

**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ASPECTS OF THE  
BLACK SASH, 1955 – 2001**

**EILEEN BENJAMIN**

**THESIS PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTERS DEGREE IN HISTORY  
AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH**

**PROMOTOR: PROF. ALBERT GRUNDLINGH**

**CO-PROMOTOR: DR. SANDRA SWART**

**DECEMBER 2004**

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any University for a degree.

  
Signature

  
Date



## SUMMARY

In this research the early development of the Black Sash is briefly explored, together with how it altered over time. Changes in the internal structures and its effect on the membership are benchmarked, together with the reasons and reasoning that compelled the organization to undertake a complete restructuring. An in-depth study is made of the disorientation brought about by the collapse of apartheid. Particular attention is paid to the resistance to, and ultimate acceptance of, the inevitability of offering a professionalized service.

Attention is focused on the relationship between the Black Sash as a white women's protest movement and the wider white community, content in the main to support apartheid. The degree to which the Black Sash was accepted by the black community as an equal partner in the struggle for a democratic South Africa is discussed and the criteria by which the organization has been evaluated. In addition, liberalism, per se, is evaluated from a "grassroots" perspective.

From 1973, socio-economic developments in the wider society saw many Black Sash members returning to the workplace. This left them with little or no time to offer the organization during formal working hours. In order for the work to continue, paid staff had to be employed to augment the volunteer component. During the 1986 States of Emergency, members of banned organizations joined the Black Sash, and it became an amalgam of different views, generations and political opinion. This represented a significant ontological shift and altered its character in the eyes of the public, but also created internal fissures.

The focus of this research is on the response of the Black Sash and its membership to the changing environment in which it was forced to function. By the 1980s, members were finding it difficult to relate to the new protest movements that were rapidly gaining black support and the black on black

violence. Ultimately, except for its service arm, namely the advice offices, it emerged as an organization in limbo, appealing neither to the white minority nor the black majority. Women from other race groups, whose membership would have corrected the demographic imbalance, were reluctant to join a predominantly white organization with a tangible camaraderie, built up over the years as a result of members' shared backgrounds and experiences. This threatened its effectiveness as an advocacy group, and access to the funding that was a vital element in its survival. Structural changes offered the only solution.

One of the intentions of this research is to draw attention to the reinvented Black Sash Trust. As a multi-racial, multi-gender, professionalized NGO, managed and staffed by salaried personnel of all age groups, with minimal white volunteer input, it has replaced the two-tiered membership based structure, with a semi-professional service arm. Having redefined its role and as the end product of slow, almost imperceptible but unavoidable innovations over time, it is developing its own identity, which encompasses much of the original Black Sash ethos.

## OPSOMMING

In hierdie navorsingsprojek word die vroeë ontwikkeling van die Black Sash kortliks ondersoek, asook hoe dit mettertyd verander het. Veranderinge in die interne strukture en die invloed daarvan op lidmaatskap word aangedui, sowel as die faktore en denke wat meegebring het dat die organisasie 'n totale herstrukturering ondergaan het. 'n Indiepte-studie van die verwarring wat deur die beëindiging van apartheid teweeggebring is, word gedoen. Spesifieke aandag word gewy aan die weerstand teen en uiteindelijke aanvaarding van die onvermydelikheid van professionele dienslewering.

Die aandag word gefokus op die verhouding tussen die Black Sash as 'n protesbeweging van blanke vroue en die breër blanke gemeenskap wat hoofsaaklik apartheid ondersteun het. Die mate waarin die Black Sash deur die swart gemeenskap as gelyke vennoot in die stryd vir 'n demokratiese Suid-Afrika aanvaar is, word bespreek, asook die kriteria waarvolgens die organisasie geëvalueer is. Daarbenewens word liberalisme *per se* geëvalueer vanuit 'n grondvlak-perspektief ("grassroots perspective").

Vanweë sosio-ekonomiese ontwikkelinge het baie lede van die Black Sash vanaf 1973 na die beroepslewe teruggekeer. Die het vir hulle min of geen tyd gelaat om die organisasie gedurende formele werksure van diens te wees. Besoldigde personeel is gevolglik aangestel om die vrywillige komponent te versterk. Tydens die Noodtoestande van 1986 het die lede van verbanne organisasies hulle by die Black Sash geskaar, wat 'n samevoeging van verskillende standpunte, generasies en politieke sieningswyses meegebring het. Dit het 'n betekenisvolle ontologiese verskuiwing verteenwoordig, wat die karakter van die organisasie in die oë van die publiek verander het, maar ook interne breuke veroorsaak het.

Die fokus van hierdie navorsing val op die reaksie van die Black Sash op die veranderende omgewing waarin dit gedwing is om te funksioneer. Gedurende die Tagtigerjare het lede dit toenemend moeilik gevind om aan te pas by die nuwe protesbewegings wat snelle swart steun gewen het. Die swart-teen-swart geweld het verder tot die probleem bygedra. Met die uitsondering van die diensfunksie, die advieskantore, het die Black Sash uiteindelik 'n randorganisasie geword wat nie 'n aantrekkingskrag vir die wit minderheid of vir die swart meerderheid gehad het nie. Vroue van ander rasse-groepe, wie se lidmaatskap die demografiese wanbalans sou kon regstel, was huiwerig om by 'n oorwegend blanke organisasie aan te sluit wie se kameraderie oor jare gebou is op die lede se gemeenskaplike agtergrond en ervarings. Die effektiwiteit van die Black Sash as 'n voorspraak-organisasie is gevolglik bedreig. Verder is toegang tot befondsing, wat noodsaaklik was vir die voortbestaan van die organisasie, ook bedreig. Strukturele veranderinge het nou die enigste moontlike oplossing geword.

Een van die oogmerke van hierdie ondersoek is om die aandag te vestig op die herstigter Black Sash Trust. Dit is 'n veelrassige professionele nie-regeringsorganisasie vir beide geslagte wat bestuur en beman word deur besoldigde personeel van alle ouderdomsgroepe, met minimale vrywillige blanke inset. Die vroeëre dubbelvlak-lidmaatskapstruktuur is vervang en 'n semi-professionele dienskomponent is daargestel. Die Black Sash Trust het sy rol herdefinieer en is besig om 'n eie identiteit te ontwikkel as eindproduk van 'n langsame, byna onopmerklike, maar onafwendbare proses van vernuwing. Hierdie identiteit omvat veel van die oorspronklike Black Sash-etos.

**To my late husband**

**Kenneth Benjamin**





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I would like to thank Prof. Albert Grundlingh and Dr. Sandra Swart for their guidance and encouragement. Without their help this study would never have been completed. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable input provided me by the External Examiner.

I am more than grateful to my interviewees, who gave so generously of their time, as did the staff of the Black Sash National Office in Cape Town and the Barrack Street advice office, despite their heavy workload.

Both the Black Sash and the Manuscripts and Archives Section of the University of Cape Town steered me towards the historical sources I needed for my research, as did Mrs Hannah Botha of the Afrikaner section of Stellenbosch University library. I would particularly like to thank Marion Cross for assistance with the graphics.

I will always be grateful to Mrs Anna Ackermann of the Catalogue Section of the University of Stellenbosch and her husband Chris, both of whom were a tower of strength when I needed it most. Finally, I would like to mention my family, whose patience was strained to the limit.

Eileen Benjamin

December 2004



## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress.
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organization
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCP	Black Community Programmes
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
COSG	Conscientious Objectors Support Group
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme
IDASA	Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa
IFEE	Independent Forum for Electoral Education
INKATHA	Inkatha yeNkululeko yeSizwe
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
PMG	Parliamentary Monitoring Group
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SAQA	South African Qualifications Association
TRAC	Transvaal Rural Action Committee
UDF	United Democratic Front
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund



<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>
--------------------------

	<b>Page</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1 – 8</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 1.....</b>	 <b>9 – 29</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND</b>	
BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BLACK SASH.....	9
SOURCES CONSULTED .....	22
CONCLUSION .....	28
 <b>CHAPTER 2.....</b>	 <b>30 – 48</b>
<b>SOCIAL PROFILE 1955 UNTIL 1995</b>	
CONCLUSION .....	47
 <b>CHAPTER 3.....</b>	 <b>49 - 62</b>
<b>WHITE PERCEPTION OF THE BLACK SASH</b>	
ATTITUDE OF THE POLICE .....	59
BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES.....	61
CONCLUSION .....	62
 <b>CHAPTER 4.....</b>	 <b>63 – 88</b>
<b>THE ROLE OF THE BLACK SASH WITHIN THE BLACK PROTEST MOVEMENT AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEMISE OF APARTHEID 1983 - 1994</b>	
BLACK PERSPECTIVES.....	64
CONCLUSION .....	88

<b>CHAPTER 5.....</b>	<b>89 – 115</b>
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE 1990 - 1994</b>	
THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE.....	91
FUNDING FOR AND ASSIMILATION OF PAID EMPLOYEES .....	99
CHANGE OF STRATEGY POST 1994.....	106
CONCLUSION.....	114
<b>CHAPTER 6.....</b>	<b>116 – 127</b>
<b>THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS 1995</b>	
CONSULTANT’S EVALUATION.....	117
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	122
CLOSING DOWN OF THE MEMBERSHIP ARM .....	124
CONCLUSION.....	126
<b>CHAPTER 7.....</b>	<b>128 – 145</b>
<b>THE CHANGING ROLE OF SASH MAGAZINE – OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE BLACK SASH</b>	
THE EFFECT OF POLICY DECISIONS .....	129
TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, CAMPAIGNS AND BOOK REVIEWS .....	131
NAME CHANGE AND INTERNAL FRICTION .....	132
CHANGING POLITICAL CLIMATE.....	135
THEMES.....	139
CONSULTANT’S REACTION .....	143
CONCLUSION.....	144
<b>CHAPTER 8.....</b>	<b>146 – 165</b>
<b>ESTABLISHING A NEW IDENTITY AS AN NGO – BLACK SASH TRUST 1995 - 2001</b>	
CHANGING VOLUNTEER PROFILE .....	150
ADVICE SEEKERS AND INTERACTION WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT .....	153
CONCLUSION.....	164

<b>CHAPTER 9.....</b>	<b>166 – 169</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	
<b>APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: CARTOONS .....</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>188 – 198</b>



<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>
-----------------------

	<b>Page</b>
Table 2.1	Membership figures by year for the Western Cape.....38
Table 2.2	Membership figures by branch for the Western Cape.....40
Table 2.3	Wage earning/student members on seven branch executives.....40
Table 2.4	Wage earning/student members of regional council 1987 to 1990.....41
Table 5.1	Membership figures .....110
Table 5.2	New membership figures in the Western Cape.....111

**LIST OF FIGURES**

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 2.1	Membership figures by year for the Western Cape.....39
Figure 5.1	Membership figures .....110
Figure 5.2	New membership figures in the Western Cape.....112

## INTRODUCTION

This research attempts to briefly trace the early development of the organization, whilst unpacking its recent history and exploring how it has changed over time. It builds on previous studies on the Black Sash by extending the time period and also the scope of the enquiry. This study fills a perceived gap in knowledge by documenting the resistance to, and ultimate acceptance of the inevitability of offering a professionalized service. Previous research has concentrated on the period 1955 to 1995, effectively preventing it from addressing this aspect of organizational change. This case study undertakes an in-depth investigation into the reasons and the reasoning that compelled the organization to undertake a complete restructuring.

To date there has been no attempt to analyse the processes that led to the closing down of the volunteer membership-based arm of the organization and the emergence of the professionalized Black Sash Trust as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). This will be compared to the organization in its original structure, namely as a membership group, with advice offices run as a service arm, and staffed chiefly by middle-class white women volunteers.

There has also been no in-depth study of the relationship between this women's protest organization and the wider white community, content in the main to support apartheid. No attempt has been made to show the impact of the whole body of laws dealing with censorship, security and subversion on white public opinion generally and on Black Sash ideas, methods and goals in particular. The attitude of the government towards the organization spilt over into white public opinion, which exposed the membership to constant public criticism.

This research also investigates the reaction of the black protest movements to this white middle-class protest group. It positions the Black Sash within the overall protest movement, in particular from the 1980s onwards, assessing its

relevance to 'the struggle' and how far it was accepted by other protest groups. It has capitalized on the increased inter-cultural, inter-racial contact that is a characteristic of the new South Africa. This has provided an alternative lens through which to reassess South African historiography with regard to the South African struggle for a democratic dispensation.

Works published post-2002<sup>1</sup> reflect this changed scenario, and this is highlighted when juxtaposed alongside invaluable works written on the Black Sash prior to 1990.<sup>2</sup> These were often written by non-South Africans, or from a particular point of view, such as a theological perspective, or in order to put forward a particular criticism of the organization.<sup>3</sup> Other approaches typically focussed on a specific organization and addressed the Black Sash as peripheral to its field of activity.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to 1990, women predominated in the field of Black Sash research, and it is wise to note C. Michelman's comment that researchers tended:

“... to react in (the organization's) favour... because of the ... rudeness, rejection, and hostility from the Nationalists, in general, and from the government, in particular ...”<sup>5</sup>

Chapter headings in Spink's publication, such as “Warriors for Justice”<sup>6</sup> and “Striking a Rock”<sup>7</sup> suggest a degree of partiality, whilst Michelman “... admits to a strong personal sympathy with (the organization's) aims and principles.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Du Preez *Pale Native*, Zebra Press, 2003 and S. Sisulu *Walter and Albertina Sisulu*, David Philip, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> C. Michelman *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism* Oxford University Press, 1975, K. Spink *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, Methuen, 1991, D.M Ackerman “*Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective*” DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990 and A.W. Marx *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> J. Wentzel *The Liberal Slideaway*, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> W. Strydom “*The Political Involvement of Kontak and the Women for Peace: 1976-1990*” MA thesis, Rand Afrikaans University 1997 and KPM Sturman “*The Federation of South African Women and the Black Sash: constraining and contestatory discourses about women in politics, 1954-1958*”, MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> C. Michelman *The Black Sash of South Africa*, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, p.24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.260.

<sup>8</sup> C. Michelman *The Black Sash of South Africa*, p.10.

Previous research has concentrated on the organization's sustained opposition to the apartheid regime and its laws and practices. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in the forward to Kathryn Spink refers to Black Sash members as "heroines",<sup>9</sup> whilst Denise Ackermann quotes *The Christian Science Monitor* of 24 December 1983 that refers to the organization as "the conscience of the (white) nation".<sup>10</sup>

In this research, sources have been used that redress this imbalance.<sup>11</sup> Use has been made of critical views of the Black Sash, such as that offered by an editorial in the S.A. Communist Party's newspaper *New Age*, that suggested the organization was "... wasting its time in attempting to shame the government ..."<sup>12</sup> Friends and even their own husbands also viewed their concern for the black and Coloured communities as hopelessly visionary and a wasted exercise.<sup>13</sup> The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley, whilst commending Black Sash members for their courage, was derisive of their parades, demonstrations and protest stands.<sup>14</sup>

Previously no attempt has been made to document the changes in the internal structures of the Black Sash, or the disorientation brought about by the collapse of apartheid. For Wentzel "By the mid-1980s ... the Black Sash, both philosophically and in its responses to the unrest, was sliding away from its traditional liberal position" which for her amounted to "a sea-change" in the organization.<sup>15</sup> This work therefore delves into an unexplored phase in the history of the organization, during which its value and viability were called into question.

Although this study does not purport to be a 'history from below', use has been made of post 1986 sources that reflect alternative grassroots ontological approaches to the history of the struggle. Advantage has been taken of journal

---

<sup>9</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, p.xi.

<sup>10</sup> D. Ackermann *Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash*, p.162.

<sup>11</sup> A.W. Marx *Lessons of the Struggle*, J. Seekings *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, 2000, David Philip and M. du Preez *Pale Native*.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, p.45.

<sup>13</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, p.60.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>15</sup> J. Wentzel, *Liberal Slideaway*, p.94.

articles written, for example, by those on the receiving end of white paternalism<sup>16</sup> and critiques of the liberal approach to race relations. These examined the dichotomy between liberal theory and practice,<sup>17</sup> and viewed South African liberalism as tainted by the master/servant relationship fostered by apartheid.

South African historiography has tended to compartmentalize and analyse the struggle on the basis of race and gender. The Black Sash was classified as a white women's organization and placed in the same category as, for example, 'Kontak' and 'Women for Peace', and its performance evaluated on this basis. Previously no attempt has been made to juxtapose the organization alongside the black protest movement. The gradual changing dynamics of the Black Sash have only been partially unravelled and the impact of the changing South African political scenario on organizations such as the Black Sash stands in need of detailed treatment.

Authors of two of the major works on the Black Sash had no experience of life under the apartheid regime,<sup>18</sup> although Spink did witness some aspects of the black African reality. But in common with Marx, both were visitors to the country and this would have conditioned the interaction. Seekings<sup>19</sup> was used to counter this tendency, since as a South African he was daily exposed to the subtler aspects of multiracial and multicultural interaction. This provided him with a background against which to monitor developments over time.

Broadly speaking, the object of the research was to monitor the evolving transformation of the Black Sash and its effect on the membership. In addition, diverse opinions have been garnered on the extent to which the organization contributed to the emergence of democracy in South Africa. More specifically it focuses on the internal demographic shift and the extent to which it could identify with the groundswell of protest action set in motion in 1983 by the formation of

---

<sup>16</sup> M. Holo 'Writing for their Rights' in *Agenda* No.46, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> A. du Toit, professor in the political studies department, University of Cape Town, 'The Legacy of Trusteeship: liberal arrogance and the dilemma of the struggle' in *Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55, December 1995.

<sup>18</sup> C. Michelman *The Black Sash of South Africa* and K. Spink *The Beginning of a Bridge*.

<sup>19</sup> J. Seekings *The UDF: 1983-1991*.

the United Democratic Front (UDF).

In essence many black activists had lost faith in the peaceful resistance favoured by this white middle-class women's group. Within this framework an attempt has been made to place in perspective the Black Sash as an organization in limbo, appealing neither to the white minority nor the black majority, with the exception of its service arm, the advice offices. In short, using documentary comment in order to view the organization from the black perspective, an analysis has been undertaken of the Black Sash during a phase of transformation and uncertainty, similar to that being experienced by all South Africans.

Prior to the 1980s, it was customary to view resistance to apartheid as split between organizations such as the Black Sash, the End Conscription Campaign, Kontak, Women for Peace, the South African Council of Churches, the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, within the country, and the banned organizations such as the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and the Azanian People's Organization, in exile. From the 1980s onwards, pressure for change was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the multi-racial UDF. The fact that, when the Black Sash opened its membership to all racial groups in the 1960s, it had failed to attract black women in any appreciable number, now worked against it. By 1990 it was conceded "... our black members are few and ... we are perceived as a white, middle-class organization"<sup>20</sup>

Yet it declined to affiliate to the UDF. Since the organization failed to appreciate the advantage of aligning itself with a national body that could claim to represent a wide spectrum of approaches, its window of opportunity was severely restricted.

Throughout, the struggle was carried out on several different levels. Starting in the 1970s with the Black Consciousness Movement and the Soweto riots, it

---

<sup>20</sup> Conference Working Paper prepared by WIG Natal Coastal Region, dated 25-01-1990. Manuscripts and Archives, BC.668, University of Cape Town, p.3.

progressed through the defiance campaigns of the 1980s and the rising influence of black trade unions, to the final negotiation stage of the 1990s. This research analyses the response of the Black Sash and its membership to the changing environment in which it was forced to function. Attention is drawn to the tactics employed, the impact their contribution had, as one small component of a larger movement, on the evolving scenario and how the membership was perceived by other groups involved in the attainment of human rights and a democratic future for all.

The small number of active members who were involved in the stands and the protest marches, exchanged their pearls and twin-sets for jeans and T-shirts. The remainder were content to attend meetings, join in the stimulating discussions and bask in the camaraderie that was one of the strengths of the organization. Preparations during the run-up to the first democratic elections in 1994 gave the membership a false sense of hope for the future viability of the Black Sash. However, the Executive were fully aware that the tide was turning, and Nell and Shapiro Consulting, c.c., a strategic planning consultancy, was engaged to put forward suggestions with regard to future options. In the face of a dwindling membership, financial uncertainty and low energy levels, the Consultants concluded that the membership arm was unsustainable. At the 1995 Black Sash National Conference this was dissolved, leaving the service arm to be reconstituted as the Black Sash Trust. Volunteers now began to be recruited from all racial and economic spheres, bringing with them different needs and approaches. White volunteers found it difficult to work alongside those for whom C.V. enhancement and training was a top priority and staff that asked for overtime pay. Interpreters were no longer needed, as new recruits to the advice offices were fluent in at least one of the indigenous languages, and, together with the staff, had experienced life in a township under the apartheid system. This served to emphasise how distant former volunteer members were from the constituency they sought to serve.

Aspects of the analysis have been informed by an awareness of how class as well as race surfaced as a divisive element within the overall South African



struggle, threatening solidarity. Attention is also paid to the way in which, when the impetus for change passed predominantly from white into multi-racial hands, it developed a momentum of its own. A similar scenario was being played out within the Black Sash, as the expertise of the black professional staff began to outstrip the hands-on knowledge of the white volunteer management. The result was that in the role of employer, volunteers became little more than 'rubber stampers' of policy decisions put forward to them by the employees.

This created an explosive situation and the friction persisted following the transition to a professionally managed and staffed NGO. Former white volunteers were no longer seen by the new structures as an asset, but as unreliable, privileged individuals who merely took up office space and commandeered limited resources needed by the staff. Ultimately Renee Lewis, a Volunteer Project Leader, was engaged to investigate and offer solutions to the problem.

However, Black Sash delegates formed part of the group that attended the Five Freedoms Forum in Lusaka in 1989, where their contribution to the struggle was acknowledged by Walter Sisulu, member of the African National Congress (ANC), who was elected as its Deputy-President in July 1991.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by a tribute to the organization from the ANC's chief spokesman, Nelson Mandela, in his speech on the steps of the Cape Town City Hall, following his release from detention in February 1990.<sup>22</sup>

In the final analysis, the demographic realities of South African society sounded the death knell for the Black Sash as a white women's organization. The way in which developments unfolded forms the basis of this study. Following a brief overview of the early history of the organization, there is an in-depth study of the organizational changes necessary for it to survive in the altered environment that evolved in the New South Africa. The Black Sash is examined both as an opponent of apartheid and as running counter to white South African opinion for

---

<sup>21</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, pp.280-290.

<sup>22</sup> D. Ackermann, *A Model for White Women's Resistance in Wit Afrikane?*, M. Hofmeyr, K. Kritzing and W. Saayman, (eds), Taurus, 1990, p.31.

most of its existence. The degree to which its *modus operandi* resonated with that of the black resistance movements is also evaluated.

The changing face of *Sash* magazine, an in-house publication, is used as illustrative of the changes taking place, both within the organization and South African society in general. Finally, one of the intentions of this research is to draw attention to the reinvented Black Sash Trust. This is particularly relevant in the New South Africa, since the history of its transformation mirrors in many respects changes taking place in the wider society, as it slowly emerges as more equitable and representative of prevailing demographics. To this end the Black Sash is analysed in its new format as a multi-racial, multi-gender, professionalized NGO, managed and staffed by salaried personnel of all age groups, with minimal white volunteer input. By consulting the Annual Reports of The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust and those of the Black Sash Trust, it was possible to compare the functioning of the organization both as a voluntary membership-based women's organization and a professionalized NGO.

It should be noted that the researcher acknowledges a degree of bias, due to involvement, throughout the period covered, in organizations similar to the Black Sash. Every effort has been made to control this factor.

## CHAPTER 1

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The focus of this case study is on how an organization changed and reinvented itself for a changing society. A limited amount of research has been published on the history of the Black Sash, some sympathetic, as in the case of Kathryn Spink,<sup>23</sup> Cherry Michelman,<sup>24</sup> and Denise Ackermann,<sup>25</sup> some sceptical, viewing the members of the organization as naive and idealistic, as with the publication *New Age*,<sup>26</sup> and others antagonistic. Jill Wentzel's book<sup>27</sup> would fall into this latter category, as she felt that the Black Sash was falling short of the liberal principles upon which it had been founded.<sup>28</sup> Previous opinions were therefore divided with regard to the value and viability of the organization.

### BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BLACK SASH

The Black Sash had its origin in a meeting over tea on 19 May 1955 of six English-speaking Johannesburg women. They were indignant over the proposed enlarging of the Senate to obtain the required majority needed to remove the qualified Coloured voter from the common voters roll. These women, Ruth Foley, Jean Sinclair, Jean Bosazza, Helen Newton Thompson, Tercia Pybus and Elizabeth Maclaren, were to form the nucleus of the Women's Defence of the Constitution League, later to be renamed the Black Sash.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> K. Spink, *The Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen.

<sup>24</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism*, 1975, Oxford University Press.

<sup>25</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective*. DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 1975, p.45.

<sup>27</sup> J. Wentzel, *The Liberal Slideaway*, 1995, South African Institute of Race Relations.

<sup>28</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 1975, pp.9-10.

<sup>29</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.28.

It is possible that their commitment was tinged with self-interest. The Constitution embodied guarantees with regard to the English language, similar to the guaranteed rights of the qualified Coloured voter. It was therefore of concern to English speakers that the sanctity of the Constitution was being violated by the Nationalist Government.<sup>30</sup> Foreign investors were becoming alarmed<sup>31</sup> and economics was high on the list of concerns of the white English-speaking community. In addition, according to a member of the League's Johannesburg regional committee, all civil liberties were now threatened by a government that based its authority on an ideology termed the volkswil (the will of the people).<sup>32</sup> The assault on the Constitution was now seen as the end of "our democratic way of life"<sup>33</sup>.

The Black Sash carried a specific social stamp. Jean Sinclair, later to become the National President of the Black Sash, was one of Kathryn Spink's interviewees for her book *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*. She described her stereotypically as a Scot, full of guts and tenacity. Along with Helen Suzman she was a member of the so-called liberal wing of the Witwatersrand Women's Council of the United Party, and a founder member of the Progressive Party. For the fourteen years of her presidency, the organization benefited from her sheer force of character.

An innately shy person, she had to overcome her fear of public speaking in order to commit herself to the fight. At the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Black Sash, Helen Suzman described her as a person "mostly in a state of burning indignation - only her sense of humour saved her from being a chronic ulcer sufferer".<sup>34</sup>

Her daughter, Sheena Duncan, who succeeded her mother as National President in 1975, maintained that if it had not been for the energy and determination of this "very thoughtful and very determined sort of woman" and a handful of other

<sup>30</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, pp.24-39.

<sup>31</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.29.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>33</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.39.

<sup>34</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, pp.73-74.

original members, the organization might have floundered during the sixties, when it was nearly impossible for even the Black Sash to get anything into the newspapers.<sup>35</sup>

Joyce Harris attended Johannesburg Girls High School and then obtained a degree in Social Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand. Having obtained a post as the first social worker at the then General Hospital in Johannesburg, she proceeded to found the first Social Welfare Department. She later went on to work at the Fordsburg John Grey Community Centre, a project that involved many young people in social work amongst the impoverished.<sup>36</sup>

She spoke of herself as a 'political animal'. Prior to her joining the Orange Grove branch of the Black Sash in 1955 she had been a fairly active member of the United Party. Disillusioned with the party, she found an alternative political home in the Black Sash. Initially she divided her time between the organization and other political interests such as her involvement in the Home and School Council. This was an amalgamation of Parent Teacher Associations in Johannesburg, concerned with the enforcement of Christian National Education and determined to oppose all efforts to prevent Afrikaans children from attending English language medium schools and vice versa.

She worked her way up from Transvaal chairperson to National Vice-President. Although viewing herself as "a backroom girl" she held the post of National president from 1978 to 1982, was a one-time editor of *Sash* magazine and vice-President for many years.<sup>37</sup> The Black Sash valued her as its most gifted 'scribe', a talent she developed through her numerous letters to the Press. The Transvaal Region compiled a bound book of all the material, including the many articles she had published in the name of the Black Sash, and presented it to her on the occasion of her 70th birthday in 1989.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.74.

<sup>36</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1990. Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.31.

<sup>37</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.195.

<sup>38</sup> *Sash*, May 1990, p.31.

Originally the Black Sash was viewed as just another extra-Parliamentary organization that had sprung up within the liberal network. What marked it out from the norm was the fact that it was a women's organization, which the membership was originally convinced endowed it with a kind of female mystical potency.<sup>39</sup> However, Jean Sinclair was conscious that it was repeating the mistake of the short-lived Torch Commando, formed by a group of Second World War ex-servicemen in 1951 to oppose the Separate Representation of Voters Bill, by refusing to co-operate with non-white political organizations. A *New Age* editorial of 6 December 1955 pointed out that this amounted to opposing the Nationalists whilst accepting apartheid.<sup>40</sup> Alan Paton, liberal novelist, author of *Cry the Beloved Country*, and political activist, saw little future for the organization because he doubted that whites would support any group formed to oppose fellow white South Africans. This Lewis Gann, professor of politics at Rhodes University, believed was because they realized that any move to democratise South African society would impact on their privileged position. Should liberty prevail and the "... heavens fall" whites knew that it would fall on them, their family and friends.<sup>41</sup>

The first Advice Office to be opened in 1958 was in Athlone in the Cape Peninsula. It offered free legal advice to Africans experiencing problems with apartheid laws, and was a joint venture between the Black Sash and the Institute of Race Relations.<sup>42</sup>

Initially, according to Ruth Foley, the organization had had no firm plan of action.<sup>43</sup> Women at that time were mostly apolitical, being content to vote in line with their husbands' preferences.<sup>44</sup> But there was a shared feeling that something had to be done, and a conviction that there must be many others experiencing their sense of despair.<sup>45</sup> A committee drew up and published a

---

<sup>39</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.54.

<sup>40</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, pp.41-46.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.8-12.

<sup>43</sup> K. Spink, *the Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.29.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>45</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.33.

manifesto, calling on all women to unite in defence of the Constitution. As a United Party Johannesburg City Councillor, Jean Sinclair organized the collection of the stipulated 500 signatures necessary for a petition to the Mayor of Johannesburg, George Beckett, asking him to call a public meeting. Other organizations followed suit.

On the morning of 25 May 1955, two thousand women assembled at the memorial to the fallen of the Transvaal Scottish regiment and marched to the City Hall. They were preceded by a drummer beating out the rhythm with a muffled drum. There they were joined by some eighteen thousand other citizens, all of whom ratified the resolution 'Withdraw the Senate Act'.<sup>46</sup> Encouraged by their success, the women organized petitions to the Governor-General and the Prime Minister and a cell system, working through telephone committees, resulted in the creation of a national organization. In just ten days, 100,000 signatures were collected for the petition to the Prime Minister. Jean Sinclair and other early members of the League, associated these times with feelings of liberation, hope, upliftment, excitement, fun and endless possibilities.<sup>47</sup>

On 28 June 1955, over a thousand women from cities, towns and villages all over South Africa marched from the centre of Pretoria to the Union Buildings to hand over the petition to the Prime Minister, calling for his resignation. Eighty women took turns to stand in silent vigil for forty-eight hours outside the Union Buildings, sleeping out under army blankets in bitterly cold weather. A substantial crowd turned out to welcome them on their return to Johannesburg. This was the first of many subsequent 'stands' that would be mounted across the country wherever a Cabinet Minister was scheduled to appear.

On 18 July, 1955, four women representing the four corners of the Union, stood in silence inside the entrance to the Union Buildings used by Ministers, wearing the black sash of mourning for the death of the Constitution. The idea of the sash had come from a Bob Connolly cartoon published in the *Rand Daily Mail* in

---

<sup>46</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.30.

<sup>47</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.37.

1955. It depicted the Constitution draped with a black sash, a symbol of death. In November 1955, thousands of women marched through the streets of Johannesburg with a large book draped with a similar sash, over which they mounted a daylong vigil.<sup>48</sup> Originally merely a nickname bestowed on it by the Press, in April 1956 the Women's League for the Defence of the Constitution ultimately adopted Black Sash as its official title at its National Conference in Bloemfontein.<sup>49</sup>

Membership of the organization rose to around 10,000 and on 29 and 30 November 1955 it held its first National Conference in Port Elizabeth. An interim National Executive was elected to organize and correlate the nationwide activity of the League, with Ruth Foley as President and Jean Sinclair as national chairman.<sup>50</sup> Despite Alan Paton's warning of the consequences of failing to work directly with "non-whites", only white speakers were invited to address Black Sash meetings. But at that stage the aim of the League was to alert the ordinary man and woman regarding their civic rights and responsibilities. This meant staying in tune with their intellectual and political convictions,<sup>51</sup> and the original members were convinced that an association with people other than whites would jeopardize the organization's effectiveness with the white population.<sup>52</sup>

According to Jean Sinclair this stand was adopted on the grounds of practicality. In 1955 she herself had held deeply conservative views on the issue of multiracialism, and most of the socially prominent women who lent respectability to the League, would not have joined any organization which involved direct association with the other race groups. The police made it clear that their demonstrations would not be tolerated if they became multiracial. In the eyes of the non-racial protest organizations, however, this was cowardice and hypocrisy.<sup>53</sup> Even she sensed that ultimately this would legislate against the continued existence of the organization. When in October 1963 the Black Sash,

---

<sup>48</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.33.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>51</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, pp.35-42.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.36-42.



after much soul-searching, did open its doors to all women resident in South Africa, the damage had already been done.<sup>54</sup>

Without black membership the organization failed to represent the broader society, a necessity if it aimed to function as an advocacy organization. In 1955, for Donald Molteno, Natives' Representative in Parliament, constitutional lawyer and long-time adviser to the Black Sash, it was inconceivable that this diverse group of upper-class housewives would develop into an organization capable of examining legislation on the basis of substance as well as procedure. But to do this a different framework had to be devised, and this would lose them the sympathy of, and their popularity with the English-speaking community.

The organization's founding members, according to Jean Sinclair, were remarkably naive, basking in the wide and admiring coverage of the English-language Press. The Afrikaans Press was openly hostile, but few of the members had a command of Afrikaans, although initially all Black Sash publications were bilingual and the organization offered Afrikaans lessons to its members.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the country, the League amassed a large reserve of silent protestors, all of whom wore a black sash. They appeared and stood in silent vigil whenever a Minister visited a particular town, attended a function, or came out from the House of Assembly in order to go about his ministerial duties.

Coded messages were sent all over South Africa as ministers left Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg for various parts of the country. A member of the League ran a florist shop in Johannesburg. An order for carnations in Port Elizabeth meant that a particular minister was on his way there. Roses, proteas and a range of other flowers were used to represent different ministers, who would be greeted on arrival with a row of silent women wearing black sashes. Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, chose to use the non-White entrance at the East London Airport rather than face the 'black sash' reception waiting for him at the entrance he should have used. Bob Connolly of the Rand

---

<sup>54</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.58.

<sup>55</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, pp.43-52.

Daily Mail, seized on the comic potential of such incidents. One cartoon showed the rear end of the Minister of Justice, Mr. C R Swart, disappearing over a wall in an undignified scramble to escape the 'black sash' women.

With the opening of Parliament on 13 January 1956, four women maintained a daily vigil outside the Parliamentary building from 0845 to 1715, slow-marching every half-hour down Parliament Street and into Government Avenue. On 9 February 1956, 150 cars holding thousands of women from more than 140 cities, towns and country areas, carried their protest to Cape Town from every part of South Africa. The only men in the convoy were two mechanics who travelled at the rear. They covered 300 miles per day, distributing information along the way. Vigils were held wherever they stopped for the night.

The lead car, a green Morris Minor with the symbolic gold book of the constitution on its roof, finally drove through the centre of Cape Town on 13 February 1956. This was the day on which the new Senate was to meet in joint session with the House of Assembly, to pass a Bill attacking the entrenched clauses of the constitution. The convoy was greeted by thousands of cheering, clapping onlookers, shouting words of encouragement.<sup>56</sup>

During the three readings of the Bill a forty-eight hour vigil was mounted outside Parliament. Members of the League sitting in the public galley had their sashes confiscated by a parliamentary messenger. There were stands by League women outside post offices and other public buildings in other towns and by 200 women on the steps of the Johannesburg City Hall. Eventually, on the final all-night sitting of Parliament on 27-28 February 1956, there was a mass rally of thousands of South Africans all over the country. However, the Bill was passed with eight votes more than the necessary two-thirds majority.<sup>57</sup>

Although the convoy to Cape Town had had no effect on the passage of the Senate Act, the efforts of the women were not unnoticed. As a black African

---

<sup>56</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, pp.33-40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

National Congress (ANC) member pointed out, it was the first time that women in South Africa had taken to protest marching, a form of demonstration traditionally associated with black culture. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley, commended them for their courage, and all this acted as a morale booster.<sup>58</sup> Country branches in the Western Cape doubled their membership, there was increased attendance at Branch meetings and the campaign of stalking Ministers reached a peak.<sup>59</sup>

Jean Sinclair announced, "Whenever a section of our population is threatened with discrimination, injustice or loss of liberty, we shall protest"<sup>60</sup> The organization mounted a protest against the Suppression of Communism Act, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the introduction of Christian National Education in white schools and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 together with all legislation that supported the apartheid system.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless criticism came from the black and multiracial protest groups for the campaigns it did not support, for example a joint protest with the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in 1956 against passes for women.<sup>62</sup> It also refused an invitation from the ANC to join a mass protest against Group Area Removals and even one tendered by the South African Institute of Race Relations with which it had close ties. It was claimed that such activities violated the Black Sash constitution.

At the national convention in October 1958 it was decided that a change of direction was necessary. With so many competing ideas and philosophies held by the membership, it was inevitable that change would be uneven and piecemeal. Clear policy decisions regarding issues suitable for protest only emerged after the 1958 elections. The change of direction that ultimately cast the Black Sash in the role of outspoken opponent of apartheid, resulted in a

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp.41-47.

<sup>59</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.58.

<sup>60</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.48.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>62</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, p.43.

leadership split and a decline in membership.<sup>63</sup> The Central Executive was moved to Cape Town, the seat of pressure for increased interracial co-operation. This branch had long been attending multiracial protest stands and inviting non-white speakers.<sup>64</sup> It had also established a bail fund office, funded by interest free loans from the public, and a legal aid bureau for African women arrested for pass offences. This was staffed by young lawyers and advocates, often completing their articles with local law firms, who were prepared to render their services *pro amico*.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, in the case of serious offences, legal aid was made available through a group of lawyers who were co-operative and sympathetic to Black Sash goals.<sup>66</sup>

However, it was difficult to get Africans to believe that white women earnestly wanted to help them for no financial or political gain, and to persuade the African organizations and societies to contact the Black Sash if any of their women needed bail for pass law offences. It seemed to be out of character and totally different from their experience of white indifference. Gradually, however, despite their inexperience, the advice office workers began to win the confidence of a significant section of the African community.<sup>67</sup> This happened because initially members were dependent on the black volunteers who not only acted as interpreters, but also as a source of knowledge regarding the pass laws. This led to a rapport that fanned out into the wider community once it was apparent that a rewarding relationship had developed between black and white.

Once this hurdle had been overcome, the volume of cases brought to Cape Town's Bail Fund Office, later called the Athlone Advice Office, convinced the Black Sash that it needed to offer a wider service. As a result, advice offices were set up in other major cities around South Africa.<sup>68</sup> As with the Black Sash itself, the scope of activities of the Bail Fund had exceeded original plans.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp.63-70.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp.82-83.

<sup>65</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.66.

<sup>66</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.114.

<sup>67</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, pp.65-67.

<sup>68</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.105.

In 1960 the organization accepted a proposal to remove from its constitution all obstacles to co-operation with non-white groups. This move alienated the conservative wing, which included many of the original members. However, the alienation was not entirely due to the move towards multiracialism. It was also based on opposition to the move away from purely constitutional issues. This innovation also alienated the majority of the white community. As a result financial support from the non-member business sector was drastically curtailed.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, realization that the campaign against the removal of the Coloured Voter had had no effect, led to a further decline in membership. But those who remained embarked on a wider form of protest against white supremacy in all its social, economic and political forms. For forty years, the organization would carry on a sustained campaign of public education, examining the legality and morality of the laws, and the administrative and judicial system.<sup>70</sup>

Once the idea of the organization becoming a mass movement was abandoned, concern over the dwindling membership was no longer an issue. This did however hamper its role as a service organization, aiming to give direct help to Africans affected by complicated apartheid laws. On the other hand, it turned a fair number of Black Sash members into legal experts.<sup>71</sup> It was hoped this would build a bridge of sympathy and understanding, however small, between the country's various racial groups, and this became one of the organization's main objectives.

