

THE BLACK SASH

CIRCULAR NO. 16/1977

56 Victory House,
34 Harrison Street,
JOHANNESBURG
2001

6th December, 1977.

CIRCULAR TO ALL REGIONS.

Dear all of you,

This will be the last circular of 1977. It has been a bad year for all of us and we cannot feel very optimistic that 1978 will be any better but it is more important than it has ever been that there should still be a white voice of dissent and protest. It is good that in all Regions the Black Sash has not hesitated to speak out and to stand exposed in spite of the fear which now rules our society.

THE MAP : I enclose one copy of the resettlement map. Barbara has done a great work and as you study it you will see what an important document it is. Unfortunately various delays in the printing and the timing of the election means that we have taken delivery of it at the wrong time. There is no point in launching it publicly at this time of year. We therefore ask you not to give it to the press yet or, if you do, to embargo it to the 28th January 1978. We have given the sole agency inside S. A. to E.L.D. Orders should be sent direct to them at : E.L.D. TRUST, BOX 2115, Johannesburg, 2000, and the sooner the better.

The cost per copy inside the Republic is R8. If you want to order a number of copies to sell in your home areas, you can do this on a sale and return basis, but all monies must go to E.L.D. who will deduct their commission and send the balance to the Transvaal Region which has borne the costs of publication.

THE BIKO INQUEST : I ask you all to give some thought to the wisdom or unwisdom of calling for a Commission of Inquiry into the question of deaths in detention. It seems to me that such a Commission could be of very negative value when the only witnesses might be members of the Security Police who have a vested interest in preventing the truth being known and civil servants who, for one reason or another, do not wish to do anything to upset the applecart. The inquest proceedings did bring to light much that should be known about - the horror of conditions in which detainees are held and these truths stand in spite of the verdict. It seems to me that it may be more valuable to ensure that each and every inquest on a dead detainee receives the same concentration of legal representation for the family as Steve Biko's had.

One can imagine the Minister of Police triumphantly waving the findings of a Commission of Inquiry across our T.V. screens in a once and for all closing of the subject.

Please think about this as it will undoubtedly crop up at Conference in March.

CHRISTMAS RECESS : Headquarters will be having its first committee meeting of the New Year on 18th January 1978. The office will be closed from 16th December to 9th January. Should you need to be in touch I am not going away and you can phone me at home 42/9713. The best times are around 6.30 a.m and 5.30 a.m. I am nearly always at home then.

BOPHUTHATSWANA INDEPENDENCE : This of great concern to us in Johannesburg. People are much more aware of the implications of enforced foreignness than they were when Transkei became independent. There are large numbers of non-Tswanas living inside the Bophuthatswana border who feel very threatened and insecure as well as large numbers of Tswanas here and there who reject the whole concept. Take a look at Barbara's map and try to comprehend this extraordinary concept of an "independence" which involves thousands of people in the crossing of an international boundary twice a day as they commute to and from work and brings a foreign country within firing range of an executive capital city. Someone somewhere must be very confident of wielding a controlling influence now and in the future.

We won't talk about the elections

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We won't talk about the election. Far too much time has already been wasted on this exercise and Mr. Vorster now has the mandate he wanted to do all sorts of things he did not disclose to the electorate.

One thing of positive value in our current situation is the increasing involvement of the Church in what is going on. Three priests of this diocese are now in detention and at last one detects the Church moving into a much more active role in the social, economic and political scene.

May you all have a very blessed Christmas and return to work in the New Year with renewed enthusiasm. No one can say life is dull in Southern Africa and most of us would rather be here than anywhere else, if only happenings happened at a more measured pace.

Love to all of you from all of us,

SHEENA.