

BLACK SASH NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Cape Town March 12 to 15 1987

PROGRAMME OUTLINE:

Public Meeting	Claremont Civic Centre Main Road, Claremont	Thursday 12 March	8 p.m.
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Working Sessions	St Michael's Church Rouwkoop Road, Rondebosch	Thursday 12 March	12 to 5 p.m.
		Friday 13 March	9 to 5 p.m.
		Saturday 14 March	9 to 5 p.m.
		Sunday 15 March	9 to 1 p.m.

Observers	Observers will be welcome for most of this time, although there will be some closed sessions. For further information please call (021) 65 3513
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BACKGROUND:

Western Cape, now the headquarters region of the Black Sash, will be hosting the annual national conference this year, so preparations are under way for an influx of delegates, official observers and visitors from all regions. Of importance to the general public is the official opening on Thursday evening 12 March when Mary Burton delivers her presidential address and a guest speaker deals with some aspect of the South African crisis.

The main work of the conference is three-fold: to receive and review reports of work done by the regions, regional advice offices and rural action projects, also by headquarters and Sash magazine; to debate fact papers on various aspects of South African political economy, ranging from housing and forced removals to militarisation and the education crisis; and to establish policy guidelines by means of resolutions and strategy planning. A special conference issue of Sash will appear in May 1987.

Meeting for the first time under State of Emergency restrictions and constraints, conference will need to be disciplined, innovative and courageous in its approach. Relationships between delegates will be more important than ever. For this reason the first working session includes a substantial period in inter-regional groups, focussing on regional reports.

Conference will also pay tribute to the End Conscription Campaign. ECC arose directly out of the 1982 Black Sash national conference in Cape Town which unanimously endorsed a resolution proposed by national president Sheena

Duncan, opposing the system of compulsory military service. (The recent achievements and tribulations of ECC are set out on pages 34 — 35.)

A much earlier Sash national conference in Cape Town in February 1971 endorsed a resolution of the Civil Rights League on conscientious objection. It called for alternative service in fields completely unrelated to the Defence Force for persons who object on strongly held moral, ethical or religious grounds to compulsory military service.

Religious objectors have been granted some such right (with room for improvement). However the state still does not acknowledge and cater for the right of conscience, the innate sense of right and wrong, good and evil, which according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition as well as secular philosophy is characteristic of human nature. There is still much work to be done in opposing militarism and militarisation and in upholding the conscientious rights of those who seek positive alternatives to compulsory military service.

Our founders pledged themselves to resist any diminishment of the ideals of mutual trust and forbearance, or sanctity of word, of courage for the future, and of peace and justice for all persons and peoples. Conference is above all an occasion for deepening and strengthening that spirit of resistance, that dedication to the service of our country and of all who live in it. So may it be in Cape Town in March 1987.

Margaret Nash