Members in the Cape and the Transvaal monitored proceedings in the Native Commissioners' Courts. As a result, according to David Viti, a black Court interpreter, the police tended to handle the prisoners differently and the magistrates disposed of cases more carefully. The whole experience was a culture shock for women accustomed, when in trouble, to engaging the help of a

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp.24-39.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp.87-89.

skilful lawyer.<sup>72</sup> But by the end of 1960, few volunteers were prepared to undertake this task,<sup>73</sup> except in the case of so-called political trials where they sat in the public gallery taking notes.<sup>74</sup> But the reports of Court monitors, and contact with the Black community through the advice offices, helped the Black Sash to understand the reality of life for thousands of people, which it then committed itself to exposing.<sup>75</sup>

Jean Sinclair attributed the reluctance to do court monitoring to the fact that all efforts to aid African prisoners generally seemed doomed to failure.<sup>76</sup> In 1986, after the imposition of the Second State of Emergency, even the progressive lawyers in the Western Cape involved in non-pass law cases, felt they were up against impossible odds.<sup>77</sup> However, court monitoring was resumed again in the 1980s following the increased unrest.<sup>78</sup>

In 1968 the Black Sash organized its last petition - against forced removals. Having obtained only 22,000 signatures, it was decided that petitions were no longer an effective means of protest.<sup>79</sup> This also mirrored a change in the attitude of Black Sash members, who now wished to render more direct assistance to those in need. Accordingly, attention was directed towards human rights, and the Black Sash became a service organization undertaking welfare projects, which were now regarded as equally as important as the campaigns. In 1969 it fought the dismantling of the traditional African communities in Cato Manor near Durban and the relocation of established Coloured communities in the Cape, in particular the long established Coloured communities of District Six in Cape Town. Once evictions had taken place, in co-operation with Church and other charitable groups, members provided blankets, food, medical care and other necessities to those displaced from their homes.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, pp.130-134.

<sup>73</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.110.

<sup>74</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.135.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>76</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.110.

<sup>77</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.152.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>80</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, pp.88-94.

However, husbands were afraid for their wives and conscious that challenging accepted social barriers could impact on their position in the business world.<sup>81</sup> Noel Robb spoke of how at dinner parties, Black Sash members would make a point of directing the conversation towards contentious issues around apartheid, in order to force English speaking whites to listen to the effect of the laws on the black population.<sup>82</sup>

The former President of the Pretoria branch, Annica van Gylswyk mentioned that her husband's career suffered.<sup>83</sup> Mary Burton emphasized that, where applicable, if they did not have the support of their husbands, members could not become involved in the organization's activities. All members were forced to examine their attitudes towards multiracialism and the consequences of taking a stand contrary to the South African norm. In the main, Afrikaans- and conservative English-speakers were unable to cope with the focus on racial issues.<sup>84</sup>

The result was a decline in membership and a change of strategy. Ultimately members had to learn, in the words of Jean Sinclair, National President of the Black Sash in 1961, the art of "making friends with failure".<sup>85</sup> This resolve was frequently all that could be relied upon to sustain them throughout the forty years of the organization's existence.

In order to monitor the path to the structural reorientation of the organization, and the philosophical and changing nature and circumstances of the middle-class women who formed the nucleus of the original group, use was made of previous research, augmented by private interviews with people involved in both the original membership arm and the present restructured Black Sash Trust.

---

<sup>81</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.55.

<sup>82</sup> Telephone interview with Noel Robb on 13-07-2003.

<sup>83</sup> Interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylswyk on 14-10-2003.

<sup>84</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 1975, p.63.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

Prominent amongst the previous research was that of C. Michelman's *The Black Sash of South Africa*. This was a rich source of historical data, covering the organization's launch and an overview of its founder members. The book was based on her DPh thesis, which in turn offered additional analytical insights not found in the book. The period covered was 1955 to 1973.

A second useful source was K. Spink's *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*. Unlike Michelman's contribution, this book was not subject to the constraints of academic writing and therefore was partisan. In addition, her interviews were conducted whilst the Black Sash was still a vigorous organization, actively engaged in a fight against apartheid. When interviewed for this study, they had the benefit of hindsight and also were interacting in the New South Africa they had worked towards.

D. Ackerman's DTh thesis, "*Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash*" also added to the pool of knowledge, but it had a theological focus, comparing the praxis of the Black Sash to the relative passivity of the Churches. Its usefulness for this research was the insights it provided into the attitude of not just the Churches, but up until the 1990s, the wider South African society.

These three works therefore were important secondary sources that provided information on the organization prior to its transformation. However, they assessed the Black Sash from a white perspective. Very little attention was paid to black opinion or black aspirations and Michelman in fact acknowledged a perceived partisan bias on the part of white researchers<sup>86</sup>.

J. Wentzel's *The Liberal Slideaway* was relevant to this enquiry since it presaged the fissures developing within the Black Sash once the common enemy of apartheid, which had cemented relationships within the organization, began to crumble. The formerly disadvantaged then began adopting strategies that the

---

<sup>86</sup> C. Michelman *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism*, 1975, p11.



Black Sash was reluctant to condemn, but which were as questionable as those of the apartheid state.

Less prominent amongst the previous research were studies that were either theme orientated or touched on the Black Sash alongside other organizations. These included W. Strydom's MA thesis "*The political involvement of Kontak and the Women for Peace: 1976-1990*",<sup>87</sup> K.P.M Sturman's MA Thesis, "*The Federation of South African Women and the Black Sash: constraining and contestatory discourses about women in politics, 1954-1958*",<sup>88</sup> and Y. Mohammed's "*The Noel Robb papers*",<sup>89</sup> which dealt with her advice office work.

Another Master's thesis was J.E. Thompson's "*Sash and human rights: a content analysis (1976-1990)*".<sup>90</sup> This exposed categorized human rights abuses by the apartheid government in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As such its content was narrowly defined. J.A. Macrobert's MA Thesis, "*Ungadinwa Nangomso – Don't Get Tired Tomorrow: A History of the Black Sash Advice Office in Cape Town. 1958 to 1980*"<sup>91</sup> was restricted in both scope and period. Another narrowly focused study was J.A Mathiane's citation "*Through my window: Black Sash listens and advises the unlearned and destitute*", which appeared in *Family Voice* in November 1978, and was again locked into a specific time period. These theses were mainly used to identify data sources. In addition, there was M. Roger's "*The Black Sash: the story of the South African women's defence of the constitution league, 1956*", which provided insights into the origin of the organization. .

Ackerman's "*The Black Sash: A Model for White Women's Resistance*" in *Wit*

<sup>87</sup> W. Strydom, *The Political Involvement of Kontak and Women for Peace: 1976-1990 Die politieke betrokkenheid van Kontak en Vroue vir Vrede: 1976-1998*, Rand Afrikaans Universiteit, 1997.

<sup>88</sup> KPM Sturman, *The Federation of South African Women and the Black Sash: constraining and contestatory discourses about women in politics, 1954-1958*, University of Cape Town, 1959.

<sup>89</sup> Y. Mohammed, *The Noel Robb papers*, in *Cabo*, Vol., 6, Iss 2, 1995, p.33.

<sup>90</sup> J.E. Thompson, *Sash and human rights: a content analysis (1976-1998)*. University of Natal, 1995.

<sup>91</sup> J.A. Macrobert, '*Ungadinwa Nangomso – Don't Get Tired Tomorrow*': *A History of the Black Sash Advice Office in Cape Town, 1958 to 1980*. University of Cape Town, 1993.

*Afrikane?*<sup>92</sup> highlighted the fact that, although the majority of members of the Black Sash were mostly members of English-speaking churches, they believed that, in order to be effective, they had to operate outside of these structures. The way in which the organization's policies were diametrically opposed to white opinion in general was also analysed. Many of the insights from this article have been used in this research.

J. Seekings' *The UDF: The History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*,<sup>93</sup> whilst having a unidimensional focus, was useful because it traced the shift in the balance of power from the apartheid state to civil society, of which the Black Sash was an integral part. This occurred because of a drastic change in the approach of this sector, which by 1991 had become more militant. The strengthening of civil society had been an important component of Black Sash policy, but this revision of the balance of power had a ripple down effect, which ultimately forced the Black Sash to reconstitute itself into a professionally run Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

In *Lessons of the Struggle*,<sup>94</sup> Marx brought a fresh approach to the emerging New South Africa, evaluating the attitudes of people such as the Sisulus, Patrick 'Terror' Lekota, Publicity Secretary of the United Democratic Front (UDF), Beyers Naudé of the South African Council of Churches, a rebel Afrikaner theologian, and Saths Cooper, one of the national leaders of the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO). It gave an overview of the many organizations that contributed in varying degrees to the demise of apartheid. This brought into sharp contrast the Black Consciousness Movement, for example, that saw the improvement of the self-image as the springboard for change, and the Soweto uprising, which was the result of physical rather than mental confrontation with the State. It also highlighted the fact that, as the black Trade Union movement grew in strength, class surfaced as a factor that threatened the cohesion of the

<sup>92</sup> D. Ackermann, *The Black Sash. A Model for White Women's Resistance* in *Wit Afrikane?* M. Hofmeyr, K. Kritzinger, and W. Saayman (eds), Pretoria: Taurus, 1990.

<sup>93</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*. David Philip: Cape Town, 2000.

<sup>94</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of the Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990*. Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1992.

black resistance movement. This development had repercussions for Black Sash members, since white South Africans were perceived as being at the root of economic exploitation.

The author of *Pale Native*,<sup>95</sup> Max du Preez, was writing as someone living under the new dispensation and experiencing the impact of affirmative action on the white community. This was also the environment in which ex-members of the Black Sash, no longer meeting the challenges provided by the apartheid state, were operating when interviewed for this study. As an Afrikaner himself, du Preez addressed the contradiction within the Afrikaans community between apartheid theory and its implementation at the official and informal level. This book also placed in perspective resistance as personified in the lives of people such as Anton Lubowski, a Namibian advocate and senior functionary of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), Steve Biko, founder of the Black Consciousness Movement and David Webster, a Johannesburg academic, and the peaceful protest mounted by the Black Sash.

*Walter and Albertina Sisulu*<sup>96</sup> by E. Sisulu, opened the eyes of the reader to the sufferings of the families of the activists as well as the activists themselves. Since these were high profile members of South African society, it was easier to identify with their traumas, as opposed to the faceless case studies found in the Black Sash advice office files.

*The UDF: History of the United Democratic Front*, together with *Lessons of Struggle* and *Pale Native*, and *Walter and Albertina Sisulu* provided the format for assessing the viability of the Black Sash in the democratic struggle. *Pale Native* acted as a bridge, since here was a white person who had been exposed to black political opinion through personal contact with black activists, an experience not available to Black Sash members. It could be argued that this rendered him more acceptable to the black community.

---

<sup>95</sup> M du Preez, *Pale Native: Memories of a Renegade Reporter*. Zebra Press: Cape Town, 2003.

<sup>96</sup> S. Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*. David Philip: Cape Town, 2002.

*Sash* magazine, as the mouthpiece of the organization, reflected its concerns and the issues in which the Black Sash was involved. Articles contributed by various experts in a myriad of fields provided an overview of the changes taking place in the wider society. Other articles contributed by non-members mirrored its changing face during the transition period, making it possible to view the organization from an outside perspective.

Journal articles were useful sources of information since they linked the Black Sash to specific areas of debate at various stages of its existence. In *Suid-Afrikaan*<sup>97</sup> for example du Toit offered a jaundiced commentary on the liberal values that formed the theme of Wentzel's *The Liberal Slideaway*. In his eyes, liberals were guilty of double standards in that when Africans displayed initiative, the leaders were portrayed as domineering. However, paternalism, although it displayed all the characteristics associated with domination, was portrayed as charitable concern for a weaker partner.

Writing in *Agenda*<sup>98</sup> in 2000, Mildred Holo, a women's struggle activist and veteran from the 1950s, presented an appraisal of white paternalism from the black perspective. This article stood in stark contrast to the two favourable leading articles in the *Financial Mail*, 'Liberal Democrats' (no byline), and 'Writing it out of her system' (no byline), both written in 1995 on the concept of liberalism per se. Newspaper comment served to confirm that Black Sash projects and protests were seen as newsworthy.

Archival research provided the richest source of data, both formal and informal. Primary sources housed in the Manuscripts and Archives section at the University of Cape Town allowed for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of the Black Sash. This material traced developments within the Black Sash as it underwent an ontological change. It revealed the tensions that developed within the organization following the unbanning of proscribed organizations such as the ANC, Pan African Congress (PAC), and AZAPO, and the release of political

---

<sup>97</sup> *Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55, December 1995, p.24.

<sup>98</sup> *Agenda*, No.46, 2000, p.44.

prisoners from Robben Island, in particular Nelson Mandela. It also charted the significant stages in the emergence of a new identity and field of operation for the organization.

Other primary sources amongst the archival material were personal letters, and internal memoranda, that documented the reactions of both the leaders and the membership to the social and legislative changes that led to the reinvention of the organization. Furthermore, by consulting the Annual Reports of The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust and those of the Black Sash Trust, it was possible to compare the functioning of the organization both as a volunteer membership-based women's organization and a professionalized NGO.

An important secondary source was the final report of Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc,<sup>99</sup> a strategic planning consultancy, a copy of which was made available to me by the Black Sash National Office in Cape Town. This provided the rationale for the closing down of the membership arm, whilst the report of Renee Lewis, a volunteer project leader,<sup>100</sup> outlined the strategies adopted to cope with subsequent problems, as former volunteers struggled to adjust to the new structures and environment and in particular, were required to modify their approach to the paid staff.

Interviews provided anecdotal material and a chance to seek elucidation on issues that needed further explanation. Private interviews were conducted with Mary Burton, Jenny de Tolly, both Black Sash past Presidents and members of the Executive, Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) and a past Vice-President, all of whom were, and continue to be Trustees of the Trusts set up to manage the finances of the Black Sash, and its successor, The Black Sash Trust. Annica van Gylswyk, former President of the Pretoria Branch, was interviewed, along with Hillary Morris, first National Director of the restructured Black Sash Trust, and her successor, Marcella Naidoo.

---

<sup>99</sup> Nell and Shapiro '*The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of the Black Sash*', January/February, 1995.

<sup>100</sup> R. Lewis '*Black Sash Volunteer Project Final Report*', November 1997.

Telephone interviews were conducted with Sylvia Schrive and Candy Malherbe, members of the present Legiwatch Committee, and several other members of the current organization. An e-mail was sent to Sheena Duncan, another past President, and telephone interviews were conducted with Noel Robb, Betty Davenport and Joan Grover, all of whom had been part of the membership arm. Further face-to-face interviews were carried out with Leonie Caroline, Regional Advice Office Director, Nomahlubi Nabe and Viyani Lallie, paralegal caseworkers, and other staff in the Cape Town advice office and Zanele Phanziso and staff in the Black Sash National Office in Cape Town.

An interview guide, using open-ended questions, was employed, see Appendix A. The aim was to collect as much of the available information and opinion as possible. However, since it was necessary to restrict the interviews to approximately an hour, the interview guide was not used in its entirety with each interviewee. Instead questions were selectively posed to those interviewees best placed to answer them.

The aim of the guide was to loosely focus on the area of interest and help the interviewer to examine issues and identify new ideas. The emphasis was on flexibility. In most of the face-to-face interviews a tape recorder was used. Each interview, together with field notes, was transcribed in its entirety shortly afterwards. The data was synthesized and broken down into manageable units, in order to identify regularities and patterns and decide what to use and what to discard.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter followed the development of the Black Sash from its embryonic phase to its change of direction, illustrating that being for something was much easier than being against something. It had been easy to arouse indignation for a relatively short period about an emotive issue such as the Senate Act. To shoulder a long-term battle was a different proposition, particularly when it had to

be fought against a deeply entrenched ideology such as apartheid. Membership figures were adversely affected by this change of policy and members were forced to face up to the fact that their involvement with the Black Sash would impact on their family and friends.

It also reviewed the sources consulted and the methodology used throughout the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### **SOCIAL PROFILE 1955 UNTIL 1995**

This chapter will focus on the fundamental changes that took place within the organization from its inception in 1955 through to 2001 that altered the structure of the Black Sash, precipitating a significant ontological shift. By 1990, demographic changes brought about by socio-economic developments in the wider society meant that the Black Sash emerged as an amalgam of different views, generations and political opinions. This led to fissures within the organization. Between 1993 and 2001 the organization changed from a women's voluntary organization to a professionally run Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

From its inception in 1955 until the 1970s, the Black Sash had been composed of middle-class, white, financially secure, English speaking, mostly middle-aged and married women who had time to spare to devote to what they considered to be worthy causes. Initially these causes were charity focused, but from 1956 members began to turn their attention to political issues. In the 1960s and 1970s the focus of the Black Sash was on the advice office work. Starting slowly in the 1970s, rising inflation brought about by the oil crisis led to a change in the profile of the membership itself and by default the mode of operation adopted by the Black Sash. Economic pressures of an expanding economy also caused the loosening of the application of the apartheid laws, as discussed in Chapter Three.

From 1973, an increasing number of women took up paid employment, either in pursuit of their careers or through financial necessity. They had less free time to engage in campaign work or to spend in the advice offices. To compensate for



this, from 1985 the Black Sash began to slowly take on paid staff. This placed an extra burden on the already over-burdened volunteers and had the greatest impact, both in the short and long term. In the short-term, it altered the organization's *modus operandi* and in the long term it led to the closing-down of the membership arm. "In 1985 the new A/O workers started getting a (small) salary. This happened without deliberation by the committee because we thought Sheena (Duncan) had suggested it (because there was money) and she thought we had, and we just let it happen and left it to the Trust to find the money."<sup>101</sup> Members disliked their new profile as employers. As one source noted, "(We) have limited time (and) have found ourselves frustrated and noncreative in administrative roles and attending meetings rather than doing concrete work in areas we consider valuable".<sup>102</sup> This comment was in tune with other observations, for example, Ackermann who saw this development as challenging the accepted methods of working, namely voluntary service.<sup>103</sup>

Employing paid staff was a groundbreaking decision, which impacted on the whole structure of the organization, but it was never an official one. It was a policy change the organization simply drifted into almost imperceptibly because many Black Sash members themselves had returned to the workplace. Internal correspondence revealed it was recognised that these paid workers were helping the organization to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society.<sup>104</sup> However, it was conceded that structural changes were necessary in order to accommodate their needs and maximise their potential contribution.

The economy functioned as the driving force behind the changing face of the organization.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, for some replacing volunteers by paid staff made

---

<sup>101</sup> National Conference working paper dated 25-01-90 prepared by Wendy Annecke, Black Sash Natal Coastal region. Manuscripts and Archives BC.668 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>103</sup> D. Ackermann, '*Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective.*' DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990, p.225.

<sup>104</sup> '*Black Sash Western Cape and Wage Earning Women.*' Work in Progress Paper, undated, author unnamed, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, BC.1065 B.2.5., p.1.

<sup>105</sup> '*What Resources are Available to Us.*' Letter to members from the National Executive, dated December 1991, Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 Mary Burton Papers B.2.1.4. University of Cape Town, p.2.

no economic sense. “The ratio of workers to money is 1:25,000 (i.e. for every worker we are requesting R25,000). The ratio of volunteer members to costs (rands) is approximately 1:507 (i.e. if we had to fund ourselves each member would have to raise/contribute R507 per year).<sup>106</sup> Members in the Natal Coastal branch also felt guilty because the Black Sash was paying what they believed to be exploitative salaries that were in no way market-related.<sup>107</sup> This was to have repercussions in 1993 when many opportunities were opened up for the black population that appeared highly attractive to the Black Sash paid staff, leading to numerous resignations.<sup>108</sup>

Wendy Annecke, Regional Chairperson, Natal Coastal Region, acknowledged that the branch could now work in areas not previously covered and that there was no turning back. Nevertheless there were misgivings. “Do our results justify the enormous costs? With R1.6 million should we rather be building a school a year (and staffing it with volunteers)?<sup>109</sup> Here we have an example of organic growth that was undermining one of the principles upon which the organization had been built, namely the upliftment of the underprivileged. A fissure had developed between the goals of the organization and its available human resources. Annecke realized this and conceded that insisting on voluntarism would be condemning the “shrunken Sash” to certain death. Furthermore, it denied women the right to earn a salary. Her closing comment that the reluctance to accept money towards the costs of the National Conference was “upper class” nonsense<sup>110</sup> illustrates how sensitive the older members were about remuneration. This issue was addressed at the 1990 National Conference where it was decided to continue along the fund raising route, but attention would be given to improving the process of administration and the channels of

---

<sup>106</sup> National Conference working paper dated 25-01-90 prepared by Wendy Annecke, Black Sash Natal Coastal region, Manuscripts and Archives BC 668 University of Cape Town, p.3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>108</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Annual Report, 1993, p.13.

<sup>109</sup> National Conference working paper dated 25-01-1990, prepared by Wendy Annecke, Black Sash Natal Coastal region. Manuscripts and Archives BC.668. University of Cape Town, p.4.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.5.

communication for financial decision-making.<sup>111</sup>

Amongst the younger working women who were members of the Black Sash during the 1980s were lecturers from the white liberal Universities. They were in a position to rearrange their timetables in order to attend the ever more frequent meetings.<sup>112</sup> Although they had minimal contact with the advice office help-seekers, their input was invaluable in turning the Black Sash into a political pressure group, since they had the knowledge needed to turn the data gathered in the advice offices into concrete legislation proposals.<sup>113</sup>

In 1986, following the imposition of the States of Emergency, some 500 members of banned organizations joined the Black Sash. Between 1986 and 1990, this temporarily increased its membership. The 1987 issue of *Leadership* recorded this change of fortune. Gideon Mendel, a professional photographer commissioned to do a photographic spread for the journal, focused on the *modus operandi* of the Black Sash. In the accompanying text he noted, “Now 30 years after Jean Sinclair started The Women’s Defence of the Constitution League ... (the organization) is enjoying unprecedented popularity. Not only is its membership growing but it is also held in sudden esteem by both black and white, something of a feat in a polarising society”.<sup>114</sup>

The 1980s saw a change in the nature of the issues brought to the attention of the organization. The question of women’s rights came to the fore as members began competing in the marketplace on unequal terms alongside their male counterparts. This brought about a change in the way the organization was viewed both by its members and the wider society. By 1986, it was seen by those who had joined in the wake of the States of Emergency as a vehicle for redressing injustices other than those resulting from apartheid. Issues raised by single parents, divorcees and lesbians challenged formerly accepted mores with

---

<sup>111</sup> National Conference 1990 Report, dated 14-03-90, prepared by Mary Burton, Manuscripts and Archives, BC.668, University of Cape Town, pp.3-4.

<sup>112</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, Methuen, 1991, p.186.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>114</sup> G. Mendel *The Sash in Leadership*, Volume 6, Issue 5, 1987, pp.82-90.

regard to family values, taken as a given by the older, more conservative, members. Spink maintained that numbered amongst this new societal grouping were more militant feminists who feared that any show of emotion would lessen the impact of their protest in a strongly male-dominated society.<sup>115</sup> Older members, who had been accustomed to a less militant approach to male domination, were alienated. This threatened the unified front formerly mounted against the common 'enemy' of apartheid. The impasse had to be handled carefully by the leadership in order to heal the breach. This was achieved through the use of sub-Committees that provided the vehicle for helping older members understand the problems faced by these younger women who were interacting in an environment very different from their own.

The single parents and lesbians who joined the organization in the late 1980s were not easily assimilated. Since membership application forms did not enquire into marital status or sexual preference, the only indication of the number of lesbians amongst the new members is that Jenny de Tolly referred to them as a 'clique'.<sup>116</sup> Amongst the members interviewed by Ackermann for her DTh thesis, only five identified themselves as lesbians.<sup>117</sup> In order to retain these new members, the organization had to refocus its approach to controversial issues.

Formerly all opposition in South Africa had been racially orientated. Now lesbian women hoped that the Black Sash would become a vehicle through which they could publicize their political goals. Members feared that this would cause the organization to lose its identity and be viewed as predominantly a militant feminist group, which the older members believed would generate opposition of a different kind from some sectors of society.<sup>118</sup> The Black Sash, however, was not programmed for such a radical change of direction. Ackermann maintained that this was because the organization did not fully understand the term

---

<sup>115</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, pp.186-187.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250.

<sup>117</sup> D. Ackerman *Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective*, DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990 p.193.

<sup>118</sup> K. Spink *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.249.

'feminism', believing it would detract from its human rights thrust.<sup>119</sup> When interviewed Jenny de Tolly conceded that there were lobby groups, and amongst these the lesbians were a particularly vocal group, that tried to win the organization over to their cause, but none were able to generate the degree of support that would have been necessary to influence overall policy.<sup>120</sup> The concern of the Black Sash was with human rights for all and fighting for individual group rights never formed part of its agenda. The reason why they were allowed a platform was that, as far as the Black Sash was concerned, the choice of a partner was in itself a basic human right.

Judy Baron, a former Black Sash member, also recalled that controversial issues were handled by sub-committees and was of the opinion that new perspectives were needed to maintain the dynamics of the organization.<sup>121</sup> Another former member, Dot Cleminshaw, felt that it had been good for the older members to explore and discuss new issues with a younger group.<sup>122</sup>

In the words of one of Spink's unnamed interviewees, those who were single parents, either from choice or as a result of divorce, had a worldview and experiences that were quite different from those of the older women, whose interaction had mostly been within a dual-parent family structure. These members had no concept of the added responsibilities shouldered by women who were household heads and often the only breadwinner. Jenny de Tolly felt that exposure to other perspectives caused the members to change in subtle ways that had a ripple effect on the Black Sash as a whole. As they were introduced to alternative lifestyles, they gained an understanding of the changing social environment. De Tolly felt that this provided valuable training for the challenges that lay ahead when members would be faced with the many different

---

<sup>119</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis*, DTh thesis, 1990, p.224.

<sup>120</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Jenny de Tolly, past President of the Black Sash on 18-07-2003.

<sup>121</sup> Telephone Interview with Judy Baron, Black Sash member from mid-1970, on 23-07-2003.

<sup>122</sup> Telephone Interview with Dot Cleminshaw, Black Sash member from early 1960's, on 27-07-2003.

viewpoints held, for example, by members of the United Democratic Front.<sup>123</sup>

During the 1986 States of Emergency, the clampdown on the Press motivated women who previously had been apolitical, either because they were working or “the family wouldn’t let them”<sup>124</sup> to attend Black Sash meetings. There they became conversant with socio-political developments. Eventually they, together with the members of the banned organizations, swelled the ranks of the organization, so that between 1986 and 1989 it could claim a membership of 2500 countrywide. By 1993 national membership was down to 1338,<sup>125</sup> by 1995 the figure stood at 1100.<sup>126</sup> It was during these three brief years that University students, as well as lecturers, from the white liberal Universities, who had been members of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) found an outlet for their energies within the organization.<sup>127</sup> As the membership became less homogenous with the influx of mostly younger women, the ambience of the organization changed and so did the pace, since they came with different opinions, political persuasions, beliefs and lifestyles.<sup>128</sup> The leadership noticed this and a determined effort was made both to harness this new source of energy and accommodate its special needs. The Executive acknowledged that, “Black Sash is growing and must therefore change.”<sup>129</sup> These white, English-speaking mostly working women, expected more from the Black Sash than the opportunity to express moral support, receive the magazine and become better informed. Being newly politicised, they challenged the organization’s historical forms and practices,<sup>130</sup> suggesting that it needed to become more politically active.<sup>131</sup> They felt that bureaucratic administration hampered a rapid response to political

---

<sup>123</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.250.

<sup>124</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton on, past President of the Black Sash, 23-07-2003.

<sup>125</sup> ‘*Critical Choices Facing the Black Sash in 1994*’, undated, Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>126</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, ‘*The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash*’, January/February 1995.p.30.

<sup>127</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.248.

<sup>128</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis*, DTh thesis, 1990, p.221.

<sup>129</sup> Work in Progress Paper ‘*Black Sash Western Cape Region and Wage-Earning Women*’ – undated- unnamed author - Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 University of Cape Town p.1.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>131</sup> D. Ackermann *Liberating Praxis*, DTh thesis, 1990, p.249.

events.<sup>132</sup> Between 1983 and 1990, members, even some from the older age group, began exchanging their twin sets and pearls for T-shirts and jeans – a clear indication that structural changes were taking place.<sup>133</sup>

From 1986 liberalism came face to face with Marxism and middle-class women who, according to Jill Wentzell, author of the book *The Liberal Slideaway*, were “ladies in pearls who kept their houses neat and tidy and gave dinner parties”,<sup>134</sup> and were easily bullied “by the Left” into abandoning their liberal principles,<sup>135</sup> were subjected to the language of the class war. Now dogma replaced discussion and again, according to Jill Wentzel, these young radicals were introducing the members to a rhetoric they did not really comprehend. They were intent on ushering in the socialist millennium and felt threatened by the concept of gradual, piecemeal evolutionary change. For them capitalism was synonymous with apartheid, and liberalism was regarded as a white middle-class doctrine directed towards staving off the revolution and protecting property rights.<sup>136</sup> But Sheena Duncan, the then National President, maintained that once part of the Black Sash these young Marxists rapidly ceased to be radical. Grassroot contacts convinced them that their doctrinaire theories about society did not match up with the wishes of the people.<sup>137</sup>

From 1990, many of these new members chose to rejoin the mainstream protest movements once they were no longer proscribed. Nevertheless during their brief membership these younger women introduced the organization to a different vocabulary, addressing each other as ‘comrade’ and openly acknowledging their commitment to the African National Congress.<sup>138</sup> This challenged the

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>133</sup> Anniversary Supplement to *Sash*, May 1995, ‘*Black Sash 1955-1995*’, p.4.

<sup>134</sup> K. Spink *Beginning of a Bridge* 1991, Methuen, p.190.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted by K. Owen, former editor of the *Sunday Times*, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* L. Husemeyer (ed.), 1997, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.102.

<sup>136</sup> D. Welsh, political consultant and writer, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997. L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.62.

<sup>137</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.214.

<sup>138</sup> ‘*Citizens and Comrades Under the Law*’ Presidential Address by Mary Burton, Black Sash National Conference 13-14 May 1995, undated, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, BC.668, p.4.

organization's claim to being apolitical. They had a style of protest that was foreign to many of the older members, for example the use of boycotts.<sup>139</sup> These were accompanied by varying degrees of coercion, justified on the premise that, just as whites were coerced into joining the South African Defence Force (SADF), blacks had to be pressured into joining this different form of protest. This posed a problem for the Black Sash, since it opposed conscription. This committed it, by default, to opposing this new form of duress.<sup>140</sup>

Conscience lay at the root of the argument used by the Black Sash in the 1980s with regard to taking a stand against military service. Here, however, the issue was not clear-cut, since those who refused to be conscripted risked being sentenced to six years imprisonment. Eventually it was decided to lend support to the End Conscription Campaign, a co-operative grouping of some eighteen organizations, committed to caring for the young men who had gone to detention barracks or prison because in conscience they could not obey their call-up.<sup>141</sup>

It is useful to view membership figures for the Western Cape, as a reflection, according to Mary Burton, of the trend nationwide.<sup>142</sup>

**Table 2.1: Membership figures for the Western Cape**

1980	858
1989	712
1991	399
1992	435
1993	433
1994	172
1995	78

<sup>139</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, David Philip, 2000, p.161.

<sup>140</sup> J. Wentzel *The Liberal Slideaway*, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1995, p.119.

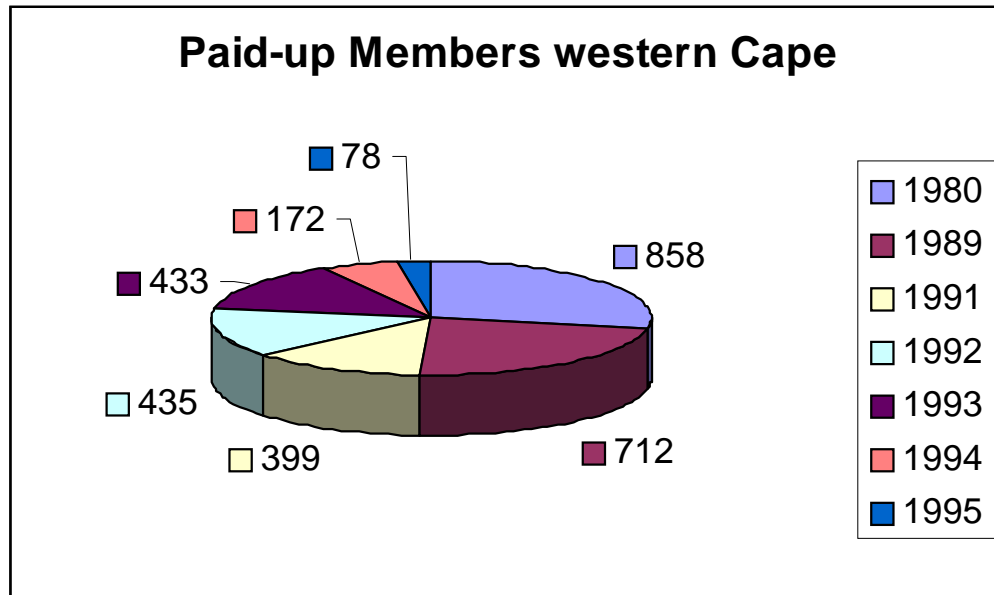
<sup>141</sup> K Spink *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.220.

<sup>142</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton, past Black Sash President on 23-07-2003.



For ease of reference this is illustrated in graphic form below:

**Figure 2.1: Membership figures for the Western Cape**



In the Western Cape a breakdown was compiled of the number of members in each branch and the percentage that were either wage earning or students.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Work in Progress Paper – ‘*Black Sash Western Cape Region and Wage-Earning Women*’ undated, unnamed author - Manuscripts and Archives, BC.1065, University of Cape Town, p.2.

**Table 2.2: Membership figures for the Western Cape**

	Plumstead		Wynburg		FalseBay		Gordonsbay Seapoint		Claremont	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<b>Total membership</b>	99	45,5	65	-	59	49.2	46	71.7	82	64.8
<b>Non-active members</b>	40	22.5	23	-	17	41.2	00		28	57.1
<b>Minimal interest</b>	25	50.0	09	11.1	11	45.5	11	45.5	17	41.2
<b>Some interest</b>	14	50.0	17	76.5	07	71.4	13	69.2	09	87.5
<b>Active members</b>	20	70.0	16	37.5	24	41.7	22	100.0	28	85.7

Column 1 indicates the actual number, whereas column 2 shows the percentage of wage-earning/student women contained in column 1.

From the table it can be seen that out of a total of 351 members (about half Western Cape's membership)

- At least 57.8% are wage-earning women/students;
- Of these, 107 (about 40.3%) are not really active;
- 73 (45.5%) show minimal interest in the work;
- 59 (70.9%) show some interest;
- 110 (67%) are active at either branch, regional or other level.

**Table 2.3: Wage earning/student members on seven branch executives**

<b>Branch</b>	<b>Wage-earning</b>	<b>Non-wage-earning</b>
False Bay	0	4
Constantia/Plumstead	6	1
Wynberg	3	3
Claremont	0	0
Rondebosch	5	5
Rosebank	7	3
Sea Point/Gardens	6	6
Somerset West	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>

These figures show that 55% of the branch executives are wage-earning women and that these members were willing to participate within the branch structures.

**Table 2.4: Wage-earning/student members of regional council 1987 to 1990**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Wage-earning</b>	<b>Non-wage-earning</b>
1987	5	19
1988	7	19
1989	9	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>56</b>
1990	6	8

The 1990 figures are incomplete since branch representatives on Regional Council were not included.

For 1987-1989 only 27% of wage earning women were willing/able to participate in this structure, although it was growing slightly (21% in 1987; 33% in 1989).

This shift towards wage-earning/student membership convinced the leadership that a more focused approach needed to be adopted in order to contain the “ever-increasing” workload. Parameters would be set around the issues with which they would become involved. Concern was also expressed that it appeared that what were termed “high profile members”, namely those working in the advice offices and doing Court monitoring, were the ones being elected to office or being selected as official regional delegates, leaving few openings for new members to rise to such positions. It was suggested that a determined effort should be made to rectify this.<sup>144</sup> This was brought about by natural attrition as younger women, who were part of the transformation taking place in the wider

<sup>144</sup> Work in Progress Paper – ‘*Black Sash Western Cape Region and Wage-Earning Women*’ – undated – unnamed author - Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 University of Cape Town, p.4.

society, moved into key positions within the organization during the 1980s. In fact thirty-year olds were the largest age group in the Natal Coastal Branch.<sup>145</sup>

However members knew that it was very much to their disadvantage that they were perceived as a white, middle-class organization. It remained a relatively closed circle of predominantly white women, a sisterhood with its own culture, into which it was hard to break and which it was difficult to change.<sup>146</sup> There was also a kind of 'clubbiness' of shared background and experiences in the Sash itself, which had prevented the organization from ever seriously recruiting, and made it difficult for outsiders to feel they belonged.<sup>147</sup>

The urgent need to attract black members presented an enormous challenge to the existing members, who clung doggedly to the comfortable, extended family ambience, which enabled them to stay loyal to the Sash even when feeling physically and emotionally drained. They felt comfortable being part of a middle class organization. They interacted with articulate, educated and financially secure women, who were free to engage in constitutional and legislative debate.<sup>148</sup> But members could no longer afford to regard the Black Sash as a kind of exclusive club, entry to which was unofficially sponsored by existing members.<sup>149</sup> There was a tangible reluctance to face up to the consequences of dwindling numbers. One of Marion Shapiro's unnamed interviewees maintained, "It's OK for me if we get very small and just sit in a small group and write booklets - the quality of the membership is more important than the number of members."<sup>150</sup> There was a fear that future members would be drawn from circles other than middle class, a reaction similar to that of the original membership to the inclusion of other racial groups. Members were subconsciously hoping that

---

<sup>145</sup> 'Black Sash – Organization of Women or Women's Organization', prepared by The Women's Issues Group (WIG) Natal Coastal Regional, undated, Manuscripts and Archives BC668 University of Cape Town, p.3.

<sup>146</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash', January/February 1995, pp.29-30.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp.v-vi.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>149</sup> R. Lewis, 'Black Sash Volunteer Project: Final Report', November 1997, p.9.

<sup>150</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward', January/February 1995, p.9.

any membership drive would take into account the ambience of the Black Sash.<sup>151</sup>

Nevertheless an incident occurred in 1993 that clearly showed the impact that the changing social profile was having on the organization. In May a letter from Sheena Duncan, advice office coordinator to April 1993, was published in *Sash* magazine that revisited a controversial issue that had first surfaced in the 1980s. This was the period when abortion was the focus of debate both within the organization and amongst the general public. It was a sensitive issue since it challenged members' religious beliefs.<sup>152</sup> An open vote was called for, which indicated that consensus would be impossible to achieve. Agreement could not even be reached over whether abortion was a Black Sash issue. The majority opinion was that the Black Sash, as a human rights organization, could not afford to avoid the moral and practical dilemmas that abortion presented. It was argued that no women's organization could ignore the restraints on women's claims for reproductive freedom, with which the unqualified right to life conflicted.

Sheena Duncan's letter referred to the plight of women in the Ciskei. Sheena wrote of how her stance had been altered by information given her by a Ciskei doctor, Trudi Thomas, who had firsthand experience of the problems faced by the women in her area. She had spoken of the desperation of married women who were impregnated annually at Christmas time by migrant husbands and left to cope with numerous children, who they were unable to feed and care for, as their own health deteriorated due to the repeated pregnancies.<sup>153</sup> The result was a realization that to outlaw abortion meant that many young black women would die and this was instrumental in swaying opinions. Duncan asked members to reassess their middle-class attitudes and acknowledge that if they did seek an (at the time) illegal abortion, they could probably find a safe medical practitioner to perform it.

