

Well-known Writer Looks at the Sash

THE woman without cultural pretensions, outside the small group who may be called the "high-brows" of South Africa, still lives in a world of morning tea, tennis, swimming, gossip, bridge, dancing and so on, varied by the occasional charity committee or flag day. And why not? Why not indeed, if she was not playing out her life against one of history's great tragic backdrops, and if, poor woman, she was not conscious every now and again of the strange lurid lights which, playing over her shoulder, give her bridge parties and cocktail times so frightening a dying-sunset glow.

Black Sash Realism

Not all the well-to-do English-speaking ladies live in this strange, menaced cloud cuckoo land. Mrs. L., a businessman's wife, Mrs. P., a farmer's widow, and Miss J., a doctor's sister, all have reason to object to what I have written, for they are members of the Black Sash, and the Black Sash is, on any count, one of the most remarkable as well as one of the most admirable feminine activities I have encountered.

Hear Mrs. L., who is voluble and not without a touch of Rodean jollity, describe it:

"People will tell you we're simply a lot of silly women who ought to be doing our work at home, that we're screaming suffragettes and so on. Of course, we began with shock tactics as a protest against the packing of the Senate—standing about with black sashes on in attitudes of grief whenever Ministers appeared in public.

"Of course, it was a bit theatrical, it was meant to be. It woke people up and shook the Ministers a little too—respectable ladies can be such an embarrassment—but above all it got women thinking. Then the Africans came along and asked, if we were out to underline what was wrong in the country, why couldn't we help them meet their grievances?"

"We feed African families where the man is gaoled, we help African women to meet evacuation orders, we go with them to court in pass cases, we protest against job reservation, banishments, Press censorship."

In fact these ladies with gracious homes are in it up to the neck. They have met the fate of all people who act because their emotions tell them that they must: they have been labelled by the Right as Communists, by the Left as society ladies amusing themselves by doing good . . .

Apart from what they have achieved, these Black

Sash women alone among well-to-do English-speaking women know what the lives of the "natives" are like in some degree; they have attended courts with them, waited with them in the long hours of bench sitting which a life of forms and passes issued by an entrenched bureaucracy demands.

They have seen the homes of their servants and the family misery that apartheid brings. They were the only English-speaking South African women I met who did not seem frightened of the "natives," because they knew a little about them. The Black Sash ladies, not afraid to be absurd, not afraid to be emotional, have won back some part of White dignity.—Angus Wilson in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

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only method of bringing about an informed electorate, but have certainly found that people who will not come to political meetings, will come in their hundreds to Brains Trusts. In practice, therefore, we are of the opinion that they serve a useful purpose.

From our experience, we have found that a majority of people canvassed are ignorant of the policies of even the parties they support, clearly indicating that while they could be informed by reading party political literature, they in fact do not do so, and even those who do we find are often floored when they hear the arguments of the other side. Further, we find many are ignorant of the effects of laws, such as the Pass Laws, about which we also hold Brains Trusts.

Any similarity between Black Sash policy and that of any other political party depends entirely on the extent to which the purpose for which the Black Sash is constituted, namely, "the upholding of people's rights and liberties," is similar to that of the political parties concerned.

As Nationalists as well as Splinter Parties have been willing to participate in our Brains Trusts, we sincerely hope that the time may yet come when the United Party will feel it worth while to take part as well. We are confident that those who have participated will vouch for the fact that they have all been given a fair hearing.

We hope that the United Party's participation in a debate with the Nationalists and Progressives at Stellenbosch indicates that the United Party is seeing the advantage of meetings where in a calm atmosphere differing views can be discussed.