

THE BLACK SASH



DIE SWART SERP

A Decisive Step

AT the Ninth Annual National Conference of the Black Sash held in Johannesburg in October, 1963, we decided to open the membership of our organization to all women of the Republic of South Africa. We believe that this was a wise decision, and the right decision for South Africa at this time.

We look upon the opening of our ranks as a firm declaration of our belief that the happy future of South Africa depends upon the trust and friendship which all South Africans should have for one another; that it is essential for people of all races and groups to meet and work together to ensure that this happy situation comes about.

During the course of our Conference, one of the foremost Johannesburg newspapers published a leading article which began with these words:

"The Black Sash, a unique phenomenon which at one time attracted world notice, inevitably moved out of the news with the passing of time, but has stubbornly refused to move out of existence. This is, perhaps, its most remarkable achievement."

We feel sure that the reason why the Black Sash has been able to remain in existence is that it has never flinched from facing difficulties, nor has it sought to evade them. It has moved with the times, and has taken courageous decisions when called upon to do so.

The decision to open our ranks was not lightly taken. It was preceded by years of earnest consideration and discussion, as we weighed up the pros and cons of this fundamental change in our constitution and its possible effects upon the work to which we have dedicated ourselves.

The Black Sash came into being in 1955 — because there was a need for it — in a spontaneous explosion of moral indignation caused by the passing of the Senate Act, that political

(Continued overleaf)

'n Beslissende Stap

OP die Negende Jaarkongres van die Swart Serp, gehou in Johannesburg in Oktober 1963, het ons besluit om die lidmaatskap van ons organisasie oop te stel aan alle vroue in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika. Ons glo dat dit op hierdie tydstip in Suid-Afrika, die regte en die wyse besluit was.

Hierdie oopstelling van ons geledere beskou ons as 'n positiewe verklaring van ons oortuiging dat die gelukkige toekoms van Suid-Afrika afhang van die vertroue en vriendskap wat alle Suid-Afrikaners vir mekaar behoort te hê, en dat ons hierdie gelukkige toestand kan bereik as alle rasse en groepe mekaar ontmoet en saamwerk.

Gedurende ons Konferensie het een van die vooraanstaande koerante in Johannesburg 'n inleiding geplaas wat as volg begin het:

"Die Swart Serp, 'n unieke verskynsel wat een tydstip wêreld aandag geniet het, het met die verloop van tyd vermydelik opgehou om die aandag van nuusblaaie te trek — maar dit het nooit opgehou om te bestaan nie. Dit is miskien sy merkwaardigste prestasie."

Ons voel oortuig daarvan dat die rede vir die voortbestaan van die Swart Serp is dat dit nooit terug gediens het in moeilikhede nie, en ook nie gepoog het om hulle te omseil nie. Die Swart Serp het pas gehou met die tyd en het moedige besluite geneem wanneer nodig.

Die besluit om lidmaatskap oop te stel is ook nie ligtelik geneem nie. Dit is voorafgegaan deur jare van ernstige oorweging en bespreking, waarin ons die voordele en nadele opgeweeg het van hierdie fundamentele verandering in ons grondwet, en die moontlike effek wat dit kon hê op die werk waaraan ons ons gewy het.

Die Swart Serp het sy ontstaan gehad in 1955 — omdat daar 'n behoefte aan was — in 'n spontane uitbarsting van morele verontwaardiging as gevolg van die Senaatwet, daardie slim politieke

(Vervolg ommesy)

A Decisive Step (Cont.)

manoeuvre which removed rights from South Africans of colour to the advantage of White South Africans, and made a mockery of the provisions of the South African Constitution. At that time, it seemed reasonable and proper to most of our members that the Black Sash should be an organization of women voters. They saw themselves as the conscience of the White electorate, whom they held primarily responsible for the state of affairs which had been allowed to develop in South Africa.

In the years that have followed, the Black Sash has continuously protested against political immorality and campaigned tirelessly for justice for all South Africans. In the course of this work, our members have learned, among other things, that the basic injustice in our country is the policy of discrimination on grounds of colour; and that while the rest of the world is rejecting racial and colour discrimination more and more, our country alone is intensifying it and perpetuating it by law.

With our own categorical rejection of the principle of racial discrimination came the question as to whether we could remain a body of voters — an organization of White women, since the South African franchise is restricted to Whites. There was a decided division of opinion among us on this question.

With the changing outlook of the whole world on racial matters, and with our own contacts across the colour line in South Africa, our outlook, too, had changed. We had come to realize that a happy and peaceful future for our country depended upon a broad concept of South African nationhood embracing all our peoples; and many of us felt that the Black Sash, which has always been in the van of public opinion in South Africa, should give expression to this concept by opening its ranks to all South African women. Yet, while they fully subscribed to the Black Sash rejection of colour prejudice and discrimination, many other members still sincerely believed that we would have a better chance of righting wrongs brought about by the arbitrarily enfranchised Whites if we remained the "conscience" of the White electorate, a voice of protest from within. They felt that as a group of privileged White women obviously seeking no material advantage for themselves in their work for justice, we would have greater strength than as a mixed group in

Dedication . . .

IN pride and humbleness we declare our devotion to the land of South Africa, we dedicate ourselves to the service of our country. We pledge ourselves to uphold the ideals of mutual trust and forbearance, of sanctity of word, of courage for the future, and of peace and justice for all persons and peoples. We pledge ourselves to resist any diminishment of these, confident that this duty is required of us, and that history and our children will defend us.