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.44.

<sup>152</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, p.249.

<sup>153</sup> *Sash* May 1993, Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., p.51.

Eventually, those who called for the rejection of the concept came to see that someone else was paying the price for their protest.<sup>154</sup> They therefore lent their support to a proposal moved by Sheena Duncan that any right-to-life clause in a Bill of Rights had to be qualified by a proviso that this must not be interpreted to deny a woman the right to choose to have an abortion.<sup>155</sup> Such proposals reflected a growing factionalization, a division along age and religious lines that was far more fragmented than that along racial lines. There was very little defection from one side to the other as attitudes were entrenched. In 1993, a long-standing, middle-class member, who referred to herself as a 'committed Christian' was so strongly opposed to the stance taken on abortion that she felt compelled to resign from the organization.<sup>156</sup>

However, 1993 saw the Black Sash turning its attention to an issue that surmounted all race, class and age barriers, namely the abolition of the death penalty. This was of interest to the public at large. One of the resolutions passed at the 1993 National Conference called for its total abolition on the grounds that it cheapened the value of human life and had no effect on levels of violence.<sup>157</sup> This issue was also addressed at the 1995 National Conference. A Conference Report covering the period September 1994 to April 1995 cited a letter published in *The Citizen* newspaper of 25 October 1994 written by a prisoner who had been on death row for six years, nine months and seven weeks, and whose sentence had ultimately been commuted to life imprisonment. He wrote of how he had experienced "mental torture, anguish and frustration, which not only affects (those awaiting execution) but our loved ones as well."<sup>158</sup> Here the organization had identified one of the issues upon which it could mount a united front, hopefully reinforce its sense of cohesion and allow it to interact with the wider community, in the process boosting its membership.

---

<sup>154</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton, past Black Sash President, on 23-07-2003.

<sup>155</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1993, pp.40-41.

<sup>156</sup> Letter of resignation, dated 04-01-1993 – restricted access – Manuscripts and Archives B2.1.4. University of Cape Town.

<sup>157</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1993, p.28.

<sup>158</sup> Conference Report on Capital Punishment, undated, unnamed author, Manuscripts and Archives, BC.668, University of Cape Town, p.3.

The reasons why people decided to join the Black Sash were many and varied. One new recruit was Maritjie Myburg who formerly had had a poor opinion of the Black Sash. In 1976 she had been a founder member of Kontak, an organization of Afrikaner women attempting inter-racial contact beyond the madam-servant relationship. At that time she had dismissed the Black Sash as a group of militant women, marching or standing with posters. This was understandable, as this was the visible face of the organization. Its involvement with the black communities through the advice offices was less visible because of apartheid. White South Africans had been constantly bombarded with the *swart gevaar* ideology of the National Party, which effectively kept them out of the black areas. Lungi Sisulu Snr., second son of Walter and Albertina Sisulu, remarked on the excitement and fascination of the children at the Crèche opposite the Sisulu home, as on 15 October 1989, they, together with many visitors and foreign journalists, awaited Walter's return after his release from Robben Island. Apart from the police, they had never seen so many white people in one place before.<sup>159</sup> Changing attitudes in the wider society made the Black Sash more accessible and by the 1980s Maritjie Myburg found herself re-evaluating the organization, after which she joined the East London Branch.<sup>160</sup>

The Black Sash also became more attractive to younger professional women such as Aninka Claasens. This in turn altered its public image, but at the same time propelled the organization further along the road towards becoming an NGO. After leaving University she had first tried to address the question of crushing poverty and powerlessness by working in the trade unions. In 1983 the Black Sash launched the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) in order to cope with the increased workload brought about by the serious, explosive issues in distant locations that volunteers could not handle alone. Aninka, together with an administrator and three others were engaged as full-time field workers. She had decided that by working in TRAC she could make a real impact in rural areas, since its policy was to sit down and listen to what the people wanted,

---

<sup>159</sup> S. Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, 2002, David Philip, p.494.

<sup>160</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, p.243.

discuss the feasibility of what they proposed and then connect them with people in Johannesburg who could provide logistical support.<sup>161</sup>

These new recruits were able to build a rapport with older members such as Noel Robb who had had thirty years of practical experience in the advice offices, and Sheena Duncan. In her own words, Sheena found it hard to come to terms with the constant round of “meetings, workshops, conferences, seminars, congresses, sub-committees, working groups, forums, and think-tanks she was asked to diarise in 1994.<sup>162</sup> She also was a person who preferred to be involved in campaigns such as ‘Speak Out on Poverty’ where she could personally interact with those she was trying to help.<sup>163</sup> Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) was another long-standing member who had had personal experience of life as experienced by the black population. The result was that she had “.... changed her mind about how the world worked”.<sup>164</sup> She had joined the Black Sash at the suggestion of her first husband, Brian Bishop, who was a member of the Civil Rights League and the Institute of Race Relations.<sup>165</sup> Annica van Gylswyk, President of the Pretoria branch, had been born in Sweden, a very open society. All these women found it impossible to interact within the constraints of apartheid, which they viewed as bizarre and incomprehensible.

This added to the structural changes that were gaining momentum within the organization at a time when energy levels were low. By 1995 there was no longer a symbiotic relationship between the membership arm and the increasingly professionalized advice offices. Paid employees were mostly younger and better equipped to handle the technological explosion. The declining membership figures meant that there was no longer a pool of potential leaders ready to fill the gap occasioned by natural attrition. Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc were called in to assess the situation. As a result of their recommendations the membership arm was dissolved in May 1995. The hope

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.104-105.

<sup>162</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, p.46.

<sup>163</sup> e-mail interview with Sheena Duncan, past Black Sash President, on 08-08-2003.

<sup>164</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) on 24-07-2003.

<sup>165</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, pp.165-166.



was expressed that former members would be absorbed into the newly formed Black Sash Trust, which would operate as an NGO.

The retention of the name 'Black Sash' by The Black Sash Trust was made conditional on an adherence to the organization's principles. However, it had an ambience vastly different from the now defunct Black Sash. Staff had been recruited with no regard to age, race or gender. New blood, new ideas, new goals and new perspectives meant that it emerged fundamentally reconstituted and reorganized, as it joined the ranks of the already approximately 54,000 other NGOs in South Africa, who in 1994 were estimated to be employing no less than 1.9m of the 12m economically active people in the country.<sup>166</sup>

It soon became apparent that the Black Sash Trust itself was lacking in direction, necessitating the engagement in 1996 of Hillary Morris, an organizational development expert. Under her guidance the NGO cut its ties with the past, a necessary step if it was to operate efficiently in the New South Africa. By the time she left in 2001 this point had been basically reached. This proved to be a further obstacle to the continued involvement of many of the white middle-class English-speaking long-standing members, who had difficulty adjusting to the new scenario.

## CONCLUSION

Between 1955 and 1995 the Black Sash became an amalgam of different views, generations and political standpoints. 1986 can be regarded as the watershed year in which the membership profile was fundamentally changed. This inevitably strained its unity. It counted amongst its members those who felt that the organization could no longer escape adopting feminism as a guiding principle and others who saw it as a threat to established family structures. It contained

---

<sup>166</sup> 'Choices Facing the Black Sash in 1994', undated, unsigned, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, BC.1065 B2.5. The Black Sash (Western Region) Collection, p.1.

intellectuals who felt that issues could be remedied by passive debate and those who wanted to jolt the organization into a more active involvement in the struggle. Some clung to the traditional liberal values of the founding members whilst others adopted the rhetoric of the ANC.<sup>167</sup> Inevitably this changed the ontology of the organization, which was accelerated by the increasing professionalization of the advice offices. After 1995 the Black Sash changed from a women's organization to an NGO, with Mary Honey as its first National Director, succeeded in 1996 by Hillary Morris.

The move towards employing professionally qualified and trained personnel, once started, developed a momentum of its own. As membership figures dropped in the 1990s, the volunteer arm of the organization could no longer undertake the management function. The many Black Sash members who were employed outside the organization had little or no time to offer during formal working hours. There was a need to expand the work, leaving the organization with no option but to employ staff to augment the volunteer component.<sup>168</sup> The newly constituted NGO changed its name to the Black Sash Trust, and members became known as 'associates'.

By 1997 the Black Sash embraced all racial and ethnic groups and counted both men and women amongst its employees – a major reorientation for an organization that had clung to its image as a women's group. Former members, now known as 'associates' were also required to reinvent themselves. A few were flexible enough to see the changes as challenges, acknowledging that if the organization was to survive, it had to carve out a different path. For others the adaptation was too radical.

---

<sup>167</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1993, p.309.

<sup>168</sup> 'Dependency on Fund-Raising and the Changing Nature of Black Sash Membership'. National Conference Working Paper, compiled by Mary Burton for the National Executive, dated 14-03-1990. BC668. Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, p.3.

## CHAPTER 3

### WHITE PERCEPTION OF THE BLACK SASH

This chapter will focus on the interaction with, and the reaction of the white community to, the Black Sash from 1955 through to its dissolution as a membership organization in 1995. At its inception in 1955 it commanded support from the greater proportion of the white community, particularly the English-speaking sector, as attested by the ease with which signatures were collected for the calling of the first public meeting and the 18,000 people who attended it. From the 1960s onwards it was increasingly marginalized. White voters were less anti-government, their worldview having been influenced by the *swart gevaar* government propaganda. At a time when the organization was championing changes that would erode their privileged position in society, electoral results indicated that whites were coming to terms with the State's policy of limiting freedom of expression and multiracialism. The Black Sash remained alienated from white mainstream sentiment throughout the 1970s. By the 1980s the organization was finding it increasingly difficult to relate to the new protest movements that were rapidly gaining black support and the black on black violence. Fluctuating membership figures mirrored the process of dramatic change taking place both within the organization and South African society at large. After 1994 the Black Sash had to renegotiate its relationship with the ANC-led government and the majority of the white community believed the organization had closed down.

Whilst its attention was focused on the blocking of the passing of the Senate Bill, the Black Sash, then the Women's Defence of the Constitution League, was generally in tune with the concerns of at least the English-speaking white electorate, and to a lesser extent the Afrikaans community. However, the strong support for the Nationalist government was made clear by the harassment of

Black Sash stands mainly by the *Nasionale Jeugbond*, the Nationalist youth group. In Bloemfontein in September 1955, the Prime Minister J.G. Strydom, was faced with a picket line of Black Sash women as he arrived for the annual National Party conference. *Jeugbond* members tore off their black sashes and ripped up their posters.<sup>169</sup> When in the early 1960s the organization began to target racial injustice, it rapidly lost support and was subjected to male catcalls, sneers and invectives from both English and Afrikaans-speaking whites.<sup>170</sup> Between 1969 and 1973, whilst the police looked on, members were regularly menaced by gangs of young Afrikaners and pelted with rocks and garbage, and showered with tomatoes, eggs, ink and tennis balls.

By the 1970s, Black Sash activities had also attracted the attention of the State, and they came under police surveillance.<sup>171</sup> Their tenacity in the face of Nationalist supporters' rudeness, rejection and hostility and their determination to carry on with their protest stands despite becoming the focus of government attention, earned them the sympathy of many English-speaking white women.<sup>172</sup> Membership figures, however, show that this did not swell their ranks. Arguably the greatest contribution made by the Black Sash to the struggle in the 1970s was attempting to stir the conscience of white South Africans,<sup>173</sup> the government and the public sector.

That the goals of the organization ran contrary to the mood of the white electorate was demonstrated by the increased majorities of the National Party in the 1958 and 1961 elections, which were a severe blow to the morale of the Sash membership. However it forced the leadership to become more realistic.<sup>174</sup> In 1958, following the death of J.G. Strydom, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd became Prime Minister. He was dedicated even more than Strydom to apartheid and the

---

<sup>169</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.35.

<sup>170</sup> *The Black Sash: the early years* 1992 video presentation co-produced and directed by Black Sash members C. Parker, N. Murphy and D. Ackermann.

<sup>171</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism*, 1975, Oxford University Press, p.189.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

achievement of a republic for South Africa.<sup>175</sup> Now there was little hope in the short-term of a new Parliamentary dispensation. Evasion and compromise therefore became less of an option for the organization.

Whites in general associated the Black Sash with organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC). This was because in 1958 the Athlone advice office was housed in the same premises and when the ANC was banned in 1960, advice office volunteers took over the defence of Africans who had fallen foul of the pass laws.<sup>176</sup> This offering of social and legal aid to prisoners and the accused set the organization on a collision course with white public opinion and white government policy.<sup>177</sup> The Security Police frequently raided the Athlone advice office and the Black Sash volunteers knew that their office telephones were tapped.<sup>178</sup> One interviewee related how on one occasion the phone rang and when she answered, the previous conversation was played back to her, confirming that calls were being monitored and recorded.<sup>179</sup> In 1963 the Port Elizabeth advice office was compelled to close because of harassment. It reopened in 1982 on a once-weekly basis, but when burning tyres were put through the door it was forced to relocate. In 1989 this advice office was completely gutted by fire as the result of an arson attack.<sup>180</sup>

It could be argued that the Black Sash was unintentionally useful to the government, and that is why it was never banned. Tolerance of the organization and the presence of Helen Suzman as a lone Progressive Party member of Parliament were useful tools that proved that South Africa was tolerant of dissent and therefore not an authoritarian state.<sup>181</sup>

Moreover, the government had little to fear from the Black Sash. Policy decisions taken as early as 1956 indicated its resolve to remain strictly within the

---

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>176</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, p.64.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.105.

<sup>178</sup> C. Michelman, *A Study in Liberalism*, 1975, Oxford University Press, p.120.

<sup>179</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Di Oliver on 24-07-2003.

<sup>180</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.164.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.131.

law. This prevented it from mounting a direct challenge since it could be controlled by the introduction of increasingly oppressive legislation. There was never any threat of its becoming a white mass-based organization, and the segment that was actively involved in the stands and as volunteers in the advice offices was less than twenty-five percent of the total membership. As mentioned by one interviewee, “The anti-apartheid and pro-black sympathies of the Black Sash were out of tune with majority white sentiment since it was perceived as leading to the demise of white supremacy and this unnerved the majority of whites.”<sup>182</sup> As a result, throughout much of its existence membership hovered around the 1100 mark, which limited its potential for effective protest.

One of the major attractions of the Black Sash for many white women with a social conscience was that the vast majority of the membership was shielded from the public gaze. The leadership realized that not all its members were prepared to sacrifice career, friends and risk the perceived threat to their own freedom, their commitment going no deeper than treating their servants well.<sup>183</sup> Margaret Legum, an independent consultant on equality issues, admitted that along with her family she was anti-apartheid, had black friends which made her unpopular amongst her white peers, was generous with her time and money, .... But as allies we were weak vessels, lacking the courage to risk prison and torture, but within those limits we were dedicated to supporting change.”<sup>184</sup> For those with a lesser degree of dedication there were opportunities for involvement in a wide range of social activities that satisfied members' needs. There were meetings to be arranged, speakers to be engaged and national conventions, all of which required publicity. Fund raising and garden parties, teas, morning markets and cake sales were held, together with the sale of Black Rose furniture polish, the Black Rose being a symbol of the organization. Flowers were sent to ailing members and tributes written for those who were deceased and there was a volume of correspondence to be handled between the regions.<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> Telephone interview with Noel Robb, member of Legiwatch and former Black Sash member and advice office volunteer on 13-07-2003.

<sup>183</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.19.

<sup>184</sup> M. Legum, independent consultant on equality issues, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*, 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.125.

<sup>185</sup> C. Michelman, *A Case Study in Liberalism*, 1975, Oxford University Press, p.76.

A white South African who went public with his criticism of Black Sash policy in 1971 was professor Lawrence Schlemmer. Writing in the publication *Spro-Cas* under the heading *Towards Social Change* he maintained that the organization was ill advised in concentrating on protest rather than putting forward positive proposals. He was doubtful of the value of conventional forms of protest, contending that they could do as much harm as good. "Highly emotional, morally coloured, biting critical statements or demonstrations of protest .... can often create an impression that South Africa is a more open society than it really is." He also maintained that younger blacks either despised or felt pity for conscience-stricken whites "... who persist in fruitless activity...", and that protest that caused many whites to feel guilty could translate into aggressive, defensive reactions.

Although Black Sash members could not fault his line of argument, they steadfastly held to their belief that protest against racial discrimination and the erosion of the rule of law was the correct path to follow. However, there was a concerted effort to modify their placards so that they also put forward positive proposals.<sup>186</sup>

In general, the organization was careful to avoid direct confrontation with the white government. This sometimes raised objections from white members who felt that the Black Sash was misled in believing that remaining apolitical was the same as being impartial.<sup>187</sup>

However, in 1986 escalating violence and repression led to a severe crackdown by the government on all forms of protest, and the imposition of two States of Emergency. 1986 also saw the Black Sash deviating from its commitment to the rule of law, in terms of which the advice offices had previously explained the laws to people, leaving the choice of whether to abide by them up to the individual advice seeker.<sup>188</sup> At no time were they encouraged to do so by the Black Sash. Now amidst rumours of the use of vigilantes to carry out murders, beatings,

---

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., pp.189-190.

<sup>187</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., pp.6-7.

<sup>188</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, pp.260-261.

petrol-bomb and grenade attacks on the homes of leaders of community organizations that opposed apartheid, in order to spread fear amongst black communities,<sup>189</sup> Sheena Duncan emphasized in her Presidential address that civil disobedience should not be considered whilst the law offered redress. It was a last resort. However, she felt that the South African law no longer offered redress for the many violations of civil liberties and human rights that were part of the laws of the country. This constituted a direct challenge to the government and the change of direction opened up a debate within the organization itself as to whether it was appropriate for people who upheld the concept of the rule of law, to break the law in order to oppose injustice. Eventually it was decided that this revolved around whether the law had had legitimacy conferred upon it by the participation of all its citizenry in its formulation.<sup>190</sup> The turnaround was not universally supported by the membership and by default held the potential for further alienation of white public opinion. Because the May edition of *Sash* magazine contained a full report of Duncan's address, the police confiscated it from the publishers.

In 1989 the South African Council of Churches, armed with a freedom that was not enjoyed by political organizations, declared its support for all those using civil disobedience as a tool to 'force change in South Africa' as a last resort before violence.<sup>191</sup>

The depth of resentment generated by opposition to the government amongst sections of the white population is illustrated by the fact that in 1988 Marietjie Myburgh, editor of the women's section of the *Daily Dispatch*, the East London paper for which Donald Woods had worked, also became the target of white hostility. Woods became involved in activist activity and had to flee the country with his family, but prior to his enforced exile his wife Wendy had been a member of the Black Sash. Marietjie was the young Afrikaans wife of a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and when she opted to join the organization, she

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp.265-267.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p.269.

<sup>191</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton past President of the Black Sash on 23-07-2003.



discovered that her every move was being monitored by a member of the Security Police, who was also a member of her husband's congregation. Suddenly, without any explanation, the congregation stopped coming to Church,<sup>192</sup> a salutary warning of the kind of price a person often had to pay for Black Sash membership. There were exceptions. Being watched was accepted as an inevitable consequence of an association with the Black Sash. But not all white people were antagonistic, as Cherry Fisher discovered in the 1980s. A neighbour told her she had been offered, but had refused to accept, money from the Security Police to keep a watchful eye on the Fishers. This was after Colin Bundy, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town, had given a talk in their home on 'Demystifying the ANC'.<sup>193</sup>

White opposition came from an unexpected direction, namely one of its own members, as a result of demographic changes that had begun in the 1970s, making it increasingly difficult for the government to enforce apartheid laws. In the face of a black population explosion, white population figures had remained static. This had resulted in a shortage of skilled labour. Employers began contravening the law by employing blacks in skilled jobs, and these employees managed to organize themselves into trade unions. They then embarked on illegal strikes. Dismissals were counter-productive since employers then had to retrain new recruits and so they were forced to negotiate, albeit illegally, with illegal black unions.

In addition, there was an influx into urban areas of blacks who were prepared to defy the pass laws and risk going to prison in order to remain in town. Blacks began moving into white areas, and the white authorities found it impossible to keep track of their movements. They were being accepted into white schools and universities and the government opted to turn a blind eye, as this offered relief from the onerous task of providing education for blacks. Added to this was increasing overseas pressure for political reform and all of this threatened the foundations of apartheid.

---

<sup>192</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, pp.162-163.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p.281.

However, in the midst of this loosening of the apartheid grip, an increasing number of anti-apartheid organizations began to regard violence as the only feasible method of resistance. Jill Wentzel, a white Black Sash member, felt that because of its traditional anti-government stance, the organization was reluctant to suggest alternative non-violent options.<sup>194</sup> In 1995 in her book *The Liberal Slideaway* she maintained that the current Black Sash was no longer adhering to the fundamental humanitarian principles of liberalism upon which the organization had been built.<sup>195</sup> Instead it was hiding behind the notion that suffering was justification for reactive violence.<sup>196</sup> She cited numerous examples of members of the black community who had been targeted by black youths because they refused to lend support to their plans for escalating the 'liberation struggle'. Mothers had been made to watch while their sons were burnt to death and told that if they cried they too would be burned as 'enemies of the people'. Those suspected of breaking consumer boycotts by shopping in Johannesburg were made to eat the soap powder or the oil that they had in their possession when they got back to the township. Fourteen-year-old boys carrying petrol bombs prevented children who wanted to go to school from doing so, and leaders of the United Democratic Front (UDF) warned children sitting their matriculation examinations that in school they might have police protection, but at home they would be defenseless.<sup>197</sup> These were clearly examples of a violation of human rights and the failure of the Black Sash to protest against these atrocities was a betrayal of Black Sash principles.

Wentzel berated the organization for its reluctance to react to the 'necklacing' of suspected police informants, convicted by 'People's Courts' of collaborating with the 'oppressor'. The many instances of willful destruction of property belonging to Black local government councilors and black policemen, had been completely ignored by the Black Sash.<sup>198</sup> General Hermann Stadler, head of the South

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp.188-189.

<sup>195</sup> J. Wentzel, *The Liberal Slideaway*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg 1995, pp.53-62.

<sup>196</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.194.

<sup>197</sup> R.W. Johnson, contributor to *The London Review of Books in Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*, 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.) Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.235.

<sup>198</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, pp.200-202.

African Public Relations Department, also commented on the organization's apparent disregard of such behaviour, which reflected badly on its credibility. He publicly asked how women, who did such good work in the black communities, could align themselves with people who carried out such actions. He also felt that the Black Sash tended to listen to only one side of the story, choosing to ignore the realities of policing problems.<sup>199</sup>

Criticizing those whom it had championed for so long required an emotional and intellectual adjustment, which it was not easy to make. For instance the organization preferred to argue that the warring factions in Natal and those who attacked leaders or members of competing groups in situations such as Crossroads "... clearly have no belief that their interests will be served or protected unless they impose their demands by force, and demonstrate that they have the power to do so." It was contended that those who had been disenfranchised for so long, found it impossible to visualize a show of strength through the ballot box.<sup>200</sup> Spink remarked on the strong loyalty to the ANC evident in some but not all sections of the Black Sash, and a marked reluctance to condemn the horrors of necklacing. She also detected a sense of satisfaction with every report of police violence.<sup>201</sup> Wentzel spoke of the "twenty-to-two rule" according to which twenty objections would be voiced against state violence compared to two regarding violence perpetrated by black activists.<sup>202</sup> For R.W. Johnson, writing in *The London Review of Books*, it was more a case of going along with whatever the movement wanted or risk being cast as a friend of apartheid.<sup>203</sup>

However on 24 August 1989, at a public meeting held in an old Methodist Church in Cape Town's Greenmarket Square, Mary Burton as National President,

---

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., pp.21-22.

<sup>200</sup> Open letter to members from the National Executive, dated 15-05-1990. Mary Burton Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, B.2.1.3, p.2.

<sup>201</sup> K. Spink, *The beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.202.

<sup>202</sup> A. du Toit professor in the political studies department, University of Cape Town, 'The Legacy of Trusteeship: liberal arrogance and the dilemma of the struggle' in *Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55, December 1995, p.23.

<sup>203</sup> R.W. Johnson, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.239.

emphatically stated that the Black Sash did not support the aggressive actions, the throwing of stones by angry people, any more than it supported police action that had on occasion led to violence.<sup>204</sup> In an open letter to members dated 15 May 1990, the National Executive clearly stated that the organization deplored and denounced "... the killings (shootings, stabbings, necklacing) and all torture and unjust imprisonment, whether sanctioned by the state or in exiled prison camps - as well as the desperate, destructive warfare which is laying waste to Natal. We try to record, expose and understand them ...".<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, Black Sash members acknowledged that the UDF orchestrated Defiance Campaign could be used as a cover for those who wished for violence.<sup>206</sup>

In the same open letter, the National Executive commented, "We are sometimes attacked for appearing to ignore acts of violence unless these can be laid at the door of the government or its suspected agents and supporters. We do not deny that we see our task as one of defending the rule of law and protecting the rights of the public against incursions by the state. But neither do we deny that we have been horrified over the years by the killings of alleged collaborators and informers. We do not make excuses for such actions. What is of the greatest urgency is finding ways to build peace instead of conflict."<sup>207</sup> This was an intimation of the no-win situation in which the organization found itself. But the Black Sash questioned how the security forces, which had once appeared so powerful, now seemed so ineffective. This clearly indicated to the government that the organization still believed that the legacy of old bureaucratic attitudes and antagonisms lay behind a cold blooded strategy to fan the flames which would allow conflict to explode into warfare.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p.276.

<sup>205</sup> Open letter to members from the National Executive, dated 15-05-1990. Mary Burton Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, B.2.1.4, p.2.

<sup>206</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.276.

<sup>207</sup> Open letter to members from the National Executive dated 15-05-1990. Mary Burton Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, B.2.1.4, p.3.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p.4.

## ATTITUDE OF THE POLICE

In the main, however, although the organization's activities invariably attracted the attention of the white police, the treatment meted out was mild compared to the arrest and detention of leaders of the black protest movements. By 1988, the year in which the UDF was banned, the declared aim of the black protest movements was to 'render the townships ungovernable'.<sup>209</sup> The government recognized the seriousness of the situation and more repressive measures were adopted. Yet the continued existence of the Black Sash was never under threat.

It must have been difficult for the police to deal with a white women's organization with the same degree of force it invariably used on members of black organizations, regardless of gender. Any evidence of police brutality would have attracted media attention. In Western culture women were traditionally seen as the 'weaker sex' in need of protection and that was still perceived as one of the functions of the white SAPS. Although there was an influx of new members in the 1980s of women incensed by the muffling of the media, they were mostly professional women with very little free time to devote to protest. In the main these members were lost to the mainstream protest organizations such as the ANC and PAC once they were unbanned. Another consideration was that by the time the State was really under threat, Black Sash members were no longer young. All these factors would have conditioned police response to Black Sash activities, compounded by the fact that, as the apartheid edifice began to crumble, a sense of insecurity began to creep into government circles.

This is illustrated by an incident that occurred in 1989. During a stand in the Transvaal in support of the UDF defiance campaign, twelve members were arrested, some being threatened and roughly treated, until a lawyer intervened. However, shortly afterwards a senior member of the security police made an extremely conciliatory telephone call, apologizing for any rudeness.<sup>210</sup> On

---

<sup>209</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, David Philip, 2000, p.3.

<sup>210</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1990, p.24.

Thursday, 24 August 1989, twenty-two members of the Cape Western region were arrested for holding a mass stand in Greenmarket Square, following a public meeting addressed by National President, Mary Burton, and other speakers. Police arrived and ordered them to disperse, and when they failed to do so immediately, the posters and banners were confiscated and the standers rounded up. However, they merely had their photographs and fingerprints taken, after which they were released on their own recognizances and the docket forwarded to the Attorney General, but no further action was taken.

The reaction of the Pretoria police on 23 September 1989 was slightly more intense. They surrounded St. Albans Cathedral with razor wire to prevent women, planning to repeat the 1955 march to the Union Buildings, from attending a religious service. As a follow-up, around a thousand Pietermaritzburg women, among them many Black Sash members who had been part of the organizing committee, defiantly made a human chain around the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity and St. Peter's Church. They stood in silence for fifteen minutes, as a symbol of their right of access to places of worship, and to protest against police interference.<sup>211</sup>

In the Pretoria region, security forces targeted members and the security police frequently harassed Mossel Bay fieldworkers in the Southern Cape and three death threats were received.<sup>212</sup> This hostility on the part of the white community and the police was understandable in the face of what appeared to be an intractable situation developing in the country between black and white.

However, autumn 1989 saw a turnaround in government policy. P.W. Botha was no longer at the helm. Negotiations were taking place between the white government and the black protest movements. President de Klerk released eight long-term political prisoners. Peace marches were taking place all over the country, mostly without undue police interference.

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., January 1990, pp.44-45.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., May 1990, p.22.

## BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES

Having begun their activity in 1955 around the assault on the sanctity of the Constitution, perhaps it could be seen as appropriate that in 1992 the Black Sash should again be turning its attention to constitutional matters. Accustomed to mounting a lone vigil in a hostile climate, the twenty-seven Southern Transvaal Black Sash members who arrived at Codesa II were gratified to discover that their banners carried demands that resonated with those of the other protest groups already there. These were the need for greater representation of and participation by women, the necessity of holding elections before a constitution was drawn up, the importance of independent, open media and an abhorrence of detention without trial. They took up their stand alongside groups of other protestors as diverse as traditionally weaponed and attired Zulus, anti-abortionists, trade unionists and religious groups.<sup>213</sup> According to Jenny de Tolly, uppermost in their minds was the thought that their previous stands would have been far more effective and less threatening if these others had turned out then to help them face the missiles and the verbal insults of pedestrians and passing motorists. Only now did they take to the streets when they could assemble in groups anywhere they wished.<sup>214</sup>

At last they were addressing issues with which the wider public, both black and white, could identify. However, de Tolly realized that this significantly reduced the organization's role as a protest group. This blurring of boundaries between racial groups also presented the Black Sash with an unexpected dilemma. Bridge building was very much on the organization's agenda. The problem was deciding with whom it was possible, and more importantly, politic to build them. There seemed to be a case for co-operating with the old regime that was now showing signs of a change in attitude and approach. However, having carefully built up and nurtured contacts with the black community the organization was loath to alienate those black people who now looked to the UDF for leadership.

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., September 1992, p.51.

<sup>214</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded – with Jenny de Tolly, past President of the Black Sash, on 18-07-2003.

To this had to be added the need to forge a relationship with the future leaders whose sympathy would be vital to the future of the organization.

Black Sash members had been the target of so much resentment from the white community that it came as a surprise to read in a leading article in the 19 May 1995 edition of *Financial Mail* that the organization had been “a beacon of hope ... during the dark years of apartheid ...”<sup>215</sup> Equally surprising was the discovery that in the eyes of those for whom they had fought, their white middle-class image, their personal financial security, and their altruism meant that they were classified as an integral part of it. As victors in the struggle, the emerging society had an energy and vision similar to that that had launched the Women's Defence of the Constitution League in 1955. But now a large proportion of the population was convinced that they were capable of fighting their own battles. A combination of these factors would eventually force the restructuring of the Black Sash into an NGO.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the interaction of the Black Sash with the white electorate, young and old, English and Afrikaans-speaking, the white Nationalist government and its white instrument of repression, namely the Security Police. It has monitored the fluctuating reaction of white opinion to the issues addressed by the organization, from its initial attack on the Senate Bill in 1955 through to 1992, when it could define itself as just one protest group with broadly based concerns, alongside a maze of other protestors. In 1994, South Africa was in a state of flux and the Black Sash was no longer as visible as it had been as a minority protest group, running counter to predominant white sentiment. Now as a predominantly white organization it linked up with the white community at large as it attempted to adapt in order to play a meaningful role in the emerging new South Africa.

---

<sup>215</sup> *Financial Mail*, Vol.136 No.7, 19 May 1995, leading article, no byline.



## CHAPTER 4

# **THE ROLE OF THE BLACK SASH WITHIN THE BLACK PROTEST MOVEMENT AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEMISE OF APARTHEID 1983-1994**

This chapter will discuss the degree to which the Black Sash was accepted by the black community as an equal partner in the struggle for a democratic South Africa, and the criteria by which the organization has been evaluated. An attempt will also be made to contrast white and black perceptions of the organization.

The notion that as an apolitical organization it presented less of a threat to the government will be discussed. The Black Sash will be contextualised and viewed as a contemporary of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s, the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s and the Black Trade Unions that were growing in strength throughout this period.

The ideologies of the Black Consciousness Movement, the United Democratic Front and the black Trade Unions were based on race, nation and class respectively. Black Sash members were white, liberal, largely English-speaking, middle-class women, who would not have fitted into the ranks of any of these organizations. It will be argued that in order for a rapport to have developed between the Black Sash and other population groups, there would need to have been clear evidence that members had cut the ties to their liberal, white middle-class roots. In researching these issues use was made of interviews, archival material and secondary material.

## BLACK PERSPECTIVE

As previously discussed, when the Black Sash was launched in the 1950s it was difficult to convince Africans that white women genuinely wanted to help them for no financial or political gain, and to persuade the African organizations and societies to contact the organization if any of their women needed bail for pass law offences. Alan Paton, for example, claimed it was contrary to Black expectations that whites would make common cause with them against fellow whites.<sup>216</sup> Its image was damaged within the Black community by its refusal in 1956 to participate with the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in a joint protest against passes for Black women. The Black Sash was wary of FEDSAW's identification with the Congress Alliance,<sup>217</sup> a multiracial protest group, which embraced Whites, Africans, Coloureds and Indians. Further refusals followed to invitations from the African National Congress (ANC) to join a mass protest against Group Area Removals and even one tendered by the South African Institute of Race Relations with which the organization had close ties. It was contended that such activities violated the Black Sash constitution.<sup>218</sup> As a result, the black and multiracial protest groups doubted the sincerity and depth of commitment of the organization,<sup>219</sup> except to issues it categorized as immoral or unethical.<sup>220</sup>

Throughout its forty-year existence, the Black Sash remained reluctant to affiliate with other organizations. There was a feeling that it would limit its ability to dissent on strategy and policy, about what autonomy/identify could be retained and the manner in which it would be possible to establish and maintain accountability and democratic procedure. In the case of FEDSAW, all regions and members were encouraged to work towards the strengthening of contact and working in close association with its projects and campaigns, so that the "process

<sup>216</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: 1955 to 1969. A Case Study in Liberalism*. PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1971, p.10.

<sup>217</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, pp.56-67.

<sup>218</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism*. 1975, Oxford University Press, p.70.

<sup>219</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: 1955 to 1969*. PhD Thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1971, p.132.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.254-259

of building trust and friendship might become a reality in practice as well as in principle”.<sup>221</sup> However, it can also be seen as a pragmatic attempt to avoid giving the government an excuse for moving against the organization on the grounds of its affiliations.

Many were sceptical of the organization’s commitment. For Denise Ackermann, for example, the founding of the Black Sash could in no way be portrayed as a removal of the barriers separating black from white. Although it did mark a turning point in the political awareness of certain white women, the fact that membership was restricted to white women voters indicated that there was no thought of joining forces with black women against oppressive legislation.<sup>222</sup>

Helen Joseph, (who was a 1956 Treason Trialist,<sup>223</sup> the first activist to be placed under house arrest,<sup>224</sup> and a patron of the UDF<sup>225</sup>), had a brief exposure to the organization when she took part in the 1955 vigil at the Union Buildings. She noted, “I found these women determined and friendly but I knew that some of my friends and I were but cuckoos in this liberal nest, for we were totally identified with the liberation struggle and they were not”.<sup>226</sup> This illustrates the conservative nature of the membership at a time when, prior to the introduction of increasingly repressive laws from the 1960s onwards, dissent was relatively safe.

By its own admission, the Black Sash was viewed by the general public as “a white middle-class organization” or put more succinctly “wealthy, idle, middle-aged meddlers”.<sup>227</sup> This was far removed from the public perception of a black activist. In his recently published book *Pale Native*, Max du Preez observed that as a child growing up in a privileged white community, he lived in a world “... very

<sup>221</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*. 1991, Methuen, p.254.

<sup>222</sup> D. Ackermann, *The Black Sash: A Model for White Women's Resistance*, in *Wit Afrikane?* M. Hofmeyr, K. Kritzinger and W. Saayman (eds) 1990, Taurus, p.22.

<sup>223</sup> S. Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu In Our Lifetime*, 2002, David Philip, p.321

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p.295

<sup>226</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective*, DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990, p.163.

<sup>227</sup> Conference working paper prepared by WIG Natal Coastal Region. Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, BS.669, p.3.

far removed from black people".<sup>228</sup> It is not unreasonable to surmise that it would be obvious to black people that Black Sash members' lifestyles and experiences were different from their own. Consecutive election results from 1958 onwards, which returned the National Party to power with increased majorities, clearly indicated that the majority of white South Africans were content with the dominant pattern of white supremacy and willing to have it maintained, and it was against this background that the Black Sash might conceivably have been judged.<sup>229</sup>

Manipulation was the thrust of the argument of an article in *Agenda* by Mildred Holo, a women's struggle activist. As a black woman she had been interviewed by whites who were in the process of writing about black women's struggles. She viewed this as manipulative, since the white women ended up either obtaining a degree or writing a book, whilst the black woman's life was unchanged.<sup>230</sup> Under the heading *Women Writing for their Rights* she commented, "She always interviews me and every time I go to her house she has more and more pillows and I still live in this hovel."<sup>231</sup> What was felt was needed was guidance so that black people could write their own stories.

However, it could be argued that Black Sash members were a departure from the norm in that they championed racial injustice and that this thrust had appealed to a different calibre of woman as early as 1958,<sup>232</sup> but was more marked in the 1980s.

Laurie Nathan, National Organizer of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was concerned that many activists within his organization relied on the assumption that being white would protect them against harsh state action,<sup>233</sup> an assumption shared by many black activists. The experience of Ian Robertson and Rick

---

<sup>228</sup> M. du Preez, *Pale Native: Memories of a Renegade Reporter*, 2003, Zebra Press, p.62.

<sup>229</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: 1955 to 1969*. PhD thesis, 1971, p.4.

<sup>230</sup> M. Holo, *Writing for their Rights* in *Agenda*, No.46, 2000, p.44.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44

<sup>232</sup> C. Michelman, *A Case Study in Liberalism*, 1975, Oxford University Press, p.152.

<sup>233</sup> M.W. Phillips, *The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988: A Study of White Extra-Parliamentary Opposition to Apartheid*. MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2002, p.92.

Turner of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) belied this assumption, but State response to the Black Sash seemed to support it. Arguably, coming from a strongly paternalistic culture, the Nationalist government would have tended to regard the protest of a women's organization as less emotive than, for example, that of a young white male grouping.

Although like the Black Sash, NUSAS was careful always to operate within the law, the government targeted it when it began to join Black Sash protests, circulate petitions and write letters to the press. In 1965 when NUSAS sponsored the visit to South Africa of Senator Robert Kennedy, Ian Robertson, who was to have toured South Africa with Senator Kennedy, was banned for a period of five years. Other leaders were banned, warned, refused passports and had their citizenship revoked.<sup>234</sup>

After the 1976 Soweto uprising, apartheid laws were applied more strictly, narrowing the avenues of action for law-abiding organizations.<sup>235</sup> In the opinion of the Black Sash, the reason for its continued tolerance by the government was that it was perceived as an empty threat.<sup>236</sup> Members were not likely to become involved in activities that would threaten their position in middle-class society. People outside the organization saw its freedom to dissent as indicative of its "toothlessness", since where protest appeared to have impact it was quickly suppressed. Black Sash members were vocal in their rejection of violence, at a time when the overall Black protest movement was growing impatient with the non-violent approach. There was a perception amongst these groupings that as Black Sash members were not the chief victims of apartheid it was easy for them to adopt a milder approach. In addition, many held foreign passports and had ethnic ties in other countries, neither of which was available to Black activists.<sup>237</sup> This made their temerity even less acceptable. According to Michelman, Black Sash members admitted to her that they were not prepared to die for their beliefs, whilst those that did not hold foreign passports lived in fear of having

---

<sup>234</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: 1955 to 1969*. PhD thesis, 1971, pp.18-19.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p.240.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.274-278.

them revoked. Added to this was the fact that not more than a few hundred of the estimated fluctuating memberships of around two thousand were actively involved in the organization's activities,<sup>238</sup> which limited its effectiveness.

