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THE BLACK SASH

CIRCULAR NO 13/1977

56 Victory House,  
34 Harrison Street,  
2001 Johannesburg  
25th October, 1977.

CIRCULAR TO ALL REGIONS.

Dear all of you,

It is impossible to write very much about the events of 19th October, because we all share the same feelings of outrage and there is no point in repeating words of anger, condemnation and horror.

To a certain extent one can predict the obvious results of the banning of almost every relevant black political organisation and a great many of the cultural and awareness-raising organisations, but it is still too early to tell whether there is a leadership vacuum in the black community and in what direction that community will now move. Of one thing I am absolutely certain and that is that such action cannot stop the thrust for liberation.

The widespread Section 6 detentions of hundreds of people over the past year has not stopped it and I believe that the hunger for freedom and the determination to achieve a new political dispensation is now so deeply rooted in our national life that it will prove to be uncrushable. The huge tragedy is, of course, that action by Government such as we have seen in the past days makes the chances of a non-violent and negotiated resolution of the political conflict more remote.

The banning of the World and Weekend World, the banning of Donald Woods and detention of Percy Qoboza have in fact destroyed the freedom of the press. As Joel Mervis pointed out at a protest meeting here last week, the editor of a newspaper has an enormous responsibility to his newspaper. He is not free to make decisions in the light of only his personal courage and commitment and it is now inevitable that every newspaper will be affected by the bannings in many different ways, in the reporting of news and in commenting on events.

This morning I heard a report of Pik Botha saying that the action had been taken because these organisations were preventing evolutionary change. This led me to think it is even more necessary for us to be quite clear what we mean by change. There is a kind of change which is either encouraged or tolerated by Government because it does not affect the basic policy in any way. Such things as international licences for hotels and encouraging employers to pay better wages and to get involved in providing housing for employees, change in sport etc., all fall into this category unless one takes the H.N.P "thin edge of the wedge" view.

The changes demanded by black South Africans such as political power in the common system, one national system of education for all, the territorial integrity of the country, the right to retain S. A. Citizenship etc., are not to be tolerated because they are quite incompatible with the policy of Separate Development. As the Government equates this policy with the Security of the State and as the policy is undoubtedly threatened by black consciousness there is a tortured logic in the actions taken.

We are now faced with a situation where we have a Government which has been in power for so long that it is no longer capable of rational thought or of devising alternative strategies to achieve its paramount aim - the maintenance of the Afrikaner group identity. The strategies used in the past will inevitably lead in the long run to the destruction of this very thing and to the destruction of much of value with it. Are there any strategies for those of us who are "in between" to use to persuade the Afrikaner people that he who seeks to save his life shall lose it?

As I told you on the telephone we did attend at nomination courts wearing black sashes. I am sorry I did not think of it the evening before to give you more chance to get organised. Pat Tucker and I managed to catch Marais Steyn who went bright red, from what emotion is undisclosed, and Pik Botha whom I asked whether he thought he was taking part in a democratic process. He told me that this was not the place to talk politics. As Pat said, we now have to keep politics out of politics. We were then turned out of the building by a very angry official waving his arms around, on the grounds that "this is a public place". However, we attended on Mr. Botha's departure and achieved some quiet satisfaction at the release of some of our feelings of frustration.

I am going/--- Page Two/

I am going to suggest to our committee here that we attend N.P. election meetings, particularly in constituencies where they are trying to grab the English speaking vote, to ask pertinent questions. The Afrikaans press here is being editorially critical of Government action last week and maybe politely phrased, non-aggressive questions might reach some of the captive audience.

I am sorry that I am unable to give you any other lead at the moment. The scale and results of what has been done is too vast to comprehend and we need some good hard thinking. I do know that we are not in any way going to let Kruger's actions alter our own determination or affect our decisions in any way.

You may have seen that Barbara Waite - one of our most active members - has been sentenced to a year's imprisonment for refusing to give evidence in a possible prosecution of Winnie Mandela. Barbara has lodged an appeal and many months will elapse before it is heard. We are very proud of her for her courage and steadfastness. She has just finished the magnificent work she has done on the map of resettlements which we had intended to publish this month, but, in view of the elections, may delay until the New Year.

I am sure she will welcome letters from those of you who remember her at National Conferences.

Please remember David Russell particularly when you are thinking of the banned people. He lives alone and is the only one of this batch who has been placed under house arrest, so he is denied even the normal day to day contact with a family.

Love to you all,

SHEENA.