

LAYING SOUND FOUNDATIONS

Address to the Black Sash National Conference

By EULALIE STOTT

Retiring National President

WE meet at the beginning of what will probably be a very difficult five years. Those of us who realise that our privileged white society cannot indefinitely maintain its position of supremacy, are naturally apprehensive of what will happen now that the Nationalist Party has again become the Government of the country, with the support of a majority of the electorate.

White Opposition

The English-speaking section is beginning to realise that the days when it was politically powerful, are over. As a political force on its own, it cannot achieve anything. The same remarks might also be made of the white opposition generally. It is clear that the present parliamentary system which enables half the white electorate to send 105 members to Parliament, while the other half is only represented by 56, does not make parliamentary changes easy or likely. The 1½ million coloured members of our society are represented by a mere four "unrepresentative" members, while the vast mass of our people, the Africans, are voiceless in Parliament. We must understand that the Government will not change the electoral system with its loaded vote. This fact, together with the Government's determination to ignore the wishes of the mass of the disenfranchised people and its denial to them of basic human rights, should make us all remember that in the preamble to the Declaration of Human Rights, the warning is given that if the rights incorporated in the Declaration are not guaranteed to the people, they will, as a last resort, have recourse to revolution.

Since the Black Sash earnestly requires that the changes it wishes to see should be brought about peacefully by orthodox and orderly methods, it must naturally be fundamentally opposed to, and view with distress, the possibility of change only by unorthodox methods.

At the same time, the Government, if it makes change by orthodox methods impossible, cannot escape the responsibility for provoking unconstitutional action.

In view of the ban on the main African political organisations and the fact that those Africans with widely different points of view, who came together this year to discuss Africans' problems, have been convicted in a court of law of furthering the aims of a banned organisation, it is clear that it is going to be difficult for any new African organisation to emerge. While the Government obviously considers this will make control easier, it can also present a grave danger.

Daily Frustrations

The daily frustrations which Africans suffer as a result of the laws which largely hamper their advancement, together with the anti-Black feeling shown by most Whites, continue to exacerbate Africans' feelings and to increase the resentment and bitterness they feel towards the Government and white people generally. Without any responsible organisation or leaders to guide them, this anger may well manifest itself in sporadic outbreaks of violence as has happened throughout history elsewhere. Yet most white opponents of the Government declare themselves powerless to alter this, as indeed they seem to be.

It was evident in the middle of 1961 that many white people, who stated that a radical change of policy was necessary if non-Whites were not to resort in increasing measure to illegal or even violent activities, were not prepared to do anything at all to assist those they considered were being wrongly oppressed. They sat back and talked in terms of non-white demonstrations and economic pressures bringing about the changes they desired. But if there is one thing that the May demonstrations and the overseas boycott have shown us, it is surely that in the present context today, there is as little chance of changing the Government through

non-white demonstrations and overseas pressure, as through the existing electoral system.

While it is certainly time that we were all prepared to treat our non-white neighbours as we ourselves wish to be treated, nobody knows just how much time there is to effect change, and we should continue as of old taking time and care to lay good, strong, sound foundations for the future. I do not believe that the talk of time running out should make us feel compelled to take hasty action, nor do I feel we should be driven to despair because all is lost, or to inactivity because of our apparent powerlessness to bring about change.

It is a sad reflection on our society that although politics is on everyone's lips, most do nothing more than pay lip service to the things they believe in. When South Africa was at war with an enemy thousands of miles from its borders, people throughout the length and breadth of the country were prepared almost daily to sacrifice their time and money to beat the forces of evil which it was considered threatened to overwhelm our liberties, but now,

when the forces of injustice exist within our own borders, fewer people are prepared to come forward to make the sacrifices which must be made to uphold those freedoms for which we fought.

The white people who sit back and wait for others to make the sacrifices would do well to realise that if non-Whites on their own have to bring about their salvation, there will be little reason for them to feel well-disposed towards white people afterwards. So we must realise that the clouds on the political horizon, which Mrs. Petersen referred to in her presidential address last year, have increased; and when one looks at them and forecasts a storm, it should be remembered that this does not mean one wants a storm, but merely that a storm seems likely.

Change in our country is inevitable sooner or later. If it is to be a change for the better, it is essential that we try to avoid a repetition of the Algerian situation. We on our own may not be able to bring about change, but we can ensure that when change comes there are sufficient numbers of Whites and non-Whites who respect



At the Black Sash conference in East London: Mrs. E. Stott (former National President), Mrs. A. Pirie (Chairman, Cape Eastern Branch), Mrs. M. Petersen (former National Vice - President) and Mrs. D. Curry (Chairman, Border Region).

—Courtesy Evening Post.

SOUND FOUNDATIONS—Continued

and trust each other, to make a multi-racial Government possible.

One of the tragedies in our country is the divisions that exist between the many opposition parties and groups—white and non-white. The result is that at present amongst them there is not one existing opposition group that could produce a suitable alternative Government, truly representative of all the people.

Since only a Government that guarantees basic rights and liberties to all can expect to establish a peaceable and stable society when the present Government goes, I consider that the Black Sash should do all it can in the coming years to persuade people openly to support a policy which will uphold the rights and liberties of every citizen, and that it should do what it can to act as a catalyst in bringing together all people who share this aim.

