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editorial

This issue focuses on two topical themes of concern to the Black Sash:
 ★ the changing face of repression and
 ★ new initiatives to increase support for a non-racial democracy among white South Africans.

These themes may appear to have little in common. They are, in fact, closely related.

During the past two years, under the umbrella of two States of Emergency, the government has developed and refined new forms of repression, underscoring the truism that a repressive regime is remarkably resilient if it is ruthless enough. The article beginning on the opposite page examines some dimensions of this resilience.

These developments have transformed the political terrain within which extra-parliamentary organisations work. As a result, most have been through a period of intense introspection, re-evaluating their circumstances, and re-defining achievable goals and appropriate strategies.

Out of this process has come a growing understanding of the urgent need for political work to enable more white South Africans to become willing partners in a negotiated transformation of their society. For, as long as the great majority of whites continue actively to resist this process, there is little chance of liberation for anyone in the foreseeable future.

Working to change perceptions within this constituency is among the most challenging of political tasks, as the Black Sash has long been aware. The government has succeeded extraordinarily well in fanning fears evoked by the escalating resistance struggle and particularly by excesses committed in its name. And during the past few years opposition movements have allowed their potential strength to be dissipated by divisions and conflict around divergent strategies.

Against this background, the Five Freedoms Forum Conference in Johannesburg in late September was a welcome development. Essentially an extra-parliamentary initiative, its major contribution was to take the first tentative steps towards bridging the schism between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition forces. Work is currently underway throughout the country to spread the conference's central message: that the common commitment to a non-racial democracy shared by various opposition parties and organisations is more important at present than the points on which they differ. This issue of SASH includes the conference's highlights.

In taking forward this work, we remember those far-sighted women who laid the foundations on which we build. On page 37 we begin a series in tribute to our pioneers. To them we say: You may be finding it difficult to accept some of the perceptions that newer members are bringing to the Black Sash. We understand what it must mean to have some of the organisation's original beliefs and assumptions challenged. We stress the importance of your continuing to offer your insights and experience, as the Black Sash attempts to respond appropriately to South Africa's crises in the late 1980s. Despite the differences that do — and should — exist, the past three decades have more than justified your conviction, expressed in the Black Sash's dedication, that history and your children will defend you.