

THE BLACK SASH AND PUBLIC OPINION

by JEAN SINCAIR

PEAK HOUR in a big city. . . . The solid lines of traffic move slowly through the streets, and hurrying pedestrians jostle their way along the pavements. All is movement and bustle . . . only a group of women standing silently on the steps of a public building remain motionless.

Once again the women of the Black Sash are standing in silent protest against injustice and discrimination in their country. Why do they do it? What do they hope to achieve by their protests?

The Black Sash holds these silent stands because its members feel very deeply the harshness of the mass of laws which discriminate on the grounds of colour, and which are unjust, inhuman and cruel in their application. Many of these laws are the negation of the rule of law, are totalitarian in concept and are in conflict with the ordinary principles of civilized government.

Morally wrong

The Black Sash believes that is morally wrong to separate a man from his wife and family, to restrict his freedom of movement or to prevent him from earning his living in the area and in the employment of his choice; that it is neither just nor equitable to prevent a man by law from becoming skilled, to deny him all rights of collective bargaining, to exclude him by reason of his race from various categories of employment, and to close to him all legitimate avenues of protest. All these things are done to-day in our name, as White citizens of South Africa. There are many more laws which have been imposed to enforce the ideology of apartheid, and with every year that passes further restrictions are introduced to bolster up an unenforceable policy which has patently already failed.

Sorrow and human suffering

Women of the Black Sash come into contact with many of the people who are affected by these harsh laws, and we well know the sorrow and human suffering which result from their application. For this reason we feel we have no alternative but to protest, and we have been doing so constantly for upwards of eight years. Our experiences have frequently caused us to wonder why White South Africans, most of whom profess to be Christians, are so little affected

by the fact that so many of their fellow citizens are suffering this very real burden of poverty and oppression.

We watch the expressions on the faces of those who pass by our silent demonstrations, and are distressed to notice the ever-increasing apathy and the apparent desire to escape from reality, the ever-increasing tendency to accept without question the tragic and mistaken doctrine propagated by the present Government, that White survival demands these unchristian measures.

The public as a whole appears to us to fall into clearly defined groups, and it seems easy to imagine what is going through their minds as they pass the women silently standing in protest.

Dedicated Nationalist

Firstly, there is the dedicated Nationalist who believes that the policy of this Government is the only solution to South Africa's problems. He regards the Non-White, regardless of his education, as having an inferior intellect, and he does not think of the Black man as a person who has the same instincts, desires, virtues, failings, fears and pride as all other human beings. He believes that it was by Divine Will that the Afrikaner-volk came to the tip of Africa to maintain White civilization, but accepts that the South African economy would collapse if the Black man's unskilled labour were to be withdrawn. He is therefore prepared to allow him to live and work in the White areas as long as his labour is required to keep the wheels of industry turning. This concession, of course, carries with it no personal liberty or individual rights. The Nationalist resents opposition to Government policy and believes that all those who do not agree with it are un-South African, and "liberalists or communists" (both words have



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the same meaning), and therefore a danger to the State.

Immature . . . and abusive

There are the immature types who express their disapproval by sneering and jibing. They like to give the impression that they pity women who are so stupid and ignorant and do not realize what they are doing. Most in this category are young people, the first generation of indoctrinated children.

There are those who hurl insults and use obscene and abusive language. A demonstration throws them into a paroxysm of rage. The fact that there is a group of people who hold opinions different from their own seems in itself subversive, disturbs their comfortable equilibrium and must not be allowed. They profess to be anti-communist, and yet they use and approve of methods of coercion which are the stock-in-trade of the Soviet bloc. They are bullies whose lives are governed by hatred and fear. It is difficult to understand how people who believe that they belong to a master race can behave in a manner so uncouth and savage that they spit at women, throw obscene missiles, and use language which it is seldom the lot of respectable persons to hear. They hate all those in opposition groups; they hate the Africans, the Indians and the Coloureds; they hate the "Engelse pers," the United Nations, the British, the Dutch and the Swedes; in fact, they appear to hate everybody and everything except that section of the people which subscribes to the fascist ideal. Racial prejudice and hate are the twin phobias which are destroying these people, and if they continue to maintain these unchristian attitudes, they may well in the end destroy the White civilization they seek to preserve.

No interest in politics

There are many people who, we imagine, feel that the most effective method of demonstrating their disapproval is to ignore us completely. At least this is comparatively courteous, and they, like all of us, are entitled to their opinions. These are the people who pride themselves on taking no interest in politics, and they seem to have only one desire: to be left alone to live their lives as they have always done, and as their fathers did before them.

A few more years of privilege

By far the largest group consists of those who are genuinely worried about the South African situation. For various reasons they are not prepared to take any action, or to be associated in any way with political activity or with people who are concerned with it.

As they walk or drive past a demonstration they take a quick look to see "what the women are complaining about now"; they read the posters and hastily look away. In their own minds, perhaps, they justify their attitudes and seek excuses for turning a blind eye to injustice. They fervently hope that the strong measures which have been adopted by the Government will ensure a few more years during which they can continue to enjoy their privileges and comfort, and perhaps by then the whole thing will have blown over!

These are the people who voice the thoughts so peculiar to White South Africa: "The natives in South Africa are better off than they are anywhere else on the continent of Africa . . . If you gave the Blacks a vote the Whites would be swamped—look at Ghana, Kenya, the Congo, Rhodesia . . . people overseas don't understand . . . after all the pass laws are there for their own protection,"—and so on.

