

BLACK SASH - CAPE WESTERN REGION

NEWSLETTER - JUNE 1973.

NO. 55.

Dear Member,

In May 1973, the Gatherings and Demonstrations Bill was introduced into Parliament, passed rapidly through all stages and published in the Government Gazette on May 30th. The Black Sash joined with other bodies and individuals in condemnation of this further restrictive measure. Our National President, Mrs. Jean Sinclair, was with us at the time and represented the Black Sash among those standing in protest on the Cathedral steps on the morning of Tuesday, May 15th.

STANDS.

On the same morning, May 15th, in support of the right to protest, the Black Sash held a stand at the foot of Government Avenue. This was of four hours duration and members came and went during the period, at least twelve being present at a time throughout. Press coverage was good and a large front page photograph appeared in one edition of the Argus that evening.

A ceremony of mourning was held on the Cathedral steps on Wednesday May 23rd, when five members of the Regional Council draped a large black sash across the steps and surmounted it with a wreath. This was to mark the death of peaceful protest in the heart of our city. The demonstration remained effectively in place for some hours and the Argus publicised the ceremony with a photograph and news item in the late edition that evening. The Cape Times had a news item the following morning, May 24th.

In accordance with our commitment to protest at each occasion of a further banning, a stand took place lining the Camp Ground Road, from beyond St. Thomas' Church to the Park Road lights. Bannings were again enumerated, including the thirteen most recent ones. The Argus published an explanatory news item the previous evening.

Public protest stands are the quickest and most direct method of bringing injustices into the light of public attention. Frequent comments are heard, however, that the Black Sash appears to be largely an organisation of elderly women, which of course is not the case. Probably one of the answers is that, over the years, older members have acquired the habit of taking part in stands as a personal obligation. In addition, older members are almost certainly less bound by the needs of young children. Would it be possible to organise branch or neighbourly crèches, such as that recently initiated as an asset to All Branch meetings? It is hoped that some such method can be devised to enable more younger members to help the Region to carry out these important commitments adequately.

STUDY GROUPS.

The first meeting of one of these groups is planned for the evening of June 18th, at the home of Mrs. Robb, the subject being Migrant Labour. The series will continue.

"BRAINSTORM".

This will be held at the Christian Institute on July 12th at 6.30.p.m. and will include supper. It is an opportunity for Black Sash members to put forward any new ideas concerning protest and possible future activities.

ALL BRANCHES MEETINGS.

On April 2nd, our meeting at Callow House was addressed by Mr. Robin Hallet on "Understanding Black Africa". This was both impressive and entertaining, Mr. Hallet's delivery being relaxed and informal.

The meeting of May 14th was held at the home of Mrs. Robb and we were most happy to have with us our National President. Many of us had not before had the opportunity to meet her personally and the region greatly appreciates her ready response to our invitation. The Regional Council invited a number of citizens to lunch at the Christian Institute on the same day to meet Mrs. Sinclair. She contrived to fly down to us, fitting the visit in between her many other commitments and the preparations for a well-earned holiday overseas. We wish her a happy and refreshing visit to children and grandchildren. It was fortuitous but very heartening to have our National President with us during the protest against the Gatherings and Demonstrations Bill.

Professor Monica Wilson was our speaker at Callow House on June 4th, on the subject: "Adam and Eve - changing relationship between Men and Women in Africa". The meeting was well attended and we were privileged indeed to be addressed by one of our most distinguished members. Her scientific approach was an object lesson, and her deep experience, wisdom and humanity were memorably impressive.

LETTERS AND STATEMENTS.

The Argus of May 8th and 14th and the Cape Times of May 9th, 15th and 17th published statements by the Black Sash pertaining to the Gatherings and Demonstrations Bill. Our stand was announced beforehand in the local and Johannesburg papers.

Letters were published

on 25/4/73	in Cape Times	on the Criminal Procedures Bill
22/5/73	in Cape Times	on the Schlebusch Commission
11/6/73	in the Argus	in support of Councillor Sonnenberg's stand against the Gatherings and Demonstrations Bill:
15/6/73	in the Cape Times	in support of the Mayor's plea that District 6 be returned to the rightful owners.

ATELONE ADVICE OFFICE.

All members are urged to visit this office and to persuade new members and friends to do the same. To hear the incredible hardships endured by fellow South Africans is to be confirmed in a resolve to work towards change in the laws - and to attempt to convert others to that viewpoint.

An excellent article by Sue Garbutt appeared in the Argus of May 11th. It outlines the work of the Advice Office and some of the tragedies encountered there and quotes the Charter for Women in full.

Mrs. Versfeld reports that the visit of our National President to the Advice Office during her time here was most valuable, giving an opportunity to learn of the problems and methods of the Johannesburg office.

We are grateful indeed to the S.A. Institute of Race Relations for increasing its annual grant towards the rising costs of running the Advice Office; without this timely help the work would be greatly restricted.

Quoting from the May report:

"Eighteen married couples, eleven of them newcomers to the Advice Office, came for advice as to how they could set about living together lawfully and "ordinarily". In each case, the husband qualified to reside in the Cape Peninsula and the wife wanted to join him, but with two or three hopeful exceptions the man's enforced payment of "single quarters" rent blocks their way. This is held to prove that the wife's real home is elsewhere."

"It is remarkable that people in this predicament should go on wanting to respect and obey the law, yet tenaciously many do..... The laws are rationally incomprehensible..... but something like heroic maturity keeps them calm and keeps them trying to fit life and law into a liveable pattern. The overall pattern is one of polarity between ordinary human needs and extraordinary legalistic prohibitions."

MEMBERSHIP.

The first half of 1973 has brought us nine new members, two resignations and one death. Miss Winifred Currey has been made an Honorary Member.

Yours sincerely,

*Helen K. X*

For the Regional Council.

WRITTEN BY NAN THOMPSON AND BARBARA BROCK.