

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONFERENCE

EAST LONDON was the venue of the 1961 Black Sash Annual National Conference. The hosts were Border region, and delegates were warmly received, even to the extent of bowls of spring flowers and welcoming notes.

During the conference itself we were relieved of all cares by the "universal aunts". Evenings were deliberately left free, except for the second night of conference when we were entertained at a delightful cocktail party in Mrs. Deena Streek's home where members of the various regions were able to get to know each other.

After Mrs. E. Stott had delivered her presidential address (reported in this issue) the conference opened, and Southern Transvaal, which will in future be known as the Transvaal Region, was elected the new Headquarters Region. Mrs. Jean Sinclair, a founder of the Sash, is the incoming president. Conference offered its loyalty and good wishes to the new Executive, and the retiring president, Mrs. Stott, paid warm tribute to the members of the former Headquarters Executive, all of whom, she said, had uncomplainingly shouldered more than was expected of them.

Setting the Pace

Mrs. Stott claimed, modestly, that her own task as president had not been onerous—a sentiment belied by the evidence at conference of the fantastic pace she has set in tours of the regions and innumerable other activities. Border expressed the appreciation of conference for these tours, and even the treasurer agreed that what they had cost had been money well spent.

Mrs. Dora Hill told conference Professor Geyser's story that Afrikaner Nationalism was about to have a baby. "And I'm sorry to tell you," said Professor Geyser, "that the baby will be born black." Mrs. Nettie Davidoff confessed that she had been afraid of nothing during the past few years except her own chairman—a sentiment endorsed by all of us who have known the tyranny of chairs!

Debate on resolutions reached a very high standard, and regional reports told a familiar

story of hard work by the few, steadily declining membership, apathy (on the part of our own members as well as the public), and strong prejudice against the Sash in some regions. On the other hand there had been a genuine and warm response from people who had been helped by the Sash. In the members who remain in our ranks there is a steady resolve to carry on, although none of us is deceived about possible future hardships.

Mammoth Memoranda

Reports from the smaller regions showed that they had done as well as the larger regions, in spite of greater difficulties.

Transvaal region (formerly Southern Transvaal) overawed the conference by the mammoth memoranda compiled by its members. An ambitious future project is a book detailing the achievements of the Sash. Will members please respond to Mrs. Sinclair's appeal for anecdotes to provide the lighter side of the book?

Mrs. Dora Hill asked for more correspondence between the regions concerning their activities, and more detailed information on lectures and meetings. This would also greatly help Mrs. Dorothy Grant, who is now the editor of the magazine.

Interesting debates took place on the Sash's attitude to racial discrimination, the need for a new national convention, Bantu education and the important subject of opening membership of the Sash to all races. It was evident that delegates had examined this particular subject with the greatest care, and that if open membership had been considered a matter of principle few would have voted against it. Most of the regions thought, however, that the strength of the Sash still lay in the fact that, as a white group, it was able to exert moral pressure with no axe to grind. The debate continued for three hours, and it was then decided to postpone further discussion until the next national conference. Border region, which sponsored the resolution, agreed that no vote should be taken this year.

We realised during the debate on Bantu Education that we are not fully *au fait* with all

the implications of the Act. We hope to remedy this. Regions will be asked to investigate the effects of the Act in local areas. Delegates were reminded of Professor Z. K. Matthews' article "The Education of the African" in "The Road Ahead." In addition there are two articles in the Black Sash booklet "Education for Isolation" dealing with Bantu Education and vernacular tuition.

Southern Transvaal was congratulated on making the greatest strides in organising conferences on the need for a new National Convention. Those who took part in the debate proved that they were fully conversant with constitutional problems.

Members will be glad to hear that they no longer need to rack their brains for a design for a goodwill badge. In the words of Mrs. Mary Stoy "the Sash already has a goodwill badge of its own." Other projects which were dropped were slogans and theme songs and investigations into the electoral laws.

The membership subscription has been raised to two rand per annum, which will include the magazine.

Difficult Husbands

Natal Midlands feared that Sash activities were becoming so diffuse that the energy and identity of the Sash might be lost, but, after hearing the impressive regional reports, it was evident that the very nature of our work, and the diversity of activities which stems from the wide field covered by Sash aims, makes it difficult to confine those activities. This region, however, has found a sure way of dealing with difficult husbands. "Ask Mrs. Stott to stay with you," was the advice of Mrs. Betty Lund.

Compulsory reading for difficult husbands is the excellent booklet produced by Mrs. Wendy Jackson of Border Region, "The Sash and You", which gives the reasons why women should join the Sash.

No Sash conference is complete without drama. This year there were a few. One concerned the S.A.B.C. when a representative suddenly arrived on the scene with a request to broadcast proceedings at conference. Mrs. Stott replied that she was flattered. Some delegates mistook her mild sarcasm, and heated remarks were made from the floor. Finally the S.A.B.C. reporter was asked to leave. "When there is a free Radio



Mrs. Dora Hill (left) and Mrs. Nettie Davidoff, both of Johannesburg, are the new vice-presidents of the Black Sash.

South Africa you will be welcome," said Mrs. Stott. The representative accepted our invitation to tea, however, and it is to his credit that he remained amiable throughout the proceedings.

The Press took opposing sides about this matter. The *Transvaler* accused us of discrimination, the *Rand Daily Mail* congratulated us; the *Cape Times* rebuked us. Sashers may draw their own conclusions by reading the report which appears in this issue of the magazine. Whether the Sash was right or wrong in dismissing the S.A.B.C. reporter, the fact remains that it was a spontaneous expression of anger that the S.A.B.C., or Radio South Africa, is being turned into a Nationalist propaganda machine.

Probably few remember the prophetic book "When Smuts Goes" by Keppel-Jones. In it we were shown that one of the last rungs the Nationalist government would have to climb in its ascent, or perhaps one should say descent, into totalitarianism, would be control over the national broadcasting system. Is there any doubt that this stage has already been reached?

To many the most gratifying experience of conference was the ability of delegates to argue objectively, and to respect the other point of view, despite frayed nerves, differences of temperament and end-of-the-year fatigue. If, for some, there must be compromise or defeat, neither the affection in which we hold each other, nor the unity of the Sash, has been impaired.