



**DISSENSION
IN THE
RANKS**
white opposition
in south africa

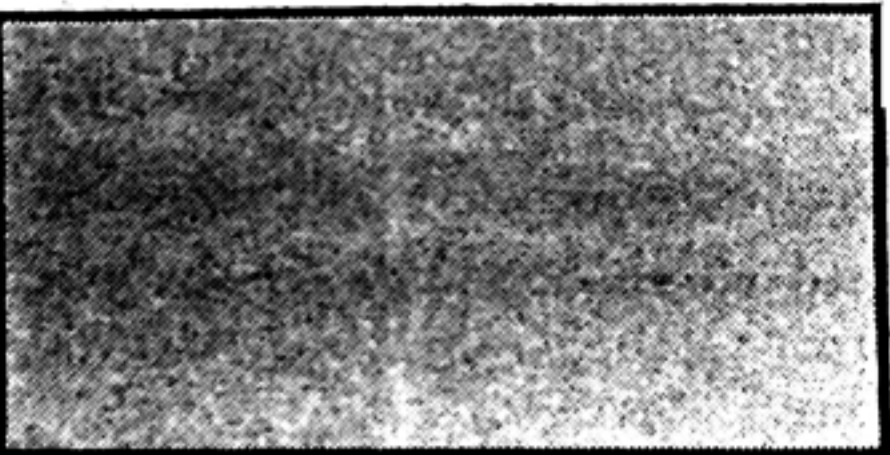
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SOUTH AFRICA 1979

**AT
THE
OUTSET...**



This book hopefully re-opens a debate which has for too long remained dormant. It is an attempt to examine the way in which white South Africans have organized to opposed inequality in the past. This will hopefully aid our understanding of the present situation in South Africa and will provide some directives for those presently included in the fight against apartheid.

The past two years have been particularly dramatic in the development of South Africa. The Nationalist Government has attempted to mobilize all the powers at its disposal to put an end to the forces that challenge and threaten the anti-democratic system which it represents. It has played a very delicate balancing act - promising reforms on the one hand, whilst introducing increasingly repressive measures on the other.

However, despite the dangers averted by this "Total Strategy", the majority of South Africans have resisted the anti-democratic nature of our society on an almost unprecedented scale. Communities have united to oppose increases in rent, or transport costs. Students have boycotted their inferior education calling for an "education which liberates", not one which "subordinates." Workers have united in demanding pay increases and democratic worker representation. At the same time, the South African civil war has intensified, each week heralding reports of acts of sabotage or the beginning of a new "terrorism" trial. A stage has been reached where people are actively challenging every issue and structure which reinforces or contributes to strengthening the anti-democratic nature of South African society.

The mass opposition of the past two years has shown various definite characteristics

- * Firstly, although much opposition has occurred in a relatively spontaneous fashion, there has been an increasing understanding of the necessity for it to be rooted in solid organizational structures. For the battle against apartheid to have maximum effect, it is necessary for people to fight on the basis of their united strength.
- * Secondly, in contrast to the "Black Consciousness period" of the late 1960's and 1970's, people are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that conflict in South Africa is not simply between Black and White. Inequality is far more deeply rooted in a fundamentally anti-democratic system of exploitation and oppression. The line is, therefore, clearly being drawn between those who defend these anti-democratic structures and those who stand for a truly democratic future.

- * Thirdly, there has been an increasing recognition of the fact that democrats have a rich history of opposition to inequality in this country. Decades of resistance have provided a wealth of guidelines and lessons for people involved in the fight against apartheid today. The advances of today are therefore seen as an extension of the organizations, programmes and activities which have preceded them.

It is within the parameters of these three characteristics that this booklet is defined. It is clear that the economically and politically privileged positions of the majority of white South Africans ensures that they accept and support the existing system of inequality.

However, a grouping of whites who firmly and genuinely oppose this undemocratic system does exist. If the battle is between democratic and anti-democratic forces, it is clear that these people do have a part to play. It is the part that these white democrats have and will play in the struggle for liberation in South Africa that we examine here.

This booklet is not a history of white opposition in South Africa. Although it relies primarily on this history, it is not an attempt to analyse or describe the progression and dynamics of this opposition. It rather focusses on the various organizational responses that whites have adopted in opposing the nature of South African society. By examining historical examples of these responses, it attempts to explain the lessons to be learned from these past victories and errors - in a sense, the "do's and don'ts" - for the operation of white democrats in formal organizational structures today.

The organizations chosen for the purposes of this booklet are not considered to be the most important or the most progressive. In fact, some of them have quite obviously failed to support the fight for a democratic future, and sometimes even hindered it. At the same time other organizations which have undoubtedly been part of this fight for democracy - NUSAS and the Christian Institute being cases in point - have been omitted from the discussion. The specific organizations have been chosen rather because it is felt that their particular histories illustrate and present the key areas of debate and discussion for the organizational considerations of white democrats.

It would be wrong if this booklet appeared as a comprehensive examination of the activities of white democrats. It, in fact, only focusses on one area of activity - that of specifically white dominated organizational structures. The roles of people working in fields such as trade unions, journalistic work and the various professions will hopefully be dealt with in a later work. This is not a reflection of the importance attached to these areas - for they are obviously enormously important - but rather of the limitations of this publication.

The aim of this booklet therefore, is to stimulate debate. It is hoped that the material provided can be extended and adopted to form the basis for working discussions between democrats in all areas and at all levels.



PARLIAMENT-
and
influencing the
'voting public'

A Distorted Parliament

A central feature of the political system which has been developed in South Africa is the equation of "democracy" with a "white-elected parliament". A four-yearly general election amongst the white public is regarded, with parliament and its associate institutions, as the legitimate mechanism whereby the concerns of society are regulated and determined.

It is obvious that parliament is at the core of the existing political system. It is here that laws are actually made and from where, more recently, proclamations are issued. However, this does not necessarily imply that parliament in any way reflects the reality of the central conflicts in South Africa. The 1981 general elections illustrated this clearly. The past two years have been marked by dramatic mass mobilization of the majority of South Africans - mobilisation against the oppressive and exploitative system under which they are forced to live. School boycotts; strike activity; resistance to rent increases; consumer boycotts and the escalation of South Africa's civil war, in the form of sabotage attacks, are only some elements of this. A brief look at the issues around which the election was fought, exposes the extent to which these developments were totally ignored. The key questions in choosing the new government were rather "Russian spies", "Dr Munnik's Diet" and the "International Communist Conspiracy" against South Africa.

The groups that have formed part of South Africa's "parliamentary opposition" must be seen with the context of this grossly distorted political structure. It is necessary to evaluate their histories and political programmes to determine whether they have in any way managed to overcome the limitations of this structure and present a challenge to it. The question is not on the "morality" of their underlying motives. It is rather whether they have been able to use the legitimacy of their positions as white political parties, to significantly attack the existing system of exploitation and oppression.

A Liberal History

South African Liberalism has a history dating back to the 19th Century. It is during its revival, in the late 1940's, that one can identify 3 distinct trends within the Liberal tradition - each emerging as responses to specific developments in South Africa as a whole :

- * The victory of the Allied forces over fascism in the Second World War, stimulated a sense of liberal optimism. Under the leadership of Smuts' Deputy Prime Minister, Jan Hofmeyr, the "Old Cape Tradition" of "morally" based liberalism was revitalised. Liberalism was originally imported to South Africa from Great Britain. The "traditional" trend remained close to the British tradition, which placed the institution of parliament, the rule of law, and an independent judiciary above all else.
- * The Second World War had a marked economic impact on South Africa. The manufacturing industry expanded rapidly and the Black population of the urban centres grew in leaps and bounds. The manufacturing industry which by the 1940's surpassed both mining and agriculture in its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, generated a new set of labour requirements. In particular, it created a large number of semi-skilled positions, which blacks were increasingly

occupying. Since semi-skilled work required training and a low job turnover, a settled labour force was required. This was in marked contrast to the high turnover of the prevalent migrant labour system. The manufacturing system therefore began to advocate the relaxation of influx control and the settlement of Black families in urban townships. A "pragmatic" trend therefore emerged within South African liberalism, which called for the phasing out of influx control and a far less coercive set of mechanisms to deal with the Black trade union and political movements.

- The 1940's were years of mass mobilization and militancy by South Africa's oppressed communities. The African trade union movement had developed enormously and created a period of intense industrial turmoil. At the same time, the African National Congress (ANC) was developing into a mass based organization with a new leadership, including men like Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu. The ANC introduced a far more militant programme of action into the organization. Before its disbanding in 1950, the Communist Party also enjoyed increased support and organizational success. These developments undoubtedly had an effect on elements of the liberal community. Whilst most stuck to their "traditional" notions, a small group of "radical" liberals emerged in the 1950's. Although these people did not necessarily align themselves with the ideas or actions of the mass organizations, they began to recognize the fact that the liberal movement could not isolate itself from other political developments.

It was the interaction between these three trends within the South African Liberal Movement - the traditional, the pragmatic and the radical - that was to characterize and determine the direction of the liberal parliamentary opposition.

The Nationalists' take over

The defeat of the United Party by Nationalists in the 1948 general election was a severe blow for liberalism in South Africa. The new government immediately set about reversing the trend of "liberalization" which had begun to take shape in the final years of U.P. rule. State control over the mobility of labour was extended and increasingly coercive measures used to crush the Black trade union and political movements.

In May 1951 the War Veterans Torch Commando was formed by Liberals incensed by the violation of the constitution by the Nationalists in removing the "Coloureds" from the voters roll. The Torch Commando supported the U.P., believing in a constitutional means of protest. The following year, an alliance of the Torch Commando, the United Party and the Labour Party was formed with the common objective of defeating the Nationalists at the next election. They called themselves the United Democratic Front.

The United Democratic Front was soundly defeated by the Nationalist in the 1953 general election. The optimism and faith which liberals had enjoyed in the U.P. were now shattered as they recognized their inability to present a serious challenge to the Nats. The stage was therefore set for the formation of two new liberal parliamentary political parties - the Liberal Party of South Africa and the Progressive Party.



The Liberal Party

A call to whites

In November 1952, at a meeting held in Johannesburg's Darragh Hall, a call was made to white South Africans to join the struggle against racism and apartheid. The meeting was addressed by Oliver Tambo of the ANC and Yusuf Cachalia, of the South African Indian Congress. Although very few whites had participated in the Defiance Campaign of that year, the campaign had stimulated much interest about the struggle for national liberation. The purpose of this meeting was to encourage whites to form a parallel organization to complement and work with the ANC and SAIC.

There were fundamental differences amongst those present at the Darragh Hall meeting which emerged in the discussion of the franchise policy which the new organization would adhere to. On the one hand, numerous people supported the policies of the ANC and therefore called for a universal franchise. These people, who included ex-members of the Communist Party, were later to form the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD). On the other hand, a smaller group of people felt that in order to avoid alienating the white public, the new organization should subscribe to a policy of a qualified franchise. This group, which was openly hostile to those Communists present, formed the basis of another new organization - the Liberal Party (L.P.)

Continuing the traditions

The Liberal Party was formed in 1953, in the wake of the defeat of the United Democratic Front at the general election. Its ideological heritage was directly in line with the "traditional" liberalism that had thrived in the Cape as much as 100 years earlier. Its founding principles included :

- The essential dignity of every human being.
- The maintenance of the rule of law.



Patrick Duncan with Alan Paton (centre), 1956.

- * The principle of freedom.
- * The right of individuals.

Central to its foundation was the absolute rejection of violence. Alan Paton, a future president of the L.P. said, "... any person who calls himself a liberal and who plans violence against persons is not really a liberal at all."

The L.P. was set up as the arch-rival of Communism in South African opposition. "Communism" was blindly lumped together with "fascism" as a "totalitarian evil", and is dated as an evil often as great as Apartheid itself. At the same time, "Western Civilization" and an idealized "capitalist dream" were set up as the party's models, in its early years. Margaret Ballinger said in the first Presidential Address that, "... the State we hope to maintain is a Western State, maintaining Western values and based on Western Culture."

It is possibly wrong to simply categorize the L.P. as an example of "parliamentary opposition". In fact, there was constant tension within the party about its precise role in South African politics. Whilst it was generally agreed that its aim was to influence the "voting public", people differed over the precise manner in which this should be done. On the one hand, it was felt that the L.P. should primarily concentrate on its role as a political party which would contest elections. The hope was that it could gain a significant number of seats, possibly over a parliamentary majority, by reassuring the white electorate that a non-racial democracy would be a "valid and exciting" choice for South Africa. On the other hand, it was felt that

the L.P. should attempt to build itself into a (multiracial) mass party which would be large enough to present a real threat to the government. The L.P. would serve as a model of multiracial organization, which would stimulate liberalism and multi-racialism - and influence events "in some way".

Both of these positions reflected a markedly underdeveloped concept of the actual process of change. The first position relied on the belief that the white population could be convinced, through the normal party political process, that it was in their best interest to relinquish their privileged position and help build a multiracial society. There was little recognition of the extent to which white South Africans actually believe that their privileged position in society is something that they have earned and which is ultimately in the best interests of all the people of South Africa. Although the second position recognized the limited potential of the parliamentary process itself, its notion of how a mass multiracial party would force the government to change, remained vague. Other than a total rejection of violence, there was little clarity as to the manner in which social change would come about.

Liberal Policy

The early years of the Liberal Party were notable for an overemphasis on purely "political" issues, at the expense of the issue of South Africa's economic inequalities. The Liberal ideology established various "freedoms" - the freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience etc. - as the essential components of a just society. L.P. policy therefore relied on examining the various actions and policies of the Nationalist Government, and establishing the extent to which they contravened these freedoms. They therefore, succeeded in isolating as unjust, acts such as the Urban Areas Act, Native Land Act and various laws enforcing influx control. They failed, however, to expose the way in which these acts aided apartheid - as a specific form of racial capitalism.

As the party developed it did become aware of the extent to which many of South Africa's key problems - particularly that of poverty - were not simply "political", but actually "economic". However, policy was based on the notion that apartheid had worked against South Africa's economic development. The Liberal framework failed to accommodate an understanding of the manner in which apartheid's various institutions, such as influx control and the Colour Bar, were actually the cornerstones of South Africa's economic growth. The party's economic policy therefore continued to rely on the hypothesis that the main requirement for improving the living standards of the population, and ending poverty, was the abolition of racial discrimination.

The issue of the franchise remained a chief concern of the Liberal Party during the 1950's. At the first Congress, in 1953, they subscribed to a qualified franchise to secure an "orderly transition" to the goal of "responsible participation of all South Africans in the government and democratic process of the country..." Although the 1954 Congress adopted the goal of a universal franchise, they believed that this should occur in progressive stages. The franchise policy did much to diminish the credibility of the Liberal Party amongst Black South Africans. Even though they eventually fully accepted the notion of universal franchise in 1959, their attitude was always regarded as being paternalistic and condescending toward those people who would have to "qualify" in the Liberal Party's terms to be able to vote.

