

**AE10**

# AZASO

Azanian Students Organisation

Rev A E 10!!

Organising for a peoples education



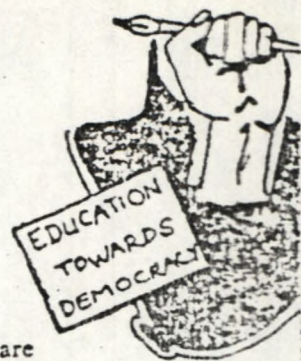
PAPERS FROM AZASO WOMENS CONFERENCE

## CONTENTS

1. Working Programme.
2. Women in National Democratic Struggles -- Sandy Afrika
3. Sexism and Education - Lesly Watson
4. Organising Women Students - Kamy Chetty



# WOMENS WORKING PROGRAMME



## OUR REALITY

South African society is characterised by capitalism. This means that the majority of people are economically exploited. Capitalism in South Africa is maintained and perpetuated through racial oppression, ie black people being denied the right to choose or vote for the type of government they want. This form of capitalism is known as racial capitalism.

Black women in South Africa suffer a triple oppression, ie race class and sex. The involvement of women in the economy has resulted in greater exploitation of women and the strengthening of economic power for the capitalist. In a capitalist society, women are used as reproducers of labour for the capitalist market. They are directly responsible for the rearing and maintenance of a healthy workforce for the labour market.

Exploitative society promotes the ideology, culture and education that serves its interests. The social oppression women suffer in South Africa though common to most societies, furthers the interests of the present status quo, because by keeping women in a state of subservience, it is ensuring that more than 50% of the population is kept in a state of bondage.

## OUR APPROACH TO THE STRUGGLE

Our response to racial capitalism in South Africa is through the waging of struggle, on all fronts where there is any form of oppression and exploitation. Our approach is through the National Democratic Struggle. It is National because it involves all the people of South Africa. It is Democratic because it takes up the interests of the majority of the people in South Africa - who are workers.

In addition we need to organise women as an oppressed sector around issues that directly affect them and to link this to the National Democratic Struggle.

## WHY DO WE ORGANISE WOMEN STUDENTS?

The primary site of struggle for students is in the educational sphere. The content of the educational system and the way it is organised perpetuates sexism. Women have to be organised to challenge these specific problems. Because sexism cannot be eradicated from our society without fundamental change, women students need to be organised to play a role in the National Democratic Struggle.

Therefore our aims and objectives of Women's groups should be:-

1. To unite women students around issues which affect them.
2. To encourage women to participate in broader student struggles.
3. To develop confidence and provide training skills for women.
4. To fight sexist attitudes and practices on campus.

5. To expose the sexist nature of our education.

6. To forge links with progressive women's and other organisations outside campus.

7. To ensure the continuous participation of women in ongoing organisational work.

## Methods of organising women students

Methods used to organise women must ensure we raise awareness, involve the maximum number of women and strengthen organisation.

We must understand the constituency that we are dealing with. There are certain social problems which hinder the effective participation of women students in struggle. Our methods must take cognisance of these facts and we must work from the level at which the students are.

1. It may be necessary to organise at an intermediate level at certain campuses eg social events, clubs etc.

2. We must identify and take up issues that appeal to the broader mass of women students. These issues may be:-

- a) rape
- b) contraception
- c) expulsion of pregnant students
- d) establishment of creches
- e) hostel problems
- f) curriculum problems

and others that may arise at the different campuses.

3. We can raise awareness by holding commemorative services, seminars and discussions.

4. To strengthen organisations, we need to develop organisational skills through training workshops, decentralisation of tasks and sharing of responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION

While the organisation of women students may take place around different issues depending on specific conditions on different campuses, our ultimate objective is common - that of organising women students to take their rightful place in the National Democratic Struggle.

## WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

1984 is an important year for women throughout the world. It marks the last year of the United Nations Death of Women, which began in 1974. In this period, and even before, women have struggled, together with their peoples, for food for all, health and child care facilities, higher wages, adequate housing peace and political rights. In countries as far apart as China, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Cuba, women have joined hands with these forces struggling for a world free of economic exploitation and political injustice.

