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Race Relations "s.-

â\200\224 its role and relevance

ohn Kane-Berman's mother, Gaby, was a founder member of Sash and a
J member of the Liberal Party. His father Louis was the Torch Commando's
National Chairman. Politicised from childhood, editor (with Clive Nettleton) of
a reportedly scurrilous sixth-form newspaper, â\200\230Sixth Senseâ\200\231, living among d
up-
licating machines, petitions, protests and endless meetings, John grew up as u
child (or skivvy) of the Black Sash, the Liberal Party, and the PFP. Members
have followed his career from president of the Wits SRC 10 an Oxford PPE as a
Rhodes Scholar, a researcher for the South African Institute of Race Relations, a
journalist, assistant editor of the Financial Mail, a brilliant foreign correspon-
dent â\200\224 and now Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations.

As a founder Sash member myself, I've known John since he was 10 and I was
23. I most vividly remember him as a young researcher for the SAIRR, bitterly
critical of the conservatism of the Council, absolutely furious when his exposures
of business malpractice were subjected to merciless scrutiny and editing by Ellen
Hellmann (it was he, was it not, who nicknamed her The Godmother?). Then, he
grudgingly admired her; now, ironically, he wears her mantle in his efforts to re-
turn the Institute to the Ellen Hellmann ethic â\200\224 political lobbying based on im-
peccable and independent research. Most vividly of all I remember John hurling
abuse at me for reading George Orwell, who, he said, curling his lip scornfully

then as now, was socialismâ\200\231s single most irresponsible and dan gerous destroyer.
Well, kyk hoe lyk hy nou . . .

John, you took over the Institute amid financial crisis and administrative
breakdown, and you have spent just over a year trying to consoli-
date and start afresh. Inevitably, amid all the cutting back and redefining
and consolidating, people have felt let down or bewildered or antagonis-
tic. | think it would be useful if we examined some of the criticisms cur-
rently levelled at you and the Institute. Let us start with the most com-
mon of these: that now there is nothing for ordinary members to do;
S h d-t that the most important functions where all races could meet, where

asn editor everybody felt comfortable and at home, were the lunch clubs. Why,
Ji'l Wentze| people ask, have these been closed down in favour of symposiums

g - where the whole flavour is elitist?
interviews

a â\200\231 The lunch clubs were stopped because, with the occasional exception, only
the lnStltUte S about two dozen people attended although well over a thousand vÂ»}crc invit
ed
Director f,-uch time to hear the guest speaker. .Now that we hold the equivalent function
in the evening we get three or four times as many pople and quite often well
JOh n Kane- over 100. We also get a much bigger black attendance.

Berm an And do you feel a more elitist audience have attended these functions?
Itâ\200\231s very difficult to judge, especially since we are seeing a lot of new faces, bl
ack
as well as white. Our evening panel discussion on the cultural boycott, which
was very exciting and controversial, drew more than 100 people, of whom
about three quarters were black people we'd not seen before.

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You couldnâ\200\231t have called these VIP's ?
I shouldnâ\200\231t have thought so.

Letâ\200\231s return to the question of there being nothing for ordinary members to do. There is widespread criticism regarding the abandoning of projects. People feel lack of money isn't a good enough excuse and say that projects can be devised where people can work together across the colour line for common goals, which do not need to cost much money. There is a lot of dismay at the closing of the arts and crafts shops.

When I was appointed director of the Institute in September 1983 it had already had to obtain a large bank overdraft and we had to take ; very thorough look at the whole range of our activities and the costs thereof. We found that we had become a kind of holding company for a large number of projects, and there was simply not the money to continue financing them. The project itself may not seem terribly expensive but there are all sorts of overhead costs like bookkeepers and telephones and so on. These all add up, so itâ\200\231s just not true to say projects can be run without worrying about the costs. The arts and crafts shops, for example. were collectively losing R2 000 to R3 000 a month. With an overdraft of well over R100 000 we had no choice but to call a halt. You canâ\200\231t go on subsidising projects on borrowed money.

In any event there are now a whole range of other organisations with expertise in a variety of fields and we see no purpose in attempting to duplicate. Operation Hunger was initiated by us and once it was able to stand on its own feet administratively it went off on its own with our blessing (as other projects have done since the 1930s) and we. of course. are still represented on its board of trustees.

We still have two major project-type activities going in Johannesburg. One is the Education Support Programme, which last year had about 1 200 black schoolchildren studying for the JMB matric. The project will continue, as long as the funding does. The main project that we have, however, is our bursary programme, which is the biggest in the country as far as I know. Last year from our Johannesburg office we had about 323 black students at university.

Our ability to continue with this very large bursary programme depends on receiving the necessary funding and I have recently been in western Europe trying to increase that funding. Some of our regional offices also run big bursary programmes for both schoolchildren and university students.

So why do people, do you think, get the vision suddenly of Race Relations as an organisation that seems to be divorced from anything other than elitist functions for important business people? Someone said that the Institute seemed to have turned into â\200\230a business advisory service.â\200\235 Why do you think people are saying that?

