

# BLACK SASH

VS.

# RADIO SOUTH AFRICA

*The Press joins in*

THE ejection of the S.A.B.C. news representative from the Black Sash National Conference in East London was prominently reported in most of the main newspapers in South Africa. (See the report on Conference in this issue.)

The *Rand Daily Mail* quoted a Sash member in Johannesburg as saying, "This is good news. As a public service the S.A.B.C. should not be allowed to function as a political weapon."

In a leading article the newspaper said: "The Black Sash movement has done well to ban representatives from the S.A.B.C. to its meetings . . ."

## Government Mouthpiece

"The S.A.B.C. has become the mouthpiece of the Government and the more that Nationalist leaders and their Press try to explain this away, the clearer it becomes that the S.A.B.C. has been taken over for the specific purpose of countering the standpoint of the English-language Press.

"The Prime Minister has spoken about the freedom of speech in relation to the radio system. His argument is false. There is no free speech on the radio in the sense that different points of view are presented impartially. There is only one 'line' — the Government 'line'."

*Die Transvaler*, reporting what had happened at the Sash conference, said that the Black Sash movement which claimed to be non-political and opposed to any form of discrimination, had actually applied it in practice.

The *Cape Times* also opposed the action taken and commented:

"We trust the report that the Black Sash had banned Radio South Africa reporters from its

"Friends,  
countrymen,  
patriots . . ."



meeting reflected only a state of temporary annoyance among this group of women who have fought so many rounds for liberty in South Africa. If, however, banning the reporters of the radio services, or any reporter for that matter, is being adopted as a policy, then we hope the Black Sash reverses that policy immediately. No matter what Radio South Africa may have done to outrage the ideals of freedom of information in the Republic, that cannot constitute any kind of reason for breaching Press freedom yet again. We believe that the Black Sash is fighting to preserve the freedom of the Press just as much as any other democratic organisation in the country is, and would not want to decrease it even to demonstrate its indignation. That kind of banning and barring can safely be left to the Nationalists."

In reply to this, the Cape Western Region issued the following statement, which was published under prominent headlines:

"We regret that the barring of the S.A.B.C. representative from our conference should have been interpreted as an interference with the freedom of the Press."

"The Black Sash does not consider that the S.A.B.C. is in the same category as the Press. The S.A.B.C. is a service to which all listeners, whatever their political sympathies, contribute financially.

"In the opinion of the Black Sash, therefore, the S.A.B.C. should not be used to represent only the Government point of view.

"When newspapers print inaccurate reports, or misrepresent a case, the public is given the opportunity to correct the position in the same newspaper. The S.A.B.C., as far as we can see, does not allow talks which correct misrepresentations or damaging omissions.

"The facts of our case are these: that as the S.A.B.C. had decided recently to stop using reports from the United Nations available through independent ordinary news channels and had instead decided to use only reports emanating from Mr. Eric Louw, we drew an ironical parallel by adopting the following resolution:

*That a similar procedure be adopted at this conference as Radio South Africa adopts in giving the U.N. reports, and that the chairman of this conference be appointed our news representative.*

"We regarded the request of the S.A.B.C. to attend our 6th national conference as an opportunity to show our disapproval of being deprived of the independent broadcasting services which we consider we are entitled to expect from Radio S.A.

"We wish to make it clear that representatives from the local Nationalist and Opposition newspapers attended the opening of the conference at our invitation and that no attempt was made to question or to influence their reports.

"Any other newspaper reporter attending would have been similarly welcomed.

"The Black Sash, far from banning representatives of groups who are diametrically opposed to it, has gone to great pains over the years to persuade them not only to attend our conferences, but also to participate in our brains trusts and Press parties and to report on our activities."

### The English Press

In the *Daily Dispatch*, which splashed the headline **BLACK SASH BARS THE S.A.B.C.** on its front page, a letter appeared from G. K. van Brackhuizen alleging that "slanting and distorting news items" was the policy of all the English language newspapers in South Africa. The letter continued:

"The Black Sash allege that there is no representative Opposition in the Republic of South Africa. This is rather a bold statement. What has the Black Sash to offer? The official Opposition at least opens its door at their national conferences and everyone is welcome to listen and

accept or reject its future policy. What does the Black Sash do? They go into closed sessions and no members of the public are allowed. Are they ashamed of their policy or do they want to hide their message from the public?

"They advocate treating their non-white neighbours as themselves. What have they done for them? Yes, they have helped political agitators to find bail, etc. — but what guarantee have they that these same agitators will not slit their throats together with others at some time in the future? The Black Sash say mete out better treatment to the non-Whites — but they must practise what they preach. I defy any of the delegates to prove that they pay their domestic servants a living



Mrs. Mary Stoy collecting signatures for the Black Sash petition. On the first day of the campaign in Cape Town, a Sash member was questioned by the police.

## SASH vs. RADIO S.A.—Continued

wage. They only receive a mere pittance in comparison to what their husbands earn.

"I say NO to the Black Sash. Give us a more popular message, one which has or embraces a more clear-cut policy, not that of continual besmirchment of Government policies when no alternative solution is forthcoming.

"My hat off to the one-third of the delegates who deemed it fit to allow the S.A.B.C. representative in their midst. They felt that they had nothing to hide or be ashamed of."

Mrs. Daphne Curry, Regional chairman, replied to this letter and advised the writer to replace his hat.

"The one-third to whom he took off his hat voted as they did on the grounds that any news, albeit distorted, which advertises the Black Sash, is better than no news, leading to the assumption that the Sash is dead. The Black Sash is not dead. The Sash is alive and its aim is to ensure

that there is a sufficient number of Whites and non-Whites with mutual respect and trust to work out a policy guaranteeing basic rights and liberties to all."

Further publicity for the Black Sash protest against the use of the S.A.B.C. as a propaganda instrument was given by the *Sunday Times* and other newspapers when Mrs. Jean Sinclair, National President, announced that the Sash would organise a nation-wide petition, if possible in co-operation with other bodies.

It was subsequently reported in several newspapers that the Sash had been refused permission from Port Elizabeth businessmen in Main Street to put petition tables outside their shops. The reports quoted Mrs. Alison Pirie, chairman of Cape Eastern Region, as saying: "I think they are afraid their business interests might suffer. We have reached a sorry state of affairs in this country when fear seems to have become the over-riding factor in people's lives."

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## *Press Statement from the Sash Conference :*

CONSIDERATION of the past year's work, and plans for the future, revealed the Black Sash's continued efforts to improve race relations through public and informal meetings of all races.

The first category included brains trusts, lectures, films and multi-racial forums. The second category comprised more informal contacts. Regions reported holding regular discussion groups, the subjects ranging from civics, education, race relations, to those of particular interest to women. These were juvenile delinquency, teenage problems, and low wages, together with the ever-spiralling cost of living.

In addition, the Black Sash continued trying to assist the victims of unjust laws by providing bail for Pass-Law offenders, and advice on the multiplicity of problems resulting from apartheid laws.

The bridges thus established are considered invaluable for future race relations in South Africa.

The conference further decided that the Black Sash, in its efforts to work for justice for all South Africans, categorically rejects discrimination on grounds of race, colour or creed. It will work to change the attitudes of mind which are governed by prejudice and fear.

The Black Sash is, and always has been, a body of women voters pledged to fight against wrongs brought about by voters, and having as its driving force a sense of personal responsibility.

If it were considered that the aims of the movement would be better served by changing the whole character of the Black Sash through opening the membership to men and non-voters, it would not hesitate to do so.

As non-white political organisations know, the Black Sash, as in the past, is always willing to co-operate on matters of common interest on a basis of complete equality.

The policy of the S.A.B.C., from its inception, was to provide entertainment and objective news and comment. Broadcasting is recognised as the most powerful publicity agent in the country. The Black Sash condemns the change in policy which has converted Radio South Africa into an instrument for Government propaganda. This gradual and insidious change is now so blatant that the time has come for the public forcefully to express its disapproval.

Delegates appreciate that there are difficult years ahead, but are determined to continue by all constitutional means their fight against the Verwoerd Government.