

SPEAK

1992

R1.50

No.38

**R50 A MONTH IS
NOT ENOUGH!
MORE RIGHTS FOR
DOMESTICWORKERS?**

**CHILD
SUPPORT
HOW TO CLAIM
THIS RIGHT**

**A WOMAN
NOT AFRAID
TO SAY NO
WRITER NAWAL
EL SADAAWI**

ALSO:
*SHORT STORY
*TAXI TALK
*HEALTH ADVICE
*PAC ON WOMEN

WOMEN FOR EQUAL RIGHTS
THE TRANSVAAL RURAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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Cover picture of a member of the Transvaal Rural Women's Movement. Picture: Gill de Vlieg



Story - A Deadly Affair



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Libby Lloyd
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Dipuo Masetlha
Pumla Baloyi

We welcome editor Karen Hurt back from long leave.

We welcome Dipuo Masetlha who has joined SPEAK staff.
We say goodbye to Gill Lincoln and wish her well in her new job.
We miss Gill in the office, but are pleased to have her as a voluntary member.

Voluntary Managing Committee members: Gill Lincoln, Nise Malange,
Jacqueline Mathabe, Helen Rees and Vanessa Taylor.

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SPEAK Comment

Great news from us at SPEAK for 1992. From May this year SPEAK will be a monthly magazine.

Not only that, but you'll be getting SPEAK at the same price. We are keeping our price at R1.50 for one copy and at R12. for six issues for subscribers.

And from early May, you'll find SPEAK more easily than ever before. In bookshops, cornershops, CNA's and streetcorners in the cities. Ask for SPEAK - and if your closest shop doesn't have SPEAK, ask them to get it for you.

Now we all know that change doesn't come easily - and not without some sweat and tears. In order to bring SPEAK out monthly we at SPEAK have lots of organising to do. So our next issue will be out in early May. Enjoy every bit of this issue in your hand right now, and hold your breath until May 1992 when we'll bring SPEAK right back to you again.

Send us ideas on what you'd like to read and know about in SPEAK. Keep sending us letters. Tell us your views - be angry, be happy, be sad, tell us a story, tell it like it is. In 1992 we'll be bringing you more competitions, more articles to get South Africans talking. Not only that, but this year we celebrate SPEAK's 10th birthday. We'll keep you informed on how we're going to do this. ☺

Previous competition winners are: Elsie Sithebe and Isaac Makhosi

Letters READERS SPEAK OUT

Traditional or war weapons Dear SPEAK

As long as the government and the police don't want to differentiate between traditional weapons and war weapons they are far from bringing about peace. Assegais were used as war weapons in those days when our forefathers were involved in wars before I was born. I am sixty six years old and I never saw our grandfathers going to cultural events with assegais. They carried sticks and knobkerries, not assegais and shields.

I grew up in Mahlake, a small village in Mount Flekhos. Our community was of Hlubi origin. I got part of my education in Natal. I know a bit about their culture. When the Inkatha started visiting Jabulani Amphitheatre they did not carry these assegais. Apparently they had forgotten this culture until suddenly in 1990. When the liberation movements were unbanned they then thought they should bring these weapons when visiting the Vaal. That is when violence became rife in the Transvaal. There is no truth in saying these are traditional weapons. Why are they carrying them around? Is there any war? Who declared it and why? Inkatha is not ready to talk peace because they are not

Thanks to all our readers who have written in. Share your views with SPEAK readers. Write to us at P.O.Box 45213 Mayfair 2108 Johannesburg

yet telling the truth. I am older than Mangosuthu himself. I never saw war where these weapons were not used. When all nations are moving into civilization, Inkatha is retreating into the dark ages. Worried

Transvaal

This letter has been shortened.

No to war toys

Dear SPEAK

Christian Women's Movement is appealing to all toy shops and to parents of all races to stop selling and buying toy guns. Harmless as the toy guns are, they leave a mark in the child's mind that a gun is a killing weapon which can be owned and used to kill other people.

How many children have died after playing with their parents' guns? If you watch a child playing with a toy gun you will notice he cries if the one who is being shot at does not fake death. Other children watching the game will all shout: "Die so and so die". If so and so "Dies" then they all laugh and clap hands. So why toy guns? What future generation are we

moulding? Let us start demilitarizing our youth by not selling and buying toy guns. Let us sell and buy educational toys. Toy guns are a menace and a waste of hard earned money. A comment from your readers will be highly appreciated.

Yours in the struggle

Mary Mkhwanazi
Christian Womens' Movement

Police killed my son

Dear SPEAK

My son has been shot dead by a policeman and he admits to doing so. The case has been handed over to the Legal Resources Centre in Grahamstown. The claim is being processed. My question is why is this policeman not suspended? Why does he continue to serve the community before the case has been cleared?

Yours faithfully
William Nqulo

Barkly-East

We want you and your family to know we are thinking of you. We have spoken to the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression (IBIIR). They say with the present law a policeman is only suspended if the police force decides to investigate a case. This is not covered by the Peace Accord. We at SPEAK say this law must change. Whenever someone is killed by a policeman, it should be investigated.

Letters

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Speak uplifts!

Dear SPEAK

Kindly send me your magazine. We want to learn about the issues concerning our rights as women.

We have searched for a long time in vain to find someone who can teach us and who can uplift the suffering of black women, then we stumbled on your address. We all know you will support our needs.

Please also give us information on how we can get issues of SPEAK on a regular basis.

Faithfully yours
ES Makhado

Louis Trichardt

If you subscribe to SPEAK you can be sure of getting every issue. If there is anything you would like to know more about, please write and tell us.

Forward Mzabalazo

Dear SPEAK

I am very pleased with this magazine. I say forward with Mzabalazo, forward! I am a girl who wants to call all women to join women who

are fighting for freedom.

SPEAK people, I have a problem. I am 24 years old and I want to organise women in Bophutatswana.

My problem is how and where because these women don't want to understand anything about women's rights. Women must organise before it is too late.

SPEAK people I hope you'll take my problem into consideration. Please help me with your advice. Women should be encouraged to take up leadership positions.

Yours in the struggle

Maria Motaung

Mabopane Block B

It is not easy to organise women. But don't give up hope. We suggest that one way forward is for you to get in touch with organisations in your area to discuss the problem. If you send us your full address we will send you more information.

Straight to the heart

Dear SPEAK

Keep up the good work, a great magazine, straight to the point and heart.

While I was reading your

articles on women's oppression, women's fight for liberation, the struggle - I had some thoughts. I think we women are doing enough apart from all the above. Who are we asking for our liberation?...the men?

I think it's up to us to liberate the men! Enough of us being the victims, it undermines us and gives no credit to all the work we do anyway. I think we can turn this jargon around and liberate the men to a more fuller life in being human. As said in Nguni, "Ubuntu" - the very thing so many men have lost touch with, within themselves.

We need men's participation within the family, interest in their children, communication. Consideration has nothing to do with 'not being a man' and most of all acknowledging the person in women.

Viva Rose Ngwenya! Viva socialism!

Holly Barker

Durban

Forward to men's participation!

IT'S A STRANGE WORLD, ISN'T IT !



JOKES ASIDE

*Two recently returned exiles were briefly arrested in Durban last year. They were thrown into the police van and teargassed before being taken to the police station. Police claimed they were arrested for "sexual harassment of a woman in the street". They were released when no woman appeared to charge them. Since when have police worried about sexual harassment? They're normally the ones doing the harassment. Wasn't this rather a case of exile harassment?

* * * * *

*A member of the ANC's national executive committee said on radio that the ANC organises people "regardless of his race, his class, his gender, his creed..."

Does that "his" mean regardless, as long as he's a man? Come on, the ANC is a non-sexist organisation, and people must be more careful about their language.

* * * * *

*At the SACP eighth congress in December Cosatu General Secretary Jay Naidoo was introduced as a "stallion" of our struggle. That was bad enough seeing as stallions can only be men. But he made it worse by answering, "I think you made a mistake. All of us here are stallions galloping towards the future." Couldn't he see the women delegates sitting in front of him?

* * * * *

*At the New Nation's Writers Conference after speeches about problems women face, a man stood up to say it isn't only men who are a problem. "Women go into the rural areas these days," he said "drinking, smoking and talking bad."

"But men have been doing that for years," said one of the women speakers. "And no-one ever complains about that."

* * * * *

*We have heard that in Australia the men working in the streets have stopped whistling or harassing women passing by. Why? The bosses have decided to pay them more if they keep quiet. Men shouldn't be rewarded for not being sexist, they should be punished for sexual harassment.

*Commenting on the rape of a 15 year old hitch-hiker, Captain Eugene Opperman warned children and women not to hitch-hike alone at night. Maybe the newspaper quoting him didn't use his full statement, or maybe he just forgot again to warn men not to rape. He makes it feel women are the criminals not the rapists.

* * * * *

*It's been written about before, but it's worth writing about again. ANC NEC member Steve Tshwete recently spoke in Natal about people's courts. He said they would continue, but would deal with "minor offences - like wife bashing."

* * * * *

*"After sewing, laundry, cleaning and cooking, I have no breath left to sing" A woman worker in a US garment factory quoted in a paper by Miriam Ching Louie.☺



Rural Women's Voices

Ring Out

In November last year 120 women from rural areas in the Transvaal and Northern Orange Free State gathered to launch the Transvaal Rural Women's Movement. They came together to make sure rural women's voices ring out in the new South Africa. Libby Lloyd was there.

Photos by Gill de Vlieg.

They came from Huhudi, from Marapong, from Oukasie, Driefontein, Ga-Maphopha - from 26 rural communities all over the Transvaal and Northern Orange Free State. The 120 women gathered at the Lobethal Mission in Lebowa late last year to make sure rural women's voices are heard in the new South Africa. They came to launch the Transvaal Rural Women's Movement.

Some of the women came with babies, some without. Some of them wore traditional dress, others ANC t-shirts or ZCC badges. Some of the women spoke Tswana, others Zulu or Sotho. But they all came with a common aim - "to

create forums for rural women to unite against oppression". "Malibongwe," they sang, "malibongwe."

The new constitution of the Transvaal Rural Womens Movement says the organisation is "open to all oppressed rural women who wish to join our struggle for women's rights". They came together, it says, "because of a shared history of suffering because of apartheid, land policies, forced removals and incorporation".

But these women don't only share a history of suffering. They also share a history of fighting hard to end that suffering. They have fought hard for the right to live d

their ancestors' land and to look after that land. They are still fighting for access to water, for health clinics, for education, for the right to have a say in their own communities...

Beauty Mkhize from Driefontein is the president of the movement. Her story is like that of many of the other women in the organisation. Her husband Saul was shot dead by a policeman nearly nine years ago. She refused to give up, and continued his fight against forced removal. She says women have learnt from being active in these struggles. They have learnt they have a role to play in their communities.

"The threat of forced removal changed things. We started thinking of each other and of ways to come together and

share our difficulties," she says.

The idea to form a movement for rural women in the Transvaal was first thought of in May 1990. Women from communities in the Western and South Eastern Transvaal met and decided to launch an organisation to push for rural women's rights.

The Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) helped organise meetings in other communities, and slowly the movement grew.

At the meetings before the launch the women began to discuss problems they all face. They talked about battles against forced removal. They talked about the problems women face in their own communities where men are still treated like kings. They

talked about the need to unite and build a strong organisation for rural women.

By the time of the launch, the Transvaal Rural Womens Movement was already a strong, vibrant organisation with its roots dug deep in the rural communities.

The women are determined their organisation won't be just a talk-shop. Even at the launch they organised workshops so they could teach each other skills. One group learned how to dig trench gardens, the women from Braklaagte taught others to make grass baskets, the women from Huhudi shared their dress cutting skills, the women from Daggakraal showed how to make pots...

After the morning of making and learning, Thoko Mzi from Zimbabwe held a workshop on women's groups.

"It is very important not only to see these groups as a way of making money," she said. "In Zimbabwe very few women's projects ever make money. There are other reasons for meeting together - to build up women's strength, and to discuss problems women face, like child-care and wife beating."

On the second day the women talked about what they wanted their organisation to do.

