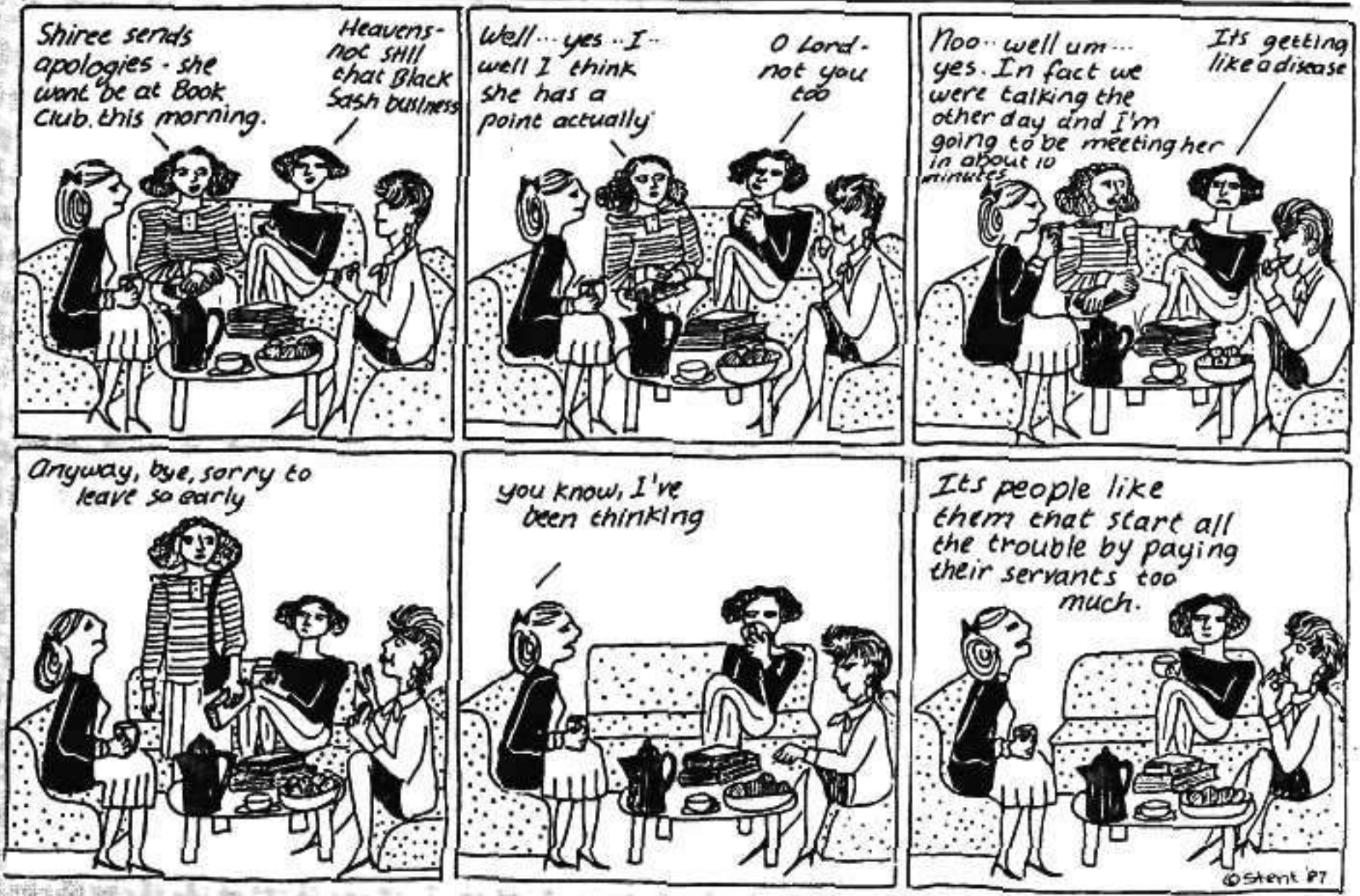


WHO'S LEFT?

by Stent



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a tribute to the pioneers



A Black Sash protest, in 1957, on the East London beach front.

