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PRISONS ND

Prison and Political Trials, and Detentions

Extensive reports were published in the Press of five criminal trials which followed certain allegations about prison conditions (see this *Newsletter*, September 1965, page 39). Two Africans, former prisoners, were convicted of publishing false information about prisons, and a former White head warder, J. A. Theron, also faced similar charges.

At the same time, Harold Strachan, the author of the first allegations, was tried in Durban. His trial lasted more than a month, during which many witnesses were called by both the prosecutor and defending

counsel to give evidence about the prisons. The verdict in Strachan's case was to be given late in January 1966. (*Rand Daily Mail* 9/12 and previous days)

It was reported that Laurence Gandar, editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, and Benjamin Pogrand, the chief reporter involved in Strachan's revelations, would themselves be prosecuted later. The passports of both these men had been confiscated in order to prevent their possible departure from the country. (*Observer* 5/12)

Mr. Abraham Fischer, Q.C., a former chairman of the Johannesburg Bar, was found and arrested. The police had searched for him for more than nine months after he had disappeared during his trial for alleged secret communist activities. His trial was expected to be resumed shortly. By order of the Supreme Court, his name was removed from the roll of practising barristers.

Under the new 180-day law allowing the internment of witnesses required in political trials (see this *Newsletter*, September 1965, page 38), fourteen people, including eight Whites, were put in prison. One of them, Mrs. Caroline de Crespigny, was said to be related to Lady Dorothy Macmillan, wife of the former British Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan. (*Rand Daily Mail* 10/12, 11/12)

In one case of detention which came before the Transvaal Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Bresler censured the conduct of the security branch of the police (*Star* 13/9). In an earlier case, the appeal court held, by a majority of three judges to two dissenting, that a person detained had no right of access to the Supreme Court when he wanted to complain of ill-treatment in prison. (*Rand Daily Mail* 29/9)

The Attorney-General of the Transvaal, Mr. W. R. Rein, indicated that the names of persons detained would not necessarily be given to the Press. (*Star* 27/10)