1984 is also an important year for South African women. On 17 April this year, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Federation of S.A. women. Women students joined hands with working class women to celebrate this proud day in our history. The Federation was formed in 1954 to unite women of all races and classes in the struggles for better living conditions for South Africa's working people, and for full political rights. Involving women in struggle on this basis, the Fed, thus articulated, not only the demands of women, but also the demands of all S.A.'s exploited and oppressed people. The Fed has been an important organisation in our history, since it is the organisation in which mass based women's struggle has its roots.

Many great and courageous leaders of our people's national liberation movement, were actively involved in the Fed. Among them are Lilian Ngoyi, Dora Tamana, Helen Joseph, Dorothy Nyembe, Albertina Sisulu, and too many others to mention. Today, these leaders continue to inspire women and working class people in the march towards freedom.

Why have women from all corners of the world seen the need to organise themselves? It must be said that the unmitigated violence of harsh regimes has not been felt by men alone, but in a special way by women and children. Not only have women had to endure their husbands, lovers and sons being tortured, maimed and killed in struggle; they themselves have been raped, and molested, and they have seen their children disappear into the hands of the enemy. Many women have given their lives in the struggle for liberation. But women have not accepted these injustices. They have refused to accept such pain and an ideological conditioning which teaches them to be passive and obedient. No! women have fought back.

Women played an active role in the Russian Revolution. In 1917, women textile workers in Petrograd were the first to go on strike. Their demands were simple - for bread, for peace, for justice. But the effects of their action were far reaching, and in October 1917, they were joined by all Russian workers in the final stage of the struggle to overthrow imperial Russia and its ruling classes.

Russia was the first revolution and women were there with the menfolk. In other revolutions too, women have played a leading role. In China, women participated actively in a cultural, political and economic overhaul of their society. In Nicaragua, women joined hands with all the people to overthrow the ruthless Somoza dictatorship. And so on....

### DIFFERENT WAYS OF SEEING.

Yet despite this agreement has not always been reached on the role of women in the struggle and the importance of the women's struggle. In Central America and particularly in Nicaragua, women have argued that the liberation of their country comes first, and that they have fought alongside their menfolk to raise human dignity, after which the elevation of women's status would be possible.

Others have argued that if women submerge their particular needs and demands to the struggle, then women are 'selling out' to men or to the revolution, and that if they don't have their vision of liberation, national liberation will not include the liberation of women.

Despite these problems and despite the fact that sexism is an ideology that is deeply entrenched and one which will be slowly obliterated, it is clear from examples of countries engaged in post liberation reconstruction that women who have fought for liberation are not content to revert to traditional roles. What is important however, both for women engaged in the struggle for national liberation, and for women engaged in reconstruction, is that because they are confronted by both the issues of national liberation and sexism, they need to work with and to gain support from other women. This is because women know best how they have been particularly exploited and oppressed, and women know best which issues most affect them and which need to be taken up - be they issues of literacy, education, child care, health care or violence. Women have extracted the women's content in the struggle around their everyday lives, whether they have felt national liberation must precede women's emancipation, whether they have felt the two must be worked for simultaneously, or whether they have felt sexism must be overcome firstly, so that women can take their rightful place in the national liberation movement.

The Federation of South African Women, e.g. believed that women had to relate their struggles around child care, etc, the broader struggle for freedom in South Africa. They believed that without national liberation, women could never be free and could at most achieve mechanical equality with men. Since women's oppression was rooted in the structure of South African society, e.g. the migrant labour system, structural employment and so on, it was necessary to eradicate these if any attempts at women's liberation were to be meaningful.

### SOME QUESTIONS

The questions which women struggling in South Africa are asking, and around which the Federation of South African Women were organised, have been asked (and partly answered by women involved in struggles in other societies.)

- Around what issues should women be organised?
- How can women be organised to maximise gains for the national democratic liberation movement, whilst ensuring that women too are freed of sexual oppression?
- Is there a need for a separate or autonomous women's movement?
- What should be the relationship between the women's movement and the national democratic liberation movement - in other words, what is the relationship between women's struggle and the class struggle?

Before we try to answer any of these questions we need to understand what it is that characterises certain struggles which people wage as national democratic in method. Let us look briefly at South Africa and then at one or two societies.

### THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, all black people, who make up the vast majority of the population, are denied a vote, and are subject to the apartheid laws of the land, whatever their class position. Moreover, even the white South Africans, who have access to parliamentary mechanisms once every 5 years, are denied access to the most influential decision-making apparatus in the country. Any struggle for fundamental change must thus harness the energies of all who are oppressed, and all democratic whites,

mobilising them in order to gain control of the decision-making apparatuses which govern their day-to-day lives.

But the above-mentioned process of national oppression must be seen in its proper relationship to the fundamental contradiction in our society - the exploitative economic relationship which exists between the capitalist class and the workers. Any struggle for fundamental change, if it is to involve the majority of the people, must take into account the interests of the majority of the people - the workers, in the case of South Africa.

Thus, for a struggle to be national democratic in character, it must at once unite all sectors and classes of people, for change, whilst at the same time projecting the interests of the workers of that society, as paramount.

In the South African context, the national democratic demands of the people are contemplated in the Freedom Charter, drawn up at the historic Congress of the People in 1955, after months of consultation with people from all walks of life about the kind of future S.A. they would like to live in. Today, the Freedom Charter remains a guiding beacon for those engaged in the national democratic struggle.

#### OTHER PEOPLE'S STRUGGLES

The national democratic struggles of other peoples have had similar features. On 19 July 1979, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSNL) guerilla army marched into Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. Their victory hailed the downfall of Anastasio Somoza, the last in line of the Somoza family, which had ruled Nicaragua for 40 years. It also signified an overthrow of the power of the United States which, through support of rulers such as Somoza, had effectively controlled the country for over 100 years, and which continues to control other countries of the South American region, such as El Salvador.

What special features of the struggle of people of Nicaragua characterise it as national democratic in method? For over half a century the Somoza family had dictated to Nicaragua - with the aid and protection of the United States government. The family alone controlled a large chunk of the economy - nearly 1/3 of the country's arable land, the majority of the most profitable industries, the import and export trade, and transport. While Somoza's personal fortune approached 1000 million dollars, the vast majority of Nicaragua's people were illiterate, without adequate housing and shelter, and living on extremely low wages. It was these conditions which led to the mass organisation of people to change the conditions of their lives. Yet the Somoza regime also met with the disapproval of some of the members of the petty bourgeoisie, because the dictatorship stifled opposition, denying them effective decision-making powers. Thus, the national democratic struggle in Nicaragua incorporated peasants, workers and sections of the petty bourgeoisie, though, once again, the interests of the workers and peasants were regarded as paramount. The FSNL sought a complete restructuring of social relationships within the country, and replacement of the capitalist system by true democracy.

Let us take a brief look at the struggle of the people of Mozambique - also national democratic in character. In Mozambique, FRELIMO (the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) was formed in 1962 out of 3 contending political organisations to unite all Mozambicans against Portuguese colonialism. The armed struggle was waged so as to eradicate the exploitative relations between the worker and peasant majority on the one hand, and the colonial bourgeoisie on the other. Because Mozambican petty bourgeois elements, with the exception of a tiny assimilado grouping, were treated almost as harshly by the colonial governments as the peasants and workers, and had no formal say in the government, they too had an interest in seeing the collapse of Portuguese colonialism. For this reason, they acted together with the workers and peasants within the

boundaries of one political framework to alter the relations of production and power in Mozambican society.

And so on. The struggles of the people of China and Zimbabwe also saw the unity of workers, peasants and a revolutionary section of the petty bourgeoisie, struggling to replace feudalism and capitalism with a system of control in which the interests of the workers and peasants would be foremost in a nevertheless egalitarian society.

#### SO WHAT ABOUT WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE?

When trying to understand the above-mentioned struggles, it is important to pay special attention to the position of the majority of women, who, besides being naturally oppressed and economically exploited, are faced with the burden of sexual (social) oppression. It is important that we understand social oppression correctly. Samora Machel, president of FRELIMO, and of Mozambique, points out:

"The basis of the domination of women lies in the system of economic organisations of society, private ownership of the means of production, which necessarily leads to the exploitation of man by man. That means that, apart from the specific features of their situation, the contradiction between women and the social order, is in essence a contradiction between women and the exploitation of man by man, between women and the private ownership of the means of production. In other words, it is the same as the contradiction between the working masses and the exploitative social order."

