

THE BLACK SASH
AND
THE BANTU LAWS AMENDMENT BILL

EVER SINCE the draft Bantu Laws Amendment Bill was published early in February, Black Sash women all over the country have spent endless hours studying the implications of the draft and the two versions of the Bill that have since been placed before Parliament. Three memoranda have been prepared — two by Headquarters and one by Cape Western Region — and submitted to the Minister of Bantu Affairs and Development; large scale demonstrations were planned in every Region to coincide with the second reading debate, posters were prepared and informative pamphlets printed. Not since the days of our protests against the Senate Act has so much endeavour been concentrated upon a single measure.

It is easy to understand why this Bill has assumed such tremendous importance in the eyes of the Black Sash. The underlying purpose of most of its provisions is to establish the Africans permanently as a migrant labour force with no rights of residence in the "White" areas except under permit. This would create an insecure and rootless people, more than ever at the mercy of the rubber stamp of officialdom, and would lead inevitably to a further breakdown in the already unsettled family life of the Africans. During the last few years we have seen at first-hand the tragic results of apartheid restrictions, in broken homes and broken lives, and, as women, we cannot but feel the deepest concern at this heartless juggling with the lives of fellow South Africans.

The Government's decision not to proceed with the whole 143 clauses of the Bill at this late stage of the Session may be seen as the result of widespread protests from groups and organizations of widely divergent views and functions, and we can, perhaps, take some encouragement from the thought that protest does sometimes obtain results. But the withdrawal can only be looked upon as a reprieve, for the Government has given no indication that it is prepared to withdraw or modify the measure.

Therefore, although the Black Sash will not now demonstrate on any major scale against the abridged Bill, which omits the clauses which gave us the greatest concern, we do not intend to put the issue into cold storage. We will do all we can to keep it alive in the minds of the public, and

will publish in our Magazine any information that comes to hand.

At the time of the first reading of the whole Bill, Black Sash Headquarters sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, asking him to receive a delegation to discuss the Bill. He referred us to Mr. de Wet Nel, Minister of Bantu Affairs and Development, to whom we wrote, asking for an interview so that we might explain our objections to the Bill. The Minister asked us first to send him a Memorandum setting out the basis of our objections. At short notice, therefore, Headquarters Region drew up our third Memorandum, with the collaboration of Cape Western Region in the person of Mrs. Noel Robb, who flew to Johannesburg for the purpose.

The Memorandum was sent off to the Minister, and some days later we received the following letter from his private secretary:

"With reference to your letter dated the 27th May, 1963, I have been directed to inform you that there is insufficient time to proceed this year with the Bill at present before Parliament.

"A short Bill with 33 sections providing for urgent matters has been submitted to Parliament instead, and the discussion you have in mind can therefore take place at a later date."

We regard this as a hopeful sign that the Minister is at least prepared to discuss the matter, and we look forward to an opportunity "at a later date" of placing our views before him.

The Abridged Bill.

AT A HOUSE MEETING held in Johannesburg on June 10th, Dr. Ellen Hellmann gave a brief outline of the provisions of the 33-clause Abridged Bantu Laws Amendment Bill, which has taken the place of the longer version. The following are some of the points she made:

- A number of the clauses deal with foreign Africans, and the conditions governing their entry into South Africa and their residence and employment here.
- Several other clauses deal with taxation, and bring the African tax year into line with the overall financial year.
- Two provisions make **welcome changes**: (1) the surviving partner in a customary union now has the right to claim damages and/or support in the event of the unnatural death of one partner, whereas formerly this right was only enjoyed by legally married couples; and (2), Africans will no longer be obliged to obtain permits to enter locations where they do not reside. The Superintendent has the power to eject anyone whose presence he considers undesirable.
- Under two of the sections, the power is given to the Minister to administer all aspects of location life, thus overriding the powers of local authorities.
- Where the local authority formerly had the power to exempt certain Africans either temporarily or permanently from living in the locations, this power now falls away; but exemption can be granted by the Minister in consultation with the local authority.
- Penalties for infringements of the regulations have been stepped up. Owners of property will now be deemed to have given permission where Africans are found illegally on their property, unless they can prove that they did not give permission or that they had no reason to suspect that the Africans were there without permission. They have no right to give permission, anyway.

The people who are really sabotaging this country to-day are the authors of the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill.

(Cape Times)

The "Servants Clause".

Of the so-called "servants clause", which limits householders to one living-in servant, Dr. Hellmann said that she could see no reason for this unnecessary interference with the arrangements of private people other than the intention of reducing the number of Africans living outside locations. In a country like South Africa where there was a good deal of under-employment, it was wrong to limit the employment opportunities of the people.

She could not accept that there was a benevolent wish to promote family life for the Africans. In Johannesburg, for instance, where Alexandra Township was the only area suitable for the provision of family life for Africans employed in the northern suburbs, the Government had declared its intention of establishing large hostels in the area for single men and women, and reducing the number of families.

Dr. Hellmann said that if she were asked to use two words to describe this Bill, she would say that it "tightens control". The single word that sprang to her mind to describe the original Bill was "dislodgeable" (which she had probably coined), because the whole principle of the Bill seemed to be to render Africans easily removable from the "White" areas.



"There's real political patriotism for you — washing up and listening to the news broadcast at the same time!"

(Rand Daily Mail)