

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE BLACK SASH

BLACK SASH National Conferences have always been a source of encouragement and refreshment to us all, and the eighth Annual National Conference held in Durban in November was no exception. The standard of debate was high, and while there was general agreement on principle and objective, on controversial issues an even greater spirit of compromise than usual was apparent, an earnest desire to find a **modu vivendi** that would accommodate the varying shades of opinion.

Delegates and observers were welcomed most kindly by our Durban hosts, who went to endless trouble to ensure our comfort and enjoyment. Our sincere thanks are due to the "universal aunts" who attended to our countless needs, and to Mrs. Keen, Mrs. Davidson, Mrs. Ventress, Mrs. Wallace, and other members of Natal Coastal Region, whose hard work and organization made this a memorable Conference.

The Conference opened with a speech of welcome by Mrs. Keen, followed by Mrs. Sinclair's Presidential address, which is reported in this issue.

The Year's Work

Reports by Regions of the year's work disclosed the usual wide range of activities undertaken by the Black Sash. The palm for constructive work this year must go to Cape Western Region whose Athlone Advice Office is providing invaluable assistance to Africans "endorsed out" of the Western Cape, or in other trouble with the pass laws and influx control regulations. The public address of Mrs. Robb and Mrs. Birt on the Urban Areas Act have roused great interest, and focussed attention on the break-up of family life and other hardship caused by the pass laws generally. The Region's suggestion of a "Prisoners' Friend" in the local Bantu Commissioner's Court has been agreed to by the local authorities, and our members have hopes that they will have some say in the appointment of this officer.

Border Region reported a good deal of apathy in the area, and the loss of a number of members. This made little difference to the work of the Region, however, as the most active members still remain within the Black Sash. The Region has suffered in its demonstrations from the attentions of the Special Branch.

Border's major interest of the year was the proclamation of Group Areas in East London, and a full account of the proposals of the Group Areas Board was distributed at Conference.

Natal Midlands has done a good deal of work during the year with other organizations on a non-racial basis. Demonstrations, protest marches and meetings and symposiums have been held, and the Region has particularly interested itself in the local implementation of the Group Areas Act, passes for African women and job reservation in the Provincial Council.



NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENTS

Mrs. Jeannette Davidoff and Mrs. Muriel Fisher, who were elected National Vice-Presidents of the Black Sash

Mrs. Ventress reported the results of a thorough investigation by Natal Coastal Region into the work of the S.A. Foundation. Conference agreed that the Black Sash should investigate and suggest practical ways in which the Foundation might carry out its aims of presenting a more favourable image of South Africa to the world, e.g., by instigating a Multi-Racial Conference.

Mrs. Keen was commended on the work done in Natal Coastal Region in the last eighteen months which has resulted in the re-establishment of the Region.

Cape Eastern Region gave Conference a graphic and moving account of the severe punishment meted out to a sixteen-year-old African boy, who received lashes for failure to produce a Reference Book. The Black Sash made a thorough investigation into the case and made representations in Parliament through Mrs. Helen Suzman and Mr. Plewman, and also to responsible officials. Unfortunately, the boy's parents, probably through fear of reprisals, refused to lay a charge against the authorities.

(Continued Overleaf)

The Annual National Conference (Cont.)

The Country branches of this Region are greatly interested in the plight of Africans banished without trial under the Native Administration Act of 1927, and Mrs. Peggy Levey made a strong appeal to Conference to take up the cudgels on their behalf. Any relief that can be given to these unfortunate people, however, comes under the heading of welfare work, which the Black Sash decided some time ago it could not possibly undertake. It was suggested that country branches might interest themselves as individuals in local cases, or work in conjunction with the local Human Rights Welfare Committees.

Transvaal Region's outstanding work of the year was the sustained protest against the General Law Amendment Act, which is being continued as the Act is implemented with constant demonstrations and stands against house arrest and the by-passing of the Courts. Association with women of other races is maintained by means of regular meetings of the Saturday club, and a constant watch is being kept on the proceedings of the local Bantu Commissioner's Courts as a preliminary to opening an Advice Office similar to that of Cape Western.

Little progress has been made on the mammoth "History of the Black Sash" undertaken by the Region two years ago, as our history is still in the making, but a brief outline of the establishment of our organization and its "first seven years" has been produced as promised last year. It is included in this issue of the Magazine, and will be issued separately in booklet form.

