

MINUTES OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE UNITED WOMEN'S ORGANISATION
POLICY MEETING HELD IN MANNENBERG ON 17 MAY 1981.

Discussion on the Policy of the U.W.O. was introduced by V. Engel. V. Engel explained that the Policy was a follow-up of the Conference and stressed that the Policy was the living blood of the Organisation and must grow out of the particular circumstances we are in. Our Policy contains our guiding principles. We must fight for them. Our Policy must be based on the issues that affect us as oppressed women. V. Engel appealed to the women to say what the problems are that face them. When the Policy statement has been completed, the meeting will give instructions to the Executive to carry out this Policy.

V. Engel said that there would be open discussion on the Policy. Z. Berends would summarize the problems raised by the meeting and Mager would cross-reference the contributions. The final statement would then be read to the floor.

Preface/Introduction to Policy statement

The first speaker, Mrs Pake, said that the Policy should relate to the general struggle for liberation in South Africa.

V. Engel said that this was possibly included in the Preface to the Policy statement. The Preface draft was then read to the house.

L. Cooper put forward a proposal from the Cape Town Branch that women's rights should be emphasized more and that women's rights should come before general rights.

Aunt Dora Tamana supported the view that the position of women must be emphasised and said that whatever was discussed in the Policy would be followed by our activities, which must be related to women. However, women were also part of the broader struggle for liberation as we saw in the trade union struggles in East London and in the Western Cape; in the rent struggles, in the Metha trial and in the struggles of the Residents Associations.

V. Engel stressed that discussion should be related to the Preface.

D. Williams put forward a counter proposal that the original draft preface should be adopted.

J. Schreiner then put forward a third proposal that an additional sentence be included in the original draft and that nothing be deleted from the draft. The third proposal was accepted by the majority.

V. Engel urged the house to lead discussion from the floor.

"You who are domestic workers,
You who are sources of cheap labour
You who sweep the streets,
Come forward with your ideas."

The second section of the Policy discussion was chaired by A. Mager.

Pass System

A speaker from Worcester urged us to condemn pass raids. The speaker said that the migrant labour system was intolerable. The speaker condemned the farm labour system which employed 14 year old children. We must organise against these things, the speaker said.

"I worked alone in 1960, to organise people. I worked from 4 in the morning till 7 at night,"

A speaker from Guguletu said that we must get rid of passes that force mothers to run into the bushes with their babies.

A third speaker said that the Pass system was like a snake. People born in their own country have to apply for citizen cards and passes so that they can be arrested. The speaker urged the house to work and to fight this system.

A fourth speaker condemned the permit system and a fifth speaker condemned the fact that black children are forced to go out to look for work when they should be at school.

There was a proposal to alter the first clause of the draft statement to incorporate the above demands. (See Policy)

Water, Electricity and Housing

One speaker said that we must demand free water and another that we demand reasonable electricity charges.

A speaker from Paarl (Mrs Petersen) said that people in Paarl had once lived in houses with big rooms but these were taken over by the municipality who removed the occupants and put them into pig sty houses. The speaker said that the Government divides the oppressed people by providing houses with ceilings for "Coloureds" and houses with no ceilings and cement floors for Africans. This is discrimination, the speaker said.

"There is no worse place than Paarl. There are worms in the water because the toilets are too near the water," the speaker said.

M. Licio said that the housing situation was very bad in Elsie's River where there was no proper sewage system and people were forced to live between mounds of filth.

A speaker from Guguletu said that it was unsafe to have toilets outside in the yards as people were attacked at night. Another speaker from Guguletu said that houses burnt down very easily.

A proposal that we condemn unhygienic housing was accepted.

It was proposed that the last section of clause 5 be incorporated in the clause on domestic workers.

Health

A speaker from Guguletu said that health care facilities were inadequate and that Day Hospitals closed at 12.00 pm.

Another speaker said that there were insufficient training centres for black nurses. A speaker from the Cape Town Branch proposed that a clause on health care for children be added.

A statement on health was formulated and accepted by the house. (See Policy)

Family Planning

One speaker said that family planning should be free.

A member from Kensington (C. Protchard) explained that family planning was free but was being enforced at the present time.

Government bodies

It was proposed that all government bodies should be rejected.

A question was then asked whether School Committees were government appointed bodies.

A member from the Cape Town Branch explained that School Committees were Government controlled.

Education

A speaker from Paarl said that the removal of children from school should be condemned.

A member from the Cape Town Branch (M. Budow) proposed that the clause on Education be amended to include "free and compulsory education for all" and that the word "actively" be inserted in the clause "We support the struggles of our children against 'slave' education."

Unemployment and Divide-and-rule

A speaker from Worcester said that unemployment was rife in Worcester. The speaker said that Africans lost their jobs because the "Coloureds" did not want to work and unite with them. The speaker said that we must work with love and through love. We cannot have unity if we do not have love for one another between races.

Ms. Lisea said that this problem was very near. M. Lisea said that she had quit a factory because of the same problem. "But we must remember that it is the system which created this problem through its divide and rule tactics. We must break those barriers and teach our children in our homes to unite and love each other so that when they get to their places of work the bosses can see that we are a united people and they cannot divide us. Through this Organisation, the U.W.O., we can teach people about trade unions and unity. Through this organisation, we can combat disunity."

Republic Day

A speaker proposed that the clause on Republic Day be amended to include an explanation of why we reject Republic Day. (See Policy)

Security Laws

A member from the Cape Town Branch submitted a proposal condemning the security laws and demanding the release of political prisoners from Robben Island.

A member from the Athlone Branch proposed that the clause be amended to demand the release of all political prisoners, irrespective of where they are held.

Activities

V. Engel led the discussion the activities of the U.W.O.

It was proposed that a full discussion of the Practical Activities should be tabled at the first meeting of the Executive Council.

It was proposed that the U.W.O. should hold

- regular language classes, starting with Xhosa and English
- workshops on women's struggles in liberated countries
- a workshop on women in the home.

Resolutions

It was proposed that the U.W.O. pledge its support for the strike of the workers of Wilson Rowntree. The following resolution was adopted:

"The U.W.O. supports the strike of the workers of Wilson Rowntree and undertakes to promote the struggle of the workers through promoting the consumer boycott of Rowntrees products."

A woman representing the evicted man, women and children now in Crossroads addressed the house and asked for the support of the Organisation in their struggle to remain in the Cape.

The Chairperson, M. Lisiea, said that the Executive would meet with the women in Crossroads and discuss ways in which the U.W.O. could support their struggles.

Emblem

The Chairperson asked the house to choose an emblem of the U.W.O.

Five samples of possible emblems were on display and the house was asked to vote. Each member had one vote. The emblem of the U.W.O. was then adopted.

The meeting closed at 6.30pm.