Black Sash members were commonly classified as liberals, only prepared to recognize and criticize what was immoral and unethical, avoiding involvement to the degree required of them by the oppressed people.<sup>239</sup> Boris Wilson, a Progressive Party M.P., admitted that liberals did little more for (the victims of injustice) than talk about their plight "... in the cosy confines of our homes, our meeting places and in the Nationalist-controlled political institutions."<sup>240</sup> Here they expressed support for a free market system and individual freedom, all of which seemed irrelevant to poverty-stricken people whose first concern was for food and shelter.<sup>241</sup>

As a white organization the Black Sash was arguably shunned by Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), since it held that liberalism had corrupted black people through religious brainwashing and cultural alienation.<sup>242</sup> The BCM was critical of liberals with their 'black souls in white skins'<sup>243</sup>, and scathing in its comments on liberal whites who claimed to be part of the struggle.<sup>244</sup> Donald Woods who, as sub-editor of the East London *Daily Despatch* newspaper, had been responsible for the publication of the photos of Biko's body that caused shockwaves around the world,<sup>245</sup> was disturbed by this attitude.<sup>246</sup> In the 1980s, his involvement with black activists eventually led to his enforced exile. But the Black Consciousness movement saw a racially exclusive opposition as essential to the psychological liberation of black South Africans, and the black elite were aware that the *Daily Despatch* was owned by the Abe

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., pp.280-282.

<sup>239</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991. Methuen, p.259.

<sup>240</sup> Quoted by A. Sparks, author and journalist, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.6.

<sup>241</sup> K. Owen, former editor of *The Sunday Times*, in *ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>242</sup> I. Mosala in *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>243</sup> A. du Toit, *The legacy of trusteeship: liberal arrogance and the dilemmas of the struggle*, in *Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55 December 1995, pp.21-24

<sup>244</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of the Struggle: South African Internal Opposition 1960-1990*, 1992, Oxford University Press, p.48.

<sup>245</sup> S. Sisulu, *In Our Lifetime*, 2002, David Philip, p.264.

<sup>246</sup> A. du Toit, *Legacy of trusteeship*, in *Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55 December 1995, p.24.

Bailey Trust.<sup>247</sup> Blacks needed to demonstrate, both to themselves and to others, that they were capable of attaining liberation without the help or leadership of whites<sup>248</sup>. According to du Preez, most of the prominent student leaders involved in the 1976 Soweto uprising were followers of the BCM.<sup>249</sup> However, they went beyond the basic ideology, repudiating the movement's rejection of non-violence, and the non-violent option was obviously and visibly supported by the middle-class members of the Black Sash, and was condemned by the student leaders as a middle-class concept.<sup>250</sup>

The Black Community Programmes (BCP), a Black Consciousness service organization launched in 1973, had as its aim encouraging self-sufficiency in order to convince blacks that they could solve their problems on their own, without white involvement.<sup>251</sup> It was emphasized that there was no prospect of whites voluntarily surrendering power except in the face of black self-assertion. White power survived only whilst blacks were prepared to abide by it.<sup>252</sup> These sentiments reflected a growing conviction on the part of black activists that multiracial co-operation was disempowering.

The Black Sash would be equally unacceptable in the eyes of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which from its inception in 1959 was effectively open only to Africans, and had come into existence because Robert Sobukwe and Zeph Mothopeng were not prepared to accept the compromises made by the ANC in order to gain allies across the racial spectrum.<sup>253</sup> This group even rejected the BCM's acceptance of Coloureds and Indians as indigenous peoples on the basis that they also suffered from discrimination. The central focus of the PAC ideology was on an ascribed Africanist identification with the land and a

---

<sup>247</sup> SAFM radio phone-in programme regarding Steve Biko commemorative lectures, 08-09-2004.

<sup>248</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of the Struggle*, 1992, Oxford University Press, p.46

<sup>249</sup> M. du Preez, *Pale Native*, 2003, Zebra Press, p.70.

<sup>250</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: 1992*, Oxford University Press, p.47.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.46-47

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

resistance to "settler colonialism".<sup>254</sup> Black Sash members were visibly descended from settler stock.

The Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), founded in 1977 by amongst others Saths Cooper and Lybon Mabasa stepped into the gap created by the 1977 banning of the Black Consciousness Movement. This group contended that the exclusion of whites from the democratic movement was essential to the maintenance of black "dignity" and "pride"<sup>255</sup>. There was no ambivalence in the remark made by Azapo President, Professor Mosala, at the 1993 Conference, where he maintained that "Liberalism is a powerful tool used by whites to enslave black people."<sup>256</sup> In the eyes of AZAPO, the Black Sash was arguably synonymous with the ruling classes, and their rhetoric made no allowance for people who had rejected their historical ties to oppression.<sup>257</sup>

It is difficult to see how the Black Sash could have fitted in with those who subscribed to the BCM, the PAC and AZAPO ideologies. All these organizations opposed the ANC's non-racial tradition of compromises. Manus Buthelezi, a leading proponent of Black Theology, maintained that there was a need to re-orientate the black identity and sense of self worth. Black people must "... assert that South Africa belongs to (us). Whites can stay, but only on our terms."<sup>258</sup>

Alongside this approach was that of the unions with their emphasis on class interests, worker solidarity and 'bread and butter' issues,<sup>259</sup> with which Black Sash members could sympathize but hardly empathise. For most trade unionists, liberalism had a symbiotic relationship with capitalism and tended to expend too much of its energy on constitutional matters.<sup>260</sup> Throughout the organization's 40-year existence Black Sash members were conscious of the

---

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p.50

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p.89

<sup>256</sup> I. Mosala in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann, Stiftung, p.14.

<sup>257</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1993, Oxford University Press, p.122

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>259</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, 2000, David Philip, p.58.

<sup>260</sup> D. Welsh, political consultant and writer, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*, 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.62.



economic distance that separated them from the people who sought their help. However involved they became in their clients' problems, they had no firsthand exposure to their experiences. Spink summed this up by saying "the anguish of (their) options would be luxuries for most of the black mothers and their children".<sup>261</sup> The gulf that separated the two groups was confirmed when in 1963 the organization opened its membership to all women and there was no influx of black members. An unnamed white Black Sash member interviewed by Denise Ackermann commented, "No self-respecting black person would want to be a member of Sash - it was not born in the struggle, and is probably not as radical as the blacks would want it to be."<sup>262</sup> A second unnamed member identified yet another obstacle to multiracial acceptance when she asked, "Isn't it more a question of class and education than of race?"<sup>263</sup> Both these observations are in line with Libby Husemeyer's comment in the introduction to "*Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*" that in the eyes of black intellectuals, liberals were "hypocritical, arrogant and patronising whites, who refused to get into the trenches during the liberation struggle but want to dictate the shape of post-apartheid South Africa ... . The worst political insult to a black radical is to refer to him as a liberal. It immediately brackets him with the enemy ...."<sup>264</sup> In the opinion of most black people liberalism was associated with wealth and big business,<sup>265</sup> and with those who "... were only prepared to bleed ink through their pens at the height of the struggle."<sup>266</sup>

Vuyani Lallie, a paralegal presently working in the Cape Town advice office, observed that Black Sash office hours were based on a white life-style, suggesting that the organization was out of touch with the circumstances of many of their advice seekers.<sup>267</sup> Mary Burton believed there had always been what she termed "a needle of resentment" amongst thinking black people, who saw the

<sup>261</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.18

<sup>262</sup> D. Ackermann, '*Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective*' DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990, p.193.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p.193

<sup>264</sup> L. Husemeyer, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, pp.xv-xvii.

<sup>265</sup> K. Nyatumba in Ibid., p.26.

<sup>266</sup> Phumsile Mlambo-Ngcuka in *ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>267</sup> Private Interview with Vuyani Lallie, 23-07-2003

organization as a charitable outreach. This was because the Black Sash had throughout most of its existence been run by privileged women, ministering to disadvantaged black communities.<sup>268</sup> In addition, although they were not co-opted by it, members were mostly able to tailor their non-violent resistance within the system.<sup>269</sup> According to Ackermann, Black Sash members made the mistake of equating their experience and reaction with that of all women, failing to take into account race and class barriers. They failed to view their relative freedom of movement and access to finance and information through the eyes of those who they were trying to help<sup>270</sup>. As late as May 1989, Helen Joseph had yet to be convinced of the credibility of the Black Sash. In a subsequent interview with Carla Sutherland, she acknowledged the changes that had taken place in the organization, was appreciative of their hard work and dedication, but still regarded them as "total middle-class capitalists".<sup>271</sup>

In the main, the attitude of black activists towards liberals in general was that they were useful allies (Lenin called them "useful idiots")<sup>272</sup> if only because they consistently generated 'righteous indignation' in the face of state repression.<sup>273</sup> Black Sash branches claimed a degree of autonomy and often mounted a campaign against a particular issue to which they devoted a great deal of energy. During her presidency Jenny de Tolly visited all the branches and sometimes had the feeling that she had walked in on a meeting of another organization because the method of operation was so unique that it barely reflected the overall image of the Black Sash.<sup>274</sup>

Acceptance was probably arbitrary and varying at different stages of the struggle. For example, ultimately AZAPO grudgingly acknowledged the organization as a

<sup>268</sup> Private Interview, - tape-recorded – with Mary Burton on 23-07-2003.

<sup>269</sup> D. Ackermann, *The Black Sash: A Model for White Women's Resistance*, in *Wit Afrikane?* M. Hofmeyer, K. Kritzing and W. Saayman (eds) 1990, Taurus, p.30.

<sup>270</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis*, DTh thesis, 1990, p.30

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163

<sup>272</sup> Quoted in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*, 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.). Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.95.

<sup>273</sup> '*Liberal Democrats: Crucial Role*', leading article in *Financial Mail*, no byline, Vol.136, No.7, 19-05-1995, p.50.

<sup>274</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Jenny de Tolly on 18-07-2003.

'useful resource'<sup>275</sup>, an opinion echoed by FEDSAW and the Community Arts Project.<sup>276</sup> An unnamed spokesman for the Cape Democrats believed that Black Sash members were appreciated by the Mass Democratic Movement for their sincerity, integrity, and willingness to "participate in a very democratic way without pushing themselves"<sup>277</sup>. On the other hand, when Zoli Malindi, a leading Cape Town member of the ANC and subsequently an executive member of the UDF, explained the pass laws to the Black Sash women when they opened the first advice office in Athlone, fellow blacks viewed her as "selling-out" to them.<sup>278</sup>

Andre du Toit, in writing a book review for *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, contended that there was a tendency for white liberals to feel that they had the right, and the ability, to speak out on behalf of 'ordinary blacks', on the assumption that they knew better than the blacks themselves what was in their best interests<sup>279</sup>. The book reviewed by du Toit was Jill Wentzel's *The Liberal Slideaway* and he used it to discuss the concept of trusteeship, to which liberalism clung, but which had been specifically rejected as far back as the 1940s by the Congress Youth League in its Africanist manifesto.<sup>280</sup> The sub-title of his article, namely, "*Liberal Arrogance and the Dilemmas of the Struggle*", expresses the crux of his argument. In examining Wentzel's book he identified "an arrogant moral certainty" with regard to political interventions on behalf of others, more particularly blacks, that coloured interpersonal relationships and prevented them from being fully integrated into the anti-apartheid struggle. Du Toit referred to what to him was an exaggerated claim on page one of her book that the escalation of political violence in the 1980s could have been contained if only liberals, because of their "high credibility" had spoken out against it. This, according to du Toit, assumed a special altruistic congruence between (white) liberals and the interests of ordinary black people, as opposed to what Wentzel termed the political agendas of militant black activists and "fashionable black

<sup>275</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.308

<sup>276</sup> M. Holo, *Writing for their Rights* in *Agenda*, No.46, 200, p.44.

<sup>277</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.308

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.64-65.

<sup>279</sup> A. du Toit *Legacy of Trusteeship: liberal arrogance and the dilemmas of the struggle*, in *Suid-Afrikaan*, December 1995, pp.21-24

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24

leaders”, and Church leaders who chose to remain silent regarding “liberatory violence.”<sup>281</sup> Here he detected what Margaret Legum, writing in *Mail and Guardian*, identified as the “... patronising behaviour (of white liberals who refused) to countenance criticism of themselves, while passing judgment on everybody else.”<sup>282</sup> Blacks were not blind to the fact that it was important for black issues to be aired, but as the victims felt they were in the best position to do so. Dr. Neville Alexander, a Robben Island political prisoner, felt that the greatest danger posed by liberalism was that it claimed “...to speak with the tongue of the people.”<sup>283</sup> Moreover, there was a tendency for whites to cling to the master/servant mode of interaction commonly used with domestic workers in white homes,<sup>284</sup> whilst Bennie Bunsee, parliamentary advisor to the PAC, writing in *The Sowetan*, resented the patronising attitude that led them to shun trying to learn about the culture, history and civilization of the African people.<sup>285</sup>

The arrogance of white liberals was all the more unacceptable because it went unnoticed by the majority of the white community. Liberal superiority could be seen as behind the operation of Black Sash advice offices that acted on behalf of black people, and were ill equipped ideologically to handle this new thrust. This would ultimately have jeopardized its position within the wider protest movement. At least one of Denise Ackermann’s interviewees understood the situation when she remarked that she had “very little in common with the Bishopscourt members - some of whom have never set foot in a township and yet make decisions affecting people there”.<sup>286</sup> There were, however, some white liberal individuals and organizations that understood and accommodated the black need for empowerment. The *Agenda* article already referred to acknowledged that there were fellow white “comrades” in the United Women’s Organization and the

---

<sup>281</sup> R.W. Johnson, contributor to *London Review of Books* in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*, 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.234.

<sup>282</sup> M. Legum, independent consultant on equality issues, in *ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>283</sup> Quoted by F. van Zyl Slabbert in *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>284</sup> M. Holo, *Writing for their Rights*, *Agenda*, No.46, 2000, p.44.

<sup>285</sup> B. Bunsee, parliamentary advisor to the PAC, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?*, 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.228.

<sup>286</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis*, DTh thesis, 1990, p.197

United Women's Congress who were making a move towards this by "working shoulder to shoulder with us to fight against apartheid".<sup>287</sup>

Given the divergence of opinion within the protest groups,<sup>288</sup> it is difficult to evaluate how accurately an essay written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu resonated with black opinion, since many of his critics referred to him, along with Alan Boesak, as a "film star" cleric.<sup>289</sup> Entitled *The role of white opposition in South Africa, 1983*, in it he wrote of the "..... quite outstanding record of protest and opposition to current policies" displayed by the Black Sash.<sup>290</sup>

However, liberals undermined their credibility in the eyes of many blacks by their support of 'reformed' apartheid, aimed at co-opting the black majority.<sup>291</sup> The aim here was to introduce reform at a pace and to a degree that would not compromise white interests.<sup>292</sup> Although the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) had opposed the introduction of the Tricameral Parliament, it ultimately participated in it.<sup>293</sup> Paulus Zulu, senior fellow in the Maurice Webb Race Relations Unit and PRO vice-chancellor of the University of Natal, felt that it was unrealistic to expect the formerly disenfranchised to forget this fact.<sup>294</sup> To the educated black observer it would be clear from the returns in the November 1984 all-white referendum that a considerable number of PFP supporters were more concerned with a loss of political control than black demands for full political inclusion.<sup>295</sup> A final consideration is that, according to Spink,<sup>296</sup> the black community never viewed Black Sash members as potential leaders in the

<sup>287</sup> M. Holo, *Writing for their Rights, Agenda*, No.46, 2000, p.44

<sup>288</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1992, Oxford University Press, p.xii.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p.182

<sup>290</sup> D. Ackermann, *The Black Sash: A Model for White Women's Resistance*, in *Wit Afrikane?* M. Hofmeyer, K. Kritzinger and W.Saayman (eds) 1990, Taurus, p.31,

<sup>291</sup> M.W. Phillips, '*The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988. A Study of White Extra-Parliamentary Opposition to Apartheid.*' MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2002, p.110

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42

<sup>294</sup> P. Zulu in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.54.

<sup>295</sup> M.W. Phillips, '*The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988. A Study of White Extra-Parliamentary Opposition to Apartheid.*' MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2002, p.32.

<sup>296</sup> K. Spink, *Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.259.

struggle because they were women.<sup>297</sup>

By 1983 opposition to the 1982 state-initiated Tricameral Parliament, perceived as an extension of the 'own affairs' ideology of the National Party, presented an emotive issue around which to present a united front.<sup>298</sup> Relying on the transformation of the black individual self-image achieved by Black Consciousness, the Charterist UDF came into being in August 1983, and set about mobilizing material resources and followers across perceived racial divisions.<sup>299</sup> Delegates came from local organizations throughout the country, gathering in numbers never envisaged by Black Consciousness.<sup>300</sup> However, the Black Sash turned down the opportunity to affiliate to this body.

Given that the UDF embraced the ANC's multicultural vision, there would seem to have been a strong argument for affiliation. It would have aligned the organization with the major players in the protest movement. According to Annica van Gylswyk, the Black Sash was wary of being associated with statements it did not necessarily agree with, such as comments on necklacing<sup>301</sup>. It was anxious to preserve its right to speak freely and to voice dissent.<sup>302</sup> There was also a concern that the democratic nature of its structures would act as a brake on Black Sash activity.<sup>303</sup>

UDF affiliation became a contentious issue. It was widely discussed at the March 1984 National Conference in Johannesburg. A motion was put forward for ratification that the Black Sash 'work actively towards affiliation with the UDF'.<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>297</sup> An exception was made in the case of Molly Blackburn, a Port Elizabeth advice office volunteer. By standing alongside local black activists she had demonstrated her willingness to take part in activities that involved personal risk. Her courage and determination to confront injustices with little regard for her own safety had won the respect of at least one unnamed Coloured headmaster, interviewed by Kathryn Spink. In his opinion "Molly Blackburn was as good as any man". She was an ideal ambassador for the Black Sash, but also an exception in the organization, where members were in the main housewives and career women, not professional politicians or martyrs.

<sup>298</sup> M. du Preez, *Pale Native*, 2003, Zebra Press, p.153.

<sup>299</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 1992. Oxford University Press, p.16.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.130-131.

<sup>301</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylswyk, on 14-10-2003

<sup>302</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.209.

<sup>303</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylwyk, on 14-10-2003.

<sup>304</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.213.

This was urged on the grounds that Allan Boesak, an activist Minister of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk, Chaplain to the students at the University of the Western Cape, who had been elected President of the United Alliance of Reformed Churches in August 1982,<sup>305</sup> had defined it as the umbrella association destined to bring together all groups and organizations struggling against apartheid, racism and injustice.<sup>306</sup> A straw vote indicated that the Conference was almost equally divided on the issue. Members closely associated with the trade unions were inclined to see the UDF as a bourgeois organization, out of touch with bread and butter issues. The more conservative membership regarded it as too radical because of its multiracial composition.<sup>307</sup> For Jill Wentzel, the UDF was committed to making the country ungovernable, and was clearly revolutionary, whilst other members emphasised its avowed commitment to peaceful protest and rejection of violence as a strategy.<sup>308</sup> There was a strong lobby that felt affiliation would prove advantageous in the new South Africa.<sup>309</sup> However, the leadership felt this would launch the Black Sash on a direct confrontation course with the government.

Annica van Gylswyk recalled that she voted against the motion because she reasoned that, even though the Catholic Church was not part of the South African Council of Churches, it joined in its work. She therefore felt that the Black Sash could operate in the same way with the UDF.<sup>310</sup> When the motion was finally defeated, Ann Colvin, a Natal member, read out a statement expressing her anger and her feeling that the organization had made an ignoble decision and had nothing whatsoever of which to be proud.<sup>311</sup>

Nevertheless, in January 1986, Sheena Duncan came out in defence of the UDF when twenty-two of its members were arraigned by the State for high treason, in what was known as the 'Delmas' trial. She argued that the attitudes and actions

---

<sup>305</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF*, 2000, David Philip, p.58.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>307</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.213.

<sup>308</sup> A. du Toit, 'The Legacy of Trusteeship' in *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55, December 1995, p.23.

<sup>309</sup> D. Ackermann, *Liberating Praxis*, DTh thesis, 1990, p.190

<sup>310</sup> Interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylswyk on 14-10-2003

<sup>311</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.213

of the UDF were similar to those of the Black Sash, a legal organization that, although it had never found favour with the government, had never been considered guilty of this crime.<sup>312</sup>

In the final analysis the Black Sash chose the alternative of lending support to the co-operation taking place between the democratic movement and other white groups such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). At its April 1983 Conference, a proposal was put forward that an organization should be launched specifically concerned with conscription, an idea that was well received by the existing Conscientious Objectors support bases.<sup>313</sup> A poster advertising an ECC meeting for Monday 18 October in the Claremont Civic Centre (year unspecified) listed Sheena Duncan as one of the guest speakers alongside Allan Boesak.<sup>314</sup>

In 1984, whilst the more conservative section of the Afrikaans Press was launching a vituperative attack on the campaign against conscription, the Cape Town branch of the ECC made a presentation at the Black Sash Annual Conference<sup>315</sup>. Mary Burton, Black Sash regional chair, attended a prayer vigil for an end to conscription, and a press conference, which allowed prominent people to explain their stand on the issue.

Sheena Duncan joined Anton Lubowski, a Namibian advocate, in condemning the South African Defence Force (SADF) use of conscripts to uphold apartheid in that country. Being photographed alongside him at the ECC Namibian press conference in June 1984, led to the right wing *Afrikaner* suggesting that she had communist connections.<sup>316</sup> In 1985, at the ECC peace festival, Molly Blackburn, Port Elizabeth PFP member of the Provincial Council for Walmer, gave an eyewitness account of the costs of increased militarisation in eastern Cape townships and testified that troops were being deployed in support of apartheid policies such as forced removals. The Black Sash lent its support to the ECC

---

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>313</sup> M.W. Phillips, *The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988*: MA thesis, 2002, p.37

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p.39

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., pp.45-50.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p.124



'Troops Out' campaign, alongside the PFP and NUSAS<sup>317</sup>, and Sheena Duncan released a statement in support of its aims.<sup>318</sup> The organization used its experience in arranging pickets, for example the joint ECC-Black Sash picket before Republic Day in 1985. It dealt with Town Councils on behalf of the ECC, and provided space for it at Sash events such as fetes and conferences.

In 1986 the ECC was invited to make a presentation to the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid and to tour the United States under the auspices of the War Resisters International. Despite efforts by the State to curtail the activities of the ECC by denying visas to several of its members, Gavin Evans succeeded in travelling to the USA. Prior to his departure, the Black Sash collected affidavits from township residents that also argued that the SADF was the apartheid state's primary weapon for upholding minority rule by force. The United Nations member countries were urged to 'do everything in their power to end apartheid' and to give political asylum and refugee status to those who conscientiously refused to serve in the SADF.

Also in 1986, Di Oliver, PFP member of the President's Council, and Black Sash member, was one of the speakers at the ECC 'Working for a Just Peace Rally' in Cape Town, alongside Trevor Manuel of the UDF, and Archbishop Tutu.<sup>319</sup> The Black Sash was represented on the Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg Committees of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group (COSG), and continued to address conscription issues even after the ECC was banned in 1988.<sup>320</sup>

However, because the organization was conscious of the need to limit the commitment of its already over-burdened volunteers,<sup>321</sup> the issue of military service was just an extra concern and not a primary focus. In contrast, the ECC

---

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., p.65

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p.100

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., pp.76-82

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p.113

<sup>321</sup> Work in Progress Paper, *Black Sash Western Cape Region and Wage Earning Women*, undated, author unnamed. Manuscripts and Archives, B.2.5. University of Cape Town, p.1.

concentrated on opposition to conscription into the army,<sup>322</sup> which the Black Sash did not, and was seen by those blacks ultimately seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict as being on track with their own aims and aspirations. In addition, a chasm separated the white Black Sash member who opposed compulsory national service from the black mother who saw her children as patriots and heroes when they decided to join the armed struggle.<sup>323</sup>

Experienced Johannesburg Black Sash personnel helped with the launch of the ECC Johannesburg branch.<sup>324</sup> In preparation for the opening of a branch in Pretoria, a meeting was planned at the home of Annica van Gylswyk, Black Sash President of the Pretoria Branch. However, the students were warned not to attend, and that night black powder was thrown into their swimming pool by persons unknown, and the next morning, 12 June 1986, Annica was arrested by the Security Branch.<sup>325</sup>

Here we have an example of government action more in tune with the experience of many black activists. 1986 was the year in which the government declared two States of Emergency. It was also the year in which a combination of events brought Annica to the attention of the State. She was arrested in her home in the early hours of the morning and detained in Pretoria prison for several weeks before being taken to police cells for interrogation.<sup>326</sup> The Security Police did not tell her on what charge she was being held – and she was never formally charged.<sup>327</sup> However, from the nature of her interrogation, she realized she had been arrested because of her association with Thami Makazuma, a Journalist with the *Pretoria News*, who was suspected of helping black youths flee the country via Botswana. Annica was Swedish and she and her husband frequently

---

<sup>322</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF*, 2000, David Philip, p.224

<sup>323</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.250.

<sup>324</sup> M.W. Philips, *A Study of White Extra-Parliamentary Opposition*, MA thesis, 2002, pp.41-57.

<sup>325</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylswyk, 14-10-2003

<sup>326</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.270

<sup>327</sup> When interviewed, she was surprised at the suggestion that she had been held in solitary confinement. On reflection, she agreed this had been the case, but thought it was unintentional and merely due to the fact that she was the only white woman in detention at the time. This she maintained was a blessing as the Pretoria branch had been very overworked prior to her arrest, as they were short of volunteers. Consequently she was exhausted and mostly slept for the first two weeks of her detention.

went to visit another Swedish family in Gaborone. As a result she was suspected of being part of the underground network.

Makazuma had contacted the Black Sash with regard to the Winterveld north of Pretoria, a squatter camp housing close on a million people, occupying what had formerly been farmland. In Annica's own words, "Those who owned the land realized that farming people was more profitable than conventional farming, and so they rented out plots to those who flocked to the area because they thought they would be able to find work in Pretoria, which was not too far away".<sup>328</sup> When the area was incorporated into the 'Independent' Bophutswana Homeland, the people lost their South African citizenship, and with it their pension entitlement.

Shortly afterwards, Makazuma was detained and later spent six years on Robben Island. She visited him whilst in detention, and tried to help his fiancé, who was also arrested shortly afterwards. For Annica there was never any possibility of her being "... in cahoots with the ANC". She had never considered doing anything illegal, as this would have jeopardized her position as the Black Sash representative on the Winterveld Action Committee. She did admit that someone in Gaborone had asked for her help in contacting the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), but she had refused outright. Eventually, after six weeks, she was given the choice of staying in detention under the 180-day regulation and then facing a court case, or returning to Sweden. She chose the latter, and the news of her deportation made the front pages of the Swedish newspapers.<sup>329</sup>

Annica was not the only Black Sash member to be targeted by pro-apartheid forces. In the 1980s, the apartheid state needed a strong defence force with which, amongst other things, to combat ANC military attacks.<sup>330</sup> Black Sash support for the ECC tended to alienate government supporters. During 1985 both Molly Blackburn and Di Oliver were victims of anonymous phone calls in the night, vitriolic letters and even death threats. On one occasion, Di Oliver's car

---

<sup>328</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylswyk on 14-10-2003.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> S. Sisulu, *In Our Lifetime*, 2002, David Philip, p.291.

was set alight. In October two teargas canisters were thrown into the grounds of the Bishops' Oranjezicht home, making it temporarily uninhabitable.<sup>331</sup>

On 28 December 1985, Molly Blackburn, Judy Chalmers and Brian and Di Bishop were returning from a visit to the black township of Bongolethu in Oudtshoorn. On a straight section of the road near Humansdorp, the car driven by Brian Bishop was involved in a collision with another vehicle. Brian Bishop, Molly Blackburn and the driver of the other car, Michael Blesi, were all killed. As soon as the news broke, Dr. Gavin Blackburn, Molly's husband, began receiving anonymous abusive phone calls.

Whether the black protest movements accepted the Black Sash as an organization is debatable, but the support for these individual members is beyond doubt. As a direct challenge to the government, at Molly Blackburn's funeral, around 20,000 people of all races clustered into the square near St. John's Methodist Church in Port Elizabeth, to listen to the service that was relayed through loudspeakers. Molly's sister, Judy Chalmers, remembered it as a day of harmony. Initially the whites were scared and locked themselves up in their flats. But after an hour, when it was realized that there would be no destructive behaviour, they started coming out onto the street, giving people water to drink and talking to those on the fringes.<sup>332</sup>

This type of challenge to the government was repeated at Brian Bishop's funeral in Cape Town, when a thousand or so mourners of all races packed St. Mary's Cathedral. Many others could not get into the building. They had come from places as far afield as Cradock, Uitenhage, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.<sup>333</sup>

Another example of black support was that in the second half of 1985, shops owned by progressive whites were specifically excluded from the consumer boycotts organized by the UDF.<sup>334</sup> On the other hand, Annica van Gylswyk

<sup>331</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.182.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.182-184.

<sup>334</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF*, 2000. David Philip, p.150.

mentioned that no Black Sash stands were ever mounted by the Pretoria branch, because members were afraid for their physical safety.<sup>335</sup>

Organizations that were banned and leaders that were imprisoned became martyrs and the black community eulogized their exploits. In 1988 an unnamed leading student's organization argued that the "UDF being banned showed it was not a failure."<sup>336</sup> In 1990 F.W de Klerk, needing to be seen as tolerant of non-violent opposition, afforded the UDF a legal and public platform.<sup>337</sup> Probably the number of white Black Sash 'martyrs' was too few for them to be noticed and accredited alongside those of the UDF, the prisoners on Robben Island and the activists in exile by the black protest movements. The comparative tolerance of the Nationalist government for the Black Sash tarnished its image, particularly in the eyes of the black youth.

Gradually, however, the Black Sash lost its relative immunity from serious harassment because of its changing demographics. Younger members joined who were involved in other spheres of protest. Between 1980 and 1989 there was an influx of new members and many came from the Universities and were political activists and ex-members of NUSAS<sup>338</sup>, a white liberal university federation. This move could have mediated acceptance within the black camp, but their connection with the organization was short-lived and terminated once the proscribed black organizations were unbanned.

One example was Janet Cherry who joined the Port Elizabeth Black Sash at the end of 1980. She was aged twenty-eight and an active member of the End Conscription Campaign. She founded the Eastern Cape Adult Learning Project, which involved her in teaching literacy skills to trade union members. In 1981 she was detained for a day after taking part in a protest for the rights of meat-workers, and again in August 1984 on the eve of the Coloured and Indian elections. She was hospitalised in July 1984 after a rock was thrown through her

---

<sup>335</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Annica van Gylswyk on 14-10-2003

<sup>336</sup> A.W. Marx, *Lessons of the Struggle*, 1992, Oxford University Press, pp.252-253

<sup>337</sup> J. Seekings, *The UDF*, 2000 David Philip, p.305

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283.

car windscreen. In July 1985 she was arrested under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act and kept in solitary confinement for three weeks.<sup>339</sup>

In 1986, when emergency regulations made it impossible for her to carry on as a literacy coordinator, she turned her office into a community and detentions advice office. This attracted the attention of both the security police and the 'right wing' elements in the area. On at least ten occasions her tyres were slashed, and her car was twice petrol bombed. She was the victim of numerous death threats, was assaulted by white thugs and rather than protecting her, the security police regularly raided both her office and her home.<sup>340</sup>

In March 1986, because she spoke fluent French, she was chosen to represent the ECC at an SOS Racism conference in France. Hours before her departure she was arrested on a drugs charge despite the fact that she pleaded her innocence. Two days later she was released due to lack of evidence, in time to travel to Paris and deliver her speech, only to be detained again by the security police in Cape Town on 22 August 1986. Transferred to the North End prison in Port Elizabeth, she spent over two months of her 342-day detention in solitary confinement.<sup>341</sup>

Another example of a person who changed the profile of the organization was Janet Small. At the beginning of 1987 she became the Black Sash fieldworker/researcher attached to the Eastern Cape advice office. She went to Cape Town where she monitored and recorded incidents of repression, referred people to lawyers and other resources in areas where there were none, and assisted with pension claims. On their release in 1987, she offered psychological counselling to those detained in 1985 and 1986, after which she helped them either to find work or apply for UIF benefits.<sup>342</sup> Whilst studying for a degree, she was arrested in Grahamstown on 30 June 1988, as a member of NUSAS and detained until September 1988.

---

<sup>339</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.289.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p.290.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.289-290.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, p.282.

But all attempts at co-operation were thwarted by the 1986 States of Emergency, when, for example, neither the United Women's Organization nor the United Women's Congress could meet. FEDSAW stepped into the breach with the launch of the first Cape Women's Festivals in 1988 and 1989, which used culture as a front for political activity. Because of its close association with FEDSAW, the Black Sash presented what M. Holo described in an article written for *Agenda*, as a 'hilarious play' about the Special Branch. The Community Arts Project held creative writing courses for all race groups, facilitated by Annemarie Hendrickz and Anne Schuster, the former being an active member of the Black Sash.<sup>343</sup> But such attempts had limited effect because of the rising tide of violence in the townships.

But July 1987, proved to be a watershed year. Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, leader of the Institute for a Democratic South Africa (IDASA), engineered a meeting in Dakar, capital of Senegal, between representatives of the ANC and a group of Afrikaners that included academics, economists, writers, artists, business people and theologians.<sup>344</sup> Stemming from this initiative, in June 1989, eight Black Sash members attended a conference with the ANC in Lusaka at the invitation of the Five Freedoms Forum. The theme of the conference was the 'role of whites in a changing society'. Its aim was to foster understanding and clarity about delegates' own roles in the future South African society.<sup>345</sup> The fact that Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC, had his photograph taken with the Black Sash delegation was seen by many of the other delegates as signifying his acknowledgement that the organization was firmly on the side of the struggle. Speaking out in a polarized society such as South Africa and supporting civil disobedience had certainly placed them, in the eyes of the South African

<sup>343</sup> M. Holo, *Writing for their Rights*, *Agenda*, No.46, 2000, p.44

<sup>344</sup> The fact that the ANC was prepared to meet with a group of predominantly white Afrikaners was seen as an encouraging sign. The prevailing belief had been that the ANC and Afrikaners were sworn enemies who could never meet except in conflict and on the battlefield. The resolve to work towards a negotiated settlement was strengthened by an openness and readiness to talk by all participants that opened up the possibility of an alternative to the escalating and inconclusive violence. According to du Preez, who was part of the unofficial delegation, for the first time the white participants identified themselves as part of Africa, because they were treated as such by the Senegalese President, Abdoa Ddiouf, the Senegalese people and the ANC delegation. IDASA later organized further meetings in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Germany, France and the United States.

<sup>345</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.280

authorities, on the side of the ANC.<sup>346</sup>

This was confirmed when on her return from the Conference, Judy Chalmers, one of the delegates, planned a report back in a white suburb in Port Elizabeth, where it was felt it would have the most relevance. Arrangements were made for eight busloads of people to be brought in from the townships, something that was not welcomed by the police. Two days before the meeting, several members of the security branch visited her home and spent three hours searching the house. Despite her protests that she needed them for the report back meeting, all her notes were confiscated. The meeting was still held and attendance exceeded all expectations such that although well over a thousand people crammed into the small hall, many more had to stand and listen from outside.<sup>347</sup>

At the Welcome Home Rally held in Johannesburg for released political prisoners in 1989, Walter Sisulu, Secretary-General of the ANC, paid special tribute to the Black Sash.<sup>348</sup> It can therefore be assumed that the work of the organization had not gone unnoticed. In addition, the *Argus* newspaper of February 12, 1990, in reporting on Nelson Mandela's speech from the steps of the City Hall, Cape Town, after his release from prison, quoted him as saying "I also salute the Black Sash and the National Union of South African Students. We note with pride that you have acted as the conscience of white South Africans. Even in the darkest days in the history of our struggle you held the flag of liberty high."<sup>349</sup>

By 1990, the effect of the massive detention of leaders was creating space for the proliferation of fly-by-night and opportunist organizations, with inexplicable resources and wealth that did not offer commensurate services.<sup>350</sup> This was followed by a general call for all groups to be mass based, or at least have the blessing of mass-based organizations. An Albany Black Sash field worker was

---

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p.290

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., pp.280-281.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p.290.

<sup>349</sup> D. Ackermann, *A Model for White Women's Resistance in Wit Afrikane?* M. Hofmeyer, K. Kritzinger and W. Saayman (eds) 1990, p.31

<sup>350</sup> 'The Black Sash: Accountability and Non-Racialism.' Paper prepared by the Albany Branch, undated, p.2. Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, BC.668.



harassed for not belonging to any such organization, on the grounds that it put her out of the reach of the "discipline" of the overall protest movement.<sup>351</sup>

In 1992 an incident occurred which expressed the extent to which anti-White and, by default, anti-Black Sash feeling had penetrated the black communities, including those the organization had championed for so many years. Under the heading "*A Kind of Violence that leaves a Different Sort of Bruise*", the May 1992 edition of *Sash* magazine reported the experience of two of its members.

The Albany co-chairperson and the Albany fieldworker were returning from the township where they had been meeting with civic leaders with regard to the suspension of basic services and monitoring a police block when their vehicle was stoned. The co-chairperson suffered serious bruising and cuts and the car was extensively damaged.

The two members later received messages of regret and condolence from many in the township and following talks between the town council and civics, services were restored, but not without damage to delicately built relationships. This was a new experience for Black Sash members, who previously had never questioned their safety when entering black areas.<sup>352</sup> Margaret Legum observed "I never took seriously the warnings about the danger of entering black areas, because my image of black people excluded anything but gratitude to me."<sup>353</sup> Margaret Nash, an active member of the ANC and former member of the Black Sash, offered an explanation. "There's an anonymity now. You can't rely on being recognised as a friend of the people. I find myself on the very edge of the white community but not part of the black community. Nowadays very few people can cross that divide. That's the harsh reality of this fragmented life."<sup>354</sup> Denis Beckett, author and journalist, echoed this sentiment when he pointed out that liberals were "... no longer the black man's favourite whites.", which did not

---

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>352</sup> *Sash* May 1992, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.49-50

<sup>353</sup> M. Legum Independent consultant on equality issues, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.126.

<sup>354</sup> Quoted by Mark Gevisser, South African journalist, in *ibid.*, p.42.

fit in with their expectations of the post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>355</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is therefore difficult to accurately assess the degree of acceptance that the Black Sash enjoyed amongst the black community, particularly its activist component. This was not an homogeneous group, but composed of different age groups, with differing political loyalties, which affected their perception of the place and the contribution made by the Black Sash to the overall liberation struggle. In the same context, the Black Sash was also an amalgam of different people with different agendas, demographic backgrounds and levels of commitment.

However, one important aspect needs to be borne in mind. Those engaged in the struggle were predominantly black, from the scholars in the 1976 Soweto uprising through to the Defiance Campaign organized by the UDF in 1989. It was waged in support of the ANC and the PAC, both black liberation movements against what was considered to be illegitimate white domination, which had lasted for over three hundred years. It is therefore probable that any white organization that was perceived as a part of the ruling class and was seemingly working against its own self-interest, would be subject to close scrutiny and a fair amount of evaluation and re-evaluation.

It would seem therefore that there is no definitive answer to the acceptability of the Black Sash within the overall protest movement. It operated from the dual disadvantages of being white and a member of the advantaged community. However, this chapter has shown that the Black Sash also worked through other organizations. This arguably ultimately made it easier for acceptance to be mediated via the overall umbrella of opposition to apartheid.