I donâ\200\231t really know. Possibly they see things changing at Auden House and feel threatened by the changes. Our

functions are certainly not divorced from issues of concern to the majority of the people in this country. We have organised discussions around the new constitution;

we've had local and foreign experts talking about the dynamics of change in this country; we've looked at Namibia. influx control, the crisis in black education, whether ethnic editions of newspapers are perpetuating apartheid. and so on.

Another issue that we had a panel discussion on one evening was the Nkomati Accord, and that was a specific attempt to enable our own members and the public at large to listen to three or four different black perspectives on the issue. We did that because we thought whites should be made aware of the fact that blacks didn't necessarily share their euphoria about the accord.

We encourage business leaders to attend because we believe that one of our roles is to try to put them in touch with black attitudes from the most militant to the least politicised. But that doesn't mean that the functions are geared towards business. Some, in fact, are geared in the opposite direction - like the briefing we specially arranged this week for trade union leaders on the Urban Foundation's investigation into influx control. We knew this information was being made available to the top business leaders and we wanted the unions to have it too.

Have you any ideas of numbers vis-a-vis black/white membership?

We obviously don't have records on a racial basis but I would guess our membership is three-quarters white and always has been. It's not at all a satisfactory situation. The question of increasing black membership has been raised repeatedly down the years at Institute meetings. but there has been a feeling that for us actively to recruit members from a particular section of the community is contrary to the whole ethos of an organisation which is supposed to be colour-blind. I don't believe that this is necessarily the right approach and we intend to take steps to increase our black membership. And people of all races continue to enrol.

One member quoted Ellen Hellmann as saying that she wanted the Institute to be relevant in the townships. What hope would there be of the Institute being relevant in the townships?

I'm never sure what that rather vague word is supposed to mean. [imagine we could be relevant as a charitable. or para-legal, or community-help organisation, but I don't think that's really our function. That work is obviously important but it is nevertheless really concerned with treating symptoms. We have set ourselves the tougher. and, I think, more radical task of getting to grips with the causes of some of the problems in this country, which are all too often rooted in our political system, and to work for structural change. If one takes something like education, our bursary programme is assisting several thousand black pupils and students and that's essential because they would not otherwise have the opportunity. However, we don't believe it is right that their chances of going to school or university should depend on the generosity of individuals or the private sector or foreign governments and foreign churches. After all, white education doesn't depend on charity. We therefore see it as our main purpose to work for fun-

damental changes in official education policy in South
Alfrica.

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I reckon when people talk about being relevant in the townships, what they are really criticising you for is not joining in on UDF campaigns, not joining the end-inscription campaign, that kind of thing.

[I don't think we and I'm sure our governing Council doesn't think that we should identify with particular political causes even though we might sometimes agree with the views of protest organisations. One of our problems down the years is that we have been too often preaching to the converted and have become part of a kind of protest laager, but if we are going to have any impact in this country in bringing about policy changes we have to break out of that laager and start making an impact on people who are not members of it. If we publish research showing the detrimental effects of the pass laws, for example, we want it to be respected because it is accurate from a statistical point of view, because it is dispassionate in its presentation, and because it is seen to be independent and not grinding the political axe of any particular organisation. We believe we will have more impact that way.

You must also remember that the Institute has been around a long time, since 1929. It has seen protests come and go: it saw the defiance campaign come and go, it saw the great hope of real change in 1960 and 1976 come and go. I can understand why many people feel this is very exciting each time it happens, and I also want apartheid to disappear overnight, but that is impossible because the government is entrenched in power. I'm not saying more gradual change is necessarily best. What I am saying is that, in my judgment, change is not going to come about in any other way. If you are to make an impact on the process, it is just as important to make a realistic assessment of your weaknesses as to know your strengths, or you might rush headlong into strategies that get you nowhere.

I have the feeling that people have reacted, actually, with a lot of anger and disappointment as the Institute has withdrawn from this kind of thing. Have you tried to explain yourself to the members? It seems to have generated a lot of anger, this withdrawal.

We have attempted to explain the new strategic direction, decided by our Council in January last year, both in our quarterly newspaper Race Relations News and at a public meeting in Cape Town and also at a closed meeting of members in Durban which our regional committees there invited me to address. As for a general feeling of anger towards our new strategic direction, I believe people will eventually agree with us when they see results when they see we are able to be more effective and more influential by acting independently.

In the correspondence published in this issue you can see that I got into some trouble for suggesting that the Institute was anathema in some circles. Nevertheless I have noted a resentment of the Institute building up in what I would call more militant, indeed more fashionable circles. I would imagine that a large part of this resentment centres around the Institute's attitude to defensive violence.

I presume by that you mean people who are not themselves involved in acts of Violence against the state but who nevertheless at the very least regard them as understandable, or even necessary | because they believe the apartheid system itself rests on what is sometimes called institutionalized violence.

