

develop their full participation in the struggle against apartheid. And they do not wish to exclude men from this process. "The responsibility to organise women as a sector of the oppressed lies with the democratic movement as a whole and not just with women," states a FEDTRAW executive member. "The democratic movement is committed to the maximum unity of the oppressed, and this means that men must be committed to building and strengthening women's organisations."

Particularly in the urban centres the position of women has changed considerably over the past few years. Far more women are now in employment outside their homes (roughly a third of black women in metropolitan areas work; about half of these are either domestic servants or semi-skilled or unskilled labourers; most of the remainder work in a clerical capacity or as teachers or nurses.) More women receive education, even if only in the lower standards. More women are the heads of households.

But it is against huge obstacles that women's organisations have survived and grown, adapting themselves to changed conditions. And women remain adamant that women's issues must be seen in the context of the whole struggle against apartheid, feeling themselves to be more ready than ever before to be an integral part of that struggle. Far from weakening or discouraging women's activities, these years of repression and of the continuing State of Emergency have brought new understanding and strength to the women's organisations. Separation, loss of children, detention, jail, torture - even death sentences - have not deterred or chastened the spirit of the women of South Africa. They will be as ready to play their full part in a free, non-sexist, non-racist democratic South Africa as they have been to play their part in the achievement of those aims.

AUGUST 9, 1989, SPEECH BY HILDA BERNSTEIN AT DAKAWA.

The day that we are celebrating today, the 9th August, Women's Day, came into being because of the great demonstration in Pretoria. That demonstration was organised by the Federation of South African Women; and when I was listening to the women singing here this morning it brought me right back to the early days of the Federation. Our women were always singing, or meetings were joyous occasions, with singing and dancing, to such an extent that Ray Alexander wrote from Cape Town one day that we should have a little less singing and a little more business at our meetings.

FEDSAW, as it is now called, did not spring into being from nothing. Women had been organising since the beginning of the century; and from 1913 onwards they revealed a militancy and independence that was far in advance of their social and legal status.

In 1913, at Bloemfontein, the women 'threw off their shawls', and brought baskets of passes to the Native Commissioner. Their struggle against the imposition of passes and permits went on for years, but in the end, the passes were withdrawn.

The first women's organisation that was not of a purely local nature was the Bantu Women's League, which was formed in 1913, only one year after the formation of the ANC. At that time, the demand of the ANC was for the vote for all civilised MEN. Women did not come into the picture, a reflection of their position in society as a whole. Charlotte Maxeke was the pioneering woman who established this first organisation. Our nurseries are named after her.

Women in the ANC were auxiliary members only without voting rights, until 1943, when they were admitted as full members and the constitution was changed to a policy of universal franchise.

The Women's League in the ANC built slowly. Its work was in a supportive capacity to the men - the usual 'Women's role' - catering and finding accommodation for delegates to conferences, fund raising, and so on. Both men and women in Congress were conditioned to accepting the limitations of the women's role, which was a reflection of their status in society as a whole.

The establishment of the Women's League had two sides to it, a positive and a negative one, and this contradiction still exists in the Women's Section today, so it is worth thinking about. The positive side is a recognition that women occupy an inferior position and have special problems, and that they need to meet together sometimes without men, who always tend to dominate discussions. But by putting women into a separate body we tend to perpetuate the sexual division, and it reinforces the idea of what is 'women's work' 'women's role', and divorces their problems from the men. After all, the men are an important part of the problem. We know that separate is not equal.

In the post-war years women became more organised and participated in many campaigns. They were instrumental in running Food Committees when there were food shortages. They were active in trade unions. I recall in the 1940's how the women participated in the Alexandra bus strike. Alexandra Township is nine miles outside Johannesburg, and when the bus company raised the fares by one penny, the people refused to use the buses, and walked to work and back again, starting early in the morning, trudging 18 miles a day, many of them elderly women carrying

bundles of washing, and with cardboard stuffed into the soles of their worn-out shoes. And when Putco, the bus company, hired young men to ride on the buses, to make it look as though the strike was broken, it was the women who boarded the buses and pulled the young men off. I also remember that the bus strike was an occasion of solidarity among women across the colour line, when white women took out their cars and gave lifts in the evenings from town for the women.

