

THE BLACK SASH

CIRCULAR NO 9/1979. CIRCULAR TO ALL REGIONS.

56 Victory House,
34 Harrison Street,
JOHANNESBURG
22nd May, 1979.

Dear Everyone,

Events seem to be piling up on us with such alarming rapidity that it is difficult to keep pace with them.

Reports of Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions. We felt that the euphoric reactions to these reports required some tempering, hence the hurriedly organised series of stands about which I telephoned you all, with the exception of Natal Midlands with whom I was unable to establish contact as their office bearers were away. I know that some of you had misgivings about these demonstrations and did not quite see the position as we did. However I am enclosing a copy of an article by Sheena, an abridged version of which was published in the Star, which might help to clarify our thinking, at least with regard to the Riekert Report. Unfortunately these stands did not receive the publicity in our local press we would have liked.

The Advocate-General "Cover-Up" Bill has caused us deep concern, as I am sure it has all of you, and I have notified all of you by telephone, again with the exception of Natal Midlands, about our intention to call on the public to drive during the day with their headlights on and to "Light Up for Press Freedom". We have had good publicity for this in the Sunday Express and the Rand Daily Mail, and hope for more in the Star. So far it does not seem to have caught on but we are hoping. It does offer the public a simple way of signifying dissent, which is so difficult to do these days.

Deputation to Dr. Koornhof. I hope all of you have received Sheena's notes on this meeting which were sent under separate cover.

Children's Rights. I told you in my previous circular that you were all let off the hook in this matter. That is not so. Pat Tucker, who is drawing up the booklet on the UN Charter of Children's Rights, needs any relevant case histories you might have, so please respond if you have any material from your Advice Offices.

Constitution Campaign. The delay in getting a national campaign off the ground is being caused by the difficulty in deciding what form it should take. The appointment of the Parliamentary Committee before the first reading complicates the compilation of a handout, which should probably cover not only the Government's proposals but also those of the P.F.P., the Labour Party and the still to be completed Reform Party's suggestions. We have not yet resolved this but feel it should concentrate on Government's plan to entrench discrimination.

A car-sticker campaign does not appear to be popular here as members are reluctant to expose their cars to possible damage, and we are presently exploring the possibility of printing stickers for envelopes saying either "No New Constitution Without Blacks", or "Convention before New Constitution" and distributing them to all our members for use on their mail. As you will hopefully all be involved in this campaign I would appreciate your views and suggestions. There is no immediate urgency but it is necessary to start a public awareness programme in the near future. If you agree to the envelope stickers how many will you need?

There has been a further successful meeting of the Constitution Group and the question of participation or non-participation was canvassed, with pros and cons on both sides. The Black Sash will be making representations to the Parliamentary

Inter-Departmental Committee/2/

Inter-Departmental Committee, concentrating on the inclusions of Blacks in any constitutional proposals and in the devising of them.

I am enclosing a brief summary on the Government's Constitutional proposals, which speak for themselves.

SASH. There is obviously diversity of opinion within Sash regarding both the content and the format of SASH. I am therefore giving timely notice that if any of you wish to see radical changes in our magazine you should bring mock-ups to the next national conference so that we can make a firm decision on what we want. It is necessary to consider whom we wish to reach, our present overseas market, the purpose served by the present format and content, the costs, and the advisability or inadvisability of trying to reach a more diffuse readership.

Venue for National Conference. Albany has suggested the holding of our next Conference as a residential one at Keiskamahok. I have replied that Headquarters feels that the next Conference should be held in Johannesburg as it will be our 25th anniversary year; and that it will be too difficult to canvass opinions of Regions by post before the next Conference. But the whole question of venues will be brought up then so you have plenty of time to give thought.

Letter to Members. I have written a letter to all our Transvaal members, and I send you a copy to use, adjust or ignore according to the circumstances in your own Regions. It tells its own story about what is happening here.

Rural Development. Our decision at our last Conference to explore conditions in the rural areas has been made even more timely by the recommendations of the Riekert Commission which, if they are implemented, can only add to the already parlous state of the rural areas and bantustans. So this is certainly something on which we should concentrate.

Weekly Demonstrations. We are proceeding with these and our posters for to-morrow's stand will read, "Stop Corruption - Don't Gag the Press", and "We Must Have a Free Press". It is difficult to word posters in advance so that you can all use them simultaneously if you so wish because topicality is often lost that way. But we will no doubt be reacting to the same events at the same time, and it does not matter if the wording is not identical.

We are not short of matters requiring our urgent attention, which sometimes seem to threaten to stretch us to breaking point. It would appear that, to be effective, we must make every effort to involve more of our members in active participation. It is a sad reflection on the condition of our country that more and more is demanded of us rather than less and less, but I feel sure that we shall measure up as we always have.

My love to you all,



JOYCE HARRIS
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.