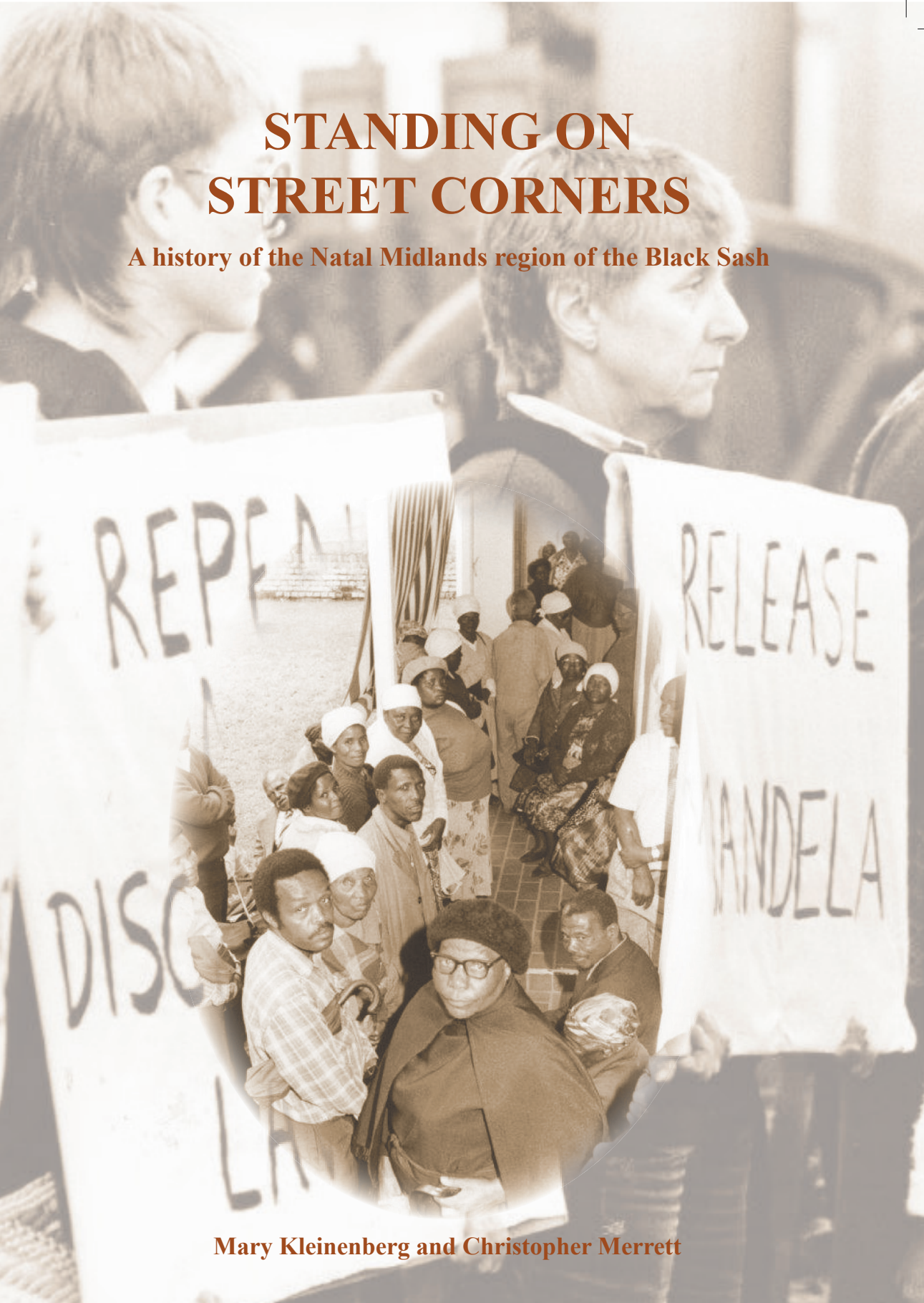


STANDING ON STREET CORNERS

A history of the Natal Midlands region of the Black Sash



Mary Kleinenberg and Christopher Merrett

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*A history of the Natal Midlands region
of the Black Sash*

**Mary Kleinenberg and Christopher Merrett
with research assistance from Kyla O'Neill**



Occasional Publications of the Natal Society Foundation
PIETERMARITZBURG
2015

Standing on street corners: A history of the Natal Midlands region of the Black Sash.

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First published in 2015 in Pietermaritzburg by the Trustees of The Natal Society Foundation under its imprint 'Occasional Publications of The Natal Society Foundation'.

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Natal Society Foundation website: <http://www.natalia.org.za/>

ISBN 978-0-99217-664-8

Design & layout: Jo Marwick

Photographs are from the archives of the Natal Midlands Black Sash

This book was written in admiration of every courageous woman who took a stand by joining the Black Sash. It is dedicated in particular to the memory of four notable Natal Midlands women: Maimie Corrigall for her tenacity and determination in keeping the region going, especially in the seventies; Marie Dyer, who played a leading role in the region for forty years and whose letters to the press still give meaning to the times; Busi Nyide, who for twenty-five years patiently listened to and advised hundreds of people who came to the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office for help, establishing vital links with the community; and Pat Merrett whose steadfast perseverance as convenor of the Advice Office ensured its survival.



Maimie Corrigall



Marie Dyer



Busi (Victoria) Nyide



Pat Merrett

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	The conscience of white South Africa	1
Chapter 2	Women of courage: the first decade, 1955–1964	25
Chapter 3	Finding a focus: the second decade, 1965–1974	51
Chapter 4	The years of uprising: the third decade, 1975–1984	69
Chapter 5	Intensified oppression: the fourth decade, 1985–1994, part 1	97
Chapter 6	Final stages: the fourth decade, 1985–1994, part 2	139
Chapter 7	Serving the people: the Advice Office, 1975–1983	175
Chapter 8	In a State of Emergency: the Advice Office, 1984–1989	195
Chapter 9	Moving towards liberation: the Advice Office, 1990–1994	217
Chapter 10	Cruel beyond description: old age pensions and disability grants	235
Chapter 11	In retrospect: conclusions and overview	261
Appendix	Members of the Natal Midlands Black Sash	267
	Interviews and interviewers	275
	Bibliography	281
	Index	287

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFRA	Association for Rural Advancement
ANC	African National Congress
AO	Advice Office
APC	Alan Paton Centre
CCB	Civil Co-operation Bureau
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CRL	Civil Rights League
DAB	Drakensberg Administration Board
DESCOM	Detainees Support Committee
DG	disability grant
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
FEDSEM	Federal Theological Seminary
FFF	Five Freedoms Forum
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GPEC	Greater Pietermaritzburg Environmental Coalition
HNP	Herstigte Nasionale Party
HP	hire purchase
IMSSA	Independent Mediation Service of South Africa
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
MC	management committee
MCRF	Midlands Crisis Relief Fund
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MIGPF	Metal Industries Group Pension Fund
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
MP	member of parliament
NAPAC	Natal Performing Arts Council
NCA	Natal Citizens Association
NCAR	National Committee Against Removals
NCW	National Council of Women
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NIM	Network of Independent Monitors
NLC	National Land Committee
NMBS	Natal Midlands Black Sash
NMCC	Natal Midlands Crisis Committee
NNLA	Northern Natal Landowners Association
NPA	Natal Provincial Administration
NSFT	Natal Society Foundation Trust
NUMSA	National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
NW	<i>Natal Witness</i>

OAP	old age pension
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PACSA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness
PDA	Pietermaritzburg Democratic Association
REAP	Rape Education Action Project
<i>RRS</i>	<i>Race Relations Survey</i>
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACC	South African Christian Council
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACOS	South African Council on Sport
SADF	South African Defence Force
SADWU	South African Domestic Workers Union
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SAR	South African Railways
<i>SM</i>	<i>Sash Magazine</i>
TRAC	Transvaal Rural Action Committee
UDF	United Democratic Front
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
WC	workmen's compensation
WDCL	Womens Defence of the Constitution League
YMCA	Young Mens Christian Association

PREFACE

The South African Left was full of highly productive writers and a source of several long-lived journal titles. Given the political priorities of the time, these were not always of a consistently high bibliographic standard. The titles of two journals frequently cited in this book, published by the Black Sash and the South African Institute of Race Relations respectively, varied with time. For the sake of consistency they have been standardised as *Sash Magazine* and *Race Relations Survey* (the first confusingly started and ended life as *The Black Sash/Die Swart Serp* and *Sash* in 1955 and 1995 respectively; while the second changed its name from *Survey of Race Relations* in 1978).

Although this book is well referenced, it has been decided not to indulge in great detail where primary material is concerned. Archival sources used at the Alan Paton Centre (APC) were the John Aitchison papers (PC 14) and the Natal Midlands Black Sash papers (PC4), which include a selection of Advice Office case files from the mid- to late 1980s. Interviews now lodged with the oral history collection at the APC are separately listed with details of interviewees and interviewers.

Thanks are due to the staff of the APC for access to key archival collections. However, the research planned by Kyla O'Neill was severely hampered by refusal of a very reasonable request based on past principle and practice of the national archives that boxes of case files be transported on the University of KwaZulu-Natal van for use under supervision at a venue within the university library system in Durban. This book is the poorer for that decision.

The Natal Society Foundation Trust (NSFT) gave a modest grant to Kyla that allowed her to travel to Pietermaritzburg and stay long enough to complete a substantial amount of research on the Advice Office that has contributed significantly to this volume. We thank Julie Parle for connecting Kyla with the project. The NSFT is to be commended for the unwavering support it has given to this book and its general backing to the publication of historical research relating to KwaZulu-Natal that would be considered unviable by commercial and academic publishers.

We thank all members of Sash who agreed to be interviewed for this book and those who conducted the interviews. Alleyn Diesel read some of the first draft, took many of the photographs and contributed valuable ideas and support and Peter Croeser checked the text. Their contributions are acknowledged with gratitude. We are also grateful to staff of the Bessie Head Library's reference section for help in locating old newspapers; and to Shelagh and Brian

Spencer; Jennifer and Pat McKenzie; Jennifer Verbeek; Mary Gardner; Pessa Weinberg; and Carol Davids (of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Archives) for identifying the forenames and photographs of some former members. The authors regard the appendix containing the names of all full and associate members of Sash and non-members who volunteered for the Advice Office as an essential part of the historical record. However, it was a challenge to compile and apologies are offered in advance for errors and omissions.

In the latter stages of production Mary Burton kindly produced a foreword at short notice, Jo Marwick laid out the text and illustrations, and Sally Hines made available her highly professional proofreading skills. As always, a book is the product of many hands and for all of these the authors are very grateful.

FOREWORD

This meticulously crafted account of the origins of the Black Sash, and of its establishment and development in the Natal Midlands, is a fine contribution to the complex history of that part of South Africa. Starting from 1955, when white middle-class women responded with eye-catching protests to the government's determination to tamper with the 1910 Constitution, the book carries us through the bitter decades of apartheid to the optimistic preparations for the democratic elections of 1994. At every stage it explores the impact of national events on Pietermaritzburg and its surrounding towns and villages.

As in other regions, women from the Natal Midlands came forward in their hundreds to oppose the National Party's intention to remove the last remaining non-racial right to the franchise, which belonged to the sector defined as coloured men. As in other regions, members drifted away in their hundreds when that particular struggle was lost and they were faced with the stark prospect of protesting against the full range of apartheid's injustice.

Buttressed by numerous interviews with Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) members who remained steadfast and whose experience spanned the four decades, this history provides insights into their actions, motives and beliefs. They might differ on political and ideological grounds, they might argue about strategies, they might be afraid, angry or overwhelmed, but they did not give up. 'The Black Sash will protest', wrote long-time regional chair Marie Dyer (in this case against punishment without trial); and protest they did.

Each region of the Black Sash had its own particular character, shaped by its context and by the views of its members. The NMBS was led by women with vision and commitment, many of whom were members of the Liberal Party, which was particularly strong in Pietermaritzburg. Other women were drawn to the Sash as a women's organisation, one in the words of Bunty Biggs that 'challenged without being aggressive'.

When other regions opened advice offices, Natal Midlands held back, swayed by Maimie Corrigan's argument that the Black Sash should not be seeking to alleviate the damage done by the pass laws and other legislation, but rather stand firm against such discrimination. This was an opinion put forward in other regions, too, as members resisted being drawn into welfare work. Yet in 1975 Maimie was among the first volunteers to serve in the newly opened Pietermaritzburg Advice Office (AO), where it worked closely with trade unions. The later chapters of the book record many cases dealt with by

the advice givers, demonstrating the value of the work and the way in which Sash members learned of the daily realities of the people who approached them.

Like its counterpart in Durban, the AO experienced the specific difficulties of working in areas that fell under the control of self-governing KwaZulu. The monitoring of pension payouts, where it was reported that elderly people had died while waiting in the queue, the endless follow-ups to try to secure pensions and other grants all led to conflict with the authorities.

Black Sash records, explored in detail, demonstrate the importance of forming networks with other organisations and participating in joint campaigns. NMBS members worked with the End Conscription Campaign, and during states of emergency with the campaign to Free the Children. There were numerous projects including opposition to capital punishment, forced removals, bannings and detentions, and promoting access to land; while in later years NMBS was drawn into work on environmental issues and women's rights. It worked closely with the Womens National Coalition, organising workshops and preparing information booklets.

The book does not shy away from internal debates within the Sash, such as the discussions about membership for men, or attitudes to the escalating violence in the country. The latter was no simple philosophical issue for Natal Midlands, where violence reached a terrifying peak. Black Sash members were active in monitoring, and took part in the Natal Midlands Crisis Committee and Midlands Crisis Relief Fund. Marie Dyer wrote a letter to *Sash Magazine* and Pat Merrett another to *The Natal Witness* arguing that violent abuses of human rights by non-government groups, horrendous as they were, and not condoned by the Sash, were a by-product of dehumanising apartheid policies. It was the role of a human rights organisation to expose government repression.

Authors Mary Kleinenberg and Christopher Merrett pay tribute to the members of their region, not only in their words, but in the weight they give to direct quotations, bringing many different voices to the fore and giving life to the different women who made the Black Sash what it was. I have greatly enjoyed reading their book and believe it will be valued by many.

The Natal Society Foundation is to be congratulated for its support of this project and for publication of this very welcome book.

Mary Burton
Past president of Black Sash, Cape Town
January 2015

1

THE CONSCIENCE OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA

In pride and humbleness we declare our devotion to the land of South Africa; we dedicate ourselves to the service of our country; we re-affirm ourselves to the contract of Union which brought us together. We pledge ourselves to uphold the ideals by which our Union was inspired, of mutual trust and forbearance, of sanctity of word, of courage for the future, and of peace and justice for all persons and peoples. We pledge ourselves to resist any diminishment of these, confident that this duty is required of us, and that history and our children will defend us. So help us God, in whose strength we trust.¹

SUCH IS THE stirring, original declaration of the Black Sash, first known as the Womens Defence of the Constitution League (WDCL). On 19 May 1955, the six women who would be remembered as its founding members met for tea in Johannesburg and decided they must do something about the Senate Act; ‘this piece of political cynicism’.² Using the cell system, by phone and word of mouth they had within six days organised a march of 2 000 women through the streets of Johannesburg from Joubert Park to the City Hall, ‘bearing banners, to the beat of a muffled drum’. The date was 25 May, which would become the Sash’s birthday. At the end of the march, thousands of protestors were addressed by Agnes Hoernlé who pointed out in an uplifting speech that ‘democratic institutions rest on foundations of mutual trust and understanding’ and stressed the need for a common destiny.³ Writing in the mid-1970s, Cherry Michelman described these events in droll fashion as ‘a happening’ and more conventionally as a ‘spontaneous flare-up of moral indignation’.⁴

Amongst the marchers was Else Schreiner, who would later become a stalwart of the Pietermaritzburg branch of Sash: ‘It was a very nervous period in the development of the Womens Defence of the Constitution League because we didn’t know if anybody was going to come. We thought it would be a very small march. In fact it turned out to be enormous ... with hundreds of women it was a fascinating performance. And ... I was asked by Jean Sinclair and Ruth Foley whether I would join the executive of the Black Sash as a member of the Liberal Party. They felt this would counter the apparent United Party domination.’⁵

The first national president of the WDCL, Ruth Foley, described the movement as a spontaneous reaction to the Senate Bill: it was the mechanism

to enable the National Party government to bypass entrenched clauses (35 and 137) in the South Africa Act (1909) and remove coloured voters from the common roll in the Cape Province, as well as abolish language equality in the Transvaal. This required a two-thirds majority of parliament, the House of Assembly and Senate, sitting in joint session. And to achieve this, the government introduced the Senate Bill, which was designed to pack the upper house with its supporters. It provided for the reconstitution of Senate in a way that guaranteed a National Party majority as it controlled four of five provinces, including the illegally occupied South-West Africa.⁶

Reaction was forthright. Arthur Keppel-Jones attacked the legislation as opening the door to dictatorship; while a statement from Rhodes University academics put it, in more philosophical terms, as a matter that ‘concerns the conscience of the nation and the maintenance of democratic practice’.⁷ Opponents saw it as another episode of encroachment upon the liberty of South Africans, part of a raft of apartheid legislation introduced from 1950 onwards and heralded by the Population Registration Act and Group Areas Act. The crucial issue of conscience to the mandate of Sash was captured brilliantly and movingly by Robin of *The Natal Mercury* in one of the most famous South African cartoons of all time.



*'The Voice of Conscience' by Robin,
cartoonist, The Natal Mercury*

The National Party chose instead to see this issue as a matter of national sovereignty, an antidote to 'constitutional enslavement'.⁸ It had a long history and represented a 'kind of Armageddon for both sides', although it had waited until 1951 and the unification of the *Herenigde Nasionale Party* and the *Volksparty* into the *Nasionale Party* once more.⁹ Parliament then adopted a *Separate Representation of Voters Act* by simple majorities in both houses that provided for white representation for coloured South Africans (four in the House of Assembly, one in Senate and two on the Cape Provincial Council), but it was struck down by the Court of Appeal in a unanimous 1952 judgment that held that the entrenched clauses of the Act of Union had not been superseded by the Statute of Westminster, which in April 1931 granted South Africa dominion status and effective independence. The Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Albert van der Sandt Centlivres, ruled in forthright terms that the notion that South Africa was not sovereign because of entrenched constitutional clauses was 'a manifest absurdity'.¹⁰

The government's reaction was the High Court of Parliament Act, the brainchild of Eben Dönges, which gave it the power to overturn an Appeal Court judgment on legislation. Boycotted by the parliamentary opposition, this law was also, and not surprisingly, found to be invalid. Emboldened by the 1953 general election result, which produced the first majority National Party government, there was another attempt to force the *Separate Representation of Voters Bill* through the legitimate unicameral route in July, but the necessary two-thirds majority remained elusive. C.R. Swart devised further legislation, this time designed to politicise the Appellate Division, but Prime Minister D.F. Malan decided to continue to pursue a two-thirds majority for the *Separate Representation of Voters Bill*. However, in another vote the leader of the United Party, J.G.N. Strauss, 'succeeded in holding his party together'.¹¹ The Senate Bill was the government's last, desperate option.

On 27 May 1955 a debate on the Senate Bill lasted thirty hours and involved an all-night sitting. At the beginning of June, the WDCL organised petitions to the Governor-General and Prime Minister, sending forms out to 290 towns. They were signed by a wide cross-section of the white female population, notably from the remotest parts of the country and even by members of the National Party. The total number of signatures collected over ten days was 100 000 and the count was covered by the BBC and other international news channels. Some of the forms were mysteriously lost in the post, so only 94 680 signatures (25 000 from country districts) eventually reached the Governor-General.¹²

On 28 June another march took place, this time to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, where the petition was presented to minister of transport, Ben Schoeman, standing in for the Prime Minister. More significantly 80 women, several over 70 and two over 80 years old, stayed on to participate in a bitterly cold, all-night, open-air vigil.¹³ Some remained for a second night. Else Schreiner was there and described the scene:

I remember the shock when we discovered that our Prime Minister was not there and that one of his deputies was going to take over [and] receive the petition forms. And I remember the anger when the women who had deposited the documents in his room came out and said 'He didn't even take his pipe out of his mouth.' We sat in the blazing sun in that amphitheatre, on the stone steps in front of the Union Buildings. Hundreds of women. We read books, we did crossword puzzles, we got to know each other, we had people talk to us about what was going on in the country, we had trade unionists trying to persuade us that we all ought to be supporting the trade unions. There was a certain amount of knitting, we sang some songs. It was a fascinating performance. And it really was a period of birth of togetherness. The nights were not so hot. It was mid-winter, June, we slept on the lawns down at the bottom. A few lucky people had tents, most of us just slept in sleeping bags wrapped up in extra blankets on the lawns. But that in itself was a marvellous experience ... and everybody lay and talked until the early hours of the morning and then went back up top. We were guarded by members of the Torch Commando who said we were in danger and they were going to guard us, and the only person who got hurt was one member of the Torch Commando who was hit over the head by another member of the Torch Commando as they came round a bush from opposite sides. In fact the chap who was hit over the head actually had to be taken to hospital to be stitched up, but that was the only incident.¹⁴

The next tactic, perhaps the most successful of all and one that defined a Sash tradition of solemn public protest, was the haunting of cabinet ministers whenever and wherever they appeared in public. It was felt that it was important to embarrass them on official business and make them feel as uncomfortable as possible. This was not an entirely unique idea: Mary Daly, an American feminist theologian, had advocated that women must learn to 'spook' or 'speak out' to overcome patriarchal misuse of power.¹⁵ The first occasion was on 18 July: 'the women did not speak. They simply stood in a dignified manner in their hats and gloves and sashes wherever they felt their presence would be an effective symbolic protest.'¹⁶ This, improbably, extended as far as Skukuza in the Kruger National Park where minister of lands, Paul Sauer, was greeted by members of the Lowveld WDCL. Much of the communication involved in organising such feats was in code. The result produced some of the most telling images of the Senate Act controversy.

Ministers were visibly embarrassed and resorted to childish comments, labelling WDCL members 'weeping Winnies' and 'foolish virgins'. Foreign minister and extreme Right-winger Eric Louw claimed to have inspected their shoes and found them clean. The cutting and appropriate response from *The Star* was that 'their consciences are too'.¹⁷ In Bloemfontein some government supporters interrupted the haunting and assaulted WDCL members, tearing off their sashes. The city's English-language daily, *The Friend*, in a prescient and courageous leader noted: 'This is the doctrine of the one-party police state towards which this country is heading.'¹⁸ The Bloemfontein incident showed that the WDCL had gone beyond merely irritating the government, whose members variously accused it of provocation, breach of peace and playing with fire. This was an extraordinarily paranoid reaction to a silent protest of disapproval.

On 10 August there was a national day of prayer. Simultaneously, an appeal to the male relatives of WDCL members resulted in the formation of the Citizens Committee. Calling for a national convention to work towards common ideals in a spirit of harmony and co-operation, it adopted a covenant. Amongst its supporters was Deneys Schreiner.¹⁹ But the Covenanters, 'organised to a large extent by former members of the Torch Commando, never really got off the ground' and men failed to adopt Sash tactics.²⁰ There was one independent protest in Johannesburg, but the Covenant 'quietly fizzled'.²¹ Another ploy was wide distribution (although apparently only in Johannesburg), often in unexpected places such as café sugar bowls, of shilling-size discs bearing a black band and the words 'Eerbiedig ons Grondwet' (Respect our Constitution).

These activities did nothing to prevent the dissolution of Senate in November 1955 preparatory to its reconstitution.²² As the *Sunday Times* editorialised, this was 'a fateful day in the history of South Africa. The Senate Act is not just another instalment of piece-meal apartheid. It deliberately sets out to destroy the Constitution of the Union.'²³ Another protest march was planned: reporting it, the *Rand Daily Mail* mentioned that a branch of Sash had just been formed in Pietermaritzburg.²⁴

On Saturday 12 November a women's organisation a mere five months old was able to bring thousands onto the streets of South Africa. Many of the marches featured a book, draped in black and symbolic of the Constitution. At Johannesburg City Hall the gathering was addressed by Sash president Ruth Foley, who declared, 'We shall not submit to dictatorship.'²⁵ Else Schreiner described the scene:

The drummer was a strange woman who turned up actually at the first march, wearing a green dress and a black beret and carrying a great big drum, who said she had come to lead us. We didn't know who she was or where she came from ... We took it in turns, four at a time, one on each corner to stand at attention, with head bowed for half an hour, without moving and then we would step back and four others would come. Husbands who had been in the army during the war told us how to rock from toe to heel, to keep the circulation going, how to tighten your calf and thigh muscles so that you didn't pass out: that was quite a problem. The next day, Bob Connelly, the cartoonist at *The Rand Daily Mail*, who was, incidentally a very close family friend, had the drawing of the Book of the Constitution, draped with a black sash of mourning and that's where ... the new name of the organisation – Black Sash – came from.²⁶

On Friday 25 November mourning vigils were held to mark the election of the new 89-member Senate and a pamphlet was distributed describing this as South Africa's 'most shameful day'.²⁷

The following week on 29 November the WDCL held its first national congress in Port Elizabeth. Ruth Foley pointed to the need to take a broader look at South African society and for the 'clean wind of truth [to] blow through every phase of our national life', going on to attack the ideology of nationalism. Two main decisions were taken: to intensify protest and conduct educational programmes. At this stage Sash comprised twelve regions and one hundred branches.²⁸ It was apparently necessary to disclaim connection to any political organisation, particularly the United Party and Congress of Democrats.²⁹

What had been founded was an innovative pressure group for the restoration of political morality, designed to fight the fear and intimidation that was the background to national discourse and educate the public about their responsibilities.³⁰ Contemporary commentators and subsequent historians have been tempted, perhaps ahistorically, to characterise Sash as the equivalent of the British Suffragette movement of fifty years earlier. Its leaders regarded it as a crusade and it was fully supported by the English-language press, even Right-wing titles such as *The Natal Mercury* and, on the platteland, *The Potchefstroom Herald*. However, this betrayed its basic nature: locked into the custom of the time and emphasising the unity of the 'two sections of the European population'.³¹ The proportion of its founding membership, probably at its height in early 1956 at about 10 000, concerned about black political rights would not have been large.³² The WDCL was conservative in two senses, constitutionally and politically, and was de facto a segregated organisation. While open to all women entitled to vote, no woman who was not regarded as white had ever been enfranchised in South Africa. Yet members of Sash believed sincerely that the government was 'committing a grave spiritual

offence against the soul of South Africa and that the country's honour is being besmirched' by what their organisation described as a 'minority party bent on maintaining themselves in power at all costs'. This, said Sash, was 'degrading cynicism'.³³

In the New Year of 1956 it was decided to intensify the campaign around the entrenched clauses. In January what was to become the renowned *Sash Magazine* was launched. For the early re-opening of parliament on 13 January, vigils at 120 centres were planned: at parliament in Cape Town, for instance, daily vigils of four members were maintained. In early February, convoys of cars set out from all corners of the country and Spink describes the planning involved as a masterpiece of organisation. Nothing was left to chance that might have derailed the operation, either through mechanical breakdown (two mechanics bringing up the rear were the only men involved) or opportunity for the authorities to intervene. Even the dress of the participants was prescribed.³⁴

In Cape Town on 13 February the Sash organised a well-supported 150-car convoy to parliament, which *The Cape Times* described as reminiscent of the Torch Commando, and then mounted a 48-hour vigil. On the following day during the parliamentary debate sashes were seized from members in the public gallery, then their black roses; but after an interlude they were allowed to wear the latter. An opposition member of parliament (MP) commented on the vigil participants: 'Thank goodness, they're on our side.'³⁵ In spite of a high-profile, and well-publicised and supported, campaign the fortnight of joint sittings came to an end with the third reading of the South Africa Act Amendment Bill on 27–28 February. In a last desperate attempt to salvage some advantage from the situation Sash had called on 'ten men of honour' among the Nationalists to vote against the bill, or abstain. Not surprisingly, none were forthcoming.³⁶ Some Sash members evaded the prohibition on sashes in the gallery by wearing long black gloves and holding their arms at an angle and the four women MPs wore black roses.³⁷ The bill became law by 174 to 68, eight more votes than the necessary two-thirds majority. The joint session ended at 6.19 pm on Monday 27 February 1956;³⁸ and with it the last thread of democracy in South Africa for nearly forty years. The parliament building was ringed by 400 Black Sash women and a mass vigil was held throughout the country.

Janet Robinson sums up the situation: 'The Black Sash had failed to do more than irritate the Government over the constitutional question. Yet ... the Sashers had already found new purposes.'³⁹ The Sash and its supporters had clearly lost, but membership flourished. The object of its vigils was

broadened to a general protest against the 'violation of democratic liberties and principles'.⁴⁰ With intimation of things to come, the first dirty trick incident was recorded when a pamphlet purportedly published by Sash was released: it advocated a boycott of Afrikaans businesses and caused considerable uproar in parliament.⁴¹ On the other hand, on 23 April a clandestine radio transmitter broadcast support for Sash, encouraging revival of the wartime V for Victory sign and using the Morse-like opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. This was the work either of the Torch Commando or a Natal dissident group.⁴²

Four days later the second national Sash conference took place in Bloemfontein. Ruth Foley emphasised that the main purpose of the organisation was to maintain 'morality as the basis of all legislation' and conduct a national education campaign around this.⁴³ It was also decided officially to change the name of the WDCL to its popular nickname, the Black Sash (Swart Serp in Afrikaans). At follow-up meetings it was emphasised that far from spent, the Sash was just beginning its work to challenge further unjust legislation. A common thread to all WDCL campaigns had been the defence of civic morality and opposition to political gangsterism.

In its formative years Sash was a strangely conservative, traditional movement infused with a strong thread of radical rhetoric that would not have been out of place during the later struggle era. Whatever the motives of its members, their approach was both innovative and courageous. White women in South Africa had never done anything like this before: 'as one ANC member pointed out, a form of demonstration more readily associated with the black culture: protest-marching.'⁴⁴ *The Economist* (London) paid Sash the compliment of comparing it with Mohandas Gandhi's passive resistance movement.⁴⁵ And it was active, albeit sometimes in single-figure numbers, in the remotest parts of the country. But this awkward alliance of the conservative and the radical was not destined to last.

Up to this point the Sash had thrived on the unifying power of opposition to a constitutional assault. As it turned towards a broader critique of apartheid, which involved a growing volume of human rights advocacy on behalf of South Africans who were neither voters nor white, that unity fractured. When the Sash became more explicitly opposed to the roots of authoritarianism, the social and economic system that sustained white South Africa, the cost of membership became too great for more conservative women to bear. Often their husbands' business or professional commitments precluded continued membership of Sash and thinking at branch level began to move at different speeds. All Sash members would henceforth be faced by this racial and

economic contradiction that found them opposing the system from which they benefited.⁴⁶ It was upon this dilemma and the loss of a sense of idealism that the idea of Sash as a mass movement foundered. As Michelman observes, morality and virtue are not in themselves sufficient to stand up to raw political power of the sort exercised by the National Party government.⁴⁷ The same had happened to the Torch Commando, but unlike the latter Sash was to adapt and endure.

The sticking point for many Sash members was moving from protest on behalf of constitutional conservation to the practicalities of extending civil rights to all: 'one standard of morality for all South Africans.'⁴⁸ As Eileen Benjamin put it so aptly, Sash turned from short-term indignation to long-term commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle.⁴⁹ For conservatives the fear was involvement in issues around the way laws were applied: this was seen as engaging in divisive party politics on the dangerous terrain of what was called the 'non-European problem'. The desire of many members was to occupy the high moral ground unsullied by specific political commitment. It was this conservative attitude that aborted the idea of a Black Sash-sponsored multiracial national conference and delayed support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by Sash until 1960. The situation was not assisted by growing hostility from the United Party, to which many Sash members belonged or supported in elections. Its leader, J.G.N. Strauss, called on the Black Sash to disband using the facile argument that all anti-National Party forces should combine to defeat it electorally.⁵⁰ It was a strategy that had already lost practical and moral force.

The counter-argument was that 'Black Sash's true function now was to oppose every form of administrative immorality and discrimination in every branch of government' and to pursue the aim of educating the white electorate about the iniquities of the apartheid system.⁵¹ Another objective of the liberal wing of Sash was to make multiracialism respectable and acceptable.⁵² The 1958 general election was a point of no return with the liberals refusing any longer to be constrained by the political ambitions of the United Party. At the June 1958 Sash conference they put forward resolutions about a new South African Constitution, opposition to unjust legislation, and active involvement to assist the oppressed. Sash headquarters moved to Cape Town where there was a strong focus on race relations and even limited co-operation with the African National Congress (ANC) and Non-European Unity Movement. In 1960, constitutional changes legitimised such contact and moved Sash towards a multiracial stance, a move that ironically created greater distance between the

organisation and the community it hoped to educate in the era of Sharpeville, moves towards a republic, and decolonisation throughout Africa. But Sash had made a classic liberal decision: 'Protest could be carried on by even a small group of sufficiently determined women. As the conscience of South Africa, their effectiveness depended more on quality than on quantity.'⁵³ This set the tone for Sash until the fall of apartheid. Its three main objectives were to bridge the racial gap, mitigate inhumanity and keep an eye on legislation.⁵⁴

The relationship of Sash with the Congress Alliance was similarly complex. The Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) had hoped in the mid-1950s that Sash would ally with it, 'cheered by this public display of opposition to the government amongst whites'. White members of FEDSAW joined in Sash demonstrations, but failed to develop the formal links for which they hoped, even after Sash shed its conservative members in the late 1950s. However, 'despite these early rebuffs, the FEDSAW continued to cultivate contact with the Black Sash' in the hope of establishing a broad alliance of all South African women.⁵⁵ While maintaining an independent stance, Sash undoubtedly complemented and bolstered the liberation movement.⁵⁶

An obvious cause for Sash protest was the extension of passes to African women required by the Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act (1952), which had sparked the march on the Union Buildings of 9 August 1956. Sash extended moral support, but was wary of a relationship with the Congress movement. Helen Joseph, for example, although she had shared the vigil at the Union Buildings in 1955, was seen as an extremist.⁵⁷ And it was several years before Sash became a non-racial organisation open to all adult women permanently resident in South Africa (October 1963). Universal franchise also proved to be a divisive issue, but by the time the tricameral parliament was being discussed in the late 1970s, Sash supported votes for all. While defence of the Constitution remained the main objective of Sash, the era of mass marches was over, haunting ceased (regarded as unacceptably anti-Afrikaner) and membership ebbed away. When South Africa became a republic in 1961 only a hard core of 1 100 remained, a figure that would rise to about 1 200 in the mid-1970s.⁵⁸ Their caution was sometimes harshly criticised by non-racial organisations from the Left and friends such as Alan Paton and Donald Molteno. But the Sash tactic of working within its own community would in time be endorsed in principle by both the ANC and Black Consciousness Movement, and was adopted from the outset with considerable political acuity.⁵⁹

It was indeed the pass laws that provided a bridge from the short-lived old Sash to the setting of a new agenda to form the basis for the rest of its existence. Given that two million people were convicted under the pass laws over twenty years (1960–80: they were abolished in 1986) this was a worthy cause. Application of passes to women had been held in abeyance for some years, but the establishment of the Coloured Labour Preference Area in the Western Cape required a mechanism to endorse people out of the region west of the Eiselen Line.⁶⁰ Pass law enforcement began in Cape Town in 1958 with Sash members immediately involved in giving informal assistance and advice. The Sash was extraordinarily outspoken and radical for the late 1950s: its take on the pass system as a geographic sleight of hand that underlay exploitation was remarkably astute and years ahead of academic debate and analysis. The Johannesburg Advice Office was later to argue that ‘the only way in which we can return to real western Christian, democratic principles of government is to remove all restrictions on the freedom of movement and residence for all our citizens and then to act with determination to solve the social problems which would inevitably arise in our cities’.⁶¹

When the ANC was banned in April 1960, Sash took full responsibility for its advice office role at Athlone (established in 1958, it was initially called a bail fund office), which transformed what was purely a political pressure group into a service organisation.⁶² This was a significant turning point in the organisation’s history that would have particular significance for the Natal Midlands region. The work of the advice office was to establish rights for Africans within the complexities of the law, providing ‘advice and assistance through the Kafkaesque web of regulations that enmeshed virtually every aspect of their lives’.⁶³ Its records became ‘a catalogue of the human tragedies’ of black South Africans: each file ‘represented a blasted life’ of what in the eyes of the state were effectively non-persons.⁶⁴ As Spink describes, ‘the Black Sash could keep a unique finger on the pulse of what was happening in the black communities even when restrictions on the media denied such information to other parties.’ And by collecting data it was able to identify trends as a starting point for public awareness campaigns.⁶⁵ Advice offices were particularly careful not to break the law by rendering direct financial assistance, although referral was a frequent option. And they took on tasks such as tracing people owed money under the Workmen’s Compensation Act.⁶⁶ Johannesburg and Durban advice offices opened in 1963 and others would subsequently be established in East London and Port Elizabeth (by 1964), Grahamstown (1973), Pretoria (1976) and Knysna (in the 1980s).

Pietermaritzburg's Advice Office opened on a part-time basis in 1975 (see chapters 7 to 10).

Advice offices enabled people to understand their position regarding the law and make choices. Case workers were able to chivvy often callous officialdom, find loopholes, and help with appeals. Test cases were often taken up by lawyers acting *pro deo* and important rulings were made and precedents set as in the 1981 Rikhoto case.⁶⁷ This role meant that active Sash members had, self-taught, to become well-versed in the law and its regulations, which were often extremely complex. This knowledge was used both to assist apartheid's victims and to explain to the white electorate the enormity of the system it consistently supported over decades.⁶⁸ Much of this analysis, which was notably absent from the output of most universities, was reflected on the pages of *Sash Magazine*, described by Michelman as a 'serious research organ'.⁶⁹

It was the advice offices that kept Sash rooted in this work. Well-known Cape Town member Noel Robb, for example, was described as 'unsentimental but resolute'⁷⁰ and it was this quality that was essential to the sustainability of the offices. While ideological differences flourished and debate raged at meetings and annual conferences, the advice offices had to deal with daily reality in the form of apartheid structures and officials, the legal system and the lives of black South Africans. Mary Burton made a point about the unrelenting nature of the problems brought to advice offices: nothing appeared to change, but the value of battling on against the system was evident in individual cases.⁷¹ The odds were strongly against Sash and it often appeared that its efforts were futile, but members regarded what they were doing as a moral obligation, a matter of conscience: history would eventually vindicate them in depriving 'the government of the consent of silence'.⁷² Many sought meaning in the belief of Pastor Martin Niemöller that to fail is not failure and to be right is justification enough.⁷³ They operated in an atmosphere of pervasive fear and conformity in which even the most innocuous political act of an unorthodox nature was regarded as subversive. One of the problems was that, apart from the Progressive Party, South Africa had no real parliamentary opposition, with the United Party often backing repressive legislation in its belief in a segregated society. For example, the United Party voted with the government on the second reading of the General Law Amendment Act of 1963, which legalised 90-day detention. The verdict of history might well be that the Sash *was* the official opposition.

It was possibly this assumed role that created a conflict between Natal and the central executive when the former opted in the 1960s for what Michelman

called 'charity work' such as nutrition schemes, clinics and classes. The objection to this approach was that Sash was a protest organisation. The counter-argument was that removed from the centre of power, symbolic protest meant little to an uninterested public and time and effort were better spent on 'demonstrably useful' work.⁷⁴

Fundamental issues of human rights such as the farm labour scheme, growing censorship, propagandistic broadcasting, Bantu Education, the compromised position of the universities and the Group Areas Act also preoccupied the Sash. For instance, it was to call for 'equal, free, compulsory education for all South Africans, academic freedom, and independence from government indoctrination and control'.⁷⁵ However, in 1962 a petition protesting at biased news broadcasting by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) drew a mere 26 000 signatures, raising concern that the organisation's resources were being stretched too far.⁷⁶ The 1960s and the growth of the South African police state proved a challenging time for Sash at the very height of apartheid, but it benefited from a period of leadership stability under Jean Sinclair of Johannesburg and began a long process of 'listening, advising, mobilising and conscientising'.⁷⁷

Crucially, Sash formed part of 'an interlocking directorate of organizations',⁷⁸ often with overlapping memberships, such as the National Union of South African Students, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), both of which pre-dated Sash, and the Christian Institute, founded in 1963. A number of Sash members worked for the Defence and Aid Fund, which was banned on 4 April 1966, but continued its support for political prisoners under the auspices of Dependents Conference, funded by the South African Council of Churches (SACC).⁷⁹ Of these organisations only the Sash was specifically established for the purpose of protest. During the mid-1960s Sash at national level was part of a Citizens Action Committee that protested against the injustice of much South African law and its administration.⁸⁰

On the tenth anniversary of Sash in 1965 its president Jean Sinclair noted that its role was to monitor the 'steady advance of official tyranny in our public affairs'. It was also important to keep alive a 'spirit of dissent' in the struggle for 'fundamental rights and dignities'.⁸¹ Three years later during protests against the Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Bill and the Prohibition of Political Interference Bill, Sinclair highlighted the danger of 'isolating of people into political vacuums' and the importance for Sash of the 'light of freedom within us'.⁸² In 1970 she summarised the work of Sash as 'championing the rights of voiceless people'.⁸³ A year later her daughter, Sheena Duncan, at the

Johannesburg national conference described the migrant labour system as a 'monstrous offspring of apartheid', which she named in turn as an 'affront to the humanity of the majority of South Africans'. Presciently she argued that an 'inevitable price ... would have to be paid' for what some Sash members were beginning to define as a system of racial capitalism.⁸⁴ By the time of the 25th anniversary of Sash in 1980, national president Joyce Harris lamented that the ongoing struggle for 'political morality and democracy in SA' was a sad reflection on the country. That Sash was on the radical wing of the political spectrum and in the vanguard of political change was indicated by its call in 1980 for the release of Nelson Mandela and rejection in 1981 of the Republic Day Festival celebrating twenty years under apartheid republicanism.⁸⁵ During the 1980s Sash increasingly referred to freedom fighters and condemned the actions of the security forces.⁸⁶

The message of Sash continued to be promoted by public protest stands, often subjected to abuse. Sheena Duncan laconically described the 1960s: 'we were labelled as communists and were shouted at and told we ought to be at home in our kitchens looking after our children. Some of our attackers were very aggressive and threw nasty things at us.'⁸⁷ At the 1968 national conference in Durban, Jean Sinclair deplored the fact that South Africans were succumbing to apathy accompanied by a growing intolerance towards protest.⁸⁸ Not everyone in Sash favoured stands, however, some arguing that they gave a false impression of the extent of freedom in South Africa.⁸⁹ Until 1973 stands were the collective efforts that had started with opposition to the Senate Act, but from 1973 the Gatherings and Demonstrations Act made more than one person an unlawful gathering. They thus became single protests with Sash women separated by the statutory 50 metres. Stands required considerable support. A back-up person was always available to make sure that protestors were not molested and to monitor the behaviour of the police.

Apart from pass law issues and other types of removal, such as those resulting from enforcement of the Group Areas Act, Sash focused on the right to shelter and the crisis of homelessness that had resulted from government policy, emphasising that family stability was a social issue as well as a human right. In 1968 it organised a petition against removals, but collected only 22 000 signatures and subsequently abandoned this tactic. Working with communities that had approached Sash, it functioned as their public relations arm although advice was also given about community organisation. Members were able to act as witnesses to removal processes and to expose the reality of

what was happening on the ground, regardless of law, policy and government propaganda.

This revealed the fact that the rural areas were the focus of severe human rights abuse, largely unmonitored, and that there was a critical need for fieldworkers. For this reason Sash had to consider going into partnership with parallel organisations. The first formal initiative was TRAC (Transvaal Rural Action Committee, founded in 1983), which formed part of the NCAR (National Committee Against Removals) and by 1985 had become part of the NLC (National Land Committee).⁹⁰ TRAC's foundation year coincided with the 70th anniversary of the Natives Land Act and in Pietermaritzburg a talk by AFRA (Association for Rural Advancement) was accompanied by dry bread and tea, symbolic of the diet of rural people.⁹¹

The issue of removal became more subtle with promulgation of the Borders of Particular States Extension Act (1986), which simply redrew boundaries in order to change the status of black South Africans. This heightened the long-term opposition of Sash to the bantustan system, which had been given teeth by the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act (1970). It ultimately deprived eight million black South Africans of their citizenship. The Bantu Affairs Administration Act (1971) compounded the problem by establishing administration boards to control the lives of Africans outside the bantustans, thus excising the authority of municipalities. Even in the reformist 1980s the Orderly Movement and Settlement Bill threatened to tighten the system still further, although it was eventually withdrawn after massive protest.⁹²

Sash was a watchdog organisation. In 1959 a resolution had been passed calling for the investigation of prison conditions and a particularly important venue was the courts, the proceedings of the native commissioners' courts being of special importance. There, Africans who had fallen foul of apartheid's bureaucracy were literally processed, as Spink puts it, 'with indecent haste ... when the magistrate barely even appeared to look up from his bench'.⁹³ Observation, an unheralded and time-consuming activity, was of immense value to the gathering of a vast dossier of socio-economic information that challenged the propaganda of apartheid. And the presence of white women also had some effect on court officials who knew full well that accused had no legal defence.⁹⁴ Once the pass law system collapsed in the mid-1980s, monitoring switched to overtly political trials.

The first death in detention was that of Looksmart Ngudle in September 1963.⁹⁵ In 1971 the Sash listed and publicised the names of the dead and it became practice to read them out at local meetings and the national conference.

Attendance at inquests was another aspect of the monitoring role and when Steve Biko was murdered in September 1977, 250 wreaths were laid in public places.⁹⁶ At the funeral of the Cradock Four held in July 1985, Sash branches countrywide were represented, in part because Matthew Goniwe was an associate member. The crowd shouted 'Viva Black Sash'.⁹⁷

The work of Sash did not get more fundamental or important than pension payout monitoring. Elderly people, or their relatives, would queue for hours in all weather for their essential grant. In Natal matters were complicated by deficiencies in the KwaZulu homeland pension system and the corrupt ways of its clerks. One Sash cause was the backdating, after interminable delays, of pension payments to the date of application.

At its national conference of 1971 Sash endorsed a Civil Rights League resolution about conscientious objection to military service. The Defence Amendment Act of 1983, which stipulated that religious belief was the only ground for conscientious objection, drew the Sash at the national conference of March 1983 fully into one of its primary campaigns.⁹⁸ It believed that moral grounds should also qualify for exemption from conscription and consequently called for compulsory military service to be scrapped, given conditions that amounted to unjust war. The situation during World War Two, when conscience was respected, was invoked. Close involvement in the formation of the ECC (End Conscription Campaign), an amalgamation in mid-1984 of regional Black Sash support committees, was perhaps one of the more risky of the organisation's undertakings in an increasingly militarised society, particularly after the army became involved in policing the townships.

Sash had from the outset emphasised that it was a political movement independent of party affiliation. For much of its history this was no problem: Sash was regarded as far too militant an organisation by most of its potential allies. In 1984 a move to affiliate to the SAIRR was defeated. There were persistent questions about Sash's attitude to the Freedom Charter, but little chance of it being adopted. While the human rights clauses would have enjoyed wide support, there was never any prospect of its economic objectives, particularly nationalisation, receiving endorsement. For the same reasons the Charter was not adopted when the UDF (United Democratic Front) was founded on 20 August 1983. Presence of the UDF increased the pressure on civil society organisations to affiliate to a broad front. Sash applauded this development in the struggle, but wisely remained unaffiliated, although the Natal Coastal region did affiliate, and the Sash co-operated over specific campaigns.⁹⁹ FEDSAW (Federation of South African Women) produced further affiliation pressures,

but it was overtly linked to the ANC and its practice of democratic centralism was several removes from Sash's liberal tradition. By the time affiliation to the Five Freedoms Forum had become an issue, a solution had been found by subscribing to organisations. This provided for low-key departure, if and when necessary.¹⁰⁰

It was at this time in the mid-1980s that a bitter debate erupted in Sash around violence. Right-wing liberals, mainly based in the Transvaal and personified by Jill Wentzel, accused the organisation of losing its moral compass and, under the influence of radical members, taking a view of the liberation movements that was too uncritical. Why, it was asked, was the violence increasingly associated with anti-government, anti-apartheid protest not condemned in the same terms as that perpetrated by the government? Why were the opportunities presented by government reform policies being rejected in favour of an increasingly pro-revolutionary stance?

This ignored Sash's condemnation of 'intimidation and retributive violence to sustain boycotts and labour stoppages'.¹⁰¹ But the ultra-liberal argument was that since the early 1980s apartheid had started collapsing of its own volition, opening up real opportunities for non-violent action and evolutionary change. Wentzel felt that Sash was drifting away from its veneration for human rights and accepting an ethos of authoritarianism at all levels. In other words, the attitudes of pro- and anti-apartheid forces were converging to the extent that both offered the prospect of dictatorship.¹⁰² Indeed, the politics of protest and boycott in a climate of coercion and violence, coupled with rhetoric about the community and the will of the people, did not leave much room for those who wished to go about their ordinary lives.

Many Sash members, broadly represented by the stance of Margaret Nash, had a less judgemental view of reactive violence and a more complex understanding of township dynamics. They pointed out that state violence as policy was the fundamental problem; that the government itself was destroying the rule of law and had declared war on sections of its own population. Nash used the analogy of the 'primary cause of infection' and reminded Sash members of institutionalised violence.¹⁰³ Right-wing liberals also tended to be praise singers for Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Inkatha. Sash had in the 1970s aligned itself with them, but their detractors were ultimately proved correct when it was revealed in the early 1990s that not only was Inkatha running a bantustan, but that its activities, including a hit squad, were bankrolled by government.¹⁰⁴

Sash addressed this ideological conflict by reaffirming its commitment to justice, the rule of law and non-violence, following its 1986 Durban conference. Clear minds pointed out that the process of witnessing, at, for example, trials and funerals, was often totally misconstrued as support for a specific cause.¹⁰⁵ Similar differences of opinion developed within Sash between liberals and radicals over sanctions. Numbers of the former left Sash during the mid- to late 1980s, although precise numbers are not clear. By the end of the decade membership was probably about 2 000, having reached 2 500 at the declaration of the Emergency. The average age of members had declined dramatically since the 1970s.¹⁰⁶

The national State of Emergency declared on 12 June 1986 closed even further the space for non-violent opposition. This led inevitably to revival of the question of civil disobedience and it was decided that conscience-driven breaking of unjust laws should be left to individuals, who would receive organisational support. At the 1986 national conference Sheena Duncan publicly advocated civil disobedience, opening a debate about whether adherents of the rule of law could 'break the law in order to oppose injustice'. Duncan's view was prescient: by 1989 the SACC was supporting civil disobedience.¹⁰⁷

Under the Emergency that dominated the late 1980s the conflict increasingly took on the form of clashes between the state and youth, many of them legally children, officially described as public violence. Emergency media restrictions made the research and publicity role of Sash all the more important.¹⁰⁸ It pointed out to a deaf government that the courts were simply and increasingly seen as part of the apartheid machinery rather than a component of the justice system. And it argued loudly that prison was not a place for children. The Free the Children Campaign resulted and developed an international dimension through support from France and Sweden.

Similarly the campaign against capital punishment was a long-standing and unifying issue for Sash. Public interest, and opposition, increased when it began to be applied to convictions that were clearly political in nature as in the cases of the Sharpeville Six and Upington 14.¹⁰⁹ Sash's renewed campaign in 1988 as part of the Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty was based on experience in other countries and aimed at opinion formers.¹¹⁰

Kathryn Spink believed that the standard of presentations and debate at annual Sash conferences was the equal of any academic gathering,¹¹¹ and of course of greater social relevance. They were based on close study of legislation, government publications and the lived experience of the oppressed through the evidence presented in thousands of advice office and court cases.

Throughout its history Sash showed itself highly adept at networking. Many members were active Christians, Sheena Duncan being perhaps the best known, and the organisation was well regarded by Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naudé and Denis Hurley, the last two being honorary Sash members.¹¹² In June 1989 this connectivity extended to the first official contact between Sash and the ANC: eight members joined a conference organised by Five Freedoms Forum in Lusaka to discuss the role of whites in the liberation process. The pressures generated by South Africa in the 1980s were sufficient to demand a pooling of expertise from a range of organisations, although this required considerable awareness: the Sash 'should always retain its identity, joint work should be directed towards a clear objective and be consistent with its aims and methods'.¹¹³

With the changing membership profile of the 1980s issues of feminism entered the internal debate. However, Sash's broad political remit meant that it remained a movement of women, rather than a women's movement.¹¹⁴ From time to time the issue of membership for men had been debated, but logically rejected, and eventually they had been granted the option of associate status in 1979.

In a tribute to Molly Blackburn, killed in a car crash in 1985, Sheena Duncan described her as a 'warrior for justice'.¹¹⁵ It was this long tradition of fighting for human rights that made Sash an integral part of the struggle. As Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge later confirmed, 'White women had joined hands with black women and through such organisations as the Black Sash ... they came out in support of the struggle.'¹¹⁶ While this was clearly recognised by the liberation organisations, Sash never betrayed its fundamental beliefs about non-violence, the universality of human rights and the sovereignty of the rule of law. It was a role that was highly respected. And its very survival was a triumph, having kept alive the tenets of a free society in what had become by the mid-1970s a vicious police state. The fact that Sash was never banned is subject to various interpretations from government reluctance to take women seriously to the potentially huge embarrassment of labelling it communist.¹¹⁷

For much of its history, and given the socio-political context in which it operated, the Sash was a truly revolutionary movement, one to which it required a considerable measure of courage to belong.¹¹⁸ Cherry Michelman claims that from afar organisations like Sash appeared a 'little absurd'; but having seen it in action 'they sounded courageous, dedicated, and still a little absurd, only now in the existential sense of struggling knowingly against hopeless odds'.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the greatest compliment ever paid to Sash came from Nelson Mandela

in his first speech after release in February 1990, in which he described the organisation as the 'conscience of white South Africa'.¹²⁰

After liberation Sash had to make considerable adjustments, although with the benefit of hindsight these were perhaps more perceived than real. As Sheena Duncan pointed out during Sash's 35th birthday in 1990, the challenge was now to promote rather than simply oppose. However, the argument that Sash had now to decide what it stood for sounded somewhat disingenuous. Its beliefs, and its ability to raise difficult questions, had been well known for decades. And it was an example to the rest of the nation of the power of unity around a culture of human rights. It had been, recalled Mary Burton, a 'long, hard road', but she remembered being reminded by Frank Chikane, secretary-general of the SACC, of the moral obligation to exercise that fraction of political space Sash had been able to enjoy as a white women's organisation.¹²¹

Soon after the 1994 general election Sash abandoned its membership-based political advocacy role and was converted into a trust with advice offices run by paid directors. But, its primary purpose, the struggle for socio-economic justice, remained largely unaltered.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Reproduced in Mirabelle Rogers, *The Black Sash: The Story of the South African Women's Defence of the Constitution League* (Johannesburg: Rotonews, 1956): 97. The declaration had a questionable and somewhat naïve attitude towards the Act of Union.
- 2 They were Ruth Foley, Jean Sinclair, Jean Bosazza, Helen Newton Thompson, Tertia Pybus and Elizabeth McLaren ('The story of the Women's Defence of the Constitution League' *Sash* 1(1) 1956: 6). Sinclair was a Johannesburg city councillor representing the United Party.
- 3 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 16, 17. The highest estimate for the crowd is 18 000.
- 4 Cherry Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism* (London: OUP for the Institute of Race Relations, 1975): 24.
- 5 Else Schreiner interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 1995. The United Party emerged from the Fusion government of 1934 (a coalition of the National and South African parties) and remained in power under J.B.M. Hertzog and Jan Smuts until 1948. It then became the official opposition in parliament until 1977. Wedded to segregation rather than apartheid, it was notorious as a fellow traveller of the National Party and consistently ambivalent about its policies.
- 6 The number of Senate seats allocated to the Transvaal, Cape and Orange Free State increased from 24 to 57. The method of electing senators was changed from proportional representation to straight majority voting (M.E. Fisher, 'How the Senate Act works' *Sash Magazine (SM)* 1(1) 1956: 7). This gave the National Party 76 of 89 Senate seats ('Fateful days in South Africa' *Economist* 5864, 14 January 1956: 130).
- 7 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 13, 15.
- 8 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 3.

- 9 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 24; Lindie Koorts, *DF Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014): 393.
- 10 Centlivres, CJ, 'Harris v. Minister of the Interior and Another' *South African Law Reports* 1952(2): 468.
- 11 Koorts, *DF Malan*: 396.
- 12 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 25; Kathryn Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa* (London: Methuen, 1991): 31.
- 13 Helen Joseph suggested at the Treason Trial that the Sash vigil inspired the more famous women's march on the Union Buildings of August 1956. See Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx, 1982): 184.
- 14 Else Schreiner interview: 7. The Torch Commando was an organisation of World War Two South African veterans founded in 1941 by progressive anti-fascist servicemen. One of its most prominent members was the famous Battle of Britain pilot A.G. 'Sailor' Malan. For further information, see Neil Roos, *Ordinary Springboks: White Servicemen and Social Justice in South Africa, 1939–1961* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005).
- 15 *Websters' First New Inter Galactic Wikediary of the English Language* (1987).
- 16 Spink, *Black Sash*: 33.
- 17 Rogers, *Black Sash*, appendix 2: 242 (quoting *Outlook* September 1955).
- 18 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 64 (quoting *The Friend* 16 September 1955).
- 19 Deneys Schreiner, husband of Else, was to become professor of inorganic chemistry at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and eventually a much-respected campus principal. He would be involved in a number of inclusive initiatives such as the Buthelezi Commission.
- 20 Spink, *Black Sash*: 36.
- 21 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 49. There is no record of the Covenant ever operating in Pietermaritzburg.
- 22 Proclamation 244, *Government Gazette* 573, 4 November 1955.
- 23 *Sunday Times* 6 November 1955.
- 24 *Rand Daily Mail* no date given, quoted in Rogers, *Black Sash*: 101.
- 25 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 109.
- 26 Else Schreiner interview: 9.
- 27 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 130.
- 28 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 133, 134.
- 29 The Congress of Democrats was the white arm of the Congress movement. Many of its members were from the Communist Party of South Africa (banned in 1950).
- 30 *SM* 1(1) January 1956: 1.
- 31 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 98.
- 32 Spink, *Black Sash*: 30, 38, 43. According to Spink, the Sash was casual about keeping membership figures at this stage.
- 33 *SM* 1(1) January 1956: 2.
- 34 Spink, *Black Sash*: 39–40.
- 35 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 192.
- 36 Spink, *Black Sash*: 41.
- 37 Margaret Ballinger (Native Representative for the Eastern Cape), Helen Suzman (Houghton), Bertha Solomon (Jeppe) and Susana van Niekerk (Drakensberg).

- 38 The speaker voted with the Ayes. The total number of members of the House of Assembly and Senate was 248, making the two-thirds requirement 166. The margin was thus a mere eight votes (South Africa, *Joint Sitting of Both Houses of Parliament (South Africa Act Amendment Bill, 1956) 13 February–27 February, 1956* (Cape Town: Government Printer, [1956]): cols. 920–922.
- 39 Janet Robinson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948–1963* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971): 142.
- 40 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 214.
- 41 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 220–223. Blaar Coetzee's conduct over this episode was strikingly reminiscent of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the United States in the early 1950s.
- 42 The opening bars of the Fifth Symphony, the Morse representation of V for victory, was the signature tune of Freedom Radio, which started broadcasting in the Pietermaritzburg area from a suitcase transmitter from Sunday 15 April 1956 (Mark Coghlan, 'The Horticulturalists, Freedom Radio and the Erase Erasmus Society: Pietermaritzburg-based protest against the Nationalist government in the 1950s and early 1960s' *Natalia* 25(1995): 57).
- 43 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 226.
- 44 Spink, *Black Sash*: 47.
- 45 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 53–54. 'Satyagraha in a Black Sash' [editorial] *Economist* 5856, 19 November 1955: 669. The leader was, however, patronising about the Black Sash, dismissing protest marches: '[they do] not seem to be a wise move.'
- 46 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 8–9.
- 47 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 40.
- 48 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 64.
- 49 Eileen Benjamin, *An Historical Analysis of Aspects of the Black Sash, 1955–2001* (MA thesis in History, University of Stellenbosch, 2004): 28–29.
- 50 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 71–72.
- 51 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 74, 77.
- 52 Michelman compares this with George Bernard Shaw's argument for the role of Fabianism in relation to socialism (*Black Sash*: 78).
- 53 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 88.
- 54 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 160.
- 55 Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*: 173, 174, 175.
- 56 *Dissension in the Ranks: White Opposition in South Africa* ([Cape Town]: National Union of South African Students, 1981): 25.
- 57 Spink, *Black Sash*: 57.
- 58 Spink, *Black Sash*: 61; Michelman, *Black Sash*: 192.
- 59 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 42, 45, 46.
- 60 W.W.M. Eiselen was minister of native affairs from 1950 to 1958. The Eiselen Line extended from the northern to the southern Cape: Gordonia (Upington) to Knysna.
- 61 *Race Relations Survey (RRS)* 1973: 138.
- 62 Spink, *Black Sash*: 63–64. The Cape Town Advice Office was later moved to Mowbray. An anti-pass pressure group had been set up in 1957 along with the ANC Women's League, Anglican Church Mothers' Union, National Council of Women, Society of Friends and the South African Federation of Women. As this evolved into an advice office these groups disengaged and the Sash was supported by the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Civil Rights League.

- 63 Spink, *Black Sash*: 3.
- 64 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 119, 125.
- 65 Spink, *Black Sash*: 69, 79.
- 66 *The Black Sash, 1955–2005: the Golden Jubilee Report* (Cape Town: Black Sash, 2005): 24.
- 67 Spink, *Black Sash*: 75.
- 68 The Bantu Administration Act (1929) and subsequent amendment acts all repealed on 1 July 1986 and the Group Areas Act, together with the pass law regulations, are pertinent examples.
- 69 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 91.
- 70 Spink, *Black Sash*: 3.
- 71 Interview with Mary Burton in Barbara Hutmacher MacLean, *Strike a Woman Strike a Rock: Fighting for Freedom in South Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004): 145.
- 72 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 129, 160.
- 73 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 156.
- 74 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 158.
- 75 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 99.
- 76 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 139–140.
- 77 Spink, *Black Sash*: 79.
- 78 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 9.
- 79 RRS 1966: 36. Defence and Aid became the International Defence and Aid Fund operating from London under Canon John Collins: see Dennis Herbstein, *White Lies: Canon Collins and the Secret War Against Apartheid* (Oxford: James Currey/Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2004).
- 80 RRS 1968: 28.
- 81 RRS 1965: 22. It is significant that Walter Sisulu, asked what exactly Nelson Mandela had been fighting for all his life, replied, ‘Ordinary respect’ (John Carlin, *Knowing Mandela*. London: Atlantic Books, 2013: 98). Sash was clearly in the mainstream of struggle thinking.
- 82 RRS 1968: 9.
- 83 RRS 1970: 21.
- 84 RRS 1971: 60; *Dissension in the Ranks*: 28.
- 85 RRS 1980: 606; 1981: 48.
- 86 *Dissension in the Ranks*: 30.
- 87 Sheena Duncan in *Black Sash, 1955–2005*: 2.
- 88 RRS 1968: 28.
- 89 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 189.
- 90 Sheila Meintjes, ‘The women’s struggle for equality during South Africa’s transition to democracy’ *Transformation* 30 (1996): 55.
- 91 Spink, *Black Sash*: 106.
- 92 See Black Sash, *You and the New Pass Laws* ([Johannesburg]: 1982).
- 93 Spink, *Black Sash*: 129, 130.
- 94 Spink, *Black Sash*: 134.
- 95 Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle (1922–1963) was the first person to die in detention. He was a member of the South African Congress of Trade Unions and Umkhonto we Sizwe.
- 96 Spink, *Black Sash*: 156.

- 97 Spink, *Black Sash*: 179; *Black Sash, 1955–2005*: 63.
- 98 *RRS* 1984: 748–749.
- 99 Spink, *Black Sash*: 213; *Black Sash, 1955–2005*: 55.
- 100 Spink, *Black Sash*: 240.
- 101 *RRS* 1984: 79.
- 102 J. Wentzel, ‘Onslaught on human rights’ *SM* 25(2) August 1982: 1–2; J. Wentzel, ‘Avoiding intellectual fascism: the dream of Orwell and his contemporaries’ *SM* 26(4) February 1984: 18–19. For further on this viewpoint see J. Wentzel, *The Liberal Slideaway* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1995): 75–94. Wentzel also became embroiled in a bruising debate over sport (see chapter 4).
- 103 Spink, *Black Sash*: 197.
- 104 *Weekly Mail* 19 July 1991; Brian Morrow, ‘To Serve and Protect’: *The Inkathagate Scandal* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010).
- 105 Spink, *Black Sash*: 205.
- 106 Spink, *Black Sash*: 249.
- 107 Spink, *Black Sash*: 269, 274.
- 108 Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1994): 117–127.
- 109 Andrea Durbach, *Upington: A Story of Trials and Reconciliation* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999).
- 110 Spink, *Black Sash*: 231.
- 111 Spink, *Black Sash*: 171.
- 112 See Peter Randall (ed.), *Not Without Honour: Tribute to Beyers Naudé* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982); Paddy Kearney, *Denis Hurley: Truth to Power* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012).
- 113 Spink, *Black Sash*: 240.
- 114 Spink, *Black Sash*: 253.
- 115 Spink, *Black Sash*: 23.
- 116 Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, ‘What price freedom?: testimony and the Natal Organisation of Women’ *Agenda* 34 (1997): 67.
- 117 Interview with Sheena Duncan in Maclean, *Strike a Woman Strike a Rock*: 99.
- 118 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 22.
- 119 Michelman, *Black Sash*: 23.
- 120 *Black Sash, 1955–2005*: 7. He also commended the National Union of South African Students.
- 121 Interview with Mary Burton in Maclean, *Strike a Woman Strike a Rock*: 148.

2

WOMEN OF COURAGE: THE FIRST DECADE, 1955–1964

FORTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER the establishment of the Black Sash, Sheena Duncan, daughter of founder member Jean Sinclair and herself a towering figure in the organisation, encouraged its members to ‘work hard enough, be committed enough, do enough, to choose the ways which will build a new, just and peaceful society for our common future’.¹ In the Natal Midlands, a relatively small region in terms of numbers, groups of women worked together with passion and commitment in their pursuit of justice and human rights. The accuracy and quality of information they collected along the way played no small part in the demise of apartheid and eventual liberation.

It all started in 1955 when Else Schreiner, who eventually moved to Pietermaritzburg in 1959, was deputised by the Johannesburg committee to travel to Natal to spread the idea of the Womens Defence of the Constitution League (WDCL) and look at the possibility of forming branches. She had some contacts, mostly from the Liberal Party, and lists of members of the Torch Commando. After holding meetings in Durban she came to Pietermaritzburg to try to explain what was being defended, and why it was so important to defend it. In Pietermaritzburg she talked to a small group of women, including Phoebe Brown, Eleanor Russell, Olga Meidner and Maimie Corrigan. The journey continued to Howick, Mooi River, Estcourt, Ladysmith and Newcastle. She remembers this trip as ‘An absolutely exhausting ten days, meeting strangers every day, trying to put forward a message which was brand new and very foreign to people’s thinking. Nobody had thought of mounting a massive nationwide women’s protest before ... so it was quite a battle.’²

The result of this visit was that women voters in the Pietermaritzburg region began to meet to discuss their opposition to the Senate Bill. In the beginning it was a very focused and limited campaign that attracted a great number of women who felt strongly about the general immorality of the National Party government breaking trust through its determination to change the Constitution at any cost. There was also the fear that if the government started tampering with the Constitution, it would be hard to stop.

Pietermaritzburg eventually formed its own branch in May 1956 and became the centre of a separate region, Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS), which took responsibility for northern Natal. As early as 1956, Howick and Ixopo were thought to be vigorous branches. Members of the Pietermaritzburg committee put a great deal of effort into visiting and encouraging branches to keep them alive, holding house meetings and addressing groups in country towns and villages like Matatiele, Kokstad, Mooi River, Cramond and Eston.³

In June 1955 members of the WDCL had marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to present a petition to Hans Strijdom, requesting his resignation as Prime Minister. Some of these women held a 48-hour vigil in the grounds of the Union Buildings and then a public meeting at the City Hall. Marie Dyer of the Natal Midlands branch remembered the circulation of the petition, but 'I don't think that a contingent from Maritzburg went there'.⁴

Some people in Pietermaritzburg lost heart when they saw that the petition requesting the resignation of Strijdom had not been a success, and they wondered how useful it was to protest. Although this caused a wane in membership, there were many determined enough to persevere. Those who remained felt that they could continue their protest as evidence to the public that there was opposition to what the government was doing: as the saying went, they could bear witness.

The next important mass Black Sash march was on 12 November, again from Joubert Park to the Johannesburg City Hall, when the symbolic coffin was carried by hundreds of women, marching to a muffled drum beat. In Pietermaritzburg there was a sixteen-member morning vigil on the steps of the Colonial Building in Church Street. Other vigils were held from 11 am to noon at the railway station and main post office. This was also the first occasion that Black Sash women were evident in Ladysmith.⁵ On Friday 25 November, nationwide mourning vigils were held to mark the election of the new 89-member Senate. Pietermaritzburg was the location of the election of Natal senators and WDCL members stood throughout the day at the entrance to the grounds of the provincial legislature. Inside, the proceedings passed off quietly in contrast to those in Pretoria and Cape Town.⁶

A vigil on 13 January 1956 marked the first recorded Sash activity in Ixopo. In early February convoys of cars set out from all corners of the country for Cape Town. The Natal convoy held vigils at Westville, Pinetown, Kloof, Hillcrest and Pietermaritzburg and was welcomed by spectators at Mooi River, Estcourt and Ladysmith. The local paper recorded the occasion in Pietermaritzburg:

More than 30 Natal members of the Black Sash movement set out from Maritzburg yesterday morning on the first leg of a 1,000 mile journey to Cape Town, where they will demonstrate during the joint sitting of Parliament. Among the women were eight from Maritzburg, headed by the local Sash chairman, Mrs M. Corrigan [*sic*]. Members of the Durban contingent arrived in Maritzburg at 11 a.m. and joined more than 70 local Sash members in a ten-minute vigil outside the Supreme Court building ... Cheered by a large crowd, the Black Sash convoy moved on shortly before noon.⁷

One member of the Pietermaritzburg contingent was former mayor Eleanor Russell.⁸

Following Else Schreiner's tour to Natal in 1955, Black Sash national president, Ruth Foley, and Muriel Fisher set off from Johannesburg on 19 March 1956. Their intention was to consolidate the existing branches, form new ones and report on Sash work. Their first stop was Newcastle, a conservative farming district, where 24 women came to hear them talk. Fisher recounted a moving incident when one woman, who although deeply sympathetic, said she could never support the organisation because her livelihood depended on a business in the area. However, after Foley's talk she publicly announced that she regretted her earlier attitude and would be pleased to wear the sash.

In Dundee some women made it clear that because it could upset their relationship with National Party neighbours, they did not wish to become involved. Fisher felt that fear was evident, but finally a small group decided to arrange a public meeting for 19 April, for which Foley agreed to make a special trip. Ladysmith, under the energetic leadership of Sheila Henderson, chair of the branch, had arranged a public meeting that quite unexpectedly attracted several hundred people.

