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SOUTH AFRICA: PRISONS.

INTRODUCTION.

In 1969 the South African gmxnxnmnnx Department of Foreign Affairs issued a lavish monograph on the country's prisons and prison system, entitlee Prison Administration iH South Africa. It compriees 46 pages of text and 80 pages of pictures, some in colour, and included the full text of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, adopted at the First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, on August 30, 1955.

The monograph emphasises that these Rules are the basis of South African legislation for the administration and management of its penal institutions, and declares:-

"The major objebtive..... dentists and social workers"

XI (quote whole passage marked(:) H on page 30 of monograph)

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/few countries would be able to advertise/hxxghtnx condltlons than those shown in the selected pictures of the brighter side of prison life. In principle, South Africa's prison system is probably no worse than that of other countries; in principle, it may be based on the Standard Minimum Rules. But in practice, there are some grave deficiencies, These have either been

ignored Or glossed over by the Department of Foreign Affairs  
In 1967 the United Nations Human Rights Commission  
of Experts .

established an Ad Hoc Working Group/to investigate 4i; charges  
or torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in South Africa.  
The Group 2Q2Q229& found,xhzk among other things that legis-  
lation and practices by the authorities Violate many of the

Standard Minimum rules; that prison conditions are made especially inhuman for non-white prisoners; that there is gross discrimination on grounds of race in the treatment of detainees and prisoners; that there is open discrimination between political and common law prisoners; that there is no effective machinery for receiving complaints from prisoners regarding ill-treatment and torture and no effective or comprehensive remedies available to prisoners and detainees; that as a general rule the authorities tolerate torture and extremely and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees.

The South African government has rejected the findings of the Ad Hoc Working Group by (a) challenging the impartiality of the Members and (b) attacking the array of witnesses who had long displayed hostility towards the South African government... some, on their own admission; members of an underground communist movement; some, members of, or associated with, militantly anti-South African organisations and movements abroad... all were committed to denigrating the South African government at every opportunity"

He said Apart from attempting to discredit those who gave evidence before the Working Group and quoting a few

the Opinions of foreign and South African Visitors to various penal institutions, the government has

ignored the specific charges. It has not appeared able to disprove the direct allegations of torture and ill-treatment. Admittedly, much of the known torture has been inflicted by the Special Branch upon political detainees. But these persons are in the custody of the Prisons Department between sessions of interrogation at Special Branch headquarters and their proper treatment should be the business of the Prisons Administration.

There is ample evidence to show:-

- (i) white supremacy and race attitudes result in non-white prisoners being treated worse than white prisoners;
  - (ii) brutality and ill-treatment is widely tolerated;
  - (iii) the treatment of political prisoners is discriminatory and vindictive;
  - (iv) The Prisons Dept. permits the gross violation of the Std. Min. Rules in the case of Detainees, and takes no action to prevent the torture of them by the Security Police;
  - (v) The prison population includes a vast number of short-term prisoners, victims of the country's race laws, especially the pass laws;
- In addition to the above, the Prisons Dept. does not

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conform to the Std. Minimum Rules in at least six other respects:-

- (1) The prison service is organised along military rather than civilian lines.
- (2) Discrimination on grounds of race operates in every sphere of prison life.
- (3) Corporal punishment is inflicted on prisoners for breach of discipline.
- (4) Prisoners are hired out at cheap rates to private contractors.
- (5) Prisoners are in general not remunerated for their labour in such a way that they can help their families.
- (6) Prisoners are not entitled to workmen's compensation for injuries on the same basis as free labour.

The monograph issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs omits all the vital statistical information necessary for a proper appreciation of the real situation. Some of this information can be found in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Prisons. The reports for the years ending June 30, 1967 and 30 June 1968 were held up, however, because officials of the Prisons Department were busy helping in the compilation of the monograph in question. The delayed reports became available in February 1970 and it is now possible to consider the questions relating to South African prisons against in the light of the latest figures.