

we wish as private individuals through other channels. It seemed certain that our professional colleagues in South Africa would suffer if the resolution were passed. As I recall, there was at the time considerable hasty and high-flown rhetoric both in favour of and against the resolution. I suspect, however, that those in favour had come better prepared with their arguments. I abstained because I felt I simply wanted more time to consider the issues knowing, as I have said, how influential such a College resolution might be.

I am now prepared to say that I would vote against the resolution and am in favour of it being rescinded. My conviction is that as psychiatrists and Members of the College, we are wise to be extremely clear-thinking with regard to our aims and motives when leaving the clinical and entering the political arena. Unless this is the case, and unless we are clear about the effects of our intervention, and unless those effects are uniformly beneficial, then we run the risk of exhausting ourselves and exasperating each other, diverting energy carelessly away from the most important everyday work we have embarked upon, to relieve the distress of those suffering from mental disorder at home.

In this endeavour we are often called upon to show considerable degrees of tolerance, understanding, patience and perseverance. These qualities have been known to have effect in political situations too where confrontation might only have prolonged and possibly intensified the misery. Why should we not set this kind of example for the world? Let wisdom guide.

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DEAR SIRs

I have read with fascination the correspondence from Dr S. Baumann (*Bulletin*, February 1988) and Professor Simpson (*Bulletin*, April 1988) and the replies from Dr Birley.

Dr Birley implies that it is incompatible to be from an "apartheid university" and to be standing out against political oppression. Firstly I am not at all sure what his phrase means. All universities in South Africa have to operate within the constraints of apartheid legislation which apart from being manifestly unjust is also very detailed. Nevertheless several universities in South Africa have a fine record of resisting apartheid with all the means available to them.

Secondly thousands of staff and students at these universities have over the years risked their liberty to fight apartheid. Many have been banned, jailed, or driven into exile; among them the President of one of the Royal Colleges. Their integrity and courage

would stand out wherever they worked, and that includes Britain. We have much to learn from them and they deserve our support.

Let me give an example. A non-medical academic friend of mine recently received a British Council award to visit a British university. On arrival she was informed that she was not welcome because she came from South Africa. She had only recently been released from a harrowing period of detention without trial. When this came to light there were hasty apologies and retractions.

Perhaps the moral is that few people in Britain have a sufficiently detailed knowledge of South Africa to know how to help anti-apartheid South Africans. May I suggest that the College approach democratic South African organisations to ask them how they wish to be helped? Unsolicited assistance can appear patronising, even when well intended. On this occasion it has also been inept.

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### *Psychological aspects of nuclear war*

DEAR SIRs

Hugh Middleton (*Bulletin*, May 1988, 12, 203) draws attention to the book by Dr James Thompson, *Psychological Aspects of Nuclear War* published as a statement by this Society. He suggests that the College should 'guide public opinion' by setting up a body to review relevant research, agree policy and make opinions known.

We published the book in 1985 and there may well be new research to consider, but as a start point I would urge all interested parties to read Thompson's book (£7.95).

By the way it is The British Psychological Society, not Association.

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### *Hospital hostels and the Griffiths Report*

DEAR SIRs

I recently attended one of the interesting conferences on 'Residential Needs for Severely Disabled Psychiatric Patients: The Case for Hospital Hostels' currently being held around the country. The meeting at which I was present, however, had difficulty in defining just what a 'hospital hostel' was. I would like,

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**Psychiatry in South Africa—Reply**

R. J. Higgo

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