If we examine women's positions before, during and after national democratic revolutions, we see that social oppression has not been caused by mere nastiness on the part of the men towards women, but has been founded on material (mainly economic but also political) imperatives.

#### POSITION OF WOMEN BEFORE THE PERIOD OF NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

Prior to the struggle, all the countries under discussion, were heavily male dominated. Women were projected ideologically as homemakers, providing sexual pleasure to their husbands; children (especially sons) to bring wealth into the family, and unpaid domestic and agricultural labour. The subordinate positions had implications for women's location in the economy. It ensured that any agricultural or other economic surplus women produced, could easily be appropriated by certain menfolk, thus reinforcing class divisions within society.

#### WOMEN IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

It is possibly true to say that women in pre-revolutionary China were among the most exploited and oppressed groups the world has ever seen. Women of the Chinese upper classes were cloistered throughout their lives, passing from the control of fathers to that of their husbands. They were housed behind high walls, never seeing the outside world. Peasants and working women were not so effectively cloistered, as their labour was necessary, but they were no less isolated or excluded. In an impoverished society subject to the ravages of drought, floods and famine, the birth of a girl child was often lamented and infanticide was a frequent occurrence. Another frequent occurrence was the sale of female children into slavery. Ideology also played the role of projecting women as weak and passive, and men as all things bright, strong, active and positive.

More horrific than all this, was the physical coercion to enforce women's passivity and compliance. This, in China took the form of foot-binding. Foot-binding was a cruel and inhuman practice which involved the breaking of a girl child's toes at the age of about 6 years. They were bent under her feet which

were then bound so that they remained small. Considered erotic and a sign of beauty, this deformation caused women to walk with a small, mincing gait, and the tiny bound foot was seen as a symbol of sexuality, submission and dependence. The practical consequence for women were that this handicap reinforced the condition of seclusion to which ideology subjected them, hampered their mobility and their ability to gain economic independence.

#### WOMEN IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY ZIMBABWE

In traditional Zimbabwe society, men wanted wives to bear them sons, so as to carry on the male lineage. Women who did not bear sons were looked upon with scorn. Marriages were arranged between the elders of the extended families, who determined which marriages would best suit their families' ends. Women were allowed no choice in the matter.

The imposition of colonial domination entrenched women's subordinate status. In fact, it distorted the traditional forms of women's subjection to meet the needs of capitalist accumulation. Women's status and rights with regard to marriage and family, which previously had been determined by customary law, became subject to the interpretation of settler officials. Though were regarded as majors in the eyes of the judicial system, women were seen as minors in perpetual bondage and tutelage to their guardians.

#### WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

In traditional South African society, women have played a vital role in the economic life of the village. In fact, women have provided most agricultural output, working long hours. Moreover, women's days have consisted not only in agricultural production but in also serving the needs of the family - cooking, washing and cleaning. Strict economic control has been exercised over women through the institution of lobola and, in political decision making, women have played only a minor role.

Traditionally, Indian women in South Africa too have been discriminated against - through forced marriages, and lives of domesticity, particularly.

Women in all these countries, and others, have not sat back and accepted these conditions. They have fought, both against social oppression and the practice of harsh ruling classes.

#### THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

Let us now go on to look at the role that women have played in the national democratic struggles of their countries. In China, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa, women have been drawn into freedom struggles. The way they have organised themselves has qualitatively affected the nature of the new states their people have tried to create.

#### WOMEN IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Whilst the Russian Revolution focused on the proletariat as the main vehicle of struggle, conditions in China lead to a different perspective. Because of extremely repressive conditions in the towns, the thrust of the revolution took place in the countryside where a vicious form of feudalism brought peasant resentment to boiling point.

