

MEMORANDUM BY THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE ON THE FUTURE ORGANISATION OF THE BLACK SASH.

The special conference of the Black Sash takes place at the most crucial point in the history of our movement.

In the resolutions submitted it is agreed that the work of the Black Sash is not yet completed. We will meet to decide what kind of organisation the Black Sash should be, what policy should be adopted, and how we can make our influence felt most effectively.

The Black Sash came into being because a handful of women were deeply angered by the Senate Act and believed that through the sincerity of their convictions they could rouse the country to protest. From this followed the enrolment of a large number of members, the establishment of groups or branches from the Limpopo to the Cape, and the raising of considerable sums of money.

Our awakened political conscience soon realised that the Senate Act was only the focus which showed the almost complete decline of democracy in S. Africa. With sincerity and a desire to make South Africa a country in which we and our children could live at peace with our fellow South Africans, we accepted and carried out every good idea that would bring our moral indignation before the public.

At that time we worked without a written policy and without a constitution. It soon became obvious that some organisation was necessary to temper the views of those living in the country surrounded by Afrikaner conservatism with those living in the towns free to express more liberal opinions. We created a cumbersome machine which slowed up the spontaneity that was our original success. Perhaps the root cause of the insistence on the rigid application of our constitution was due to a mistrust engendered, not only by the long distances between the Regions, but also by a lack of knowledge of the women who started the Black Sash, and who were obviously going to be the first executive.

Sometimes we moved ahead very fast and did not take all our members with us all the way. This often led to friction between Regions who did not see eye to eye with demonstrations or actions proposed by those who had moved the fastest. Often the disagreement was not so much over the proposed action as over the tactics which the Central Executive or other Regions suggested to rouse public opinion. The Central Executive was forced to spend endless hours trying to find a middle way to satisfy the majority. In a genuine desire to hold the Sash together, without sacrificing principle for expediency, the Central Executive became less and less of a planning body and more and more only "the interpreter of policy".

Through working together, and getting to know each other on convoy at demonstrations and conferences this mistrust has largely been dispelled. However it must be categorically stated that the Central Executive has had to spend far too much time in allaying misgivings. This is one of the reasons for the Central Executive's proposals for changes in the Constitution and organisation of the Black Sash.

From May 1955 until late in 1957 we carried out a tremendous programme. Then pre-election activity began to claim an increasing part of our members' time and energy. Regions worked on many plans which they hoped would influence the course of the election, but the slowing down of overt Black Sash activities led to a slackening of interest of a once sympathetic and supporting public, since we could not publicise the invaluable work Black Sash members were doing through political pools, special propaganda, and, even more important, the education of its members.

To sum up:

On the POSITIVE SIDE, our three years of existence have shown that:-

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- (a) there is a large body of women prepared to follow dynamic and spectacular leadership;
- (b) all leaders and active members have gained a greater knowledge of the meaning of legislation and its ultimate effects on the community and eventually on the individual when administered harshly or even sympathetically by local bodies; in this way thinking members have been made more aware of the responsibilities of citizenship;
- (c) through our demonstrations and work, a community of interest in South Africa has been created among our members; mutual admiration has been engendered, and lasting friendships have been made amongst women from all walks of life in town and country;
- (d) our placards, pamphlets, magazines, special propaganda and reprints of worthwhile articles were seen and read by Government and Opposition supporters and by the apathetic. Who can assess the train of thought and heart-searching we started off by baring the truth, and by showing the ultimate results of legislation which deprived citizens of the freedoms laid down by the Atlantic Charter?
- (e) our members have brought into their work for the Opposition a greater awareness and a more critical attitude. This must eventually percolate from the smallest local committee to the highest executive.

On the NEGATIVE SIDE, our three years of existence have shown:-

- (a) no apparent reduction of Government support; in fact, according to some we have stiffened the electorate's resistance to a more liberal outlook:-
- (b) exhaustion, followed by depression of the active members as a result of the tempo of work with no obvious results;
- (c) a lessening of public interest and support now, as evidenced by a falling away in membership and a lack of "news" value;
- (d) that the three points enumerated above have led many members to believe that moral indignation is not sufficient, and that their time and energy could better serve South Africa in other fields.