"We must demand that women have equal rights to land," they said. "Women should have a say in political matters in our communities."

This is a burning issue. Many of these women are not allowed to go to the decision-

The women don't want their organisation to be a talk-shop. Here they teach each other to make baskets.





The women want to have a say in political matters in their communities.

making body in their communities, the kgotla. Their husbands, fathers or brothers are expected to speak for them. The women are determined to fight for their right to have a say.

"We are living in new times," said a woman at one of the meetings early last year. "In the past, women weren't even allowed to sit on chairs in the presence of men. Women take care of the most important things in life - health, education and the family - and should be represented at all levels in the society, from the kgotla to the parliament."

The women also decided it was important to "bring rural and urban women closer, and promote respect of rural women by their urban sisters". "Urban women must speak our language when they come to visit us," said the women from

the Western Transvaal. "They usually come and speak English and we can't join in." The women also decided the organisation must fight for the end of child labour and for the right of their children to attend school. It must fight for better child support from fathers and for their right to decide when they want to have children. Rural women must be able to learn to read and write and get an education.

The women also felt strongly the organisation must give rural women a voice in the new South Africa.

"The executive must make sure our voices are heard or we will be left out," the women said. "They must be the eyes and ears for us about discussions on women's issues around the country."

At the end of the second day the meeting came to an end.

"It has been a wonderful meeting," said one woman. "We have learnt skills and worked out the road ahead for our organisation."

"We should start earlier so we can discuss things more," said another delegate. "We could start our meetings at six or seven in the morning!"

"We should stop tea breaks and all the eating that goes on," said a woman from Driefontein. "People can afford to eat less and be as thin as me!"

"I have learnt something here," said Thoko from Zimbabwe. "I also think you can learn from us. It is most important to remember that these problems don't end with independence. "Phambili the Transvaal Rural Women's Movement! Forward to a national rural women's movement so all the women from the rural areas in South Africa have a voice." ☼

TAXI TALK

Will you or won't you take your husband's surname?

What do you think about women changing their surnames when they get married? That was the question Florence Mosala asked people. In terms of the law a married woman CAN choose to keep her own name.

Nana Gumede

"I will keep my own surname when I get married. I don't know who came up with this idea of changing surnames. To me, taking on your husband's surname is a form of oppression. My name is a thread to my personality and I don't want to lose that. Male domination is something I can't tolerate. If he loves me he'll have to understand this."

Mahadi Miya

"Right now I am happy with who I am. If I got married and changed my surname, I would have to change all my documents. And then what happens with divorce? I'd have to rechange them. And what happens if I get married five times?"



Dineo Mogapi

"I have been involved with my boyfriend for 11 years and we have a six year old boy. It's been a long time, and I can't wait to be called Mrs... I don't think there's any woman who doesn't want that. To tell the honest truth it's a gift."

Lloyd Mdakane

"Surnames are the identification of the clan. When a woman is married her new surname will link her to the clan which she now belongs

to. It signifies the link between the two families. "

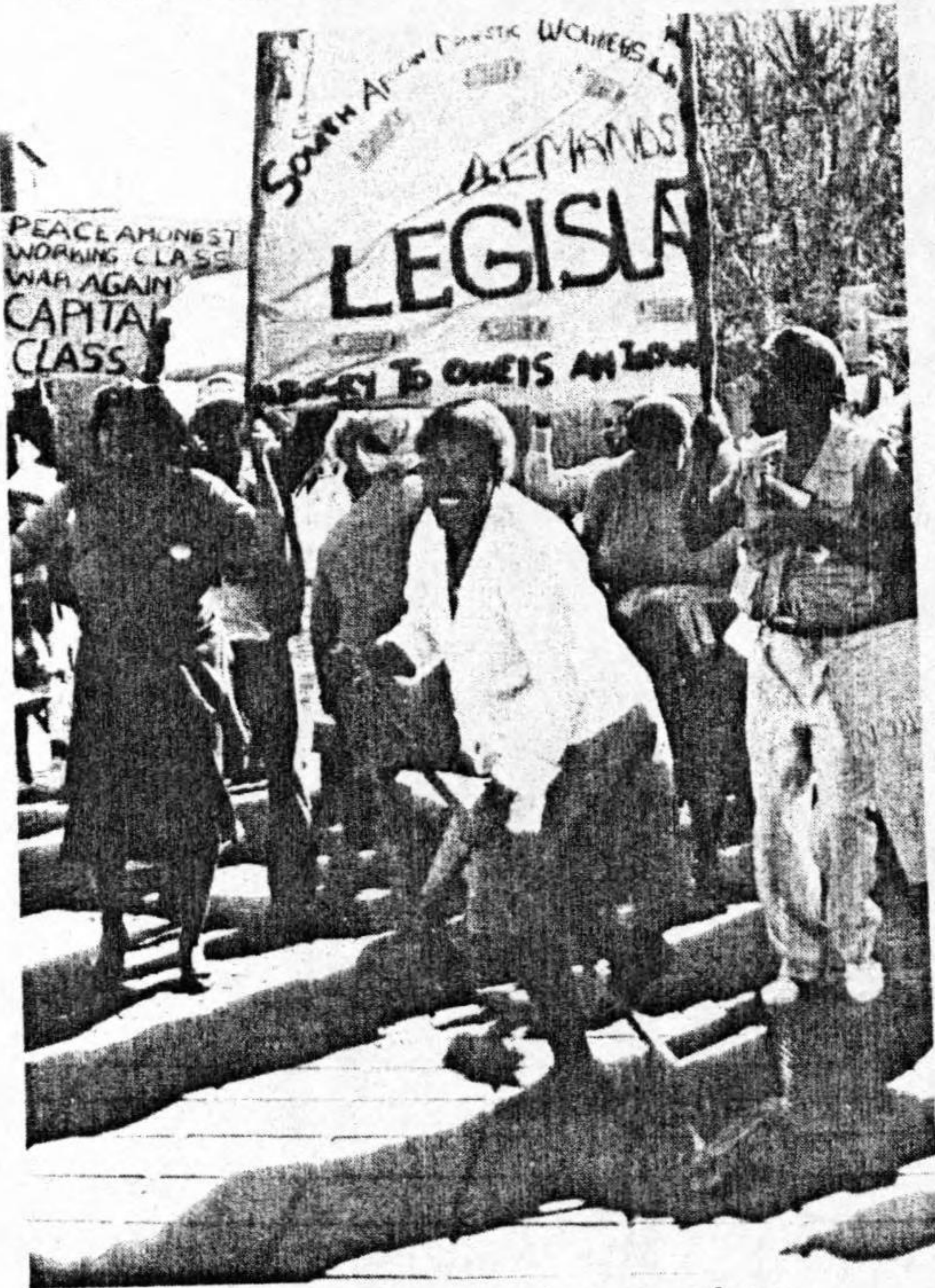
Shirley Yssel

"I changed my surname because it was done. I got married immediately after studying. I didn't bother to find out about it or think about why. I think it depends on an individual and how strongly she feels about herself. I don't think whether one changes or whether one does not is really that important. What is important is to know the purpose of the marriage."

Duki Mathibe and Rose Ratshefola

"Changing surnames is part of culture. Even before documents were introduced and certificates were used women used to change their name to that of their husbands clan. Nowadays though people are rethinking this. Some people have good reasons not to change surnames. Some women, like professional women, have a status and a change of surname could ruin their status. Other women have been recently divorced and don't want to change again." ☺

The workers hidden in homes



The domestic worker's marches were not in vain Picture: Karen Hurt

Last year the government finally agreed to include domestic workers in the labour laws. It has been a long fight for the unions to win this right, but the battle is not over. Domestic workers still face many problems. Libby Lloyd visited the South African Domestic Workers Union's offices to find out more about their battles, struggles and victories..

It is Thursday - the day SADWU's members crowd into the union's offices to get advice and hold meetings. When SPEAK arrives first thing in the morning, the offices are already filling up. This is the only day off for many of these workers - the only time they can make it into the offices of their union.

Some of the workers sitting in the office aren't yet SADWU members. It isn't easy to organise domestic workers. There is no factory floor to visit, only thousands of individual households. The union often has to rely on workers hearing about them from friends or neighbours.

According to the government there are more than 860 000 domestic workers in the country. The government says only about 23 000 of these



workers are paid up union members of either SADWU or the Black Domestic Workers' Union (a NACTU affiliate).

It's difficult to speak to SADWU president Violet Mothlasedi. The office is busy and the phone rings all the time. She asks us to wait a while. She is trying to phone one of the members but the "madam" won't let Violet speak to her. "Everytime I say I want to speak to her, the boss just puts down the phone. She says her worker is not allowed to take phone calls. How am I supposed to deal with our members if I can't speak to them? And what if a family member phones to give bad news? This is unacceptable!"



Domestic workers gather in SADWU offices to discuss low wages, long days and the fight for better working conditions.

Picture: Dynamic Images

Violet says firing of workers is the biggest problem for the union these days.

"Most of the people who ask for help these days have been dismissed," she says.

"Employers sometimes say they can't afford to pay anymore. Sometimes they give no reason at all. They just say the domestic worker was stupid.

"We're dealing with one case now where a worker was fired because she didn't eat rye bread and she wanted ordinary bread."

But firing isn't the only problem. Some live-in workers say they have no freedom. They can't have visitors in their rooms, and their families aren't allowed to stay over. Others talk about being locked in by security systems - their bosses don't "trust" them to have keys, so they are prisoners behind the high walls.

Violet says white bosses aren't the only problem.

"Black and Indian bosses sometimes treat their workers worst. In townships workers often don't have rooms. They have to sleep in the kitchen or the children's rooms. They don't get even one hour off. They are on call 24 hours a day, every day of the week."

At the moment there is little the union can do about this. Domestic workers aren't included in labour laws. They have almost no rights - no protection from unfair dismissal, no right to leave, sick leave, overtime pay, or time off.

But this is changing. Unions

have been fighting hard for many years for domestic workers to be included in labour laws. There have been marches, petitions and protests to try to get domestic workers protected by the law. Last year they began to win their battle.

The government's National Manpower Commission set up a committee in 1991 to look at the problem. Late last year the committee published its recommendations. It was clear the unions had won a major victory.

The report says domestic workers should be included in the Labour Relations Act. It says workers should also have set working conditions laid out in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

If this becomes law it means bosses will be forced by the law to treat workers fairly. It means workers will be able to take bosses to court for not treating them fairly.

The report isn't law yet though and it could take time to get made into law.

The Commission is waiting for comment on the recommendations and some of the details of the report are still being worked out.

Only when this is done will it go to parliament to be voted into law. It is hard to know whether Cosatu's demand for laws to be passed in July this year will be won. Some people say it could take over a year before it gets passed by parliament.

The battle is not yet over though. Unions say the recommendations are not

The workers hidden in homes

perfect. The Commission has turned down one of the major union demands.

The unions insist a minimum wage for domestic workers should be put into law, but the Commission decided the law should only give wage guidelines. This means bosses could continue to pay peanuts.

"We will be looking at campaigns on this at our February congress" says Violet. "We must win this fight, otherwise it will be pointless." The union says domestic workers should get at least R450 a month. Bosses claim they can't afford this, and say a set minimum wage will mean more workers get retrenched. "If they can't afford it," says Violet, "they shouldn't employ someone full-time. Then the workers can do piece-work." While we talk she looks at the membership forms in front of her.

"Look at this one," she says. "She's only getting R50 a month!"

"We have to have this in law, otherwise people pay what they want."

Violet looks at her watch. It's time to go. More and more workers are arriving to ask for help.

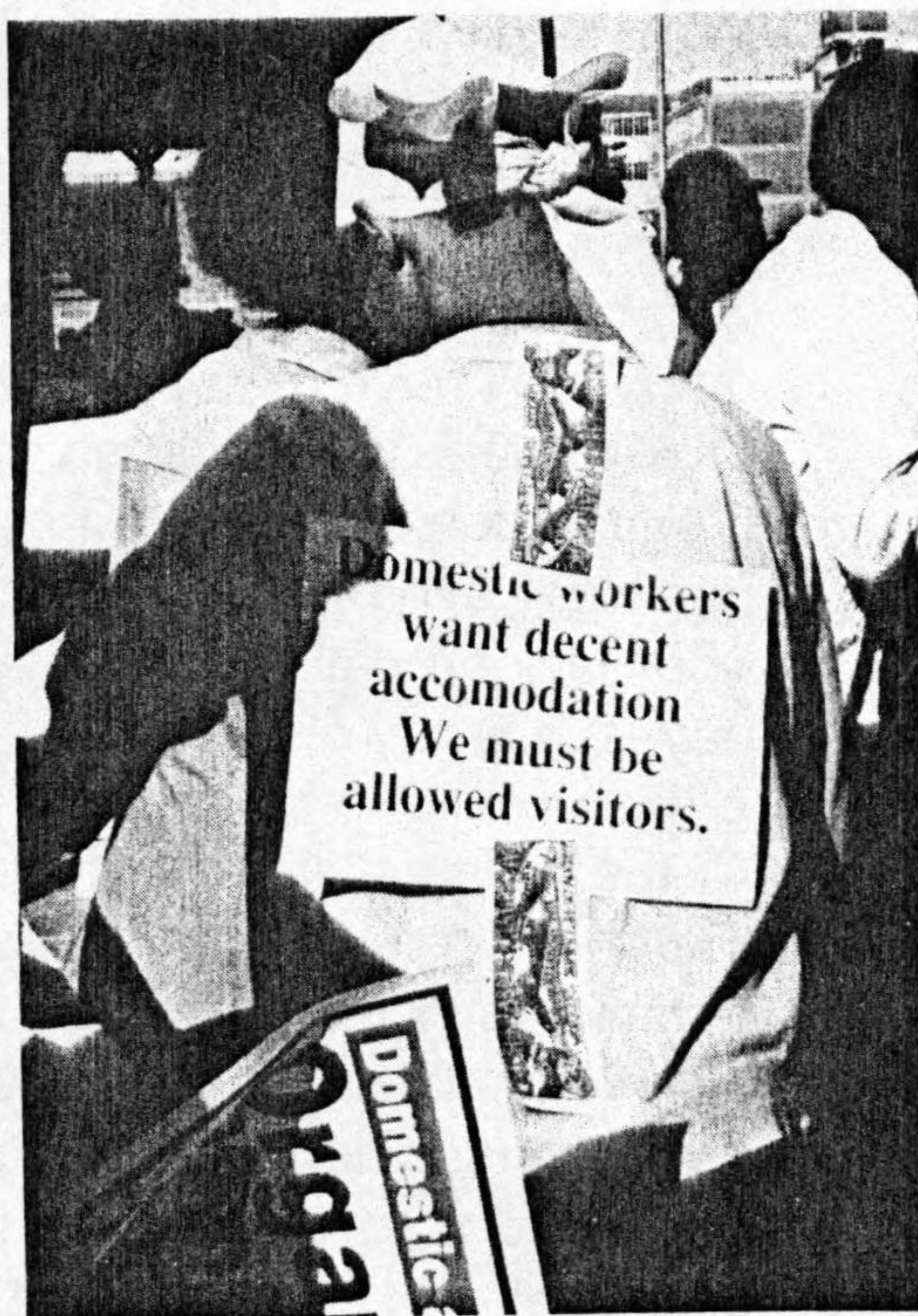
Before we leave, we speak to Johanna Nkonyane, one of the women sitting in the offices.

"I was fired just like that," she says. "I came in to work after my day off to find they'd hired someone else. She was already working in the kitchen."



SADWU President Violet Mothlasedi : "Bosses who can't afford a living wage shouldn't employ someone full-time."

Picture : Dynamic Images



Domestic workers are sometimes prisoners behind high security gates *Picture : Karen Hurt*

I got a month's wages, and nothing else. I wish I could retire now, but I can't afford it. I hope the union can do something for me."

At the moment there is little the union can do to help Johanna or the hundreds of other workers who crowd into the offices. Until laws are passed, domestic workers can only hope their bosses are kind. Even when there are laws on domestic workers it will be difficult for the unions to challenge every boss in every home. But still, there is no doubt, this is a victory for South African domestic workers and unions. ☺

National Manpower Commissions recommendations for domestic workers

In September last year the National Manpower Commission (NMC) published recommendations on the working conditions for domestic workers. These recommendations are not yet law. Details still have to be worked out. The final recommendations will be taken to parliament to be made into law. It's not clear when this will happen. Some people say laws will only be made next year. Cosatu is demanding there be laws before July this year. Here are the most important points of the recommendations.

The Labour Relations Act (LRA)

The NMC says domestic workers should be included in the LRA. This has been a major campaign by the unions. It means domestic workers' unions would get recognition. Workers could use this act to protect their rights. A special code is being drawn up to spell out rights for domestic workers and for employers. This will also spell out an unfair labour practice law for domestic workers. If workers felt their bosses had not been fair to them they would be able to take it up. The NMC suggests the worker and the boss should first try to sort out problems through an outside person or group (this is called conciliation). They are working out a simple conciliation procedure. If this doesn't work, the matter could go to a Small Labour Court or to the Industrial Court.

Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF)

It was agreed domestic workers

should fall under the UIF Act. A certain amount would be paid into UIF by the employer and the worker. If the worker lost her job or stopped work she could go to UIF to collect money for a certain period. UIF also pays money for maternity leave.

Basic Conditions of Employment Act

The NMC recommends this Act includes domestic workers. This Act lays down working conditions. Here are some of the recommendations for working conditions for domestic workers.

***Hours of Work**

The NMC says domestic workers who work five days a week should not work more than 9 hours and 15 minutes each day. If the worker works a six day week she should work an eight hour day. Workers should get at least a half hour off for lunch. They cannot be asked to do any work during this time.

***Overtime**

No worker can be forced to do overtime. Overtime should not be more than three hours each day and no more than 20 hours a week. This overtime work must be paid at one and a third of the ordinary wage. This means a worker getting R15 per hour would be paid that R15 plus a third of R15 for overtime work. This means she would get R15 plus R5 - R20 altogether. No worker can be forced to work on Sundays. If she agrees to work on a Sunday, this work must be treated as overtime. The recommendations say the worker should be paid more for Sunday work than for other overtime work.

They say she should be paid double time. This means the worker who earns R15 an hour would get R30 an hour for Sunday work.

***Leave**

It was agreed workers should have at least 14 days paid leave every year. Workers should also have paid sick leave. People working five days a week should have 10 days sick leave, those working six days a week should get 12 days sick leave a year. The NMC also agreed workers should get three months maternity leave (one month off before the birth and two months off after the birth). This would be paid out of UIF. Workers will be guaranteed their jobs back if they give written notice before they go on maternity leave.

***Notice**

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act says if workers are paid weekly they should be given one weeks notice. Two weeks notice is needed if they are paid monthly.

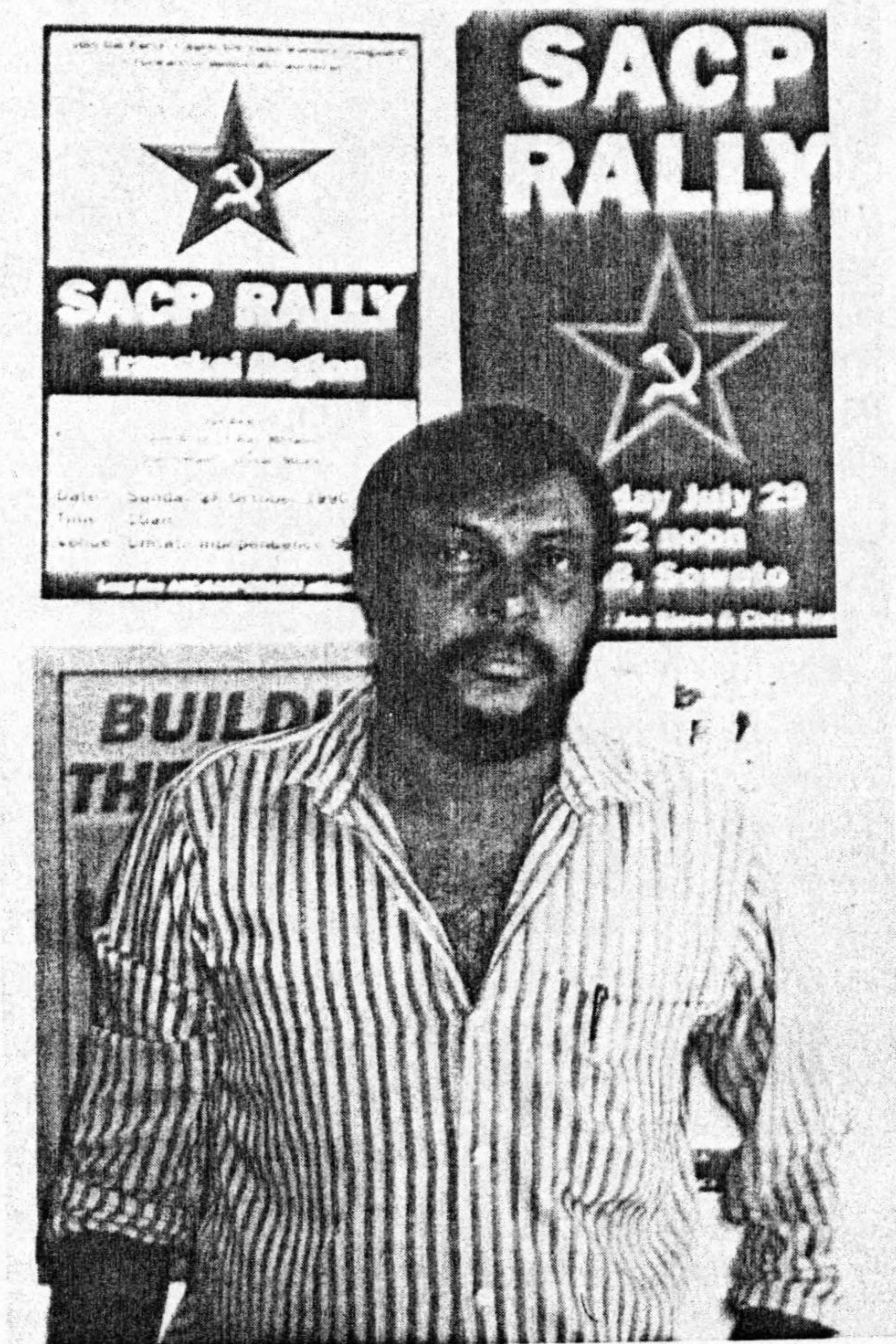
***Wages**

The recommendations say there should only be guidelines for wages - not a set minimum wage. The unions are fighting this. Unions are demanding a legal minimum wage be decided on after consultation with all interested parties.

***Guidelines**

It was also agreed guidelines should be set out for pensions, meals, transport, protective clothing etc.

A Conversation with Indres Naidoo



Former Robben Islander Indres Naidoo spent three years in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as deputy chief ANC representative. SPEAK's Karen Hurt had a conversation with him about women in the GDR, life in a socialist country and sexism in South Africa.

Picture Libby Lloyd

KAREN : What would you say is the role of women in the struggle against sexism and what is the role of men?

INDRES : Women must spearhead this struggle. Men must be part and parcel of it, not just helping or standing on the side. I don't know if you agree with that.

KAREN : My position is women will spearhead, but I am very disappointed with so-called progressive men on this issue. Very few men I know protest about sexism. They wait for you as a woman to protest.

INDRES : To lead.

KAREN: No. There are a lot of men I know who will raise workers' demands, the class struggle and racism, but sexism is not on their agenda. It disturbs me. I have done interviews with women who are married to progressive men who beat them up. That is very hard to understand.

INDRES : What we must do is start educating people. We must educate our women so they will start taking leadership positions. I am very pleased SPEAK is strong about sexism.

We need more magazines that raise women's issues and we should fight for these issues to be covered in the big newspapers.

KAREN : Let's talk about the GDR. As a socialist country did it do anything to fight women's exploitation?

