

13/6/68 H 147

SOBUKWE TO STAY ON ROBBER ISLAND

“Enemies want a star”

From Our Parliamentary Correspondent

Cape Town, Thursday.

THE “MAN ON THE ISLAND” is to remain there. The Minister of Justice, Mr. Pelser, announced in the Assembly last night that he had, after careful consideration, decided that Robert Sobukwe, former leader of the banned P.A.C., would not be released from detention on Robben Island.

Mr. Pelser himself used the term “the man on the island”

when, during the second reading of the General Laws Amendment Bill, he gave the assurance that Sobukwe's fate “is not a matter to be decided by capricious decision one way or the other. I weighed the pros and cons very carefully before deciding what I should do.

“In the final result it was a matter of choosing between the interests of the country and those of an individual.”

A solemn Mr. Pelser told an attentive House that, with the information at his disposal, he would have failed in his duty if at this stage he were to let the interests of the country give way to the strong humanitarian impulse to bring about a change in this man's fate.

His conscience was at rest—“because I know that the powers that are seeking our downfall are gathering their forces to destroy us and are at this very moment assiduously looking for a star to give lustre to their nefarious schemes.

Opportunity

“The man concerned would, if he were given the opportunity, not hesitate to do everything in his power to make up and regain what he has lost during his time of detention because in his life and aspirations, he has in no way changed his attitude or his aims.”

He could therefore, with the knowledge at his disposal, not be expected to play into the hands of the enemies and to give them the opportunity to rally round the man whom they thought could unify them to bring about the downfall of South Africa.

Sobukwe had told him that he was a Communist. In fact Sobukwe had broken away from the A.N.C. when he thought it was being taken over by Communists.

She moved an amendment that the Bill be read this day six months.

Mr. M. Mitchell (U.P., Durban North) protested that the Bill dealt with so many different matters that it would have been better to have had several separate Bills.

The Opposition had decided on a free vote for its members on the liquor provisions.

Mr. W. V. Raw said that the liquor provisions should have been contained in a separate Bill and that the Opposition should have been given adequate time to study it.

Wide powers

He pleaded with the Minister not to take too wide powers to close on-consumption premises for non-Whites.

This was a sociological problem which could not be hidden away in shebeens and backyards.

At the end of the debate Mr. Pelser said he was not taking any powers to which the liquor trade could object.

Referring again to Sobukwe, he said that he himself had had a private conversation with him and he had found that Sobukwe had not changed his views.

Mrs. Suzman's amendment was rejected with only her own vote being recorded in favour of it.

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ion) said she would oppose the Bill as a whole because of the clause which made possible the detention of Sobukwe after he had served his sentence.

This clause could affect other people. There was no guarantee that someone would be released after serving a sentence.

Incitement

She reminded the House that Sobukwe had not in fact been sentenced for terrorism, treason or crimes against the State.

He had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment for incitement against the pass laws at a stage when the P.A.C., which he was leading, was still a lawful organization and before it became violent.

He was still suffering from the “tragedy of Sharpeville,” where it had not been his followers who opened fire, but the authorities.

She asked the Minister whether it was his intention to detain Sobukwe forever or when he would decide that he had atoned for his crime.

She rejected an allegation by Mr. G. F. van L. Froneman (N.P., Heilbron) who said that

Mrs H Suzman MP Hough

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