

Donald Molteno essay competition

The Cape Western Region of the S.A. Institute of Race Relations has decided to organise an annual essay competition on some aspect of race relations or civil liberties in memory of the late Professor D. B. Molteno. The region feels a special responsibility in this because it grew out of his work as Regional Representative of the Institute in the early days.

In many ways Donald Molteno was an extraordinary man. He was outraged at injustice or any departure from the rule of law; he was angered by the denial of civil rights to people on grounds of race or colour and by the humiliations heaped upon them. But when he was considering these problems his thinking was clinically dispassionate and no emotion or bias ever entered into it.

In addition to his clarity of thought Molteno was also an intensely human person who devoted a large slice of his life to the solution of the problems of others less privileged than he. As Regional Representative of the Institute he carried a huge case-load of problems connected with passes, migrant labour, influx control, housing and family life until the Region was started and took over the load from him. Even then he helped to start a course of training for volunteers to help in his work, out of which the Athlone Advice Bureau eventually evolved.

He was always ready to help. He was President of CAFDA (Cape Flats Distress Association) from its inception; he was at the continual beck and call of the Black Sash, the Regional Office of the Institute, the Liberal and later the Progressive Party, and many individuals who went to him for advice. To all of these calls he responded positively often at great cost to himself and his health.

He was born in 1908, educated at the Diocesan College, gained his Law Tripos at Pembroke College at Cambridge and practised at the bar at the Inner Temple in London and later in Cape Town until he was invited to stand for Parliament in 1937 as one of the Native Representatives in consequence of the Hertzog 1936 legislation which removed Africans from the Cape common roll of voters.

Together with Dr. Margaret Ballinger and his other two colleagues he fought a running battle with the establishment which became the pride and joy of all liberal thinkers in the Western world and which certainly laid the foundations for the later formation of both the Liberal and the Progressive parties.

Later he was to be asked to preside over a commission set up by the Progressive Party to decide upon its franchise proposals. The Commission produced a report which was a model of lucid thought and logical argument, the basic principles of which have stood the test of time. In 1967 he was appointed Professor of Public Law at the University of Cape Town, a position which he held until his death on Christmas Eve, 1972.

He was very closely associated with the Institute of Race Relations from its very early years when he was a young man and at one time he was its president. Throughout these years he helped to guide and strengthen the Institute both regionally and nationally in both material and other ways. He wrote a book on civil liberties and assisted with the drafting of memoranda on current problems as well as with lengthy representations to authorities. The Institute owes him an immense debt of gratitude.

The Regional Committee of the Institute appeals to members of the public who wish to be associated with this tribute to a great man to send their contributions to the Regional Secretary, SAIRR, 1 Dorp Street, Cape Town, 8001.

It is the intention of the Committee to invest the money thus collected and to devote the income derived from it to one or more prizes in an annual essay competition to be organised by a sub-committee appointed for this task.