

MAIMIE CORRIGALL

TWO TRIBUTES

The Liberal Cause has suffered another cruel blow with the death of Maimie Corrigan, member of the Liberal Party, of the Black Sash, and of the Board of this journal.

Maimie started her political life off as a member of the Communist Party, drawn to it much less by its "communism" than by its non-racialism, one suspects. More than once she said that, if there had been a non-racial Liberal Party at that time, she thought that was what she and her husband would have joined. It is a sad commentary on pre-1950 South Africa that there was not.

I doubt if Maimie would have felt very much at home in the Communist Party for long, for if ever there was a totally uncompromising democrat, she was it. No number of arguments advanced by the "pragmatists" would ever have persuaded her to deviate one inch from her conviction that everyone should have the vote and that what most voters felt was right should prevail. Even thirty years of Nationalism did not blunt her faith that reason, not emotion, must ultimately prevail in the conduct of human affairs.

Thirty years ago Maimie was left a widow with four children to bring up, the eldest not yet eight, the youngest still to be born. Most people would have found just that a fulltime job. And indeed she did make it a fulltime and extraordinarily successful job, as anyone who knows the family would testify. But she was one of those people who seem to be able to manage more than one fulltime job, and so, apart from bringing up the family, she became deeply involved in other things. One of these was the Black Sash, of which she was a founder-member in Pietermaritzburg and in which she held office, in one capacity or another, almost up to the day of her death. The other was the Liberal Party, which she joined soon after its inception in 1953. For a long time she kept in the background of its activities — that is until the wave of detentions and bannings in the 1960s began to leave large gaps in its leadership and staff. She then came forward to take over much of the administration in the Party's National Office and went on doing so until, in 1968, the law closed the Party down because it refused to give up its non-racial character. And when REALITY was started, to try to keep alive the ideas for which the Liberal Party had stood, she was on its founding Board and it was she, more than anyone, who ensured that this journal appeared, more or less on time, year in and year out. "Coming out on time" was an obsession of hers, and nothing incensed her more than having to wait for contributions which didn't make the deadline, or hold-ups at the printers! What her death will mean to this small journal one hesitates to speculate.

But Maimie was much more than a remarkable organiser. For one thing, she was very brave. As far as I know the only thing which really terrified her was making a speech. She would be in a state of jitters for days before it had to be

done. She would try to learn it off by heart. She would practise it aloud. And when the dreadful moment came, and she had to get to her feet, she would be shaking like a leaf. By contrast, the attentions of the Security Police and their sick, right-wing hangers-on, she treated with complete contempt. And contemptible they were — anonymous and threatening telephone calls at all hours of the night, attempts to set her flat alight, abuse at Black Sash poster stands. That is one group of people that will be glad it no longer has to contend with the sharp edge of her tongue.

For another thing she was totally honest; and unbending in her adherence to principle. She would say exactly what she thought about anything to anyone. And woe betide anyone who at a Liberal Party meeting suggested some course of action or change in policy which she felt was in any way a retreat or deviation from principle. She would never stand for that. She was an essentially political person and what energies she didn't direct towards her family and friends, she directed into political work. Social work she regarded as a waste of time, a prolonging of the agony.

Does all this talk of efficiency, bluntness and uncompromising commitment to principle leave an impression of a rather cold and austere personality? Nothing could be further from the truth. Maimie could certainly be fierce but she was mostly a very warm and caring person. She had a great sense of humour, as often as not directed against herself. During the years when I was banned and wasn't supposed to attend gatherings, a few of us used to meet, almost every week, for "drinks" at her flat. If any members of her family were in town, they would be there too. There was nothing dry or austere about these occasions. Much fun was had by everybody, sometimes at the expense of ourselves and our friends, more often at the expense of "the authorities".

Those, for me, were some of the most sustaining "events" of those years.

Peter Brown.

Her friends had for some time known in their hearts that Maimie was going to die as they watched her enduring ever more frequent spells of pain and acute discomfort, but her indomitable spirit and abundant life made the knowledge seem quite unreal, so that when death came and word of it spread among those many people all over South Africa who knew and loved her it was shockingly unbelievable.



Maimie Corrigan

Maimie was a rock, a seemingly indestructible source of strength to everyone who ever worked with her in the Liberal Party and in the wider Pietermaritzburg community.

Through all the years of her active work which continued until her death she held steadfast to those values of freedom and justice, public and private integrity, and the infinite

petition between Xhosa, Gonaqua and trek boer pastoralists for the regions around Port Elizabeth, becoming institutionalised when the British became involved in a numbered worth of all human beings, which values have been so assaulted and diminished in our country. It is because of people like Maimie and those others with whom she worked so closely that such ideas have survived at all. It has taken great courage to continue to state such convictions in the fact of Government action, public unconcern and the ridicule of those who no longer understand that just and peaceful societies can only be built on such foundations.

She was one of the founders of the Black Sash in Natal. She took part in its first and most striking national enterprise: the convoy of cars converging on Cape Town to demonstrate against the Senate Act — and returned to take the lead in the Natal Midlands. Besides working in Pietermaritzburg, during those early days of widespread and heady enthusiasm she travelled all over the area, starting or visiting branches in such unlikely or remote places as Matatiele, Kokstad, New Hanover and Cramond. But these and other country branches could not survive the Black Sash's growing recognition that political logic and political idealism in South Africa demanded more than a general adherence and loyalty to the terms and spirit of the 1910 constitution. Maimie was a vigorous advocate in the Black Sash of the pursuit of the most uncompromising principles; and when this resulted in the gradual collapse of most of her work in the country branches, she was disappointed but not deterred.

Maimie was a legend in the Black Sash, a leader whose wisdom and wit and acerbic style had much to do with the overall growth and development of the organisation from the beginning and whose strength and steady determination had everything to do with keeping us alive during the long, dead political years of the nineteen sixties.

She was beloved. Her monument will be the truth she held and handed on, and we will keep faith with her.

Sheena Duncan.

BOOK REVIEWS

1. **A roar on the other side of silence - two chronicles of the penultimate Xhose war.**

by M. G. Whisson

T. R. H. Davenport : **Black Grahamstown - the agony of a community**

S.A. Institute of Race Relations. pp. 65 including maps, photographs. R2,00.

M. Nash with N. Charton: **An Empty Table? Churches and the Ciskei future . . .**

S.A. Council of Churches. pp. 81 including maps, photographs. R2,50.

The history of the Eastern Cape might be seen as a series of attempts by white forces to roll back the Xhosa to the Eastern banks of the Great Fish River, and to return them there whenever a substantial breach was made. It began in the latter part of the 18th century with intermittent com-

series of "Wars" between 1811 and 1879. With the triumph of British arms, the military solution to the "problem" of Xhosa expansion became passé, and administrative solutions were sought instead. Sir Harry Smith, the colourful, courageous madman on the horse gave way to the faceless bureaucrat and the man in a safari suit and Administration Board bakkie. Sudden, glorious death in battle gave way to miserable, meaningless death in the resettlement camps.

But history is never quite as simple as that, and the dams built to contain the Xhosa flood were never dykes. From the early years of contact there was trade between white and black, and an ever growing and ever more regulated flow of blacks was welcomed into the regions west of the Great Fish. Among the earliest were Fingo refugees who had passed through the Xhosa dominated territory in flight from the expansionist Zulu. They allied themselves with the British and after 1835 established permanent settlements in Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage,