at Kranskop for a picnic lunch - and what a magnificent place it is to have one's first sight of Zululand. The dirt road extends along the crest of a thin ridge which ends in the actual kranskop. On either side immense valleys and gorges fall away down to the Tugela valley. One could see for about 25 miles up, down and across the Tugela valley. Directly in front, on the far Zululand side of the Tugela one could see the dark triangle of the Nkandla forest through the bluish haze. Here Cetshwayo sought refuge and his grave lies in a valley below the forest. Here also is the Mome Gorge where the last Zulu rebellion - Bambata's - was quelled by the British in a dum-dum bullet massacre.

While we were eating we were treated to virtuosa flying performances by innumerable crows and ravens which soared in the updraughts round the kop.

The journey resumed, we descended into the Tugela valley down a winding road which had numerous cuttings through pink and yellow hued sandstone, with every now and then a volcanic pipe of darker rock with seams of white quartz. We crossed the Tugela into Zululand at Jameson's Drift and then climbed the long and tortuous road to the Nkandla. We passed beautiful rounded high hills from the top of which we could see what appeared to be a funeral or celebration far down in a valley. The ululating of women echoed in the hills. Before we reached the Nkandla we descended sharply to the bottom of the gorge of a tributary of the Tugela. The rock strata which broke through the hillsides were nearly perpendicular. It looked like something out of some Alpine mountain journal. Although the Nkandla forest is only about 17 miles as the crow flies from Kranskop it took us more than  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours to reach it. We stopped for about ten minutes in the forest in the rather eiry moonlight.

After a night in the Eshowe 'Provincial Hotel' we set off for Kwa Nzimela (Robertson's Place), the site of Bishop Robertson's mission, which is near Melmoth. The road was already thronged with people as we passed the mission hospital at Kwa Magwaza. We drove into a parking lot already cramed with cars and numerous buses. We walked up to the crest of a semi-natural amphitheatre and looked down upon a row of people - probably more than 5,000 and possibly 7,000 sitting on the grass. The upper edges of the amphitheatre were ringed with richly coloured banners of the congregations of Zululand. The buses had brought people from far and wide - and there were several carloads of people from Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The hillside sloped down to a small wooden platform and altar, behind it a large rugged cross of gum tree trunks, with a backdrop of rolling hills and timber plantations merging into the haze covered hills bordering the Mhlatuze valley.

Various choirs and groups held the stage until about 10 a.m. when the pageant started. An oxen drawn cart appeared (the oxen looked old-fashioned by the rubber wheels looked decidedly modern) and followed by a band of whopping Zulu warriors. To the great amusement of everyone Bishop Robertson's wife fell off the cart and was crushed to death. The amusement was heightened when the unfortunate bishop had his waggon commandeered by a Boer commando at gunpoint. Canon Johnson then played the part of his grandfather who achieved fame as an extractor of teeth. After further representations of a modern mission hospital scene and of the work of the Diocesan Health and welfare scheme, the Eucharist was celebrated. The sermon by bishop Zulu referred to the history of war and exploitation that had moulded the Zululand of today. The Church was perhaps the one hope for reconciliation and love in our land. As one can imagine the communicating of 7,000 people involved considerable logistical problems. Small altar railings were set up to either side of the chalice covered altar. The people moved down a central aisle from the back and were directed through the 16 or so 'altar rails' behind each of which were two priests - one with the wine, one with the bread. The long lines of people moving down to the altar and back made swathes of moving colour across the crowd.

The culminating event was the reading of a poem specially composed for the day by the well known poet and writer, Otty E.H. Mandla Nxumalo. It referred to the past heroes of the Zululand church and was composed in the traditional izibongo praise-poem style. As he was giving forth ululating started and several women, some in tribal dress danced round him, urging him on. With that the celebrations ended though not the catering problems - 4,000 people had been expected not several thousand

more. However, as with the original Feeding of the Five Thousand, all seemed to depart well filled. Speaking to several Africans I knew from Pietermaritzburg I found that all of them had derived an intimation of hope for the future from this Zululand Pentecost.