Multiracial membership

Although the L.P. was founded by whites, it was conceived as a multiracial organization. L.P. members harshly criticised the structure of the Congress Alliance - with its four racially defined associate organizations. The L.P. was to be a "model of multiracialism", even if this only took the form of "multiracial association of social gatherings". From 1954 onwards, Africans were recruited into the L.P. Most Black members were involved in professions such as teaching or journalism. Isolated groups of workers and peasants did join, however, the best example being 200 illiterate peasants who joined after Liberal Party lawyer, Ernie Wentzel, handled a successful land tenure case for them in the Northern Transvaal.

Liberal Party membership eventually reached 5000, although it is doubtful whether a great percentage of these were actually active in the organization. Besides contesting elections, the activity centred around membership drives and public meetings, rather than active participation in organizational work and campaign. At the same time, the contradiction of having a multiracial organization gearing itself to contesting whites-only elections, contributed to the L.P. never actually gaining a seat in parliament. (Although a number of white "Native Representatives" in parliament and the Senate were from the L.P.).

Although the "multiracialism" of the Liberal Party was presented as a particularly attractive concept, it ultimately did little more than provide a point for the social interaction of people from different racial groups. In political terms, it more often hindered than advanced the efficacy of the organization. Members did not realize that whilst "non-racialism" is a central goal of democrats strictly non-racial



The South African delegation to the All Africa Peoples' Conference, Accra, 1958. l-r: Patrick Duncan, Ezekiel Mphahlele, (Dr Nkrumah), Rev. Michael Scott, Cynthia Duncan, Jordan Ngubane.

organization is not necessarily the most effective means of achieving that goal. The divisions of South African society have developed largely along racial lines, ensuring that the different racial groups live under the different conditions and have different interests. As a result, it is often most practical for organizational structures to develop in line with the specific conditions of each group. The key priorities are, firstly, that these groups are co-ordinated and, secondly, that they share a common programme in working for a non-racial future.

The Liberal Party and the Congress Movement

The Congress Alliance - consisting of the ANC, SAIC, Coloured Peoples' Congress, South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the Congress of Democrats (COD) - emerged in the early 1950's as the dominant political force fighting apartheid. Under the political programme of the Freedom Charter, it initiated a decade of mass mobilization including defiance campaigns, boycotts and national stay-aways.

From the time of its formation, the Liberal Party defined itself outside the ambit of the mass movement. Its insistence in only supporting constitutional and parliamentary means of bringing about change, automatically implied a rejection of Congress strategies. At the same time, the paternalism of many L.P. members, coupled with their blind antagonism towards Communists antagonized many Congress members. As a result, in its early years, Congress leaders regarded the L.P. members as little more than a "subtle species of Nats."

In 1955 the Congress Movement set about organizing what would be the most democratic national gathering in South Africa's history. A campaign was launched to collect and correlate the demands of all the people of South Africa for a democratic future. These demands were synthesized into the Freedom Charter, which was adopted by 3000 delegates at the "Congress of the People" held in Kliptown. The Liberal Party was invited to participate in the Congress, but refused because of its ever present fear that Communists would dominate. The credibility of the party suffered greatly because of this decision.

Whilst the initial years of the Liberal Party had been dominated by the ideas and attitudes of the "traditional" liberal trend, the later years saw an increase in the influence of the "radical" liberals. The notion that change should only come about through strictly constitutional means, lost ground in the face of the magnitude and impact of Congress activities. As a result, Liberal Party members began to cooperate with Congress in certain areas. These included organizing food for the Treason Trial; supporting the Alexandra Bus Boycott and joining the Congress call for a foreign boycott of South African goods in 1959.

Although by the end of the 1950's COD recognized the need to work with the more "radical" members of the L.P. the relationships between the two organizations always remained relatively hostile. The Liberal Party continued to brand COD as being nothing more than the reconstituted Communist Party and failed to recognize the practical considerations which went into its existence as a racially defined organization within a non-racial alliance. It was because of such differences that the Liberal Party only supported the Congress Movement on isolated occasions whilst COD formed an essential component of that movement.

The Liberal Party and the Pan African Congress (PAC)

Although the relationship between the Liberal Party and the Congress Movement improved, the relationship always remained ambiguous and erratic. The breakaway of the "Africanists" from the ANC in 1959, to form the PAC under Robert Sobukwe, introduced a further complication into the already complex situation. The "Africanists" presented themselves as the natural ally of the "radicals" within the Liberal Party. Not only were they equally anti-communist, but most of their antagonisms were directed against the Liberal Party's "bugbear" - the Congress of Democrats.

The Liberal Party "radicals" did not adopt a unified approach towards either the ANC or PAC. Some undoubtedly rejected the PAC and continued to offer their erratic support to the Congress Movement. On the other hand, a fairly substantial relationship did develop with the PAC during the two years of its existence. Although Patrick Duncan was a particularly controversial L.P. member, his involvement with both the L.P. and PAC reveals many of the problems of their association.

Patrick Duncan was originally a United Party member who rejected the Liberal Party on the grounds that it was never likely to emerge as a real political power. He had been one of the few whites to participate in the Congress Defiance Campaign of 1952 but his violently anti-communist views had limited his increased involvement with the Congress Movement. He claimed that communism was a "greater enemy than Verwoerd" and, on those grounds, developed a hostile attitude towards the Congress of Democrats. The decline of the United Party as a real challenge to the Nationalist Government during the early 1950's, caused Duncan to eventually join the Liberal Party. He worked as a national organizer for 2 years before resigning to establish and edit the Cape Town newspaper, "Contact".

Duncan consistently attempted to maintain close relationships with leaders from all spheres of the political spectrum - ranging from Nationalist businessmen to ANC activists. It was quite clear, however, that his ultimate sympathies lay with the Africanists of the PAC. A close relationship developed between the liberals involved in the "Contact" newspaper, and the PAC in the Western Cape. Although the paper was mildly critical of the new organization, it was undoubtedly supportive of it. At the same time, the PAC began to approach the Liberal Party for material aid, in particular finances to run their campaigns.

The true nature of this relationship, however, emerged during the explosive events of Cape Town in March 1960. Following on the deaths of 69 people at Sharpeville and Langa during PAC anti-pass campaign activities, the Western Cape entered into a general period of crisis. The Congress Alliance called a National stay-away as "Day of Mourning and Protest" and initiated a sustained period of strike activity and violent demonstrations - eventually causing the State to declare a "State of Emergency".

The culminating event of this period came on March 30, when as many as 20 000 people marched from the African townships into the centre of Cape Town. The leader of the march was Phillip Kgosana, a young PAC member who enjoyed a close relationship with Patrick Duncan. Duncan's role in "solving" this situation was particularly dubious. After negotiating with the police, he persuaded Kgosana to disband the march in favour of the promise of a meeting with the Minister of

Justice. Kgosana, placing enormous faith in Duncan's judgment, agreed. The march was disbanded but when Kgosana presented himself for the meeting, he was arrested. Duncan had therefore succeeded in completely dissipating the militant mood and demands of the people of Cape Town's townships and played straight into the hands of the South African Police.

The relationship between the L.P. and PAC was a particularly problematic one. Not only did it increase Congress Movement hesitancy about working with "liberals", but it also actually dampened the limited mobilization which the PAC was able to achieve. It was highly ironic that the same group who had criticised the role of the Congress of Democrats in the Congress Alliance, now played so dubious a role with the "alternate" liberation movement.



Patrick Duncan at work in the Contact office.

A step or two behind.....

"The Liberal Party was one or two steps behind the Congress Movement. The liberals always moved with history. But they were always a step or two behind. They changed, but they never radicalized. They could never get into the action."

- Former Congress Movement member

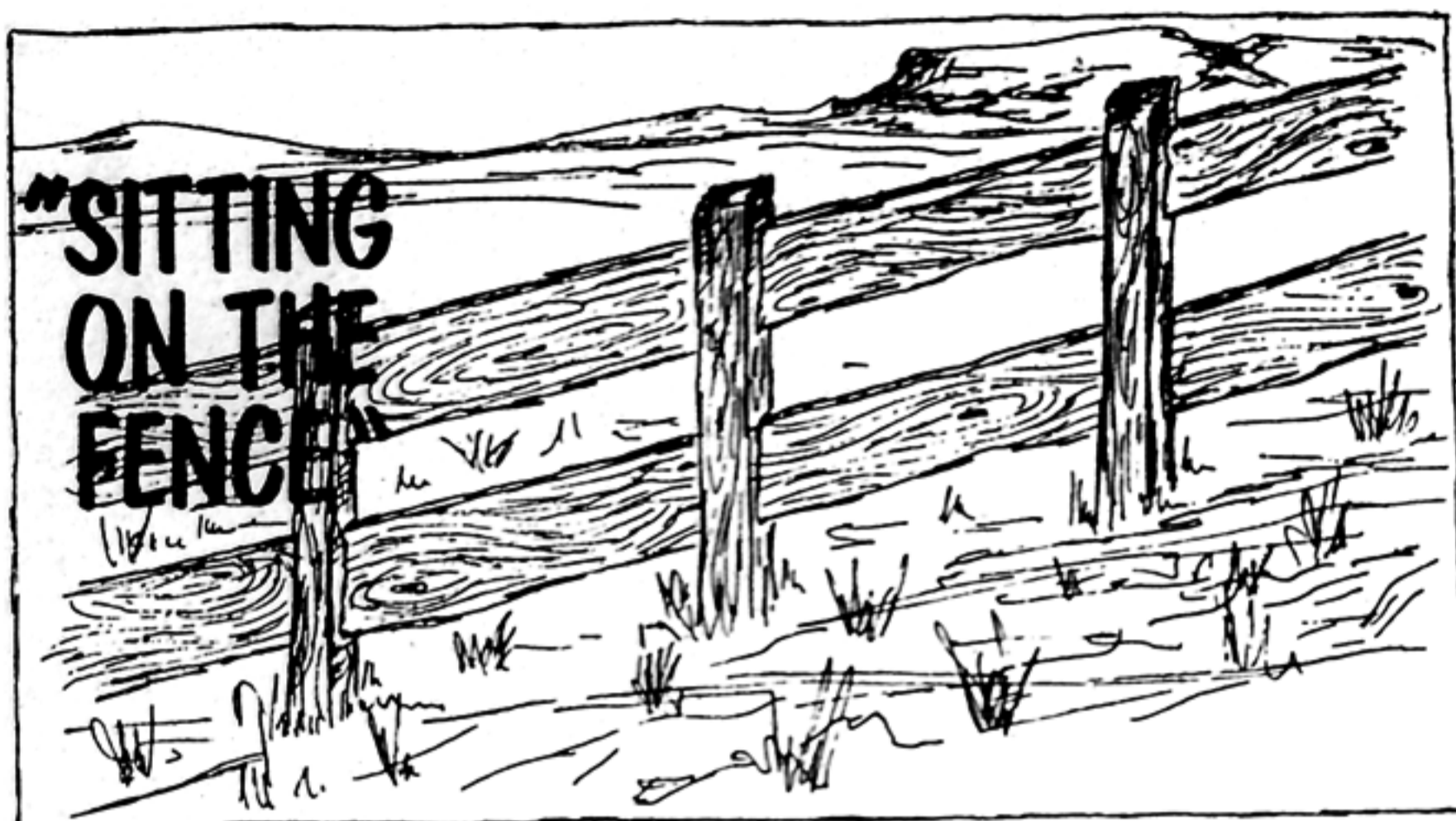
The Liberal Party undoubtedly changed as it developed through the 1950's. Firstly, the increasingly entrenched position of the Nationalist Party in parliament, convinced members that they would not be defeated by an electoral party in a conventional general election. Extra-parliamentary, non-violent strategies for change therefore became increasingly acceptable to the L.P. Although they did not initiate such strategies, they began to support them.

A further change occurred in the Liberal Party's economic policy. The enormous economic boom which engulfed South Africa at the beginning of the 1960's, shattered the traditional liberal notion that apartheid and economic expansion were incompatible. At the exact moment that apartheid had taken on its most developed form, the South African economy was expanding at an unprecedented pace. Many L.P. members began to question their previous policies as they recognized that South Africa's economic and political developments were parts of a single social system. They no longer saw the single removal of racial discrimination as an adequate solution to the country's problems. The idea of a "welfare state", modelled on those emerging in Western Europe, presented itself as an attractive option. During the early 1960's, Liberal Party economic policy therefore called for the modification, although not the fundamental restructuring, of the existing social system as a whole.

The "radicalization" which took place in the L.P., however, was decidedly limited. Although members attempted to keep in pace with the developments at the time, they were ultimately unable to situate themselves as active participants in the fight for change. On the one hand, their "radicalization" undercut their support amongst the white electorate and prevented them from playing any significant role within parliamentary structures. On the other hand, the limitations at the "radicalization" insured that they were never able to consistently and wholeheartedly support the activities of the Congress Movement. Whilst certain groups did contribute to Congress campaigns and initiatives, they always remained isolated and sporadic. At the same time, others chose to align themselves with the PAC - a grouping whose national chauvinism undoubtedly undermined the unity and strength of those fighting for change.

In 1959 the Progressive Party was formed, and largely took over from the Liberal Party, the liberal public platform. The massive period of State repression between 1960 - 1964 did not leave the L.P. unscathed. Banning orders and detentions largely emasculated its leadership. At the same time, the participation of L.P. members in the sabotage activities of the African Resistance Movement (ARM) gave the party particularly negative publicity in the white public eye.

The 1960's therefore saw the Liberal Party fading as a political organization, let alone a political force. In 1968 the Nationalist Government introduced the Prohibition of Improper Interference Act. This act made it a criminal offence to be a member of a multiracial political organization. On the grounds that this made the very existence of the L.P. illegal, it decided to disband.



The South African Institute of Race Relations

"Remaining Neutral"

It is debatable whether a history of the South African Institute of Race Relations should actually be included in a discussion of "white opposition" in South Africa. The Institute itself vociferously proclaims that it is "a-political" and retains a position of official "neutrality" in the political conflict in South Africa. However, a key question arises as to whether an organization like the Institute can actually remain "neutral". Is there really an "apolitical position"? Beyond that, what are the results of the refusal to choose sides?

To answer questions such as these, it is necessary to examine the content of the Institute's activities and to determine whether they do, in fact, have political consequences. Its inclusion in the publication, like the inclusion of some of the other organizations, is not a reflection of an acceptance of its position as a legitimate opposition grouping, but rather an acceptance of the relevance of the areas of debate which are thrown up by its history.