So help us God, in Whose strength we trust.

'n Beslissende Stap (Verv.)

plan wat van Suid-Afrikaners van kleur regte ontnem het, en sodoende Blanke Suid-Afrikaners begunstig het, en 'n bespotting gemaak van ons Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet. Op hierdie tydstip het dit redelik en passend gelyk, dat die Swart Serp 'n organisasie van vroue kiesers sou wees. Hulle het hulself beskou as die gewete van die Blanke kiesers wat, in hulle oë, verantwoordelik was vir die ontwikkeling van sake in Suid-Afrika.

In die daaropvolgende jare het die Swart Serp aanhoudend protesteer teen politieke immoraliteit, en onvermoeid geveg vir regverdigheid teenoor alle Suid-Afrikaners. In die loop van ons werk het ons lede o.a. besef dat die basiese onreg in ons land die beleid van diskriminasie op grond van kleur is, en terwyl die res van die wêreld ras- en kleur-diskriminasie meer en meer verwerp, is dit net ons land wat dit verskerp en deur wetgewing bestendig.

Met ons absolute verwerping van die prinsiep van rasse-diskriminasie, het die vraag ontstaan of

Toewydingsrede . . .

MET trots en nederigheid verklaar ons ons gehegtheid aan die land van Suid-Afrika, ons wy ons aan die diens van ons land. Ons belowe plegtig die ideale te handhaaf van onderlinge vertroue en verdraagsaamheid, van die onskendbaarheid van beloftes, van moed vir die toekoms, van vrede en regverdigheid teenoor alle persone en rasse. Ons beloof plegtig om ons te verset teen enige vermindering hiervan, oortuig dat hierdie plig ons opgelê is en dat die geskiedenis en ons kinders ons sal regverdig.

Mag God ons help, op Wie se krag ons ons verlaat.

which many women would be fighting to establish their own rights.

And after nearly four years of discussion and soul-searching, the issue was decided in October last year. By a majority of more than two-thirds, the Black Sash decided to open its ranks.

Many factors contributed to that final decision, not least among them being the ever-developing political consciousness of our members themselves. Our present members have learned much in their work for the Black Sash. In seeking to educate themselves politically, they have come to appreciate the value of determination and moderation, and, above all, of racial tolerance. We hope that our new members, too, will derive the same great benefit and satisfaction from their participation in the work of our organization.

In these difficult days, many South Africans are afraid to take their stand openly against injustice and political immorality. The example of the Black Sash protest is needed as never before. We appeal to all our members to re-dedicate themselves to the service of our cause, and help to make the voice of the Black Sash ring out fearlessly in 1964 in its protest against injustice.

The Black Sash, December, 1963/February, 1964

ons kan voortgaan as 'n groep stemgeregtigtes — 'n organisasie van Blanke vroue, omdat die stemreg willekeurig tot Blankes beperk is. Op dié punt was daar skerp menings verskil.

Deur die verandering van uitkyk in die hele wêreld aangaande rasseaangeleenthede, en deur ons kontakte oor die kleurlyn in Suid-Afrika, het ons uitkyk ook verander. Ons het tot die besef gekom dat 'n gelukkige en vreedsame toekoms vir ons land afhang van 'n breë konsepie van die Suid-Afrikaanse nasie wat al ons mense sal insluit, en baie het gevoel dat die Swart Serp, wat nog altyd 'n leidende rol gespel het in Suid-Afrikaanse publieke opinie, hier ook die voortou moet neem deur ons lidmaatskap vir alle Suid-Afrikaanse vroue oop te stel. En tog, terwyl alle lede ten volle die Swart Serp verwerping van kleur-diskriminasie onderskryf het, het baie opreg gemeen dat ons 'n beter kans sal hê om omregte waarvoor die Blankes (wie se stemreg op kleur gebaseer is) verantwoordelik is, reg te stel, as ons as "gewete" van die Blanke kiesers optree — 'n stem van protes van uit ons eie Blanke groep. Hulle het gevoel dat 'n groep Blanke vroue wat klaarblyklik geen persoonlike voordeel sou trek uit hulle stryd vir billikheid teenoor ander, in 'n sterker posisie sal wees dan 'n gemengde groep waarin baie vroue sou veg vir hulle eie regte.

Na vier jaar van bespreking en oorweging het ons die besluit in Oktober 1963 geneem. Met 'n meerderheid van meer dan twee-derdes het die Swart Serp besluit om sy geledere oop te stel.

Baie faktore het bygedra tot hierdie finale besluit, nie die minste daarvan synde die steeds ontwikkelende politieke bewussyn van ons lede. Die huidige lede het baie geleer in hulle werk in die Swart Serp. In hulle strewe na politieke ontwikkeling, het hulle die waarde van vasberadenheid en gematigheid en, bo alles, verdraagsaamheid, besef. Ons hoop dat nuwe lede ook dieselfde voordeel en bevrediging sal ondervind in die werk van ons organisasie.

In hierdie moeilike dae, is baie Suid-Afrikaners bang om openlik teen onreg en politieke immoraliteit te stry. Die voorbeeld van die Swart Serp is dus nog meer dan voorheen nodig. Ons doen 'n beroep op al ons lede om hulle op nuut te wy aan die diens om ons doel te bereik en sodoende die stem van die Swart Serp teen onreg sonder vrees te laat hoor in 1964.