INDRES : Early in 1990 I read a survey which showed Cuba had the highest number of women in top positions, then Sweden and Norway and then East Germany. In East Germany, about 35% of all top positions were held by women.

There is no doubt the GDR went out of its way to promote women's rights. There was equal pay for equal work. You would find women working in all fields, from bricklayers to taxi-drivers to office workers to doctors. There was a law banning sexism in the workplace.

There was maternity leave. After the baby was born, there was one year's fully paid parental leave. The mother could remain at home for the first six months, and the next few months the father could stay. I must admit in practice parental leave didn't work. In most cases men carried on working while the mother took a full year's leave. On the child's first birthday, the child automatically went into a free creche.

KAREN : What struggles were women fighting? Often in the books it says women must not

be discriminated against, but men get the jobs anyway.

INDRES : In the GDR I don't think there was any job discrimination. But in the home, the wife would go into the kitchen and cook while the husband had a beer. This was particularly among the older generation.

The younger generation does show a trend towards change and sharing the housework, but it is not widespread.

KAREN : Now we are reading stories about racism in the united Germany - was there racism in the GDR before?

INDRES : There was none at all. I travelled the whole of the GDR and I never found any racism.

Recently the right wing has sprung up very quickly in East Germany. The unemployment has shot up and that has also

created a problem. The latest figures say almost a million people are now unemployed. Before unification there was no problem of unemployment. This figure is rising and most of those unemployed people are women.

Now there are many prostitutes - when there was no prostitution before. If you ask the young girls why they have taken to the streets, they say they need the money.

It is also more expensive to live now - before we had cheap housing for example, but rents have risen enormously.

KAREN : So in fact when the crunch comes, it is back to the old ways - women fired first. But how does that sexist thinking suddenly come back if it has not been there?

INDRES : Today it is no longer the GDR. Today it is the Federal Republic of Germany. The country falls under the laws of Germany and these laws actually discriminate against women.

KAREN : So any laws for women in the GDR have all gone since unification?

INDRES : An example is abortion. Abortion was free and available everywhere in GDR. In the West it was illegal. During the talks on the unification of Germany one of the sore points was the question of abortion. Finally they agreed they would allow abortion in the East, but not in the West. Now the conserv-



Berlin, Germany: Protestors demonstrate against racism in the new united Germany. Indres Naidoo says women have also been losers since East and West Germany reunited in 1990. Picture : SPARE RIB

A conversation with Indres Naidoo

atives are complaining that women from the West are going over to the East to have abortions. I think very soon this law will be scrapped.

Another thing is sexist advertising. Using women in adverts to try to sell products was not allowed in East Germany - but now we see adverts for cars with women's legs all over them.

KAREN : Everything you have said up until now in a way says the re-unification of Germany has not been in the interests of women.

INDRES : Women are the losers - absolute losers.

KAREN : If you came to power in South Africa tomorrow, how would you try to stop the exploitation of women?

INDRES : The first position would be equal salary for equal work. We must also bring out very clearly that the women's role is not in the kitchen. Women are part and parcel of society. They have contributed

in the liberation struggle and they must continue to build the country.

Then we have to provide the essentials for the community - housing is one of the most important things. Once we have provided proper housing and employment for our people and full medical care we will definitely move away from the sexism we have today.

KAREN : But how is that going to change anything? You haven't said anything about what is going to happen in the home where women work another shift.

INDRES : Education.

KAREN : Are you saying the answer is for men and women to share that work?

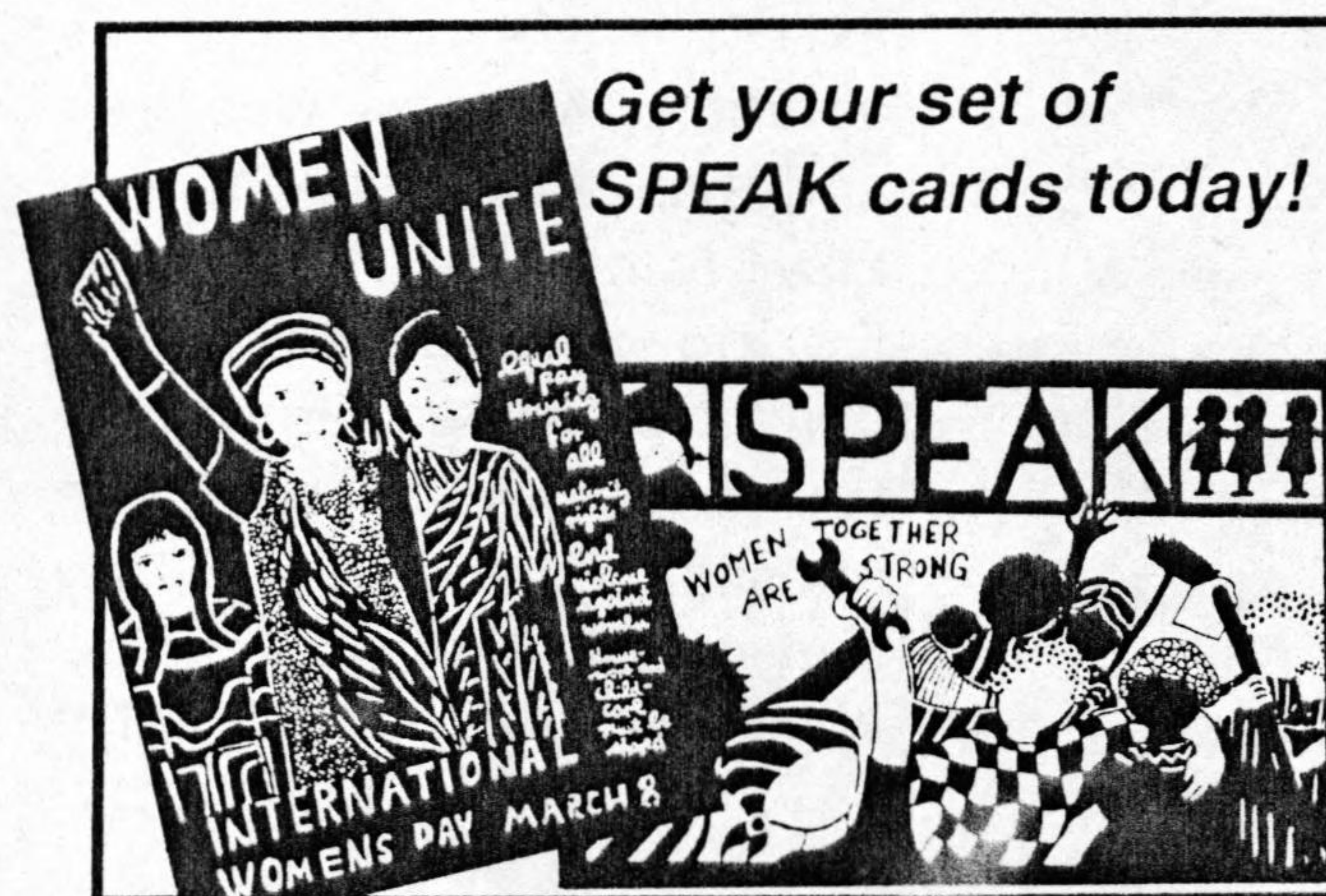
INDRES : Absolutely. I will give you one simple example. An MK cadre came to South Africa and was living underground in Soweto with a young couple. Both the husband and wife

went to work. When they came home, the wife started preparing the meal while the husband went to have a beer. After a few beers the husband would come back to eat.

On the very first night, the cadre cleared the table. The husband asked what he was doing. Then he started washing the dishes and the husband objected, saying this was the woman's work. The cadre said: "No, not in our society. In our society we share the housework". The following day when the family came home they found the house sparkling clean. The MK cadre had cleaned it. In this way, little by little, he showed that the husband and wife could share the household work. This was through education.

KAREN : But you can't employ millions of cadres to try to teach every household. Serious work has to be done.

INDRES : Education - television, radio, periodicals. Education is what we have to give our people. ☺



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A Deadly Affair

A warning to men not to roam...

A short story by Shepi Mati...

The time is eleven forty-five at night. The streets are deserted as the last taxi makes its way home. Let-Him-Go, the taxi driver, cuts through a red traffic light. He turns into NY1 and picks up speed. Let-Him-Go has been in this business for ten years now. He slows down as his hand reaches for a piece of paper.

This is Thandi's address. NY 21 No 297. He must find it. His wife has gone out of town for three weeks so he could take Thandi out for another night.

He remembers how he met her thumbing a lift last week. He gave her a lift and they ended up at his place. That night they really had a nice time together. She even put on his wife's nightgown before going to bed. Such a nice time with her.

The indicator flickers and he turns into NY 21. This is where he dropped her off that freezing morning. She left with his jacket on. He should have asked her for a telephone number at home or at the neighbours. Sometimes it is better to make an appointment for these things.

At last he finds the damned



house. Let-Him-Go gets out of the car and walks to the gate. He opens the gate and goes to knock at the door which is opened by a big old lady. The old lady looks disturbed when Let-Him-Go asks for Thandi. She asks him some personal details. Nodding her head approvingly, she listens to him patiently.

Then she begins to explain. She is Thandi's mother. Thandi died five years ago. "No," says Let-Him-Go. He gave her a lift last Thursday. He even gave her his jacket to wear in the morning. Impossible. This is Thandi's home. She can't be dead. Impossible. He dropped her off last Friday morning.

Thandi's two brothers and an elder sister are all up now. They all find this strange man's

story ridiculous. One of the brothers even offers to take Let-Him-Go to the graveyard to see Thandi's grave. This upsets Let-Him-Go even more. Slowly he regains control of himself. Shaking his head at this unbelievable tale he asks to be allowed to leave. His hosts are even more disturbed.

The night was sleepless for Let-Him-Go. He may have slept with a dead woman. This frightens him more. He even forgets about how sweet she was that Thursday night.

Early in the morning he goes back to Thandi's place. He takes the offer to go to the graveyard.

Thandi's brother takes him there. Now he is getting more worried.

At the NY5 graveyard they find Thandi's grave. She died on 28 January 1986. Five years ago. Next to the grave lay the jacket he gave Thandi to wear that Friday morning.

Let-Him-Go bellows and wails uncontrollably. He descends into madness.

Today, he walks the streets of Cape Town babbling nonsense to himself. ☼

CODESA - An all male choir?



The first meeting of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA 1) is still a hot topic - and it isn't just because it was the beginning of talks about the "new South Africa". People are still discussing the way Nelson Mandela challenged FW De Klerk, and they are still talking about the debate on women.

In the women's debate, women from the ANC, the Democratic Party, the Nationalist Party, the SACP and the IFP spoke with one voice. They all complained about how few women were at the meeting and they all demanded women be drawn into the process.

The convention passed a resolution telling the management committee of Codesa to investigate "mechanisms to ensure adequate representation of women in all the structures of Codesa".

SPEAK tried to find out what had been done about this resolution.

No-one at the first meeting objected to this resolution, but many of them seem to have "forgotten" they passed this resolution. Only a few of the parties and organisations at CODESA 1 have chosen women to represent them in the

working groups which have been set up. There are five working groups and each party participating can choose two representatives for every working group.

Several leading ANC women wrote a letter to a weekly newspaper complaining about these double standards. They said this makes them doubt the participants are serious about non-sexism.

"The African National Congress, Democratic Party, Inkatha Freedom Party,

National Party and the South African government are among the all-male delegations...Is the anthem of the "new" South Africa to be sung by an all-male choir?"

And what has the Management Committee done about the resolution? SPEAK asked Murphy Morobe.

"We have taken the women question further," he said. "Women can't be separately represented because they are not a political party. We also cannot dictate to the parties that they must have more women in their delegations. The women in the different organisations must fight for that.

"We have therefore allowed interest groups to make submissions to Codesa. This includes women. These groups would have to make their submissions to the office and we would take it up with the relevant working group."