There would have been no squatters' movement without the full participation of the women, who made homes for their families in shacks and shanties in Orlando and Jabavu. Women led the campaign against the council-run beer halls where men were forced to go if they wanted beer. They were active in establishing cultural clubs in protest against Bantu Education when it was first introduced. Indian women participated in the Passive Resistance campaign; and women were among the 8,500 people who went to jail for participating in the Campaign Against Unjust Laws. Without the women, there would have been no boycotts, particularly the potato boycott, which was a protest against slave conditions on the potato farms in Bethal. All the great political campaigns of the 50's could not have taken place without the full participation of the women - but they were always led by men.

On the 17th April, 1954, with joyful enthusiasm, women met together to establish the Women's Federation. FEDSAW broke new ground: it was the first non-racial women's organisation, and it placed women firmly in the perspective of the struggle as a whole. It brought to the fore for the first time women's triple oppression. Its leaders were powerful women - Albertina Sisulu, Frances Baard, Dorothy Nyembe, Ray Alexander, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and many others. Its unique features were its joint commitment to the emancipation of women, and to the national liberation movement. Multi-racialism was a strong element. It was always a pioneering organisation, stressing the need to fight customs and laws that kept women inferior.

The Federation ran many campaigns, but it was the campaign against the imposition of pass laws on the women that is best remembered. This is how it came about: the Black Sash, then an exclusively white woman's organisation, sent a deputation to Pretoria to protest against the extension of passes to women. Our women said: 'The Black Sash went to Pretoria and they didn't invite us. We will go to Pretoria, and we will invite EVERYBODY!' So the first deputation of women, 2,000 from the Transvaal, went to Pretoria. It was then decided to organise a national demonstration. The anti-pass movement spread like wildfire across the country. Women wrote to us from East London: 'Oh, what a law! We are refusing totally!' The Germiston women said 'Even if the passes are printed in pure gold we will not have them.' In Venterspost, when 500 women went to the Native Commissioner, they were asked the names of their leaders. 'Afrika is my name!' the women replied. In Brakpan 1200 women protested, in the little town of Bethlehem, 400; and for the first time in Johannesburg, 400 domestic workers demonstrated. In Port Elizabeth, 2000 working women gave up a day's wages to tell the Native Commissioner; 'We shall not rest until all laws restricting our freedom are abolished.'

On the day of the demonstration, all processions in Pretoria were banned. The women, most of whom had arrived the previous night, began walking through the streets in twos and threes, towards Union Buildings. For those of you who have never seen it, Union Buildings is set on a hill, with two arms of the building forming a large amphitheatre, and shallow steps leading up to the building through gardens. The women converged at the foot of the steps, a stream that became a huge river of women,

It was a brilliant and colourful sight. There were women from the Transkei wearing their ochre skirts; Congress women in their green and black blouses; Indian women in brightly-coloured saris; and a sprinkling of white women. Looking back from the top of the steps it seemed the stream of women was endless. The leaders went into Union Buildings to present hundreds of thousands of signatures on petition forms. The Prime Minister and his officials refused to see them, so they left the forms outside his office, then went back to the packed amphitheatre to report to the women. They then stood in complete silence for 30 minutes - even the babies on their mother's backs did not cry - before they dispersed. That day is blended into our history, and will yet stand as a monumental achievement by the most oppressed, suffering and down-trodden of our people, the women of South Africa.

But the campaign did not succeed. Little by little, women were forced to accept passes. Nurses and teachers were dismissed if they did not have a pass number; old people could not collect their pensions without a pass. At the end of 1956, 156 leading members of the Congress movement were arrested and charged with treason, among them Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph. The trial lasted 4 years, and after the shootings at Sharpeville in 1960, the ANC was banned, and with it, of course, the ANC Women's League, which was the backbone of the Federation. The organisation declined when all its leading members were banned and restricted.

