

Enc. 37.

TO ALL REGIONS.

ESTELLA HOUSE,
47a, Main Road,
CLAREMONT. Cape.

1st March, 1960.

The enclosed correspondence is sent to you for your information.

As you will see the leader on a Republic in the February issue of the Black Sash magazine caused great distress and confusion in Natal Coastal Region. We now learn that it has also caused some distress in other Regions.

We are, therefore, forwarding all correspondence which we have had with Natal on this matter, together with the letters which it was suggested Natal Coastal should publish in the 'Natal Mercury' in order to explain the mistake made on the Black Sash attitude to a Republic.

We should be very pleased for your Region to make use of any part of this correspondence which it might wish to use in order to correct any misapprehension which may have arisen in your Region.

We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that Natal Coastal are very anxious for all Regions to publish the statement of the Black Sash attitude to a Republic, so that there can be no misunderstanding in anyone's mind on this matter. The C.E. are happy for Regions to comply with Natal Coastal's request in this matter, but would like to leave the timing for the publication of such a statement to the discretion of the Region with the suggestion that possibly the best time would be when the Bill for the Referendum comes before Parliament for discussion.

(Sgd.) M.C. PETERSEN.

COPY

THE BLACK SASH
NATAL COASTAL REGION

DIE SWART SERP
NATAISE KUSGEBIED

6, Glynnwood Grove,
Bellair,
DURBAN.

16th February, 1960.

The National Chairman,
Estella House,
47a, Main Road,
CLAREMONT. Cape.

Dear Mrs. Petersen,

Thank you for your telegram of the 12th instant, in reply to mine of the same date. We have not yet received your letter.

At our Regional Executive Meeting held this morning, a very full and frank discussion was held on the statement which appeared in the 'Natal Mercury' on the 11th instant, and which caused such distress in our Region.

The Resolutions on the Republic, i.e. iia, iib, and iic, which were discussed at the National Congress in Cape Town on October 14th to 17th, 1958, were read as was 'Statement on the Republic' which was released to the Press then.

It was unanimously decided that the following points be brought to your notice:-

1. The timing of such an Editorial on a Republic was most regrettable in fact it could serve no useful purpose at this stage when so many members of the Black Sash are engaged in active Anti-Republican work; indeed it has done positive harm.
2. We ask that the Central Executive at once republish 'The Statement on a Republic' of October 1958, which has never been rescinded or altered, or even discussed since it was passed. We wish this Statement to be handed to the local papers of all Regions for publication. If this is not done, our Region is in grave danger of being disbanded. We have received a 'death blow' from which we may not survive. Already resignations have been received from foundation members and other esteemed and irreplaceable members have expressed their intention not to continue unless some reassuring statement is issued by you and the Central Executive.
3. We are most apprehensive when resolutions which have caused much controversy and heart-searching in the past, have been re-worded in such a way as to convey quite a contrary opinion from that expressed by the Region. What guarantee have we that this will not happen again?
4. As our Magazines were not available for distribution until some days after this statement appeared in the 'Natal Mercury' the tragedy is that our members only read this bald statement not knowing the source of the Editor's information. We maintain that our Magazine Secretary, who is most efficient and capable, should distribute all Black Sash Magazines in our area.

..... 5. /2.

5. We would refer you to a statement made by the National Council in November 1956 which reads as follows :-

' The National Council has attempted to define
' its attitude towards a suggested Republic in
' South Africa.

' We have reviewed all shades of opinion on this
' subject, ranging from implacable opposition to
' a republic in S.A. at any time, to the belief
' that unity in S.A. will not be achieved until
' such time as a Republic is established.

' After very deep consideration we have agreed as
' follows:-

' The Black Sash opposes any demand for a Republic
' now. The members of the present Nationalist
' Government through the Senate Act and other
' legislation, have proved that they respect neither
' the spirit underlying Constitutional government
' nor the rights of the minorities. For this
' reason the Black Sash opposes any demand for a
' Republic now.

' We believe that the above statement would be
' acceptable to all members of the movement, since
' it conforms with our constitution and the policy
' laid down at the National Conference.

' The National Council believes that this Statement
' should not be issued publicly at the present time
' as a premature statement might do irreparable harm.
' November 1956.'