The next five days were spent in Pietermaritzburg, hosted by Maimie Corrigan and Eleanor Russell. As well as a public meeting on 21 March, a lively regional conference was held in Russell's home the following day. This was attended by delegates from Pietermaritzburg and branches including Mooi River, Ixopo and a large contingent from Howick, as it included representatives



Reprinted from Black Sash calendar 1989 (original cartoon by Stent, 1987)

from Lion's River, Lidgetton, Balgowan and Dargle. On the way home, Foley and Fisher visited the Howick, Mooi River and Estcourt branches. Fisher found some people a little bewildered by the changes from the first phase of focused protest to the beginning of a wider engagement and commented that 'we Black Sash women are just beginning to know one another and to realise our strength, and we need more such tours.'⁹

On Union Day, 31 May 1956, Sash held a vigil in Pietermaritzburg to 'mark the sorrow felt by so many people that the spirit in which Union was initiated no longer prevails'. It had already held a service of re-dedication on 25 May, the first birthday of the organisation, at the Congregational Church Hall, followed by a vigil in Longmarket Street.¹⁰

Marie Dyer joined NMBS in 1956 and recalls why she did so:

I got intrigued by I suppose the way it had grown so much, and also the efficient way in which it got started. One read things in the paper about how quickly people had joined and how much people were doing and all of these huge marches and things like that, and it really seemed as though something was being done about what the Nats were doing, and so people joined. I joined, fairly enthusiastically. And the fact that it was all women, that women were opposing. I don't think you anticipate it, but when we ourselves went and stood outside the Natal Colonial Building, there was a little report about that saying 'these women were so well organised' because we were. And we felt good, and felt proud in being involved in an organisation that was run entirely by women, but still so efficient and so capable, and I say 'but' – that was the general attitude at the time. I think there was some kind of awareness that this was something quite special. Certainly, you saw pictures of these hundreds of women from all walks of life at the Union Buildings and that very big demonstration outside parliament. You had the feeling that things would never be the same again.¹¹

On 31 July a protest meeting in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall attracted 750 people. Speakers included Alan Paton, Geoffrey Durrant, Selby Msimang and Nell Green, acting Black Sash national president, who strongly criticised apartheid legislation, including the Group Areas Act. It was suggested from the floor that Ray Swart, a United Party member of parliament who was billed as one of the speakers, was forbidden by his party to address the meeting. However, Maimie Corrigall, who opened the meeting, apologised for his absence due to unforeseen circumstances. 'After the speeches, the meeting unanimously passed a resolution disapproving of the increasing inroads being made on human rights in South Africa, involving freedom of speech, movement and access to courts of law, exemplified in legislation passed during the last session of Parliament.' Green spoke about the Group Areas Act and said that it was the very fabric of apartheid. She urged the audience, especially the women, to investigate what the authorities in their areas were doing under this

law, which she called ‘a monstrous unsettling of the whole country’.¹² She went on to say that 230 000 non-whites (an acceptable term at this time) and 3 500 whites in Durban alone would have to be moved under the Act.

It is remarkable that before feminist concepts had been fully formed in South Africa the Black Sash appealed to such a wide range of women. This perhaps shows that there was a severe crisis to which these politically aware women felt a strong urge to respond. In the fifties, women were still seen as appendages of their husbands and fathers: by joining the Black Sash they broke these boundaries, showed courage, passion and a deep commitment to the organisation, and over the years became highly politicised. Commentators at the time expressed surprise at how well-organised they were. In the photograph on page 30, published as an example of Sash activity in the fifties, it now seems strange that members were described in terms of their fathers’ achievements. It is therefore significant that these women from prominent Natal families bravely chose to stand on street corners demonstrating.

That these were challenging, determined women is well illustrated by an article written by Doreen Tarboton after the 1957 national conference:

We in Pietermaritzburg were indeed grateful to Mrs Foley for her address at the opening of the last conference. It stimulated, encouraged, and inspired us. It even made husbands go home with smug expressions, when she lauded their tolerance and patience in allowing their wives to absent themselves from home in pursuit of an idea. And that is where I did NOT agree with her. To start with, it is not only an ideal it is a terrible, terrible, necessity. Make no mistake. All husbands of women of the Black Sash must realize that what their wives are doing is not an idle pursuit, nor a frivolous desire to become news in the papers, but a frightening realization that, if we thinking women do not do every single thing that is possible for us to do now, then it will be the men who will be forced to neglect us, and leave us in order to don battledress and fight with all the horrors of man’s destructive weapons, to keep alive the light of liberty in this dark land.

We are women who are deeply conscious of our duty to our husbands and our children. Up till now our homes have been the core of our life. We now realize that to preserve that core of happy family life FOR ALL RACES (make no mistake, not only for the white), then we must go out to our meetings, we must bring together the weapons that we can muster. We must organize, lecture, teach and pray. We must get up earlier in the mornings, and make the puddings, and do the lunches, and organize the households so that we can attend our conferences and make our just cause grow and grow. **We want to preserve our sons for better things than fighting.** No! Do not let the husbands feel smug that they allow their wives to join the Black Sash. Do not let them say ‘I do not want my wife to wear a Black Sash and make an exhibition of herself’. I have heard this so often, ‘My husband doesn’t like to see me standing in public.’ An exhibition of yourself? What an idea! We are not individuals when we stand on vigil. We sink our individuality. We are making an exhibition of our immoral, fanatical, crazy government. That is what we are drawing attention to, and it is with these silent, but virulent weapons, please God, we will triumph.¹⁴



Four of the eleven women who held a vigil outside the Post Office, Howick, in February 1956. They are left to right: Mrs E.M. McEwen, granddaughter of the Hon. C.J. Smythe, a member of the National Convention; Mrs M.E. Soutar, daughter of the Hon. C.J. Smythe; Miss Betty Sutton, daughter of Sir George Sutton, president of the Legislative Council; and Mrs W.M. Hyslop, daughter-in-law of Sir Thomas Hyslop, a member of the Natal Convention at the time of Union¹³

In 1957 *Sash Magazine* reported:

A most successful haunt, composed of members of Estcourt, Mooi River, Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg was held in Weenen when Mr Sauer (Minister of Lands) paid a visit last month (August 1956). It had to be seen to be believed to what lengths a Minister will go to avoid walking past the accusing eyes of Black Sash women. He not only avoided them by using the back entrance of the hotel, but even jumped into another car, and made the occupants of that car get out and get into his car from which the pennant was flying!¹⁵

However, it seems that ministers very seldom came to Pietermaritzburg, so there were few occasions to haunt them there. Marie Dyer's comments provide some alternative views of the practice:

The one thing that got me slightly irritated, and was one of the reasons why people stopped haunting [here], was the Mooi River branch that was very active in those days haunted the Minister of Agriculture who came to the Mooi River Agricultural Show. They became very unpopular because their husbands and their friends had organised this show and they had invited the minister, and it was a big deal to have a minister there, and here was the Black Sash haunting – it was very offensive. And so they didn't like it and they themselves thought it was perhaps a bad idea, that it was counter-productive if one wanted the kind of sympathetic publicity one was supposed to get. And this happened in other places too, and they even started thinking of having a little poster saying 'We are the Black Sash objecting to the minister not the occasion.' But I don't think that worked and so ultimately they stopped haunting.¹⁶

In other parts of the country, because it was suspected that the phones were tapped, and it was thought some degree of surprise was necessary, coded messages were exchanged when arranging a haunt. For example, as Rosemary Smith from Grahamstown records:

As an official left Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg, a coded message would be sent to members in the next city. An 'order for carnations' in Port Elizabeth meant that a particular minister was on his way there. 'Orders' for roses, proteas and a whole range of floribunda represented the movements of others. Forewarned by these messages, Sash members in all the major centres would be at the ready to welcome unsuspecting politicians at their destinations.¹⁷

While some members decided not to continue with haunts, the Mooi River branch, a farming area, agreed to hold vigils outside the magistrate's office, once a month when the stock sales were held. So these women were not afraid to make visible their support for the Black Sash.

It was committed to building bridges across the colour line. In the Natal Midlands, right from the beginning social gatherings were arranged with black, coloured and Indian women so that they could get to know one another, and perhaps gain some understanding of each other's backgrounds. These meetings were often arranged around a speaker or activity on Saturday afternoons, usually in the homes of Black Sash members. Marie Dyer commented that 'it was a very limited crossing of the colour line. It was, I suppose, quite useful for us, but I don't know if it had any kind of political effect.'¹⁸

These gatherings started off as the Saturday Club and were later referred to as tea parties. Many members felt that they were a successful bridge-building activity, which often included activities like knitting squares for blankets. Fleur Webb recalls hosting some of the gatherings:

The tea parties were interesting and lots of hard work. I hosted several, three or four. The trick was to find something to attract our visitors, apart from the tea and cakes. I recall two

successful occasions held at my house. One was a Tupperware party – the lady guests placed their orders but I was left having to deliver the goods! My favourite memory of this arduous chore was calling at the home of a coloured lady living in a remote suburb. I was invited in and observed with interest, in her living room, two large coloured portrait photographs on the wall: one was of a very dark skinned lady in formal Victorian dress, the other was of a young British soldier, pill-box hat, blond curls and blue eyes. Upon enquiring, I was proudly informed that these portraits were of her grandmamma and grandpapa.

My most successful party was the one when I invited a beauty consultant from one of the local shops to come along and demonstrate her art to the guests: how they loved it; all wanted to have make-overs. At long last this bevy of happy new beauties departed into the sunset! It was all such nonsense, but the goodwill was great.

So, I guess something good was achieved in the end. Politics never entered into the picture. I suppose that my more intellectual friends might feel that there was condescension on our part, but we did not see it that way. These things happened nearly fifty years ago.¹⁹

In 1957 *Sash Magazine* claimed: ‘There are five women councillors on the Pietermaritzburg Town Council, all of them belong to Sash.’²⁰ However, a check against the *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook* reveals only four: Isabel Beardmore, Doris Goodwin, Pamela Reid and Gwladys Terry. Eleanor Russell had previously been a member of the City Council from 1930 to 1948.

In the late fifties the NMBS organised a number of Brains Trusts, which were in effect public meetings with panels put together from diverse interest groups, ranging from conservative to liberal, and often including government representatives. These were well attended, included school groups, and were designed to make more people conscious of current political issues. Panel members put forward their views, which were vigorously debated, and the audience often stayed on for informal discussions. Topics included universal suffrage, the Zulu monarchy, the value of the Senate, provincial control of education, and pass laws. Archie Gumede of the African National Congress (ANC), a panel member in 1957, said of the pass laws: ‘The Industrial Conciliation Act excludes pass bearing Africans from membership of trade unions. Influx control makes the African worker submissive.’²¹

In February 1959 a quiz on the Constitution held in the City Hall Supper Room was attended by an estimated four to five hundred people. The quiz master was Edgar Brookes, professor of History at the University of Natal, and the panel included people with a variety of opinions: Eleanor Russell, a prominent member of Sash, Peter Brown of the Liberal Party, Ismail Meer of the Natal Indian Congress, Albert Luthuli (ANC), Val Volker from the National Party, and Douglas Heaton-Nicholls of the United Party. Luthuli was quoted as saying: ‘The basis of democracy is that all people should determine the future of their country.’²²

Many prominent Black Sash members were also members of the Liberal Party, so it is unsurprising that the two organisations formed close links. The Liberal Party was founded in 1953, two years before the Black Sash, and it was particularly strong in Pietermaritzburg. During the fifties when NMBS was organising protest meetings, Alan Paton, Peter Brown, Edgar Brookes and Selby Msimang from the Liberal Party were often billed as speakers. The Black Sash and Liberal Party shared values, including the rule of law, human rights and social justice, and for the Black Sash from 1963 universal suffrage. In 1968, 'In its closing message, ambitiously termed a temporary farewell, the Liberal Party predicted that apartheid could not last and appealed to individuals to continue fighting for freedom and equal opportunity for every South African and [a] non-racial society.' Of the nineteen streets re-named in Pietermaritzburg a few years ago, three of them commemorate Liberal Party members – Selby Msimang, Peter Brown and Alan Paton – and a fourth was named after Peter Kerchhoff, a Pietermaritzburg associate member of the Black Sash.²³

Bunty Biggs, a member of both the NMBS and the Liberal Party, described the importance of the latter:

I think one of its main things was to make it absolutely clear that everybody that lived in the country had a part of the political process, that there was no distinction to be made between men, women, class, colour or anything. The other thing that was important was that we were actually able to meet together at a level that was interesting, important, sharing and getting insights into the lives of other people who normally one didn't meet on a social level, or through the professional level – so that it was a very important meeting place and a place for learning for all of us. And also I think, maybe, although I'm not sure about this, maybe it had an implicit impact on other people that this was actually what a democracy was about even though they didn't join for various reasons. I know that there were people who felt in sympathy but who felt they couldn't join because their husbands were working in government departments, and there were a huge number of people who were employed by the government in those days. I was absolutely amazed at the proportion of people who were dependent on the government for their work. Now those people, rightly or wrongly, felt too vulnerable to come out and join either the Black Sash or the Liberal Party or any overt anti-government organisation, but the fact that the Liberal Party was there was a marker for the future.²⁴

Pessa Weinberg talked about how Pietermaritzburg people reacted to the NMBS protest stands, or vigils as they were called in the beginning: 'Well there were lots of people who were quite prepared to throw tomatoes at us, and spit at us, and were angry at us. Occasionally you would find people who would say, "I am so glad that you are doing this."'²⁵ Joy Roberts remembers the protests as very dignified events:

I took part in protest stands whenever I could and I thought they were a wonderful demonstration of solidarity. We were there, we were together; we were all having the same reaction to the things that were popping up. They were important; they were evidence of a sort of attitude that wasn't the accepted one of the time. We were all friends and we were very disciplined: we stood in a line at the corner opposite the City Hall (what used to be the gardens where the cannon was). We would line up in two columns with our placards and our sashes and when the clock struck we would walk out and move to left and to right to take up our positions and stand there without moving, if possible, until the half hour struck and then we turned around and walked away.²⁶

Phoebe Brown comments on the importance of protest: 'Every piece of legislation that was passed in those days was moving us all away from what we believed in, so we were quite happy to stand up against it.'²⁷

At its birth as the WDCL, Pietermaritzburg was just one of fifteen Sash branches in the Natal Midlands region. The rest were found in small rural towns.²⁸ From about 1960 membership again began to dwindle, particularly in the rural areas, largely because they were rather more conservative. The Senate Act, which had kept people buoyed up, had been passed, and there seemed to be no further work for the Black Sash. There was also a feeling among more conservative members that the organisation was becoming too diffuse and radical. The 1960 national conference had decided to start co-operating with multiracial and black groups and become involved in assessing apartheid legislation and monitoring all unjust laws. This resulted in a considerable loss of members and meant the end of most rural branches. Marie Dyer recalls a resignation from the Black Sash at this time:

I remember a branch called Cape Midlands which included Middelburg and Graaff Reinet, and places like that in the Karoo. After the 1960 conference, Madeleine Phillips from the Karoo wrote a scathing letter to headquarters saying that they were closing their branch because they had joined the Black Sash in order to save South Africa, and now, as far as they could see, the Black Sash was interested only in the rights of coloured people. And that was why they left.²⁹

This is a view almost certainly replicated amongst membership in the Natal Midlands.

It was in 1960 that sixty-nine people were shot dead at Sharpeville and South Africa's first State of Emergency was declared. At the same time the Unlawful Organisations Act was passed, enabling the banning of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). All of this was of grave concern to members of the Black Sash. In 1960 Bunty Biggs had been attracted to the Black Sash by a number of things:

I think both its activities and its objectives. It was also a women's organisation and I think in South Africa, a very male-dominated society, an organisation which gave women their head and their opportunities to do their own thing their own way was very attractive. I liked the way that it challenged without being aggressive. That it was thoughtful, it was well-informed, the people who worked there did their homework, they knew what they were talking about. When we protested against things, or when we stood on poster stands, the message that we were getting across was something that we knew was valid. And the other thing that attracted me too, apart from the quality of the people, and that was in itself an attraction, was the fact that it was also an educational body. Whenever a new law came out, and there were endless new laws, or regulations, or amendments, the Black Sash took the trouble actually to find out what it meant and then produce literature, or even had public meetings to express and explain and to get people aware of what was going on so that it was really a kind of public opinion monitor, and it kept track of what the government was doing as well as being a protest organisation.³⁰

In the Natal Midlands, Mooi River and Ladysmith branches remained open at this stage, largely because there was a core of dedicated women. In Mooi River, Puck Woods was also a member of the Liberal Party; and in Ladysmith key members were Sheila Henderson, Tina Barlow and Sheila Burnett.³¹ There were also a few remnant groups, not big enough to be called branches. They did not want to sever their connection with the Sash, so a contact member kept in touch.

In 1961, Elizabeth (Betty) Lund commented on this fall-away in membership: 'NMBS feared that its activities were becoming so diffuse the energy and identity of the Sash might be lost but, after hearing impressive regional reports, it was evident that the very nature of our work, and the diversity of activities which stems from the wide field covered by Sash aims, makes it difficult to confine those activities.'³²

In spite of the loss of membership, in 1962 the Pietermaritzburg branch held yet another Brains Trust on race integration, while multiracial tea parties continued. The Howick branch supported a talk on the Education Advisory Council Bill and later collected signatures for the petition against it; while the Kokstad group arranged a house meeting on the bill. The Pietermaritzburg branch sent copies of a leaflet on the pass laws to the Southern Transvaal region; members joined the Indian community in a mass protest and prayer meeting against group areas; as well as holding a ten-hour vigil against the Group Areas Act in March; and protest stands on the General Law Amendment Act in May and the Censorship Bill (later the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963) in June. It chose the theme of education for a number of successful house meetings. It is worth noting that at this time church leaders from six

different denominations condemned the General Law Amendment Act as containing the 'implied principle that evil should be overcome by evil'.³³

In May 1962, under the shadow of the General Law Amendment Bill, the Pietermaritzburg branch held a Brains Trust on education. The panelists were asked to discuss three issues. First, 'What should be our aim in the education of our children?': general agreement was reached that the development of the capacities of each individual child was most important. The second question, 'Should the central government take over our schools from the provinces?' met with a vehement 'no'. When asked 'To what extent, if any, education for various races should be different', the speakers emphatically said there should be no difference. 'Mr Bhengu, a lawyer, explained how the attempt to shape Bantu Education to fit a particular race was giving rise to a complex unreal myth, where, for instance, tribal traditions and attitudes were supposed to be taught in schools whose very existence is a daily denial of tribal habits.'³⁴ It was agreed that Bantu Education was basically an unsound principle. Mr Poodhun, a minister of religion, searched for a single advantage to vary the chorus of disparaging remarks and emerged with the fact that total illiteracy had been very greatly reduced since 1953.

A solemn and silent vigil to protest against the General Law Amendment Bill (popularly known as the Sabotage Bill) began in the Pietermaritzburg Carbineers' Garden on the night of 21 May 1962.³⁵ Betty Lund, who was chair of NMBS at the time, lit the symbolic lamp of liberty, marking the start of a protest that continued throughout the night. Posters held by Black Sash women said: 'For evil to succeed it is sufficient that good men do nothing'; and 'Reject the Sabotage Bill – the Bill to end all liberty'. The lamp continued to burn until the end of a packed protest meeting in the City Hall on the afternoon of 22 May where a strongly worded resolution attacking the Sabotage Bill was read out. When the meeting ended the audience was asked to move to the garden where the lamp's flame was extinguished. The meeting was organised by the Progressive Party, the Black Sash, the Liberal Party and the Congress of Democrats.

October 1963 saw the results of a NMBS referendum on open membership, which was to go to the national conference. The 'Yes' vote was carried by the two active branches, Pietermaritzburg and Mooi River, who voted in favour, but aided by a number of abstentions, the rest of the region voted against. Later in the year, when Black Sash effectively became non-racial by opening membership to all adult women permanently resident in South Africa rather than those qualified to vote, there was another spate of resignations.³⁶ In the



Protest against the Senate Act on the steps of the Old Colonial Building, Pietermaritzburg, 1955 or 1956 (from top: Maimie Corrigall, two unidentified Sash members, Margaret Kirwood)



Sash protest, probably against the Senate Act on the steps of the Old Colonial Building, Pietermaritzburg, 1955 or 1956 (from left: Iris Wood and Marion Harper)



Sash protest against the Pageview removals in Johannesburg held on the steps of the Old Colonial Building, Pietermaritzburg, probably 1963



Sash protest in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 2 November 1987 (from left: Pat Merrett, Mary Kleinenberg, Fidela Fouché, Monique van Wyngaard, Monika Wittenberg, Didi Stevens, Jenny Clarence, Juliet Armstrong, Joan Kerchhoff, Christine Chapman, Ruth Lundie and Angela Rivett-Carnac)



Sash protest, 1987 (from left: Sue Maughan Brown, Ruth Lundie, Fleur Webb, Angela Rivett-Carnac, Mary Gardner and Stephanie Alexander)



Sash protest, 1987 (from left: Renate Cochrane, Mary Kleinenberg, Didi Stevens, Fiona Bulman and Fidela Fouché)



Alleyn Diesel in a one-person stand against capital punishment, Commercial Road, Pietermaritzburg, 7 March 1988



Sash protest in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 1988 (from left: Christine Chapman, Ruth Lundie, Pat Merrett, Wendy Leeb, Didi Stevens, Renate Cochrane, Joan Kerchhoff, Pessa Weinberg, unidentified and Fidela Fouché)



Sash Women's Day play performed in Pietermaritzburg, 9 August 1988 (from left: Mary Kleinenberg, Renate Cochrane, Jo Stielau, Joan Kerchhoff and Bobby Keal)



Sash members gathering before the Standing for Truth Campaign peace march, Cathedral of the Holy Nativity, Pietermaritzburg, 21 September 1989 (from left: Fidela Fouché, Didi Stevens, Bochara Karam, Mary Kleinenberg and Lorenza Cowling)



Sash banner paraded during the Standing for Truth Campaign peace march, Pietermaritzburg, 21 September 1989



Rosemary Radford Ruether addressing the Women's Day rally at Wadley Stadium, Edendale, 6 August 1989



Sash members in the crowd at the Women's Day rally at Wadley Stadium, Edendale, 6 August 1989



Sash stand, Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 1989 (from left: Didi Stevens, Marie Dyer, Paula Krynauw, Pat Merrett, Pat Dunne, Monika Wittenberg, Joan Kerchhoff and Fidela Fouché)



Sash stand marking David Webster's assassination, Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3 May 1989. A policewoman takes Mary Kleinenberg's details with Mary Gardner at the right and Jo Stielau obscured by the policewoman

Natal Midlands, Eleanor Russell, who had long been a stalwart, decided to resign. By this time the Black Sash was stating that it was unacceptable that the voters roll should be restricted to whites, so they were advocating universal suffrage, which many thought was rather too radical. Others, however, thought that it had been a big mistake to limit membership to voters from the start, because there might have been some black involvement if this had not been so. However, it seems that in 1963 this was too late because by now the ethos of the organisation was established as white middle class. Very few black people joined, none in the Natal Midlands. When opening the membership was discussed in Pietermaritzburg it caused some rifts. Else Schreiner recalls the discussion:

That was where the Sash, well, Sash and I rather parted company ... I remember it with some pain, with some amusement. There was a meeting in Mrs Russell's house, in Scottsville – that amazing house that she lived in full of Siamese cats – to discuss this very point and Mrs Russell was very strongly against opening membership to people of other races: she insisted that it had to be a membership of people who had the vote. I believed just as strongly, just as strenuously, that Sash ought to be open to women of all races, whoever they were, that any woman who was concerned with what was happening to the country, should be welcome to join Sash. At that meeting Mrs Russell and I had quite a stand up fight. She was an intimidating lady. She was a very large-bosomed lady who stood up and spoke down at you. She was angry with me, she certainly was, she gave me hell, and I fought as hard as I could for what I wanted to say, but was overpowered, intimidated and squashed out, and I lost the argument. We then broke for tea and Mrs Russell was charming. The next day Mrs Russell phoned me about something (she used to call me 'my child') and she said 'My child, your voice sounds funny? Do you have a sore throat?' So I said, 'It's a bit scratchy.' It was a terribly hot day, and a couple of hours later Mrs Russell arrived here on the drive with two brown paper packets, one clutched in each hand; one had some lemons in and the other one had some honey in it, and she had brought me lemons and honey to deal with my throat. That's the kind of woman she was ... And at that stage, I stopped active involvement in the Sash and I joined the National Council of Women because it was a non-racial organisation and I felt it was desperately important to be involved in a non-racial set-up.³⁷

Marie Dyer's thoughts on opening membership were as follows:

By 1960 the Black Sash already had a kind of white middle class ethos, and there was just no home for Black women in it. I suppose it was quite high-powered academic and, in some ways, I had reservations about the Black Sash in the sixties and seventies because it had this intense energy, and a lot of really, really clever women with a lot of political insight. And you would go to a conference and people would give papers, marvellous papers on all kinds of subjects, and you simply could not take them all in ... you came out of a conference with your head buzzing with all this amazing information and analysis that you'd had, and actually, nothing ever happened about them. So there was a lot of harnessed energy

that never found a proper outlet. On returning, we had deadly dull meetings trying to give account of all these papers so it seemed that they were wasted. In fact, in our area, Maimie Corrigan, objected to all this and there was a general feeling in Maritzburg that what the Black Sash ought to be was a pressure group and it ought not to get involved in such a lot of analysis. It should simply protest against bad legislation.

Although it was clearly understood that some analysis was needed in order to protest, Marie Dyer went on to say:

You don't need a heck of a lot of analysis on those general laws amendment bills. The kind of papers people would give would not necessarily be directly about the things that were happening at the time, directly about legislation. They were more academic, sometimes historical, or political science kind of things. We never sent papers to conference, almost on principle, because there was this sort of sense that they were a waste because nothing ever happened about them.³⁸

And Bunty Biggs added: 'I was really very much happier with a membership that was open to anybody who believed in the principles and practices ... it was always my feeling about membership of an organisation that obviously you have differences in detail but the principles must be shared by anybody and everybody.'³⁹

The year 1963 also saw Robert Sobukwe, president of the PAC detained for twelve months under the eponymous clause of the General Law Amendment Act; and he was to remain in effective detention until 13 May 1969.⁴⁰ A United Nations resolution condemned apartheid and urged the release of political prisoners.⁴¹

Along with Eleanor Russell, described as a woman of tremendous energy and marvellous intellect, Maimie Corrigan also had considerable influence on the NMBS in the sixties and seventies. She was probably the reason for not opening an advice office in Pietermaritzburg after most Sash regions had done so. Her dedicated leadership, strength and determination kept Pietermaritzburg alive during the difficult years of the sixties. Marie Dyer recalls her influence and objection to advice offices:

The Black Sash in the sixties, was Maimie Corrigan, I think, even up to the seventies, and the thing about the advice offices was – she didn't like advice offices, she was very against them, and nobody in Maritzburg was really prepared to go against that – partly because we were daunted by the amount of organisation that it would need. But also there was the sense that in running an advice office, what you were doing was looking for loopholes in apartheid policy, and to some extent you could be sort of helping apartheid to work. But you were compromising yourself very much if you were accepting without protest, in the sense of these laws, and trying to get around them. The idea was that we should sort of meet the law head on, and not try to help people to duck the law, as they had tried to do in the advice offices.

In 1963 the executive committee was convinced that there was no real need for an advice office in the region, and both human and financial resources were too limited. Marie Dyer elaborated on this decision:

Ninety percent of the work in the beginning was mainly to do with influx control which in Maritzburg didn't bear terribly hard on people because, you know, the homelands abut so closely ... and so people could commute. I mean, we didn't have very many hostels, we didn't need to endorse people out of town. And that's why it didn't seem to be such a pressing need.⁴²

Joy Roberts, who was chairperson of the Edendale Welfare Society from the mid-1950s to 1994, remembers some opposition to her work:

I was involved in Edendale and I used to have arguments with particularly Maimie who thought it was wrong to do the government's business for them: you shouldn't be involved in welfare. Just let them sink, she said, that's the state's responsibility, you are doing their job for them. Well, that was hard, because you couldn't turn your back on them. I couldn't, anyway. But, you could do battle in small ways – things like grants which, at that stage, were very much geared to white grants being higher than Indian grants, and coloured grants, and black grants were very small. So, you could put in your word of protest there.⁴³

The NMBS had become very involved in opposing the tragedy created by black spot removals, which, according to the government's apartheid policy, affected 250 African settlements in Natal. This plan was likely to uproot about 400 000 people, destroy the sanctity of individual property and at the same time break promises made to African purchasers by the government's predecessors. Peter Brown explained that a black spot was a place where Africans lived, usually on freehold property, in what the National Party government called white South Africa:

Some of these are farms owned by individuals; some are mixed suburbs of rural towns; some are country areas bought initially by a tribe or a group of individuals, where families live on small freehold plots. All of them are distinguished by the fact that the people who live in them bought their land legally, believing that by so doing they were buying security of tenure, and that a White Government meant it when it said that a title deed gave such security. Most of them have built up community lives based on Western institutions. All of them are distinguished by the independence of their people and these people's pride in their homes, schools, churches and small businesses, and they deserve to be left in peace to live where they are.⁴⁴

Five hundred copies of this article with a covering letter were sent to women's organisations, institutes, churches, municipalities and provincial councillors because it was believed that most people had little understanding or knowledge of what misery these removals caused, and the thousands of people whose lives were so dreadfully affected.

In 1963 an event to protest against the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill, which was planned in a small courtyard near 'the fountain in Commercial Road' with a bell tolling every few minutes, was rejected by the Pietermaritzburg City Council. It stated: 'The Finance Committee of the Pietermaritzburg City Council has recommended that the Black Sash should not be permitted to use a recording of a tolling bell in connection with a vigil in protest against the Bantu Laws Amendment Act. The reason for the refusal is that it is against Council's policy to permit loudspeakers or music in the streets.'⁴⁵ Instead, the City Hall Supper Room was used for the meeting with law lecturer Tony Mathews discussing the Act; Peter Brown speaking on black spot removals; Mark Prestwich addressing the Publication and Entertainments Bill; and John Macquarrie dealing with the Coloured Persons Education Act.⁴⁶

The first national conference of Sash hosted by the Natal Midlands region was held in the Supper Room of the City Hall in October 1964. It was at this conference that it was agreed to ask branches to adopt a three-pronged approach to their work: informing the white electorate, bridging the colour bar, and bearing public witness. Later, Joy Roberts talked about this approach: 'The three-pronged thing was really to protest against unjust legislation, to inform the public about the results of that legislation, and then we also tried to build bridges. To be honest this didn't work all that well. We'd have small tea parties where black and Indian friends were invited, but that's always quite a difficult thing.'⁴⁷

The first decade of the life of the Black Sash ended with the Rivonia Trial judgment and the sentencing of Nelson Mandela and other leaders of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, to life imprisonment.⁴⁸ The trial, in which ten activists were accused of sabotage and plans to overthrow the government, took place between 1963 and 1964. MK had been launched on 16 December 1961 after many years of non-violent resistance to attempt to force the government to recognise the rights of black people in South Africa. Ronnie Kasrils, a member of MK, recorded a view on the move from non-violence to armed struggle, which, in the beginning, was aimed at installations: 'I hope this sabotage will lead to armed struggle proper, where we can challenge the regime's monopoly of force. But these actions must be part and parcel of the general resistance of the people. They must link with the mass struggle in the urban and rural areas. Achieving that might not be so easy. Time will tell.'⁴⁹

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Witness* 6 May 2010.
- 2 Else Schreiner interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 1995: 11.
- 3 One of the most active campaigners in the rural areas was Maimie Corrigall (Sheena Duncan, 'Maimie Corrigall' *Reality* 13(4) 1981: 17).
- 4 Marie Dyer interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 4 September 1995: 7.
- 5 Mirabelle Rogers, *The Black Sash: The Story of the South African Women's Defence of the Constitution League* (Johannesburg: Rotonews, 1956): 109.
- 6 Rogers, *Black Sash*: 130.
- 7 *Natal Witness* (NW) 9 February 1956.
- 8 Eleanor (Mrs W.A.D.) Russell was the first female mayor of a Natal town and held office from 1943 to 1947. See Pat Merrett, 'Mrs E.E. Russell and the role of Pietermaritzburg women in public life' in *Pietermaritzburg, 1838–1988: A New Portrait of an African City* edited by John Laband and Robert F. Haswell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1988): 213–216.
- 9 M.E. Fisher, 'Tour of Natal' *Sash Magazine* (SM) 1(4) April 1956: 13.
- 10 *Natal Daily News* quoted in Rogers, *Black Sash*: 237–238. Longmarket Street is now Langalibalele Street.
- 11 Marie Dyer interview: 5.
- 12 *NW* 1 August 1956.
- 13 *SM* 1(6) June 1956: 13.
- 14 Doreen Tarboton, 'Mainly for husbands' *SM* 2(6) March 1957: 14.
- 15 *SM* 1(9) September 1956: 11.
- 16 Marie Dyer interview: 8.
- 17 Rosemary Smith, *Swimming With Cobras* (Cape Town: Modjaji, 2011): 42.
- 18 Marie Dyer interview: 30.
- 19 Fleur Webb interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 July 2011: 9.
- 20 *SM* 3(7–8) September 1957: 10.
- 21 *SM* 3(22) October 1959: 8.
- 22 *NW* 25 February 1959.
- 23 Christopher Merrett, 'SA politics' pocket Hercules' *Witness*, 8 May 2013. See Randolph Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953–68* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997): 223–224. The Liberal Party voluntarily liquidated itself in 1968 after passage of the Prohibition of Political Interference Act.
- 24 Bunty Biggs interviewed by Pat Merrett, Leonard Stanley, Gloucestershire, 25 August 1996: 19.
- 25 Pessa Weinberg interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 8 July 2010: 3.
- 26 Joy Roberts interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 3 August 2010: 3.
- 27 Phoebe Brown interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 9 August 2011: 1.
- 28 The other fourteen were: Dundee, Estcourt, Eston, Greytown, Harding, Howick, Ixopo, Kokstad, Ladysmith, Matatiele, Mooi River, New Hanover, Richmond and Vryheid.
- 29 Marie Dyer interview: 11.
- 30 Bunty Biggs interview: 26.

- 31 Sheila Burnett was married to the Ladysmith parish priest, Bill Burnett, who was later Bishop of Bloemfontein, then of Grahamstown and later still Archbishop (the first South African) of Cape Town.
- 32 *SM* 5(5) December 1961: 7.
- 33 *NW* 22 May 1962.
- 34 *SM* 6(3) March/April 1962: 25.
- 35 In Johannesburg a similar flame was lit outside the City Hall accompanied by a vigil, but despite the protection of bodyguards it was disrupted by hooligans and had to be abandoned at night (*Race Relations Survey (RRS)* 1962: 42).
- 36 It is sobering to remember that white women in South Africa were enfranchised only in 1930. The South African Institute of Race Relations believed that the extension of the vote to all women in the Transkei Bantustan played a role in the Sash decision (*RRS* 1963: 10).
- 37 Else Schreiner interview: 18.
- 38 Marie Dyer interview: 13. This view of Sash conferences is intriguing because it describes a period before academic debate, even at the open universities, started engaging with the surrounding realities of apartheid. It could suggest that Sash was temporarily filling an intellectual vacuum.
- 39 Buntz Biggs interview: 18.
- 40 See Benjamin Pogrand, *Sobukwe and Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1990).
- 41 *The Black Sash, 1955–2005: The Golden Jubilee Report* (Cape Town: Black Sash, 2005): 17.
- 42 Marie Dyer interview: 16.
- 43 Joy Roberts interview: 2. See Joy Roberts, 'The Edendale Welfare Society' edited by Jean Hey *Natalia* 43(2013): 37–54.
- 44 Peter Brown, 'Black spot removals' *SM* 7(2) July 1963: 18.
- 45 *NW* 20 March 1963.
- 46 Mathews was later a professor of law at the University of Natal. Prestwich was already professor of history and Macquarrie professor of education.
- 47 Joy Roberts interview: 2.
- 48 See Joel Joffe, *The Rivonia Story* (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1995).
- 49 Ronnie Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013): 28.

3

FINDING A FOCUS: THE SECOND DECADE, 1965–1974

IN THE MID-SIXTIES the Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) began to work with other organisations and was represented on liaison bodies such as the Education Vigilance Committee, Group Areas Resistance Committee, Natal Convention Continuation Committee and Human Rights Committee. It also worked with the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in opposition to the transfer of coloured education. There was a general feeling that the political climate had changed considerably with a marked swing to the Right, accompanied by a certain amount of intimidation amidst a frightening apathy. These factors contributed to a difficult and depressing context for the work of the NMBS. Feelings of gloom were not unfounded and certainly exacerbated by the extension of the security state during the mid-1960s. The existing provision of 90-day detention without trial was extended to one hundred and eighty days for potential state witnesses in 1965; and from 1967 the Terrorism Act allowed for indefinite detention for the purpose of interrogation.¹

The ten years from 1965 to 1974 marked the apotheosis of apartheid. Already banned, the African National Congress (ANC) had marginalised itself still further by declaring the armed struggle. Albert Luthuli, who preferred a non-violent approach and had often spoken from liberal platforms, remained president-general of the ANC in name only. Attitudes hardened on both sides, putting acute pressure on the space occupied by the Black Sash. The state militarised while the ANC in exile was increasingly influenced by security conscious Communist Party thinking, although it also developed diplomatic relations in democratic countries. The whites of South Africa moved wholesale into the embrace of the National Party while extreme right-wing Afrikaners supported the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) and later the Conservative Party. The Progressive Party for most of this period was limited to a single member of parliament, Helen Suzman. White society became militantly and emotionally patriotic and increasingly hostile to the reasoned approach of the Black Sash. The white voters of Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands

continued to support the United Party in elections but the party's appeal was largely ethnic and historic and in parliament it adopted a generally bipartisan approach to government. These were, perhaps, to be the most challenging years in the history of Sash.

Government pressed ahead relentlessly with black spot removals and it was felt that ordinary people needed far more information about the destructive effects of this policy. The Liberal Party had established close links with rural communities over some years and was an ally of the Northern Natal Landowners Association that formed part of the resistance to removals. The Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) would be founded in 1979 to work with affected communities. It was the black landowners who were members of the Liberal Party who 'took the party into the mainstream of anti-apartheid activism'.²

Some of the Pietermaritzburg men who had been arrested under the 90-day clause of the General Law Amendment Act of 1963 had gone missing and local emergency welfare organisations were looking for them. Peter Brown was banned in 1964, followed by Selby Msimang and John Aitchison in 1965 and Jean Hill and Heather Morkill in 1966. All were Pietermaritzburg activists, members of the Liberal Party, and Morkill was also a member of the NMBS. Demonstrations and public meetings were held to protest against these detentions. Marie Dyer spoke against the banning of Chota Motala of the Natal Indian Congress at a very well-attended meeting at the Lotus Hall. Phoebe Brown, Peter's wife, who had joined the Black Sash in 1955, remembers her husband's banning: 'No, they [the Security Branch] didn't worry me, but we knew they were watching the house and seeing who came ... So, our life was quite different for ten years to how we had lived before.'³ This had included a visit from Nelson Mandela in the early 1960s. He recalled in a letter that never reached Alan Paton, 'When I and a friend visited their house Mrs Brown served us with coffee and buttered scones so fresh and soft that that they went down before one could chew.'⁴

In March 1965, the secretary of the NMBS summed up the year with a report to the annual general meeting in which she pointed out that although all branches were asked to form Ninety-Day Protest Committees only Pietermaritzburg had succeeded. This culminated in a protest meeting in the City Hall on Human Rights Day. The report went on to say that co-operation between the regional committee and Pietermaritzburg had been close but, unfortunately, there had been very little contact with other branches and groups. The increasing apathy in the region required a special effort to make known the injustices of so much legislation and resultant administrative action.⁵

On 6 September 1966, Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd, apartheid's main architect, was assassinated by Dimitri Tsafendas and replaced by B.J. Vorster. The demise of one tyrant did nothing to release the stranglehold of apartheid, and under his successor, the quintessential minister of police portrayed by cartoonists in jackboots, racial discrimination and abuse were to tighten their grip. However, Vorster, relatively junior within the National Party when he assumed office, was to adopt a degree of pragmatism in some areas of policy and legislation and these eventually provided loopholes that could be exploited by groups like Sash.

Many of the former members interviewed remember the June 1966 march organised by the University of Natal in response to the detention of NUSAS president, Ian Robertson. It was reported in the local press: 'Shortly after the marching column had passed over Victoria Bridge the scuffles started. Placards were snatched from the hands of students and either smashed or set alight with the aid of captured torches.'⁶ The event is vividly recalled by Fleur Webb:

There was one great march that I mustn't forget. It was organised by the University ... Anyway, varsity decided to march and we decided to join them, a contingent of us from the Black Sash as solidarity. It was a night time thing and we set off from varsity main gates. It was dark already, and we went in academic gowns with us wearing black sashes. We were attacked all along the route by young men taken from the railway hostels. The Special Branch had either invited or instructed these young men to come and attack the march, which they did; we were told to take no notice. There were some big, strong tough guys in that varsity march, like Cake Manson, who was fiery and powerful; he took no notice, and walked on even though he had mud thrown in his face. They were throwing all sorts of stuff at us. But the most dangerous thing was that some of our people were holding flaming torches ... and these wretched young louts were coming in and tipping the flaming torches over so that the flame fell on the man carrying it. Colin [Webb] was set alight because, being tall, he was carrying a torch. Someone pushed the torch and it went all over his gown. Fortunately he had people around him who had the presence of mind to take their gowns off and put out the fire. But I remember, now that I am thinking of it, that horrible sound of human beings in a crowd, who have lost their sense of being human. There was that almost animal panting. They were running and they were panting like demented animals, running along the side of the march and you could smell them because they were sweating. Anyway, on and on we went and we got to the City Hall and presented our petition ... That was fairly memorable, especially because of the flaming torches and because it was dangerous. We thought that they would come and shout rude words at us, but we didn't expect to be set alight.⁷

Another participant in this march, Phoebe Brown, remembers that when the police started getting unruly and threatening she hit out very hard at one of them. Heather Morkill, who was walking behind her, remarked that Phoebe

must have something very violent in her, and she was surprised to discover, like numerous other women in Sash, that her activism had revealed aspects of her character never before displayed.⁸

A slightly different Pietermaritzburg protest, a stand on 25 May 1965, had featured a banner reading 'Against these we have stood – legal now, immoral forever'. Members held posters listing legislation against which Sash had protested for the last ten years.⁹ Demonstrations were also held to protest against banning without trial, banishment, removals, job reservation, the pass laws, censorship legislation and the Group Areas Act; and in support of the entitlement of every accused to legal defence. Protest was also organised against the continuing house arrest provisions of the Sabotage Act.¹⁰ The Prohibition of Political Interference Act, promulgated in 1968, forbade racially integrated political activity and resulted in the disbandment of the Liberal Party, while the Progressive Party became whites-only.

In 1969 and 1970, the idea to take schoolchildren on tours of welfare agencies, with a view to encouragement to become more aware of the less fortunate in society, met with disappointing results from government schools. The exception was Girls High School, whose pupils filled the first tour in July 1969. Afterwards a letter from the Director of Education pointed out that regulations did not permit correspondence with government schools without permission from his department. However, when such permission was sought, no reply was forthcoming. Later in the year, boys from Hilton College and Michaelhouse, large private schools in the Natal Midlands, were taken on tours by members of Black Sash and the Institute of Race Relations. The agencies visited by the first group on 2 December included the Peter Pan Play Centre for children with mental disabilities; the Kupugani depot that distributed healthy, affordable food; Kwa Hlengabantu, a home for disabled children; and the Child Welfare Home for white children.¹¹ The group stopped for lunch at the Edendale Lay Centre where Reverend Sikakane addressed them.

On 3 December, the second group visited the Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare; the Plessislaer Crèche; Emuseni Home of Kindness for aged Africans; New Horizon School for the Blind for Indian youth; and the Aryan Benevolent Society Children's Home, where they were addressed by Miss Chetty, an Indian social worker. A letter of thanks from one of the visiting teachers pointed out that 'the boys enjoyed visiting the Indian Blind School because they met and talked to Indian students of their own age who had just written matric and they were able to establish some common ground'.¹² The teacher also said that an insight into any section of welfare work was valuable,

so it did not really matter who was visited. Bunty Biggs reported on some of these visits to Edendale, which Marie Dyer helped to plan, saying:

Marie was very clear, very thoughtful – she thought things right through very straight – no faffing about, and came to clear, clear conclusions. Very on the ball, and a very hard worker, I remember her specifically because she and I used to take groups of schoolchildren out to Edendale to see just exactly how African children had to cope with schools that were ill-supplied with equipment and with homes that were so bare and so minimal and we enjoyed doing that together. I think it was her idea that we should organise that, and so we did.¹³

Cherryl Walker, later a fieldworker for AFRA, wrote about the government's attempt in 1969 to modernise white agriculture and eliminate what she termed old feudal practices. This resulted in the labour tenant system being outlawed in the Weenen district. The system of allowing families to live on farms in exchange for their labour for six months of each year had been common practice and the vast majority of African people in this area knew only the Weenen district as home. These large-scale removals affected many thousands of people who were dumped in tented resettlement camps and had to give up their livestock. The plan to settle the bulk of removed labour tenants at Madadeni, near Newcastle, was thwarted by their resistance and many of them ended up at places like Keate's Drift and Tugela Ferry.¹⁴

The Black Sash was consistently opposed to forced removals, and showed its outrage in demonstrations and vigils, letters to the media, and undertaking



Black Sash map, published in 1977, showing the geography of forced removals

research for a wall map (published later, in 1977) showing which communities had been moved and to where.

NMBS also involved itself in the Natal Citizens Association (NCA) formed by a number of individuals with Archbishop Denis Hurley as chairperson. A letter from him set out its aims: 'The intention of this letter is to tell you of the aims and objects of the newly formed NCA, how and why it has come into being, and to ask you to associate yourself with its aims. As you know, a new series of "black spot" removals in Northern Natal, mainly in the Dundee magisterial area, were commenced by authorities early this year. They are likely to be intensified.'¹⁵ In 1969 people were forcibly relocated from Washbank to Limehill where there were no facilities, not even water. All they had was a huge pile of tents, which people did not even know how to erect. NMBS members, a group of church representatives and other concerned citizens witnessed the devastation.¹⁶ Demonstrations against removals were widespread:

The Black Sash will hold a demonstration in Johannesburg on Friday in protest against the Government's uprooting of thousands of Africans and the 'resettlement' in such areas as Morsgat, Limehill and Stinkwater. In leaflets sent out to publicise the demonstration the Black Sash says that 900,000 Africans have been uprooted from their homes by the government since 1959. Morsgat, Limehill, Klipgat, Stinkwater and Mondhlo are some of the known resettlement areas, it says. 'How many more of them are there all over South Africa?' asks the Black Sash.¹⁷

Further state repression in 1969 included another General Law Amendment Act, which prohibited possession of military or police documents regarded as prejudicial to the security of the state. This Act also established the notorious Bureau for State Security; known, with certain poetic licence, as BOSS.¹⁸

Another full year for the now-diminished membership of NMBS followed in 1969 with the October annual national conference held in Pietermaritzburg. During this year, two members meetings were held. The first was addressed by Mr Duckett, who explained the current position of coloured people in South Africa, while Mr Singh spoke on the life and aims of Mahatma Gandhi at the second.

A public meeting at St Saviour's Cathedral Hall to protest against the re-banning of Peter Brown was addressed by Alan Paton and Edgar Brookes. The 200 people present, there to register their strong objection to this act of tyranny and inhumanity, passed a motion expressing opposition and indignation at the imposition of five more years of restrictions. *The Natal Witness* reported on this meeting with the headline 'Paton Raps Government over Banning of Peter

Brown' and quoted him as saying that 'Mr Peter Brown has again been silenced and restricted because he had not given a slavish obedience to authority and had not respected an order that permitted injustice'.¹⁹

On the day after this meeting a protest stand over the further banning was held. Permission was sought to have friends of Peter Brown stand with the NMBS and this allowed fifteen people to participate. However, only three men were able to join the stand of twelve Black Sash women. On Family Day in 1970 a protest was held that featured the following pointed slogans:

- White comfort – black misery
- Those whom God has joined together apartheid puts asunder
- Family life is white privilege

Later that year, Albert Falls near Pietermaritzburg was declared a white group area, compelling many Indian families to move to a nearby area named Cool Air, which had no water supply. Forced removals continued apace throughout 1971, during which 65 481 people were moved and resettled within three months in order to clear what the government termed the remaining 311 black spots.²⁰

In one of a number of well-attended public meetings during 1971, Leslie Weinberg, a prominent Pietermaritzburg human rights lawyer and member of the Liberal Party, talked about the horrors of capital punishment. The Black Sash was always opposed to the death penalty and worked long and hard for its abolition, hoping that South Africa would join civilised countries that no longer used it. This is clearly illustrated in a Black Sash research project published some years later. On the cover, Brian Currin of Lawyers for Human Rights is quoted: 'Death row is like a factory. I find the whole place has been brutalized, dehumanized. It's a factory which produces corpses. You know, you go in live and come out dead. To produce that product a system is developed. The whole place is serviced. They provide food. They make gardens. They give notice of execution. They hang. And they bury.'²¹

At other meetings, Roger Ellis, an Anglican priest who lectured in Religious Studies at the University of Natal, discussed the World Council of Churches; Colin Gardner, English lecturer at the University of Natal and member of the Liberal Party, talked about the cancellation of the 1970 cricket tour to England; and Bunty Biggs of NMBS presented a paper on the social results of forced removals. Other topics at meetings were 'Church and state confrontation', 'Christian protest', 'Present trends in the Nationalist Party' and 'Election results and the cancelled cricket tour' discussed by speakers such as Edgar

Brookes, Tim Dunne, Jeremy Hurley, David Hallows, Brian Stuart and Colin Gardner.

During the same year protest stands were held on detention under the Terrorism Act and the re-banning of John Aitchison. When Anglican Bishop Ken Hallows and Dean Lloyd Wellington joined the Aitchison protest stand they were photographed and interviewed by the police special branch. Marie Dyer wrote to the press in forceful terms arguing the case of the banned:

The Black Sash objects to all official punishment without trial. Pietermaritzburg members are particularly angered and dismayed at the new five-year banning order imposed on John Aitchison. Mr Aitchison has been accused of no crime, been served with no charges – but at the expiry of this order he will have spent one-third of his life restricted to Pietermaritzburg, reporting to the police every week, avoiding any gathering of two or more people, keeping away from schools, factories and newspaper offices, knowing that the police are keeping a careful watch on him – ready to act against him if any of these restrictions are infringed. The Minister is ‘satisfied’ that Mr Aitchison has been furthering the aims of Communism. He may have cause for this satisfaction – but civilised legal procedures, which a banning order circumvents, do not recognise the satisfaction or even the certainty of one party as sufficient grounds for action. The Minister may be wrong; the informers or security policemen on whose information he (presumably) acts (since he has certainly asked no questions of Mr Aitchison himself) may be mistaken, unreliable, over-officious, even malicious – all of these possibilities must be considered by an impartial court before punishment like this can be regarded as anything less than wrong, unjust and undeserved. Under civilised systems, citizens are secure if they satisfy the law; and the law can be known by everyone with certainty. But if our security depends on our satisfying a person, we are no longer citizens, but subjects, guessing and speculating about mood, ideas, or opinions of our ruler; dependent on his favour or his agreement; if we are timid, fearful of offending him; or our principles are wavering, trimming our ideas to what we know of his convictions. This degradation of our public life in these circumstances is inevitable and obvious. Members of the Black Sash will stage a protest demonstration against this and all bannings, banishment and imprisonment without trial on Thursday, April 8 at 8.30 am opposite the City Hall.²²

She followed this up a few months later:

The latest in the series of people punished by the Government’s secret tribunals after transgressing the secret laws are Mewa Ramgobin (banned and house arrested) whose ‘crime’ may be that he intended to revive the perfectly legal Indian Congress; and Justice Moloto (removed from Johannesburg to Mafeking and banned there) who was probably found ‘guilty’ of taking a leading part in an organization – the UCM [University Christian Movement] – which is positively anti-racist in principles and practice.

It is surely hardly necessary to keep on repeating the primary objection to these punishments; namely, that there is a central concept of Western law which provides no man should be punished by the State except after conviction in a proper and public court for the infringement of specific and publicly known laws.

No gestures by the Government towards ‘enlightenment’ or ‘outward’ or ‘forward looking’ can mean anything while this principle is regularly and cruelly being betrayed by its officials.

The Black Sash will protest against these and all punishments without trial in a poster demonstration opposite the City Hall tomorrow at 8.30 am.²³

Other letters to the press tackled the deportation of clergy and missionaries, conditions in Swartkop Location (modern-day Vulindlela) and the banning of Cosmas Desmond.²⁴

Marie Dyer had reservations about regular stands, because ‘the whole point about a stand was that it ought to be newsworthy and if you were going to have them regularly then people would get too bored and they wouldn’t take any notice of it all ... but I suppose it was a good feeling that whenever these awful laws were passed ... you had stood in the street for an hour about that law.’²⁵

In 1971 the Black Sash publicly named people who had died in detention and from then on these sombre lists were read out at all meetings. The poignant comment was made: ‘It is one thing to read, in bald statistics, that 90 people have died in detention since 1963. It is quite another to hear how long it takes to read out a list of their names; or to imagine the conditions in which they must have spent their final hours.’²⁶

That same year the Black Sash endorsed a resolution of the Civil Rights League (CRL) on conscientious objection to military service as many young men at this stage were refusing conscription based on their political and religious beliefs. The intention of the CRL was to promote public discussion and publications on what was regarded as the government’s illegitimate demand to conscript all white South African males into its apartheid military force.

A protest stand on human rights was held before a regulation against open-air demonstrations was issued on 7 June 1972 in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act. It defined a riotous assembly as the gathering of more than one person for a common purpose and was to remain in force until 8 July 1972. It read:

deem[ing] it necessary for the maintenance of public peace, [the Minister of Justice] prohibit[s] ... the assembly of any public gathering of a political nature, that is to say, a public gathering at which any form of state or any principle or policy of the government of a state is propagated, defended, attacked, criticized, or discussed, or which is held in protest against anything; with the exception of such a public gathering which takes place for as long as it lasts, within the walls of a building.²⁷

The minister of justice reportedly said that he had taken this action because of the 'defiant and provocative conduct of students and others at certain universities, and in view of certain information in the Government's possession'.²⁸

Sash member meetings discussed banished Africans,²⁹ the United Nations and its internal organisations, and the legal position of African women.³⁰ A protest stand took place on Human Rights Day and the following letter written by Marie Dyer was published:

On December 10, 1948, the Declaration of Human Rights was signed in Paris by all member states of the United Nations except Russia and the Communist states, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

The full endorsement of it by the nations of the West probably makes it the nearest thing we have to a definition and summary of 'Western values.' The alignment of South Africa with the Communist countries in rejecting the Declaration was one of the first significant international actions of the Nationalist government. Since then we have seen more and more frequently how the Government, in ostensibly protecting the country from Communism, imitates some of the Communist States' worst practices.

Most notably, in recent weeks, we have seen a campaign of arbitrary search and arrest, secret interrogation, and imprisonment without trial. These practices, among many others common in South Africa, were rejected by the West in the Declaration. Articles 9 and 11 state: 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile', and 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence.'

Members of the Black Sash will re-affirm their support of the principles of the Declaration, and protest particularly against the Government's present cruel inflictions of secret arrest and interrogation, tomorrow, Saturday December 11. There will be a poster stand outside the City Hall at 8.30 and later in the morning members driving in town will attach posters to their cars.³¹

In 1972 letters about the irony of celebrating Family Day when apartheid laws were relentlessly breaking up families were published in *The Natal Witness* and *Daily News*. One, written by Mary (Maimie) Corrigan on behalf of the NMBS, gave a very good account of what it was that the Black Sash found abhorrent about Family Day:

Sir, Question 1: in what country are many thousand fathers of families constrained to spend their whole working lives in 'bachelor' hostels, visiting their wives and children for one month every year?

Question 2: in what country do wives need permission from the authorities to visit their husbands in town? In what country will they be prosecuted if they are caught visiting their husbands without permission?

Question 3: in what country are children of 16, who fail to produce the proper qualifications, prohibited from living with their parents? In what country are both parents and children prosecuted if they are caught living together?

Question 4: in what country are mothers living on their employers' property prohibited from having their babies to visit them even if their employers agree? In what country are employers and mothers prosecuted if they are caught with the babies on the property?

Question 5: in what country has a government minister described workers' wives, children and elderly parents as 'superfluous appendages'?

Answer: in the country whose government has instituted a special public holiday for reminding its citizens how precious and important family life and family attachments are.

The cruel cynicism of celebrating Family Day in South Africa is painfully obvious to members of the Black Sash who have been confronted in their advice offices with thousands of parents, wives and husbands struggling to keep their families together in the face of laws which are designed to keep them apart.

It is still not possible to hold a demonstration with more than 11 people in Pietermaritzburg: but on Saturday at 8.30, 10 Black Sash women will stand with posters protesting against this Government's hypocritical and inhuman attitude to family life.³²

During this very dark time, it was most encouraging that the editor of *The Natal Witness* continued to show his support for the anti-apartheid struggle, and particularly the work of the Black Sash, by giving such generous space in the letters columns.³³ A report in the Durban press recorded yet another banning:

They stood in silence, but spoken words were not necessary to get their message across to the public passing by. Their placards spoke for them. Ministers, students, members of the Black Sash, men and women stood outside St Saviour's Anglican Cathedral in Pietermaritzburg yesterday – in protest against the banning of Anglican Priest, Father Stephen Hayes. In all 30 people took part in the silent demonstration. The Rev. Bob Clarke, a Pietermaritzburg Anglican minister, was one of the clergy present [Bob Clarke's poster read 'Ban banning without trial'].³⁴

The NMBS was concerned that the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) admitted only whites to its performances, so in 1972 they asked it to consider separate performances for each race group since multiracial performances were banned. To no great avail, letters were written to overseas performers to explain the position and ask them not to accept contracts in South Africa unless they were able to perform for everyone. A positive result of this campaign was that some seats were then reserved for coloured and Indian people at all Philharmonic concerts in Pietermaritzburg. When in 1974 the City Council, during a period of significant liberalisation, decided to withhold the NAPAC grant unless performances were given to black audiences it promised an extra R3 000 to help meet the additional expenses likely to be incurred. Although the NMBS considered this a step forward, it felt strongly that it was far from ideal since integrated audiences were the only satisfactory solution.³⁵

Professor Edgar Brookes, a frequent speaker at Sash events, paid tribute to the ability of the women of the Black Sash to make the colour black beautiful by wearing sashes in mourning for the destruction of the Constitution, and to highlight the many ills facing South Africa. He ended an article by noting: 'During these years of trial, when evil forces have increased in power, the Black Sash has stood strong and unconquerable. Many have failed but not they. Truly *black is beautiful*.'³⁶

At this time 150 copies of the Charter for Women, drawn up by the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in 1954, were ordered with a view to sending them to all women's organisations in the region. FEDSAW was a broad-based, inter-racial women's organisation, led by Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi and Amina Cachalia. The Charter set out women's demands for the removal of laws discriminating against them. For example, under the section about equality for women, the clause read: 'We resolve to struggle for the removal of laws and customs that deny African women the right to own, inherit or alienate property.' Two members of NMBS, Pam Wellington and Mary Park-Ross, expressed a willingness to give talks on the Charter to interested audiences. However, along with other organisations, some members of NMBS thought they should not be doing this work since it would be better for black women to fight for their own rights. Perhaps this was a legitimate view since it was FEDSAW leaders who headed the march to Pretoria on 9 August 1956 to protest against the pass laws. As it turned out, the Federation of Womens Institutes refused to have any copies distributed to their branches in Natal.

Joan Kerchhoff became a member of the NMBS in the early seventies and described her reasons for joining:

I felt as though it was an excellent way of learning ... lots of discussions and debating ... with the other women in the group and speakers who addressed us from time to time. There were also problems that all groups had in those times. We felt quite vulnerable to informers ... so we were unable to trust strangers. The sense of being at the mercy of the Security Police was also quite difficult. It was interesting and quite alarming that the Security Police believed that we had contacts with Moscow, etc. and really we were just a group of concerned women. Especially in the early days of the Sash it was important to me to have contact with other like-minded women. It felt so necessary not to be alone in one's stand against the government of the day.³⁷

Meg Strauss continued to organise the Saturday meetings, usually in NMBS members' homes and sometimes at the houses of other participants who were not members. Those attending these meetings knitted squares for blankets or

made patchwork quilts for charities, as well as participating in the activity of the day. The value of these gatherings was re-assessed at a well-attended meeting in August 1975 when it was unanimously decided that they should be continued, but re-designated as Saturday Club meetings rather than tea parties.³⁸

Concern about widespread poverty prompted two demonstrations. The first, during Compassion Week, showed the inadequacy of black old age pensions by packing a parcel with food worth R5.75 and listing the contents. And the second was a demonstration against a bread price increase. Placards used the following slogans:

- Bread is the staff of life
- New bread price hits the poor
- If my brother asks for bread ...
- Shall the poor eat cake?
- Give us this day ...
- Subsidised bread before public celebrations³⁹

Early in May 1973 the government introduced the Gatherings and Demonstrations Bill, prohibiting all gatherings or demonstrations in the open air in Cape Town, including St George's Cathedral on the steps of which many demonstrations had taken place. 'According to the Deputy Minister of Police, the intention of the measure was to ensure that deliberations could take place in Parliament without any disturbance in the vicinity. However, the provisions apply irrespective of whether or not Parliament is in session.'⁴⁰ In March of that year, the government had come down heavily on Pietermaritzburg students who protested against police action at St George's. In response to this, some local students had banning orders imposed upon them. The NMBS had 500 stickers printed, proclaiming 'Attack injustice, not students'.

This heavy-handed action by the police was roundly condemned in a letter written by Marie Dyer, at the time chairperson of the NMBS, to the press, which was given huge headlines on the letters page: 'Sash horror at banning of students':

Members of the Black Sash were horrified at the cruelty of the bans against student leaders, and see in them nothing but attempts to victimize and intimidate. It is nonsensical to suggest that NUSAS has been 'misled' by these [students] ... It is almost unbelievable that the Opposition should have given its endorsement to the ruining of careers of [these] young people who have not been found guilty of any crimes. The typical reaction of uneasy White people to this kind of tyranny is that 'they wouldn't do this if there wasn't a good reason.'

This kind of humility before authority is not civilized. Western democratic law demands that the full reasons for any punishments by the state are always made public and that nobody is punished without an open trial. If we acquiesce in every cruelty which the authorities choose to mete out, with the thoughts (a) 'they know what is best for us,' and (b) 'if I complain I may be next,' we are no more free than the subjects of Shaka.

She closed by writing: 'It seems as though the Government has determined to try and terrify all the youth of this country into silent acceptance of its policies. Apart from its cruelty and cowardice, this is a hopeless endeavour. Cruel and tyrannical actions like this simply confirm and stiffen intelligent young people in their opposition to a system which thus continually demonstrates its own worthlessness.'⁴¹

Not everyone thought the stand taken by the Black Sash was laudable. In fact, most of the white population found the Black Sash far too radical in its approach and generally expressed negative feelings about its work. Sometimes, however, there was a somewhat befuddled approval of some progressive views. This confusion is clearly illustrated in a letter published in the local press and signed Portia:

I would love nothing better than to see the present Government replaced with a Progressive Party government, but I cannot agree with Jean Sinclair's [national president of the Black Sash] views on the restriction of open-air protest. Personally, I wish the government would ban demos altogether, whether peaceful or otherwise. What has the Black Sash accomplished by their peaceful protests in the past? I feel the money and time spent on stationery, paint etc. could be better spent on providing food and clothing and other amenities for the poor. I know the Black Sash do a wonderful job amongst the Africans in cities, advising them on legal procedures and their rights ...

She continued,

I am of full British descent and was brought up with the good old British traditions of justice and fair-play, and giving credit where it is due even if it is to my enemy or opponent in opinion ... At the moment we have some youngsters suffering the ignominy of being banned (with one tragically cooling his heels for the next few months in jail). Can you imagine the heartache for his parents? I wonder whom God will hold responsible. The Government and Police who are trying their best to prevent unrest and possible violence? Or the lecturers and clergy responsible for egging on these well-meaning youngsters to fight their battles for them, with no thought whatsoever for what the consequences may be. There is a saying in the New Testament which the Christian clergymen preach to their followers 'What profit it a man if he gain the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul?' If a Progressive Party government is to come into power, I would prefer it to come about in a way which finds favour in the sight of God, not bad behaviour and deliberate and malicious misrepresentation of the facts.⁴²

A quick and clear response pointing out Portia's confusion was written by Marie Dyer on behalf of the NMBS:

Your correspondent Portia would like to have it both ways. On the one hand she is interested in justice and fair-play, and supports Progressive Party policy with its emphasis on individual liberty and the rule of law, and, yet on the other she supports the actions of policemen in chasing and beating peacefully demonstrating students, and of the Government in punishing people without charge or trial, ostensibly because they might at some unspecified time cause some unspecified trouble. It is hard to know how to achieve justice and liberty, but it is certain that they will not be achieved by cowardly appeasement or sycophantic approval of those whose actions destroy them.⁴³

Fleur Webb talks about police harassment during the early seventies, which, although she makes fun of it, was intended to be very intimidating. Most people found it so:

They came to our house once in Townhill ... because we were both being a bit high-profile at the time. You know if you stand on the street corner you become obvious, and Colin [Fleur's husband] was doing a lot of public speaking, and we were involved in ... controversy: some black guy had tried to infiltrate, in the clumsiest way, the Progressive Party. We thought it was so stupid we were going to make an official complaint to the police because he was really a plant, he was a spy, and the Special Branch were on to us ... They had been tapping our phone for years; we knew that. They came one night, actually they came two nights. It was really a pantomime these two blokes arriving at our door in the dark, in the rain wearing raincoats with the collars up and Fedoras, or whatever you call those hats. They said, 'We are very sorry to disturb you but we would like to come in and talk to you for a little bit.' Oh they were sinister, really, and I couldn't resist playing them along, I was such a silly flibbertijib, but I thought this was too ridiculous for words. It was like a play, making threats, and of course, there were the children and the men were making insinuations ... Anyway, they went off and didn't arrest us but they had made threatening noises, they had tried to scare us; through the children they tried to scare us.⁴⁴

South Africa in 1974 was a place of despair for human right activists. Two years before the Soweto Uprising supporters of apartheid were at the height of their power and confidence. In the April 1974 whites-only elections the National Party took 123 of 171 seats and 56.2% of the vote with another 3.9% going to the HNP. The only slight glimmer of hope was the 6.4% vote for the Progressive Party: it increased its number of seats from one to seven, but none of them in Natal. The South African Indian Council and Coloured Persons Representative Council were held in low esteem and Africans were assigned to bantustans headed for a spurious independence recognised by no one but the South African government and each other.

Statistics told a grim story. Pass law prosecutions numbered 515 608 in the previous year and 185 568 Africans had been removed from their land, so-called black spots, since 1948. Per capita annual expenditure on school education for whites ranged from R387 to R557 (in Natal) and for coloured and Indian children from R91 to R183. For African pupils in white areas, the figure was a paltry R29. Franz Auerbach estimated that in 1970 the number of Africans over 15 with no schooling amounted to 51.8% of the total. Finally, the monthly maximum pension and free income for whites totalled R99, for coloured and Indian people R50.50, and for Africans R17.91.⁴⁵

For Black Sash the tenor of the times was perhaps best summed up by the infamous Schlebusch Commission, a secret parliamentary investigation into four organisations: NUSAS, the Christian Institute, the University Christian Movement and the South African Institute of Race Relations. Sash had personal or institutional links with all of them and Schlebusch led an intensive investigation into their objectives, administration and finances; and, in particular, their foreign connections. The report on NUSAS ran to 641 pages. This was not a judicial commission: there were no charges, nor circulation, cross-examination or leading of evidence. In the words of Helen Suzman, it 'offended against the principle of natural justice', its reports consisting of parts of testimony edited by the prosecution.⁴⁶ As a result of this 'travesty of legal proceedings, in effect an inquisition', there were widespread bannings and the Affected Organisations Act was introduced.⁴⁷ Those who refused to testify, including Beyers Naudé, were prosecuted.

The government foiled almost every endeavour of the Black Sash and all those attempting to alleviate growing social disaffection, especially in black communities, ensuring that opposition activity was very restricted. Apartheid seemed impregnable. Although the Black Sash was never affiliated to any political party, understanding the entire gamut of opposition to apartheid was seen as important. And members did their best to educate themselves, and others, about the appalling repression and the sinister tentacles of government reaching into all communities.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Criminal Procedure Amendment Act, 1965, and Terrorism Act, 1967.
- 2 Christopher Merrett, 'SA politics' pocket Hercules' *Witness* 8 May 2013.
- 3 Phoebe Brown interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 9 August 2011: 2.
- 4 'Mandela's undelivered letter to Alan Paton, 1979' *Natalia* 41(2011): 1-2.
- 5 Minutes of the Natal Midlands AGM, 25 March 1965.

- 6 *Natal Witness* (NW) 2 June 1966.
- 7 Fleur Webb interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 July 2011: 5. Manson was a colourful lecturer in English at the University of Natal.
- 8 Phoebe Brown interview: 1.
- 9 Executive Committee minutes, June 1965.
- 10 General Law Amendment Act, 1962.
- 11 Kupugani had been founded by a Natal Midlands farmer, Neil Alcock, and was supported by local liberals and Black Sash members. Alcock had been spurred into action by the scandal of malnutrition amidst food plenty and wastage. John Aitchison describes Kupugani as a ‘magnificent achievement’, while acknowledging that Alcock’s vision of a democratic, participative rural development agency represented in each magisterial district was later reduced to a food distribution network (John Aitchison, ‘Neil Alcock: reflections of an irresolute disciple’ *Reality* 15(6) 1983: 4).
- 12 Executive Committee minutes, February 1970.
- 13 Bunty Biggs interviewed by Pat Merrett, Leonard Stanley, Gloucestershire, 25 August 1996: 27.
- 14 *Sash Magazine* (SM) 21(4) January 1980: 17. See Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa: Natal* (Cape Town: SPP, 1983; v.4 of the SPP report).
- 15 Denis Hurley, letter dated 10 September 1968 in John Aitchison papers.
- 16 For further information on Limehill see Cosmas Desmond, *The Discarded People: An Account of African Resettlement in South Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): particularly 235–240.
- 17 *Rand Daily Mail* 5 November 1969.
- 18 *The Black Sash, 1955–2005: The Golden Jubilee Report* (Cape Town: Black Sash, 2005): 31.
- 19 NW 9 August 1969.
- 20 *Black Sash, 1955–2005*: 33.
- 21 *Inside South Africa’s Death Factory* ([Johannesburg]: Black Sash, 1989): cover.
- 22 NW 8 April 1971.
- 23 NW 1 October 1971.
- 24 Cosmas Desmond (1935–2012) was a London-born Roman Catholic priest and anti-apartheid activist who resigned from the priesthood in 1973 and left South Africa in 1978, returning in 1991. In 1994 he unsuccessfully stood for parliament for the Pan Africanist Congress.
- 25 Marie Dyer interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 4 August 1995: 25.
- 26 SM 30(1) May 1987: cover note.
- 27 Government Notice 999 *Government Gazette* 3549, 7 June 1972.
- 28 *Race Relations Survey* (RRS) 1972: 73.
- 29 For a comprehensive history of banishment see Saleem Badat, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment Under Apartheid* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2012).
- 30 The Natal Code dated from 1878 with statutory force from 1891 (Natal Law 19). Under its provisions African women remained perpetual minors at the mercy of guardians with reduced legal capacity and limited property and inheritance rights. Married women could not gain exemption (M.L. Lupton, ‘The legal disabilities of Zulu women’ *Reality* 7(4) 1975: 6–10).
- 31 NW 10 December 1971.

- 32 NW 7 July 1972.
- 33 In the early 1970s the editor was Stan Eldridge and in 1974 he was succeeded by Richard Steyn.
- 34 *The Daily News* 14 July 1972.
- 35 Executive Committee minutes, 6 February 1974.
- 36 Edgar Brookes, 'Black is beautiful' *SM* 15(4) March 1972: 16.
- 37 Joan Kerchhoff interviewed by Lorenza Cowling, Pietermaritzburg, 30 August 2010: 3.
- 38 *SM* 18(2) August 1975: 27.
- 39 Executive Committee minutes, January 1972.
- 40 *RRS* 1973: 55.
- 41 NW 5 March 1973.
- 42 NW 25 May 1973.
- 43 NW 4 June 1973.
- 44 Fleur Webb interview: 6.
- 45 *RRS* 1974: 171, 183, 340, 389.
- 46 *RRS* 1974: 35.
- 47 Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1994).