Ikon Publications.

One of the more delightful aspects of expiry of my banning order is that Jenny no longer has to do the books for Ikon. I am not so delighted. Particularly as Ikon always seems to be in debt. So dear kind people SUBSCRIBE NOW. It only costs one rand for 5 issues. Back numbers of the 3rd and 4th issues are available and the 5th should be out in late July or early August. It will include some photographs of the Zululand celebrations, articles on The land and God (by John Davies) and on the creative teaching of English (by E. Rought-Jenkins), and a reproduction of a magnificent woodcut (inspired, if that is the right word, by the misery caused by forced population removals in South Africa) sent in by a reader of Ikon.

PLEASE NOTE THAT IKON HAS A NEW ADDRESS:

IKON PUBLICATIONS  
P.O. BOX 1343  
PIETERMARITZBURG

Visit to Babylon

Two weeks ago I paid a hurried visit to Johannesburg. I had to go alone as the lift I was offered didn't fit in with Jenny's working hours. The trip through the O.F.S. was, as can be predicted, boring, enlivened only by sight of a Secretary bird, herds of springbok and blesbok and the memory of a dam we had passed in northern Natal - with a horse in the middle which would occasionally submerge to eat weeds off the bottom. Sceptics may write to me for full directions if they want to view this wonder for themselves.

On arriving at the Christian Institute offices in Braamfontein I was greeted by Cosmos Desmond, author of "Displaced People" who now works for the Institute. I had a long chat with Danie van Zyl who works with the African Independent Churches Association. The walls of his office were covered with graph paper covered with statistical breakdowns of the effectiveness of various frames of the programmed theological education course he is producing for AICA. The first few lessons have been experimented with and are now being revised. The course will cost in all R80 and last four years. It assumes no real educational qualifications apart from basic literacy and on completion the candidate will receive a certificate which will be recognised by the Association of South African Theological Institutions. People who are interested in enrolling should contact AICA, c/o the Christian Institute, P.O. Box 31134, Braamfontein, Johannesburg. Initially the courses will only be available in English, Xhosa and Sotho.

That evening I was invited to a small house mass-agape. It was a very ecumenical gathering - of the dozen or so people there, two were Anglicans, two Lutherans, and the rest Catholics (several of them ex-religious). We sang some simple folk song type hymns accompanied by a tape recorder, there was a short Bible reading followed by some meaningful and relevant discussion. After a brief intercession and canon the bread and wine was passed round the circle round the table. For one used to the formality of going up to an altar rail, receiving the Body of Christ from the person next to one was a new liberation.

Finally the circle held hands and we sang a closing prayer. And then we had supper. This was especially appreciated by me as I hadn't eaten all day.

Then on to Narnia Coffee Bar which aims to be a Christian presence in Hillbrow, Johannesburg's high-rise flatland in which a considerable portion of its workers are stored at night. It has the reputation for being the centre of drug peddling in Johannesburg. Narnia coffee bar is sponsored by the Witwatersrand Council of Churches and a friend, Don Andreason of the U.S.A. works there. He, however, was at a wedding - this at 10.30 p.m! Anyway we sat around and absorbed atmosphere. (I had been instructed by some comrades in PMB who want to start a coffee bar to absorb atmosphere. After about an hour not a single drug-crazed hippie had materialised and as a gawping tourist I was feeling swindled. However some uniformed and plainclothes cops came in twice and frogmarched three people out. Nobody turned a hair, half the people didn't even look. I assumed that this was regular entertainment but, when Don eventually arrived back from his wedding, he assured me that it had never happened before. To me the grimest sight in Hillbrow was the number of small African boys who beg in the streets and are glue-sniffing addicts.