We feel that these points on the positive and negative sides express a fair evaluation of the last three years during which we have been concerned with OUR SHORT TERM POLICY.

Do we believe that we have exhausted the possibilities of our protest?

What can the Black Sash do?

We are clearly conscious that our work must have as its ultimate aim the insurance of GOOD GOVERNMENT FOR SOUTH AFRICA.

Good Government means:-

- (a) A high standard in public life;
- (b) Increasing liberty for the subject, and increasing responsibility of the subject - i.e. making democracy work.
- (c) Just laws, justly applied - all laws to be assessed from only one standpoint - will they promote the spiritual, material and moral welfare of the people of S. Africa?

This is a tremendous programme, but a worthwhile one.

The result of the election has shown that South Africa is tragically divided on racial grounds. The spirit behind our original aims, which was protest against injustice, must continue to be its *raison d'etre*. We must now consider positive proposals for more human and far-seeing legislation. Most legislation discriminates against non-Whites, therefore, inevitably much of our work must be centred on the colour issue. To avoid last minute compromises and recriminations between different Regions, all members must face, immediately, what is involved.

THE BLACK SASH MUST PLAY ITS FULL PART IN MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO CHANGE THE THINKING OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA.

How can we use our time and energy to do this most effectively?

by continuing exactly as heretofore?

by becoming purely an education movement?

by becoming a political party?

by extending our membership to include men?

by becoming an adjunct to charitable or welfare organisations?

by devising new means of rousing the public and by finding new forms of activities which will bring pressure to bear on every government supporter who holds office, petty or important? by engaging in political activity designed to harass our representatives? to reform our electoral system and to ensure correct and proper voters' rolls?

We feel that the sixth solution offers the only real hope of making our point of view felt in South Africa, although in carrying this out we may from time to time use some or all of the other proposals.

The Central Executive proposes the following future programme:

1. Re-organisation -
 - (A) Revision of the Constitution.
 - (B) Consideration of our organisation.
 - (C) Finance.
2. Pressure Tactics.
3. Education and Propaganda.
4. Careful planning to ensure continuity of activity, should the Black Sash be declared illegal.
5. Practical help to victims of ideological legislation.
6. Demonstrations.

Let us examine each proposal in greater detail, bearing in mind that no group can work at fever pitch indefinitely. No woman can work indefinitely as hard as many of the Black Sash leaders have done, not only because of the time involved, but because of the mental and emotional strain which will crack and then break *them* and possibly their families. All people need time to meditate, time to rest and time to mix and work with people with different interests if they are not to become cranks.

1. Re-organisation:

(A) CONSTITUTION:

- (i) The Central Executive Resolution No. 2 proposes a revision of our "Aims and Objects" with a view to making them more realistic and bringing them up to date;
- (ii) A Region has proposed that a sub-Committee be appointed to review the Constitution, simplifying it and making it more flexible.
- (iii) A minority view on the Central Executive supports a Federal system instead of the present system for the following reasons:-
 - (a) With rare exceptions, e.g. the Senate Act, the public are only interested in legislation which affects them or their locality. Progress by the Black Sash will, therefore, be more likely if action of any sort is directed at local injustices by local people for local people. Laws and their application affect different areas in different ways. The outlook and therefore the best line of attack differs radically from area to area.
 - (b) Spontaneity is killed by over-centralising. Under a Unitary system everything must pass through headquarters. Quick action and the spectacular are essential if the public eye and ear are to be caught effectively.
 - (c) Some areas wish to be more radical than others and must not be tied, nor must the more conservative be held responsible for the action of others.
 - (d) Vigilance all over the country is essential but simultaneous action is not always necessary and effective.

(B) ORGANISATION:

- (i) The Central Executive should consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, an Hon. Organising Secretary, Hon. Treasurer and the Convenors of Committees, (The possibility of members without portfolio should be considered) and a legal adviser.

Committees:-

- (a) Administration,
- (b) Political Activity.
- (c) Education and Propaganda.
- (d) Demonstrations.
- (e) Underground Resistance.
- (f) Panel of legal advisers.

Each convener must form an active sub-Committee, meeting regularly and planning to the last detail every aspect of their activities.

The addition of an Hon. Organising Secretary will eliminate purely routine matters which will be carried out by the Administrative Sub-Committee under the convensorship of the Organising Secretary.

