

Robert Sobukwe's

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unreal jail life

WEEKLY MAIL

By BENJAMIN POGRUND

ROBERT MANGALISO SOBUKWE, former Pan-Africanist Congress leader, yesterday entered his third year of detention without trial on Robben Island. He is there for as long as the Government chooses — and there is no indication when he will be released.

Mr. Sobukwe is detained under a special provision of the General Law Amendment Act which was rushed through Parliament two years ago to cater for him. He is the only person detained under this law.

Friday, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, told Parliament that no decision had yet been taken whether to extend this law beyond June 30 this year, when it expires, or whether to release Mr. Sobukwe.

Mr. Sobukwe was originally jailed in 1960 after the P.A.C.'s anti-pass campaign. After the campaign came the Sharpeville shooting; the massive strike by Africans in Cape Town, the State of Emergency and the arrest of thousands without trial, and the banning of the P.A.C. and the African National Congress.

Guilty

Mr. Sobukwe was found guilty of incitement. When his three year sentence ended he was immediately transferred to Robben Island.

There he has led a strange, unreal existence; he is a prisoner, kept inside a high-barbed-wire enclosure under 24-hour guard and sealed off from other prisoners. At the same time, he has privileges and



ROBERT SOBUKWE
... no trial.

enjoys attention unheard of for those in a jail.

Through friends outside, and with the agreement of the jail authorities, he has a radio (able only to receive S.A.B.C. broadcasts), a record player and records and unlimited books. The Cape Town newspapers are delivered daily, his food comes from the warders' kitchen and he receives a weekly parcel of fresh fruit. He wears his own clothes.

In fact, contrary to extravagant claims overseas that he is being maltreated, the jail authorities take scrupulous care

to maintain his well-being. Against this solicitude for him is the severity of restricting visits by his wife to three times a week on the occasions when she is able to travel from Johannesburg to see him. He is also restricted to receiving and writing only two letters a week.

Studying

Left entirely to himself, he spends much of his time studying for a Bachelor of Economics degree through London University.

Although Mr. Sobukwe's Pan-Africanist Congress had a legal existence of a bare two years, its impact on South Africa was considerable.

He has been widely viewed as a rabidly anti-White racialist. It is true that, in his organisation, there were many of this type. But Mr. Sobukwe has always stressed his acceptance of all people, irrespective of colour — and those who know him well testify to his wholly nonracial beliefs.

So much so, that he told one visitor to Robben Island that he believed any future political organisation like the P.A.C. which might be started should be based on nonracialism.

He remains on Robben Island — without trial, without any public reason, without hope for release except at the Government's pleasure.

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