The main features of Chinese feudal society were that:

- a) peasants produced for themselves agricultural products and most of the handicrafts they needed. What the landlords and nobility exacted from peasants in the form of land rent was chiefly for private enjoyment and not for exchange. Nevertheless, the peasants worked long, hard hours under difficult conditions;



- b) Women were oppressed, subjected both to the feudal authorities and to their menfolk. They worked hard in the fields, and also at home - cooking, cleaning and rearing children. Chinese feudal society lasted for 3000 years. It was not until the middle of the 19 century, with the foreign capital, that great changes took place in Chinese society. However, over the years, China's feudal society had developed a commodity economy and thus carried within it the seeds of capitalism. The Chinese feudal forces colluded with imperialism to arrest the development of Chinese capitalism, and women were actively involved in the struggle both to put an end to this and to bring about an entirely new and democratic order.

By the 1920's many women, mainly professionals and students were engaged in the struggle against foreign aggression. These women articulated demands that reflected their desire for social equality in Chinese society. They demanded equal job opportunities, equal pay and the end of foreign rule. However, these were not necessarily the demands of the present working class women who were struggling to eke out a living and whose demands included food, shelter and economic independence.

Some women within the Communist Party of China saw the need to articulate the demands of peasant and working class women, and to incorporate women into a struggle, not merely for mechanical equality with men, but for a society where there was no economic exploitation and national oppression. Their understanding reflected a deeper ideological difference between Chinese progressives and nationalists which led to a split in the Communist Party. Progressives in the CP began to take up issues which affect women. At first their approach was quite immature - they wore their hair loose and long, and dressed in pants, reflecting a new found confidence in their abilities. But this frightened off a lot of peasant women, and it became necessary for women activists to identify with the lifestyles of ordinary women. They encouraged a spirit of collectivity and organisation in women and even such ordinary activities such as embroidery and sewing were put to the use of revolution. Needed concepts of health and childcare, food provisions and work modes were put into practice, by involving men, women, and children on an equal basis, in building people's republic of China.

Women also became actively involved in the armed struggle. They were involved in espionage in engaging the enemy in struggle. Peasant women provided food, shelter and clothing to armed militants.

Women were thus involved at every stage in the struggle for liberation. This is not to suggest that women in China have no problems today. Attempts to put into practice new divorce and marriage laws have contradictions in them. Also men have not rid themselves entirely of sexist attitudes. However the picture of the coy, submissive woman so typically projected in the capitalist media, has been wiped of almost entirely from the Chinese soil, and women have been actively integrated in the process of reconstruction. This has ably been achieved through consistent struggle on the part of the women.

#### Mozambique

In Mozambique, on the position of women, Machel has this to say:

"The antagonistic contradiction is not between women and men, but between women and the social order, between all exploited people both men and women, and the social order. This contradiction can only be solved by revolution, because only revolution destroys the foundations of exploitative society and rebuilds society on new foundations, freeing the initiative of women, integrating them in society as responsible members and involving them in decision making.

Therefore, just as there can be no revolution without the liberation of women, the struggle for women's emancipation cannot succeed without the victory of the revolution."

The adoption of this position on the role of women in the struggle reflected the victory of progressive forces in FRELIMO, over the competing reactionary forces, who sought merely to replace white rulers with blacks, whilst leaving untouched, the exploitative foundations of Mozambican society. At the second congress of FRELIMO in 1968, the progressive lined triumph after long and fierce debate between the two tendencies.

FRELIMO's progressive attitudes were reflected in women's practical involvement in the struggle. Women provided food, initiated schools and rudimentary health schemes. They transported military equipment, spied and were involved in clandestine operations. In the struggle, traditional values and practices, e.g. polygamy and lobola were challenged, and the structures and regulations introduced in the liberated zones ensured that women had access to political and economic decision-making mechanisms.

#### Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, too, women played a vital role in the struggle for liberation. There, too, women broke out of their traditional roles and asserted themselves in armed struggle, organising and mobilising the masses of the people. The women's struggle was closely identified with the broader anti-colonialist struggle, as a statement by the ZANU Women's League suggests:

"We are fighting for socialism. We women of ZANU know that there will be no complete emancipation of women in any society other than a socialist society. We women, workers and peasants of Zimbabwe, are not going to tolerate any oppression and exploitation of man by man. It must be done away with by relentlessly waging the liberation war to the bitter end. Total liberation can only be brought about when there is social ownership of the means of production and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

#### Nicaragua

In Nicaragua, women were involved in the revolution on a large scale, and saw their contribution as complementary to the struggle against the imperialist-backed Somoza regime. Said a female activist of the FSLN, Fatima Caldora:

"As we organised the first CDCs for the insurrection in Managua, so many husbands were frightened when they saw the degree of involvement of their wives. Terrified by women taking the initiative, fighting, organising. In so many households, the men were less committed than the women. And the woman, with her double oppression - oppressed by Somocismo, oppressed by machismo - had to make the choice between her husband and the revolution. It was extraordinary how many of them, thousands, opted for the revolution."