The Regions should be set up on the same plan, though in their case, while new ideas may, and should originate, they are also responsible for carrying out national activities, as well as special work most suited to their Region and circumstances.

Once a resolution has become a "policy decision" any activity by any Region to implement the resolution must have the full moral support and acknowledgement of every other Region. There can be no question of a Region repudiating activity by any other Region if their action implements a "policy decision". However, Regions must not be asked necessarily to implement every resolution, and should be given autonomy to tackle the issue or issues or undertake the activity they know to be most effective in their Region.

Any proposed activity shall be submitted to the Central Executive who will only have vote power if it does not fall within the scope of the "policy decisions" taken at Conference. Once the Central Executive's approval has been obtained Regions shall be free to approach each other, direct for support or assistance on that one activity. No Region shall be obliged to give another more than moral support if they do not wish to do so.

The Central Executive should issue a regular report to all Regions, reporting fully on Black Sash activities all over South Africa, and compiled from information supplied by the Regions.

(ii) The minority view supporting a Federal system suggests:-

Headquarters:

A small group, consisting of not more than seven women including President (or Chairman) two Vice-Presidents (or Chairmen) an Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer, to act as liaison and to undertake:-

- (a) responsibility for issuing a monthly report of news from all areas;
- (b) responsibility for organising any national gatherings. This need not occur more than once a year, and might be a Council meeting followed by a Conference and ending with a short Council meeting;
- (c) the right to speak for the whole movement on its general policy at times of national moment without prior consultation with the Regions;
- (d) the duty to suggest action or comment on previous action, but the right to enforce or veto.

Regions should have autonomy as to organisation and action, within the limits of up-to-date "Aims and Objects" based on opposing inhumanity and suggesting improvements on present conditions; and with the condition that all must report fully and promptly each month to Headquarters. Freedom to communicate direct with other Regions, and to decide on joint action, should be granted.

(C) FINANCE:

Finance is always a problem. While stringent economy must be practised so that fund raising does not become a burden, nevertheless, if we show enough imagination and enterprise, the money will be forthcoming.

Regions must decide for themselves the best way of raising funds. National schemes must be instigated from time to time, both to help the Regions and to keep alive public interest.

2. PRESSURE TACTICS:

The Black Sash came into being as a pressure group. It must remain as a pressure group but it must exert more pressure.

It is almost impossible to make the public think along prolonged lines of reasoning. The only hope, therefore is:-

to try to influence small bodies in authority, or individuals, as often as possible;

to influence the public, in general, by occasional shock or surprise tactics;

to insist that we, the minority, are also being represented by the government official or representative, and that we want our rights;

at the same time, equal insistence that the opposition representative is really an opposition and will never again sacrifice principles for expediency;

for party members to use immediate and continuous pressure to ensure that candidates offering themselves for parliamentary, provincial council, city or municipal council elections are of the calibre South Africa needs;

to work with other suitable organisations to form committees to protest against unjust laws. There must be a consolidation of civilised opinion and to achieve its object the Black Sash must be ready to co-operate with other organisations on specific issues.

Obviously under this heading innumerable examples for exerting pressure could be suggested; to quote only a few:- the abolition of pass laws for African women; the abuse of the postal vote system; constant surveillance of the voters' roll; working for higher wages for non-Whites and a better standard of living for all; opposing Job Reservations; pressing for technical training for all who wish for and need it; insisting on commensurate remuneration for teachers; etc., etc.

3. EDUCATION AND PROPAGANDA:

The Black Sash must intensify its educational programme and thus revive public support. A wider public must be reached, and the information must be presented in interesting and varied ways by:-

- (a) Regular public meetings open to all Sash members, using the services of the best possible speakers.
- (b) The formation of discussion clubs. Small meetings in private houses in an effort to obtain as wide a body of opinion as possible, introducing non-White speakers occasionally.
- (c) Regular and frequent summer schools and symposiums. Some of the summer schools could be for one day only.
- (d) The introduction of outside speakers at as many Black Sash meetings as possible to stimulate interest at Branch meetings.
- (e) The use of poster campaigns to illustrate the implementation of unjust laws.
- (f) The use of ridicule.
- (g) A panel of advisers consisting of authorities on various aspects of our work.
- (h) Distribution of factual information and propaganda designed to break down prejudice and to stimulate thought, with a view to bringing about a change of heart.