Theresa Released



Three of the Sharpville Six who were released. The three in the centre Reid Mofokeng, Theresa Ramashamela and Oupa Diniso enjoy a warm welcome home. Picture : City Press

Women publishers from Africa



Women publishers from eight African countries attended a month long course organised by the Centre for Foreign Journalists in the United States. From left to right: Fleur Ngweno (Kenya), Rebecca Musoke (Uganda), Karen Hurt (SPEAK, South Africa), Regina Chigwedere (Zimbabwe), Gwendoline Konie (Zambia), Poppy Khoza (Swaziland), Estelle Coetzee (Namibia), Janet Karim (Malawi)

Women Writers Women Fighters

One day of the New Nation's Writers Conference in December last year focused on women and writing. Women writers from all over the world talked about what made them defy tradition and begin to write.



Writers Nadine Gordimer and Nawal El Sadaawi at the New Nation Writers Conference.

Picture: Dynamic Images

"My grandmother told me - don't grow up and wash any man's underpants - not even out of kindness".

These were the words of one of the women speaking at the New Nation Writers Conference. Dionne Brand comes from Trinidad in the Caribbean. She was one of many writers who came from all over the world to attend the conference.

One day of the conference focused on women and literature. Women writers from Trinidad, Egypt, Japan, India and of course from South Africa, spoke about problems they face in their countries.

They spoke about sexism and how difficult it is for women to write. They spoke about how people don't take women's writing seriously. They spoke about how important it is for all books, including children's books, to promote non-sexism.

During the tea breaks the women talked excitedly and laughed, but some of the men complained they were under attack.

"We are talking about pushing for a society where all people are free," said one of the women. "The men are part of that freedom too." Almost all the people speaking on the platform talked about how women were oppressed in



Above: Sankie Nkondo addressing the conference.
Picture: Dynamic Images

Below: Njabulo Ndebele and Bongi Dhlomo at the opening of the conference.
Picture: Dynamic Images



their societies and in liberation movements around the world.

"We only seem to exist as mothers of the warriors of the revolution," said Dionne, "but we are not all mothers, and we want to contribute to that revolution in other ways than just producing the warriors."

South African writer Loretta Ngcobo said sexism "rips apart all the solidarity structures we have built in our years of struggle".

"How many of our leaders begin their speeches talking about non-racism and non-sexism and then ignore the issue of sexism?" asked Afrikaans writer Welma Odendaal. "They begin with how they want a non-racist, non-sexist society, then carry on talking about what they see as the real political issues. They ignore sexism till they finish their speeches."

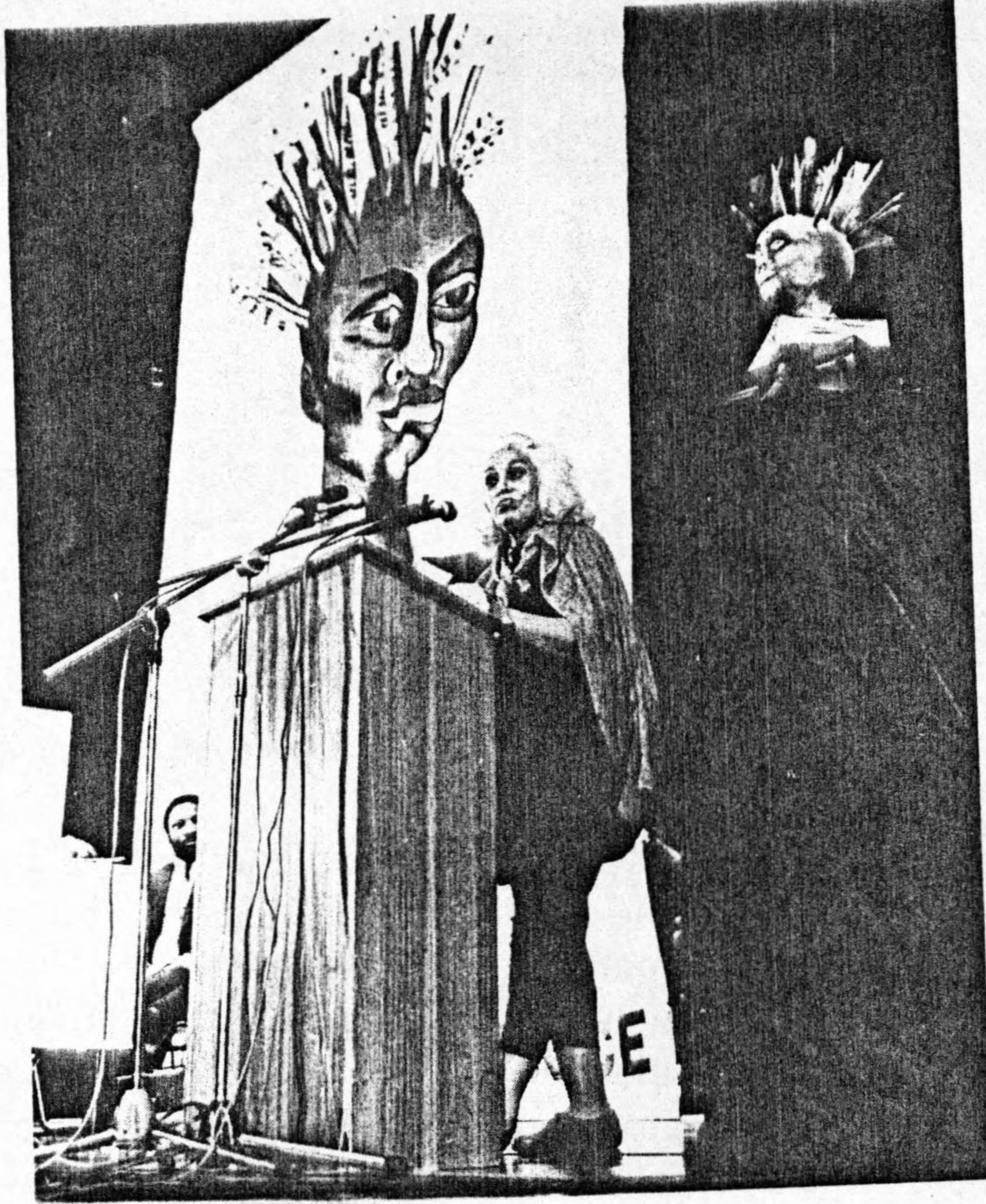
But it wasn't only women who spoke out. South African writer, Willie Kgositsile, talked on one of the panels.

"Yes, men oppress women," he said.

He said too often only men writers from South Africa were asked to speak at international conferences.

"People outside will think we only have men writers, when we have so many good women writers in our country. Often people see women as a last resort. It is an insult to see women, whether as writers, cadres, organisers, whatever, as a last resort."

And everyone spoke about what had made them dare to be different and to begin writing. "My grandmother was the first one that encouraged me," said Dionne from Trinidad. "She also used to warn us when we missed school that we would end up washing men's pants. I knew there was no way I wanted to end up washing any man's drawers." ☼



Nawal El Sadaawi is a writer from Egypt. She is not a woman who keeps quiet about anything - and because of speaking out, she has been jailed, her books have been banned, and she was fired from her job in the Egyptian government. Libby Lloyd interviewed her when she was in South Africa for the New Nation's Writers conference.

Nawal El Sadaawi addresses the opening session of the conference. Picture: Dynamic Images

The woman who won't keep quiet for anyone Nawal El Sadaawi

Nawal El Sadawi is a woman who believes in saying "no".

She believes in saying "no" to sexism, "no" to repression, "no" to governments, to religious leaders - to anyone or anything she thinks is wrong.

And she never whispers that "no". She shouts it out. She writes about it and she fights for other people's right to say "no" to injustice and discrimination.

This she believes is what has made her able to be creative, to write books which are read not only in her own country, but throughout the world.

"Every one of us is creative, but often we are too polite. In order to create we need to learn to disobey," she says. "People, particularly women, must stop being polite and must start to disobey

their husbands, fathers, religious leaders, governments, everyone. We must start expressing our anger."

She leans forward while she speaks. All her feelings show in her face. You can see she is a woman who lives what she believes. She is a woman who won't keep quiet when she sees something wrong.

She tells the story of the first time she said "no". "I was still very young," she says. "I was reading a book and the girl in the book had the same name as me, Nawal. The boy in the book was called Achmat.

"The book said: 'Achmat writes, Nawal sleeps. Achmat plays, Nawal cooks.'

"This upset me. Achmat was doing all the things I wanted to do. I wanted to write and play,



Nawal El Sadaawi and husband Sherif Hetata.

Picture: New Nation

instead of to cook and sleep. But I also wanted to still be Nawal."

And El Sadaawi said "no" to cooking and sleeping and grew up to be a doctor, a writer, a feminist, a socialist and a fighter.

"Other things also shaped me," she says. "I remember boys throwing stones at me. I remember men touching me in the buses. I remember the anger at being treated like a piece of meat.

"I also learnt from my grandmother - my father's mother. She was poor, she couldn't read and write, but she never let a man feed her after her husband died."

El Sadaawi doesn't only say "no" to sexism. She believes women's issues aren't separate from politics.

She has spoken out against US interference in other countries. She has fought hard for health care for all the people - not only the rich. She lives in a Muslim country and she is probably most famous for fighting hard against people who say Muslim women must be silent and cover themselves up with veils.

"Nowhere in the Koran (the bible of Islam) does it say women must cover themselves with veils or be silent. If you look at the prophet Mohammed's wives, two of them were very strong women, fighting women. They were revolutionaries."

She has written books about things it was forbidden to even whisper about in her country. She has written about how religion often suppresses women, about sex and women, and how men sexually abuse women and young

Nawal El Sadaawi

girls.

She has paid the price for speaking out. She was fired from her job in the Egyptian Health Ministry in 1973 and she was put in jail in 1981 for alleged "crimes against the state". But she doesn't regret her stand.

"You pay a high price to disobey. I lost the approval of my parents after losing faith in a god outside me. But I discovered a god inside of me. 'I lost my job, I was jailed, all my books were banned under the previous president of Egypt. Even though my books aren't banned anymore, I am almost silenced in my country. I can't speak in the media, the papers don't write about my books. I was on a deathlist of religious fanatics. The Egyptian government put guards in front of my house 24 hours a day for two years - claiming they were protecting me. It causes me a lot of pain to work like this.

"But then my books are in almost every home in the Arab world. They are distributed from person to person. People ask 'have you read this one have you read that one'. People sometimes stop me in the street and say my books changed their lives."

Last year an organisation she helped found, the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), was banned in Egypt. She is fighting this and has taken the government to court. The government says the organisation was too political.

"Our organisation spoke up against the Gulf War. Half a million people were killed in this war so the US could control the oil. This affects us as women. What US president George Bush decides in the White House affects my aunt in my village. We can't separate international and national issues from women's issues. I can't understand why people try to separate things. "People often ask me why I am so political. Men ask me why I don't write about love. I tell them love is politics."

She says the Gulf War has affected women in Egypt and the Arab world.

"The Gulf War was a defeat for women. The economy in my country has got worse and women are the ones losing their jobs. More women are forced to wear veils now. More people are pushing that women should be

obedient, and should stay at home and look after the children. Nowadays some job adverts even say 'no women must apply'."

El Sadaawi believes it is important for women to study history to discover the role women have played.

"When I started to write I needed to find other women who had written. I looked back into history and I found out the first person who created an alphabet was a woman. I found out one of the goddesses, Isis, was not a goddess of the home, but of the head, of the intellect.

"We all need to delve into our history - the history of women fighters, the history of women writers."

She also believes women must be part of organisations to fight for their rights.

"I believe in movements, organisations. We cannot liberate ourselves alone.

"In these movements we have to liberate all women - whether they are educated or not. Educated women must not stop other women from having a chance by speaking on behalf of them. Rural women, for example, must represent themselves. We have to give all women a chance to speak."

El Sadaawi's husband, Sherif Hetata, sat beside her all the time SPEAK talked to her.

"We are a team," she said.

He is also a writer, and he translates her books into English. And he is also a fighter. He spent 13 years in jail for being a socialist. We asked him what being married to someone like El Sadaawi has meant for him.

"Sometimes it has been difficult, and I have had to change. But through her I have been introduced to the feminist movement. A whole new world has opened up - the world of women. This has been very important to me."

