

WOMEN'S DEFENCE OF THE CONSTITUTION LEAGUE.

MINUTES OF A CONFERENCE HELD AT 4, EDEN ROAD, GLENDINNINGVALE,  
PORT ELIZABETH, ON 29th and 30th NOVEMBER, 1955.

PRESENT: Mrs. R. Foley (in the Chair)  
and delegates as per attached register.

WELCOME: Mrs. A. Pirie, Chairwoman of the Eastern Cape  
Region, welcomed all delegates.

OPENING: The Chairwoman declared the Conference open, and in  
her address Mr. Foley outlined the history of the League and  
suggested future plans. In discussing the tremendous moral  
force of the movement, she emphasized the consequent  
responsibility devolving on its leaders.

Publication of the Chairwoman's address: It was AGREED  
unanimously that this address should be printed and published  
in both official languages.

THANKS: In reply to a vote of thanks, proposed by the  
delegates from the Western Province, to the Chair for her  
initiative in starting the League, Mrs. Foley said that she  
was only one of a group who had co-operated equally in  
launching the League.

MINUTES: The Minutes of a Conference held in Johannesburg on  
September 11th and 12th, 1955, having been circularised, were  
taken as read and approved.

PURPOSE, COMPOSITION, AND POWERS OF THE CONFERENCE: The powers  
of direction and management of the League were, at present,  
vested in the members of the Johannesburg Committee of the  
League, by virtue of a Constitution formally adopted in June,  
1955. Owing to the exceptional and unforeseen growth of the  
movement, the necessity of amending this Constitution and of  
drawing up rules and regulations appropriate to a nation-wide  
movement had become manifest.

In terms of a resolution taken at the Conference  
held in September, the Acting National Executive had called  
the present Conference.

Purpose of Conference: The business of the Conference would  
be as follows : -

1. To discuss amendments to the Constitution.
2. To draw up rules and regulations suitable to  
the conduct of the League as a nation-  
wide movement.
3. To receive progress reports.
4. To discuss future policy, tactics, and activities.
5. To make arrangements for the calling of a  
National Congress at the earliest possible  
date. This Congress to be convened according  
to the finally agreed draft of the Constitution  
to be formally proposed for adoption at this  
Congress.

Composition of Conference: For convenience in organisation  
South Africa had been divided into 12 geographic regions.  
These regions were, at present, administered by the Executive  
Committee of the most important town in each region, acting  
as a Regional Executive. Representation at the present  
Conference/

Conference was on an equal basis for all regions regardless of numbers either of branches or of members.

Powers of Conference: Opportunity for discussion on all relevant matters had been provided for under 5 main headings on the agenda as follows : -

1. Policy.
2. Organisation.
3. Demonstrations.
4. Propaganda and Information.
5. Finance.

After full discussion the Acting National Executive and all Regions must be prepared to implement all resolutions passed.

POLICY: The Chairwoman reiterated the aims of the League as defined in the Constitution as follows : -

"TO CONDUCT PROPAGANDA AND ENLIST SUPPORT AND AID FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF :

1. THE PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.
2. THE MORAL PLEDGES AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS OF THE COMPACT OF UNION.

AND TO DO ALL SUCH THINGS AND CARRY ON ALL SUCH ACTIVITIES AS MAY BE CONDUCTIVE TO THE FURTHERANCE OF SUCH AIMS."

Two defined points of policy of the League are as follows:-

1. The League is non-party political.
2. The League has no intention of merging with any other organisation or body.

This was emphasized by the following resolution which was passed unanimously:-

"THAT THE LEAGUE REAFFIRMS ITS SEPARATE IDENTITY."

As a corollary to this resolution it was AGREED that on all possible occasions the separate identity of the League be reaffirmed in published statements and that its non-party political status be emphasized repeatedly.

To achieve its aims and publicise its policy, the League has adopted the following methods :-

1. Demonstrations.
2. Political education programme.

Co-operation: The Chairwoman stated that the Acting National Executive had co-operated in demonstrations with other non-party movements, and the approval of the Conference was required as a guide for future occasions when co-operation might be invited or desired.