Women had played an important role in the anti-imperialist struggle, yet Nicaragua's record of national women's resistance is fairly young. AMPRONAC (the Association of Women Contradicting the National Problem) was born in September 1977. It relied on the notable strength of the working class women. However, many prominent middle class women were also active in its leadership. AMPRONAC retained a broad platform designed to attract women of different political persuasions and defined its aims as being:

- \* to encourage the participation of women in the revolution of the country's problems
- \* to defend the rights of Nicaraguan women in all sectors and all aspects - economic, political and social
- \* to defend human rights in general.

Early AMPRONAC activities included hunger strikes, church occupations and protests at human rights violations. Yet the important part is not that these activities reflected the early dominance of bourgeoisie women, but rather that they came to represent the task which the women's movement, with its current strength and composition, could most effectively undertake. Actions like the occupation of the United Nations building in Managua, had enormous international repercussions against the dictatorship. The growing stature of the movement became more apparent towards the middle of 1978, as AMPRONAC worked more directly with the FSLN and more women joined the armed struggle. Thus, women's struggles became increasingly identified with the struggle for national liberation.

#### Women and the National Democratic Struggle in South Africa

In South Africa, women have long been involved in the struggle for national liberation. This is because women have been affected in a particularly cruel manner by the government's apartheid laws and policies. The migrant labour system, introduced with the discovery of minerals in the 19th century, confined

African women to the reserves where they were expected to eke out a living for themselves, their children and old people. This provided a justification for bosses paying male workers the cost of reproducing only themselves and not their families. But the reserves were barren areas, and women were forced to seek work in the cities. Particularly after World War I, they occupied jobs in the informal sectors - i.e. they were domestic servants, washerwomen, prostitutes, etc.

World War II saw the growth of the manufacturing industry and an increase in job opportunities. Many African women found jobs in industry. Bosses were keen to employ them since they could be paid low wages. But, women's involvement in the economy had a politicising effect on them. Not only did they break out of the traditional positions they had held in the reserves, they also came into contact with the mass political and trade unions of the time. Women were increasingly organised, not only in trade unions and political organisations, but also in issues that affected their day to day lives, e.g. the food committees of the Western Cape, creche clubs, etc.

1948 saw the coming into power of the Nationalist Party, which immediately began implementing a series of harsh laws, which denied the freedom of speech and movement, e.g. the Suppression of Communism Act, the Group Areas Act and the "homelands" policy. Women resisted these along with their menfolk, and participated in 1952, in the Defence Campaign called by organisations within the Congress Movement. In 1954, the Federation of South African Women was formed to unite women of different races and classes against apartheid. The FSAW had an affiliated structure, and had, as its main affiliates, the ANC Women's League, the South African Congress of Democrats (COS), the South African Coloured People's Organisation (CPO), the Cape Housewives' League, the Non-European Women's League, and the Food and Canning Workers' Union.

Already, the Nationalist government had begun to talk about extending pass books to women. This was fiercely resisted by the women themselves, who saw passes as a curtailment of economic freedom and an infringement on human dignity.

Throughout the country, the affiliate organisation organised women against the pass laws and on 9 August, 1956, 20 000 women from all over South Africa gathered outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria, in protest against the pass laws, whilst their leaders went in to present a stack of petitions calling for their repeal to the Prime Minister. Their leaders found an empty office. But the women stood outside in solemn silence for 30 minutes then broke out into a song:

"Strijdom, you have tempered with the women,  
You have struck a rock,  
You have dislodged a boulder -  
You will be crushed."

Today, 9 August is honoured each year as S.A. National Women's Day by all those involved in the national democratic struggle.