Our organization Opposes violence from whatever quarter not only because we regard human life as sacrosanct but also because history shows there is a very great risk that out of it will come a society based on even greater institutionalized violence than the one it replaces (Iran for example). The great impatience of everyone who wants to see immediate change is understandable, as is their scepticism about its chances of coming about peacefully: but, whereas the hardcore perpetrators of violence fully understand what they are about, some of their supporters, including their armchair supporters, are naive in the extreme in supposing that a government installed in power here at the end of a protracted period of violence and civil war would necessarily be better than the present one.

Any organization, like the Institute, that attempts to explode this romanticism will be deeply threatening. We have chosen to work for black-white reconciliation. We cannot deliver results quickly enough for angry people. Our task is the hard grind of promoting the idea of political compromise and the plodding search for accommodating structures. and if necessary building up such structures block by block from the bottom up.

We see no benefit in a vicious circle of violence and counter violence. Indeed our raison d'être is to break that cycle. So attracting resentment, as you put it, from hardliners on left and right, is really part and parcel of the price that we have to pay for being what we are. Our job of promoting reconciliation and compromise necessarily involves understanding every point of view and presenting each point of view to the proponents of other points of view. In order to do that we have to give a platform to all points of view. If we are anathematised it is because we refuse to unathematise others.

One of your members, upset by what she feels is the changed role of the Institute, said, 'The word Race Relations implies doing something to improve race relations. Is there now a new definition of the title Institute of Race Relations and have we now to get used to a new concept?' So John, do you feel the Institute really has a role to play improving race relations?

I certainly do. Apart from the fact that people meet and talk at all our functions (that is what they are all about - discussion across differences of race or ideology), we are able to bring together government officials, black trade union and political leaders, black personnel managers, white businessmen and so on, so that we have blacks and whites not only just meeting each other, but meeting in circumstances where the divide is not always black-white. :

But we don't think that simply providing those kinds of opportunities is enough. It's only a step. Improving race relations necessitates fundamental change. If race relations in industry are better now than ten years ago, it's not because people are politer to one another but be.

cause industrial relations have been restructured. Black workers have fought for and won trade union bargaining

power so management has had to change its attitude. Improving race relations in a more genuine sense means getting the government to do the same. In other words, it means working for political compromise and structural political change. This won't happen merely by talking or doing research or protesting but by the building of politi

cal bargaining power by the African majority. If we can act as a kind of intermediary in persuading whites to respond constructively, that is part of our role. Our research comes in, not as an end in itself, but as a data base for us to use to back up our arguments with solid fact and dispassionate analysis. It's also very useful to others - as one trade union newspaper said. Because our Survey provided back-up information for

* representation to various authorities.

I may add that the political compromise I am referring to is not simply a question of white and black, though that will be difficult enough. Black politics is already starkly polarised within itself and mutual acceptance of each faction's political legitimacy would be essential to the success of any national convention or equivalent process. Otherwise we may run the risk of going the same way as Angola and Mozambique.

Are you willing to have dealings with the government?

Of course we are. The very confusion in government policy which is evident in practically every speech a minister makes is not something merely to be laughed at. That is the job of newspaper cartoonists and opposition MPs. Our job is to recognise that there is a confusion and exploit it by injecting some objective data into the debate in order to point the way to different policies. When a senior minister sent one of his advisers to see us recently to ask for our perspective on the disturbances in the Vaal Triangle I saw it as our job to make use of the opportunity to raise with him all the issues that we have been shouting to deaf ears about for years, like freehold, and why black political prisoners should be released and banned parties legalised again. To talk to him about the necessity of sensible financing of local authorities, to say to him the government must recognise that it cannot expect black local authorities to get off the ground unless it gives them real power, and that if it gives them real power it must recognise that it may find this uncomfortable. But that it is actually in everybody's interests that black people build up non-violent bargaining power.

Well, a lot of people are going to call this co-operating with an evil system.

It is not a question of co-operating with evil. It is a question of making use of an opportunity to get your views heard in circles that make political decisions which affect people's lives. In any event, the question for the Institute is not whether the government is evil or not, but how to get it to abandon policies that are harmful to the country. It always particularly amuses me when people in universities attack others for collaborating with evil or capitalism or whatever, because these institutions wouldn't last a day without their huge subsidies from parliament and business. I don't suppose any of the political hardliners there are going to refuse money

voted to them by the new tricameral parliament either.

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So you mean, John, that making use of structures the government has been compelled to create could have strategic advantages for blacks?

Well. if one takes, for example, something that has arisen in the last year in black schools. the demand for SRCs. Those have now been conceded. Not in the form that the schoolchildren wanted, but it is a major step. |
canâ\200\231t for a moment see the white Transvaal Education Department readily allowing SRCs to be formed in white government schools. I would suggest that the kind of strategy that needs to be carefully considered â\200\224 I am not necessarily advocating it â\200\224 is to say. â\200\234All right, we now have the SRCs. We are going to take them and put our leaders on to them at democratic elections and we are going to use them to our political advantage.â\200\235 That's~ one strategy as opposed to simply rejecting the proposal completely because it hasnâ\200\231t been conceded in precisely the form you want.