We emphasise that this Statement still stands and is accepted by our Region as Black Sash policy on the Republican issue.

Your sincerely,

(Sgd.) KAY BRUMMER.

REGIONAL SECRETARY.

Encls. Statement - October 1958.

Encls. Natal Coastal's Letter of 16/2/60.

STATEMENT ON A REPUBLIC.

The Black Sash has considered the Republican issue and emphatically rejects the proposals of the Government for a Republic now, on the grounds that members of the Government have, through the Senate Act and other Laws, proved that they respect neither the spirit underlying the present Constitution, nor the freedom of the individual nor the rights of minorities.

We believe that any new Constitution, which must command the allegiance of all South Africans, must safeguard the rights of all, and should not be brought into being without the support of the overwhelming majority of all the people in South Africa. Whether this support is indeed a fact cannot be ascertained unless the exact proposals for a new Constitution are made public and time given for consideration thereof.

AGREED that this Statement be released to the Press.

The above was taken from the Minutes of the National Conference held in Cape Town from the 14th to the 17th October, 1958.

HEADING (In Bold Black Print)

"SASH" WOULD BACK REPUBLIC, BUT

" The Sash sees no objection in principle to a republican form of government for South Africa and it would accept a democratic republic, provided a clear majority of the people desired it, says the latest issue of "The Black Sash", official publication of the movement in the Union.

An article in both English and Afrikaans on the front page of the February issue of the publication says: " We see no advantage whatever in the formation of a republic under the present Nationalist Government, brought about by a simple majority of White voters. For all practical purposes South Africa is a republic already, our Parliament is completely unfettered and does what it likes - or rather, what the Nationalist Government likes.

All that is lacking is the formal abolition of the monarchy. This is necessary, we are told, to promote national harmony. If there were indeed, any prospect that the present divisions in South Africa would be healed by the declaration of a republic, the Black Sash would welcome it. But there is no possibility of harmony while our Government is conducted on the basis of a narrow exclusive nationalism.

Whether the Government's attempt to achieve a republic succeeds or fails is unlikely to have a significant effect on the way we are governed.

The Prime Minister's statement that Parliamentary government would be preserved under a republic is worthless because Parliamentary government depends upon the observance of Parliamentary conventions, respect for the rights and views of minorities, a wide franchise, fair electoral laws and a representative body of legislators. None of these conditions exist in South Africa today.

It may be argued that, from this point of view, a republic would not make our situation worse.

Nevertheless it is certain that many people who are not opposed to republicanism in principle will vote against a republic in consequence of their profound distaste for the objects and methods of the Nationalist Government.

A vote in favour of a republic within the Commonwealth might pave the way for a republic outside it - and who can guarantee that we would be permitted to remain within the Commonwealth even if we desired it? "

THE BLACK SASH

DIE SWART SERP

Estella House,
47a, Main Road,
CLAREMONT. Cape.

17th February 1960.

Mrs. A.D. Powell,
60, The Crescent,
Hillary,
NATAL.

Dear Mrs. Powell,

Herewith enclosed are the statement which I read to you over the telephone and another which we had also drawn up as an alternative in case you preferred it. We are only too happy for you to use either or both as you think fit.

I am calling a special executive meeting on Friday morning to deal with the letter which you say you are posting to us by airmail today.

May I thank you once again for the wonderful help you have given both the C.E. and your Region over the difficulty caused by the leader on the Republic. I cannot tell you how grateful I am, nor how clearly I realise that if it had not been for your prompt action and wise and sympathetic handling of the situation, it might have brought about the complete demise of the Natal Coastal Region.

We^{/all} wish you the very best of luck in your future efforts to put right the mistake which has been made, and if there is any further way in which we can help you, we would make every effort to do so.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) M.C. PETERSEN.

Encls.

THE BLACK SASH

DIE SWART SERP

Letter No. 1.

ESTELLA HOUSE,
47a, Main Road,
CLAREMONT, Cape.

17th February, 1960.

The Editor,
The Natal Mercury,
DURBAN.

