

THE BLACK SASH

NATIONAL CONFERENCE - DURBAN

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

BY

SHEENA DUNCAN.

I have never experienced more difficulty in deciding what to say in a public speech than I have had in preparing this address tonight. I am known to be an incurable optimist having infinite faith in the capability of human beings to achieve goodness but this has been a bad year, a tragic year, for all South Africans who care about justice, about honesty and democracy in Government, and about people.

One is tempted to say that there has never been a year as dreadful. But there have of course, been years as difficult, as full of foreboding and seemingly without hope. There have been worse years in the past and there will undoubtedly be other years of defeat and escalating conflict in the future.

At this conference the Black Sash will be trying to assess the meaning and consequences of the events of the past twelve months and we will be attempting to find new ways of working for our objectives which remain unchanged - "to enlist support and aid for the observance of political morality and the principles of parliamentary democracy within the Republic of South Africa ; to strive to secure the recognition and the protection by law of human rights and liberties".

The women who founded this organisation twenty three years ago were far-sighted and realistic when they set those objectives. They did not underestimate the task they set themselves and us. They talked of enlisting support and of striving. They did not speak loosely of achieving their ends.

These ideals are probably unattainable in our life-time in South Africa but they remain worth striving for. Indeed, it is imperative that these ideas are fought for and that they are stated over and over again. Ideas are fragile things and when there is no-one left who believes in them they cease to exist. We draw nearer to the point in South Africa when this could happen, when the last remnants of those ideas will vanish and be forgotten.

In an article written for the Sunday Tribune just before the general election last year Laurens Van Der Post said: ".....we must face up to the fact that in the past thirty years Afrikanerdom, exercising the greatest power that it has had in its history, politically unchallenged, has produced a lesser concept of what it means to be a South African than it inherited when it took over".

Mr. Van Der Post was writing with, in his words, an "acute and deeply felt fear for the Afrikaner people of South Africa "He was writing as an Afrikaner of his own people who have exercised total power in this country for a long time. Through their policies and actions we as a nation are radically different to what we were thirty years ago. But I do not wish to have what I am about to say construed as being an attack on the Afrikaner people. Everything that has been done in this country has had the support of some people of other language groups and other races. Sometimes this support has been given by active encouragement and connivance. In other cases it has been given by passive acceptance and conformity and in others by the failure to dissent, particularly in the boom years of economic growth and development when many refused to upset the applecart by speaking out or doing anything/---

doing anything to prevent political and social wrongdoing. Equally, opposition and protest has come from within Afrikanerdom as well as from those outside.

We South Africans are indeed a lesser people than we were in every way. In particular we have become reduced as human persons by the way in which we use and abuse our fellow human beings.

We have achieved a daily average prison population of over one hundred thousand people, large numbers of whom are gaoled, not because they are criminals, but because they are pass offenders.

What is a pass offender? He may be a person who left his reference book at home, or a young person who has been refused issue of a reference book because his name has not been on any permit during his childhood. She may be a wife who has been refused permission to live with her husband and remains "illegally" in the area to be with him. Pass offenders are people from rural areas whose reference books are stamped that they are "farm labour only" but who come to town because they can earn much more employed in other sectors of the economy.

Pass offenders are men and women who are not allowed to seek work outside the area of the Labour Bureau in their home place and who are never offered work at home so come to town to seek the means of survival for their children. We put people in prison for this.

During 1976 216 112 men and 33 918 women were arrested for offences relating to reference books and influx control. In the twelve months between July 1975 and June 1976 29 337 people were sent for trial for infringement of the curfew regulations. It must be remembered that this curfew has nothing to do with a state of emergency or warfare. It is a long standing provision in the Urban Areas Consolidation Act making it an offence for a black person to be outside during specified hours in specified areas.

