

R.R. 103/50.  
PMB. 3/7/50.SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (INC.)  
SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VIR RASSEVERHOUDINGS (INGELYS)CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER REGARDING THE DETERIORATION  
OF RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNION AND THE ADVISABILITY OF HOLDING A  
NATIONAL CONVENTION.

1. On the 6th June, 1950, the Institute wrote to the Prime Minister:-

"Soon after the present Government came into power you were good enough to receive a deputation from this Institute and to assure it that both you and your Ministers would always be willing to receive representations in the future. We very much appreciated this assurance and since that time we have devoted a great deal of time to rethinking the very complex problems of our country. We know perhaps better than most organizations all sides of the racial problem. Lately we have been very grieved at the many signs that come to our notice of deteriorating race relations and we shall be grateful if you will read this letter as the considered opinion of the Executive Committee of the Institute.

"For many years, there has existed a measure of discontent amongst a section of our Non-European peoples. The basis for this you are aware of - lack of housing, inadequate facilities for vocational and technical training, the conventional bar to the use of skilled Native labour, the pass laws and their administration, etc. Over the past two years the resentment has undoubtedly increased and symptoms of this are to be found in the riots and disturbances we have had in Durban and on the Reef.

"A significant change however is coming about. Where formerly the discontent, resentment, and feelings of frustration were confined particularly to the literate Non-European, to-day these feelings are spreading to the mass of the illiterate Non-European population whether in town or country. This we consider to be a most serious development and one which requires most serious attention. We, of course, completely condemn acts of violence by lawless elements against whom the mass of Non-Europeans wish and require protection, though we do consider that this criminal element has come into being largely as a result of the prevailing social conditions. This letter, however, is concerned with the decent and law-abiding Non-European population.

"In the interview with you already referred to, the Institute's deputation was frank. It stated its disagreement in principle with certain aspects of the policy contained in the National Party's election manifesto and in the findings of the Sauer Commission and it suggested that the attempted implementation of the policy would lead to racial trouble and frustration. It pleaded that the Government should put into practice first the positive constructive aspects of the policy. The Government has, in our opinion and viewed from a Non-European angle, not done so. The following is a list of major measures and declared intentions of the Government which affect race relations.

Measures.

Repeal of Chapter 2 of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act.  
Group Areas Bill.  
Population Registration starting with Natives.  
Native School feeding reduced.  
Tightening up of the pass laws.  
Cape Corps and Native Military Corps disbanded.  
The raising of the qualifications for exemption from pass laws.  
Apartheid in stations and post offices.  
Replacing of Africans by Europeans (Civilized Labour policy).

Intentions.

Abolition of Natives Representatives in the House of Assembly.  
Abolition of Natives Representative Council.  
Removal of Cape Coloured from the common roll.

/The.....

"The Institute is still considering the Unlawful Organizations Bill and cannot as yet comment on it.

"In addition to this the price of maize has gone up and the cost of a variety of everyday commodities increased. Such price rises affect our poorer classes, Non-Europeans most keenly.

"The Institute has awaited compensatory positive measures but little to balance the negative aspects of the government's policy has been forthcoming. There has been an increase in the number of betterment areas in the reserves; small additional powers have been given to chiefs; the Native Builders Bill may be of benefit to Africans; it is noted that the Natural Resources Development Council has sent persons to Umtata; there has been an increase in the education vote and greater consideration is given to Africans who apply for bus and trading licences.

"We wish, sir, to be frank about the position as we see it and we feel it to be our duty to the country and to all sections of the population to draw your attention to the rising tide of bitterness and resentment. And we would plead with you most sincerely to take steps to deal with the situation by the declaration and implementation of positive measures. There is wide scope in the fields of education, vocational training, housing, in industry and in the reserves, for measures of this kind which will reassure our Non-European peoples and in which all sections of the community can co-operate.

"A national convention on Non-European policy has been suggested and this Institute would support such a suggestion provided leaders of Non-European opinion participate in the discussion and provided there are no prior conditions. Should a policy be framed without such consultation and without the co-operation of Non-Europeans, we feel that the position will not be eased and that Non-Europeans will merely regard any all-European Convention as a move on the part of Europeans to present a united front. This would lead to even greater friction than before. The agenda for such a national convention could be based on subjects such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

"Our Non-Europeans are anxious to be South Africans in the true sense. They too wish a nation, however racially diverse, to emerge with a common loyalty to our land. South Africa must be made secure and play its part in a troubled and uncertain world. It cannot do so if the greater part of its population is discontented and disaffected.