Lengthy discussion took place. Several delegates expressed the view that co-operation might endanger the League. The Chair pointed out that demonstrations against undemocratic measures were not the sole prerogative of members of the League.

The discussion closed with the following resolution, proposed by Mrs. P. MacRobert of Pretoria, and duly seconded and passed : -

"THAT/

"THAT THE INTERIM NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DECIDE WITH WHICH NON-PARTY ORGANISATIONS THE LEAGUE SHOULD COLLABORATE. THAT THE INTERIM NATIONAL EXECUTIVE PROTECT ITS MEMBERS LEGALLY BOTH AS REGARDS PROPAGANDA AND DEMONSTRATIONS AND THAT THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE TAKES OVER THESE FUNCTIONS WHEN THIS EXECUTIVE IS ELECTED."

Delimitation 1956: The following resolution, proposed by Mrs. J. Sinclair and duly seconded, was passed unanimously:-

"ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES OF THE LEAGUE WAS TO ENSURE THAT ALL VOTERS ARE REGISTERED BEFORE MAY, 1956."

The following resolutions were AGREED unanimously:-

"THAT THE LEAGUE MAKES A PRIORITY OF SPREADING KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSTITUTION."

Mrs. Drummond from Durban reported that an effective method of so doing was to address small groups of young people gathered informally at homes and places of work.

"THAT DURING THE FORTHCOMING SESSION OF PARLIAMENT A VIGIL BE KEPT DAILY IN CAPE TOWN AND THAT BLACKSASHING BE CONTINUED. THE ONLY INDIVIDUALS TO BE 'blacksashed' ARE CABINET MINISTERS."

The following resolutions were withdrawn on the grounds that the points had already been covered by discussion :-

"That the League should never take any steps that would incriminate any individual member, e.g. Letters to Senators."

"That it is desirable to have provincial control together with a representative National Executive which will provide the necessary direction."

In regard to the resolution proposed by Bloemfontein "that there be a more definite policy for the 'silent sisterhood'" it was AGREED that the silent sisterhood could be invaluable assistants to the League doing clerical work, acting as baby-sitters, etc., and in collecting funds. The resolution -

"That if conditions make continued standing no longer efficacious, that the League should go underground and reappear in force on unexpected occasions" was covered under DEMONSTRATIONS.

ORGANISATION: Mrs. P. Britten, on behalf of the Acting National Executive, made a statement on organisation. The following points were noted:-

1. Work of all branches should be simplified and made more interesting for individual members by delegation of duties to sub-committees.
2. The holding of regular GENERAL MEETINGS was considered to be of the utmost importance. No organisation could possibly function efficiently without continued personal contact of those in authority with the rank and file.
3. In the larger towns division into as many Branches as possible was advocated. In Johannesburg this system had produced most encouraging results.

Chairwomen/



Chairwomen were picked from residents of a particular suburb, and it was found that "local knowledge" was invaluable in recruiting and maintaining interest in the League.

A resolution proposed by Cape Town "that a truce be observed from December 15th to January 4th" was not adopted.

DEMONSTRATIONS: Mrs. J. Sinclair gave a most interesting talk which led to considerable debate. The following decisions were thereafter taken : -

