

Fischer's ashes: Kruger ruling may be relaxed

The Department of Prisons will negotiate with the family of Bram Fischer over the disposal of his ashes.

The decision to negotiate follows criticism by prominent South Africans of the controversial order by the Minister of Prisons, Mr Jimmy Kruger, that the ashes of the 67-year-old communist who died in Bloemfontein yesterday must be handed to the Department of Prisons.

Bram Fischer is to be cremated in Bloemfontein on Monday afternoon.

Mr Kruger made the following conditions about the funeral:

- That it would have to take place in Bloemfontein.
- That it be held within one week of death.
- That Fischer's ashes must be handed to the Department of Prisons.

The Minister of Prisons said in Cape Town today: "We will look at the matter and negotiate with the family over the disposal of the ashes. We will not exclude their wishes."

Several Black leaders are among those who have attacked the order that the ashes be handed to the department.

The Rt Rev John Carter, Anglican Suffragan Bishop of Johannesburg, said the disposal of Fischer's ashes was a matter which called for sympathy and sensitivity, not for a demonstration of power over the powerless.

Mr Colin Eglin, leader of the Progressive Party said in Cape Town that the Government should reconsider its attitude, because it showed evidence "of insensitivity and unnecessary intrusion in what is a personal matter."

Mr Dave Epstein, MPC for Hillbrow and outspoken UP politician, also criticised the order that the ashes be handed to the Department of Prisons.

AFRAID

He said the order had been made because the Government were afraid a shrine in memory of Fischer would be created.

Mrs Ruth Eastwood, Fischer's daughter, said from Bloemfontein today that the Fischer family were "annoyed and grieved" at being ordered to hand the ashes to the department.

"It is a matter of principle as far as we are concerned. We did not even want Bram to be cremated in Bloemfontein, but we had to accept the conditions. We had no choice."

Mrs Eastwood also said that although her father did not make a "death bed speech," he died "a dedicated communist."

PRISON REGULATION

In an interview later, Mr Kruger explained that in terms of Prison Regulation No 96, the body of a prisoner who died of causes other than judicial execution had to be buried in the area where he died.

In terms of the same regulation the Commissioner of Prisons could at his discretion allow the next of kin, relatives or friends to bury the body. But if it were cremated, the ashes had to be returned to the Prisons Department.