The hybrid nature of the SAIRR makes it difficult to isolate a single organizational strategy, except insofar as it is dominated by a liberal outlook. Briefly, the Institute is composed of two main components :

- (1) Research and Information, and
- (2) a cluster of service organizations to the black community; including bursaries, craft centres, information and education, the organization of domestic workers, etc.

In effect, therefore, the Institute is representative of two responses. The first is the response of the "academic", who wishes to make a contribution to South African society through the utilization of intellectual skills. The second response is that of the person who somehow wishes to alleviate the suffering of people in this country through the provision of certain kinds of services.

Formation and early years

The 1920's saw a number of significant political developments in South Africa. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) was formed in 1919 and achieved a considerable degree of mass mobilization of Black workers during the decade. Although by the end of the decade it was effectively a spent force, it had clearly illustrated the potential for South Africa's oppressed majority to mobilize and unite in opposition to their subordination. The 1922 Rand Revolt of white mineworkers had also, however, illustrated the force of white labour and their potential to mobilize in defence of their privileged position. These two concurrent political developments, starkly illustrated the two conflicting forces in operation in South Africa : white privilege against the oppressed masses.

The emergence of the SAIRR must be seen against the background of the emergence of this conflict onto the surface of the South African social structure. The Institute was founded in 1929 as the first "national multiracial organization, specifically established to promote inter-racial goodwill and to conduct investigations bearing upon race relations". In 1932, the organization's objectives were clearly defined. Firstly, it would "work for peace, goodwill and practical cooperation between the various sections of the populations of South Africa". Secondly, it intended to "initiate, support, assist and encourage investigations that may lead to greater knowledge and understanding of the racial groups and of the relations that subsist and should subsist between them".

Various local bodies concerned with "race relations" had preceded the Institute. In 1921, a Dr Thomas J Jones and Dr J E K Aggrey from the United States visited South Africa and, together with people like Mr J D Rheinallt Jones, urged the formation of Joint Councils to "promote understanding and goodwill between Europeans and Africans". The Councils gained a certain momentum and by the late 1920's there were about 30 in operation amongst various racial groups. On this basis, Rheinallt Jones secured funds from groups such as the Carnegie Corporation and called an Inter-racial conference in Cape Town in 1929. The organizing committee for this conference met again later in Johannesburg and agreed to constitute itself into the South African Institute of Race Relations.

From the outset it was made clear that although the Institute was formed in response to conflict, it did not wish to choose sides. It "pledged itself to pay due regard to opposing views sincerely held" and agreed not to identify or associate with any political party. It refused in the early years, to comment on national issues and conducted its investigations into race relations in terms of a belief in "the pursuit of the truth as a value in itself." On these grounds, representatives and deputations were made to the government on matters of race relations.

Eclipsed

The victory of the Nationalist Party in the 1948 general election, and the rapid solidifying of National Party power, however, forced the SAIRR to adopt a more

decisive political position. The actions of the Apartheid Government decidedly worsened "race relations" in the country presenting them as the primary source of conflict. On these grounds, the Institute began to speak against the systematic application of Apartheid policies, which "further entrenched white domination and extended the areas of legally institutionalized discrimination".

In 1952, the Institute presented extensive written evidence to the Commission on "The Socio-Economic Development of the Native Areas within the Union of South Africa" (The Tomlinson Commission), in which it emphasised that only through continued economic development would there be increased integration. A summary of this evidence was published in the booklet "Go Forward in Faith" which, for the first time, stated the broad lines of the Institute's own policy on major racial issues and indicated the path it believed South Africa would have to follow to achieve multiracial harmony, equal opportunity and common citizenship in the interests of all its people.

Although the Institute opposed the discriminatory nature of Apartheid, it clung to the notion that it could exist as some kind of "neutral mediator" in the conflict. Whilst South Africa's oppressed majority mobilized behind the Congress Alliance in an unprecedented display of mass resistance during the 1950's, the Institute still avoided "choosing sides". Its aim remained to try and ease tensions by submitting proposals to the Government on African development — specifically choosing areas where agreement was possible.

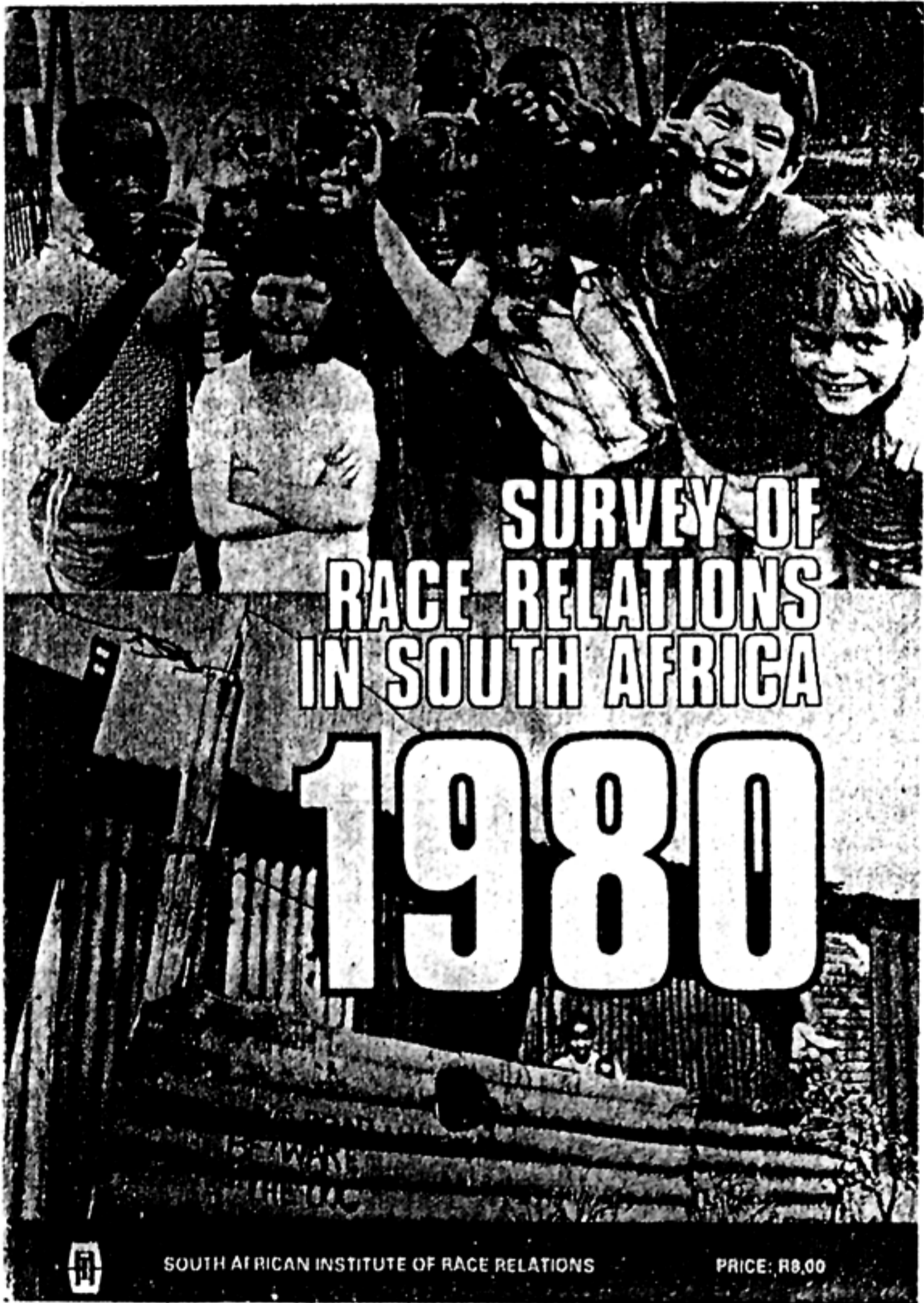
The attempt by the SAIRR to play a delicate balancing act between the forces of oppression and liberation, was ultimately to prove counter-productive. On the one hand, the "liberal" proposals proved unacceptable to the Apartheid Government and relations with the Institute became increasingly strained. On the other hand, the failure of the Institute to identify with or support the mass movements, prevented it from playing an effective role amongst opposition groupings.

The two roles

Although the Institute failed to situate itself as an active participant in the fight for change, it has found areas of activity in which to expand and grow. The two offices with which it began, later grew to eight. With financial and material assistance from institutes such as Wits University, the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation as well as personal contributions, its activities have expanded and diversified. The membership of the SAIRR has remained predominantly white and English-speaking. Whilst in 1947, 2 547 people were members, by 1977 members had increased to 4 098.

The activities of the Institute have continued to focus around two areas; fact-finding and services :

- * The core of the Institute's work is the accumulation of factual data relating to the living conditions of Black South Africans. An attempt is made to keep abreast of government legislation and departmental reports, as well as monitoring areas such as Cost of Living Indexes and the Poverty Datum Line. This material is publicized in various forms. The annual Survey of Race Relations undoubtedly the central publication of the Institute, and probably the most comprehensive
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**SURVEY OF
RACE RELATIONS
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

1980



SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

PRICE: R8.00

The 1980 edition of the 'Survey of Race Relations.'

collection of data on South Africa available. Information is also disseminated in publications such as *Race Relations News* and various specialized booklets, as well as the various talks and addresses given by members of the Institute. The research and material gathered is primarily stored at the library on "Race Relations", which was formed in 1933 and is now at Head Office in Braamfontein.

- Based on the notion that the improved living conditions of the "underprivileged" leads to better "inter-group relations", the Institute has dedicated a major part of its energy to the provision of services to the black community. An attempt is made to establish where such services are needed and the intention is that they will continue to function on their own. During the 1950's, services included areas such as aiding other organizations to arrange conferences and managing welfare organizations in their formative stages. More recently, the focus has shifted to dealing with more specific areas, such as domestic workers – leading to the establishment of the Domestic Workers Employment Project (DWEPE). In the field of education, activities include the work of the Education Information Centre, which offers a Winterschool to black matric pupils, as well as various school tuition programmes and the administration of trust funds. Other services offered by the Institute also include the African Art Centre, as well as workshops teaching dance and photography.

Assessing the fact-finding role

The theme of the Institute's policy is its belief that by exposing and presenting the hidden facts and figures of inequality in South Africa, by empirically demonstrating the tragic social consequences of a political ideology and by suggesting rational solutions to practical problems, the Institute can contribute to removing the scourge of racism and racial inequality from South African society. This is a commendable enough objective in itself, for an essential part of any fight for justice is the documenting, researching and exposing of the inadequacies of a political system. But the problem posed by the Institute's work is of another kind – it emerges in its attempts to portray the findings as objective, neutral and balanced, free from the distortions of political ideologies. This claim to the "truth", as it were, stems partly from a mistaken belief that by adopting a so-called scientific procedure, consisting of verifying hypotheses by empirical data, the Institute can appropriate for itself the role of the academic, objective observer carefully sifting through the wealth of data to arrive at a balanced, non-biased judgement.

The flaws in this kind of logic are evident: firstly, even if one were to accept this mystical notion of science, the point is that finally, even after one has assimilated all the possible data available, these facts and figures have to be presented in an coherent form. Once this occurs, the so-called raw data is subject to the vagaries of interpretation, to the particular world view of the researcher. There is not, although many may wish it, a standard authorised doctrine of social reality. The acceptance of a particular view of reality is based upon its capacity to interpret and explain social phenomena, rather than on its claim to be the truth. Secondly, besides the pure assimilation of data, the Institute does make recommendations, analyse laws and interpret the implications of political actions. These acts, of themselves, require going beyond the narrow parameters of data collection into the realm of interpretation and explanation. Of course, these insights may rely heavily on a thorough grasp of the actual situation, but any enquiry draws on raw data in

different ways and does not inevitably lead to the same conclusions. "One man's meat is another man's poison."

The Institute is therefore perfectly correct in analysing and interpreting the social situation in South Africa; it makes its mistake in presenting its findings not as a product of a certain ideology, but as objective, impartial and without ideological persuasion. Besides this, social data themselves are capable of infinite combinations and even the selection of a object of investigation is itself determined by what the researcher considers to be significant. Thus even the act of delineating fields of research is determined by the particular world-view of the researcher.

In practice, the Institute hasn't fooled those whom it so desperately wishes to influence. The Government has had no difficulty in identifying it as a partial political body of liberal persuasion. (Its investigation under the 1972 Schiebush Commission clearly illustrating this) nor have any organisations to the left of liberalism ever intimated that they see the Institute as anything other than an organ of liberal opinion. Indeed the Institute has always vigilantly curbed any attempt to transform it into a more radical organisation by careful censorship, hierarchical controls and the appointment of liberal minded people to positions of authority. Perhaps the Institute's concern for presenting itself as a neutral body is particularly suitable to a liberal ideology intent upon putting itself across as the voice of reason in the midst of the "extremes" of the right and left. Politically, this strategy implies that people are won over to liberalism under the guise of objective, scientific neutrality.

Assessing the services role

The services aspect of the Institute of Race Relations is less problematic, yet once again the possibility of confusion arises. For many people in South Africa today,



Delegates at the 1980 Race Relations Annual Conference .

the provision of much needed welfare services (and we are not referring to charity only here) is itself a political act, because it fills a gap which the Government so patently neglects. However, it is necessary that these services are not provided under the delusion that they are actually altering the balance of power in the country. Politics for the oppressed involves acts of organization, mobilization, education and resistance – acts specifically designed to wage a war of attrition against the status quo to alter the balance of power in favour of the oppressed.

Although service organizations have often been the embryonic form of more extensive organizational structures, the service organizations of the Institute seldom, if ever, develop in this manner. Instead they tend to remain stunted at the level of the provision of services only. This occurs partly because their functionaries believe that political change occurs when leaders have a change of heart, rather than when they are challenged by the organized and democratic resistance of the masses. Thus, for these people, the organization of the oppressed is not essential and may even be counterproductive, in that it can lead to a militancy which breaks the rules of "liberal finesse". Change for these people must come from above and not from below.

There are people within the service organizations of the SAIRR who have a more realistic view of their work. Although they have a sympathy for the masses, they do not see the service organizations as developing the political strength of the masses. They recognize that although their work is valuable in terms of human need, it is not capable of tipping the scales in favour of the oppressed. However, even on the rare occasions that the Institute does develop an organization of another kind, it tends to favour a moderate policy. And once again, many can testify to the vigilance of the Institute to quash organizations with more militant leanings.

A little pressure – the 1970's

The re-emergence of mass militancy during the 1970's forced all political forces in South Africa to reassess the direction and focus of their activities. Although the political events of the decade did not cause the SAIRR to change the two key areas of its activity, research and services, it did see the Institute extending itself to play a more directly political role. Whilst previously the Institute ardently claimed to be "apolitical", it now began to establish itself as something of a political pressure group.