1. That on the opening of Parliament on January 13th a vigil of four women be held in as many towns as possible throughout the Union.
2. That place and venue of vigils should be varied on different occasions, as this would bring them to the notice of a greater number of people.
3. That on the day of the first joint sitting called to remove the coloured voters from the common roll, a Union-wide convoy of cars converge on Cape Town and that together with Cape Town members a large scale demonstration take place.
4. That it is time now that, subject to cost and legality, a suitably worded advertisement be published in all the major newspapers. The advertisement should contain a coupon calling for membership and financial support for the League.
5. That an appeal in the Press be made by the Chairwomen (now National President) on the 13th January, 1956.
6. That individual members of the League send letters to their own M.P'S, after legal opinion had been sought, whenever a Bill is tabled of which the League disapproves.
7. That members wearing the black sash sit in the visitors' gallery in Parliament.
8. That a question be placed on the order paper of the House by a co-operative M.P. This question to refer to the refusal on three occasions by the Prime Minister to receive a deputation from the League, representing 100,000 registered voters which represents ...% of the electorate. If not answered, the question to be reworded and again placed on the order paper.
9. That an appeal at the Bar of the House be made before the Coloured Vote Bill is passed. Note to enquire whether any other organisation has previously lodged a similar appeal.  
IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY AGREED THAT IN VIEW OF THE GRAVE CRISIS STILL EXISTING IN SOUTH AFRICA THAT THE LEAGUE CONTINUE TAKING EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE.

Tabled proposals were dealt with as follows :-  
Pretoria/

Pretoria: AGREED that the routine for vigils and black-sashing be adhered to as far as possible, but that the discretion of the leader should be used in an emergency.

Middelburg (Cape) and Port Elizabeth: The meeting disagreed entirely with the proposals that black-sashing of Ministers be restricted to times when they are acting in their official capacity only. Black-sashing should continue at all agreed times, but the discretion of the leader should be used.

Middelburg (Cape): A vote was carried that there be no time limit set for consistent Black-Sash activity.

Cape Town: (1) In reply to the proposal "that in order to maintain the dignity of the movement, the wearing of the black sash be confined to formal or specific occasions, e.g. vigils and haunts," it was RESOLVED that, subject to the issued Black Sash Regulations, the time and place for wearing of the black sash be left to the discretion of the Regions and Branches.

(2) In reply to the proposal "that demonstrations should not be called for which may show up a lack of strength or divulge our numbers," it was AGREED that the value of the demonstrations lay in their determination and sincerity, and the resolution was lost.

Stellenbosch, Elgin, Somerset West & Hermanus: It was AGREED to adhere to our original decision that Ministers must be looked at during "black-sashing"; only on vigil will heads usually be bowed.

Slogan: Mrs. Dey proposed that members of the League should continue to wear the slogan "Eerbiedig ons Grondwet." In answer to the suggestion by several delegates that the slogan be translated into both languages, it was stated that there was no adequate translation for the word "eerbiedig". It was AGREED that members continue to wear the black sash with the slogan, in Afrikaans only, on all haunts and vigils.

Governor-General: It was AGREED that as the Governor-General was the Queen's representative, NO black-sashing of Ministers be done at functions where the Governor-General is present.

PROPAGANDA and INFORMATION: Mrs. J. Davidoff, on behalf of the Acting National Executive, gave a most interesting address. The following points were noted :-

Since the commencement of the League written propaganda on a large scale and with excellent and varied content had been used. That this had been well received was evident from the fact that all Branches, particularly those in country districts, were continually crying out for more literature. How far the dissemination of the literature had/

had affected the general public or caused them to appreciate the necessity of protesting against the undemocratic acts of the Government, it was, of course, impossible to say. Judging by the apathy of the English-speaking section, however, it would appear that only a very small section of the community was as yet politically aware. We must concentrate on this part of our work, on which we have a beginning. We must pursue with vigour the imparting of information to both the English- and Afrikaans-speaking section of the community.