---

<sup>355</sup> D. Beckett, author and journalist, in *ibid.*, pp.75-77.

## CHAPTER 5

### ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE 1990-1994

This chapter will follow the transformation of the Black Sash after 1990. It will outline the organization's experience of plummeting hopes and growing despair, tempered by brief spells when the members confidently believed they still had a meaningful role to play in the new democratic dispensation. However, the material socio-political changes taking place in the New South Africa led to a loss of purpose and a demographic upheaval that eventually compelled the leadership to call upon the services of management consultants, who provided an objective assessment of both the opportunities and difficulties facing the Black Sash. The result was a complete ontological change brought about by a massive transformation. The organization redefined its role and attempted to forge a direction that would preserve much of what had characterized it from its inception.

The incisive changes that had taken place in South Africa had had a limited effect on Black Sash members. The future, although uncertain, did not seem entirely unpredictable. Nevertheless, during the 1990s goals and issues around which to muster support and enthusiasm were less easy to identify. As a result the organization lacked focus.

1989 was the first year that signaled coming dilemmas, since it was no longer easy to remain impartial with regard to violations of human rights.<sup>356</sup> The organization had doubts about the advisability of being present in court at the trial of a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military arm of the ANC, accused of having planted bombs. Members had misgivings over attendance at the funeral of two young people blown up by a bomb whilst involved in violent action, who

---

<sup>356</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.44.

were clearly viewed by the black community as national heroes. Ultimately they justified their attendance on the basis that the death of any young person was a tragedy.<sup>357</sup>

Tellingly, individual members like Mary Burton were becoming confused by the pull of the warmth, enthusiasm and love offered by the black communities and nagging doubts about some of the methods of the liberation struggle. She was also conscious that her lifestyle separated her from those she served and recognized that for her, as for many Black Sash women, temperamentally she would not be able to adopt any other.<sup>358</sup> Throughout its 40-year existence Black Sash members would be conscious of the economic distance that separated them from the people who sought their help. However involved they became in their clients' problems, they got into their cars at the end of the day and returned to a world of comfort and security.<sup>359</sup> This would make the compromises that would have to be made during the transitional period difficult to negotiate.

Criticized equally by the Nationalist government, the liberal white community and organizations aligned to the ANC, Mary Burton observed "I sometimes feel that we walk along the top of a wall, and sometimes we fall off on the one side and sometimes we fall off on the other, and as long as we fall off the same number of times on each that's about the best we can do".<sup>360</sup> This observation resonates with that of David Williams from the University of the Witwatersrand, who wrote in an article for *The Sunday Independent* that the liberal really could not win, since he was doomed to be dismissed by both the white right and the black left as a "patronizing hypocrite."<sup>361</sup>

In an open letter to members on 15 May 1990, four days before the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Black Sash, the National Executive

---

<sup>357</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, pp.204-205.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292.

<sup>361</sup> D. Williams, director of public affairs, University of the Witwatersrand, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.) Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.186.

commented on the "extraordinary political change" taking place in South Africa. "An inexorable process of transformation seems to have begun. Slowly the Grand Apartheid edifice is crumbling."<sup>362</sup> Members were warned that the transformation phase would not be an easy process. This would also be true for the organization itself. " ... and there are no guarantees that the outcome will be a positive one ... apartheid has penetrated every aspect of our lives". In much the same way, membership of the Black Sash had infiltrated the lives of its members.

## THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE

The Black Sash was facing a fundamental problem - how to adapt a 40-year old organization, which had simply grown to meet the needs of a particular historical period, so that it would continue to function under a new government and new conditions.<sup>363</sup>

Mary Burton, the then National President, knew that having been brought up in the Western humanistic liberal tradition, with its long commitment to human rights and a belief in the liberal process, it would be difficult for some people to accept that others did not necessarily share their vision.<sup>364</sup> The human rights of the dispossessed majority would inevitably impinge on the carefully held and long protected rights of those in possession of, for example, land. One of the most difficult questions would be how to marry the rights of black people's access to land in places where they actually wanted to live, close to their families and to work opportunities, with the perceived rights of whites to protect their property values. Even paying servants a living wage was a hurdle for some.

She defined the biggest dilemma facing the organization as the fact that it knew what it was against - injustice, exclusion and repression. However, despite an

---

<sup>362</sup> Open letter to members from the National Executive dated 15-05-1990. Manuscripts and Archives, BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4. University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>363</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.43.

<sup>364</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton on 23-07-2003

ongoing debate, it was unable to formulate what it was for. High on the agenda of the Black Sash was the need to hold the government accountable. From 1993 to 1995, it therefore made comment at every stage of the drafting of the New Constitution and kept a careful watch on the policies that were put in place to implement the new laws.<sup>365</sup>

Eventually three areas of concern were identified. Firstly, working towards the elimination of the bureaucratic and financial maze created by separate and very unequal government departments. The second issue was the repeal of the Land Acts and the Group Areas Act, together with research into how growth in the economy could be fostered in order to create jobs and provide the funds for social welfare. Thirdly there was the need for peace within a clean and healthy environment. This latter was a new area of interest for the organization, and it was realized that protection of the ecology could well clash with the needs of a growing urban population.

In 1990 the radical social and political change had removed the common enemy against which the Black Sash, together with other organizations, had mounted a stand.<sup>366</sup> Apartheid had provided a clear rallying point, and although there were still excesses against which to protest, after 1990 the sense of urgency had disappeared and protest had given way to the need for a reconstructive approach. Failure to attract black members meant that the membership did not represent the broader society, and this would hamper its future as an advocacy organization.<sup>367</sup> Amongst potential members there was also a political exhaustion, a feeling that the battle had been won and that the issues had changed.<sup>368</sup> Failure to open up the membership could impact on the funding it would be able to obtain.<sup>369</sup>

---

<sup>365</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded - with Jenny de Tolly past President of the Black Sash on 18-07-2003.

<sup>366</sup> 'Response to the Viljoen Commission Report' by the National Executive of the Black Sash dated March 1993. Manuscripts and Archives, BC.1065. University of Cape Town, p.3.

<sup>367</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash,' January/February 1995, p.31.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p.v.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p.37.

But the early 1990s were a watershed period in which the Black Sash could still cling to its past image, even though it was unsure of its future and its place in the new dispensation. A member interviewed in 1990 by Denise Ackermann<sup>370</sup> saw that changes were taking place that threatened her relationship with the organization. "I knew what the Sash stood for. As it has grown and different layerings of people have joined, it is not so narrowly defined and my links are not so close. There are many different agendas now". At the end of 1990, the philosophy of the organization was summed up by a member of the Eastern Cape region - "Our desire is to facilitate practical involvement in the many crises, for example in black education, and to fulfill a possible bridging role between those eagerly awaiting change and those fearing it ....".<sup>371</sup> Although the prevailing sentiment was that the organization was banging its head against a brick wall and hoping for a miracle, there were encouraging signs that the apartheid wall was crumbling and that those sheltering behind it were losing faith in its protection.<sup>372</sup>

In 1991 it was finally accepted that change was inevitable and that coping mechanisms would have to be devised. But the National Executive knew that to meet these challenges, the organization would need to restructure and cooperate with other organizations in order to conserve its resources.<sup>373</sup> In December 1991, Barry Ronge, a well-known TV personality and cinema critic, voiced the opinion that, "soon black sashes will only be found in antique shops".<sup>374</sup> This was not the opinion of the hardcore membership who were convinced that there would always be a place in the new South Africa for NGOs, particularly an organization concerned with the creation of a new just and humane society.<sup>375</sup> They were convinced that the legacies of apartheid would provide fresh challenges for those determined to preserve what the Black Sash stood for. Although they had had very little success in the past, they had had

---

<sup>370</sup> D. Ackerman "*Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective.*" DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990, p187.

<sup>371</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.24.

<sup>372</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.307.

<sup>373</sup> Open letter to members from National Executive dated December 1991. Manuscripts and Archives, BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4., University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

plenty of lobbying experience.<sup>376</sup> Overall it was decided that the Black Sash would concentrate on posing uncomfortable questions and raising difficult issues.<sup>377</sup> In this way it was hoped that the divide created by group identity and ethnicity would be less evident.<sup>378</sup>

They were encouraged by a message from Danchurchaid, one of the organization's main overseas funders, "We have no doubt that the Black Sash will prove crucial also in the years ahead in promoting civil and human rights at the policy level as well as at grassroots level through its advice offices. The need for Black Sash and the civil society at large to remain involved and provide guidance and assistance in the process (of reconciliation, democratization and development) is beyond question".<sup>379</sup>

The 1993 Annual Report of The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust contained a comment by Mary Kleinenberg from the Natal Midlands Branch. She wrote, "Some mornings we wake up feeling really excited about the prospect of a future which will incorporate some of the things that we have worked for. Then there are the mornings when we wake up feeling extremely depressed and wishing that we had been born in another century. One asks what impact do we have? But we, like the country, are in a stage of transition, everything is less clear, less obvious than it was."<sup>380</sup> This points to a degree of doubt and disorientation that was beginning to surface.

Jenny de Tolly's 1993 Presidential Address draws a picture of the prevailing political and social climate. During 1992, not only Black Sash members but South Africans in general had felt pessimistic and gloomy. There had been a breakdown in political negotiations, escalating criminal and political violence. This had been accompanied by a downturn in the economy, a decline in public

---

<sup>376</sup> Private interview – tape-recorded - with Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) on 24-07-2003.

<sup>377</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.318.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p.293.

<sup>379</sup> *Sash* magazine, September 1994, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pg.51.

<sup>380</sup> Annual Report of The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust, 1993, p.19.



ethics, escalating unemployment, increased economic crime and runaway corruption.<sup>381</sup>

By mid-May 1992 it had become clear that the ANC and the government had been aiming for different goals. The ANC had been negotiating a transition to majority rule and the National Party was trying to prevent it. Codesa II had collapsed. This was followed by much political jockeying as the various parties sought to gain the upper hand and increase their support base. Ultimately the ANC concluded that, even if it gained overall power, it would probably be unable to govern the country unless it could be assured of the support and allegiance of the defence force and police force. A tentative agreement was therefore reached on the establishment of a government of 'national unity'. The Black Sash prepared to fight this development, as it meant that there would be no significant opposition, effectively placing unfettered power in the hands of the politicians. Jenny de Tolly reminded members that the organization had built its reputation on the voicing of objections to the excesses and injustices of the past. It would need to do the same in the future, if only to ensure that the organization retained its energy and enthusiasm.<sup>382</sup>

Constitutional matters would remain its central concern. A short-term goal was to step up the monitoring of Parliamentary debates around constitutional and justice issues. The government would be attacked regarding the communication gap between the lawmakers and the general population.<sup>383</sup> Lawmakers neither explained nor consulted with people, particularly those in the rural areas, before new laws were passed. This threatened the principle of democracy and would be opposed by the organization.

At the 1993 Conference it was resolved that the Black Sash would work for the entrenchment of affirmative action in law and a bill of rights. This had to be positively enforced rather than relying on a passive 'non-discrimination' approach. It must also not become reverse discrimination and must apply to all

---

<sup>381</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1993, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.5.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5-9.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

sectors of the society. It had to have clear objectives linked to achievable goals, have time limits and be regularly reviewed, re-assessed and re-adjusted.<sup>384</sup> It was unanimously agreed that a parliamentary monitor and lobbying coordinator would be employed. Effective lobbying (or advocacy) was considered one of the organization's most effective tools that would be used not only to achieve a better social welfare system, but also to pressurize parliament and a constituent assembly regarding human rights in general.<sup>385</sup> Basic human rights had to be monitored and protected from the compromises and concessions taking place during the formulation of new legislation.<sup>386</sup>

Six women from the Western Cape region had participated in a 12-month Women's Advocacy Education Pilot Project run by the Grail, an international women's ecumenical organization committed to the training of women lobbyists. Candidates had been selected from the Western Cape since it was assumed that Cape Town would remain the seat of Parliament. They had developed a women's advocacy model better suited to South African society, and were convinced that, provided it had a reasonably large membership base, lobbyists from outside Parliament were better placed to criticize government actions.<sup>387</sup> In order to study the drafts of laws being proposed by the technical committees for the Negotiating Forum, a Legiwatch group was formed.

However, the organization slowly began to accept that it no longer had the capacity to take up every issue. The solution was to focus on a couple of areas of work and pool resources with other like-minded organizations. De Tolly reminded members that patience and tenacity were essential elements in any long-term battle. "We have long realized that trying to be everything to everyone is the quickest way to become ineffectual".<sup>388</sup> Although there was an opportunity for proactive initiatives towards the shaping of the new dispensation, members were warned to prepare themselves for unfulfilled expectations.<sup>389</sup> But the 1993

---

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., September 1993, p.23.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., May 1993, pp.38-40.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., September 1993, p.6.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., p.7.

Conference closed on an optimistic note, with the membership feeling, according to *Sash* magazine, as if after wriggling their toes in the sand, they had "... finally found a firm footing."<sup>390</sup> This was a twilight phase during which thoughts regarding the future of the organization could be put on hold. There were endless avenues through which to show its usefulness in the unfolding scenario preceding the first democratic elections. Mary Burton wrote an article for *Sash* magazine in which she emphasized that the Black Sash needed to co-operate with all who sought to ensure that the elections were free and fair. National Peace Accord structures and voter education programmes had to be fostered, and a means devised for preventing coercion and for building a climate of political tolerance.<sup>391</sup>

The Southern Cape region set up a model polling station at the Percy Mdala High School, with a voting booth, ballot box, ballot papers, etc. and the pupils went through the motions of voting. Many of the students were of voting age and in addition it was hoped that they would carry back information to their families. Later a photographer and a pile of ID application forms were taken into the community to help people apply for their ID document.<sup>392</sup> Two Danchurchaid volunteers produced a voter education 'klipchart kit' that was launched at the 1993 National Conference. It had been tested with advice office clients, para-legals and farmworkers and had been workshopped in local communities.<sup>393</sup> The voter education group published *You and the Vote*, a teaching book for voter education groups, in a number of languages, available free from all Black Sash offices and 40,000 copies were distributed.<sup>394</sup> Black Sash members were knowledgeable about electoral procedures, and most of the active members were more than willing to share their expertise.<sup>395</sup>

Immersed in activity, there was a feeling that despite its reduced size, the Black

---

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., May 1993, p.4.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., September 1992, p.50.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., May 1993, p.34.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>395</sup> '*The Black Sash's Role as Part of Civil Society in the New South Africa.*' dated 21-07-1994, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 Mary Burton Papers B2-5 University of Cape Town, p.2.

Sash could still make a valuable and effective contribution to the unfolding of events.<sup>396</sup> It can be seen, therefore, that there was not total despair or disillusionment. Members failed to appreciate that this phase was unique and would not be repeated. The organization set about educating rural black women voters. These women were subject to intimidation in the form of threatened job loss or abuse by partners on whom they were economically dependent. They also had no faith in the secrecy of the ballot. But domestic responsibilities, such as caring for children and the elderly, and the highly labour intensive and time-consuming nature of housekeeping and food preparation, made it difficult for these women to attend voter education workshops.<sup>397</sup>

Volunteers at the national level and staff in the advice offices embarked on an Education for Democracy campaign and the monitoring of conflict in the pre-election period.<sup>398</sup> Monitoring South Africa's first democratic election was seen as an important area for Black Sash involvement. Some members had gained experience via their participation in the Independent Forum for Electoral Education (IIFEE) and the Network of Independent Monitors and observer missions to the elections in Namibia and Lesotho.<sup>399</sup> As a result of this exposure the Black Sash became part of the South African IFEE, comprised amongst others of religious, legal, human rights and literacy groups.

Black Sash members policed the processing of identity document applications by the mobile units of the department of Home Affairs. The intention was to stay ahead of developments in order to defuse dangerous situations and be part of the network working against violence.<sup>400</sup> In the eyes of the membership, their previous contact with the black communities qualified them to play a vital part in the process of defusing conflict. Encouraged by this sense of involvement, members began to feel that if the campaign work of the membership arm and the work in the advice offices could be merged, there would be a future for the organization.

---

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>397</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1994, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.17.

<sup>398</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995.

<sup>399</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1993, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.31.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., September 1993, p.22.

In July 1992 Val Viljoen of Border region had launched an investigation among a reasonably representative sample of Black Sash members in order to examine the way in which Black Sash management functioned and to look at ways of improving management structures. The commission tried to identify all the major areas of concern to the grassroots membership.<sup>401</sup> Along with the changing *raison d'être*, had come a concomitant change in the demographic shape of the Black Sash. However, there was almost universal agreement that the voluntary component of the organization was of vital importance, but now volunteers as well as paid staff needed job descriptions, which were clear, understood and accepted by all other staff and volunteers. A proper induction and training programme for all staff, both paid and unpaid, also needed to be introduced in each region.<sup>402</sup>

## FUNDING FOR AND ASSIMILATION OF PAID EMPLOYEES

Staff development programmes were hamstrung by a tangible, emotionally charged, tense and pressurized work environment. This was present in both the advice offices and the community outreach projects, exacerbated by the involvement of both paid staff and volunteers in campaigns that had previously been undertaken on a volunteer basis.<sup>403</sup>

When it became necessary to take on paid employees, the Black Sash had set up the Advice Office Trust Fund in June 1985 to raise and administer funds for the service arm of the organization.<sup>404</sup> From then onwards as the number of employees increased, budgets had to be enlarged. The regions continued to use members' subscriptions to finance their administration, augmented by morning markets, bazaars, and cake, book and rummage sales. By 1989 the Black Sash

---

<sup>401</sup> The Black Sash and It's Advice Office Trust Annual Report, 1993, pp.4-5.

<sup>402</sup> 'Critical Choices facing the Black Sash in 1994', undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2-5 University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>403</sup> 'Response to the Viljoen Commission Report by the National Executive of the Black Sash', March 1993. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2-5 University of Cape Town, p.4.

<sup>404</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Annual Report 1993, p.2.

had just under forty paid employees around the country, and was administering a budget of close on a million rand.<sup>405</sup> By 1993 employees numbered forty-seven and in line with the recommendations of the Viljoen Commission, the National Executive had sanctioned the introduction of the posts of National Advice Office Coordinator, Financial Administrator and National Researcher, in order to establish sustainable management systems at a national and regional level, independent of the work of volunteers.<sup>406</sup>

In 1993 for the first time, with membership down by between 25%-30%, the National Executive was unable to meet its budget. In that year a total of R2.7 million had been spent, R2.35 million on running the advice offices with a further R250000,00 on the voter education project.<sup>407</sup> Eventually the Advice Office Trust was supporting the work of over fifty paid staff. The organization had therefore become a fairly large employer, with the burden of raising a considerable amount of money annually.

By 1994, with few exceptions the advice offices had been almost entirely professionalized. A paid Coordinator for the voter education project had been engaged on a one-year contract.<sup>408</sup> At the end of the year, the Black Sash had R2.1 million, either in the bank or in signed contracts, but this represented only 47% of the 1995 annual budget, now standing at R4.3 million.<sup>409</sup>

In a confidential circular written in February 1994, the National Executive/Strategic Team observed "The amounts raised at the Johannesburg and Cape Town Sash morning markets, which are the main fundraising events of these regions, were substantially less in 1993. The economic climate is bad, there is a lot of competition from other fundraising groups and from craft markets.

<sup>405</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*. 1991, Methuen, p.238.

<sup>406</sup> 'Response to the Viljoen Commission Report by the National Executive of the Black Sash', March 1993. Manuscripts and Archives, BC.1065 Mary Burton Papers B.2.5. University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>408</sup> Confidential Circular to Black Sash Members and Staff dated 08-02-1994, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.5 University of Cape Town, p.4.

<sup>409</sup> Letter from National Executive/Strategic Team dated 14-12-1994. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4. University of Cape Town, p.3.

Our stalwart members are no longer prepared to work so hard to raise so little.”<sup>410</sup>

In 1995, Bill Davies, Professor of Development Studies at Rhodes University, wrote an article for *Sash* magazine in which he asserted that funding uncertainty was exacerbating the problems faced by all NGOs in the transitional phase. Funders were either changing direction in pursuit of more fashionable or politically correct involvements or else were faced with a rapidly proliferating phalanx of competing NGO interests. Foreign governments were tending to shift their support towards longer-term development programmes through direct government-to-government financial assistance. The South African Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was increasingly seen and adopted as an appropriate target for foreign government funding, on the assumption that NGOs would be able to gain access to these resources as part of the civil society component involved in implementing the RDP. Likewise local private sector corporate funding was being directed towards government approved (RDP) involvements, for example housing and education, or alternately to undertakings that were directly related to company employees or that were associated with particular geographical areas where companies had business interests. There was also a distinct preference for foundations and trusts or for carefully packaged ‘projects’ rather than contributions to general running costs such as salaries and administration/operational expenses. Many of these funders were hesitating, cautiously evaluating the various options before making critical funding policy decisions that might turn out to be inappropriate.<sup>411</sup>

A recurrent point on which there was substantial agreement was that, although it was acknowledged that the Black Sash Advice Office Trust had contributed enormously to managing the growing staff component, there needed to be more transparency. It was therefore recommended that with the resignation of Sheena Duncan as National Advice Office Coordinator, this post should become a full-time paid position. The new coordinator, together with the financial administrator

---

<sup>410</sup> Confidential Circular to Black Sash Members and Staff, dated 08-02-1994, unnamed author. Manuscript and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.5 University of Cape Town, p.5.

<sup>411</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.44-45.

and the national researcher would then establish sustainable management systems at national and regional levels.<sup>412</sup> A decision was taken at the 1994 conference to draw together the two arms of the organization, merging the campaign work of the members and the work of the advice offices.

Three options were considered. Firstly, the complete separation from the Black Sash of the Advice Office Trust and its programmes. The advice offices would become a different organization from the Sash and would be independent of the Sash and its volunteers and become totally professional. They would not be managed by volunteers nor be accountable to a membership-based organization. The advice offices would become an NGO, delivering a service with an appropriate style of planning and management. They would lose the support, expertise and political analysis that had been provided by Sash members in the past.

Secondly, there was the merger option, whereby the Black Sash and the projects funded by the Advice Office Trust would become one body. There was talk of a national 'board' that would comprise voluntary leadership advised by paid national coordinators, who would do the day-to-day managing of staff and volunteers. Thirdly there was the possibility of two separate bodies, the Black Sash and the advice offices, each with their own founding documents, sources of funding and accountability structures. This path, however, threatened the organization's tax exemption, as the new structure would have political overtones.<sup>413</sup> Although unanimity was not reached, there was a substantial degree of agreement that the membership-based structures and those of the advice office should be merged and the National Executive was empowered to take the process further.<sup>414</sup> A facilitated workshop was held, designed to usher in the major structural decisions necessary within the Black Sash in order to

---

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>413</sup> Confidential Circular to Black Sash members and staff dated 08-02-1994, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B.2-5 University of Cape Town, pp.9-10.

<sup>414</sup> Annual Report - Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 University of Cape Town, p.1.



implement a closer union between advice offices and regions within the Black Sash.

## FINANCIAL CRISIS

However, the process of implementation was aborted. With little warning, the guarantees regarding funding upon which the organization relied for its existence were withdrawn. USAID would not be continuing its seven year substantial support to the advice offices for 1995, opting instead to channel its funding directly to the new government's Reconstruction and Development Programme.<sup>415</sup> Disillusionment spread throughout the organization, as this was not only a serious blow but also a possible indication of a wider trend. The Black Sash could no longer be absolutely certain of having funds beyond the next four months, and wholesale retrenchments seemed inevitable.

All staff were informed of the situation and retrenchment procedures set in motion. Following discussion, it was decided that advice office staff would receive three-month termination of employment notices with effect from the end of November 1994. The advice offices would close at the end of February 1995.<sup>416</sup>

The combined crises of volunteer management overload and financial uncertainty, were closely related and the fact that closure of the advice offices was seen as the route to take in the crisis situation was seen by some as a direct consequence of the former. One of Shapiro's unnamed interviewees observed - "I think management just said, "It's too big, too huge, too difficult. Let's just stop."<sup>417</sup> This was interpreted as a reflection of the doubts of the organization's leadership as to its overall viability. The financial crisis and the announcement of the imminent retrenchment of staff took its toll in terms of staff morale and

---

<sup>415</sup> Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Report, 1994-1995, p.4.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., pp.1-2.

<sup>417</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward', January/February 1995, p.2.

members' anxiety. A number of key staff resigned, and in view of the uncertainties were not immediately replaced.<sup>418</sup>

With the news of the threat to the nine Black Sash advice offices came considerable publicity and widespread concern. Many messages of support were received. There were tributes on radio, television and in newspapers. There was even a comment in the British *Daily Telegraph*, headlined '*Black Sash women face their final fight*'.<sup>419</sup> Closer to home, clients of the Cape Western advice office took their cards and asked their Minister to pray for the Black Sash.<sup>420</sup>

In an ironic twist, there was a turnaround in the organization back to voluntarism. Staff members, among them Nomahlube Nabe who is still a caseworker in the Cape Town advice office, concerned about the needs of the people they served, offered to work without pay while they were drawing from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.<sup>421</sup> A number of members in different regions also promised that they would keep the service functioning, even if it meant doing it on a voluntary basis.<sup>422</sup>

In 1993 41,569 case histories had been recorded of people seeking information and assistance in resolving their problems.<sup>423</sup> By 1994 this had grown to 42,400 and between January 1994 and May 1995 alone 18,621 people had come to the advice offices looking for help.<sup>424</sup> This strengthened the determination to continue operating the advice offices for as long as the community had need of them, and ultimately saved them from closure. A special strategy team was appointed to explore alternative avenues to retrenchment, and to undertake an urgent fund-raising campaign. Budgets were re-examined and a moratorium placed on all expansion projects. New fund raising possibilities were identified, while existing

---

<sup>418</sup> Annual Report - Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>419</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.43.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>421</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Nomahlube Nabe on 23-07-2003.

<sup>422</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.15.

<sup>423</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Annual Report 1993, p.6.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 1994-1995, p.6.

fundere were assured of the organization's determination to meet its commitments.<sup>425</sup> Thisbe Clegg, National Financial Administrator, requested speedy decisions where applications were awaiting reply. She also made new contacts. No effort was spared to make the public aware of the importance of the advice office work.<sup>426</sup> In the community-based advice offices the situation was even more parlous. Eventually a message from a government spokesman placed working for justice on the developmental agenda.<sup>427</sup> Therefore particular attention was paid to sustaining the work performed outside the advice offices, such as legislation monitoring, political pressure, public information, the campaigns against militarization, capital punishment, gender discrimination and all injustice, and the persistent protection of people's rights.<sup>428</sup>

During December, the threat to the organization receded with the news that the Danish Peace Foundation had selected the Black Sash as the recipient of its Annual Peace Prize. Not only did this consist of a substantial cash award (approximately R60000,00), but the visit to Denmark to receive the award also would provide an opportunity to cement relationships with funders in seven countries. In addition, potential funders in Europe would be approached.<sup>429</sup>

Due to the more stringent budget and the confirmation of continued support from two major funding partners for the next twelve months, thereafter subject to annual review, it was possible by the end of 1994 for the strategy team to dispense with retrenchment procedures. At least for the immediate future, the staff position was secure. The strategy team continued reassessing and restructuring the organization's work, with an emphasis on identifying areas already addressed by other agencies.<sup>430</sup>

Therefore in 1994 there was again a brief period of euphoria for both staff

---

<sup>425</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1993, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.43.

<sup>426</sup> Annual Report - Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>427</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.43,

<sup>428</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Report 1994-1995, p.4.

<sup>429</sup> Annual Report - Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>430</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.43.

members and volunteers. They had attended the advice office workshop proposed at the 1994 National Conference. In her report, Marj Brown, a Black Sash volunteer, confidently predicted that the Black Sash still had a future and that much lay ahead that would prove both challenging and exciting. Plans were made to concentrate on four main issues. The major focus would be on the drafting of the final constitution, and monitoring the government's adherence to the interim constitution, its guiding principles and the enshrined fundamental human rights. Human rights-related legislation would be monitored in the national parliament as well as in the provincial councils in those four provinces in which the Black Sash was located: PWV, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and kwaZulu/Natal. Local governments and their coming elections, a campaign for demilitarization, and gender issues were the other three main areas on which energy would be focused.<sup>431</sup>

## CHANGE OF STRATEGY POST 1994

The 1994 National Conference had been held over until after the April General Elections. When it was finally convened in July 1994, much time was spent discussing the organization's future, which it was felt was an internal matter. Delegates therefore agreed that it should be held "behind closed doors",<sup>432</sup> which attracted wide media coverage, criticizing the decision. The leadership took advantage of the unwelcome publicity and issued a response, which was printed in full.<sup>433</sup> Later that year a public launch of the September 1994 'Civil Society' issue of *Sash* magazine was organized. The Black Sash used the occasion to alert members, supporters and the Press to the creation in August 1994 of the new full-time post of National Legislation Monitor. The organization felt monitoring of legislation and the submission of recommendations could be best carried out by a staff member, and the appointment of Allison Tilley as first Legiwatch Monitor was seen as an important development and worthy of note.

---

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>432</sup> Annual Report – Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC.1065 University of Cape Town, p.4.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., p.4.

On several occasions during 1994, committees approached the Black Sash direct asking for submissions.<sup>434</sup>

In May 1995 Mary Burton reported "... a steady rise in the public's perception of the Black Sash, particularly arising from the Legiwatch work ...".<sup>435</sup> This was because she had immediately taken up the issue of the taxation of married women. Also, working together with a group of volunteers from the Western Cape region she had then made submissions on issues such as the Public Protector Bill, the Katz Commission, the Correctional Services Amendment Bill, the Human Rights Commission Bill and the Liebenberg Amendment,<sup>436</sup> all of which had an impact. She then issued a number of Press statements on capital punishment, peace structures, constitutional and legislative matters, and many of these were used on the radio even if not published in the newspapers.<sup>437</sup> To capitalize on their new image, as well as sending letters to the press, the Black Sash appeared on the electronic media, giving interviews on radio and TV. Jenny de Tolly, immediate past President, was confident that "By being informed and in turn informing others we become part of the informed electorate that is an important part of citizenship and democratization."<sup>438</sup>

This newly created avenue for involvement in the new South Africa fitted in well with what many Sash members saw as relevant to their membership, confirmed by various Nell and Shapiro's interviewees, "Legiwatch is what will ensure that we get what we fought for" and "We have to see that they create new and good legislation". "This is a very exciting part of Sash work at this time."<sup>439</sup>

Previously there had been a National Researcher responsible for the gathering and analysis of statistics and the dissemination of information around trends and issues. Her role had recently been modified to focus on the Sash's important

---

<sup>434</sup> 'Lobbying in the New South African Parliament: The Black Sash Experience', undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives, BC.1065, University of Cape Town, p.4.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>436</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward', January/February 1995, p.8.

<sup>437</sup> Annual Report – Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 University of Cape Town, p.5.

<sup>438</sup> Sash magazine, September 1994, p.11.

<sup>439</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward', January/February 1995, p.8.

involvement with the National Social Welfare, Social Services and Development Forum.

Tilley actively encouraged all regions to become involved in the Legiwatch process, particularly those centres close to provincial legislatures. However, she had expressed concern at the lack of direction from volunteers and the Sash generally regarding her proactive role and how her productivity and effectiveness would be measured.<sup>440</sup>

In an open letter entitled "*The Black Sash's Role as Part of Civil Society in the New South Africa*" de Tolly emphasized that civil society was a vehicle, which was autonomous from the State, involving "... citizens acting collectively in the public sphere to express their interests and ideas, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold the state accountable". The latter had been one of the foundation stones upon which the Black Sash had been originally founded.<sup>441</sup> The Black Sash saw in this one aspect of its operation a lifeline that would sustain the organization indefinitely. This created a confidence which allowed Jenny de Tolly, National President in July 1994, to claim "... there is more than enough to do and the Sash has much to offer in the skills and resources that have been built up over the nearly 40 years of our existence ... of initiating networks and working in co-operation with other like-minded organizations."<sup>442</sup> But its deep roots would prove unreliable in the face of the rapidly shifting climate of the new South Africa.

Throughout 1994 de Tolly emphasized the importance of empowering and improving the status of women and improving gender relationships.<sup>443</sup> The organization continued to participate in the National Women's Coalition that was campaigning for a Women's Charter.<sup>444</sup> August 1994 saw Sash members forming part of a delegation that presented the Charter to the Gauteng Premier. The

---

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>441</sup> '*The Black Sash's Role as Part of Civil Society in the New South Africa*, dated 21-07-1994, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2-5, p.1.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>444</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.6.

Black Sash also coordinated the international petition against gender violence.<sup>445</sup> A lot of time and energy was expended in the Constitutional Court during 1994 and 1995, centred around the death penalty as an infringement of constitutional rights.<sup>446</sup> In August 1994, eight Black Sash members participated in the annual Winter School of the University of Cape Town, presenting a series of five lectures under the title 'Women for Human Rights: The Black Sash in a Changing Society'.<sup>447</sup>

Nevertheless it was realized that, if it was to survive, important decisions regarding the organization's future could no longer be deferred.<sup>448</sup> June 1985 had seen the establishment of The Advice Office Trust to raise and administer funds for the service work of the organization. Now that many of the volunteer members were working full-time, it had become necessary to employ fifty paid staff members, mainly in the advice offices, as caseworkers, interpreters, researchers, administrators and coordinators to manage the offices and facilitate the activities of volunteers.<sup>449</sup> The Black Sash had thus developed into two separate organizations - the one membership-based and volunteer driven and the other an increasingly professionalized non-governmental organization, running nine advice offices.

Therefore one of the major issues confronting it (and which had not been resolved at the 1994 National Conferences, despite the decision to go for a 'merger') was how the advice offices and the rest of the Sash activities should relate to each other. Another was the direction and focus of the advice offices themselves.<sup>450</sup> By 1994 some form of transformation became inevitable. Members were beginning to despair of finding a solution. As one interviewee remarked "We need a vision to energize members who, if they are active, are

---

<sup>445</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Report 1994-1995, p.21.

<sup>446</sup> Conference Report on Capital Punishment September 1994-May 1995, undated, unnamed author. Black Sash Cape Western Archives BC668 Manuscripts and Archives University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>447</sup> Annual Report – Black Sash National Headquarters August 1994-May 1995. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2-5 University of Cape Town, p.3.

<sup>448</sup> *Sash* magazine, September 1994, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.45.

<sup>449</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Annual Report 1993, p.2.

<sup>450</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.14.

drained and tired, and if they are inactive, are apathetic."<sup>451</sup>

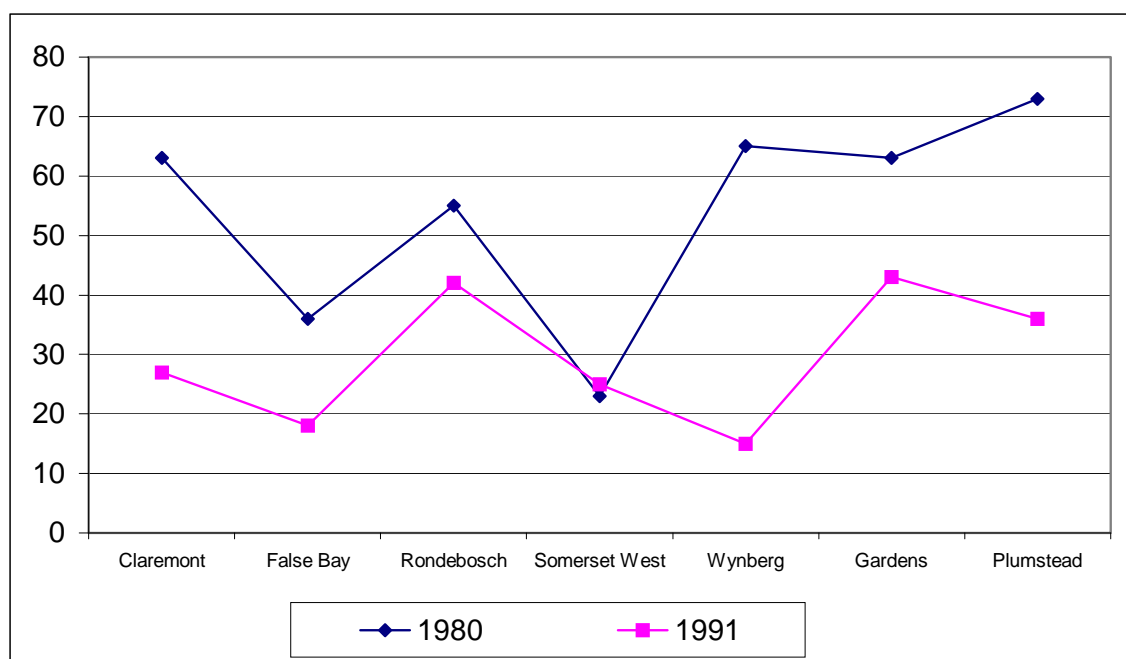
With the exception of Somerset West, membership was dwindling, as illustrated by the figures for a reasonably reliable sample of Western Cape branches.

**Table 5.1: Membership figures**

	1980	1991
Claremont Branch	63	27
False Bay Branch	36	18
Rondebosch Branch	55	42
Somerset West Branch	23	25
Wynberg Branch	65	15
Gardens	63	43
Plumstead Branch	73	36

By 1994 membership figures for the organization as a whole had dropped down from 2150 in 1989 to 1100.<sup>452</sup> It is important to note that prior to 1995 less than 1% of members were from other race groups. The above data is illustrated in graphic form below:

**Figure 5.1: Membership figures**



<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>452</sup> Membership analyses, undated, unnamed author. Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4 Manuscripts and Archives University of Cape Town.



A general malaise infiltrated the organization making it even more difficult to make decisions. In 1993 Carol Lamb reported that attendance at branch meetings was averaging about six to eight, even at larger branches such as Rondebosch and Rosebank, and Somerset West "after valiant efforts to keep going" could no longer function as a branch. Other branches were considering combining for meetings or meeting on alternate months.<sup>453</sup>

But many members chose to ignore the warning signs, such as a troubling increase in public apathy. Stands mounted on such issues as the land question, pension parity, the Bophuthatswana fiasco, casspirs at flea markets and Edenvale hospital, had far less effect. It seemed that this form of protest was no longer seen as necessary.<sup>454</sup> An analysis of applications for new membership in the Western Cape Region provides a useful indicator of the situation:<sup>455</sup>

**Table 5.2: New membership figures in the Western Cape**

Year	Membership
1980	28
1981	35
1982	26
1983	56
1984	27
1985	128
1986	135
1987	6
1988	1
1989	5
1990	1
1991	0
1992	0
1993	9
1994	0

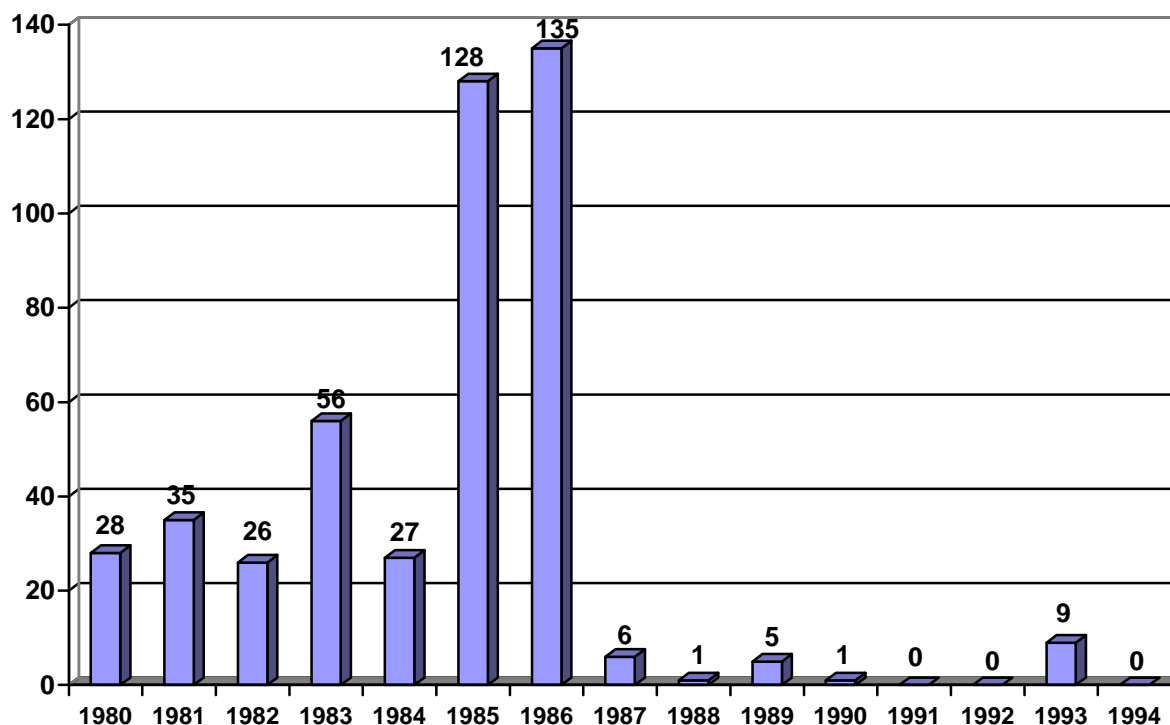
<sup>453</sup> Membership Portfolio 1993, undated, unnamed author. Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4 Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.

