

EDUCATION

"We reject this utterly," said Mrs. Nell, "because we believe we are members each of the other, and although we are a diversity of peoples, we believe that South Africans should at least share the things they have in common. This, I think, is political wisdom, and if we do not accept it in South Africa, we are doomed."

Speakers had stressed the narrowness and rigidity of the syllabuses. Vernacular education had been rejected, "the mystique of the mother tongue." To a child, said Mrs. Nell, it was child's play to learn another language.

Education for women had been touched upon. "If you educate a man," said Mrs. Nell, "you educate an individual; educate a woman, and you educate a family." African women in particular would have an increasingly important part to play in family, social and political life.

Teachers in all groups were not being paid salaries commensurate with the importance of the work they were doing. Teachers were the main architects of our society, and unless we could attract to the teaching profession a substantial proportion of the best brains and the best characters in the country, there would be a lowering of our social life.

Mrs. Nell said that she deeply regretted Mr. Leshoai's pain, but asked him to accept that prejudice exists everywhere, not only in South Africa. We must fight it and try to give our children better opportunities than we had had, so that they could see their fellow human beings not through the colour of their skins, but through their hearts and the quality of their characters. The profoundest education a child received was in his home, from his father and mother.

Mrs. Nell spoke of the reasons for the calling together of this forum, the need the organizers had felt for the people of Johannesburg, and of South Africa, to get to know one another. She quoted the words of Dr. Van der Ross, when she had asked him how we could build bridges between our children. "The bridges are there," he had said, "Cross them."

So, concluded Mrs. Nell, "Let us have the courage and goodwill to cross these bridges, us from our side, and you from yours. Let us start with our children. Let us try to teach them the way of goodwill, the way of self-knowledge, the way of self-respect and mutual respect, the way of friendship."

A State which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself.

Lord Acton.

INTERVIEW WITH SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL BILL

THE Select Committee of Parliament on the Union Education Advisory Council Bill invited the Black Sash to give evidence before it in support of the memorandum it had submitted; so on February 14 the delegates presented themselves at the Committee Room in the Houses of Parliament. There were three of us—Mrs. W. F. Grant, wife of an ex-Professor of Education at the University of Cape Town, and herself sub-Convener of the Education Committee of the Cape Town branch of the National Council of Women; Miss N. Henshilwood, for thirteen years Principal of the Cape Town Teachers' Training College; and Mrs. L. Marquard, ex-University lecturer.

We were most courteously received by the Chairman, Mr. Mostert, and introduced to the rest of the Committee, who then questioned us on the views expressed in the Memorandum. As we agreed afterwards, it was a satisfactory interview in that the questions fairly enabled us to make and support our main arguments. We were told that ours was, until then, the only memorandum that totally rejected the proposed Council; all the others had suggested modification of various kinds.

The reasons we gave for emphatically rejecting the Bill were the following:

- (1) First and foremost there were no statutory limits set to the powers of the Minister in the Bill, and in a field so vaguely defined as "the basic principles of education", which could control the entire life of teacher and pupil, he was given virtually dictatorial powers. While most Acts of Parliament set statutory limits to the powers they confer, this Bill sets none.
- (2) The members of the Council were all, directly or indirectly, to be appointed by the Minister himself, and even then there was no guarantee that their advice would carry any weight, although the Minister might, before introducing legislation, consult with "any other interested Minister of State."
- (3) There was no guarantee that any member of the Council would be an educationist in any sense of the term, except that in each province one person was to be appointed, recommended by the Administrator concerned, "who has special knowledge of education matters in that province" — a definition that suggests administrative rather than educational knowledge.

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- (4) Since the Council was to consist of full-time members, Directors and Superintendents-General of Education and school inspectors — people in actual touch with education — would automatically be excluded.
- (5) The wide and inadequately defined powers given to any specially appointed committee to carry out investigations at any school, with access to all documents and unlimited right of questioning "in connection with any matter affecting the basic principles of education" give opportunities for "witch-hunting" that can do untold harm to education.

The delegates were asked whether, if a guarantee were incorporated in the Bill that recognised educationists would be appointed to the Council, it would be acceptable to the Black Sash. We replied that we should still oppose it on the above grounds and because we considered both that there was no need for such a Council and that it would be harmful to education. It went over the heads of the Provincial authorities, and its effect would be entirely to centralise and so to standardise education, instead of allowing it that elasticity and diversity that all sound theory (and practice) recognised as vital to education. Under the present system it was possible for the various provinces to try out different methods and compare the results of experiments.

The need for consultation and co-operation at a Provincial level had been recognised by various education commissions in South Africa and provided for, and Mrs. Grant spoke of the findings and recommendations of the De Villiers Commission. The machinery exists for such consultation, and the Matriculation Board provides a guarantee that standards shall be maintained in the different provinces. The Bill ignores the whole

of the present provincial system, and overrides the authority of director, inspector, school boards and committees, and principals of schools.

Moreover, we said that even assuming that a truly advisory Union-wide body were desirable, the whole tenor of the Bill showed that the present time was entirely unfavourable to its setting up. Quoting the clauses that give unlimited powers of investigation into any school, Miss Henshilwood spoke of what she had herself seen of the effects of the fear of political "witch-hunts" on teachers and their pupils and on the recruitment of teachers. This hazard prevented many young people from entering the teaching profession.

Finally, we were questioned about our objection to the clause which limited the work of the Council to "matters affecting the education of White persons." We replied that while we were opposed to the setting up of the Council, we objected to the assumption that there was such a thing as specifically "White education", while in fact, there was only education. To separate the departments of education was to provide something called "Bantu" or "Coloured" education, which must in the nature of things be inferior in quality. The amount of education provided should be as much as the individual student was capable of absorbing, regardless of his colour.

One member of the Committee said: "So the Black Sash wants to have children of all colours under the same roof?" We replied that what we asked for was for all education to be under the same authorities, and that they should be in charge of *education*, not of Bantu or Coloured Departments. On integrated schools the Black Sash had no policy and had expressed no opinion. Whatever opinions the three of us might hold were purely personal and unofficial, and might be contrary to those of many of our other members.

This ended our interview, in which we had met with every consideration and courtesy. About a week later we were sent a transcript of our evidence for approval.

THE EDUCATION OF JOHANNESBURG'S CHILDREN



Speakers at the Black Sash Forum on Education (left to right): Rev. B. L. E. Sigamoney; Mrs. C. Alexander; Mr. B. L. Lesboai; Mrs. J. Stuelair, National President of the Black Sash; Mr. R. Tunmer.