

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA: An Emergency Bulletin

On the weekend of May 15, 1977, people in San Francisco associated with the Committee on the Breytenbach Case and the Floating Museum learned that the South African (white) artist and writer Breyten Breytenbach has received the Prix des Sept, a literary prize awarded by a group of European publishers.

Breyten Breytenbach is a South African political prisoner. Arrested in 1975 for the "crime" of supporting the anti-apartheid movement, Breytenbach has been made the victim of judicial procedures that have elicited condemnation from Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists.

The Committee on the Breytenbach Case, a group of writers, artists, and activists, has published A DOSSIER ON THE CASE OF BREYTEN BREYTENBACH, including the report of the International Commission of Jurists' observer at Breytenbach's trial. The record shows that after being put in the hands of pro-government "defense attorneys," Breytenbach apologized in court to Vorster, South African head of state, for having written a poem critical of him, and furthermore "confessed" his participation in the organization of the anti-apartheid movement. He was then sentenced to nine years' imprisonment, which he is now serving in a prison hospital. Since his trial Breytenbach has been subjected to extended solitary confinement and other forms of psychological torture.

THE WEEK OF MAY 15 EUROPEAN NEWSPAPERS REPORTED THAT THE APARTHEID REGIME HAS PREPARED A NEW TRIAL FOR BREYTENBACH. THE AFRIKANER NON-CONFORMIST'S SECOND TRIAL, ON CHARGES OF "TERRORISM," IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN ON JUNE 20, 1977. WE BELIEVE CHARGES OF ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE WILL FIGURE IN THIS NEW TRIAL.

Breytenbach is an Afrikaans writer enjoying great popularity among South African readers. His works are used in the South African school system. He has translated Shakespeare into Afrikaans. He is a painter of world reputation. By persecuting Breytenbach the apartheid state is telling the world it cares nothing for the rights of its opponents.

WE WANT JUSTICE FOR BREYTENBACH.

The Committee on the Breytenbach Case and the Floating Museum have joined to call on all people of conscience in the U.S. to communicate with representatives of the South African government, to inform them of our concern that Breytenbach be granted all normal democratic rights before his accusers.

A list of the Committee's endorsers, as well as A DOSSIER ON THE CASE OF BREYTEN BREYTENBACH, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem on Breytenbach, WHITE ON WHITE, are available from the Committee at the address below.

NO MORE FORCED CONFESSIONS !

PROTEST SOUTH AFRICA'S CONTINUED MISTREATMENT OF BREYTEN BREYTENBACH !

Committee on the Breytenbach Case

P.O. Box 26481, San Francisco, California 94126 USA

June 1, 1977

(Please reprint)

"Breytenbach's resistance is entirely in accord with the mandates and precedents of World Law."

The following was sent on the letterhead of the CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL:

May 30, 1977

Hon. Consul General  
South African Consulate  
120 Montgomery Street  
San Francisco, California

Dear Sir:

This letter is to urge you to see that Breyten Breytenbach -- an artist of international merit and acclaim presently held in prison by your government -- be released from solitary confinement and allowed access to competent legal and medical authorities.

I ask you to suspend your sense of irony at receiving an official letter from a country as racially troubled as my own, and understand that I am not trying to shift an onus from my country's shoulders to yours. I wish merely to state that while Mr. Breytenbach's anti-apartheid work may be against your country's internal laws, Mr. Breytenbach's resistance is entirely in accord with the mandates and precedents of World Law established at the Nuremberg trials. I do not, and neither would Mr. Breytenbach I'm sure, object to punishment meted out for consciously opposing the law of one's land. It is to be expected. What is not expected, or to be accepted or condoned, is physical or mental torture to the individual designed to eradicate his moral and ethical bases by coercing confessions and apologies to the State.

If Mr. Breytenbach is, indeed, guilty, let him serve out his sentence in peace, free, like all other convicts, to follow his own thoughts and analysis to their moral and intellectual resting place. If he is not guilty, and some international jurists seem to feel that even that is in question, I urge his immediate release.

Ultimately, the State will be free of interference by its artists and thinkers only when it lives up to the challenge of their visions.

Thank you for reading this letter and for whatever actions on Mr. Breytenbach's part you might make.

Respectfully,

Peter Coyote, Chairman

COMMITTEE ON THE BREYTENBACH CASE

P.O. Box 264-81, San Francisco, Ca 94126 USA