The "political" role of the Institute took on various forms. On the one hand, it spoke out harshly and protested against the repressive and brutal nature of the Government actions. Prominent areas of concern were the number of people detained without trial and, particularly during 1977, the incredible number of deaths in detention. Besides these protests, the Institute also issued various public calls to the Government to rectify the policies which were causing conflict and unrest in the country. In all these calls and protests the Institute continued its attempts to maintain its image as the voice of "reason" and "objectivity" in a conflict-ridden society.

Besides these vocal, and often largely ineffectual, protests the Institute also began to situate itself as a more direct political force in mediating conflict situations. Two



Checkers' Managing Director hands over a donation of R25 000 to John Rees, for the Institute's 'Operation Hunger', which provides relief to drought and poverty-stricken rural areas.

examples stand out in particular. Firstly, the participation of the SAIRR in the committee of ten prominent Durban men set up at the height of the 1976 unrest in an attempt to "pinpoint grievances and problems of blacks in the city." Other members (who would obviously have had to be "prominent" figures, rather than those actually part of the living experience) included representatives to the Durban Chamber of Commerce, the Kwazulu Urban Representative and the Durban Chamber of Industry. The second example was the "multiracial committee" formed in the Western Cape at the height of the unrest in 1976, as a "catalyst" group to bring blacks and whites together.

The defining characteristic of groups such as these was their intention to diffuse conflict situations at all cost — irrespective of which side benefits from that resolution. Rather than establishing Apartheid as the enemy and therefore attempting to resolve conflict in favour of the opponents of Apartheid, they saw conflict itself as the enemy. The ultimate effect of their "mediation" would therefore be to remove conflict, whilst leaving the status quo intact.

In 1977, the SAIRR decided at its annual conference in Durban that it should change from a "thinker" to a "doer" organisation. Study groups were set up to investigate this role. The most important of these was to investigate "what the white community in South Africa should be told to foster a necessary change of attitude". The group therefore rested on the belief that change in South Africa would come through a "change of heart" of the white community — and ignored the capacity to change their own lives. This failure to perceive the reality of the process of change, has also manifested itself in repeated attempts by the Institute to attract Nationalists to the concept of dialogue with blacks.

The challenge of the 1980's

The distinguishing feature of the first years of the 1980's has been the consolidation of the mass militancy of the oppressed majority into increasingly solid demo-

cratic organization. Organizations have been built in all sectors of society — from the schools and universities to the communities and factory floors — and have begun to coordinate their activities as part of a non-racial democratic front, under the guiding programme of the Freedom Charter. The effect has been the undermining of attempts by the Apartheid Government to consolidate its position by containing conflict within its "Total Strategy."

The emergence of this Broad Democratic Front has increasingly undercut the position of those political groupings that have attempted to occupy "middle ground" in South African conflict. The message has emerged: "You are either with us or against us!" Liberal organizations, like the SAIRR, have been presented with the clear choice of either choosing to aid the forces working for democratic change, or to be relegated to association with the oppressors.

This choice has brutally challenged the proclaimed "neutrality" of the SAIRR. The 1980's have therefore seen the Institute acting in an inconsistent and often contradictory manner. Its "political" actions have included:

- * Support for the 1980 Free Mandela Campaign, but only on the grounds that "the Institute has always been committed to peaceful change in South Africa and to continued consultation with all groups".
- * Supporting the demands of workers for democratic, non-racial representation during the Meat Strike of 1980, but, at the same time, calling on the Government to play a "constructive" role by not only supporting the employers.
- * Responding to the school boycotts of 1980 by calling on the Government for a "stronger statement of intention to bring immediate amelioration of the existing tensions among pupils of all race groups and some hope that the lot of the protestors will be improved in the very near future". Although doing this, the Institute failed to take note of the fact that pupils were not only calling for an "improved lot" but for a fundamental restructuring of the education system and an "education for liberation".

Whilst actions such as these suggest a general confusion within the Institute, others have illustrated a far more carefully considered response to the conditions of the 1980's. The role of SAIRR officials in the 1980 Western Cape Bus Boycott once again illustrated their intention to mediate and diffuse conflict, irrespective of the outcome. During the heat of the boycott, Cape Western Regional Chairperson, Daphne Wilson, and the Institute director, John Rees, formed part of a delegation to the Minister of Transport and Police to discuss the boycott. When the crisis had not been resolved 2 months later, Institute officials once again visited the Director-General of Transport. Besides the fact that these meetings undercut the general impetus of the boycott, they were criticized for two other reasons: Firstly, for taking the initiative completely out of the people's hands and, secondly, for acting with no mandate whatsoever.

The direction of the Institute during the 1980's has therefore not been particularly encouraging. There has been little, if any, indication of an awareness of the demands of the masses of South Africans and the initiatives of progressive organizations. Whilst some activities have supported these initiatives, others have actually stifled them. The gauntlet has been thrown down to organizations like the Institute to join the fight for change. At present, there seems to be little to suggest that it will rise to meet the challenge.

*from
protest
to
service*

THE BLACK SASH

*to
support?*

The choice

The examination of the Liberal Party served as a historical example of the inability of "liberals" to adequately situate themselves as a positive force in the fight for change in South Africa. With this in mind, it is strange to recognise that another essentially "liberal" organisation – the Black Sash – has in recent years developed in a manner which gives it the potential to play a meaningful role, in aligning itself with progressive forces and campaigns.

The members of the Liberal Party and Progressive Party organized themselves for the specific purpose of furthering the "Liberal cause" as a political force. The members of the Black Sash, however, have rather organized in an attempt to contribute to rectifying the blatant injustices of South African society. The dramatic increase in the mobilization and organization of South Africa's oppressed people over the past few years has therefore presented the Sash with a crucial choice: Is the organization prepared to contribute to the process of change, even if it differs dramatically from the path they would ideally envisage? Does its commitment to changing the injustices of South African society survive in the face of the recognition that a changed South Africa would not reflect the "liberal model"?

It would be wrong to present the Black Sash as a homogenous organization in which all members share common views. This history will in fact illustrate that there are two distinct trends within the organization at present — only one of which promises to guide the organization in a progressive direction.

Early years

In 1955 the Apartheid Government introduced the Senate Bill in parliament, calling for the removal of "Coloureds" from the voters' roll. In response to this, a group of white women, including United Party City Councillor Jean Sinclair, formed the "Womens' Defence of the Constitution League". In the short run the League wished to act to prevent the Senate Bill becoming law. The long-term aim was "to uphold the principles of parliamentary democracy and the moral pledges and constitutional safeguards of the concept of Union". The League was therefore clearly founded on the basis that the existing status quo in South Africa was worth fighting for.

In its first year, the W.D.C.C. launched an extensive campaign against the new Bill. During the parliamentary recess, women wearing black sashes kept vigil outside the Union Buildings, whilst others formed silent guards in various towns throughout the country. Protest marches and petitions were also organized in an attempt to get the Governor General to veto the Bill.

The obvious impotence of these protests in the face of apartheid legislation forced an early reassessment of the League by its members. At its first annual conference in 1956, substantial changes were introduced.

Firstly, the name was changed to the "Black Sash", which would now turn its attention to opposing all legislation which involved the deprivation of civil rights. At the same time it was felt that the S.A. constitution was actually inadequate for the needs of a multi-racial society and the Black Sash therefore "decided to work for a new constitution in which fundamental rights for all sections of the population would be effectively safeguarded".

The failure of the Senate Bill protests had to some extent illustrated the limitations of "protest politics". Whilst it was still seen as important to "remind" South Africans of the evils of apartheid, the Black Sash no longer saw protest as its only function. In 1958, two new areas of activity were therefore begun. Firstly, the Sash decided to form advice offices to provide practical assistance to the "victims of unjust laws" (such as the pass laws). Secondly, it was felt that the organization

could serve as a forum for discussion of this unjust legislation and should therefore organize symposiums and lectures.

It is fairly remarkable to note the extent to which the early history of the Black Sash failed to be influenced by the major developments in South Africa during the 1950's. During this period South Africa's oppressed people were mobilizing into an increasingly militant democratic front – in the form of the Congress Alliance. Whilst most political organizations were forced to situate themselves relative to this front, the Sash managed to maintain an isolated position – choosing sides neither way. Although the ideologies of Sash members differed dramatically from the notion of change advanced by the Alliance, the activities which the organization developed – “limited protest”, “advice to victims of apartheid” and “education” – were all clearly suited to complementing the democratic thrust. At this early stage of its existence, the dilemma therefore emerged as to whether the Sash would ultimately align itself with the movement for change – or whether it would define itself outside of its orbit.

A spirit of Dissent.

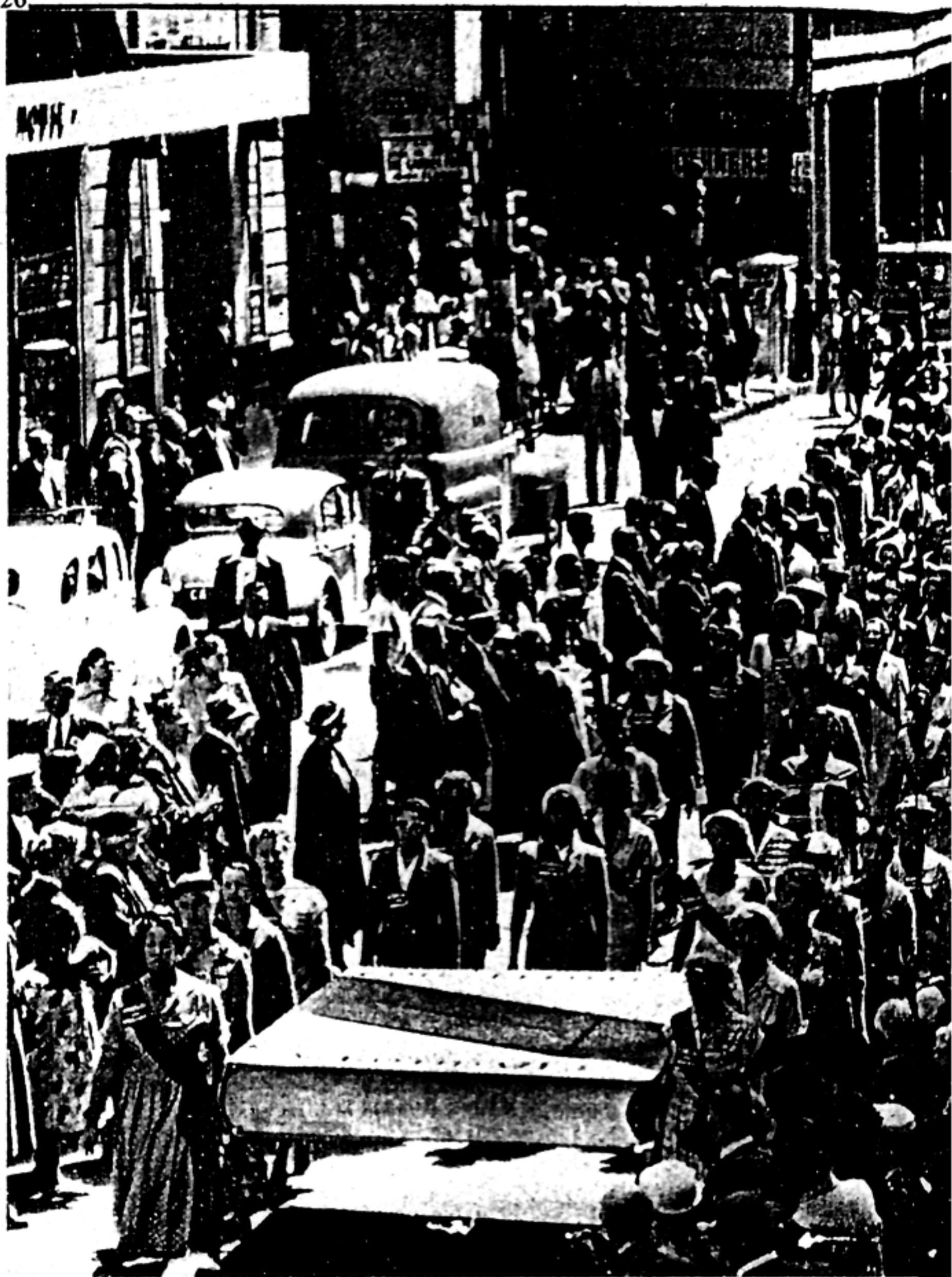
It was during the political “dry season” of the 1960's that the activities of the Black Sash grew in importance. In 1965, Jean Sinclair said that the function of the organization was to “keep alive a spirit of dissent” in South Africa, in the face of the “steady advance of official tyranny in our public affairs”. In the absence of other voices at political dissent, the Sash played an important role during the 1960's in publicizing and protesting against the activities of the Nationalist Government. The focus of this protest was widespread. Issues raised included the introduction of additional security legislation; the bannings of political activists; the prohibition of racially mixed political parties and the segregation of the universities.

