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When Headquarters canvassed regions about the type of Symposium to be held at National Conference this year, Mrs. Streek of Border Region sent us a report which Mrs. Wendy Jackson, who was a delegate at last year's conference, had sent to Border giving her impressions of the Conference. This report, written completely spontaneously was, we thought, of great importance to the Black Sash as a whole, and particularly to the small regions.

Mrs. Jackson has given her permission for the report to be circulated to all regions and we do this because this matter must be discussed fully at Conference this year. We hope that all regions will give this serious consideration.

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.....The Black Sash Conference, like any other conference is three days of sometimes very dreary hard work. It seems strange to classify sitting and listening to debate hard work, but this it ends up being. One is incredibly tired at the end, and of course comes away wondering, as one does from such gatherings, just where all this is leading.

This is something I want to try and develop as a theme, just where is all this leading?

As we all know, the Black Sash is composed of a very bright body of women. I don't know that we on the Border quite fall into the category I'm talking about! but there are women from the Transvaal and Cape Western who quite clearly have the ability, and now the political experience, to hold cabinet rank.

It seems to me an incredible waste of this country's brainpower that they remain largely ineffective - and have too, to remain background workers

Because Sashers themselves find very little to disagree about these days, the conference takes on an air of being an educational affair - and a three day dialogue and lecture session on some of the problems facing the country today. It takes on an intellectual, and almost unrealistic tone.

When I say unrealistic I don't mean that Sashers are not aware of the problems facing South Africa today. I mean, unrealistic in the sense that this sort of political discussion is so way above the sort that one hears on the streets, at tea parties, and even dinner parties.....In other words The Sash today, controlled as it is by clever, amazingly well informed women, is operating on a level way above the man in the street. In the beginning the Sash wasn't like this. It had as well an emotional, popular appeal. Today it operates on high level reasoning. Emotion isn't involved.

Now this appeals to me. It probably appeals to you. And I like to feel I belong to this type of organisation. But the big point is that I don't think the man in the street cares one whit about this sort of thing.

He operates on the level of : "If I vote this way, would it end up with my wife having her baby delivered by a black nurse" or "how will this affect my pocket?" or "Will I have an Indian neighbour" etc.; etc.

But the Black Sash, in its way, is trying to influence the way the man in the street votes, not only at parliamentary level, but at provincial level, at local level. If it fulfils its function of protest group, of let us right these wrongs, it must influence the people who have the political power, so that they will be moved to act.

This/.....



This seemed to me to be the theme of this conference. To make strong effective protest in order that the right people took the right sort of action, whether they be officials, church leaders, town councillors, or cabinet ministers.

One of the most important papers presented at this conference was the one on protest read by our new vice president, Mrs. Joyce Harris.

I don't know how you feel, but I found that I had been bogged down - and did not see as clearly as I should just what the role of the Sash is.

Mrs. Carlson explained this in much more basic, understandable terms, but Mrs. Harris' argument is clear. This is what the Sash is all about.

The point is, if we don't like it, then we must change the Sash.

The second most significant discussion at this conference in my opinion was the way led by Cape Western on "Ways and means of protest" and I'd like to come back to this shortly.

.....Until this conference I wasn't clear about any sort of Sash policy for the future, but now I realise that they are following their theme of Manpower-Apartheid versus Productivity through a series of symposia. They hope to educate - thus voice their protest - offer some sort of alternatives to those produced by the Government and so influence and change.

But if the Sash protests in order to change just who is it trying to influence?

The Government ignores it - can at present afford to ignore it. We know what the man in the street thinks. Business leaders might be attracted by the subjects of the symposium, university lecturers and students might be interested - but who else? Who is attracted from a morning's shopping by a Mercury ad saying "The Black Sash invites you to a symposium on Manpower Productivity versus Apartheid. Subject : The essential Requirements of Farmers and Workers in Agriculture."

I am not suggesting that the title "Apartheid is costing you money" "Come and hear why", Or, "Bring down the price of cabbages!" "Abandon apartheid" would bring them in in droves, but I think you see where my argument is leading.

Because the Sash is a group of above intelligence women (I use this in the broad sense) and because its leaders are moving and working in circles similar in thought and ability to their own, they tend, curiously, to be sort of detached from the average white voter - or even from say, a port of the white voters, if, for the sake of this argument, you discount the railway and George woodcutter group. In other words I found to my surprise that a lot of these women were operating on a complete different level than the one that I would choose if I were trying to lead the political protest of our group.

That they appeal to the abovementioned groups is undisputed. That they appeal to anyone else is open to question. If the aim of these symposia and fact papers is self education - then the Sash is doing a good job. If the aim is to influence that group - they may succeed. But if the aim is to reach the conservative voter in South Africa - in my humble opinion they won't get anywhere fast.

And the greatest tragedy is that the Sash has so much to offer. So much work has been done, so much sheer ability is there to be used.

And/....



And this is where we come in - people like us on the Border. People like those in the Cape Eastern Region, people like some of the Natalians. Because if the aim of the Sash is to reach the more ordinary conservative voter, then it is our job to help them do it. We're moving in the sort of groups that make it possible for us to see certainly what doesn't appeal - and perhaps what might appeal.

As it stands, the Sash has no popular appeal. If it is not meant to have, then that's fine. Otherwise we've got work to do.....

All this wasn't entirely clear to me as I sat there half hour after half hour listening to the arguments back and forth. It isn't entirely clear to me now. If I had a ready answer I'd give it.

But to me there seems to be a great need for ordinary down to earth plain talking. We kid ourselves about ourselves. Deena said a while ago - do you read Advice Office reports any more? I confessed I didn't. Why? When one can answer that small question effectively you've got down to the root of this problem - putting things across effectively.

Let Deena show you the mounds of paper she was handed out at conference. Who can absorb all this? Yet it is all excellent, in fact outstanding material compiled by people I think should be honoured as South Africa's greatest citizens.

But even now, sitting peacefully at home I haven't read it all. I'm not attracted to it. I want to know more about the essential requirements of the employer in industry and commerce but faced with 21 typed pages I say to myself - tomorrow I'll get down to it. But one thing I read straight way - Border's little booklet! Short and snappy - but with a message loud and clear. Deena said to me at conference "I hate to say much because we're so small and unimportant". Here I disagree. We're not unimportant..... Why not try to stumble, even bumble along - but to do the easiest thing - be ourselves - and tell them how things operate on our level in our groups. Because if we just sit silent the Sash will surely die.

Back in 1948 it was the little groups of so called unimportant voters who changed South Africa's history. Discounting that anti-Smuts-soldiers vote, it was, as we all know, the country people, not the town people, who put the Nats into power.

Our job then is to tell our bigger neighbours just what the little people are thinking.

But enough too, of this. The fact papers Deena has. They speak for themselves. There is very little of definite decision to report. Impressions seem the answer.

.....It is very interesting to see the way Transvaal and Cape Western completely dominate the scene, and the effort of Headquarters to try to listen to the other regions' viewpoint - and how much those regions share Border's problems. Natal Coastal and Midlands seem apart from everyone else too, as if somehow they're determined to work alone, and not allow anyone to interfere with their plans.....

W. JACKSON