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Minutes of CAPE REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF FEDERATION OF S.A. WOMEN

Held on Saturday 19th June, 1954, 3 p.m. at The Dinning Room, City Hall, CAPE TOWN.

PRESENT: Mrs. Gladys Smith - Vice President of the Federation in the chair.
Dora, Ray, Katie, Hetty, Annie, Louise, Cecelia, Elizabeth of the National Executive Committee together with 37 delegates representing 18 organisations (see attached list).

Conference received greetings from Mrs. F. Ransome Kuti, General Secretary of the Nigerian Women's Federation and from many S.A. friends.

AGENDA.

1. OPENING OF CONFERENCE.

Gladys Smith opened the Conference and said:-

Delegates, Your presence here is a proof of your interest in our Women's organisation and I feel sure that your desire is to see us go forward! Welcome to you all.
I will give you a brief report on the National Conference held in Johannesburg on 17th April, 1954 at which 140 delegates representing about 200,000 women were present. I cannot report on all aspect of the Conference but will tell you what I think were the things which impressed me most.

- (1) FIRSTLY I was impressed by the gathering together of so many women of so many races, creeds and colours, who had one desire between them which was to form an organisation to fight for the rights of all women.
- (2) SECONDLY what amazed me was the disabilities suffered by the women of different races in South Africa. These were outlined by Indian, African, Coloured and European women.
- (3) THIRDLY what struck me as so important was the fact that the delegates at the Conference felt the need to get together and do something.
- (4) What also impressed me was the fact that we were not alone in our fight for women's rights. Telegrams and greetings came from organisations in Berlin, Paris, all over Africa and many other places.

Two messages from our own people impressed me. These were the messages from Blue Cliff Station and Alicedale.

Resolutions and a Charter for Women's Rights were adopted and will be discussed here.

APPLAUSE.

Ray moved the suspension of the Agenda to pay tribute to Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Agreed. Ray said:-

On June 21st it will be a year that those in America who strive for war, murdered the innocent Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the beloved parents of Michael and Robert.

Eisenhower and his set-up have defied the world-wide protest

against this murder. The civilized world realised that this Eisenhower American set-up are determined to intimidate all peace loving people. We dare not forget this shameful assassination, we must honour their memory by continuing the fight for peace and freedom from which they were torn away.

We dare not forget their spirit of courage and confidence in humanity. The words written by Ethel Rosenberg from the death cell in Sing Sing prison must find a place in our hearts:-

"Death and fear are all around us
yet we two are unafraid
The people's courage beats within us
Of their heart our strength is made." 11/1/1953.

"Earth shall smile, my sons, shall smile
And green above our resting place,
The killing end, the world rejoice
In brotherhood and peace.

Work and build, my sons, and build
a monument to love and joy,
To human worth, to faith we kept,
For you, my sons, for you." 24/1/1953.

Women, mothers of South Africa, do not forget or pardon the crime committed by Eisenhower and his clique. Resolve to carry on the struggle for a free and peaceful life! Honour the memory of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

APPLAUSE.

Gladys asked the Conference to rise in silence as a mark of our honour to Ethel and Julius and determination not to forget, not to pardon the crime committed by the American fascists. Conference paused in silence.

2. CONSTITUTION. Cecelia and Dora read and spoke on the draft Constitution, paragraph by paragraph. The Constitution was adopted on a motion by Betty McLeod, seconded by B. Kaplan with the following amendments and recommendations to the National Executive Committee:

- (a) That the language of the Constitution be simplified. Copies of the Constitution be circulated to all Regional Committee members.
- (b) Representation at National Conference shall be two delegates for every branch and for any affiliated organisation.
- (c) The National Conference shall decide the venue of the next Annual Conference.
- (d) Members of the National Executive Committee may attend all conferences and meetings of the Federation.

DISCUSSION ON CHARTER. Ray and Dora introduced the Charter and said:-

Here we have a Federation of all women, irrespective of race and nationality. The disabilities suffered by the African women are far greater, the biggest sufferers of all are the African women in Natal and the Transvaal. They are for ever and ever treated as minors. They have not got rights over their children. The same applies to our Indian women in Natal.

The Charter we adopted at the National Conference is something long overdue for South African women.

We have here delegates from Paarl, Worcester, Wellington, etc. I make a suggestion to you that our women delegates from these areas should organise conferences of women in their particular towns. Get the women from Trade Union social welfare organisations, A.N.C. churches to these conferences. Their problems are ours, and ours theirs. Textile, Tobacco, Furniture, Tin, Food & Canning delegates take a copy of the report back with you to your Union meetings and ask for a special meeting of your women. We will send a speaker to your meetings. On you rests the responsibility of organising your women workers and make them realise their disabilities and to struggle for rights.

We will win our Charter for women's rights, taking up matters and problems that affect our women and children.

(Examples of work done by our Committee were given).

I mention these things to you just to help you to get aware of things around you. In every area you live - you working women - the streets are dark, full of potholes and roads are not as they should be. When the streets are in darkness the children have a fear to go out into the streets at night and instead of growing up fearless they grow up with fear.

The streets where working families live, need not remain dark. They need not and must not be filthy. You must organise yourselves through meetings and deputations and demonstrations and fight for the right to live like decent human beings and not like beasts. These are some of the things we want every regional Committee and Branch Committee to take up. And as you take up these issues, that are near and dear to your hearts, you take up bigger things in the demand for your rights and full equality with your menfolk.

Our aims are.... and she read extracts from the Charter.

General Secretary remarked on the wonderful achievement of the Port Elizabeth women organising 600 members in the A.N.C. Women's League. She urged the women at the Conference to do likewise and pointed out that in the Cape Western the A.N.C. comprised of not more than 60 women in their organisation. To the African women here today, I say, it is your task to go back to your respective areas and not only work for our organisation but encourage more and more of your women to join the A.N.C. Because friends, our Charter's main demands cannot be achieved by us only, but with the full participation of men and women for full freedom in our lifetime!

After discussion, Conference accepted the Charter and agreed letter of congratulations to be sent to P.E. Women.

Mrs. Johnson, Paarl. I am very thankful for the speech just made. In Paarl we are living very bad. Our children are running about the streets, have no schools. From the 1st of June I was more than a year without a roof. I am staying with other people. I have got one child and no husband. My child is working for me. My son was driven away, he must go to the men's barracks and I must be alone. When I say this, I am thinking of the words spoken before me. I am thinking and I can see, if we continue to do this, we shall get our freedom. I would like women who have been to the National Conference to preach this news.

Mrs. Mafeking. I am thankful that I am here at this meeting today. Because where I see the truth I also feel warm. I also see that the women could come out of this meeting and help us in Paarl. Perhaps that done, we would feel our difficulties to be lighter. We as Africans, we must not go backwards but forward. It matters not whether the Government treats us as humans or not, although the law proves that we are not human beings. We want as for our children. There are no shelters when it rains, and the children get wet and go to school in wet clothes, as the school

is so far away from there the children live.

She also reported on a case of assault.

CONFERENCE DECIDED that she should get a statement from the woman concerned and that we take this matter up immediately.

THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE WAS THEN ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY:-

B. Lan
Betty
Margaret Castle
Mrs. Daniels
Annie Goldberg
Mrs. Muscel
D. Welsh (Furniture)
Phillip
Dora A.
Maissa
Maqubela
B. Kaplan.

THE COMMITTEE WAS GIVEN POWER TO GO-OPT OTHERS.

LOU SA. (Nyanga) We want people to come out to Nyanga to help us to organise.

The time being 6.30 p.m. Gladys closed the meeting with thanks to all.

Collection Number: AD1812

RECORDS RELATING TO THE 'TREASON TRIAL' (REGINA vs F. ADAMS AND OTHERS ON CHARGE OF HIGH TREASON, ETC.), 1956 1961

TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

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