Contrary to expectation, there has been little reduction in membership as a result of the raising of the membership subscription last year, but a good deal of dead wood has been pruned out in all Regions. All Regions co-operated during the year in protests against the "Sabotage" Act and House Arrest, and made investigations into the Bantu Education Act. Cape Western Region made a summary of the provisions of this Act, which will be distributed to all Regions in abridged form.

All Regions worked on the petition against the slanted broadcasts of the S.A.B.C., and all encountered apathy and fear in their areas. Conference felt that the petition had been ill-timed, but that another launched now might have better results, as public indignation has been aroused by the now blatantly pro-Government broadcasts.

Major Decisions

Major decisions of Conference were concerned with constitutional amendments. It was agreed that aspirant members of the Black Sash should be proposed and seconded by existing members of the organization, and should be required to sign a membership form accepting the principles and the aims and objects of the Black Sash. It was also agreed that any alteration to the categories of persons admitted to membership should have the backing of a substantial majority of the members, and a two-thirds majority of the total voting strength of the National Conference was agreed upon.



Natal Coastal Regional Chairman and some of her helpers. Seated: Mrs. A. Keen (Chairman), Mrs. P. Davidson. Standing: Mrs. M. Davidson, Mrs. Hayes

The question of the opening of the membership of the Black Sash to women of all races has been discussed for the last two years, and this year it was brought up as a firm proposal by Border Region. There was more support for the proposal this year than in the earlier discussions, but it was obvious that very many members of the Black Sash are still of the opinion that the strength of the organization lies in the fact that it is a group of voters with a strong sense of personal responsibility as its driving force, pledged to fight against wrongs brought about by voters. The resolution did not obtain the necessary two-thirds majority, but it is a matter that is very close to Border Region's heart, and they intend to bring it up again next year.

A number of minor amendments were made in the Constitution, mainly the correction of illogicalities and the tightening up of phrasing suggested by our Mrs. Russell of Pietermaritzburg, whose knowledge of procedure and public affairs has stood us in good stead over the years.

General Discussion

Interesting discussions were held on separate amenities, Human Rights Day, the S.A. Foundation, the removal of Africans from the Western Cape, haunts and demonstrations. It was agreed that the Black Sash was opposed in principle to the enforcement of separate amenities, but where local authorities are compelled to provide separate amenities, the Black Sash insists that these amenities should be equal in every respect.

National Headquarters

Transvaal was again elected Headquarters Region, and Mrs. Jean Sinclair was elected National President for a second year, with Mrs. Jeannette Davidoff and Mrs. Muriel Fisher as National Vice-Presidents. Headquarters Region subsequently appointed Mrs. Roberta Johnston as Hon. National Secretary, and Mrs. Kathleen Fleming and Mrs. Dorothy Grant were again elected to take charge of the National finances and the Magazine, respectively.

Highlights

Highlights of the three days of Conference were the enjoyable cocktail party given by our Natal Coastal hosts on the Tuesday evening, the lunch-hour demonstration on the Wednesday, and the delightful social evening with the Region's Indian friends on Wednesday night.

More than fifty women took part in the poster demonstration against house arrest, the by-passing of the Courts, and indoctrination by the S.A.B.C. The demonstration, which was held in the City Gardens, was carried out in the greatest comfort, as members were carried to and from the City Hall by bus, and a delicious sandwich lunch was served on the bus by our hostesses. That bus ride will long be remembered by us all — the animated conversation of our fifty women was something to hear, and strongly reminiscent of the school playground!

COVER PICTURE - DURBAN

The Lunch Hour Demonstration against House Arrest, the By-passing of the Courts and Indoctrination by the S.A.B.C

At the social evening on the Wednesday, members of the Indian Women's Cultural Association staged a spectacular sari display for our entertainment. The show was compéred by a charming young woman doctor, and a number of lovely Indian girls modelled dozens of beautiful saris and traditional costumes in rich and exotic fabrics and breath-taking colours. There was also a graceful dancer of traditional and symbolic dances.

To the Black Sash women, tired after two days of Conference and with a third day before them, it was a wonderful and relaxing evening, and we cannot sufficiently thank our Natal Coastal members for their inspiration, or their Indian friends for the enchanting memory they gave us to take away.

House Arrest and The Rule of Law



The Black Sash began its protests against the General Law Amendment Act when the Bill was first placed before Parliament, and continues to show its opposition to the provisions of the Act by frequent demonstrations. In the picture above, the Transvaal Region begins a 48-hour vigil to protest against the principle of House Arrest and the by-passing of the Courts.