I think. dure 1 say it. that the black local authorities present a possible opportunity for the same Kind of thing now that it seems that they may be in a stronger position financially. If the different political organizations (UDF, Inkatha, Azapo etc) built up their power bases as political parties and variously and democratically took control of the 400-o0dd black townships in this country, you would have councillors who were less vulnerable to nepotism or manipulation by the government because they would have to answer to their political party. In this way you could use the black local authorities to build up strong black institutional bargaining power around the country â\200\224 and a potential formidable challenge to the government. Itwould need alot of political ingenuity (of the kind which the trade unions have developed) to pet control of these institutions: but they could be hijacked to the advantage of the legitimate black political organisations.

There's another point. If Africans are one day going to be running this country, then the more practical experience they get in the meantime wherever they can get the chance the better. No matter what their causes are, the housing and educational backlogs are not going to disappear when the National Partyâ\200\231s monopoly of power does. nor are the problems that are attached to urbanisation or squatting. After all, Mugabe and Machel are having to grapple with them, as are dozens of other governments all over Africa. There is no time to be wasted in

finding the appropriate solutions. and the sooner blacks can involve themselves in the awesome responsibilities that all government, including democratic government, entails, the better it will ultimately be for everyone. Here as in other countries, it's a question of trial and error. The quicker the trials start, the quicker the errors have a chance of being eliminated. I don't say the black local authorities in their present form are the answer. What I do say is that I have every confidence that legitimate black leaders can out-manoeuvre whatever Machiavellian intentions the government may have and turn these local authorities to the advantage of their constituents.

Let's deal with the criticism that is so often hurled at you, John, that you don't really retain your independence, that you are biased towards Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and Inkatha. You are a great friend of Chief Buthelezi, are you not?

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I would be honoured if he regarded me as a friend. I certainly am an admirer of his. But my personal friendships do not cause the Institute to be biased. I suggest, I would ask you to point to one policy decision taken by the Institute or one publication issued that substantiates an accusation of bias towards anybody since I have been Director (and before, of course). Chief Buthelezi has had a platform at the Institute. But so have representatives of the Transvaal Indian Congress, the Labour Party, the Transvaal Council on Sport, Swapo, black journalists with anti-Inkatha views. the Soweto Civic Association, etc.

Nobody objects to our providing platforms for, or having contact with, any of these other organisations so cannot avoid the suspicion that the reason the Inkatha question is raised at all is that there is a strong and fashionable sentiment in some circles that Buthelezi must be completely stigmatised rather than given a platform along with many others at the Institute. This sentiment sometimes leads to very odd behaviour, for example, when demonstrators effectively stopped him from speaking at the University of Cape Town last year. But for a group of university students including white South African students, who must be among the most privileged of elites on earth to deny any black leader with a large following of poor and illiterate people the right to be heard seems to me rather arrogant, to say the least.

The Institute need not endorse or reject Buthelezi's overall political strategies but for us to treat him as a political untouchable, as some people seem to want us to do, would be indicative of an almost colonialist mentality. In any event our Council decides policy and to suggest that the present Director can align the Institute contrary to its constitution in favour of any one political organisation is nonsense.

What is your attitude to disinvestment?

If one is talking about general disinvestment as opposed to carefully chosen, limited sanctions tied to specific attainable targets, where the arguments may be different we need to recognise that the single most difficult problem which this country has to face is the spectre of many millions more jobless people by the year 2000. And that in my view means one has got to welcome investment that creates more jobs whether that investment is local or foreign.

No doubt some people who favour general disinvestment do so in the belief that if white South Africans are hurt economically they will be persuaded to make radical political changes. That seems to me to be rather naive. It is much more likely that if the economic cake shrinks, whites will try and hang on to things even more

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firmly. ;

If disinvestment were to succeed it would have the potential to inflict great hurt and it is the long run effect of disinvestment which is the most disquieting. We live in a society with an explosive conjunction of affluence in the midst of poverty. We have to create jobs and prosperity

and share that prosperity widely throughout our society to deal with rapid population growth and rising black expectations. Already we have a vast backlog in educational opportunities, not to mention jobs and houses. Disinvestment and/or trade sanctions, by causing the country as a whole to get poorer, will condemn even more people to lives of illiterate, jobless squalor.

The danger of disinvestment is that it will deliver a blow to the economy which no political change will be able to reverse. The idea that foreign companies will withdraw from South Africa but return after political change is naive, for there are many places where that foreign investment would in the interim have been relocated.

I think there is another important point that one has to remember about foreign investment. If trade unions are not in a position to deliver material gains because the economy is stagnant and profits are declining and businesses are going bankrupt, they will have a very much tougher battle in winning benefits for their members. If we had been in a situation of economic stagnation, with foreign capital being withdrawn through the 1970s, I wonder whether we would have the resilient trade union movement that we have today.