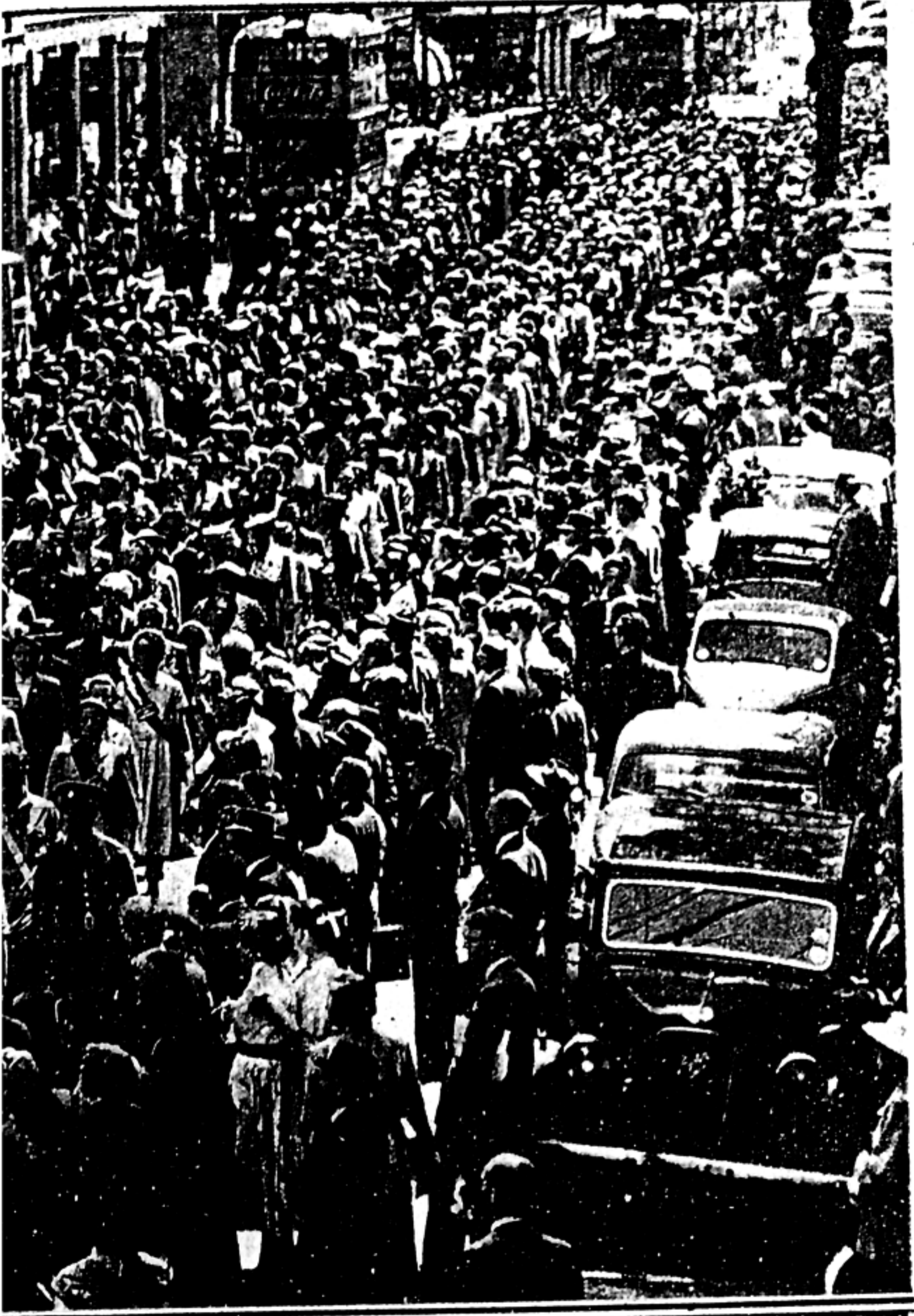
The greatest amount of energy, however, was spent dealing with the migrant labour system. Repeated protests were held against the dehumanizing effects of the system whilst a concerted effort was made to expand the Black Sash's advice offices. During the decade the Sash had functioning offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London, Elgin and Athlone. It is largely true that these offices helped individuals to cope with the difficulties of migrant labour and were therefore dealing with the “symptoms” of apartheid. Their importance, however, lay in the fact that their focus on the migrant labour system isolated and exposed the very heart of the apartheid system.

The 1970's – making changes

The political events of the 1970's were in dramatic contrast to those of the previous decade. Whilst the 1960's had been notable for the lack of mass political activity, the 1970's were quite the opposite. In 1973 and 1974, South Africa's industrial labour force rocked the economy with a massive wave of strike action. Two years later, with the events of Soweto 1976, South Africa's youth erupted in opposition to the Bantu Education system. The ability of the students to unite with workers in the form of national stay-aways further shock the country.

The Black Sash was unanimous in laying the blame for the “unrest” of the 1970's at the door of the Government and police. It protested strongly against the in-





creased use of State force to quell the resurgence of mass political activity. The restrictions placed on "affected organizations"; the provisions of the Riotous Assemblies Act; increased restrictions on the "freedom of the press" and the banning of organizations in 1977 were attacked. However, the severe restrictions placed on public protest by the Government in 1973 and 1978 undercut the possibilities for this form of activity, forcing organizations like the Black Sash to further redefine their roles.

The Black Sash did not abandon its "protest role". The increased restrictions on protest did, however, serve to further emphasize its "severe role" in the form of advice offices. New offices were formed in areas such as the Natal Midlands, while the number of people utilizing the existing offices increased dramatically.

Many Black Sash women clung to their "traditional" liberal notions in the face of the changing conditions of the 1970's. Although they clearly opposed the activities of the Nationalist Government, they clung to the view that apartheid was inadequate because it was an "uneconomical" system. In 1979 Joyce Harris, President of the Sash, criticized the "cost" of apartheid, both in terms of real financial costs and the "costs of human misery".

It is also possible, however, to trace in the Black Sash during the 1970's an increased awareness of the real nature of South African society. As early as 1972, Sheena Duncan noted that migrant labour was in fact the centre of a "vicious circle which promotes broken families, separations, poverty, exploitation of labour, low wages, starvation and malnutrition". The day-to-day contact of the Black Sash with the real problems facing South African people, at their advice offices, has infused a definite awareness amongst certain members of apartheid as a form of racial capitalism, rather than simply an "uneconomical" appendage of the economy. This awareness, coupled with witnessing of the resurgence of mass militancy during the 1970's, has served as a backdrop to the definite emergence of a progressive trend within the organization.

Going either way

The Black Sash is compared mainly of middle-class white women (men can only be honorary members!) Structurally, it consists of a co-ordinating group of elected full-time employees, as well as numerous part-time workers who staff the advice offices and sub-committees. To date, the organization has succeeded in playing a fairly careful balancing act — maintaining credibility amongst the white "liberal" public, while managing to avoid the harsh criticisms levelled by progressive organizations at many other "liberal" groups. The political activity of the past two years, however, has made the occupation of this "middle-ground" increasingly difficult. As South Africa's conflicting groups consolidate into two distinct camps — with the beneficiaries of apartheid ranged against a broad democratic trend — it becomes increasingly difficult to choose sides either way.

Recent years have not seen any dramatic changes within the Black Sash. At the 25th anniversary of the organization, in 1980, resolutions were passed which followed the normal pattern of protest developed throughout its history. They condemned repressive actions, such as the forced removal of people and press censorship, while also demanding an end to bannings and detentions and a "uniform and free education" for all South African children.



People with influx control problems at the Black Sash office.

However, two clearly distinct trends appear to exist within the Black Sash at present. On the one hand, a group of women appear to be pushing the organization towards the acceptance and support of the emergent democratic trend. On the other hand, a "traditional" liberal trend hopes to utilize the credibility which the organization has established to promote "liberal" solutions to South Africa's conflict — however, ~~the~~ ^{what} step these may be with the demands of the majority of South Africans.

The "progressive" trend has best been illustrated by the speeches of Sheena Duncan. At the beginning of 1981, she described how more people than ever were having to be turned away from the advice offices, because of the restrictiveness of the post-Riekert pass law system. She claimed that this supposed "liberalization" in fact worked against migrant workers — "who are caught up in the annual

contract system and are placed in categories of labour from which they may not change... as economic boom brings no hope for the majority, as people are deprived of land and of all right to participate in either the political or economic structures of this country".

On the premise of this position, various Sash members have pushed the organization towards the support of democratic organization and campaigns. In 1980, the organization supported the "Free Mandela Campaign" unconditionally — not shying away from the fact that Mandela stands for a society radically different from the traditional liberal State. The verbal support for the Red Meat boycott of that year, also displayed a recognition of the importance of democratic worker organization. At the same time, various Black Sash members said in interviews that they recognized that the school boycotts of 1980 were actually calling for an "education for liberation" and not simply "equal education for all".

The last Black Sash conference was further evidence that the seeds for this "progressive" trend have been sown. The reference to ANC guerrillas as "freedom fighters" in official policy and the condemnation of the SADF raid on Matola in Mozambique, are evidence of a position far more in tune with the reality of conflict in South Africa than the vast majority of liberal organizations. The increasingly cautious and carefully considered responses being adopted towards support of ongoing issues, be they school boycotts, strikes or residents in Thomsville or Kliptown, further reflects the growth of this progressive trend.

The recent disclosure of Black Sash leader, Joyce Harris' initiatives to hold a national conference to "hammer out a new constitution for South Africa", has rudely awakened democrats to the continued prominence of the "traditional" liberal grouping within the organization. In June, the Sowetan newspaper disclosed that for three years Joyce Harris has been working to bring together "Black politicians of different views" to an indaba aimed at producing an alternative to government policy". Those taking part in the indaba, which is being hosted by the Black Sash, are the Secretary-General of the South African Council of Churches, Bishop Desmond Tutu; the Progressive Federal Party; Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha; the Indian Reform Party; and the Coloured Labour Party.

It is fortunate that this initiative has been "exposed" at the same time that progressive organizations have initiated a call for a National Democratic Convention, to lead the way to a democratic future in South Africa. This call highlights the extent to which Harris' initiative is clearly out of step with the demands and organizations of the majority of South Africans. It illustrates that her call is little more than an attempt to consolidate the position of organizations occupying the "middle-ground" in the political spectrum, in the face of the re-emergence of a Broad Democratic Front against apartheid.

The call for a National Democratic Convention is not a new one. In 1961, at the time of the formation of the Republic of South Africa, an All-In African Conference was held to call for a National Convention to draw up a non-racial constitution for a democratic South Africa. At this conference, leaders laid down specific preconditions for such a convention. These included the release of all political prisoners; the release of those in detention; the unbanning of the banned

and the return of those South Africans who had been forced into exile. They claimed that only with the unconditional participation of these people, would the National Convention be truly democratic.

The preconditions established for a National Convention in 1961, are equally applicable today. The call for a National Democratic Convention therefore echoes these same preconditions, and claims that any such convention must be organized on the terms of the majority of South Africans. It must be a gathering of all democratic forces – not simply those whose policies allow them to operate freely under apartheid. Joyce Harris' attempt, of bringing together organizations, many of which have been actively rejected by the majority of South Africans, is a far cry from the democratic call. It, therefore, differs markedly from the more "progressive" trend within the Black Sash.

Three roles

The history of the Black Sash is an important one in that it reflects on three different types of opposition activity in which whites have been involved:



A Black Sash protest against the migrant labour system in 1975.

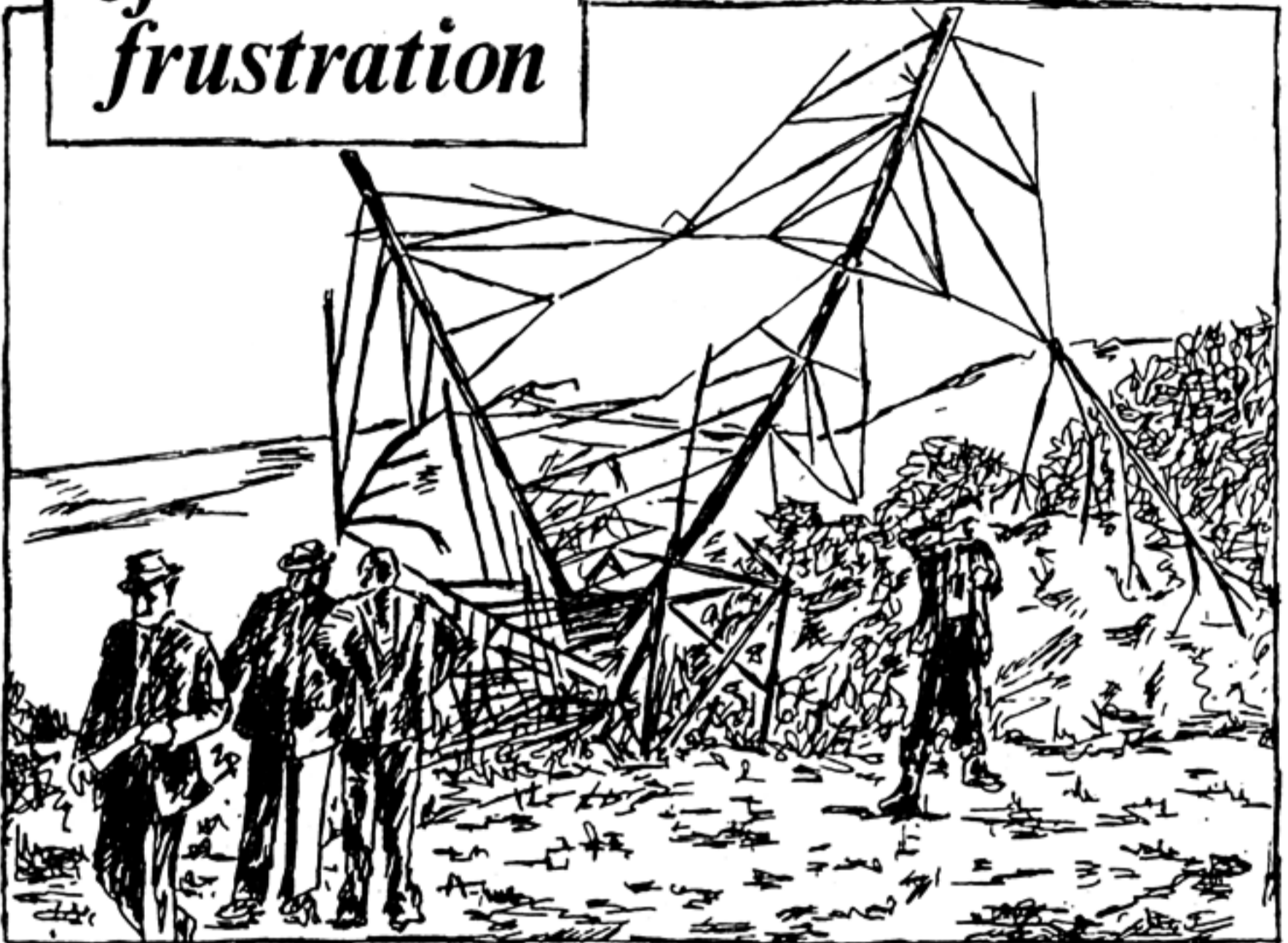
- Although the Black Sash was formed as a protest organization, its protest role has gradually been subordinated to the other functions of the organization. While it is definitely necessary for groups to protest against the repressive and exploitative nature of South African society in an attempt to keep the "fascist tide" at bay, it is important to recognize the limits of this pressure. Firstly, South African law severely limits people from protesting, however peacefully. Secondly, and more importantly, while protest might provide a limited degree of pressure, it does not provide an active challenge to the actual power relationships in question.
- The service role of the Black Sash, in the form of its advice offices, has developed into the primary function of the organization. Although this involves dealing with the problems of isolated individuals, and can therefore be seen as simply dealing with the "symptoms" of apartheid, it has undoubted possibilities for being utilized in a progressive direction. On the one hand, it allows people to monitor the general trends affecting working people and initiate activities to counteract them. (At present, improved relationships with groups such as trade unions would appear to be vital). On the other hand, it has facilitated a process of self-education within the organization — keeping members harshly in touch with the reality of South Africa's harshest structure — the migrant labour system.



The Sash stand outside the Houses of Parliament to reaffirm the right to peaceful protest, 1972.

