

THE BLACK SASH  
CIRCULAR TO REGIONS

CIRCULAR NO 9/1980.

Khotso House,  
42 De Villiers Street,  
Johannesburg  
14th August, 1980

Dear Everyone,

I have been in the Kruger Park watching wild rather than human predators, and finding them infinitely preferable, hence the delay in this circular.

- CONFERENCE MINUTES : With the concurrence of Cap. Western and Natal Coastal, and in the absence of communication in this regard from the rest of you, I ask you to amend your copies of the Draft Minutes of the 1980 National Conference as follows :
- (a) Scrap Resolution 9 on page 13. Resolution 10 on Page 15 now becomes Resolution 9.
  - (b) Under Regional Reports, Albany, first paragraph, please substitute the words, "resigned from the office", for the words "left the organisation". This refers to Pat Lanham. Page 3.

I feel it is unnecessary to retype the entire minutes for the sake of these alterations, and hope that you are in agreement.

OFFICE BEARERS.

Thank you for the updated lists of your office bearers. I enclose a copy of office bearers for all Regions for your convenience.

STATE OF THE NATION :

Ban on Meetings : The ban on meetings in downtown Cape Town has been extended to 11th August 1982, according to a Gazette Extraordinary on 8th August. This outrageous arbitrary action on the part of the Government is surely an indication of the fear and insecurity it has engendered in itself as a result of its own policies. It is, of course, a lethal attack on the democratic process, making it difficult, if not impossible, for opposition groupings to function effectively. We shall have to accommodate ourselves to these prolonged restrictions, which may well be imposed on the rest of the country, without allowing them to reduce our activities unduly.

General Unrest : There has still been no response to our telegram to the Prime Minister or my written request for an interview. I doubt whether it would serve any useful purpose at this stage but we shall have to go through with it should he now accede to it.

Unrest in Albany : Following upon a request from Margot Beard, who reported by telephone on the deeply worrying situation in Grahamstown, I sent the following telegram to Mr. Koornhof, "Black Sash deeply concerned about unrest all over specially Grahamstown. Country urgently needs positive political action to redress grievances not police action. Please instigate meaningful negotiation immediately with leaders and unions of peoples' choice". This has not been acknowledged.

Johannesburg Municipal Workers' Strike : I know that unrest in the social, political, educational and labour spheres is widespread - one has only to open one's newspaper to read of violence all over the country - but I should like to mention specifically the strike by municipal workers in Johannesburg and the manner in which it was 'settled'.

The Management Committee of the City Council is preening itself on having successfully dumped the striking workers back in the 'homelands' and replaced them with others from the same or other 'homelands'. This was all very expeditiously executed, with the result that there is seething discontent about lost jobs, lost possessions and disgusting treatment, yet a special meeting of the City Council was convened to commend the Management Committee for its efforts in settling the strike. A number of us attended this meeting, where the PFP proposed a counter motion strongly condemning the actions of the Management Committee. Needless to say the original motion was passed, despite a walk-out by the PFP.

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We have been infuriated by this total insensitivity to the justifiable grievances and the human dignity of the workers, and have made statements to the press, written letters, and are co-operating with the S.A.C.C., the I.R.R., the P.F.P., and other interested bodies and individuals in attempting to disseminate information, to help the people involved and to censure the Management Committee. We distributed information leaflets to those volunteers who came to help remove the city's refuse during the strike.

Constitution Campaign : The next meeting has been postponed until later in the month, but members are still displaying a keenness to attend.

Free Enterprise : The advertisement in the Financial Mail did not elicit the response we had hoped for. Nevertheless we are persevering with the idea of organising a symposium, possibly in November, for business men and politicians and people of influence, to be addressed by Sheena and a speaker on what free enterprise really means.

Quail Commission Report on Independence for the Ciskei : I attended a privately arranged meeting of interested people on the Quail Commission which was addressed by Prof. Quail and the Secretary of the Commission. Despite the strongly worded findings of the Commission a number of the black people present felt that the Commissioners should not have agreed to serve at all because, by so doing, they had given credence to the homelands policy. It seems to me that, sadly, there is a growing divergence between black and white thinking, even amongst those who have been quite closely attuned. The black opinion obviously shook the Commissioners.

SASH : We are trying to get our magazine onto a more satisfactory economic footing and have accordingly included the following insert in most of our overseas copies..

"The Black Sash regrets that, owing to rising costs, and as from the beginning of August, 1980, the price of its magazine to subscribers outside the Republic will be R15.00 per annum surface mail and R20.00 Airmail.

A good response from subscribers will help to ensure that the magazine can once again increase its size and provide the content to which its readers have become accustomed.

We further regret that we shall be forced to reduce our numbers of complimentary copies, and trust that those recipients who are able to will become subscribers".

I trust that this meets with your approval.

I give notice now that Headquarters intends proposing to the next National Conference that the price of SASH be raised to R1.00 per copy, with local subscriptions for non-members R5.00 per annum, to cover postage. Please will you give this matter your consideration, because it is obviously going to mean an increase in membership subscriptions to cover the additional costs.

ABORTION LAWS : You may have been approached by A.R.A.G. to make representations to the Government asking for a commission to examine the Abortion Act, to ask that women of all racial groups be represented, and to make suggestions of specific women to serve on the Commission. Headquarters has decided against participation in this project, feeling that we are already overburdened and that this is not specifically a Black Sash issue. However Natal Coastal has become involved and has asked me to inform you all that this has become a matter of urgency, as the Government is probably about to appoint a Commission. So if you decide you wish to participate, you should make your recommendations soon.

It would be easy for all of us in the Sash to become disheartened because of our apparent impotence in the face of official intransigence and smug self-satisfaction, but I remain convinced that our continued protest in whatever form it may take remains not only relevant but important. If we did not perceive events with different eyes and offer different methods of dealing with them then the few people we do reach might never have been aware that there could be another viewpoint. I do believe that our influence spreads further than we think.

I shall be away for six weeks from 7th September until 19th October, but shall probably be writing to you again before I leave.

My love to you all,

  
JOYCE HARRIS

NATIONAL PRESIDENT.