

THE BLACK SASH.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE - DURBAN OCTOBER 15TH 1973.

OPENING ADDRESS.

BY

MRS. JEAN SINCLAIR - NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

TIME FOR A CHANGE.

This year the Nationalist Government celebrated its 25th year in office - 25 years of increasing power and increasing authoritarianism ; but what has South Africa got to celebrate?

Twenty five years of Apartheid ; of racial discrimination, injustice, inhumanity, bannings, banishments, detention without trial, confiscation of passports, refusal of visas, deportations, race classification, immorality laws, group areas, enforced removals, resettlement villages, migrant labour, bachelor hostels, endorsements out, broken families, permits, permits to live, permits to work, to reside, Bantu Education, Tribal Universities, attacks on students, a Schibusch Commission, Bantustans, poverty, a Coloured People's Representative Council, an Indian Council, separate entertainments, separate buses and trains, separate entrances, separate lavatories, separate ambulances, separate hospitals, separate blood, International isolation in sport, theatre, travel, conferences and agencies ; immigrant "scum" a flag with a "scab" which would drop off, Boerehaat, current Affairs, censorship, Marais Steyn; Ministerial threats, attacks on the English-speaking Churches and the Press threats of further press censorship, the Physical Planning Act, Border Industry, fear, doubt, tension - You name it, we have it.

Sackcloth and ashes/—

Page Two/

Sackcloth and ashes would be a more appropriate posture to the situation than celebration.

One of the notable occurrences of this year has been the wresting of some political initiative from whites by blacks. The repercussions of the Bantustan policy are immense and far-reaching. In 1960 Dr. Verwoerd said that the Africans could develop to their limit in the Bantustans and that they would be fully independent states. This promise has become a major plank in the Government's justification of the whole apartheid system and black leaders are successfully using this fact by refusing independence until they have just land consolidations, proper boundaries, a fair share of our national wealth and are accorded the respect and freedom due to leaders of the various legislative assemblies.

The Chief Ministers are demanding more land. They demand that the Bantustans be consolidated into viable geographic entities. They are not satisfied either with the consolidation proposals or with the inequitable distribution of land as set out in the 1936 Land and Trust Act in terms of which 7,250,000 morgen of land were to be acquired for their reserves. When all this land is handed over to the Bantustans the total amount of land owned by all the Bantustans will be 13,7 per cent of the surface area of the Republic. It is understandable that the Black leaders find this unequal division unacceptable.

Only the Transkei and the minute Basotho Qwaqwa are geographic entities and even in the Transkei certain white towns including Port St. Johns are to remain in the Republic. All the other Bantustans have scattered blocks of land surrounded by white areas, such as Kwa Zulu with 29, BophuthaTswana and the Ciskei each with 19 ; the other "homelands" varying from 2-4 blocks of land. The South African government's consolidation proposals reducing the number of blocks to a smaller number of larger blocks but still scattered are not acceptable. The leaders too are totally opposed to the massive enforced removals which the consolidation proposals would entail.

All white interest groups are consulted about consolidation proposals but the black people who will suffer the major upheavals and who are most closely affected are not given any official chance to express their views.

Bantustan governments require finance for development of industry and for an infra structure. They are asking for the right to accept investment from abroad with no strings attached.

Chief Ministers Buthelezi, Matanzima, Mangope, Phatudi and Ntsanwise are increasingly critical of apartheid. They oppose the migrant labour policy. They want freedom of movement for their citizens in the white areas as well as in the black ones. They criticise influx and efflux control, poverty wages, the lack of trade unions. In March this year Chief Buthelezi is reported to have told business men and trade unionists that what Blacks wanted from Whites was economic security, social stability and free and compulsory education for their children.

Chief Buthelezi/---

Chief Buthelezi regrets the lack of dialogue between the South African Government and the Bantustan Governments. He objects to communicating with Cabinet Ministers only through the Commissioner General.

Kwa Zulu's request for its own radio station and its own defence force have been turned down. Chief Buthelezi was not even allowed to have the private secretary of his choice.