But today there is a great revival among the women, and the traditions of FEDSAW are being carried on by a new generation. At present it has been impossible to organise in a national movement because of the State of Emergency, but there is a Federation of Transvaal Women, and other women's organisations in the different provinces. But what is remarkable about the women's movement today is the remarkable degree of unity among diverse women's organisations, joining women of different sections, colours, beliefs. Recently a conference was held: Women Against Repression, and this new alliance included not only women from FEDTRAW and representatives of the radical organisations, the UDF and COSATU, but also women from the Black Sash, from the YWCA, and women involved in student, church and other organisations. They issued a statement on International Women's Day, March 8, calling for solidarity against oppression after 1,000 days of the State of Emergency. And in February, 900 white mothers of South African conscripts met to protest about the forced military service of their sons in the townships and in Namibia. While Women Against War held press conferences in many areas. FEDTRAW said it was encouraged by this brave and open stand.

Women have become increasingly politically conscious, their organisations are more political, they are more united, have stronger aims. Women are banned, detained, imprisoned, tortured - and murdered. Nyembe, Hogan, Pastoor, Modise, Sparg and many others spent, or are still spending, long years in jail. Motamela died shortly after her release, because of medical neglect while she was in jail; Ngoyi was banned in 1961, and for the next 19 years, with the exception of a few days, until she died; Elizabeth Mafekeng was banished hundreds of miles from her husband and children; Mary Modley was banned in 1963 until she died in 1979. And we should not forget the many women who have been murdered: Ruth First, Jabu Nzima (together with her husband), Jeanette Schoon and her 6-year-old daughter Katryn, Victoria Mxenge, Dulcie September and many, many more inside South Africa.

We also observe how the mothers of young militants condemned to death turn their sorrow into defiance. Martha Mahlangu, after whose son

SOMAFCO was named, appeared on a public platform the night after Solomon was executed, draped in the black, green and gold flag of the illegal ANC, declaring it was shameful for mothers to remain silent while their sons died for their country. Sarh Mosololi sent this last message to her son the night before he was executed: Go well, my son. I love you. I am proud of you because you are to die for your country.

One of the speakers who brought greetings today spoke of the support women give to men, and referred constantly to women as our 'mothers, wives and sisters'. I want to tell you that women resent always being classified in relation to men - mothers of men, wives of men, sisters of men. We don't constantly speak of fathers, husbands, brothers, when we are speaking about men. Yes, some of us are mothers - and not all of us - and grandmothers as well, and some are wives and sisters, but in the first place we are people, humans, not male appendages. As for supporting men - well just listen to these figures: 30 per cent of all African households in urban areas are headed by women; 47 per cent in the Bantustans, and 59 per cent in rural areas in the Bantustans. Who is supporting whom?

What are we to do? Men and women are conditioned to accept their specific roles, so men resent it if you question them; they feel threatened. But so do many of our women - they have absorbed their own colonialism, they prefer the comfort of conformity to the difficulties of decision-making. Within our own organisation, after many years of struggle, recognition has been given in broad principle to the needs and necessity of organising women and giving them better status. But there is much ambivalence. While at the top women are appointed as Chief Representatives in important countries, it sometimes seems that change has scarcely penetrated to the rank and file.

Change depends not on the women, but on all of us. On this day we must pledge to fight against the segregation of women's issues in our organisations - they are men's issues as well. We say, make space for the women, draw them into positions of responsibility and decision-making. What are we doing here? We are preparing ourselves for the construction of a new society in South Africa, a democratic, unitary, non-racial, NON-SEXIST state.

When that time comes, our women will be singing once more - new songs of hope and of triumph. And when that time comes, then the sound of their singing will echo round the world.

1) LIVES OF SA WOMN - CONTRASTS, CONTRADICTIONS.

- * Lowliest position i our society, bottm o pile -
YET HEADS O HOUSEHOLDS, HOLD FAMILIES TGETHR, FORCD INTO
independence, howevr painfl.
- * IN LAW POWERLESS -
YET actions hve powerfl effect on events in our times
- * IN TRADITION SUBORDINATE - show deference to men, many
accēpt traditions & customs
YET hve strong self-image, know their strength.
- * SLOWER TO ORGANISE - lessr numbrs i struggle, rarely i leadng
positions
YET whn aroused display greatr courage & tenacity thn men,
militancy, capacity fr sacrifice
- * MAJORITY LEAD LIVES O PAINFUL DEPRIVATION & POVERTY
YET joyful, singing, defiant, ebulliant.