An American visitor said, Why is the Institute so orientated towards the English-speaking community. Are you trying to change this?

The Institute's main support base down the years has been the white English speaking community, but we are not orientated solely in that direction. We make strenuous efforts to get our publications publicised in Afrikaans newspapers and in white newspapers read by blacks. In fact the briefing papers that we have published over the last year have had more coverage from newspapers like The Sowetan than in any other paper. We have at least one major Afrikaans company among our corporate members and I hope that we will get more. | recently had the opportunity to put the Institute's viewpoint on why the ANC and PAC and other black political organisations should have their bans lifted, and on other issues, to a group of Afrikaans academics. which included the chairman of the Broederbond. That is the kind of opportunity which we need and I welcome., I we can facilitate situations where black organisations can talk directly to the same kind of people, I welcome that too.

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National conference 1985

Presidential
address

Sheena Duncan

This year the Black Sash will observe its 30th anniversary.

It was May 19, 1955 that six women met together in Johannesburg in anger about the introduction of the Senate Bill in Parliament.

As you know, it was that legislation which packed the Senate with sufficient members of the National Party to enable the government in the following year to remove coloured people from the common voter's roll.

The energy of those women is quite astonishing as is the speed with which they acted. The next day hundreds of women came together and addressed a petition to the mayor requesting him to call a public meeting.

On May 25, 1955, 2 000 women marched to the City Hall to join 18 000 Johannesburg citizens who had gathered there to protest against the Senate Bill. The Women's Defence of the Constitution League had come into being.

It was then decided that two petitions should be drawn up, one to the Prime Minister calling on him to repeal the legislation or to resign, the other to the Governor General asking him to withhold his assent from the Act. Women, working in continuous shifts over the weekend of June 4, 5 and 6 dispatched petition forms all over the country.

More than 100 000 women signed the two petitions within the next ten days. The petition to the Governor General was handed to his secretary with 94 680 signatures. The Prime Minister refused to receive a delegation from the League. On June 28, over 1 000 women representing dozens of cities, towns and villages in South Africa marched to the Union buildings in Pretoria to hand over the petition to the Prime Minister calling for his resignation. For 48 hours, in the bitterly cold highveld winter, 80 women held vigil at the Union Buildings.

Those were the days when freedom of assembly still existed in this country. In the 30 years which have gone by since that time, this right to come together in protest has been taken away piece by piece beginning with bans imposed on gatherings in the central city of Johannesburg and in a large area around Parliament in Cape Town, to the present total ban on all outdoor gatherings which has been in force since 1976.

A gathering is defined as more than one person coming together, so for the past eight years Black Sash demonstrations have been one woman standing alone with her poster, out of sight of the next person. Even this is now under threat from the police. In November last year in a combined protest with Churches, DPSC and other organisations calling for the release of detainees, de-

monstrators were arrested in a massive police action as soon as they took up positions. Posters were confiscated, charges laid and a long-drawn-out investigation is apparently being conducted by the police.

It is my belief that this ban on outdoor gatherings together with the frequent temporary bans on indoor gatherings and on funerals must be held largely responsible for the chaos which is now the way of life in many black townships. People who have come together in orderly fashion to picket polling booths in the August elections, to demand negotiation with town councillors and Development Board officials about rents, or with Department of Education and Training officials about abuses in the intolerable bantu education system, or to bury their dead, have been ordered to disperse and when they failed to do so, have been forced to scatter in confusion by the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, bird and buck shot. Orderly organised protest and non-violent resistance is prevented. When the authorities also abuse the wide powers given to them and resort to removing leaders by detaining them for 48 hours, or indefinitely, it is not surprising that planned disciplined non-violent resistance in the form of boycotts by students, boycotts by consumers, withdrawal of labour by workers, withholding of rent by householders, become disorganised with disorganised violence cropping up in all directions. It is only a short step from that to organised and coercive violence, the evidence of which is now appearing in some places. It is inevitable that this should be so when the State uses its whole repressive machinery to prevent grievances from being expressed, to prevent demands from being laid on the negotiating table, to prevent organisation from taking place: to insist that control by the few over the many continues.

One of the issues we will be discussing at this conference is the way in which the State is laying criminal charges against those who oppose the government's policies thus keeping them in prison as awaiting trial

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Members of the Black Sash countrywide lined the railings of the Houses of

prisoners for lengthy periods or immobilising them by making issues subjudice and thus not open for discussion. Very often, charges are withdrawn at the last minute or the prosecution does not go ahead. The recent non-trial of Archbishop Hurley is just one example.

I ask you all tonight to remember Madoda J acobs, the young leader of the Cradock Youth Organisation who was head boy of his school. He was held in preventive detention last year and is now a â\200\234listedâ\200\235 person. He is at present being held as an awaiting trial prisoner on a charge of murder at the Mortimer police station miles and miles from anywhere.

