

Interview with . . .

Helen Suzman

Janet Sahli interviewed Mrs HELEN SUZMAN, PFP MP for Houghton, on her view of the 1978 parliamentary session

Q: *What is your general opinion of the 1978 parliamentary session?*

A: It was a strangely unsatisfactory session, largely concerned with amending Bills. Although almost as many Bills were passed as in 1977, we never seemed to get to grips with anything of real importance.

The main Bills passed affected 'plural relations' — I still can't get used to that term! Most detrimental to African interests were the amendments to Section 29, which imposes severe penalties on any African person who is declared to be 'idle and undesirable'. We managed to get the definition of 'idle' amended. Now if a man is registered as a workseeker he has some protection.

The Citizenship Bill virtually removed South African citizenship from first-generation South Africans. We haven't begun to feel the effects of that one yet.

As regards the provision for 99-year leasehold for urban blacks the Minister has said there would not be ambiguity. The descendants of South African citizens with 10(1)(a) rights would be eligible for leasehold. In other words, he is protecting the rights of these descendants and so a certain class of foreigner will be able to enjoy leasehold.

Q: *What, in your opinion, was the single worst piece of legislation passed?*

A: There were two — the Fund-raising Bill and the Citizenship Bill. I mentioned the Citizenship Bill earlier.

The Fund-raising Bill will directly affect all sorts of organisations as money can't be accepted even if it is not solicited. Money collected overseas will be deemed to have been collected in South Africa. This is going to affect the defence of accused in political trials.

Q: *With reference to the Rhodie affair, why did the Prime Minister say that South Africans should avoid giving the impression overseas that things are wrong in South Africa? One gets the impression that the Government regards it as unpatriotic, not to commit certain wrongs, but to point them out.*

A: Well, of course this is an old tendency of the Prime Minister's. I've often been criticised

for asking questions simply to 'give ammunition' to overseas critics.

The Biko debate was a very tense one. Kruger seemed reasonably crestfallen by the whole affair, which is why he's appointed two watchdogs to investigate the condition of political prisoners. I don't know what effect this will have on police enthusiasm.

Colin Eglin, the leader of the party, made some good speeches during the constitutional discussions. The Prime Minister gave an intractable reply. He seeks out the weak points in his opponent's policy instead of clarifying his own.

Q: *Do you think the Nationalists have made progress in their 30 years in office?*

A: There are one or two signs of change, like the continued broadening of the sports policy and the 99-year leasehold for Africans — although we'll have to see how many take it up. There was also the ruling on the opening of theatres — although nothing irritates me more than having everything by permit — even normal activities like theatre-going.

South Africa is as economically integrated as ever. Every other facet of life has been compartmentalised — education, social amenities, residential separation — half a million coloureds, and Indians, have been moved — and complete political separation which began with the removal of the coloureds from the common roll and the removal of African representation in Parliament.

Hundreds of statutes designed to restructure South Africa have been introduced. The Nats say that the progress of the homelands is proceeding apace. At least a million people have been moved. The irony is that the two homelands which have accepted independence so far are recognised only by themselves and by South Africa — and Transkei has broken off relations with South Africa. If that's achievement . . .

Q: *Why do the Nationalists constantly talk about fulfilling black aspirations and appear to take no real account of them in practice? When I hear radio reports of what some of them say in Parliament about black feeling I often wonder whether we're living in the same country.*

A: The Nationalists deceive themselves. They are past masters at self-deception. They think that

by giving Africans three universities they have more than compensated for the closing of white universities to them. Opportunities in the homelands compensate for removals. Community councils replace town councils.

But they never consult with truly representative urban Africans. I can't get over Dr Mulder considering elections and by-elections in Soweto as representative with a less than six per cent poll. Leaders like Dr Motlana are pushed aside and community councillors become the Government's advisors.

We haven't heard the end of that, either!

Q: Do you think that Sash still has a rôle to play?

A: Very much so. A highly important rôle. I steer overseas visitors to your Advice Offices, and I try to persuade Ministers to visit them. They eyeball to eyeball confrontation with the actual people involved in this situation is invaluable.

The practical advice based on a wealth of experience must be of inestimable value to people with nowhere else to turn for free advice.

OBITUARIES

QUEENIE FOUCHÉ

SINCE the last issue of the magazine the Black Sash has lost two of its oldest and most dearly loved members — Queenie Fouché and Tertia Pybus.

Queenie died suddenly in April. She retired from active work some years ago, but until her retirement had been a member of the National Executive Committee.

Queenie was a character. She sat always in the same chair at meetings, smoking cigarette after cigarette, but missing nothing. Her wisdom was of inestimable value to us in the early days of the Black Sash. A woman of few words, she gave us the benefit of her wise judgement in her forthright manner.

Queenie had a delicious sense of humour and her description of some of the people she knew in her young days kept us in fits of laughter. Some of her remarks are often quoted to this day.

Queenie was one of the people who formed the character of the Black Sash. She was wise, kind, generous, and was a great favourite with her colleagues on the committee.

To her son, her daughter and the grandchildren we offer our deep sympathy.

TERTIA PYBUS

TERTIA PYBUS was one of the original six women who met on a Sunday morning in May 1955 to decide what could be done to protest against the Senate Bill. A march to a public meeting was organised and a week later The Women's Defence of the Constitution League was formed.

Tertia was deeply involved in the Black Sash. She organised demonstrations and was the Transvaal treasurer for a time. She was always the first to volunteer for any job which had to be done.

Anne Marais, when talking of Tertia recently, said 'With all the crazy women in the Black Sash, I never once heard a word of criticism of Tertia from anyone. We all loved her'.

In the early sixties, she and her sister Dorothy went to live in Swaziland, but Tertia never lost her interest in the Black Sash. She kept up-to-date with our activities and year after year a lovely parcel arrived with things she had made for the morning market.

Recently when I saw her on several occasions when she was in hospital, we talked about the old days and had many a laugh over some of the things we did in our enthusiasm to put the world to rights.

All of us who knew her so well will miss her greatly, but we give our thanks for the privilege we had working with such a kind, compassionate and caring person.

We all send our love and sympathy to her sister Dorothy, and hope that the knowledge of our respect and affection for Tertia will be of some comfort to her at this sad time.

JEAN SINCLAIR