

something must be done to get a revision of present race policies.

At a time like this, when our country is in a torment of bitterness, fear and resentment, it should be remembered by the Black Sash that no effort to mitigate the political deadlock or to right the intolerable injustices we see all around us, is ever wasted. Even should there be violent reactions by those who are so oppressed by the present unjust laws, that violence is bound to be tempered and modified to some degree by the goodwill established by right and just action on the part of some Whites now. Let us bear in mind, therefore, that even if we are unable to prevent the unpleasant consequences resulting from the present Government's policy of oppression, we can do a great deal to mitigate the severity of these consequences.

I see a year of tremendous political importance lying ahead for South Africa. I do not think it is in any way a wild guess to say that perhaps this is the last year in which it will be possible to find a solution to South Africa's race problems round the conference table. The Black Sash realises full well just how fast the sands of time are running out, and therefore on it lies a tremendous responsibility to try to bring about and to help make fruitful some form of round table conference between leading members of all political parties and groups.

The political scene is in a state of flux. If what emerges is wrought into something of real value—and the Black Sash must strain every nerve to see that this happens—then we may truly be able to build a better South Africa for all our peoples. If not, a dark, dangerous and unforeseeable future lies ahead for all of us.

The Chairman's Review

FACED WITH unprecedented difficulties, the Sash rose magnificently to face the challenge created by the State of Emergency. At a time when the rule of law had been suspended and it was left to senior officers in the Special Branch to decide whether an action was dangerous to the State or not, Black Sash women set about helping those who were suffering as a result of having protested against laws which both they and the Sash believe to be unjust. . . .

In every Region, except Lowveld where there has been little scope for such activity, the Black Sash has been busy doing what it can to help the families of political detainees and to help those detainees, who asked for it, to obtain legal aid. . . .

Because the protests by Africans which began on 21st March shook many White South Africans out of their political lethargy, the Sash was offered a better opportunity than it had ever had before to get across to the man in the street the real nature of the pass laws and the incredible hardships and humiliations they inflict on Africans. Several Regions perceived at once the opportunity which was being offered and immediately got busy organising pass law meetings. When public meetings seemed unwise, these were organised in drawing rooms and by private invitation.

Much of the C.E. work has been concerned with educating the public and its own members regarding



Delegates from many parts attended the national conference in Cape Town—here, from left, are Mrs. A. Pirie (Cape Eastern), Mrs. D. Currie (Border) and Mrs. S. M. Johnson (Natal Midlands).

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW—continued

all aspects of pass laws. Mrs. Stott has been on two tours, during the emergency, the first to Natal Midlands and the second to Border, and in each case she visited every Branch in each Region to tell them about pass laws and to keep them up to date with what the Sash was doing and could do in this field.

I went to Beaufort West, where I found a tragic ignorance not only of pass laws, but of what was happening in Beaufort West itself as a result of pass laws, but the members there are very keen and were deeply stirred when they came face to face with what was happening.

I also visited Natal Coastal and spoke to the remaining Branches in that Region. Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Walker from Southern Transvaal very kindly went to Lowveld, but were unfortunately not able to speak to all the Branches in that Region. The C.E. regard this as most unfortunate as this Region is the one

which is most out of touch with Sash work. . . .

One fact which has emerged most clearly from these tours is that Branches, however remote they are from a big town or from the inspiration which can be provided from attending the meetings of the Regional Committee, if they have even as much as one dedicated worker, are doing great work for the Sash. The C.E. is more convinced than ever that where there is a true will to do something constructive, something gets done, and I would like to express the gratitude and admiration which the C.E. feels to all those Branch workers who have patiently carried on, in the highways and byways of South Africa, the work of the Sash. The Sash is what it is today as much as a result of their unremitting and often apparently unrewarding work as it is to the better known efforts of Regional leaders.