4

THE YEARS OF UPRISING: THE THIRD DECADE 1975–1984

AFTER YEARS CONVINCED that an advice office in the region was unnecessary, the Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) opened one in February 1975.¹ This was a logical move: a characteristic of both Natal regions of the Sash was the poverty and unemployment that surrounded them and ‘the difficulties people experience[d] in coping with dual administrations’.²

In February 1975 members of the NMBS completed *This Is Your City: Pietermaritzburg*, a pocket-sized booklet. It was widely distributed, a triumph for the region, and the first comprehensive documentation of the huge discrepancies between the living conditions of the various race groups defined by the apartheid state. Gwen Allday did the research while the results were collated by Marie Dyer, typed by Stephanie Alexander and arranged in final form by the latter and Colleen Irvine. Unusually, it was commended in a *Natal Witness* editorial headed ‘Basic facts’:

Not every citizen of Pietermaritzburg can be accurately described as a fanatical supporter of the Black Sash. Nevertheless all who want to know something of the essential facts of life in this community will do well to obtain a copy of the booklet *This Is Your City* compiled by the local region of that organization. It deals almost entirely with fact: in its 19 pages there seem to be only two short paragraphs of comment. It gives the municipal population of each ethnic group and the population of the African settlements on the city’s borders; it tells of wage rates, housing standards, rents, bus-fares, schools, health services, lunch facilities in town for all groups, public lavatories, facilities for recreation, culture, and even for burial. The producers are to be commended on their zeal, enterprise and objectivity.³

Protest stands, organised by Fleur Webb, had been resumed in the early seventies. She described the process:

We would decide at meetings what we were standing for – we had a lot to stand for in those days. I would then go home and think up the slogans to put on the billboards. Finally, I would have to write a letter to the Town Clerk, Mr White, and then go and see him. He treated me like dirt: all I can recall is the implication that it was disgusting sort of stuff we were doing, and grudgingly he would grant permission. On Saturday morning I would set off and we would meet on the corner by the cannon [Church Street]. We would hand the boards out and arrange ourselves around the corner with sashes on, and remind everyone:

no talking, no looking up, look at the ground and take no notice of whatever is flung at you, don't chat among yourselves.⁴

The following letter received from the Town Clerk illustrates how difficult it was to obtain permission for protest stands, and the detail required:

With reference to your letter dated 14 July 1975, permission is granted to hold a poster demonstration on Wednesday 6th August 1975, from 9.30 a.m. to 10.15 a.m. at the edge of the Supreme Court's gardens, subject to no obstruction being caused in the streets or on the pavements. Permission is granted on the strict understanding that no authority can be given in conflict with any proclamations prohibiting any gatherings which may be in force. The following posters only may be used:-

Détente Demands Change at Home; Planned Change Means Peaceful Change; Change Now: Delay Means Disaster; Share the Land, Opportunity, Prosperity, Power.⁵

Forced removals were still of grave concern to members of the NMBS who invited knowledgeable people to speak at general meetings in order to keep abreast of developments. Peter Brown, whose two banning orders lapsed in 1974, spoke in 1976. He gave some details concerning the horrors of removal at Roosboom, a freehold area about 11 kilometres from Ladysmith, which had been proclaimed a black spot. In 1975 landowners were given notice that they, and their tenants, were to be moved to Ezakheni, a township built in the KwaZulu homeland about 25 kilometres from Ladysmith. He talked about Elliot Mngadi, who had grown up on his father's land in Roosboom, joined the Liberal Party, and in 1956 was employed as campaign organiser against black spot removals by the party. Mngadi was known to many Black Sash women and Liberal Party members, and was admired for the sterling work he did. Unsurprisingly, as national treasurer of the party Mngadi was banned in 1964. Randolph Vigne writes about his work:

His monthly reports and correspondence reveal an energetic and thorough approach to a gigantic task. He travelled far and wide, handicapped by slender funds, poor transport and bad roads, compiling information, spreading the word of the gathering storm and discussing means of resistance. By mid-1958 he had made plans for the setting up, with 40 Black Spots as members, of an association which could unite them in their fight to save their homes and communities. With the blessing of the Liberal Party, the Northern Natal Landowners Association (NNLA) was established.⁶

Working with other organisations had become important to the NMBS. In December 1975, members were urged to attend the opening of a new organisation of women, Women for Peaceful Change Now, which advertised that it planned to work on a non-political and multiracial basis to attempt to create trust and a deeper understanding between communities. The question

arises why another women's organisation so similar to the NMBS should be launched. The Black Sash was vehemently anti-violence, had been open to all races since 1963 and had attempted to build bridges between communities for many years. Perhaps it was the political component that was thought to be too radical and therefore did not appeal to all women. Following the launch, there was some limited contact between the two organisations.

In May 1976, the National Council of Women (NCW) organised 'Women Today', an exhibition to mark Women's Year. The NMBS was one of 33 organisations to exhibit. However, it appears that this was not entirely successful as it was reported that 'The Sash stall was very striking, and very political. We felt that this did not appeal to at least thirty of the other organizations! We were ignored in a very well-bred manner.'⁷

Both the NCW and Black Sash were organisations working for change, and both were organisations of women, but apart from the fact the NCW was non-racial from the beginning, what were the differences? Perhaps Pat Merrett's suggestion, with which Else Schreiner concurred, goes some way towards an explanation: 'In a sense, if you want to define the difference between say Black Sash and NCW, it's almost analogous to that difference between the Suffragettes and the Suffragists. The latter worked quietly behind scenes by talking to government officials, whereas Suffragettes were very much more public.'⁸ The Black Sash did both, worked quietly, especially in advice offices, but also attracted public attention. Members of NCW worked with less publicity and did not stand on street corners with posters denouncing apartheid policies. It is interesting to note that having started off as non-racial, at some stage in the seventies the NCW split into racial groups, as explained by Else Schreiner:

Later on, and it was in the 70s, the National Council of African Women separated from the National Council of Women on the grounds that they needed to become conscious of themselves. As people, a Black Consciousness thing, they wouldn't succeed in becoming truly independent as black women and ... capable of running an organisation until they split from us. I went to the meeting in Edendale at which it happened and it was very sad. I was an honorary member of the National Council of African Women in Edendale and there was a formal separation, but we continued to work together.⁹

The sixteenth of June 1976 marked the beginning of serious protest, the Soweto Uprising, when black students revolted against the forced use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. Many were shot dead by police and thousands of pupils went into exile and government also used long-term detention without trial. Sibongile Mkhabela, one of the leaders of the

student protest, was subsequently arrested and charged with sedition. Much later she worked in the Johannesburg Advice Office and in 2006 became chair of the Black Sash Trust. She wrote:

The 1976 uprising was a wake-up call to all sectors of society. It gave new meaning to the spirit of resistance, the civil-rights movement and Black Power among Black communities in South Africa and elsewhere, including the bastion of White supremacy, the United States of America. It also engendered fear, confusion and insecurity among White people in general, and supporters of the racist government of the day in particular.¹⁰

A decade later a request from the executive committee of NMBS was sent to some local schools asking them to commemorate student sacrifices during the uprising on 16 June in their assemblies. Mrs B. Cocker, the headmistress of Wykeham, a private girl's school in Pietermaritzburg, replied:

We had an ordinary day, but special prayers in the Assembly for our Country and all those who are suffering through broken families, those losing homes and possessions, children lost in the confusion and through arrest and detention, were said. Prayers that we may all be shown our role in helping to build a new and just South Africa.¹¹

Desmond Ducasse of Hilton College wrote: 'We plan to hold an assembly for the whole school when the events of Soweto will be remembered and when we will have special prayers for peace.'¹²

Activities of NMBS were curtailed following the extension of the government's ban on outdoor gatherings until 31 December 1976. A letter written by Maimie Corrigan to the press gave details of the posters that would have been used in October had this been permitted:

The Minister of Justice, Mr. J. Kruger, placed a ban on outdoor gatherings, which included Black Sash stands. The ban was due to expire on October 31, 1976, and the Sash were planning to have country wide stands. However, Mr. Kruger has re-imposed the ban until December 31.

If the Sash stand had taken place ... the following wording would have been used on the posters:

Consult or Confront – The Choice is Yours.

Words or Weapons – The Choice is Yours.

Fear or Freedom – The Choice is Yours.

Change or Chaos – The Choice is Yours.

National Convention or National Disaster.

I hope you will publish this letter so that your readers may think of the choices before us.¹³

At about this time Prime Minister John Vorster made a speech in Durban urging people not to be intimidated and to defend democracy and free enterprise. Mary Park-Ross of NMBS wrote to *The Natal Witness* giving her views on democracy:

We are living in a time of crisis and great danger, but my fear is not the Communism on our border, but the enemies we are creating with the State. By our treatment of Black people, we are driving them to communism, which promises them freedom from oppression.

If all our people share a common citizenship and feel a common loyalty, we need not fear the enemy at our gates; but a city divided against itself can never stand.¹⁴

With so many restrictions in place, chairperson Maimie Corrigan, trying to keep members interested and involved, sent out a circular telling them there were two relevant things for them to do: ‘keep and make contact across the colour line and try to get whites to understand the urgency of the situation and to accept the only possible alternative to violence.’¹⁵ Regular letters to the press continued to be written and it was hoped that these would keep the general public informed. In solidarity with the Justice and Reconciliation Commission of the Roman Catholic Church, an all-night vigil was held in October 1977 at St Mary’s Cathedral to protest against the declaration of the Christian Institute as an affected organisation, which meant that it could not solicit foreign funds. Joining in an effort to prevent duplication and initiate group activities, the region became part of the Co-ordinating Committee of Concern, which was supported by a range of other organisations. And Saturday tea parties continued, but it was thought that the political climate was affecting attendance.¹⁶

With the ban on gatherings lifted at the end of December 1976, the Sash celebrated its 22nd birthday in May 1977 with a large poster at a protest stand saying that the organisation still embraced the following beliefs:

Racial discrimination must go;
 Equal pay for equal work;
 Banning is uncivilized, unjust, unnecessary;
 Prolonged detention under the new Security Bill is abhorrent;
 Migrant labour wrecks families;
 Black spot removals must stop;
 Free compulsory education for all;
 The courts not politicians must decide;
 Planned change means peaceful change;
 Change now – delay means disaster.

Later in 1977, when unemployment was rife, it was suggested at a meeting of the NMBS that a gathering should be arranged with unemployed people in Edendale to explain unemployment insurance, which many people did not understand as a right. Although it was illegal, many employers did not pay what had been deducted from workers into the fund thus making it impossible

for ex-employees to claim their benefits. Maimie Corrigan wrote to her member of parliament (MP) about the problem and received the following answer, dated 19 April 1977, from MP Alex Boraine:

Thank you for your letter of 30th March in connection with unemployment. I took this as my major theme in the Budget debate, but I am not sure if it got any publicity at all in your local newspaper ... Certainly there are no visible signs as of now that the Government is taking the very dangerous and desperate unemployment problem with any degree of seriousness. I do hope that you will continue to push this in the press, because it is clear that this problem is going to increase even more alarmingly over the next months.¹⁷

A public meeting on 30 August 1977 to discuss universal franchise was led by Peter Brown who, as a prominent member of the former Liberal Party, had since the party's inception advocated suffrage for all adults. The Black Sash nationally, and locally, was by now convinced that universal franchise was necessary and so rejected a new constitutional framework, the tricameral parliament, proposed in 1978 by Prime Minister P.W. Botha. This proposal came to fruition in 1984, when separate legislative houses were established for white, coloured and Indian groups, but the African population was still totally excluded and the powers of the ruling party were as entrenched as ever.

Sheena Duncan, national president of the Black Sash, took the concept of universal franchise much further by proposing the following motion to the March 1978 national conference for discussion and consideration:

The Black Sash believes that one person, one vote is basic to any system of political justice, and the vote of each person should be equal in value to the vote of every other person. The vote is the most essential to the disadvantaged who have no other power to exert. Social and economic justice will not be achieved without it. But, it has been demonstrated that a universal franchise does not guarantee political justice. Therefore any political system should also entrench the following:

1. The absolute independence of the Judiciary and the Courts of Law.
2. The absolute protection of the individual from arbitrary arrest and punishment through guaranteed access to the Courts.
3. Freedom of the Press.
4. Freedom of assembly and speech.
5. A fixed period of time which may elapse before government must seek a new mandate from the people.
6. Protection of the rights of minority groups.

These are the basic requirements and any political or economic system can be just if it is based upon them.¹⁸

A newsletter sent to all NMBS members described the banishment of Winnie Mandela in 1977 to the remote rural village of Brandfort. This action greatly

upset members, especially Maimie Corrigan. At this time Mandela's only supposed crime was belonging to a family torn apart by their commitment to the struggle against the apartheid system. She was a young woman with small children, dedicated to a cause, who lost her home, her friends and her whole support system when she was banished to Brandfort and a great deal of sympathy was felt for her.¹⁹ Maimie Corrigan explained:

It is heartless and unjust to take her from her home with its many comforts, from her work in Johannesburg, from her interests and her friends. The Police have tried hard enough in all conscience to have her found guilty of some offence – with no success and so she is savagely punished without charge or trial. I wrote a letter to her expressing my sympathy and sent a copy to J. Kruger, Minister of Justice. In his reply he says among other things, 'living in Brandfort is no different from living in Soweto.' I find it incredible that Mr. Kruger cannot see the enormity of his action.²⁰

Corrigan went on to say that she had received a letter from Winnie Mandela, the date of which was not given, and quoted from it:

I cannot thank you sufficiently for your lovely letter which was a tremendous source of inspiration to my daughter and me, particularly because we were just over a week in Brandfort and we knew no one at all. Yours is not cold comfort at all, the knowledge that there are still people like you at this very troubled time of our history is comforting in itself. I do not know how loss of all comforts and material values by me is supposed to change black thinking and the deprivation of four hundred years. Perhaps in thoughtful people like you lies the answer, the conscience of our land.

When one has been reduced to this level of nothingness I hardly know what we should ask you to help us with as we need everything now, even for the very poor people who surround us. It would be costly to send tinned food from there unless someone was coming our way. Perhaps you could send us reading matter, novels for my teenage daughter and modern magazines. If you have a Church Group of women or some cultural club you might collect used clothes for all ages for these children and adults who roam the streets around us barefoot in this weather. Once more thank you ever so much for being thoughtful.

Much love, Winnie Mandela.²¹

It appears from communication between Sheena Duncan and Maimie Corrigan that the latter had asked questions about visiting Mandela, to which Duncan replied: 'Whites do need a permit to go into Brandfort Location to visit Winnie and you won't get one. I see from the press that Helen Suzman was refused one.' Duncan later wrote, 'Winnie Mandela may be getting your parcels. I don't know how good she is at answering letters, or she may have so many she can't keep up. I have just had a reply to the one I wrote the day she was sent to Brandfort.'²²

In 1977 members of NMBS regularly telephoned the police special branch to enquire about the welfare of local detainees until it was thought that this could do more harm than good. However, Maimie Corrigan alone continued this practice until the death of Steve Biko in Pretoria on 12 September 1977 when in her final call she said she wanted nothing further to do with the special branch. Strangely, this last call coincided with an end to anonymous midnight calls to her home phone number.²³ Biko's appalling death was marked by a letter to the press from Bunty Biggs:

So Steve Biko is the latest to die in the maximum security of the detention cells of the secret police. To have removed forever one of the most gifted, intelligent, dedicated and courageous leaders of an oppressed people may no doubt be considered an achievement in some quarters. For those who are concerned for an understanding of what he stood for and the need to implement the things he was working for, namely justice, freedom from discrimination, personal dignity and worth, equality of opportunity, his death is an occasion for mourning. Shock waves will be felt throughout the Black community and hopefully among those Whites who still have a conscience. How many more have still to die, uncharged and in isolation, deprived of legal aid, before the authorities will agree to a judicial inquiry into these untimely deaths?²⁴

On 19 October 1977, over a month after Steve Biko's death, nineteen organisations were banned. The front page of *The Natal Witness* that day carried a huge headline: 'BANNED – Massive Clampdown'. The editorial comment on that day opened with the sentence, 'Has the government lost its head?' Donald Woods, editor of *The Daily Dispatch* in East London and a *Natal Witness* columnist, was among those banned. *The Natal Witness* described him as 'widely respected as an opponent of apartheid, and authoritarianism, always calling for people to be charged in open court rather than be arbitrarily banned'. The Christian Institute, headed by Cosmas Desmond with whom the NMBS had worked, was also banned. Jimmy Kruger, minister of justice, was quoted as saying: 'Publications and organizations had been banned because they endangered the maintenance of public order.'²⁵

In 1977 during the week that followed Black Solidarity Day, the name given for a while to 19 October, the NMBS placed a polystyrene replica of a Sash woman, holding a banner saying 'Don't Victimize Critics' near the cannon at the Supreme Court Building opposite the City Hall where protest stands were usually held. She aroused considerable interest and Sheena Duncan in a letter to Maimie Corrigan commented: 'It was a brilliant idea to have the polystyrene lady standing in your usual place.'²⁶

In response to the bannings, a letter from Marie Dyer on behalf of the NMBS to *The Natal Witness* expresses some of the dismay felt:

The Black Sash is not often at a loss for words; but these latest bannings are almost impossible to comment on coherently.

What will these thousands of socially conscious and articulate Black people do – what can they do, when the Government blocks every legal means they have of discussing and expressing their views – views determinedly and passionately held? Is there the remotest chance that they will all accept the restrictions with humility and submissiveness, and acknowledge from now on the humanity, justice, and virtue of apartheid?

There is no short-term sense or reason (not to mention justice or humanity) in these bans. They must have doubled the extent of Black anger and the probability of violent confrontation in South Africa.²⁷

Once again, it seems that the leadership of NMBS was understandably depressed. However, a letter from national vice-president Joyce Harris expressed optimism and encouragement: ‘I do believe that as long as we can manage to keep going, to be seen to be protesting, and to indicate to blacks that there are whites who care, we will more than justify our existence. You are such a small region, and I think you work wonders.’²⁸ Perhaps such letters from the national office helped to inspire the region to keep doing whatever was possible.

The South African Institute of Race Relations summed up the Black Sash nationally in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising: ‘Although public protest had been severely limited due to security legislation ... the Black Sash held meetings where possible and continued to protest by other means: numerous letters to the press, the publication and distribution of pamphlets, writing of letters to cabinet ministers and lobbying of opposition MPs.’ It reported that the Sash advice office in Port Elizabeth had ceased to function ‘due to harassment by security police’.²⁹

In Pietermaritzburg a feeling that not enough was being achieved surfaced from time to time. While membership of the NMBS fluctuated, as it had done from the beginning, there was always a small core of women passionate enough about social justice to form a committee, organise meetings and protests, and do whatever else was necessary, all of which was demanding and time consuming. Then there were the quieter women who worked in the Advice Office, or raised necessary funds by making jam, baking for cake sales, and finding clothes for jumble sales. Not everyone wanted to be flung into leadership roles. Many were afraid to take part in stands, which were at times made very intimidating by continual security police presence and filming of

every protest, and occasional verbal abuse and throwing of objects by passers-by. So, these women's names are not in the minutes, nor are they as clearly remembered, but they, too, were committed to the work of the Black Sash. It seems that everyone who took any part in Sash activity benefited greatly from the accumulation of knowledge about politics in South Africa, built up their confidence, and enjoyed tremendous solidarity with other like-minded women. There was a web of support that helped in difficult times, and strong bonds and important friendships were formed.

Peter Kerchhoff and Reverend Sol Jacob encouraged members of NMBS and the local Institute of Race Relations to visit an informal settlement known as the Barracks, situated at the lower end of Church Street, in 1977. The appalling conditions revealed by this visit so enraged members that a deputation was sent to visit the Mayor, Ashton Tarr. Finally, families who had lived in indescribable squalor with no running water, functional lavatories, electricity or heating of any kind were moved into tents on church grounds.³⁰ Later the municipality instituted an emergency housing scheme for these people with all costs borne by the national Department of Community Development. The City Council then set up a relief fund (known as NEED) for poor people and donated the first R60 000 to a tree planting project designed to alleviate unemployment. It was encouraging to see what pressure on a relatively sympathetic City Council could achieve.³¹

In 1978, a letter from the NMBS to the City Council asking for the 11 pm curfew in Pietermaritzburg to be lifted met with the response that this was a matter for the Drakensberg Administration Board (DAB). The DAB had taken over African affairs from the municipality in 1973 and immediately issued an instruction that no further latitude would be allowed in the requirement that all Africans must be contract workers and contracts had to be renewed every year. This prevented any African from accumulating the necessary ten years of service that would allow them to qualify to be in a white area by right under the Bantu Laws Amendment Act. In the past, this rule had not been strictly applied in Pietermaritzburg. As well as the letter to the City Council, Maimie Corrigall wrote to the Department of Plural Relations and Development and received the following reply:

I have to inform you that the application of the curfew regulation was reviewed by him [Minister P.G. Koornhof] earlier this year, but as it is his and the Department's considered opinion that this control measure still serves a purpose towards the good order of a community he could not see his way clear to repeal the regulations. It must however be pointed out that this control measure is being applied with circumspection.³²

A confidential paragraph in a letter from Sheena Duncan reported that when the deputation from the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) had recently visited Koornhof, one of the matters discussed was the curfew and surprisingly ‘Dr. K. said he would like to remove it but the Police insist on its retention. He said it was discriminatory and they were discussing making it non-discriminatory by applying it to all race groups living in wrong group areas between 10 pm and 6 am. That will liven up your next committee meeting!’³³

In a letter from Sheena Duncan to Cherryl Walker of the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) in October 1980, Duncan again referred to the SAIRR meeting with Koornhof saying:

I think some black spot removals have been delayed while the report of the Van der Walt Commission into consolidation is awaited and I believe that Government is more sensitive to press publicity than it used to be because of the image it is now trying to present. However, and this is confidential because it is not my own information, Koornhof told a deputation from Race Relations recently that all forced removals have been stopped. When confronted with the evidence, he got cross and insisted that forced removals are stopped but that the Department ‘talks’ to people and ‘persuades’ them because ‘they have to go.’ It is a question of terminology.³⁴

At about this time, the Drama Department of the University of Natal was asked by NMBS to include plays of a political nature in their street drama programme. However, although the department felt sympathetic, they said they could find nothing of sufficient artistic merit. Maimie Corrigan commented: ‘Whites here are complacent because so far there has been no unrest. It is difficult at the moment to see quite what Sash can do.’³⁵

Nalini Naidoo, a volunteer in the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office and the writer of a weekly report for which the Pietermaritzburg committee was duly grateful, was invited to join the NMBS but she declined. In an interview she gave reasons for this, saying:

You know, I think it was to do with the politics of the time. I saw myself as an activist and I was involved in a whole cross section of activities. At that time the Black Sash was seen as a sort of white organisation, and while I loved the work, and admired the work, it was just the whole image of the organisation, so I didn’t think it would be suitable to join. That was part of the reason, but the other part was that we were so busy at the time and I remember that FOSATU [Federation of South African Trade Unions] was getting stronger and stronger, there were few activists, and they were making more and more demands [on us]. There was the Simba boycott and the Fattis and Monis boycott. There was a lot happening. I think it was on two levels: the level of the perception of the Black Sash at the time; and the other was that there was so much else going on.³⁶

Once again protest stands, open-air gatherings and political meetings were prohibited by government who defined them as illegal if more than one person was present. On 2 May 1979, the polystyrene Sash woman was put to work in her usual place holding a poster reading '1948–1978 The Great Trek Backwards'. And on 22 September Buntie Biggs and Mary Park-Ross staged a single protest stand demonstrating against removals at Crossroads: 'Don't Destroy Homes and Families – Save Crossroads'. It was usual practice to have two women at single stands, one to hold the poster and one to monitor in case of any trouble. Before long a uniformed policeman told them their stand was illegal and he had received a complaint to say that a by-law was being infringed. Having ascertained that this was not correct, the two women continued their protest.³⁷ Single stands became one of the ways to continue to protest publicly.

Correspondence from Maimie Corrigan in 1979 indicates that Peter Kerchhoff was a member of the NMBS executive committee, which must have been unprecedented since as a man he was excluded from membership of this women's organisation, and it therefore seems strange that he should have been part of decision-making for the region. However, he was generous with his time and his compulsion to help the less privileged was well known, which meant he was involved in numerous organisations. Clearly his association with the NMBS was valued. Corrigan wrote to Kerchhoff:

You'll know how inactive we have been as a Region with all our active members having other priorities. Anything even slightly adventurous we have done this year we have been drawn into by you, without whose energy and initiative and imaginative approach our record for the past year would have been a very shabby one. I do hope you will continue to come to our committee when you can and that you will invite our help in your many activities. We are grateful to you for letting us share your service to the community.³⁸

A recent activity initiated by Kerchhoff had been a petition for prisoners' education and the NMBS had set up a table and obtained a good number of signatures.

For some time NMBS had been concerned about the inferior education offered to black pupils. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 ensured that education would be delivered on racial grounds, mostly benefiting whites. Black pupils were certainly the worst off since they did not receive free education, it was not compulsory and it was badly underfunded, resulting in vastly inferior schooling. The apartheid government's attempts to control the black population through this scandalous deprivation left many thousands of poorly educated, unemployable and angry black people who would never

reach their full potential. The Black Sash nationally and locally believed that education should be free and available to all children. Political activist Mamphela Ramphele aptly summarised the expectations of black South Africans: ‘Most people in our village assumed that one automatically became a teacher or nurse if one did well at school, or a policeman or labourer if one did not.’³⁹

A resolution adopted at the 1980 Black Sash Conference sets out the thinking of the time: ‘Bearing in mind that those who do not have the vote are inclined to get second class facilities, this conference calls upon the Government to introduce as rapidly as possible, one uniform system of free and compulsory education for all South Africans. The Black Sash gives notice that working toward this objective is one of its aims in 1980.’⁴⁰

The NMBS prepared a display concerning the education of black pupils, which was lent to various schools. Sandra Lupton of Epworth High School asked for the loan of this display on black education for two weeks from 27 October 1980, adding, ‘Our art girls are doing a project on Social Justice and the two together would make a feature.’⁴¹ A note written on this letter indicates that the display was currently at Girls High School until 16 October 1980.

The matter of education was also taken up by Mary Park-Ross, an active member and chair of the Natal Midlands region in the 1970s. A letter to *The Natal Witness* expressed her unease:

Many responsible people living in Imbali and Edendale must have been as distressed as I was to read of the Drakensberg Bantu Administration planned expenditure for the coming year. The contrast between R1.7 million for increased facilities for drinking as against R475 000 for housing, and R375 000 for schools speaks for itself ... The excuse that the R1.7 million expected profit was needed to provide the other social services is a pernicious argument. What would the response of White people be if they were told that a provision of schools for their children depended on how much they drank?⁴²

The restrictions on education went right up to tertiary level, controlled by the Extension of University Education Act, which was designed to prevent black students from going to a university of their choice. In an interview, Nalini Naidoo talked about being accepted by a White university:

When I matriculated in 1973 I decided I wanted to study journalism and I was encouraged by my English teacher. The only journalism school then was at Rhodes, but at that time there was a system of separate universities for separate race groups and if you belonged to the Indian race group you had to go to the University of Durban-Westville. But, if you wanted to study a course that was not offered there, you could apply for special permission from the Minister of Interior which is what I did, and this came late in 1974 so I went to Rhodes

just after the first term in 1974. I had to go late because I didn't want to miss the opportunity since it would have meant applying for another permit and I wasn't sure if I would get it. And the University was very gracious and they said I could do fewer courses and I could come along, so I went in '74.⁴³

Marie Dyer represented the NMBS on the AFRA committee. She had chaired the Natal Midlands region for a long time, but found it very difficult to relinquish this role because no one else wanted the job. It was thought to be quite a burden, largely because there was so much to do and everyone felt that they needed to be doing so much more than seemed possible. Dyer commented:

You could never kind of relax when you were chairperson ... One of the ways to get off was just to resign from the committee, which eventually I was forced to do. So I was off the committee for a long time, but in the late 70s when AFRA started I agreed to be the AFRA representative on the Black Sash committee, and I came back. There were a whole lot of new people; there was yourself [Pat Merrett] and Maggie Clarke, a whole new generation like Fiona Bulman, Mary Kleinenberg, Juliet Hart, all too young to be active before. It was a great revelation to see a whole lot of new people rather than the same old people ... There was always work to do, and you didn't join the Black Sash because you wanted to wield power, because you couldn't. The Black Sash didn't offer that kind of opportunity.⁴⁴

In August 1980 Cheryl Walker became full-time organiser at AFRA, working almost exclusively on forced removals, which had been unleashed on a huge scale. Walker described the Weenen district, 30 kilometres from Estcourt, as dry thornveld country suitable for stock farming, with the Tugela River and its tributaries providing some scope for irrigation. However, it is a barren, eroded part of the country mainly occupied by Zulu people. Before 1969 the labour tenant system had given families the right to live on the land by working for the farmer for six months of the year at a nominal wage. This system was outlawed in 1969 when farmers were allowed to have only five families living on their land and they were required to work full-time on the farm. Although labour tenancy was deeply entrenched, especially in the Weenen district, large-scale removals of established tenant communities took place with people dumped in hastily erected and overcrowded villages. Walker went on to say that these removals had happened ten years ago and the people were still there: 'Since the mid-1970s this area has been repeatedly devastated by a series of "faction fights" between rival clans, jostling for space, competing for inadequate resources, resentful, frustrated, and, increasingly hungry.'⁴⁵ And, it seems that all the tenants were asking for was the right to live on the land in communities they knew with the means to keep cattle and build a future for themselves and their families.

In 1975 Neil Alcock, a member of the Liberal Party in Pietermaritzburg, with his wife Creina had moved to a degraded farm called Mdukutshani in the Weenen district, planning to set up an environmentally friendly cattle co-operative that would lead to the rehabilitation of the land. Although not members of the Black Sash, they shared its concern for removals, and the general deprivation of the people living there. Soon they were drawn into local community problems, including the hardships experienced by the massive removal of labour tenants and then serious drought, and became involved in food relief. An article for *Sash Magazine*, although written in a light-hearted tone, hoped to draw attention to the terrible suffering and the difficulty of sharing the inadequate amount of food delivered to their farm by benefactors among so many starving people. The irony of the title is revealed in the last paragraph, which read: ‘Love is a four letter word spelt FOOD, said a headline in *The Star* which arrived this week. No, it had nothing to do with drought relief. Gourmet Chef Robert Carrier was in Johannesburg to open a R450 000 Food and Drink Fair.’⁴⁶

In September 1982 when removals from around Sodwana Bay and Lake St Lucia were taking place, Cheryl Walker expressed her opinion about the possible role of the Black Sash:

The role of outsiders is that of a resource, supportive rather than innovative. There is always the danger of outside groups co-opting, both wittingly and unwittingly, local struggles and deflecting them into channels that do not ultimately benefit the people ... the formulation of democratic principles is far easier than their implementation, particularly in places as dislocated, fractured and divided as most rural communities have become.⁴⁷

In 1981 the Natal Midlands region said farewell to Bunty Biggs who left with her husband to retire in England. She had worked with many organisations, chaired the Black Sash Natal Midlands region from 1977 until the beginning of 1981 and was also a stalwart of the Liberal Party. Maggie Clarke, secretary to the NMBS, wrote:

Black Sash Natal Midlands Region can be grateful for Bunty’s clear thinking and energetic concern in matters as diverse as removals, tours of welfare organizations by schoolchildren, conditions of Swartkop Location and the curfew. Bunty served on the Committee for twelve years, often taking the chair temporarily until she was elected in 1977. Under her chairmanship meetings were never dull; indeed they were often hilarious. She was a vigorous correspondent to the local Press, and her letters on behalf of Sash or in her private capacity were always relevant and telling.⁴⁸

A letter to the press from Maggie Clarke indicates how strongly the region felt about the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Republic of South Africa:

I am writing in support of Mr P.M. Brown (letter February 3), who congratulated Mr L.L. Botha on his resignation from the Royal Agricultural Society on the issue of co-operating with the Republic Festival celebrations.

These festivities are intended to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Republic of South Africa. And which of its achievements are we to laud? The Government is eager to tell us of the improvements in the lot of urban Africans which are to result from Dr Koornhof's new Bills, and yet upon examination these prove to enshrine only more rigorous and more efficient ways of enforcing influx control. Promises are made that no one will be moved from his home against his will – and yet removals continue. Lip-service is paid to the Freedom of the Press – and yet the Post newspapers were banned. These are but a random sample, to add to those cited by Mr Brown, of the more recent 'achievements' of this Republic.

And now the public of Pietermaritzburg wakes up to find that its quaintly named Royal Show (a harmless enough anachronism, that name) has become the 'Republic Festival Show'. The new name is bound to be offensive to the majority of our community, who are Black, any number of whom have already decided to have nothing to do with the Republic Festival. It is too late to change the name again. All we can do is follow the example of Mr L.L. Botha and absent ourselves. I call upon each one of your readers, Black or White, man, woman or child, to ponder deeply whether it is sensitive, or moral, to attend or participate in this renamed Republic Festival Show.⁴⁹

The NMBS delegates to the national conference in Grahamstown reported that a resolution had been adopted, at their suggestion, condemning the Republic Festival.

In the eighties when people in townships were being necklaced, a debate about violence raged in the Black Sash nationally and locally. It was committed to non-violent ways of acting, believing that this could be a positive force for transforming society, whereas violence would beget violence. Kathryn Spink says that 'when the violence debate was at its height, it was hard to appreciate the organization's reluctance to condemn the horror of the necklacings as clearly and as frequently as it so consistently condemned the violence of the repressive state'.⁵⁰ Not all Black Sash members at a national level agreed with this lack of condemnation, however. Marie Dyer's letter to some extent clarified the thinking of many of the members of the Natal Midlands region:

In Barbara Waite's heartfelt and moving letter (*Sash*, February 1987) she appeals to us to express our outrage and revulsion at, and to condemn utterly, all cruel and savage acts taking place in this country, lest we ourselves become accomplices by default in murder and dementia, and cease to be wholly human. I believe that the implications of this appeal are too far-reaching. They include the proposition that all people who keep silent when any of their compatriots commits a cruel or savage action should be regarded as partners, or participants, or at least sharers of responsibility in that action.

This may be true in a spiritual or philosophical sense. 'No man is an island'. But the Black Sash is a social and political, not a philosophical and spiritual, organization. In the narrower

social and political definitions of ‘accomplices’ and ‘responsibility’ appropriate to our aims, there is one and only one violent group in this country whose members we as citizens are *specifically* involved with, whom we are *actually* accomplices of, whose victims in a real and strict sense, we are *practically* responsible for. And these are the ‘security forces’. We pay their salaries; those of us who are white elect the people who give them their orders, they are accountable to us. No other group – not the ANC, nor Inkatha, nor the ‘comrades’, nor the UDF, nor tribal chiefs, nor people’s courts, nor vigilantes (except if they are agents of the security forces) – are our responsibility in this way; no other group I submit, can legitimately call us their ‘accomplices’, or implicate us ‘by default’ in what they do.

This doesn’t affect the issue of what we *feel* for the victims. We are surely wrenched with pity and horror when any person is necklaced or hacked to death, or any home is destroyed, or any child is shot. And our *feelings* are surely in their turn not affected by our sense that the perpetrators of these evil deeds may be ‘understood’, or that reasons or even excuses may be found for them. Even barbarity has a source: people are not born beasts. They may have been hardened by years of wretchedness and frustration; they may have been brainwashed and brutalized by years of exposure to a corrupt system; they may consider themselves at war where ‘all’s fair’; they may be acting in desperate retaliation for some utterly intolerable injury.

We feel the same *pity* for all their victims; but nevertheless we must feel more *responsibility* for those whose sufferings have been caused by our own agents. I believe, then, that we *have* to feel responsible both for the sufferings and also for the cruel and unjust actions of some people more than others. Furthermore, we are entitled to demand from some people – the security forces – but not from others ... And so our protests, our investigations, our denunciations do belong more properly in one direction than in others; and to direct them really effectively in this way would take all the energy we have.⁵¹

Joan Kerchhoff remembered some of the varied opinions inside the organisation nationally. During the years of political violence some Sash members condemned all violence equally, while others agreed with Dyer. There were also some ‘who were possibly more supportive of Inkatha, than those of us in KwaZulu-Natal’.⁵²

After leaving South Africa Bunty Biggs, a committed Quaker, was drawn into a discussion about the South African armed struggle in an interview conducted in England:

I tend to have to take a long view, but it can also be slightly sort of perfectionist to expect other people who are in a totally different situation to be able to do that. I mean Gandhi led the way in India and was immensely revered by many, including people in England ... But that doesn’t mean to say that one can’t respect and understand when people have to go a different route and it’s no good being holier than thou and saying ‘oh, no, no, you can’t do that, it’s not the perfect way.’ It may not be the perfect way, it may be the only way. What I would say is that if that way is chosen then reconciliation has to be part of the solution in the long term. Without it there’ll just be further disaster.

When asked if at that stage in the 1960s she was opposed to the African National Congress (ANC) armed struggle Bundy's reply was, 'No, I don't think I was.'⁵³ Such was her opinion, one of a great variety within the membership of the NMBS.

In the early 1980s the Black Sash briefly added women's concerns to its political agenda. For many women in the West the right to abortion appeared to be an absolutely necessary condition to exercise their human rights because, apart from abstinence, there had never been a fully reliable method of contraception. In August 1980, the first discussion on abortion took place in the Natal Midlands; a difficult subject with members holding many different views. It took until July 1984 for a national statement to be released from the Black Sash national conference:

There is no consensus in the Black Sash on whether a woman should or should not choose to have an abortion in any particular circumstance. The opinions of our members vary across the whole spectrum of the worldwide debate. As an organization we are unable to say that we are either for or against abortion. However, we are united in believing that it is a moral and ethical issue of a most serious nature and that there should be no legislation that prevents a woman from choosing to do what she feels to be essential in her own particular situation.⁵⁴

The Black Sash nationally was, however, in favour of the abolition of the death penalty and NMBS invited human rights lawyer Les Weinberg to address a members' meeting on capital punishment. Reasons for his opposition were sent to all members:

Why I am opposed to capital punishment:

The main object of punishment is to deter others from committing crimes. There is no evidence that capital punishment has this effect. In fact, there are indications that more murders are committed in countries which have retained the death penalty than in those which have abolished it.

It is believed in many authoritative quarters that acceptance of executions as a form of punishment:— (a) places a 'seal of legality' on murder, (b) encourages 'imitative' crimes.

Capital Punishment (a) provides no opportunity for reformation of the criminal, (b) is irremediable and provides no opportunity for correcting errors, and these have occurred.

Because of the time involved in awaiting execution and the anticipation thereof, it is a form of punishment which is often more savage than the crime itself.

Most civilized countries have abolished executions as a form of punishment.

'Capital punishment is a disgrace to our Society, which its partisans cannot reasonably justify' (Albert Camus).⁵⁵

Events reported in *Sash Magazine* during 1982 included the deaths of Mary Park-Ross and Maimie Corrigan, both stalwarts of the NMBS who had been on the executive committee for many years. They were sorely missed. Following

the death of Corrigan, a letter from the African Art Centre indicated that her children had donated her books to it. They proposed to open their library on Thursday 10 September on the occasion of their annual general meeting at which Archbishop Denis Hurley was due to speak.⁵⁶

In a busy round of talks, Cheryl Walker addressed a meeting about the beginnings of black women's struggles for freedom, and Christopher Merrett, an associate member of NMBS, spoke about South Africa's censorship laws. At a joint meeting with the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, Brian Bishop of Cape Town talked about the Nyanga squatters. Pessa Weinberg, on behalf of NMBS, gave a talk to Women for Peaceful Change Now on 'Things that divide us'. Topics for letters to *The Natal Witness* during the year included the detention of a young journalist who had worked in the Advice Office and the removal of Bishop Desmond Tutu's passport.⁵⁷

Members of the NMBS were encouraged to attend Pietermaritzburg Detainees Support Committee (DESCOM) functions, which often took the form of vigils, evenings of music and poetry, relevant films and extra-mural lectures organised by John Aitchison, head of the Department of Adult Education at the University of Natal. DESCOM was formed in 1982 to monitor detention without trial in the Natal Midlands. This remained a relatively low-key activity until the declaration of the State of Emergency in June 1986 (see chapter 5).

In June 1977 Sheena Duncan had written to the NMBS with a request to find and help a missing detainee:

Adelaide Pholosi who is one of our interpreters here, has a brother who is in detention in terms of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act in Pietermaritzburg. His name is KGWEDI EZEKIEL PHOLOSIS and Adelaide doesn't know which particular jail it is. He has been there for ages and this is not the first time. Do you think one of your members could deliver food to the prison for us? We will pay if you send the bill. We feel so helpless but are informed that food does get delivered sometimes and means a good deal to detainees as an indication that they have not been forgotten.⁵⁸

Detentions affected people from all walks of life, and they were a pernicious form of cruelty and intimidation. Busi (Victoria) Nyide who worked in the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office for 25 years recalled how her son was detained:

Do you remember I told you about Moses Ndlovu [from the union in whose premises Nyide first worked for the Advice Office] and that it was so scary when he was detained? In 1982 my husband came to fetch me from work and when we got near home we saw a string of cars on the road and we thought, my God, what is happening. It was the Special Branch people again, at my place. They were in my bedroom, others in other bedrooms. I got into

my bedroom and saw Dumisani was there and I asked: why are you here? And he said, 'Quiet'. After about 45 minutes they left with Dumisani who was working at the hospital then ... It was another experience.⁵⁹

However,

Detention without trial, apparently a strong weapon in the hands of the state, had a fatal weakness: its sheer injustice extracted a reaction even from some unpoliticised citizens and was guaranteed to elicit an adverse reaction from the international community. Coupled with hunger strikes it ultimately proved a political liability for the government, although the long-term damage to the socio-political fabric of the Natal Midlands, as elsewhere, was considerable.⁶⁰

The death in detention of Neil Aggett on 5 February 1982 was a seminal event in the history of political detainees and had a profound effect on parts of the white community from which Sash membership was drawn. Aggett was a qualified doctor who, as a medical activist, was concerned with health issues in the unions, working with the Food and Canning Workers Union. He died, at his own hand, in a cell in Johannesburg's notorious John Vorster Square police station after solitary confinement then intensive interrogation lasting 60 hours. He was the first (and last) white person to die in detention and as Nalini Naidoo, an activist at that time, pointed out, 'Some white detainees were regarded as ethnic traitors and given a particularly hard time.' Aggett's death 'proved the point made repeatedly at the time, that prolonged detention without trial is a form of psychological torture'.⁶¹

From the 1960s onwards the sports boycott, supported by the non-racial South African Council on Sport (SACOS), caused something of a stir in a sport-mad nation. A sentiment often heard was that sport and politics should not be mixed. Christopher Merrett, an associate member of the NMBS from Pietermaritzburg, wrote an article for *Sash Magazine* in favour of the boycott, and Jill Wentzel, a Right-wing liberal and member of the Johannesburg region of the Black Sash, responded with what she labelled 'a more agonized view'.

In 1982 minister of education, Gerrit Viljoen, attacked SACOS and described it as one of South Africa's 'most violent sport enemies' run by 'fanatical politicians rather than sports administrators'. The government regarded sport in South Africa as 'normal' because it had permitted a relaxation of segregation on sports fields and in clubhouses. This view was quickly adopted by the public, news agencies and more conservative sports administrators. However, a significant proportion of the country's sporting fraternity encapsulated their attitude in the slogan 'no normal sport in an abnormal society'. The argument was that sport cannot be compartmentalised

and isolated from the socio-political conditions in which it is played. As South African society was founded on a fraudulent system of social engineering, no sporting activity could be normal. President of the Natal Cricket Board, Krish Mackerdhuj, summed up:

Free interaction of all human beings in all activities of society on the basis of total equality and opportunity and without regard to the race or racial group to which one may belong would be fundamental. In this sense, the search for societal morality, non-racial sport has a political aim and expresses solidarity with groups like the non-racial trade unions and the Black Sash in their struggle for a free and democratic South Africa.

Merrett ends his article by saying ‘There is little doubt that reviewed in historical perspective decades ahead, the tactics of SACOS will look realistic and its strategy morally defensible.’⁶²

Jill Wentzel disagreed that the slogan ‘No normal sport in an abnormal society’ encapsulated the non-racial attitude. She disapproved of what she saw as an all-or-nothing attitude and believed that this might contribute more to racial polarisation than to the cause of non-racialism. She said, ‘The linking of sport to all the ills of our society has rendered sportsmen of all races powerless to make their own specific contribution to progress.’⁶³ The debate continued when Merrett was given the opportunity to reply to Wentzel’s anguish in the May edition of *Sash Magazine*:

Sportsmen and sportswomen who cannot relate sporting activity to the society in which it is played, and worse, allow themselves to be used for propaganda purposes, are not ‘being driven into the arms of the government’. They belong there in the first place. The inherent racism of most white South Africans, and the paternalistic attitude of their sports bodies and acceptance of the ‘multi-national’ and ‘international’ charade, has bred an understandable intransigence in non-racial circles. In view of the importance of sport to white South Africans (in the sense that the performance of a Springbok team has always been related to assumed superiority and virility, and actual political ascendancy of the ruling group), there can be little doubt that boycotts are tactically correct. The few changes that have taken place owe much to boycotts, nothing to liberal persuasion. Certainly this attitude can be labeled punitive, but given the facts of South African history, it would be arrogant to deny black South Africans one of the few weapons they possess. Recent South African history is littered with the political corpses of those who tried to ‘work for change within the system’.⁶⁴

Wentzel replied:

I did not come to a conclusion adverse to SACOS but raised the question whether all-or-nothing is necessarily the most effective weapon and whether carrot-and-stick tactics do not have a place. I reiterated a few times the fact that white intransigence had virtually ended all hopes of gradual reform. Obviously an answering intransigence is understandable and inevitable. I just don’t see it as a moral obligation; for its consequences are clearly ominous.⁶⁵

The Natal Midlands affiliation to the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), like other Black Sash regions, was related to the extensive use of South African Defence Force (SADF) troops in black townships and in neighbouring states. There were widespread assaults and harassment of township residents and teargas and bullets were often fired at funerals of political opponents. It was strongly felt by members of the Black Sash and the ECC that apartheid was the real reason for the violence in townships and until there was a political solution to the conflict it made no sense to use security forces to play such a repressive role. However, the government detained prominent members of the ECC under section 29 (detention without trial for the purpose of interrogation) of the Internal Security Act and raided the homes of many members across the country, erroneously maintaining that the ECC was a pawn in the hands of the ANC.

After its formation in 1984, the ECC quickly gathered momentum and support from all quarters of the population. Clare Verbeek explained the ECC's motivation:

The ECC is a front of 46 organisations whose opposition to conscription is based on the fundamental belief that individuals should be free to choose whether or not to serve in the South African Defence Force (SADF). The ECC is not affiliated to or taking orders from any other organization. It is the role of the SADF itself which has caused the growing movement against conscription and the increasing commitment of South Africans to building a democratic, just and peaceful future for all.⁶⁶

The police security branch continued to use intimidatory tactics by photographing NMBS protests and taking down names and addresses of all participants. Joan Kerchhoff remembers with some humour a rainy day: 'We were always photographed at the stands. I recall one time when I was standing in Longmarket Street and it was raining and I kept raising the umbrella so that the security policeman trying to photograph me had quite a difficult time.'⁶⁷ Pessa Weinberg, who was chairperson of the NMBS in 1984, reacted in her usual feisty manner when she experienced a more severe form of intimidation:

When I did a stint as chairperson (we all had to do a stint at some time or other) I was called up by the Brigadier (Security Police) for interrogation. That was really quite an experience. I remember going to the tenth floor of the Trust Building in Church Street and arrived there at about 10 o'clock. I didn't really worry about it: I felt very cocooned really because Les [Pessa's husband] had already got Julian von Klemperer and a whole group of lawyers together so if they were going to arrest me, or anything like that, they would be ready to defend me. I think I was hauled over the coals because I wrote a very strong letter to the paper on one occasion about a man in Gauteng who had been arrested without trial, and

then disappeared. You know, that was one of the terrible things they used to do – arrest people without due course to the courts of law. When the Brigadier called me up to his room the first thing he said to me, after being very friendly and offering me tea, was did I know this particular man? ... I said no, I didn't know him. Then I thought the best line of defence is to ask questions yourself, so before he could do anything, I asked the Brigadier, 'How would you like it if your son was taken away and you never knew where he went and you wanted to know where he was? How would you feel if you never saw him again? You were just telling me that you went on holiday with your family over Christmas, how would you have felt if you had never seen your son again? I know how I would have felt if one of my children had been taken away ... and if you purport to be religious and believe in your Christian principles this is not the kind of thing that any government with any civilised attitude towards people would do. That's why I am so angry about this, and I still want to know what has happened to him.' I took the wind out of his sails but it was like a boxing match. I'd give one knock and he would knock me again. Anyway, this went on for about two to three hours. So yes, I was called up from time to time and I remember that particular occasion.⁶⁸

One of the last important actions of this ten-year period was the countrywide vigil focusing attention on what Alan Paton called a 'fatal event'. On 19 June 1913 the Natives Land Act, the first major piece of segregation legislation passed by the Union Parliament, was promulgated. It made it illegal for whites and blacks to purchase land in areas designated for the other racial group. According to Paton, this brought African agriculture to an end. Worse was to come when the National Party government implemented its plans to seize black-owned land, later known as black spots, in declared white areas. Black owners of land had valued the freedom of ownership and could not believe the government would take their sacrosanct title deeds from them. At the seventh session of the Native Representative Council in December 1943, Z.K. Matthews had said: 'You say we must love our land. We love it and we shall always do so. We only hope that it will be made possible by the rulers of this country that we may have some land to love.'

Paton went on to say that the Liberal Party was intimately associated with resistance to black spot removals. He gave as an example the struggle in Charlestown where Abraham Ngwenya bought a house and plot from a white owner in 1911. His purchase was legal and over the years he worked hard to make a life as a blacksmith for himself and his family. He died just before the government was to move him and his family to Buffalo Flats, 64 kilometres from Charlestown and 22 kilometres from Newcastle, the nearest town. Paton asked how 'a government of a state that acknowledges sovereignty of Almighty God could do such a thing, and how a Minister can sleep soundly at

night after ordering such a thing?’ He ended his article saying that it was good to remember such things at the vigil: ‘They must never be forgotten.’⁶⁹

Coverage of the distressing issue of forced removals continued. Peter Brown imagined a tour of the ruins left after families had been removed from black spots and recommended that schools make such trips, just as they visited the historic battlefields of Natal:

My job today is to tell you something about what relocation means in Natal. I thought I would take you on a short tour along a road with which many Transvalers are familiar. That is the old national road, from where it leaves the Transvaal at Volksrust, as far as Ladysmith. The distance is 153 kilometres, just under 100 miles, a good deal less as the crow flies. As we go along I will tell you the story of some of the places you can see from that road, and the story of others that you would see if you made a short detour off it.⁷⁰

His route passes the black spot removals in Charlestown, describing the ‘heaps of rubble’ left when landowners like Abraham Ngwenya were moved to the bare wastes of Buffalo Flats. He describes Madadeni, where some Charlestown people and more landowners from Lennoxton and Fairleigh, suburbs of Newcastle, were relocated saying, ‘Their presence might have been legal but it was offensive to apartheid.’ Leaving Newcastle near the mining village of Ballengeich is Alcockspruit from which black freehold farmers were moved in the 1970s. The next stop is Limehill from where ten freehold farmers were moved in 1968. Steencoalspruit, whose 11 000 tenants were moved to Ekuvukeni, 30 kilometres away, is in ruins, as is Crimen. Matiwane’s Kop, Jonono’s Kop, Lusitania and Driefontein are black freehold areas still occupied, but under threat. A poignant description of Ezakheni, visited by NMBS member Beth Franklin, is included in the article:

People were relocated here from many other areas in and around Ladysmith. The present population (1983) is 47,000, about 10,000 greater than the population of Ladysmith itself. More than 10 years ago when the first families arrived they were allotted a stand on which stood a tin toilet and a tin house, 3 x 3.5 metres. The ‘temporary’ dwellings still stand as the ground was found to be unsuitable for the traditional mud houses and the people were too poor to be able to erect habitable dwellings. The schools are overcrowded and crime is rampant.⁷¹

ENDNOTES

- 1 The history of the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office is dealt with in chapters 7–10.
- 2 *Race Relations Survey (RRS)* 1982: 579. This referred to the overlapping responsibilities of the province of Natal and the homeland of KwaZulu.
- 3 *Natal Witness (NW)* 8 February 1975.

- 4 Fleur Webb interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 July 2011: 4.
- 5 H.D. White to Black Sash, letter dated 21 July 1975.
- 6 Randolph Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party 1953–1968* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997): 92.
- 7 *Sash Magazine (SM)* 18(5) May 1976: 32.
- 8 Else Schreiner interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 1995: 32.
- 9 Else Schreiner interview: 28.
- 10 Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth & Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 2001): Introduction.
- 11 B. Cocker, letter dated 19 June 1986.
- 12 Desmond Ducasse, letter dated 6 June 1986.
- 13 *NW* 5 November 1976.
- 14 *NW* 29 November 1976.
- 15 NMBS circular, September 1976.
- 16 *SM* 18(5) May 1976: 33.
- 17 A.L. Boraine, letter dated 19 April 1977.
- 18 Sheena Duncan, newsletter to members, September 1977.
- 19 This was a long time before her involvement in criminal activity became a scandal. In 1991 she was convicted of kidnapping related to the murder of Stompie Moeketsi (James Seipei) and her six-year prison sentence was reduced to a fine on appeal. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission found her responsible by acts of commission and omission of gross violations of human rights. In 2003 she was found guilty of fraud (43 counts) and theft (25). The theft verdict was overturned, but a suspended sentence of three-and-a-half years in prison was upheld for fraud.
- 20 Newsletter to NMBS members, July 1977.
- 21 Winnie Mandela, letter to Maimie Corrigan, date unknown.
- 22 Sheena Duncan, letters dated 12 August and 8 September 1977.
- 23 *SM* 20(1) May 1978: 30.
- 24 *NW* 16 September 1977.
- 25 *NW* 20 October 1977.
- 26 Sheena Duncan, letter dated October 1977.
- 27 *NW* 25 October 1977.
- 28 Joyce Harris, letter, date unknown.
- 29 *RRS* 1978: 46. It re-opened in May 1982 (*RRS* 1982: 578).
- 30 Joe Alfes, 'Background to squatters: 1. Pietermaritzburg: the Barracks – an urban slum' *Reality* 9(2) 1977: 10–13.
- 31 *SM* 20(1) May 1978: 30.
- 32 Department of Plural Relations and Development, letter dated May 1979.
- 33 Sheena Duncan, undated letter.
- 34 Sheena Duncan, letter to Cheryl Walker, dated 14 October 1980.
- 35 *SM* 19(1) May 1977: 31.
- 36 Nalini Naidoo interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 August, 2013: 4.
- 37 *SM* 21(1) May 1979: 30.
- 38 Maimie Corrigan, letter dated November 1979.

- 39 Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013): 148.
- 40 'Resolutions adopted at 1980 conference' *SM* 22(1) May 1980: 7.
- 41 Sandra Lupton, undated letter.
- 42 *NW* 31 December 1976.
- 43 Nalini Naidoo interview: 3.
- 44 Marie Dyer interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 4 August 1995: 21–22.
- 45 Cheryl Walker, 'Weenen and farm labour removals' *SM* 21(4) February 1980: 18.
- 46 Neil Alcock and Creina Alcock, 'Love spells food' *SM* 24(4) January 1982: 24.
- 47 Cheryl Walker, 'Forced removals in Natal' *SM* 25(3) November 1982: 20. Later, in 1984, although not related to the work of the Black Sash, resistance to removals paid off when 12 000 black people at St Wendolins were allowed to stay. This area, near Mariannhill between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, had been divided into plots and sold to Catholic Church members between 1930 and 1950, but in 1966 it was proclaimed white under the Group Areas Act. Landowners formed a committee and ignored notices of eviction, but demolition of houses began in 1980. These ceased after representations and submissions to the Group Areas Board, which eventually re-zoned the area back to its original status. It was thought that this happened largely because of the huge amounts of compensation that would have been due to people who owned freehold title to their properties.
- 48 *SM* 24(2) August 1981: 20.
- 49 M.J. Clarke, letter, *NW* 7 February 1981.
- 50 Kathryn Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa* (London: Methuen, 1991): 202.
- 51 Marie Dyer, 'The Black Sash and violence: the debate continues' *SM* 30(1) May 1987: 40.
- 52 Joan Kerchhoff interviewed by Lorenza Cowling, Pietermaritzburg, 30 August 2010: 3.
- 53 Buntz Biggs interviewed by Pat Merrett, Leonard Stanley, Gloucestershire, 25 August 1996: 25.
- 54 *Black Sash Policy and Procedure Manual*: 18.
- 55 Occasional newsletter, supplement, 8 August 1982.
- 56 African Art Centre, letter dated 2 September 1981. Maimie Corrigan, like many Sash members, had been a staunch member of the Liberal Party. Unlike most, she had started her political life as a Communist Party of South Africa member. An obituary described her as an uncompromisingly political person (Peter Brown, 'Maimie Corrigan' *Reality* 13(4) 1981: 16).
- 57 *SM* 25(2) August 1982: 22. The name of the journalist is not known.
- 58 Sheena Duncan, letter dated 3 June 1977.
- 59 Busi Nyide interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 2 August 2005: 5.
- 60 Christopher Merrett, 'Emergency of the state: detention without trial in Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands, 1986–90' *Natalia* 41 (December 2011): 29.
- 61 Christopher Merrett, 'Honesty killed him' *Witness* 7 October 2013; Beverley Naidoo, *Death of an Idealist: In Search of Neil Aggett* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2012).
- 62 Christopher Merrett, 'Sports boycott: playing the game: some non-racial viewpoints on sport in South Africa' *SM* 25(4) February 1983: 10, 12.
- 63 Jill Wentzel, 'Sports boycott: a more agonized viewpoint' *SM* 25(4) February 1983: 12.
- 64 Christopher Merrett, 'Non-racial sport' *SM* 26(1) May 1983: 22.

- 65 Jill Wentzel, 'Non-racial sport' *SM* 26(1) May 1983: 22.
- 66 Clare Verbeek, 'End Conscription Campaign' *SM* 28(3) November 1985: 26.
- 67 Joan Kerchhoff interview: 2.
- 68 Pessa Weinberg interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 8 July 2010: 4.
- 69 Alan Paton, 'Fatal event' *SM* 26(2) August 1983: 19–20.
- 70 Peter Brown, 'Natal's historic ruins' *SM* 26(3) November 1983: 12. For a comprehensive survey see Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa: Natal* (Cape Town: SPP, 1983; v.4 of the SPP report).
- 71 Brown, 'Natal's historic ruins': 13.

5

INTENSIFIED OPPRESSION: THE FOURTH DECADE, 1985–1994, PART 1

IN THE EIGHTIES South Africa was affected by draconian repression culminating in four states of emergency starting on 12 June 1986 and ending on 8 June 1990, except in Natal where emergency regulations remained in force until 18 October of that year.¹ The National Party government, dominated by the National Security Management System, made a last attempt to crush dissent by restricting organisations, detaining without trial thousands of people, hampering the press and generally tightening security. However, unbeknown to most of the population, secret negotiations were taking place and the very different nineties heralded multi-party talks, the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), the end of apartheid, and the release of Nelson Mandela and other long-term political prisoners.² Finally, the first democratic elections were held on 27 April 1994 and the Government of National Unity was installed with Nelson Mandela as President.

From the early eighties Natal entered a period of escalating violence climaxing in the short Seven Day War of 1990. One source of this violence was the link between state security and Inkatha: ‘Many detainees described how their original arrests were the result of joint Inkatha and police operations in which they were tracked down, assaulted and interrogated by vigilantes before being detained.’³

With violence increasing in intensity, Black Sash members were at loss. In a letter to all members, national president Sheena Duncan wrote:

In all the regions of the Black Sash there is anxiety, uncertainty and unhappiness about the terrible violence in our country at the present time. We find ourselves withdrawing from words like ‘comrades’, ‘progressive’ and even ‘democratic’ because there is a jargon in current use which reflects a new kind of ideology. Like the misuse of words by the National Party government for so many years it leads us to wonder whether words mean anything at all any more or whether words just mean what the user wants them to mean. We have now entered a period when all the violence in our society can no longer be attributed almost entirely to the State and its agents. People are being killed and tortured every day. Homes are being burnt down every day and children are sometimes killed or injured in these attacks. Most of the time, we do not know who is committing these atrocities. Sometimes we think

we know but we have no evidence to support our interpretations. We don't know how to respond to all this. We have warned for years about the inevitability of violent conflict but now that it is upon us we don't know what to do about it.⁴

Even in the seemingly dire circumstances of 1985 the Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) continued to organise meetings in an attempt to keep members, and sometimes the public, informed. Interestingly, in these circumstances new members continued to be attracted to the organisation. Paula Krynauw was one of them:

I joined in the early or mid-eighties because of Pat Merrett. Pat and Christopher were friends, and hearing everything that Pat was doing made me realise that Sash offered an opportunity for me to join those who were taking a stand. What appealed to me immensely about Sash was, of course, that it was a women's organisation. By then I had become more tuned to women's rights, as well as the political rights of people, and Sash was just perfect for that. It was a direct result of Pat Merrett that I joined Sash.⁵

Two public meetings were arranged in 1985. The first, in June, was addressed by Paul David, one of those who had sought asylum in the British Consulate in Durban, and designed to give people, including NMBS members, some understanding of what the United Democratic Front (UDF) stood for. The UDF was the most important anti-apartheid organisation formed in the 1980s: a coalition of civic, church, student, worker, sport and other organisations, all non-racist and anti-apartheid, initially established to oppose the tricameral parliament under the slogan 'UDF unites, apartheid divides'. It was launched in Natal in May 1983, in the Transvaal in June and the Cape Province in July.⁶ This mass democratic movement attracted a huge following throughout South Africa, and prominent and charismatic leaders like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reverend Allan Boesak, Albertina Sisulu and Helen Joseph. Early in its life the UDF adopted the Freedom Charter, a statement of aims for a free South Africa and the basis for a democratic constitution. Although the UDF and ANC shared this charter, the UDF was never formally attached to the ANC and did not participate in the armed struggle.

At an executive meeting in February 1985 Pat Merrett proposed that affiliation to the UDF should again be discussed at the next Black Sash national conference, adding that most NMBS members felt very strongly that the Black Sash should be affiliated.⁷ However, Jenny Bowen, who worked in the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office in 1986, had a slightly different perception of the affiliation issue. She said that when she came to Pietermaritzburg the region was at the height of the conflict between Inkatha and the UDF and gathered that working with UDF structures was still quite a divisive thing

among members.⁸ One of the main arguments against affiliation to other organisations was that members felt that an important strength of the Black Sash was its total independence.

The second public meeting, held in collaboration with the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) in August, featured Francis Wilson who spoke about the Carnegie Conference on Poverty. This major gathering at the University of Cape Town in April 1984 was organised by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit, headed by Wilson. Norman Bromberger described the two major views that caused some initial consternation. First, a total recasting of the socio-economic and political system in the country was called for, confirmed by the evident failure of the existing dispensation to cope with poverty. Second, there was a view that reduction of poverty might actually be underway in the least likely places.⁹

In an interview, Wilson was asked how he would define poverty. He answered that what emerged from the Carnegie Inquiry was that poverty could not be reduced to a single number, any more than illness can be reduced to a temperature: 'In South Africa today, two-thirds of families are living below the minimum level, it's a very serious fact but it doesn't help you in terms of strategies.'¹⁰ He went on to say that the first part of the book written by him and Mamphela Ramphele, one of the major thrusts of the inquiry, was to tell in real detail what poverty meant to people.¹¹

Speakers at member meetings during this period included national chairperson Sheena Duncan, who visited Natal in November 1985 and talked to members about forced removals; followed by David Walwyn of the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA). He told members about the 37 families who, after the property was sold, were being moved from Stendahl Mission near Weenen to Waaihoek, a resettlement camp situated near Ladysmith. In October, Pessa Weinberg, who was NMBS chairperson at the time, had spoken about detentions to a National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) meeting in Pietermaritzburg.¹²

Before the declaration of the June 1986 Emergency, detention without trial in Natal took place in terms of the Internal Security Act and it was hard to monitor the welfare of those detained. A protest against detentions was held in the grounds of the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity on 29 November 1985. The cathedral bells rang every 15 minutes and many people other than NMBS members joined the protest. The security police were out in full force taking photographs and recording vehicle number plates, but it was assumed that

the cathedral precincts would give protesters some protection. Nobody was arrested.¹³

Because there was so much for which the executive committee of the NMBS was responsible, it was decided in 1986 to form three sub-committees to take some of the pressure off the executive and report back on their various activities at regular meetings. These sub-committees constituted the Advice Office, represented by Judith Crouch and Juliet Armstrong since Pat Merrett had taken brief leave of absence due to ill health; AFRA represented by Marie Dyer; and a Community Liaison Group represented by Lorenza Cowling and Paula Krynauw.¹⁴ Marie Dyer reported to the November meeting that Cherryl Walker had left AFRA and Richard Clacey had been employed as a fieldworker; with the less cheerful news that farm evictions in Northern Natal continued apace.¹⁵

The intensity of the national crisis encouraged a spate of meetings with prominent speakers in 1986, starting in February when Laurie Nathan of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) discussed an idea for a Working for Peace Campaign to be launched in April. The April ECC campaign was a success with approximately sixty volunteers taking part. Some NMBS members joined the ECC by working at Compensation Farm to build a bridge and plant sedge trees, while others painted murals and built a sand pit at Hilltops, a children's home. Some new tricycles were built from old parts. On 4 June the weekly Pietermaritzburg campus University Lecture was delivered by ECC leader, Janet Cherry. The June State of Emergency set the ECC back considerably with further harassment and yet more detentions, including that of Cherry.¹⁶

Other speakers during the year included Tony Mathews, a law professor at the University of Natal, who on 12 February talked about the background to emergency legislation. It appeared that it was still possible to criticise and protest against the law itself. On 24 May 1986, a panel consisting of Jacques Boule (ECC), Colin Gardner (UDF) and Pierre Cronje (Progressive Federal Party) led a lunchtime public meeting to discuss the raids into neighbouring territories. Atrocities like the assassination in 1982 of Ruth First, who lived in exile in Mozambique, were well known, and illustrated the capabilities of the South African Defence Force (SADF). However, it was a long time before the severe damage wrought by South Africa in these territories was fully understood.¹⁷ At a general meeting of NMBS on 19 July 1986, Christopher Merrett talked about detentions, a hot topic. On 31 July, Peter Rutsch of the Legal Resources Centre in Pietermaritzburg talked on the regulations pertaining to influx control.¹⁸ Mary Burton, the national president, visited the

region on 28 August and spoke to members about the Black Sash under State of Emergency regulations.¹⁹ On 20 November, Margaret Nash from Cape Town Black Sash talked on her ideas about national reconstruction, suggesting economic, as distinct from political, injustices as subjects for the attention of Sash members. A meeting led by Fidela Fouché was the activity for Human Rights Day, 10 December, when the Free the Children Campaign was launched with the sale of stickers and Christmas cards. On the same day there was a candlelit vigil in Church Street to remind people that those in detention could not be with their families.

The national Free the Children campaign was taken up by the NMBS with a vengeance, but distressingly there was really little, apart from protest, for members of Black Sash to do. Paula Krynauw commented on this work:

The Free the Children campaign was the most important work that I remember, the postcards, the little T shirt stickers which were absolutely emblematic. We still have them stuck on things. We stuck them to our children's school bags. We in 'Maritzburg, Midlands, pushed it because it was something we could really get involved with. The prisons had hundreds of actual children, and we are not talking about borderline 17 or 18 year olds. It was recorded that 9, 10 and 11 year olds were in prison with adults and it was for those children that we were saying 'free the children'.²⁰



Free the Children sticker

Marie Dyer, the constant letter writer for the NMBS, added to the campaign by writing to the press. Her letter was headed 'Persecution of children':

White South Africans often feel aggrieved that in this brutal and violent world our own regime is singled out among all other tyrannies for general condemnation ... But lately that has been an aspect of South African oppression that in itself seems not to be exceeded or matched in other regimes that white South Africans loudly condemn. I refer to the deliberate campaign against children, which was intensified during the state of emergency and is still continuing. The state of emergency is officially over; but children in many places continue to be the specific targets of official persecution and harassment. Furthermore, the damage inflicted by their experiences will remain with them – and us – for the rest of their lives. The Black Sash proposes to observe June 1, this year, as a national children's day when South Africans will be asked to consider the nature and implications of these events. In tolerating them our 'Western Christian' society has surely lost its claim to being ordinarily civilized.²¹

Local publications came into focus again when the October committee meeting reported that the booklet *This Is Your City*, first published in 1975, was to be updated and NMBS member Kerry Harris agreed to write the introduction, with other members doing the research. In October 1986, the NMBS put together and distributed a fact sheet pertaining to children in crisis. It talked about normal societies nurturing and protecting children, while in South Africa children were being detained, and even tortured. According to the Detainees Parents Support Committee, the shocking fact that of the approximately 22 000 people detained, 42% were children led to the question: 'Is this a matter we can afford to ignore?'²² A quotation from *The Natal Witness* of 15 October 1986 was included in the fact sheet:

The kind of treatment to which children are subjected by authorities is utterly reprehensible, totally unacceptable and indiscriminately applied, irrespective of any possible guilt. The result could be – unless immediate action is taken to defuse anger – people who have been so brutalised by brutality and by escalating violence that the damage may well be irreparable.

The NMBS became involved when fares were increased in Pietermaritzburg in May 1986, resulting in angry community members stoning buses. On behalf of the NMBS, Marie Dyer met representatives from organisations in Edendale, the largest local township, to select a group to visit the City Council, which owned the buses, and ask that no increase of fares be implemented. The delegation met George Hitchens and another official of the Pietermaritzburg municipality who promised to respond within two weeks.²³ However, meetings between the municipality and the community petered out, although there was one positive outcome: black pensioners were given permission to travel free of charge.²⁴

Just before the Emergency was declared in June 1986 two protest stands were held. The first, in April, highlighted the SADF raids into Zimbabwe and Botswana; and the second, in June, was against the Public Safety Amendment Bill, which allowed for any district to be declared an unrest area by the minister of law and order, thus attempting to avoid the negative consequences of and publicity from declaring a national State of Emergency. In both cases names and addresses of participants in the protest were taken down by security police.²⁵

On 6 June 1986, the local newspaper carried a huge advertisement headed ‘DON’T SAY YOU DIDN’T KNOW IT WAS HAPPENING’. This had been placed by the NMBS along with various progressive organisations and included a list of two hundred names, individual and organisational, who had paid for the advertisement and wished to be associated with its contents. It went on to list the consequences of proposed amendments to the Public Safety and Internal Security Acts:

1. People Can Disappear. The names of people detained can be withheld for lengthy periods.
2. Period of Preventative Detention Extended. Police officers above the rank of Lieutenant Colonel may extend the period of detention from the present 14 days.
3. News Coverage Can Be Stopped. The minister of law and order may curtail press coverage of any police or South African Defence Force actions.
4. Police Can Act Without Fear of Prosecution. It will be practically impossible to sue the police, even if they act unlawfully.

REMEMBER: 3 681 children were detained during the period 21.7.85 to 7.3.86.

18 966 people were arrested for unrest-related offences last year.

1 000 (at least) people have died at the hands of the police during the past 19 months.

14 (at least) people have died in detention in the last year.²⁶

In March 1986, Fidela Fouché and other members of NMBS had recently been to the national Black Sash conference in Port Elizabeth where repression was prevalent, and news that the Black Sash in the Eastern Cape had been infiltrated by spies was on everyone’s mind. Three months after this conference a fraught meeting took place in Pietermaritzburg, described by Paula Krynauw:

The night [after] the 1986 State of Emergency was declared [that is, Friday 12 June], we had a meeting at Pat Dunne’s house. I can almost conjure up the feeling of the incredibly sombre mood that we all gathered under and it is probably the only time that I experienced distrustful, almost paranoid, behaviour from some of the members of Sash. We had, in the past, always felt very easy with each other, but on that night people were looking at others and thinking: is it possible that she doesn’t have the best intentions of Sash at heart? It was a very, very un-nerving meeting. Then a strange person arrived, one that none of us knew,

and we all thought: why is this woman here? She had not been introduced to us properly, we didn't know who had told her about the meeting, we didn't know who she was, and we were almost afraid. We all sat around in a circle quite politely talking about nothing much and drinking tea, and it was totally different to any other meeting. We had expected to get a report from the Eastern Cape which was a very repressed area and Black Sash there was doing a lot of work exposing children in prisons. Due to the stranger, the report back was withheld. I always felt the biggest thing we did was to gather information, record information, and make that information freely available. That night we did none of that. We relied on people to record what was being done because the government worked by not letting people know what was going on in their own country and that included everyone, blacks, whites, educated, uneducated. The idea was to keep you in ignorance and they could get away with a lot.²⁷

The stranger Krynauw describes was Yvonne Spain who had been nominated by a member, Bobby Keal, but her acceptance and introduction had not taken place before this meeting. She certainly was not a spy, became a very loyal and useful member of the NMBS, and remembers this occasion with some humour.

The third State of Emergency, which lasted from 12 June 1986 to 11 June 1987, elicited a letter from the new national president, Mary Burton, giving details of Black Sash members who had been detained. In Pietermaritzburg there were none except associate member Peter Kerchhoff and Advice Office volunteer Gaye Spiller, both employed by PACSA.