It is possibly premature to discuss the third role that the Black Sash has begun to play — that of supporting the broad movement for change. While the tendency towards such a role definitely exists within the organization, it is at this stage no stronger than the tendency pushing the Black Sash away from the broad democratic trend which has emerged to confront apartheid. The credibility and resources of the organization do, however, provide it with the potential to play a particularly constructive role in supporting ongoing struggles — be they in the community, schools or at the work-place. It is the responsibility of white democrats to provide the "new blood" to ensure that this potential is consolidated, and does not dissipate into "paternalism" which threatens to dominate the organization.

*acts
of
frustration*



THE AFRICAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

"Change is just around the corner"

The 1960's began particularly traumatically for South Africa. The previous decade of mass mobilization and successful political organization had greatly raised the hopes of democrats. The feeling was that change was not only inevitable, but imminent. At the same time, however, the apartheid State was in the process of unleashing a stunningly vicious attack on those who threatened it. An all-out effort was made to crush political organizations: the ANC and PAC were banned and thousands of political and trade union activists were detained, banned or imprisoned.

It was within this context that the African Resistance Movement (ARM) was formed. Its strategy of utilizing sabotage to shock the white electorate into recognizing the inevitability and desirability of change, was possibly one of the most remarkable responses of whites to the inequalities in South African society. Whilst the short history of the organization does not occupy a substantial place in the general history of the fight for change in South Africa, it undoubtedly provides a dramatic example of the potential dangers of attempts by whites to contribute to this fight.

The National Committee for Liberation (NCL)

In 1961, a group of white intellectuals, with histories of involvement in either NUSAS or the Liberal Party, formed the National Committee for Liberation as a political discussion group. They represented a broad spectrum of political opinion ranging from "radical" liberals to "anti-communist" Marxists. They shared a common frustration of working within existant political structures, and were united by a desire for "direct political action". A former member of the NCL described their political affiliations as aligning themselves with the :

- * official leadership of the PAC
- * the "non-communist wing" of the ANC
- * the "left-wing" of the Liberal Party
- * "more progressive Progressives"

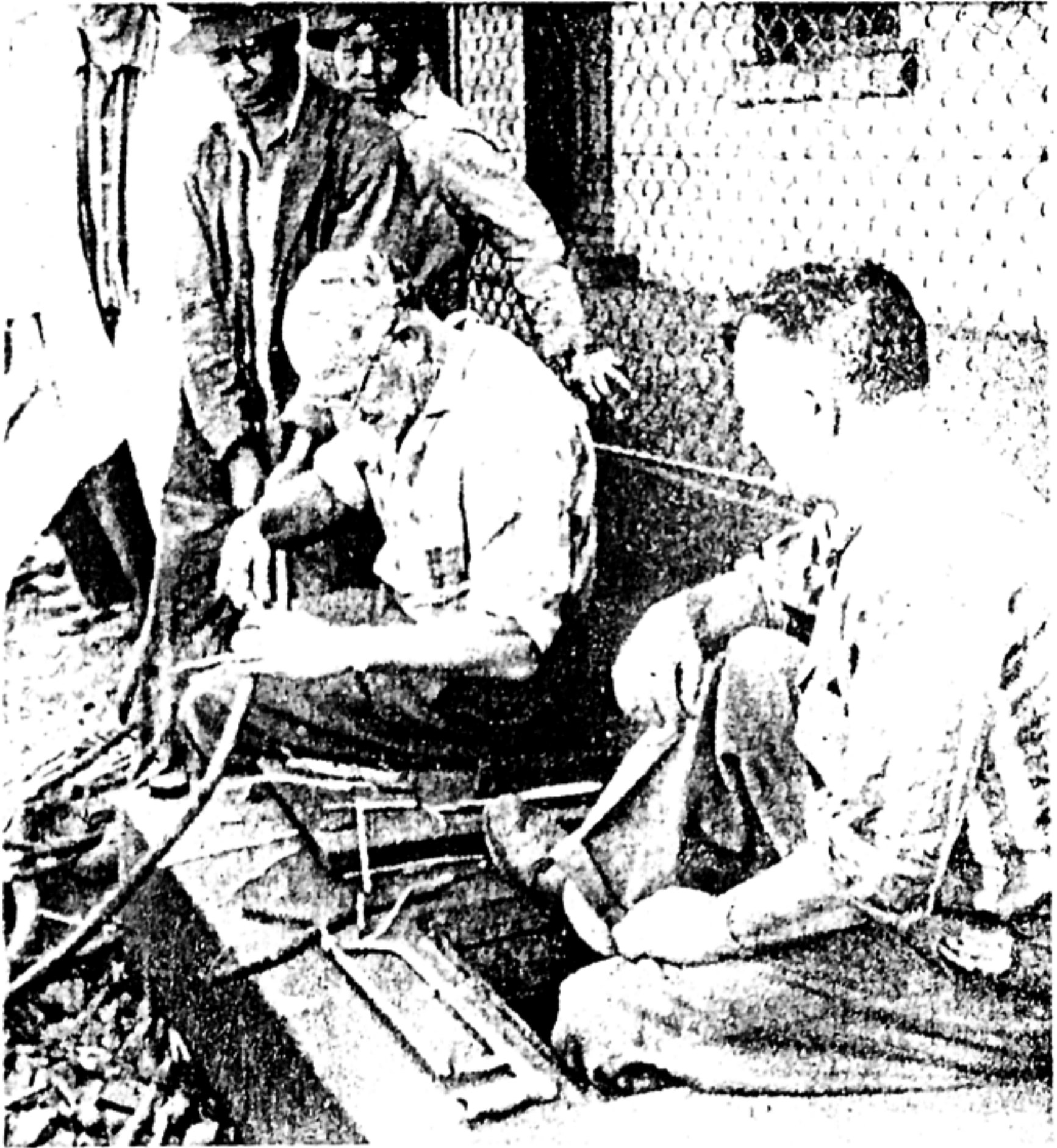
At the time of the NCL's formation, members believed that the apartheid State was crumbling. As a group of intellectuals, however, they felt particularly isolated from the broad mass of the people and urgently sought a means of "getting in on the action". Hugh Lewin was later to write that he actually saw detention without trial as a positive experience, because it gave one the opportunity to "know what it was like to be black".

The NCL always remained relatively exclusive, never growing above 50 members. The two main centres were Johannesburg and Cape Town, although there were small groups in Durban and Port Elizabeth.

Discussion led the NCL to the conclusion that they should form a sabotage organization – later to be known as the African Resistance Movement. They were particularly vague, however, about the exact effect they wished to achieve. Still caught up in the notion that change could only come through parliament, they defined their activity in terms of the white electorate. The immediate aim of sabotage was to shock the white electorate – the the possible intention of forcing them to recognize the reality of the South African situation and the necessity of voting the Nationalist Party out of power.

Making plans

Having elected to pursue this course, the NCL set about planning their activities during 1962. First off they needed to acquire the necessary resources for sabotage. Dynamite, fuses etc. were acquired largely within South Africa, for example by burgling coal mines in the Transvaal. An unexpected windfall supplemented this stock. 2 ex-members of the NCL who had emigrated to London sent a telegram



Sabotaged signal cables at Observatory Station.

saying that a "present" would be arriving shortly. A few weeks later NCL member Michael Schneider's mother received a shipment of glassware from England — hidden in a false bottom was the largest shipment of plastic explosives ever smuggled into South Africa.

It is difficult to establish the extent of links between the NCL, Umkhonte we sizwe and Pogo (the military wings of the ANC and PAC respectively), but there appears to have been some linkage. An NCL document has been discovered which expressly sets out the basis for co-ordination of activities among the 3 groups. Patrick Duncan

of Liberal Party fame, joined the NCL after fleeing Lesotho, and was later linked to the PAC. There also seems to have been some collaboration in the planning of NCL emergency escape routes. Links may also have been established for financial purposes. The NCL was receiving large amounts from an apparently foreign source, and banking them under the name of Independent Students' Bursary Fund. Besides the acquirement of the necessary logistical material, the NCL also required training in essential skills, particularly in explosives. Robert Watson, a Cape Town member, had been trained as an expert in this field in the British Army, and he trained the NCL on Blouberg and Llandadno beaches.

Finding the targets

Sabotage being the method, targets had now to be pinpointed. In this early period the NCL were inexperienced and ambitious, and this is reflected in some of the targets they considered. There was a scheme to blow up the Wemmershoek Dam, thus totally disrupting Cape Town's water supply. An even more ambitious scheme was a plan to destroy the Western Cape wheat and grape harvests with bacteria. A plan was also drawn up to attack the government garage in Buitenkant Street, Cape Town, about 400 metres away from the police station. It would have involved driving a truckload of barrels filled with petrol into the garage and igniting them, while accomplices spread bent nails on the far apron of the nearby fire station. The most ambitious of these ideas, however was the consideration of a bid to rescue PAC leader, Robert Sobukwe, from Robben Island.

Structure

The NCL was controlled by various regional committees. These bodies took overall decisions for each region, while recommendations and practical planning were referred to it by a Planning Committee. Every member had a code name, and often members only knew each other by this name. Activities were often of a cell type, individual cells not being aware of the activities of others. Every operation was meticulously planned: reconnaissance was done, explosive requirements calculated, the acquisition of necessary equipment designated to various people etc. Dark, but not conspicuous clothing was essential, including balaclavas and gloves, socks were worn over shoes to prevent footprints, and any tyre tracks were always erased. While some members would be on a raid, others would be on 'standby', waiting beside telephones with medical aid kits handy.

Plans to sabotage

Dams and wheat crops having been overruled by mere practicalities, the ARM set about looking for its first target, something which would be conspicuous as well as effect the public's daily routine. In terms of these needs it was decided to attack the FM radio tower on Constantiaberg in an attempt to disrupt radio programmes and be visible to large sections of Cape Town. The necessary reconnaissance and planning complete, the ARM moved on its first target on the night of 18 August 1963. Charges were set at the base of the tower, using alarm clocks to give the saboteurs time to escape... next morning FM programmes went on as usual and the tower was still intact – the clocks had failed and the dynamite was not detonated!



Fuses, electrical equipment, alarm clocks, rubber gloves, shape charges and other items which a police witness at the main sabotage trial in Cape Town, claimed to have been found in a garage in Sea Point.

The failure of the first attack was an obvious source of disillusionment to the group. On top of this, the police discovered the charges and quickly realized that they were dealing with a new organization. Nevertheless, the members of ARM pressed on.

Bombs away!

The problem of the first action had been technical – clock failure. The task was therefore to find a target which could avoid the precious mishap. The eventual target was the signal cable parallel to the Cape Southern Suburbs railway line. On the early morning of 3 September 1963, it was blown up in 4 places. The method was to use simple (burning) fuses rather than unreliable clocks. The operation had immediate effect – a trip to Mowbray Station the following morning revealed hundreds of commuters stranded on the platform. The “success” paved the way for continued activity.

Early in 1964, a group within the ARM began to motivate for a discontinuation of sabotage activities on the grounds of their futility, and lack of political effects. Adrian Leftwich and Eddie Daniels travelled to Johannesburg to attend a national meeting to discuss the issue. It was decided to continue with sabotage – with an attack on electricity pylons in both major centres on the same night to give the impression of a far larger, and more co-ordinated organization than actually existed.

On the night of the 18 June 1964 three pylons were bombed in Cape Town, with similar attacks in Johannesburg. The attack was successful – with only one pylon's clock failing (only to be detonated manually on return to the site two days later). This was to be the last “official” action by ARM, except for the infamous petrol bomb attack on Johannesburg Station by peripheral member John Harris. The station attack, which was the only one ever to involve human life, took place 2 weeks after the organization had actually collapsed. Harris was subsequently hanged.

The Fourth of July Raids

The 4 July Raids were a sweeping action by the police in order to capture members of Umkonto we sizwe, who had escaped the Rivonia arrests. During the course of these sweeping raids, the security branch visited the flat of ARM member Adrian Leftwich. There they found, with no attempt at concealment, the entire documentary history of ARM, down to every last detail. Lynette van der Riet, who was at Leftwich's flat at the time, was followed and seen going to her flat with 2 heavy suitcases. Later, during questioning, the police demanded to know what she had done with the “documents” inside the suitcase. They learned, to the astonishment, that the suitcases had in fact contained dynamite!

The arrest and trial of ARM members, in both Johannesburg and Cape Town during 1964 and 1965 was a particularly unpleasant experience for those working for change in South Africa. Adrian Leftwich, who had done extensive work on the psychology of detention in order that ARM members could be prepared for such circumstances, lasted for 4 days before breaking and divulging all the details of the organization to his interrogators. Lynette van der Riet lasted only 2 days. Both turned State witness against other ARM members in return for pardons.

There were two separate ARM trials – one in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town. The State charges centred on their attempt to :

- "... overthrow the South African Government by means of acts of malicious injury to property, thereby causing inconvenience, confusion and disruption".

Most of the ARM members who had not escaped the country received relatively light sentences of one to four years. Hugh Lewin, however, spent 8 years in Pretoria Central Prison for his participation. The sole black member, Eddie Daniels, spent the following 15 years of his life on Robben Island.

"... what we did was in itself futile and stupid..."

At his trial, Adrian Leftwich attempted to explain the motivations of those involved in ARM :

"I realized, too, that – I believed that – what we did was in itself futile and stupid, but I don't believe the ideals which underly it and the personal frustration we felt prior to it, are stupid or futile."

A sense of deep frustration, together with a feeling of guilt, evidently underly the formation of ARM and the adoption of its strategy of sabotage. The failure of this group of white intellectuals to relate to the organizational groundswell of resistance which formed the foundation of the Congress Movement during the 1950's and early 1960's caused them to initiate what, in retrospect, appears as a futile act of desperation. It would be wrong to view this as a logical outcome of the position of democratic whites in South African society. From early in this century groups of whites have not only kept in step, but constructively contributed to the movement for change.

The flaw in the ARM response lay largely in the inadequacy of their analysis of conflict in South African society and the process of change aimed at eradicating that conflict. Although ARM members evidently did not see South African conflict in simple Black/White terms, they failed to recognize the extent to which it is, in the final analysis, a contest between democratic and anti-democratic forces. Although the vast bulk of whites are likely to defend their privilege, this does not exclude certain white groupings from joining the opponents of this system of privilege. The basis of this alliance, however, must not be a feeling of guilt or frustration. It must be a carefully considered decision which takes into account the nature of the movement for change and allows white democrats to utilize their skills and privilege to their greatest capacity within that movement. If it is the mass actions of the majority of South Africans that is to force an end to apartheid, then it is vital that all strategies and actions of democratic groups develop in accordance with that mass action.

Possibly the most frightening aspect of the history of ARM was the naivety of its members. Not only did members fail to recognize the "exposed" nature of white democrats as members of an overwhelmingly undemocratic sector of society, but they totally underestimated the power of the South African State. Although they attempted to develop something of a security-tight structure, much of their behaviour was nothing more than irresponsibly risky. A blatant example of this was the story of the night that members had a party at which dynamite was passed around to everyone to see. Minutes later the police arrived, because people had been making too much noise!



THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONGRESS OF DEMOCRATS

Two groupings emerged from the Darragh Hall meeting in November 1952 at which leaders of the ANC and South African Indian Congress (SAIC) called on whites to join the fight against Apartheid. The Liberal Party has already been dealt with in this publication. The second organization to emerge was never to grow to the same numerical size as the Liberal Party. Its influence and impact on the fight for change, however, far outstripped that of its "liberal" counterpart. That organization, whose legacy has ultimately outlived its 10-year-history, was the South African Congress of Democrats.

Following on the Darragh Hall meeting, a provisional Committee was established in Johannesburg as the embryo of a white organization which would cooperate fully with the National Liberation Movement. People involved on this committee included Ruth First, Helen Joseph, Father Trevor Huddleston and Rusty Bernstein. A similar group, called the "Democratic League" already existed in Cape Town and joined the Johannesburg Committee in organizing the inaugural meeting of the Congress of Democrats (COD) in September 1953. Those who came together at this inaugural meeting were previously involved in organizations including the Springbok Legion, Communist Party, World Organization for Peace and Transvaal Peace Movement. Although having relatively diverse political positions, they were united by their recognition of the Congress Movement as the central force fighting for change in South Africa.

The history of COD is undoubtedly the most important in this publication. It is this history that stands out, above all others dealt with here, as testimony to the positive potential of the participation of democratic whites in the fight for change in South Africa. It is wrong to idealize any organization; for they all have both positive aspects and inadequacies. It is rather necessary to weigh up both the successes and failures in an attempt to develop a set of guidelines for current activity.

One cannot simply superimpose the organizational forms of previous decades onto the conditions of South Africa today. The real conditions under which the fight for change is taking place has altered dramatically. However, this does not prevent one from extracting from the history of an organization, like the COD, numerous lessons and directives. This short history therefore attempts to utilize the COD as a "working model". It does not suggest that a COD-like organization would necessarily be appropriate to the conditions of today. It does, nevertheless, recognize the constructive nature of many of the ideas and activities of the "white" member of the Congress Movement.

The Historical Context

The 1946 Strike by over 100 000 Black Mineworkers marked something of a watershed in the fight for change in South Africa. Besides the sheer impact of so vast a number of workers opposing the conditions of their exploitation, the strike signified the crystallization of a series of political relationships which were, from that time onwards, to dominate the forces working for change.

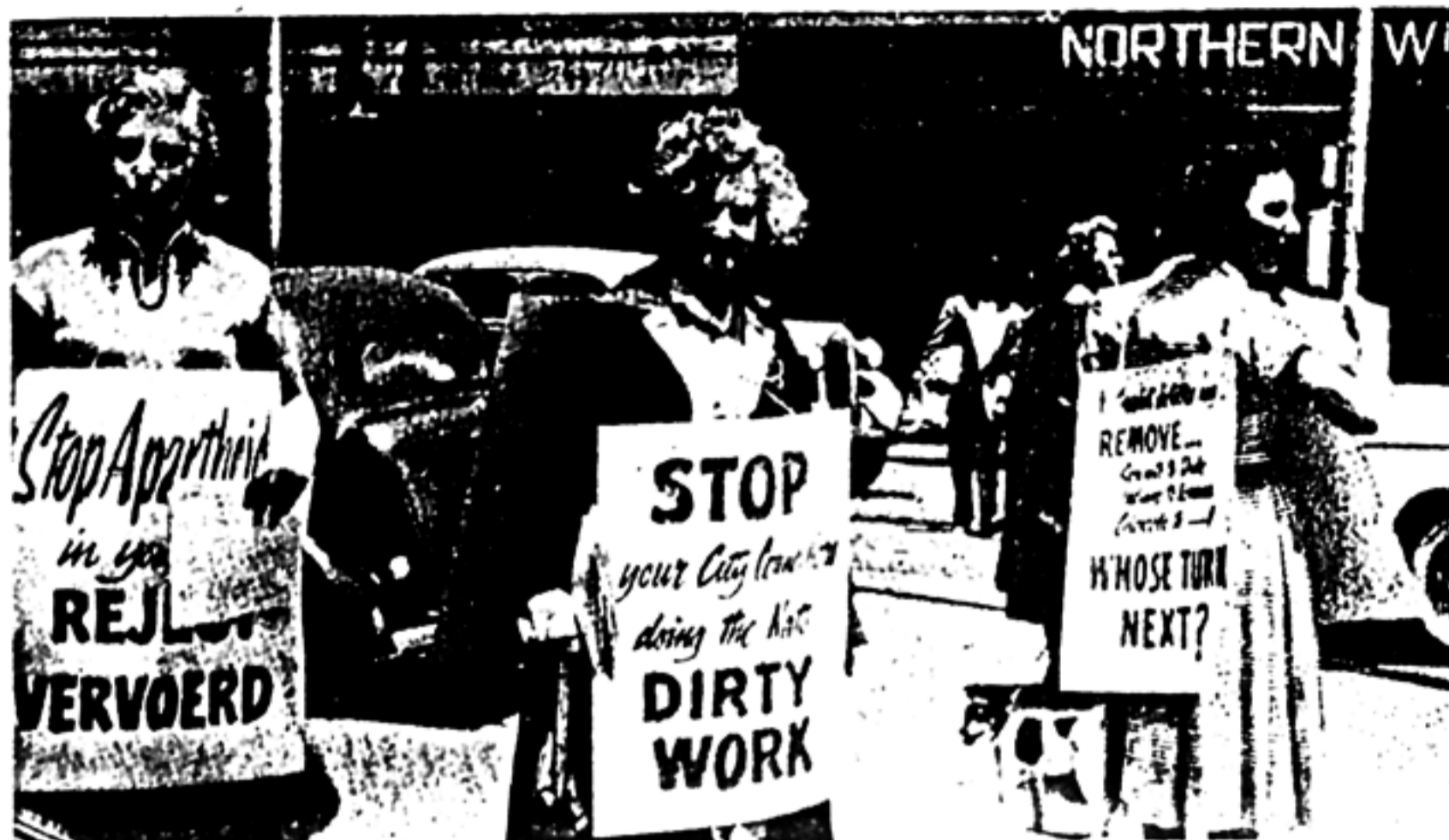
Three organizations participated in the development of the African Mineworkers Union and its leadership of the 1946 Strike. These were the Council of Non European Trade Unions (CNETU); the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA); and the African National Congress (ANC). The cooperation of these groupings over the strike — in many senses laid the foundation for the emergence of the Congress Movement as a Broad Democratic Front against Apartheid during the 1950's.

None of these organizations was to enter the 1950's unchanged, however. CNETU disbanded to join the trade unions from the Trades and Labour Council (T&LC) in forming the non-racial trade union co-ordinating body, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The CPSA disbanded in 1950, in anticipation of the Suppression of Communism Act which was to outlaw the organization. When it re-

emerged 3 years later, the Communist Party operated underground and played a substantially different role. The ANC also underwent changes. In 1949, members of the "radical" ANC Youth League, such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu, took over the leadership of the ANC and with their "Programme of Action" ushered in a period of militant mass mobilization. During the 1940's the basis had been established for the cooperation and integration of the trade union and mass movements under a common political programme. In 1952, the "revitalized" ANC joined the SAIC in organizing a massive Defiance Campaign against South Africa's unjust laws. The particularly small participation of whites in the campaign indicated the vacuum existing in democratic political structures. Whilst democratic whites had previously been able to organize as part of the CPSA, the banning of the Party left no structure for their incorporation in the fight for change. The call by the ANC and SAIC for whites to join the fight against Apartheid was therefore an attempt to fill this political vacuum.



A procession and mass demonstration by the ANC marked Human Rights Day, 10 December 1952.



White women in the streets of Johannesburg protest against apartheid.

The Congress of Democrats emerged to take up this role in the Congress Movement. It was not, however, a simple 'rehash' of the Communist Party, as many have suggested. Firstly, from the late 1920's onwards the CPSA had been a predominantly Black organization. Secondly, and more importantly, COD attracted and involved a far broader political range of people than had been involved in the Party. Although many ex-CPSA members participated, they were joined by a broad spectrum of people in supporting the Congress Movement's fight for liberation.

A partner in the Congress Alliance

Whilst the constitution of the Congress of Democrats did not have any specific racial provisions, it was decided that it would be developed as a specifically white organization within the Congress Alliance. This decision was not an automatic one, but emerged after careful and thorough consideration. The reasons for this decision included:

- * Recognition that the various racial groups in South Africa have historically developed under different conditions – each experiencing differently the real conditions of South Africa's unique form of racial capitalism. The different experiences and real conditions have ensured that the racial groups have varying levels of political consciousness and political potential. A movement which aims to mobilize the broadest possible front against Apartheid must recognize these variations and organize so as to accommodate them. For practical organizational reasons it was therefore decided that the racial groups would organize separately, but that the various organizations would be united and coordinated in a non-racial alliance.

- The feeling of the ANC that because of the privileged position of whites in South Africa, white democrats had greater political experience than their black counterparts and would therefore dominate organizations. The formation of a separate organization for white democrats was therefore seen as facilitating the development of democratic black leadership.
- The importance placed on the mobilization and organization of the greatest number of democratic whites possible, was an important aspect of Congress activities. It was felt that only with the participation of white democrats would the Congress Movement establish the notion that the struggle in South Africa was not between Blacks and Whites, but rather between progressive and reactionary forces. An organization which would be geared towards and sensitive to the specific position of whites in South African society would best achieve this mobilization.



Canvassing for the Congress of the People.

It was within this context that COD joined the National Consultative Committee and Joint Planning Council, the policy-making bodies of the Congress Alliance. It was in structures such as these that COD acted as an equal partner with the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), Coloured Peoples Congress (CPC), SAIC and ANC. The 1956 Treason Trial, in which 150 Congress leaders were placed on trial for four years on charges of High Treason, illustrated the extent to which COD members were integral to the Alliance. The trialists included numerous COD members, such as Lionel Bernstein, Jack Hodgson, Joe Slovo, Ruth First and Lionel Foreman. All the trialists were eventually acquitted and released.

The two cornerstones of the COD constitution were the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Freedom Charter. The policy of the organization based it itself on the belief that the struggle in South Africa was between the forces of oppression and reaction, spearheaded by the Nationalist Government on the one hand, and the forces of progress and democracy, spearheaded by the ANC and its allies in the Congress Alliance, on the other. Apartheid was seen as being inextricably tied up to the economic subjugation of Blacks in a cheap labour system and what was required was, therefore, a radical transformation of the entire South African system. COD pledged itself to uphold all "democratic ideals" and to extend them to all fields of South African life, so that all people could live as human beings in their homeland.

The official role of COD was to draw white democrats into the Congress Movement and win them over to the common programme of the Freedom Charter. There was to be an attempt to inform whites of the conditions under which black South Africans lived under Apartheid and to show that, in the long run, the interests of all South Africans coincided. As conceived, COD was to primarily focus its attention and energies on the white community, although it was also to participate in general Congress Campaigns. In reality, however, a large proportion of COD's energy was utilized in playing a resource role to the other organizations in the Alliance particularly the ANC and SAIC. A former COD member describes the activities:

"It is important to remember that the ANC was a massive political organization, in fact the premier organization in the country. It was therefore capable of fulfilling all the required functions on its own. It was obviously convenient for us to work in "white areas", and was therefore our responsibility. I suppose we did also play a secondary resource role, although we did not see that as our priority. In most cases we joined in with the general Congress Campaigns. However, we did run certain campaigns on our own, like elections and petitions".

The activities

COD grew fairly rapidly in its early years, but never became a particularly large organization. Large branches operated in Johannesburg and Cape Town, with smaller branches in areas like Port Elizabeth, Durban and Pretoria. It would be impossible to document the numerous activities of COD in this short publication. It is useful, however, to briefly examine some of these activities in an attempt to gauge the way in which COD fitted in to the general Congress Movement.

One of the most important contributions of COD was to the organization of the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955. COD assisted both with the practicali-

ties of the Congress, as well as playing an important role in the campaign to gather the demands of the population for inclusion in the Freedom Charter. An enormous amount of organization went into the smooth-running of this Congress, at which 3 000 delegates from throughout South Africa met to adopt the Freedom Charter. COD later adopted the Freedom Charter as its political programme, as did the other Congresses.



Three of the women accused in the Treason Trial, Helen Joseph, Yettah Børenblatt and Sonia Bunting.

In 1955, the ANC called on people throughout the country to resist the new Bantu Education Act by boycotting primary schools. Although the boycott was only partially successful on a national level, it had particular success on the East Rand and in Port Elizabeth. In these areas, a series of "cultural clubs" were established for the "alternate education" of the boycotting students. COD members played an important role in organizing and teaching in these clubs, which still had an attendance of over 1500 by late 1956. The level of political awareness of those who were educated here continues to bear testimony to the success of the campaign.

In the first week of 1957, the residents of Alexandra Township outside Johannesburg launched a boycott of Putco busses in opposition to a fare increase. Under the cry of "Asikwelwa" ("we will not ride"), thousands of people set out to walk to and from their places of work each day. Although the Congress Movement had not initiated the boycott, the ANC soon emerged to play a significant leadership role within it. On a secondary level, members of COD grouped together to organize transport for the boycotters. Each morning and evening, cars were organized to provide transport for those who could not cope with the long walk. The support of COD members, often in the face of direct police intimidation, boosted the morale of the boycotters and contributed to the ultimate victory of the act of resistance.

COD continued to play an important role in Congress activities during the early years of the 1960's, despite the mammoth security crackdown on the Congress Movement. Two examples of its role during this period stand out: Firstly, COD played an important role in mobilizing public support for the Natal African Municipal Workers Union in its dispute with the Durban City Council. A second area was the role COD played, together with the Federation of South African Women, in aiding SACTU with the organization of African peasant women in Natal. Both these activities show the diversity of COD activity and the capacity for complementing the activities of other Congress organizations.

Besides the few activities mentioned above, COD engaged in numerous of its "own" activities. These included organizing fund-raising; collecting signatures for petitions opposing repressive government legislation and the distribution of study-notes and pamphlets on key issues. Although COD did not see itself as a political party, it contested certain municipal elections in order to publicize the Congress cause.

The crackdown

"From the very beginning, COD was a focus of state activity. Certain people were banned almost immediately after it was formed. Besides trials, bannings and detentions, our offices were often raided and files confiscated".

