

THE BLACK SASH.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1971.

HEADQUARTERS REPORT.

OFFICE BEARERS :

PRESIDENT	MRS. JEAN SINCLAIR
VICE PRESIDENTS	MRS. JOYCE HARRIS
	MRS. ANNA MARAIS
HON. SECRETARY	MRS. R. M. JOHNSTON
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	MRS. B. BEINASHOWITZ.
MAGAZINE EDITOR	MRS. S. DUNCAN.

The period under review contains largely the same ingredients as previous years in the life of Headquarters Region. The South African scene does not change very much from year to year except in degree, and the role of the Black Sash remains very much the same within this framework. There was the same plethora of restrictive legislation such as the Bantu Law Amendment Bill, The General Law Amendment Bill and The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Bill, of edicts, regulations, ministerial statements, unhappy episodes, but our work this year was made increasingly difficult by the General Election and the Provincial Elections which naturally diverted the energies of many of our workers. However every effort was made to keep all our activities up to date and under control, and there is much to report. We ask your indulgence for the inevitable overlaps on the Transvaal Regional Report, but these are really inevitable when the business of both is conducted by the same people at the same meetings. It is often almost impossible to separate the two.

MAILING LIST :

Following upon a suggestion by Mrs. Stott at last year's conference that our propaganda might be more successful if it was constantly aimed at the same people instead of being diluted by a wide spread, Transvaal Region decided to draw up a mailing list of 5,000 people to whom we would send all our pamphlets, handouts etc., This was accomplished by wading through "Who's Who", a tedious task but it has given us a relatively static, captive audience at whom to direct our ideas. I mention this list here because it was mainly at these people that our two big campaigns of the year were directed.

REMOVALS CAMPAIGN :

This campaign was renamed the "H" Campaign after the "H is for Homelands" pamphlet which was drawn up in conjunction with the Citizens' Action Committee in order to highlight conditions in the Homelands and the plight of the people existing there. This pamphlet was circulated to all regions and was so successful that it was reprinted twice. It may not have achieved anything in terms of a termination of the policy or an improvement of conditions but at least there are now many more people who know about them.

Some of these same people also received copies of a pull of the "Star" article on malnutrition and the hand-out on Morsgat.

All regions co-operated fully in the distribution of information and in the rushed campaign to send telegrams to Mr. M. C. Botha refuting his statement that there is no starvation in South Africa, so that although there was no organised national campaign as such it did take on a national character. As the policy of removals is still with us, and is likely to be ^{with} us for a long time, there can be no foreseeable end to our campaign, and all regions have continued to concern themselves with removals in their own areas.

CAMPAIGN ON THE PLIGHT OF AFRICAN WOMEN :

This campaign was instigated by Transvaal Region, but the full and enthusiastic co-operation of all regions converted this, too, into more of a national campaign. The pamphlet, "Who Cares" was distributed to the 5,000 on the mailing list and to various women's organisations, and has also been widely distributed by all regions. The booklet, "Who Cares", comprising articles previously printed in series on the leader page of the "Star", has been well received and many copies have already been sold. Transvaal Region put up tables in shopping centres and were quite amazed at the response of the public. Other regions might consider following suit.

Further steps in the campaign are to be discussed here at Conference, Transvaal Region to put forward its ideas on the drawing up of a Charter on the rights of women and the presentation of a plea at the bar of the House.

THE RULE OF LAW :

Transvaal Regional Report contains full details of weekly stands organised to protest about the re-detention of the "22", but here, again, co-operation of all regions made this more a national than a regional campaign. When 19 of the 22 were eventually charged and brought to court the Press was inclined to lay all credit for this on student protest, forgetting the prolonged protest of the Black Sash, but I think we are entitled to some degree of credit for what it is worth, and certainly our continued re-iteration of the value of protest has been vindicated.

Headquarters Region signed the call by the Civil Rights League for the appointment of a Judicial Enquiry into detention and the abrogation of the rule of law, but this was subsequently dropped because the BOSS Commission of Enquiry had been set up and this made the whole subject sub judice.

An appeal was made through the Press to the legal profession to speak out against a system which denies the very principles upon which their profession is based.