In the same twelve months 147, 470 people were charged with trespass. One woman who did not go to prison for this "crime" because she paid an admission of guilt fine was picked up in a pass law raid sitting on a suburban pavement at three o'clock in the afternoon. One presumes that she and thousands of others to whom this has happened were deemed to be trespassing because they were not labouring at the time. Blacks are O.K if they are wielding pick and shovel in public places but not O.K if sitting down.

The notorious Section 29 which allows a black person to be declared idle or undesirable not only remains on our statute book but is now in the current session of Parliament, being reinforced and harshened. This section makes it an offence for a black person to be not working in an urban area and proof that he is working is that he must be registered to do so.

The penalties for not working are, among other things, forfeiture of all urban rights in terms of Section 10, up to two years in a penal institution, or deportation to any place indicated by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner. An idle person's family may be deported with him.

A person may be declared/---

A person may be declared to be idle because he has been ordered to leave an area but has failed to do so. Many people we have seen in the years of work in the Advice Offices have failed to depart after being ordered to do so. The reason they have stayed is precisely because they are not idle in any meaning which can be assigned to that word. They were idle at home because there was no work there. They are in town because they have found work and are often working very hard for long hours.

Our national lack of concern about people has not been more graphically illustrated than in the demolition of Modderdam, Unibel, Kraaifontein and other settlements such as the one demolished here in Durban.

The squatters in the Cape Peninsula were families to whom the law denies the right to live together. The labour of the men is required by the white economy but they are not allowed to establish homes for themselves in the areas where they must spend their working lives. The human desire to be with their husbands brings the wives to town. Housing is denied because the women are 'illegals' and, when they build their own shelter, the front end loaders and mechanical shovels move in to knock them down. When the Courts uphold the law and insist that people's rights are not infringed by administrative actions the Government changes the law to remove the jurisdiction of the Courts, a protection of individual rights which has been whittled away through the years in many other respects.

Mr. Laurence Wood said in Parliament in February last year that the shortage of houses for Whites, Coloureds and Asians was about 86 000 units. The Chief Director of the Vaal Triangle Administration Board said in September that the Government had accepted that 400 000 houses were needed for blacks, 2000 000 in the so called white areas and 200 000 in the homelands. Assocom has intimated that the national average number of people living in every house in African urban townships is 17.

Government response to this need is to continue to demolish existing houses in order to move people into Group Areas somewhere else or, in the case of Africans, to move families into the bantustans and to replace their homes with hostels for so-called "single" workers. Over five hundred thousand people have been moved from their homes in terms of the Group Areas Act and over one hundred and fifty thousand are still to be moved. In 1972 the Institute of Race Relations estimated that 1,82 million African people had been removed and resettled.

This national preoccupation with shuffling the population around on a vast scale is complemented by the policy of not allowing the building of family housing for African people in urban townships to meet the urgent need for such accommodation.

Mr. I. R. Van Onselen, Secretary of the Department of Plural Relations, said in his evidence to the Cillie Commission that the Department had been obstructive in implementing housing planning by Johannesburg because

the City Council /---

the City Council "did not see the labour potential of residents in Black townships as a condition for residence in urban areas. They were seen as permanent residents, free either to work or lie about.....They also failed to propagate migratory labour".

Government policy is thus responsible for the acute shortage of houses in areas like Soweto where over 20 000 families are on the waiting list and thousands of other families are homeless because they do not qualify to even get on to the waiting list.

Policy aside, our inhuman lack of concern for people is also illustrated by our national priorities. An Opera House is being built in Pretoria which is to cost R46 million. Mr. Alf Widman estimated that each seat would cost R25 000 - enough money to build ten Community Development core houses or eight standard Administration Board Township homes. The stage alone is to cost R8 million. In 1976 only R9 100 000 was spent on housing in the whole of South Africa.

We are at present experiencing another national crisis - unemployment. Government cares so little about black unemployment that it cannot even produce accurate statistics in spite of the numbering, fingerprinting, counting, computerising and compulsory registration of all black South African men.

This is not a new problem.

Serious unemployment is a permanent fact of our national life but because of the policy of migrant labour and of not allowing unemployed people from rural areas to remain in the towns to look for work it is only in the last eighteen months that unemployment has become visible to whites. We now admit that we have a crisis but go on enforcing policy irrespective of the lives we trample on in the process. In recent months I have spoken personally to dozens of people who are not allowed to accept jobs they have found for themselves. Other workers in all seven of our Advice offices around the country must have had the same experience. There was the University graduate who was offered a job in commerce at R450 a month but was not allowed to accept it because he was first employed in the hotel industry and is not allowed to move out of that category. There was the widow from Kwa Zulu working in Johannesburg to support her children - endorsed out because the law does not allow her to be registered. There was the employer whose Physical Planning Act allocation was out and who was ordered to discharge 25 men. The recent concession which allows employers to exceed their quotas by employing youths between the ages of 16 and 20 is welcome but if the authorities cared more for people than for the policy the restrictions would be lifted altogether.

The policy also dictates that black people are to have no freedom of movement. This aggravates unemployment by preventing those who have the initiative and the skills to achieve their own economic survival from moving to the towns where there are the consumer communities to provide a market for whatever goods or services they can offer. The restrictions on the number of urban residents who are allowed to register as self-employed has the same effect.

We were told a short while ago/

We were told a short while ago that the removal of pass laws and influx control restrictions in South West Africa/Namibia was "causing" unemployment there. Of course there are serious social problems which arise during any period of rapid urbanisation but unemployment is not caused by removing restrictions. The unemployment has been there all along but was not visible to whites until people were allowed to come freely to the towns to look for jobs.

These social evils are all the result of a policy which can never make of South Africa a great nation. It is a policy based on human greed and a false ideology which claims that one minority group of people has the right to appropriate for its own benefit most of the resources and most of the land and all of the power which in justice and by right belongs to all of us.

The policy is being ruthlessly carried out regardless of the human suffering it entails.

The Black Sash has just published a map compiled by Barbara Wain in Johannesburg which graphically illustrates some of the mass population removals which have taken place and vividly exposes the unequal partition of South Africa's land area - 87% for four and a quarter million whites in which the presence of the so-called Coloured and Asian people will be tolerated.

We can afford to tolerate them because we plan to have a new constitution which will remove all power from Parliament, or Parliaments, and vest it in the hands of an executive president whose instructions will come from undisclosed sources. 13% of the land is allocated for over eighteen million blacks.

It is now ten years since the well publicised removals to Limehill took place. A working paper, Limehill Revisited, written by Cosmos Desmond has recently been published by the Development Studies Research Group of the University of Natal. This document should be compulsory reading for all supporters of Government policy. It points out that the resettled people "did not come from impoverished, broken-down communities. They were from stable, well-established communities and were relatively prosperous compared, for example, to many of those removed from white farms.

Virtually all of them had land and cattle and many were able to do occasional work in Wasbank to supplement the income from their migrant workers". It then goes on to analyse the present condition of the community. "11% of the children who were aged 5 years or less at the time of the removal are now dead.....almost 20% of the children born at Limehill have not survived until the survey date". Male unemployment is over 34%. Only 13% of women between 15 and 64 years are employed which figure the survey compares to the figure for women in Johannesburg where 47% were in employment in mid 1977". There never has been, and there is not, any intention on the part of the government to provide employment in or near Limehill. The nearest border industry area is Ladysmith, from where they have been moved further away.....In any event, these border industries draw their labour primarily from Ezakheni, which was established for that purpose and is much closer".

