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THE BLACK SASH
CIRCULAR TO ALL REGIONS.

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At the Annual General Meeting of Transvaal Region the guest speaker was Mr. Sheldon Leader, who enlarged on the ideas he presented at the Conference Symposium on "Change and You". His subject was Intermediate Groups, and he discussed both Principles and Practice.

PRINCIPLES : There are four problems in South Africa. They are :-

1. The FEAR of dictatorship in one form or another - of a Government which does not respect minority rights.
2. The FEAR of the loss of group identity.
3. The DILEMMA over the distribution of resources and whether this should be according to abilities or needs. This is not simply a racial dilemma. It remains even without racialism.
4. The DILEMMA about the Franchise and the reasons why a man should have the right to vote, about which there is no clear answer.

A closer resolution to these problems could be found if intermediate groups were taken seriously. The creation of strong democratic groups would help.

There are already some, though not enough, intermediate groups representing the interests of individuals in society, such as professional, consumer and ratepayers groups, but these are often racially exclusive and not democratic.

They are not democratic because decision-making is the prerogative of executives who are not sufficiently accountable to the membership. There is insufficient decentralisation and inter-communication. For example, Trade Unions have executives and a passive membership, where the individual has no real say.

But if there were to be active participation in an Intermediate Group the individual would immediately have some power, perhaps more than a vote in Parliament would give him. This reduces his distance from politics.

It would also provide a valuable process of education, because people who are given some influence will need and want to know more about society and public affairs.

The Education required to assist in decision-making is not the acquisition of information, but it is the experience of having to decide about public affairs. Intermediate Groups give these heightened feelings of responsibility.

Such Groups must have powers - to act and to control the affairs they deal with. For instance, consumer associations must have the power to boycott, to conduct investigations etc., These Groups will then be political if they are internally democratic.

There are other groups which need help to pursue their particular form of interest, and the Black Sash is an important resource group to help in the founding of such groups. As many groups as possible should be encouraged, particularly mutual interest groups.

If we define the conflict of interests we shift the site of the conflicts and increase the area of bargaining - not just political bargaining but, for instance, consumer/producer bargaining. This would help to make political bargaining less of an all-or-none affair.

Intermediate Groups would have the following effects upon the four problems mentioned earlier :-

1. Dictatorships do not necessarily thrive on ignorance, but they do thrive on the destruction of Intermediate Groups, which destruction makes the State very important.
2. The desire for Group Identity is presently forced upon people by the State. Intermediate Groups could pursue cultural identity as a voluntary objective, while those who value multi-racialism could also do so through collective action in an Intermediate Group with common interests.
3. It is not our right to decide the Distribution of Resources. This is the job of hard bargaining between Intermediate Groups in the market place. We need institutions for bargaining.
4. With regard to the Franchise the right sort of education is important - education through participation.

PRACTICE : There are not so many legal obstacles to the creation of Intermediate Groups, and there are many areas of shared interests.

But Intermediate Groups must be democratic, though there are problems. Whites may be either more experienced than Blacks and therefore usually win when ideas are discussed, resulting in mutual frustration ; or an initial imbalance must be provided, though this can too easily result in racialism in reverse.

The Black Sash is one of the few groups that can encourage Intermediate Groups. We must practice what we preach. We should create internal multi-racial democracies within the Black Sash and should encourage our members to feel that they as individuals make a contribution, and the Black Sash is their responsibility.

DISCUSSION.

Question : How can we overcome lack of democracy within the Black Sash itself?

LEADER : In what areas are central decisions necessary and in what areas can decisions be decentralised? Perhaps we could decentralise our functions and make people feel they belong. Trade Unions have found the payment of dues imperative.

Q.: What could be the standard of responsibility for the vote?

L.: Perhaps participation in Intermediate Groups, though this does not necessarily produce disinterested people. Responsibility is not to think in all-or-none terms. Responsible thinking can see the other man's point of view, without being weak. Perhaps if we could have functional groups directly represented in Parliament the franchise could be more responsibly exercised.

Q.: How does one involve the silent majority?

L.: The refusal of Blacks to work with Whites has been over-emphasised. Black power and Black consciousness have their roots in liberal domination. People must be approached as, say, consumers, and not as Blacks, or Whites. Black and White people need each other, as consumers and in many other areas.

Q.: We are split white-white as well as black-white?

L.: It is hard to proselytise with such groups, but it is convenient to be white in South Africa. If Whites were to learn that their interests would be more effectively promoted if they worked with Blacks then things would change, for instance multi-racial Trade Unions.

Q.: Can you offer us some practical suggestions :

L.: Mainly strong consumers' groups - politics must be kept out of the constitutions of Intermediate Groups. Group Areas restrictions can be evaded through the informal leasing of multi-racial venues. The Black Sash is an enabling organisation to promote Intermediate Groups in other organisations.

Blacks and Whites probably have most in common in terms of food consumption.

What has to change is the balance of power - we must try to achieve this in a planned, rational way in order to produce good government.

The Black Sash might try to identify areas of potential common action as opposed to charitable areas, and must then decide whether to participate as individuals or as the Black Sash.

Or the Black Sash might decide to be a resource group to provide education in a programme on how to run a meeting etc., (loud guffaws)

JOYCE HARRIS
NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT.

P.S. REMINDER.

If you have'nt already done so, PLEASE let me have your financial statements for your Advice Office, as we would like to convey these to the Bantu Welfare Trust, in order to get our grant.

SHEENA DUNCAN
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.