

Why The Black Sash Opposes THE GROUP AREAS ACT



— By —
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MOST important of the aims of our movement is the securing of good government and of established rights.

The Group Areas Act is subversive of both. Indeed, of the many Nationalist measures which infringe elementary human rights, this is one of the most drastic and unjust. The right freely to acquire title to the ownership and occupation of fixed property is in truth an elementary right, and is recognised as such in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, a great charter expressive of the fundamental values of Western Christendom.

The Group Areas Act explicitly denies that elementary right, for it prohibits a member of any ethnic group from acquiring property from a member of another, save with official permission. It also makes

drastic inroads upon the right of occupation of fixed property where the would-be occupier belongs to an ethnic group different from that of the owner, or—in cases especially determined by proclamation—of the existing occupier. The Act further empowers the Government to reserve whole areas for the ownership or occupation or both of a particular ethnic group. And the Government thus empowered is representative of only one of the groups concerned—the White group. In the exercise of this power, moreover, the Government acts on the advice of a Board comprised exclusively of White people appointed and paid by the Government, and holding office at its pleasure. Even if it were permissible to restrict individual liberty on racial lines, as this Act does, what possible prospect of achieving impartial justice between the various groups is there by an arrangement such as this, which, in effect, makes the politically dominant group the judge in its own cause?

Here in the Cape Peninsula the vicious potentialities of the application of this Act are particularly menacing. For here we have a plural society consisting of Asian and African, White and Coloured communities, which is the result of 300 years of evolution.

Now it is sought, by means of a kind of ghastly surgical operation, a grim experiment in social vivisection, to carve up the living functioning body of Cape society—men and women, together with their children, are, purely on racial grounds, to be driven away from their homes, their schools, their churches, their mosques.

We in the Sash are convinced that human societies are not susceptible to treatment of this kind save at a terrible cost in human suffering and hardship and degradation, to say nothing of the gravest injustice. That is why we have pledged ourselves to fight, by all means in our power, the implementation of this cruel legislation.

Well Bowled!

"Apart from moral considerations, how anyone can suppose that a persistent policy of suppression and the denial of basic rights to the labour force of a country can end in anything short of a most dangerous crisis in the long run, baffles understanding. All liberal opinion seemed at one in condemning what is regarded as the exploitation of the native, and such bodies as the Institute of Race Relations and The Black Sash combine with the English language newspapers to feed the public conscience on an issue of appalling breadth and complexity. . . .

"Whatever his faults, it seems to me the average African native has his full share of two virtues which condone much else in life. One is a fund of fun and humour, the other a natural sense of good manners."

The most interesting part of the above extract is its source, because, believe it or not, it is culled from a book devoted exclusively to cricket—in fact, a description of the M.C.C. Tour in South Africa in 1956/57, by E. W. Swanton. This is the first and probably the last time that the Black Sash will get a boost from a book on cricket!