PROPAGANDA FOR JUNIORS:

The franchise will be extended to the eighteen year olds. The Black Sash should train them in good citizenship, and make them aware of their personal responsibilities. Through them an effort can be made to bring the youth of both language groups together, and to try and counteract the racial bias they have acquired in their education. Every endeavour should be made to create a climate of opinion against the ideologies of the government amongst the eighteen year olds, or those who will be eighteen in five years' time. Branches might consider opening a private card system for this age category, so that we are ready if and when they are put on the Voters' Roll. It may be considered necessary to form Junior Black Sash Branches

No propaganda shall be printed, issued or distributed without the consent of the Central Executive.

MAGAZINE:

The future of the Black Sash magazine must receive careful consideration.

4. CAREFUL PLANNING TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF ACTIVITY:

Plans must be made in the event of the banning of our organisation. It is unlikely that such an event will occur but we must not overlook this possibility. Let us take a lesson from resistance movements the world over; action and disappearance is often far more disconcerting than constant public appearance.

5. PRACTICAL HELP FOR VICTIMS OF IDEOLOGICAL LEGISLATION:

The Central Executive has suggested that a legal adviser be a member of the Central Executive and she and her sub-committee must examine every appeal for assistance. This Committee must do everything it can to give these victims of ideological legislation the courage (and perhaps the finance) to fight unjust legislation in the Courts of Law.

6. DEMONSTRATIONS:

(A) This phase of our work needs careful thought. It is essential that the public sees the Sash and reads what it stands for or against. However, fewer and larger demonstrations, quite different in concept should, and must be conceived. We need not worry; the Government will give us cause to demonstrate. Let them think we are inactive and they will be all the more surprised at the psychological moment. Constant standing at City or Town Halls becomes ineffective. We could try more ridicule and less dignity.

It is important to remember that through our demonstrations our members learn something about public affairs.

Demonstrations and protests are of value as they show the non-Whites that some Whites appreciate the injustice of the discriminatory laws and are in sympathy with the victims.

(B) VIGILS AND HAUNTS:

It is the consensus of opinion that Vigils and Haunts are no longer effective and should, therefore, cease, as a routine form of protest.

This long term policy will need resolution and courage. No government stays in power for ever - we must in the next few years influence South Africa's thinking so that when the change comes we have a dynamic and just government.

This memorandum expresses the combined views of members of the Central Executive. The only point of disagreement is on the principle on which a future Constitution for the Black Sash should be based, i.e. Unitary or Federal. We therefore state the majority and the minority views under the heads, "Constitution" and "Organisation."

Mrs Foley was not able to be present at the numerous discussions from which this memorandum emerged, and she may wish, therefore, to make her own personal comments at, or before the Conference.

THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDS that the following three resolutions should form the basis discussion at the Special Conference, and, if they are accepted, form the future pattern for the Sash.

1. that the Black Sash should continue.
2. that the aims of the Black Sash should be amended:-
that Clause 2(i) of the Constitution shall be amended to read:-
"2. The Objects of the Organisation shall be:-
(i) To conduct propaganda, enlist support and aid for:-
(a) the observance of good government and the principles of parliamentary democracy;
(b) the preservation and extension of civil rights and liberties for all the peoples of South Africa."

that the above become the keystone round which our future policy and work is centred.

3. We submit a further ~~a further~~ resolution, which is the result of an analysis of the Central Executive's suggestions and all Regional resolutions:-
that the Black Sash will work most effectively to implement this policy, as laid down in our Objects, by:-

1. Re-organisation of
 - (a) the Constitution by (i) bringing it up to date;
(ii) creating greater flexibility.
 - (b) Organisation.
 - (c) Financing the Black Sash.
2. Determining the most effective forms of Demonstrations, Vigils, Haurts
3. Planning for continued action in event of banning.
4. Practical help to victims of ideological legislation.
5. Using greater pressure
 - (i) on those concerned in the making and implementation of unjust laws.
 - (ii) to create a climate of opinion.
6. Creating more effective education and propaganda. (Magazine)
7. Emphasising particular propaganda slanted to age groups under 21.
8. Co-operation with other bodies.