

CONFERENCE IMPRESSIONS

THE LAST AND THE NEXT

IN TOWN . . .

To the Editor, *The Black Sash*,

The Conference opened in a spirit of apprehension. There seemed to be doubt as to whether the Black Sash had achieved anything or if, indeed, it had done more harm than good. It was not long before that spirit was completely dispelled. It was evident that there was much still to be done—work that no political party could do.

With this assurance Conference set to work with a will and did much constructive thinking and came to certain definite decisions.

The resolutions passed were more concrete and constructive than any decisions taken in the past. Our policy has moved from the negative to the constructive line. We have now something definite to work for.

The need for establishing the climate of opinion whereby the public will realise the necessity for a new Constitution for South Africa is of the first importance. It is becoming more and more evident to us that there is a danger of a republic being accepted in this country under the existing Constitution. As far as true South Africans are concerned the Constitution has been destroyed. It is now an instrument which any unscrupulous government can manipulate at will. South Africa needs a rigid Constitution in which the fundamental liberties and basic rights of all the people are enshrined. There is a *limitless field of work and study to be done in this aspect of our work alone.*

The resolution of bringing pressure to bear on all those concerned with the making and implementation of unjust laws is one of the most effective ways of realising our aims and objects. The Southern Transvaal Region has met with not negligible results in that it has drawn the attention of the public to the danger of removing rights from one section of the population, for this inevitably removes the rights from all sections. It has expedited the lifting of the ban on more than 10 Africans being allowed to attend meetings. What is more it drew a lengthy reply and explanation from the Minister of Native Affairs, when a letter was written to him asking him to receive a deputation from the Black Sash to discuss the ban. This resolution offers endless ways of bringing direct pressure on those in authority and is possible of great achievement.

The third resolution of giving direct help to those affected by unjust legislation is a very worthwhile one. While it assures a more complete knowledge of the facts for our own members and will after their thinking to a great extent, it will give very real assistance to those who need it most.

As a general impression the Conference was an exciting one. It left one with the desire to get on

with the job and to do it thoroughly. It was felt that those who have drifted away from the Black Sash cannot fail to be impressed and that here at last is work for every individual member to do.

In Johannesburg we feel that once this very full programme is properly in operation, our membership should consolidate and increase.

J. SINCLAIR.

To the Editor, *The Black Sash*,

I believe practical work will help the Sash find common ground with the general public. When people say, "Why do you stand around air-ports all the time?" etc. we can and have explained to them our new ideas and many have changed their opinion of us.

We feel that it is quite in order, apart from the deprivation of rights and liberties, to stress again and again the inhuman aspect of the various laws and their amendments and implementation. It is this which will disturb people more effectively than the abstract ideals. We cannot, of course, do without the latter, but they are more difficult to "sell."

One gratifying thing is that all the members we have now are quite sure that they want the Sash to go on, know why they are still members, and are waiting to get going. Our minds are not obscured by disconcerting things like a general election.

I am sure we all expect the next conference to consolidate all the proposals for active work and education which were put forward at the Special Conference.

DIANA DAVIS,
Port Elizabeth.

IN THE COUNTRY . . .

To the Editor, *The Black Sash*,

Mrs. Green's stimulating "Special Conference Impressions" in the August issue must have helped to revive the constructive spirit of the June Conference in some of us in whom that spirit was becoming a little dim. For—let us face it—in the country regions we have experienced a melancholy flagging in the "determination, energy and enthusiasm" which are required of us. Here, in my own Region, we put everything into the Election fight. It was a **personal** fight, and its failure caused a reaction of profound despondency. With us, no-one is anonymous, so "husband trouble" and genuine fear of victimisation are urgent realities. "What is the use of carrying on?" and "What good can WE do?" are questions which sometimes seem unanswerable.