It isn't only her husband's life El Sadaawi has changed. Her books, her writings, her political battles have changed the lives of many women inside and outside the Arab world. She hasn't only said "no" for herself, but for many many women, and she has given many women the courage to say "no" for themselves.☺

ADVICE

Child Support

How to claim this from the father

*Many women don't know they have a right to claim support from the father of their child, even if they are not married. Even when women know they have this right, they don't know how to go about claiming the money. Here **SPEAK** looks at how to claim maintenance.*

Mary is one of the many women who didn't know about her right to claim support for her child.

She has a four year old child, Themba. She is not married to Themba's father, Jabu, and, like many men, Jabu refused to take responsibility for his child. Mary asked him to give support towards Themba, but Jabu always refused. He claimed he was not the father.

One day someone Mary worked with told her she had a right to get financial support from Jabu. This type of support is called maintenance. Mary found out she did not need to pay for a lawyer to demand this money. She could go to the maintenance officer at the local magistrate's court. The officer takes up this case for free. Mary went to the maintenance officer and he took down her story in a sworn statement. The officer sent Jabu a summons ordering him to appear in court on a certain day. He was told to bring his pay slip and other papers to prove how much he earned. If he did not go to court, he could be charged with contempt of court and be given a fine or even sent to jail.

In the court Jabu again claimed Themba was

not his child so the court ordered Jabu, Mary and their child Themba to go to have blood tests or tissue tests (where they test the skin of the parents). These tests can prove almost 100 percent whether someone is the father of a child or not.

The tests showed there was a 99.9 percent chance of Jabu being the father. These tests are done at the South African Blood Transfusion Service and cost R220 for the blood test and R700 for the tissue test. Jabu was ordered by the court to pay the money for the test.

Jabu was also ordered to pay a certain amount of money for Themba every month. This was worked out from the amount of money he earned each month. Jabu was ordered to pay the money to the court before the 7th of every month. Mary could then collect the money.

What Are Your Rights

Many of us have been through what Mary went through or know of friends who struggle to get money from the fathers of their children. Many women don't know about their rights or what the law says about getting maintenance from fathers. Even when women know they have a

Advice - Child Support

right to claim money for support, they think it would be too expensive to take the fathers to court. What rights do mothers have?

The only time a mother cannot claim maintenance is if the child or children live with the father and not with her. She is then not paying any money for bringing up the children. Many men try, like Jabu, to say the child is not theirs. They also try to claim the mother has had sex with many men. This doesn't matter. The law says the father must prove a child is not his. If he admits he has had sex with the woman, the court presumes the child is his. He has to prove to the court it is physically impossible for him to have fathered the child (by producing a doctor's certificate saying he is not able to father children). The fact that the woman has slept with other men is not an issue to the court. These days courts send people for blood tests or tissue tests to prove whether the man is the father or not.

The amount of maintenance the man will have to pay depends on his wages. The law says both parents have a duty to pay support for children according to how much money they have. The court will find out how much money both the mother and father earn. The court will then decide how much needs to be paid each month. This is called the maintenance order.

It is a criminal offence for a man to stop making payments if the court has ordered him to pay. There is no excuse he can make. He cannot get away with saying he doesn't have to pay anymore because he has got married to someone else or because he has other children.

The father also cannot give less money than the court has ordered him to give. Even if the child is visiting him for some time, the father cannot pay less or stop payment. If he says he is not able to pay the amount anymore, he has to go to court again and explain why. The court might

then give another maintenance order saying he can pay less each month.

A woman can go to the court to have the amount of maintenance increased from time to time. She can go because of the higher costs of living or if there have been changes in the situation. If the father is earning more money, for example, he would have to pay more support.

Finally, this all costs nothing. You do not need to pay to see a maintenance officer.

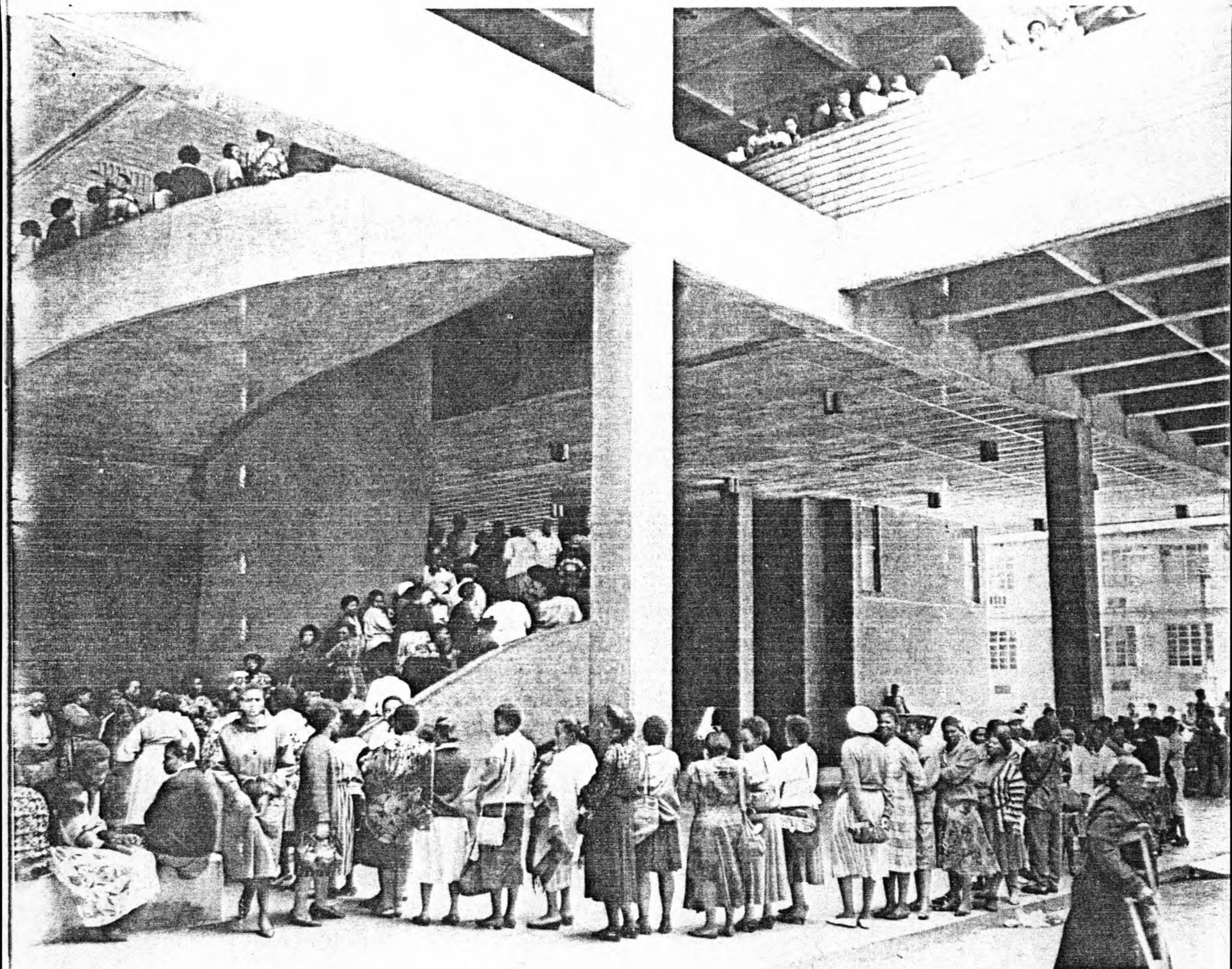
Problems With Getting Maintenance

But the law is one thing, and actually getting the support is another. Women face many problems with getting maintenance.

Women often have to spend hours in a queue waiting to receive the payments. Many women then find the father has not paid the money. It is a crime not to pay maintenance, but it could take a long time to take this up. The mother meanwhile has to struggle to support her child. When the case finally does get to court the father might argue he hasn't been working so he hasn't been able to pay.

Many women also have to travel long distances to get to a maintenance officer. Although the mother does not pay the court costs it could cost her a lot of time and money to travel to the court.

There is talk that the Department of Justice is discussing ways to make this easier. Men, for example, might be forced to pay the money directly into the mother's bank account. She would not have to stand in long queues anymore if this happened. The father could also be forced by the court to have a stop order on his account. The bank would then automatically take the money out of his account every month, and put it in the mother's account. He couldn't then decide not to pay one month. This would



Women in Johannesburg queue to get their money for maintenance.
A better method of collecting this money must be worked out. Picture: Guy Adams

solve some of the problems.

Many men try to find ways not to give over money to help support their children, and it can be a long and often tiring procedure trying to force them. This is something which needs to be looked at by all of us so we can come up with the best way to make it easier to claim maintenance. We also need to make sure the amount of money fathers have to pay is enough to cover the costs of the child.

In some areas women have organised themselves to take up problems of maintenance. If you are in such a group or know of any groups please write to us about your experiences. ☺

Main Points of Maintenance Laws

1. Even if you are not married, the father of the child still has to give support;
2. You can prove that someone is the father of your child by blood tests or tissue tests;
3. Even if the father has children by another woman, he still has to pay maintenance for your children;
4. You can get the amount of maintenance increased if the father is earning more money or because of higher costs of living;
5. If you have any problems, go to the Maintenance Officer at the local magistrate's court.

Politics isn't for men only

A woman youth leader speaks out

This is the true story of a woman in the leadership of one of the ANC Youth League Branches. She is one of the few women to be in branch leadership in youth organisations. She says young women must join organisations and not leave politics to the men. She didn't want her name used in the story because she is scared of being a target of hit squads - like so many other leaders in our country.

I am 18 years old and am in Standard Ten. I live in Diepkloof Soweto with my mother and my sister. I have been involved in the Diepkloof branch of the ANC Youth League since the branch was launched in February last year. I am now the vice-chair of this branch.

The first political organisation I joined was the South African Youth Congress in 1989. I was interested in politics so I decided I had to be part of organisation. As a female I feel I have to contribute like anyone else. It was not easy to do this. There were mainly men in the organisation and very few females. I was afraid to talk in meetings. If decisions were being taken, I tried to tell myself we are equal - I must be free to talk as men are free to talk.

In SAYCO there was a women's section and this helped me because only women were in these meetings and during discussions there I was developing. When we went to general meetings it was easier for me to contribute.

When the ANC Youth League branch was launched I was elected treasurer. There were two female comrades on the executive at the

time, but the other female did not attend meetings. She said she had family problems because her parents did not want her to interfere in politics.

I am proud to be the only female on the executive. It is my only chance to show other women there is nothing we as women cannot do. Many females think it is only men who are in politics. Women in organisations can do many things - you can be a women organiser or be involved in education. In such a way you can show your view and how you see things.

In our branch presently there is no separate women's section. We as women want to participate equally with men. If the female is over 18 years she has a right to join the Women's League.

We do have education around women in our branch, for example we look at the role women can play in our struggle. Women also come with their programmes when there is a campaign e.g. when looking at the crime in the township we can look at how this crime is affecting women.

There is a problem in the branch because at the moment there are only two active females in the branch. This is a big problem because it means they are expecting men to do things for them. I think youth females are scared to join the organisation because they are afraid of detention or being killed.

Earlier this year we saw there was a problem in the executive about portfolios. We decided to reshuffle positions and I was asked to become



Youth at a SACP rally in 1990.

"Many females who are card carrying members do not want to come to meetings".

Picture: Dynamic Images

the vice-chairperson. The reason I was asked to be in this position was because I was seen as being able to fight for the constituency generally. The male comrades also felt if I was vice-chairperson it would push up my profile and maybe other women would join the organisation. Other women are now joining in the sub-structures.

I do not feel happy because many females who are card-carrying members do not want to come to the meetings. This makes me feel bad because I don't think there is anything wrong with the organisation. It's just like students in the classroom where there are a lot of men but women must try to take part in discussion and ask questions.

Women and men in organisations can do the

same things. I feel the men listen to me when I talk and when I chair a meeting. In the Youth League we believe everyone is equal and you can't just listen to the male.

In my branch we are trying to increase the amount of women by having women's netball clubs and there is a traditional group where we have singing and do drama. If this does not bring the women into the organisation, we will try other methods like having dancing.