During the recent session the Lebowa Legislative Assembly has passed three non-racial Bills - the Establishment of Magistrates' Courts Bill, the Road Traffic Bill and the Intoxicating Liquor Bill - all discriminatory racial reference was removed from drafts which had been compiled in consultation with the South African Government (The Rand Daily Mail 22/9/1973). These Bills, however, still have to be confirmed by the South African Government.

All the demands and criticisms of South African policy by the Bantustan leaders are obviously an embarrassment to the Republican government. Separate development is not working out in the way it was intended.

Black consciousness and Black political awareness are now a fact of life. Black consciousness is the determination of the black man to know himself - to realise his worth as a person and to depend on himself to achieve his aspirations. The analogy in this country is the growth of Afrikaner nationalism which began in exactly the same way as Black consciousness.

Black consciousness is spreading both in the rural and the urban areas. It is producing a consolidation of opinion among all Black groups including the Coloured people and the Asians. The Coloured Persons Representative Council is not working. The Coloured people, having been deprived of the political rights which they once had in the Cape, do not regard the Council as a meaningful alternative to the vote on the common roll. The policy with regard to the Coloured people and the Asians is so vague and undefined that it pleases no one.

Young black people, like the young everywhere, are not as moderate as their parents. To them no white of any shade of political opinion has any credibility and they have decided to go it alone. This year the banning of eight student leaders has led to a hardening of attitudes. Confrontation with authority at the Black universities and some secondary schools has become endemic. Unrest flared up at Fort Hare at the beginning of August. One hundred and fifty students were suspended and the following week hundreds of students walked out. Students at the Federal Theological Seminary staged a sit-in.

In Damaraland students of the Martin Luther High School boycotted classes in sympathy with students of the Augustinium College in Windhoek who had staged a mass walk out the week before after refusing to comply with certain of the college's regulations. Two SASO officials were banned in August, Mr. Mervyn Josi, Administrative Assistant and Mr. Henry Isaacs, the President. Then there were the disturbances at the University of the Western Cape,

The demands and the criticism/---

The demands and the criticism of the South African Government has led to the growing solidarity of all black people, politicians, professionals, academics, workers and students. The meeting held last month in Athlone was attended by 12,000 people who came to demand the unconditional readmission of all the students of the University of the Western Cape. This meeting addressed by Chief Buthelezi, Mrs. Fatima Meer, Mr. Adam Small and Mr. Sonny Leon, is evidence of the solidarity which now exists between all black people.

The Black People's Convention - a new political movement, is aimed at Black solidarity, but like SASO, it rejects the Bantustan policy. It feels that by accepting office in the Bantustans the leaders have become part of the system.

The Coloured people, having been rejected, deprived of their rights, and their dignity insulted and assaulted, are bitter. They are bitter about their education, though from next year there is to be free and compulsory education for all Coloured children. They are bitter about the Group Areas policy where they have been moved from their long established homes ; they are bitter about the horrors of race classification, about separate entertainments and about the futility of the Coloured Persons Representative Council.

On September, 14th, Mr. Tom Schwartz, the appointed Executive Chairman of the Council moved a motion calling for the adjournment of the Council. Mr. Leon, the leader of the Labour Party, opposed the motion on the grounds that much of the work of the Council was unfinished. He said he would agree to a motion for the Council to stand adjourned "for all time".

The Asians, too, who have been victims of the Group Areas Act have lost their homes and their businesses in their enforced removal to areas of the government's choosing. They too have associated themselves with the call for Black solidarity.

The unrest in South West Africa is evidence of the growing dissatisfaction of the Ovambos. The strikes started in 1971. Since then, although a state of emergency was declared, there have been spasmodic outbreaks and disturbances. In the recent election of the Ovambo Legislative Assembly 21½% of the electorate cast their votes. Hardly a demonstration of enthusiasm for separate development. Since the election violence has erupted again in the Katutura township.

In the urban areas of the Republic and in South West Africa, the migrant labour policy, the pass laws, the lack of family housing, the poverty wages continue to harrass the African people.

