

SACBC SECRETARIAT WELCOMES NEW DISPENSATION FOR EDUCATION (OCTOBER 1985)

A press release on October 1 1985 by the general secretariat of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference welcomed a tentative step towards a single education system for South Africa.

It is significant that norms and standards for the financing of education, the conditions of service of teaching staff, the registration of teachers and the norms and standards for syllabuses, examinations and certification of qualifications for all population groups will now be determined by a single department.

The setting up and broadening of advisory bodies so that there is now representation from all groups will allow the problems and inadequacies experienced in the different schooling systems to be brought directly to the attention of the Minister.

Undoubtedly the South African Council for education (SACE) and the three separate certification councils for different types of education could be a force for positive change, but they represent only a very weak shadow of the basic recommendation for a single ministry of education made in the De Lange Report.

Moreover the positive aspects of the new dispensation are overshadowed by the insistence on treating education as an "own affair" and by maintaining separate departments of education for white, "coloured", Indian and African pupils. In so doing the government continues to politicise education in South Africa.

Until such time as our education system can operate on a regional or geographical basis rather than on a racial one, it will continue to be seen as an unequal and divisive system.

The acknowledgement by the government of the role of private education through government subsidisation of private schools is also to be welcomed. It is to be hoped however, that the aid envisaged will not be linked to any attempt to control the intake of pupils of all races to private schools.

As regards the registration of new schools, the interpretation of some of the conditions will be watched with interest. The freedom both to represent various educational traditions and to be innovative in education is crucial to the *raison d'être* of private schools and must be respected.

The condition that a proposed new school will not in any way influence the interests of the existing public schools would seem to impinge on the rights of parents to choose the type of education they want for their children. The stipulation that certain conditions laid down by the department as regards the composition of the school pupil population must be adhered to, needs clarification. If it is an attempt to control the intake of pupils on a racial basis, it is unacceptable.