The Black Sash of today owes an inestimable debt of gratitude to its pioneers, who with great courage and foresight created a political home for hundreds of like-minded women to work together for justice and democracy. The articles on the following pages are the first in a series dedicated to our pathbreakers. Some have written their own inimitable accounts of the early years, capturing the issues of the day and the character of the Black Sash then. Other members have been briefly profiled. We salute you all.

Hilda Wind

living history and future hope

marjorie shingler



What excitement as East Londoners, waving Union Jacks, gathered on the Market Square. There was ginger beer, buns and a medal for each child. It was 31 May 1910, and I'd just turned four — my earliest recollection. It was Union Day, when there was going to be 'one country'. I had no understanding then that the cost of Boer/Brit unity was an agreement not to extend the franchise rights of black South Africans.

Our father, Philip Wills Shingler, grandson of an English 1820 Settler and an English father, was deeply involved in public affairs so as a family from early childhood we attended political meetings in the East London and Cambridge town halls. Later in our teens John, Dorothy and Marjorie (known as J, D and M) became interested in national issues and always shared the same views and principles.

After finishing high school in East London, I worked in an office for eight years. In this period D and I were keen members of the Young Women's Christian Temperance Union — a worldwide body to combat alcohol and drug abuse, advocating women's franchise and pacifism and other forms of community welfare.

Abroad

In 1930 J and I set sail for a holiday in Britain and the Continent. Winning a £250 competition (a small fortune then) enabled me to extend my travels to Canada and New York. This glittering and rather overpowering metropolis — so different from ancient London — was a stimulating experience.

Passing through Harlem one

was saddened by the overcrowded tenements and obvious poverty of its black inhabitants. I had not then seen our South African black townships. That lay in the future.

Lovedale

A new epoch in my life dawned when in 1932 I went to Lovedale Missionary Institution as the Principal's Secretary. As an ordinary white South African whose previous black contacts were limited to domestics and messengers, I was now in the Mecca of black education, pioneer of academic and industrial training and nursing. Founded in 1841 by Scottish Church missionaries, it attracted thousands of students from the huts of Ciskei, Transkei, other South African villages and cities as well as East, Central and West Africa. Later 'coloured' and Indian students joined the black boys and girls — a challenging amalgam. The staff was a happy blend of foreigners and South Africans of all ages. Many sporting, cultural and religious activities promoted the development of the whole person.

Many Old Lovedalians made their mark as community leaders seeking to improve the lot of their people, but alas some, branded as 'agitators', were imprisoned or detained. As a Former Students' Reunion I remember a prominent Trade Union leader, in reply to an old teacher's chaffing remark: 'You didn't learn that at Lovedale', saying 'No, Sir, but you taught us to think.'

Those golden years at Lovedale gave me an insight into the minds,

aspirations and hearts of those who longed for a full free life, denied them by their skin colour.

Tragically Lovedale and other leading missionary institutions, some years ago, were closed and their special contributions were lost. Recent good news is that Lovedale will be rejuvenated and equipped as a Teachers' Training College.

Political involvement

Leaving Lovedale with great sadness in 1947 I returned to East London to be with my elderly mother and D. My new employer was active in public work and was especially concerned with racial problems. Knowing my sympathies, he soon enlisted my help as Secretary of the Civil Rights League, then the Treason Trial Defence and Aid Fund. When after four years all were acquitted, we had to help the detainees and their families.

D and I joined the Liberal Party, welcoming contacts with all races in our home, a venue for meetings. The Black Sash also claimed our allegiance and we took part in protest stands in front of the City Hall. On one occasion I noticed a black man who, as he walked on the deserted pavement past us, quietly raised his hat in silent tribute.

Whilst our family were South Africans who happily accepted black people as our fellow human beings, my dear English-born mother shrank from contact with 'black hands.' One day I mentioned that I'd invited Miss Minnie Soga, the well-known Red Cross worker and a friend, to tea. Whereupon mother said 'Then I'll remain in my

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room.' However, she was in the lounge when they arrived and had an entertaining time hearing of overseas travels. As mother shook hands with them and thanked them for coming, I was happy to hear her invite them to come again! If only all could have such contacts, how much happier we would be.