In March this year the strikes in Natal caused consternation and even fear among white employers. These strikes are significant because they were spontaneous and unorganised. With the rising cost of living the wages most workers were earning were not enough to keep either the men or their families in health or decency. Wages were increased throughout the country, but still a large percentage of workers are earning well below the poverty datum line.

The exposure in the British press/---

The exposure in the British press of the poverty wages paid by British Companies operating in South Africa, resulted in the appointment of a British Parliamentary Commission to enquire into the position. There has been some heartsearching among employers as a result of the strikes, with regard to wages, lack of communication and lack of training. It is sad but true that wage increases for black workers have not matched the increases given to white workers and in many cases the gap has been increased.

Sporadic strikes have broken out all over the country and are still continuing. It is imperative that the disparity in the wages between black and white workers be narrowed and that all workers be paid a living wage as soon as possible.

The migrant labour policy is one of the main causes of low wages. There are several very important factors which seem to be disregarded by employers. Firstly it is not the fault of the migrant worker that he has neither education nor training. Secondly, he is forced by law to be a migrant and can never be anything but a migrant. He has to live in bachelor hostels all his working life, while his wife and family eke out an existence in a Bantustan frequently in a resettlement village. He has therefore to try to support his family on his meagre wages and pay his own rent and food in the urban area where he works. Thirdly, he pays income tax, officially he does not pay income tax, but he does pay tax on his income which he must pay when his earnings reach the shamefully low level of R360 per annum. The tax increases as his income rises and he receives no rebates for being a married man with or without children. In addition he pays a general tax of R2,50 a year and in his Bantustan he has to pay hut tax. He pays exactly the same as a white person for food, clothing and household necessities and in the black townships many essentials cost more than they do in town. From this it must be realised that the rising cost of living is a much more serious matter for an African than it is for a white man.

It is true that the migrant worker is often inefficient and his productivity low, but is it surprising when his service contract is for a maximum period of a year, when his living conditions are appalling, when he has no security, no family life, poor feeding and no privacy. All these factors mitigate against efficiency and stability.

The migrant labour policy is evil and indefensible and should be abandoned. It has dehumanised the worker, turned him into a "labour unit" and a serf.

Education and training are an urgent priority. Emphasis in this matter comes from all sections of the population - black and white. The government should abandon Bantu Education and educate all children for an equally productive role in society. Whether or not/^{white}skilled immigrants will continue to come to this country, South Africa has a moral obligation to teach and train her own population. A crash programme is needed in the short term and many industrialists, I am sure, will help. As a first step it would help if the government stopped endorsing out the thousands of teenagers in the urban areas and set up emergency vocational schools to teach them skills.

This July the Bantu Administration

This July the Bantu Administration Boards took over the administration of African Affairs from the local authorities. A stated object is to give more mobility to labour. The deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education has announced that all legislation affecting Africans is to be simplified. It certainly needs simplification but this will probably entail the final removal of the few remaining loopholes. There is no word of repealing any of the harsh provisions of influx and efflux control or of reintroducing home ownership and freehold tenure. Neither is there any word of allowing the right of all African workers to live with their families in the places where they work. There is no evidence that "endorsements out" are being reduced nor that any of the regulations are being relaxed - quite the opposite, in fact.

The Chief Ministers of the Bantustans are equally disturbed about the "endorsements out". In the already overcrowded Bantustans there is large scale unemployment and poverty and the enforced repatriation of the urban dwellers merely serves to aggravate the situation, causing more misery, more broken families, more malnutrition and more hardship.

Although the apartheid laws and regulations have not changed much over the last year, the attitudes of the Black people have changed as I have demonstrated. They are becoming increasingly bitter and exasperated with the injustices, the discrimination in every sphere ; in employment, education, wages, living conditions and housing. The Blacks are grasping the political initiative while White South Africa seems incapable of moving to bring about radical change.

We turn now to white politics. The most obvious trend appeared to be the government's unwillingness to admit to the failure of its policy and to face the fact that it is futile to persevere with a plan which is unacceptable to the majority of the people it governs.