2) APARTHEID - WHAT IT MEANS.

Simply most extreme form o racialism. Divides SA society
into separate grps.

Rac in all countries, to greatr or lesser extent, u are aware.
But SA is ONLY country which embodies racial divisions i laws.

Skin colour defines everythng - hw born, how long live, where
live, health, education, job, pay - where buried - all
determined nt by prejudice, bt by law.

Ap pyramid - white men top, blk wmn bottom. Ap society rests
on ths position o blk wmn. Nev'r change Ap without changing
lives & conditions o maj o wmn.

TRIPLE OPPRESSION

1. AS BLACKS - ideology o inferiority, colonial
2. AS WOMEN - bth i backward social traditions 'gender'
3. AS WORKERS reserve army o labr, discrimination i law,
wages, jobs.

Some o these exist i othr societies, BUT maj o SA wmn suffr 1st
& foremost frm effects o Ap - & these hve nt changed.

To ENO

3) WOMEN ORGANISE & RESIST

Long tradition o struggle - 1913 to present, bth separately & within mixd orgs. ANCWL, FSAW. Multi-racial, grass-roots struggles, self-help; pass laws.

Wmn bth i open struggles, & i underground. Wmn detain'd, imprison'd, sentenc'd to death (Theresa Rama wrld-wide campaign, stll i jail. Evelina de Brum. Uppington 14,

Wmn suffr more i jail thn men - numbrs, isolation, separation frm childrn. T voice o wmn.

ANCWL nw reform'd aftr 29 yrs exile to 'spearhead struggle fr emancipation o wmn within ANC & thru-out SA society.'

4) WHT WE CAN LEARN FROM OUR SA WOMEN

Ap undergoing changes. All aware o violence, murderous struggles in SA today. Is de Klerk doing away wth Ap?

^{+300 yrs Colonialism}
40 yrs/o Ap/cant b brush'd aside as pol. mistake.
It was ECONOMIC TOOL tt enabled W SAs to build rich, modern society - 1st wrld style.

Crimes o Ap are o sch enormity, diff to recount. Tday 7 mill people are homeless - in shacks, 1 i 3 o urbn pop. Squatter probm is part o Ap - Limtng social responsibility i interests o wealth accumulation.

2 mill our childrn are physically deform'd i country tt exports food. U see SA fruit & products everywhere - blk SA childrn dont.

SA hs widest gap btween rich & poor out of 57 countries fr which data is available.

I some blk townshps there are almost 20 people to each tiny hs & 60 to each pit toilet.

40 yrs Bantu ed - chief purpose ws to prevent blks being educat'd - reach'd complete breakdown. Generation o young blks who do nt knw hw to learn. incapable o respondg, who hve grown up i conditions obitter violence & conflict. T murdr rate i one o our mst beautiful cities - CT - is 3 times tt o New York. In 1 yr, twice as many people were murdered i one small area - Cape peninsula - as i whole o Brit.

One third o blk, Asian, Colour'd childrn are stunt'd fr ther age

Untold thousands ride the blue train. 'T blue train is meths; t 'white train' is a lethal mixture o meths & detergent.

Ap is not dead. A process o change hs been set i motion, bt wth it goes a struggle fr power. de Klerk wants to retain W ec privilege, bt crimes o Ap cn only be rectified by radical change i nature o SA society.

3A → Wmns fight to change their status i SA is a political fight, bcos without endg Ap there can never b any lib fr Wmn

Lib o wmn i SA is nt simply a matter o amending laws or changing male social attitudes. Lib demands we destroy whole basis o racial exploitation fr men & wmn.

Wmn's 6 mountains.

Colonialism Bkward ideas, whether frm feudal or
traditional society Own bkwardness (illiteracy)
Colour Men Women.

Profound belief in W's power to affect change
in yr unity tt crosses racial, national barriers.
In yr strength & love tt binds & sustains us all

YOUR ROLE

3B
Wht hs been achieved (Mandela / Negotiations)
is thru combined struggle within & without
Your petitions, demos, boycotts, pressures,
sanctions

AND THESE MUST CONTINUE to end Ap.
Struggle just beginning

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