— former COD member

Although the Congress Movement had suffered state repression throughout the 1950's, it was only during the 1960's that a systematic campaign was launched to crush it. In 1960, following on the unrest surrounding the deaths at Sharpeville and Langa, a State of Emergency was declared. The ANC and PAC were banned and scores of people were detained and arrested. In total, at least 100 white and 2 000 black trade union and political activists were detained without trial. The vast majority of whites detained were members of COD.

During the following four years, the state intensified its attack on the Congress Movement, using detentions, bannings, banishments, house arrests and a whole series of political trials. In September 1962, the state banned the South African Congress of Democrats under the Unlawful Organizations Act. It is interesting that, having banned the ANC in 1960, the second "target" amongst the Congress organizations was COD.

The attack on white democrats, and the general Congress Movement, did not end with the banning of COD. In December 1962, 36 organizations were "listed" and specified groups were prevented from participating in their activities. Those barred from participation were the 432 people "listed" under the Suppression of Communism Act; all banned people; and any person who had been a COD member. In 1963, all banned and listed people were forced to resign from any body discussing government policy.

The actions of the state during the years 1960 – 1964 were brutally effective in removing and destroying the existing Congress leadership. The "quiet" political



Demonstrations of support during the Treason Trial.

period of the 1960's to some extent illustrated this success in the short-run. However, the state strategy did not take into account the level to which the very ideas and demands on which the Congress Movement was built, were ingrained in the consciousness of the South African people. Apartheid has found no strategy which can even begin to destroy these ideas and eradicate the lessons learned by democrats of all races during the exciting decade.

Looking back. . .

"It was never possible for COD to mobilize a large number of whites. Our support was limited by the nature of our programme. We did however have access to numerous people and definitely contributed to popularizing the ANC cause".

The positive contribution of COD began with its clear cut recognition of the Congress Movement as the primary force in the fight for change in South Africa. Members of COD did not imagine themselves to be at the *forefront* of this fight and did not seek to play a spectacular role in it. They rather recognized that if they were to play anything of a constructive role, it was to be in a complementary capacity to the National Liberation Movement. Although the broadest opposition grouping possible is needed to effectively tackle Apartheid, it is only the black oppressed and exploited majority who have the capacity to bring it down.

Beyond this it is important to recognize the extent to which the short history of COD did manage to shift the emphasis of the fight for change in South Africa from being a black - white struggle, to being one between the forces of progress and forces of reaction. The participation of democratic whites in an organized and disciplined political structure illustrated the capacity for democratic forces to unite on a non-racial basis to fight Apartheid. The solid nature of the non-racial alliance was shown by the preparedness of the ANC to endure the 1959 PAC breakaway - as a direct attack on the participation of whites in the struggle.

Possibly the only significant flaw in the conceptualization of COD, was an over estimation of the potential for whites to be incorporated into the fight for change. Although it is vital to mobilize and politicize the greatest number of whites possible, it is also important to recognize that the exceptionally privileged position of whites in South African society will always prevent a large number from relinquishing their position of economic political privilege to dedicate themselves to working for change. Whilst it was correct for COD to organize campaigns specific to the white community, these should have simply intended to regenerate the ranks of white democrats and practically illustrate the non-racial content of the struggle. The impression is created that, in actual fact, too much emphasis was placed and energy spent attempting to mobilize an essentially immobile grouping.

The history of COD is fairly monumental in the history of the democratic movement in South Africa. Not only did it illustrate the willingness of white democrats to join the fight for change, but it added to their willingness, lessons about the actual form which their contribution could take. Whilst the actual structure of the COD organization would possibly not be suitable to the conditions of the '1980's, the complementary role which COD developed and practiced undoubtedly remains suitable.



The past months have been particularly inspiring for democrats working for change in South Africa. After the "quiet" political decade of the 1960's, and the militant, yet fragile decade of the 1970's, democratic forces have developed a broad front of progressive organisations in opposition to Apartheid. Under the guiding document of the Freedom Charter, worker, student, women's and community organisations are once again regrouping in a non-racial alliance.

The re-emergence of a broad democratic front is significant for many reasons. Most significant is the extent to which those participating are doing so on the basis of a history of struggle against oppression and exploitation. The many historical lessons of the fight for change in South Africa can ensure clarity of purpose and action in the activities of the 80's. The fact then that a principal focus of the progressive movement is to anchor its activities in durable, grassroots organisational structures, comes as no surprise. It emerges from the experiences of history and the recognition of the necessity to challenge Apartheid from a base of united, organised strength.

The centrality of this question of organisation has promoted the discussion on white democrats. This booklet has not concentrated on the role and actions of white democrats who are working against Apartheid in "specialised" structures - be they trade unions, newspapers or resource groups. Nor has it concentrated on those who challenge Apartheid in their professional fields, such as law, medicine or education. It has concentrated rather on the actions of democrats in principally white, political, organisational structures. Although the guidelines which have emerged are often applicable to all of these, this is not always necessarily so.

No "Blueprint" for white democrats has emerged from the histories of the organisations discussed. These histories have however, provided pointers which enable us to learn the do's and don'ts of effective organisation and action today. The question of how these lessons can be adapted into the working of democratic forces is the current challenge facing all those working for change.

Choosing sides

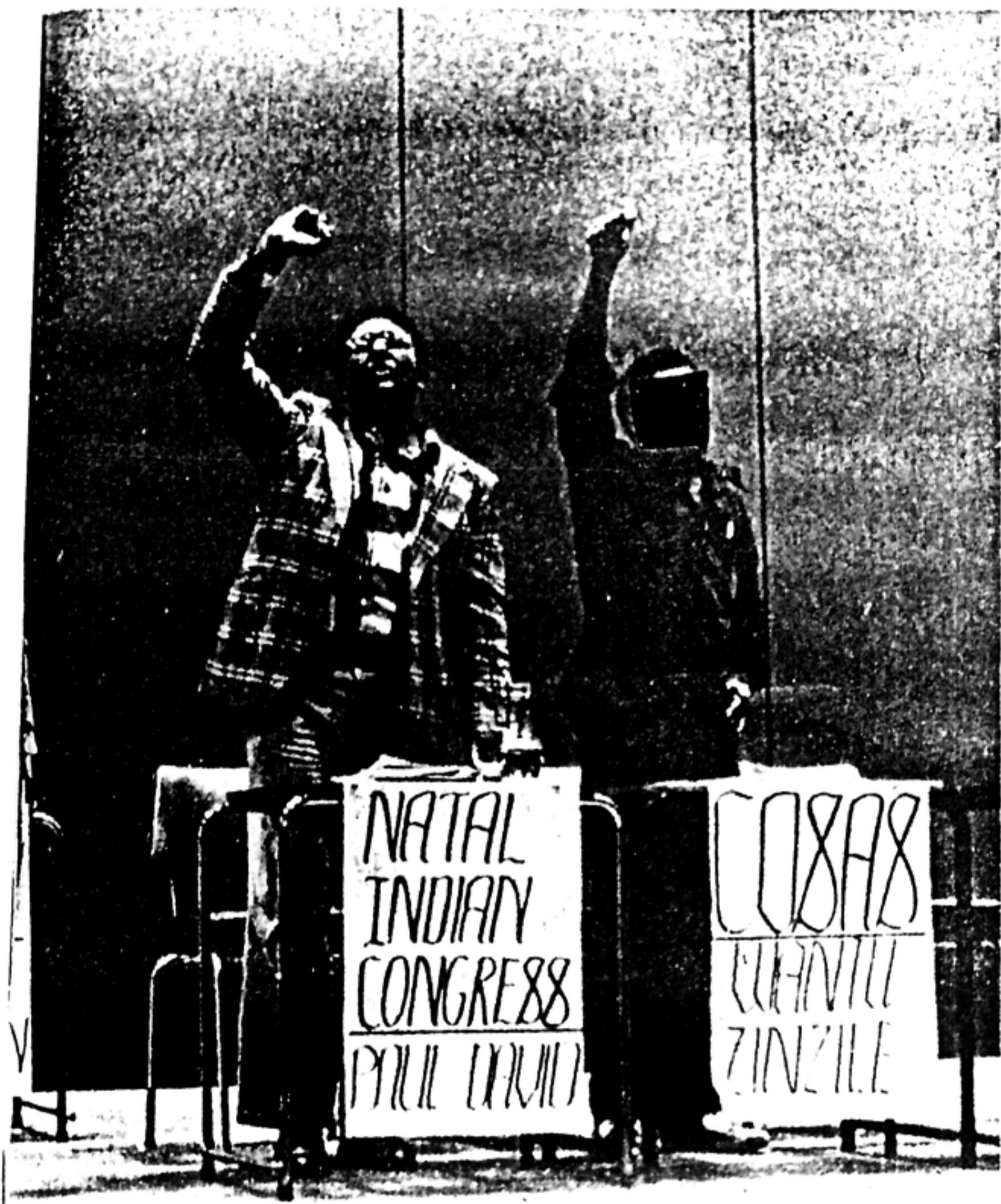
Conflict in South Africa is not simply a conflict between black and white. Although the racial factor has been intricately bound into South Africa's history, it is not the sole determinant of social, political and economic division, nor is race the sole factor around which opposition and struggle take place. The history of South Africa is rather one of the development of a specific form of racial capitalism, which has resulted in a society divided along the lines of those who have access to both political and economic power and those who are denied such access.

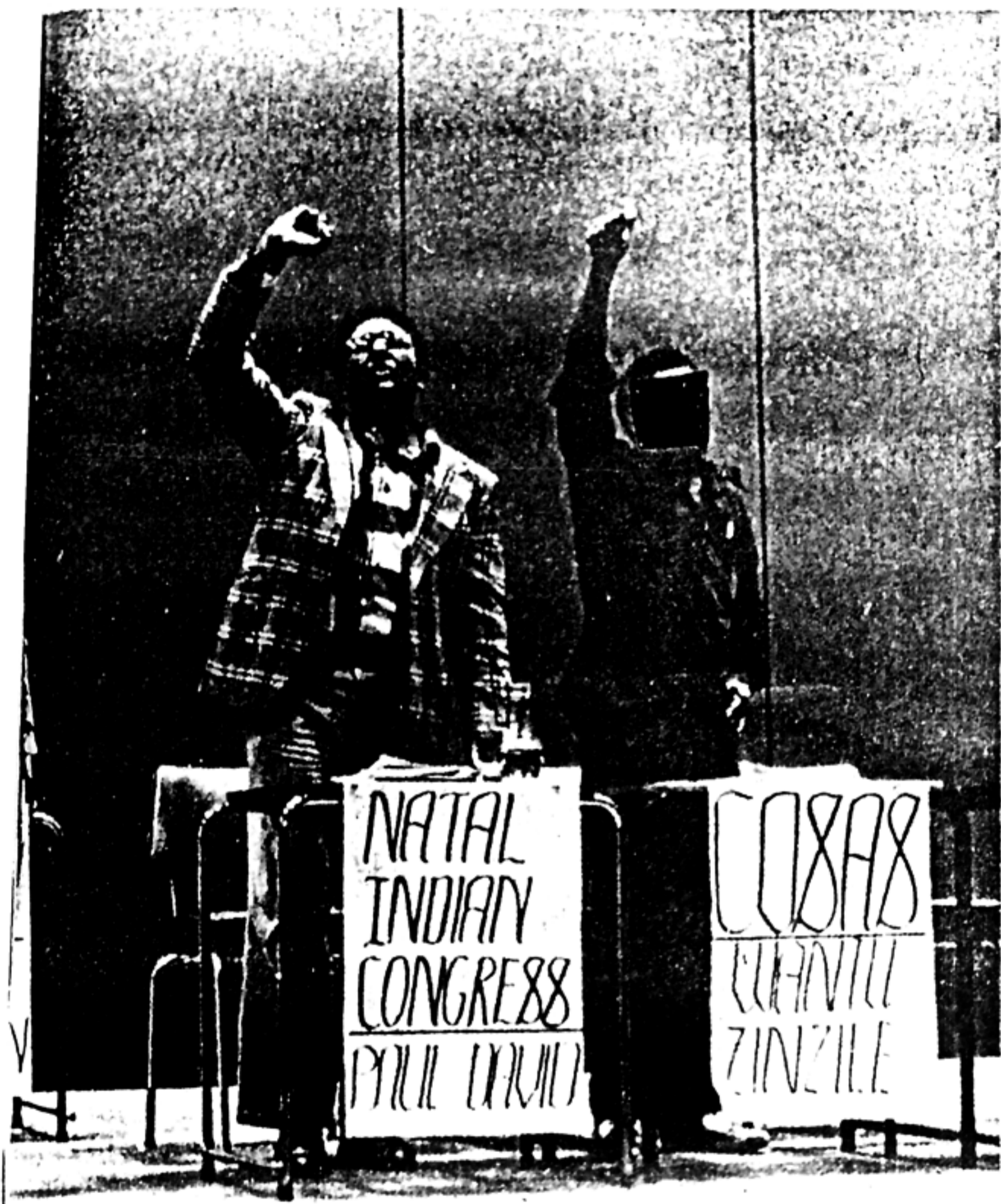
Therefore, it is only with a thorough understanding of the real dynamics of South African society, that those working for change can develop the most powerful strategies and effective organisational forms. It is necessary to identify which forces are working for a society which would strive for equality, in the economic, political and social spheres, and which forces are simply hoping for a slight adjustment to the existing power structure. To understand which groups and organisations present the real threat and challenge to the status quo it is also necessary to understand the process through which change will occur.

It is possible to draw distinct lines between the forces of oppression and exploitation, and the forces of liberation and democracy. The majority of people in South Africa, because of their subordinate position, automatically tend towards support of the forces of change. Those who form part of South Africa's privileged minority, however are faced with the choice of joining either side. The fact of their privilege ensures that most whites in this country favour the maintenance of the status quo (with a few minor alterations perhaps). But there are also those who manage to escape the pressures of their privileged position and choose to support, and work for fundamental change. It is to these people that the term 'white democrat' refers.



Mass Rally at Wits to protest against the Republic Day Celebrations





The most immediate of these include:

- * The potential to dramatically underestimate the power of the Apartheid state in opposing democratic forces
- * The possibility of failing to distinguish between the real forces of liberation, and those of "national chauvenism" or "reaction".
- * The potential for political opportunism or adventurism.

Dangers such as these should not deter the activities of white democrats however. Throughout South African history, the democratic movement has indicated its commitment to a non-racial struggle and therefore, its acceptance of both the potentials and the limitations of all democratic groups. These dangers should rather be viewed as factors which are constantly challenged and eradicated.

Progressive forces in South Africa have taken great strides forward over the past few months, and the dominant trend has been towards non-racial struggle. Numerous groups have publically expressed their total acceptance of the contribution of white democrats, often in the face of harsh criticism. The challenge now, is to all white democrats - to strengthen their position within the democratic movement for change. And it is the duty of all those committed to a free and democratic future in South Africa to rise to meet this challenge.