"We have, sir, taken you at your word - that we would make our representations frankly to you in the first place - and we do so in the same spirit which inspires all of us - the common good of our common land."

2. Mr. J.D. Rheinallt Jones, in his personal capacity, wrote the following letter to the Prime Minister on the 5th May, 1950:-

"Recently a conference of Rotary Clubs passed a resolution asking that a national convention be called to consider the racial situation in the Union. I was about to write this letter when I found that Senator Edgar Brookes and Mrs. Margaret Ballinger, M.P. had asked you to convene a round table conference on the same matter. I wish to support both. I venture to do so as a citizen who has spent over forty years in social and educational work in our country, during which period I have continued to make first hand investigations on the various aspects of our racial situation.

"As a Senator (1937-1942) elected by the Natives of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, as Director for nearly twenty years of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and in other ways I have been enabled to keep in close touch with the Non-European peoples over these years, and I can say that there is great anxiety on both sides of the colour line over the rapid deterioration in racial relations during the recent years. The causes are many and are not by any means all due to the present Government's pronouncements and actions; these have, however, heightened the tensions. Fierce political partizanship, over many years now, has had inflaming effects upon all the races which make up our population, and has made it difficult, if not impossible, to secure sound statesmanship on racial issues and wise administration on matters affecting the races.

"The....."

"The time has certainly come to call a halt to this, and to create a calmer atmosphere in which the leaders of all the races can together seek policies and programmes that will lead to racial harmony and co-operation. I can assure you, Sir, that responsible leaders among the Non-Europeans, as well as among Europeans, are profoundly disturbed over the trend of events in the Union and would rejoice to see a new start made, in the attitudes of the races to each other.

"Whether it be a "round table conference" or a "national convention" that is brought into being, it is vitally important that provision be made for Non-European leadership to collaborate. Without this there is no real hope for racial harmony and the co-operation of responsible Non-European leaders cannot be obtained.

"The recent statement of the Minister of Native Affairs has shown that the political parties represented in Parliament are perhaps within bridgeable distance of each other, and it is possible that a round table conference of their representatives would bring agreement between them on the main points of racial policies. But without the agreement of the Non-European peoples this would take us very little of the way to the goal. We must face the fact that one-fifth of the population cannot safely rule the remaining four-fifths without the consent of the governed and, indeed, without their co-operation.

"Please pardon this truism: my experience has taught me that it has not been appreciated by our governments in the past. Any new start must begin with full consultation of Non-European leadership if it is to succeed.

"Since the Durban riots sixteen months ago public attention has been concentrated on the worsening racial situation in the large centres. But the position on the farms and in the platteland is also grave.

"Before, during and after my period of office as Senator I have found the Native workers on the farms becoming more and more sullen and resentful in their attitude towards their white employers, and the best of the workers have left for the towns. In consequence the farmers have become more and more angry and impatient of the irresponsibility and waywardness of their Native workers. They revolted in 1948 and voted for a new government to deal with the situation. The tension is greater as a result of events that have happened since.

"In the Native Reserves the easy-going tribal Natives have been affected by the economic pressure on the Reserves and by the growing turbulence outside. They too have become less friendly and are suspicious and resentful of the Government and its efforts to help them.

"The other Non-Europeans are in no better case. The Cape Coloured feel themselves to be between the European upper and the Native nether millstones, and they too have become soured. The Indian communities are unhappy and insecure. The desperate poverty of the mass is hidden by the wealth of the few.

"While the Non-European peoples are seething with discontent and becoming less and less co-operative, we Europeans are uncertain of ourselves and of each other. Our leaders are bewildered by the country's racial problems, and, privileged as a race, we Europeans are unwilling and unable to carry the responsibilities of our privileges. We seek escape in unreal party political strife. Of us as a ruling race the words of the Book of Proverbs are true: "The Prince that lacketh understanding is an oppressor also." What we do to the Non-European we do without understanding and bring upon ourselves the reproach that we are oppressors.

"I believe the foregoing to be a true analysis of our racial situation, and the facts have to be fully appreciated in any new effort to achieve a truly national racial policy.

Time is short. Our country is in mortal peril. We are slipping into internal disorder which may quickly become civil war. We are also in danger from without. The world is dangerously near another great war in which, if it occurred, we would be involved. We must ourselves work to prevent it by strengthening our defences. Our defence depends upon unity within and collective security without. Our collective security is threatened because the democracies with whom we would find collective security dislike our racial policies and attitudes. Our own line of defence

/is.....

is perilously weak because we have not been able to find the way to the kind of inter-racial unity that will develop a common loyalty to the state.