On the 17th February the Financial Mail published an article called "Apartheid is working ... It pointed out that, whereas in 1960 62% of South Africa's African people were living in the "white" areas, by 1970 the proportion had been reduced to 52%. In the same issue the Financial Mail quotes a Benbo report which disclosed that 180 000 people moved into Qwa Qwa between 1970 and 1976 and that the population density in that homeland has risen from 56 per square kilometre to 415 . The density in White South Africa is 13 people per square kilometre. 90% of the present population of Qwa Qwa have settled there since 1970. 56 000 people were resettled there and the Department of Plural Relations claims that the rest went there voluntarily. The Black Sash has had much experience in the past of people who went to their homeland "voluntarily" because they were refused permission to be anywhere else.

This little country, smaller in area, than Johannesburg, is destined for independence according to South African Government policy.

The Prime Minister said in Parliament on the 30th January this year "as sure as we are sitting here in this House now, within the next five years other Black nations will follow. I can very well foresee that within the next five years perhaps every one of them, with the exception of Kwa Zulu, will have become independent".

On 6th December last year 2½ million people were stripped of their South African citizenship when Bophuthatswana became independent. Over half of those people live in South Africa. The year before that over three million people had South African citizenship taken away from them, over a million of whom live permanently in South Africa. It is arguable that the majority of these people did not want this foreign status to be thrust upon them. Less than 1% of Tswana people eligible to vote in the pre-independence elections did so and fewer registered as voters than had done so for the previous elections.

Firm rejection of independence has been widely expressed both inside and outside the homelands. In June 1976 Mr. M. C. Botha warned that the Government would definitely not tolerate "negative obstruction work" by individuals, organisations and press media who wanted to wreck independence of Transkei. "Negative obstruction work" evidently referred to legitimately expressed opposition. It was ignored as is all protest.

There is no choice for people who wish to remain citizens of South Africa. Both the Status of Transkei and the Status of Bophuthatswana Acts state that they shall "cease to be" South African citizens. There are no loopholes and those who wish to renounce their new citizenship may do so only after independence and, in terms of the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Amendment Bill, must first apply for citizenship of another non-independent homeland and, if this is granted, must then apply to the South African Government which may or may not allow them to resume South African citizenship.

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Page Seven/

As it is the stated policy that there are to be no black South Africans it is unlikely that many such applications will be granted and those that are will be of very temporary effect.

Black people are justified in feeling that they have been betrayed. Both the Status Acts have clauses which say that no citizen of either newly independent country who is resident in South Africa "shall, except as regards citizenship, forfeit any existing rights, privileges or benefits by reason only of the other provisions of this Act".

But that was last year. This year an amendment to Section 12 of the Urban Areas Act has been introduced which will remove all rights of residence in urban areas from the children of the new foreigners who are born after independence day. The next generation and the generations to follow will only be allowed to enter, be or remain in prescribed area if they are given written permission to do so. This permission may be withdrawn at any time without any reason being given.

Permits are no substitute for legally enforceable rights.

There has also been much obscuration of the facts by semantic agility. We were repeatedly told that people who accepted citizenship of the homelands would be granted privileges and preferences. We were told in June 1976 that citizens of a newly independent Transkei should be favoured above people from African states and should not be declared aliens. In February 1977 the Department of Community Development said that Transkei citizens were entitled to use white beaches, cinemas, swimming pools, restaurants etc., etc., because Government policy does not differentiate between black and white foreigners. But both legislation and subsequent official statements have made it clear that the discrimination against black foreigners remains exactly as it was before they became foreign. Passes and permits remain as before and the fact that a pass is now to be a document issued by a homeland government instead of a reference book makes no difference. It is very necessary to be alert to what Government statements actually mean and not to be deluded by what they seem to mean.

The new Minister of Plural Relationships said in Parliament on 1st February "With much ado the argument was noised abroad that the pass system, the reference book system, the so-called reprehensible system was still in force in South Africa" He outlined an agreement reached with homeland leaders and went on to say :

"homeland citizens who are in possession of travel documents will no longer be required to produce their reference books for labour or influx control purposes, as the particulars will appear in their own travel documents which are provided by their own Governments, -"
a statement which is indeed most worthy of the Minister of Information.