Education is also very important. With new members we always have a workshop where we deliver a paper where we discuss things like women's triple oppression.

My message to other women is they must join the organisation and participate because no-one will fight for us as women. ✪

The PAC and Women

Ellen Mothopeng is the publicity secretary of the African Women's Organisation - the women's section of the PAC. She talked to Shamim Meer of SPEAK about the PAC and women.

SPEAK: How did you get involved in politics?

ELLEN: My political involvement was mainly influenced by the Soweto uprising in 1976. As a student I was very active. I was 16 years old and at high school. I was lucky to escape arrest. Some of our colleagues were shot right next to our school premises. On June 16 I remember passing Uncle Zeph's (late president of the PAC) house with other students on the way to Orlando West where the actual protests took place. He was standing outside waving to us, giving us moral support and encouraging us to go forward in fighting for our rights as students. A few weeks later we saw police pick him up. Later many of my friends and I visited his son John for political briefings. I fell in love with him and we married in 1981.

SPEAK: What does the African Women's Organisation (AWO) of the PAC stand for?

ELLEN: The African Women's Organisation and the PAC have the same objectives. The

African Women's Organisation aims to rally African women under the banner of African nationalism and to educate the women socially, politically, morally and to conscientise them.

The PAC's objectives are: to rally Africans under the banner of African Nationalism; to overthrow white domination; to establish a Africanist Socialist Democracy; to unify all African states into the United States of Africa.

SPEAK: What do you mean by African women?

ELLEN: This includes indigenous African people, the so-called coloureds, the so-called Indians and anyone who owes their loyalty to Africa.

SPEAK: The PAC refused to attend the Conference for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). The PAC also says the armed struggle should not be suspended. Could you explain why?

ELLEN: We say CODESA is an undemocratic structure. De Klerk and the Nationalist Party have too much representation.

We wouldn't consider taking part till this is changed. We also say talks should be held in a neutral venue with a neutral chair.

About armed struggle, we say this has to be increased until we have total liberation.

This is a very tricky period and we must always be on guard.

SPEAK: When was AWO formed?

ELLEN: On 6 April 1986. At the time political organisations were banned. Most of the women were left behind by their men who were behind bars. Urbania Mothopeng, the wife of the late president of the PAC, and many women around the country decided to form a women's organisation to lift up the spirit of women, bring them together, educate and motivate them and build the spirit of Pan Africanism amongst the women.

It was launched in Katlehong. About 500 women attended the launch. Women from all over the country came. Women in the Cape came out strongly in the membership drive. The Cape is still our stronghold, together with the



Ellen Mothopeng : "The success of any struggle depends on the participation and support of women".

Picture : Shamim Meer

Transvaal.

SPEAK: What have women in the PAC organised around?

ELLEN: We have had many programmes, such as calls for the release of the Sharpeville Six. We focused on Theresa Ramashamola and campaigned for her release. We are delighted our word carried some weight because she is finally free. We celebrated Women's Day in 1991 with a talk on AIDS. It is one of our national campaigns. We have realised the youth of today are going to be targets of AIDS. These are our future leaders.

SPEAK: What does AWO say about women's oppression?

ELLEN: AWO sees national oppression and sexual oppression as two sides of the same coin. We are committed to fighting colonial oppression alongside our male comrades as well as fighting against male domination and chauvinism as sisters in the feminist cause. Our slogan is "Educate a woman and you shall have educated the nation."

SPEAK: Are there many women in PAC leadership?

ELLEN: Women make up a dismal 18 or 20 percent of the national leadership. AWO will campaign to ensure women make up no less than half of PAC leadership.

SPEAK: Has AWO taken up issues with the PAC on women?

ELLEN: We have dealt with things like sexual harassment. Personally I always give my PAC menfolk a strong tongue lashing for repeatedly leaving their wives or girlfriends, and the womenfolk in general, behind when attending rallies and meetings. AWO says the success of any struggle depends on effective participation and support by women.

SPEAK: Do you think different organisations are getting on better these days?

ELLEN: With women this is developing. I attended a meeting called by the ANC women on women's rights. Forty-two organisations were there. Since this meeting, women are working together. AWO is committed to building greater understanding among women across organisations.

SPEAK: What are the tasks facing South African women?

ELLEN: We need to educate each other about what is happening - about the constituent assembly, about elections. Elections are important because the Africans in this country have no experience of these. We need to draw up constitutional clauses which will protect women and children from the injustices they face.☼

SPEAK

Premenstrual Syndrome

When you know it's nearly that time of the month

If you feel depressed, or tired, or your tummy is swollen and your breasts sore before you get a period, you could be suffering from Premenstrual Syndrome, which is also called PMS. SPEAK looks at this problem that many women face, and at what can be done about it.

Many South African women may not have heard of Premenstrual Syndrome or PMS, but many women are probably suffering from it. PMS is a mixture of emotional and physical feelings a number of women get before they start their period. It includes feeling depressed or very tired, head-aches, sore breasts and many other symptoms.

These feelings begin one to two weeks before the period starts. After a woman starts bleeding this feeling goes away or starts to get better. Here is a list of the symptoms or feelings women suffering from PMS get. Some women have only one symptom, while others have many.

*Mood Changes

This is probably the most common symptom of PMS. Women feel irritable and bad-tempered. They find themselves shouting at people over small things. Sometimes women can even get physically violent when they are not usually violent at all. Some women feel anxious or depressed. They cry more easily than usual. A common problem is to feel very tired and drained and wanting to sleep more than usual.

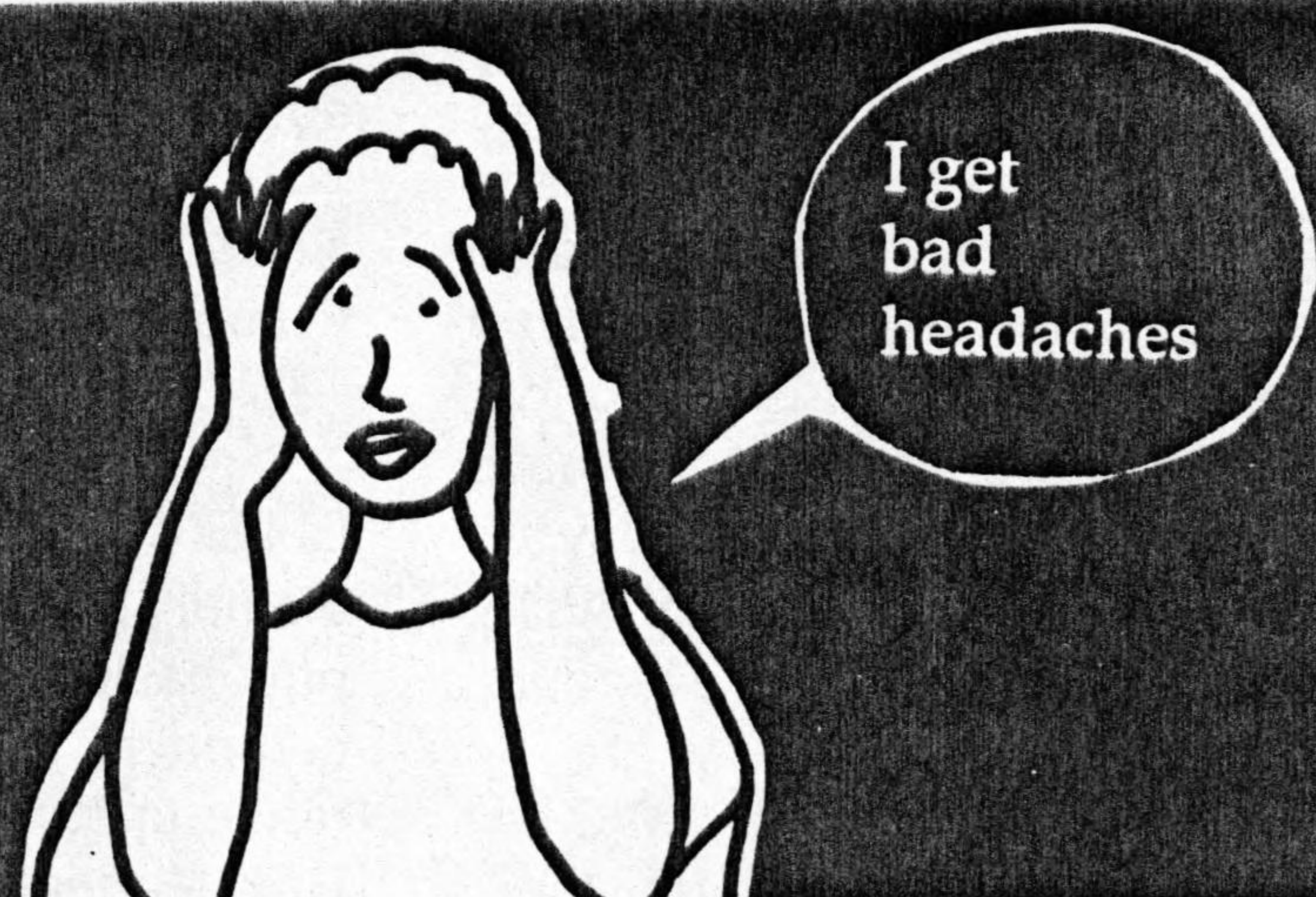
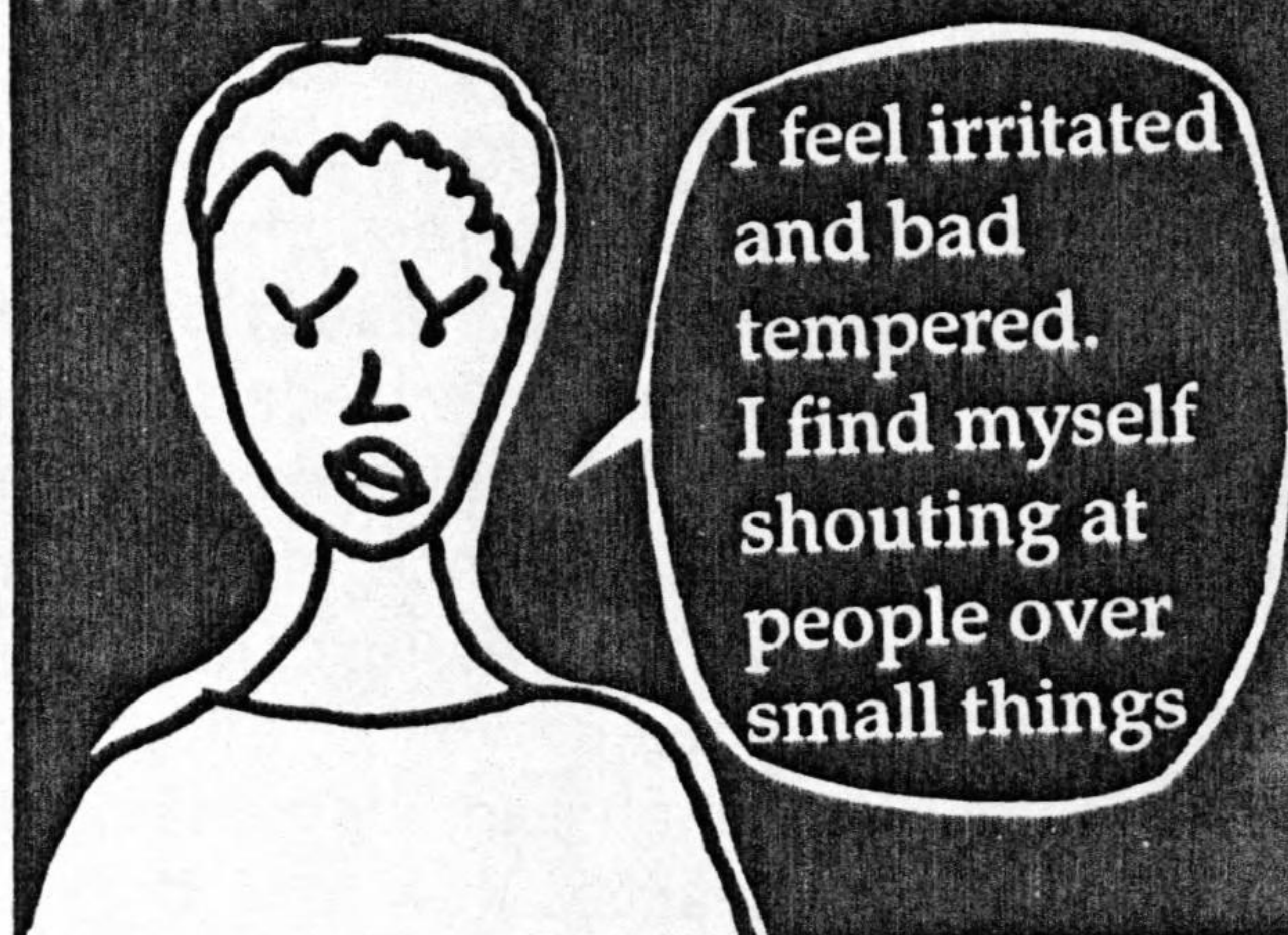
* Headaches

The most common headache of PMS is a stress headache. Women feel a pain like a band around their head. Sometimes they feel a pain at the back of their neck or at the top of the head.