London — Anti-Apartheid

D and I worked in London in 1953/4 and on retiring in 1961 we returned to spend a few months there. Following another trip to the Continent we started work in London and stayed 12 years, loving every minute of that fascinating city and seeing all that we could of it, an endless delight.

A friend asked us to help in the newly formed Anti-Apartheid movement, so after work every Tuesday we went to the office where we met many South African and English members.

When 'coloureds' were to be removed from the common voters roll. D and I, wearing our black sashes, stood in a protest group on the pavement facing South Africa House. A West Indian BBC singing star, Nadia Catousse, was our neighbour and when an irate Rhodesian abused her for wasting time, Nadia replied that she could think of no better way to spend it.

Rallies at Trafalgar Square were memorable as we mingled with up to 50 000 marchers from Hyde Park through the streets of London to hear protests against some actions of the SA government, sometimes standing in falling snow. The processions were usually escorted by good natured policemen and we personally never saw any disorderly behaviour or violence then. An unforgettable experience was a rapt congregation in a packed St Paul's Cathedral listening to the spell-binding American civil rights campaigner, Martin Luther King Jnr tell of their non-violent crusade for human rights and abolition of colour discrimination. Still ringing in my ears is his closing message 'Either we live together as brothers or die together as fools.' Some months later the first woman to

speak in St Paul's Cathedral, his equally dedicated and gifted widow, Coretta, brought the same message.

What struck us as South Africans was the freedom of speech at public meetings and in the open. Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park was one of London's most popular spots not only for the British, but a 'must' for all tourist. The media too had few curbs while BBC television was the mouthpiece of all shades of opinion on public issues. This was especially evident before a general election when all parties had their say. We were sometimes surprised and shocked at the views of political extremists, but realised it was essential for the public to know what they were thinking and planning. After a while strong ideological differences began to emerge in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and although we shared a mutual goal to end apartheid we differed in other aims. So D and I ended our connection with the organisation.

Other action

Where we lived in North West London had become a 'black' area because of a large West Indian and African influx. The English residents — conservative and wary of foreigners — found the 'blacks' very different and resented the overcrowding due to housing shortages. As members of the local Methodist Church and as South Africans happy to be with darker people, we welcomed them into our home. Many West Indians had been devout Christians back home and so we helped to integrate them gradually — from the back pews — into the full life of the church community where many are now valued leaders. This was our contribution to English Anti-Apartheid!

During our London stay our home was open to many South Africans and people from over 20 different countries. These contacts were an educative and enriching experience for us, while they appreciated the hospitality of an

'English home' which we pointed out was, in fact, a South African home.

Home again

We were both nearing our allotted span and brother John wrote 'As we grew up together, let us end our days together.' Dorothy had her passport, but South Africa House had refused to renew mine on expiry, of course refusing to give a reason! However, they issued a temporary document as I 'claimed to be a SA citizen' and we returned home safely in May 1973.

After an absence of 12 years many changes and developments were noticeable in residential and industrial expansion. It was good to see well-dressed urban people, indicative of their higher incomes, and black faces behind counters and in offices. Black Consciousness shone in youth's face — no longer for them their elders' subservience. We welcomed the good and grieved over the bad, and prayed for a just, united land.

Back to be beginning

Eighty-one years ago I was born at Highgate, Cambridge, East London. Time's clock has moved full circle and I'm now resident at Fairlands Home, Cambridge. Here one follows with keen interest the unfolding of the future of our beloved land. In spite of Anno Domini, in the recent general election I was happy to give the Progressive Federal Party a little help and am an active Toc H member — and I am, of course, still a very interested member of the Black Sash.

Among our nursing staff is the grand-daughter of Nellie Mlumbi, who 50 years ago, I'd known at Lovedale when she came each term to pay the fees of her seven sons and two daughters. Barefoot, illiterate and unable to speak a word of English, she had a magnificent obsession to educate all her children. Seven became teachers and her grand-daughter's strong arm and kindly heart supports many a frail, white resident. There is hope for South Africa.