A change of heart

Finally, there is the small band of people who have already made up their minds. Most of them did so many years ago and have been working for a change of policy and a change of heart among White South Africans. To these people we extend our thanks and appreciation for the support they give us. A smile, a kindly word, a man who passes with his hat in his hand—these small gestures are of tremendous encouragement to the Black Sash.

(Continued overleaf)

Yet in the short space of the eight years of our activity it has been distressing to note how many South Africans have lost heart, have succumbed to the unceasing propaganda put out by the Government and its press and radio, and are no longer shocked or angered by legislation which a few years ago would have stirred them into vigorous protest.

We do appeal most earnestly to those among us who are disturbed about the crisis in South

Africa to come out and make their voices heard, to work for justice and humanity, to face the reality of the serious situation and to accept the change which will inevitably come, by preparing now to share what South Africa has to offer* with all her citizens. We beg them primarily to try to rid themselves of prejudice, and to root out unjust discrimination wherever it is to be found. The Black Sash sees this as the only solution and the only hope for a peaceful and stable future for our country.

BLACK SASH CROSSWORD PUZZLE

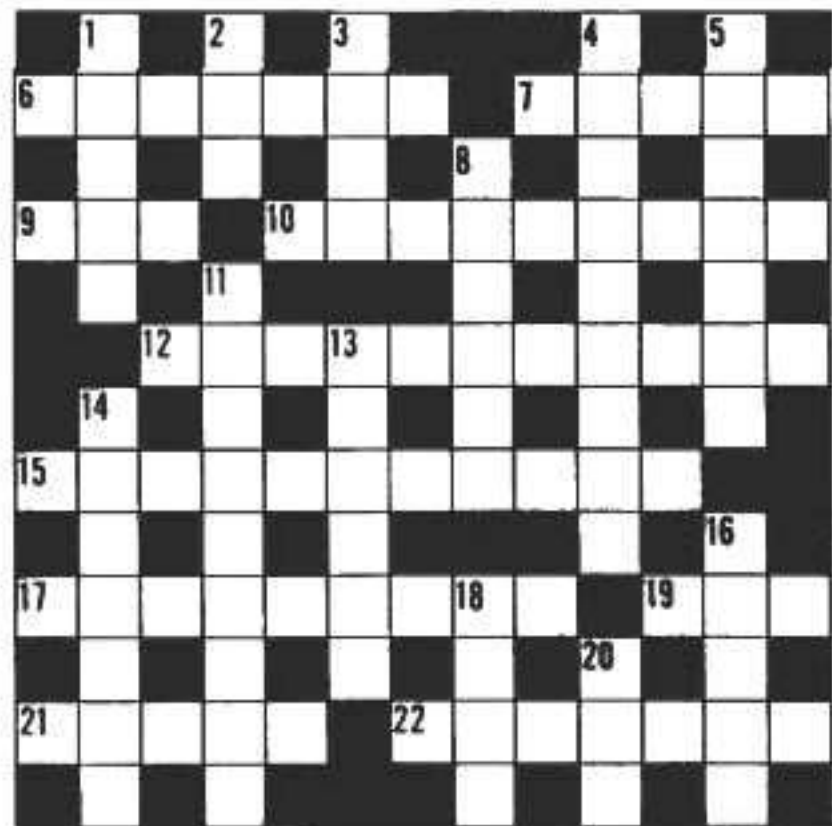
ACROSS

6. Although she evidently drops her aitches, Archy takes her for some target practice — but not in a pistol club! (7).
7. Southern Rhodesia would forge a hostile weapon if she incorporated Mozambique, in a way. (5).
9. An electrifying unit and a small member of Parliament? Obviously Mrs. Helen Suzman! (3).
10. A notion as fantastic as those produced by opium — like 17 across, perhaps. (9).
12. Describes any piece of legislation (Job Reservation, for instance) designed by Whites to preserve White privilege. (1, 7, 3).
15. The Chinese are regarded as this in certain quarters, although now many of them are Red. (6, 5).
17. A dream world in which one confused little Nationalist is a bus meets another retracing his steps. (9).
19. Pa's not a Nationalist, and in the Platteland he's still regarded in retrospect as a member of this, his old party.
21. Soothe the people's troubled spirit, but take nought away. (5).
22. Surely one could describe boerewors as an established South African custom? (7).

DOWN

NOTE. Clues 1, 4, 14 and 11, in that order, plus two articles, form a well-known Black Sash Slogan. (5, 9, 7, 9).

1. Without the A.A. in America, lawlessness would be chaotic. (5).
2. A postal device now out of date in South Africa is singularly electrical here. (3).
3. A disorderly ride for three in Germany. (4).



4. An official South African policy based on that hated pair — racial discrimination and White privilege. (9).
5. Will evil spread about a banned organization help us to preserve our equilibrium? (7).
8. Perhaps, for the good of South Africa, some of Mr. Eric Louw's colleagues might like to follow his example? (6).
11. Is it of significance for South Africa that such solitary confinement is usually ordered in cases of infectious and dangerous disease? (9).
13. The Western countries, as referred to in Fanagalo, seem most depressed. (6).
14. Here's punishment a-plenty! (7).
16. An African township outside Cape Town. (5).
18. The common ancestor of men of all races. (4).
20. A serpentine member of 19 across? (3).

(Solution on Page 32)