Means of achieving this were :-

- A. Visual:
- i. Demonstrations.
  - ii. Movie film made by overseas television companies to be obtained and shown here.
  - iii. Cartoons in Press and Newsletter.
- B. Spoken:
- (1) Meetings and speakers.  
Speakers to specialise on different aspects. A questionnaire to be sent to all likely speakers enquiring about suitable times and subjects.
  - (2) Lectures by Profs. Thompson and Durrant and Mr. Franklin are available. All Branches should study the memorandum on these lectures.
  - (3) Symposium:
    - i. Impact of the Senate Act on a lawyer, youth, ex-senator, historian, clergyman, etc.
    - ii. What South Africa means to me by actress, typist, musician, shopgirl.
    - iii. Quiz: men's team vs women's team.
- C. Written:
- i. Press reports and articles; letters to the Press. (People should be approached to write articles for the Press)
  - ii. Statements by the League.
  - iii. The League has had printed and issued:  
Mrs. Hoernle's speech;  
Phyllis Lewsen's article;  
Mrs. Fisher's article on the Senate Act.
  - iv. The League has sold pamphlets by Prof. Carter of U.S.A.,  
The Constitution and Public Confidence by Prof. Brookes;  
Then and Now by The Hon. R. Feetham.

The following resolutions were passed unanimously :-

1. "THAT ALL PAMPHLETS TO BE USED AS PROPAGANDA MUST BE FORWARDED TO THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE FOR APPROVAL BEFORE DISTRIBUTION."
2. "THAT ALL REGIONS SHOULD BE INFORMED OF NEW PLANS BEFORE INFORMATION IS GIVEN TO THE PRESS."

NEWSLETTER: Mrs. D. Rankin reported progress. This publication was to be called the "Black Sash" - "Swart Serp." Publication of the first issue was now expected in January. The editorial staff was composed of professional journalists, but all publications were subject to the approval of the sub-committee. The first issue was to be issued free of charge. Thereafter a small charge (probably 6d.) was to be made. All /



All Regions were asked to submit articles for inclusion (short).

After discussion it was AGREED unanimously :-

"THAT THE FOLLOWING BE PUBLISHED IN THE NEWSLETTER :-

- i. The DEDICATION SHOULD BE PUBLISHED IN THE EARLY EDITIONS.
- ii. That a SHORT ACCOUNT OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE APPEAR.
- iii. That INFORMATIVE ARTICLES ON CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT BE A PROMINENT FEATURE OF EACH EDITION."

FINANCE AND FUND-RAISING: Mrs. D. Hill gave a general resumé of Headquarters finance. The value of propaganda leaflets in fund-raising was enormous. These leaflets had been widely distributed in Johannesburg and are now available to Regions.

In regard to affiliation dues, Regions were to make payment direct to National Headquarters; Branches to make payment to Regional Treasurers. Branches should not retain a float in excess of £10.

It was important that receipts be issued for all monies received. In turn, Headquarters would issue a receipt for all monies remitted to them by the Regions. This to apply also to monies received by Regions from Branches.

A central fund had been established to be administered by the National Executive. Regional contributions were to be paid annually.

NOTE: Regions may apply to the National Treasurer for monies for specific purposes.

During discussion it was suggested that a fund-raising competition be organised, but this was to be left to Regions.

It was AGREED that payment for printed matter be made by Regions.

Anonymous Donations: Mrs. Hill made it clear that receipts were to be issued in the name of "anonymous" for such donations.

REGIONAL BOUNDARIES: A sub-committee consisting of one delegate from each Region and under the chairmanship of Mrs. Pirie was appointed to establish the present boundaries of the 12 Regions. This committee reported unanimous agreement on boundaries. (See attached map for boundaries agreed upon).

CONSTITUTION: A sub-committee consisting of one delegate from each Region, plus Mesdames Foley, Sinclair and Hill, was appointed to discuss the draft Constitution submitted by the Acting National Executive. This sub-committee was instructed to take into consideration points submitted by the Western Cape.

REPORT OF CONSTITUTION SUB-COMMITTEE: Mrs. Pirie reported that with certain very important amendments (hereafter minuted) the draft Constitution submitted by the Acting National Executive had been approved in principle by the sub-committee. It recommended that the amended draft be approved in principle/

principle by the Conference and that the final wording be left to the acting National Executive.

The important amendments AGREED upon by the sub-committee were as follows :-

That fairly frequent meetings of the National Council should be held.

That representation on this Council should be on a basis proportional to the number of members in a region but in no case to exceed the number of four nor to be less than two.