"We must find the way to bind all our races in this common loyalty. Despite the difficulties of working democracy in a multi-racial state, "democracy is the strongest system in a harsh context." It should not be beyond our capacity to find a more effective form of democracy in so far as our Non-European peoples are concerned. We certainly cannot escape the task of winning back their goodwill and co-operation not only in daily work (which to-day is suffering from the lack of these qualities), but also in the affairs of the country generally. This can only be done through full consultation with their leaders and through the attainment of racial policies and programmes that offer them hope for their children. The initiative lies with us Europeans and we must not delay.

"The convention - which should include leaders in national activities such as the churches, commerce and industries as well as leaders of the Non-European peoples - must not only seek a long term national policy in race relations, but must also agree upon quick action in regard to housing, high food prices and the pass laws to release some of the pressure on the Non-Europeans. "Where there's a will there's a way,"

"The gravity of the situation and my own sincere desire to be helpful are, I believe, adequate reasons for approaching you in this way and at such length."

3. The Prime Minister's Private Secretary replied to the Institute on the 16th June, 1950, as follows:-

"I am directed by the Honourable the Prime Minister to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 5th instant, relative to the racial problem in South Africa.

"Similar representations to yours were recently made to the Prime Minister by Mr. Rheinallt Jones. Dr. Malan feels that the reply which has been sent to Mr. Rheinallt Jones appropriately deals also with the points raised in your letter and in the circumstances a copy thereof is attached for your information."

4. The letter of the Prime Minister's Private Secretary to Mr. Rheinallt Jones (dated 20th May, 1950) is as follows:-

"I am directed by the Honourable the Prime Minister to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 5th instant, and to thank you for the statement of your views on a matter which exercises the mind of everyone who seriously contemplates South Africa's problems and future.

"The Prime Minister regards your suggestion that our racial problems should be solved by means of a round-table conference including all political parties, certain other interests on the European side, as well as the leaders of the three non-European communities, Native, Coloured and Indian, as an impressive ideal. He is convinced, however, that it can have no satisfactory outcome. The divergence between the communistic and liberalistic standpoint, on the one hand, demanding, as it does, the removal of all colour bars, and the policy on the other hand, of those seeking to solve the problem by way of differentiation based on just and fair treatment for each group in its own province, is too wide to be reconciled in that way.

"The Prime Minister entirely agrees with you that an earnest endeavour should be made through proper contacts to win the co-operation and support of the non-European population for any policy in connection with the relations between Europeans and non-Europeans. It will, however, be appreciated how difficult the establishment of such contacts is, after, as had already happened during the regime of the previous Government, the machinery created for that purpose by the legislation of 1936, failed.

"The reason of the Native Representative Council for the discontinuance of their meetings was in actual fact their inexorable demand for no racial discrimination whatsoever. The assurance can, however, be given that new means of establishing the necessary contacts are being seriously explored by the Government.

"The Prime Minister regrets that the deterioration in racial relations, stressed by you, must be admitted by everyone. The fact must, however, not be overlooked

/that.....

that instigatory speeches from the communistic side and the continual emphasis, albeit unfounded, from the liberalistic side that the policy of apartheid is nothing less than an attempt to deprive the non-Europeans of their rights and to oppress them, must of necessity have that result which you and which everyone deploras.

"It may be recapitulated that the Prime Minister on various occasions in the past has endeavoured to effect an approach to the colour question on a non-party basis, and that on each occasion such a course was rejected by the Opposition.

"The Prime Minister desires me, in conclusion, to assure you that the Government are deeply conscious of their responsibility to promote the interests of all sections of the population, but that at the same time they realise that this can be done only by tackling real problems in a just and resolute way and not by ignoring them and allowing them to develop inevitably and unchecked into those very catastrophes which you dread."

5. Mr. Rheinallt Jones forwarded a copy of his letter to the Prime Minister to the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable J.C. Smuts, who replied as follows on the 10th May, 1950:-

"Thank you very warmly for your letter of the 5th May and your anniversary good wishes. I need not say how much I appreciate them and your goodwill.

"I have read the copy of your letter to the Prime Minister with deep interest, as you will realise. The subject gives me deep anxiety from many points of view. So far all overtures for co-operation on the Native question have been made subject to the apartheid policy, which of course begs the whole question and makes a nullity of the constitutional guarantees for Native rights. We must now await the Prime Minister's response to the plea which Senator Brooks and Mrs. Ballinger have made to him."

.....

**Collection Number: AD1715**

**SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974**

**PUBLISHER:**

*Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation*

*Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

©2013

**LEGAL NOTICES:**

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.