Also very much in our thoughts are the leaders of the UDF now awaiting trial for treason. Many of them are our personal friends. All of them are highly respected.

Those days when the Black Sash began were very different. South Africa was certainly not a democracy but the Rule of Law did mean something and people could and did look to the Courts for protection. Last year I spoke about those old fashioned people in areas threatened with removal who cannot understand that the law is not a protection anymore. They are all middle - aged to elderly. Young people in this country do not understand the concept. They have never known it and have never lived under the protection of the Rule of Law. For them, the law has always been a threat. A threat because it denies them the fundamental human rights.

I do not wish to spend time this evening going into the details of security legislation but do wish to say that one of the most urgent matters on the national agenda should be the restoration of the Rule of Law. Todayâ\200\231s young people are tomorrowâ\200\231s government and it will be very bad if the injustices embodied in our law are to continue into yet another era and used for preservation of yet another government in power. There are already too many signs of coercion and cooptation of people into opposition strategies. These give cause for disquietude and anxiety. There is no time to be lost if we are to demonstrate what democracy really means.

The values which are embodied in the phrase â\200\230Rule of

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Parliament, Cape Town, ;'n a continuous vigil.
photo: â\200\230The Black Sashâ\200\231 by Mirabel Rogers

Lawâ\200\231 are lost to us because they have not been practised for so long. We need to restore them now in order to preserve them into the future.

It is a disaster that President Bothaâ\200\231s â\200\230reformâ\200\231 programme has been marked by ever greater repression andâ\200\231 that there are no signs whatsoever that he intends to re-

peal any of the repressive laws â\200\224 quite the opposite in fact. 1982 saw several new laws placed on the statute book which prevent many of the legitimate activities of opposition groups â\200\224 the Protection of Information Act, the Prohibition of Demonstrations in or near Court Buildings Act and, of course, the omnibus Internal Security Act.

The Womenâ\200\231s Defence of the Constitution League held its first National Conference in Bloemfontein in April 1956. It was at that conference that the nickname given us by the press â\200\230The Black Sashâ\200\231 was adopted as the official name of the organisation.

It was also at that conference that one Jeanette Davidoff was elected to the central committee. Netty is still very much with us. She is here tonight as one of the Transvaal delegates to this conference. In 1955 she was chairman of the education sub-committee whose task it was to inform and educate our own members as well as the wider public. Another one of those early stalwarts who is here as a delegate from Cape Town is Noel Robb. Her task used to be to support and look after the country branches in the weslern Cape. The two of them should really be up here talking to you about those first years. Some of you in this hall tonight were among those who began it and we salute you.

I was not around then but it has been very instructive for me to page through the early minute books to see what issues were engaging the Black Sashâ\200\231s Kttention at that time.

Many women had joined in outrage at what was called the â\200\230rape of theÃ© constitutionâ\200\231. They had never before thought about justice in race relations or been brought to face the political consequences of the nature of South African society.

In the Cape itself we find the same uncertainty. In minutes dated October 14, 1957 we find the following entry:

An official protest was handed in by Mrs H. A statement in the paper advertising a series of lectures had appeared with the words "open to all races". She felt this was provocative.

One argument which is a little more familiar and not so far in our distant past is outlined in this September 30 1957 minute in Cape Town after a request for support for striking members from the Council for Canning Workers:

"... agreed that a reply should be sent stressing that we only concern ourselves with moral issues and not industrial disputes."

This anxiety about what was or was not a moral issue crops up over and over again, very often related to relationships with the then official opposition, the United Party. The non-party political stance of the Black Sash has always been maintained but in those days when there was still a hope nurtured that the National Party might be defeated at the polls, it was a constant concern not to weaken the opposition while maintaining a principled public protest. One member in Cape Town is recorded in the minutes of September 19 as saying:

"As far as Kei Road was concerned, the quieter the Sash kept at the moment the better. It must not be seen or implied that the Sash supports the progressives." She was evidently in a minority.

Sometimes these debates sound very strange to us now. On August 12 1959 we read:

"Mrs Stott had been asked to enquire whether atomic fall-out in the Cape Province was not dangerous. Mrs Stott wonders whether the subject of atomic bombs is a moral issue for the Sash or not."

Eulalie Stott is still one of our most active and valued members in Cape Town.

In many ways we have not changed at all. I'm glad our offices remain untidy places with second-hand furniture and limited equipment. We have not erected barriers of technology and the paraphernalia of modern office furnishings between us and those who come to seek our help.

Allegations against the Black Sash remain much the same now as they were then. In 1959, "loose allegations of incitement levelled at Sash" were discussed at a Cape council meeting. Only last year a member of the Cape Provincial Council accused us of creeping around the black areas at night and being always present where there was trouble.

Perhaps these accusations are not framed so quaintly .
as they used to be.