Undoubtedly, the most outstanding achievement of the C.E. during the year was the publication of the book, "South Africa — The Road Ahead", conceived

COMMENTS FROM THE PRESS

THE BLACK SASHERS ARE REALLY CLUED UP . . .

So said Ronald Fisher in a report in *Post* of 13th November.

"I went along for a sundowner with the gentle ladies of the Black Sash in the Peninsula the other night," he writes, "But—and make no mistake about it—some of these good ladies are quite fiery; others surprisingly militant in their political outlook.

"I don't mean they'd start a national uprising overnight. But these housewives have the country's situation — politically — pretty well sewn up . . .

"These Sashers—spear-headed by Eulalie Stott and Molly Petersen—are all extremely sincere. And they are DOING something."

Bridges of Trust

THE Black Sash has done much to build bridges of inter-racial trust that are sorely needed, said Gerald Shaw in a leader page review published by the *Cape Argus* on 9th November.

"It is in its unremitting campaign to mobilize public opinion against the destruction of family life that the Black Sash has performed its greatest task.

"The promptings of conscience can be disturbing—but they are always salutary.

"As an important voice in White South Africa's

conscience, the Black Sash has a valuable role to play in public life."

In a leading article the *Argus* commented:

"The political struggle is constantly before us but it is these devoted women who keep reminding the nation that there is also a moral struggle. 'Endorsing out,' for example, may have its political justifications but the separating of families, the shattering of homes and the reduction of respectable citizens to homeless nomads in their own country offend all morality. . . .

"The Cape can take pride in the fact that so many of its women are in the front ranks of the one organized, non-party, non-partisan moral assertion being made in the nation's public life. They have made of the black sash not only a sign of mourning but also a band of hope, because moral assertion has been carried, as it must be carried, into the field of practical application and effort.

"The members do not content themselves with bemoaning broken homes and indignantly denouncing the dispersal of families. They strive to defend their rights, to feed, clothe and assist mothers and children. This is something that, when the final records come to be written, will be set down in honour not simply to an organization but to South African womanhood. . . .

"The Black Sash puts forward no Bill of Rights but it has come to stand for justice and mercy. It is the women's creative contribution and a light shining forth bravely where the darkness is deepest."

and compiled by Mrs. H. Spottiswoode, who also did all the business arrangements concerning its publication. . . .

A feature of this year's work has been a series of pilot activities undertaken by the C.E. to see if they offered a possible new field or method of action. The first of these were social evenings to which were invited leading Nationalists and non-Nationalists of *the business and professional world, to discuss what could be done to ease the present race tensions in South Africa* . . .

The second very successful pilot venture was a Brains Trust on Constitutional Reform undertaken in the strong Nationalist constituency of Moorreesburg, 70 miles from Cape Town. This was arranged with even more than her usual brilliance of concept and attention to detail by Mrs. Stett, and was an unqualified success.

New Opportunities

It is the hope of the C.E. that now that it has been proved that such meetings can be held, other Regions will try to carry out both these ideas in their own regions, openly in the name of the Black Sash. . . .

In conclusion, I would like to say that although there has been a further drop in membership, it has in no way militated against the influence which the Sash has had in the political field. I think it would even be fair to say that in no previous year has the Sash made a greater impression among South Africans of all races than it has this year. This has, of course, in part been due to the foundations so well and patiently laid through past years and in part to the peculiar opportunities which this year has provided, of which the Sash has made good use.

We may well be entering this next year at a turning point in the history of the Sash. It may — in fact I believe it will — open up new opportunities for the Sash to become recognised as a responsible body whose opinion should be considered: a body whose motives need not therefore be suspect and a body of efficient workers with wide contacts which can be very useful in any effort to gain co-operation across the boundaries of party and group politics.

As this recognition gains ground, and it must gain ground if we go forward in the same objective way we have always done in the past, I believe that we shall attract more members. I say this because it is my considered opinion that there are three main reasons why we lose old members and do not replace them with new ones:

- The first is fear. People believe it is dangerous to protest against what the Government is doing.
- The second is prejudice. People do not want any kind of political change that will entail non-Whites

having a share of political responsibility, but as more and more people see the writing on the wall and swing to the Black Sash point of view, these two hindrances to membership will fall away and the time may come when it will even be fashionable again to belong to the Sash.

- The third reason why I believe we do not attract new members is that because of the sort of stigma that has been attached to the name "Black Sash" we have to conduct many of our most rewarding activities incognito. This results in people being quite unaware that the Sash is a dynamic, live organisation with a finger in a hundred pies and not just a group of women who, from time to time, stand around holding placards and draped in black sashes.

If we were able, without defeating our own ends, to act in our own name on all occasions, I believe we would attract new members of the right sort and I believe the time is no longer far distant when our name, instead of frightening people away, will be a draw.

Let us go forward, therefore, into the new year, aware and ready to face the difficulties and even dangers which may await us, but drawing new hope from a realisation that there are bright rifts in the clouds that darken the fair skies of our country.

IMPRESSIONS OF CONFERENCE

by HILDEGARDE SPOTTISWOODE

WHEN the conference opened, Cape Town very regrettably turned on a period of unseasonably intense heat, but the Prince's Hotel at Claremont provided us with comfortable chairs and peaceful surroundings. It was a great pleasure for us to see the many familiar faces as well as some unfamiliar ones — it is always revitalising to meet Sashers new to conference.

After Mrs. Petersen's stimulating opening address little time was lost in settling down to business, and it soon became evident that the Sash is more dynamic than ever before. The year behind us has been one of particular difficulties but the Sash has met them successfully. Reports from all Regions regarding assistance to the families of detainees, investigations into farm and convict labour, attendances at Native Commissioner's Courts, and active



In accordance with a National Conference decision, the Central Executive of the Black Sash has been replaced by a Headquarters Region, initially Cape Western. In this picture of the former Central Executive are, from left, Mesdames E. Stott (now national president), M. Petersen (former president, now vice-president), H. Spottiswoode (former vice-president), D. Berman (editor), B. Willis (treasurer) and F. Snitcher.

SAM AND ANNIE—continued

Fort Beaufort. A member of the Black Sash wrote to the magistrate about the book. Without our interest Sam might have had to start from the beginning applying for a new one. It was not explained to me when, where and how Sam would have had this complicated procedure explained to him. Possibly the instructions would have been on his next prison release form, for I am willing to bet that Sam would have found himself back in prison.

Members of the Sash were able to help his wife move her furniture in the cruelly short time given. They were able to raise the train fares for Annie and the children from the Emergency Fund. On 10th August, a sad little family caught the train to Fort Beaufort. They must forget about the life they had been leading in the place of their choice and learn to fit into a completely new community where it is decreed that they shall live.

Sam and Annie's case we know about at first hand. How many thousands of Sams and Annies have been dealt with in the same manner—only perhaps more harshly because no one bothered about them?

Act II of this drama opens three weeks later. A series of pathetic letters have arrived from Fort

Beaufort from Sam and Annie. Here are a few paragraphs from them:

"I am still well under the breath of Fort Beaufort, but oh! madam it is too hard for me here at this country. Sam did get his book, but he is not working yet, the jobs is too scarce here." Later—"Please, please answer your poor Annie at this little town of Fort Beaufort, I don't stay nice here and want to come back to P.E. Please help me madam, it is no good at this place, no work for Sam or me." Later from Sam this: "I am thanking madam for the money you gave us for train fares, I can't talk about how poor am I in this town and Annie is complaining for starvation. There is no work at this place and no rain falling. Goodbye, madam answer please."

There is nothing in the law to stop Annie and her two children from returning to Annie's parents' home in Port Elizabeth, for she was born there. She is married to Sam only by Native law which is not recognised in European law.

The last act of the play has still to be written, but nothing suggests that any of the characters have a hope of "living happily ever after".

PEGGY LEVEY.