But the Federation was not without problems. Most crushing of these was the clampdown on organisations by the government in the 1960s. Since the Federation had drawn most of its leadership from the ANCWL, the banning of the ANC meant that the Federation lost this section of its membership. Also the banning and detentions of its leaders had serious effects. Although the Federation itself was never banned, these and other factors, e.g. financial problems, and the practical difficulties in running a massive national organisation meant that it collapsed in the 1960s. For a long time thereafter, there was not any form of national women's resistance.

In fact, in the 1960s saw the decline of all forms of mass-based activity - on the factory floor, in the schools, community and in political institutions. The Soweto uprisings of 1976 accelerated this process and by 1980, a strong network of democratic organisations had been built throughout the country, each seeking to relate its struggles to those on other sites. The period has also seen the growth of women's organisations. The FSAW, e.g. was revived in the Transvaal, and organised women around issues that affect them. The United Women's Organisation (UWO) was formed in the Cape. The UWO is engaged in the struggle for lower rents and food prices, better housing, adequate creches and schooling facilities. The UWO and FSAW also relate to the political struggle - e.g. they are both affiliated to the UDF.

In Natal, the newly-formed Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) also attempts to organise women around issues that affect them, e.g. the new taxation laws.

Even the seemingly small and insignificant women's groups, whose activities include sport, knitting and sewing are important. They provide women with skills confidence and allow them to break out of the sterility of their homes and to make new friends. However, for such organisations to have any significant impact on the South African social structure, they must, at some stage, relate their activities to the struggle against apartheid.

#### SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN STUDENTS IN THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

South African women students have a special responsibility to women engaged in the national democratic struggle. This is because their access to theoretical concepts and an understanding of women's experiences enables them to translate these into their implications for South African women and the S.A. liberation movement. Thus it is important for women students to identify with the struggles in their communities.

But women students, too, are discriminated against. They must fight against

social oppression in their lives. the dominant ideology in our society trains women to accept a subservient role in the family, and engenders in them, attitudes of passivity, obedience and shyness. At school and at home, women are channelled into practices and courses which fit in with these norms, e.g. at home women are taught cooking, baking and are expected to do domestic work, whilst being denied an understanding of how machines such as stoves and electrical circuits operate. At school, women are encouraged to do subjects like domestic science whilst men are encouraged to do science, maths and physics.

Women enter into university, socialised into accepting these values. There, they are subject to sexist attitudes of lectures and administration, and are the victims of social oppression by male students. On the repressive campuses, women are harshly controlled, being locked up at night in their hostels, being expelled if pregnant and often being forbidden to form women's groups. These actions must be seen as an attempt to exercise control over women, since freedom of movement and speech would enable them to challenge the authorities.

To overcome these problems, women students must organise themselves. Only through united action will effective strategies be devised. But it is important to note that all black students are oppressed - thus women must relate their struggles to the struggles of the broad masses of oppressed students, so that a complete overhaul of our education system can be reached. Even more important is the idea and historical fact that both men and women students relate their struggles to those of the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa, since only with the freedom of all people, will students be freed.

#### CONCLUSION

The challenges facing South African women are great. Women need to address the question of how to relate class struggle to the struggles against their social oppression. Yet abstract theories will not help us in answering these questions. Only by actively attempting to raise women's consciousness, by mobilising and organising them around issues that affect their day to day lives, will we be able to identify the links. Also, we must remember that our guiding principle is mass mobilisation, and we must take up issues that do not alienate women.

This is not as simple as it sounds. Women face many problems in becoming involved in organisations.

Very often, their viewpoints are not taken seriously, and they lack skills and confidence. Even for women who do want to get involved, there are problems - women have a double job - at the workplace, and in their kitchens.

Examination of the struggles of women in other countries has shown that course of struggles, women were able to assert themselves.

But even after liberation, these women still have a lot to strive for. South African women must take example both from our own historic and heroic women's organisations but also from women in other countries.

Through developing autonomous women's organisations, which nevertheless relate to the national democratic struggle, women will recognise their social oppression and also be able to relate it to the broader forces of national oppression and economic exploitation.

**Collection Number: AK2117**

**DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

**©2012**

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of the collection records and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a private collection deposited with Historical Papers at The University of the Witwatersrand.