

FSAW Cc4.3

MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN NURSES
AND MIDWIVES AND TO THE RAND NURSES PROFESSIONAL CLUB BY THE
FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN.

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify the proposed campaign of the women of the Federation of South African Women and the A.N.C. Women's League in opposition to the compulsory production of identity numbers for the registration of nurses.

It is obvious that the intention of the Nationalist government goes far beyond the establishment of the separate registers called for in the Nursing Act. The demand for identity numbers is a deliberate attempt not only to compel African nurses to carry passes, but to introduce passes for African women into the cities and larger towns, where until now Verwoerd has not dared to send the pass units. It is clear that the government hopes that if African nurses are compelled to produce numbers which apparently can be obtained only from reference books, the example of nurses will easily be followed by other African women, who see their educated sisters, member of a highly respected profession, accepting passes.

On African nurses, therefore, rests a heavy and a double responsibility; those who take reference books for the purpose of registration betray not only themselves and their fellow nurses, but also hundreds of thousands of African women, who look to the nurses, now in the forefront of Verwoerd's attack, for courage and loyalty. And they betray the noble women of Zeerust, Lichtenburg and Uitenhague who suffered gaol rather than accept passes.

The Federation of South African Women and the A.N.C. Women's League realise the desperate position of the nurses and are determined that they shall not face this attack without the mass support of women. As women and mothers we are determined also that our daughters must be protected, for young girls who enter hospitals for training are far from the protection of their homes. Women will bitterly and steadfastly oppose this attack upon the nurses and through them upon all African women.

To this end, therefore, it has been decided that the major campaign of the Federation of South African Women in 1958 will be in support of the opposition of nurses to passes; non-nursing women propose to organise mass demonstrations of women of all races to hospitals to protest to matrons who are compelling nurses to produce identity numbers. The women will present their objections to the matrons and will maintain that they will not permit their daughters to commence or to continue training as nurses under these conditions.

It must be clearly realised, however, that these mass demonstrations will be from outside the hospitals, and that they will not call for official participation by nurses, for this could only be as a result of the decision of the nurses themselves. Women realise fully the dangerous position of the nurses in relation to their careers and their livelihood, a danger that has not yet directly confronted other women. The purpose of the women's campaign is to show clearly that thousands of women not only support the opposition of nurses but will demonstrate the opposition of all women to this vicious exploitation of the nursing profession for political ends. Similarly, non-nursing women of all races will protest to the S.A. Nursing Council and will make representations to national and international women's organisations. This action will not depend upon action by nurses' organisations, but it should not be isolated from the active opposition of nurses. It is for this reason that the proposal has been made that there should be close liaison at both national and regional levels, so that we may all go forward as women in harmony and co-operation, although not necessarily in joint or simultaneous action. It is of the utmost importance that there should be full knowledge and confidence between the nurses' organisations and the organisations of non-nursing women.

The Federation of South African Women and the African National Congress Women's League have each appointed four representatives to a national liaison committee and it is our earnest hope that the Federation of South African Nurses will also send four representatives to this liaison committee so that by our mutual understanding and co-ordination the women of South Africa, nurses and non-nurses may go forward in united opposition to this attack upon the nursing profession, and may show South Africa and the world outside that women are not prepared to accept the slavery of the pass system.

Similar liaison committees are being formed at provincial and regional levels, and once again we hope that the Rand Nurses Professional Club and other regional organisations of nurses will also send four representatives, to form this essential liaison with other women's organisations.

Every effort will be made to broaden this liaison committee so as to include women representatives of many other organisations and also individual women and to form a firm united front of protest against this attack upon nurses.

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