On the Saturday morning I drove round JHB visiting friends I hadn't seen for many years. It was a somewhat horrendous experience. Maybe one gets used to it but that single ugly city centre and then the vast miles and miles of suburbia seemed to me the essence of an inhuman city. I spoke recently with someone who said that a place like London, in spite of its size is a much more human place than Johannesburg, for it has numerous subcentres and communities within it. Perhaps the Johannesburg communes in their small way may be working towards a more human Johannesburg. I was told that there are about 23 houses in Johannesburg lived in by groups of people, though only about 5 are really conscious of themselves as a commune. One of the five is Zionist and its occupants tend to move on to kibbutzes in Israel. I spoke to a couple of people at THE ORIGINAL Melville commune. They seemed keen on ecology as a means of radicalising the bourgeoisie. They may well be right. I heard from other sources that the Melville commune was for Women's Liberation and intellectual snobery of the "you poor deluded bourgeois fools" type, but these may be the grossest libels. The other commune I saw was the Regent Street commune. The previous evening some kind person had beaten in the windows of two cars parked outside (so far this had happened to six commune cars). We had a very interesting talk with a member of the commune. I was struck by the very clear awareness of the problems of commune life. Among such problems were mundane ones like keeping the house clean, and psychological ones. A lot of people join a commune to work out their own problems rather than to further the commune movement. There was too much introversion in the communes and not enough communication and community feeling between the various communes. The possibility of the communes providing the basis of a liberated South African subculture is tremendously important. If it is true that there are 30,000 South African "exiles" in London alone one realises how important. Granted of 30,000 many would simply be people who want to be in swinging London. But many, apart from the real political exiles, must be thinking people who left because there was no creative way of life open to them.

There didn't seem to be any notably Christian influence in any of the communes. I met one Christian who said there were four Christians in the commune he belonged to. I made these enquiries because the commune I know most about - the Eros Commune in Windhoek is very much a Christian one. The Community of St Simon the Zealot, to give

it its proper name, is the only commune that I know of that is a full member of the Commune Federation (headquarters in the U.K.) The place where I stayed in Johannesburg had been a sort of Christian community but was closing due to the difficulty in getting new people to replace those who left - they had also had problems getting people to sweep their rooms. (I wonder if this problem doesn't have its origin in white children never having to care for their home. In a servantless country it is probably semi-automatic. To a white South African sweeping a room is a real effort.) The communes were by no means full of political radicals - probably only a minority see the communes as an overtly political movement. There was also no effort to encourage inter-racial mixing. This was thought to be partly due to a more repressive atmosphere in Johannesburg, partly due to the more pragmatic views of the left in a place like Johannesburg. What it does mean is that the communes in Johannesburg are something very different from suburban liberalism for whom all political goals are summed up by "building bridges across the colour line".

Communes.

Those interested in making contact with the British Communes Movement should write to:

Communes  
c/o Nicholas Albery  
BIT  
141 Westbourne Park Road,  
London W11,  
United Kingdom.

The British Commune Movement produce a really excellent publication. The issues I have seen contained some unusually fine and poetic writing. In addition they produced an excellent layout and printing job using very simple equipment (an old hand turned duplicator), though I hear that future edition will be printed by offset-litho.

Proposed international tour

If transport materialises we hope to visit the Community of St. Simon the Zealot in Namibia (SWA) later in July. We may pass through Johannesburg on the way there. There were many people my whistle-stop tour left unvisited, and those that I did see I would have liked to have seen longer.

Addresses - contacts

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(postal) P.O.Box 1329, Pietermaritzburg.

Steve Hayes, Dave de Beer, Chris Nicholson & Dick Blair. (home - send  
no post) 41 Klein Windhoek Road, Windhoek.  
(Postal) P.O.Box 9219, Eros, Windhoek.

Ikon (subscriptions). P.O.Box 1343, Pietermaritzburg.

Laurens Otter. (London Christian Anarchists). 35 Natal Road, Thornton  
Heath, Surrey, U.K.

Catonsville Roadrunner. 3 Caledonian Road, London NW 1.

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