Before this was prohibited, Black Sash women used to hold vigil in the public gallery of the House of Assembly- They were rebuked by a National Party whip who told them:

â\200\230You ladies must not come to Parliament to propa-
gate.â\200\231

But the issues which concerned us then are astonish-
ingly the same as those which occupy us now â\200\224 the pass
laws and pass law arrests, Group Area removals,
academic freedom, freedom of the press, freedom of
movement, SABC propaganda, race classification, farm

labour, support for the families of detainees and how we
can co-operate with organisations in this and in protest
against all detentions and bannings.

Passive resistance and support for those entering into
civil disobedience was an issue then as it is now. The
Black Sash support for the A N C and for Chief Luthuli
in those long ago days caused the same debates as has
our support for the U D Fin the last 18 months. Protest
against the banning of Chief Luthuli was as
wholehearted then as is our protest now about action
taken against U D F and other leaders. Economic
boycotts were very much an issue as they are now.

In August 1959 we were saying:

â\200\230In the history of South Africa the white man has so
frequently broken his word that promises should not
be broken now without the Africans, to whom they
were made, approving of the step.â\200\231

The list of broken promises has lengthened immeasur-
ably in the 26 years since that statement was made. Is it
really now coming to an end? There is no evidence of
that yet.

Allegations against the Black Sash remain much the
same now as they were then. But the issues which con-
cerned us then are astonishingly the same as those
which occupy us now.

Some people have suggested that the present govern-
ment has deliberately adopted a strategy of sowing con-
fusion and uncertainty in order to introduce piecemeal
reforms. This would be such an incredibly dangerous
course of action that we cannot believe that any rational
group of people could embark on it. The other interpre-
tation of current government actions is that it is as con-
fused and uncertain as everyone else and is therefore
being totally inept. Whatever the reason, this country
cannot afford the current total lack of clarity about gov-
ernment intentions nor the contradictory statements

which often follow one another on a daily basis from the mouths of the same ministers.

Confusion, whether deliberately or carelessly sown, is leading to total chaos and a state of disorderliness in administration and in daily experience for the majority of people in this country, which will take us nowhere.

What does Dr Viljoen's statement about the suspension of removals mean? He did not go as far as Dr Koorhof's previous statement that, "There will be no more forced removals," but perhaps the public may be inclined to give greater weight to what Dr Viljoen says. When pressed, he said he supposed that there were about 26 black spots and about the same number of urban communities whose position would be reassessed. A little later the number of black spots involved was given as 67. We all know that there are 188 black spots in Natal alone which are scheduled for removal and well over 200 in the country as a whole. What does the minister mean and when is he going to say firmly and openly what his intentions are?

The urban communities of Huhudi at Vryburg and Valspan at Jan Kempdorp are reprieved from the total removal but then there is talk about their development only within existing already overcrowded boundaries. What will happen to those who cannot be fitted in?

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photo: Cape Times

â\200\234Good heavens! Where've they been for the past thirty years?â\200\235

When did they speak out against migrant labour, the pass laws, the Group Areas Act, removals, denationalisation, race classification? We know when they spoke out â\200\224 when the disinvestment lobby began getting somewhere, the US legislation embodying economic sanctions of one kind or another suddenly became a real possibility, when black workers got organised and began making demands backed by united action and the power to strike effectively.

We welcome the claims made by employerâ\200\231s organisations in their memorandum to Senator Kennedy in January this year. The Chambers and Federations of employers concerned represent more than 80% of the employment strength of this country. They have been urged over and over again for the past 37 years to use their undoubted power to persuade government to stop removals, to remove influx control, to retreat from apartheid. They are doing so now, at last, and we must be thankful for it. They must be held to the commitments they made to Senator Kennedy and to all of us. I quote:

â\200\234In the national interest they are committed to an ongoing programme of legislative reform to give effect to the following goals:

â\200\224 meaningful political participation to blacks

â\200\224 full participation in a private enterprise economy for all South Africans regardless of race, colour, sex or creed

â\200\224 common loyalty to the country in all South Africans through a universal citizenship

â\200\224 the development of a free and independent trade

union movement -

â\200\224 the administration of justice as safe-guarded by
the Courts

â\200\224 an end to the forceful removal of people.â\200\231

Will they hold to those commitments if the threat of dis-
investment and divestment is removed? They must
prove to us that they would do so.

I am surÂ¢ that most members of the Black Sash would
agree with me in saying that nothing must be done which
will cause one more person to lose a job. There is no so-
cial security in this country, no safety net to rescue the
starving except what can be inadequately provided by
voluntary welfare organisations. We sit in the advice of-
fices all day long, faced with people who literally do not
know where the next meal is to come from and we will
not do one thing to make that situation worse.

But, we have some questions to ask of the business
community here â\200\224 both South African and foreign
businessmen. The unemployment which exists on so
large a scale now in this country is not a consequence of

The unemployment which exists on so large a scale
now in this country is not a consequence of disinvest-
ment, or economic sanctions. They have not yet been
imposed.

disinvestment, divestment or economic sanctions. They
have not yet been imposed. We ask those who are most
audible in their criticisms of the disinvestment and di-
vestment lobby overseas:

â\200\224 How many jobs have you destroyed in the last
five years because you have mechanised?