For the past two months, a state of emergency has been in force throughout the country. Like other organisations, we have been affected by the regulations issued and by action taken against us. A number of our members have been detained and some are still in detention at the time of writing. You will have read in the press that Annica van Gylswyk, chairman of the Pretoria branch, after weeks of detention was obliged to leave the country [for Sweden]. We are sad and angry at their suffering, and proud of their courage. We pay tribute to Annica and to Ann Burroughs, Louise Vale and Priscilla Hall (all three from Grahamstown), Sandy Stewart of Port Elizabeth, Peter Kerchhoff of Pietermaritzburg and Gay Spiller who was released, Gaby Shapiro of Cape Town (released) and Gill de Vlieg, Joy Harnden, Liz Kistner and Jane Smallbones – all of Johannesburg and all now released. We remember thousands of those, known and unknown to us, who are also held in terms of the state of emergency or of security legislation.²⁸

At this time there was some orchestrated harassment directed at family and friends of Pietermaritzburg detainees. It was particularly marked on 16 June 1986, Soweto Day, when the families of two detainees, Joe Vawda and Peter Kerchhoff, received hoax phone calls claiming they had been admitted to hospital with heart attacks.²⁹ Joan Kerchhoff recalled this event:

I got this phone call saying that Peter was in the ICU at Grey's [hospital] and a young student, Richard Matthews, who happened to be at the house rushed me across to Grey's and, of course, they knew nothing. From the matron's office I phoned Brigadier Beukes [Security Police] and I said, 'Can you please tell me if my husband is alright, because I had a call which supposedly came from the police saying that he was in ICU, and I don't know where he is.' So Beukes, whether he knew or whether he didn't know, said 'I'm not sure, but I'll find out.' He went off for a little while and when he came back to the phone said, 'Your husband is well.' He went on to say, 'That call was not the truth and somebody was playing games.' So I thanked him, but I just didn't know how much he knew. I had this constant feeling of being under surveillance and harassed by the Security Police.³⁰

There was a close relationship between NMBS and the local Detainees Support Committee (DESCOM): Marie Dyer was a member of the committee, as were associate members Peter Kerchhoff, Colin Gardner and Christopher Merrett. Monitoring of detentions grew increasingly difficult as the size of the detainee population grew in 1987 and 1988, conditions in New Prison deteriorated, and detainees were moved about between police stations and the prison, thus making the whereabouts of individuals hard to track.³¹

Members were often encouraged to support the activities of other anti-apartheid organisations and the November minutes recorded a request to do this for the newly formed Pietermaritzburg Democratic Association (PDA), started by prominent local people: Marie Dyer, Simon Burton, Colin Gardner and Ruth Underwood. The PDA arranged a cultural event at the University Club on 7 November, which was attended by many NMBS members who attested to the fact that not all political occasions were gloomy.³²

Believing that replica machine guns, pistols and similar toys encouraged violence in children, the NMBS decided to join the ECC in a campaign against giving war toys for Christmas. During December 1986, NMBS members conducted a survey to try to establish the views of shoppers and shop assistants on war toys with the interesting result that significant numbers expressed disquiet about their encouragement of violence. The NMBS readily joined the Progressive Federal Party and ECC in a campaign to display posters, distribute pamphlets, and sell T-shirts printed with the slogan 'Don't teach children violence'.³³ As violence increased, it was necessary to keep members as informed as possible, which Marie Dyer, chairperson at the time, tried to do in the 1987 annual report:

During 1987 Pietermaritzburg became one of the most violent regions in the Republic. The official figures for deaths in the townships for 1987 (261) are believed to be very conservative by local progressive organisations who are attempting to monitor the violence. PACSA has produced the following statistics: deaths in 1987 = 291; for 1 January 1988

to 31 January 1988 = 110. Residents in townships report that homes are being burnt and families are being harassed every night. It appears that hundreds of residents have sent their children to other areas of Natal/KwaZulu for safety. The South African Police have been massively deployed in these areas but reports of their activities are mixed and there are accusations of arbitrary arrests.

The origins of the violence seem to lie in attempts by Inkatha to recruit members by force and to take violent action against UDF and COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Union] activists who threaten Inkatha and UWUSA's [United Workers Union of South Africa] hold over the local population and labour force. The former groups began to retaliate. But it is now recognised that there are many anti-Inkatha elements which are not affiliated to the loosely organised UDF, as well as criminals, operating under the umbrella of politically motivated violence. The diminishing resources in the region – schools, employment, housing, etc. – also seem to have provoked much of the brutality and violence.

Informed sources therefore hold out little hope for the UDF-Inkatha peace talks which are being held under the auspices of the local Chamber of Commerce.³⁴

This murderous township violence, with police playing an ambiguous role, proved a challenge for the NMBS because it was difficult to investigate thoroughly the unrest and make it public. Facts were hard to verify.

Sudden and unexpected detentions continued. At a member meeting in January 1987 Jennifer Verbeek reported that her daughter Clare had been in detention in Johannesburg since 2 December, presumably because of her ECC work. She described conditions at John Vorster Square police station as disastrous, but a bit better at Diepkloof prison where Clare had been moved. She expressed her concern for all detainees.

At the same meeting, Pat Merrett, once again convening the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office, reported that a motivation for another employee had been sent to Sheena Duncan, who was not very enthusiastic about the idea (see chapter 7). Marie Dyer, on behalf of AFRA, reported a steady stream of forced removals in the Weenen district, threatened evictions from land allocated to game reserves by the KwaZulu government, and the destruction of more than one hundred squatters' shacks by municipal officials on vacant land adjoining Northdale in Pietermaritzburg.³⁵

The very important issue of the KwaZulu Indaba was addressed by Gerry Maré at a member meeting on 30 July 1987 and a video was screened. A short resume of his talk was made:

1. Background – the Indaba emerged from two earlier developments: the 1984 Ulundi Accord in which KwaZulu and the Natal Provincial Administration laid down a basis for the joint administration of Natal; and the move towards a Joint Executive Authority for such administration. Invitations for the Indaba were sent out in February 1986.

Participants were made up of political parties, economic groups, administrative bodies and a miscellaneous group of religious organisations, women's organisations, etc.

2. Critique of the process – nine organisations refused the invitation on the basis of a rejection of the Indaba's process. This process was regarded by left-wing organisations, including the ANC and UDF, as undemocratic; there was no participation in deciding who should be invited; representation was not based on the size of participating organisations; there was no provision for delegates to report back to their membership before voting on specific issues; the whole notion of a Natal solution reinforced fragmentation.
3. Critique of its proposals – the Indaba proposals themselves contain serious flaws, which Maré mentioned briefly. Amongst the most important are the following: the proposals' protection of minority rights is undemocratic; the Bill of Rights offers little protection against state infringement of individual rights and while it models itself on the United Nations Bill of Rights, it has dropped all the latter's welfare provisions; the proposed equalisation of services is totally unrealistic.

Maré concluded by stressing the dangerous implications of a regional solution for Natal heavily based on the political ambitions of Inkatha.³⁶

In November 1987, the NMBS circulated a fact sheet on the background, context and proposals of the Indaba, including their own principles, such as genuine democracy involving the participation of all people and the belief that a national solution was necessary to dismantle apartheid. Later, a letter jointly written by Paula Krynauw, Joan Kerchhoff and Marie Dyer to the press expressed concern at the low level of response to the Indaba fact sheet and the odd error of portraying Jane Raphaely, editor of *Cosmopolitan*, as a member or the organisation:

We were pleased with the publicity given in *The Witness* to the Black Sash pamphlet factsheet on the KwaNatal Indaba, since our intention was to encourage public debate on this very significant matter – debate which up to now has been rather discouraged by the sheer scale of the Indaba's marketing campaign, and also by a tendency amongst some Indaba supporters to regard the proposals as sacrosanct and criticism of them as sinister.

The factsheet is, as you reported, a position statement, issued by the executive committee of the Natal Midlands Region of the Black Sash. It was preceded by two general meetings of the members of the region, in which aspects of the Indaba were discussed and the Indaba's own video was shown.

We are shocked, however, by the low level of the response in *The Witness* on November 27. We had hoped to elicit some open and public reply to the content of our pamphlet. The issues raised in it are important ones. They could not be usefully addressed in an article whose main feature seemed to be a picture of Jane Raphaely. She holds no executive position in Black Sash, is not a member of the Natal Midlands Region and informs us that she has never seen the pamphlet.³⁷

The editor of *The Natal Witness* quickly apologised for incorrectly quoting Raphaely as a Black Sash member.³⁸

Other talks to members were given by Mike Sutcliffe on Inkatha and township violence; Peter Kerchhoff on the Pietermaritzburg situation; and Johan Krynauw and Sarah Burns on the Five Freedoms Forum (FFF), an alliance of white anti-apartheid organisations launched in Johannesburg in March 1987. In a letter to the chair of the NMBS, Johan Krynauw explained that the purpose of the FFF was to encourage democratic organisations in South Africa to co-operate along a broad political front to oppose apartheid effectively and to share resources. How this would be implemented was open to discussion.

In an attempt to help members get to know each other better, on 9 June 1987 an informal cheese and wine function was held at Marie Dyer's house. Paula Krynauw, now chairing the NMBS, talked about protest stands; Marie Dyer about publicity, including letters to the press; Fidela Fouché and Didi Stevens about Black Sash projects; Pat Merrett and Jenny Bowen about the work of the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office; Mary Kleinenberg about *Sash Magazine*; and Kerry Harris about small-scale fundraising. It was stressed that help was needed in all these areas. It is worth noting that at a committee meeting following this event the first call was made for the region to use gender-free language in all NMBS communications. The evening was not entirely taken up with speeches. Members enjoyed the gathering and expressed a desire for more events of this nature, much-needed light relief from the fairly relentless work of monitoring and protesting.³⁹

There were two protest stands during this period: protesters stood singly with a monitor because group stands were prohibited under State of Emergency regulations. On Saturday 9 May 1987 (Mothers' Day) a relay stand, lasting four hours, took place opposite the City Hall with a poster reading 'Tomorrow is Mothers' Day. *All* children should be at home'. Some people felt that the wording on the poster was too obscure for people to make the connection with children in detention. Most of the comments from people walking past were ones of encouragement.⁴⁰ In August 1987 the Royal Agricultural Society Show chose as its theme the 75th anniversary of the South African Defence Force. Members of the NMBS opposed this militarisation of the event by protesting at all entrances to the showgrounds on the opening day. Inside, Casspirs and other lethal-looking weapons were on display, with children being encouraged to play on them. Posters read: 'Cattle shows, not Casspir shows' and 'Don't put violence in our show'.⁴¹ Comments from the public about this stand were

not encouraging, suggesting a warped understanding of patriotism that was encouraged by the regime.

Then, in September 1987, Jenny Schreiner, daughter of the well-known member of NMBS, Else, was detained under section 29 of the Internal Security Act. Else Schreiner describes her feelings, and the law, when this happened:

That morning when that appalling voice on the phone said ‘Mrs Schreiner, we are phoning to tell you that we have detained your daughter Jennifer, under section 29’. That was an almost unhandlable shock. Section 29 is solitary confinement for the purpose of interrogation. And it is, was, in the first instance for six months but it could be extended if the security police could convince the minister that they had reason to believe that this person had information which they needed and was not co-operating, it could be extended and extended and extended. Solitary confinement was applied to those people and Jenny was not the first, by any means. I know this happened to thousands of other families: it meant no communication with your family or your friends and no letters; it meant no reading material, nothing to occupy your hours. It meant that the only contacts you had in the time that you were detained, until the end of that detention, was the security police and its minions. You were visited, or supposed to be visited, by a magistrate, or an inspector of detainees: she was visited by an inspector of detainees who was totally uninterested in her condition. She was visited by the various people that the law says must visit as a safeguard for the detainee. It didn’t help her at all. The interrogation and the psychological torture, and the physical torture, and the threats of further physical torture got so bad that in January [1988] she tried to commit suicide. I don’t know why, but we were allowed to visit her in hospital.⁴²

On behalf of the NMBS Paula Krynauw wrote a letter to the Schreiners saying, ‘We will be thinking of you as a family and will be asking for Jenny’s immediate release. We hope that you will contact us if there is any further specific action you would like us to take.’⁴³ Else Schreiner’s reply dated 13 November 1987 said that the support and concern of Sash was appreciated. She added that the family trusted in Jenny and believed in her strength.⁴⁴

Along with thirteen others, Jenny Schreiner was eventually charged with terrorism. Her imprisonment in Pollsmoor Prison lasted for three years, during which time her parents were given one contact visit. Her mother went on to say: ‘I don’t think any of us will ever understand the depths of the traumas that are produced in the prisoners and in the families and how many thousands of people there are all over this country who have been traumatised to that extent, and greater. People whose children, husbands, wives, died in detention. It’s an appalling history.’⁴⁵

In November 1987, Martin Wittenberg, son of Monika, a member of the NMBS who worked for PACSA, was detained and released after six days, but in February 1988 he was re-detained.⁴⁶ The fourth State of Emergency

had begun in June 1987 and later that year the NMBS committee decided to apply for permission to hold group stands as opposed to the 'single person not in view of another protestor' type stand that had been legally possible. After a fairly lengthy exchange of correspondence with the chief magistrate for Pietermaritzburg, NMBS made history:

On Saturday 29 August, 1987 the Natal Midlands Region held a group stand to protest against the presence of the South African Defence Force in Namibia. Twelve of us stood together with placards for the first time since the clamp-down on public gatherings. And it was perfectly legal! We applied to the chief magistrate for permission and after giving a written assurance that it was not our intention to 'incite the public', we were given permission to stand together. The stand was videotaped by the police and participants were also photographed. Plain clothes and uniformed police kept a constant watch on us but they could not prevent our message getting across to the public.⁴⁷

In a letter to *The Witness* written to pay tribute to Cecil Dicks after his death in 2011, Mary Kleinenberg wrote:

The Chief Magistrate in Pietermaritzburg, Mr Cecil Dicks, a large, kind and very courteous man, required an outline of each proposed protest to get his permission for 12 members of the NMBS to stand in silence opposite the City Hall holding large posters which displayed their concerns. While the rest of the country could not get this permission, the NMBS continued the Black Sash tradition and valued the considerate Mr Dicks for his support when they despaired that democratic change would ever come to South Africa.⁴⁸

This triumph of standing in a group was reported by Kathryn Spink:

In the course of 1988 Black Sash members in Pietermaritzburg, the Natal Midlands region held a number of group pickets with permission from the local chief magistrate to protest about the detention of those involved in local peace negotiations, the muzzling of the press, the banning of progressive organizations and the police force's apparent support of Inkatha in the township violence. Elsewhere, however, the right to assembly and to peaceful protest remained tightly curtailed.⁴⁹

It was a good but exceedingly rare example of first, loopholes that could sometimes be found in repressive law; and second, the ability of willing officials to exploit them.

An example of the relentless police pressure was given by Paula Krynauw while she was still chair of the NMBS in 1987:

I was once unexpectedly visited by a policeman – [Mike] Smuts from the security police. He just arrived. I was in the garden with Mieke [her daughter] and we didn't have security gates like we do now. I looked up and there was this man, who I recognised, in my driveway. He had come to ask me to provide details on other Sash members as in addresses and what they did, etc. I remember thinking, 'Now, hang on, I wouldn't do this'. It was quite a cordial

conversation, but I just said to him, ‘Firstly, you know we would never do that to each other and, secondly, you probably know more about my friends than I do so don’t come and ask me.’ And he left. It was purely an intimidation tactic but, of course, it frightens you. It was very unpleasant and he was just letting me know that he knew the Sash women that I knew.⁵⁰

In the 1988 annual report the conflict between Inkatha and those who did not support them was described as intractable. The report went on to say: ‘One of the biggest problems in the Pietermaritzburg area is that of the displaced youth, who, having fled their homes because of the violence, have no family structures or support, and are desperate. Their numbers have increased and the difficulties are reaching frightening proportions, with no long-term solution in sight.’⁵¹

In March 1988, Pat Merrett set out her personal view of characteristics that ‘make Pietermaritzburg somewhat of an aberration compared to other regions’. She asked where else it was possible to hold regular, permitted, protest stands during the State of Emergency and pointed out that repression here was much milder than in Grahamstown or the larger centres. Furthermore, torture was less common and detentions fewer. She added: ‘Some of the political features of this region can be attributed to two allied political forces: Inkatha and the Indaba. Inkatha is the political party that rules KwaZulu and claims majority black support in the region. It operates freely during the State of Emergency, unlike groups like the United Democratic Front (UDF) and trade unionists within COSATU who suffered severe repression and detentions.’

Merrett explained that the Indaba was a series of talks between various Natal-based organisations and political parties, of which Inkatha was a major role player, and culminated in a set of constitutional proposals its proponents believed could bring peace and stability to the region, if implemented. The UDF and COSATU declined to participate in the talks, believing them to be designed to protect vested political and economic interests. The National Party and other parties on the Right also refused to take part, which meant that the Indaba support base was limited to the centre. At the same time there was horrific violence in the region, mainly between Inkatha and UDF supporters, with rumours that there was a third force involved. Merrett went on to say: ‘What all this violence has achieved is to show that the Indaba process has been unable to address the roots of the conflict in this area. It also reveals the spurious nature of Inkatha’s claims to be the voice of “the people” and its determination to resist any challenge to its hegemony.’

She called for active research and documentation in the region, which she thought could not be done by members who didn’t have the aptitude or freedom

to devote to this, and paid tribute to the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office, where volunteers worked in the mornings: 'The voluntary nature of the Black Sash is a hallowed tradition, and is not likely to die out, for there is an increasing number of politicized women in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere who wish to be active in progressive women's organizations.'⁵²

Group protest stands continued, with permission given in each case by the chief magistrate. Posters with Zulu wording were included. Every protest stand was recorded by security police. They would move along the line and ask, using participants' names, whether they still lived and worked in the same place – they had all the addresses. Mary Kleinenberg remarked on this in an interview:

They took still and video photos, some of our backs, and it was very intimidating, though I often thought what a waste of resources. I don't think the police had film in their cameras, but they might have. I do know that some members felt weak in the knees and couldn't take part in these protests. The police also drove up and down the road taking registration numbers from cars when we had Sash meetings, and at public meetings arranged by us. So they were always around – there was always a feeling of intimidation.⁵³

Subjects addressed in protest stands during 1988 were: the need for police impartiality in the local conflict; a call for dialogue and democracy, rather than banning and repression; cross-border raids (Kassinga Day); forty years of Nationalist rule; refugees in Pietermaritzburg; group areas; a call for peace and goodwill, rather than violence; and pollution. Most of these Saturday morning protests were reported in *The Natal Witness*, some with accompanying photographs and coverage of the topic concerned.⁵⁴ It reported on the December protest:

The Black Sash picket to remind the public that most people in South Africa do not have peace, not even at Christmas, provoked strong reaction from passersby in Church Street on Saturday. Holding placards saying 'Peace and goodwill for everybody', 'Repression not peace', 'No peace without justice', and 'Violence is a problem not a solution', the Black Sash members faced accusations of being trouble makers. 'These people are just causing trouble. They should be locked up,' said one pedestrian as he walked past. Asked by her son what the people in the picket were doing, a mother replied in Afrikaans 'They're just naughty aunties.'

However, the Black Sash members also received a lot of support, and many people stopped to read the posters or talk to the women. Explaining the purpose of the picket, Black Sash member Fidela Fouché said the state of emergency, now in its third year, has brought repression not peace. 'The government has consistently promoted violence and not peace. Hundreds of people who oppose apartheid through non-violent means are in detention without trial.'⁵⁵

Because permission for joint protest stands, with agreed slogans, had to be arranged two weeks in advance, the NMBS continued to hold single pickets when urgent issues cropped up. These stands were often targeted by the police. On one occasion on 7 March 1988, Alleyn Diesel was conducting a single stand at the cannon on the corner of Church Street and Commercial Road (now Chief Albert Luthuli Street) when she was frog marched down the steps by two burly Riot Squad policemen and carted off in a police van. Fidela Fouché, who was monitoring the stand, was not told where she was being taken. Michael Cowling, the pro bono lawyer who often helped the NMBS, rushed around trying to find where she was. Mary Kleinenberg continues the tale:

Loop Street and Alexandra Road [police stations] said they knew nothing about the arrest. We were getting frantic by the time she was located at Loop Street two or three hours later. The police had taken her to their barracks [in Oribi Village] and left her sitting in the back of the van while they showered. It got cold and dark, and she was terrified. No charges were laid, so it seems it was pure intimidation.⁵⁶

Alleyn Diesel was then asked to fill in details:

They threatened me with 90 days detention, because it was during the State of Emergency, and they said there couldn't be such stands. We had arranged for the two-people stands so that one held a poster and the other monitored in case something went wrong, as it did in this case. I think they were very threatened by this. I was very roughly handled and there was a lot of very threatening talk, and then eventually they took me off to Loop Street where there were mutterings of 90-day detention. Michael Cowling was not very encouraging because he thought they could get serious about it, but in the end he persuaded them and their bluster turned out to be nothing more than that.⁵⁷

The situation was much more serious than Diesel's description of bluster. The law allowed for indefinite detention as long as State of Emergency regulations were in place. The Internal Security Act governed 90-day detention, but this had largely fallen into disuse. On 21 June the police replied to a letter from the NMBS executive committee saying that Diesel had been arrested under section 2(1) of Pietermaritzburg Municipal Regulations in that she caused an obstruction on a footpath. This absurd excuse was found unsatisfactory, so Cowling was asked to write to demand an apology for the harassment of members conducting individual stands.⁵⁸ Although this matter was also taken up by Mike Ellis, a member of parliament, no apology was ever received.

A little later, Marie Dyer, who was standing outside John Orr's, on the corner of Church and Timber streets, was accosted. She recalled the event in an interview:

The riot squad arrived, literally two lorries, each one with six men who jumped out and stood around me holding R1 rifles. It was so absurd that I wasn't even frightened. A horrible fellow said to me 'What are you doing?' and I said, 'I'm standing here, holding this poster.' He then said, 'You are not allowed to hold that poster, you must go away.' I answered that it was the end of my stint anyway and I was packing up to go. I think I might have been afraid if they'd had a pick-up van there because I did know about Alleyn Diesel being carted off.⁵⁹

On 30 April 1988 ten members of NMBS were preparing to participate in a planned protest stand for which they had permission. They were asked by a friendly *Natal Witness* photographer, Jonathan Kaplan, quickly to form a group holding their posters for a photograph. Kleinenberg records what happened next:

We did this. The security police swooped down saying that as this gathering had happened five minutes before the allotted time, it was therefore illegal. So, they gathered us up and arrested us. We were taken to a prefab somewhere along the Edendale Road to be processed, which involved filling in forms, having fingerprints and mug shots taken. At first we were a bit silly about the forms, writing all sorts of nonsense where it asked if we had any disabilities or markings on our bodies. In retrospect this was a nervous reaction. However, when a burly chap waved his gun at us and threatened to shoot if we did not behave, we settled down. It was a thoroughly unpleasant experience.⁶⁰



Black Sash gathering deemed illegal, 30 April 1988 (Back, from left to right: Yvonne Spain, Bobby Keal, Alleyn Diesel, Mary Kleinenberg, Jennifer McKenzie, Diana Davey and Jennifer Verbeek. Front, from left to right: Maureen Hobbs, Jo Stielau and Monique van Wyngaard)

The case was taken to court where Mike Cowling defended the group pro bono. In court, one of the accused refused, as a Quaker, to take the oath, saying this was unnecessary since her word was enough to guarantee the truth would be told. When the magistrate asked one of the more nervous trialists what she did for the Black Sash, perhaps expecting something slightly subversive, she told him she made jam, which caused a ripple of mirth in the courtroom. Eventually the magistrate threw the case out, saying it was a waste of his and police time. However, it had been a very stressful incident for all concerned.

The Natal Witness made valiant attempts to give coverage to events in the townships, in spite of restrictions and other difficulties. In May 1988, Joan Kerchhoff, the current chair of NMBS, was interviewed and attempted to present the organisation's commitment to civil rights on a human interest level. The day centre, started by Sash for the city's refugees, was also given coverage. Kerchhoff said: 'All this is important, if we are to reach people before they move so far to the right that they are lost to all reasonable argument.'⁶¹

Kerschhoff's interview in *The Natal Witness* had an eye-catching photograph of her holding a poster reading 'Is UNITA a SADF front?' The article recorded:

'Those people should be shot.' That was the response of a Pietermaritzburg schoolgirl as she walked past a group of twelve Black Sash women – holding up their placards – on her way to school one morning. This violent reaction to passive protest is strange says Joan Kerchhoff. 'It shows that South Africans are not used to living in a democratic society. South Africans tend to see any form of protest as weird and going against the norm, whereas in a democratic country, while people might not agree with a protest, they respect the right of others to voice their opinion.' Kerchhoff then gave a brief history of the Black Sash, stressing the work of the advice offices, and went on to say: 'We are often thought of as stern, pessimistic and disapproving, but we do positive and creative things.' Her example was the producing of colourful cards and stickers, like the bright yellow one that says 'Apartheid-free zone.'⁶²

Member meetings continued to be well supported. At a meeting, co-hosted with PACSA on 22 June 1988, Ruth Tomaselli, a Durban academic expert on broadcasting, spoke on Pietermaritzburg's violence and the SABC. In August, members had an interesting debate on the role of Sash, covering three points: its independence and non-alignment; its active social role; and Sash as a feminist organisation. It appeared that many members, particularly the younger ones, felt that Sash in the region had already become a feminist organisation. And on 12 October a meeting was addressed by Yusuf Bhamjee and Yunus Carrim on the municipal elections.⁶³ This was followed by a public meeting, chaired by NMBS, and co-hosted by eleven progressive organisations that covered both repression and the municipal elections.⁶⁴

Two more sub-committees were formed during 1988. The first, probably a result of the re-establishment of the Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, was an abolition of capital punishment sub-committee, headed by Jane Worsnip, whose first task was to canvass local organisations to gauge their feelings on the subject. Sheena Duncan, always vehemently opposed to capital punishment, took this up when she delivered the popular University Lecture in Pietermaritzburg on 20 April 1988. She urged the public to push for an independent commission of enquiry into judicial killing in South Africa, saying: 'Over the past 10 years 1 114 people have been hanged in South Africa, and this figure excluded hangings in the independent homelands.' She concluded with the statement, 'I think the execution rate in South Africa reflects the violence inherent in this society.'⁶⁵

The second sub-committee concerned with refugees was headed by Fiona Bulman. This was originally formed in response to the lack of reaction by the city of Pietermaritzburg to the escalation of violence and increasing numbers of displaced youth. As the NMBS executive committee believed establishing a day centre had a welfare focus falling outside its ambit, this work was handed over to an independent steering committee. However, the NMBS sub-committee decided to continue to seek ways to contribute to justice and peace in work with refugees.⁶⁶

A *Natal Witness* editorial articulated NMBS and public concern about the proposed day centre, but members of the NMBS thought use of the Group Areas Act to explain the problem was somewhat disingenuous:

Burger Street residents have petitioned against the establishment in the area of a recreational and educational day care centre for displaced or refugee children. This seems rather a fuss about what would only be a temporary arrangement for the property involved is due to be demolished towards the end of the year. Further, the argument that the presence of refugees might exacerbate crime in the area is weak: it is the idle, hungry, homeless and hopeless who commit street crime. Children at supervised play or school work during the day cannot at the same time be roaming the streets picking pockets and snatching purses.

But this, some will suggest, is not the fundamental reason for Burger Street fears, nor is the petitioners' purported belief that the Black Sash, which originated the idea of the centre, would work at inculcating 'leftist ideology' into the children. It is more likely that the real reason lies in the invocation of the group areas act: 'The area is zoned for white residential purposes ...'

We in Pietermaritzburg cannot point accusing fingers at the bigots of Kraaifontein and Mayfair West while we have the germ of something so very similar right here.⁶⁷



Mary Kleinenberg collecting signatures for the street children petition, Pietermaritzburg, 1989



Handing over the street children petition, Natalia, Pietermaritzburg, 1989 (from left: Alleyn Diesel, Fidela Fouché and Mary Kleinenberg)



Sash stand against corruption, Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 15 May 1989 (from left: unknown, Maureen Hobbs, Clare Kerchhoff, Alleyn Diesel, Fidela Fouché, Carleen Richardson and Pessa Weinberg)



*Police take details at a Sash stand, Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 1989
(from left: Fidela Fouché, Jane Worsnip and Christine Chapman)*



Women's ring around the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity, Pietermaritzburg, 1989 (Sash members from left: Pat Merrett, Kate Richardson, Carleen Richardson, Clare Kerchhoff, Fiona Jackson and Joan Kerchhoff)



*Women leave the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity, Pietermaritzburg, 1989
after surrounding the building and holding a service (Sash members visible
Joan Kerchhoff and Mary Kleinenberg)*



Joan Kerchhoff in a Sash stand, Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, 1990



Anti-cricket tour protest, Jan Smuts Stadium, Pietermaritzburg, 3 February 1990 (Sash members visible are Fidela Fouché, Mary Kleinenberg, Jennifer McKenzie and Joan Kerchhoff)



Black Sash Natal Midlands welcomes the release of Nelson Mandela, 11 February 1990 (from left: Mary Nathanson and Mary Kleinenberg)



Police at women's peace march, Edendale, 29 March 1990



*Black Sash banner displayed at women's peace march, Edendale,
29 March 1990*



Sash/End Conscription Campaign protest at the Royal Agricultural Showgrounds, Pietermaritzburg, 4 August 1991 (Sash members visible: Mary Gardner, Mary Kleinenberg and Fidela Fouché)



Happy Valley informal settlement, Pietermaritzburg, 6 June 1992



Sash stand protesting at treatment of Happy Valley residents outside Allied offices, Pietermaritzburg, July 1992 (from left: two unidentified protestors, Monika Wittenberg, Jo Stielau, Pat Dunne, Anne Grayson and Marie Dyer)



Sash stand, Loop Street police station, Pietermaritzburg, 1992 (from left: Mary Kleinenberg, unknown protestor, Rosemary Bamford, Fiona Bulman, Felicity Wiggill, Gail Wannenburg and an unidentified protestor)

Vernon Lund, an Anglican priest and chairperson of the newly formed Pietermaritzburg Day Centre Steering Committee, attempted to allay fears in another letter, saying, 'The Centre is not a Black Sash project. The Black Sash originally saw the need and made it known, but the project is being planned by an independent committee of concerned citizens.'⁶⁸

NMBS contact with other organisations was varied and certainly held the interest of members. On International Women's Day it participated in an event at the Lotus Hall where a play depicting a Sash stand was presented, showing passers-by expressing support, disgust or violent opposition, and the police taking names and addresses. Although this item was a serious one, with posters dealing with real issues, it was also entertaining and raised considerable laughter. Later, three NMBS members attended, by invitation, the memorial service held for four Mpopomeni trade union leaders at BTR-Sarmcol (a Howick rubber factory) killed by Inkatha vigilantes in December 1986. The committee kept in touch with other monitoring organisations who gave information on detainees, the local conflict, removals and evictions, and conscription issues.⁶⁹

Intimidation, amid the chaos, continued when in June 1988 Jenny Bowen's household was woken by security police at 5 am. She thought it was probably because the UDF leader, Skhumbuzo Ngwenya Mbatha, was staying with her family.⁷⁰ She remembers the occasion because it was the first time her baby daughter had slept through the night and recalls being struck by the politeness of the police. 'Eight of them barged in and I told them that they couldn't go into the baby's room because she was sleeping, and they didn't. I was overwhelmed by the fact that they didn't and I thought: how stupid because if I was hiding someone that's what I would have said.'⁷¹

The 1989 NMBS annual report opened with the statement 'While F.W. de Klerk was announcing sweeping reforms Chief Maphumulo's house in the Table Mountain district was burning, and people in Imbali were being shot. The Natal conflict, far from abating, has intensified over the past weeks.'⁷² This rising tide of violence, particularly in Natal, with thousands killed and displaced, could not be ignored even by those who had so far shown little interest in what was happening. It was the subject of discussion in the press, and at the national Black Sash conference held in March 1989 at Mariannhill near Pinetown. *The Natal Witness* reported on the conference that Wendy Leeb of the Centre for Adult Education had given the keynote address entitled 'Daily life, daily death'. Carmel Rickard recorded that Leeb had made 'an impassioned plea that white people in Natal begin to take notice of the violence

and destruction on their doorsteps'. She also told Black Sash delegates that 'in the 354 square kilometres monitored by the Centre for Adult Education, 680 people were killed last year, 3 000 homes were destroyed, 30 000 people were displaced and an unknown number irrevocably psychologically damaged'. In her address, Mary Burton, national chairperson, said there were already signs of the country becoming 'profoundly undemocratic' and she urged Sash members to commit themselves to working for human rights. Among other aims she said members of the Black Sash should retain their 'fearless impartiality' as this would lend weight to the testimony of the organisation.⁷³

The Mercury reported:

As with so many South African situations, one tends to look upon the unrest that plagues the black townships round Pietermaritzburg with a mixture of hope and despair. Hope because the level of violence that has claimed about 670 lives since September 1987 has, according to the police, declined markedly in recent months; despair because there are still 30 murders a month, part of a pattern of revenge killing rooted in political and factional differences.⁷⁴

The *Sunday Times* took up conference issues, saying, 'Delegates ... heard how black children in the troubled townships, where chances of formal education have become a joke, satisfied their natural curiosity by watching the decaying process in corpses.' The report went on to say that the conference issued the following statement:

Two weeks ago, on a categorical assurance from Minister [of law and order] Vlok that he would apply his mind to the release of detainees, many detainees suspended their hunger strike. Today, in spite of his promise, the majority of the about 1 000 detainees remain incarcerated. Those who have been released face restrictions so severe they amount to an alternative form of imprisonment. The Black Sash National Conference believes that Minister Vlok has not honoured his word and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees.⁷⁵

It was reported in a circular to NMBS members responding to the violence that some had participated in a fast in March 1989 in solidarity with hunger-striking detainees, many of whom were UDF/COSATU members involved in peace talks.⁷⁶

Conference delegates passed the following resolution: 'This conference recognizes that the violent conflict in Natal/KwaZulu constitutes a national crisis, the resolution of which is crucial to South Africa. It therefore resolves to work with other organisations on a national campaign to collect and disseminate information to our constituency, the public of South Africa and the international community, to facilitate the ending of conflict.'⁷⁷

Some dissatisfaction was felt among the associate members present at this conference when only full members were permitted to attend a closed session. Michael Morris, of the Centre for Social and Development Studies on the Durban campus of the University of Natal, had been invited to provide an analysis of the shift in state policy away from Verwoedian apartheid into a new phase. In retrospect it seems rather strange to exclude associate members, who were well known to the organisation and committed to the aims of the Black Sash, from participating; yet have a man known only to a very few delegates address the conference. Christopher Merrett wrote to *Sash Magazine* about this exclusion:

Last year Margo Beard raised the issue of male, associate members of the Black Sash, calling it a 'rather idiotic compromise'. Until recently I would have disagreed strongly with her, arguing that the Black Sash as presently constituted is well placed to fight the dual oppression of race and gender. There are good reasons for believing that if men were accorded full membership the organization would become less effective.

However, I was extremely disconcerted to find at this year's [national] conference that closed sessions were open only to full members. An organization might restrict the right to vote, and even speak – but *listen*? Perhaps it is time to abolish associate membership.⁷⁸

Partly as a result Verne Harris, previously an associate member in Pietermaritzburg but now living in Pretoria, sent a questionnaire to Black Sash members in the Natal Midlands and Pretoria asking first, if they would like males admitted to the organisation, to which the answer was a resounding No. There were three other questions: did they see themselves as feminists?; would they like the Black Sash to be a feminist organisation; and if not, would they like feminist issues addressed by the organisation? Harris supplied a history of associate membership and his interpretation of the survey. Men had been admitted to the Black Sash in 1979, with no voting rights, largely to accommodate legally those who supported the organisation financially, but the organisation's constitution provided no adequate rationale for the subordinate status of associate members. The results of his questionnaire showed a positive response to addressing feminist issues, although only a small minority thought the Sash should become a feminist organisation. Harris suggested that there were four options for Sash: the status quo could be retained; it could continue its broad human rights commitment and drop the gender restriction; it could make sex-based injustice a pillar of its programmes; or it could become a fully fledged feminist organisation. He thought that the role of men should be closely defined and he concluded that 'the Black Sash, with its proud human

rights record *and* women's tradition, should promote feminism. Both the deep-rootedness of sexual oppression and the indivisibility of freedom demand it'.⁷⁹

Whether the Black Sash was a women's organisation or an organisation of women was discussed with great intensity in the Midlands region. However, Sash as a whole largely favoured the status quo. A circular from the national office in Cape Town set out a draft mission statement: 'The Black Sash is a women's organization committed to human rights and justice for all. It is working for a non-racial, non-sexist, and non-violent society that is free, democratic, redistributive and in which the Rule of Law is upheld, and the Bill of Rights is entrenched. At the centre of its core is the sanctity of life and the development of the potential of every human being.'⁸⁰

Forced removals still occurred and were often discussed, although there seemed little to be done apart from protesting and trying to make the consequences of this wilful destruction public. In June 1989 thirty labour tenant families in the Weenen district were evicted from land they had occupied for generations. They were dumped on the side of a road with inadequate shelter and no facilities. At a meeting arranged by AFRA, Archbishop Denis Hurley conducted a moving service by the roadside. Members of the NMBS were there to lend their support. Marie Dyer, also AFRA vice-chairperson, gave an opening address; Pat Merrett gave a message of support from the Black Sash; and Renate Cochrane read two scripture passages.⁸¹

In July 1989, Fidela Fouché became a delegate to Lusaka on behalf of the NMBS. This was not simply a visit to meet the ANC, but a conference to debate issues facing all South Africans and attempt to develop some understanding about the future of South African society. Jenny de Tolly of Cape Town wrote a report:

The Five Freedoms Forum (FFF) had invited 114 people from around South Africa to take part in a conference with about 80 ANC members. It was the biggest-yet delegation from South Africa: delegates came from 13 towns and cities, and represented over 30 groups working for change – both inside and outside parliament. Mike Oliver, chairperson of the Five Freedoms Forum in Johannesburg, said: 'If we are to be part of a common and peaceful future we need at least to understand each other. What I think we all have in common is a desire for a non-racial and democratic future. I suspect we will not all agree on what exactly this entails and how best we should get there – but this is the essence of what we are here to talk about.

A press statement drafted by Black Sash members at Lusaka airport summed up their experience: 'Over the past three days we have had a chance to explore with our fellow South Africans in the ANC the issues that confront our country

today and our common future. We did so in an atmosphere of mutual warmth and acceptance that made it possible to be completely honest and outspoken.' De Tolly went on to say: 'These valuable and unique exchanges reinforced for us the urgent necessity for the unbanning of the ANC. South Africa cannot afford to be denied the *ubuntu* (togetherness or humaneness) and expertise of our exiled compatriots in the building of a strong, proud, democratic nation.'⁸² A general meeting on 4 August was arranged for Fidela Fouché and other delegates who had returned from Lusaka to give a report.

Activities in Pietermaritzburg during 1989 included protest stands, the first highlighting capital punishment on 11 March. It was suggested that the NMBS should ask Dean John Forbes of the Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Nativity to ring the bells on days when people were hanged, but this did not materialise. Other protest stands included: state secrecy and corruption; the enforcement of the State of Emergency and its effects; the proscription of the ANC; unequal health facilities; and conscription. A stand on 3 May asked, 'Who killed David Webster?'⁸³ A topical and necessary talk was given by John Aitchison on 'Violence in the South African context' on 12 April.⁸⁴ A communication with members asked for support for two fundraising events: the Arts Students Flea Market on 13 August at which the NMBS planned to sell second-hand books, home-baked bread and cakes; and a mini-market in the cathedral grounds on 15 October selling whatever members contributed.

Early in 1989, Pat Merrett attended a meeting in Imbali organised by Sue Matheson and Sally Howes to discuss the growing refugee problem.⁸⁵ The NMBS also decided to link with Coastal Black Sash on 18 May to discuss the violence and Fidela Fouché, Mary Kleinenberg and Paula Krynauw met a Durban delegation but, unfortunately, these meetings did not continue. In March the refugee sub-committee (also known as the Natal conflict sub-committee) reported that women in the townships had asked to be given cameras to record Inkatha attacks. This was discussed at length by the executive committee, which agreed that under such dangerous conditions the taking of photographs should be categorically discouraged, while the Black Sash could not be involved in providing cameras.⁸⁶ However, a member took it upon herself, without consultation, to arrange a photographic workshop with women in Caluza. During the workshop one of the teachers, a journalist, took a photograph of the women learning to use a camera that was published in *The Weekly Mail* (Johannesburg). The Caluza women were furious and felt that they could no longer trust the Black Sash. Eventually, the journalist apologised to the women in Caluza, but damage had been done. Something that could

have developed into a disastrous situation caused a great deal of animosity in the sub-committee and the executive of the NMBS.⁸⁷

It was agreed at an executive meeting in May that the Natal conflict sub-committee should be disbanded. Several reasons were given: the Natal Midlands was one of the smallest regions, did not have members with the spare time and the training to do thorough research, and its human resources were too widely dispersed. The issues were very complex, which made it difficult to find a single focus and resulted in situations getting out of control: in order to gather information the NMBS needed to link with the many researchers working in and around Pietermaritzburg for other organisations.⁸⁸

On 27 April a draft of the motivation for a Black Sash researcher was circulated, agreed, and sent to the Advice Office Trust.⁸⁹ Fidela Fouché proposed that the NMBS establish an environmental sub-committee and presented her motivation to the executive committee, remarking that ‘Black people who are already discriminated against are the people most affected by pollution. There is a need to educate the public with regard to environmental abuse.’ Comment from the membership was invited.⁹⁰ A vote was taken at a general meeting of the NMBS in October when sixteen members voted for this new sub-committee, while there were no votes against or abstentions. It was therefore agreed that this would go ahead with Fidela Fouché convening the group.

A letter from Clive Willows, chairperson of the Street Children Project, indicates that a day centre house had been found in May 1989. He wrote, thanking the NMBS for their support, noting that ‘when the permit was granted, the official concerned stated that the fact that a petition had received support from white families in the neighbourhood of the shelter had considerably influenced the decision’.⁹¹ However, this was short-lived as shown by a press article:

Chairman of the Street Children’s Project, Mr Clive Willows says the numbers of street children in Pietermaritzburg will increase as the economic situation weakens and the political instability and violence increases. In a statement from Lawyers for Human Rights, spokesman Mike Cowling said yesterday he found it amazing that after all this talk of political reform and change the situation can arise where a number of homeless children can be turned out of an existing shelter and onto the streets purely because they happen to belong to the wrong race group. The children were evicted from their home in Baverstock Street at the end of May following objections to their presence in a white area.⁹²

Letters opposing this eviction followed and once again *The Natal Witness* published a very sympathetic leader:

No country can claim to be civilized if it allows its children to live in the streets without regular feeding, proper care or even minimum shelter. Yet there are at least 300 street children in Pietermaritzburg at the present time, when temperatures reach zero during the night. The primary cause is the disruption of home life that the current unrest has brought about to children who are innocent victims of their elders' inability to solve differences without violence and bloodshed.

But the country's peculiar politics also played a part. Because they are black, the homeless children cannot be provided with shelter in a 'white area'. Those who were housed in Baverstock Street were evicted in May, following complaints. Mr F.W. de Klerk and his fellow Nationalists are eloquent about the pace and extent of reform, but how can they look the world or their fellow South Africans in the face when such things are allowed to happen?⁹³

A pathetically inadequate response was received from Mayor Mark Cornell: 'What I keep hearing from residents is – why don't the people who are trying to help, put the children in their own homes or areas – why pick on our area? I am afraid there is nothing I can do.'⁹⁴

In March 1989, *Sash Magazine* focused on children and an article about the Pietermaritzburg street children was published:

The escalation in the Natal conflict meant more and more traumatized children left their violent areas to live on the street. In Pietermaritzburg some lived in a run-down municipal house found by the Child and Family Welfare Society, but because a neighbour complained about the presence of black children in a 'white' area, these twenty five street children were evicted. Natal Midlands Black Sash drew up a petition, initially to prevent the eviction, but later to ask for the still empty house to be used for street children's accommodation. The petition went to the Administrator of Natal and to the Minister of Home Affairs. Simultaneously, appeals went to the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg [Mark Cornell]. These appeals were met with granite indifference, and the moralistic idea that to provide these children with food and warmth would only encourage them to seek adventure in the city. However, the public of Pietermaritzburg responded with blankets, clothes and money paid into the Street Children's Fund, and a feeding scheme, set up by concerned members of churches and the public, was initiated. As a last resort the NMBS appealed to Mike Tarr, a Democratic Party member of parliament to use his influence to promote the cause of the street children.⁹⁵

MacDaniels, a local restaurant, arranged a fun giant kebab cook, a long line of kebab over fires in Longmarket (now Langalibalele) Street. The cooked meat was sold to the public and the restaurant offered to donate all profits to the street children fund.⁹⁶ Finally, in August there was fairly encouraging news: a day centre was going ahead, a venue had been found, and a person had been appointed by the Young Mens Christian Association (YMCA) to oversee the project.⁹⁷

Supporting women's events had become an important part of NMBS networking in Pietermaritzburg and one such event was reported in *Sash Magazine*:

On Women's Day in August 1989 members of NMBS were invited to attend the 'Peace' rally at Wadley Stadium in Edendale. The well-known feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (from the US) was visiting Pietermaritzburg, and went with us to the gathering. When we introduced her to the organizers they asked her to talk to the women, which went down very well. It was an extremely festive occasion with stalls selling hats and beadwork, and a huge crowd of women.⁹⁸

Unfortunately, there was a fair amount of rabble rousing by young males through their choice of poetry and speeches. When Mary Kleinenberg wrote to complain, Pauline Stanford of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), who was one of the organisers, apologised and agreed that this had been inappropriate.⁹⁹

The Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), a loose association of democratic organisations, planned the defiance campaign of 1989 that encouraged acts of civil disobedience in order to bring down the apartheid system. This was a turning point in the history of the struggle and throughout the country protest marches took place with police using more restraint than they had shown in the past. Mary Burton, national Black Sash president, wrote in challenging tones:

The most important question of all is: What is our responsibility? Do we need to throw our weight behind the organisations that represent the majority of the people to achieve their aims – because they are the majority? Will we be accused of being 'useful idiots' – the unwitting tools of the ANC, or of the working class, or of the communists?

I believe the question for us is: Do we want to uphold and protect human rights? And if so, how? We have a special responsibility to tell the truth without fear or favour. We must throw back the thick and musty curtains of apartheid and emergency rule, and let the healthy air and daylight in.

I will no longer be silenced by the emergency regulations, and I call on the editors of newspapers of this country to unshackle themselves, to report events with only the proper restraint of wise and responsible journalism, and no longer to deny their readers the full picture of what is being done.

The Defiance Campaign, in the words of Professor Jakes Gerwel, Principal of the University of the Western Cape, is 'an opportunity to rise in a disciplined and non-violent manner and indicate to a minority government that it does not rule with the consent of the people.'

Let us grasp this opportunity.¹⁰⁰

At this time South and Addington Beaches in Durban were among the few still designated for whites only by the Durban City Council. In another act

of defiance, NMBS members joined, with enthusiasm, the huge MDM beach protest on Sunday 2 September 1989. Although there was a large police presence, with personnel armed with shotguns and water cannon, the thousands of people swimming and picnicking on the beaches were undeterred.



Police at Durban beach protest, 2 September 1989

The large NMBS banner carried in the Standing for Truth Campaign march in Pietermaritzburg on 21 September 1989 said 'Black Sash supports peaceful protest'. The press reported that more than 7 000 people of all races had participated in this orderly march through the city centre. They gathered at the Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Nativity for a short service before the march began at 1.15 pm. The report went on to say:

With banners flying, some calling for the resignation of Law & Order Minister, Adriaan Vlok, and others saying, 'Don't shoot, this is a peaceful march' they turned into Commercial Road and then Loop Street to stop in front of the police station where Bishop Khoza Mgojo, past president of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa, handed two memoranda to Captain Adam Barnard of the South African Police.

Other memoranda from the Veda Dharma Sabha, the Muslim community and the Natal Indian Congress were handed over. In their memorandum, the Christian religious leaders made it clear that they would fulfill their ordination vows by conducting funeral services in accordance with normal practices, without any regard to restrictions placed on particular

funerals in terms of the state of emergency regulations. Other memoranda referred to the institutional violence of apartheid and the many ills brought about by police action in townships, detention without trial and the continuation of the State of Emergency.¹⁰¹

NMBS, given its small size, collaborated with organisations in Pietermaritzburg that shared its ideals in order to make bigger public statements. At a general meeting in September 1989, Mary Kleinenberg suggested that a local defiance action could be a chain of women around the Anglican cathedral as a symbolic counterpoint to the razor wire recently used in Pretoria. This proved to be a very successful protest:

On 23 September 1989 the Pretoria police surrounded St Albans Cathedral with razor wire to prevent women, planning to repeat the 1955 march to the Union Buildings, from attending a religious service. In response women of Pietermaritzburg made a human chain around the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity and St Peter's Church as a symbol of their right of access to places of worship, and to protest without police interference.

The protest began with an interfaith service. Immediately after the service women, singing and dancing and carrying banners and posters, left the grounds of the Cathedral and walked to the Longmarket [now Langalibalele] Street entrance. They then formed a chain around the churches and stood in silence for 15 minutes.

The protest was planned and organised by: Natal Midlands Black Sash; community women's organizations; Cosatu women; Natal Indian Congress women; women from the Black Students Society and Students Representative Council of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg; and women from Standing for Truth Campaign.

Much of the success of this protest stems from the fact that approximately 1 000 women from so many organizations co-operated in solidarity with one another.¹⁰²

A letter from Shirley Moulder of the South African Council of Churches in September 1989 gave the good news that the motivation for a grant to employ a researcher for two years had been approved by the funder Victims of Apartheid and was now being sent to Europe for final approval.¹⁰³ Less cheerfully, Pat Merrett had resigned to take up a full-time position with AFRA. A letter thanked her for years of hard work, concluding that her analytical mind and dry sense of humour would be greatly missed and hoping that she would enjoy a well-earned rest from Sash committees.¹⁰⁴

A group of people associated with PACSA put an idea to the NMBS: placing white guests with Imbali families who requested help to show support in a tangible way and deter those who were threatening and harassing the community.¹⁰⁵ Some NMBS members joined the Imbali Support Group, hoping that staying with community people overnight would protect women and children from the prevalent violence. Having a white face did appear to

deter enemies, be they political opponents or thugs, because night raids on homes ceased when volunteers stayed in townships.¹⁰⁶

In November 1989 the Five Freedoms Forum explained to the NMBS the setting up of a conflict monitoring network to respond to requests for help from the community. It was envisaged that in situations where there was a fear of raids, at mass rallies, political funerals and other conflict situations, someone from the network would be made available to monitor. As it was clearly established that this network would not operate under the banner of any particular organisation, members of the NMBS willingly took part in some of the monitoring activities.¹⁰⁷

On 11 February 1990 the NMBS suspended 'Sash welcomes Nelson Mandela' banners from two highway bridges when he was released from Paarl's Victor Verster prison.¹⁰⁸ In his first public address, from the balcony of the City Hall in Cape Town that same day, he chose to pay tribute to the Black Sash rather than any other women's organisation, saying: 'The Black Sash was the conscience of white South Africa.' This was generous and heart-warming recognition by an outstanding leader.¹⁰⁹

A rally to welcome Mandela and other released ANC leaders was held on Sunday 25 February 1990 in Durban. The executive committee wrote to members: 'We would strongly encourage you to be there as this will be an event of enormous political and historical importance.'¹¹⁰ Many members of the NMBS joined thousands of people in Durban on this joyous occasion to hear Mandela speak. It was here that he advised everyone to throw their weapons into the sea, an appeal that unfortunately went largely unheeded.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Christopher Merrett, 'Emergency of the state: detention without trial in Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands' *Natalia* 41(2011): 25. States of Emergency were declared under the Public Safety Act of 1953 and renewed on 12 June each year until 1990. The Act produced seven emergencies in all: 1960 (partial); 1985–1986 (partial); 1986–1987, 1987–1988, 1988–1989 and 1989–1990 (national); and 1990 (Natal only). Subsequently, certain magisterial districts were named unrest areas.
- 2 The secret negotiations that initiated this chain of events are described in Richard Rosenthal, *Mission Improbable: A Piece of the South African Story* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998).
- 3 Merrett, 'Emergency of the state': 27.
- 4 Sheena Duncan, circular dated November 1985.
- 5 Paula Krynauw interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 2012: 1.
- 6 See Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983–1991* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000).
- 7 Executive Committee minutes, 28 February 1985.

- 8 Jenny Bowen interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 5 May 2013: 1.
- 9 Norman Bromberger, 'The Carnegie Conference: poverty and development in southern Africa' *Reality* 16(4) July 1984: 11, 13.
- 10 Francis Wilson, 'Uprooting poverty' *Sash Magazine (SM)* 31(3) December 1988: 20.
- 11 Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1989).
- 12 Report for national conference, 1985.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 General meeting minutes, 8 January 1986.
- 15 General meeting minutes, 4 November 1986.
- 16 Annual report, 1987. Locally, ECC's Jacque Boulle was detained for nearly two weeks in June 1986.
- 17 See Victoria Brittain, *Hidden Lives, Hidden Deaths: South Africa's Crippling of a Continent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).
- 18 General meeting minutes, 30 July 1986.
- 19 General meeting minutes, 28 September 1986.
- 20 Paula Krynauw interview: 4.
- 21 *Natal Witness (NW)* 12 May 1986. Marie Dyer was referring to the partial State of Emergency that had been declared on 25 July 1985 and lifted on 7 March 1986.
- 22 General meeting minutes, 8 October 1986.
- 23 The second official was probably Arthur Dyason who worked at the bus depot in a technical capacity (email from Gary Buitendach, Human Resources Support Services Manager, Infrastructure Services, Msunduzi Municipality, 31 May 2014).
- 24 Executive Committee minutes, February 1986.
- 25 General meeting minutes, 27 May 1986.
- 26 *NW* 6 June 1986.
- 27 Paula Krynauw interview: 2–3.
- 28 Mary Burton, circular to members, 12 August 1986.
- 29 Merrett, 'Emergency of the state': 15.
- 30 Joan Kerchhoff interviewed by Jennifer Verbeek, Pietermaritzburg, 6 May 1998: 12–13.
- 31 Merrett, 'Emergency of the state': 16–20. In February 1988, all regional DESCOS were restricted under the emergency regulations. The local group simply renamed itself the Detainees Aid Committee (DACOM) and carried on its work.
- 32 General meeting minutes, 4 November 1986.
- 33 Annual report, 1987.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 General meeting minutes, 8 January 1987.
- 36 General meeting minutes, 30 July 1987.
- 37 *NW* 4 December 1987.
- 38 *NW* 5 December 1987.
- 39 Committee meeting minutes, 11 June 1987.
- 40 'Mothers' Day action' *SM* 30(2) August 1987: 59.
- 41 Mary Kleinenberg, 'The army in agriculture' *SM* 30(2) August 1987: 45.
- 42 Else Schreiner interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 15 September 1995: 24.

- 43 Paula Krynauw, letter to Else and Deneys Schreiner, 19 September 1987, attached to Executive Committee minutes, 1 October 1987.
- 44 Else Schreiner, letter to NMBS, 13 November 1987, attached to Executive Committee minutes, 18 November 1987.
- 45 Else Schreiner interview: 29. She recorded the events surrounding her daughter's detention and trial in her book, *Time Stretching Fear: The Detention and Solitary Confinement of 14 Anti-Apartheid Trialists, 1987–1991* (Cape Town: Robben Island Museum, 2000).
- 46 Detainees Aid Committee preliminary report, 1988–1989 attached to Executive Committee minutes, 11 June 1989. Martin Wittenberg was initially detained on 13 November 1987 when part of a UDF delegation to local peace talks and released on 19 November. He was re-detained on 10 February 1988; and again from 11 June to 8 July 1988. For a detainee profile see *Weekly Mail* 4(15) 22 April 1988.
- 47 'Natal Midlands make history' *SM* 30(3) December 1987: 55. Cecil Dicks also assisted the non-racial, anti-apartheid sports movement when he granted the Pietermaritzburg Regional Council on Sport a permit to conduct a protest fun run against mercenary, boycott-busting cricket tours on 25 January 1986. However, at that stage emergency regulations did not apply to Pietermaritzburg.
- 48 *NW* 25 February 2011.
- 49 Kathryn Spink, *The Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa* (London: Methuen, 1991): 271.
- 50 Paula Krynauw interview: 11.
- 51 Annual report, 1988.
- 52 Pat Merrett, 'A personal view from the Midlands' *SM* 30(4) March 1988: 50–51.
- 53 Mary Kleinenberg interviewed by Alleyn Diesel, Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2013: 5.
- 54 Annual report, 1988.
- 55 *NW* 5 December 1988.
- 56 Mary Kleinenberg interview: 6.
- 57 Ibid. Alleyn Diesel's account is included in her interview of Mary Kleinenberg.
- 58 Executive Committee minutes, 20 April 1988.
- 59 Marie Dyer interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 4 August 1995: 25.
- 60 Mary Kleinenberg interview: 6.
- 61 Annual report, 1988.
- 62 *NW* 19 May 1988.
- 63 Yusuf Bhamjee and Yunus Carrim had both been in exile in the British Isles and both worked for the Development Studies Research Group of the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. Both became leading figures in the ANC after 1994. The former would serve in the provincial legislature and become mayor of Umgungundlovu District Municipality. The latter has been a long-serving member of the national parliament and was deputy minister for co-operative governance and traditional affairs in the Zuma administration.
- 64 Annual report, 1988.
- 65 *NW* 21 April 1988.
- 66 Annual report, 1988.
- 67 *NW* 8 February 1988.
- 68 *NW* 16 February 1988.

- 69 Annual report, 1988.
- 70 *Comrade Lost: A Life to Inspire Us* (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 1992) records his life.
- 71 Jenny Bowen interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 5 May 2013: 5.
- 72 Annual report, 1989.
- 73 NW 3 March 1989.
- 74 *The Mercury* 3 March 1989.
- 75 *Sunday Times* 5 March 1989.
- 76 NMBS, 'Response to the violence', undated document. The hunger strike is documented in Christopher Merrett, *Sidla Ekhlanya – We Shall Eat at Home: The Detainees' Hunger Strike in Pietermaritzburg, 1989* (Pietermaritzburg: Detainees Aid Committee, 1990).
- 77 'Conference resolutions' SM 32(1) May 1989: 42.
- 78 Christopher Merrett, 'Time to abolish associate membership?' [letter] SM 32(1) May 1989: 49.
- 79 Verne Harris, 'The Black Sash, associate membership, and the question of gender' SM 33(1) May 1990: 35.
- 80 Black Sash, national circular, June 1989.
- 81 'Weenen farm labourers evicted' SM 33(2) September 1989: 44.
- 82 Jenny de Tolly, 'Looking at Lusaka' SM 33(2) September 1989: 38.
- 83 David Webster was a University of the Witwatersrand social anthropologist who played a key national role in the work of detainee monitoring and support. He was shot dead by Ferdi Barnard of the Civil Co-operation Bureau in the driveway of his home in Troyeville, Johannesburg on May Day, 1989. See Julie Frederikse, *David Webster* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1998).
- 84 Executive Committee minutes, 16 February and 12 April 1989. John Aitchison ran the highly regarded Unrest Monitoring Project from the Centre for Adult Education on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal.
- 85 Executive Committee minutes, 6 March 1989.
- 86 Executive Committee minutes, 21 March 1989.
- 87 Emergency executive meeting minutes, 17 April 1989.
- 88 Executive Committee minutes, 11 May 1989.
- 89 Executive Committee minutes, 6 July 1989.
- 90 Executive Committee minutes, 20 July 1989.
- 91 Clive Willows, letter to NMBS, 11 May 1989.
- 92 NW 21 June 1989.
- 93 NW 22 July 1989.
- 94 Mark Cornell, letter to Mary Kleinenberg, 27 July 1989.
- 95 Fidela Fouché, 'Discouraging news for street children: little help in sight' SM 32(3) January 1990: 48.
- 96 Executive Committee minutes, 10 August 1989.
- 97 Natal conflict sub-committee minutes, 14 August 1989.
- 98 Mary Kleinenberg interview: 4.
- 99 Executive Committee minutes, 17 August 1989.

- 100 Mary Burton, 'The Defiance Campaign' *SM* 32(3) January 1990: 43.
- 101 *NW* 22 September 1989.
- 102 'Pietermaritzburg response' *SM* 32(3) January 1990: 45.
- 103 Shirley Moulder, letter to NMBS, 11 September 1989.
- 104 Mary Kleinenberg, letter to Pat Merrett, 20 September 1989.
- 105 Mbulelu Hina and Graeme Swan, letter, October 1989 referred to in Executive Committee minutes, 18 October 1989.
- 106 *The Black Sash, 1955–2005: The Golden Jubilee Report* (Cape Town: Black Sash, 2005): 69.
- 107 Five Freedoms Forum, letter to NMBS, November 1989.
- 108 Annual report, 1989.
- 109 *Black Sash, 1955–2005*: 6.
- 110 Newsletter, 17 February 1990.

AN IMPORTANT NATIONAL women's conference, entitled Malibongwe, took place in Amsterdam in January 1990. Its theme was 'Women united for a unitary, non-racial, democratic South Africa'. Although no members of the Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) attended, other women from Pietermaritzburg did. Following this conference, the Natal Organisation of Women arranged a Mini-Malibongwe Conference in Pietermaritzburg on 11 March 1990. The conference began with a report back from Amsterdam delegates, including Black Sash national vice-president Rosemary van Wyk Smith from Grahamstown. Discussions were based on issues arising from the Amsterdam conference and focused on the possibility of setting up some sort of national women's organisation. This would give women the opportunity to share ideas and work together for peace, justice and equality in South Africa.¹ Many members of NMBS attended this conference, which exceeded expectations, with van Wyk Smith's participation described as being highly beneficial and constructive. A unanimous decision at the end of the conference was that United Democratic Front (UDF) and Inkatha women should get together to discuss the current situation, given the fact that men had signally failed to achieve peace.² However, the women seemed unable to carry positive messages from the conference into the townships and later it became very clear that their ability to curb the bloody battles soon to be fought in the Edendale valley was negligible.

Telegrams and faxes were adopted as methods of alerting government to the concerns of NMBS and from mid-March the following were sent to President F.W. de Klerk:

- 15 March 1990: 'Please institute a judicial commission of inquiry into police activity in the Pietermaritzburg townships. This matter is very urgent.'
- 30 March 1990: 'Following our fax of 15.03.1990, it has become increasingly evident that the riot police and the kitskonstabels must be withdrawn if peace is to be restored in townships. Please use your influence to ensure that something is done immediately/urgently.'³

- 3 April 1990: 'We agree with you that anarchy cannot be tolerated and that we should build a new South Africa without brutality. We therefore urge you to pay attention to police lawlessness, bias and brutality.'

When the NMBS agreed to shift the focus from the police to Inkatha, since they appeared to be the aggressors, a fax to Oscar Dhlomo read:

- 28 March 1990: 'On the 20 February 1990 Mr David Ntombela successfully persuaded Inkatha people not to launch an attack in the Edendale Valley. In the interests of peace we appeal to you, and all Inkatha leaders, to go to Edendale today and use your influence to try and persuade people to go home, and to destroy their weapons.'⁴

Appeals for peace were, however, unsuccessful:

During the single week from 25 to 31 March 1990 a small-scale war took place to the west of Pietermaritzburg. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), 200 people died and 20 000 were displaced. They were mainly from Ashdown, Caluza, Mpumuza, Gezubuso, KwaShange and KwaMnyandu in the lower Vulindlela and Edendale areas. There are no figures for those who were injured or disabled. Twenty years later ruined, abandoned buildings were still to be found from what became known as the Seven Day War. At the same time, with superior media coverage, the battle for Beirut was taking place across the Green Line between Syrian forces and General Michel Aoun's Lebanese army: 300 people were killed and 1 200 injured.⁵

During the Seven Day War the Natal Midlands Crisis Committee (NMCC) was set up to provide and co-ordinate support, resources and information to community organisations; support victims of violence; and monitor and record incidents of unrest to make the public more aware of the crisis.⁶

At a NMBS executive meeting it was noted that Joan Kerchhoff and Mary Kleinenberg would continue to attend NMCC meetings held at the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity at 7.30 am every day. On 28 March it was reported that police had agreed to display photographs of the dead at Plessislaer in order to assist relatives identify family members. Three clinics had been set up and over 800 wounded people seen while two mass funerals would be held at Edendale Lay Centre. A church procession took place on 8 April to show symbolic support for those living in strife-ridden areas.⁷ In another report, Radley Keys of the Democratic Party gave examples of police standing by while Inkatha members attacked UDF supporters and refusing to make arrests when witnesses had enough courage to file complaints.⁸ Jenny Bowen spoke of her memories of the war and a particularly difficult job she did:

Although it wasn't directly Sash, the job I was given, with PJ [Schwikkard], was to go to the mortuary every day in order to try and look at unclaimed bodies and then to match them with missing people. Radley [Keys] ... was centrally involved and [the Democratic Party] office was the clearing house for people who couldn't find children. They would identify missing children and we would try and match them with bodies in the morgue. PACSA [Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness] was also very involved.⁹

Allister Sparks wrote:

Pietermaritzburg, South Africa – The road that runs westward from Pietermaritzburg passes through a valley flanked by rolling hills, which at this time of year, after late summer rains, are a brilliant green, dotted with little clusters of houses from which wisps of blue wood-smoke rise. But the appearance of tranquility is deceptive. The people living in this idyllic spot in South Africa's garden province of Natal have named it 'The Valley of Death'. It is the most violent killing field in a civil war between rival factions of the Zulu tribe that has exacted 3,500 deaths since January 1987 – more than Lebanon and Northern Ireland combined for that period.¹⁰

In April 1990 a finance sub-committee, Midlands Crisis Relief Fund (MCRF), was formed to provide material relief and aid to the victims of violence. Mary Kleinenberg of NMBS was elected to this committee, which met weekly. It raised funds and disbursed them as necessary. At this time, there were about 12 000 displaced persons in temporary centres in churches and schools around Pietermaritzburg and the cost of feeding them was approximately R20 000 per week.¹¹ An MCRF report of June 1990 acknowledges 'the invaluable contribution of organizations and individuals in the city, [but] we must record with regret our distress at the attitude of the majority of the privileged population who seem to carry on as if nothing had or was happening. It is ironic that what white residents call "sleepy hollow" has in the past 3 years seen more deaths than Northern Ireland in 21 years of bitter civil conflict.'¹² Kleinenberg recorded details of the winding down of the MCRF: 'Attached are a set of Income & Expenditure Accounts to 8 August 1990 from MCRF. A meeting ... decided that the balance of R7 614.53 would be transferred to the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches as they have taken over the relief work.'¹³

Women continued their attempts to influence the situation, even though they had little or no success. An example was the peace march on 29 March 1990 after the Edendale valley had been torn apart by political violence. A large crowd of hundreds of women were walking along the Edendale Road, arms linked, chanting '*Wathint' abafazi, wathint' mbokodo*' (You have struck a woman, you have struck a rock) when they were confronted by a roadblock

mounted by the notorious and much-dreaded riot squad. The press reported as follows:

A march of women through Edendale yesterday to protest against alleged police partisanship and violence dispersed after police threatened to use shot guns and teargas ... Chief Magistrate, Cecil Dicks, had given permission for the march to be held from Market Square to the Trust Bank Building, where a petition demanding the withdrawal of the riot police and special constables was to be presented to the district commissioner. However, because of transport difficulties, the protesters convened instead at the Methodist church in Edendale. Approximately 500 residents were joined by 11 white women, most of them members of the Black Sash. When the police arrived the women were told to get off the road [and] they moved onto a side road, where police again ordered them to leave. The white women and a male were locked into a police van and taken to Plessislaer police station. They were later released after being forbidden to re-enter the area.¹⁴



In the police van at the peace march of 29 March 1990 (Back, from left to right: Jane Worsnip, Louise Hall, Anton Krone, Bridget Krone and Clare Kerchhoff. In front, Mary Kleinenberg)

At a talk at the Alan Paton Centre, Mary Kleinenberg recalled this event: 'The crowd was furious and started banging on the van, calling for our release. The situation got critical when the police threatened to shoot at the crowd with live ammunition. Those of us in the van managed to persuade the women outside to disperse.'¹⁵ It was, of course, typical of the tactics used by the police at that

time, given the unrestrained powers they were able to wield against anyone whose actions were considered subversive. Kleinenberg and Fidela Fouché were invited to attend an evaluation of the women's peace march, which they reluctantly agreed to do. They were concerned that it could be difficult because when the march disbanded the women went to the Edendale Lay Centre where they were joined by the politician Harry Gwala, recently released from Robben Island, who berated them for daring to organise a women's event without his permission. Kleinenberg and Fouché were nervous about getting involved in a situation where male leaders were attempting to curb the actions of these independent women.¹⁶ In fact, the meeting went well and Gwala was not much of a threat.¹⁷

Protest stands continued. The first, on 14 March, arising from the Mini-Malibongwe Conference, was held on women's education. On national budget day a single-person stand was held, and on 19 May a stand highlighting the differences between black and white pensions, an issue the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office had taken up, took place. The activities of the Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB), a South African Defence Force hit squad, were tackled in a stand on 29 September.

Later in the year Mary Kleinenberg reported the good news that Anne Truluck (later Harley) had accepted the job of researcher/fieldworker and would start work on 1 September 1990.¹⁸ Christine Chapman donated a desk and fan, Sarah Carlisle a chair, and a computer was bought and carpet laid, all within budget through the generosity of members.¹⁹ The environmental sub-committee's first fact sheet, focusing on hormone herbicides, was published in October 1990.

The only resolution adopted at the February 1991 national conference perhaps illustrates that this organisation of women was beginning to think seriously about the status of women in general. The resolution was added to the organisation's aims and objectives: 'To address in all its work how each area of such work affects women.' The fact that women were discriminated against in all walks of life was beginning to take root in organisational consciousness. The same conference issued a statement on the murder in Pietermaritzburg of Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo of Table Mountain:

The Black Sash is concerned about the increasing lack of credibility of the South African Police and the judicial process in Natal. For this reason we call for a full investigation into the murder of Chief Maphumulo and the immediate prosecution of those implicated. We are increasingly aware that reconstruction in Natal remains impossible whilst violence in the region continues. Until the process of law and order is seen to work, this violence is certain to continue.²⁰

The plight of people forced to move from their homes during the violence in Pietermaritzburg so moved Maphumulo that he offered them temporary residence in his area of jurisdiction. He became a mediator and peacemaker and petitioned the State President to set up a judicial commission of inquiry into the violence. His obituary noted: 'He was shot and killed by assassins' bullets at his home on 25 February 1991. News of his death was received with shock and disbelief. His funeral, at Wadley Stadium, was attended by some 30 000 mourners.' Nobody knew who had killed him.²¹

The feminism debate was taken up with great intensity in the early nineties and two significant contributors, to the national debate as well as that within Sash, were closely associated with the NMBS past and present: Sheila Meintjes and Fidela Fouché. Gender groups had been formed in some regions and in NMBS the group was particularly strong. *Sash Magazine* took up the issue of women's rights by interviewing Western Cape members who held widely divergent opinions ranging from 'feminism ... is a philosophy of liberation that aims at a society in which both men and women are free from all oppression' to 'that is not what I joined the Sash to do'.²²

In the NMBS there were older members who thought that the Black Sash had been formed to champion the rights of all South Africans, and taking up women's rights specifically put the region in danger of being distracted from its purpose. Phoebe Brown recalls a meeting where she and Joy Roberts, as older members, felt out of place:

Joy Roberts and I went to a Black Sash meeting. I don't remember what year it was, but it was quite a while after all the people that we knew were active in it. There were a whole new lot of younger people, and we went to the meeting which was an important one, I have forgotten why, and Joy said 'I think this isn't the right meeting that we have come to'. We waited a while and then discovered that it was the Black Sash meeting. After that she and I just opted out because we thought that we didn't know anyone anymore and their views were more radical than ours were.²³

This was very unfortunate because everyone in the organisation had a role to play and certainly the gender group had no desire to alienate older members. They believed that the work had changed, demanding a more gender-sensitive approach; and because the organisation was responding to very different circumstances, working with women became an important focus. Men had been excluded from full membership of the Black Sash since its inception, so the extension into working with women, and against sexism, seemed appropriate.

