

THE SOVIET UNION AND SOUTH AFRICA

There are those who say that one cannot distinguish between the United States and the Soviet Union in the matter of human rights, because there are violations in both countries.

To begin with, these myopic souls should read the latest survey by Freedom Foundation, the prestigious body which annually reviews the state of freedom around the world. One of the characteristics analyzed is "Civil Liberties," by which they centrally mean the ability of all citizens to talk, write, complain and meet about political affairs without governmental punishment.

Nations are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, depending on the state of those civil liberties. The United States is in the first ranking, along with 19 other nations in a field of 155 nations. In other words, only about 13 per cent of the nations of the world meet the highest standards of civil liberties. About 50 nations in the world fail to meet even the lowest standards of civil liberties, and are rated as 6 or 7.

The nations which systematically repress civil liberties fall into three categories: first, are the backward, pre-industrial countries with old-fashioned dictatorships. This category includes over 30 countries, most in Africa, some in Southeast Asia and South America, and a bloc of Arab countries.

The second category, countries which rank at the lowest level of political freedom, are the left-wing totalitarian industrialized countries, headed by the Soviet Union, and most of its East European satellites.

The third, and smallest, category, at the bottom ranking, includes other industrialized nations which deny civil liberties. South Africa is the notable example in this category. Argentina might be added.

The distinction between democratic societies, such as the United States, and the undemocratic countries cited above, such as the Soviet Union and South Africa, is not that democracies are perfect in their administration of justice, and the others are not. There are always flaws and violations in democratic countries. The difference is that a democratic society is correctible, and the undemocratic society is not.

Injustice is correctible in a democratic society simply because people have the right to talk, write, complain and meet about it. "Political prisoners" are not just people who have been imprisoned unjustly; they are people who have been imprisoned because they attempted to talk, write, complain or meet about an injustice they wanted to correct. By that definition, incidentally, Amnesty International failed to find one case of a "political prisoner" in the United States.

We know about the Soviet Union, which has a common practice and standard of political imprisonment. South Africa, as an industrial state, is worth noting. South Africa's Internal Security Act of 1976 bans anyone who, in the opinion of the Minister of Justice, "engages in activities which are calculated to endanger the maintenance of public order." Making a speech or holding up a placard against apartheid can be considered such a bannable activity by the Minister of Justice, and no court or law can reverse him. People who are banned cannot communicate with each other, and it is unlawful to disseminate anything written by a banned person. In addition, there is physical banishment to Siberia-like distances from home. The principle of "preventive detention" has also been legitimized in South Africa. Last year, at least 135 people were detained without due process for periods up to 137 days, and annumber of them were then "banned" for five years.

Earl Raab

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There is a difference between the Soviet Union and South Africa, in that South Africa's repression is localized, while the Soviet Union's repression is also meant for export. But the quality of the repression is the same in both countries. We cannot consistently take a moral or principled position against one, without taking a position against the other.