*Breast problems

Many women get swollen, sore breasts. Their bras feel tight as their breasts get bigger. It feels very uncomfortable if anyone or anything touches them and it can be uncomfortable to make love.

At that time of month.....



***Feeling "blown up"**

Many women notice their weight increases just before a period. Sometimes their tummies get very swollen and uncomfortable. Sometimes also their hands and feet swell up.

***A change in eating habits**

A few women want to eat more food before their period. Some women crave sweet or salty things during this time.

Who gets PMS?

Two out of every 10 women have serious problems with PMS, and some people say as many as five out of 10 women have some problems with PMS. Any woman can suffer with this problem. Women can start having PMS any time between the ages of 20 to 45 years. They can suffer from it both before and after they have children.

What causes PMS?

Health care workers and researchers are still not sure what causes PMS. Some say it is caused by hormones, others disagree with this.

PMS happens in the second part of the women's menstrual cycle. At this time there are two female hormones in the blood called oestrogen and progesterone. These hormones are made by the ovaries which also store a women's eggs.

In the middle of the cycle the ovaries release an egg. If the egg is not fertilised and the

woman does not fall pregnant, the ovary stops producing as many female hormones as before. As soon as the hormone level drops, the women's period starts.

Some health workers believe it is these two hormones, oestrogen and progesterone which lead to PMS. They say that PMS is caused when these hormones are not properly balanced.

Other health workers don't believe it is a hormone problem, but aren't sure what exactly causes PMS.

How to treat PMS

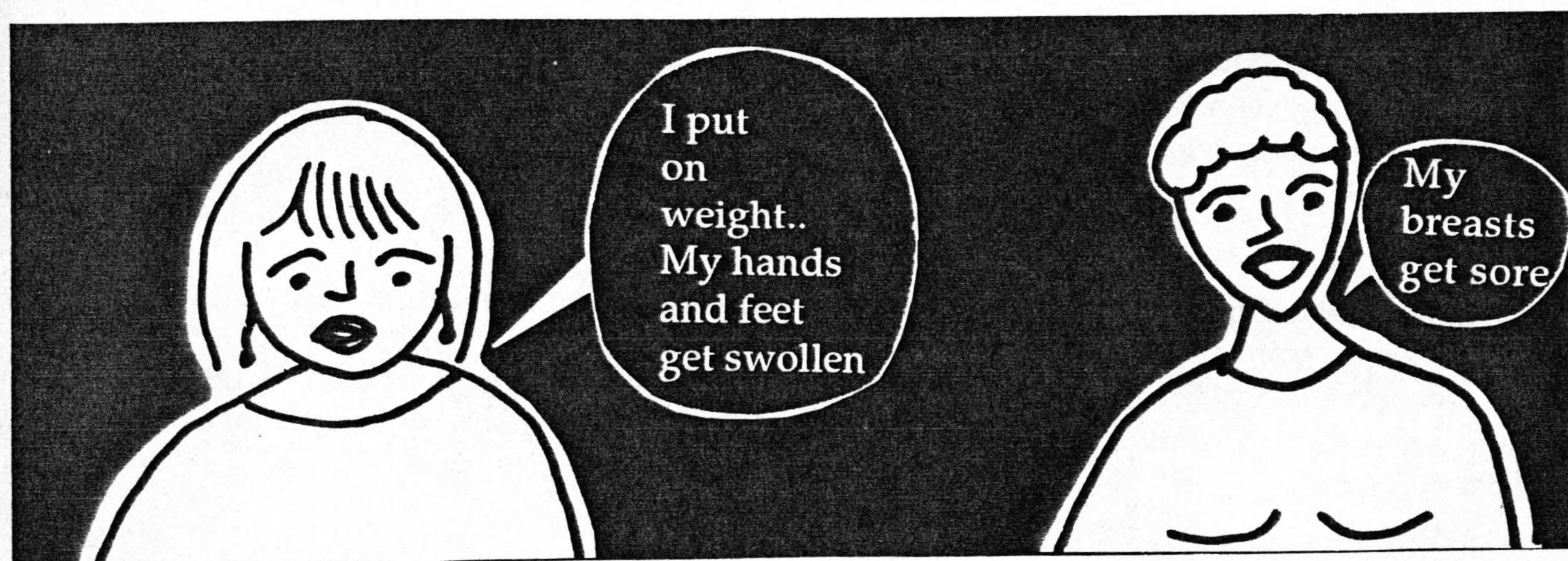
Because doctors do not really understand PMS, there isn't one single medicine which is guaranteed to help. But there are lots of different medicines women can try for PMS. Some treatments work on one woman but don't help another woman.

The only way to find the right medicine for yourself is to try them out. Some medicines can be bought from the chemist and others can only be got from a doctor or a clinic.

Here is a list of some of these medicines:

***Vitamin B6 tablets**

These help with the mood changes and tiredness. You take one 50mg tablet every day from four days before the symptoms start until three days after the period starts. Some women find it easier to take a B6 tablet every day so they don't have to work out when to start. These tablets can be bought from the chemist. They are not too expensive.



**Oil of Evening Primrose*

This works for the same symptoms as Vitamin B6. Take one capsule every day. It can be bought from the chemist, but it is very expensive.

**Other Vitamins*

Some women find vitamins helpful. Two vitamin tablets used are Vitamin E and Magnesium vitamin pills.

You can buy these from a chemist.

**Water Tablets*

If you feel bloated or swollen, you can get water tablets from your doctor or clinic. Take one every morning on the days you feel very swollen. If bloating is a big problem you should try to cut out or cut down on salt as this can make you retain water.

**The combined contraceptive pill (the Pill)*

This is the pill which is taken for contraception or prevention. It usually makes PMS better. Sometimes though it makes it worse. You can get it from your doctor or clinic. Discuss the Pill with your doctor or clinic sister. They will advise you on whether you can take the pill or not.

**Progesterone tablets*

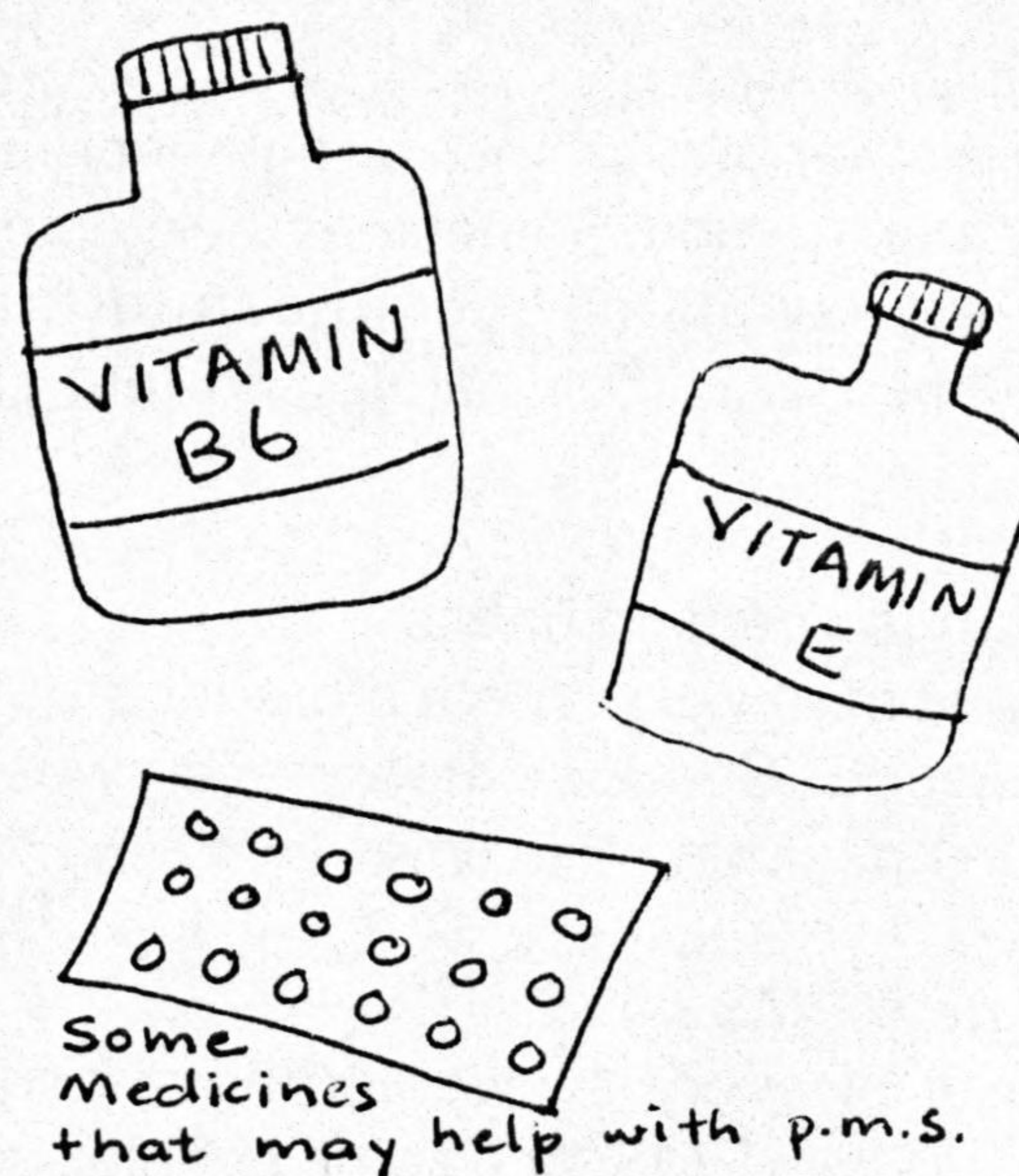
These are hormone tablets. They sometimes correct the balance of hormones, but some doctors say the side effects are worse than PMS. They are taken in the second part of the cycle. You can get these from your doctor or clinic.

**Bromocriptine*

There is also a medicine called bromocriptine which helps breast tenderness. This is very expensive. It can only be got from a doctor or clinic.

**Calming Tablets*

Some doctors prescribe medicines which calm your nerves or stop depression. These are called anti-depression tablets and can be useful on the days when you feel very tense or irritable.



These medicines must only be used under the supervision of a doctor or a specialist nurse.

**Ponstan*

A medicine called "Ponstan" may help with PMS. It is especially good though for period pains. You take this a few days before the symptoms of the PMS start. You can get these from a doctor or a clinic.

**Diet*

Some health workers also believe a change in diet can help. They say women should try to eat more regular meals around this time; they should cut out salt; they should try not to eat junk food; and try not to drink tea, coffee, cocoa or coke.

If you do have symptoms of PMS get your local doctor or nurse to check you. There are other illnesses that can give women similar symptoms and you must be checked for these.

One of the conditions is endometriosis which we will write about in the next issue of SPEAK. Remember if you do go for a check up make sure you go for a pap smear (a test for cancer of the cervix) at the same time.☺

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