SECTION 10 CAMPAIGN :

The expected legislation removing Section 10 rights was not introduced so there has been no Section 10 campaign as such, though the campaign on the rights of African women covers a number of relevant aspects and may well lead in to such a campaign should it become necessary. In the meantime Mrs. Sinclair and Mrs. Duncan have completed the updated memorandum on the "Pass Laws" with the assistance of Cape Western Region - an herculean task.

GENERAL ELECTION :

Headquarters felt that the best contribution it could make to the General Election was the dissemination of information to the public.

Accordingly the "H" /---

Accordingly the "H is for Homelands" pamphlet was geared to the elections, an article entitled "We Protest" was sent to the "Star" and given leader page presentation, and an article on "The State of the Nation" was given prominence in the Rand Daily Mail. Letters were also sent to all United Party members of Parliament about the manner of their approach to the problems of urban Africans and there was correspondence on the subject between our National President, Sir de Villiers Graaff and Mr. Marais Steyn.

ARTICLES AND LETTERS :

In addition to those already mentioned a statement appeared in the Rand Daily Mail commenting on their article on "Morsgat". The "Star" published a letter on African taxation. A letter was sent to the Minister of Police on the prison van deaths

REGIONAL MATTERS :

A rather dreaded perusal of all the Regional correspondence files proved to be exceedingly rewarding. Not only was there a considerable interchange of letters between regions and headquarters, but a quite incredible amount of activity was revealed. Headquarters Region is constantly amazed at the amount of excellent work achieved by all regions, large and small, and heartened by the unquenchable enthusiasm displayed despite all obstacles and frustrations. Naturally there were points of disagreement at times - some of which will be discussed here at Conference - but areas of agreement are always far larger than those of disagreement.

This brings me to a recommendation from Headquarters, which we ask you to consider. Correspondence is not the most successful form of contact, and Headquarters feels that it would be most advantageous if one of its representatives, and preferably the National President, were to visit each of the Regions at least once during the year or maybe even twice. This would help to clear up inevitable misunderstandings and to strengthen the very real bonds that already exist between all regions. But it would cost money, and regions would have to decide whether the additional expense would be justified and how much they would be able and willing to contribute. Perhaps this might be discussed here.

Headquarters has noted with interest and gratification the much improved Press coverage that most regions appear to have received from their local newspapers.

FINANCE AND MAGAZINE :

These will be discussed in separate reports.

MRS. MIDHCLMAN :/—

MRS. MICHELMAN :

You will remember that Mrs. Michelman from Massachusetts visited us last year in connection with a doctoral dissertation she was writing on the "Black Sash". A preliminary draft of her study has been received for comment and alteration, and very excellent it is too.

PERSONNEL :

As though we were not sufficiently disrupted by the Elections we had also to do without our National President for three months while she was on a well-earned overseas holiday. Only while she is away does one become really aware of the tremendous burden of responsibility which she so cheerfully and effectively shoulders and of the truly enormous amount of work she so quietly and efficiently gets done. Jean Sinclair is a quite remarkable woman, dedicated body, soul and mind to the Black Sash and what it stands for, and a veritable fount of information on everything related to it, which is a broad field indeed. She is possessed of many rare qualities and we are very fortunate to have them at our entire disposal. During her absence and mine, Mrs. Anna Marais gallantly held the fort and Mrs. Bobby Cluvor was appointed as an acting National Vice President. We are most grateful for her always welcome and helpful services, as we are for the magnificent jobs done by our Magazine Editor, Sheena Duncan, our National Secretary, Bobbie Johnston and our two National Treasurers, Mrs. Dora Hill and Mrs. Bertha Beinashowitz.

Our office staff, Mrs. Margaret Kirk, Mrs. Henrietta Radale and Mrs. Mabel Makgabutlane have, as usual, responded graciously and willingly to the sometimes overwhelming demands made upon them, and we record our deep appreciation not only of all their hard work but of the charming manner with which they cope with all our varying and difficult temperaments.

Lastly we thank all of you - all the Regions - for keeping us informed of all your activities, for responding so generously to all requests and suggestions from Headquarters and for fighting so staunchly for the principles of the Black Sash.

JOYCE HARRIS
NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT.