MINUTES OF BLACK SASH NATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD FROM 10TH TO 13TH MARCH, 1983 IN CAPE TOWN.

The opening meeting of Conference took place on the evening of 10th March at the Claremont Civic Centre and was addressed by the National President Mrs. Sheena Duncan, and by Dr. Allan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Mrs. Mary Burton, Chairman of Cape Western Region was in the Chair.

(The National President's address is Conference Document No. 1).

FRIDAY 11TH MARCH.

The first business session began at the Mowbray Town Hall at 8.30 a.m. on Friday 11th March.

PRESENT: In the Chair

Sheena Duncan National President
Joyce Harris National Vice-President
Jill Wentzel National Vice-President

DELEGATES:

Headquarters
Ethel Walt
Esther Levitan Magazine (deputising)

Natal Coastal
Solveig Piper Secretary do
Jill Nicholson
Sarah Burns
Mary Grice
Ann Colvin
Joan Hemson

Natal Midlands
Pessa Weinberg (3 delegates and 3 alternates)
Beth Franklin

Albany
Margaret Barker
Gusta Macdonald

Border
Susie Powers

Eastern Cape
Bobby Malunsky
Molly Blackburn
Adelaide Allchurch

Cape Western
Mary Burton
Beverley Runciman
Rosemary Meny-Gilbert
Noel Robb
Joan Grover
Margaret Nash
Valerie West
Di Bishop

Transvaal/
Photographs are needed all the time. Regions are asked to send photographs wherever possible and relevant to current issues.

Costs. Quotations had been asked for from various printers. Several, on learning what Pacific Press charged, did not quote at all. Quotes which were received were at least one third higher than Pacific Press.

The audited accounts show that Headquarters spent R8327 on the magazine in 1982 and received R3801.

The editor said that either the price of the magazine must be increased or that the February issue must be dropped.

It was agreed that the February issue be retained and that the magazine remain a quarterly publication.

2,200 copies of each issue are ordered now but the number will soon have to be increased.

Margaret Nash requested that the magazine report to Conference be more analytical in future and that it should include details of who it goes to, where and whether on a subscription or complimentary basis.

Headquarters sells all the magazines ordered to the Regions according to their orders. Transvaal Region buys from Headquarters the surplus after Regional orders have been fulfilled. Transvaal and Cape Western subsidise the complimentary copies sent out but in the absence of the Treasurer the extent of the subsidisation was not established.

The whole question of magazine distribution will be investigated in the coming year and all Regions are asked to send to the Editor the number of magazines ordered by them which go to

(a) members; (b) subscriptions from non-members (c) Press (d) complimentary copies other than Press.

That the price of the magazine charged by Headquarters to the Regions be R1.20 per copy, i.e. R4.80 per annum.

Proposed by Marian Lacey, seconded by Audrey Coleman and carried.

It was agreed that Regions are free to decide at what price they sell to their members and to vary the price for certain categories of members.

It was pointed out that Transvaal Region already charges subscribers overseas R20.00 per annum by airmail and R10.00 per annum by surface mail and that subscribers inside South Africa who are not members have to pay extra for postage and expenses.

The magazine report was adopted; proposed by Gusta Macdonald, seconded by Ethel Walt.

C. The Treasurer's Report (Conference Document No. 4).

Was presented by Ethel Walt in the absence of the National Treasurer.

The auditor's report was tabled.

The honorary auditor, Mr. Len Butt, who has done the Headquarters and Transvaal books for 28 years is now retiring. Conference unanimously expressed its grateful thanks and good wishes to him.

The Treasurer reminded Regions that audited Regional accounts should be sent to Headquarters and asked Regions to send her accurate and regularly updated membership figures.

The Treasurer’s report was adopted; proposed by Rosemary Meny-Gilbert, seconded by Joyce Harris.
REGIONAL REPORTS Cont---

Transvaal Region (Conference Document No. 10)

Was presented by Audrey Coleman who emphasised the harassment by the authorities of the families of refugees from South Africa.

The Pretoria Branch Report (Conference Document No. 11)

Was presented by Annica Van Gylswyk who expressed regret that Mary Harrop-Allin, the Chairman of the branch, had been unable to come to Conference.

Arising out of the Pretoria report and the contract for domestic workers drawn up by several organisations in that city the question was asked as to whether we had fulfilled the obligation placed upon us by the 1982 resolution on a minimum wage. The Chairman ruled that it was impossible to enter into an extremely lengthy discussion at that stage but that anyone who wished to raise the matter in the future should make sure that it appears on the 1984 conference agenda.

Pretoria was asked to send a copy of the domestic workers contract to the Durban Advice Office.

Cape Western (Conference Document No. 12)

Was presented by Joan Grover on behalf of the 1982 Cape Western Chairman, Mollie Crawford. Joan Grover paid tribute to the hard work done by Mollie during her time in office.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS (Agenda Item XII)

Joyce Harris read a paper to introduce the discussion (Conference Document No. 13).

Joyce was thanked and congratulated on the quite brilliant clarity of her paper. Cape Western tabled two papers (Conference Documents Nos. 14 and 15) "Memorandum on the present Constitutional Proposals" and "The Planned New Constitution".

The second paper, containing a warning that the public debate on the constitution should not divert us from concentration on other crucial and fundamental issues, was read and proposed as a Black Sash policy statement.

A wide-ranging and very lengthy discussion followed on how the Black Sash should oppose the new constitution, on whether or not to adopt the Cape Western statement, and on co-operative strategies. Differing interpretations of the word "negotiation" led to some heated debate.

The following statement was proposed by Joyce Harris, seconded by Sheena Duncan and carried unanimously.

Statement on the Constitutional Proposals.

The Black Sash totally rejects the Government’s Constitutional proposals. The Black Sash believes in a common citizenship in a unitary society with political representation for all through universal franchise.

Cape Western was thanked for reminding us that it is very easy to become diverted from the basic issues. Their paper was received with thanks but not accepted as a policy statement. Cape Western agreed to this.

The Freedom Charter/---

Page Six/
ABORTION. (Agenda Item XIV)

Resolution.

The Black Sash urges the Government to appoint a Commission of Enquiry under the chairmanship of a judge and including experts from various fields and women of all races to investigate the workings and effects of the 1975 Abortion Act.

The resolution as it appeared on the agenda paper was proposed and seconded by members of the Natal Coastal region.

The chairman said that, unless she was overruled by Conference, she would not allow debate on the resolution as it had been extensively discussed at previous National conferences and in the regions.

The motion was put and carried by 23 votes to 4.

Cape Western asked for the reasons for the votes of 4 delegates from Cape Western against the motion to be recorded. Mary Burton explained that feeling had been very divided about the resolution at their Regional Conference. One branch felt most strongly that abortion is not a Black Sash matter. Others felt very strongly in favour of the resolution.

Adjournment : 6 p.m.

SATURDAY 12TH MARCH.

DEATHS IN DETENTION.

Delegates and observers wearing sashes each with the name of a person who has died in detention stood while the names were called out one by one and then observed a minute's silence.

Sheena Duncan, on behalf of all the delegates, thanked Cape Western warmly for the lovely party given at the home of Mary Burton on Friday evening.

She also thanked Paul Alberts for taking photographs at the conference and for giving them to the magazine as a gift. Delegates could order prints from him.

Sheena opened the day's work by urging members of the Black Sash to open out the debate on alternative economic solutions to the injustice caused by the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few at the expense of the many. We do not debate it properly because we are sometimes fearful of facing the differences between us. Even if we are unable to achieve consensus we must discuss and debate the issues.

ADVICE OFFICE REPORTS (Agenda Item XV)

A. Advice Office Reports were presented by Jill Nicholson for Natal Coastal, Beth Franklin for Natal Midlands, Margaret Barker for Albany, Bobby Melunsky for Cape Eastern, Annica Van Gylswyk for Pretoria, Valerie West for Cape Western, Sheena Duncan for Transvaal. (Conference Document Nos. 16 - 21).

Sheena read a report from Border (Document No. 18B in the Headquarters master file only as copies had not been sent to other regions).

Discussion was deferred to the end of the day when the papers on labour and relocation would have been presented and the overall picture would have been made clear.

B. Commissioner's Courts. Cape Western tabled a report on the monitoring of the Langa Commissioner's Court (Conference Document No. 22).
The offence for which they were convicted and sentenced arose out of attacks on the Wonderboom, Moroka, Bocyesens and Orlando police stations or out of other acts of treason as defined by the law.

From statements they made in trials it is clear that after the countrywide unrest in 1976 they became disillusioned and desperate. They saw no hope for peaceful change in South Africa; change that would take into account the aspirations of the vast majority of Black people in our country.

Motivated by high ideals, they then set upon a course of conduct which they believed would bring about the change they desired. It culminated in acts which in the eyes of the Government amounted to treason. In the eyes of their people however they are heroes.

We are members of the Black Sash which at its 1982 national conference resolved to oppose capital punishment because we believe that it has a destructive effect on society that far outweighs any deterrent advantage some people believe it might have.

We contemplate with concern the prospect of our society attempting to solve rising tension in the future by increased use of judicial killing.

In the light of this resolution and the circumstances relating to the six persons named above we pray that you will exercise your powers of clemency and commute the death sentences imposed on these men.

RELOCATION (Agenda Item XVIII)
A. Ethel Walt reported briefly on distribution of the map.
B. Transvaal Region tabled a report on developments in the Transvaal (Conference Document No. 26).

Attention was drawn to the Government's relatively new strategy in handling the removal of communities.

189 black spots in Natal remain to be removed.

The comprehensive report of the Surplus People's Project will be available soon.

Pessa Weinberg reported on official duplicity in the Government towards the people of Matiwane's Kop.

Esther Levitan requested information on Reserve 4 near Richards Bay where the people are totally opposed to their proposed removal.
C. A report on recent developments in the Eastern Cape was tabled (Conference Document No. 27).

Discussion was centred round the resistant people of Ngwali.

Ann Colvin read a letter from Minister Van Der Walt which was almost identical to letters written by other Ministers to several threatened communities.

A general discussion followed on strategies for exposing removals.

D. Squatters and Housing (Conference Document No. 29) - tabled.

The Housing Shortage (Conference Document No. 28).

The Housing committee in Cape Western have produced a coloured map of group areas and black townships in Cape Town and surrounding areas. Joan Grover presented the map and explained it.

Noel Robb referred to the section on squatters in the Athlone Advice Office report and reported on the most recent developments.
5. **Cartoon pamphlets.** The teaching cartoon strip on gastro-enteritis produced by Gadra in Grahamstown was shown to delegates. Cartoons and pictorial representations are most valuable and Regions were asked to remember this and to look for people who can produce drawings.

6. **Use of other publications.** Articles need to be specially written in a suitable style for magazines such as Fair Lady, Scope, Huisgenoot, Rooi Roos, Learn and Teach, newspapers.

7. **Local and Regional issues** can be dealt with in small publications for local circulation such as "Know Your City". Natal Midlands is at present writing a new one for Pietermaritzburg and will publish it jointly with PACSA.

8. **Photographic publications** could be very useful - not the expensive, glossy-coffee-table type but designed to show people the truth about other communities e.g., to show urban people conditions in the bantustans and rural communities about one another.

9. **Advice Office Reports.** Cape Town was commended for their presentation.

10. **Different types of documents** needed for different target audiences e.g., campaign against Orderly Movement Bill - different papers on the same subject were prepared for Churches, press, economic sector, the public in general. (N.B. people in Europe whose first language is not English found the little yellow book useful).

11. **Slide-tape and video.** A suggestion was made that a video be made about the Black Sash. Delegates felt it should be issue related rather than centred on the organisation. It should be designed to show the whittling away of civil liberties in relation to the history of the Black Sash. A Transvaal observer felt it could be done cheaply and easily by amateurs.

Visual aids made for any purpose tend to be expensive if professionally made. It is therefore most important to plan distribution and to be assured of audiences before embarking on such a venture.

Publications control and censorship needs to be kept in mind.

12. **Posters** are useful as they reach an audience which would not come to any kind of meeting, presentation or exhibition.

13. **Car-stickers.** More of the "Release all detainees" stickers are available from Cape-Western who will also produce one in opposition to the constitution. e.g., "Say no to Bota" is one which has been printed by another organisation.

14. **A publication of historical cartoons** was suggested.

15. **Reactive publications** to counteract Government propaganda and misinformation for the overseas audience as well as the internal public.

16. **A constant supply of written material** for overseas visitors is required.

17. **Essay competition.** The Highway Branch (Durban) report refers to the schools competition run by that branch.

18. **Publications** in response to specific requests by communities, e.g., pamphlets prepared for Mgwali which lead to the production of "You and Removal" in the Transvaal.

19. **Translation**
C. The Advice office dilemma in the face of government promoted "change"; and increased severity of legislation and administrative control; the breakdown of law as a useful strategy.

C.1 Concentrate on teaching and information-giving both by publication, individual one to one teaching in the offices and teaching groups wherever possible. People need the tool of knowledge to decide on their own strategies.

C.2 Avoid being trapped into distinguishing between "legals" and "illegals", "qualified" and "unqualified". Do not give credibility to the urban/rural divide.

C.3 Support communities who are using non-violent strategies of organised resistance and civil disobedience.

C.4 Create information environments in the Advice offices.

D. Action on the Constitution.

Joyce Harris reported on her group which has now been meeting regularly for five years. She was warmly congratulated on the work she has done in maintaining this group. It has not been an easy task. Tribute was paid to her with acclaim.

D.1 Refer to minutes on Agenda Item XII.

D.2 Co-operate wherever possible with groups opposing the constitutional proposals by non-violent means.

D.3 Plan our own action to implement our Resolution to urge our members and the public to boycott any election held in terms of the new constitution.

D.4 Produce urgently teaching and protest material when the legislation is published.

D.5 Regions, where possible, organize members to write to the press so that every day letters opposing the proposals appear in the major newspapers.

D.6 Car sticker (see under Publications above) Cape Western will design one and inform regions. Regions should notify them immediately how many they can use.

Ann Finsen, an observer from Cape Western asked the permission of conference to re-open the discussion on the resolution urging our members and the public to boycott an election held in terms of the new constitution. She wished to put a motion that the resolution be rescinded.

Audrey Coleman raised a point of order that Ann Finsen not be allowed to raise the matter.

The Chairman over-ruled this saying that she would prefer conference to decide rather than that she should rule on a point of order about which neither the constitution nor the discarded rules of procedure has anything to say.

The question was put to conference as to whether Ann Finsen be allowed to propose a motion to rescind the previous resolution.

17 voted against, 13 for, with 2 abstentions.

Ann Finsen asked that the following statement be minuted:

"As a matter of principle/—

Page Fourteen/
The following statement was unanimously approved by Conference for release to the press:

PENSIONS.

The Black Sash wishes to alert the public and those organisations or companies who operate pension schemes, to the danger that these private pensions could disqualify African contribution from drawing on a State pension. We call upon them to make themselves and their potential contributors aware of the disqualifying minimum income allowed.

The possibility exists that such contributors might draw a pension which is less than the State pension from which they would be excluded. In order for a private pension to be worthwhile it must pay out monthly, a considerably higher sum than that of a state pension which is at present R49.00 a month.

The following action was agreed upon:

1. There will be a Black Sash focus on pensions in October during the week of the aged.

2. Headquarters will circulate the H.A.P special report on pensions to all Regions and will plan the action in 1. above.

3. Jill Nicholson will draft a letter to Pension Funds and Insurance Companies pointing out the inequities in many of their schemes, particularly those for domestic workers and small employers.

A suggestion that the magazine carry a comparative cartoon on pensions similar to that on the back cover of the February 1983 issue was referred to the editor.

CONSCRIPTION AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION (Agenda Item XXIII)

Ann Colvin of Natal outlined the provisions for religious conscientious objectors and the punishment to be imposed on those whose objection is based on other than religious grounds.

Sheena Duncan reported on her observations on a recent visit to Namibia with the C.P.S.A. Justice and Reconciliation committee.

The occupation of Ovamboland by the South African army invokes memories of all the history of the Nazi occupation of France and Holland etc.; There are very similar reports of military actions and special police units, collaboration and co-operation, resistance and attack, reprisals and disinformation.

The following statement was unanimously adopted for release to the press:

CONSCRIPTION AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION.

Statement in regard to the Defence Amendment Bill and proposed legislation concerning conscientious objection.

During World War II The South African Government respected the conscience of individuals and there was no conscription. The country is even more seriously divided now than it was then.

South Africa is illegally occupying Namibia and this is cause for many, in conscience to refuse military service. When South Africa withdraws from Namibia there should be no need for a massive military establishment unless there has been a political failure to respond to the desires of the citizens.

If a conscripted army is necessary/
The Death in detention of MR. TEMBUISE SIMON MUDAWE has exposed once again the brutality of detention.

The Minister's code of conduct has been shown to be totally ineffective.

More ominously, the press has joined in labelling MR. MUDAWE an "insurgent" and "terrorist", and implicitly justified his detention and death.

We report most urgently our call for the total abolition of the security laws and the unconditional release of all detainees.

Only this can end the litany of deaths in detention.

We re dedicate ourselves to the continued campaign against the detention system.

Conference then again moved into committee at the request of Natal Coastal.

THE MASERU RAID. (Agenda Item XXII)

Solveig Piper called upon the Conference to censure the P.F.P., for its response to the Maseru raid. She felt most strongly that the Black Sash should not align itself with the P.F.P., anymore. Other delegates pointed out that we had never aligned ourselves with any political party.

After some discussion the following statement was adopted for release to the press.

STATEMENT ON MASERU RAID.

The Black Sash National Conference, meeting for the first time since the December 1982 S.A.I.D.F. raid on Maseru which caused the death of fellow South Africans, condemns that raid. We also condemn efforts made to condone this raid, especially by the P.F.P., as the official opposition.

We re-iterate the resolution of the 1981 National Conference which expressed grave concern at the increasing engagement of South African military forces beyond the borders of the country, in particular the 1980 raid into Maputo which was in violation of international law and could only serve to bring us closer to open warfare.

The 1981 Conference issued the reminder that our fellow South Africans have been driven to armed struggle by the institutionalised violence of Apartheid.

It concluded "the only way to end violence is to establish justice and the Rule of Law".

RESOLUTION ON BLACK SASH IMAGE (Agenda Item XXVIII)

Cape Western had withdrawn their resolution but wished to introduce the subject as an item for discussion.

Beverley Runciman introduced the discussion expressing the concern of the Wynberg branch that the Black Sash appeared to be quite unknown or totally misunderstood in the white South African community. She said that the Sash appeared only to have credibility in intellectual and academic white circles. We are therefore not reaching the general white public.

There was a wide ranging discussion. Delegates felt that some of the problems would be resolved with imaginative carrying out of the discussions made under PUBLICATIONS above. We need to put greater effort/