Dear Sir,

The Central Executive of the Black Sash sincerely regrets that the leader in the February issue of the Black Sash magazine created an erroneous and unfortunate impression by the use of the word "ACCEPT" in the context that " it would accept a democratic republic provided that a clear majority of the people - all the people - desired it. "

The policy of the Black Sash is as stated in the following resolution taken at a National Conference of the organisation held in October 1958, i.e., " that while acknowledging some members are not opposed, in theory, to Republicanism, the Black Sash, recognising the realities of the situation at the moment, emphatically rejects the demand for a Nationalist Republic. "

This was further amplified by the press statement handed out at the end of the Conference which read:-

" The Black Sash has considered the Republican issue and emphatically rejects the proposals of the Government for a republic now, on the grounds that members of the Government have, through the Senate Act and other laws, proved that they respect neither the spirit underlying the Constitution nor the freedom of the individual, nor the rights of minorities. We believe that any new Constitution, which requires the allegiance of all South African, must safeguard the rights of all, and should not be brought into being without the support of the overwhelming majority of all the peoples in South Africa. Whether this support is indeed a fact cannot be ascertained unless the exact proposals for the new Constitution are made public and time given for consideration thereof. "

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) M.C. PETERSEN.
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

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The Black Sash, as a movement, is not concerned in theory to approve or reject republican or monarchical forms of government. What it does say is that it would be politically immoral to make a change to a Republican (or any other form of government) without the explicit wish of a clear majority of all the people of South Africa. Further, that no such change could be politically moral unless it guaranteed civil rights and liberties to every citizen.

The Black Sash would neither approve nor reject a republic which incorporated such principles and Sash members, as individuals, would support it or not according to whether they were monarchist or republican by conviction.

Yours faithfully,

(sgd.) M.C. PETERSEN.
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

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Yours faithfully,

(sgd.) M.C. PETERSEN.
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

THE BLACK SASH.

Central Executive Committee.

DIE SWART SERP.

ESTELLA HOUSE,
47a, Main Road,
CLAREMONT. Cape.

25th February, 1960.

Mrs. K.E. Brummer,
6, Glynnwood Grove,
Bellair,
DURBAN.

Dear Mrs. Brummer,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th instant, which only arrived here on the 23rd, and was fully discussed at our meeting on the 24th.

Firstly, after my report on what had occurred in Natal as a result of the 'Natal Mercury' report of our article on the Republic, the C.E. took a unanimous vote most sincerely regretting that they had caused so much distress in your Region. The points in your letter were then dealt with individually.

With regard to No.1. The C.E. would like to explain that they chose to have a leader on the subject of a Referendum and a Republic because in view of the Prime Minister's statement and of the fact that legislation for a Referendum is to be introduced into Parliament this Session, the subject was extremely topical. The C.E., however, have noted Natal Coastal's comment concerning the timing of this editorial.

2. The C.E. is quite happy to comply with your request that all Regions should be asked to arrange for publication in their local newspapers of the Resolution and statement taken in October 1958.

3. The leading article on the Republic was never intended to convey "quite a contrary opinion" from that contained in the Resolution taken at the Conference in 1958. In fact, the leader states "we see no advantage whatever in the formation of a republic under the present Nationalist Government." The trouble seems to have arisen because the word "ACCEPT" was capable of being construed as meaning "WELCOME" or "APPROVE", when what was meant was the Sash would not protest against such a Republic. We understand very how uneasy your Region must feel, but can only assure you that in future we will try to examine each word with even greater care than we have done in the past.

4. Our reason for sending advance copies direct to all newspapers throughout the country is in the hope of receiving publicity. Unfortunately, in this case, the publicity received was of the wrong sort.

In regard to the wish expressed in your letter, we have cancelled the copies sent to the Press in Natal Coastal direct from here and would be grateful if you would confirm that you do in fact not wish us to send copies of the magazine direct to the press in your Region. In future, shall we send extra copies of the magazine to your magazine secretary, so that she can forward them on to the Press?

5. While we /2.

5. While we do not consider that there is anything in the November 1956 National Council Statement which is at variance with the October 1958 National Conference Resolution, you will of course remember that it is only Conference which lays down policy and therefore, it is the 1958 Resolution which is the official expression of the Black Sash policy regarding the Republic.

We trust this letter, together with the letter sent to you for the Natal Mercury, will be reassurance to your Region and we sincerely hope you will accept our apologies for all the distress and difficulty which you have been caused.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) M.C. PETERSEN.
NATIONAL CHAIRWOMAN.