

More members tell why they joined the Black Sash



Nazi Germany

WHEN I was young I saw from far away what happened in Nazi Germany. I asked myself: couldn't people see it coming, couldn't they do something, didn't they protest? Some people did see it coming, many people did something and their protests took them into the concentration camps to die.

Things aren't as bad as that in this country. The millions of unwanted Africans, unlike the Jews in Germany, do not end up in gas chambers; they provide a much-needed labour force. Food isn't rationed with only selected persons able to procure it — anyone may buy it provided he has enough money left after the rent has been paid. Houses are available for those who qualify for residence. Jobs are there, provided there's no insistence on choosing what to do. The law is still there, although for whose benefit isn't always clear.

But it's all bad enough and it gets under your skin. It has got under mine and I find my nice home and garden, ample larder and safe place in the sun not so enjoyable. The contrast is too painful — the prospects are too bleak for too many.

Some women find party politics difficult to understand. I am one of these. I support the party of my choice, having examined its intentions, but I can't work up much enthusiasm about doing more. I *can* get enthusiastic about combatting injustice directly — even by way of a simple, silent protest. There are, in the Sash organization, many direct ways in which to help the oppressed; it depends on your talents and your time and your interest. You need not have a degree in Social Science; all you

need is a little compassion.

Even if our protest fails, if our whole structure in South Africa crumbles because our efforts were too weak or came too late, it's a good thing to have protested, to have cared about the broken homes, the terror caused by police raids, the lack of freedom, the feeling of being unwanted anywhere. That is why I joined the Sash.

— B. MURRAY.

An Individualist

I AM an individualist. I believe that governments exist for the individual and not the individual for the government. To me, a government is good and the laws are just only in so far as they respect and uphold the rights of the individuals of whom the state is composed. Today, far too often everywhere, this view is ignored and the individual is ruthlessly sacrificed in the interests of the state or such meaningless abstractions as "dictatorship of the proletariat", "white supremacy" or "baasskap".

The Black Sash appeared to me to be an organisation that would oppose the regimentation of the individual in the interests of a political theory.

I believe in Parliamentary democracy, but Parliamentary government cannot work without a strong, healthy, critical opposition. A great Parliamentary leader of the past said that it was the business of the opposition to oppose. The official opposition in the House of Assembly appears to have forgotten this, or never to have known it. Its feeble antics so infuriated me that I was prepared to join the Black Sash almost before it started to carry on the business of the opposition outside Parliament more vigorously than it was carried on within.

Long ago men and women struggled to build up a civilization which I inherited. This civilization has given me immense benefits. I am a debtor to the men and women of the past; to pay that debt I must pass on to my children this heritage undiminished. In the Black Sash I can work with other women conscious of their debt to the past and of their obligations to their children.

—MARY STOY.

I hated these Ideas

I JOINED the Black Sash because four years ago I knew no other effective way in which I could protest against the outrages which the Nationalist Government was perpetrating in the name of South Africa. I hated the ideas which they were pledged to carry to ruthless extremes, and I despised the cynical irresponsibility of Opposition politicians who seemed unwilling or unable to make any stand against them on clear moral issues.

Men of the kind I had helped to elect to Parliament had, I felt, failed dishonourably in their duty, by not expressing more vehemently the disquiet and indignation that was disturbing many ordinary people. In the face of the threatening evil I felt helpless, but I could not be content to remain passive.

I was in no doubt that the job I was doing, bearing my children and caring for my home, was my supreme task for the time being. But I knew I had a share of public responsibility as well.

Then the Sash came into being. The women who participated in its first dramatic demonstrations made it clear that they held the same ideals as I did. I could not take part in all they were doing, but I could associate myself with their courageous protests by merely joining the Sash. And that was what I did.

Quote . . .

South Africa has the most tyrannical political system masquerading as a democracy this side of the Iron Curtain.

—Mr. Alfred Friendly, U.S. Editor.

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You may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you.

—Sir De Villiers Graaff.

At about this time I met Christopher Gell. His titanic fight in the cause of the oppressed, when he knew that he himself was dying, inspired my profoundest respect and admiration. I knew that I did not have the heroic qualities by which he had risen above his disabilities to become a living legend. But his example proved to me something I already suspected, that the old defeatist parrot-cry "What can I do about all this?" is nothing but a weak excuse for not doing anything.

Even if in the end the evil policies that threaten us prevail (and I do not believe that they will), I have at least the answer to my own conscience, and to my children's later questioning: "What were you doing while all this was going on?" I haven't been able to do very much. But I give my unqualified support to the Black Sash, which has done a good deal towards upholding standards that I cherish.

—MARGARET RAINIER.

A Splendid Job

WHEN the Black Sash first came into existence I took it to be a feminine edition of the Torch Commando, a praiseworthy demonstration — no more. Although I admired the women who stood in silent protest I did not join them because I felt that neither defence of a constitution which was already broken, nor mourning, was a constructive, forward-looking task.

Now that the Black Sash has taken upon itself the much more real task of preparing the ground for a new constitution, I feel no such hesitation. It is doing a splendid job on two fronts. On the one hand through functions like its Brains Trusts, and through its magazine, it is bringing to large numbers of white women a realisation of their country's problems; and, on the other, through its positive help to non-Whites in their troubles, it is building a body of goodwill between races which may well be the deciding factor in maintaining Western civilization in this country.

Black Sashers are not the only people engaged in such work, but women today form an important half of the body politic and the useful, sensible co-operation of Sashers with other organisations has won for them an important place among those who plan a better South Africa.

When I am an old lady, I know that I shall not be able to look back upon this time without a sense of shame if I do not actively associate myself with the Black Sash.

—B. M.