

THE BLACK SASH
CIRCULAR TO ALL REGIONS

CIRCULAR NO. 10/1977

503 Lestar House,
58 Marshall Street,
2001 Johannesburg
16th August, 1977

Dear all of you,

There are so many things happening all around us that it is hard to keep pace with all that must be done.

SQUATTERS. The demolishing of Modderdam and of shelters in Clermont has been the single most dreadful thing which has concerned us all the last weeks, Cape Western and Natal Coastal have both been involved in protest and in trying to do something to prevent these ruthless actions. The members in Cape Town who have been so closely connected with the people concerned for a long time are particularly distressed. It looks as if the Government intends to proceed to act against all black families living in squatter settlements in all urban areas and until Government emphasis changes from removing blacks from white areas to seeking to provide accommodation for unhoused people, the situation will continue to deteriorate. One thing we can continue to do is to hammer the real facts into the heads of the white public. Far too much press comment seems to assume that squatter communities are composed of poverty stricken lay-abouts and the use of the word "illegal" crops up all the time without any attempt to point out that the being illegal is in itself imposed by an immoral policy.

U.I.F. News on this front is much more cheerful and Solveig Piper is to be congratulated on the wonderful work she has done. She wrote an excellent Memorandum to the Minister of Labour including a very careful analysis of the cases dealt with by the Durban Advice Office. The new Secretary for Labour responded by going to Durban to see her and they had a most constructive meeting at which local officials of the Department were present. The Secretary had already taken action on most of the points she had raised and told her of other initiatives in the pipeline.

This has all been most encouraging and in Johannesburg anyway the new regime has brought about a marked improvement in the administration of the Act.

SECTION 29. We here are turning our attention to this once more and are hoping to monitor the inquiry Court regularly with a view to hammering at this the worst section in the whole bad Urban Areas Act.. Information gathered will be passed on to you in due course.

SOWETO. Political developments in Soweto are most interesting and the emergence of the Committee of Ten and the negative response of the Government has produced a whole new set of factors. It remains to be seen whether students representative council is going to co-operate with the committee.

WELFARE BILLS AND FUND RAISING BILL. These three Bills were published recently and aim to tighten up control on the Social workers profession and to impose much stricter restraints on the collection of moneys from the public for various purposes. Headquarters is taking a legal opinion on the Bills which will be circulated to all of you as soon as it is ready.

JUDGMENT ON SEAN MORONEY. I don't know how many of you saw the judgment reported in the press. Sean now works for the Institute of Race Relations, but two years ago while at Wits he published a paper which was subsequently declared to be undesirable. He was then prosecuted for publishing it, convicted and on appeal the conviction has now been upheld in the Supreme Court. This is obviously going to put more and serious restraints on the freedom of the press.

It is impossible to know in advance what publications may be banned under our crazy system and the threat of prosecution for publishing something which may be banned will undoubtedly lead to more self-censorship.

MEMBERSHIP. Several Regions are arranging meetings for final year women students to tell them about the Black Sash and the work they do. This seems a very good idea but if you decide to adopt it don't leave it too late. September is probably the optimum month before they get involved with exams.

CAPE EASTERN/---

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CAPE EASTERN. I have no further information about this Region's decision to disband because they do not reply to letters.

THE FRANCHISE. You will remember that at Conference this year it was decided that we must discuss the whole question of whether or not the Black Sash should take a stand on this issue and if so what that stand should be. I attach a working paper for discussion groups so that delegates to Conference next year will come prepared to discuss it and will have some idea of what the members in the Regions think.

I am visiting Albany and Border in the week 20th to 23rd September and will be in Durban for two days at the beginning of October when I have to go down for a Church meeting.

Esther is now back from her holiday as is Gita, so Headquarters is at full strength again until Joyce goes away next month.

The new Headquarter's Treasurer is Robin Harvey. Bertha Beinashowitz has done this thankless job for so many years and we all owe her the deepest gratitude for the way in which she has kept our affairs in order and struggled with our financial ups and downs. Thankfully she has not retired altogether and is still an active member of the Committee and is putting in more time in the Advice Office than ever.

Love to you all from all of us,

SHEENA.

P.S. CONFERENCE MINUTES. I cannot remember whether I have said this before. We had no objections or alterations to the Draft Minutes which were circulated in April.