The Conference resolution urging members to undertake practical work amongst those deprived of civil rights and liberties has little reality for us,

because in a country region it is almost impossible to implement. Lacking a local press, we hear of cases or know what is happening under, say, the Group Areas Act, only when action is too late even if, earlier, it might have been effective. We know also that in many instances the intervention of the bitterly disliked Black Sash would do more harm than good. Such work as the feeding of native school-children—victims of “unjust and discriminatory” regulations — has generally already been undertaken by organisations such as the Child Welfare Society or the Rotary Anns. Since they can command wider support than the Sash, we recognise that they can do the job better, though of course many of the keenest workers are Black Sash members.

We had hoped that the Black Sash might have tackled the problem of the political indoctrination of school-children—an abuse of which country members are intimately aware. The Conference, however, turned it down on principle. The difficulty would have been to combat indoctrination without becoming tarred with the same brush, without ourselves competing for the children’s minds. Nevertheless, this might have been made an issue at the forthcoming Provincial Elections by challenging every candidate to work for a united nation by the introduction of legislation penalising teachers convicted of the offence. The shelving of this whole vital matter was a disappointment to us. We hope the October Conference may have second thoughts about this as Black Sash work.

Whatever the decisions of the Cape Town Conference may be, we have the problem—what is the present job of the country regions? For we know we ARE important; that it IS important that we carry on. Nationalist strength is in the country areas and it is there, ultimately, that a change of heart must come if South Africa is to survive. So we have to remain alive, keep the organisation ticking over, our members alert and informed. But our really important job is to keep the whole Black Sash in touch with the outlook of the country areas—an outlook which must be understood and MUST be kept in mind because it is the final key to the whole situation. And we must give the whole movement the moral support of country members—support which the Nationalists fear more than one might suppose.

It is a difficult, unexciting programme, calling for steadfastness of purpose rather than the stimulating action required of Black Sash members who can play a more positive part. We shall lose members; we shall get few recruits because we have so little to offer them. But somehow we shall carry on—because WE MUST.

B. H. TRACEY.

To the Editor, **The Black Sash**,

I have been ruminating on the Resolutions passed at the Special National Conference, and wondering how a country region such as ours can implement them. I found these ruminations very depressing and I tried to put myself in a more constructive

frame of mind by wondering what I would like to see emanating from the Annual National Conference in October.

Living in a small country town in the Transvaal, where no-one is anonymous, we have found that our active protests, haunts, vigils and demonstrations etc. were taken, quite rightly, as criticism of the present Government and therefore, quite wrongly, as being “Un-South-African” and disloyal to our country. Any attempt to put over the Black Sash point of view, in person, has invariably been met either with frank disbelief or, which is far more shattering, with cold hatred. Only those members who have lived in the Platteland and have tried to argue with the more embittered Nationalist, will realise what we are up against. We hold our meetings; we talk to the converted only; we seem to get no further. We have no Constitutional experts to prepare blue-prints for brighter and better constitutions for South Africa; the bulk of our practical welfare work is already being done by individual members of the Black Sash.

I, personally, consider that our only hope lies in propaganda, and by this I mean the right type of propaganda put out in the right way to the right recipients. It is no use making brilliant speeches to those who already agree with you. It is no good telling the victims of unjust and discriminatory laws that they are being badly treated. They know it already. Printed propaganda has been successful in this area, as we know it was read, but it is expensive and wasteful.

I would like to see the October Conference come to light with ideas for practical propaganda which will reach the Nationalist supporters. For instance—

Through the Afrikaans Press:

Would it not be possible for someone of Mrs. Green’s calibre to approach the Afrikaans Press and ask if they will accept and publish regular articles expressing the Black Sash point of view? I have in mind something of the “Jan Burger” type, which appears in “**The Star**.” If the Nationalist Press refuses to accept such articles, the new United Party Afrikaans papers would be the next best thing, as they are also read by some Nationalists.

Through practical Welfare Work:

We have found that most of our local welfare work is already being organised or carried out by individual members of the Black Sash. It is more than likely that the same conditions prevail in other regions. I suggest that these members try calling on their Nationalist friends, acquaintances and local organisations to assist them, and so let the Nationalist women see for themselves the results of the discriminatory laws.

I am sure there must be many practical ways of influencing the electorate, and I hope that Conference will try to ensure that our propaganda reaches the right people.

S.M.P.