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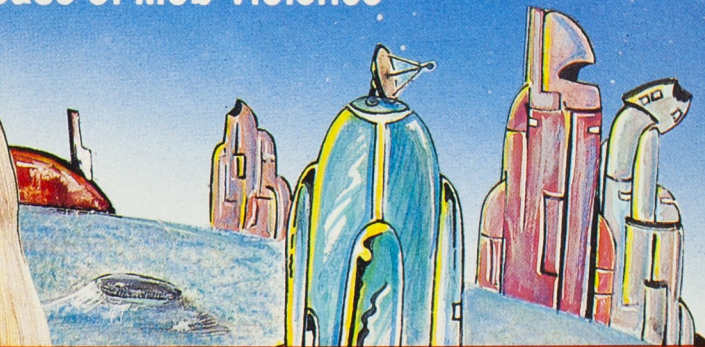
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# STREET WISE

THE STREET LAW MAGAZINE



- ◆ SPACE COLONY PROJECT  
Legislating for the Future
- ◆ THE DEATH PENALTY: Can it be Defended?
- ◆ YOU BE THE JUDGE in  
A Case of Mob Violence



Featuring **MAX MBOYA** *the Street Lawyer*

# STREET CORNER

Hi,

and welcome to the first issue of **Streetwise**, the Street law Magazine. Some people may say that law is a strange thing to have a youth magazine about. Shows how much they know. The law touches every one of us, every day of our lives. Sometimes it touches us in ways that we would rather not be touched. Sometimes it makes us feel so helpless and frustrated because it seems like the law is being used by those who are rich and powerful to make themselves richer and more powerful, while those who are poor and without power are unable to use the law to protect themselves.

Well, there may be some truth in that, but it's far from the whole truth. The law is not like a political party. It is not there to serve the interests of a particular political or social group, to the detriment of others. If the law is used like that, then it is being misused.

## JUST LAW

The most most important thing about the law is that it is, or should be, based on the concept of justice. And justice is even-handed. Just law (law that is truly based on justice) should favour no person above another.

Why then, all over the world, and especially in our own country, do people openly challenge or defy the laws of the land, risking all kinds of punishment in the process? If you think about it, there can really be only two reasons: either the people who defy the law are criminals, or the laws which they take such risks to defy are not truly based on justice.

## PEOPLE VS PEOPLE

The other important thing about the law is that it is written by people, and can be changed by people.

Some laws are so old that many people believe that they were given to us by God. These ancient laws are common to most cultures and have been the cornerstones of many different civilisations through the ages. Examples are laws against stealing, murder, adultery, sexual abuse and assault. Few law-abiding people ever challenge these ancient laws: they are the glue that holds society together!

But there are thousands of other laws, rules and regulations which govern the lives of people living in modern societies. Many of these laws are written for a specific purpose, by people or groups whose power or influence in the society puts them in a position to alter the law.

It is these kinds of laws, which appear to favour some people at the expense of others, that a lot of people have problems with. We have seen many examples recently in our own country, where large numbers of otherwise law-abiding people have become so outraged by what they believe to be unjust laws, that they are prepared to go to almost any lengths to challenge or undermine these laws.



When this happens, the thin line that separates law from politics is broken. When law becomes politicised in this way, justice itself hangs in the balance.

## DANGEROUS TIMES

We live in exciting times. Dangerous times, when justice loses its grip on the minds and consciences of the people. Tragic times, when frustration and emotion explode into violence, and even the ancient laws which protect the lives of each and every one of us from danger, are overturned. Challenging times, when we all have to make serious choices about what we want.

Because we are young, we stand to inherit the society which is presently governed by our elders. If they've made a hash of it, they may be too old, too set in their ways, too lacking in imagination, to put it right.

So what do we do about it? Well, for starters, we don't ignore it, that's for sure. We find out about it. Talk about it, argue about it if we have to. And read about it. Read the newspapers, magazines, whatever we can get our hands on, and try to form our own opinion. The issues are complex, and there are no easy answers.

## MESSAGE ON A SERVIETTE

So it's over to you. My hand is aching from scribbling this message to you on the back of a serviette in the cafe where I normally have my breakfast. I hope my secretary, Sibongile, can read it. She has to type it and get it over to the editors by noon, so they can get this magazine to the printers. Myself, I'm going to be up to my ears in a case. A very interesting case, but that's another story. I'll tell you about it sometime.

Keep in touch, and remember, "the law is fragile, don't break it!"

Sincerely,  
**MAX**

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at Uthongathi School in July.

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## FROM THE PUBLISHERS

**W**hat you are holding in your hands is an experiment. For a long time we have been talking about publishing a magazine for young people which has nothing to do with fashion, pop music, sport, or any other kind of fun. We believe that young people in the 15 to 20 age group are not only excitable and fun-loving, but that they are also seriously interested in the world in which they are soon to take their place as adults. Through the Street law programme, through events such as the recent Space Colony Project (see page 17), we have seen school pupils display a level of maturity, understanding, imagination and tolerance which puts many members of their parents' generation to shame.

We believe that **Streetwise** is a very special magazine because:

☛ **It is colour-blind.**

**Streewise** is a magazine for **all** young South Africans who are interested in their future and the laws which govern their lives. We are not in the slightest bit interested in the colour of your skin, whether your hair is curly or straight, or whether your eyes are blue, green or brown. But we are interested in the person underneath that skin of yours, in the ideas roaring around under that straight or curly hair, in what those eyes are seeing around them.

☛ **It is a two-way magazine.**

Just like a two-way radio, this magazine is as concerned with receiving ideas from you, as it is with sending ideas out. A number of the features have been designed to find out what you think. We are giving away cash prizes to readers who send us their opinions. Some of these opinions will be published in the next issue. Some features, like **STREET BEAT** (our letters page), and **ASK MAX** (our legal advice column), will only come into operation next issue, once we have heard from you.

☛ **It doesn't provide easy answers.**

You'll find a lot of questions, arguments and opinions in the pages of **Streetwise**, but you won't find too many answers. As Max Mboya says in his message on the opposite page, the issues facing us all are complex, and there simply are no easy answers. You'll notice that in most of the articles we've left it up to you to form your own opinion from the facts and arguments presented.

☛ **It's serious!**

Friends may try to kid you that it's dumb to be serious, when you could be having fun. Don't mock them for their lack of understanding. Just give them a copy of **Streetwise** to read. They'll soon discover that it's hip to be serious sometimes, especially when there's so much at stake.

We'd like to thank the contributing editors, artists and photographers who have all taken time off from their busy schedules to help us put this issue together. And a special vote of thanks goes to Max Mboya, who has given freely of his time, despite his heavy case-load, to assist us in adapting some of his cases into comic strip form. The first of these strips appears in this issue, and there are plenty more where it came from!