Will you therefore please erase the word "draft" from your copies of the minutes in order to save more paper and postage.

WORKING PAPER ON THE BLACK SASH ATTITUDE TO THE FRANCHISE.

16.8.77

This paper is meant only to provide a basis for discussion. I am well aware that the question of one man one vote is a very sensitive one in the Black Sash and I in no way mean this or the discussion at National Conference in March next year to be made so crucial that it imperils our other work.

This paper inevitably expresses my own personal view and if any of you wish to write another viewpoint please do so and I will see that it is circulated to all the Regions.

The Black Sash has not in the past felt it necessary to make any stand on the question of the franchise on the grounds that we are not a political party and do not need to have a policy on the franchise. However events have moved us into a new phase of our national life and I am not sure that to stick to that stand now is not to evade a responsibility.

1. The first of the aims and objects written into our Constitution reads as follows :-

- i) To enlist support and aid for the observance of political morality and the principles of parliamentary democracy within the Republic of South Africa.

The first question therefore is :

What is the very basis of Parliamentary Democracy?

2. When we look at the ghastly happenings around us such as the demolishing of Modderdam and squatter shelters in Clermont, the acute shortage of housing for blacks the appalling conditions in urban black townships, the wage gap, influx control, migrant labour and the break up of families, Group Area removals and the resettlement of black people into the homelands Bantu Education, the removal of South African citizenship from those Transkeians who didn't want to lose it, and the similar insult of the future independence of other homelands, the pass law Courts, the inequality of social pensions, the imposition of Community Councils on urban black people etc., etc., in fact everything we protest about and fight to change we have to ask ourselves firstly whether these things could happen if the victims of the system had a vote, and secondly, will these things ever be changed as long as black people have no political power?

Can there be social and economic justice if there is no political justice and can political justice be achieved with an unequal sharing of the basic expression of political opinion - the vote?

3. Even the National Party Government has accepted the principle of 'one man one vote'. They claim constantly that they have accepted it and have put it into practice through the policy of Separate Development.

Other white political parties have not accepted the principle but the black demand is such that I do not believe that there can be a peaceful political solution to our country's problems without white acceptance of the principle.

The Black Sash is always concerned to minimise violent confrontation and to seek peaceful ways of bringing about change. Whether we agree with the principle of one man one vote or not do we not have a duty to seek to minimise violent confrontation by preparing the white South African community to accept the inevitable?

4. Since Conference this year I have been challenged on the Black Sash stand on this issue on several occasions and from several different quarters the most recent being a query in writing from the Roman Catholic Church's Commission of Justice and Peace. This challenge is going to be presented to us more and more frequently in the future and I am afraid that we are going to be forced to declare ourselves one way or the other - yes or no. It makes me most uncomfortable to have to go into a long apologetic explanation of why I cannot give a straight and honest answer. I do not think the Black Sash can preserve its credibility by being evasive on the issue. I think it is necessary for your National President to be able to say "Yes we are in favour of one man one vote or No, we are not in favour of this principle".

We have never been afraid before to say what we believe and we must not be afraid now.

Many of our newer younger members are also raising the question in all the Regions.

5. I therefore propose that something like the following statement be submitted to our next National Conference for consideration. I hope you will send me your preliminary thinking before then and your advice as to the wording, additions, amendments etc., The subject must appear on the agenda because this was a decision taken last year but it need not necessarily be in this form.

"The Black sash believes that one person, one vote is basic to any system of political justice, and the vote of each person should be equal in value to the vote of every other person.

The vote is most essential to the disadvantaged who have no other power to exert. Social and economic justice will not be achieved without it.

BUT, it has been demonstrated that a universal franchise does not guarantee political justice.

THEREFORE any political system should also entrench the following :-

- i) The absolute independence of the Judiciary and the Courts of Law.
- ii) The absolute protection of the individual from arbitrary arrest and punishment through guaranteed access to the Courts
- iii) Freedom of the Press.
- iv) Freedom of assembly and speech.
- v) A fixed period of time which may elapse before Government must seek a new mandate from the people.
- vi) Protection of the rights of minority groups.

These are the basic requirements and any political or economic system can be just if it is based upon them".

SHEENA DUNCAN
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

16th August, 1977.