<sup>454</sup> *Sash* magazine May 1992, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.40.

<sup>455</sup> Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4., undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives University of Cape Town.

The trend between 1980 and 1990 only is illustrated below in graphic form:

**Figure 5.2: New membership figures in the Western Cape**



Members found the exuberant hopes and aspirations of the 'previously disadvantaged', whose liberation the Black Sash had long championed, demoralizing. Previously, given that the majority of South Africans, particularly the poor and oppressed, had been without a voice, it had been appropriate for an organization such as the Sash to use its privileges, namely the vote, education and relative wealth, plus the information garnered through its work on the ground in the advice offices, to the benefit of those it sought to help.<sup>456</sup> Once a Black government was at the helm, access to the corridors of power was no longer an exclusive white prerogative. It was the actualization of the scenario painted by one of Denise Ackerman's interviewees in 1990 "We are now entering an era

<sup>456</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward', January/February 1995, p.26.

where the terms are set by others...".<sup>457</sup> Now there was a lack of direction. An Advice Office Management Committee member remarked, "It is very difficult to be a human rights organization in a democracy. You have to be clear about the issues."<sup>458</sup>

On the face of it at least, the Black Sash had lost its *raison d'être*, and it was argued that it was acceptable for an organization that had achieved its long-term goals to close down.<sup>459</sup> The need for a 'voice for the voiceless' no longer existed, much of what the Black Sash had set out to challenge had gone and by 1994 much of what it originally set out to do had been achieved. The only alternative was for the organization to reinvent itself, which was not an impossible goal since, due to a dwindling membership, its mode of operation had already been forced to change.<sup>460</sup> Members also had to accept that changed circumstances in the wider society would threaten relationships built up with other organizations,<sup>461</sup> and guard against unrealistic expectations regarding the role of the Black Sash in a future South Africa.<sup>462</sup> It was felt that the situation would benefit from an outside opinion. After much soul searching, Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc., a strategic planning consultancy, was selected to evaluate the organization's current position and its relevance under the new dispensation. The result was a final report, entitled *The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash*, that lived up to its title - it charted the way forward, and provided the rationale underlying the eventual closing down of the membership. It was presented at a time when members were acutely aware that alternative donors had afforded them a breathing space for strategic action rather than a reprieve.<sup>463</sup>

The Consultants proposed that at the end of February 1995 a workshop should

---

<sup>457</sup> D. Ackerman, "*Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective*", DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990, p.199.

<sup>458</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.26.

<sup>459</sup> Discussion Paper on the policy of the Black Sash, undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives. Strategic Planning 1996 BC.668. University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>460</sup> '*Critical Choices Facing the Black Sash in 1994*', undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC 1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.5 University of Cape Town, p.1.

<sup>461</sup> '*The Black Sash: Accountability and Non-racialism.*' Paper prepared by the Albany Branch, undated. Manuscripts and Archives BC668. University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>463</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.2.

be convened in order to draw up a plan of action using input from representatives from all regions. At the National Conference at the end of April 1994, Mary Burton envisioned the emergence of a new Black Sash. It would be approaching its 40th birthday with maturity, and the conviction that it was poised to make its own special contribution to the one-year old but still 'new' society, which along with thousands of others it had helped to shape.<sup>464</sup> It would, however, emerge minus *Sash* magazine, which had been published three times a year for the past forty years. A resolution was passed at the 1995 Annual Conference suspending publication as from the May 1995 issue.<sup>465</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This chapter covered an important phase in the emergence of an acceptance of the inevitability of structural change. The Executive had long realized that a whites only human rights champion would be far less effective in a democratic society. It was also doubtful whether the members, spread as they were across a wide spectrum of age and length of membership, but not race, would be prepared to negotiate with other organizations that were more representative of the larger population.<sup>466</sup> The organization would inevitably be re-evaluated in the new South Africa, which would pose a threat to sponsorship. Before it became clear that the election phase had provided an outlet that was non-sustainable, periods of despair and disillusionment were counter-balanced by those of increased activity that seemed to offer scope for involvement in the emerging scenario of the new South Africa. Members, however, were uncomfortable managing the advice offices, since this ran contrary to their concept of their role in the organization.<sup>467</sup>

---

<sup>464</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.43.

<sup>465</sup> Minutes of the Black Sash National Conference held in Sandton at the SACC Conference Centre 13-14 May 1995. Black Sash Western Cape Archives, undated. BC668 University of Cape Town, p.17.

<sup>466</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Jenny de Tolly on 18-07-2003.

<sup>467</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) 24-07-2003.

Once the National Party was no longer the sole source of power, the Black Sash was faced by dramatic political and social change, which threatened the fabric of its existence. Ultimately difficulties became insurmountable obstacles that could no longer be glossed over. Structural change offered the only solution.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS 1995

This chapter will explore the arguments used and the guidance given by Nell and Shapiro c.c. the independent Consultants engaged to steer the Black Sash into its future role. They highlighted the strengths but also the weaknesses of the Black Sash as a membership-based organization and the potential for growth within the advice offices.

When Nell and Shapiro was appointed the National Executive/Strategic Team emphasized that the vision of an outsider was vital to the continued existence of the organization. However, members were assured that, although the recommendations for restructuring would come from without, the final decision whether or not to accept them would rest with the membership.<sup>468</sup> Although they were in the minority, some crucial members within the Black Sash believed that the best option for the membership organization would be to close down on the basis that it had fought the good fight, and had contributed significantly to the changes that had taken place. Members could then go their own ways and take up the cudgels for accountable government and human rights from different platforms.<sup>469</sup> Human rights had been so central to the concerns of Black Sash members that they could not help but continue to champion them in whatever sphere they found themselves.<sup>470</sup> Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) summed this up when interviewed with the remark "I carry Sash into everything."<sup>471</sup>

---

<sup>468.</sup> Open letter to members from the National Executive/Strategic Team dated 14-12-1994. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4. University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>470</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded - with Mary Burton 23-07-2003.

<sup>471</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded - with Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) 24-07-2003.

## CONSULTANT'S EVALUATION

The consultants felt that closing down the membership arm would be a bold step that would allow the Sash to go out on a strong note, rather than dwindling away through lack of focus, membership, leadership and funds. And although many members and non-members would be saddened by its passing, it would, in many ways, be the easiest option available. It might be the only possible one.<sup>472</sup> The consultants cited the opinions of others at grassroots level, obtained during their interviews. There was a feeling that the Black Sash was incapable of making the necessary changes "... there is just too much baggage." There was a perception that the membership organization was destined to wither away, "I am very scared that if the Black Sash doesn't close, they will kid themselves that they can change and go on as they are until they just dwindle away," and "It would be sad if the organization just limped on until it died."<sup>473</sup>

Some of the membership felt that the Black Sash should close while it still had the chance to do so with dignity. The consultants pointed out that any other option would require enormous effort from the already over-stretched and often exhausted leadership and active membership, and they might simply not have the energy left to give to such an effort. A decision to close the membership organization would still leave options open in relation to the advice offices, including that of continuing activities such as Legiwatch within a professional framework. In this way the analytic skills, which over the years had been one of the strengths of the Black Sash, would not be lost.<sup>474</sup>

Nevertheless, members found it difficult to accept that what the Sash stood for could be achieved through a professional service as opposed to a volunteer organization. They felt threatened. A comment by an unnamed interviewee shows there was an attempt to cling to the past as a bastion against the tide of change that was encroaching on their way of life. "We will have to give up our

---

<sup>472</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, *The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of the Black Sash.* January/February 1995, p.43.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p.43.

ownership and special affinities with certain people and our common culture."<sup>475</sup> Another comment suggests a feeling of insecurity. "Jo pointed out that every time we take work away from a volunteer and give it to a paid worker we may be disempowering ourselves."<sup>476</sup>

This showed how out of touch many members were to the slow changes that had already occurred within the organization, subtly changing its profile. A few members (more in some regions than in others), not wanting to be involved with the stands or the campaign work, were active volunteers in the advice offices, and some defined their membership of the Black Sash in terms of this. But advice offices were increasingly looking to sources outside the membership for volunteer help, bringing in, for example, students, including black students from tertiary institutions.<sup>477</sup>

Finally the consultants evaluated the other possibilities that had been considered for the membership organization, for example, pushing ahead with the merger option, and trying to continue the work of the Sash as a coherent whole. They felt this could lead to the volunteer organization losing its identity and disappearing as a visible force. It did not hold a solution to the pressing problems of vision and membership, and would only partially solve the problem of the management burden. Furthermore, if Sash, as a merged organization floundered, the advice offices would die with it, something which an advice office caseworker felt had to be avoided at all costs, "If the Black Sash were to go down, I don't know what would happen to the people - they would be left in darkness."<sup>478</sup> The work of the advice offices was consistently seen as central to the work of the Black Sash. In 1990 an interviewee had remarked to Denise Ackermann that, "Without our service arm we would not have been where we are today .... In the early days the Black Sash was the advice office."<sup>479</sup> Through the

---

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>476</sup> 'The Sash as a Voluntary Organization' Argument, undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>477</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, 'The Way Forward', January/February 1995, pp.31-32.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>479</sup> D. Ackerman, "Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective" DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990, p.201.



advice office structures Black Sash members had become aware of "... second-generation socio-economic rights. It is in our advice offices that we witness problems that arise from poverty, hopelessness and unemployment."<sup>480</sup>

The consultants recommended that the organization should seriously consider both the options of closure and separation, but that "death by attrition, of whatever nature, of the Sash and the advice offices together or separately, should be avoided. The history of the Sash deserved a better end than that."<sup>481</sup>

Although seen as essential, there was no consensus amongst the members regarding the function of the advice offices. For some they were there solely to do casework whilst others appreciated the macro contribution made by the time consuming analysis and research.<sup>482</sup> An attempt had been made to maintain the balance between volunteers and paid staff, in order to avoid changing the image of the organization.<sup>483</sup> However, managing professional staff through volunteers had become increasingly problematic. Now the professional staff knew more than the volunteers and the question of who gave direction to whom became blurred. This was particularly the case with the advice offices, but was also an issue in an area such as Legiwatch. This had been borne out by a comment from a member of the Management Committee, "A lot of what we do is rubber stamping."<sup>484</sup>

Members expressed frustration at the time spent in administrative roles and chairing Management Committee meetings. This was viewed as "noncreative", preventing them from doing work that they considered valuable. In particular they resented the burden of managing "complicated employer/ee relationships" and felt that the constant need to raise funds made them vulnerable to the "corrupting influence of money".<sup>485</sup> Until the 1990s the Black Sash had been well

---

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., p.153.

<sup>481</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, pp.43-44.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>483</sup> The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Annual Report 1993, p.5.

<sup>484</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.33.

<sup>485</sup> '*The Sash as a Voluntary Organization*' Argument, undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 University of Cape Town, p.4.

resourced. Being pressed for funds was a new experience for an organization previously supported by generous sponsorship and one they were reluctant to advertise. This explains the reaction of Nomahlubi Nabe to a funder's query. On a visit to Denmark as one of the Black Sash representatives chosen to receive the Danish Peace Foundation prize in 1994 she was asked "Shouldn't you start charging a small fee for advice-giving?". The question came as a shock because the organization had never considered charging for its services. She therefore merely committed herself to raising the topic for discussion.<sup>486</sup> Nevertheless, funding had become a major consideration. Now the viability of a campaign had to be weighed up against the financial as well as the manpower cost. This meant that in future the organization would have to be run on business principles, which was a powerful argument for professionalization.

Nell and Shapiro saw as most problematic the moulding together of two very different types of organization, one political, mobilized for political purposes, and volunteer based, the other a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), service-type structure, largely run by professional staff and funded by donor money. Each called for a different kind of accountability and style of leadership and management.<sup>487</sup> The membership organization was accountable to the membership. It therefore had elected office-bearers. The accountability of the service organization was to clients and donors, through a management structure appointed (not elected) by the Trust on the basis of proven skills.<sup>488</sup>

The Consultants realized that integrating professional staff into a volunteer organization would not be a straightforward process, particularly as there was no clarity regarding the role of the volunteer/member, as opposed to that of the staff member. In addition, whilst it would probably be possible to raise some project funding for specific projects such as Legiwatch, or specific publications, the membership itself would have to bear the cost of regular activities, including the costs of running the National Office and campaigns. This would require selective

---

<sup>486</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.36.

<sup>487</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward*', January/February 1995, p.v.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

campaigning and the cutting of costs until such time as membership increased.<sup>489</sup>

A vitally important consideration was the fact that most offices had reported either an increase in the number of people coming to their doors since the national elections, or maintenance of numbers. There was thus a general belief that, while the political dispensation may have changed, the bureaucracy was much the same, and, for the most economically disadvantaged, there was little relief from their problems. This sentiment was endorsed by an Advice Office Management Committee member's comment, "We unravel the bureaucracy people have to face in their daily lives."<sup>490</sup> A caseworker remarked that "This office provides a link between the government and people at the grassroots - we are educating people about what they are entitled to demand from government."<sup>491</sup> There was also a new willingness on the part of both bureaucracies and managements to put matters to right.<sup>492</sup> Therefore the consultants felt that the Black Sash had the potential to make a unique contribution to the building of democratic accountability in South Africa.

Nevertheless, separating the two components and attempting to reconstitute the membership organization around a refocused central vision aimed at rallying support from a broader constituency would require a great deal of effort. There was also the danger that the Sash membership component would wither away into insignificance.

There was a need both for a more strategic view of the advice office work, and a more professional management structure. It was suggested that an Advice Office Director should be appointed to whom Regional Coordinators would be accountable. It was important to have a form of advice office governance that did not rely heavily on volunteer management. Finally there was a need to resolve what would be the best kind of relationship between the advice offices and the

---

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., pp.35-38.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., pp.13-15.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., p.42.

membership of the Sash. There had previously been no incentive to resolve this issue since services, such as the outreach work done in some regions, had already been curtailed, due to uncertainty as to the future of community-based advice offices in general.<sup>493</sup>

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

It appeared that the Black Sash had enough money to run the advice offices through 1995 and by the increasing professionalization and diversification of its fundraising, it might well be able to address the problems of the increasing budget for the following few years. The consultants had attempted to contact some of the key Sash donors, both by telephone and fax, but only DanChurchAid had responded. This was due to a general reluctance to discuss funding whilst South Africa was in a state of flux. The DanChurchAid response was positive save that it warned that, while funding might continue into 1997 and 1998, it would be by decreasing amounts. This was seen as indicative of a trend from donors in general. Some of the points made by DanChurchAid were salient. Whilst appreciating the importance and quality of the work done by the Black Sash, in particular their linking of the micro and macro, it was even more important that the organization expand its membership to reflect more accurately the demographics of South African society.<sup>494</sup>

With a new government in place, there was a lot of stated commitment to democratic and accountable principles to which government had to be held accountable. The situation was very fluid, with many openings to engage in the creation of legislation. Legislators were inexperienced and looking for reliable, trusted bodies to assist them develop the understandings they needed to do their job.<sup>495</sup> Legiwatch was in a position to teach them how to track and comment on

---

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., p.iv.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., pp.37-44.

proposed legislation. Possibly a way could be found to monitor the record of legislators on voting on key legislation.

Legiwatch was the most resourced of the portfolios, and funding for this position had been guaranteed for three years. Nell and Shapiro in their final report said "(Legiwatch) has direct links to the Sash's founding mission, and stands out as the most recent manifestation of the unique contribution the Sash has been able to make over the years in monitoring laws and their implementation".<sup>496</sup>

In discussing the membership crisis, the Consultants warned that a successful membership drive could completely change the face and character of the Sash. However it was doubted that new members would be forthcoming in any appreciable number, since the Sash was not involved in nutrition and development projects, housing schemes or employment creation. Realistically speaking, the Sash needed a minimum membership base of around 5000. Great passion had accompanied the launch of the organization in the 1950s. Nell and Shapiro doubted that such an emotion could be rekindled and even if it were, that the organization would have the energy, or the numbers, particularly across the racial spectrum, needed to mount a stand.<sup>497</sup>

They also felt that the Black Sash was engaged in too many activities, and recommended that it should concentrate on accountable government rather than human rights. Here was an opportunity for it to focus the work in an area which it had made uniquely its own, and one around which considerable support could have been rallied. In the past, the denial of human rights had led the Black Sash to concentrate on this aspect of its concern with accountable government. Now with the political changes that had taken place, this needed to be revisited.

In the present climate the issue seemed to be more about helping government understand how human rights were affected by different kinds of legislation and then holding it accountable for its actions in the light of its avowed commitment to

---

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., pp.44-45.

them, rather than lobbying for those human rights themselves. An advice office volunteer contended, "The people are hungering for corruption to be controlled".<sup>498</sup>

## **CLOSING DOWN OF THE MEMBERSHIP ARM**

In February 1995, Nell and Shapiro facilitated a workshop at Kirstenbosch In the Western Cape, where agreement was reached on the complete restructuring of the Black Sash. The membership arm was closed down, the Advice Offices professionalized and the organization was converted into an NGO.

In her editorial comment in the final May 1995 edition of *Sash*, Mary Burton as National President pointed out that structural changes to the Black Sash and the dissolution of its founding constitution as a membership-based organization had created a streamlined core of professional staff. "Together we step forward to develop new ways to defend justice and human rights under democratic and accountable government."<sup>499</sup> The Black Sash was to streamline its operations and move from a membership-based organization with a variety of projects to a clearly focused, professionally managed organization that would draw on volunteers as an essential component of its personnel.

Decisions taken at the 1994 National Conference were summarized in a press statement issued by National President Mary Burton on 14 May:

"Forty years ago this week the Black Sash was born out of a concern for equality and justice for all and the sanctity of the constitution."

"An historic conference held this weekend saw the emergence of the Black Sash Trust - a professional organization which will continue the traditions of the Black Sash through its advice offices and their projects."

---

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>499</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1994, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.4.

"It is fitting that with an Interim Constitution in place and a final constitution in the process of being formulated, the membership body of the Black Sash dissolves. Hence, with the establishment of the Black Sash Trust current members and other persons wishing to associate themselves with the objectives of the Black Sash Trust will be asked to become associates of the Black Sash Trust."<sup>500</sup>

A personal letter from Jenny de Tolly to Mary Burton, following the decision taken at the workshop in February 1995 to separate the advice offices from the Sash membership organization, completes the story of the re-invention of the Black Sash as it had been experienced by so many of its members. Date-lined 3 a.m. 22 March 1995, it began "I can't sleep ...." an indication of the anguish glossed over by formal minutes and reports.

"..... To many of us the Sash has been a vital part of our lives, and its hard to just hand it over to a few people who will be paid to carry on the work that we felt so much a part of. .... There are a couple of reasons why members are feeling disempowered and angry. Firstly, power has shifted away from the membership to the staff and the trustees, and members no longer have a role in the direction and policy of a well-resourced organization. Secondly, many of us really believed our own PR. .... that it is the combined efforts of staff and volunteers that make the work of the Sash special. .... now the members feel cast aside, and cannot see a role for themselves in the future structure. ...."

"It is also important to realize that the recommendations came as a shock to the bulk of members .... We have not taken them along with us on the rather veering path that we have taken."<sup>501</sup>

---

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>501</sup> Personal letter from Jenny de Tolly to Mary Burton, dated 22-03-1995. Manuscripts and Archives B2.1.4. University of Cape Town.

This was the feeling of the organization in 1995. However, in an open letter to members, the strategic team referred to the “hours of thought and discussion” that had been devoted to exploring ways in which they could remain involved,<sup>502</sup> and in which the needs of members could be accommodated in a reconstituted advice office structure.<sup>503</sup>

According to Jenny de Tolly, the dissolution was a process rather than a vote. Regions canvassed for a mandate. Marion Nell carried out an exercise. She asked those who felt the membership arm should continue, and those who felt it should close down to go into opposite corners. She then asked those who wanted to keep the membership arm open to step forward if they were prepared to take on a leadership role. No one stepped forward. Even those who had been part of the organization for a long time were no longer prepared to shoulder that responsibility. It had become too onerous.

When interviewed, Di Oliver confirmed that by 1995 the organization no longer had the energy to run the membership. Political change had come about and members felt they had earned the right to "mount a horse and ride into the sunset. A remarkable victory had been achieved". A number of members had started to become involved in new ventures. Their involvement with the Black Sash had opened doors for them to be involved in a range of NGOs and in government. The new South Africa offered endless opportunities and many members stepped into very rewarding jobs.

## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis a difficult decision had been made in regard to the future of

---

<sup>502</sup> Open letter to members from the Strategic Planning Group, undated. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, BC.668 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>503</sup> Minutes of the Black Sash National Conference held at Sandton in the SACC Conference Centre from 13-14 May 1995, undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives Black Sash Western Cape Archives BC668 University of Cape Town, p.5.



the Black Sash. Many of the former members interviewed, such as Noel Robb, Betty Davenport and Joan Grover, still regretted it.<sup>504</sup> This chapter has shown, however, that it was not a snap decision, rather an inevitable one. It was taken after all other avenues had been explored. Ultimately members would have had to re-invent themselves in order to be relevant, and the fact that the launch of the NGO was a difficult phase in the history of the organization, indicates that this was no easy task.

---

<sup>504</sup> Telephone Interviews between 13-07-2003 and 09-08-2003.

**CHAPTER 7****THE CHANGING ROLE OF SASH MAGAZINE – OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE BLACK SASH**

*Sash* magazine was the official journal of the Black Sash from its inception in 1955 until the membership arm was closed down in 1995. The first issue was published in January 1956 and reported on the formation and the activities of the Women's Defence of the Constitution League from May 1955.

This chapter will follow its development from a chatty informal in-house publication in the 1950s, to an informative and challenging publication that attracted subscribers from organizations and individuals external to the Black Sash, both at home and internationally. Landmarks will be identified as the magazine extended its scope, venturing into the field of political analysis and debate on issues of social significance at the time, as well as book reviews, letters from readers and cartoons. Its final task in 1995 was to reflect back on the organization's forty-year history and announce its transformation into a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), namely the Black Sash Trust.

For the first five years from 1956 *Sash* magazine was published monthly, and known as *The Black Sash*. The first issue focused on the protest against the passing of the Senate Act. By the 1960s it had developed into an organ concentrating on the analysis of apartheid legislation. A distinctive feature at this time was its high moral tone, with contributions couched in terms of Christian principles.<sup>505</sup> There is a sense of mission with members seeing themselves as embarking on a crusade. Volume 1 No.2 marks the organization's first attempt at proselytising. *The Black Sash* became a bilingual publication, named *The Black*

---

<sup>505</sup> K. Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.310.

*Sash/Die Swart Serp* to attract more Afrikaans members, and was registered as a monthly newspaper. Since attempts to attract significant support from the Afrikaans-speaking community proved fruitless, and by June 1961 there was a decline in membership, it reverted back to English and in 1961 became a quarterly publication.<sup>506</sup>

The focus of the articles in the various issues of the magazine reflected South Africa's historical landmarks. Community preoccupation with the upcoming elections dominated Volumes Nos 2 and 3 of 1957 and 1958. Volume 3 No.6 documented, under the heading "Picking Up the Pieces",<sup>507</sup> the disillusionment felt by liberal United Party supporters at the election results that had returned the National Party to power with increased majorities.

By June/July 1958 the magazine was more insular, its biggest concern being with falling membership. The National Party victory had a demoralizing effect, and many former members felt that further efforts to try and educate the white community were pointless. Despite its reduced size, the August 1958 issue carried a loud protest against the police halting of its demonstration against the Group Areas Act, and stated that this in no way affected its determination to continue its campaign.

## THE EFFECT OF POLICY DECISIONS

This issue also recorded two landmark decisions taken by the Black Sash, which would bring about a fundamental ontological change. Volume 3 No. 9 of August 1958 announced the organization's decision to open its first advice office and to move its headquarters from Johannesburg to the Cape Western region where members were far more radical.<sup>508</sup> The tone of the articles became more strident, with comments such as "... the vehemence of our indignation makes it more

---

<sup>506</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.3.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

imperative than ever that we go on until the disgrace of the Senate Act has been wiped out and we are citizens of a country to be proud of.”<sup>509</sup> There is also a report of a lone Black Sash protest following the prohibition of gatherings.

The March 1961 issue contained accounts of the practical help given to often illiterate Africans who were being relocated. These had an impact that fanned out beyond the membership to the wider community, since it was illustrative of apartheid in action. Believing that the Black Sash provided a climate and opportunities for interracial contact, a different calibre of woman was drawn into the organization.<sup>510</sup> One such recruit was Eleanor Andersen, who later recalled her reaction in an interview with Mark Gevisser, journalist with the *Weekly Mail*, “How could I not (join)? I (was) very conscious of having had a cushy and protected life. But one had the wonderful rushes of longing to do something for someone....”<sup>511</sup>

Volume 6, No.1 of April 1962 reported on the effectiveness of the work of the first advice office. But concern was no longer confined to the plight of the poor. In 1963 the pages of the magazine carried a warning to readers that the recently promulgated Censorship Laws would lead to intellectual isolation and a climate of fear.<sup>512</sup>

The new direction taken by the Black Sash was filling a vacuum within the social security field and Volume 8 No.3 carried reports on the activities of six additional advice offices that had been opened by October/November 1963.<sup>513</sup> Nevertheless, as the Black Sash approached its ten-year mark, concern was expressed in the May/July 1965 edition regarding the organization’s slow growth. By 1966 the government clampdown on dissident activities was affecting the Black Sash. Volume 10, no.1 recorded the banning of two long-standing

---

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>510</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism*, 1975, Oxford University Press, p.95.

<sup>511</sup> Quoted by M. Gevisser in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.41.

<sup>512</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 1975, Oxford University Press, p.136.

<sup>513</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.3.

members, Jean Hill and Ruth Hayman. Volume 12 no.2 1968 contained articles on the Group Areas Act, poverty and hunger, written by members, drawing on their own work and experiences in the black communities. This issue also spearheaded the drift towards contributions from people outside the organization, in order to broaden its focus.

For the Black Sash the value of the magazine lay in the fact that its thirty-seven volumes contained a record of the “passions and concerns of the Black Sash”, and provided “... an authentic and detailed record of the evil of the apartheid years.”.<sup>514</sup> It reflected the real experiences of the thousands of people who visited the Black Sash Advice Offices. It also mirrored the increasing level of sophistication and analytic skills of the Black Sash contributors, and in the 1970s the organization opened the pages of its magazine to contributions from national and international editors, scholars, academics, church people and politicians.<sup>515</sup>

## **TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, CAMPAIGNS AND BOOK REVIEWS**

By May 1975 the Black Sash was celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This prompted Jean Sinclair in her last presidential address to remark in Volume 18 No. 1 on the way the organization had changed. “In 1955 we were, on the whole, a conservative group of women, very naïve and politically uninformed ... compensated for by enthusiasm.” Volume 19, no.2, October 1977 indicated that this had been rectified, since after much debate it had been decided, “We regard universal franchise as fundamental to political justice”.<sup>516</sup> Editions devoted to housing and resettlement followed, whilst Volume 22 no.1, May 1980 contained a dossier of deaths in detention.

---

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., p.3.

Book reviews were introduced in the 1980s, in order to draw attention to works dealing with issues deemed by the editors to be of importance. *Death by Decree: South Africa and the Death Penalty* by Theron, Sloth-Nielsen and Corder of the Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty and the Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town,<sup>517</sup> was a particularly apt choice as its findings were in line with those of the organization's own research paper. This was published in 1989 under the title *Inside South Africa's Death Factory*. It compared Pretoria's Death Row to a factory producing corpses,<sup>518</sup> and spearheaded the Black Sash campaign against capital punishment.

## NAME CHANGE AND INTERNAL FRICTION

In February 1983 the magazine changed its name and was now known simply as *Sash*, reflective of the fact that it was no longer just an in-house publication distributed only to members.<sup>519</sup> Amongst the archival material was a lone Black Sash mailing list, dated 1988, which indicated that *Sash* was distributed to approximately 1100 members and 900 non-members. The non-membership list included, amongst others, the Library of Congress, Washington DC., the Australian, Austrian, Argentinean, Belgian, Bolivian, Canadian, Chinese, Danish, Finnish, French and German Embassies, the Urban Foundation, the Aid Centre, Langa, NIKRO and the Department of Labour and Department of Manpower in both Pretoria and Cape Town.<sup>520</sup> This edition was used to draw attention to the conditions under which detainees were held, which it was claimed were causing irreversible physical or mental damage.<sup>521</sup>

In a complete departure from the norm, in the 1980s *Sash* mounted an attack on its own policies. In the August 1982 edition, Jill Wentzel, a Black Sash founder

<sup>517</sup> *Sash* magazine, September 1991, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.41.

<sup>518</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.230.

<sup>519</sup> Telephone interview with Candice Malherbe, former Black Sash member, on 12-07-2003.

<sup>520</sup> Black Sash Papers, undated, unnamed author, BC.1065. Cape Western Archives, BC.668. Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.

<sup>521</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.155.

member and coordinating editor at the time, took the unprecedented step of replacing the customary editorial with an article in which she accused the membership of an apathy that was leading to a disregard of the liberal principles upon which the organization had been founded. This she attributed to a desire to retain the goodwill of the 'disadvantaged' after so many years of fighting for their rights.<sup>522</sup> Wentzel was disturbed by what she termed 'double-think' according to which one set of moral and political standards was applied to violence by the apartheid state and another to the violence by black activists and the liberation movements.<sup>523</sup> This turnaround in approach reflected the doubt and confusion that was creeping into the Black Sash in the 1980s, when South Africa was enmeshed in a climate of fear, due to the tide of protest that was sweeping the country.<sup>524</sup>

In February 1984 Wentzel contributed an article that was more specific in its accusations. She reminded readers that protest against the abuse of human rights had been a basic tenet of the organization since its inception. Now she contended the Black Sash had lost its objectivity. Having been loud in its condemnation of the totalitarian approach of Afrikaner Nationalism, which demanded unquestioning obedience to its ideology, the organization chose to remain silent when dissident organizations that were opponents of the government were adopting the same strategies. In support of her argument she cited the question of boycotts. Those in the black communities who chose not to support consumer boycotts were physically abused. Radicals were urging community members to place the needs of the new order ahead of individual preference. To do this they had to oppose the creation of the Tricameral Parliament that would extend the franchise to Indian and Coloured, but not to the black population. Wentzel maintained that a totalitarian leadership was forcing the 'oppressed masses' to support their campaigns regardless of whether it was in tune with their wishes.

---

<sup>522</sup> M. Gevisser, South African Journalist, in *Watchdogs or Hypocrites?* 1997, L. Husemeyer (ed.), Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, p.43.

<sup>523</sup> A. du Toit, 'Legacy of Trusteeship: liberal arrogance and the dilemma of the struggle' in *Die Suid-Afrikaan* December 1995, p.21.

<sup>524</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, p.191.

Open discussion of such a contentious issue suggests that the organization was tolerating internal dissent. Wentzel, however, viewed the organization's insistence that the article be presented as her personal opinion rather than reflective of Black Sash thought, as an indication that the membership was reluctant to court the disapproval of orthodox leftist opinion by lending support to less spectacular alternative piecemeal reform and educating the black community with regard to their rights.<sup>525</sup>

In the 1980s, *Sash* provided the reader with insights into a Black Sash that was in a state of flux and a country in turmoil. Across the land, Wentzel could point to townships torn by riot and intimidation that by the November 1984 issue had given rise to a form of dictatorship. Since meetings were proscribed self-appointed leaders felt no responsibility towards their constituents, who were told, "collaborators have only themselves to blame for violent attacks upon them".<sup>526</sup>

Wentzel's reprimand brought to the surface a structural weakness within the organization. Comfortably placed whites felt they had no right to judge township people driven to defensive violence by an intransigent government, whose talk of reform was not matched by actions that satisfied the black communities.

Articles in the following issues of *Sash* were on the defensive. It was imperative that the organization be in possession of all the facts, bearing in mind that the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) had explicitly rejected violence as an acceptable strategy. There was a concern that an inappropriate response would jeopardize the 'bridge building' and the 'credibility' the organization had achieved among the black community. On the letter page, however, was one from a member who urged the Black Sash to be "fearless and courageous in speaking out against injustice" wherever it was found.<sup>527</sup> In Johannesburg, several members resigned because they felt that the

<sup>525</sup> A. du Toit, 'The Legacy of Trusteeship' in *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, No.55, December 1995, p.22.

<sup>526</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, pp.190-194.

<sup>527</sup> Personal letter dated 01-05-1993 from Janet Mill to the Chairperson of the Cape Western Region. Manuscripts and Archives Black Sash Collection B2.1.4. University of Cape Town, p.1.



organization had not come out strongly enough against the violence in the townships. Jill Wentzel resigned from the Black Sash due to the reluctance of members to confront the issue. This was followed by the publication of her book *The Liberal Slideaway* for which she received the Don Caldwell Unconventional Hero Award in 1995 “for her unflinching support of liberalism and her courageous stance against liberals who turned a blind eye to revolutionary violence”.<sup>528</sup>

In researching the editions of *Sash* magazine published when the violence was at its height, resolutions and statements did appear to lean more towards condemnation of state violence than of the horror of necklacing, the practice, prevalent in the townships, of placing a burning tyre around a victim suspected of being uncommitted to the struggle. However, in March 1986, the organization eventually issued a statement condemning seemingly arbitrary and anarchic forms of ‘liberatory violence’.<sup>529</sup>

Volume 27 No.3 of August 1984 focused on an issue that was attracting attention from the white community, and to which the Black Sash was lending its support, namely the call to end conscription.

## CHANGING POLITICAL CLIMATE

Volume 27 No.4 of February 1985, marked the organization’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Ordinarily one would expect the content to be focused on past concerns and achievements. However, an event had occurred that laid claim to much of the available space. Matthew Goniwe and three of his comrades had died under suspicious circumstances. Members of the Eastern Cape branch, in particular Molly Blackburn, Judy Chalmers and Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) had had a close working relationship with Matthew from 1983, and this issue carried a tribute to the four men, written by Judy, which referred to Matthew as a ‘dear friend’.<sup>530</sup> A

<sup>528</sup> *Financial Mail* Volume 138 no.9, 17 November 1995, leading article, no byline, p.60.

<sup>529</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge*, 1991, Methuen, pp.202-203.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.177-178.

determined attempt was made to discredit the official explanation of their deaths as the result of a feud between the UDF and AZAPO, by emphasising there was no history of friction between these organizations in the Cradock area where the four men lived.

Further space was devoted to an article by Molly describing the involvement of all regions of the Black Sash at the funeral in Cradock. During the traditional all night vigil, twelve members from the Eastern Cape branch had joined the vast crowd of singing, toyitoying people in the streets of Lingelihle, Cradock's black township. They had also gone to pay their respects to the widows and family of Matthew and the other three members of the 'Cradock Four'. Ultimately they had slept in a Convent in Cradock's Coloured township. Next morning representatives from all the organization's branches attended the funeral.<sup>531</sup> Editorial comment saw this as a picture of the multiracial country that South Africa was hopefully moving towards.

Contributors to this issue were loud in their condemnation of a perceived government cover-up. This added ammunition to the accusation that the Black Sash was prone to side with the protest movements, since, by their own admission, in this case they were not in possession of all the facts

In 1986, due to the escalating political unrest of the 1980s, there was a general clampdown on the press. This made it difficult for the organization to use the magazine to channel information regarding the changing environment as organizations such as the UDF gained support. From September 1986 to September 1990, each edition of the magazine contained the disclaimer: "The contents of this magazine have been restricted in terms of the Emergency regulations".<sup>532</sup> In actual fact the Black Sash had always been conscious of the need to maintain strict legality as a protection against government action. From as early as 1959 lawyers sympathetic to the Black Sash perused all its activities,

---

<sup>531</sup> Ibid., pp.178-179.

<sup>532</sup> *Sash* magazine, September 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.3.

speeches and publications.<sup>533</sup> Nevertheless, in 1986 police confiscated the May edition of *Sash* magazine from the publishers because it contained a full report of Sheena Duncan's presidential address, already discussed in Chapter Three, with regard to civil disobedience.

Volume 28 No.1 of 1985 had reported on a country under a state of emergency, but by September 1988 South Africa was no longer in what the Black Sash had dubbed a state of war. This sea change allowed contributors to turn their attention to more topical themes, a trend that predominated through to 1995.<sup>534</sup> Now that contact between black and white was no longer proscribed, the Black Sash tried to lift the veil on grassroot experiences. An article entitled "*black schooling: a can of worms*", appeared in the January 1991 edition of *Sash*. It was adapted from an excerpt from Elizabeth de Villiers book *Walking the Tightrope*, in which de Villiers, a white teacher in a Sowetan school, recounted her frustration with a Principal who refused to discipline the staff, teachers who failed to report for duty, leaving children to write exams with no invigilator, exam papers with pages missing and children who were totally unmotivated because they returned to school and their reports had still not been finalized. Faced with a deputy-Principal who was the "manifestation of corruption and disorder", under-trained teachers who, overwhelmed by the sheer number of children at the school, were unreliable and negligent, the children were being processed in a system of chaos they were likely to perpetuate.<sup>535</sup>

In the 1980's the kind of debate offered by the magazine was difficult to access elsewhere. That this would not always be the case was presaged by comments in the 1990 editions on South Africa's moves towards a more democratic dispensation. The pages of the magazine mirrored the hopes and disillusionment being experienced not only by Black Sash members but the South African population in general. Progress was neither smooth nor constant. Many contributors felt that participants in the negotiations were playing on ethnic

---

<sup>533</sup> C. Michelman, *The Black Sash in South Africa: 1975*, Oxford University Press, p.105.

<sup>534</sup> *Sash* magazine, May 1995, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.3.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.31-34.

loyalties in an effort to cement their position in the ongoing power struggle. This led to escalating violence, especially in Natal and the Vaal Triangle.

During 1990 *Sash* experienced a subtle language change. This was a reflection of changes taking place within the organization, which in turn were sparked off by contextual societal changes. Now the inflection was noticeably pro-working class, as the views of those sympathetic to the black political movements came to the fore. The voices of those who would later join the ANC once it was unbanned were being heard. A Transvaal advice office researcher clothed her report in Marxist terminology: "Working class organizations must be rebuilt to take forward the task of leading the mass struggle for food, shelter and democratic rights ...." "... the bulk of advice work is related to the attack on the working class by the state and big business.". It was necessary to "... actively align advice office work with working-class organizations in the struggle."<sup>536</sup> *Sash*, however, juxtaposed these sentiments alongside others from contributors offering messages of healing, forgiveness and peace. This emphasized the dichotomous ontology of the Black *Sash*. At this stage members believed peaceful coexistence could be mediated through the shared vision of the field and advice office workers, despite the prospect of a looming class war.<sup>537</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s *Sash* focused on the experiences of recently released political prisoners as they attempted to reintegrate back into society. The September 1990 issue carried an article entitled, "*legitimizing constitutions: Albie Sachs conveys the ANC vision*". As a member of the ANC constitutional committee, he had been interviewed by Shauna Westcott, who seized the opportunity to pass onto readers his comment regarding white reaction to the crumbling of apartheid. "I am encountering an energy and sense of optimism all over, not only here in Rylands, Cape Town, but also among white friends and associates who seem overjoyed at being able to feel free of the strangling effect of apartheid."<sup>538</sup>

<sup>536</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*. 1991, Methuen, pp.310-311.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, p.313.