â\200\224 Did you worry about unemployment when you
merged and relocated and rationalised your
operations?

â\200\224 What have you done about the growing mono-
polistic control over industry and commerce,
about price fixing, about destruction of com-
petition, about squeezing out the small man?

â\200\224 Have we heard your voices raised about the new
Regulations relating to the retailing of coal
which will destroy the small traders, or about the
monopolistic controls over road transportation

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which prevent the self-employed driver from

finding his survival?

As you move into agri-business producing what, I am told, are called in America "non-consumptives" that which is not food have you ever wondered about the one and a quarter million people who were dispossessed from South African farms in the years between 1960 and 1980? Do you know what happened to them in the resettlement camps where they were dumped? They are not part of the urban middle class in which your interest has been invested since 1976.

We sit in the advice offices all day long, faced with people who literally do not know where the next meal is to come from and we will not do one thing to make that situation worse.

You have told us that you are totally opposed to disinvestment and to divestment because it will cause increased unemployment here in South Africa.

Then you must answer us as to why South African businesses have become multinational? Why are you investing in Massachusetts and Britain and elsewhere? How many jobs could you have created here by bringing those investments back home? :

Is it true that Anglo American is the second largest foreign investor in the United States?

Is it true that a major foreign company recently announced a R40-million investment in a new plant in South Africa which will not create one single new job, and is it true that in the same week that company was laying off 460 workers for a period of eight weeks?

These are, no doubt, naive questions but we are entitled to honest factual answers. You are presenting to us an apocalyptic vision of the consequences of disinvestment and divestment. We are entitled to ask you just where your investment is and what your investment is doing. You must start being honest with us. We have to be persuaded that your operations really do create jobs, really do spread the profits of capitalism through the whole society.

The evidence is not in your favour. The Reserves policy upon which the sophisticated political structures for apartheid are based were created by you in the past in a deliberate programme designed to ensure a plentiful supply of cheap labour. The migrant labour policies of succeeding governments were merely a development of your model created to maximise profits on the mines.

During the boom years apartheid was entrenched and refined and because it was in the interests of profits, you did not speak out against the manifold injustices and increasing poverty and misery. :

Much more recently your free enterprise/home own-

ership model has furthered the government's urban preference policies which are squeezing out the poor and less well paid because the struggle to find accommodation is now a winner take all struggle for privilege and preference available only to those who can pay the inflated costs of residence in the confined, limited geographical borders of black townships. All this contributing to the great fortified wall which has been erected between the urban insiders and the poverty-stricken outsiders.

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Were you ignorant or naive when you proclaimed to Senator Kennedy that you have been in the forefront in successfully urging the South African government to

- make meaningful policy changes especially in the following areas:

opening up housing to black private ownership and

thus effectively reversing the use of black urban housing shortages as a form of influx control.

Have you heard of the August 26 1983 amendment to Section 10 which made the housing shortage a more stringent influx control tool than it has ever been before?

You were told about it but we never heard you complain. :

You owe us answers to these questions and you should be aware that if you fail to answer, not only in the things that you say at Carlton Hotel banquets, but in what you do in your business enterprises, the future will condemn you. You will be judged if you cannot provide much more concrete evidence that free enterprise really does mean more freedom, more well-being, more peace with justice than any other economic system devised by man.

My last question is addressed both to you and to the State President.

What do you mean by 'meaningful political participation by blacks'? Meaningful political participation means one person, one vote no more and no less. After accepting that principle one can start negotiating constitutional structures to protect the liberty and security of individuals.

[Is this what you mean?

If you do not mean that we are all doomed. The demand in black communities has gone beyond any tinkering around the edges of local government, educational systems, housing policies. It is a demand for liberation. Only if government is responsible to the whole people will all the injustices in welfare, pensions, housing, ur-

The demand in black communities has gone beyond any tinkering around the edges of local government, educational systems, housing policies. It is a demand for liberation. Only if government is responsible to the whole people will all the injustices in welfare, pensions, housing, urbanisation, employment policies fall

away.

banisation, employment policies fall away.

Peace with justice is only ever achieved in the tension held between conflicting interests. Are you prepared to risk everything to be a partner in that creative tension? Or will you wait to be destroyed because you have never been able to show that you mean what you say?

Meanwhile the rest of us have to get on with doing what we have to do.

We in the Black Sash have always been concerned with the victims, the excluded, the poor, the dispossessed. Our task is to find the non-violent ways in which power can be transferred to the powerless â\200\224 not in any desire for the defeat or subjugation of the presently powerful, but in the true longing for a society in which equal distribution of powers will lead to peace and justice preserved in that creative tension which exists between conflicting interests of equal strength.

Port Elizabeth, March 14 1985