Much in Common

We will need to introduce more and more white people to non-Whites in order that they may realise the non-Whites' point of view and find how much they have in common.

This will be an immensely difficult task, because it is apparent that the Government is banning just about every articulate non-White. We must however, continue our efforts to organise multi-racial discussion groups, conferences, etc.

Another thing the Black Sash needs to do is to find ways of combating the effects of Government propaganda which results in people, even in the opposition camp, widely believing such untruths as, for example, that a reference book is nothing more than a white person's identity card or passport. How to do this, when most people do not think for themselves, and do not have the facts on which to base their views, is one of our most difficult tasks.

In the Sash, I believe, we may have to face three problems. One is the dearth of people in our organisation willing and able to undertake

This magazine, as the official journal of the Black Sash, carries authoritative articles on the activities of the Sash. The organisation does not, however, necessarily endorse the views expressed by contributors.

Cartoons in this issue by courtesy of the "Cape Times".
Cover Cartoon by courtesy of "Die Weekblad".

SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

AT the close of her presidential address Mrs. Stott reminded members that those who sat on committees shared with the Chairman the responsibility for all activities undertaken. It was of the utmost importance that committee members should give their earnest attention to such activities in the realisation that they could be held responsible.

In conclusion, Mrs. Stott said: "It appears that in future we may have to get permission from the relevant City Councils to hold stands in the streets of towns. It seems that if a group of people come together in order to stand against a particular Bill, it means that they have come together for a common purpose and therefore constitute a meeting, which may not take place without permission."

the activities we have decided should be carried out; another is that some people within our organisation feel that their time may be better spent working for their political party; a third problem may be caused by members allowing their party political differences to be brought into the Sash.

Members will realise that the Black Sash is constituted to uphold people's rights and liberties and to do all it can to assist in getting these rights and liberties respected, and that within the Sash one is fortunate in having only to consider what people's rights are and what methods should be used in order to have them upheld. We stand on principle, and therefore are lucky in not having to consider expediency.

Members of the Black Sash should understand that people may legitimately differ in their opinion of which party is able best to supplant the present Government or to effect the necessary changes, and that fellow members of the Black Sash should not have their integrity questioned because of the political party they see fit to support. Inside the Sash we do not deal with party politics, but *outside* the Sash, everyone must clearly be entitled to advocate support for her own point of view. It seems to me greatly lacking in tolerance to think that because a person does not belong to the same political party as oneself, that person is wrong and her sincerity should be

suspect. This indicates not only intolerance, but lack of respect for parliamentary democracy which by its very nature depends upon the existence of different political parties. The Black Sash should surely encourage people to think for themselves and respect the rights of others to hold a point of view different from their own.

I foresee the time when once more some political leaders will try to weaken, if not break, the Sash as an organisation. After all, they would not be human if they did not wish to have devoted to their cause the time and money available from their members. In addition, in the white field, it is immeasurably safer to be a member of a large parliamentary opposition that is concerning itself mainly with work in the white electoral field. In the coming years, small pressure groups working with non-Whites can expect to come more and more into conflict with authority, but on the other hand I think political parties would do well to remember that when this Government goes — as I am sure it will — it will be very difficult for any other white Government at its outset to have the confidence of non-Whites. Those of us who have worked with non-white leaders know how very *suspect or discredited almost every white leader* is in non-white circles.

Greatest Asset

So many non-Whites feel that white people only "say" the things they do because they are afraid of black nationalism. They fear that if the white opposition were in power, it would itself devise clever ways of keeping the mass of the people without rights and liberties. From a hard-headed point of view, therefore, I think political parties would do well to realise that one of the greatest assets they can have is a large number of Black Sash members throughout the country, who are known to have been working hard with non-Whites in their darkest hours.

It is constantly stated by people that we have failed to make any impact on the white electorate, and I think it is necessary for us to examine the statement to see if it is true.

It is clear to me that there has been a significant change in the attitude of the white electorate in the last six years. Since for a very large part of that time the Black Sash was one of the few groups in the field advocating that

NEW NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Mrs. Jean Sinclair of Johannesburg, a founder of the Black Sash, was elected National President at the recent conference in East London.



all people's rights should be safeguarded, it seems reasonable to consider that we have played a significant part in bringing about this change of attitude amongst a certain section. Who knows whether, if we had spent the same amount of effort, time and money in Nationalist areas, we would not have had a similar impact!

At election time, people inevitably become more concerned with political matters, while at other times it is very difficult to evoke any response and active interest in politics from the electorate. As we all know, the Black Sash reduces its activities at election times, in order to let its members work for the party of their choice. In the five years ahead, people will once again fall into their usual apathy and it will require a great deal of ingenuity to get them to come to meetings to hear what they need to know regarding the views of non-Whites and the effects on them of present legislation.

Also, one may take it that the non-white opposition groups will have further inroads made on their liberties and that they will suffer increased hardships. Such help as we can give, I believe should be readily available.

I am perpetually astonished by members who say to me: "There is nothing for us to do." I can assure you that for those who are really anxious to help, there is plenty to do. The fact that we are not better known is due entirely to the fact that we do not do all the things we should.