When Dr. Verwoerd launched the policy of Separate Development he said the fragmentation of South Africa was not what we would have liked ; but it had to be done to reduce the pressures on South Africa from abroad.

In theory separate development was intended to present the moral justification for apartheid. In the event many anomalies have been uncovered and unexpected demands have revealed the shortcomings of the policy. The government's failure to fulfil many of the promises originally given, such as the consolidation of the boundaries and the fact that certain towns like Richard's Bay in Kwa Zulu and Port St. John's in the Transkei have been excluded from their territories has caused disillusionment and bitterness. Dr. Verwoerd led his Party into a cul-de-sac down which it stumbles blindly.

The government finding/-----

The government finding itself in this uneasy situation has three courses of action open to it. To admit defeat and change its policy ; to resign and allow another government to take over, or to rule by force in the face of the increasing anger and frustration of the Black people. The last option is what the government has chosen to do, and in so doing has adopted authoritarian methods and abandoned the democratic principles of government.

Early on in its administration the government realised that it could not implement apartheid without legislation designed to curb extra-parliamentary opposition. Such laws as the Suppression of Communism Act, which provided for the imposition of banning orders without trial, were passed. In the years that followed a mass of apartheid legislation and other laws which abrogate the rule of law were put on the statute book to restrict and silence further, opposition to and criticism of government policy.

During this 25th year of Nationalist rule, in the name of State Security, the government has taken the most undemocratic and despotic action against those who refuse to conform.

The attack on the English-speaking students and NUSAS began some years ago. Last year we had the police assaults on students peacefully demonstrating. This year the government gave us the Schlebusch Commission appointed to investigate four organisations ; The National Union of South African Students, the now defunct University Christian Movement, the Institute of Race Relations and the Christian Institute. All are organisations openly critical of apartheid ; all are working for justice and reconciliation ; all are opposed to racial discrimination ; all are trying to establish contact and goodwill among all racial groups. All the organisations are respected and none of them can rightly be accused of subversion or of being a threat to the security of the State.

Those witnesses who in conscience have refused to give evidence before the Commission regard it as a denial of justice but would be prepared to give evidence to a judicial commission. These members of Schlebusch are party politicians, some of whom have expressed publicly their one-sided opinions of certain or all of the organisations. The work of the Commission is carried out in secret and witnesses are denied the right of their legal advisers to cross examine. This is a travesty of justice. After the publication of its first report the government banned eight student leaders without giving any reasons. What cowardly action to silence criticism.

As I write this Dr. Beyers Naudé has had his passport withdrawn. An undated order to surrender his passport was handed to him at the Airport when he was about to leave for Europe. The fact that Dr. Naudé had failed to notice his passport had expired is beside the point. The news rooms of the world have broadcast the story about a man - a world figure, honoured and admired by all freedom loving people.

How stupid can the govern

How stupid can the government be when the Minister of Finance is at the Annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the Minister of Foreign Affairs is dealing with a delicate situation at the United Nations.

Incidents like these as well as the abrogation of the rule of law, the discrimination and the injustices have caused anxiety and criticism from many Afrikaner intellectuals, academics and businessmen. They are deeply concerned about the inequality of opportunity and the lack of communication and meaningful dialogue. They see the dangers for the future of South Africa and have launched a new movement, Verligte Aksie. Membership of the organisation is open to all South Africans of all races of whatever shade of political opinion. This obviously is a step in the right direction and we wish them well. I do, however wish to stress that the implementation of this government's plan for Separate Development is a sham designed to ensure that White South Africa can make use of Black labour without in any way sharing power, prosperity or privilege. We therefore believe that it is illogical to support Separate Development and oppose the negative and totally evil aspects of what is erroneously called "petty" apartheid. It is also impossible to enforce the policy without abandoning any pretence to govern within the rule of law. For these reasons we cannot see how it is possible to belong to, or vote for the National Party, and at the same time be a member of Verligte Aksie. Separate development is inherently discriminatory.