The debate was taken up in *Sash Magazine* and Fidela Fouché, co-chairperson of the NMBS, contributed two articles. In the first, she consulted monitoring records, which revealed that there were many ‘dismal, gory and heart-rending’ incidents of attacks on women. However, she argued that women were not only victims of the Natal conflict who had lost family members and homes, and become vulnerable to rape, but were also agents who used their considerable power within the patriarchal framework to further the war dynamic. This was done by protecting sons and relatives in hiding, defending homes and possessions, and looking after the injured. These women had been known to cheer and ululate to encourage their men to join battle. However, she also believed there had been rallies with women calling for peace, which she thought introduced a tacit note of resistance to war waged by men. Perhaps this represented the beginnings of a feminist consciousness questioning patriarchy.²⁴

In her second article, Fouché examined the claim that urban Zulu women’s situations could be regarded as a special case from the gender perspective, given that all women are prey to the tension between theory and practice over the struggle to extend their power beyond the constraints of men’s authority. She put forward the argument that ‘women’s responses to patriarchal norms are a mix of acceptance and rejection, compliance and rebellion’. And she went on to say she believed that black women’s situations in South Africa were equally applicable to the relations between women and men elsewhere in the world: ‘The case of Zulu women should [therefore] not need special elucidation.’²⁵

The NMBS continued its various activities, many with other organisations. During 1991, for example:

Greater membership participation has been facilitated by monthly ‘coffee evenings’ at the homes of working committee members. Stands held on old-age pension delivery, Shirley Gunn’s detention, the plight of Edendale refugees, and the CCB scandal. In October, at the time of the Black Sash national campaign for peace, the names of 1 300 dead (since 1987) in the PMB area were inscribed on a ‘tombstone’ displayed in public, as part of the Midlands’ observance.

Research worker Anne Truluck revised and updated two earlier Black Sash booklets on Pietermaritzburg and issued *Pietermaritzburg 1990: The Fractured City*. The *Natal Witness* gave generous coverage to this booklet.

Other activities include links with Earthlife Africa, regarding the environment, and the Women’s Group’s co-operation with Natal Coastal to celebrate significant women by means of a diary or calendar – a project which, for various reasons, has had to be postponed.²⁶

In the next *Sash Magazine* the NMBS reported news of further protest stands, one with a triple focus, as well as the activities of the women's group:

On Saturday, 29 June, along with all other Black Sash regions, we held a stand to mark the end of apartheid legislation and, more importantly, to focus on the need for ongoing protest against current discriminatory practices.

Sixteen women gathered outside the City Hall and divided into three groups. The first acknowledged areas of South African life about which we need no longer protest – group areas, population registration, pass laws and land acts. The second highlighted social and political issues over which there remains great concern – segregated education, the Internal Security Act, homelessness and the existence of Bantustans. The third called for some solutions, including setting up an interim government, restitution of land and a single education system.

We later realised that, unlike other Black Sash regions who in many ways were reclaiming their public terrain, Natal Midlands, through the support of the sympathetic chief magistrate, has been standing every month during the past few years.

Our stand on 6 July focused again on the plight of black pensioners. It highlighted the present inequality of pensions between different racial groups and called for an end to apartheid in pension payments and the immediate implementation of parity.

Members of the women's [gender] group, which is one of our most stimulating groups, agree that our current project 'Women in the new constitution' is an extremely exciting and rewarding one. We have discussed areas of life particularly pertinent to women – such as health, family, reproductive rights, and legal status – and we are now examining each in detail with a view to the protection of women in future legislation. At the same time, we are encouraging other women to start similar projects by talking about the group on every possible occasion.²⁷

The local press reported the burning of the homes of at least fifty families in the Jesmondene informal settlement. Private security personnel arrived at about 2.30 am on Tuesday, 16 July, poured petrol on at least 23 tents and set them alight. It appears that landowners had assured the squatters that they could remain until the end of July and that they were included in the 1 044 families who were scheduled to be relocated to the farm Whispers near Copesville. The destruction of the squatters' homes therefore took place while negotiations for their accommodation were being discussed with the Natal Provincial Administration and Pietermaritzburg City Council. One of the former residents, Dianne Mkhize, said they were mostly refugees who had fled Maqongqo in the Table Mountain district when fighting broke out the previous year. She went on to say they had nowhere to go.²⁸

A letter to the national Black Sash president, Jenny de Tolly, from Mary Kleinenberg and Fidela Fouché gave details of the press article and added the following information:

Further information gathered is that the private security company [Combat Force] was employed by Allied-Grinaker's head office in Johannesburg. Allied-Grinaker is an amalgamation of Allied Building Society and the construction company Grinaker. We are asking Sash National to put pressure on Grinaker, and the NMBS will picket outside the main branch of Allied on Saturday morning, 20 July.

It appears that the Deputy Minister of Law and Order, Scheepers, has urgently requested that members of the public should notify the police of any illegal squatting. We are told by the Legal Resources Centre that the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act provides for illegal structures to be demolished; however, there is no mention of burning in the Act.

On Wednesday afternoon, 24 July, those remaining in the Jesmondene area were threatened and chased away by gun-toting members of the same security firm. Some of the black guards also carried traditional weapons.²⁹

A successful protest stand was held on Saturday 20 July, eliciting a considerable amount of support from the public. The NMBS handed out a pamphlet saying, 'We strongly condemn the action and question why the owners of the land, Allied/Grinaker, employed the confrontational security firm to deal with such a delicate situation in such an inhumane manner.'³⁰ The issue was taken up with Grinaker Construction by de Tolly, but the reply indicated that the security company had been employed to protect the legal rights of property ownership and adequate warning, and offers of transport, had been given to the squatters. They went on to say that the land had been purchased for housing and development purposes and with the squatters remaining on it illegally no development could take place.³¹ While NMBS members might have agreed that development was important, the process of setting alight people's homes and possessions, and threatening them with firearms, was considered grossly inappropriate.

The Natal Midlands region continued to work with women in and around Pietermaritzburg and, because the organisation had developed a high profile, they were often included when significant women visited the area. Two of these visits occurred in 1991:

Angela Davis, American human rights activist and author, toured the Pietermaritzburg unrest areas with members of the ANC Women's League. NMBS was invited to join them for a morning's discussion and several members also attended a seminar which Davis addressed at the University of Durban-Westville. Radha Kumar, one of India's leading feminists, was also in Pietermaritzburg for a few days, which enabled the branch to spend several hours with her in fruitful discussion about her involvement with the community in Bhopal, particularly the women, after the disaster there. Her courage and commitment often in the face of extraordinary odds, is an example and encouragement to us all.³²

Mary Kleinenberg recalled meeting these two women and a variety of others:

In our work with other organizations I was very privileged to meet some remarkable women visitors, largely through Patsy Seethal, an activist in this area. For example, I met Angela Davis, the well-known American author; Rhada Kumar and Vandana Shiva, who were environmental activists from India; Cheris Kramerae, who compiled the *Feminist Dictionary*; and Gayatri Spivak a fierce feminist activist, author and academic. She questioned my presence at a meeting because I was white and I remember Patsy gave her quite a mouthful and said she didn't think colour was relevant: she thought what people were doing was important and relevant.³³

Protest stands continued to be an important focus for the NMBS:

The NMBS and the End Conscription Campaign joined forces on two Sundays in protest at the presence of a casspir, billed by the organizers as a welcome diversion for children, at a local market. The stand drew considerable public interest and copies of the letter written in protest to the officer-in-charge of the police reserve were handed out to people in the park. The casspir is still on display, however, to people who seem unwilling to admit to or recognize the very serious statement its presence is making.³⁴

Some of the slogans used were 'Weapons of death are not children's toys'; 'Children should be afraid of weapons'; and 'Children should play with cuddly toys not casspirs'.

Another very productive year followed in the Natal Midlands in 1992. A stimulating and exciting workshop to discuss various issues showed the level of consensus and a new vision statement for the region was reported:

We envisage Black Sash as a proactive women's organization, working impartially, sensitively and in an informed way for justice; networking increasingly with other NGOs and community structures; monitoring and exposing human rights abuses, and promoting the recognition of first, second and third generation rights; expanding our advice office services to reflect the Black Sash's general policies; engaging in relevant research; and promoting human rights education.

We believe that we are currently doing nearly everything this statement envisages, as the following shows:

1. Rape Education Action Project (REAP). Towards the end of last year we joined with a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the city (including the African National Congress Women's League, Five Freedoms Forum, Lawyers for Human Rights, Women for Peaceful Change Now, Rape Crisis and the Centre for Criminal Justice at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg) to discuss the possibility of holding a seminar on rape, which is a major problem here. It became obvious, however, that a single seminar would be grossly inadequate, and thus REAP was formed. We plan to hold monthly seminars on different aspects of rape, such as medical, psychological, socio-cultural, date-rape and so on, and our first, in early March, on media and rape, attracted a lot of interest.

2. We have made the decision to hold public instead of members-only meetings on important issues, such as local government, pre-primary education, censorship, and public transport. Our first, on future local government, had a good response, and Sheena Duncan addressed the second on the Social Assistance Bill.
3. Our environmental group, with Earthlife Africa, put together a motivation for a municipal re-cycling scheme, and a report was presented to the city council's environment committee last November. The council has now committed itself in principle to such a scheme and has employed a consultant to advise.
4. The booklet, *You and the Constitution*, with special emphasis on women [gender] and the constitution, is being worked on by the women's group which hopes to complete the draft by the end of April.
5. We motivated that [the Canadian volunteer] Gail Cockburn be asked to survey how our advice offices are addressing women's issues, and when she visits every region she will address this particularly.³⁵

REAP arranged several well-attended seminars, but by the end of the year support began to dwindle and so a decision was made not to continue with the project. However, the gender group was discussing a 'violence against women' booklet based on the REAP seminars.³⁶

Fidela Fouché describes how when the NMBS gender group began to work on their constitution booklet, the language used excluded one of their members. The group had decided to discuss women in the family and workplace, their legal status, abuse and education, and in the media. However, at an early stage one of the members missed a meeting. This is how she responded to the minutes:

As a lesbian woman I was quite used to exclusion and even invisibility, but I certainly did not expect it from this group. If I could so easily be excluded by such a supportive group, how do we construct and empathise with women from very different cultures and experiences? Do we have the capacity to understand other women sufficiently to work with them for change? And what does this say about our ability to make a significant contribution to a new constitution?

From this experience the group learned that there would be lapses into stereotypical expressions unless there was constant vigilance and more sensitivity. This applied especially to women who did not belong to the same culture, if they were to understand what it meant to join with them in a common effort for change.³⁷

Minutes of the executive committee reported on events and achievements including the environment group, which had linked with other organisations to plan action to stop the shipment of plutonium around the South African coast. Anne Truluck's book *No Blood on Our Hands* had been completed in July and

referred to Pat Merrett for editing. The women's group had completed *You and the Constitution*, which had been passed on to Marie Dyer to edit.³⁸

The book *No Blood on Our Hands* was regarded by NMBS as of great importance, providing the region with empirical evidence, not just hearsay, about what was fuelling the violence.³⁹ It was fairly obvious, but not clearly documented, that Inkatha had been aided by the security forces, which made the government complicit in the unrest. But the evidence was lacking. The violence was terrifying, unrelenting and widespread and there was hardly anyone who was not in some way affected by it.

A reference group was set up to manage the research, and help and give guidance to Truluck where necessary. It consisted of two NMBS committee members, Jenny Clarence and Mary Kleinenberg, and three academics working at the University of Natal, John Wright, Simon Burton and John Aitchison. The group met Truluck regularly and the system seemed to work very well. Anne Harley (Truluck at the time of writing the book) later talked about the research and writing and some of the support that she received:

I was very honoured to be involved in it because I think what it did was make the ways in which white people had been involved very clear. It looked at business, local government, and at the State, both in terms of government officials and also security forces. It used what was really very much in the public domain so it wasn't about some sort of secret thing that was hidden away, it was about simply taking what was already there. I sat in court cases and read affidavits and spent hours and hours in the Natal Society Library reading newspapers. It was all there, it was really a question of putting it together in a way that made it become very obvious. I also conducted a lot of interviews all over the Midlands with people in local government, in business, and some security force people. For me, in those interviews there was a lot of fudging and a lot of it was fairly dishonest. I remember interviewing the then Minister of Police, Adriaan Vlok, and knowing that he was lying, but there was nothing I could do about it. So for me what was important about it was that the stuff that was already in the public domain needed cataloguing, which made the involvement so blatantly obvious that no one could really argue against it.

Harley went on to say:

It was awful. I did find it very difficult. Oddly enough just sitting in the library was the hardest in some ways because it was just day, after day, after day reading this awful stuff in a quite isolated context. I remember John Morrison [then deputy librarian] used to be around and he would come and check on how things were going, so that was one person I did get to speak to a little bit, but, for the most part, it was quite alienating.

What helped a lot was that I quite rapidly became integrated into the networks of the people who were doing this work ... pretty remarkable people. That helped, but what also helped was that I knew that I'd been lucky (I'm not sure if that's the right word) to have escaped it because I arrived after the Seven Day War. In some ways I didn't have to

experience the intensity of that particular horror, so reading about it was about as bad as it got for me. But certainly, going out into communities and having people talk about it was a very disturbing thing and I remember feeling incredibly angry about what was happening and about the ways in which it was being lied about. It was the lying that really made me very angry, but doing the work with other people helped.

The executive committee believed that being exposed to so much violence was very difficult for Truluck, so she was offered professional counselling. But she chose a weekly meeting with Clarence and Kleinenberg, who used exercises from a wonderful handbook to try to alleviate the all-consuming horror of what had taken place.⁴⁰ Harley's response to this in her interview was gratifying:

I do remember at some stage, you [Mary Kleinenberg], Jenny Clarence and I meeting at various points and talking about the violence, and I remember finding that quite emotional but a very good thing that helped me to talk through some of the emotions that I was having and dealing with. I remember very well how helpful those sessions were, but I was also very well supported in the job. It wasn't like working for some company or the university; there was a 'Sashness' about it that I have never experienced in any other job. It was a very supportive space and a lot of that, I think, was about the fact that it was women. I have subsequently experienced jobs, and before that, with women who were not supportive, but I found that Sash was a really supportive women's space. To the organisation you were a human being, and a woman, before you were an employee, volunteer or whatever your actual professional relationship was. So I really feel that that was a crucial aspect of it with Sash as this very caring women's organisation.

I think it was an excellent process, I really do. I think that if I had just been let loose the end product would not have been as good as it was. That reference group was really important. I didn't experience the reference group in the way I experienced being in Sash, but that was because it was a very serious thing – it was about making sure that the research was rigorous and so they weren't a support group for me, they were a reference group, which was fine and they were good people. And, I really felt that they were very helpful. The whole thing felt to me at the time that it had been really well thought through, and subsequent to that I have modelled other research projects on that because it made sense.⁴¹

The next committee meeting recorded that *No Blood on Our Hands* had been given to Julian von Klemperer, a local, supportive lawyer to read and check for defamation. Four pages of queries were received for Truluck to work on.

The environment group reported to the committee that they were dissatisfied with the way in which the City Council had handled the recycling issue. The consultant who had prepared a way forward had not been invited to the meeting to present his report.⁴² Anne Harley recalled her view of the environment group and NMBS in general in an interview:

I had a very strong feeling of the Midlands Sash being a little bit of an outsider in Sash nationally. I felt that we were pretty good and solid in terms of having active members and ticking over, but we were doing some interesting stuff that other Sash branches weren't involved in. I do feel that we were politically a little bit more radical, especially in terms of the feminist and the environmental stuff, which was largely Fidela [Fouché]. It wasn't the kind of liberal, do good, let's recycle stuff, it was much more out there and I think we pushed the boundaries, both in Maritzburg and in Sash. I think there were some people who looked at Midlands askance, but I think a lot of Sash really admired us. Some of the oldies were maybe a bit dubious ... The protests that we had – we were protesting against things that other people just weren't prepared to go out in public and do, and although they might have supported us, they weren't prepared to stick their necks out and we did. Some of the things that we were protesting against other parts of the Sash weren't, or maybe didn't even know about. And that was clear in the very first conference about the violence. Sash people knew that there was this problem of violence but they didn't understand it, and I think that we helped them to begin to recognise that it wasn't what was being portrayed in the press.⁴³

The NMBS allied itself with a variety of organisations including the African National Congress (ANC), Built Environment Support Group, the Combined Residents and Ratepayers Association and religious groups to challenge the City Council's attempts to demolish the Happy Valley informal settlement at Otto's Bluff. The NMBS, with the other organisations, held two stands a day on average to protest about the City Council's refusal to negotiate with the residents and on 6 June members were present at the site to give support at the eviction due to take place that day.⁴⁴ The press reported that the removal to Shenstone/Ambleton farms had been rejected because of a complete lack of amenities: no schools, no transport to the city, no medical facilities, no shops, and far from places of employment.⁴⁵ However, it was later reported that on 9 June shacks belonging to about forty families who were living on the borders of Happy Valley were demolished.⁴⁶

Another protest stand was broken up by heavily armed police. Organisations opposed to the Happy Valley removals met outside Ron Robbins' shop in the Hayfields shopping centre, the purpose being to expose his role in the squatter demolition controversy as chairperson of the City Council Management and Finance Committee. It was believed that Robbins had been instrumental in ordering the demolitions. A number of shoppers responded angrily to the picket. One incensed woman picked up a poster and tore it in half, but others wanted to know what the picket was about and what Robbins had done. He later described the event as pathetic and said that although everyone had the right to their own opinions he was comforted by the number of shoppers who disagreed with the picketers. He added that the City Council was trying to

improve the squatters' quality of life. Contrary to this belief, deputy mayor Rob Haswell said it was abundantly clear that the squatters did not wish to move and it was ludicrous to suggest they were simply being put up to resistance by agitators.⁴⁷

In July the City Council announced a moratorium on demolitions, declared Happy Valley a transit area, provided water and sanitation, and signalled its intention to negotiate with residents. The NMBS believed that constant pressure on the council influenced this positive decision.⁴⁸ The landowner, Ron Robbins, threatened to sue the NMBS for interference, but later withdrew this threat. A fact sheet on Happy Valley was produced by the NMBS for the Economic History Conference held at the University of Natal in June.⁴⁹

It was noted by the NMBS that the security firm Combat Force, the same company that had burned shacks at Jesmondene, was also involved in the demolitions at Happy Valley. Combat Force was at this time under investigation by the office of the Attorney-General after one of its employees was convicted of murder. During his trial it was alleged that the owner, Norman Reeves, had offered employees a bounty of R100 for each person killed.⁵⁰ Security firms at that time were notorious for their utter contempt of, and callous disregard for, the rights of people with whom they dealt. The Happy Valley protests elicited some strong differences of opinion in the NMBS over protest tactics:

Some members were unhappy with what they felt was undignified and 'unSashlike' behaviour at protest gatherings. They called for silent stands which are so much part of our tradition. They felt that public opinion of the Black Sash is low, and that our participation with other organizations had contributed towards this. At a well-attended special general meeting, widely differing opinions were aired. While we did not attempt to reach consensus where it was clearly not feasible, two important points emerged.

Firstly, it was agreed that the traditional Black Sash stand retains a central place in our activities and that no-one wished this to be different. A large group, however, argued for the extension of the kinds of protest in which we engage especially when we join other organizations. Here, different opinions emerged but the majority opinion was that it is crucial that we retain contact with others around common concerns and that the Black Sash cannot, in joint protests, impose its own style. There was no suggestion that violent forms of protest should be condoned. Secondly, and most importantly, it was agreed that it is crucial, especially in the face of so much division elsewhere, to build on areas of common concern. While acknowledging and welcoming different perspectives, we must not allow these to undermine our central unity of purpose.⁵¹

It seemed that members had spent a great deal of time on the Happy Valley crisis and consequently not many other protest stands had taken place. However, when Martin Williams, managing editor of *The Natal Witness*, ridiculed the Women's

National Coalition by writing ‘there is something disquietly undemocratic about the coming together of women’, the NMBS quickly arranged a protest stand outside the offices of the newspaper.⁵² The coalition had been founded in April 1992 and was regarded as a temporary body designed to look after women’s interests during the negotiations phase of 1990–1994: it was feared that political parties would concentrate on other matters. Sheila Meintjes later described it as an ‘incredible achievement’. Fidela Fouché pointed out that there was a need for an ‘informed feminism’ that did not simply aim for ‘equality with the patriarchy rather than social justice’.⁵³ Meintjes highlighted the general attitude that ‘Women’s concerns were considered to be in the realm of the “private” while public matters were the concern of men’; black women having been subjected to the triple oppression of class, race and sex.⁵⁴ Sash had been challenging that view for decades. Meintjes highlighted the oppressive role of customary law and traditional leaders (which was often illustrated in advice office cases), the dismissive attitude of the South African Communist Party towards women, and the need to give meaning to the ‘shadowy notion’ of non-sexism.⁵⁵

Another protest stand, which included a petition, was on impartial policing and largely calling for the withdrawal of 32 Battalion from Imbali and the lifting of the unrest area declarations in Natal. Members of the NMBS visited women in prison who had been arrested for demonstrating on this issue. Two further stands highlighted the detention of children in prison; and, with the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), the discriminatory conscription of white males.⁵⁶ Mary Kleinenberg recalled handing in the petition during the impartial policing protest stand: ‘I was asked to go and give it to the commander, and I remember being walked along many corridors by a policeman, and being quite nervous about who I was to see and whether I’d find my way out again. The commander was not friendly and I found the building very intimidating.’⁵⁷

Meetings in the region continued to be held regularly with reports sent to members who were not in attendance. The executive committee minutes reported that the Natal Museum had asked members for anti-apartheid struggle mementos they were willing to donate. Reference was made to the appointment of Mary Kleinenberg to the new committee, known as the Viljoen Commission, which included representatives from Johannesburg, Cape Town and Grahamstown, set up to consider accountability and management in the Black Sash.⁵⁸ The results were published in 1993. The October minutes reported the formation in Pietermaritzburg of the Women’s National Coalition, whose aim it was to find out what women’s expectations and needs were in order to

draw up a Women's Charter. It was agreed that participating organisations would retain their own identities, but join the coalition to identify areas of joint action.

At the same general meeting members once again debated abortion, with Pat Merrett outlining Sash's current response to this issue, and Mary Kleinenberg summarising the current legal position. It was resolved, with one dissenting voice, to accept the proposal put forward by Sheena Duncan that 'Any right to life in a bill of rights must be qualified by a proviso that this must not be interpreted to deny a woman the right to choose to have an abortion'. This was followed by a discussion on affirmative action, its goal, efficacy and possible methods of implementation. The meeting resolved to accept the gender group proposal to recommend that an anti-discrimination clause be included in the Constitution with a statement of intent to compel government to take the issue seriously.⁵⁹

The NMBS 1992 report to the national conference recorded that political conflict in Natal had intensified, particularly in townships of smaller rural centres like Richmond and Estcourt. Many NMBS members had been personally touched by the violence through the death or injury of a friend, colleague or employee. It went on to say that the region had decided to put pressure on the police to try to speed up investigations into the unresolved murder of Skumbuzo Ngwenya Mbatha, assassinated on 8 February 1992. Mbatha was a peacemaker well known to the region, and a friend and colleague of Anne Truluck. The Imbali mayor, Phikelela Ndlovu, and his deputy Abdul Awetha, both prominent Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) members were arrested in June, charged with the murder and released on bail.⁶⁰

At a later executive meeting it was announced that eight members of NMBS had been accredited by the Network of Independent Monitors (NIM), a local forum to co-ordinate monitoring. With increasing violence and devastation it was felt necessary and helpful to come together to attempt to record events accurately and impartially. One of the first tasks of NIM was to monitor the return of people from Phatteni to their homes and then the funeral of Reggie Hadebe on 8 November 1992.⁶¹ Hadebe, a unionist, was also known as a diplomat and peacemaker and his murder was a blow to the region.

The *You and the Constitution* booklet published in October 1992 was a great success. The Advice Office Trust had borne the cost of 15 000 copies, with a request from Sheena Duncan that she be permitted to keep 1 000 copies she wished to distribute to churches in the Johannesburg area. Copies were sent to *New Nation* and *New African*, and Derek Alberts asked if the booklet could

be reproduced in full for *Echo*, the free *Natal Witness* supplement. A request received from Alan Brews of the Education Contact Network was for copies to send out with their monthly diaries to a large number of resource centres.⁶² *You and the Constitution* was reviewed by Nancy Gordon:

This attractive and excellent little booklet addresses educationally disadvantaged women in South Africa, giving information on what a constitution is, how it affects women, and how we can get involved in constitution writing. Remarkably comprehensive and lucid, with good layout and illustrations which cleverly augment the text, it should meet the needs of its target readership, but also be useful to many of us more privileged educationally. Every Black Sash member should become familiar with this booklet, and help promote it. It would be good to have it available in other languages as well.⁶³

Late in 1992 Gcina Mhlope gave the NMBS the opening gala night of her play, *Have You Seen Zandile?* to raise funds, for which the organisation was extremely grateful. Staged in the Hexagon Theatre, University of Natal, and a very well supported occasion, it ranked as the most successful fundraising event for NMBS, netting a much needed profit of R2 668. Pat Merrett wrote to thank Nikki Brighton, a NMBS member, for her huge effort in organising the catering and ticket sales and it was suggested that she should be co-opted onto the executive committee to work on fundraising with Juliet Armstrong.⁶⁴

A voter education workshop had been arranged for 30 November 1992 to find out what projects were in progress, what skills on offer and what resources could be made available to help in the planning of the essential service of voter education. The NMBS had written to the minister of manpower, urging him to announce a date to the amendment to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and alerting him to the fact that farmworkers were currently being evicted to circumvent their inclusion in the legislation. The executive committee had also written to Mike Tarr (Democratic Party) about proposed amendments to the Fundraising Act that would adversely affect the ability of all non-governmental organisations to raise funds from overseas donors. Tarr replied by sending a copy of a letter he had received from S.J. Schoeman, deputy minister of national health, which said the matter had been postponed and a judicial commission of inquiry had been appointed to investigate certain aspects of fundraising activities.

Perhaps the most worrying event, although it was an old chestnut, concerned an accusation in *The Natal Witness* that Black Sash was inconsistent and even hypocritical in not condemning necklacing while attacking state acts of violence. Pat Merrett on behalf of the NMBS wrote a reply:

The *Natal Witness* managing editor and editor have recently accused the Black Sash of inconsistency and even hypocrisy in not condemning necklacing while attacking state acts of violence and repression (October 7 and 23).

The Black Sash came into existence in the late 1950s to monitor and expose the human rights abuses of the South African apartheid regime. Sash's protest is based on the premise that the government should be answerable to its citizens, and that the citizenry is accountable for its government. Our prime target has always been the government for we believe that the state is responsible for the protection and welfare of its citizens through the defence of human rights, the maintenance of the rule of law, and the equitable distribution of resources.

We also believe that we have a duty as voters to challenge and criticize the government when it violates that responsibility – as the South African government has done for over 40 years. The Trust Feed trial⁶⁵ is merely one recent reminder of how state functionaries have abused their position as civil servants and protectors of the people, and have committed atrocities.

Necklacing – which no one can deny is a gruesome and horrifying crime – is a by-product of the dehumanization of apartheid, of the policy of 'divide and rule', of political frustration and of a desperate fight for diminishing resources. It is the reaction of the victims of apartheid; it is not being carried out (as far as we can judge) by elected or appointed state legislators and bureaucrats.

Black Sash is fully conscious of violations of human rights abuses by non-government parties and groups, and certainly does not condone violence. But there is a qualitative difference between state acts of violence and what may be called private acts of violence such as necklacing. It is up to the police and the courts to prevent or punish the latter; it is hardly the role of a human rights organisation. But it is the role of a rights organisation to expose government repression and infringements of civil rights.⁶⁶

Voter education was seen as a priority in 1993, as was continued monitoring, and in the first part of the year preparations to host the national Black Sash conference took precedence over many other activities. Anne Harley summed up the difficulties of finding enough time for all the required activities: at one point she, Ann Strode and Gail Wannenburg were sitting together at a meeting and had to find a date to meet during the following week, but their diaries were full of Sash activities. The three of them collectively realised that Sash had pretty much become their lives.⁶⁷

The national conference took place in Pietermaritzburg from 2 to 4 April 1993 and Stephanie Alexander wrote a summary of the session on Natal, which included four speakers who had been working on violence issues. These were central to the concerns of NMBS members.

Jenny Irish of the Human Rights Commission, Durban, an active monitor of Natal violence and instrumental in setting up NIM in Natal, said that the death statistics were no indication of the true extent of the violence: 'they say nothing of the occurrence of non-lethal violence and intimidation, or of the suffering of

injured, the bereaved and the dispossessed; suffering which will have untold long-term effects.' She went on to talk about the tensions between the IFP and the ANC, heightened when KwaZulu authorities denied the ANC the right to hold political meetings, and said that the South African government was by no means neutral, with security forces still either actively involved in violence or simply failing to respond to warnings of impending attack.

John Aitchison, head of the Centre for Adult Education at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, who had made a special study of the origins of violence in Natal, talked about points raised by the Black Sash in 1988 that he still considered relevant to future work. They included continuing to put pressure on the state to cease evading its responsibilities; and encouraging peace moves, especially by non-government organisations, such as churches and civic bodies: 'the simplest way to encourage peace is to reward it.' He gave as an example the fact that the Imbali Rehabilitation Committee had received no tangible support. Other recommendations were to put pressure on the police for swift and thorough investigation of violent incidents; press for the installation of representative, democratically chosen black local authorities; and last, to assist in the healing of the deep trauma caused by violence through counselling, training and education designed to attend to inner human needs.

Thomas Hadebe, a fieldworker for Peace in Natal, a politically independent, internationally funded conflict resolution organisation, talked about the fact that peace agreements were often not agreements at all. He gave the example of Table Mountain, where violence had ceased because the IFP, with the aid of security forces, had driven out ANC supporters. He said that monitoring provided information about communities and their needs. If development went hand in hand with peace initiatives this would show that the latter could bring substantial rewards. He also advocated patient negotiation so that eventually displaced persons might return to their homes.

Gerry Maré, a lecturer in sociology at the University of Natal, Durban, held the view that 'violence has bedevilled the negotiation process in South Africa'. He considered that a further major obstacle was regionalism and gave a brief history of the National Party's suggestions for regional division, arguing that Buthelezi's dominance over KwaZulu and Natal gave him a stepping stone into national politics. He believed that the past and the projected chain of events could create federalism if this region accepted a constitution proposed by Buthelezi, with considerable potential for dissatisfaction and disagreement from those opposed to strong regional power bases.⁶⁸

For the Midlands region the most important resolution emanating from the conference concerned the ongoing violence:

The Black Sash, re-affirming its commitment to seeking ways of ending the violence that is contributing to the destruction of our society, and noting with concern the ongoing violence, especially in Natal but also in other parts of the country, calls upon the government to assume responsibility for the ending of the violence and the reconstructing of damaged communities by:

1. banning the carrying of all arms and dangerous weapons in public;
2. prohibiting the supplying of arms by the South African police and the homeland police to other parties;
3. ensuring that members of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and police act impartially at all times;
4. ensuring that police thoroughly investigate and follow through to conclusion all reported cases of violence;
5. ensuring that members of the police and SADF who are charged with complicity in the violence be suspended from duty and full investigations be instigated, with accountability to the public for the outcome of such investigations;
6. providing immediate financial assistance for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged communities to aid in the creation of a climate for peace.

Three other resolutions were:

The Black Sash would work for the entrenchment of affirmative action in law believing that it was a positive action, not one of reverse discrimination.

Noting that the Black Sash was fundamentally opposed to the death penalty and calling for its total abolition.

Supporting the principle of women's right to moral and physical autonomy it was proposed to introduce a clause in the bill of rights that did not derogate from a woman's right to choose.⁶⁹

After the stress and hard work involved in organising the conference, the NMBS were gratified to receive a fax from Jenny de Tolly, national chairperson:

Our very grateful thanks for a superbly organized conference; for the delicious, nutritious food, the welcoming homes, the relaxing entertainment, the efficient secretariat and for organizing the transport. You made us feel welcome and supported – very much a reflection of the strong, well organized and well-focused region that you are. Thank you. Natal Midlands Sash is a source of great strength and pride to the rest of Sash.⁷⁰

Some of the positive results for the region of hosting the conference were reported in *Sash Magazine* and clearly it was thought to have been a great success. It is of interest to note that a gender portfolio, new to the organisation, was decided upon at this conference:

Organising National Conference resulted in a series of exciting and positive experiences for the region. Some we expected: the characteristic warmth and dynamism of the people in our organization and the renewed energy and commitment that always seems to go with that, was a strong as ever. We thank everyone who contributed towards making it such a rejuvenating time.

We had also expected the conference to be hard work and were somewhat anxious about our ability to undertake such an enormous task. What was unexpected was the extent to which members of our region, some of whom had not been particularly active in the Black Sash recently, offered assistance in a whole host of different ways. Not only did this make the organization far less of a burden for some, but it provided the vehicle for a new sense of cohesion and commitment from far more people in the Midlands. In a small region like ours, this is a much appreciated bonus.

Of all the issues debated at conference, the most exciting (and daunting) for us was our new responsibility for the gender portfolio. Discussions about the full implications of this are well underway and we have contacted all regions requesting their expectations of us so that we can plan with the broad context firmly in mind. We would welcome suggestions and comments at any time and look forward to frequent communication, especially with women's groups, during the course of the year.⁷¹

On 10 April 1993, Right-wing extremists assassinated the charismatic South African Communist Party leader Chris Hani in Boksburg, a huge loss to South Africa: 'The murder of Hani threatened to derail political negotiations but the ANC and government ... manage[d] to reach agreement on a Government of National Unity with a Transitional Executive Council.'⁷² In Pietermaritzburg on 14 April a memorial service took place on Freedom Square (then known as Market Square) at which various people were invited to pay tribute to Hani, including Mary Kleinenberg of NMBS. The crowd greeted the sometimes inflammatory speeches of leaders, one of whom was Winnie Mandela, with enthusiasm, cheering and singing of freedom songs.

At that time it was still common practice for Black Sash to monitor large and potentially violent events, such as funerals. After the formalities NMBS monitors, all wearing their sashes, dispersed themselves in pairs among the crowd, which had surged out of the square into the surrounding streets. While it was the Sash brief to play a monitoring role, members were also there in solidarity with the people. The general atmosphere was one of celebration; the celebration of the life of a great hero. On this occasion, the fear was that police might unnecessarily use firearms to control the crowd and monitors expected the obvious emotion of the crowd to dissipate in singing, toyi-toying and a strong sense of solidarity. However, well into the march, some monitors were greeted by extreme anger. Fidela Fouché, Mary Kleinenberg and Monika

Wittenberg were some of the monitors and much later wrote a story about their experience:

The three of us were walking along Loop [now Jabu Ndlovu] Street, relaxed and chatting to people, when we were startled at what seemed like the sharp repetitive explosions of gunshot. We leapt onto a low wall and looked back. Youths were hurling bricks at the windows of the police station. Suddenly, we were surrounded by a group of furious youths in Hani T-shirts and beanies, takkied feet leaping menacingly. The youth in front yelled hoarsely that we had no place in the march: 'You white bitches get down, we are going to fuck you up'. We got off the wall very quickly, but with the big crowd pressing closely upon us there was no possibility of fleeing. We were trapped in the dense crowd. But almost as suddenly, some women gathered closely around us and shouted at the youths to move away. There was a loud, fierce and furious argument in very fast Zulu and the young men retreated, shaking their fists and yelling. Still surrounding us, the women insisted that we leave immediately and, very vocally forcing a way through the mass of toyi-toying people, ushered us down a side street to Burger Street and from there they accompanied us back to Market Square to our car. It was their intervention – possibly in an impulse of sisterhood – that rescued us, for which we are very grateful.⁷³

Sequels to this story were first the astonishing phone call from an ANC leader, Ray Lalla. Our rescuers had obviously told the story to some influential person and Lalla conveyed to us a message from Cyril Ramaphosa, thanking us for our efforts and apologising on behalf of the ANC leaders for the behaviour of the youth. Not long afterwards, the Wittenbergs were at a petrol station where the woman in attendance jubilantly embraced Monika telling others that she had been one of the women who had sheltered the monitors at the march.⁷⁴

The devastation in the city was considerable: marchers smashed hundreds of windows, looted shops and torched three cars after the memorial service. It appeared that the monitors who had been led away by women were lucky. Police estimated the crowd at about 15 000 while the ANC thought it was more like 40 000. The press reported:

There were at least six attacks on police patrol vehicles, most came under fire while removing burning barricades. A policeman and traffic officer were assaulted by a group of youths who wanted to take their guns. Police also fired tear gas at a crowd attempting to enter the Natalia building. Police restraint, coupled with tough control measures by the ANC marshalls, saved the city from even greater damage than that which did occur yesterday.⁷⁵

Similar activity included successful monitoring of the historic ANC cultural festival at KwaXimba.

The Viljoen Commission looking into the management practices of the Black Sash had been working over a period of many months and the results were summarised by Mary Kleinenberg:

An investigation to determine exactly how the Black Sash currently managed its offices, and following on this to look at ways of improving this management was motivated by Val Viljoen of the Border region. Sue Power of Southern Transvaal co-ordinated the project, assisted by Mary Kleinenberg of Natal Midlands, Rose Meny-Gibert of Cape Western and Rosemary van Wyk Smith of Albany region. It was found that the Black Sash Advice Office Trust, although responsible for raising and distributing funds for the advice offices, appeared to members as shrouded in mystery. To remedy this, various recommendations were made to establish communication between offices, Black Sash members and the Trust. With Sheena Duncan's resignation as the volunteer National Advice Office Co-ordinator it was recommended that this should become a full-time paid position. The commission attempted to highlight major areas of concern and its final advice was that the Black Sash should take management seriously.⁷⁶

The recommendation to appoint a paid Advice Office co-ordinator was adopted. Interviews took place immediately after the Pietermaritzburg April national conference and resulted in the appointment of Annemarie Hendrikz.

Following the October 1992 attack on the Black Sash's response to necklacing, *The Natal Witness* editor again found it necessary to be disparaging about the Black Sash and liberals. This was quickly rebutted by Fidela Fouché in a published letter:

Martin Williams in Fair Play of July 7 says that the Black Sash along with 'liberals' fails to criticize violence when it comes from the left and that 'most tellingly the Black Sash equivocated about condemning necklacing'. Thereby they 'compromised their principles'. In using 'equivocate' Williams presumably means that Sash ambiguously both condoned and condemned. The Black Sash in fact never condoned necklacing and the national executive issued a strong statement against necklacing. More recently Sash protested against the detention without trial of the Derby-Lewis couple.⁷⁷ In terms of its constitution the Black Sash does not affiliate with any political party; its policy is to maintain its independent stance as a human rights organization.

As to Williams' generalization about 'liberals' (in support of which he invokes Jill Wentzel)⁷⁸ it is inaccurate and unfair to say that all liberals have suspended their critical faculties as regards the left. And as Black Sash thinking is not monolithic, by no means would all Sash members wish themselves classified as 'liberals'.⁷⁹

The Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA) conducted training for NMBS members and staff of the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office, who used it first by assisting with the training of university students as voter educators and then providing ongoing support of the students who went out in teams to conduct voter education. The Black Sash booklet *You and the Vote*, written by the Transvaal region, was widely distributed. A democratic election was one of the distinct features of a future envisaged by the Black Sash, so it was no surprise that members were deeply committed to and involved in

conducting voter education workshops with the clergy, domestic workers, other women, and any groups who asked for training. This was indeed very gratifying and stimulating work.

The January 1994 *Sash Magazine* was devoted to women and change and quoted the Universal Declaration of Women's Rights as Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1991. This was an impressive document listing what all women have the right to do, think, learn and enjoy; and their freedom to participate in government. Fidela Fouché added to the debate. Before giving her opinion on the topic she quoted *Speak Magazine*, which provided some understanding of the complex issue of women involved in the negotiating process for a new Constitution at the World Trade Centre. While women were demonstrating outside the centre, delegates started to arrive. Among them were women, one in each of the 26 delegations, 'who swept past the demonstrators with their noses in the air, as if they saw the demonstrators as riffraff'. It seemed they had forgotten the only reason for their presence was because of the campaigns organised by the women now waving placards outside.⁸⁰

Fouché wrote: 'We have to actively work on building a shared sisterhood between women of different race and class, if we are to sustain a movement for women's rights in this country.' She quoted Albertina Sisulu's heartfelt plea to white mothers during the 1980s: 'Our children are dying in the townships, killed by your children. You are mothers. Why do you allow your children to join the army? ... How can you, as mothers tolerate this? Why don't you support us?' Fouché believed that the common experience of motherhood invoked as forming a bond among women is mythical because motherhood has different meanings in different cultural and historical contexts, and went on to compare a white middle-class mother with a rural woman farmworker who would have been expected to toil in the fields with no concessions made for being female and a mother.

Writing about the often-expressed guilt of white women, she said: 'If we gain understanding of those others, and simultaneously of ourselves, we might overcome our guilt and the distance separating us.' She advised that instead of hand-wringing guilt, white women should engage in practical action on issues that affect all women, even if not in identical ways, and gave the example of rape and other kinds of violence that threaten women of all races and classes.

Fouché believed that it is seriously unrealistic to think that women can find a common bond in their oppression, because they are oppressed in very different ways. Furthermore, if there were no strong women's movement in

South Africa to ensure women's participation in the writing of a Constitution and Bill of Rights, the situation of women would remain unchanged. She ended her article by saying that 'we have to acknowledge women who hold other views'.⁸¹

One year on, in May 1995, Jenny Schreiner, by now an ANC member of parliament, pointed out that having women in parliament, as the demonstrators had insisted upon, was not the same as gender transformation because even with a sizeable presence of women in the House of Assembly many were more interested in their own careers than in transforming society.⁸² On 27 April 1994 the first democratic elections took place in South Africa and the involvement of NMBS members was recorded thus:

Many Natal Midlands members participated actively in election work, in diverse capacities. For those who monitored or observed it was an exhausting exhilarating experience. For one monitor a touching moment came in an upmarket white old-age home. The equalizing effects were tangible in the corridor outside the voting room. White residents, some crotchily demanding, others warmly interactive, sat alongside the black domestic staff, all on demurely braided Edwardian-style chairs, all waiting expectantly to cast their votes.

On special voting day, the strapping six-foot partner of a Black Sash member, was sent on a 'jolliepatrollie' with the South African Police to monitor several outlying polling stations. He returned – many, many hours later – utterly exhausted. He had spent most of the day carrying disabled gogos [grannies] from table to table through the voting station, until the presiding officer figured it was faster to bring the different materials to each granny at a single table!⁸³

Other members monitoring outlying areas experienced the celebratory mood in the crowds that formed those endless queues to cast their votes. They saw disabled and very elderly people brought to the voting stations in wheelbarrows and on the backs of strong young men. It was, for all South Africans, an incredibly memorable occasion. A Black Sash donor, DanChurchAid, sent the following message to all members:

We have no doubt that the Black Sash will prove crucial also in the years ahead in promoting civil and human rights at the policy level as well as at grassroots level through its advice offices. The need for Black Sash and the civil society at large to remain involved and provide guidance and assistance in the processes of reconciliation, democratization and development is beyond question.⁸⁴

For the NMBS work continued, much of it with the Women's National Coalition that many members had joined, and the gender group was engaged in writing another booklet. These activities were reported:

Our region continues to be actively involved in the Women's Coalition, with two members, Else Schreiner and Anne Harley, on the regional steering committee. Since the elections, the Midlands coalition has been involved in a number of areas, including commenting on the final draft of the Women's Charter. Harley, along with Ann Skelton of Lawyers for Human Rights [and] Saras Jugwanth of the Faculty of Law, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, designed a well-attended workshop on 'Women and Community Policing'. The presence of the head of the police reservists in Natal added to the dimension of an important and enjoyable day. Participants asked the coalition to continue with such initiatives.

Many women had expressed concerns about the local government negotiating process, particularly the lack of available information. The coalition was asked to find ways to inform women about what was happening as well as encourage them to participate in the negotiations. Both NMBS and the Coalition are represented on the Pietermaritzburg Local Government Negotiating Forum.

The booklet on rape, emanating from the REAP seminars, is in final draft form and in circulation to the regions for comment, after intense work by the women's [gender] sub-committee and vigorous discussion of its content. Once regional comments are in, the layout will be completed, inspired drawings inserted, and it will go to the printers. It is planned to have it available before the year ends.⁸⁵

The NMBS environment sub-committee was always an active and challenging group and Anne Harley produced an important article. It explained a unique attempt to impact on the Pietermaritzburg area's environment and development in response to changes taking place in local government. The Greater Pietermaritzburg Environment Coalition (GPEC) was established in 1993 and drew up a draft manifesto to answer questions frequently raised about the supposed elitism of environmental concerns. It adopted a definition of environment that incorporated basic needs and power relations, concerning itself with accountability, democracy and transparency alongside the more predictable statements about waste and pollution. Harley said:

In many ways, GPEC is a unique experiment. An initiative driven by civil society, it managed to bring together a very inclusive range of individuals and organizations with knowledge, experience and interest in the environment. The environmental manifesto is the only one of its kind in this country and can be used as a 'green-print' by other areas. Its particular contribution is in its very broad definition of environment to include transport, health, and worker issues, and in its bringing together conservationist-type concerns with second generation human rights. The draft manifesto reflects a coming together of gender, development and environmental issues.⁸⁶

It was also reported that members of the environment group took part in an Earthlife street theatre protest against the importation of toxic waste: 'we dressed in boots, yellow overalls and gas masks, and dispersed drums marked "toxic waste" all over a busy street.' This received a great deal of public and media interest.⁸⁷

Sash Magazine reported the completion of *Say No to Rape*, the booklet the gender group had been working on for some time: 'This booklet was launched in October in the Black Sash's pocket size format. We hope and believe that it will be a valuable and useful resource and are distributing it widely as we have received many requests for copies. A Zulu translation is being prepared and we intend other languages to follow.'⁸⁸ An Afrikaans translation followed the Zulu, and in 1999 by popular request the booklet was updated by Lorraine Bassett and republished as *You and Rape*, following the usual format of Black Sash booklets.

As well as the rape booklets, REAP also resulted in the gender group working on other forms of abuse against women:

This region is represented on a broadly-based human rights committee to publicise the new regulation for obtaining interdicts against domestic abusers. The committee managed to have an unsympathetic court official transferred, and has organized lectures to doctors and other groups. Our advice office co-ordinator wrote an informative article on interdict procedures for the bilingual township supplement of the *Natal Witness*, and a Zulu version was prepared by a case-worker. After publication of these articles, the number of women applying for interdicts doubled.⁸⁹

The last NMBS report in *Sash Magazine* gave details of some of the final activities of the region:

On 10 December a Human Rights Festival was organized in the Pietermaritzburg Art Gallery grounds. Among local bands and craft stalls there were human rights displays – we had a table with posters and pamphlets about the Black Sash and also the Gun-Free campaign.

However, during this period of funding crisis/holiday/strategic assessment, not much else was organized. We managed some publicity in the *Natal Witness* about the funding difficulties and also sent out appeals – to members, businesses (via the Chamber of Commerce), the Community Chest and the City Council. Members' response was disappointing; the others not yet known.

We made a submission to the commission to determine an interim capital for Natal/KwaZulu (giving unanswerable argument in favour of Pietermaritzburg!).

The *Natal Witness* published a good and extensive feature on the death penalty and the constitutional court, and included the Black Sash policy statement in support of abolition.⁹⁰

Change came to Black Sash in 1995 with a new political environment. Resources from members, both human and financial, no longer met the funding needs of an organisation with a growing number of paid staff. Jenny de Tolly, the national president, commented:

Forty years ago the Black Sash was an organization whose work was done by volunteer members and whose funds were all raised from and by those members. Today it is an

organization most of whose members are in paid employment and thus have limited time available. It now employs 50 staff and the annual budget is over R4m ... Consultants were asked to make a strategic assessment and to help us to 'evaluate all of the national, regional and advice office programmes and services in order to make recommendation on which of them should be continued; how these should be staffed, managed and financed and under what structure.' Their recommendations were considered at the 1995 National Conference.⁹¹

Delegates from all eight regions of the Black Sash gathered at this historic conference held in Johannesburg on 12 and 13 May 1995 and it was notable that several past presidents of the Black Sash were present: Mary Burton, Sheena Duncan, Joyce Harris, Eulalie Stott and honorary life vice-president, Noel Robb. It was invigorating to be among many of the women who had made the Black Sash such a vibrant organisation, but also very sad because the decisions taken in effect closed membership, paving the way for the Black Sash Trust to continue to oversee the restructured body through its advice offices and their projects. A press statement was issued:

It is fitting that with an interim constitution in place and a final constitution in the process of being formulated, the membership body of the Black Sash dissolves ... The aims of the Black Sash will be incorporated into the Deed of Trust so that the ethos of the old structure will be carried forward with the new.⁹²



Closing Black Sash membership conference, May 1995 (Photo: Gill de Vlieg)

As Eileen Benjamin put it, Sash had re-invented itself as a non-governmental organisation.⁹³ This also ended the publication of *Sash Magazine*, which so ably dealt with topical issues and drew on the real experiences of the thousands of people who visited the Black Sash advice offices over the years. This was reported in the magazine, which ended thus: 'The 37 volumes of SASH provide a running commentary on a dark period in our country and an organization comprising a small group of middle-class, white women who soldiered on and are at last living in a country of which they can be proud.'⁹⁴

Every member of the NMBS when asked what important things were gained from their participation in the organisation talked about the privilege of being a member. They found friendship, loyalty and commitment and spoke of learning about relationships. It was described as an extraordinary time, when they gained an understanding of the true meaning of integrity and personal worth. Those who worked in the Advice Office talked about gaining insights into current legislation and working with other people in a way that valued and respected everyone, whatever their background. There was a general feeling that governments are about compromise and there is always a need for somebody to hold them to account. Sash seemed to have that complete commitment to what was right, what was morally correct; not necessarily legally correct, but morally principled. And many felt sorry that Sash decided not to continue. Paula Krynauw's interview ended:

Although I differed with some members on individual issues, in general my outlook was moulded by relationships with other members of Sash. It was a defining time in my life. It changed how I related to the world – I appreciated that small changes are better than no changes. It changed how my family (father, brother, in-laws) related to me – I was finally allowed to have serious opinions and ones that differed from theirs. It also affected my daughter's character – she saw the meetings, the protest stands, the discussions and she has subsequently always taken part in civic and community activities.⁹⁵

Mieke Krynauw confirms this:

My earliest memory is of a Saturday morning in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, sitting at my mother's feet while she stood silently with a placard in a Black Sash protest. The reason that this memory is such a vivid one is not that a man walking past spat at us, but rather that none of the women reacted to his vitriol. My memory doesn't extend to the exact words he used, but I do remember that he yelled, red-faced and incensed, at these silent women drawing attention to what others were only too happy to ignore.

Being a 'Sash daughter' meant that I never questioned that women were a force to be reckoned with. Sash women commanded the room when they spoke; these were women who refused to be intimidated by bullying policemen; these were women who were never silent when they needed to speak up and were silent when that was most powerful. And yet

it was the very ordinariness of my mother and the other Sash women which was noticeable. They instilled in me the unwavering belief that living an ordinary life with the demands of full-time jobs and raising children is not mutually exclusive with social activism.

I was always in awe of my mother and the other Sash women who would gather in suburban houses to discuss and plan, argue and challenge and ultimately go out and do something about the wrongs they identified in society. But it was not all serious; I also remember a great deal of laughing. That my mother was happy when she was doing Sash work is evident in the few photos of her from this time that I jealously guard.

My mother's involvement with Sash was, and continues to be, something of which I am immensely proud. The enduring influence that Paula's involvement with Sash has had on me is the way I approach anything I do. If there is something that must change, we cannot rely on the comfort of our affluence and wish it away. We must stand up, sometimes silently, and hold a mirror to the world.⁹⁶

Peter Thompson, a Sash child of an older generation, reflected on his mother, Mac Thompson:

She was the social conscience of our family and was very unhappy with the injustices in this country in the years after the war. This was difficult for her in the context of the conservative Thompson family. I remember leaving school early when I was about 10 (in 1956) to stand across the road in town and watch her stand with her Black Sash outside the court buildings, the so-called Justice Department. I saw how she and others stood resolute and unmoving whilst they were spat on and sworn at. I was so proud of her.⁹⁷

In an anniversary supplement to *Sash Magazine*, Marie Dyer headed her article 'A time to party'. It is fitting tribute to her that this chapter ends with her voice, one that was heard for over forty years in the Natal Midlands:

Having been a Black Sash member since 1955, I was one of the five Black Sash women chosen to attend the President's luncheon on 23 July 1994, given for 'Veterans of our Struggle for Freedom'. It was held in the grounds of the President's Pretoria residence, under an enormous marquee.

I went on a bus from Shell House in Johannesburg, sitting among elated East Rand township women, all of whom had run safe houses or organized underground ANC branches or seen their children leave the country to join MK. As we reached Pretoria they couldn't sit still: they sang and toyi-toyed in the aisle. At the lunch I sat with a group of men from the Eastern Cape whose combined time on Robben Island probably totalled more than 100 years.

It was a great struggle for the organizers (Jo Slovo was the Master of Ceremonies) to bring us all to order – people kept jumping up, recognizing each other from years before, embracing, asking, 'did you ever think we'd live to see this day?'

The food and drink were plentiful. Many of the people in attendance seemed to be staff inherited by the President from the previous administration: if they were bemused they didn't show it. In his address President Mandela said it was right that the premises should be taken over for the day by the people who had suffered longest under the cruelty.

The (joyfully) delayed proceedings caused trouble for people missing flights home. I went back in my bus, with my companions loaded down with generously distributed leftovers for their families – fruit, juice, wine, chocolates, flowers and even a plastic bag or two full of stew. What a day!⁹⁸

ENDNOTES

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- 7 Executive Committee minutes, 28 March 1990.
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- 10 Allister Sparks in *Guardian Weekly*, 15 April 1990.
- 11 MCRF minutes, April 1990.
- 12 MCRF report, 29 June 1990.
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- 19 Executive Committee minutes, 22 August 1990.
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- 25 Fidela Fouché, 'Women's power, men's authority' *SM* 34(2) September 1991: 29–30.
- 26 'Natal Midlands report to national conference' *SM* 34(1) May 1991: 15.

- 27 'Stand with a triple focus' and 'Constitutional focus for women's group' *SM* 34(2) September 1991: 47.
- 28 *NW* 17 July 1991.
- 29 Mary Kleinenberg and Fidela Fouché, letter to Jenny de Tolly, 19 July 1991.
- 30 *NW* 22 July 1991.
- 31 Grinaker Construction, letter to Jenny de Tolly, 16 September 1991.
- 32 Jenny Clarence, 'Visits by leading international feminists' *SM* 34(3) January 1992: 49.
- 33 Mary Kleinenberg interviewed by Alleyn Diesel, Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2013: 9.
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- 35 'Examining the future role of the Black Sash' *SM* 35(1) May 1992: 51.
- 36 General meeting minutes, 21 October 1992.
- 37 Fidela Fouché, 'Women, language and a new Constitution' *SM* 35(1) May 1992: 28, 30.
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- 57 Mary Kleinenberg interview: 5.
- 58 Executive Committee minutes, 2 September 1992.
- 59 General meeting minutes, 21 October 1992.
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- 95 Paula Krynauw interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 2012: 8.
- 96 Mieke Krynauw to Mary Kleinenberg, email, April 2014.
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SERVING THE PEOPLE: THE ADVICE OFFICE, 1975–1983

Every comment, every statistic, every statement issued by the Black Sash was underpinned by the daily experience in the advice offices, in rural fieldwork and in personal witness. This strong foundation of first-hand knowledge earned the respect of many who came to rely on its information, and remains an important factor today.¹

IN 1958 A BAIL FUND was set up to assist people, mainly women, arrested as a result of the pass laws. Soon afterwards, the first Black Sash advice office offering a free paralegal service and providing information and support was opened in Cape Town. Over the following five years advice offices were established by five other regions of the Black Sash, staffed mainly by volunteers and supported by men and women from the townships acting as interpreters.² The work of the Cape Town Advice Office in Athlone had become sufficient challenge to the authorities that in July 1965 it was subjected to a raid by police who took names and seized documents. The Johannesburg office was at the time handling up to one hundred cases per month.³

On 20 February 1975, as result of the efforts of ‘four dedicated Black Sash volunteers’, the Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) Advice Office, eventually known as the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office (AO), opened its doors for the first time.⁴ The three-fold aim was to assist people disadvantaged by racially discriminatory legislation and bureaucracy, educate the public and campaign against discrimination, and empower victims to exercise their rights.⁵ Its hours were from 9 am to 12 noon on weekdays, except Wednesdays, and its office in Thomas Street on the corner of Church Street was shared with trade union workers, although it operated independently of them.⁶ Jane Voss took on the role of convener and offered to write regular reports. The first women volunteers to work in the office were Maimie Corrigan (formerly opposed to opening an advice office), Buntie Biggs, Sandy Rutsch, Jenny Silburn and Margie Yates, the last offering her services as secretary. Dora Matawane was employed as interpreter and Christine Stilwell undertook to raise her salary by asking for a donation of R1 per month from fifty benefactors. In return,

they were to receive regular progress reports on activities, successes and case histories. Solveig Piper from the Durban AO spent two mornings with volunteers helping them to understand the work. In her first report, written in March 1975, Jane Voss noted that the office would operate 'on the same lines as the Black Sash office in Durban; the advice given is to help workers to solve their problems within the framework of the law; all advice is given free to any person that seeks it.'⁷ The report went on to say that the bulk of problems, so far, had been pay disputes, dismissals, workmen's compensation (WC), unemployment benefits and pension applications.⁸

Soon after its opening, the AO closed for two weeks while a new interpreter was sought. Unfortunately, Dora Matawane had decided to move on. Busi Nyide (known to everyone as Victoria) was employed and continued to work for the AO for 25 years. This was how she remembered the beginning:

And so, on Thursday 25 June 1975, I went to this place and I found both of them [Jane Voss and Carmel Rickard] and they said we would wait for clients to come in and tell us their problems. Well, that is how it started. I worked three days a week from 9.00 am until 4.00 pm and there weren't many clients then: we saw three to four during those hours. And so it continued like that with the unions next door, with their noise.⁹

There was some concern about the small pool of workers, which had already been depleted. However, everyone was determined to keep the office going even if it meant opening for fewer days a week. Then, in 1976, another blow fell when due to pressure of work Jane Voss found it impossible to continue an organisational role. Sheila Hindson (Meintjes) eventually agreed to do this while Brenda Bell continued to run the financial operations. Hindson believed that a fundamental problem experienced by clients was a lack of communication with their employers. She thought it would benefit both parties if a letter were written to firms suggesting some sort of induction for new workers to help overcome this problem. She also observed that unemployment cases were increasing.¹⁰

From the outset in 1975, during her university holidays Nalini Naidoo volunteered to help in the AO and when in 1978 she started work at *The Natal Witness* she continued to assist on Saturday mornings. She described early conditions: 'At that time it was FOSATU [Federation of South African Trade Unions], it wasn't COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions] ... Basically, it was an extremely busy office, very busy. You had Victoria Nyide in one office, this union in another office and there would be meetings going on. People were in and out. A lot of the issues were labour-related.' When

asked about the relationship between the union and Black Sash volunteers, she was very positive:

Oh, it was a wonderful relationship; it was lovely; that office was such a hive of activity ... there was a wonderful rapport ... The unions accepted all of us as part and parcel of the whole place and there was this wonderful vibe, a wonderful buzz. I think it suited the unions because it also gave them an in, because somebody would come to join the union and they would have a problem so they would immediately be referred to the Black Sash [who] would write the letters. So, it was a good symbiotic relationship because by helping people solve their problems the workers saw the union as being helpful, not realising that it was the Black Sash solving their problems. It worked very nicely, a very noisy office. On a Saturday morning, you got there early, it was packed: everybody seemed to know; if you have a problem come here. We were always busy and some very firm friendships were formed [as] we all got on so well ... some really close bonds were forged there. John Makhathini was an old trade unionist from the SACTU, the union [federation] that was banned ... He was part of that old trade union that was aligned to the Congress movement and the ANC and I think he spent time in detention ... He was highly regarded, highly respected, and he was in charge of that Thomas Street office, so anything we needed to organise we negotiated with him.¹¹

Naidoo went on to say:

So often we look at the bigger things, we look at the UDF and the big marches; but the Black Sash in its little way ... writing those letters to employers, they were such empowering experiences for the workers and gave them such a sense of dignity and fighting back. I think one of the reasons why I got involved with the Advice Office was because I really saw how important its role was. I come from a Black Consciousness background because when we were in school it was the black consciousness people who conscientised us: they used to run projects and drama groups in school. One of the things we learnt in the black consciousness movement is the importance of empowering people and people doing things for themselves and how the little things count. It's the issues down at grassroots and community level and that's the lesson I have carried with me throughout my life. That's why it was so easy to get involved with the Black Sash ... you could spot the trends and know what was happening. There was a big campaign about UIF ... We even dealt with domestic worker issues, and that was so important because nobody else did. And I think that all that working in the Black Sash office shaped me ... the lesson I learnt there is how much these little actions count and how empowering it is ... FOSATU actually owes a debt of gratitude to the Black Sash. I think for a lot of us we owe our personal growth to the Black Sash ... One of things I really must do is to pay tribute to Busi Nyide because I think she was the backbone of that office. She had a wonderful way with people who came in: she made them feel at ease, she was very understanding, so she helped to establish that rapport. There was an element of trust immediately established and people felt that we were there to help them. So ... without her, I don't think the office would have established such an important and vital link with the community. She was wonderful, really, really wonderful and, I think the success of the Maritzburg office owed a lot to her.¹²

In 1976, the AO operated under the name of the Black Sash Advice Bureau.¹³ By the end of that year it felt the need for more workers, having handled 1 284 cases with spikes in the early months of the year and then in July, October and November. The majority of these were old and continuing cases. At this stage the balance of old and new cases was stable, showing not only the length of time cases took to solve, but the hurdles clients of the AO faced in navigating problems. Despite seeing the value of their work, AO workers were also acutely aware, especially in an increasingly harsh economic climate, that they reached only a small portion of people who needed assistance.

While the range of problems encountered by the AO was broad, the most frequent centred on labour issues, unsurprising given its location in a trade union building. Furthermore, there was a significant rapport between the then unregistered non-racial trade unions and Sash. This link was further strengthened in 1976 as some of Pietermaritzburg's trade union officials such as John Makhathini were banned. In response, the AO offered administrative services to the unions thereby freeing them to pursue factory recruitment and organisation. Another more general reason for the definite labour bias in the caseload was Pietermaritzburg itself. After a long campaign by the City Council to attract industry, in 1963 Pietermaritzburg had been made a bantustan border industrial area and substantial incentives were offered to industries to relocate to the Midlands region. This was part of the National Party government's policy to decentralise industry, bringing it closer to bantustans in an attempt to stem black urbanisation while simultaneously retaining a cheap labour force.¹⁴ Thus the city had gained a significant industrial sector, which by 1973 employed 36% of the labour force despite the scrapping of incentives in 1971 and an ensuing slump in growth.

This is the context to a noteworthy relationship with the black trade unions. Cases were often passed on to the AO for reasons that are unclear, but could relate to capacity issues on the part of the unions, which were in a formative stage in the mid- to late 1970s. The Thomas Street unions had developed out of the General Factory Workers Benefit Fund and the grassroots, shopfloor movement that had been responsible for the Durban strikes of early 1973. In 1974 the non-racial Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council was set up. The Black Sash link would have been strengthened by the fact that Student Wages Commissions on both the Durban and Pietermaritzburg university campuses had played an important background role in this resurgence of African unionism.¹⁵

The first non-racial, unregistered, workerist union, the Metal and Allied Workers Union, was founded in Pietermaritzburg in April 1973, reviving the tradition of independent unions that had been violently suppressed in the late 1940s.¹⁶ The AO thus played a key supportive role during a formative phase in trade unionism: in 1979 the government, following up the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission, passed the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act that granted African workers the status of employee and the right to join a union, a much underestimated key moment in the nation's history. The non-racial, non-aligned Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) had already been founded in April. Having learned the lessons of SACTU's political partisanship and membership of the Congress movement, it was committed to a worker-driven agenda, factory level bargaining and shop steward structures, although it did cautiously move into community issues in the early 1980s while still rejecting populism.¹⁷ This was entirely consistent with the role of the AO and it would appear there were no misgivings from within Pietermaritzburg FOSATU, as there apparently were in the Transvaal, about the role of whites in allied service organisations.¹⁸

So, this relationship thrived. The largest numbers of cases involved pay and work disputes; while in the second half of 1976 Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and retrenchment cases rose significantly.¹⁹ The AO suggested that the root of these problems reflected the effect of national economic recession on the city. This was borne out in AO statistics, showing that cases of retrenchment peaked in November while pay dispute cases reached their highest numbers in October (21) and December (19).

Such disputes were exacerbated by poor communication between employers and employees, shown by some firms' barely functional liaison committees and general ignorance amongst workers that they existed. Moreover, the AO found that inadequate employers' compliance with procedures that ranged from late submission of forms to inaccuracies caused unacceptable delays, particularly in UIF cases. During the three months it took for verification from Pretoria, employees were sometimes endorsed out of the area: the positive provisions of the UIF Act were contradicted by influx control. In some cases employers deliberately avoided UIF altogether by hiring vulnerable unregistered workers. The Durban AO speculated that the penalties for such conduct were insufficient, or too inconsistently applied, to constitute a deterrent. This exacerbated an already untenable situation in which UIF covered only about a fifth to a third of all employed workers (agricultural and domestic workers were excluded for

example); and for most of those who received benefits, they failed to match need.²⁰

In dealing with these cases, and others, the AO not only assisted individuals to solve disputes, but was also proactive in seeking ways to reduce problems at source. Following an earlier suggestion by Sheila Hindson, in November 1976 three hundred letters were sent to major Pietermaritzburg employers and the Chambers of Commerce and Industry informing them of the circumstances of their black workers and suggesting that some of these could be mitigated by clear, written contracts. The few responses received to these letters were negative, but this was not necessarily entirely representative. Some employers did seem to care about their employees and sought to introduce changes to address their needs. However, the largely negative reaction, combined with the sheer scale of the plight of the community they assisted, tempered the AO's optimism evident in early 1976.

The following year brought with it little change and much continuity, but office administration did experience a shake-up. In July 1977, Sheila Hindson relinquished her position as organiser of the office to Cara Pretorius. At some point financial administration was shifted from Brenda Bell to Mary Park-Ross. However, these changes had little if any impact on the daily running of the office, which operated much as it had done before with the staff comprising voluntary workers, assisted by Busi Nyide, recording cases, planning strategy and dealing with correspondence.

While working five days more (228) in 1977, the office reported a small decline in the number of cases attended to from 1 284 to 1 178. Non-labour related cases, excluding pensions, comprised only 9.2% of all new files and were lumped together under the umbrella category of miscellaneous.²¹ This covered diverse problems from divorce to hire purchase payments. Most of these clients were referred to attorneys and only merit a brief mention in the annual reports, so the overarching theme of the AO's work remained labour, including domestic workers.

The economic recession continued and the malign effects of retrenchment and large-scale unemployment were primarily borne by black workers, especially the skilled and semi-skilled. This downturn was reflected in the breakdown of AO cases with pay disputes continuing to dominate the caseload at just over a third (33.4%) of new files. This was followed by work disputes, including unfair dismissals (21.4%), and UIF (15.5%).

While employees' lack of knowledge generated a certain percentage of cases, the AO tended to lay greater responsibility on employers. They found

that some were, put in polite terms, not always scrupulous about what was included in pay packets, especially where dismissal was involved. This was exacerbated by unsympathetic and unscrupulous pay clerks as well as a general lack of sympathy by employers for the tough lives of their employees. The consequence was often underpayment for workers who then queried this at the AO, beginning a lengthy correspondence with employers to claim what was owed. This understandably created a general distrust among workers about their bosses, as reflected in the number of AO clients querying their pay.

More distressingly, given the tough economic climate, problems around UIF persisted. In the AO's experience, employers continued to flout UIF procedure. Transgressions included deduction of contributions from employees without applying for their UIF cards, and late card applications. In the latter case the worst possible scenario occurred on an employee's dismissal, risking eligibility for benefits. The problem was apparently so pervasive that the issue of UIF and employers' responsibility was mentioned in the media.²²

Many of these trends continued into 1978. However, the number of AO open days declined significantly from 223 to 178 and there was subsequent further reduction in the total number of cases from 1 178 to 1 013, the bulk of which concerned old files. The office began a new service enhancement programme that aimed to improve follow-up and provided for more volunteer training.²³ The office also benefited from the assistance of Dumisani Nyide, presumably as a volunteer interpreter.

Labour disputes continued to dominate the work of the AO, making up 50.9% of all new cases for the year.²⁴ This high percentage was indicative of the poor conditions of workers, compounded by inadequate channels of communication between employer and employee. Vague payslips and unscrupulous bosses continued to be commonplace. Many of the reactions from employers remained cool if not impolite with a few exceptions, although no details are given. The AO suspected that in the still depressed economic climate many pay disputes boiled down to attempts by workers to secure any possible extra, much-needed pay as wages were very low. Indeed, many cases turned out to be simple misunderstandings about slips. Continued poor communication in workplaces was thus seen as a significant problem and one over which the AO could readily join forces with trade unions.

The 1978 annual report highlighted other significant labour issues that came to the AO's attention. The first was that of WC, which would remain a small but significant portion of the caseload. Despite being an easy claims process, in many cases accidents were not reported at the time they occurred

thus making it harder to prove that injuries were work-related. Such practices further exploited already vulnerable workers.²⁵

Some of the most exposed, and of special concern to the AO, were domestic, farm and railway workers. They were not covered by UIF, their working conditions were often poor and wages were low. Domestic workers were especially vulnerable as there were no employment laws to regulate the sector. While similar conditions prevailed for farm workers, they were even more dependent on their employers because they often received accommodation and rations to supplement their income. At that point the small and unassisted AO could offer no further insight or strategy to deal with the plight of such workers.

Advice Office cases, 1978

Mr M.²⁶ worked for a timber concern. His induna quarrelled with him and had his employment terminated.

Mrs K. was retrenched from the firm that employed her. She could no longer pay the rent on her house in Imbali where she lived with her children.

Mr N. worked as induna and tractor driver, supporting his wife and seven children on R40 per month. His old employer's son had taken over the farm and refused to give his employees food and wood as in the past. Mr N. could no longer manage on his wages.

Mrs X. worked as a domestic servant. In September 1977 she went on maternity leave until January 1978 and supplied her employer with a replacement. When she returned to work she was told that her replacement was doing the work so well that she was no longer needed.

The end of the decade proved a testing time for Pietermaritzburg's workers and the AO. In the first six months of 1979, the efforts of the previous year's bid to improve the office's administration gained traction. The AO appeared to have found a new working rhythm, driven by a swell in interest and enthusiasm from volunteers that brought with it badly needed increased efficiency. Client interviews were previously handled by voluntary caseworkers while follow-up was seemingly haphazard. Under the new system two caseworkers, often Nalini Naidoo and Lydia Levine, were dedicated to follow-up, which included a prompt response to letters and swift action to match new developments. Other efforts to improve service were made by Peter Kerchhoff, who had regular meetings with AO workers in order to share information and facilitate further training. This centred on issues surrounding particular cases. One noteworthy study was made into the laws governing notice and leave pay. While some

found these meetings interesting, they were so poorly attended that an appeal for advice on how to improve attendance was made in the mid-year report.²⁷ Where the AO lacked sufficient knowledge or capability it was able to rely on sympathetic attorneys such as Pat Stilwell, Peter Rutsch and Andrew Burnett working *pro deo*. Ravi Joshi from the Durban union offices assisted with wage queries.

These improvements to the running of the AO were well-timed and helped offset the problems facing it. The economic crisis, evident in the office's cases, hit Pietermaritzburg particularly hard. According to the mid-year report, the city was said to have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. The AO itself was not exempt from hardship and began to feel it in 1979. At this point its primary income source was presumably donations and in tough economic conditions these declined. Added pressure was put on the office by a decline in the pool of available volunteer workers with sufficient time to donate.

Indeed, despite these difficulties, its work increased marginally in tune with economic conditions. The caseload advanced to 1 017, old and new, and the office was open for more days than the previous year. As with previous years, disputes (both work and pay) formed the bulk of the new case work at just over 54% (24.4% and 29.7% respectively). It was again followed by UIF cases (9.4%). However, for the first time, welfare and pensions complaints also constituted a significant portion of the new files at 7.7% and 7.4% respectively.

Advice Office cases, 1979

Mr X.A.N. was employed by a supermarket and when he was dismissed he did not receive his UIF card. The case was immediately reported to the Department of Labour and the card was then supplied.

Mr B.N.'s son worked for a construction company in Johannesburg. On his death the pension was not paid out to his family. The office traced the money and it was sent to a magistrate's office in KwaZulu.

Mr M.N.Y. worked for a sports club in 1977 when he was injured on duty and lost a toe. He was not compensated and now wished to claim WC.

