

# SOUTHERN TRANSVAAL'S EXPERIMENT IN CONSULTATION

## SASHERS IN ACTION

OUR "experiment in consultation" is an effort to provide one small bridge for consultation between African and white women in the urban areas, and envisages a series of regular, organised discussion groups dealing with everyday subjects of interest to women in general.

The first conference was arranged for September/October, and was held in three sessions, two afternoon sessions, which were attended by 30 women, and one all-day session for general discussion, which was open to all. This was attended by about 50 women. At all three sessions attendance was equally composed of African and white women. Those taking part in the discussions were professional women, nurses, teachers, clerical workers, housewives and mothers. Nobody was asked to come as the representative of any organisation—all were individuals, and free to speak as they chose.

The women were divided into three discussion groups, and the subjects discussed were:

**Income and Employment** (working mothers, standards of living, cost of living, etc.).

**Parents and Children** (old age, courting problems, adolescence, citizen or delinquent?).

**Education** (for what? This included best use of talents, use of leisure, etc.).

### Army of Citizens

THERE is an army of ordinary citizens who have challenged the abuses by personal action, such as the Black Sashers, a body of women who have fought with leonine courage and a delightful forthrightness. By their constant attendance in the courts where the pass cases were tried they slowed down the pace from some rattle-trap seconds to a decent period where they was at least time for justice to be done, and they often succeeded in compelling the court to do it.—*Rebecca West, in the Sunday Times, 15th April, 1960.*

The first day was spent in getting to know one another, and discussing the given subjects; the second in compiling papers co-ordinating the results of the discussions; and on the third day the groups came together, the prepared papers were read, and general discussion followed.

The atmosphere was warm and friendly—discussions were quite informal, nobody was afraid to speak, and all were eager to put their points of view.

The chairman of the group dealing with Income and Employment, Mrs. Mzaidume, was excellent in keeping members to the point and encouraging them all to speak. This group produced a minimum basic budget which worked out at £35 per month and included only the bare essentials—one item was £2 10s. per month for travelling expenses for only one member of the family.

### Parents and Children

Dr. Norris took the chair of the group discussing Parents and Children. The African women are as worried as the Whites about the problem of delinquency, particularly among teenagers, and they also have their ducktails. Those children attending schools can do so for only three hours a day, in a class of 70 to 80. For the rest of the time, there is nothing for them to do, apart from a few social centres.

At the end of the conference, the organiser, Mrs. Morris, was presented with a bouquet from the African women as a token of their gratitude. Their appreciation of her efforts to provide them with an opportunity of meeting sympathetic white women was overwhelming. She has since received a number of letters of congratulation, saying how interested the writers had been, and how much they would like to be included in future discussion groups.

Mrs. Morris received invaluable help in organising this venture from Mrs. Phyllis Mzaidume, and Mrs. Anne Welsh.

We feel that the white women learned—among other things—that the African women, because of the restrictions on their lives, have to cope with problems that we, in the enjoyment of our freedom of movement, do not dream of—a very salutary lesson even for women as well disposed as our members; and that the African women, in their turn,

### CONSULTATION—Continued

learned that all women, whatever their colour and background, have similar family and domestic problems.

For the benefit of other Regions who might wish to experiment in consultation, the following suggestions are offered:

1. It is important to set a subject and provide a list of questions for each group, to start them on their way. Each group chose its own leader, and a secretary to make notes.
2. The groups should not be too large.
3. It is essential to hold more than one meeting, in order to build up the talks. Two would be

sufficient, but the series of three worked out very satisfactorily.

4. It is a good idea to approach in advance one or two prominent African women who could suggest themes for discussion and invite other African women who could attend.
5. Preliminary work and planning must be undertaken. In this case, roped circular letters were sent out, and individual letters were afterwards sent to the African women who had indicated that they were interested. Replies were received from all, and those who were not able to take part expressed regret. Most of the white participants were telephoned.

Reviewer of *Education for Isolation* asks:

## EDUCATION FOR WHAT?

THE GOODWILL, skill and energy of the women of the Black Sash are an asset to South Africa. Another special issue of their magazine has just appeared, this time called *Education for Isolation* (2s.). It shows these qualities of theirs. The twenty-odd articles, pictures and quotes are solid material, well presented. One piece, "Jabulani!", about a farm school, is a little gem. Others, like Mrs. McCormick's on text-books, are as good, though serious and factual. There are quotations that should not be forgotten, like Verwoerd in the 1953 parliament: "When I have control of Native education I will reform it so that Natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them."

The main attack, on Christian National Education, leads the editor to ask parents to work for "the establishment of schools in which children of both language groups are given the opportunity to know each other". The word "official" after "both" would repair the error, but is this what the Black Sash wants? Or have they also left "White" out after "which"? The sentence illustrates the weakness of the publication, of the Black Sash itself and of the many valuable organizations of similar qualities who are concerned about South Africa. This is the weakness:—

- They only know what they DON'T want. In this case—no Bantu Education, no C.N.E., no salary differentiation between Coloured and White teachers, no pro-White bias in text-books, no centralization, and many more noes.
- But they don't know what they want instead, or how to get it if they did know. At the

recent National Conference on Education in Durban, the most consistent attack was on ignorance, on retardation, on retribalization, on illiteracy, but no one could, or dared, say how they were to be replaced.

- They can only be replaced in a new South Africa, which Liberals believe can only be built on liberalism and democracy. People of goodwill who belong to and work in organizations like the Black Sash must make up their minds whether they agree or disagree.
- *Contact* welcomes their excellent latest issue, *Education for Isolation*, and urges them to face the question: If not for isolation, then education for what?

—*Contact*, 10th September, 1960.

### "A Little Masterpiece"

I'VE ALWAYS respected the Ladies of the Black Sash for making such a good job of being White South Africa's conscience.

But today I sweep off my tasteful Homberg in a particularly low and elegant bow to these ladies—their special issue of "The Black Sash" entitled "Education for Isolation" is a little masterpiece.

Get it, friends, and you have the whole truth about Separate Education ("No mixing in language, culture, religion or race") in a nutshell. What's more—they give you both sides of the picture.

—*Post*, 11th September, 1960.