<sup>538</sup> *Sash* magazine, September 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.15-17.

Issues such as the status of women in the new Constitution came under the spotlight. The May 1990 edition focused entirely on women's rights. Black Sash delegates had attended a conference in Amsterdam in January 1990, at which 150 women had considered the role of women in the liberation movement and in a future free and democratic South Africa.<sup>539</sup> Albie Sachs had remarked during the interview with Shauna that the only truly non-racial system in South Africa was patriarchy. In as much as racism was a tool of oppression, so too was sexism.<sup>540</sup> In 1993 negotiators were busy drawing up an interim Constitution, and the Black Sash was particularly conscious of the fact that the elimination of racism would not automatically lead to that of sexism. *Sash* echoed the concern expressed in the Annual Report of the Black Sash Trust that had devoted two pages to the issue of gender, emphasizing the necessity of raising consciousness with regard to violence and discrimination against women and focussing on women and health.<sup>541</sup>

## THEMES

As will have been apparent, each issue of *Sash* focussed on a theme. One in each volume focused on the annual National Conference. Each issue also had contributions from cartoonists, refer Appendix B, with Gus Ferguson contributing regular cryptic cartoons that commented on the absurdities of some of the issues under review. An example was the one accompanying an article by Shauna Westcott, journalist and Black Sash Cape Western member, on '*ecofeminsism*': *the quest to merge culture with nature*. The cartoon captioned 'PLANT visualized the different images the word conjured up for men and women. For the woman it was a pot plant, for the man a group of factories in an industrial complex.'<sup>542</sup>

*Sash* magazine of January 1992 appeared at a time when land claims and the return of the land to the dispossessed were being hotly contested. Alongside the

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., May 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.38.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., September 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.21-23.

<sup>541</sup> Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust Annual Report 1993, pp.24-25.

<sup>542</sup> *Sash* magazine, January 1991, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.37.

article entitled *the right to private property or the right to shelter?* was a cartoon by Andy of *The Star* newspaper. It depicted Bishop Tutu seated at his desk and being addressed by a member of his staff, behind whom were two Khoisan applicants. The caption read “Your Grace, there’s a delegation with rather a large land claim seeking your support”.<sup>543</sup> Each edition contained a sprinkling of humorous drawings that emphasized one or other aspect of the argument being offered. The titles of the articles also reflected the academic background of contributors.<sup>544</sup>

From its inception, a participatory style was encouraged by the introduction of a rotating editorship. In May 1992 this was reinforced when *Sash* opted for what was termed a “troika” of coordinating editors.<sup>545</sup>

The Black Sash also used the magazine as an educational tool. In the September 1990 edition an article appeared entitled “*a beginner’s guide to the constitution-making process*”. This relied on input from John Dugard, Professor of Law and the director of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Steven Friedman, journalist and a consultant with the Urban Foundation and Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, a political consultant and director of policy and planning at the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA).

Formerly banned organizations were turning themselves into political parties in preparation for the multi-party negotiations. This same edition of *Sash* reviewed their aims and policies. Interviews were conducted with Musa Zondi, national chairperson of the Inkatha Youth Brigade, Kwedi Mkalipi, senior member of the Pan African Congress and Ray Alexander of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party. Finally the Azanian People’s Organization came under

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., January 1992, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.6.

<sup>544</sup> For example, “*satanic mills in the 1990s*” introduced a discussion of a project initiated by the UCT Industrial Health Research Group investigating potentially hazardous working environments. “*Not a drop to drink: our vanishing water resources*” was the heading for an article by Jacqui L’Ange based on research by Jenny Day, senior lecturer, UCT Department of Zoology and Patricia McCracken of *Personality* magazine. This suggested that water recycling could be used to address South Africa’s threatened water crisis.

<sup>545</sup> *Sash* magazine May 1992, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.51.

the spotlight as Monde Ntwasa, vice-president of AZAPO (Cape Province) set out the basic positions from which the organization would canvass for support.<sup>546</sup>

During the 1990s, books selected for review reflected the general relaxation of censorship and banning. Some were Black Sash publications, for example, *Now we are free: A handbook for ex-political prisoners and their families*. This helped released prisoners and their families handle the weeks or months it took “for everybody to get used to each other again”.<sup>547</sup> Others were autobiographies such as *To My Children’s Children* by Sindiwe Magona. Although when she wrote the book she was living in New York and working for the United Nations, she wanted to tell the story of her first twenty-three years, and how her life had been shaped by apartheid, so that her grandchildren would know their background.<sup>548</sup>

In September 1992 *Sash* turned its attention to electioneering. Two pages of this issue were devoted to listing media ownership in South Africa. This was seen as posing as great a threat to the democratic process as the National Party’s control of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>549</sup>

At a time when Legiwatch was monitoring a plethora of new legislation and its effect on the lives of women, *Sash* January 1994 concentrated on women and change. An appeal was made for greater participation by women in politics and the encouragement of sisterhood. In addition, the controversy surrounding African Customary Law was addressed and attention was drawn to the introduction of the mandatory forty-six hour working week for domestic workers.

This edition also reflected the organization’s concern with HIV/AIDS, and how it could impact on so many aspects of a woman’s life.<sup>550</sup> Articles covered transmission to unborn children, infection as a result of rape, care of infected family members, and the role of traditional healers in black communities.

---

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., September 1990, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.28-33.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., May 1991, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.46.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., January 1991, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., p.40.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., January 1992, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.26-27.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., January 1994, Clyson Printers (Pty) Ltd., pp.38-39.

Towards the end of 1993 and through to April 1994, *Sash* concentrated on the upcoming first democratic, multi-racial elections, a subject that was uppermost in most people's minds. Its pages reflected the organization's commitment to educating the electorate with regard to voting procedures and the secrecy of the vote. The result of research into the influence of the media on voting patterns was publicized.

Once the elections were over, contributors to *Sash* turned their attention to South Africa's future. In September 1994, Mary Burton, who became a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, debated the pros and cons of "lay(ing) the ghosts of the past".<sup>551</sup> This edition also contained a discussion of the African Stokvel as an alternative to the capitalist methods of accumulating capital.<sup>552</sup>

Of significance in light of the imminent demise of the organization, was an article entitled *NGOs: A question of survival* written by Sheena Duncan for this issue. As an executive member of a number of NGO boards, it addressed the doubts that were surfacing regarding the future of the Black Sash. One of the concerns was finance, as under a democratically elected government, funds would no longer come direct to the NGOs, but would be mediated via bilateral government-to-government agreements.<sup>553</sup> Another was with regard to staff and volunteers. Those with potential were either being absorbed into the legislature, the national cabinet or the executive councils. The corporate sector was also anxious to make 'politically correct' appointments and staff were being offered salary packages that the NGOs could not match. Nevertheless Sheena was determined to cling to her conviction that the need for a vibrant, argumentative and protesting civil society would ensure the continued existence of the organization

## CONSULTANT'S REACTION

---

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., September 1994, pp.18-20.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., pp.8-9.



Nell and Shapiro, the Consultants who were engaged in 1995 to advise on the transformation of the Black Sash, did not share her optimism. They also had strong views regarding the value of *Sash*. Despite a funding proposal dated June 1994, that read, "We see the continued publication of *Sash* magazine as an essential tool for promoting our present aims and for propagating those notions which could build a civil society and promote and sustain a Human Rights culture in South Africa.",<sup>554</sup> the Consultants felt it had outlived its usefulness. By 1995 the information it offered could be found in newspapers and more mainstream channels. Consequently it had become something of a luxury. Because by 1995 it had developed into a quality publication that carried photographic illustration, it was costly to produce, averaging between nine and ten rand per copy. In 1993 it had cost R36806,00 to produce and had only brought in R18580,00. Declining membership not only meant lower membership fees that had formerly financed its production, but also fewer volunteers to assist with its production.

It was recognized that it still commanded a loyalty from members, many of whom had worked on its production over the years. If it was to become a viable proposition, sponsorship would need to be procured, but this was made dependent on a circulation increase to at least 3000, preferably 5000. Circulation figures remained consistently low, despite the employment of a staff member tasked to reverse the trend.<sup>555</sup> It was therefore recommended that it should cease publication. At the 1995 Black Sash National Conference a resolution was passed making the May 1995 issue the last one to be published.<sup>556</sup>

---

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>555</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, '*The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash*', January/February 1995, pp.10-11.

<sup>556</sup> Minutes of the Black Sash National Conference held in Sandton at the SACC Conference Centre from 13-14 May 1995, undated, unnamed author. Black Sash Cape Western Archives, BC.668. University of Cape Town, p.17.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the development of *Sash* magazine from its modest launch in the 1950s, through to its development in the 1960s into an organ concentrating on the analysis of apartheid legislation.<sup>557</sup> In the 1970s the magazine reflected the organization's concern with universal franchise for South Africa and social upliftment. From the 1970s onwards the magazine featured articles on these issues from experts outside of the Black Sash and this enhanced its academic content.

The 1980s was a period of unrest and increased repression of dissent and *Sash* magazine channelled information to both a national and an international readership. It contained comment on the changing environment as organizations such as the United Democratic Front gained support. In 1986 *Sash's* editorial freedom was curtailed by a general clampdown on the press.

This was also a time of disorientation for the organization itself, as prominent members such as Jill Wentzel used the magazine to question the policies being followed by the leadership. Faced with a breakdown of law and order in the townships, she felt that the organization was no longer adhering to its liberal principles.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the experiences of recently released political prisoners were publicized and issues such as the status of women in the new Constitution came under the spotlight. The May 1990 edition focused entirely on women's rights.

In the 1990s, the magazine followed South Africa's tentative moves towards a democratic dispensation and its pages followed both the hope and disillusionment being experienced by South Africans of all race groups. During 1993 and 1994 *Sash* gave extensive coverage to both the run up to the first

---

<sup>557</sup> K. Spink, *The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*, 1991, Methuen, p.310.

multi-racial elections, and the election itself.

Funding was a vital element in its survival, as from 1995 it was no longer possible to finance its production from membership fees. Sponsorship was made dependent on an increase in circulation that could not be won. *Sash* had acted as a flagship for the organization. Its readers and contributors were drawn from a minority group of middle-class white English-speaking people, who were politically well informed.

It ceased publication by virtue of Resolution No.2, proposed by Sue Joynt and seconded by Sue van der Merwe at the 1995 National Conference, and disappeared along with the membership arm of the Black Sash. .

*Sash* magazine had been a useful channel of communication that reached beyond the membership to selected organizations and members of the public. Volume 37 No.3 dated May 1995 was the final issue and outlined the reinvention of the Black Sash as a professionalized NGO, to be known as The Black Sash Trust, with former members, now known as 'associates', providing the volunteer component.

Starting in the 1970s, it carried contributions from erudite experts in a wide range of fields. It will therefore remain a useful research source for those interested in the social and political history of South Africa from 1955 to 1995, and the effects of the apartheid system. It replicated class divisions through its varying linguistic styles. First and foremost it recorded the path followed by a women's organization, operating in a white man's world, during a particularly eventful period in South Africa's history.

**CHAPTER 8****ESTABLISHING A NEW IDENTITY AS AN NGO – BLACK SASH TRUST 1995 – 2001**

This chapter will trace the path taken by the Black Sash, now known as the Black Sash Trust, following its complete ontological change in 1995 from a two-tier organization with a membership base and a semi-professionalized service arm, into an almost completely professionalised Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). The years 1995-1997 were characterized by idealistic aims and unrealistic expectations with regard to the opportunities for involvement that would remain open to former members, now called associates. By 1997 there were signs that friction was developing between the amalgam of opposites brought together as components of the newly structured NGO. The team spirit that had been taken for granted had not materialized, possibly because there was too large a gulf between the former white middle-class organization and the NGO that was run on business lines, with set hours and overtime pay and mostly staffed by professionals rather than volunteers.

Hillary Morris, an organizational development expert, was appointed in 1996 on a short-term contract to the salaried post of National Director. She realized that business-orientated management systems and clear goals were lacking. Both these issues were addressed and 1997 saw the introduction of the first of the organization's three-year goals, focussing on social security, with special emphasis on child support, disability, retirement and unemployment provision.<sup>558</sup>

By 1996 four of the office managers were black, two Indian, two Coloured and one white. The profile of the Black Sash Trust trustees reflected the

---

<sup>558</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report 1997, p.4.

demographics of the country, i.e. white/black, male/female, younger/older.<sup>559</sup> New strategies were used to achieve basically the same goals. In 1996 Sheena Duncan placed the NGO in the familiar role of opponent of the government by attacking its Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme (GEAR).<sup>560</sup> Formerly the Black Sash had approached government departments direct. Now tired of waiting for action, she appeared on SATV to publicize delays and cancellations of pensions.<sup>561</sup>

In 1997 the Black Sash Trust used the SAFM Monday morning national radio programme to inform listeners of forthcoming discussions in Parliament, as a means of disseminating information and alerting the public to issues that would affect their lives.<sup>562</sup> This was a new route to a time-honoured goal. Black Sash Trust paralegals tackled an area ignored by members of the formal legal professions, namely the bureaucratic bungling and obstructionism that blocked the flow of resources to deprived communities.<sup>563</sup>

By 1997 all Black Sash Trust paralegals working in the advice offices had to have local language skills. Whilst visiting the Barrack Street advice office in Cape Town, the phone rang incessantly and was answered by caseworkers who were equally conversant in English and Xhosa.<sup>564</sup> Staff were now able to pass out information in the vernacular to help-seekers waiting to be interviewed. Those with similar experiences were assigned to handle sensitive outreach projects such as maintenance. This it was felt would help those who sought advice to feel that the Black Sash Trust was an organization run 'for the people, by the people'.<sup>565</sup>

However, changed demographics led to incompatible relationships that threatened the smooth functioning of the new structures. There was friction

---

<sup>559</sup> Minutes of Regional Meeting on Strategic Planning 1995, undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC668 University of Cape Town, p.2.

<sup>560</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 1997, p.2.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 1997, p.6.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 1997, p.8.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 1997, p.4.

<sup>564</sup> Interviews with caseworkers in Cape Town on 23-07-2003.

<sup>565</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report 2000, p.38.

between those ‘associates’ who had formerly been in a managerial position, and the salaried professional staff, who had more expertise. As a result in 1997 the Black Sash for a second time sought outside help, this time from Renee Lewis, a volunteer project leader. According to Sheena Duncan, Chairperson of the Black Sash Trust, in 1997 everyone was floundering amidst the complexities of trying rather unsuccessfully to move from the old volunteer management structure with an increasing number of employees, and sitting very uncomfortably in its new structure as an NGO.<sup>566</sup> The Black Sash had accepted and implemented the recommendations of Nell and Shapiro. Nevertheless in the words of Hillary Morris, it was sitting awkwardly “... in its new structure. ....I soon realized that the crucial missing link in its transformation was that of change management – the need to take people through a process of letting go of the old while adjusting to the new ....”<sup>567</sup> This was an oversimplification of the situation.

Between 1995 and 1997 developments within the newly formed professionalized Black Sash Trust had mimicked those taking place in the whole of South Africa as it went through its own transition phase. The mix of volunteer/professional, black/white, student/settled housewife/career woman, young/old, working class/middle class, local/foreign proved abrasive.<sup>568</sup>

The membership arm of the Black Sash had been a campaigning organization, which had been led rather than managed. The new NGO was a service-delivery organization, which existed to meet a need, had to be professional, effective and low cost. It also had to be selective about its recruits and could no longer operate with personnel who basically offered their services because they believed in the work. These could be useful for fund raising, mailing literature, badgering authorities and sitting on boards, but not as part of the core administration.<sup>569</sup> Former Black Sash members, now referred to as ‘associates’,

---

<sup>566</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report 2001, p.3.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>568</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, *The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash* January February 1995, p.33.

<sup>569</sup> Confidential circular to Black Sash Members and Staff from Jenny de Tolly and the National Executive, dated 08-02-1994. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 Mary Burton Papers B2.5 University of Cape Town, p.7.

had been used to operating at this level. They had set ideas, and the changes taking place within the Sash were hard to accept<sup>570</sup>. Now they were interacting with people who had neither knowledge of, nor interest in the history of the Black Sash. The current staff knew it had been a 'white liberal' organization but for them it only became relevant in 1996,<sup>571</sup> when it had appeared to be more accessible and to be doing the type of work in which they were interested.<sup>572</sup>

In 1995 when the membership arm was dissolved, hopes had been expressed of developing ways of harnessing the skills and energy of 'associates', making their input personally satisfying yet manageable. The National Executive was conscious of "... the enormous contribution made by members to the achievements of the Black Sash."<sup>573</sup> This, however, was proving impossible to implement. There was confusion as to why the associates were there: was it in order to 'conscientize' them or as another pair of hands. Staff sometimes doubted their commitment, whilst associates often felt that staff were "just doing a job" and lacked passion.<sup>574</sup> When interviewed Mary Burton conceded that some of the energy was lost in the process of professionalization because of the need to let the new structures develop and find their feet. But in her opinion, employees who applied for the advocacy work still had passion.<sup>575</sup> As employment conditions became increasingly formalized, 'associates' who were unpaid often resented demands from staff for overtime pay.<sup>576</sup>

A solution had to be found to the impasse, and in 1997 Renee Lewis was commissioned to investigate and submit recommendations. The '*Black Sash Volunteer Project Final Report*' contained her suggestions. It was the result of interviews conducted with staff, volunteers, associates and trustees, together

---

<sup>570</sup> Interoffice memorandum regarding strategic planning dated 14-08-1996, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives. BC.668. University of Cape Town, p.3.

<sup>571</sup> Private interviews with Hillary Morris and National Head Office Staff on 16-01-2002.

<sup>572</sup> R. Lewis, '*Black Sash Volunteer Project Final Report*' November 1997', p.7.

<sup>573</sup> Open letter to Black Sash members from the National Executive, undated. Manuscripts and Archives, BC.668, University of Cape Town, pg. 1.

<sup>574</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, *The Way Forward*, January/February 1995, p.35.

<sup>575</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton, past President of the Black Sash on 23-07-2003.

<sup>576</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, *The Way Forward*, January/February 1995 p.35.

with an analysis of existing volunteer structures in other NGOs. She identified the need to analyse volunteer profiles, needs and expectations, both from the viewpoint of the volunteer and the organization. Accordingly, workshops were run with both paid staff and volunteers at all the advice offices, as well as the National Office. Finally she undertook an in-depth study of the volunteer structures in each office.<sup>577</sup>

## CHANGING VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Organic growth within the organization had produced a different class of volunteer, with changed motivations and needs, and this had to be taken into account. Lewis identified three basic categories. Firstly there were the older white women, known as 'associates'. From middle-class backgrounds, they were educated, skilled and knowledgeable regarding the political situation in the country. They had a social conscience, humanitarian concerns and were also involved with charity and church organizations. They had a long history with the Black Sash, being mostly ex-members. Some were retired professionals or had a private income.

Secondly there were the foreign volunteers – young women who came from mostly privileged backgrounds. They were usually students and their time with the organization formed part of their studies. They were generally keenly interested in human rights. They were short-term volunteers who did tight-focused work on specific projects and were usually recruited through their universities or the funding organizations. There was resentment amongst the paid staff because they felt that their work received an inordinate amount of attention.

Thirdly there was a new group that had started showing an interest in the organization, with whom the 'associates' found it hard to identify. They were

---

<sup>577</sup> R. Lewis, *Volunteer Project Final Report 1997*, pp.3-4.



young black and Coloured women who had some educational background. They offered their services in the hope of gaining new skills and work experience, being either looking for work or between jobs. Coming from a less privileged background, they had different needs and expectations. They had a concern for human rights, were politically conscious and mostly recruited via word of mouth.

The changing face of the volunteer carried with it a new dynamic, namely a reversal of roles in that ex-members were now answerable to, and managed by paid staff, many of whom they had previously managed. In addition, people from diverse backgrounds were invading a territory formerly perceived as a white middle-class enclave,<sup>578</sup> making integration potentially hazardous. 'Associates' had stereotyped volunteer profiles. They were expected to be passionate about the issues in which they were involved, have skills and time and above all altruism. Paid staff also held stereotypical images of volunteers. They were unreliable and uncommitted because they were frequently unpunctual and failed to warn the office if they did not intend to come in that day. Mistakes occurred when they were asked to do work beyond their capabilities and the language barrier led to confusion. The paid staff resented being forced to include them in projects.<sup>579</sup>

Now people volunteered for different reasons, ranging from humanitarian to opportunistic, for example CV enhancing or making contacts. Unencumbered with a sense of guilt for belonging to a privileged class, they had no desire to give something back to society. This change in motivation carried with it different needs but more importantly limitations as to what could be expected of those who wished to volunteer.

There was an undercurrent of feeling amongst the 'associate' volunteers, and Legiwatch in particular, that in order to swell their ranks a determined effort should be made to re-establish contact with ex-members, but the response was minimal. In contrast there was a definite preference amongst the newer type of

---

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., pp.3-5.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., p.20.

volunteer and some paid staff for recruitment to be directed towards the country's future leaders. The goal was empowerment so that ultimately they would be better equipped to function in their own communities.<sup>580</sup> From the organization's point of view this would bridge the language gap, allowing a complete understanding of important detail offered by help-seekers, which was sometimes lost in translation.<sup>581</sup>

In essence Lewis recommended that younger staff and older volunteers should be encouraged to engage in constructive criticism. Problems needed to be verbalized in an atmosphere where everyone felt safe. Issues of racial dynamics and hierarchies, ageism and change of ownership<sup>582</sup> should be addressed and people needed to know that other people's attitudes affected their self-esteem.<sup>583</sup>

By the end of 1997 the problem had solved itself. By then the only 'associates' who were still in contact with the advice offices were the members of Legiwatch who had bi-weekly report back meetings with advice office staff in the Barrack Street, Cape Town advice office and the trustees who attended strategic planning sessions with the National and Regional Directors.<sup>584</sup> 'Associates' had stopped offering their services, and ex-members rapidly lost contact with each other. As Mary Burton observed, it takes effort to keep in touch.<sup>585</sup> When interviewed Joan Grover, an ex-member, had just been speaking to David Viti, one of the original fifty paid employees, now retired, who was trying to raise funds to help him set up a community advice office in Langa outside Cape Town.<sup>586</sup> So there was contact, but it was usually needs driven. Grahamstown advice office was the exception. Here twenty of the same 'associates' that previously manned it, opened the office on a Saturday morning. They currently operate on a roster basis in an area that has one of the highest unemployment

---

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., pp.6-8

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., Appendix II pp.6-7.

<sup>584</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) Trustee of the Black Sash Trust, on 24-07-2003.

<sup>585</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton, past President of the Black Sash, on 23-07-2003.

<sup>586</sup> Telephone Interview with Joan Grover 24-07-2003.

rates in the country. The arrangement works because there is no contact with paid staff. All advice offices are closed over the weekend, and their input is appreciated because it lightens the workload of the regular staff without being invasive and the associates enjoy involvement on their own terms.<sup>587</sup>

Only Legiwatch survived the transition because it was very much part of the organization's outreach work. Attached to the Cape Town Office as the seat of Parliament, some of the members are ex-advice office workers, some ex-members whilst some are new volunteers.<sup>588</sup>

## **ADVICE SEEKERS AND INTERACTION WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT**

That the new NGO had the same *raison d'être* as its predecessor was confirmed by the queues of help seekers passing through the doors of the advice offices, initially in slightly smaller numbers because many believed that the Black Sash had ceased to exist, but word of mouth soon rectified this misconception. In 1997 there were still advice offices in Cape Town, Knysna, Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Grahamstown and Johannesburg, but their mode of operation reflected the cultural, social and political changes that had taken place. With the exception of Nomahlubi Nabe, who joined the Athlone advice office straight from school and twenty-seven years later was still working for the NGO in the Barrack Street advice office, they were manned by paid staff who had never been members of the original Black Sash. The pass laws and the Group Areas Act had been repealed. Now advice seekers required help with their battles with the Welfare Department.<sup>589</sup> The issuing of new identity books caused endless confusion. Greater freedom of movement among the black population brought the usual problems associated with urbanization. The queues were full

---

<sup>587</sup> Telephone Interview with Betty Davenport, former Chairperson of the Western Cape region, on 08-09-2003.

<sup>588</sup> Private Interview with Marcella Naidoo, National Director, Black Sash Trust on 23-07-2003.

<sup>589</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report 1996, p.7.

of people grappling with pension payouts, insurance queries, unemployment and poverty. From 1999 whites and Coloureds as well as blacks were to be found in the advice office queues, as unemployment and a housing crisis began to affect all sectors of South African society.<sup>590</sup>

The most notable change in 1997 was a complete turnaround in the relationship between the Black Sash Trust, now more confident in its new demographic profile, and those the organization had previously championed. No brake was placed on criticism of the rampant corruption and inefficiency of provincial government departments or its officials. By keeping a watching brief on legislation and government performance it attempted to hold government accountable.

The period 1998 to 2001 saw the Black Sash Trust developing its own style of operation. New voices were added, but two from the original Black Sash remained vocal, namely that of Sheena Duncan, Chairperson of the Black Sash Trust and Alison Tilley, National Legislation Monitor. Human rights issues were still high on the agenda. 1999 saw a determined effort to highlight the plight of domestic workers who were excluded from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). Black women constituted 76% of those for whom there was no social security cover.<sup>591</sup>

In her Chairperson's overview in the 1999 Annual Report of the Black Sash Trust, Sheena Duncan clearly indicated the organization's disillusionment. She claimed that press freedom was under threat, citing as "one of the greatest disappointments of the new South Africa" the fact that subpoenas had been served on editors of newspapers by the Human Rights Commission. Also in 1999 the Minister of Safety and Security was pressing for a change to the Constitution that would allow for detention without trial of persons suspected of

---

<sup>590</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded - with Nomahlubi Nabe, paralegal caseworker, Barrack Street Advice Office Cape Town, 23-07-2003.

<sup>591</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2000, p.25.

urban terrorism.<sup>592</sup> This had an ominous ring for former Black Sash members whose work in the apartheid days had been hamstrung by successive States of Emergency.

A cabinet reshuffle followed the 1999 national elections, necessitating the establishment of new contacts at government level. Disregarding the possible consequences, the Black Sash Trust publicly lent support to the call for all persons whose salaries were derived from the public purse to agree to a voluntary freeze on their salaries and allowances for the next two years. Ultimately increases for members of Parliament were scaled down from the proposed 10% to 4%,<sup>593</sup> a satisfying outcome for an organization whose concerns had regularly been completely ignored by the Nationalist government.

Clearly the government was sensitive to the developmental path chosen by the Black Sash Trust, since it suggested that it should relinquish its 'watchdog' role in favour of 'partnership'. But in 1999 changes were still needed before this could be considered.<sup>594</sup> Instead attempts were made to help untrained bureaucrats and "recalcitrant bureaucracy", whose officials either did not know how to, or did not want to change.<sup>595</sup> Initially the organization had felt justified in making allowances for national and provincial governments that were undergoing transformation. Now in her Chairperson's overview Sheena Duncan attacked bureaucrats "who are paid to do a full day's work but do not do it and certainly never exceed their minimum hours" and national and provincial ministers who were no more transparent than their employees.<sup>596</sup> The Human Rights Committee had found that in the Eastern Cape, "A vast number of public servants have taken it upon themselves to loot the funds in the overstretched budget", whilst the provincial public service included 16,000 lazy and largely corrupt "supernumerary bureaucrats paid to do nothing."<sup>597</sup>

---

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 1999, pp.1-2.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>595</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Jenny de Tolly, past President of the Black Sash on 18-07-2003.

<sup>596</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 1999, p.1.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid., p.9.

The expectations harboured by the Black Sash following the first democratic elections had been shattered by blatant corruption and widespread inefficiency and this the organization was determined to expose. No disciplinary action was taken against officials who were suspended on full pay for months or even years instead of being charged, convicted, dismissed and imprisoned.

The advice office staff was hamstrung in its attempts to shorten the queues, since letters, faxes and e-mails were ignored. In the penultimate paragraph of her overview, Sheena Duncan defined the organization as embarking on a new struggle against a government hamstrung by the constraints of its own Constitution. "Democracy is alive and well in South Africa and the strength of the civil society of which we are a part is exciting as we move from the euphoria of the first years after 1994 into the real world of the political and economic realities."<sup>598</sup> At least in 1999 the organization could count on the protection of the new Constitution.

As already mentioned, when the Black Sash was restructured, permission was given for the NGO to continue to use the Black Sash name. However, it was written into the agreement that this was conditional on the Black Sash Trust operating according to the principles of the original organization, which had always had a concern for the disadvantaged.<sup>599</sup> In 2000 through its advice office the Black Sash Trust became aware of, and began to protest the plight of, the thousands of grant beneficiaries in the Eastern Cape whose names had been removed from the register through the maladministration of what it termed the most corrupt 'homeland' administration<sup>600</sup>. Pressure was placed on the government for the introduction of the Basic Income Grant. A particular staff member was given the responsibility for this campaign and special funding was set aside for its implementation. The first hurdle was seen as that of convincing

---

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., pp.1-2.

<sup>599</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Di Oliver, Trustee of The Black Sash Trust, on 24-07-2003.

<sup>600</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2000, p.10.

the public at large that its introduction would narrow the disparity in income and living conditions that was arguably responsible for escalating crime.<sup>601</sup>

Another area for protest in 2000 was the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The government was criticized for "Rushing headlong into the global free market (which is nothing of the kind)". Rather than eradicate poverty, it marginalized the developing world.<sup>602</sup>

Nevertheless, this ultimately turned out to be the year that saw the Black Sash Trust reaching an accommodation with the government. By 2000 there were indications suggesting stronger more positive links between the organization and many government departments and government officials. David Viti had spent thirty-nine years with the original Black Sash and was ideally placed to comment on this. Now the government was prepared to listen to NGOs. In particular he identified Zola Skweyiya, Minister of Social Development, with whom he had frequent contact through his *pro bona* work in the Community advice office in Langa. He stated that he could now rely on the Department of Social Welfare to support him in his battles with problems of unemployment and poverty, often brought about by the backlog in the payment of disability grants and old age pensions.<sup>603</sup> Betty Davenport recalled how this had been far from the case when Geraldine Fraser Moloketi had held the portfolio, when it was nigh on impossible to obtain any assistance.<sup>604</sup> The Black Sash Trust therefore agreed to co-operation where feasible, with the proviso that after a stipulated period litigation would be resorted to. For Hillary Morris, National Director, this was an indication of how the organization had matured in its first five years, and how the developmental phase was reaching closure.

In 2000 Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) took over from Sheena Duncan as Chairperson of the Black Sash Trust. The organization adopted a revised vision

---

<sup>601</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Jenny de Tolly, past President of the Black Sash, on 18-07-2003.

<sup>602</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2001, pp.2-3.

<sup>603</sup> Telephone Interview with David Viti, paralegal caseworker, retired, on 25-07-2003.

<sup>604</sup> Telephone Interview with Betty Davenport, former Chairperson of the Cape Western Region, on 09-08-2003.

statement, which contained a specific reference to the poor, and government's obligation to them. The new Chairperson immediately made it known that after six years of democratic rule it was unacceptable that there were still so many unmet needs, which had had a ripple effect in the escalation of violence against women, children and the elderly.<sup>605</sup>

Echoes of the past emerged in the printing of an explanatory leaflet in Xhosa, which was distributed at the Courts, since despite eleven official languages, claim forms were only available in English.<sup>606</sup> Sheena Duncan challenged the police lawyer over what she termed legal "gobbledegook" in the draft regulations that accompanied the new Firearms Control Act. In his reply he maintained, "in his opinion plain language experts mess up the law".<sup>607</sup> The Black Sash Trust revisited its role as a voice for the voiceless with its condemnation of the government practice of disseminating information via the Government Communication and Information system. This was marginalizing those who did not have access to a website because they lacked not only computers but also electricity to run them. She appealed for a return to communication via the radio, press or government publications.<sup>608</sup> Lack of access to modern technology was a distinct disadvantage. This was evident from the case files in Vuyani Lallie's office, a paralegal caseworker in the Barrack Street advice office. These reflected the many claims processed on behalf of indigent clients who had no access to fax machines or photocopiers.<sup>609</sup>

In 2000 the Black Sash Trust made six submissions to the task team that was investigating a comprehensive social security system. Rights' education had become an important aspect of its work. Rural communities around Port Elizabeth were being taught how to gain access to social security. Grahamstown

---

<sup>605</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2000, p.3.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>609</sup> Interviews with caseworkers at the Barrack Street advice office on 23-07-2003.



advice office was concentrating on increasing the capacity of community-based advice offices.<sup>610</sup>

The Department of Trade and Industries was criticized for failing to prosecute a single unregistered moneylender, despite repeated law violations. At the same time the organization challenged the legality of moneylenders forcing borrowers to sign blank forms, including an admission of debt and a list of goods to be repossessed. In 2000 the Micro Finance Regulatory Council declared the practice illegal.<sup>611</sup> The fact that the Black Sash was now once again in the public eye is suggested by an article by J. de Villiers that appeared in the June/August 2000 edition of *Kaapse Bibliotekaris Cape Librarian*, drawing readers' attention to the availability of the video on the history of the organization.<sup>612</sup>

A striking aspect of the new NGO was the plethora of young advice office workers, with a large proportion of them drawn from formerly disadvantaged communities. These younger employees, making its tone noticeably optimistic, had written many of the contributions to the 2000 Annual Report of the Black Sash Trust. Marcella Naidoo, who took over from Hillary Morris as National Director in 2001, commented on how different it was directing younger employees who were not locked into the past, and for whom everything was possible.<sup>613</sup>

The Cape Town advice office began a campaign in 2001 for the recognition of 'constructive dismissal'. If an employee resigned, he/she forfeited the right to draw UIF. However, many of the cases brought to the advice office related to sexual harassment or relationships within the workplace that left the employee with no option but to resign. Vuyani Lallie was handling this aspect of the organization's outreach. As an LLB graduate, and a qualified Advocate, he was indicative of the professional status of some of the personnel now employed by

---

<sup>610</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2001, p.4.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 2000, p.22.

<sup>612</sup> J. de Villiers in *Kaapse Bibliotekaris Cape Librarian*, Vol.44, No.4., June/August 2000, Mills Litho, p.37.

<sup>613</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Marcella Naidoo, National Director, Black Sash Trust, in the Cape Town National Office on 23-07-2003.

the Black Sash Trust. Previously he had worked for Legal Aid, and saw his move as career enhancing because now he was involved in a wider variety of experiences. The Black Sash had sent him for lobbying and campaigning skills training, and he had attended workshops on advocacy and project implementation and management.<sup>614</sup> Advocacy work was seen as a vitally important area of involvement, and the National Office in Cape Town had taken on three further LLB graduates to handle this work. They were being assisted by other LLB graduates who as volunteers formed part of a team campaigning on current issues of concern to the organization.<sup>615</sup> Prominent amongst these was the subtle way in which new legislation affected women's rights. Two of the volunteers interviewed were doing gender sensitive research into the distribution of resources, particularly with regard to gender equality in education.<sup>616</sup> Voluntary service with the Black Sash Trust provided a stepping-stone to employment in the public and private sector, since people left with a CV, references, hands-on experience of office routines, and an understanding of work reviews.<sup>617</sup>

Skills training had always been a high priority for the Black Sash, but now it was part of official policy. People, other than Black Sash Trust staff, were being trained, particularly those wishing to open advice offices in rural areas. Johannesburg had a particularly good training scheme and people were sent from different parts of the Province to spend time in their advice office. Advice office workers were sent on any external course that would improve their usefulness to the organization, and those who showed potential were encouraged to attend courses on computer skills upgrade, data capturing and analysis.<sup>618</sup>

---

<sup>614</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Vuyani Lallie, paralegal caseworker in the Barrack Street advice office in Cape Town on 23-07-2003.

<sup>615</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Mary Burton, Trustee of The Black Sash Trust on 23-07-2003.

<sup>616</sup> Interviews – tape-recorded – with staff and volunteers in the Barrack Street advice office on 23-07-2003.

<sup>617</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 1999, p.5.

<sup>618</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Vuyani Lallie paralegal caseworker in the Barrack Street advice office on 23-07-2003.

Secure in its new structures, the NGO co-operated with other organizations on broad based issues, and this was the path followed with regard to the inclusion of domestic and seasonal workers in the UIF legislation. Shehnaz Seria, Black Sash Trust regional advocacy co-ordinator, together with the Cape Town advice office, became part of a civil society coalition of interested organizations mounting a strong lobby for the amendment of the legislation. 2001 saw the coalition engaging, inter alia, with the Labour Portfolio Committee and the Commissioner of the Fund on this issue.<sup>619</sup> However, getting legislation passed was only part of the battle. The Cape Town advice office files contained a volume of correspondence regarding claims for workmen's compensation where the employer had failed to report the matter to the Department of Labour.<sup>620</sup>

Whereas the original Black Sash had been mainly concerned with group rights, the Black Sash Trust also focused on individual rights. In 2000 the organization launched a successful application against the Minister of Social Welfare in the Pretoria High Court, regarding monies owed to individual pensioners. This represented a victory for the Black Sash Trust and the Legal Resources Centre, after more than three years of litigation. Sheena Duncan saw this as an effective way of demonstrating how the provisions of the Constitution could be used for "enforcing people's rights in a tangible way."<sup>621</sup> On 11 September 2001 the government agreed to an out of Court settlement of the dispute regarding monies owed to pensioners due to the inordinate delays in 1998 in processing their applications. The Black Sash Trust had made a successful application in the Pretoria High Court to have Regulation 11 of the Social Assistance Act regulations invalidated. This regulation had limited money owed to new grant recipients to a maximum of three months, which was regressive. The Court accepted the organization's contention that it was unconstitutional to limit a person's right to back-pay when this had arisen from the department's delay in

---

<sup>619</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2001, p.21.

<sup>620</sup> Interviews with caseworkers at the Cape Town advice office on 23-07-2003.

<sup>621</sup> *ChildrenFIRST* unnamed author, Volume 5, No.39, October/November, 2001, p.37.

processing applications, some of which had been made as far back as April 1998. This ruling was set to benefit more than 1.9-million people.<sup>622</sup>

It had been an uphill battle and when the issue was finally resolved, the *Saturday Star* of 25 May 2002 referred to “A feisty group called the Black Sash” who were determined that people would be made aware of their rights and the fact that they were not conferred automatically, but had to be claimed. This was a thread that had run through Black Sash policy from its inception in 1955.

However, by 2001 confrontation had been replaced by limited co-operation, and the government was giving the Black Sash Trust credit for its input into the new South Africa.<sup>623</sup> The motion passed in Parliament by NCOP Chief Whip, J. Mahlangu, in May 2001, indicated its approval of the organization by placing on record its appreciation of the role played by the Black Sash Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) in the drafting of Minutes for Parliamentary Committees. It also acknowledged the important role played by this group in taking Parliament to the people and promoting transparency.

In June 2001, *The Sunday Independent* newspaper also voiced its appreciation of the documents prepared by the PMG. “As any researcher will tell you, getting information about government activities and matters of public record via the Internet is like drawing blood from a stone. Even government employees use the Parliamentary Monitoring Group website in preference to the government website”. Access to the website on a daily basis had risen from 79 in October 1999 to 327 in October 2001.<sup>624</sup> For this project the group had employed six full-time interns as well as many students on a part-time basis. The idea was to provide a career bridge for university graduates unable to find permanent employment after graduation. The PMG had already lined up a team of interns for 2002.