It is well known that the Black Sash is totally opposed to Apartheid and all that it entails. We oppose the coercion which has been employed to establish the Bantustans. If the policy is to have any moral basis at all there must be consultation and agreement with the governments of these territories. It is common cause that the Bantustan governments are unwilling to accept independence until their territories are consolidated into a cohesive whole and until they are given adequate land, a fair share of the country's resources and access to the sea ports. They must also be given full control over their own affairs.

However we are not convinced that black people, if given a free choice would choose to fragment South Africa. The only alternative is full citizenship for all South Africans.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of white politics over the years has been the failure of the United Party, either to present a positive and understandable policy to the electorate, or to give firm and dynamic opposition in vital matters of principle. Its shilly shallying over authoritarian legislation, its connivance at the erosion of the rule of law, its willingness to serve on the Schlebusch Commission and its tacit acceptance of apartheid with all its inhuman restrictions. have given the government the green light to fill the statute book with legislation which has no place in a democratic society. Now that the Party has been relieved of the burden of Mr. Marais Steyn it may listen to its more dynamic^{young} leaders.

The Progressive Party/---

The Progressive Party with its one remarkable member of Parliament, Dr. Helen Suzman, has provided the only real opposition in Parliament. She fights alone for the rights of sixteen million South Africans, most of whom are unenfranchised. In her twenty years in Parliament she has opposed each and every undemocratic Bill. Her performance has earned for her the reputation of being one of the greatest parliamentarians of the day.

It is unfortunate that the white electorate has guarded its privilege and its material wealth and has closed its eyes to injustice and the need for meaningful change. Its unwillingness to make any sacrifice of its comfort has denied the Progressive Party of the support which its principles deserve.

A new political party is about to be formed. Mr. Gerdener's Democratic Party. It may break the present log jam into which white politics have fallen. We hope it will, but one thing is certain, in our present situation nothing will succeed unless there is consultation and consensus on the policies to be adopted.

We have become used to the Prime Minister's fulminations at Nationalist Party Congresses, but his recent threat to the freedom of the press is ominous. The press is the only institution which gives South Africa's image an air of respectability. Mr. Vorster's excuse for threatening to impose further curbs on the press is that he says it is guilty of incitement to racial hatred. The government should realise that it is thanks to the English-speaking press that any element of goodwill still exists; that the press is an outlet for Black people to voice their frustrations and grievances and that the press is the one institution which practises the government's stated policy of dialogue. If it were not for the press the lack of communication would be even greater than it is.

Dr. Diedrichs^e did not do himself or the country any good when in Nairobi he publicly attacked the South African Press. Nor did Dr. Paul van der Merwe help matters when on a tour in Europe, he accused sectors of the press of printing "downright lies, liable to incite racial hatred".

If incitement to racial hatred is the Prime Minister's worry it would be more appropriate to censor the actions and utterances of his Cabinet and members of his Party. The use of such phrases as "superfluous appendages", "labour units" "immigrant scum" are certainly incitement to racial hatred, not to mention the campaign of Boeréhaat, revived last year by the Minister of Defence during a by-election campaign. More importantly the whole apartheid policy is incitement to racial hatred.

Another threat hanging over/---

Another threat hanging over our heads in the near future is legislation which will effectively silence our universities. The only comment one can make is "Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad".

The time has come for a change and all of us who fear for the future of South Africa must stand together to oppose the forces of despotism.

The Black Sash has for the last eighteen years protested against injustice, racial discrimination and the erosion of the rule of law. It will continue to do so. It will continue to fight for a change of heart and a change of policy. It will continue to expose the facts and the effects of apartheid on black people. It will continue to try to create goodwill and understanding among all South Africans.

We shall look for new ideas and ways and means to meet the new challenges of our day. As Chief Buthelezi has said "The ball is in White South Africa's court and it is up to white leadership to save us all from a confrontation that is bound to destroy all of us, and whose aftermath is too terrible to imagine".

JEAN SINCLAIR.
NATIONAL PRESIDENT.

CONFERENCE 1973.