

THE BLACK SASH - CAPE WESTERN REGION.

TO ALL REGIONS:

4 Oakdale,  
Main Street,  
NEWLANDS. Cape.

4th December, 1961.

The undermentioned letter has been sent to the Chairman of the South African Society of Journalists.

Not only, however, has the Press chastised the Black Sash but we have had two resignations from members who are journalists and who took the strongest exception to the banning of the SABC for the same reason as the 'Cape Times'.

The Black Sash would find itself in a very false situation if, being itself considered to have interfered with the freedom of the Press, it should wish to protest against the legislation which may be introduced into Parliament to curtail press freedom.

In view of this, Cape Western Region thought other Regions might wish to consult with journalists in their regions as to the full implications of the banning of SABC representatives from Conference.

To: The Chairman, Cape Town Branch, The Society of Journalists, 21/11/61.  
c/o The Cape Times, Burg Street, CAPE TOWN.

Dear Mr. Owen-Williams,

At our recent National Conference in East London, we took a resolution to exclude the SABC reporter from our Conference. The resolution read as follows:-

that a similar procedure be adopted at this Conference as Radio South Africa adopts in giving the UN reports and that the Chairman of this Conference be appointed our news representative.

By adopting this ironical parallel, we hoped to register our disapproval of the fact that we were being deprived of the independent broadcasting services which we consider we are entitled to expect from Radio South Africa.

X It was naturally, therefore, with considerable concern that we learned from the 'Cape Times' leading article, a copy of which is attached, that our action could be interpreted as an endeavour to interfere with the freedom of the Press.

X In order to clarify our position, we issued a statement, a copy of which is attached, which the Cape Times were kind enough to publish, but we understand from a senior journalist that he considers our argument spurious.

As a group of people who wish to do all in their power to uphold press freedom, we are naturally most anxious to do nothing ourselves which will infringe press freedom. We are writing, therefore, to your organisation in the hope that you will be so kind as to discuss this problem and to advise us of your views.

(Signed) M.C. PETERSEN.  
VICE-CHAIR.

X For attachments - see overleaf.

CAPE TIMES - November 13th, 1961.

We trust the report that the Black Sash had banned Radio South Africa reporters from its meeting reflected only a state of temporary annoyance among this group of women who have fought so many rounds for liberty in South Africa. If, however, banning the reporters of the radio services, or any reporter for that matter, is being adopted as a policy, then we hope the Black Sash reverses that policy immediately. No matter what Radio South Africa may have done to outrage the ideals of freedom of information in the Republic, that cannot constitute any kind of reason for breaching Press Freedom yet again. We believe that the Black Sash is fighting to preserve the freedom of the Press just as much as any other democratic organisation in the country is, and would not want to decrease it even to demonstrate its indignation. That kind of banning and barring can safely be left to the Nationalists.

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CAPE TIMES - November 14th, 1961.

A spokesman of the Cape Western Region of the Black Sash yesterday explained why the Sash had decided to ban the SABC representative from its Conference.

The statement read: We regret that the barring of the SABC representative from our conference should have been interpreted as an interference with the freedom of the Press. The Black Sash does not consider that the SABC is in the same category as the Press. The SABC is a service to which all listeners, whatever their political sympathies, contribute financially.

In the opinion of the Black Sash, therefore, the SABC should not be used to represent only the Government point of view.

CORRECTIONS ALLOWED. When newspapers print inaccurate reports, or misrepresent a case, the public is given the opportunity to correct the position in the same newspaper. The SABC, as far as we can see, does not allow talks which correct misrepresentations or damaging omissions.

The facts of our case are these: that as the SABC had decided recently to stop using reports from the United Nations available through independent ordinary news channels, and had instead decided to use only reports emanating from Mr. Eric Louw, we drew an ironical parallel by adopting the following resolution:

that a similar procedure be adopted at this conference as Radio South Africa adopts in giving the UN reports, and that the chairman of this conference be appointed our news representative.

OUR CHANCE. We regard the request of the SABC to attend our 6th National Conference as an opportunity to show our disapproval of being deprived of the independent broadcasting services which we consider we are entitled to expect from Radio South Africa. We wish to make it clear that representatives from the local Nationalist and Opposition newspapers attended the opening of the conference at our invitation and that no attempt was made to question or to influence their reports. Any other newspaper reporter attending would have been similarly welcomed.

The Black Sash, far from banning representatives of groups who are diametrically opposed to it, have gone to great pains over the years to persuade them not only to attend our conferences, but also to participate in our Brains Trusts and Press parties and to report on our activities.

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LETTER OF RESIGNATION:

12th November, 1961.

From: Mrs. M. Challans.

" I would like to say how entirely I agree with Black Sash condemnation of the present biased SABC programmes. From being a National corporation it has become the equivalent of a Nationalist newspaper or magazine, with the difference that listeners who do not share its views are, since it has a monopoly of fees, being forced to finance it. I fully respect the feelings of members who are giving up their licences, especially when their sets get only local reception. Having bought my own during the last Emergency, especially to hear overseas news services when the censorship was in force, I intend keeping it for the same purpose.

It is this question of censorship which brings me, however, to the Black Sash's decision to ban the SABC from its meetings; those, I mean, to which Press representatives are admitted. This is, undoubtedly, an act of indirect censorship, the only one within our power; and its moral basis seems to be that one is entitled to censor anyone whom one sincerely believes to be wrong. This is precisely the standpoint of those Nationalists who want to censor the English Press; many quite genuinely believe it is an evil influence and it will be almost impossible to justify the Black Sash action without in some part justifying them too. This seems to me, in a choice of evils, very much the greater.

As a member of the P.E.N. Club Committee, I was associated with one of the two motions opposing the bill to censor publications. Though our efforts were successful for the time, it is always likely that a new bill will be put forward; if so, I should like to be free of any commitments which might compromise me in opposing it again. It is for this reason, not through any loss of respect for the work and ideals of the Black Sash, that regretfully I must tender my resignation.

(Sgd.) MARY CHALLANS.

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The other letter of resignation was received from Mrs. A. Stewart Thompson, and her reason for handing in her resignation was merely given as being on account of our decision to bar the SABC from the Conference. When telephoned she gave a further explanation for her decision and was then asked to attend a Regional Council meeting when she could discuss her objections with the Council.

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