Miss G.Q.N. was employed at a filling station. She was dismissed for unsatisfactory work, but the reason given on her UIF card was resignation.

Mrs T. worked for a laundry where she was injured on duty. She received compensation, was permanently disabled as a result of the injury and advised to apply for a disability pension.

Mr M.C. was dismissed from a tanning concern, apparently for staying away after an injury. He had worked for the company for 25 years, was paid R30 per month (on which he supported a wife and seven children) and wished to be reinstated.

Following a work dispute at a battery chicken factory, Mr M.E.M. was dismissed. He wanted his job back and after the AO intervened on his behalf he was reinstated.

Mr A., a bus driver, was found not guilty of assaulting a woman passenger while on duty. Nevertheless, he was dismissed on grounds of 'suitability' and his fellow workers came out on strike to support him. It is perhaps significant that Mr A. was a member of the works committee and a trade union member.

Mr J.A. had been suspended from South African Railways since February 1979, with a case to be heard in June, for allegedly assaulting a foreman. He had been back every Friday since then as ordered, but to no avail. Neither registered nor signed off, he sat in limbo without an income. The suspension was highly questionable.

In addition to its usual work, the AO also produced a survey of South African Railways (SAR) cases from 1976 to 1979. This evolved from discussions with Jillian Nicholson at the Durban AO, which had carried out a similar investigation. A condensed version of the results was included in the 1979 annual report and provides a glimpse into the workings of one of the country's large parastatals. The survey uncovered abysmal practices. Although a dedicated SAR liaison officer handled disputes, of the 63 cases dealt with by the AO the majority were pay related (23) or concerned dismissals (20). In general, disputes were handled within the SAR, which was exempt from Department of Manpower oversight. The only recourse for those subject to disciplinary procedures was review in the Supreme Court (today's High Court). This disadvantaged employees with no access to legal representation, compounded by a lack of established labour organisation in the workplace.

Furthermore, the AO found that negligence and indifference characterised the SAR. For example, it failed to register its employees for UIF and they were eligible for a pension only after they had worked for the company for five years. The terms of employment were inadequately explained and some cases showed active deception on the part of management. Employee problems were handed in pass-the-parcel fashion from one administrator to another. When employees queried short pay, many were subsequently dismissed; and securing monies owed, such as notice or leave pay, proved difficult. Some employees were sacked on their return from leave, including sick leave. Other means of dispensing with unwanted employees included indefinite suspension, known euphemistically as 'go to sleep' practice. This inculcated a general reluctance

to approach the SAR management even over simple matters, as shown in the significant number of miscellaneous cases (11) brought to the AO. No further action, other than assisting those SAR workers who came into the AO, was taken at this stage.

One small victory for the AO came while dealing with WC cases. In one issue of the *Government Gazette* in 1979 a list was printed of unclaimed WC money. The AO responded by publishing in a local paper its own list of Natal Midlands clients who were owed money, as a result of which R301 was successfully claimed.

After a difficult and uncertain year, the new decade signalled further and greater changes for the AO. In April 1980 the branch was visited by the national Sash president, Sheena Duncan, and during her visit many suggestions about improvements were made. This included reform not only to increase the AO's administrative effectiveness, but also to serve better its ideological foundations and make its work more useful to the broader Black Sash goals of opposing apartheid and alleviating the suffering it caused.

The most radical change proposed by Duncan was to move the AO. Since its inception it had shared office space with an embryo trade union federation. This meant that many clients referred to the AO had labour-related problems the union itself should have been dealing with and led to a feeling that the AO was doing much of the union's work.²⁸ Moreover, both shared resources like the telephone at a time of expansion. Thus in June, after much consultation with all those affected, the office moved to the hall of St Saviour's Church in Loop Street. At this stage Juliet Armstrong took over the finances from Mary Park-Ross and general training sessions were run by Pat Merrett, Maggie Clarke, Cara Pretorius and Ruth Edgecombe.

The move coincided with some relief to the financial woes that had dogged the office during the previous year. The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) offered to help fund the AO as it would form part of its service to the Pietermaritzburg community. This was not unprecedented as the Athlone AO in Cape Town had worked in partnership with the SAIRR since the early 1960s. However, the primary source of funding remained members of the NMBS themselves.

There were several alterations to the organisation of the AO, the first being a name change from the Black Sash Advice Bureau to Pietermaritzburg Advice Office. Administrative changes would follow as the AO formalised its structures. This particularly affected financial decision making, which was

from now on to be a joint responsibility of the local Black Sash executive committee and the SAIRR. The office's general administration was to be handled by an AO workers' management committee.

Duncan felt strongly that the aim of the advice offices was to assist clients while decreasing dependence. Thus, rather than perpetuating maternalism by acting on behalf of clients and writing letters and managing follow-up, she believed they should be given the confidence to tackle their own problems. This included getting clients to write their own letters, helping only when asked. Where letters were required for illiterate clients AO workers were to act like scribes, writing and translating what their clients wanted said. Replies, especially those including money, were not to be sent to the AO, but to clients' homes. This would offset the potential for authorities to charge the organisation with embezzlement in the event of a missing cheque. It was suggested that clients who felt that posting money to their homes was too risky could open building society accounts and use them for deposits. This new system also intended that clients should be responsible for follow-up by reporting progress back to the AO and asking for further advice where necessary. Duncan also suggested that AO workers should communicate with clients in English and use an interpreter only when absolutely necessary. In doing so, she hoped the AO would give clients greater confidence and change the way they engaged with officials by seeing them as there to serve.

This would be accompanied by changes to the administration of the office. In particular, the record keeping system was altered to make it more relevant to the research of the AO, seen by Duncan as one of its primary functions. It had been much neglected. To achieve this she requested that clients be asked questions to situate them in a broad context. Thus, rather than focus solely on their problems, clients would be asked about their origins and assets, such as land and cattle, thereby creating a picture of socio-economic conditions.

Busi Nyide provided an example of how the AO not only sorted out legal problems for clients, but talked them through a range of issues considered important:

Ja, when people came to us we used to ... find out what they are here for and they would tell us their problems. Let me just give you an example of a person coming to the office to collect his money, his pension. We used to advise that person how to invest his money and, if it was a pension, he should not keep it to himself, but make a will now whilst things go well, and also think about the children equally, girls and boys. One gentleman said to me 'you cannot tell me this because my son is a delinquent and so he misbehaves and I cannot give him anything.' I said, but he is still your son and if you say you will not give anything to

this son and give it to the others, you are creating an enmity between the children and I don't think this is good. Besides, you don't know what the future holds for all of your children. As time goes on the others might become useless and the one that you are withholding from becomes something, then what will you do? That gentleman came back to me to say, 'thank you very much for your advice because my son, the not good one, is now a minister of religion.'²⁹

The perennial problem of staffing the office also attracted attention. While it was consistently understaffed, Duncan felt that greater continuity was also needed from volunteers to ensure the smooth running of the office. She felt this could be achieved by volunteers working more regularly and while requiring great commitment, she believed that this would not only improve their knowledge and the service offered but also increase job satisfaction. This would be supplemented by more meetings and more formal training sessions run by experts. Duncan herself held several formal and informal training sessions during her visit, including one for prospective workers. This proved to be successful as the office acquired several new recruits. In addition, to maximise service the AO considered the possibility of reaching out to other welfare and assistance organisations in Pietermaritzburg to avoid repetition of work where possible.³⁰

Other proposals concerning staff included the suggestion that more than one volunteer be in the office at any given time and that they should keep personal files of useful information. It is interesting to note that at this stage most AO volunteers were not Black Sash members, something Duncan found regrettable but not critical. This indicated the absence of a strong connection between the AO and the Sash, which, it was hoped, would change in time.³¹ A newspaper report written by Nalini Naidoo provided welcome publicity for the AO:

Many of us get very confused when it comes to legal matters or problems we may have in our workplaces or homes. For instance do you know how to apply for a disability grant, what your rights are when it comes or leave pay or notice pay, how to sort out hire purchase or a pension matter? A place that can help is the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office, which has moved ... to larger offices in the old St Saviours Church in Loop Street (the same building as Ekupumuleni Restaurant).

Mrs Nene is one of the many people who has visited the Advice Centre and was assisted with a very difficult problem. Mrs Nene (not her real name) is 56 years old. Three years ago her husband, who had worked at a local hospital, retired and the family were looking forward to a large pension. Suddenly two weeks after he retired Mr Nene died, the pension did not arrive and his wife was left destitute.

A friend told Mrs Nene that the Advice Office may be able to help her. After many months of writing letters to the relevant authorities, a cheque arrived, but unfortunately it had expired so was of no use. The matter had to be taken up again, this time with the Department of Pensions and Social Welfare in Pretoria. The authorities asked Mrs Nene to send in documents to prove she was the wife of Mr Nene. The Advice Office guided her on the exact steps to take and after a few months the money arrived.

Mrs Nene's case is one of hundreds that the Advice Office deals with annually. The centre tries to help people understand their legal rights or work through problems that may seem impossible to handle. The Advice Office is open four mornings a week, on a Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. It is manned by voluntary workers who have some knowledge of the law so that they can guide people, and an interpreter, Mrs Victoria Nyide.

Mr Peter Kerchhoff, one of the voluntary helpers at the Advice Centre, said it was heartbreaking to see the kinds of problems that many people face. 'Sometimes we come across firms that are persistently unfair in their treatment of workers and who trade on their ignorance.' Mr Kerchhoff mentioned a construction company that issued each bricklayer with a set of tools and then forced these workers to buy off their tools by deducting an amount from their wages each week. Later the workers were demoted from bricklayers to ordinary labourers, but as they had started paying for the tools money was still deducted from their wages. This matter was handled by the Advice Office and the money paid out by the workers was duly given back to them.

Mr Kerchhoff said that many firms also neglect to give their employees their UIF card or leave and notice pay. He added that while some employers and officials were rude and uncooperative, others offered a sympathetic hearing and did their best to help. 'In trying to help people we do not take sides, but just try to guide our clients when they have a genuine claim,' said Mr Kerchhoff.

He said that sometimes a person goes to the advice centre to try his luck at getting his own way. But this person is easily found out because of the questions asked. 'When a person is found to be lying he is asked to leave and never return.' Besides being assisted with their problems, clients who visit the Advice Office also leave with a better understanding of the law and how to deal with officialdom, Mr Kerchhoff said.³²

Despite major reforms, these had very little impact on the caseload. By moving away from the trade unions it had been hoped there would be a shift in the types of cases seen by the AO. All the same, labour cases continued to dominate the work. Attendance on Saturdays declined in favour of weekdays and overall the AO experienced a significant drop in the number of cases from 1 017 in 1979 to just 899 in 1980 (a decrease of 118) even while working the same number of days. Pay and work disputes again formed the majority of 446 new cases, but slipped to under 50% (at 48.7%) for the first time since 1976 after a steady rise.³³ This was followed by miscellaneous cases at 14.6%, UIF cases at 13.2% and pension cases at 8.3%.

The move of the AO to St Saviour's Hall was not to be permanent. By the end of 1981, after eighteen months at this venue, the AO felt it was increasingly uninhabitable and as the plot was also for sale another move was necessary. Thus in January 1982 the office was moved to Ubunye House in Pietermaritzburg Street. While this was again a shared venue, alongside organisations such as the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches, the move proved quite satisfactory as the AO remained there for nearly a decade before suggestions to move again were made. Further publicity was achieved through Thandi Moses:

Do you have a legal problem you feel only an attorney could deal with, but you cannot afford to seek his advice because of the low salary you earn? The legal aid clinic is the answer. The clinic, run by senior law students, deals with the legal problems of people in lower income brackets. Help is given to members of all race groups, free of charge.

The service was introduced on university campuses to provide law students with practical experience, and to provide a social service to the community ... The clinic operates from the campus but the students also go out to Edendale and Northdale on Saturdays. They handle problems like non-payment of domestics, (the most common problem dealt with by the clinic), hire-purchase problems, pension benefits, divorce, workman's compensation, UIF, wills and many other problems.

Those eligible for legal aid are: a woman whose income does not exceed R140 per month, plus R25 per dependent child; a male whose income does not exceed R280, plus R25 per dependent child; and a married person, male or female, whose income does not exceed R280 per month, plus R25 per dependent child ...

Another centre which offers advice to people with problems in work places or homes is the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office. This centre which is run by voluntary workers, with Mrs Pat Merrett seeing to its administration, does not solve problems for people, but tells them their rights and helps them to stand up for those rights. [It] deals mainly with UIF, workmen's compensation, wages, leave problems, emancipation, pensions, work permits, domestic servants' problems and many more.

Mrs Merrett pointed out that the people running the centre are not trained lawyers, they only advise people. She also said that the centre offers advice only and not charity, nor is it an employment bureau. The Advice Office is in the old St Saviour's church in Loop Street (in the same building as the Ekuphumuleni Restaurant). It is open on Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays between 9 am and noon.³⁴

Although the other changes made during 1980 generally worked out well, they were not without minor hiccups. The management committee (MC) was broadened and now comprised five people, each representing a portfolio within the office's ambit along with one adviser and a representative from the SAIRR. MC meetings were generally well attended, but the training portfolio was a perennial headache for the committee and it was often vacant. More and more members were in paid employment, demonstrated by poor showings

at meetings with only 64% of workers turning up to the one general meeting of 1981. This also spoke to challenges faced by an organisation comprising individuals with highly variable schedules and commitments. It took its toll on AO work as non-consultative activities such as research and publishing continually suffered. In 1981 only two letters were published in *The Natal Witness* on old age pensions (OAPs; this issue is dealt with separately in chapter 10).

A major project taken on by the AO was that of Wilgefontein squatters.³⁵ The project arrived via the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA), an overworked rural affairs non-governmental organisation that appealed to the Black Sash to assist. Wilgefontein is located nearly 10 kilometres south-west of Pietermaritzburg and was built on South African Development Trust land. In late 1981 *Echo*³⁶ published a report alleging that some people from the settlement had been charged with illegal occupation and were being served with summonses. If they did not demolish their homes and leave the settlement, they were faced with R50 fines, a large sum for people on low wages, or a suspended sentence of 50 days in prison. However, the affected people denied any wrongdoing, saying they had approached the local induna for permission. He had asked for R40 and issued chits. The induna vehemently denied receiving any money and giving out the receipts, although he was aware of them. The following January, it was discovered that he was a proven dubious character facing over one hundred charges of fraud.

The project was still in its early days and many individual cases were pending at the end of the year. Yet, there was hope with one case successfully resolved through the work of an attorney; while the rest would be similarly defended. Further plans included surveying the affected people and engaging an MP to speak to Piet Koornhof, minister of co-operation and development, about the settlement and the services provided there. By the end of 1982, the AO began to see progress, though slow, for the residents of Wilgefontein. Appeals to a Progressive Federal Party MP³⁷ were heard and with the help of the Urban Foundation a steering committee comprising local government and business was formed. It would look into the possibility of establishing a utility company for services in the settlement. However, the planned survey, to be distributed by a local college, had yet to materialise.

The outlook was not so rosy for the rest of the AO's clients and for the AO itself. Worsening economic conditions for the residents of Pietermaritzburg were mirrored in statistics for 1982. With the office open for 183 days, it

experienced a resurgence in the number of cases recorded (1 036, of which 411 were new). While the number of new pay and work dispute cases decreased, they remained the bulk of the load at 39.4%. Again the number of new cases exceeded the number of old cases, making up 51.9% of the total number. Together, these showed the increased need for the assistance provided by the office and reflected a general downturn in the local and national economies.

There was a major jump in UIF cases from 39 to 121 in the course of a year. Such was the increase that even the Department of Manpower, which handled UIF, was overcome by the number. This was aggravated by the discovery that in Howick UIF applications had been administered in an irregular fashion. Other categories such as financial assistance (including maintenance and education funding cases) also increased. The AO speculated that these shifts were consequences of increased redundancies, unemployment and the inflated cost of living. Realising the little it could do to combat or alleviate the plight of clients, the AO combined with its partner, the SAIRR, and extended its network to include Kupugani, a food relief programme, while working regularly with the Pensions Department at Vulindlela.

Generally, the AO's work was made much harder as the limited pool of volunteers shrank. Despite efforts to coax more people into volunteering, recruits were hard to find. Had it not been for a small dedicated group, the office would not have been able to remain open. Indeed, while there was a need for more open days, the office could not be staffed. Moreover, the office would experience another management change at the end of 1982 with the departure of Pat Merrett from the post of convenor of the MC for full-time employment. She was replaced by Gay McCormack.

A small reversal in fortune occurred in 1983 as more volunteers were found. This allowed the AO to open for a fifth morning on Saturdays although it did not increase the total number of working days, which remained static at 183. This was not a moment too soon as there was a sharp increase in the number of cases. The caseload nearly trebled that of the previous year to 3 022 with an average of 16.5 interviews per day. In addition, the AO also offered its services, mainly providing advice on pensions, once a month at St Raphael's Church at Swartkop Location where Peter Kerchhoff distributed food parcels from the Church Hunger Fund.³⁸

ENDNOTES

- 1 *The Black Sash, 1955–2005: The Golden Jubilee Report* (Cape Town: Black Sash, 2005): 7.
- 2 Ibid: 5.
- 3 *Race Relations Survey (RRS)* 1965: 158, 162.
- 4 Much of the information used in this chapter is drawn from regular AO reports written by various volunteers and workers. In the main these are not individually referenced.
- 5 *What is Black Sash?* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Midlands Region of the Black Sash, 1991): 8.
- 6 The premises are still standing and known as the Community Development Building.
- 7 Advice Office report, 2 March 1975.
- 8 Apart from those mentioned in the text the following were also listed as working as AO volunteers (Advice Office minutes, March 1975): Brenda Bell, Maggie Clarke, Sheila Hindson (Meintjes), Joan Kerchhoff, Sue Maughan Brown, Cara Pretorius, Carmel Rickard (all recorded as Sash members); and Jill Berning, Mrs de Havilland, Rose Doyle, Athene Hall, Bruce Irvine, Lydia Levine, Danne Pretorius, Mary Riekert, Mark van Wyk and M. Williams (recorded as not being members).
- 9 Busi Nyide interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 1 August 2005: 6.
- 10 'Advice Office report' *Sash Magazine* 18(7) November 1976: 25.
- 11 Nalini Naidoo, interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 August 2013: 3.
- 12 Nalini Naidoo, interview: 5–6.
- 13 Reports used different names: for example, Natal Midlands Region Black Sash Advice Office in the first biannual report for 1976. However, in the 1980 report the name of the office was given as the Black Sash Advice Bureau. By the annual report of 1982, the name was the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office.
- 14 Trevor Wills, 'Segregation, separation and desegregation: Pietermaritzburg since 1910' in *Receded Tides of Empire: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Natal and Zululand Since 1910* edited by Bill Guest and John M. Sellers (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994): 295.
- 15 Amongst Pietermaritzburg students involved were John Morrison and Jeanette Cunningham-Brown: she was consequently banned. See Christopher Merrett, 'Durban's crucial labour moment' *Witness* 18 March 2013.
- 16 It was joined within the next twelve months by unions representing clothing, textile, chemical, and furniture and timber workers, although it is not known if all of these were represented at the Thomas Street office and supplied the AO with clients. See Linda Ensor, 'A look at the open trade unions' *South African Labour Bulletin* 1(3) 1974: 49–52; Linda Ensor, 'Tucsa's relationship with African trade unions: an attempt at control, 1954–1962' *South African Labour Bulletin* 3(4) 1977: 33. At the time of writing MAWU's successor, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), is again asserting a workerist legacy and has been expelled from COSATU.
- 17 *RRS* 1979: 266, 279; Gail M. Gerhart and Clive L. Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990: Challenge and Victory, 1980–1990* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013, v.6): 61; Eddie Webster, 'MAWU and the Industrial Council: a comment' *South African Labour Bulletin* 8(5) 1983: 14–19.
- 18 Phil Bonner, 'Focus on FOSATU' *South African Labour Bulletin* 5(1) 1979: 12. For further background see: Johann Maree, 'Overview: emergence of the independent trade

- union movement'; Dudley Horner, 'The Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau'; and Joe Foster, 'The workers' struggle: where does FOSATU stand?' all in *The Independent Trade Unions, 1974–1984: Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin* edited by Johann Maree (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987): 1–11, 12–16, 218–238.
- 19 In the second report for 1976, pay disputes are indicated to cover leave and notice pay while work disputes include 'dismissals, working conditions, victimisation etc.'. Retrenchment was not itemised in the first report for 1976, but included with pay/work disputes.
 - 20 Solveig Piper, 'The problem of unemployment among African workers' *Reality* 9(5) 1977: 6–7.
 - 21 It is unclear how pensions were understood at this point. Later there were separate OAP and pension categories, the former becoming a staple of the AO's work. OAPs had first been paid to whites in 1928 under J.B.M. Hertzog's Pact government and to Africans from 1944 by the wartime administration of Jan Smuts in recognition of increasing urbanisation.
 - 22 This was confirmed by a national investigation in the early 1980s, which also identified fraud and corruption in the system (Georgina Jaffee, 'Unemployment and social security: the UIF investigation' *Work in Progress* 33 (1984): 27–30).
 - 23 Mentioned in the 1978 AO report as having assisted were: Juliet Armstrong, Maggie Clarke, Rose Doyle, Lorna Ferguson, Fidela Fouché, Sheila Gordon, Athene Hall, Fi Henderson, Doreen Hindle, Sheila Hindson, Doug Hindson, Liz Hosken, Joan Kerchhoff, Peter Kerchhoff, Margie King, Cara Pretorius, Paddy Tonkin, Mark van Wyk and Bunny Young.
 - 24 The statistics are apparently added up incorrectly, or incorrectly captured in the report tables. Thus for 1978 the total number of new cases when adding up the figures in the second table amount to 306 while the previous table stated that the total number of new cases was 305. The number of 306 is used to calculate percentages.
 - 25 Many cases were briefly written up in the report, illustrating the difficulties faced by clients.
 - 26 Anonymity has been applied in reporting specific cases.
 - 27 No reason is given for the poor attendance. Possibly the volunteers, who were mainly women and generally either wives or students, found that their responsibilities clashed with these extra Black Sash activities.
 - 28 While undoubtedly a fair assessment of contemporary AO opinion, it is not known how much was appreciated about unions' shop floor struggles against employer hostility, attempts to counter largely ineffective structures such as liaison committees, and the general difficulties of operating as unregistered entities before the legalisation of black trade unions as a result of the Wiehahn Commission and the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act.
 - 29 Busi Nyide interview: 5.
 - 30 These included SANTA, NEED and the Pietermaritzburg Urban Ministries Project.
 - 31 In May 1980 the following Sash members served as AO volunteers: Pat Merrett (convenor), Juliet Armstrong (Hart; finance), Maggie Clarke (roster), Dianne Lawrence (contact person), Cara Pretorius (report writing) and Jenny Silburn. Volunteers who were not Sash members were listed as Denise Armour, Ruth Edgecombe (training) and Sabera Haffeejee. In 1981 Gaye Spiller was also noted as a volunteer. Other names thus appear to be missing.
 - 32 Nalini Naidoo, 'Helping hand' *Echo* 17 July 1980.
 - 33 This does not necessarily represent the number of new clients as some had multiple problems.
 - 34 Thandi Moses in *Echo* 12 March 1981.
 - 35 Wilgefontein is also known as Willowfontain.

36 A weekly supplement to *The Natal Witness*.

37 The authors assume that this was Mike Tarr.

38 Other events involving the AO included an address to Lawyers for Human Rights undertaken jointly with organisations like the SAIRR, AFRA and Legal Aid. This was in an attempt to encourage more organised pro bono work among attorneys.

THE RIKHOTO CASE, raised by the Johannesburg Advice Office and taken to the Supreme Court by the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in 1981, had provided a watershed moment. The court ruled that Mehlolo Rikhoto had the right to remain in a white area for more than 72 hours because he had worked on a contract for one employer on a renewable annual basis for ten years. This was deemed continuous employment, thus satisfying section 10(1) (b) of the Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945. In June 1983 the Appellate Division upheld the judgment, enabling contract workers to claim urban residential rights. However, the legal status of wives and families remained subject to restrictions introduced by the Laws on Co-operation and Development Act of 1983 designed to stem the flow of rural migrants to the cities. Government estimated that over 9 000 urban workers in the area of the Drakensberg Administration Board (DAB) around Pietermaritzburg were now eligible for residential rights, but by July 1983 only one person had been awarded them.¹

Extra hours and workers did not provide the needed reprieve for the Pietermaritzburg Advice Office (AO). Hardship only worsened as factory retrenchments and increases in inflation took their toll. This was illustrated by the statistics: Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) queries increased nearly fourfold from 121 to 477, presumably new, cases. Many of them revolved around the late arrival and/or incorrect payment of benefits, which the AO suspected was the result of maladministration and inefficiency in labour offices or at the Department of Manpower.

Unsurprisingly, pay and work dispute cases remained high at 370 (27.7%). The reason for much of this remained the perennial problems of employer neglect and poor communication with employees, coupled with the latter's limited knowledge of workplace rights. However, in the tough economic climate a fair portion of these disputes centred on pension payment issues, especially in the case of Huletts Aluminium employees and more broadly those working for companies belonging to the Metal Industries Group

Pension Fund (MIGPF). The solution came with an amendment to the policy allowing employees to claim pension refunds up to six months after they left employment if they were still unemployed.

Another indicator of the grim economic climate lay in the increase in financial assistance cases. These amounted to 135 for the year, not including welfare cases – old age pensions (OAPs) and disability grants (DGs) – totalling 56. It was in these cases that the impact of retrenchment, inflation and poor UIF administration were evident to the AO, leaving many clients destitute and with little recourse to state grants. The AO responded by referring people to other organisations able to provide the necessary relief. As an interim measure clients were sent to Kupugani. Pietermaritzburg's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) formed an ad hoc local committee to tackle the issue, especially for those people with little chance of employment or income. This included raising funds and the prospect of starting self-help schemes. However, the AO believed that voluntary organisations were ill-equipped to cope with such a large-scale problem and that the real responsibility lay with national government.

Advice Office cases, 1984–1985

Mr M.P.Z. worked for a business in Pietermaritzburg until September 1983 when he was given immediate notice on a Friday. He was paid up until the previous Wednesday (payday) and given neither notice pay nor his UIF card. The AO contacted the firm and queried these three omissions. The firm finally agreed that it owed Mr Z. notice pay and two days' pay, and found his UIF card. Finally, the AO also assisted Mr Z. to apply for back payment of his pension deductions, of which he was unaware. This was a typical case showing workers' lack of awareness of basic rights and the casual attitude of employers to their workers.

Mrs S.C.S.'s husband, who had worked for Bisonboard, died in August 1985. The client was married by customary union and her husband had told her she was a pension beneficiary. However, Bisonboard had no pension scheme, but gave employees two years full pay in lieu. When the client's husband died, money was paid to M. (a second wife), E. (his son) and Christina (a daughter). The client claimed there was no child named Christina, and wrote an affidavit to the effect that she was the C. who should be given the money. It was established that the daughter's name was M.S., not Christina. This case was referred to the Legal Aid Clinic.

The problem of destitution was subsequently brought into sharp relief by correspondence between Roma Pridmore, national manager of Kupugani, and the AO. Pridmore wrote:

I am concerned about the growing numbers of destitute people being referred to Kupugani from the Black Sash Advice Office. At the present time this is costing our organisation more than R600 per month, but this is not my main concern as we are in a financial position to cope at present.

My main concern is that the people we are helping have no real hope for the future, and giving them one Twenty Rand parcel is not solving the very real problem that they have. Sister Mofokeng in her most recent report made a statement that I had been thinking around for some time, when she said ‘unemployment is with us to stay, and are we really doing a service by handing out free food parcels?’

Unfortunately we do not have the time to follow up all the cases you send to us but we do try to help some to obtain disability grants by taking them to the hospital or clinic and can sometimes pass them on to the Welfare Society for regular assistance. I am also aware that Kupugani is being regarded more and more as a place for free hand-outs and this is something we have tried to avoid. Originally we said we would help people for a short period whilst they were waiting for a pension or unemployment benefit but more and more of the people referred to us have little or no hope for an income of any kind in the foreseeable future.

Would it help for Sister Mofokeng and I to meet with you and your helpers at the Advice Office?²

The meeting took place between AO workers and Kupugani on 14 May 1985 and was followed up by correspondence from the AO convenor:

This is to record the decisions made at the meeting with you and Sr Mofokeng, viz. that our unofficial arrangement for food parcel handouts for Advice Office clients must cease immediately, and that this must include private arrangements between individual Advice Office workers and Kupugani.

We fully appreciate the administrative problems that our clients have caused you and your staff, and that our arrangement was not strictly in line with the principles of Kupugani. We are also very aware of the problems of dependency creation, and have in fact had two meetings recently to discuss using self-help agencies in preference to food parcel handouts. If the state were to exercise its full responsibility to black citizens, agencies like ours would not be overwhelmed by these insuperable problems, although of course such problems would not disappear.

On behalf of all the Advice Office workers, I should like to thank you, Sr Mofokeng, the rest of your staff, and your committee, for assisting us so obligingly since 1981. It has been an enormous relief to us to be able to ‘pass the buck’ when clients claim to be ‘destitute’, but the time has come when we must face our responsibilities in this respect and not try and solve fundamental problems with temporary palliatives. We shall have to discuss how we shall do this, and I hope that we shall be able to co-operate with Sr Mofokeng on her return, in the field of self-help schemes. The possible alternative schemes you suggested have provided us with a basis for future discussion.³

The problem of unemployment and consequent high levels of destitution was further compounded by difficulties in registering workers in terms of influx control and the issue of pass books: the number of related cases increased in the recession from eleven during the preceding year to 47. This matter lay with the DAB, which applied influx control regulations so that city employers were unable to hire people from outside the labour pool at Mason's Mill. But, it was argued, many of those available were unsuitable for vacant positions. For job seekers, this primarily affected people living outside the Pietermaritzburg townships of Ashdown, Imbali and Sobantu. To illustrate the problem the AO described a case it put forward to the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development. The client was a man who had left his Johannesburg job in order to work closer to his family in Edendale. However, after eighteen months and despite finding potential work in a factory, and with proof of it, he was unable to take up the offer due to influx control restrictions. In the meantime, he and his family were living on his wife's tiny income of R8 a week.

Staffing problems resumed in 1985 while the caseload continued to rise, increasing to 3 985. The number of new cases continued its decline to 43.5% of the total. Regardless of being open for considerably more days (43 days were added, taking the total number of open days to 226), the AO continued to struggle with this increase in clients, ultimately turning some away because it could not cope. Extra opening hours would have alleviated some of this pressure, but the lack of workers (at least six more would be needed) and the spartan nature of the AO's funding made this impossible. The problem was compounded by lack of space at Ubunye House. A temporary solution was implemented early in 1985 by renting sitting space in another room to deal with the numbers. This placed more pressure on already strained finances. The AO felt that moving would ultimately be the best solution, but this was not acted upon.

The increase in cases did not bring much change to the composition of the caseload. Labour cases remained dominant: pay and work disputes made up the majority of cases at 40.6% with UIF problems constituting the second largest number at 22.8%. As with the previous year, pension payment complaints, mainly relating to the MIGPF, comprised a significant number of these cases. In addition to the usual root of the problem, poor communication from managers and employee ignorance, the AO attributed disputes to unscrupulous management practices that engendered fear and suspicion among workers. In order to offset some of their caseload, the AO increasingly relied on the Industrial Councils and the Department of Manpower.

Another worrying trend for the AO was the number of insurance related cases being brought to the office for the first time. Most of these clients had policies with Golden Aid and Mercury Insurance, both owned by a company believed to have been based in Krugersdorp. When it closed down, it disappeared without informing policy holders what had happened to their contributions. In assisting these clients and others needing assistance with financial matters, the AO successfully partnered with attorneys at the Legal Underwriters Association of South Africa.

With case numbers continuing to shoot upwards, the need for more AO staff was greater than ever. Given the difficulty in finding regular volunteers, the AO sought to employ a part-time caseworker, but lacked sufficient funds to do so and had applied for and secured further funding from the Ford Foundation. In February 1984 a grant award of R18 000 was acknowledged.⁴ Not only did this eventually allow for a paid caseworker, but it also permitted rental of a larger office in Ubunye House, which helped ease overcrowding. The extra worker would allow for sorely needed additional open days as the caseload soared.⁵ On 1 May 1986, Jenny Bowen started work at the AO. She was expected to update and co-ordinate reference material, liaise with other organisations, find ways to educate clients, and identify areas of research. It was also anticipated that she would accompany monitors attending pension pay points.⁶ Her appointment allowed the AO to open for longer hours and for the first time, except Wednesdays, during afternoons.

The work of advice offices in other regions tended to reflect their political context. For example, the Athlone AO in Cape Town often dealt with pass law and influx control cases as a result of the status of the Western Cape as a coloured labour preference area.⁷ However, local issues of inter-party political violence, rent boycotts and citizenship rights barely featured in the litany of cases at the Pietermaritzburg AO, although a few clients presented problems related to the conflict between Inkatha and the United Democratic Front (UDF). Overwhelmingly, cases reflected clients' efforts to survive: they painted a picture not of broader political struggle against apartheid, but its impact on ordinary people and their attempts to navigate a world of severe economic restraints. This is poignantly illustrated in the preponderance of pay, work dispute and UIF cases.

Amidst burgeoning violence in 1986, the AO was open for 233 days and UIF claims and disputes dominated new cases (30%); while pay and work disputes followed closely behind (27.4%). Their source was to be found in the continuing poor economic climate with a high rate of dismissals and

retrenchments. When combined with poor magistrate's court administration and increasing difficulties in getting UIF cards, this meant long payment delays and a higher risk of destitution. To these cases can be added pension refunds and private pension disputes, which amounted to 15.1% of new cases. Many of these involved disagreements that often dragged on, especially in the motor and metal industries. Bids by clients to secure extra income, including grants, were merely, as the AO put it, 'short term solutions to long term problems'.⁸ A pervasive, but not unfounded, fear of worsening conditions, including UIF collapse and the drying up of an already limited pool of resources for the destitute, permeated the AO, which was already able to offer only minimal assistance. Such was the concern that destitution was prioritised by the AO for further work the following year.

In her first report dated 30 July 1986, Bowen wrote that increasing numbers of clients meant that research and resource work were going more slowly than expected, and quoted client numbers: March 434, April 460, May 547 and June 600. In 1986 the number of recorded cases rose by over seven hundred compared to the previous year. Yet, this understated the numbers who passed through the AO's doors. In a bid to maximise efficiency, many cases in 1986 went unrecorded without files especially if clients were referred to other organisations or simply required information (although this practice was not universally applied). This may obscure the extent of problems like destitution and the treatment of domestic workers that were apparently referred to other organisations; in the latter case to the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU).

In October 1986 Bowen arranged a workshop on basic legislation for advice office volunteers.⁹ In an interview she talked about the difficulties of working at the AO:

I think one of the ongoing problems was the fact that so few of us spoke Zulu so were, in fact, all pretty dependent on Mrs Nyide who did all the interpreting and ... a lot of the kind of educative work in the waiting room. One picked up things, particularly because so many of the issues were consistent in terms of what people were bringing in as difficulties and problems. The theory at the time was to move on to more educative work, empowering people to take up the issues themselves. I don't think in reality that this ever really worked, or happened, partially because people didn't believe that they could actually do it themselves. Partially, I think that the educative process that was happening was kind of tacked on because there were so many people. I think one of the overwhelming memories I have, and I probably remember it well because I was living with a small child, was arriving every day at lunch time and still seeing so many people. I think it was supposed to be three hours a day until half past four, and one of the days of the week we were closed, and that was

the time to write up reports and pull out statistics. Just seeing a waiting room, despite the fact that there could have been three or four volunteers working all morning ... still packed with people many of whom had struggled to get there [made] it ... very hard ever to close when one was supposed to ... because of that overwhelming feeling ... of just many, many people all patiently [waiting], desperately needing help.

When asked who was helpful, Bowen replied:

There was Mr Budhai in what was called the Department of Manpower [Labour] in those days, and he was our person to go and see if we weren't getting sorted out. I think he was marvellous and he went out of his way. I am not surprised that he had heart attacks after a while because he was one of the few people there who was concerned; he was human. A lot of the issues were around unemployment, and a lot of it was about either not being given an unemployment card, employers not contributing towards unemployment or people not being aware that they needed to apply within a certain period of becoming unemployed, and also around sickness benefits and death benefits. So the pension issue was big and there were labour issues. I remember one day in particular having eight people arrive all from the same small business, all saying they had walked out of work and would I phone their employer: they were not going back due to ill-treatment and non-payment of salary. I remember being totally astounded because I phoned the employer who immediately offered to pay me if I would simply give him the names of the people who had walked out so he could deal with them. One of the other issues I particularly remember was the women whose husbands had died, and the fact that there was more than one wife, and sons were taking all the resources, and how to deal with that. I remember being quite struck by that.¹⁰

The AO recognised the need for its caseworkers to be up-to-date on evolving legislation and generally well informed, not only to provide better and more efficient support for clients but also to fulfil the office's educative role. To this end its resources were updated and new sources added and this was supplemented by talks and workshops. These included a lecture by Sheena Duncan and the lawyer Peter Rutsch of the Durban LRC who spoke on changing influx control and citizenship legislation. Bowen went to two workshops on pensions held in Durban and the first ever national AO conference in Port Elizabeth, which proved so successful that it became an annual event.

Nevertheless, the Pietermaritzburg AO faced particular regional difficulties that made the need to improve the educational aspect of its work more urgent. Many clients were illiterate and spoke no English. Coupled with this was a significant caseload and an almost completely voluntary workforce, supported by one, or occasionally two, interpreters. One answer to this conundrum was to have Victoria Nyide address clients on general issues, such as the UIF application procedure, while they waited. This strategy assisted clients merely seeking information, freeing caseworkers for other clients, and had the added

benefit of furthering the broader AO and Black Sash goals of encouraging more independent action from clients.

In the face of rising case numbers, the language barrier between clients and volunteer caseworkers remained a significant problem. Often Mrs Nyide was their only interpreter, which must have slowed the speed with which they dealt with cases. No mention is made in reports of the ability of any of the volunteers to speak languages besides English. Nor do the records state whether any attempt was made to encourage volunteers to learn Zulu, although there may have been individual initiatives.¹¹ The language issue highlighted Sheena Duncan's 1980 vision for enhancing the independence of clients at advice offices and her request that interviews be conducted in English.

Advice Office cases, 1986–1987

Mr S.R.Z. tried to apply for a reference book and was told to bring an older male relative, but his 25-year-old brother was rejected as unsuitable by Vulindlela magistrate's court and his father was untraceable. In another case, S.S.S.'s father refused to help his 17-year-old son get a reference book because he had come to the aid of his mother whom his father was assaulting.

Mr S.G. of Sinathing was trying to get a work seeker's permit, but did not appear on his landlord's list so was unable to get his reference book stamped by the chief.

Ms N.B. worked for Town Hill Hospital for 37 years. Her pension cheques from the Department of Health and Welfare were issued in the wrong name, supposedly corrected, but issued again in error.

Mr P.M.H. was from Hlobane Collieries and had been born at Wesselsnek, yet his reference book categorised him as Xhosa and his birth date was given as 1942 instead of 1941.

Mr B.T.M. was evicted from his Imbali house by the township superintendent. His mother had deserted his father and married again before he died. The son had proof of parentage, which gave him a right to the house, but it had been sold to the mother.

Mrs E.M. (born 1918) and her older husband were attacked by youths and robbed of their pensions and belongings; the local induna and Camperdown police being unable to offer assistance. They were eventually admitted to Emuseni old age home, but told to leave by other residents because they were not Inkatha members. The husband died attending to a dispute at Nqutu and there were subsequent problems with the estate.

Mr S.A.M. worked for Springbok Motors in Pietermaritzburg for R113 per fortnight. He was dismissed and given R50 to cover two weeks wages without notice pay. His case was referred to the Industrial Council for investigation. Mr M.K. was fired by the same firm with four days' wages and no notice pay. There were allegations of

theft, but no charge had been laid and the manager was abusive and defiant when phoned. This case was referred to Legal Aid.

Mr D.T.M. was assaulted by his employer when he asked for his pay a day early.

Mr S.R.D. who worked for Cassimjee Supermarket had his promised bonus withheld because his girlfriend owed the business money.

Mr S.B.Z. received no UIF card from Fidelity Guards on resignation. Security companies and other firms with a high labour turnover declined to give references on the highly revealing grounds that their records were not complete enough. Mr T.P.N. was summarily fired by the same firm for lateness and told to return the uniform for which he had paid. He had never been warned; there was no notice, nor notice pay.

Ms M.D., a cleaner, was sacked by Tegn Timbers on suspicion of theft. When questioned about the legality of this, the employer threatened to dismiss the whole staff. She was reinstated, but later fired.

Mr T.J.M. who had worked for Eastmore Butchery for two years was dismissed for no reason without notice pay or a UIF card.

Mr A.Z. complained that when his job ended he did not receive a UIF card, but his job was on a farm that was not covered by welfare legislation. Mr J.D. lived and worked on a farm at Mooi River. Dismissed by the new owner he and his family were allowed to stay, but required to pay rent.

Mrs N.R.N. was deserted by her husband and applied for a divorce in 1980. She was living with her children in the marital house in Imbali and asked the superintendent to transfer its registration to her name. She was told to vacate the house because it had been sold to her husband. Councillors said they would review the case, but had not done this. N.R.N. was referred to the Legal Aid Clinic.

Mrs M.M.M. asked the AO how to obtain maintenance. She claimed that both she and her children were assaulted by her husband and was referred to social workers.

Mr S.M. started working for Edendale Hospital in 1958 but was dismissed for theft in 1985. The client thought his pension deductions commenced in 1960, but did not know how much was deducted. When consulted, his payslips confirmed that there had been pension deductions and after numerous letters from the AO an amount of R1 781.19 was paid to him.

Mr M.N.N. had not received his refund from the MIGPF. It was reported that the cheque had been sent to Noshezi School, but it had not arrived. After many letters a replacement cheque was sent to the AO.

Mr B.M. applied for his retirement benefits from the MIGPF, but nothing was forthcoming. He was due R817.75, which the fund claimed had been posted to him and banked. The client's bank savings account book was scrutinised and showed no such deposit. Eventually, after many letters, a second lump sum cheque for R472.60 arrived at the Advice Office. The balance remained missing.

Such was the bureaucratic maze suffused by widespread racism in which black South Africans struggled to exist.

In spite of the language barrier, AO volunteers and staff continued to process large numbers of cases in 1987, assisted significantly by Peter Rutsch of the LRC in Durban. In addition to its normal work, the AO became a teaching venue hosting Federal Theological Seminary (FEDSEM) students enrolled as part of their training in a practical theology course. This included an address by Jenny Bowen entitled 'The AO: a model for participation in the struggle'. The AO also hosted students from the University of Natal's Centre for Adult Education. A manual was produced for AO workers and training and education was furthered by frequent meetings on specific topics. Some volunteers attended a workshop by Sheena Duncan organised and hosted at Hillcrest, Durban, by Coastal Black Sash.

In 1987 the AO was open for 228 days (though no longer every Wednesday or Friday afternoon) and dealt with 4 369 cases, 1 750 of them new. This was the first time in seven years that the AO had experienced a drop in case numbers, which represented a decline of just over 25%. However, this decline was in part a reflection of administrative changes. Building on the decision of the previous year, when files were not opened for referrals or those seeking information, the AO adopted a more personal approach by spending more time with clients explaining their rights and encouraging them to take action themselves. Files were opened only when deemed absolutely necessary.

What constituted 'absolutely necessary' was not made clear. Indeed, a brief survey of the extant case files shows that the complexity of complaints and the need to keep track of correspondence seems to have been part of the reason to open files. But others are Spartan in their detail. Far from the comprehensive case histories that were aimed for in 1980, some files document only referrals to other organisations like SADWU. Other reasons for the drop in numbers could include increased knowledge in the client pool about the extent of services, especially with regard to charitable relief. A further explanation could lie in the continued morning sessions on UIF held by Victoria Nyide, along with informative posters in the waiting room that may have helped literate clients simply seeking advice.

What did not change substantially was case composition. Work and pay disputes returned to their predominant position at 26.4% of new cases. This was caused in part by problems falling under the auspices of the Industrial Council, located in Durban and responsible for the entire province of Natal. According to the AO it was understaffed and therefore very slow in dealing with disputes.

This category was closely followed by UIF matters, which dropped to second place with a total of 22.6% of the new cases (a considerable drop of 8.26% from the previous year). The AO put this down to Nyide's talks, not improved efficiency on the part of government. Other categories to experience declines included pension refunds, cases resulting from the liquidation of companies and destitution; possibly because more people came to appreciate that the AO was not a charitable organisation.

However, the AO did record a few areas of growth. One major category was the ever-present miscellaneous, which totalled just over 7.5% of new cases. These comprised basic everyday issues such as deceased estates and problems with identity documents. Other significant categories included OAPs and DGs (86 cases).

The most conspicuous category concerned insurance matters. This had been first recorded as an independent category in 1983 with a total of 23 new cases for that year. From then on numbers rose steadily to 42 cases in 1985 and 40 in 1986. In 1987 they peaked at 139 or about 8% of the total new cases for the year. While the AO could not account for this sharp increase, it did note the all-too-common pattern of exploitation of often semi-illiterate and illiterate clients who were sold policies whose written form failed to match the verbal description. Furthermore, they were often not given their policies and probably did not understand them. With the assistance of a representative from the Life Offices Association, the AO was able to assist some clients.

These statistics concealed various issues and trends and the impact of wider events in Pietermaritzburg that touched the AO in small but noteworthy ways. For example, a major lingering issue (first raised in 1980) was that of the unreliable nature of clients' addresses which posed great difficulties for financial transactions. The initial, and still preferred, solution was to try to encourage clients to use a building society account to handle transfers and deposits. However, where they could not, this often meant money was sent to the AO first and forwarded to the client. The system proved incredibly reliable as over R149 000 successfully passed through the AO in 1987, but it was only a proportion of the monies dealt with as it did not include some categories like OAP arrears.

This was also a significant year in the history of Pietermaritzburg and, more broadly, the province. During September 1987, five days of heavy rain brought about one of the most devastating floods in South Africa's history. Over 400 people died with 50 000 more left homeless and damage assessed at over R400 million.¹² Pietermaritzburg and surrounding areas were severely

impacted, especially the residents of Edendale and Sobantu where water levels were waist high.¹³ Affected people came to the AO looking for relief and were assisted where possible; for example, those with property bought on hire purchase (HP) that was damaged or lost in the floods. However, in most cases people were referred to other organisations (and consequently these cases were not recorded) such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC, in the same building as the AO) which was dealing specifically with matters relating to flooding.

It arrived amidst continued political violence in the Natal Midlands region. As in previous years, the AO seldom dealt directly with the consequences of the violence. Rather, it was the subtext to cases or was referred to during discussions. There was a case where a man claimed he was unfairly dismissed because his supervisor thought he was a troublemaker as he had been arrested for carrying an illegal weapon. He said he brought it from home for protection, presumably because he was expecting violence. Those impacted by the violence went, according to the AO, 'directly to PACSA (Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Action)'.¹⁴ Clients who went to the AO were generally referred either to PACSA or organisations such as the SACC.

Political violence reached new heights in 1988, but was still not reflected in the casework although it remained an undercurrent. For example, a woman was forced to move to Durban without giving notice at her job in order to escape the violence and battled to get pay owed to her along with her UIF card. Others were too scared to collect UIF for fear of being killed. The AO, too, was far from immune as Victoria Nyide missed many days of work due to violence in her neighbourhood and other unspecified problems. This severely impacted the work of the AO as it lost not only its one full-time employee but one of its most experienced, sympathetic and efficient caseworkers as well as a skilled interpreter. Another problem connected to the violence was the number of houses destroyed by arson, forcing many people to move. This was again not reflected in the official statistics, possibly concealed in the destitution or miscellaneous categories. A more likely reason these cases were not clearly recorded is that they were referred to other organisations.

Jenny Bowen had left the AO to further her studies at the end of 1987. An advertisement for the post was placed in the *Weekly Mail* and elicited twelve applications. After a competitive selection process, Clare Kerchhoff, an active member of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), was appointed to the post and began working in the afternoons from mid-January 1987.¹⁵ During May and June of that year the LRC and University of Natal, Durban, jointly ran a

paralegal course to which the AO invited its staff, volunteer and paid, although only Kerchhoff and Nyide were able to attend.

Further staff changes included Nyide being upgraded to full-time caseworker-interpreter at the beginning of 1987. But the AO lost the services of the Durban-based lawyer Peter Rutsch and had to rely on other forms of legal assistance in addition to the existing group of attorneys willing to take on some *pro deo* cases. Sources of help included the newly opened Pietermaritzburg branch of Lawyers for Human Rights, the Legal Aid Clinic and the Legal Aid Officer, especially for divorce cases. In appropriate instances clients were referred to the Small Claims Court, which excluded attorneys.

In addition, the AO continued to serve not only as an advice bureau, but as a training site. It opened its doors to both students, especially tertiary students required to do some form of community service as part of their course of study, and fellow NGO workers looking for experience. In 1988, it hosted a student from St Joseph's Scholasticate as well as some staff from newly opened advice offices in Ashdown and Edendale, with which the AO hoped to forge good links.

On top of the continuation of the new frugal filing policy, which the AO estimated cut recorded cases by at least half, these new advice offices would also have an impact on its operations. For a second year the caseload took another significant plunge, particularly in the last quarter when the new advice offices opened. The total number of cases (new and old) fell from 4 369 in 1987 to 3 102 in 1988, a drop of just under 29%. Yet, the decline in the number of new cases from 1 750 to 1 075 (-38.6%) was more severe and probably indicative of the impact of these new organisations.

The composition of the caseload again shifted in 1988. Pensions and pension refunds for the first time topped the number of cases. Many of them involved widows' pensions, cases that were frequently difficult to resolve. Workers' widows would often come to the AO in desperate need of income long after the death of their husbands and at best many could remember only the place of employment. Few would have further information such as a specific department or, more importantly, payslips proving payment into pension funds if they were contributing. This scenario bore many parallels to the AO's encounters with workmen's compensation (WC): workers would claim benefits long after an accident once they were in financial need. However, not all pension cases were so bleak and occasionally there was a happy ending. This was evident in the case of Pillar Naco clients after the company closed in early 1988. Pension

payouts were relatively large compared with the norm and one client received R27 000, while in total AO clients were paid out over R250 000.

From 1988 a new category of cases headed 'labour' was created, possibly as a more concise description of work and pay disputes. This was the second most common type among new cases at 22.2%. Work and pay problems during the previous year had constituted the most common category and made up 26.4% of new cases. Two areas showing significant annual increases were OAP, DG and WC cases. OAPs and DGs rose from just 5.7% of new cases to 12.6%, the fourth largest new case category. This was also reflected in the actual number of cases, which increased from 99 to 135. In addition they comprised 37% of old cases, far outstripping any other category. This is but a small indication of the delays experienced by those claiming grants. Recent claims were also hindered by issues around the new identity documents, which often had incorrect dates of birth. This trend was echoed in WC cases, which rose from 5.1% in the previous year to 9.5%.

In sharp contrast, UIF cases declined sharply from 22.6% to just 14% in 1988 and to the third most common type of new case. They were often rooted in poor administration from both government officials and employers. The perennial problems with the latter included deductions and failure to issue cards timeously. But a far more insidious tactic used by some employers was to take on people as temporary workers. They often had little or no protection and were not covered by UIF.

Another category showing significant decline involved insurance. After a few years of sharp increases that culminated in this becoming the fourth largest new case category in 1987, it experienced an unexplained decline to just 2% in 1988. Despite their small number, these cases worried the AO since many clients would stop paying premiums long before they officially cancelled their policies, meaning that they would get no money back.

This same concern was displayed about HP complaints, which made up only 1.1% of cases in 1988. They had been a tiny but regular feature in the AO statistics since 1978 when they were first recorded as a separate category (on some occasions they were combined with other case types such as consumer problems or not independently recorded). The number of new cases remained at 5 or often less, but in 1983 they rose to 12 and continued generally upwards reaching 18 in 1986 and 22 in 1987. In 1988, there was a decline to 12. The AO's major concern with these cases was the ease with which clients become seriously indebted. From the following year these cases were subsumed under the miscellaneous category.

Advice Office cases, 1988

Mrs E.P. reported that her late husband did not receive his UIF card or a pension when he left the employ of the KwaZulu government in June 1987. It was too late to claim UIF benefits, but an amount of R261.58 was paid to the widow as her share of his pension.

Mr J.F.Z. was injured on duty in May 1987 while employed by Zako Engineering, losing two fingers. WC had no record of the accident. The client completed application forms with sworn statements from two witnesses. When the witnesses were required to sign an affidavit they said they were too scared to do so in case they lost their jobs. However, this became unnecessary because the employer agreed to submit an accident report, which resulted in a payment of R1 930 to the client.

Mr F.A.M. was injured on duty in a tractor accident in July 1988 while working for the Royal Agricultural Society (RAS). After a long spell in Edendale Hospital, with his hearing impaired he felt he could no longer work. He claimed that the employer had given him R100 and his UIF card. WC acknowledged receipt of accident reports, but the RAS works manager said there had been a question of the client being drunk on duty so he was reluctant to take him back to complete the resumption report. The client's wife said he could not work because he had been mentally affected and his behaviour was aggressive and irrational. WC told the AO that the client would now receive a monthly pension and a lump sum of R1 576 had been sent to the employer in January 1990. The client collected this money and his wife reported that he had disappeared with all of it. The client died in March 1990 and it was established that his wife was not entitled to any further compensation, nor could she receive a monthly pension.

Mrs M.J.M. claimed that her husband died in December 1987 while in the employ of the city of Pietermaritzburg cleaning a swimming pool. The employer wrote to say that he did not die on duty, but drowned at Jolliffe swimming pool in Pine Street on Christmas Day after closing time when he had no authority to be there. The matter had been reported to the South African Police and no compensation was available in cases of this nature. However, R726.57 was received in UIF death benefits.

Mr I.N. was dismissed without pay or leave when he was absent from work at Fountainhill Estate due to illness. He was re-employed in October 1988 but reported ill again later in the month. The manager then said he could not be re-employed. However, the client reported to the AO in April 1990 that the pay problem had been solved.

Mr K.P.J.'s unmarried son who had been a policeman at Florida (Transvaal) was killed in September 1987. Although the father had received an insurance cheque for R21 000 he queried if his son had paid into a pension scheme. After completing an affidavit to the effect that he was the sole heir, a pension refund of R1 803.07 was sent to the client.

The downward trajectory of the AO's cases came to an end in 1989 when the office again opened files for most clients, causing a dramatic upswing in the recorded number: from a total of 3 102 filed cases in 1988 the number grew to 4 050. However, this did include 972 unfiled but recorded cases, probably from the day book, which were left out of previous annual report statistics. Without those the total number of filed cases was 3 078, slightly less than the previous year. Given that in 1988 the AO estimated that it recorded only about half the number of cases that it dealt with, the actual total number of cases for that year would have been about 6 200.¹⁶ In 1989 most case categories, except WC, experienced increases. Yet, the most significant, if not dramatic, increase was seen in OAP and DG cases (see chapter 10).

In August 1989 a Natal Midlands Black Sash monthly newsletter focused on the AO. Extracts follow:

The Black Sash's Advice Office in Pietermaritzburg is situated at 174 Berg Street where two inter-leading rooms and a client waiting room serve as accommodation for this vital and very active organization.

The Advice Office management committee exists to co-ordinate its activities, and consists of Pat Merrett (convener), Gay McCormack (co-convener), Mary Kleinenberg (treasurer), and Sarah Carlisle (fundraiser). Their meetings are attended by Clare Kerchhoff and Victoria Nyide, the two paid employees. Clare has been working for the Advice Office for nearly 2 years while Victoria has 15 years' service.

Volunteer workers are an essential part of this organization and currently the following are helping in the mornings: Maureen Wright, Ruth Lundie, Jenny McKenzie, Marie Dyer, Sarah Carlisle, Pat Merrett, Mary Kleinenberg, Margie Shaw, Bobby Keal, Gay McCormack, Leonie Prozesky, Juliet Hart and the only man, Ian Calder.

Clients arrive very early, the norm being an overflowing waiting-room when the office is opened in the mornings. Most of the files opened deal with old age pensions, WC, disability grants, Unemployment Insurance and labour related cases such as notice and leave pay. On average 33% of clients can be referred to other organizations for help.

The role of the Advice Office is to try and empower people to solve their own problems, helping them to know their rights and encouraging them to take control of their own lives.

Some of the most rewarding times in the Advice Office are when pension refunds for clients come through because most of these people are destitute and are desperate for money to survive. The low points are when you refer unemployed people to the Department of Manpower knowing there are no jobs available; or when a client comes to you with a legitimate claim but too much time has elapsed and the claim is useless; sometimes widows don't know where their husbands had worked and they don't have any old pay slips or other documentation so nothing can be done for them.

There are lighter moments too – for example when someone wanted advice on where the best caravan park was in Pietermaritzburg!¹⁷

Like pensioners, DG clients were not spared and in 1989 many long-term recipients arrived at the AO complaining of sudden and unexplained payment stoppages. According to the AO, the KwaZulu government felt that there were far too many people claiming DGs and that these numbers were artificially inflated by able people who had been misdirected to apply for DGs as a means of coping with unemployment rather than seeing social workers. Those subjected to stoppage of payment were eventually told that they required a medical review and many were subsequently informed that they no longer qualified for grants (see chapter 10).

While OAPs and DGs appeared to dominate the AO's work in 1989, it was only the second largest category after pension fund payment cases. However, unlike OAPs and DGs these, while numerous, were often simple and required little more than helping clients to fill in the appropriate form. A major concern was a sense that in assisting people with these refunds, the AO was essentially doing the work of employers; a fact confirmed by some employers.

A similar feeling permeated the handling of UIF cases and, arguably, labour-related cases. Broadly, in their dealings with all three the AO attempted to step back from action that would arrogate the responsibilities of employers or other bodies. Thus, in the case of pension refunds it attempted to refer clients back to employers as far as possible along with efforts to monitor employer-employee relations. In UIF cases, the Department of Manpower's treatment of clients was monitored. Labour issues, too, were seen as within the purview of other organisations and, despite a long history of dealing with such cases, they were now to be referred to relevant trade unions, leaving the AO with UIF matters and leave and notice pay issues.

Another significant load in 1989 included UIF cases, which comprised over 12% of the total number. However, it was the second largest category of unfilled cases with a total of 203. Resolution of clients' problems was made all the more difficult by Manpower's recurrent computer system outages, which meant that the department was often dealing with backlogs. The situation was compounded by the closure of the struggling Vulindlela branch of Manpower, forcing many to go to the Imbali office. But to the relief of the AO this development did not result in the expected upsurge in cases.

The last major area of AO concern was WC problems, although they comprised fewer than 7% of all cases and declined dramatically compared with the previous year to just 34. The concern was justified given the fundamental nature of the problem: employers were not reporting accidents. This in turn placed the evidential burden of proof, including production of witnesses, on

workers to prove claims. It was often made all the more difficult because clients would only come forward with claims much later when their memories of the accident, and those of potential witnesses, had receded. While it may be tempting to view this failure of employers to report WC cases as yet another form of exploitation, it seemed that at least in part this failure was rooted in ignorance from both employers and employees. This was made plain at a Technilaw course on WC aimed at employers, which Clare Kerchhoff attended in October on behalf of the AO.

Advice Office cases, 1989

Ms T.D.S. resigned from her work as a petrol attendant at Thabizolo Service Station, but was not given a UIF card. After a letter was written to the manager, he sent the card to the AO.

Mr E.J.N. had been injured on duty in November 1988 when he worked for Midlands Building Suppliers. He was in hospital for a week after the accident, received no compensation and was owed one week's notice pay. After letters were written to the firm it was agreed that he was owed the leave pay and compensation, but he was not at his last known address. An advertisement was placed in *Echo* to try to trace him.

Mr M.E.N. worked at Lyndale Farm, New Hanover. He was injured on duty in September 1989 and three fingers on his left hand had to be amputated. The employer was telephoned and said that all the necessary papers had been completed and sent to WC, but the client had not resumed work and a resumption report was necessary for WC to make a payment. The client, who said he was afraid of the dogs, was advised to go back to the farm to conclude the matter.

Ms N.F.N. resigned from her position as a domestic worker in March 1989, but was not paid for the last ten days of employment. The employer said that the client owed her money so she would not pay her, although the client claimed she owed nothing. The matter was referred to the Small Claims Court with a caution to the client that she must be prepared to swear that her claims were justified.

Ms S.L.M. was employed as a domestic worker for one employer for sixteen years and was dismissed in March 1988. The client claimed that since 1980 the employer had deducted R12 every month as a contribution to a special savings account for her. She had received notice pay, but not the money in the savings account, and also wanted to know if she was due a long service bonus. The AO was unable to contact the employer, whose telephone went unanswered, so the client was referred to the Legal Aid Clinic.

Ms S.A.S. worked at a house in Chase Valley for one year, but was dismissed because the husband of her employer said that they no longer needed help because his wife would do the housework. The client was given a good reference, but no notice pay. When contacted the employer said that the client was earning R4.30 a day and as she was on 24 hours' notice she was paid R4.30.

Mr M.M. claimed death benefits from Baynesfield Estate where his brother Z.J.M. had worked for eight years before his death. He was unmarried and had no other dependants. Numerous letters from the AO produced no progress so the matter was handed over to Legal Aid, represented by Loots Steenkamp, who wrote demanding full and final settlement. Finally, an amount of R7 500 was paid to the client.

Mr A.G. worked for South African Transport Services (SATS) from 1935 until 1970 when he retired. He died in December 1989 and his widow B.G. enquired about her entitlement to a share of his pension. A letter from SATS stated that no provision was made in the Railways and Harbours Pension Amendment Act (1941) whereby a pension may be paid to widows or other dependants of deceased pensioners.

Mrs B.G.Z. enquired about her entitlement to some of her late husband's pension. M.H.Z., who had worked at the water purification plant, Esikhawini on the Natal South Coast, died in January 1989. The AO duly wrote to enquire and eventually received a letter from the Department of Works apologising for the delay and enclosing forms for completion. In July 1990 the client received a cheque for R32 000 and a further R3 000 in August.

For the AO, 1989 was a significant and busy year. It began with the welcome move from Ubunye House to 174 Berg Street (now Hoosen Haffejee Street), a house owned by the Ecumenical Centre Trust and shared with two other NGOs, PACSA and the Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa. This physical change was succeeded by an equally significant change in personnel. While still staffed with volunteers and the two paid employees, Victoria Nyide and Clare Kerchhoff, 1989 saw the departure of Pat Merrett as its convenor, a position she had held for most of the past nine years. While the co-chair temporarily filled the gap, her departure was keenly felt in the organisation and the position remained unfilled for some time. It was not until December 1989 that a new convener, Yvonne Spain, was appointed. These changes intersected with a global financial crisis that not only impacted the country still in the grip of a debt crisis but its effects were also experienced by NGOs.¹⁸ Operating within the bounds of constrained finances was not new to the AO, but it was forced in November 1989 to reduce its opening hours by cancelling Saturday morning sessions. This reduced its open time to just four days a week and would save R100 per month in interpreter fees.

Other challenges facing the AO were more ideological. In late November 1989 there was a meeting at which concerns were again raised about the relationship between the AO and the Black Sash as its parent organisation. As before, there was a feeling that the work of the office with its large caseload and focus on solving individual problems created a working ethos that could

potentially detach the AO from the broader Black Sash. In short, the AO was simply not attending to root causes of clients' problems such as lack of empowerment and education and the broad effects of apartheid that were at the core of Sash's campaigns.

Many suggestions were put forward to address this imbalance. For example, training opportunities for AO workers and other organisations and groups, such as trade unions, could be increased. Efforts to increase resources and produce more educational materials in Zulu and English, such as posters and pamphlets, could be stepped up. These publications should also be distributed to the public and versions printed in the press to further the twin goals of education and empowerment. More time could be dedicated to case analysis to shed light on pressing trends and initiate appropriate action such as campaigns and publicity to pressure government for reform.

Such undertakings were, however, hamstrung by the AO's perennial need for workers and skills. To work within these constraints yet put suggestions into action, the meeting suggested a number of solutions. First, they needed to change the way volunteers were used: for example, the Saturday volunteers, no longer needed for casework, could take on more administrative tasks and thus free Clare Kerchhoff to work on other projects such as educational materials and case analysis. Moreover, to meet the skills shortage, volunteer workers should be encouraged to specialise in particular areas rather than being partially skilled in everything. Regular meetings of volunteers would also aid in skill promotion and serve to keep everyone in regular contact. Furthermore, by looking outside the AO and the Black Sash for volunteer workers, the need for skills as well as personnel could be addressed. One idea in this vein was to approach university law programmes to consider making AO duty part of students' course work, given that many of the areas dealt with by the AO required legal knowledge and action. It could also streamline administration by creating pro forma letters rather than draw up correspondence on an individual basis.

At a further meeting of the management committee in early December, decisions were made about implementation of some of these suggestions. Based on previous experiences, including those of the year when two volunteers from Wilgespruit and a student from St Joseph's Theological Seminary volunteered at the AO, it was decided to encourage other tertiary programmes apart from law, such as theological students based at seminaries, to send students to work at the AO as a practical part of their studies. Moreover, Clare Kerchhoff would start to work flexitime, giving her more opportunity to pursue various projects

and go to meetings. This would mean Victoria Nyide would have to take on more responsibilities such as case follow-up or volunteers would need to work in the afternoons. It was also decided that officially opening the office to the public on Wednesday morning would further help Kerchhoff. While the AO was closed to the public on Wednesdays, Kerchhoff was there to do case follow-up, but she was hard-pressed to turn away clients who nevertheless came to the AO seeking assistance. The committee proposed that during the first two weeks of the following year, Kerchhoff would focus on administrative tasks and do less casework. In April 1990 it was reported that she had moved to Johannesburg and Ann Strode had replaced her as AO caseworker.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that at the 1989 AO conference the issue of conditions of service was raised. Regions were still run by local volunteer committees and conditions varied depending on the size and wealth of the region. Mary Kleinenberg wrote to Sheena Duncan, who was the voluntary national AO co-ordinator, raising the following five questions:

- is it a feasible proposition to introduce parity of salary between regions?
- is medical aid likely to be introduced in all regions?
- are there any criteria for paying severance pay, and would this still apply now that a pension scheme has been introduced?
- do any regions have extra leave over and above the Christmas break?
- do all regions contribute to the WC Fund?

However, there would be no change until 1993 when Annemarie Hendrikz was appointed national AO co-ordinator on a paid basis. She arranged a weekend workshop with Sash trustee Mary Kleinenberg, an AO co-ordinator from East London and a staff member, Wellington Ntamo. They thrashed out the beginnings of staff conditions that preceded the writing of a manual.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *The Black Sash, 1955–2005: The Golden Jubilee Report* (Cape Town: Black Sash, 2005): 60; Race Relations Survey (RRS) 1983: 264–266. Rikhoto's name was in fact Rikhoso.
- 2 Roma Pridmore, letter to Pat Merrett, 26 April 1985.
- 3 Pat Merrett, letter to Roma Pridmore, 16 May 1985.
- 4 Pat Merrett, letter to Ford Foundation, 2 February 1984.
- 5 In October 1985 volunteer AO workers who were not Sash members were listed as: Terri Broll, Julia Meineke and Leonie Prozesky.
- 6 Executive Committee minutes, 27 May 1986.
- 7 J.A. Macrobert, *Ungandinwa Nangomso – Don't Get Tired Tomorrow: A History of the Black Sash Advice Office in Cape Town, 1958 to 1980* (Masters Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1993): 21.

- 8 AO annual report, 1986.
- 9 Executive Committee minutes, 4 November 1986.
- 10 Jenny Bowen interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 5 May 2013: 2–3.
- 11 It would be unwise to be too definite or judgemental on this point: some of the volunteers, having grown up in Natal, would have spoken a basic form of Zulu.
- 12 G. du T. de Villiers and R. Maharaj, 'Human perceptions and responses to floods with specific reference to the 1987 flood in the Mdloti River near Durban, South Africa' *Water SA* 20(1) 1994. Available at http://www.wrc.org.za/Lists/Knowledge%20Hub%20Items/Attachments/4827/1994_January_0754_abstract.pdf (accessed 29 June 2014).
- 13 Owen McGee, 'Floods' in *Pietermaritzburg, 1838–1988: A New Portrait of an African City* edited by John Laband and Robert F. Haswell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1988): 11.
- 14 AO annual report, 1987.
- 15 The ECC aimed at ending compulsory military service for white males. The Black Sash was aligned to it and had been heavily involved in its formation.
- 16 Since the AO had a day book system where interviews were recorded regardless of whether files were opened, it is possible that such estimates have some solid grounding in reality. However, in what remains of their case file archives at the Alan Paton Centre, only one day book (for 1986) is available. The others, like the missing case files, are unaccounted for. This makes accurate comparisons across years somewhat difficult. Nonetheless, general trends can still be discerned.
- 17 Monthly newsletter, 2 August 1989.
- 18 Alan Hirsch, 'The origins and implications of South Africa's continuing financial crisis' *Transformation* 9 (1989): 31–50.
- 19 Executive Committee minutes, 5 April 1990.

MOVING TOWARDS LIBERATION: THE ADVICE OFFICE, 1990–1994

DURING 1990 THE Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) was instrumental in collecting blankets, food, toys and money for displaced people at KwaKothe store, a refugee camp in Edendale. Pietermaritzburg Advice Office (AO) workers visited the camp to offer paralegal services, regarding pensions in particular. The AO frequently referred victims of the violence to agencies in the city that could assist them.¹

Advice Office cases, 1990

Mr D. worked for a Pietermaritzburg company that produced blinds, but the company went insolvent in 1985. In 1990 he decided to apply for a pension refund and submitted his form through the AO. After several months the refund was still outstanding, despite numerous written reminders.

Mr M.P.M. worked for Western Deep gold mine but was refused payment of UIF after he left. He completed an affidavit stating that the refusal to pay benefits was because his application was out of date was incorrect. Mr Budhai of the Department of Manpower agreed to help him and it transpired that the problem had arisen when, in error, the employer said he had stopped work in 1987 instead of 1988. Budhai sorted out the matter and the client was paid his UIF.

Mrs D.R.N. had been receiving maintenance grants for her children from the KwaZulu government since 1977, to begin with for five children and later for two. This suddenly stopped in 1988 and a Mr Fouche wrote to say that there was no record of her children in the Vulindlela office. However, it appeared that some files of persons living outside KwaZulu had been transferred to the Natal Provincial Administration and Fouche thought this might be one of those cases.

Mr M.R.T. was injured on duty when a train ran over his foot while working for South African Transport Services (SATS). He had not received compensation. However, following AO enquiries he was told he could collect a cheque for R4 200 from SATS.

Mr V.M.B. worked for E.S. & L.C. who were manufacturers and distributors of lightning conductors and earth spikes. The client was unable to get to work on 31 January 1990 due to the violence in the Table Mountain area where he lived. He was dismissed and claimed he had not been paid notice pay or given his UIF certificate. His employers claimed he had been seen in Pietermaritzburg that day.

B.A.L. was at high school in the Table Mountain area, but could not continue going to school due to the violence. He had also received a death threat. It was arranged for him to continue his schooling by correspondence through Damelin College based in Johannesburg. It permitted him to register for six subjects in one year.

Ms D.C.K. had worked for the same family, first on their farm and then in their house in Durban from 1955 until 1989 when both the original employers had died. Their nephew inherited the house and when he put tenants into it the client was no longer needed. The client asked if there was a gratuity for long service or a pension.

In March 1991 Mary Kleinenberg attended her first meeting as a member of the Black Sash Advice Office Trust, having been nominated by the Natal Midlands region when Jillian Nicholson, from the Coastal Branch in Durban, resigned. At the time the Trust aimed to have representation from all regions.

In May 1991 a domestic worker survey conducted by the AO revealed:

- the average monthly wage for those living out was R145, while those living in received R169.28;
- the daily rate of pay was R10.62;
- only 30% of domestic workers had discussed working conditions with their employers while just 11% had employment contracts;
- dismissal was at the whim of employers. Employees had been dismissed after a request for an increase or bus fare; refusal to work all week, Saturday and Sunday; and use of an employer's stock cubes without permission.

Writing in the local press, Anthea Garman noted:

Many of the workers paid R169 a month are breadwinners upon whom families of five, six or more members rely for survival. The domestic worker-madam relationship is a complex one and advice office experience is that while this sum might be considered exploitative, many women in the city are concerned about what they pay their workers and would like to compensate them fairly. Behind every working woman there is her domestic worker who keeps her home together while she is out earning a living. The relationship between madam and maid is a unique one between a powerful and a powerless woman. It is intimate and complex and not easily subjected to outside influence.

Garman quoted Ann Strode who said, 'Domestic workers are the backbone of the economy, and these workers are often entrusted with looking after children and old people. They have the role of a second mother, but they are unprotected by the law.' The article went on to say that the AO advocated a contract at the outset of employment and could offer guidelines. Matters that needed to be included in a contract were: name, age, experience and family members to contact in case of emergency; wages, bonuses and their review in the light of

inflation and new skills gained; annual, sick and maternity leave entitlement; duties; accommodation and protective clothing; breach of contract and grounds for dismissal. Furthermore, it was pointed out that pension funds for domestic workers were severely neglected with reliance on the inadequate old age pension (OAP). It went on to give reliable contact details should anyone be interested in looking into a pension scheme.

The article quoted Strode's ideas about creative ways to compensate domestic workers if the employer could not afford to pay more. She made several suggestions like teaching the domestic worker English, but said that general awareness was most important of all: 'A visit to her neighbourhood could be highly informative regarding what might be done to help her and her family.'²

In November 1990 Strode had reported that the AO was maintaining fairly close contact with the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) with relevant cases of dismissal referred to it if the clients were members or willing to join the union. Otherwise, they were referred to the Small Claims Court. In July 1991 she noted that the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) had closed its farmworker and labour tenant advice centre, a move that put a burden on other para-legal programmes in the city, particularly the AO, which lacked experience in this field.

The AO reported to the February 1991 national conference held in Cape Town as follows:

We are faced with an increasing number of employment related problems every year. It appears that our role in this field is to act as an advice service to workers who are not unionized. Although we encourage our clients to join a union, many of them do not have the opportunity to do so as they are employed by small businesses.

We try to act first as a referral agent, using the Industrial Councils and the Department of Manpower wherever this is possible. We have noticed that at the beginning and end of each year our number of labour cases increases. This is disturbing as it appears that employers are trying to relinquish establishing benefit schemes for workers by having a high turnover of staff.

Recently we have been trying to impress on all our clients that when they start a new job they must ensure that they clarify their conditions of service with their employer and that they keep all their pay-slips together in a safe place.³

Sheena Duncan remained the voluntary national AO co-ordinator and in her report at a conference in 1991 she talked about two Advice Office Trust programmes. The first involved nine advice offices, six of which had fieldworkers tasked with extending their work into rural areas, small towns

and homeless communities. Unfortunately, Pietermaritzburg did not have a fieldworker. The second programme was the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), which had been established as a Black Sash project. She emphasised, 'Our information comes from our advice offices and fieldworkers, and not from academic papers.'⁴

Advice Office cases, 1991

A group of 35 farmworkers visited the AO because the week after the farmer's truck was stolen R50 was deducted from every worker's salary. They were advised that this was illegal and the AO assisted them to make a claim for the return of the money through the Small Claims Court.

Messrs N.D.K. and S.C.N. were employed by Baileys Furnishers and dismissed without explanation, notice pay or UIF cards. From their account it appeared to be a case of unfair labour practice in terms of the Labour Relations Act because while they had been employed for thirteen months for five days a week with overtime payments, they were regarded as casual labour. Baileys explained that the clients were not casual and their intention to terminate their services was made clear in the presence of a section leader. Their UIF cards had been applied for and would arrive from Pretoria within the week. They had been paid leave pay which, unfortunately, had been calculated incorrectly, but would be rectified and given to them the following Friday.

Mrs S.R.N. had four children, and her husband, who was employed by the Department of Parks and Recreation, had a maintenance order for R150 per month. He had paid for ten months, but had now defaulted. The desperate client gave her husband's address to the Prosecutor's Office, but it was lost. She was asked to give it to them again, but was still waiting to hear what had transpired.

Mr J.M.S. was a passenger in a vehicle crash in 1985. He was in hospital in Dundee for a while and had made a third party claim within the prescribed period of two years. In answer to the AO's queries Santam, the insurers, claimed that correspondence had been forwarded to the client's Katlehong (Transvaal) address, but they had received no reply. They had extended the case to October 1988 when it expired. It was now too late to do anything.

Early in January, Mr Y.A.K. had applied for an incapacity pension from the Metal Industries Pension Fund (MIGPF), but had heard nothing. He had worked for H.M.E. Hydraulics and was injured at work. He was required to complete forms and obtain a medical certificate which he did and he was compensated with the sum of R296.43.

When a domestic worker asked her employer for annual leave she was told that she had already had it because she did not have to work on public holidays. She consulted the AO to ask if this was correct.

Mrs S.D.K. disputed a hire purchase agreement with Protea Furnishers. She said her payments kept increasing, which was true because she was in arrears. The explanation was that the client started paying in November 1991 but should have started in August. The monthly payment due in August was R68, but she had been paying R60 and each month the arrears increased. The client refused to accept the explanation and it was therefore suggested that she should discuss it with the Legal Aid Clinic.

Ms M.N. was dismissed from her labourer job on Waterford Farm in September 1991 without notice pay. She had been earning R140 per month. The farmer wrote to say that she had been warned on several occasions that she would be dismissed if she continued to have so many women and children living with her. However, this behaviour continued despite warnings and her persistent defiance resulted in dismissal.

Mr H.S.H. had worked for Mell Estates for eight years. In May 1991 he was injured off duty and hospitalised. Upon his discharge he was told to stay at home for a few weeks, but found he had been evicted. The landlord said he had not paid rent for three months and the dwelling had not been kept in a satisfactory state. The client's employer had been responsible for the rent so he was advised to visit the farm to find out what had happened. The client's story about verbal agreements became very complicated and he was advised to go to the farm, together with the landlord, to try to resolve the matter.

Ms S.S.S. was dismissed from her domestic worker job without notice or leave pay. When her employer was phoned she agreed to provide notice pay, but only gave the client R75 instead of a full month's pay (R150). The employer claimed that she could not afford the full amount, so the client was advised to go to the Small Claims Court.

Mrs Z.M. was a widow who had received R300 from G.W. Poole (Pty) Ltd when her husband died. She said he had worked for Poole's Fruiterers from 1965 to 1988, but had not contributed to a pension scheme. Mr Poole wrote in December 1991 to say that the deceased had received free accommodation on the Poole's Fruiterers premises until the business was sold. He had been the victim of a savage mugging and stabbing some years before he died and subsequently became very ill. While he was ill, his wife had been given his full pay for many months, well in excess of any sick leave requirements. After his death Poole's had transported the client backwards and forwards to the Department of Manpower to assist her to obtain UIF death benefits. In addition, she was paid a gratuity in the absence of a pension fund.

In an interview, Anne Harley spoke about the role of advice offices in publicising the reality of the South African condition. She said, 'I think Sash played a fairly consistent role in making issues public and they weren't always the issues that were already known. They weren't necessarily the things that the *Weekly Mail*

was publishing because there was the much more hidden stuff, and that's what the advice offices did so brilliantly; to say here are the real issues – they are issues around poverty, they are issues around disempowerment, and they are issues around rural people being ignored. I think that was really critical.'⁵

From May 1991 to March 1992, a short-lived publication series entitled *Infobrief*, intended for both employers and employees, was published by the AO. The six topics covered were:

- Domestic workers' common law rights (May 1991);
- Recommended domestic worker minimum wages (based on SADWU demands) (June 1991);
- Contract for domestic employment (August 1991);
- Domestic workers and the Small Claims Court (September 1991);
- Dismissal (Firing) (except domestic, farm and state workers) (March 1992);
- Dismissal for misconduct (except domestic, farm and state workers) (March 1992).

In January 1992 Ann Strode resigned and the caseworker/researcher post was filled by Gail Wannenburg. A year later, in February 1993, Strode became the director at Lawyers for Human Rights and contact with her was maintained. Wannenburg's appointment coincided with the good news that the Basic Conditions of Employment Act would soon be extended to include farmworkers. However, reports then came into the AO that many farmworkers were being evicted before the Act was implemented.

The local press gave the AO good coverage. *Learn with Echo*, an educational supplement prepared by the Centre for Adult Education at the University of Natal, ran features based on information supplied by the AO in 1992.⁶ This was followed by three articles supplied by the AO, which included information about procedures to be followed, and what constituted fair or unfair dismissal, and published in *Echo*.⁷ The *Infobrief* series on unfair dismissal also appeared in *Echo* over a period during 1993. Nearly twenty years after the foundation of the AO in the FOSATU office, labour issues still dominated its affairs. The workers who were usually the most unprotected were from small businesses, although their employers were required to follow the guidelines of the Industrial Court.

In February 1992 Mary Kleinenberg wrote to Sheena Duncan about an interesting and fairly new development at the AO:

In the past, our assistance has largely been sought by underprivileged people who happen to have been black. We now find that we are being approached by white and perhaps other

more affluent members of the public. We wonder if other regions are experiencing anything similar.

Firstly, the Department of Manpower are referring to our office an increasing number of people wanting advice on labour issues. These are often telephone enquiries, but they do take up a lot of time. Secondly, the Department is referring unfair dismissal and retrenchment cases to our office.

Recently the *Natal Witness* printed an article on pensions written by our Advice Office researcher/caseworker, Gail Wannenburg. This provoked many phone calls from this new category of people, mostly pensioners seeking assistance with their pensions.

The following are three examples of the sort of assistance being sought:

1. Mr H., who called himself the managing director of a local take-away, was dismissed and needed advice ... After we had assisted him he referred a friend to us who needed advice on her employment contract.
2. Ms Y. was the bookkeeper at a clothing firm. She earned R2 000.00 a month, and was charged with theft and dismissed. Later the criminal charges were withdrawn but she had incurred enormous expense by engaging an attorney whom she could no longer afford. She sought our advice.
3. Ms F., also a bookkeeper, earned R1 700.00 a month working for a sawmilling company. She was, unexpectedly and without warning, made redundant when the company closed down. We assisted her at her conciliation board hearing.⁸

Duncan's reply read, 'I am fascinated by your new type of clientele. I have not heard any similar report from other regions. I suggest that you raise the matter in your Advice Office report to conference. If people are being exploited I don't think it matters what colour they are, or how much they were earning.'⁹

In July 1991 a Canadian, Gail Cockburn, an honours graduate in political science and women's studies, had written to Jenny de Tolly, national Black Sash president, offering to do voluntary work with women's groups and de Tolly circulated the request to all regions. Early in 1992 the NMBS gender group responded by suggesting a task for Cockburn and asked the Advice Office Trust to sponsor some part of her visit. The motivation read:

At National Conference last year, and again at the Advice Office workshop in September last year, the Black Sash resolved to address in all its work how such work affects women.

We agreed that advice offices should collect data in such a way as to allow us to analyse the status of women as reflected in such data; and subsequently discussed the possibility of Black Sash becoming a reporting organisation to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDA).

However, such a resolution requires fairly far-reaching changes in the way our advice offices operate; and, as we are treading new ground, we have no-one to offer advice in this regard.

For these reasons, we would like to motivate that Ms Cockburn be employed for the following:

- To evaluate whether our advice offices are adapting themselves in such a way as to make the collection of data on the status of women possible; and if so, how.
- To make specific recommendations on how advice offices should be adapting themselves to make this process more efficient and productive.
- To research the feasibility of Black Sash becoming a reporting organization in terms of the Convention.

We would recommend that she visit at least one advice office in each of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Natal and the Transvaal, for as long as she deems necessary. She could be accommodated by Sash members, and Sash could explore the possibility of paying for a round ticket to enable such visits.

We think that this is important work, which could only be of benefit to Sash. It would allow her maximum exposure to the work we do, as well as to general conditions in South Africa. It seems the best use for the considerable skills she appears to possess.

This request was agreed and between 8 June and 8 August 1992 a questionnaire, designed by Cockburn and relating to women clients, was circulated in advice offices. Cockburn visited the offices to help with the work. Before it commenced, she sent a circular to all advice offices highlighting what she called 'The Crisis is Women':

The most technical reason for initiating this project is that Black Sash resolved at its 1991 conference to look at how its work affects women. The process of collecting information on women will help the Sash fulfill this mandate, therefore assisting in developing projects which will benefit women. Sash is in a unique position to gather information on women as thousands come through the offices every year.

An important philosophical reason for focusing on women is the fact that women are oppressed groups in all societies, but especially in communities which are themselves oppressed by apartheid.

Besides the actual benefits of action resulting from information collected, the process of putting women on the agenda is invaluable to the awareness of both interviewers and interviewees that women's issues are important and deserving of attention.

She went on to ask the offices to discuss how the findings would be shared with the women who were interviewed, and to be sensitive about who conducted the interviews because it was possible that women might feel ill at ease if this were a man. The results of the survey were indeed interesting and provided much to think about. The questions had largely been designed to collect information on the socio-economic status of women visiting advice offices. Some of the most interesting discoveries were:

- their average age was 44 years;
- 63% visited advice offices because of benefit or pension problems;
- most had been to school, but no further than primary level;

- 62% were unemployed and domestic work was their only past or present employment experience;
- when asked if they belonged to a women's group, 68% said they belonged to a church;
- 69% were not married, lived in formal housing belonging to a family member, and had between zero and four children;
- 67% stated that all their children were registered under their father's name; and
- 60% said that all their children were in school.

Although the study included all provinces, 98% of the respondents were Zulu speaking. When asked what they would like advice offices to provide, they replied: women's legal advice, information on support payments, help with solving domestic worker problems, and information on employment opportunities and poor relief. Unfortunately, the Black Sash did not become a reporting organisation for the United Nations.

In June 1992 a national conference on legal rights and HIV/Aids was held in Port Elizabeth, and attended by AO staff. Edwin Cameron, an advocate from the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, was the main speaker and argued that HIV/Aids threatened to replace race as the principle focus of human rights abuse in South Africa over the next decade, and become the major factor of discrimination and exclusion. Already widespread violation of rights was occurring in the employment and health sectors, together with a more insidious form of unfair discrimination: denying people with HIV/Aids a fair share of national resources. He felt a Charter of Rights was essential and concluded with a thought-provoking comment: 'Help us help ourselves, fight Aids not people with Aids.'¹⁰

In May 1992 Kleinenberg wrote to Sheena Duncan, who must have spent a great deal of time on the phone on Sunday evenings catching up with the regions:

Thank you for phoning on Sunday evening; your insights and encouragement always help to rejuvenate us. I am writing partly to keep you informed of the Advice Office Info Briefs on dismissals, and progress on our booklet *You and the Constitution*, but also to tell you about a very interesting violence workshop that I attended. At this event, Blade Nzimande said that this country owes a lot to the Black Sash; for its monitoring, for its publications and for recording what has happened in this country over the last thirty seven years. He added that without its work it would not have been possible for the ANC [African National Congress] to formulate an analysis, particularly on the violence. Perhaps we do get the required injection of energy from such compliments.

The letter went on to give details of AO work and the Constitution booklet.¹¹

In September 1992 Wannenburg reported to the executive committee that the AO was handling the second largest number of cases after the Transvaal with by far the smallest number of staff. By the end of 1992 the number of cases had increased to an average of 354 per month. With the first democratic elections looming, the staff had started talking to clients in the waiting room about the significance of identity documents. As a result of the increase in cases, a motivation for funds to pay a part-time worker was prepared for the Advice Office Trust.¹² Bev Glennie, who had been a volunteer for some time, was later employed as a half-day afternoon caseworker, applications from Zulu speakers having been very poor.¹³

At the end of June 1992 Wannenburg reported to the support committee that the AO had seen 268 clients that month. A request from the Happy Valley Action Group had resulted in some research on the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act that gave rise to a fact sheet distributed to the action group. It was thought it might also be useful to farmworkers.

Advice Office cases, 1992

Mr L.L.M. was employed by Capital Furniture Manufacturers. In February 1992 inspectors from the Department of Manpower visited the factory to check that minimum wages were being paid. The client alleged that the employer urged him to tell the inspectors that he was earning R300 per week. Since he was only earning R25 per week he told the inspectors the truth and was dismissed. When he asked for notice pay he claims the employer drew a gun and told him to get lost. The client was sent to the Industrial Council for the Furniture Industry to find out what remedies were available to him.

Mr M.M.M. was employed on the farm Gellview at Mkondeni and he alleges that he was dismissed in January 1992 for going to buy cigarettes. He was not paid notice or leave pay, or his wages for two days. He had been paid R300 per month plus food and dormitory accommodation and had left some of his belongings on the farm, but was too nervous to collect them. He was advised to go to the Salvation Army hostel for accommodation and ask the police to accompany him to the farm to collect his belongings.

Ms P.J. was employed as a domestic worker for three days a week. She sought help because her husband was ill and had not been employed for more than a year: she had three children and was unable to pay school fees. She was referred to a social worker.

Mr C.F.N. was employed as a teacher at Mpolweni Secondary School until March 1991, but he had not received a pension refund. Following AO enquiries the Department of Finance wrote in February 1992 to say that a voucher for R4 855.56 had been posted to the Standard Bank in Pietermaritzburg.

Advice offices nationally were already discussing how they might facilitate access to information on elections. Wannenburg wrote to the editor of *Sash Magazine*, Sarah-Anne Raynham, to explain the difficulties of voter education in the Natal Midlands. She described the region as largely rural with high rates of illiteracy and expressed the belief that violence and the recession had persuaded women they had no political say. There was a lack of infrastructure and resources, and farmers were unlikely to allow access to farmworkers and labour tenants. Furthermore, she felt that the ANC was unlikely to allow other people to become involved in voter education.

Sheena Duncan talked about future democracy and how the Black Sash and other civil society organisations could contribute:

We are often asked whether advice offices are necessary now that ‘apartheid is dead.’

We are firmly convinced that paralegal services are of the utmost importance in contributing to the building of a Civil Society by giving people the information they need to insist on the rights they do have, enabling them to organize to establish those rights which are denied them.

Apartheid is not dead. We still have a system of government and administration based on racial and ethnic classification. Even when those become a thing of the past we will all remain in the boxes of poverty, relative prosperity, or extreme wealth in which apartheid has placed us.

Even in established democratic societies civilians have to be constantly vigilant to prevent the powerful and bureaucrats from abusing human rights. We are not yet a democracy and we have a long hard haul ahead of us before justice will be established in this land.¹⁴

In spite of Wannenburg’s reservations, voter education went ahead:

The Pmb advice office is busily educating up to 30 clients per day. In addition, every Tuesday and Thursday voter education is being offered at a permanent venue in town. We hope that this new venture will attract support from employers of domestic servants. In response to requests to the office, 13 workshops have been held with clergy and domestic workers, as far afield as Ladysmith.

Black Sash members have assisted with the training of university students as voter educators, in a project organized by the local branch of the National Women’s Coalition. The Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA) conducted the initial training and the Black Sash is providing ongoing support of the students who will go out in teams to conduct voter-education workshops in rural areas. On 28 October Black Sash members also helped to fund a workshop for 17 chiefs in the Hlanganani area, organized by the Women’s Coalition.

The office has distributed 10 000 *You and the Vote* booklets. However, we are curious as to the ultimate fate of our resources. Gail Wannenburg recently had a visit from an indignant parish priest from Richmond. He discovered the local youth had surreptitiously hooked up a hired television to a plug in his church. Around the back they were showing voter education videos to the local populace who were charged a fee for their illumination.

More disturbing is a report from Richard Fowler of the Methodist church, who has made use of our voter-education resources. In trying to set up workshops on the South Coast, he has been threatened by local people who insisted 'there would be trouble' if the workshops went ahead. No voter education was wanted as there would be no election, they declared.

In monitoring activities members of NMBS monitored the historic African National Congress cultural festival at KwaXimba, which went ahead without incident despite being seen as in direct confrontation with the Shaka Day activities of the Inkatha Freedom Party. However, more recent monitoring of a meeting in Bulwer left the monitor very gloomy about the prospects for free political activity and campaigning in Natal. The acting chief refused permission for the local ANC to hold a pre-arranged meeting in the area's primary school. When asked why he was acting against the spirit of the Peace Accord, he insisted that 'the Peace Accord does not apply to him'.¹⁵

A fax from Wannenburg to Gill de Vlieg, who was co-ordinating national voter education, was further evidence of the work being done in Pietermaritzburg:

1. We have held workshops with domestic workers, literacy groups, students and training members.
2. One of the most common questions asked is how do we end the violence. People are aware that this may adversely affect the election process and they experience fear of voting in the present context.
3. One domestic worker suggested that the I.F.P. may maliciously tell its supporters to vote for all parties. She was under the mistaken impression that this would ruin the elections, and was most relieved to hear that it would just constitute a spoil paper.

The AO conference report for January to August 1992 concentrated on pensions, which seemed to be the most common problem, but others were noted, one of them being labour:

Many of the persons that the Advice Office saw with labour problems were unfairly dismissed or retrenched. There appears to be a general ignorance amongst businesses and workers as to their rights and duties in respect of dismissals and retrenchments. Many small businesses have no disciplinary procedure and feel that they have the right to fire workers indiscriminately. An example of this is given in the following case study: Mr M. was a labourer at a local business and was retrenched without notice just before Christmas. We negotiated a settlement of R3 528.00 at a conciliation board hearing.

Although housing was not an issue commonly brought to the AO, 27 people were seen between January and August 1992 and a very interesting case study was reported:

Mr Z. bought, from a white farmer, a piece of land that his family had lived on for generations. He signed an informal sale agreement and put down a deposit. The balance of the purchase price was to be paid on transfer of the property. Mr Z. subsequently found that the land had been sold and transferred into the name of Mr B., who then wished to sell it.

After some research we referred Mr Z. to a lawyer to obtain an interdict blocking Mr B's sale and asking that the property be transferred into his name.

Early in 1993 an AO working group met to discuss ways to improve conditions for domestic workers. One of the ideas mooted was that their salaries should be made tax deductible, a serious suggestion that went nowhere.

A financial columnist, Midas, appealed to readers to treat domestic workers as regular employees. He remarked that he paid his domestic worker, employed for three mornings a week, R300 per month.¹⁶ This met with a strong reply from B.M. Phillips who concluded that he 'should change his name from Midas to Scrooge'. On 16 April 1993 Marie Dyer wrote to Midas about the tax idea:

We must endorse the appeal made in your column a week or two ago for domestic employers to treat their workers in effect as ordinary employees. In our office we are regularly and often consulted by domestic workers who are excessively and miserably exploited. (No doubt we see some of the worst cases.)

It seems to us that the conditions of domestic workers would be greatly improved if their wages were tax-deductible. This would not be an illogical provision since wages for someone to take care of the house and especially the children must very often be a necessary charge on the income of a working woman.

Advantages of the provision would be the probable creation of more jobs, increase in the depressed wages of many of those presently employed, automatic upgrading of their status to that of 'employees' since contracts and wage slips would be needed.

The reduction in the amount of taxes paid by employers would be partly offset by the increase in the taxable expenditure of the employees; and also more significantly by a reduction in cases of destitution, diseases of poverty, school drop-outs and similar but not easily quantifiable charges on the economy.

We would be very pleased to hear your opinion of this suggestion; and if you think it is a sensible one your advice on how to set about lobbying for it.¹⁷

Midas subsequently wrote that there were forty million citizens of South Africa and although he appreciated the problems of economic inequality that had to be addressed, 'the world has 5.3 billion people and it is a much more unequal place than South Africa'.¹⁸

Wannenburg reported that the AO was seeing more dismissals related to gender, giving examples of the constructive dismissal of a woman who had alleged sexual harassment and a security guard dismissed on the grounds of gender. She also reported that the AO was conducting voter education every Tuesday and Thursday over the lunch hour at Tembalethu in Burger Street.¹⁹

Marj Brown, a researcher in Cape Town, asked all advice offices for examples of Springbok Patrols dismissals required for a pending court case. Wannenburg found two examples, one showing that diligence in following up cases was an essential part of AO work:

A client's son worked at Springbok Patrols and was killed on duty. The client was assisted to make a Workmen's Compensation claim for the minor child of the deceased as so far only the common-law wife of the deceased had received any compensation. Our client's claim was successful.

A client claimed he had been unfairly dismissed from Springbok Patrols in May 1993. However, it transpired that he had been dismissed for drunkenness on duty, and discharging a firearm whilst under the influence at the school that he was guarding. He admitted that he had been drunk and six witnesses could testify that he had fired his gun at the school. At the time he was on a final warning for a similar offence. In addition, a disciplinary enquiry was held three days after the incident and he was allowed to appeal two weeks after the first hearing. Since we were of the view that there were no substantive or procedural grounds for an unfair claim, we informed the client that we could not continue with his case.

Advice Office cases, 1993

Mrs S.A.M. had two children who were entitled to a foster care grant, which had in the past been collected by their foster father who had died. Since he was the registered foster parent, the client was unable to collect this grant. She was advised to apply to become registered to collect the grant on behalf of the children. Her application was accepted and arrears were paid to her.

Mrs M.P.N. had worked for Don's Garden Services but was dismissed. She claimed that unbeknown to her, her card had been clocked in on a day when she was absent. A letter from the employer set out the rules clearly: that it was a dismissible offence for both the person who clocked the card and the absent person whose card was clocked. Salaries were paid according to the clocked cards and falsification of company records could not be condoned.

Mrs R.T.K.'s husband died on 14 July 1991 after working for the KwaZulu Government. The client applied for her late husband's pension in August 1991, but had heard nothing. Following AO enquiries, the Department of Finance wrote on 9 August 1992 to say that the client was entitled to receive a pension of R569.02 per month with effect from 1 July 1991 and arrears would be paid into her account.

Mr B.P.N. had applied to the MIGPF for his pension, but had not been informed of progress. A letter from the MIGPF said it had no forwarding address for the client and the AO phoned leaving a message asking him to complete a form and provide a forwarding address. A lump sum payment for R3 847.89 was approved, but another letter from MIGPF indicated that it was unable to pay this because the client was no longer at his address. The client gave the AO yet another address when contacted and eventually the cheque was sent to the AO where it was collected.

Lance Corporal M.Z.M. left the South African Defence Force (SADF) where he had worked from July 1987 to June 1991. He applied for his pension on the day he left but this was still outstanding in September 1993. AO enquiries resulted in a letter from the head of the Defence Force explaining that the client owed the SADF R1 706.40 while the pension refund amounted to only R877.78, so he still owed

the SADF R828.62. He was advised that this had to be paid and instalments could be arranged if he was unable to pay the full amount immediately, although he was unsure how he came to owe his employer any money.

Mr J.Z.Z. resigned from Transnet in February 1992, but did not receive the crossed cheque for R2 015.54 made out to him for his pension refund. It was established that the cheque had been cashed by another party, so this was reported to the police and a case was opened by the Legal Aid Clinic.

AO activities in 1994 were reported as follows:

Our advice office has handed over R133 700 to our clients this year, elicited from inaccessible, unsympathetic or inefficient bureaucracies. This sum does not include money paid directly to our clients' addresses, nor the considerably greater sum of state pension arrears, achieved by threats and pressure from our office and our generous attorney, but which are given out by state officials.

The co-ordinator has been monitoring pension payouts paid on behalf of the KwaZulu government by a private high-tech undertaking. The money is calculated by computers and to that extent accurate; but the firm only pays out under instructions from the government. Corruption at the payout is reduced, but application still has to be made through government clerks. We have received many reports of clerks 'mislaying' the application unless it is accompanied by a bribe.²⁰

Wannenburg left the AO at the end of 1993 to take up a position as a peace fieldworker for Lawyers for Human Rights. The last AO co-ordinator employed by the volunteer committee was Ashnie Padarath.

The closure of Sash as a membership organisation in 1995 did not affect the advice offices, which continued to serve the public as a non-governmental organisation until 2012 when, during a strategic planning exercise, a decision was made to limit the offices to one per region, and to phase out one-on-one advice. The focus on working at a regional level meant that the offices in Gauteng, Durban and Port Elizabeth would remain. The location of the Cape Town office would be re-assessed in the light of a need to strengthen work in the Northern Cape. A help line was established to give advice by telephone to those who continued to ask for this.

The Black Sash trustees issued the following statement:

The Black Sash believes that at this time in the history of South Africa, and of our organisation, the most urgent issues to be addressed are the on-going poverty and inequality afflicting the lives of the most vulnerable members of our society.

South Africa cannot be free as long as the majority of its people continue to live under conditions of deprivation and injustice. We are affected and diminished by this.

We further believe that the transformative task of changing this situation can best be carried out by individuals and communities who experience its effects most acutely. It is also a task for all of us, working in mutually respectful partnerships.

We therefore commit ourselves to foster, support and encourage community initiatives to monitor, record and analyse the socio-economic conditions prevailing in South Africa.

We are profoundly aware that there is a deep sense of injustice and exclusion among South African citizens who see growing wealth and power in the grasp of those who control the economy and the government. People are excluded from opportunities, from resources and from acquiring capability.

Mindful of the resource constraints which affect us and other organisations of civil society, we will continue to offer skills training and educational material in the field of human rights. We know that we must reduce dependence on international aid and encourage the release of our country's resources to build philanthropy in South Africa to support this process towards social and economic justice. We believe that many citizens are offended by the conditions under which people live, and will participate in combined efforts to change them.

We may need to reduce our capacity to provide face-to-face advice-giving, but we will continue to participate in country-wide networks of individuals and organisations whose goals we share.

Our work at the local level where people experience most harshly the effects of this system must be directed towards analysing and exposing its basic causes. Advocacy work will derive from their own ability to identify the issues, and to articulate them. This is the foundation of a true democracy.²¹

ENDNOTES

- 1 'Response to the violence', undated [1990].
- 2 *Natal Witness* (NW) 20 June 1991.
- 3 'Report round-up: advice offices' *Sash Magazine* (SM) 34(1) May 1991: 18.
- 4 Sheena Duncan, 'A narrative report of the Advice Office Trust' SM 34(1) May 1991: 16.
- 5 Anne Harley interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 26 October 2010: 8.
- 6 *Learn with Echo* 7, 14 and 21 May 1992. They were about unemployment insurance, WC and OAPs respectively.
- 7 'How do you get fired for incapacity'; 'When incompetence loses you your job'; and 'When workers are redundant' *Echo* 11 and 25 June and 2 July 1992.
- 8 Mary Kleinenberg, letter to Sheena Duncan, 4 February 1992.
- 9 Sheena Duncan, letter to Mary Kleinenberg, 13 February 1992.
- 10 Cameron was appointed a judge by Nelson Mandela in 1994 and assumed office as a Constitutional Court judge on 1 September 2009.
- 11 Mary Kleinenberg, letter to Sheena Duncan, 6 May 1992.
- 12 Report to national executive, 29 November 1992.
- 13 Executive Committee minutes, 2 March 1993.
- 14 Advice Office Trust report, 1992.
- 15 SM 36(3) January 1994: 46.

16 *NW* 26 March 1993.

17 This letter did not appear in the *NW*, possibly because of the large volume of correspondence received about the assassination of Chris Hani.

18 *NW* 28 May 1993.

19 Newsletter, November 1993.

20 *SM* 37(2) January 1995: 52.

21 Statement from Black Sash strategic planning workshop, 28 September to 1 October 2012.

CRUEL BEYOND DESCRIPTION: OLD AGE PENSIONS AND DISABILITY GRANTS

THE PIETERMARITZBURG ADVICE OFFICE (AO) took up the issue of old age pensions (OAPs) as a special project in the 1980s and the issues raised were in many senses symbolic of the struggles of its clients in general. This was endorsed by Loretta van Schalkwyk: 'the ... apartheid system makes a mockery of welfare systems by the total irony of welfare disbursements calculated on the basis of "need", but "need" being determined by a discriminatory qualification of race.' And there was double suffering since the systems responsible for African pensions were unreliable. Homeland governments, such as that of KwaZulu, relied entirely on Pretoria for resources and case records often 'disappear without trace'.¹ Mary Grice expanded on this in forthright terms: 'The darker the skin colour the smaller the pension and free income or assets allowed'; and pointed out that while white pensions were deemed inadequate, elderly Africans generally received nothing and had to rely on the support of their children.²

KwaZulu had taken over pensions in the areas it administered in 1973 and subsequently moved its offices from Pietermaritzburg to Ulundi, the bantustan capital. Initially there were no phones and a lack of service ethos continued to plague its Department of Welfare. This culminated in a complete stoppage of pension payments in 1978 when it was claimed funds had run out. All recipients, including the very ill and aged, had to re-apply at considerable cost since several attempts were often needed. Communication with pensioners was non-existent. Where age checks were required, these had to be verified by Pretoria and there were reports of people of eighty and ninety turned down. It was a process, in the memorable words of Neil Alcock, 'cruel beyond description and ... a futile exercise'.³

The AO report for 1980 gave details of OAP and disability grant (DG) problems, thought to be largely due to bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of trained personnel. Although there was no irrefutable evidence of corruption

at Vulindlela magistrate's court where pensions were paid, there were some suspicious events. An example offered was a pensioner who was told her money was no longer available. The magistrate claimed she had signed for it, but when the AO attorney took action the full arrears arrived with re-instatement of the pension. No explanation was given about exactly what had occurred.⁴

Pension cases at Vulindlela, 1980

Mrs K.N., a widow with no income at all, had been abandoned by her children. She applied for an OAP in 1979 but the application was not forwarded to Ulundi until 15 August 1980 and by 30 October it had still not been approved. This was evidence that it could take 6 to 18 months for an application to be processed. In the meantime, the applicant was left to starve since the poor relief facilities were equally inefficient.

Mr N.Z. was senile and suffering from cerebral sclerosis. His wife was also disabled, but they were caring for five orphaned grandchildren and without an income. Mr N.Z. had been back and forth between Vulindlela and Umgeni Court because both denied he fell within their jurisdiction.

Mr B.M. (65) had been certified as disabled. His wife earned R60 per month on which they were trying to support three school-age children. He was told that because of his wife's earnings he was not eligible for either an OAP or a DG.

At this point the AO began to receive some welcome press publicity from *Echo*: 'Pension pay-out days are turning into misery and humiliation for many aged and sickly Indaleni pensioners.' The article went on to say that pensioners had to leave their homes at dawn because of long distances and lack of transport. They received no sympathy from clerks, who would order them to stand in the rain and, it was claimed, manhandle those slow to obey. Illiteracy meant that some pensioners were unable to identify their reference books after collecting their pensions. The article continued: 'Twenty pensioners who had queued with the hope of receiving the benefits, were told that their money had not come. Thirteen of these claimed to have last received pension benefits in July last year, and the rest, some of whom applied for pensions as early as 1976, had never received them.' When these people went to the magistrate at Hlanganani they claimed that the chief threatened to have them evicted from their homes. It appears that some of their names had not been submitted by the clerks to the magistrate's office. The magistrate told *Echo* that he would write to Ulundi asking for an explanation, but the chief pay clerk refused to comment when approached by *Echo*.⁵

In 1981, OAPs and DGs, which had previously comprised only a tiny number of cases, increased sharply from a total of 42 the previous year to 94 (19.8%). Unsurprisingly, this attracted attention in the annual report. A significant cause of the upswing in cases was the new pension point payout monitoring project at Busani's and Zondi's stores in Swartkop Location begun in May 1981. Pat Merrett, Gilbert Lukhau, Jean Ngubane, Pat Dunne and Grace Baxter started monitoring largely because social grant fraud and intimidation were suspected. It was at this moment that Pat Merrett, who had chaired the region for a year, became chairperson of the AO, a position she continued to occupy for most of the eighties. She was tireless in her dedication to the AO and as well as working in the office she trained many of the volunteers. A letter by her to the press summarised basic problems regarding OAPs:

There have been a number of reports in the local Press recently concerning the plight of Black old age pensioners in neighbouring areas of KwaZulu (*Natal Witness* 13.11.80 and 12.1.81; *Sunday Tribune* 2.11.80).

Our office can confirm that a number of elderly people who live in Sweetwaters, Edendale and adjacent areas are living in severe poverty because of the inadequacy and inefficiency of so-called Black pensions. There are, for instance, numerous obstacles which may hinder the filling in of application forms; applications can take months to be processed; and in some cases pensioners are told at the payout point that there is no money for them that month and they subsequently never receive back-pay.

In the meantime these people beg from neighbours and relatives (many of whose incomes are well below the poverty datum line) and they exist on a starvation diet. Furthermore, receipt of a Black pension is no safeguard against want. White pensioners struggle to make ends meet on R109 per month, but Blacks are expected to survive on the paltry sum of R33 per month which is only paid out every second month.

The treatment of Black South African citizens of pensionable age is a disgrace, particularly in a country as wealthy as South Africa. A measure of the level of civilisation in any country can be gained from the way that country treats its disadvantaged citizens. In these terms South Africa's record is abysmal. It has the wealth to pay all old people an equal living pension, yet chooses to condemn those with black skins to struggle for the basic essentials of life. This policy is unjust, un-Christian and indefensible.⁶

The AO exposed major problems with the state pensions system, whether administered by Pretoria or Ulundi. The system was blatantly discriminatory and in the late 1970s the gap between white and African social pensions had grown wider. All pensions were means tested against income and assets and in December 1980 the maximum monthly pension was R109 for whites and R33 for Africans, who were paid only every other month.⁷ In 1981, 3% of the white and coloured population were receiving pensions, but only 1.25% of Africans living outside the bantustans.⁸ While in part a reflection of lower life

expectancy, this figure also indicates access problems. There was in certain sections of the government a general contempt shown towards all pensioners. In 1981 the minister of health, welfare and pensions, L.A.P. Munnik made the ludicrous claim that R20 per month was sufficient for the necessities of life bar accommodation.⁹ Piet Koornhof, minister of co-operation and development, stated the following year that African pensions had been over-budgeted, but this was belied by evidence from Sash advice offices at Grahamstown and Pretoria complaining about problems at Glenmore and Winterveld respectively. Figures for 1983 showed that per capita annual expenditure on white pensions was R1 467 compared with R429 spent on Africans. The maximum monthly white pension was by then R152 with the equivalent for Africans set at R57 (R114 every two months). A plea for African pensions to be paid monthly was rejected as this involved too much administration. The means test disqualified Africans with a monthly income of R40 or more, or fixed assets greater than R10 500. A survey in the Transvaal showed that Africans wished to collect their money at post offices, building societies or banks and were dissatisfied with chaotic conditions and long queues at township payout points.¹⁰

In 1981 and 1982 the Durban AO claimed more than R60 000 in pension arrears.¹¹ It is not clear whether this involved the Pretoria or Ulundi budget, but the latter's system was well-known to be riddled with corruption.¹² Chiefs and indunas extorted bribes; and clerks short-changed recipients and reacted punitively if challenged. There was also common-or-garden confusion and incompetence, inevitable with such a bureaucratic system spread between magistracies, Ulundi and Pretoria coupled with a general disregard for African South Africans.¹³ The extent of such maladministration is supported by the fact that advocacy work engendered considerable hostility. When Jillian Nicholson, the Durban AO director, criticised the chaos in the KwaZulu pension system (60% of Durban cases involved arrear payments) Frank Mdlalose, bantustan minister of health and welfare, called her a 'white pseudo-liberal' who was unappreciative of the poverty of his government. KwaZulu required an additional R10 million to deal with the pension backlog and an unexpected number of applications had been received, presumably because of the redrawing and manipulation of bantustan boundaries. Mdlalose claimed that over 50% of his department's budget went on social pensions and that hospital funding was consequently at risk. However, the 1983–1984 budget allocation of R89 million was raised to R129 million in 1984–1985.¹⁴

The crucial factor in determining eligibility for OAPs is age. Yet many African people often had little by way of proof, be it documentation or

confirmatory witness accounts. As a result many potentially eligible people were subject to the whim of officials who often turned them away or withdrew their entitlement. At some point in the late eighties the practice of having an older sibling to verify age was stopped, and applicants were asked to indicate an historical event and give their approximate age at the time. A list of such events was provided in an attempt to help the applicant: for example, the Bhambatha rebellion of 1906; Great War; 1918 influenza epidemic; 1933 big drought; 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II or the festival of Shaka at Stanger; 1959 increase in Bantu taxation from R2 to R3.50; and so on.

Often an applicant's success boiled down to appearance. Application at the magistrate's court was a difficult process, as the sheer number of complaints by clients attested; and transferring pension districts was risky because cancellation and re-application was required.¹⁵ Unreasonable demands made of applicants included proof of KwaZulu citizenship, Inkatha Party membership and payment of 'male tax', although this latter requirement was not brought to the attention of the AO until early 1982.

A further and distressing problem was unexpected and unexplained termination of payments. This was exacerbated by long approval times for pension claims, in many cases six months to a year. Such approval was at the discretion of the secretary of the KwaZulu pensions department, at the time Mr Mtetwa. The AO wrote to him asking for approval of pensions from the date of application in a bid to compensate for long delays. He did not reply. This summed up the attitude of a system that did not regard itself as a service and left too much to individual whim.¹⁶

For the AO these problems were the result of inefficient and inadequate numbers of trained staff within the pensions section, coupled with unsympathetic and sometimes hostile clerks. The AO also speculated that there was a policy, albeit unofficial, to reduce the number of applications due to a lack of funds. Given that many of the AO's clients were unsophisticated, in the sense that they were naive or trusting (they often did not count the money paid to them) and easily intimidated, poor service placed great burdens on these vulnerable people. Monitors at payout points carried with them mock, correctly coloured notes which pensioners were encouraged to memorise and check on receipt of their money from the clerks.

In a bid to assist clients, the AO, accompanied by the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), took applicants to the magistrate's court to help them apply for pensions. However, this strategy was dropped in favour of writing on behalf of clients. This was quite effective as

most cases, whether chasing up delays in approval or enquiring into cessation of payment, resulted in resolution of the issue. In some instances, such as those involving long delays, recourse to legal assistance was required. Further attempts to change the fate of cases included a successful meeting with the secretary of the pensions department in July 1982 at which he promised to help clients where he could. However, despite successes a general air of despair pervaded reports on these pension cases: they indicated awareness of a wider problem and the feeling that under the current political dispensation fundamental change was impossible. The underlying structural deficiencies were highlighted by a hard-hitting letter to the press:

Your correspondent of March 23, Mr Simon Mandla, drew attention to the uncomfortable and inconvenient conditions under which Black pensioners have to collect their pensions at Vulindlela (Edendale). Having to get up at 4 am (to ensure that one is first in a very long queue), having to wait hours to collect one's pension, with no protection from the elements, provides a glaring contrast to the conditions in which White pensioners collect their money. It is, however, an inevitable, although unfortunate, concomitant of the underdevelopment of the so-called Black areas of South Africa, and the remedy is a long-term one.

What can be remedied immediately, however, are other inequalities between Black and White pensions. The Nationalist Government has recently announced an increase in White pensions of R16 a month which brings the total to R138 a month (*Natal Witness*, March 25). Black pensions increase by R9 to R49 per month. The logical conclusion to be drawn from this gross disparity would be that Blacks, because of some unique racial characteristic, eat less than Whites, require fewer essential clothes than Whites, travel shorter distances than Whites, enjoy free education, are fully employed, and are generally highly privileged.

Since it is patently clear that none of these conclusions are true, one can only assume that our minority White Government (and the majority of the White electorate) believe that Blacks are less than human, simply because their skin colour is different. This attitude is racist, arrogant and selfish, and completely contradictory to Western ideals of justice and Christian ethics.

The Pietermaritzburg Advice Office encounters a never-ending stream of cases of unemployment (and its adverse psychological effects), malnourishment, lack of education, and desperate poverty among Black South Africans. We believe that many of these problems are either caused by, or made worse by, the structure of apartheid.

The near starvation pension payment of R40 per month is one of the obvious statutory examples of how the ideology of apartheid contributes directly to poverty.

We therefore ask all Whites who care about their fellow citizens to write to their local MP and urgently request that the Government be approached to make pensions to all elderly South Africans equal, regardless of colour, and to ensure that sufficient funds be made available to the so-called homeland governments for the same purposes. How can the phrases 'concerned Christians', 'White civilisation' and 'just and equal treatment for all' be used in the face of such gross inequalities.¹⁷

Pension monitoring in Swartkop Location, 1982

A pensioner showed the AO monitors the card indicating how much she was to be paid and then came back to them and asked that her money be counted. She was R20 short. Monitors went with her to the clerks and made a complaint. They were told impatiently to wait until the end of the payout and later she came back to say they had given her the R20.

Another pensioner, Mrs N.N., was supposed to receive R472 in arrears. Monitors were unable to be present for this transaction. When she finally arrived at the AO a month later, there was only R272 in the plastic bank bag and she was adamant she had 'borrowed' only R5.50 for Christmas food. An attorney was asked to check with the magistrate and he claimed he had sent Mrs N.N. with a policeman into town to cash the cheque for R472. There was, however, nothing to be done about this, as she had put her thumbprint onto a document and in law signed it. Furthermore, she was a very elderly person who could not count and a month later came to tell the AO not to worry about her case anymore because she was very old and might be mistaken. Neither Mrs N.N. nor the AO ever knew where R200 went.

The pension pay point monitoring project continued. Despite efforts, many of the problems originally encountered recurred, although the exact extent of the success of assistance was hard to determine given reliance on client report backs for progress updates. The biggest problem with 145 pension cases so far recorded revolved around the application process: how to go about applying and getting clerks to accept applications. Other problems encountered included missed payments, and difficulties obtaining arrears and changing payment points across districts. In contrast to earlier experience, prospects became harder if clients were assisted by the AO as clerks treated such applicants with open aggression while AO workers felt that their presence at pay points was resented by KwaZulu officials. In some instances, especially arrears cases, the assistance of attorney Andrew Burnett was needed to ensure a successful outcome.

Pension monitoring in Swartkop Location, 1983***Busane's and Zondi's stores, 7 June 1983***

Twenty-five people made contact. Six of them were entitled to missing payments of R22 that had been the subject of radio announcements and they were given letters to take to the Vulindlela office in the hope of payment in July. However, three other pensioners stated that when they took correspondence from the AO to Vulindlela, clerks tore up the letters and refused assistance.

Zondi's store, 26 July 1983

There were too many clients to be dealt with individually so they were addressed as a group and given general advice about how to apply for OAPs and DGs. One man who had been short of R40 at the last payout reported that on 13 July he had received the money as a result of an AO letter.

In 1983 it was announced that no new OAP applications would be approved by KwaZulu until April the following year. This increased the existing backlog of cases and put more families at risk of destitution. However, there were some positive signs for the AO. Cases, both at Swartkop and at the AO, were generally down and there was success in securing some clients' back pay with the help of local attorneys.

A paper dated 14 February 1983, written by Pat Merrett, possibly for an AO conference, set out the systems used for black OAPs in Pietermaritzburg. They were administered by two authorities: the Department of Co-operation and Development for areas such as Sobantu, Ashdown and Imbali; and the KwaZulu Department of Health and Welfare in Edendale and the Sweetwaters/Swartkop Location. Since the Pietermaritzburg AO monitored pension payments at two points in the latter, the paper dealt with the KwaZulu administration.

Merrett argued that social pensions were a legal right, not a privilege, and that people living in Sweetwaters were South African citizens. The regulations were clear with men eligible for an OAP from the age of 65 and women from 60, but KwaZulu 'makes a mockery of the regulations.' In practice the whim, and sometimes the venality, of chiefs and officials determined whether or not pensions were granted, and for how long. Furthermore, due to a lack of information many black people did not know they were entitled to an OAP.

Age determination was often a problem for pension applicants who had no formal identification, birth certificates, baptism certificates or reference books. In such cases Merrett commented that 'the magistrate is empowered to assess their age and declare them eligible, and if they are sufficiently wrinkled and grey this is not a problem!' But, if they did not look their age, an older sibling who could prove his or her age was taken to the magistrate's court to testify to the applicant's age. Failing this, a doctor at Edendale Hospital could assess an applicant.

Merrett pointed out that proof of age was only the beginning of pensioners' problems. After spending money on a bus or taxi fare to reach the magistrate's court they were often turned away. 'We have been told on a number of occasions the clerks have told elderly ladies to "go and find a husband to support you", or, "go and get a job granny." Clerks are not noted for their

politeness and seem to have no sense of duty.’ The paper went on to discuss the gross disparities between pensions paid to whites and blacks, and even though it had been claimed that the government intended to close the gap there was no evidence to support this. In October 1983 white pensions were due to increase by R14 a month bringing them to R152, while black pensions would rise by R8 per month to R57.

Whites could apply for a pension on any working day and when approved the grant was paid monthly and backdated to the date of application. However, blacks could often apply only in certain months and were required to produce a KwaZulu citizenship card, which Merrett claims was illegal. Once approved, their pensions were paid every second month, and backdated at the whim of the Ulundi clerks, if at all.

Black applicants had been known to wait between six months and two years for their pensions to be processed, with applications being ‘lost’ in some cases. Sometimes black pensions suddenly ceased to arrive, with payment clerks telling pensioners to return next month. A further problem was that pensioners were required to sign with their thumbprint before receiving their money. Since many of them were illiterate and innumerate, this opened the system up to corruption.

Merrett concluded her paper: ‘Since KwaZulu has not yet formally accepted so-called independence, and since much of their finances come from Pretoria, we believe that the South African Government is ultimately responsible for the inefficient administration of KwaZulu pensions. If the same amount of money and effort was spent on black pensioners as is spent on white pensioners, there would be slightly less poverty and malnutrition in KwaZulu. This is a grossly unjust situation for a country as wealthy as South Africa.’¹⁸

Pension monitoring at St Raphael’s, 3 May 1984 ...

Eighteen people were seen and five received letters for Ulundi. At least a dozen had already been posted in the previous two months, but without any response.

... and 4 July 1984

It was reported that Mrs N.M.Z. for whom R122 pension arrears had been obtained through the AO lawyer and collected, had been robbed of the entire sum on her way home.

State pension cases remained significant and totalled 110 in 1984. The Swartkop Location pension monitoring programme was discontinued in September 1984, although the reasons for this are unclear. However, related work continued through monthly sessions at St Raphael’s as many of the

Swartkop clients regularly attended these. By mid-year, the backlog of new applications from 1983 was being processed, yet approval was still seemingly arbitrary. The impact of such maladministration on poor families experiencing high unemployment, and the harsher application of influx control, was monumental. There was hope, however: the AO and its attorney continued to have success securing back pay and arrears, claiming R1 976 in total for six clients. An administrative change in KwaZulu's Department of Health and Welfare also proffered a glimmer of hope. Under the new head, Dr Daryl Hackland, the department seemed a little more responsive by acknowledging complaints, although in the AO's experience it was slow to do anything of substance.

In 1985 Gilbert Lukhau and Peter Kerchhoff joined Pat Merrett and Pat Dunne in monitoring pension pay points at Swartkop and Vulindlela once again. Corrupt officials were demanding payment before accepting pension applications and applicants were told to apply for KwaZulu citizenship before being granted a pension. A pamphlet in Zulu explaining how to make a pension application proved very helpful.¹⁹ And small AO successes continued to be found in the resolution of pension cases with the aid of local attorneys. In 1985 it was able to secure arrear payments totalling R1 879 for four clients.

Pension and disability grant cases, 1986

In April 1986 Mrs L.M., great-grandmother to three children, travelled by bus with others from Table Mountain to Hammarsdale to register for an OAP. They were sent by the Maphumulo Tribal Authority at Maqongqo and the trip cost R6 with R5 to the induna. L.M.'s application was refused by Magistrate M.J. Nkosi as she was not in his opinion 60 years old. His decision was based on her lack of grey hairs after he forced her to remove her woollen hat for inspection. Her birth had never been registered and although her baptismal certificate recorded a date in July 1925 it was suggested that she had only been baptised in middle age. The magistrate reckoned her to be about 55 and told her to return in five years' time. She noted in her complaint to the AO that her mother had received a pension even though she lacked white hairs. The Mpumalanga chief magistrate replied within a month.

Mrs N.I.N., born in June 1923, applied for an OAP in July 1985 and was paid in January, March and May of 1986. But when payment stopped in July, she was informed she had to provide proof of her age.

Mr E.M. received his first pension payment at Vulindlela in January 1985. But the second, a lump sum refund of R686, was not made as the cheque had been issued against a fraudulent signature.

Mrs B.Z. was allegedly refused a pension until she paid for KwaZulu citizenship.



Contemporary (2014) views of the original building and entrance housing the Advice Office, Thomas Street, Pietermaritzburg





Pat Merrett with a pensioner and unknown interpreter at Busane's store, Vulindlela, 1983



Pat Merrett and Gilbert Lukhau monitoring a pension payout at Busane's store, Vulindlela, 1983



Pension payout, Vulindlela, 1984



Pension payout, Vulindlela, 1984



Pat Merrett, Sheena Duncan, Gilbert Lukhau and unnamed persons, location unknown, probably November 1985



*Advice Office, Pietermaritzburg, 1989
(from left: Pat Merrett and Busi Nyide)*



*Anne Truluck (Harley) and Ann Strode at
Advice Office Conference, Pietermaritzburg,
16 September 1990*



Advice Office, Pietermaritzburg, date not recorded: unknown client with Busi Nyide



Clients queuing at Advice Office, Pietermaritzburg, 1991

In the Richmond area, Messrs I.M. and D.N. had their pensions stopped suddenly and they were reinstated only after a lawyer's letter was sent.

Mr M.E.M. applied in July 1987 for a DG and having completed the medical forms went to Chief Zondi at Sweetwaters for the necessary stamp. The clerk demanded R70. This was regarded as an exorbitant bribe and a complaint was made to the magistrate's court at Vulindlela.

Mrs T.D.M. had her DG application turned down because her application for a reference book did not carry the requisite distinct fingerprints. But her grant application concerned a paralysed left hand: her disability thus prevented her obtaining a grant for her disability.

In 1987, in addition to dealing with cases at the AO itself, it was decided to reinstate visits to pension payouts in Sweetwaters with two visits taking place that year and more to follow during the next. The significance of OAPs in the work of the AO is illustrated by the generally upward trend in the number of cases handled after they had first appeared as a category in 1981 under the heading of state pensions:

OAP cases handled by the Advice Office in the 1980s

1981	94	1984	75	1987	99
1982	not available	1985	91	1988	135
1983	54	1986	86	1989	328

The contrast between those whose pensions were administered by the KwaZulu government (the vast majority), and those handled by the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA), continued to be stark. NPA pensions produced few if any problems. In contrast, KwaZulu pensions were plagued by problems causing many people to turn to the AO.

The KwaZulu pensions system continued to operate on a bi-monthly payment basis with recipients subject to periodic reviews. From March of 1989 many clients with existing pension rights were not paid. When pressed by the AO about this, the then Department of Welfare and Pensions, based in Ulundi and approximately 300 kilometres from Pietermaritzburg, said that those pensions had either not been reviewed or were reviewed late. According to officials at Ulundi the procedure was to review pensions every six months, but this conflicted with what the Vulindlela magistrate told the AO: he said that he reviewed pensions annually. Even when reviews were completed there were delays in getting the pension payments restored and in claiming arrear payments. In many cases these involved cheques sent via the post that often went missing. By the time they were retrieved, they had expired so had to be reissued.

Similar lengthy delays were experienced by new applicants. While they should have had to wait only four months between application and first payment, many were subject to much longer delays, some of up to two years. This was explained by a department official, V.S. Kubeka, as the result of shifting to a new computer system. It was an unsatisfactory response as it did not explain older cases that had experienced delays. For the families of pensioners who died while waiting for their arrears there was no way to continue the process of claiming outstanding pension money despite the fact that many had helped support elderly relatives. They could, however, claim funeral expenses. Yet, to add further salt to the wound, some waited years before being reimbursed.

The impact of these administrative problems was further illustrated by the AO's legal dealings with the Ulundi Department of Welfare and Pensions. In the past, the AO had relied solely on Andrew Burnett, a local attorney, to deal with unresolved pension cases. His usual approach was to send a letter of demand to the department and this usually prompted a suitable response. Yet, in 1989 these letters ceased to work. As a result Burnett was forced to make an approach to the Supreme Court and at the end of the year was preparing a further four such applications. In addition, the increased number of unresolved cases was too great for Burnett to deal with alone. The AO had to look for further legal assistance.

Such was the extent of the problem that stronger legal interventions were not considered sufficient to hold the department to account, so the AO joined forces with its Durban counterpart and set up meetings with the Welfare Department and other officials. The first meeting in late September 1989 was apparently uneventful with the AO giving Kubeka, one of the officials present, a bundle of a hundred pension cases that needed to be sorted out, which he resolved to do. By November, the AOs were not satisfied with progress. Following two meetings between the AOs, the Legal Resources Centre and the Durban AO's pensions attorney Chris Brunswick at the Durban suburb of Hillcrest, it was decided to meet the head of the Welfare Department, M.M. September, and possibly the heads of the other departments responsible for pensions (Justice and Finance) early the following year.

Meanwhile, lack of progress was illustrated at the end of November when Clare Kerchhoff accompanied the Elandskop Roman Catholic priest Tim Smith on a trip to the Vulindlela magistrate's court. Like the AO's clients, some of his parishioners also had outstanding pension problems. Both Kerchhoff and Smith were displeased with the clerks' handling of the pensioners' enquiries and had an informal meeting with the local magistrate, Mr Smit, in which he insisted he was doing what he could and affirmed that the heart of the problem lay with Ulundi.

This was followed by a second meeting in mid-December, which was in Kerchhoff's view productive. It was attended by various local officials from the Welfare Department's branches in KwaMashu and Umlazi as well as Mr Ntseli from the department's head office. Ntseli proved to be most willing to assist. This assistance included embarking on an educational campaign to make people aware of pensions and their procedures through articles he would share with the AO (boosting its existing resources) for publication in newspapers like *The Natal Witness* (in *Echo*) and, more usefully, in the Zulu-language *Ilanga*. Moreover, he had already approached the national broadcaster about running television and radio segments on pensions. He went on to say that he would happily pass on problematic cases sent to him to the correct person. Kerchhoff took full advantage of this and gave him a selection of 125 AO cases, but it is unclear if these were resolved.

While these meetings may not have yielded the more concrete results for which the AO and others had hoped, they did shed light on the workings of the department and its systems. This gave the AO some insight into the origins of the problems experienced by clients. They learned that the administration of pensions fell to a triumvirate of departments – Welfare, Finance and Justice – with ultimate responsibility falling on the first. While this trio failed in their handling of their roles in the process, for the AO it was the lack of oversight and follow-up on the part of the Welfare Department that was crucial.

For instance, when Welfare authorised arrear payments, Finance would be informed but often that is where the process ground to a halt. In the meantime, Welfare would inform affected pensioners of the authorisation of arrears payments and that they should collect them. These pensioners, some of whom were very old and frail, would then make often long and costly journeys to pensions offices only to be turned away because the money had not been sent. This process could be repeated several times before payment was made. Yet, when officials were confronted, they pointed fingers at others for the poor state of OAP administration. This passing of the buck made a speedy resolution all the more elusive: 'the administration of pensions in KwaZulu remains in a state of abysmal and infuriating chaos.'²⁰

Added to this was the adoption of a new computer system in 1988. By Welfare's own admission, the changeover was riddled with problems. Part of this was rooted in the limited functionality of the new system, which no longer automatically authorised arrears payments to be paid with the current pension payment, but rather issued separate cheques that would then be forwarded to the pension office for collection. Nor did it send reminders to pensioners

to have their pensions reviewed, probably the cause of the heavy caseload the AO experienced. Given the nature of the problem, and previous efforts to engage officials that had produced no tangible results, the AO changed tack. At the suggestion of Ntseli, instead of writing to the Welfare Department, it wrote directly to the minister, M.M. September, and forwarded copies to the departmental secretary. At a management committee meeting in December 1989, the issue of pensions had become significant enough to merit a five-person AO sub-committee that would meet early in 1990 to lay the groundwork for a pension campaign. It would have noted that of the homelands KwaZulu had by far the largest pension budget for 1988–1989 at R335.46 million (Transkei being second with R152.54 million). In March 1989 it had been announced that in urban areas pensions would in future be paid on a monthly basis. By this time it appeared that 18% of payments were being made into savings accounts.²¹

Pension and disability grant cases, 1988–1989

Mrs N.R.M. was not paid her OAP in March and May 1988. It appeared that it had been stopped due to non-review of the procurator, which should have happened every six months. This was renewed, but the problem continued and she was not paid in July 1988. The problem persisted and in November 1989 the client was again required to complete forms. After two letters from Andrew Burnett, of Shepstone, Wylie and Tomlinson, lawyers aiding the Advice Office, it was found that her renewals were lost and she was required to sign an affidavit to say she was still entitled to the pension.

Mrs D.N. applied for an OAP at Vulindlela in 1988. When she went to enquire about her application in April 1989 she was told to return mid-month because they were too busy to help at the moment. She received a letter advising her that a cheque had been posted from Vulindlela, but this was not received. The client was advised to check again in July and when nothing was forthcoming the AO wrote asking why she had not been paid her current pension and arrears. The KwaZulu department replied in December apologising for the delay and suggesting that she should check again three months after receipt of that letter.

Mrs T.I.M. applied for funeral expenses for her deceased husband who had been receiving an OAP, but there was no response. She was advised to go to Vulindlela with the death certificate and the funeral expenses. She was not helped. In November 1989 the AO phoned Ulundi to be told that they were not yet dealing with funeral expenses.

Mrs G.G.M. applied at Umgeni Court for a DG in April 1987, but there was no response. In reply to an AO query, a letter from the NPA in April 1988 said that the client's application had been refused because her spouse's income was too high. The

client reported to the AO in April 1988 that her husband was no longer employed, which meant she could re-apply for her grant. This was confirmed by the NPA provided that a fresh medical report was submitted with the application.

Mrs D.N. was reviewed for her DG, but no money was received. After correspondence with Ulundi she was paid in July 1989, but without any arrears. Eventually a cheque for R2 604 arrived at the AO in payment.

In the meantime, the press had recorded the scandalous deaths of pensioners in queues, although there were none in Pietermaritzburg. The following report gives an indication of bizarre official attitudes:

A KwaMashu resident, Saboka Mthethwa, died in mid-March – the third person to die at a Durban pay-out point in the last 5 months. According to the Black Sash the 62 year old Mthethwa died shortly after collecting his pension. His body was left lying in the sun for about 2 hours. Last November, Florence Madlala was trampled to death. And in January Florence Mqidi collapsed and died after a long wait in the sun.

Umlazi pensions department head, Siphso Gwala, promised that in future bodies of pensioners who die in queues would be promptly removed. He said nothing about what the department would do to prevent further deaths in pension queues ... An official admitted that the pension problems were immense. However, he said, old people enjoyed standing in queues to chat, 'It is an exciting outing for them,' he said.²²

Ann Strode, Clare Kerchhoff's successor as paid caseworker, put a great deal of effort into publicising the dismal state of black pensions. The press took this up with a vengeance and during April 1990 coverage could be found in numerous newspapers including *Ilanga*, *The Mercury* and *New Nation*. Stephen Coan wrote an article for *The Natal Witness*, part of which read:

The massive increase in problems encountered by KwaZulu pensioners and those entitled to disability grants has been highlighted recently, but action on the part of the authorities is noticeable by its absence. The Pietermaritzburg Advice Office reports that there were fifty-nine pension queries in three weeks last year, but in the corresponding period this year there were 268.²³

Pension cases, 1990

Mrs T.V.N. had applied for an OAP at Vulindlela in December 1986, but when she followed up there was nothing. The client lived in Mpumaza in the district of Vulindlela, which had been confused with Mpumalanga so her application could not be traced. The muddle was finally sorted out when Andrew Burnett, one of the lawyers assisting the AO, wrote a letter which resulted in approval for payment in November/December 1990.

Mrs M.R.N. was receiving an OAP that suddenly stopped from November 1989. The suspension was due to late review of her procurator's expiry date and arrears of R600 were forwarded to the magistrate's office at Vulindlela.

Mr M.R.M. applied for an OAP in November 1987 and received the first payment in January 1990. The client should have been paid arrears amounting to R1 260, but instead a cheque for R600 was received in May 1990. The Department of Welfare and Pensions wrote that regrettably they had made a mistake and a further cheque for R660 would be issued.

On 1 June 1990 a memorandum on the current state of pension administration in KwaZulu was sent to M.M. September, minister of welfare and pensions, in which the 1985 report of Committee of Inquiry into the Payment of Social Pensions in KwaZulu, commissioned by the KwaZulu Cabinet and convened by the University of Natal economist Jill Natrass, was quoted:

The enquiries of the committee showed that there were indeed inefficiencies, injustices and frustrations suffered by all who participated in the system, both pensioners and administrators alike. The majority of the recommendations made deal with these inefficiencies, injustices and frustrations and not with matters of principle. Indeed most of the recommendations are an attempt to improve the almost non-existent system of communication with pensioners and would-be pensioners.

The memorandum went on to say that the majority of the recommendations had never been implemented. Five years later, the state of pension administration remained chaotic: 'Applications are stalled for months and sometimes even years and some are lost. Pensions can be stopped without warning with long delays in getting them reinstated and in getting arrear payments. Pensioners are sent away and told there is nothing for them, but to come back and check again.' The memo ended as follows: 'Despite several meetings with officials from your department over the past two years these problems remain unaddressed and in desperation we now appeal to you publicly, Sir, to immediately adopt the recommendation for the 1985 Inquiry.'²⁴

Strode reported that OAPs remained the most important issue and she planned to send a daily fax to September, who feigned ignorance of pension problems.²⁵ Later, on 22 June, a demonstration, including many pensioners, was held in Durban. Strode reported that this was a success and certainly drew the attention of September who predictably accused the Black Sash of using pensioners to its own ends.²⁶ The press reported on the demonstration:

More than 80 KwaZulu pensioners from areas around Durban and Pietermaritzburg staged a placard protest outside the NPA buildings in Durban yesterday. While they stood with their posters singing hymns, their representative handed a memorandum on the problems they are experiencing with pensions and payouts to KwaZulu's Minister of Welfare & Pensions, M.M. September.

The pensioners had hoped for discussions with September, who came to Durban from Ulundi especially so they could hand the memorandum to him. However, the Minister did

not address the crowd, but told the pensioners' representative he would read the document and then 'have a joint conference with this committee of pensioners.'

September accused the Black Sash members accompanying the protesters of 'using people.' The Black Sash said that hundreds of thousands of rands had disappeared because of fraud and corruption.²⁷

Strode sent the following fax to September monthly in mid-1991 and included a list of the names of people seeking assistance and their problems:

The Pietermaritzburg Advice Office is a para-legal office run by the Black Sash. We offer free advice, on a variety of problems, to members of the greater Pietermaritzburg community. At present our office is being inundated with requests for help by people who receive old age pensions and disability grants from the KwaZulu government.

Although we have had numerous meetings with members of your department over the past two years, these problems remain unaddressed. Furthermore, it appears that the problem is worsening all the time. In desperation we have decided to fax you regularly in order to advise you of the magnitude of the problem.²⁸

On 6 July 1991, the AO made a call for pension parity and issued a press statement accordingly:

White pensions are R304 a month while those of Black people are R225 a month. Despite the removing of the apartheid acts during the last parliamentary session, Black pensioners still receive R79.00 a month less than White pensioners. We regard the White pension (R304.00) as totally inadequate given increasing costs of rent, clothing, medical care, food and transport. But to expect Black people to live on R225.00 a month is grossly unjust and condemns them to a life of humiliating and miserable poverty.

The Pietermaritzburg Advice Office calls for pension parity for *all* old age pensioners, and calls on the government to link pensions to the cost of living.²⁹

This was followed by a letter from Ann Strode to the press:

Despite the removing of apartheid acts during the last parliamentary session and a statement by F.W. de Klerk that 'apartheid is dead', black pensioners still receive R79.00 a month less than their white counterparts ... It presumes that the cost of living is less for black pensioners ... The Pietermaritzburg Advice Office condemns the continuing apartheid in pension payments and calls for pension parity at a level that takes into account the cost of living.³⁰

An enquiry from Mary Kleinenberg about social pensions gave rise to a response from E.H. Venter, the national minister of health and welfare, in which the government's aims were set out in detail:

The main object of the Social Assistance Bill is to bring about one umbrella bill for all South Africans. Furthermore the draft act has the following aims:

- to eliminate all discrimination in connection with social assistance;
- to achieve parity in terms of social allowances to ensure that social security is accessible to all RSA citizens;
- to ensure the affordability of the scheme in terms of the financial ability of the country.

All South Africans have the right to apply for social assistance and if a person complies with the prescribed requirements, for instance the means test, the person qualifies for assistance.

The residence qualification that has changed will in no way affect any of the inhabitants of the self-governing territories or the TBVC States [Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei]. The inhabitants of the self-governing territories are South African citizens. Multilateral and bilateral agreements exist between the RSA and TBVC States concerning social allowances and no citizen of these countries' social allowances will be affected in any way. Section 3 of the Bill implies that in future citizens of any country other than the self-governing territories or TBVC States with whom agreements exist, cannot apply for social assistance unless the person becomes a South African citizen.

The government has already committed itself to the phasing out of disparity in social assistance as soon as possible and has already narrowed the existing gap by approximately 20% as from 1 April 1991.³¹

Pension and disability grant cases, 1991

During July, Mrs S. was phoned with good news. The AO had been informed by Ulundi that her arrears in pension, a cheque for R1 200, had been sent to Vulindlela Magistrate's Court. But the next day Mrs S. arrived at the AO in tears. When she got to the pay office she was told that her cheque had already been collected. After reporting this to the magistrate and the police it was suspected that the culprit was one of the pension officials, but the person had yet to be apprehended. The matter was referred to an attorney.

Mrs L.D. was receiving a pension that just stopped. It appeared that it had lapsed due to non-review and she was owed arrears for 1988, 1989 and 1990. A letter from Jon White, an attorney at Browne, Brodie, Fourie & Carr who assisted the AO, asking what arrears were due and when to expect payment resulted in a cheque for R1 400 being sent to the client.

Mr B.N.N. applied for an OAP in 1990, and when the case was eventually handed over to lawyer Jon White in October 1991 the Department of Welfare and Pensions wrote to say that the application had been approved in March 1990, but erroneously rejected by the computer. An arrears cheque for R3 825 had been sent to the magistrate's office at Vulindlela for collection by the client.

Mrs A.V. claimed that she had applied for an OAP years ago. There was a problem with her new ID which had been issued in August 1991 because a clerk had written an incorrect date of birth on the bottom of the certificate which was not acceptable. The matter was resolved and the client was advised that she could collect her pension in December.

Mr P.F.N. was receiving a DG that stopped in March 1987, was re-instated in September 1989 and stopped again in July 1991. It had not been explained to the client that the grant was stopped because it was annual: a further medical examination was required each year on which basis the grant would be renewed, or not.

A report released in 1992 concentrated on OAPs after the office had seen 1 200 pensioners in eight months. An extract says:

A recent innovation at the KwaZulu pay points has been the payment of huge sums, for arrears, paid in cash rather than by cheque. The rationale for this is that the clients do not fetch their money quickly enough, and when cheques expire pensioners have to wait even longer for their money. However, all our clients claim to visit the Magistrate's court regularly to check whether their money has arrived, and they say they are never informed timeously of the arrival of their money.

The new system has already caused problems illustrated by the following case study. Mrs M. went to the payout point to receive her arrears. She received the sum of R2 500.00 in cash. Unbeknown to her she was supposed to receive R5 000.00 in arrears. She signed a voucher stating that she had received the full amount. There is no way we can prove that she was defrauded.

Further problems that have come to our notice are that some KwaZulu pensioners are receiving less than the gazette amounts and some pensioners are paying in the region of R15 every two months to unknown persons at the payout points for death insurance. Most of the pensioners claim that they do not have any documentation to prove their membership of a fund. On enquiry we received a very rude letter from AVSAF Burial Agency stating that all the pensioners had documentation. We have contacted a client and asked her to take this up with the affected communities.³²

Pension and disability grant cases, 1992

Mr M.D. applied for an OAP in October 1990, but by April 1991 there was still no response. The case was handed over to Jon White. In September 1992 it was ascertained that an arrears cheque for the amount of R2 800 could be collected from the magistrate's office at Vulindlela.

Mr B.T.M. was receiving an OAP but the last payment was made in November 1991. It had been suspended due to the expiry of the procurator authorisation, and renewal documents had not been received by the Department of Welfare and Pensions who became aware of the problem only when they received a letter from the AO. Arrears amounting to R820 were authorised and a further R950 was issued for payment at Vulindlela.

Mr M.D.K. applied for an OAP in January 1991, but by June 1992 he had heard nothing. The matter was handed over to Jon White, who managed to arrange for an arrears cheque to the amount of R5 743 to be forwarded to the magistrate's office at Vulindlela.

Mr M.J.M. applied for an OAP in April 1989 in the district of Hlanganani, but by June 1991 had received nothing. The case was handed to Jon White who found that the Department of Welfare and Pensions had not recorded the client's full identity number so he could not be traced. Arrear payments were sent to the magistrate's office at Hlanganani. These amounted to a cheque for R4 785 in April 1992 and a further R900 in June 1992.