That a National Executive be elected to carry out the urgent business of the League. This National Executive to be composed as follows :-

A National President who shall ex officio be a member of every council and every committee of the League.

A National Chairwoman.

Two Vice-Chairwomen.

A Secretary.

A Treasurer.

Three co-opted members.

Regions shall receive from their Branches nominations in writing for their representatives on the National Council two weeks prior to a Regional Conference, which must be held before a National Conference.

The recommendations of the sub-committee were accepted.

It was further AGREED :-

1. "THAT THE ACTING NATIONAL EXECUTIVE SHOULD PREPARE AN AMENDED DRAFT CONSTITUTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND THAT THIS DRAFT BE FORWARDED TO REGIONAL COMMITTEES FOR DISCUSSION. ANY FURTHER AMENDMENTS TO BE INCORPORATED IF POSSIBLE AND THE FINAL DRAFT TO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL AT THE FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE."
2. That the Johannesburg Committee be asked to elect as soon as possible an Interim National Executive, modelled on the lines agreed to by this Conference.

GENERAL:

Victimisation: The National Executive should be informed of the true facts of any case of victimisation. Where desirable the National Executive will give publicity to these.

Incidents: The National Executive would give publicity to any incidents occurring in small centres on advice received.

Black-sashing Overseas: It was AGREED that no black-sashing of Ministers be done outside the borders of the Union.

Office organisation: Mrs. Foley outlined the correct method of handling official correspondence. Correspondence from regional secretaries should be addressed to the Hon. National Secretary, 511 Leisk House, Bree Street, Johannesburg, the original to the Secretary and a copy to the National Chairwoman. All letters to be under headings of reference and mention made of date of letter under reply; and margin left to aid filing.

A confirmation copy of all telegrams to be forwarded to the addressee.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE: It was proposed that a National Conference be held at an early date.

It was suggested that if at all possible this should coincide with the convoy to Cape Town. If this was at too early a date, it was proposed that the venue be Bloemfontein in early May 1956.

Nominations for representation to be received by the 28th February, 1956.

CLOSURE:

A vote of thanks was accorded to Johannesburg, on the proposal of Mrs. O'Connor of Bloemfontein.

Mrs. Green addressed the meeting in Afrikaans.

Mrs. Scott proposed a vote of thanks to the Chair.

In closing a highly successful Conference Mrs. Foley in her address gave a vote of thanks to Port Elizabeth, which was heartily applauded.

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Confirmed:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ 1956.

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MEMORANDUM ON LECTURES.

We have available in Johannesburg for use by Branches the material necessary to conduct three lectures : -

- (1) Prof. L. Thompson - Background to Union Constitutional Morality.
- (2) Mr. L. Franklin - Whittling Away of Political Rights and Deprivation of Liberties.
- (3) Prof. G. Durrant - The Challenge of the Senate Act and your Response.

Copies of these will be sent out free on application by Branch Chairmen on condition that they are used to the best advantage. We suggest that this series of three lectures is organised to take place preferably in the evenings so that men and women are able to attend; that they be given in the order in which they were delivered in Johannesburg; and that the person reading the lecture be fully conversant with the text and therefore enabled to read it well and intelligently. For each lecture we can supply one copy of the full text to be read at the meeting, and as many copies of a resumé as you expect your audience to number (these to be distributed and kept by audience.) It is suggested that a silver collection be taken to cover advertising, hire of hall, etc. The aim should be to spread knowledge on the implications of the Senate Act, and to attract an audience beyond those who are already supporters. The Chairman at the first or each lecture should give a short history of the Women's League as an introduction and use the meeting to canvass members.

These lectures will shortly be available in Afrikaans and English.

Please let us know immediately whether you can use the text of these lectures; how many copies of the resumé you will require and whether you could have the latter roneed to save us expense and postage.

JEANETTE DAVIDOFF,  
Chairman,  
INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE.

Johannesburg,  
5th January, 1956.