This consummation of the policy has only been achieved by a quite ruthless determination to stamp out all opposition. The said year behind us has seen the death of Robert Sobukwe, one of South Africa's

greatest sons, /---

greatest sons, while he was still under sentence of a banning order which has restricted him ever since he was released from prison where he had been held for six years longer than the sentence imposed upon him by the Courts. It has seen the death of Stephen Biko and seven other men. He and they died while being held incommunicado by the Security Police. The disclosures made at the inquest into his death revealed the unimaginable cruelty and inhumanity of those who chained him naked to a grill and drove him naked and dying to Pretoria in a van. Other inquests have made other disclosures of unexplained injuries and dreadful human suffering. 45 people are known to have died in detention since 1963. Many have been young. Dumisani Mbatha who died on 25th September 1976 was only sixteen years old.

In November 1977 714 people were known to be in detention. More frightening is the fact that we cannot know how many more were and are being held. No person is entitled to any information about a detainee and we in the Black Sash have seen people this year who only know that their husbands, sons or brothers, sometimes their daughters and sisters, have been taken in by the security Police. They were refused information even as to where a detainee was being held. We have seen other people whose relatives have just disappeared, who do not know whether they have left the country, gone to live in another area, have died or fallen ill, or whether they are in solitary confinement in a prison somewhere. There were press reports that several hundred children were detained in terms of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act.

As at 28th November 1977 161 people were living under banning orders.

The 19th October crack down in which three newspapers were banned, most opposition black cultural and political organisations were banned and forty two black leaders taken into preventive detention has presented us with a most urgent challenge.

The actions of the Government on that day were the last straw for many people. It seemed to them that they were left with only two alternatives - to accept and submit to the policy and to the armed might of the State or to resort to violence to oppose the policy and to defeat the State.

The Black Sash is and will remain totally opposed to the use of violence, whether by the State or by dissidents. We are dedicated to working for social, economic and political justice by non-violent means only. We believe that the means used inevitably shape the ends reached and that good and desirable ends are not attainable by the use of wrong means. But for many other people and organisations like us it is equally unthinkable that we should cease to oppose the policy.

It is important that we understand that to be in the passive state of being non-violent is not necessarily to be in opposition to the policy. Many black people would probably now argue that it is always white people who claim to be committed to non-violence because it is in their interests to maintain the status quo which as they might argue, can now only be changed by violent force stronger than the violence used by the State to maintain it.

Unless we are seen to be seeking/

Unless we are seen to be seeking and using non-violent and effective means to bring about change our pleas for non-violence are likely to be ignored.

Violence is escalating all around us. Periods of national service have been extended ; expenditure on defence goes on increasing ; our traffic cops carry firearms ; the number of guns owned by private white persons is now one for every two adults ; murders are reported every day in the press ; there are constant reports of bomb threats in our cities ; acts of terrorism are directed both against those who oppose the Government and against those who co-operate ; Richard Turner was killed ; Sergeant Nkosi was killed ;

- X We have indeed produced a lesser concept of what it means to be a South African.
- X We are less than just.
- X We are less than honest.
- X We are spiritually poorer. We have lost our awe of death and make jokes about the death of a man in detention. We place less value on human life and on the quality of that life.
- X We have no intellectual honesty and so fear the truth that we protect ourselves from hearing it by censorship and bannings.
- X We are less in courage and less in faith. - We choose to put our backs to the wall with guns in our hands rather than to go forward in confidence to a different kind of future.

The tragedy of all this is that we could, if we wanted to, become a truly great nation, blessed by the wonderful diversity of our people, enriched by the right use of our land and our pastures. We can, if we want to, achieve that great act of re-union which Laurens Van Der Post spoke of.

We can if we want to, be proud again to say "I am a South African".

SHEENA DUNCAN
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

13th MARCH, 1978.