Mrs N.B.H. applied for an OAP in June 1990, but by July 1991 there had been no response. She was told to re-apply in November 1990 and again in September 1991. The Department of Welfare and Pensions wrote to the AO in January 1992 to say that an arrears cheque for R2 450 could now be collected.

Mr N.B.M. was receiving a DG that stopped between September 1990 and January 1992. Upon enquiry it appeared that it had been suspended due to the expiry of a medical report. When in September 1992 the report was completed, the grant was reinstated with an arrears payment of R5 450, payable in November 1992.

Mr T.B.N. was receiving a DG that stopped in March 1992. The grant was re-instated for the pay period September/October 1992, payable in November. An arrears payment of R4 111 was sent to the magistrate's office at Vulindlela.

In August 1993 all advice offices were informed that the following information had been obtained about the yet unpublished Mouton Commission report and this gave an opportunity for the Black Sash to comment before publication. In summary, the commission would first recommend parity regarding amounts paid and all rules involving pensions. It was thought that payments to whites might have to be lowered, though it was unlikely that government would agree to this. Second, the current rule was that if any pensioner owed a house valued at R15 000, as well as other assets, the means test applies. The commission would recommend that this ceiling be raised to R40 000. Last, the commission recommended 65 years as the qualifying age for both men and women, to be phased in over a period.

Black Sash wrote to the Commission saying that the suggestion that women should qualify for pensions at 65 was unacceptable. Because pensions should be viewed as a safety net, not a luxury, moving this net further from the grasp of people would increase poverty. It would therefore be better to lower the qualifying age of men to 60. The cost of parity need not be to the detriment of white pensioners, but rather at the expense of an overloaded bureaucracy currently funded to administer poorly so many separate pensions. It was not just costs that were at stake, but old people.³³

Pension cases, 1993

Mr B.H.Z.'s OAP was first suspended in November/December 1989 and then again in 1991–1992. An arrear payment of R2 405 for these periods was only made available in January 1993.

Mrs M.T.D. applied for an OAP in May 1992 and by August 1993 there had been no payments. A letter from Vulindlela stated that her ID showed she was not eligible because she was not yet 60 years old. The client claimed the ID was incorrect.

Mr S.M. applied for an OAP in August 1992 and received his pension until January 1993 when it stopped. Upon enquiry, it appeared that all mail sent to the address given by him was returned to sender and Ulundi could find no record of his application or payments. When the client visited the AO to enquire about his pension he was advised to re-apply.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Loretta van Schalkwyk, 'Black people's pensions' *Reality* 16(2) 1984: 10.
- 2 Mary Grice, 'Plight of the pensioner' *Sash Magazine (SM)* 18(5) 1976: 25.
- 3 Mary Grice and Neil Alcock, 'Pensions in KwaZulu' *SM* 21(1) 1979: 14; 'Privations of pensioners' *SM* 20(1) 1978: 24.
- 4 Maggie Clarke, 'Pietermaritzburg: administration of Advice Office' *SM* 25(2) August 1982: 21.
- 5 *Echo* 29 January 1981.
- 6 Pat Merrett, letter *Natal Witness (NW)* 30 January 1981.
- 7 Even the means test was discriminatory as African applicants could be turned away if sons or daughters were deemed able to provide support. This apparently still applied in KwaZulu in the late 1970s (Gerhard Maré, 'Old age pensions and the bantustans' *Work in Progress* 17(1981): 18, 20. For a financial history of KwaZulu pensions in the 1970s see the same source, table 7.
- 8 *Race Relations Survey (RRS)* 1979: 579; 1980: 580.
- 9 *RRS* 1981: 414. For some years afterwards the R20 note was derisively called a lapa.
- 10 *RRS* 1982: 552; 1983: 516.
- 11 *RRS* 1983: 517.
- 12 Maré, 'Old age pensions and the bantustans': 20.
- 13 Grice, 'Plight of the pensioner': 25.
- 14 *RRS* 1984: 533, 732.
- 15 Grice and Alcock, 'Pensions in KwaZulu': 15.
- 16 Marj Brown, '*This Money Will Be Used to Bury Me ...*': *The Current State of Black Pensions in South Africa* ([Johannesburg]: Black Sash National Advice Office, 1990): 6.
- 17 P.L. Merrett, 'Time to act over pensions' *NW* 1 April 1982.
- 18 Pat Merrett, paper on old age pensions dated 14 February 1983.
- 19 Report for national conference, 1985.
- 20 Brown, '*This Money Will Be Used to Bury Me ...*': 44.
- 21 *Ibid*: 2, 5.
- 22 *NW* 21 March 1989.
- 23 *NW* 17 April 1990.
- 24 Memorandum from AO to KwaZulu Department of Welfare, 1 June 1990.
- 25 Executive Committee minutes, 6 June 1990.
- 26 Executive Committee minutes, 4 July 1990.
- 27 *NW* 23 June 1990.
- 28 Ann Strobe, faxes to M.M. September, June, July and August 1991.
- 29 Advice Office report, 6 July 1991.
- 30 *NW* 9 July 1991.
- 31 E.H. Venter, letter to Mary Kleinenberg, 2 March 1992.
- 32 AO conference report for the period January to August 1992.
- 33 Black Sash to Mouton Commission on Pensions, 1993.

CONSCIENCE IS A WORD consistently applied to the Black Sash from its earliest days to the dawn of liberation when Nelson Mandela addressed the Cape Town crowd on his release from prison. Ironically, the end of apartheid ultimately signalled the demise of Sash, which was 'programmed for redundancy and a limited lifespan'.¹ Looking back from a vantage point of twenty years, with democracy under threat from both old and new directions, its passing, together with that of many other human rights organisations, can be regretted. It seems appropriate summing up the history of the Natal Midlands Black Sash (NMBS) to address three questions: what was its general relevance and legacy; what did this mean for the women who belonged to it; and what was distinctive about this particular region of Sash?

In a sense Sash made a false start: its initial campaign demonstrated the futility of politics centred on a race-based parliamentary politics. But it was fortunate to have a core membership perceptive and determined enough to steer it in a new, overtly anti-apartheid direction. Ultimately it outlived by many years organisations that may be regarded its near equivalents, the Torch Commando, Liberal Party (although it was legislated out of existence) and the National Union of South African Students. Sash appeared indestructible, yet eventually liquidated itself.

However, it is too easy to write off the very early days of Sash as an exercise in constitutional conservatism that had long since abandoned African South Africans. To an extent this is true as shown by the massive fall off of membership numbers once the initial battle was lost. However, from the outset some remarkably radical and challenging statements were made publicly by Sash members and the organisation quickly adjusted to the broader struggle against apartheid. Before and after Sharpeville its astute analyses of the South African condition (for instance, the pass laws and labour exploitation) were remarkably penetrating and prescient long before other civil society

organisations and the open universities got to grips with the root of the national crisis. Sash was a good illustration of the liberal precept that principles have greater ultimate weight than sheer numbers.

Without doubt Sash was a significant part of the liberation struggle. As Daryl Glaser argues, 'The liberal defence of freedoms of expression and association, indeed of multi-party democracy, is ... well grounded in the lessons of history and should be wholeheartedly embraced by the left (including the revolutionary left).'² However, it is easy to dismiss as tokenism the political campaigns embraced by Sash and the stands, petitions and letter writing campaigns that drove them. They were indeed the work of a decidedly small group of women and at first glance had little impact on Sash's constituency, the white electorate.

Nevertheless, during the very darkest hours of a dismal period of South Africa's history, Sash provided a glimmer of hope by keeping alive and in the public consciousness the fundamentals of universal human rights. It was a commitment that never wavered: Sash established a 'foundation of trust' and backed its talk with action significant enough for it to be nominated by a Swedish group for the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize.³ Sheena Duncan summed up Sash in an obituary for NMBS stalwart Maimie Corrigan: she was noted for her commitment to 'freedom and justice, public and private integrity, and the infinite worth of all human beings' and her courage in facing the assault on those values.⁴ In doing so, she and all Sash members reached across an artificial racial divide designed to perpetuate an unequal division of resources and power. The other consistent aims of Sash were to educate the public about the inhumanity of apartheid and monitor, and protest about, legislation. Above all, Sash bore consistent witness in a country with a government that persistently committed crimes against humanity, a watchdog role recognised by both the African National Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement. It was only in the 1980s that the whites of Pietermaritzburg started voting in significant numbers for a party, the Progressive Federal Party, with any commitment at all to a post-apartheid society. In a sense for many years, especially in the 1970s after the loss of the Liberal Party, the real white political opposition to the National Party government was the Black Sash.

Sash's total independence of any other political organisation was a wise strategy that frequently came under pressure given the dire nature of the struggle against the apartheid state. This was especially true of a relatively small centre like Pietermaritzburg where organisational memberships overlapped to a significant degree. The Black Sash could have been readily compromised by other agendas, but a way was found around this by co-operative campaigns. Two

of the most significant, opposition to military conscription and promotion of human rights in rural areas, were particularly important in the Natal Midlands, addressed alongside the End Conscription Campaign and Association for Rural Advancement respectively. After 1990, co-operative work around violence of various types and the forthcoming elections became particularly important. Networking was one of Sash's strengths, introducing a flexibility in which unity was maintained. Sash was fortunate to have, both locally and nationally, wise and astute leadership that managed to balance individual interests and collective action while sticking to its principles such as non-violence and the rule of law.

As a result of several quirks of personality, and history and geography (industrial development was late arriving in Pietermaritzburg and influx control had different dimensions from elsewhere), the NMBS was one of the last regions to establish an advice office (AO). When it did, it provided an excellent service to a community severely battered by the racist assumptions of apartheid and its bureaucratic ineptitude and indifference. The AO provided a unique facility that served and represented the oppressed, in particular poor women.⁵ Its relationship with the Federation of South African Trade Unions in the late 1970s was particularly significant and continued to define the AO in some ways; while co-operation with the South African Institute of Race Relations was an essentially pragmatic move. Failure to open the AO until 1975 was a myopic, ill-judged decision and there remained a surprising degree of animosity towards it for many years from certain quarters. In retrospect, the supposedly high-minded suggestion that AO staff and volunteers were helping to make apartheid work while those standing with placards in public were confronting the system head on looks spectacularly misplaced.

Both aspects of Sash were equally important and the symbiotic relationship between political pressure group and service organisation was plain. The AO was a place of black empowerment, ongoing adult education and assertion of human dignity, especially for non-unionised workers, reinforcing the belief that all South Africans were citizens with rights, however limited in the short term. In its later years it became a training ground for students who would go on to community-based careers where information gathering and advice-giving skills would be important. This educational role extended to employers, including those of domestic workers, who were brought face to face with their moral and legal responsibilities. And the state pensions monitoring project that was a particular speciality of the AO unearthed fraud, corruption and whimsical administration that unhappily remains a particular characteristic of

the post-liberation nation. Funds were retrieved in sufficient quantities to make a real difference to significant numbers of people. The information gleaned at the AO, and other offices around the nation, was invaluable in backing up Sash's critique of apartheid and its legislation with hard evidence of day-to-day reality and struggle in black communities. The undoubtedly risky and daring act of standing on street corners with challenging and defiant placards was validated by the sheer grind and sense of desperation compiling case files in the AO and talking to pensioners in payout queues. Many Sash members did both. And the work of the AO consistently fulfilled all the basic objectives of the broader organisation.

Over the years there has been a certain amount of post-liberation hubris from AO staff. It was assumed that the supposed professionalisation of advice offices put them on a different plane from those staffed largely by volunteers during the apartheid era. For this book, the issue rests solely with the standard set by the AO up to 1994. Volunteers were generally highly educated and resourceful people well able to grasp quickly the legal, political and social implications of the situations with which they were faced. Indeed, the fact that they were voluntary workers simply underlined their extremely high levels of commitment, determination and effectiveness. They were second to none, even though unpaid and learning on the job. There is no evidence that standards subsequently rose and there were suspicions that some post-apartheid workers were too close by far to government and its agencies.

From a gender perspective Sash was one of the first South African organisations to demonstrate the organisational capabilities of women. In this sense Sash doubled (or perhaps squared) its liberation credentials. The mass mobilisation of 1955 and 1956, however short-lived, and the symbolism that was invoked in countrywide petitions, hauntings and vigils was a truly remarkable achievement in the context of time and place. It, and ongoing public Sash activity, also required considerable personal courage. South Africa was not Nazi Germany, but nevertheless the National Party was in the process of erecting a substantial police state that was supported by some notably unpleasant people. The unrelenting hostility of even the politer sections of white society was a considerable burden. A steely determination and the courage of one's convictions were required to persist with Sash activity.

Appropriately, Sash remained a political pressure group of women rather than transforming into a women's organisation, although there was support for the latter in the NMBS. And, as one interviewee put it, the organisation remained challenging without being aggressive. There is a sense, however, that

the NMBS was one of the regions that leaned most heavily towards feminism, not surprising in view of the multiple manifestations of oppressive patriarchy in the area.

One of its virtues was that Sash offered its members a variety of ways of engagement from the high profile to the low key. Personal opinions and memories reflected in *Sash Magazine* and later in interviews illustrate exactly what Sash membership meant to individual women. They became far more politically conscious and found a web of support among like-minded women. Gaining tremendously in confidence, they acquired the courage to express their opinions on a wide variety of issues, especially the appalling impact of the inhuman policy of apartheid on the everyday lives of black South Africans. Unexpectedly, many women acquired the audacity to challenge assumptions expressed by family and friends which either deliberately or unwittingly supported the status quo.

Volunteering in the AO provided a unique opportunity for middle-class white people to gain real empathy for the lives of those rendered invisible by apartheid. By meticulously recording and following up these interactions, volunteers challenged the intentions of the State. This also brought new insights, teaching those concerned to work with other people in ways that valued and respected everyone, whatever their background. Listening to people's stories was both humbling and moving; and taught the important lesson not to create dependency in clients, but empower them to help themselves. This became useful in other areas of volunteers' lives and at the same time they gained valuable insights into current legislation.

Looking back over the years through the research for this book has revealed how passion and commitment, and the privilege of working in the Black Sash, were rewarded by a profound feeling of individual honour and pride to have been part of this remarkable organisation at such a key point of South African history.

The NMBS constituted one of the smaller regions, but there is a wealth of evidence and opinion to show that it consistently punched above its weight. Pietermaritzburg, until the 1960s a city dominated by the professions and education, produced some remarkable individuals, a high density of anti-apartheid activity and by the mid-1970s a relatively liberal city council with a scattering of enlightened municipal officials. It would be an error to overstate the nature of the challenge: it was largely a matter of turning a blind eye to petty apartheid rather than confronting National Party policy and the law. But Pietermaritzburg was indeed a South African city with a difference: the

Natal Society Library was desegregated, a multiracial cricket team (Aurora) played in the local league and use of the City Hall was relaxed. Sash reflected that local distinctiveness and under the State of Emergency of the late 1980s was able to conduct protest stands with co-operation from a sympathetic magistrate. NMBS even had for a while, in the person of Peter Kerchhoff, a male committee member, which must surely have been unique.

In these conditions it was active and productive: stands, letters written to the press, work with schools (in the 1960s and 1970s), a steady stream of quality publications, a mixed level of success in putting pressure on the municipality and a very active AO. The region's contribution to the national body was consistently recognised as significant, particularly from the 1980s onwards. All of these activities contributed in some way to bridging the racial chasm created and maintained by colonialism and apartheid. Like other regions, from time to time NMBS faced major moral questions such as the use made by both the State and its opponents of violence. Under strong leadership such issues were thoroughly and democratically debated and cohesion was maintained around the organisation's founding and unwavering principles.

Over forty years from 1955 to 1994 the NMBS was a local focal point of progressive thought and political action that attracted admiration, support and practical action from lawyers, academics, religious leaders and political activists in each of Pietermaritzburg's communities. Above all, it built and maintained a bridge and used it as a hopeful route to a better life for all South Africans, including the most humble, even during the very darkest of days.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Eileen Benjamin, *An Historical Analysis of Aspects of the Black Sash, 1955–2001* (MA thesis in History, University of Stellenbosch, 2004): 167.
- 2 Daryl Glaser, 'Liberating "liberal" freedoms' *Work in Progress* 61(1989): 10.
- 3 Gideon Mendel, 'The Sash' *Leadership SA* 6(5) 1987: 85, 86.
- 4 Sheena Duncan, 'Maimie Corrigan' *Reality* 13(4) 1981: 17.
- 5 Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organisations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006): 244.

APPENDIX

Members of the Natal Midlands Black Sash

We have attempted to list the names of all former members, associate members, and those who worked in the Advice Office without joining the Black Sash.

There are likely to be gaps, for which we apologise, and we have been unable to find a few forenames.

Former members

Forename	Surname
Jenny	AITCHISON
Stephanie	ALEXANDER
Gwen	ALLDAY
Karen	ALLSOP
Dorothy	ANDERSON
Juliet	ARMSTRONG
Elsie	AUSTIN
Jill	BAILEY
Rosemary	BAMFORD
Tina	BARLOW
Hazel	BARNES
Gwen	BARRETT
Lorraine (Helen)	BASSETT
Grace	BAXTER
Jo	BEALE
Isabel	BEARDMORE
Dee	BEDINGFIELD
Brenda	BELL
Jenny	BELL
Joan	BENNET
Astrid	BERTHOUD
Bunty (Ida)	BIGGS
Felicity	BORLAND
R.	BOWDEN
Jenny	BOWEN
Nikki	BRIGHTON

Terri	BROLL
Joan	BROMBERGER
Phoebe	BROWN
Agnes	BROWNE
Fiona	BULMAN
Sheila	BURNETT
Sarah	CARLISLE
Christine	CHAPMAN
Eileen	CHRISTOPHER
Jenny	CLARENCE-FINCHAM formerly Clarence
Maggie	CLARKE
Jay	CLUTTON
Renate	COCHRANE
Pam	COPE
Maimie (Mary)	CORRIGALL
Lorenza	COWLING
Judith	CROUCH
Diana	DAVEY
Alleyn	DIESEL
Margaret	DRUMMOND
Gwendoline	DUGMORE
Barbara	DURRANT
Marie	DYER
Patricia	EAGLES
Eileen	ECCLES
Charmaine	ESLICK
Verina	FARRER
Lorna	FERGUSON
Ivy	FLEMING
Olive	FORSYTHE
Fidela	FOUCHÉ
Beth	FRANKLIN
Iris	FRIDAY
Mary	GARDNER
Bev	GLENNIE
Mary	GODLONTON
Doris	GOODWIN
Anne	GRAYSON

Dawn	GUINNESS
Ruth	HALL
Helen	HALLOWES
Anne	HARLEY formerly Truluck
Marion	HARPER
Kathleen	HARRIS
Kerry	HARRIS
Unity	HARRISON
Trudi	HARTZENBERG
Penny	HASWELL
Dorothy	HAUFF
Bridget	HAZEL
Georgie	HEATON-NICHOLS
Amanda	HEDDEN-McCARTHY
Erica	HENDERSON
Sheila	HENDERSON
Freda	HICKSON
Maureen	HOBBS
Nanettte	HOCH
Emily	HOLLEY
Joan	HOPKINS
Marion (Thuli)	HYSLOP
Fiona	JACKSON
Esme	JOAQUIM
Sheila	JOHNSON
Ursula	JUDD
Bochara	KARAM
Bobby	KEAL
Mary	KEAL
Clare	KERCHHOFF
Joan	KERCHHOFF
Alice	KIMBER
Margaret	KIRWOOD
Mary	KLEINENBERG
Paula	KRYNAUW
Deanne	LAWRENCE
Charmaine	LE FEUVRE
Wendy	LEEB

Gillian	LEWIS
Joan	LINDEGGER
Veronica	LINZ
Pat	LOUW
Kathy	LUCKETT
Elizabeth (Betty)	LUND
Sandy	LUND
Sally	LUNDIE
Irene	MACQUARRIE
Val	MAGGS
Marie-Anna	MARAIS
P.C.	MASTERS
Debora	MATHEWS
Eleanor	MATHEWS
Pam	MATHEWS
Mrs	McCLELLAND
Gay	McCORMACK
E.M.	McEWEN
Jenny	McKENZIE formerly Hugo
Olga	MEIDNER formerly McDonald
Sheila	MEINTJES formerly Hindson
Pat	MERRETT
Margery	MOBERLY
Heather	MORKILL
Mary	NATHANSON
Betty	NAUDÉ
Edith	NEWSOM
Sheila	NIVEN
Doris	NUTTALL
Elizabeth (Betty)	OBERHOLZER
Joan	O'CALLAGHAN
Bambi	OGRAM
Una	O'HAGAN
Maeve	OSLER
Hazel	OWEN-SMITH
Mary	PARK-ROSS
Maxine	PENDLEBURY
Jane	PHILLIPS

Louise Ann	PHILLIPS
Cara	PRETORIUS
Danne	PRETORIUS
Margie	PRETORIUS
Dot	PROCTOR
Merle	PROSSER
Jenny	RADLOFF
Lynn	READ
Pamela	REID
Heidi	REISS
Gillian	RENNIE
Carleen	RICHARDSON
Carmel	RICKARD
Angela	RIVETT-CARNAC
Joy	ROBERTS formerly Hey
Bridget	ROSE
Heidi	ROSS
Eleanor	RUSSELL
Hazel	SCHNEIDER
Else	SCHREINER
Margrit	SCHULTZ
Kay	SELLERS
Margie	SHAW
Margaret (Peggy)	SHEPSTONE
Anne	SHUTTLEWORTH
Jenny	SILBURN
Elizabeth (Biddy)	SOLOMAN
Mary Emily	SOUTER
Yvonne	SPAIN
Sheila	SPENCER
Didi	STEVENS
Jo	STIELAU
Christine	STILWELL
Olivia	STONE
Meg	STRAUSS
Ann	STRODE
Mary	SUTHERLAND
Betty	SUTTON

Wendy	SWAN
Doreen	TARBOTON
Gwladys	TERRY
Mac (Margaret Adelaide)	THOMPSON formerly Canning
Carol	THOMSON
Liz	THOMSON
Cynthia	TOMLINSON
Yvette	VAN AARDENNE
Christine	VAN DEN BERG
Birgitta	VAN DER WESTHYSEN
Christina	VAN HEYNINGEN
Monique	VAN WYNGAARD
Jennifer	VERBEEK
Marie	VOERWERK
Jane	VOSS
Alix	WALKER
Celia	WALTER
Gail	WANNENBURG
Gillian	WATKINS
Fleur	WEBB
Denise	WEBBSTOCK
Pessa	WEINBERG
Pam	WELLINGTON
Felicity	WIGGILL
Georgena	WILDMAN
June	WILSON
Naomi	WINTERTON
Monika	WITTENBERG
Iris	WOOD
Puck	WOODS
Jane	WORSNIP later Argall
Margie	YATES

Associate members

Chris	ALBERTYN
Tim	DUNNE
Colin	GARDNER
Verne	HARRIS
Mike	HICKSON
Colin	IRVINE
Peter	KERCHHOFF
John	MACQUARRIE
Patrick	McKENZIE
Christopher	MERRETT
Brian	SPENCER
John	VAN WYNGAARD

Advice Office volunteers (non-Sash members)

Denise	ARMOUR
Jill	BERNING
Eileen	BULL
Ian	CALDER
Mary	DE HAVILLAND
Thulani	DLAMINI
Rose	DOYLE
Ruth	EDGECOMBE
Sabera	HAFFEJEE
Athene	HALL
Bruce	IRVINE
Margie	KING
Lydia	LEVINE
Gilbert	LUKHAU
Ruth	LUNDIE
Julia	MEINTJES
Sikhosiphi	MGOZA
Moses	MOYA
Cleophas	MUDZINGADUTU
Nalini	NAIDOO
Jean	NGUBANE
Isaiah	NTSHANGASE
Maxie	NURNBERGER

Dumisani
Leonie
Mary
Gaye
Paddy
Mark
M.
Maureen
David

NYIDE
PROZESKY
RIEKERT
SPILLER
TONKIN
VAN DYK
WILLIAMS
WRIGHT
ZONDI

INTERVIEWS AND INTERVIEWERS

Alan Paton Centre call numbers are given in brackets

Buntly BIGGS interviewed by Pat Merrett, Leonard Stanley, Gloucestershire, 25 August 1996 (96APB9).

Jenny BOWEN interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 5 May 2013 (13APB2).

Phoebe BROWN interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 9 August 2011 (11APB6).

Marie DYER interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 4 September 1995 (95APB9).

Anne HARLEY (TRULUCK) interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 26 October 2010 (11APB4).

Joan KERCHHOFF interviewed by Jennifer Verbeek, Pietermaritzburg, 6 May 1998 (98APB12); and by Lorenza Cowling, Pietermaritzburg, 30 August 2010 (11APB3).

Mary KLEINENBERG interviewed by Alleyn Diesel, Pietermaritzburg, 21 March 2013 (13APB1).

Paula KRYNAUW interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 2012 (12APB1).

Nalini NAIDOO interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 August 2013 (13APB3).

Busi (Victoria) NYIDE interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 2 August 2005 (05APB1).

Joy ROBERTS interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 3 August 2010 (11APB2).

Else SCHREINER interviewed by Pat Merrett, Pietermaritzburg, 25 August 1995 (95APB11).

Fleur WEBB interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 19 July 2011 (11APB5).

Pessa WEINBERG interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg, Pietermaritzburg, 8 July 2010 (11APB1).

INTERVIEWEES*Else Schreiner**Marie Dyer**Fleur Webb**Bunty Biggs**Pessa Weinberg*



Joy Roberts



Phoebe Brown



Joan Kerchhoff



Nalini Naidoo



Busi (Victoria) Nyide



Paula Krynauw



Jenny Bowen



Mary Kleinenberg



Anne Harley

INTERVIEWERS



Pat Merrett



Jennifer Verbeek



Mary Kleinenberg



Lorenza Cowling



Alleyn Diesel

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Note: This bibliography does not list newspaper articles or letters to the press.

INDEX

A full list of the names of Natal Midlands Black Sash members and associate members, and Advice Office volunteers who did not join Sash, is to be found in the appendix. All statutes are listed under the heading: Acts and Bills of Parliament.

32 Battalion 154

A

abortion 86, 155, 159

Acts and Bills of Parliament

Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act (1952) 10

Affected Organisations Act (1974) 66

Bantu Administration Act (1927) 23 n.68

Bantu Affairs Administration Act (1971) 15

Bantu Education Act (1953) 80

Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act (1970) 15

Bantu Laws Amendment Act (1963) 48, 78

Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1983) 156, 222

Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act (1945) 195

Borders of Particular States Extension Act (1986) 15

Coloured Persons Education Act (1963) 48

Defence Amendment Act (1983) 16

Education Advisory Council Bill 35

Extension of University Education Act (1959) 81

Fundraising Act (1978) 156

Gatherings and Demonstrations Act (1973) 14, 63

General Law Amendment (Sabotage) Act (1962) 35–36, 54

General Law Amendment Act (1963) 12, 52

General Law Amendment Act (1969) 56

Group Areas Act (1950) 13, 23 n.6, 28–29, 36, 54, 57, 112, 116

High Court of Parliament Act (1952) 3

Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act (1979) 179

Internal Security Act (1983) 90, 99, 103, 109, 113

Laws on Co-operation and Development Act (1983) 195

Natives Land Act (1913) 91

Orderly Movement and Settlement Bill 15

Population Registration Act (1950) 2

Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (1951) 147, 226

Prohibition of Political Interference Act (1968) 13, 54

Public Safety Amendment Act (1986) 103

Publications and Entertainments Act (1963) 35, 48

Railways and Harbours Pension Amendment Act (1941) 213

Riotous Assemblies Act (1956) 59–60

Senate Act (1955) 1–2, 3, 5, 20 n.6, 25, 34, 37, 38

Separate Representation of Voters Act (1951) 3

Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Act (1956) 13

Social Assistance Act (1992) 149, 256–257

South Africa Act (1909) 2, 3

South Africa Act Amendment Act (1956) 7, 22 n.38

Terrorism Act (1967) 51, 58, 87

Unlawful Organisations Act (1960) 34

Advice Office (Pietermaritzburg) 100, 108, 112, 187–188, 210, 221–222, 223–224, 249, 263–264, 265; *see also* Black Sash, advice offices

administration 182, 186

case studies 182, 183–184, 196, 202–203, 209, 212–213, 217–218, 220–221, 226, 230–231; *see also* old age pensions, case studies

caseload 176, 178, 179, 180, 181, 183, 188, 190–191, 195, 196, 198, 199–200, 201, 204–205, 207–208, 210, 211, 216 n.16, 226, 228–229, 237, 250

- caseworker/researcher positions 106, 129, 133, 199, 206, 215, 222, 226, 231
- communication with Zulu speakers 200, 202, 216 n.11
- convenor 106, 191, 213
- Ecumenical Centre Trust office 213
- and Kupugani 196–197
- letters to the press *see* Natal Midlands
- Black Sash, letters to the press
- liaison with other organisations 187, 190, 196, 219, 263
- management committee 189
- name of 175, 192 n.13
- OAP applications 239–240, 241, 243, 244, 251; *see also* old age pensions
- objections to 46–47, 263
- opening 69, 175, 263
- press coverage 187–188, 189, 222, 223, 236
- relations with Black Sash 213–214
- relations with clients 186–187, 205, 231
- relations with FOSATU 177, 178, 181, 185, 193 n.23, 263
- resources (financial and human) 175–176, 183, 185, 187, 189–190, 191, 198, 199, 201, 213, 214, 226
- St Saviour's office 185, 189
- and students 204, 207, 214, 263
- survey of clients 224–225
- Thomas Street office 175, 176, 192 n.6, 245
- training 162, 175, 182–183, 187, 189, 200, 204, 206–207, 214, 263
- Ubunye House office 189, 198
- views of workers 168
- and violence 206
- and voter education *see* Natal Midlands
- Black Sash and voter education
- white clients 222–223
- Advice Office Trust *see* Black Sash Trust
- AFRA *see* Association for Rural Advancement
- African Art Centre 87
- African National Congress 9, 10, 18, 34, 51, 90, 98, 107, 127, 128, 152, 158, 161, 225, 227, 228, 262
- Womens League 147, 148
- Aggett, Neil 88
- Aitchison, John 52, 58, 67 n.11, 87, 128, 137 n.84, 150, 158
- Albert Falls 57
- Alberts, Derek 155–156
- Alcock, Neil 67 n.11, 83, 235
- Alcockspruit 92
- Alexander, Stephanie 39, 70, 157
- Allday, Gwen 69
- Allied-Grinaker 123, 147
- Allsopp, Karen 172 n.63
- ANC *see* African National Congress
- Armour, Denise 193 n.31
- Armstrong, Juliet 39, 82, 100, 156, 185, 193 n.23, 193 n.31, 210
- arson 206
- Aryan Benevolent Society Children's Home 54
- Ashdown 140
- Association for Rural Advancement 15, 52, 82, 100, 106, 127, 190, 219, 263
- Auerbach, Franz 66
- Awetha, Abdul 155
- B**
- Balgowan 28
- Ballinger, Margaret 21 n.37
- Bamford, Rosemary 123
- banishment 54, 60, 74–75
- banned individuals 52, 54, 56–57, 58–59, 61, 63–64, 66, 70, 73, 76, 77
- banned organisations 76, 77, 110
- bantustans 65
- Barlow, Tina 35
- Barnard, Adam 132
- Barracks 77
- Bassett, Lorraine 166
- Baxter, Grace 237
- beaches 131–132
- Beard, Margo 126
- Beardmore, Isabel 32
- Bell, Brenda 176, 180, 192 n.8
- Benjamin, Eileen 9, 168
- Berning, Jill 192 n.8
- BESG *see* Built Environment Support Group
- Beukes, *Brigadier* 105
- Bhamjee, Yusuf 115, 136 n.63
- Bhengu, *Mr* 36
- Biggs, Bunty 33, 34–35, 46, 55, 57, 76, 80, 83, 85–86, 175, 276
- Biko, Steve 16, 76

- Bishop, Brian 87
 Black Consciousness Movement 10, 71, 262
 Black Sash 77, 261; *see also* Advice Office (Pietermaritzburg) and Natal Midlands Black Sash
 and abortion 86, 155, 159
 advice offices 11–12, 18, 20, 22 n.62, 64, 77, 149, 164, 167, 168, 175, 186, 199, 200–201, 215, 219–220, 221–222, 223–224, 227, 231–232; *see also* Viljoen Commission
 and affirmative action 159
 and the ANC 19, 262
 associate members 19, 126
 Cape Town convoy 7
 and capital punishment 18, 57, 86, 159
 and children 18
 and civil disobedience 18
 and clandestine radio 8
 closure of membership 167, 168, 261
 constitution 9
 court monitoring 17, 18
 declaration and foundation 1
 detained members 104
 and fake pamphlet 8
 finance and human resources 166–167
 and forced removal 55–56
 and Freedom Charter 16
 and gender issues 19, 126–127, 143, 144, 160, 264
 haunting of ministers 4–5, 10, 31, 264
 and liberation struggle 262
 marches 1, 4, 5–6, 10, 26
 membership 6, 10, 18, 20, 45–46, 71
 national advice office conferences 201, 215, 219, 225
 national conferences 6, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 34, 46, 48, 50 n.38, 74, 81, 84, 103, 124–126, 143, 155, 157–159, 167
 and non-racialism 10
 origin and adoption of name 6, 8
 pension payout monitoring 16; *see also* old age pensions, payout monitoring
 petitions 3, 13, 14, 26, 262, 264
 political independence 1, 6, 9, 10, 16–17, 19, 66, 99, 162, 262
 press coverage 6
 protest stands and vigils 4, 6, 7–8, 14, 21 n.13, 26, 50 n.35, 64, 262, 264
 radicalisation 7–10, 261–262
 role of 1, 5, 6, 7–10, 12–13, 20, 34, 262
 and rule of law 18, 19
 and sanctions 18
 three-pronged approach 48
 and Universal Declaration of Human Rights 9
 and universal franchise 10, 74
 vigils *see* protest stands and vigils
 and violence 17, 19, 71, 84–86, 90, 97–98, 156–157, 159
 Black Sash Trust 155, 162, 167, 218, 219–220, 226, 231–232
 Black Solidarity Day 76
 black spots *see* forced removal
 Black Students Society 133
 Blackburn, Molly 19
 Bloemfontein 5
 Boesak, Allan 98
 Boraine, Alex 74
 Bosazza, Jean 20 n.2
 Botha, L.L. 84
 Botha, P.W. 74
 Boulle, Jacques 100, 135 n.16
 Bowen, Jenny 98–99, 108, 124, 140–141, 199, 200–201, 204, 206, 278
 bread price 63
 Brews, Alan 156
 Brighton, Nikki 156
 broadcasting 13
 Broll, Terri 215 n.5
 Bromberger, Norman 99
 Brookes, Edgar 32, 33, 56, 57–58, 62
 Brown, Marj 229
 Brown, Peter 32, 33, 47, 48, 52, 56–57, 70, 74, 84, 92
 Brown, Phoebe 25, 34, 52, 53–54, 144, 277
 Brunswick, Chris 251
 BTR-Sarmcol strike 124
 Budhai, Mr 201, 217
 Buffalo Flats 91, 92
 Built Environment Support Group 152
 Bulman, Fiona 40, 82, 116, 123
 Bulwer 228
 Bureau for State Security 56
 Burnett, Andrew 183, 241, 251, 254
 Burnett, Sheila 35, 50 n.31
 Burns, Sarah 108
 Burroughs, Ann 104
 Burton, Mary 12, 20, 100–101, 104, 125,

- 131, 167
 Burton, Simon 105, 150
 bus fares 102
 Busane's store (Vulindlela) 237, 241, 246
 Buthelezi, Mangosuthu 17, 158
- C**
 Cachalia, Amina 62
 Calder, Ian 210
 Caluza 128, 140
 Cameron, Edwin 225, 232 n.10
 Camus, Albert 86
 Canning, Margaret Adelaide *see* Thompson, Mac
 Cape Labour Preference Area 11
 capital punishment 18, 40, 57, 86, 116, 128, 159, 166
 Carlisle, Sarah 143, 210
 Carnegie Conference on Poverty (1984) 99, 198
 Carrim, Yunus 115, 136 n.63
 casspirs 148
 Cathedral of the Holy Nativity 99, 100, 118, 119, 128, 132, 133, 140
 CCB *see* Civil Co-operation Bureau
 censorship 13, 54, 87
 Centlivres, Albert van der Sandt 3
 Chamber of Commerce 106
 Chapman, Christine 39, 41, 118, 143
 Charlestown 91, 92
 Charter for Women 62
 Cherry, Janet 100
 Chetty, Miss 54
 Chikane, Frank 20
 Child Welfare Home 54
 children 18, 60–61, 66, 102, 103, 106, 108, 116, 117, 125, 129–130, 141, 154, 217
 Christian Institute 13, 66, 73, 76
 Church Hunger Fund 191
 Citizens Action Committee 13
 Citizens Committee 5
 Civil Co-operation Bureau 143, 145
 civil disobedience 18, 131
 Civil Rights League 16, 59
 Clacey, Richard 100
 Clarence, Jenny 39, 150, 151
 Clarke, Bob 61
 Clarke, Maggie 82, 83–84, 185, 192 n.8, 193 n.23, 193 n.31
 Coan, Stephen 254
 Cochrane, Renate 40, 41, 127
 Cockburn, Gail 149, 223–224
 Cocker, B. 72
 Coetzee, Blaar 22 n.41
 Coloured Persons Representative Council 65
 coloured voters 2, 3
 Combat Force 147, 153
 Combined Residents and Ratepayers Association 152
 Committee of Inquiry into the Payment of Social Pensions in KwaZulu 255
 Communist Party of South Africa 21 n.29, 51, 154
 Compassion Week 63
 Compensation Farm 100
 conflict monitoring 134
 Congress of Democrats 6, 21 n.29, 36
 Congress of South African Trade Unions 106, 111, 133
 conscientious objection 16, 59
 conscription 16, 59, 128, 154
 Conservative Party 51
 Cool Air 57
 Co-ordinating Committee of Concern 73
 Copesville 146
 Cornell, Mark 130
 Corrigan, Maimie 25, 27, 28, 37, 46, 47, 49 n.3, 60–61, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 86–87, 94 n.56, 175, 262
 corruption 117, 128; *see also* old age pensions, corruption
 COSATU *see* Congress of South African Trade Unions
 court monitoring 15
 Covenant 5, 21 n.21
 Cowling, Lorenza 42, 100, 279
 Cowling, Michael 113, 115, 129
 Cradock Four 16
 Cramond 26
 cricket 57, 120
 Crimen 92
 Cronje, Pierre 100
 cross-border raids 90, 100, 103, 112
 Crouch, Judith 100
 CRRA *see* Combined Residents and Ratepayers Association
 Cunningham Brown, Jeanette 192 n.15
 curfew 78
 Currin, Brian 57

D

DAB *see* Drakensberg Administration Board
 Daly, Mary 4
 DanChurch Aid 164
 Dargle 28
 Davey, Diana 114
 David, Paul 98
 Davis, Angela 147, 148
 De Havilland, *Mrs* 192 n.8
 De Klerk, F.W. 139, 256
 De Tolly, Jenny 127, 128, 146, 147, 159, 166–167, 223
 De Vlieg, Gill 104, 228
 deaths in detention 15, 59, 88
 Defence and Aid Fund 13, 23 n.79
 defiance campaign (1989) 131
 Department of Community Development 77
 Department of Manpower 198, 201, 210, 211, 219, 223, 226
 Department of Plural Relations and Development 78
 Dependents Conference 13
 deportation 59, 104
 DESCOM *see* Detainees Support Committee
 Desmond, Cosmas 59, 67 n.24, 76
 Detainees Parents Support Committee 102
 Detainees Support Committee 87, 105, 135 n.31
 detention without trial 12, 51, 52, 58, 71, 73, 74, 76, 87–88, 90, 97, 99–100, 101, 102, 103, 104–105, 106, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 154, 162; *see also* deaths in detention *and* hunger strikes
 Dhlomo, Oscar 140
 Dicks, Cecil 110, 112, 136 n.47, 142, 146
 Diepkloof prison 106
 Diesel, Alleyn 40, 113, 114, 117, 279
 disability grants 211, 235–236, 244, 253, 256, 257, 258
 domestic workers 177, 182, 218–219, 222, 229
 Dönges, Eben 3
 Doyle, Rose 192 n.8, 193 n.23
 DPSC *see* Detainees Parents Support Committee
 Drakensberg Administration Board 78, 81, 195, 198
 Driefontein 92
 Ducasse, Desmond 72

Duckett, *Mr* 56

Duncan, Sheena 13–14, 18, 19, 20, 25, 74, 75, 76, 79, 87, 97, 99, 106, 116, 149, 155, 162, 167, 185, 186, 187, 201, 202, 204, 215, 219–220, 222, 223, 225, 227, 248, 262
 Dundee 27, 49 n.28, 56
 Dunne, Pat 44, 103, 123, 237, 244
 Dunne, Tim 58
 Durrant, Geoffrey 28
 Dyason, Arthur 135 n.23
 Dyer, Marie 26, 28, 30–31, 34, 44, 45–47, 55, 58–59, 60, 63–64, 65, 77, 82, 84–85, 100, 102, 105–106, 107, 108, 113–114, 123, 127, 150, 169–170, 210, 229, 276

E

Earthlife Africa 145, 149, 165
 ECC *see* End Conscription Campaign
 Echo 156, 222, 236
 Edendale 55, 73, 81, 102, 139, 140, 206
 Edendale Lay Centre 54, 140, 143
 Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare 54
 Edendale Welfare Society 47
 Edgecombe, Ruth 185, 193 n.31
 education 13, 32, 35, 36, 66, 73, 80–82, 143
 Education Vigilance Committee 51
 Eiselen Line 11, 22 n.60
 Ekuvukeni 92
 Eldridge, Stan 68 n.33
 Ellis, Mike 113
 Ellis, Roger 57
 employers 176, 179, 180–181, 188, 195, 198, 201, 211, 212, 219, 228, 263
 Emuseni Home of Kindness 54, 202
 End Conscription Campaign 16, 90, 100, 105, 106, 122, 148, 154, 216 n.15, 263
 Epworth High School 81
 Estcourt 25, 28, 30, 49 n.28, 155
 Eston 26, 49 n.28
 Ezakheni 70, 92

F

Family Day 57, 60–61
 farm labour 13, 156, 182, 219, 222, 227
 Federal Theological Seminary 204
 Federation of South African Trade Unions 79, 176–177, 178, 179, 181, 185, 192 n.16, 193 n.23, 263

Federation of South African Women 10,
16–17, 62
Federation of Womens Institutes 62
FEDSAW *see* Federation of South African
Women
FEDSEM *see* Federal Theological Seminary
Ferguson, Lorna 193 n.23
First, Ruth 100
Fisher, Muriel 27, 28
Five Freedoms Forum 17, 19, 108, 127, 134,
148
floods 205–206
Foley, Ruth 1, 5, 6, 8, 20 n.2, 27, 28, 29
Forbes, John 128
forced removal 14–15, 39, 47, 52, 54, 55–56,
57, 66, 70, 73, 79, 80, 82, 83, 84, 91–92,
99, 106, 127
Ford Foundation 199
FOSATU *see* Federation of South African
Trade Unions
Fouché, Fidela 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 101, 103,
108, 112, 113, 117, 118, 120, 122, 127,
128, 129, 143, 144, 145, 146–147, 149,
152, 154, 160–161, 162, 163–164, 193
n.23
Fowler, Richard 228
Franklin, Beth 92
Free the Children Campaign 18, 101
Freedom Charter 16, 98
freedom of speech 74
Freedom Radio 22 n.42
funerals 132–133, 155

G

game reserves 106
Gandhi, Mohandas 56, 85
Gardner, Colin 57, 58, 100, 105
Gardner, Mary 39, 44, 122
Garman, Anthea 218–219
general elections 65, 74, 97, 164
General Factory Workers Benefit Fund 178
Gerwel, Jakes 131
Gezubuso 140
Girls High School 54, 81
Glaser, Daryl 262
Glennie, Bev 226
Goniwe, Matthew 16
Goodwin, Doris 32
Gordon, Nancy 156

Gordon, Sheila 193 n.23
Grayson, Anne 123
Greater Pietermaritzburg Environmental
Coalition 165
Green, Nell 28–29
Greytown 49 n.28
Grice, Mary 235
Group Areas Resistance Committee 51
Gumede, Archie 32
Gwala, Harry 143, 170 n.17

H

Hackland, Daryl 244
Hadebe, Reggie 155
Hadebe, Thomas 158
Haffejee, Sabera 193 n.31
Hall, Athene 192 n.8, 193 n.23
Hall, Louise 142
Hall, Priscilla 104
Hallows, David 58
Hallows, Ken 58
Hani, Chris 160–161
Happy Valley Action Group 226
Happy Valley informal settlement (Otto's
Bluff) 122, 123, 152–153
Harding 49 n.28
Harley, Anne 143, 145, 149, 150–152, 155,
157, 165, 221–222, 248, 278
Harnden, Joy 104
Harper, Marion 38
Harris, Joyce 14, 77, 167
Harris, Kerry 102, 108
Harris, Verne 126–127
Hart, Juliet *see* Armstrong, Juliet
Haswell, Rob 153
Have You Seen Zandile? (Gcina Mhlope) 156
Hayes, Stephen 61
health 128
Heaton-Nicholls, Douglas 33
Henderson, Fi 193 n.23
Henderson, Sheila 27, 35
Hendrikz, Annemarie 162, 215
Herstigte Nasionale Party 51, 65
Hill, Jean 52
Hilltops 100
Hilton College 54, 72
Hindle, Doreen 193 n.23
Hindson, Doug 193 n.23
Hindson, Sheila *see* Meintjes, Sheila

hire purchase 206, 208, 221
 Hitchens, George 102
 HIV/Aids 225
 Hobbs, Maureen 114, 117
 Hoernlé, Agnes 1
 Hosken, Liz 193 n.23
 house arrest 54, 58
 housing 228–229
 Howes, Sally 128
 Howick 25, 26, 27–28, 30, 35, 49 n.28
 Human Rights Committee 51
 hunger strikes 125
 Hurley, Denis 19, 56, 87, 127
 Hurley, Jeremy 58
 Hyslop, W.M. 30

I

Imbali 81, 124, 128, 154
 Imbali Rehabilitation Committee 158
 Imbali Support Group 133–134
 IMSSA *see* Independent Mediation Service of South Africa
 Independent Mediation Service of South Africa 162, 227
 Industrial Council 198, 202, 204, 219
 Industrial Court 222
 influx control *see* passes
Infobrief 222
 informers and spies 62, 103
 Inkatha 17, 85, 97, 98, 106, 107, 108, 110, 111, 124, 139, 140, 150, 155, 158, 170 n.3, 199, 203, 228, 239
 insurance 199, 205, 208
 interdicts 166
 International Women's Day 124
 Irish, Jenny 157–158
 Irvine, Bruce 192 n.8
 Irvine, Colleen 69
 Ixopo 26, 27, 49 n.28

J

Jackson, Fiona 118
 Jacob, Sol 78
 Jesmondene informal settlement 146
 job reservation 54
 John Vorster Square police station (Johannesburg) 88
 Jonono's Kop 92
 Joseph, Helen 10, 21 n.13, 62, 98

Joshi, Ravi 183
 judiciary 74
 Jugwanth, Saras 165
 Justice and Reconciliation Commission 73

K

Kaplan, Jonathan 114
 Karam, Bochara 42
 Kasrils, Ronnie 48
 Keal, Bobby 41, 104, 114, 210
 Keate's Drift 55
 Keppell-Jones, Arthur 2
 Kerchhoff, Clare 117, 118, 142, 206, 207, 210, 212, 213, 214–215, 251, 252
 Kerchhoff, Joan 39, 41, 44, 62, 85, 90, 104–105, 107, 115, 118, 119, 120, 140, 192 n.8, 193 n.23, 277
 Kerchhoff, Peter 33, 78, 80, 104, 105, 108, 182, 188, 191, 193 n.23, 244, 266
 Keys, Radley 140, 141
 King, Margie 193 n.23
 Kirwood, Margaret 37
 Kistner, Liz 104
 kitskonstabels 170 n.3
 Kleinenberg, Mary 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 82, 108, 110, 112, 113, 114, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123, 128, 131, 133, 140, 141, 142, 143, 146–148, 150, 151, 154, 155, 160–162, 210, 215, 218, 222–223, 225–226, 256, 278, 279
 Kokstad 26, 35, 49 n.28
 Koornhof, P.G. 78, 79, 84, 190
 Kramerae, Cheris 148
 Krone, Anton 142
 Krone, Bridget 142
 Kruger, Jimmy 75, 76
 Krynauw, Johan 108
 Krynauw, Mieke 110, 168–169
 Krynauw, Paula 44, 98, 100, 101, 103–104, 107, 108, 109, 110–111, 128, 168, 169, 278
 Kubeka, V.S. 251
 Kumar, Radha 147, 148
 Kupugani 54, 67 n.11, 191, 196–197
 KwaHlengabantu 54
 KwaKothe store 217
 KwaMnyandu 140
 KwaShange 140
 KwaXimba 161, 228

KwaZulu Department of Health and Welfare
235, 238, 239, 242, 244, 250–251, 252–
253

KwaZulu Indaba 106–107, 111

L

labour tenants 55, 82, 127

Ladysmith 25, 26, 27, 30, 35, 49 n.28, 92

Lake St Lucia 83

Lalla, Ray 161

Lawrence, Dianne 193 n.31

Lawyers for Human Rights 148, 207

Learn with Echo 222

Leeb, Wendy 41, 124–125

Legal Aid Clinic 207

Legal Resources Centre 195, 206–207, 251

Legal Underwriters Association of South
Africa 199

legislation *see* Acts and Bills of Parliament

Levine, Lydia 182, 192 n.8

Liberal Party 1, 25, 33, 36, 49 n.23, 52, 54,
70, 91, 261, 262

Lidgetton 28

Life Offices Association 205

Limehill 56, 92

Lion's River 28

Louw, Eric 5

Lukhau, Gilbert 237, 244, 246, 248

Lund, Elizabeth (Betty) 35, 36

Lund, Vernon 124

Lundie, Ruth 39, 41, 210

Lupton, Sandra 81

Lusaka Conference 19, 127–128

Lusitania 92

Luthuli, Albert 32, 33, 51

M

Mackerdhuj, Krish 89

Macquarrie, John 48, 50 n.46

Madadeni 55, 92

Madlala-Routledge, Nozizwe 19

Makhathini, John 177, 178

Malan, D.F. 3

Malibongwe 139

Mandela, Nelson 14, 19–20, 23 n.81, 48, 52,
97, 120, 134, 169, 261

Mandela, Winnie 74–75, 93 n.19, 160

Mandla, Simon 240

Manson, Cake 53, 67 n.7

Maphumulo, Mhlabunzima 124, 143–144

Maré, Gerry 106–107, 158

Mass Democratic Movement 131

Matatiele 26, 49 n.28

Matawane, Dora 175, 176

Matheson, Sue 128

Mathews, Tony 48, 50 n.46, 100

Matiwane's Kop 92

Matthews, Richard 105

Matthews, Z.K. 91

Maughan Brown, Sue 39, 192 n.8

MAWU *see* Metal and Allied Workers Union

Mbatha, Skhumbuzo Ngwenya 124, 155

McCormack, Gay 191, 210

McDaniels 130

McEwen, E.M. 30

McKenzie, Jennifer 114, 120, 210

McLaren, Elizabeth 20 n.2

MCRF *see* Midlands Crisis Relief Fund

Mdlalose, Frank 238

MDM *see* Mass Democratic Movement

Mdukutshani 83

Meer, Ismael 32

Meidner, Olga 25

Meineke, Julia 215 n.5

Meintjes, Sheila 144, 154, 176, 180, 192 n.8,
193 n.23

Meny-Gibert, Rose 162

Merrett, Christopher 87, 88, 89, 100, 105,
126

Merrett, Pat 39, 41, 44, 71, 82, 98, 100, 106,
108, 111–112, 118, 127, 128, 133, 150,
155, 156–157, 185, 189, 191, 193 n.31,
210, 213, 237, 242–243, 244, 246, 248,
279

Metal and Allied Workers Union 179, 192
n.16

Metal Industries Group Pension Fund
195–196, 198, 203, 220, 230

Mgojo, Khoza 132

Mhlope, Gcina 156

Michaelhouse 54

Michelman, Cherry 1, 9, 12–13, 19

Midas (pseud.) 229

Midlands Crisis Relief Fund 141

migrant labour 14, 73

Mini-Malibongwe Conference 139, 143

minority groups 74

MK *see* Umkhonto we Sizwe

Mkhabela, Sibongile 71–72

- Mkhize, Dianne 146
 Mngadi, Elliot 70
 Mofokeng, *Sister* 197
 Moloto, Justice 58
 Molteno, Donald 10
 Mooi River 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 35, 36, 49
 n.28
 Morkill, Heather 52, 53–54
 Morris, Michael 126
 Morrison, John 150, 192 n.15
 Moses, Thandi 189
 Motala, Chota 52
 motherhood 163
 Moulder, Shirley 133
 Mouton Commission 259
 Mpumuza 140
 Msimang, Selby 28, 33, 52
 Mtetwa, *Mr* 239
 municipal elections 115
 Munnik, L.A.P. 238
- N**
- Naidoo, Nalini 79, 81–82, 88, 176–177, 182,
 187–188, 277
 Namibia 110
 NAPAC *see* Natal Performing Arts Council
 Nash, Margaret 17, 101
 Natal
 Department of Education 54
 violence 97, 105–106, 111, 124–125, 144,
 145, 150–151, 155, 157–158, 159, 206
 Natal Citizens Association 56
 Natal Code 67 n.30
 Natal Convention Continuation Committee
 51
 Natal Indian Congress 132, 133
 Natal Midlands Black Sash 265
 and abortion 155
 and affirmative action 155
 branches 26, 27–28, 30, 31, 34, 35, 52
 camera controversy 128–129
 and Cape convoy 26–27
 and capital of KwaZulu–Natal 166
 court case 115
 and environmental issues 129, 143, 145,
 149, 151–152, 165
 executive committee 80, 100
 foundation 5, 25–26
 fundraising 108, 128, 156, 166
 and gender issues 108, 115, 127, 144–145,
 146, 149, 152, 155, 160, 164–165, 166,
 264–265
 haunting of ministers 30–31
 hosting of national conferences 48, 157,
 159, 160
 human rights festival 166
 jumble sales 77
 letters to the press 58–59, 60–61, 63–64,
 65, 72–73, 76, 77, 81, 83–84, 87, 102,
 107–108, 110, 156–157, 162, 190, 229,
 237, 240, 256, 266
 liaison work 33, 51, 56, 70, 71, 73, 105,
 124, 133, 145, 148, 152, 153, 155
 and marches 42, 53–54, 132, 133, 142
 member meetings 36, 60, 99, 103–104,
 106, 108, 115, 153
 membership 26, 32, 34, 35, 36, 45, 56, 77
 messages to the President 139–140
 Ninety-Day Protest Committee 52
 play 41, 124
 polystyrene protestor 76, 80
 protest stands 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,
 33–34, 36, 37–41, 44, 48, 54, 57,
 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 69–70, 72, 73, 76,
 77–78, 80, 90, 103, 108, 110, 111,
 112–114, 115, 124, 128, 143, 145, 146,
 147, 148, 152, 153, 154, 168, 169, 264,
 266
 public meetings 28, 32, 35, 48, 52, 56–57,
 70, 74, 98, 99, 115, 149
 racial bridge building 31, 48, 73, 153, 266
 Saturday Club *see* tea parties
 and schools 32, 54–55, 72, 266
 sub-committees 100, 116, 128, 129
 tea parties 31–32, 35, 62–63, 73
 and UDF affiliation 98
 views of members 168, 265
 vigils *see* protest stands
 violence monitoring 111–112, 128–129,
 155, 160–161
 vision statement 148
 and voter education 156, 157, 162–163,
 164, 226, 227–228, 229, 263
 Natal Midlands Crisis Committee 140
 Natal Museum 154
 Natal Organisation of Women 139
 Natal Performing Arts Council 61

Natal Witness 56–57, 61, 69, 76, 102,
107–108, 115, 116, 129–130, 153–154,
157, 162
Nathan, Laurie 100
Nathanson, Mary 120
National Committee Against Removals 15
National Council of African Women 71
National Council of Women 45, 71
National Land Committee 15
National Party 2, 3, 7, 9, 27, 51, 65, 111, 112,
158, 262, 264, 265
national reconstruction 101
National Security Management System 97
National Union of South African Students 13,
24 n.120, 51, 53, 63, 66, 99, 261
Native Representative Council 91
Nattrass, Jill 255
Naudé, Beyers 19, 66
NCA *see* Natal Citizens Association
NCAR *see* National Committee Against
Removals
Ndlovu, Moses 87–88
Ndlovu, Phikelela 155
Network of Independent Monitors 155, 157
New Hanover 49 n.28
New Horizon School for the Blind 54
Newcastle 25, 27, 92
Newton Thompson, Helen 20 n.2
Ngoyi, Lilian 62
Ngubane, Jean 237
Ngudle, Looksmart 15, 23 n.95
Ngwenya, Abraham 91, 92
NIC *see* Natal Indian Congress
Nicholson, Jillian 184, 218, 238
Niemoller, Martin 12
NIM *see* Network of Independent Monitors
Nkosi, M.J. 244
NLC *see* National Land Committee
NMCC *see* Natal Midlands Crisis Committee
No Blood on Our Hands 149–151
Non-European Unity Movement 9
Northdale 106
Northern Natal Landowners Association 52,
70
NOW *see* Natal Organisation of Women
Ntamo, Wellington 215
Ntombela, David 140
Ntseli, Mr 252, 253

NUSAS *see* National Union of South African
Students
Nyide, Busi Victoria 87–88, 176, 177, 180,
186–187, 188, 200, 201–202, 204, 205,
206, 207, 210, 213, 215, 248, 249, 277
Nyide, Dumisani 87–88, 181
Nzimande, Blade 225

O

OASSSA *see* Organisation for Appropriate
Social Services in South Africa
old age pensions 63, 66, 143, 145, 146,
193 n.21, 235–238, 239, 240, 241–244,
250–260, 260 n.7
age determination 238–239, 242
case studies 236, 241, 243, 244, 250,
253–255, 257, 258–260
corruption 235–236, 238, 244
deaths at payout points 254
demonstration 255–256
parity 146, 240, 256, 257, 259
payout monitoring 16, 199, 231, 237, 239,
241, 243, 244, 247, 250, 263
Oliver, Mike 127
Organisation for Appropriate Social Services
in South Africa 213
outdoor gatherings 14, 63, 70, 72, 73, 80, 110

P

PAC *see* Pan Africanist Congress
PACSA *see* Pietermaritzburg Agency for
Christian Social Awareness
Padarath, Ashnie 231
Pan Africanist Congress 34
Park-Ross, Mary 62, 72–73, 80, 81, 86, 180,
185
passes 11, 15, 32, 35, 54, 62, 66, 100, 179,
198, 201
Paton, Alan 10, 28, 33, 52, 56, 91–92
PDA *see* Pietermaritzburg Democratic
Association
Peace in Natal 158
pensions 207–208, 211; *see also* old age
pensions
Peter Pan Play Centre 54
PFP *see* Progressive Federal Party
Phatteni 155
Phillips, B.M. 229
Phillips, Madeleine 34
Pholosi, Kgweddi Ezekiel 87

- Pietermaritzburg 265–266
 economic recession 179, 180, 183, 190, 191, 199–200
 industry 178
Pietermaritzburg 1990: The Fractured City 145
 Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness 99, 105–106, 115, 133, 141, 206, 213, 239
 Pietermaritzburg City Council 48, 77, 102, 151
 and housing 146, 152–153
 municipal regulations and by-laws 80, 113
 and segregation 61
 Town Clerk 70
 Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches 141, 189
 Pietermaritzburg Day Centre Steering Committee 124
 Pietermaritzburg Democratic Association 105
 Pillar Naco 207–208
 PIN *see* Peace in Natal
 Piper, Solveig 176
 Plessislaer 54, 140, 142
 pollution 112, 129
 Poodhun, *Mr* 36
 Portia (pseud.) 64–65
 poverty 63, 69, 99, 196, 197, 198, 200
 Power, Sue 162
 President's lunch (Pretoria, 1994) 169–170
 press freedom 74, 84, 97, 103, 110
 Prestwich, Mark 48, 50 n.46
 Pretorius, Cara 180, 185, 192 n.8, 193 n.23, 193 n.31
 Pretorius, Danne 192 n.8
 Pridmore, Roma 196–197
 prisons and prisoners 15, 80
 Progressive Federal Party 105, 262
 Progressive Party 12, 36, 51, 54, 64, 65
 Prozesky, Leonie 210, 215 n.5
 Pybus, Tertia 20 n.2
- R**
 railway workers 182
 Ramaphosa, Cyril 161
 Ramgobin, Mewa 58
 Ramphele, Mamphela 81, 99
 Rape Crisis 148
 Rape Education Action Project 148, 165, 166
 Raphaely, Jane 107
 Raynham, Sarah-Anne 227
 REAP *see* Rape Education Action Project
 recycling 149, 151
 Reeves, Norman 153
 refugees 112, 115, 116, 124, 128, 129–130, 141, 144, 145, 146, 158, 217
 regionalism 158, 159
 Reid, Pamela 32
 Republic Festival (1981) 14, 83–84
 Rhodes University 2
 Richardson, Carleen 117, 118
 Richardson, Kate 118
 Richmond 49 n.28, 155, 227
 Rickard, Carmel 124–125, 176, 192 n.8
 Riekert, Julian 192 n.8
 Rikhoto case 12, 195, 215 n.1
 Rivett-Carnac, Angela 39
 Rivonia Trial 48
 Robb, Noel 12, 167
 Robbins, Ron 152–153
 Roberts, Joy 33–34, 47, 48, 144, 277
 Robertson, Ian 53
 Robin (cartoonist) 2
 Robinson, Janet 7
 Roosboom 70
 Royal Agricultural Society, Royal Show and Showgrounds 84, 108–109, 122, 209
 Ruether, Rosemary Radford 43, 131
 rule of law 17, 19
 rural areas 15
 Russell, Eleanor 25, 27, 32, 45, 46, 49 n.8
 Rutsch, Peter 100, 183, 201, 204, 207
 Rutsch, Sandy 175
- S**
 SABC *see* South African Broadcasting Corporation
 SACC *see* South African Council of Churches
 SACOS *see* South African Council on Sport
 SACTU *see* South African Congress of Trade Unions
 SADF *see* South African Defence Force
 SADWU *see* South African Domestic Workers Union
 SAIRR *see* South African Institute of Race Relations
 SAP *see* South African Police
 SAR *see* South African Railways
Sash Magazine 7, 12, 108, 168

- Sauer, Paul 4, 30
Say No to Rape 166
 Schlebusch Commission 66
 Schoeman, Ben 4
 Schoeman, S.J. 156
 Schreiner, Denys 5, 21 n.19
 Schreiner, Else 1, 4, 5–6, 25, 27, 45, 71, 109, 165, 276
 Schreiner, Jennifer 109, 164
 Schwikkard, P.J. 141
 security companies 203
 security police 53, 58, 62, 65, 76, 87–88, 90–91, 99, 103, 105, 110–111, 112, 114, 118, 124
 Seethal, Patsy 148
 September, M.M. 251, 253, 255–256
 Seven Day War (1990) 97, 140–142, 150–151
 Shapiro, Gabby 104
 Shaw, Margie 210
 Shiva, Vandana 148
 Sikakane, *Reverend* 54
 Silburn, Jenny 175, 193 n.31
 Sinclair, Jean 1, 13, 14, 20 n.2, 64
 Singh, *Mr* 56
 Sisulu, Albertina 98, 163
 Sisulu, Walter 23 n.81
 Skelton, Ann 165
 Slovo, Joe 169
 Small Claims Court 207, 219, 220, 221
 Smallbones, Jane 104
 Smit, *Mr* 251
 Smith, Tim 251
 Smuts, Mike 110–111
 Sobantu 206
 Sobukwe, Robert 46
 Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty 18, 116
 Sodwana Bay 83
 Solomon, Bertha 21 n.37
 Soutar, M.E. 30
 South African Broadcasting Corporation 115
 South African Christian Council 206
 South African Communist Party *see* Communist Party of South Africa
 South African Congress of Trade Unions 179
 South African Council of Churches 13, 18
 South African Council on Sport 88, 89
 South African Defence Force 90, 100, 103, 108, 110, 159, 230–231
 South African Domestic Workers Union 200, 204, 219
 South African Indian Council 65
 South African Institute of Race Relations 13, 16, 22 n.62, 50 n.36, 54, 66, 77, 78, 79, 185, 186, 263
 South African Police 44, 53, 103, 106, 110, 112, 113, 114, 120, 139–140, 141–143, 154, 158, 159, 161
 South African Railways 184–185
 Soweto Uprising 71
 Spain, Yvonne 104, 114, 213
 Sparks, Allister 141
 Special Branch *see* security police
 Spiller, Gaye 104, 193 n.31
 Spink, Kathryn 11, 15, 18, 84, 110
 Spivak, Gayatri 148
 sport boycott 88–89
 Springbok Patrols 229–230
 St Joseph's Theological Seminary 214
 St Rafael's Church (Swartkop) 191, 243
 St Wendolins 94 n.47
 Standing for Truth Campaign 42, 132–133
 Stanford, Pauline 131
 State of Emergency (1960) 34, 134 n.1
 State of Emergency (1986–1990) 18, 87, 97, 100, 101, 104, 108, 109–110, 111, 112, 113, 128, 133, 134 n.1
 state secrecy 128
 Statute of Westminster 3
 Steencoalspruit 92
 Steenkamp, Loots 213
 Stendahl Mission 99
 Stent (cartoonist) 27
 Stevens, Didi 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 108
 Stewart, Sandy 104
 Steyn, Richard 68 n.33
 Stielau, Jo 41, 44, 114, 123
 Stilwell, Christine 175
 Stilwell, Pat 183
 Stott, Eulalie 167
 Strauss, J.G.N. 3, 9
 Strauss, Meg 62
 street children *see* refugees
 street theatre protest 165
 Strijdom, Hans 26

Strode, Ann 157, 215, 218, 219, 222, 248, 254, 255, 256

Stuart, Brian 58

Student Wages Commissions 178

Sutcliffe, Mike 108

Sutton, Betty 30

Suzman, Helen 21 n.37, 51, 66, 75

Swart, C.R. 3

Swart, Ray 28

Swartkop Location *see* Vulindlela

T

Table Mountain 124, 143–144, 146, 158, 217, 218

Tarboton, Doreen 29

Tarr, Ashton 77

Tarr, Mike 130, 156

Terry, Gwladys 32

This Is Your City: Pietermaritzburg (three editions) 69, 102, 145

Thompson, Mac 169

Thompson, Peter 169

Tomaselli, Ruth 115

Tonkin, Paddy 193 n.23

Torch Commando 4, 5, 8, 9, 25, 261

torture 111

TRAC *see* Transvaal Rural Action Committee

Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council 178

Transvaal Rural Action Committee 15, 220

tricameral parliament 74, 98

Truluck, Anne *see* Harley, Anne

Trust Feed 157, 172 n.65

TUACC *see* Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council

Tugela Ferry 55

Tutu, Desmond 19, 87, 98

U

UCM *see* University Christian Movement

UDF *see* United Democratic Front

UIF *see* Unemployment Insurance Fund

Umkhonto we Sizwe 48–49, 86

Underwood, Ruth 105

unemployment 69, 73, 74, 176, 198

Unemployment Insurance Fund 73–74, 177, 179–180, 181, 182, 184, 191, 193 n.21, 200, 201–202, 204, 208, 211

United Democratic Front 16, 98–99, 106, 107, 111, 139, 140, 199

United Nations 46, 60, 223, 225

United Party 1, 3, 6, 9, 12, 20 n.5, 52

United Workers Union of South Africa 106

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 9, 60

Universal Declaration of Women's Rights as Human Rights 163

universal franchise 10, 32, 45, 50 n.36, 74

universities 12, 13

University Christian Movement 58, 66

University of Natal (Durban) 206–207

University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) 53

Centre for Adult Education 204, 222

Centre for Criminal Justice 148

Drama Department 79

Students Representative Council 133

University Lectures 116

unrest areas 103, 134 n.1, 154

Urban Foundation 190

urban residential rights 195

UWUSA *see* United Workers Union of South Africa

V

Vale, Louise 104

Van der Walt Commission 79

Van Gylswyk, Annica 104

Van Niekerk, Susana 21 n.37

Van Schalkwyk, Loretta 235

Van Wyk, Mark 192 n.8, 193 n.23

Van Wyk Smith, Rosemary 31, 139, 162

Van Wyngaard, Monique 39, 114

Vawda, Joe 104

Veda Dharma Sabha 132

Venter, E.H. 256

Verbeek, Clare 90, 106

Verbeek, Jennifer 106, 114, 279

Verwoerd, H.F. 53

Victims of Apartheid 133

Vigne, Randolph 70

Viljoen, Gerrit 88

Viljoen, Val 162

Viljoen Commission 154, 161–162

Vlok, Adriaan 125, 132, 150

Volker, Val 32–33

Von Klemperer, Julian 90, 151

Vorster, B.J. 53, 72

Voss, Jane 175, 176

Vryheid 49 n.28

Vulindlela 59, 140, 191, 251

W

Waaihoek 99
 Waite, Barbara 84
 Walker, Cheryl 55, 79, 82, 83, 87, 100
 Walwyn, David 99
 Wannenburg, Gail 123, 157, 222, 223, 226,
 227, 228, 229–230
 war toys 105, 148
 Washbank 56
 Webb, Colin 53, 65
 Webb, Fleur 31–32, 39, 53, 65, 69–70, 276
 Webster, David 4, 128, 137 n.83
 Weenen 30, 55, 82, 106, 127
 Weinberg, Leslie 57, 86, 90
 Weinberg, Pessa 33, 41, 87, 90–91, 99, 117,
 276
 Wellington, Lloyd 58
 Wellington, Pam 62
 Wentzel, Jill 17, 88, 89, 162
 White, H.D. 69, 70
 White, Jon 257, 258
 Wiehahn Commission 179
 Wiggill, Felicity 123
 Wilgefontein 190
 Wilgespruit 214
 Williams, M. 192 n.8
 Williams, Martin 153–154, 162
 Willows, Clive 129
 Wilson, Francis 99
 Wittenberg, Martin 109, 136 n.46
 Wittenberg, Monika 39, 44, 123, 160–161
 women 118, 119, 139, 163–164
 African 60, 62, 67 n.30, 87, 145, 154,
 223–225
 and the Constitution 163, 164

dismissal of 229
 peace march (Edendale, 1990) 121,
 141–143
 and politics 29, 164
 suffrage 50 n.36
 white 163
 Women for Peaceful Change Now 70–71,
 87, 148
 Women's Charter 155, 165
 Women's Day rally (Edendale, 1989) 43, 131
 Womens Defence of the Constitution League
 see Black Sash
 Womens National Coalition 154–155, 164,
 165, 227
 Wood, Iris 38
 Woods, Donald 76
 Woods, Puck 35
 Working for Peace Campaign 100
 workmen's compensation 11, 181–182, 185,
 207, 211–212
 World Council of Churches 57
 Worsnip, Jane 116, 118, 142
 Wright, John 150
 Wright, Maureen 210
 Wykeham School 72

Y

Yates, Margie 175
You and Rape 166
You and the Constitution 149, 150, 155–156
You and the Vote 162, 227
 Young, Bunny 193 n.23
 Young Mens Christian Association 130

Z

Zondi's store (Vulindlela) 237, 241, 242

WHAT WAS the relevance and legacy of the Black Sash, the women's anti-apartheid organisation, and what did this mean to its members? This book looks specifically at the Natal Midlands (Pietermaritzburg) region and the distinctiveness of its contribution.

Like other regions it supported the liberation struggle through public protest and educational campaigns aimed at exposing iniquitous apartheid legislation. In a police state this required considerable determination and courage. During the darkest hours Natal Midlands Sash kept alive hope for universal civil rights in a democratic South Africa.

The Pietermaritzburg Advice Office became one of the country's busiest, specialising in old age pension and disability grant issues. Knowledge painstakingly gathered about life for black South Africans was fed back into Sash's political and information campaigns while Natal Midlands produced several significant publications.

One of the smaller branches, it punched above its weight. Whether Sash was a political pressure group of women, or a women's organisation challenging patriarchy, generated lively debate. Environmental issues were also accorded a high priority.

Fifteen interviews show that involvement in Sash was a life-enhancing experience for many members who have looked back with pride and honour at their part in the anti-apartheid movement from 1955 to 1994.



Occasional Publications of
The Natal Society Foundation.
PIETERMARITZBURG



Photographs are from the archives of the Natal Midlands Black Sash