

FSAW CB 14.2

DON'T STIFLE THE WORK OF THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION!

The success of the women's mass anti-pass demonstrations are the two outstanding events of the years 1955 and 1956. We take off our hats to the women who marched, both to Pretoria to see Strijdom and Verwoerd, and to their Native Commissioners! These are glorious achievements, not only for the success of the marches themselves but because they represent months of solid, steady organising by the Federation of South African Women and the A.N.C. Women's League.

DOUBTS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

But if we are honest with ourselves we must admit that some members of Congress and some sections of our organisation are filled with doubts and misunderstanding about the women's movement : the form it takes and the nature of its work. These doubts are being voiced in some places, but not always where they should be : in the branches and on the committees; and the true nature of the misgivings is being obscured in many cases by the way the problems are being raised. In one breath people are recognising the fine achievements of the Federation and of the women but in the next they are asking "But what is the Federation?" "Why a Federation?" "Should not the Women's League be the body to handle this?" "If the organisations of the Indian, Coloured and democratic European women, are ready enough to go to Pretoria why can they not simply work with the A.N.C. Women's League instead of starting a new Federation?"

Back of these queries and misunderstandings is the same misunderstanding that has led to incorrect criticism of other movements and campaigns not initiated by or directly undertaken by Congress. Much the same sort of attitude characterised criticism of the Advisory Boards' delegation to protest against the Verwoerd Bills of the last session.

NO MONOPOLY OF FREEDOM FIGHT

Let us face it! The Nationalists have driven the African people to the point where many who were formerly not involved in political movements - who are today still outside the African National Congress - are up in arms against apartheid and for their rights. This is inevitable and this must be welcomed. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL VANGUARD FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM ARE LED IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS BY THE MILITANT PROGRAMME AND ACTIONS OF THE A.N.C. BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE A.N.C. SHOULD EXPECT OR TRY TO CLAIM A MONOPOLY OF ALL ANTI-APARTHEID FIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE. Many actions may originate outside the ranks of the A.N.C. some locally, some initiated by other leaders and groups. But if they are for the right policies the A.N.C. must welcome such actions and campaigns and fight with them in the over-all freedom fight. It is the principle that counts, the battle that is being waged and every struggle must be judged on that basis and not on the basis of personalities and inter-organisation jealousies.

BEWARE OF TRAPS!

To fall into these traps is to isolate the A.N.C. from such correct actions as the Ministers' Call for an All-In conference against apartheid and other similar movements, and also to fall into the trap of giving only halfhearted support to the women's protests because they were not directly initiated by Congress itself.

The Women's Federation represents a great working unity between the different women's organisations representing the different sections of South African women. To suggest that it is unnecessary or that the A.N.C. Women's League "could have done the job" is in the same breath to attack the very basis of the Congress movement itself. Why then do we not say to the Indian and Coloured Congresses and to C.O.D. : "Why a National Action Committee?" "Why not come in with us?"

PART OF THE ALLIANCE

ON THE WOMEN'S FIGHTING FRONT THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION IS THE COUNTERPART OF THE ALLIANCE BUILT BY THE CONGRESS MOVEMENT. It is composed of the bodies that campaign together, that stand for the same programme, yet it is something mightier than all its independent parts, built by their co-operation on the basis of unity of action. Coloured, Indian and democratic European women, though not affected by passes today,

have opposed these evils inflicted on African women because they know this is apartheid at work and no woman's rights or future are safe under apartheid. A WOMEN'S FEDERATION IS NEEDED TO ORGANISE AND UNITE THOSE WHO ARE THE COURAGEOUS ALLIES OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN. Within the Federation the affiliated organisations will fight together on common issues and yet each organisation affiliated preserves its identity, its rights and its need to organise and campaign separately among its own women.

The A.N.C. finds fresh strength and firm allies by being part of the Congress front; it also leaps ahead with its job of organising the African people. The two are not contradictory : they supplement one another. Trade unions which join Trade Union Co-ordinating Councils build workers' unity and solidarity through the Council but nevertheless their daily job of organising at the factory gates and inside the workshops goes on to build the union, and at the same time, the size and strength of the Trade Union Co-ordinating Council.

SO THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION IS PART OF THE FREEDOM FRONT. IT AUGMENTS AND STRENGTHENS IT. IT IS A FULL-BLOODED MEMBER OF THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND MUST NOT BE REGARDED - OR TREATED - AS A STEP CHILD

PART OF THE CONGRESS FRONT, THE FEDERATION MUST NEVERTHELESS HAVE FREEDOM OF ACTION WITHIN IT.

To insist, as some are doing, that every decision of the Women's Federation must first have the rubber-stamp approval of the Congresses will result in stifling control, and red tape that will bind the limbs of the Federation, but also of Congress.

All allies in the Congress front meet together to discuss broad principles and plans of concerted campaign. There must be this co-ordination. But then the Federation must be free to launch and conduct its campaigns as an autonomous body. The women are on the march for freedom!

New women's leaders are being born, women's initiative is being developed in their campaigns. We must not be guilty of stifling this initiative, of trying to "control" their every step, of holding up Federation and Women's League work, even if we make the excuses that we are busy "co-ordinating".

A resourceful and growing Women's movement, spurred on by active Congress aid, will build the entire freedom front!

All aid to our sisters, our wives, our daughters, fighting with us!

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