---

<sup>622</sup> E. Mhlanga, ‘State to fork out R2-billion’ in *Pretoria News Weekend*, 25 May 2002, p.1.

<sup>623</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report 2001, p.23.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19-23.

Clearly the new government was also aware and approved of the constructive contributions being made by the organization with regard to poverty alleviation. In 2001 the Black Sash Knysna Office received an award for excellence in consumer protection from the Department of Trade and Industry in recognition of its work on access to credit for the poor. Lauren Nott, Regional Director, had criticized the ubiquitous debt trap facing the poor, which impacted on every aspect of their desperate efforts to survive. She had called on the banking industry to reposition its social responsibility programme so as to serve the majority of the people of the country.<sup>625</sup> The Knysna office had long been concerned about the 'reckless lending' to clients who were in no position to repay the loan. This created a debt trap. Submissions on the Draft Amendments to the Micro Finance Regulatory Council resulted in an obligation being imposed on the lender to take into account the borrower's financial position. A National Loans Register was to be created which would afford lenders information on loans the prospective borrower already had. There was also now an obligation on the lender to take note of the purpose for which the loan was requested.

The Local Community Newspaper *CX Press* had been following the case with interest for some time, and in 1998 chose to feature it as the main news items on their advertising billboard, which stated in broad type BLACK SASH INVESTIGATES MONEY-LENDERS.<sup>626</sup> The next project to be undertaken by this office was with regard to 'reckless selling' on credit. Plans were afoot to lobby for similar controls to be introduced in this area.<sup>627</sup>

Many new areas of concern were now seen as relevant to the work of the Black Sash Trust. Leonie Caroline, Regional Advice Office Director, had helped a refugee from East Africa who was trying to start a Disabled Refugee Association. He had come to the Barrack Street advice office because he needed to open a bank account. As English was not his first language, he was finding it difficult to

---

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., pp.12-13.

<sup>626</sup> *CX Press* – Issue 13 – 1-15 December 1998 in Black Sash Trust Annual Report 1998, p.15.

<sup>627</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2001, pp.12-13.

understand the implications of the legal terminology contained in the contract.<sup>628</sup>

Nomahlube Nabe had no doubts as to the continued existence of the Black Sash Trust. As she explained, it was like a wartime ambulance. “There are those that we will not be able to help, but we pick them up anyway.” Occasionally the caseworkers found a loophole they could exploit, but either way somebody had listened to their story and that she believed made it worth coming to the office.<sup>629</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There were many challenges facing the reconstituted Black Sash Trust in 1996. One of the most important was how to move beyond the shadow of the membership arm in order to develop a new relationship with the changing environment, and its own identity and culture. More tangible was the need to introduce procedures, systems and structures that would focus its work and improve efficiency. Hillary Morris concentrated on monitoring and responding to constant changes in the external environment at both national and provincial levels and sometimes even at regional levels.<sup>630</sup> Another challenge was its symbiotic relationship with the new government. From 1996 to 1999 the organization found itself cast in the dual roles of ‘watchdog’ and ‘partner’ and vacillated between the two as appropriate. This created a certain amount of tension. But by 2000 there was a softening of attitudes on both sides. Nevertheless, the organization remained prepared to mount a direct challenge to the government if considered necessary.

The Black Sash Trust as an NGO was both similar and dissimilar to the original Black Sash. It was less visible because it no longer mounted stands. It was no longer at odds with white opinion, but it was still loud in its protests against

---

<sup>628</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Leonie Caroline, Regional Advice Office Director, on 23-07-2003.

<sup>629</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Nomalube Nabe, advice office caseworker, on 23-07-2003.

<sup>630</sup> The Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 1997, p.4.

undemocratic procedures and infringement of human rights. Legiwatch was still involved in monitoring proposed legislation together with its implementation once new laws were passed. It still channelled grassroots experience through to the government with suggestions on legislation that should be introduced, but now these suggestions were more likely to be acted upon. As before, information was gathered and analysed in the advice offices, a function unique to the organization.

However, once professionalized, 'associate' members were no longer the mainstay of the organization and energy was directed towards practical solutions that were more achievable under the new democratic dispensation. Its approach was therefore more business-orientated than altruistic. This proved problematic for the 'associates', most of whom severed their connection with the new structures. This created a space for the Black Sash Trust to develop a new profile that nevertheless carried on in essence the work of the original organization.

**CHAPTER 9****CONCLUSION**

The focus of this research has been on how the Black Sash as an organization changed and reinvented itself over time, in changing contexts. An attempt has been made to view the Black Sash through a variety of lenses in order to assess how it was perceived both by the people it sought to help and those who were its contemporaries. We have discussed how, from its inception in the 1950s, through to 2001, the changing membership had had an impact on the profile of the organization.

Founded originally in 1955 by a group of housewives for whom the organization provided an outlet for their energy, these apolitical founder members turned their attention in the 1960s to the pass laws, becoming progressively preoccupied with government legislation. The 1970s witnessed significant membership realignment during this phase, as volunteer members were largely in paid employment and coping with heavy work schedules. By the 1980s members were working alongside newly recruited activist members whose loyalties lay with the banned protest movements. The 1980s also saw traditional family values coming under pressure as members who were part of less conventional family structures brought different issues forward for discussion at national and branch level. Eventually by 1995 the original organization had been drastically restructured into a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), utilizing largely paid help, within which constraints those few volunteers who still remained involved found it difficult to operate. The membership, and particularly the leadership, had thrived on the camaraderie that opposition to apartheid nurtured. They knew they had grown and developed through their involvement with the



organization.<sup>530</sup> Shared backgrounds and experiences made it difficult for the Black Sash to accommodate women from other racial groups, even those with leadership qualities, in order to make it more representative. By the 1990s this had closed off access to funding and was making the organization less effective as an advocacy group.

The Black Sash as a membership-based women's organization was from its inception programmed for redundancy and a limited lifespan. Given South Africa's demographics, it was illogical for it to have restricted its membership to white female voters resident in South Africa, making it a whites only organization. With the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that from the start this created structural weaknesses. However, in 1955 multiracial contact was more the exception than the rule. Even cross-cultural interaction between the English and Afrikaans communities was rare.

The Black Sash survived the initial setback occasioned by the failure of its protest against the Senate Bill by choosing to campaign for black rather than white rights. Between 1958 and the late 1980s, apartheid legislation provided the organization with ample scope for campaigning, lobbying and offering concrete assistance to those most affected by the restrictive laws. That the Black Sash was increasingly an anachronism became clear once South Africa was democratised. The voiceless suddenly became vocal, and the common enemy, apartheid, that had provided the organization with its *raison d'être* began to disappear in the latter half of the 1980s. By the mid-1990s the majority were in power and marches and demonstrations were no longer proscribed.

The 1994 democratic elections provided members with opportunities for participation, but also gave rise to unrealistic expectations with regard to the place of the organization in the new South Africa. Moreover, from 1994 the need to take on additional paid employees strained the organization's financial reserves. By 1995 the Black Sash had reinvented itself and this ontological

---

<sup>530</sup> Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc, *The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash*, p.1.

change meant that it emerged as an NGO, the end product of the slow, almost imperceptible, innovations that it had been forced to make in the intervening years.

The general feeling amongst the black community was that they could now manage without white intervention. Nevertheless queues still formed at the advice offices, especially once they had been expanded and restructured to make them more demographically representative, with the result that the black community saw them as more user-friendly. However, this also meant that the white volunteers were increasingly marginalized. In September 1992, Sheena Duncan had written, "Development is fundamentally about enabling people in their own organizations, neighbourhoods and communities to make their own decisions about what they want to happen and the strategies that they will employ to reach their objectives."<sup>531</sup> This had now happened with the result that there was no organizational space for the 'associates', who were not as *au fait* with the experiences and circumstances of the help-seekers as the professional staff. The path to the restructuring of the Black Sash was a painful period for former members. It was as variable and as equally unpredictable in 1994/95 as that of the country as a whole.

Due to its protest 'stands', as a membership group the activities of the Black Sash were clearly visible to the white population. At a time when whites were being urged to unite in the face of 'the total onslaught' from the ANC, Black Africa and much of the Western world, the Black Sash appeared to be on the side of the 'enemy'. From a black perspective, because members benefited from apartheid and were relatively untouched by the harsher forms of repression, their contribution to the struggle for a democratic South Africa was less evident.

In the 1990s, during the transitional phase, funding became a vital element in the organization's survival. By 2001, when there was a turnaround in the organization's financial position, the membership arm had already closed down.

---

<sup>531</sup>: *Lobbying in the New South African Parliament. The Black Sash Experience*, undated, unnamed author. Manuscripts and Archives BC1065 University of Cape Town, p.1.

In his Report for 2001, Ian Hogan, Financial Director, revealed that donations from overseas funders had allowed the Black Sash Trust to survive another year. Without this backing, the organization would have suffered the same fate as many other NGOs that had had to close their doors.<sup>532</sup> Plans were laid for a fairly concentrated national fundraising drive. In recognition of its long history of involvement with the Constitution and with Parliament, it was to have been launched at a reception in the Parliamentary Senate Chambers and would have been hosted by the National Council of Provinces. For various reasons it had to be postponed, but remains on the agenda of the Strategic Planning Group.<sup>533</sup>

Once apartheid collapsed and the ANC became the government, South Africa became a joint partner with the other States on the African Continent. It was no longer viewed as a pariah by the Western world. The Black Sash had never fully identified with either of these extremes.

In 1993 the *Cape Times* cartoon depicting a black sash lying across the Constitution, that had led to the naming of the organization, was reprinted in the same newspaper. However, this time alongside was an identical cartoon by Tony Grogan, showing it being removed by animated figures resembling members of the multiracial negotiating team that was drafting an Interim Constitution<sup>534</sup> (Appendix B). This signified not only the resurrection of democracy but also the release of the spirit of the people who previously had been denied involvement in the nation's development, and who now felt confident enough to take over the reins of government.

This can also be viewed as symbolic of the new vision that permeated the Black Sash Trust, as it emerged from forty years of equivocation, confident in its new format as representative of the demographic realities of South African society and equipped to understand its strengths and weaknesses.

---

<sup>532</sup> Black Sash Trust Annual Report, 2001, p.32.

<sup>533</sup> Private Interview – tape-recorded – with Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) on 24-07-2003.

<sup>534</sup> 'Black Sash: 1955-1995' insert in *Sash* magazine, May 1995, p.12.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BOOKS

Du Preez, M. *'Pale Native: Memories of a Renegade Reporter.'* Zebra Press: Cape Town, 2003.

Hofmeyer, M, Kritzinger, K, Saayman, W (Eds.). *'The Black Sash: A Model for White Women's Resistance.'* In *Wit Afrikane? 'n Gesprek met Nico Smith.'* Taurus: Cape Town, 1990.

L. Husemeyer (ed.) *'Watchdogs or Hypocrites?'* Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung: Johannesburg, 1997

Marx, A.W. *'Lessons of the Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990.'* Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1992.

Michelman, C. *'The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism.'* Oxford University Press: London, 1975.

Seekings, J. *'The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991.'* David Philip: Cape Town, 2000.

Sisulu, S. *'Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime.'* David Philip: Cape Town, 2002.

Spink, K. *Black Sash: 'The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa.'* Methuen: London 1991.

Wentzel, J. *'The Liberal Slideaway.'* South African Institute of Race Relations: Johannesburg, 1995.

<b>THESES</b>
---------------

Ackermann, D.M. *'Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective'*. DTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1990.

Macrobert, J.A., "*Ungadinwa Nangomso – Don't Get Tired Tomorrow: A History of the Black Sash Advice Office in Cape Town. 1958 to 1980*" MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1993.

Michelman, C. *'The Black Sash of South Africa: 1955 to 1969. A Case Study in Liberalism.'* PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1971.

Phillips, M.W. *'The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988. A Study of White Extra-Parliamentary Opposition to Apartheid.'* MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2002.

Strydom, W. "*The political involvement of Kontak and the Women for Peace: 1976-1990 Die politieke betrokkenheid van Kontak en Vroue vir Vrede 1976-1990*" MA thesis, Rand Afrikaans Universiteit, 1997.

Sturman, K.P.M. "*The Federation of South African Women and the Black Sash: constraining and contestatory discourses about women in politics, 1954-1958*", MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1959.

Thompson, J.E. "*Sash and human rights: a content analysis (1976-1990)*". MA thesis, University of Natal, 1995.

## JOURNALS

De Villiers, J. '*The Black Sash: The Early Years*' in *Kaapse Bibliotekaris Cape Librarian* Volume 44, No.4., June/August, Mills Litho, 2000.

Du Toit, A '*The Legacy of Trusteeship: liberal arrogance and the dilemma of the struggle*' in *Suid-Afrikaan* No.55, December 1995.

'*Grant recipients win financial relief*' unnamed author, in *ChildrenFIRST*, Volume 5, No.39., October/November, 2001.

Holo, M. '*Writing for their Rights*' in *Agenda* No.46, 2000.

'*Liberal Democrats: Crucial Role*' leading article, no byline, in *Financial Mail* Volume 136, No.7, 19 May 1995.

Mendel, G. '*The Sash*' in *Leadership*, Volume 6, Issue 5, 1987.

Mohammed, Y. "*The Noel Robb papers*", in *Cabo*, Vol.6, Iss 2, 1995.

'*Writing it out of her System*', leading article, no byline, in *Financial Mail* Volume 138, No.9., 17 November 1995.

## REPORTS

Lewis, R. '*Black Sash Volunteer Project.*' November 1997.

Nell and Shapiro Consulting cc. '*The Way Forward: A strategic assessment of The Black Sash.*' January/February, 1995.

## ANNUAL REPORTS

The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust, 1993.

The Black Sash and its Advice Office Trust, 1994-1995.

The Black Sash Trust 1996.

The Black Sash Trust, 1997.

The Black Sash Trust, 2000.

The Black Sash Trust, 2001.

## NEWSPAPERS

*Argus*, 12 February 1990.

*Cape Times*, April 1993.

*CX Community Newspaper*, Issue 13, 1-15 December 1998.

*Daily Dispatch*, 12 May 1970.

*Daily Telegraph*. November 1994.

*Pretoria News Weekend*, 25 May 2002.

*Saturday Star*, 25 May 2002.

*The Citizen*, 25 October 1994.

## MAGAZINES

Mathiane J.A. “*Through my window: Black Sash listens and advises the unlearned and destitute*”, citation in *Family Voice*, November 1978,

*Sash*, Volume 32, No.3., January 1990. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 33, No.1., May 1990. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 33, No.2., September 1990. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 33, No.3., January 1991. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 34, No.1., May 1991. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 34, No.2., September 1991. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 34, No.3., January 1992. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 35, No.1., May 1992. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 35, No.2., September 1992. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 35, No.3., January 1993. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 36, No.1., May 1993. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 36, No.2., September 1993. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 36, No.3., January 1994. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 37, No.1., September 1994. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 37, No.2., January 1995. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

*Sash*, Volume 37, No.3. May 1995. Clyson Printers (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.



Anniversary Supplement to *Sash* May 1995, '*Black Sash 1955-1995*' Clyson: Cape Town, 1995.

<b>ARCHIVES</b>
-----------------

**Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.**

Annual Report – Black Sash National Headquarters, August 1994-May 1995, BC.1065.

*'Black Sash: Organization of Women or Women's Organization.* undated. Prepared by the Women's Issues Group (WIG) Natal Coastal Region. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

*'Citizens and Comrades under the Law'* Presidential Address by Mary Burton, Black Sash National Conference 13-14 May 1995, undated. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection. BC.668.

Conference Report on Capital Punishment, September 1994-May 1995. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

Conference Working Paper prepared by the Women's Issues Group (WIG), Natal Coastal Region. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

Confidential Circular to Black Sash Members and Staff from Jenny de Tolly and the National Executive, dated 08-02-1994. Mary Burton Papers, BC.1065 B2.5.

*Critical Choices Facing the Black Sash in 1994.* undated, unnamed author. Mary Burton Papers, BC.1065 B2.5.

*'Dependency on Fund-Raiding and the Changing Nature of Black Sash Membership'*. National Conference Working Paper compiled by Mary Burton for the National Executive, dated 14-03-1990. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

Discussion Paper on the Policy of the Black Sash, Strategic Planning 1996. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection BC.668.

Graduation Address *'Trained as Locusts'*. Law Faculty, University of Natal, April 1995, delivered by Sheena Duncan. Mary Burton Papers, BC.1065 B2.1.4.

Interoffice Memorandum regarding Strategic Planning, dated 14-06-1996. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection BC.668.

Letter of resignation, dated 04-01-1993. Mary Burton Papers (restricted access) B2.1.4.

Letter to members from National Executive/Strategic Team, dated 14-12-1994. Mary Burton Papers BC.1065 B2.1.4.

*'Lobbying in the New South African Parliament: The Black Sash Experience.'*, undated. BC.1065.

Mailing List. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection. BC.1065 BC.668.

Membership analysis. Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4.

Membership Portfolio 1993. Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4.

Minutes of the Black Sash National Conference held in Sandton at the SACC Conference Centre 13-14 May 1995. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

Minutes of Regional Meeting on Strategic Planning 1995. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection BC.668.

National Conference Working Paper prepared by Wendy Annecke, Black Sash Natal Coastal Region, dated 25-01-1990. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

National Conference 1990 Report, dated 14-03-1990, prepared by Mary Burton. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

Open Letter to Members from the National Executive, dated 15-05-1990. Mary Burton Papers B2.1.3.

Open Letter to Members from the National Executive, dated December 1991. Mary Burton Papers BC.1065 B2.1.4.

Open letter to Members from Strategic Planning Team, undated. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668

Personal letter from Janet Mill to the Chairperson of the Western Cape Region. Mary Burton Papers (restricted access) BC.1065 B2.1.4.

Personal letter from Jenny de Tolly to Mary Burton, dated 22-03-1995. Mary Burton Papers B2.1.4.

*'Response to the Viljoen Commission Report by the National Executive of the Black Sash.'* March 1993. Mary Burton Papers, BC1065 B2.5.

*'The Black Sash: Accountability and Non-Racialism.'* Paper prepared by the Albany Branch, undated. Black Sash (Western Cape) Collection, BC.668.

*'The Black Sash's Role as part of Civil Society in the New South Africa.'* dated 21-07-1994. Mary Burton Papers, BC1065 B2.5.

*'The Sash as a Voluntary Organization'* Argument. BC.1065.

*'What Resources are Available to Us.'* Letter to members from the National Executive, December 1991. Mary Burton Papers, BC.1065 B2.1.4.

Work in Progress Paper, *'Black Sash Western Cape Region and Wage Earning Women'*. BC.1065.

## INTERVIEWS

Judy Baron, former Black Sash member, telephone interview, 23-07-2003.

Mary Burton, private interview – tape-recorded - past President of the Black Sash and Trustee of the Black Sash Trust, 23-07-2003.

Leonie Caroline, Regional Advice Office Director, private interview – tape-recorded – 23-07-2003

Caseworkers and Volunteers at the Barrack Street advice office in Cape Town – tape-recorded - 23-07-2003.

Dot Cleminshaw, former Black Sash member, telephone interview, 27-07-2003.

Betty Davenport, former Black Sash member, telephone interview, 09-08-2003.

Joan Grover, former Black Sash member, telephone interview, 24-07-2003.

Vuyani Lallie, paralegal caseworker, Barrack Street advice office, private interview – tape-recorded – 23-07-2003.

Candice Malherbe, former Black Sash member and member of Legiwatch, telephone interview, 12-07-2003.

Hillary Morris, first Black Sash Trust National Director, and National Head Office Staff, private interview, 16-01-2002.

Nomahlube Nabe, caseworker, Barrack Street advice office, private interview – tape-recorded - 23-07-2003.

Marcella Naidoo, National Director, Black Sash Trust, Zanelele Phanziso and National Head Office Staff, private interviews, 23-07-2003.

Di Oliver (formerly Bishop) past Black Sash Vice-President and Trustee of the Black Sash Trust, private interview – tape-recorded - 24-07-2003.

Noel Robb, Member of the Legiwatch group and former advice office volunteer, telephone interview, 13-07-2003.

Jenny de Tolly, past President of the Black Sash and Trustee of the Black Sash Trust, private interview – tape-recorded - 18-07-2003.

Annica van Gylswyk, past President of the Black Sash Pretoria Branch, private interview – tape-recorded - 14-10-2003.

David Viti, retired paralegal caseworker, telephone interview, 25-07-2003.

SAFM radio phone-in programme 08-09-2004.



**VIDEO**

*'The Black Sash: the early years'* 1992 video presentation co-produced and directed by Black Sash members C. Parker, N. Murphy and D. Ackermann

**APPENDIX A**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

## **Chapter Two**

Was the professionalization of the advice offices already on a non-return course before the membership arm closed down?

Did a concern with gender equality and women's rights transcend racial boundaries?

Did age play a part in determining reaction to the abortion debate?

Do you share the view that lesbians, Marxists and single parents joined the Black Sash in the 1980s, hoping to use the organization as a platform for their own political ends?

Did their membership in any way alter the face of the organization?

Were you aware of the obstacles that stood in the way of attracting black members?

## **Chapter Three**

Did your condemnation of such practices as 'necklacing' alter relationships with the black communities?

Did Jill Wentzel's expose in her book *The Liberal Slideaway* lead to the membership dividing into two camps?

Do you believe that the State reacted differently to the Black Sash because it was firstly a white and secondly a women's organization?

Was it impossible to retain the new recruits that joined the Black Sash during the 1986 States of Emergency once the proscribed organizations were unbanned?



#### **Chapter Four**

How would you evaluate the part played by the Black Sash in the protest movement?

Do you feel a white middle-class women's organization was able to relate to the basic tenets of the struggle?

Did you personally experience arrest, solitary confinement or deportation?

#### **Chapter Five**

Why was the 1994 National Conference held behind closed doors?

Was the creation of the salaried post of Parliamentary monitor and lobbying coordinator aimed at lessening the workload or improving efficiency?

Did you ever question the organisation's acceptance within the overall black protest movement?

#### **Chapter Six**

Did you agree with Nell & Shapiro that there was a limited window of opportunity for a white women's organization post-1994?

#### **Chapter Seven**

Was *Sash* magazine designed to influence people both inside and outside of the membership?

Was the magazine of a consistently high quality?

Has the demise of the *Sash* magazine left a gap?

## **Chapter Eight**

Does the term 'associate' denote an ex-member of the membership arm whilst 'volunteer' refers to a new recruit?

Do racial dynamics and age hierarchies still surface in the new structures?

Do 'associates' play a significant role in the Black Sash Trust advice offices?

How successfully have you integrated the volunteer component into the new professionalized office structures?

Do volunteers now receive travelling allowances and lunch money, as recommended by Renee Lewis?

Does the volunteer component now encompass all racial groups?

What is the demographic profile of the black volunteers?

Why do volunteers offer their services?

Does time spent with the Black Sash Trust still provide training in campaigning, organizing, running meetings and fund raising, which could be CV enhancing?

Does the Black Sash Trust still value its volunteers?

Does the Black Sash Trust still attract foreign volunteers?

In which fields are volunteers mostly used?

Are staff salaries market-related?

Do you have a fairly stable workforce or are your staff/volunteers lured away by better offers?

What are the main issues/concerns of the Black Sash Trust?

Is the Black Sash Trust still involved in land issues?

Are human rights issues still high on the agenda?

Does the Black Sash Trust still undertake campaign work?

Do staff and volunteers experience divided loyalties when the Black Sash Trust is critical of government policy and accountability?

How is the Black Sash Trust currently funded?

Does the Black Sash Trust still operate as a pressure group?

In the public perception, is the Black Sash Trust still regarded as a women's organization?

Is the original Black Sash aura still present in the current advice offices?

Has the introduction of male staff members and volunteers had an impact on the nature of the organization?

Do the paid staff show the same passionate concern for issues such as social security and the basic income grant that according to Nell & Shapiro defined the membership approach?

Has the requirement that from 1997 all paralegals must speak one of the indigenous languages improved relationships with the black communities?

Are translators still employed?

Are all racial, gender and age categories now represented in the Black Sash Trust Head Office and the advice offices?

What are the demographics of the current advice-seekers?

On average, how many cases do you deal with per day?

Do you still operate advice offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban, Grahamstown, Pietermaritzburg, and Knysna?

Nell & Shapiro suggested that the success of the advice offices would be gauged by their ability to impact on root causes so that the queues would be diminished. How would you score them based on this criterion?

Are former members of the Black Sash who are not involved in the Black Sash Trust engaged in other directions with human rights issues?

Was any training given to the volunteers who were co-opted into Legiwatch? If so what was the content?

Does Legiwatch still function as a vehicle for lobbying for measures to address problems identified via people such as Vuyani Lallie in the advice offices?

What status does training given by the South African Qualifications Association (SAQA) enjoy?

Do other organizations such as FAMSA, SANCA, Municipalities and Community Health Workers still give advice to people waiting to be interviewed on issues such as maintenance, alcohol and drug abuse, service charges and HIV/AIDS?

Is the Black Sash Trust still committed to building a strong civil society?

Do former Black Sash members maintain contact?

Has Marcella Naidoo introduced policy changes?

How does interaction between government departments and the Black Sash Trust compare to that of the former Black Sash?

How was foreign funding obtained for the work of the Black Sash Trust?

Is the Black Sash Trust actively involved in networking with other organizations with similar concerns?

Who are the Trustees of the Black Sash Trust?

What function do they perform?

## **GENERAL**

Administered to past Leadership and current 'associates'.

May I ask you for some personal details with regard to your background? When, how and why did you join the Black Sash?

Has the new South Africa lived up to your expectations? How critical/satisfied are you with the ANC government and its policies?

Was the camaraderie, debate, listening to interesting speakers, contact with educated, erudite women as important and rewarding as the protest side of Black Sash membership?

Do former Black Sash members maintain contact with members of the Black communities?

With the benefit of hindsight, are there any issues that you would have handled differently?

Given the time and energy involved in belonging to the Black Sash, was it all worth it? Would you do it again?

#### **Administered to current staff and volunteers**

May I ask you for some personal details with regard to your background? When, how and why did you join the Black Sash Trust?

What projects/fields of enquiry/outreach programmes are you involved in?

Is funding still difficult to obtain? Who are your main donors? Do you receive a government grant?

Have you noticed a change in the concerns brought to the advice offices by help-seekers?

On average how many cases do you deal with per month? Is this in line with records kept prior to 1995?

Do you feel that you have a rapport with those with whom you interact, regardless of race, age or gender, because ultimately people are people with varying degrees of problems and experiences?

**APPENDIX B**

**CARTOONS**



SASH VOLUME 37 NUMBER 3 MAY 1995  
ANNIVERSARY SUPPLEMENT

# BLACKSASH



1955 ~ 1995

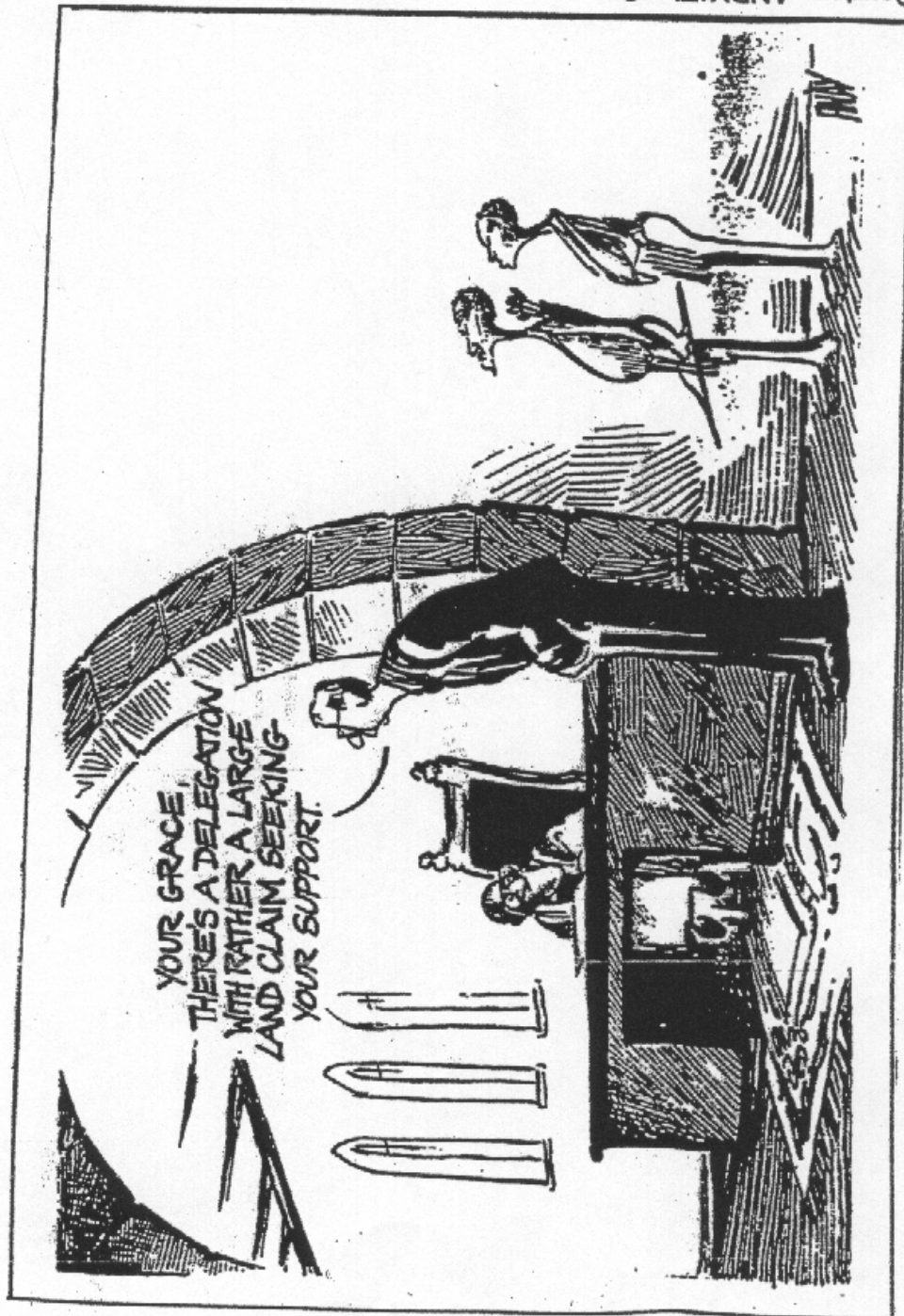
Cartoon: Donald Kenyon, Daily Dispatch, 12 May 1970.

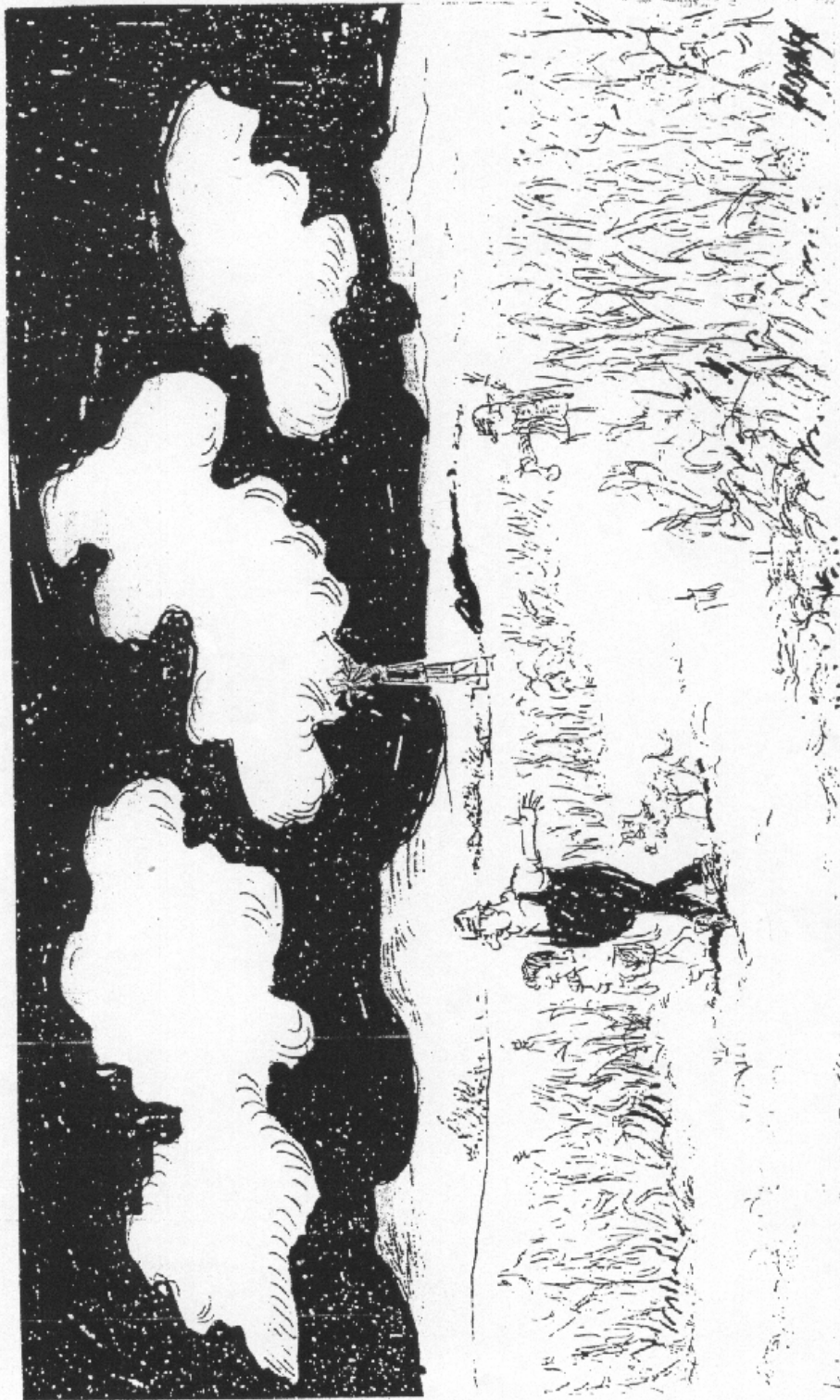
**INSIDE:**

Forty years ~ a celebration

Turn left at the donkeys ~ anecdotes and other memories

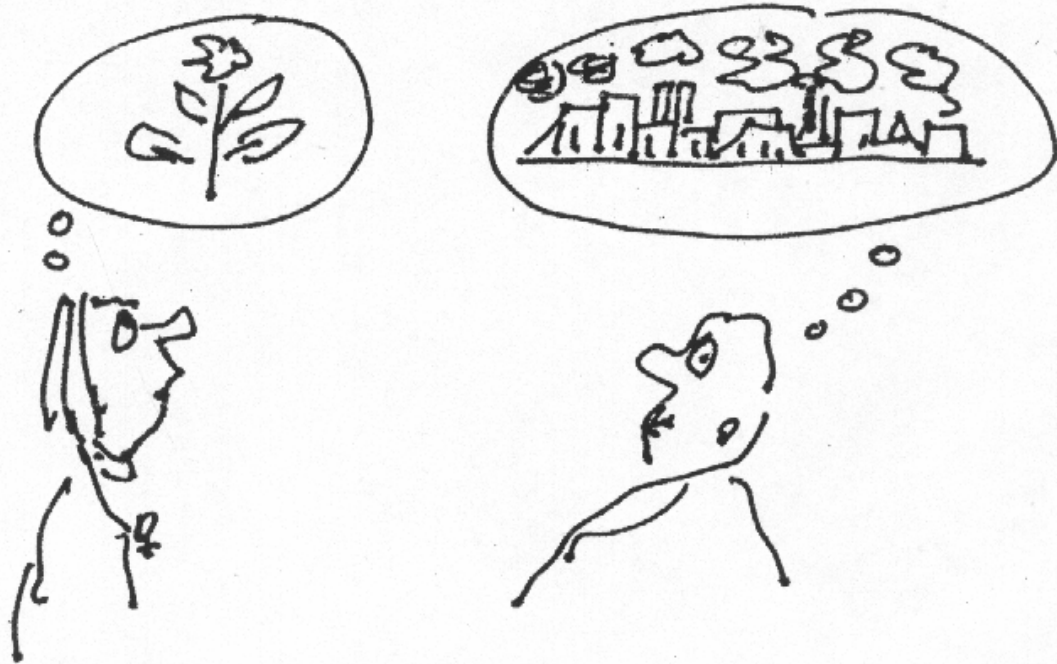
Courtesy ANDY/The Star





Courtesy of the Cape Times

“Dr Treurnicht is absolutely right. The government can't tamper with history. Our farm has been in the family ever



P L A N T



Courtesy of the Women's Press



Psst! Wanna swap your hotels for three hospitals  
and all the Mining Rights in the W-Cape?

### Addressing the Black Sash



Amanda Louw, assisted by Gus Ferguson, provides pungent comment on some letters recently received by her sisters of Natal Coastal region.

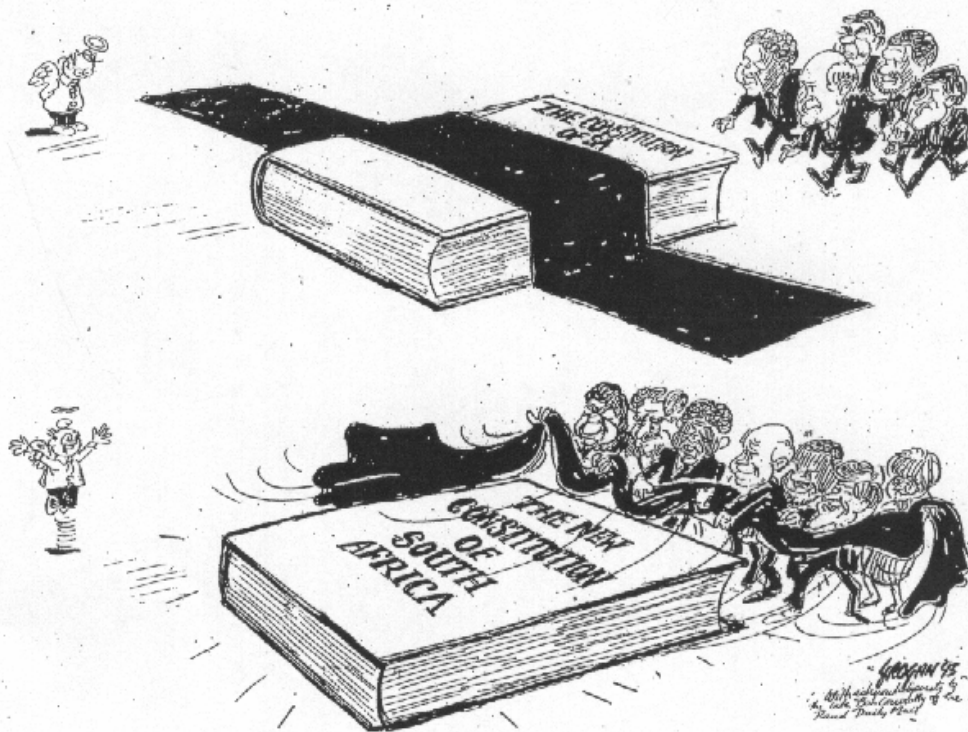
All slips being Freudian, we must take careful cognisance of mail received by our Natal Coastal office. Correspondents have mangled, poeticised and transmogrified our good name as:

- |              |                            |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Lack Sash    | (liberation at last!)      |
| Black Search | (a hard one)               |
| Black Sack   | (hate the innuendo)        |
| Black Gash   | (violence!!)               |
| Black Dash   | (we <i>stand</i> , dammit) |
| Black Cash   | (any colour will be fine)  |

The Natal Coastal regional office is in the Ecumenical Centre in St. Andrews Street, Durban, which prompted one mendicant correspondent to convert it to the Economical Centre.

The weirdest ms-interpretation was the gentleman caller who was convinced that the organisation was a New South Africa escort agency. Salome and the dance of the seven sashes? Such are the burdensome connotations of our name.





(cartoon by Tony Grogan of the *Cape Times* with acknowledgements to the late Bob Connolly of the *Rand Daily Mail*).