



1956 — 1986

WOMEN ON THE MARCH FOR FREEDOM

30th Anniversary of the March on Pretoria

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (SOUTH AFRICA) WOMEN'S SECTION

1956 — 1986

THIRTY YEARS OF STRUGGLE

August the 9th is South Africa's Women's Day. It is used to commemorate the 1956 march on the Union Building in Pretoria, when 20 000 women protested the introduction of passes for them.

For generations African men had been forced to carry the hated pass: that document which was used to regulate their every moment — where they could live, work and breathe. Failure to produce the pass meant instant arrest: 'irregularities' meant gaol and deportation. And now the government turned its gaze on African women.

The process was a gradual one. First, in 1950, an amendment to the Urban Areas Act, which would enable the introduction of the hated documents for women, was tabled. Throughout the country, women protested. The government, wary of provoking nationwide resistance, back-pedalled for the moment. But it was determined to push the measures through. In 1952 the Natives Bill, ironically sub-headed the Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Bill, was passed. It became clear that reference books for women were on the agenda.

The government moved slowly. Aware of the fierce antipathy throughout the country, it waited until 1956 before issuing the first passes. The process was piecemeal. Government vans toured the countryside hitting on remote areas and, through a combination of lies, persuasion and guile, they gave out passes. But even in these places, isolated from the cities and from organised opposition, the government agents met with resistance. Women refused to accept the passes, they returned them to the location superintendents and they burnt them *en masse*.

The anti-pass movement began to grow. The Federation of South African women decided to hold a mass demonstration against the documents in 1956. For months organisers toured the country, slipping into townships at night, evading police harassment and spreading the word of the projected demonstration.

August 9th saw the convergence of 20 000 women outside the government buildings. They came from all over. They had paid up to a month's wages to get there — in some cases they came as delegates paid for by the whole population in their township. They came with babies on their backs, food baskets balanced on their heads, many of them dressed in the black and green uniform of the ANC. They each signed their own protest letter — a technique to avoid being arrested on an illegal demonstration — and they walked in twos and threes until the bulk of the crowd meant that they stopped in a mass outside Union Buildings. After a delegation handed in the letters to the office of the Prime Minister, the women stood in silence. For thirty minutes they stood, unmoving in the winter sun, their children quiet beside them, their arms raised in the ANC salute.

When thirty minutes was over the women sang *Nkosi Sikele 'iAfrika*. They dispersed, singing. And for that day they had made up a new song: *Wathint' a bafazi, wa inthint' 'mbokodo uzokufa* — Now you have touched the women you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed.

Fighting Woman

Brilliant daughter of Africa
Fighting woman of our land
Hunted across the country
Once

By ever frenzied Special Branch
hiding behind laws
Who now have
their pound of flesh behind bars
Their pound of flesh
on scales of blood behind walls of writing
But still Dorothy,
age-old African victim and victor
You still instill fear in their hearts.

Fearless sister
Locked in barbed Barberton prison
Where people live and die
Spending stabbing days
Entangled nights
In the silent cell of angered bell.

We are proud of you good sister
You whose light bathed the path
Whole-heartedly we tread the trail
Prepared to lay down our lives
For mothers of your mould.

Esther Ka-Maleka the joining spear
A display of seasoning bravery
Pushing forward struggling
Millicants born and mothered
Drawing in the fighting milk
That begot them.

You dedicated your life
Sacrificed your youth
Living the torture of 'solitary'
in the crowding of dreams and memories
Alone in the cloud of loneliness
But still the chin uphigh
For this we honour you.

Keep fighting Dorothy keep fighting
Tomorrow we'll stand united
Hand in hand comradely
Holding the dream by the hand
In a liberated South Africa ...

Duduzile Ndelu

(Dedicated to Dorothy Nyembe, who served a 15-year jail sentence. During the Defiance Campaign she served two prison sentences, and in 1956 led the Natal contingent of women to the Union Buildings in Pretoria.)



SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN SPEAK



'We organise as women because it's easier to talk to a person who understands the same language as you. There are quite a number of pressures which affect women directly. A woman will understand because she speaks from experience. Also, because of the sort of life we have been under — I mean colonialism — it has always been accepted that men are better than women. You come up against that in meetings where there are men. Women have to bring women up and convince them that they can do anything men can do, that they can be even better than men. It is only in meeting with women that some of us who don't think we are capable can make a start'.

Gertrude Shope



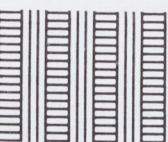
'After all, we stand shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk in a common struggle against poverty, race and class discrimination'.

Albertina Sisulu

'By silencing a person, you are not silencing the entire nation because it is not people who make history but history makes people. As long as conditions remain what they are, people such as her will always spring up from the community'.

Zodwa Sisulu,

talking about the constant arrests and bannings of her mother, Albertina



'Most women, having been enslaved for so long, are afraid to embark on an uncharted exploration in the great adventure to freedom and underrate their own talents. While most find fulfilment of their destinies in eventually being tied up with domesticity — washing clothes, lighting the stove, bringing up children — for me happiness was tied up with being able to do something not just for myself, but for the suffering masses'.

Dorothy Nyembe, who served fifteen years in a South African jail.



'They can kill hundreds of Mxenges and the struggle for liberation will not stop ... When people have declared war on you, you cannot afford to be crying. You have to fight back'.

Victoria Mxenge, talking about the murder of her husband, Griffiths, in 1981

'Victoria, we give you credit for what you did for us mothers and we greet you in the name of the stalwarts who are left ... The struggle is not only a struggle of our menfolk. Join us, mothers who are still sitting. There is no time to waste.'

Sister Bernard Ncube, President of the Federation of Transvaal Women Speaking at the funeral of Victoria Mxenge who was murdered in 1985



The unity and purpose of our women continued and consolidated, especially in 1984, the Year of the Women of South Africa. In that year women were again in the forefront of the struggle for liberation. New organisations in all provinces were formed and old ones strengthened. There was mass mobilisation of women on a large scale, as they played their role in the democratic movement. The response has been great and many are taking up their positions with efficiency, courage and confidence, undermining the racist regime.

Only last year, in 1985, history repeated itself when more than 20 000 women demonstrated against racist repression. These were the women of Mamelodi township who protested against the presence of the SADF in the townships, demanding their withdrawal and a halt to all brutality throughout the country. Their action forced supporters of the system to resign from the posts they occupied.

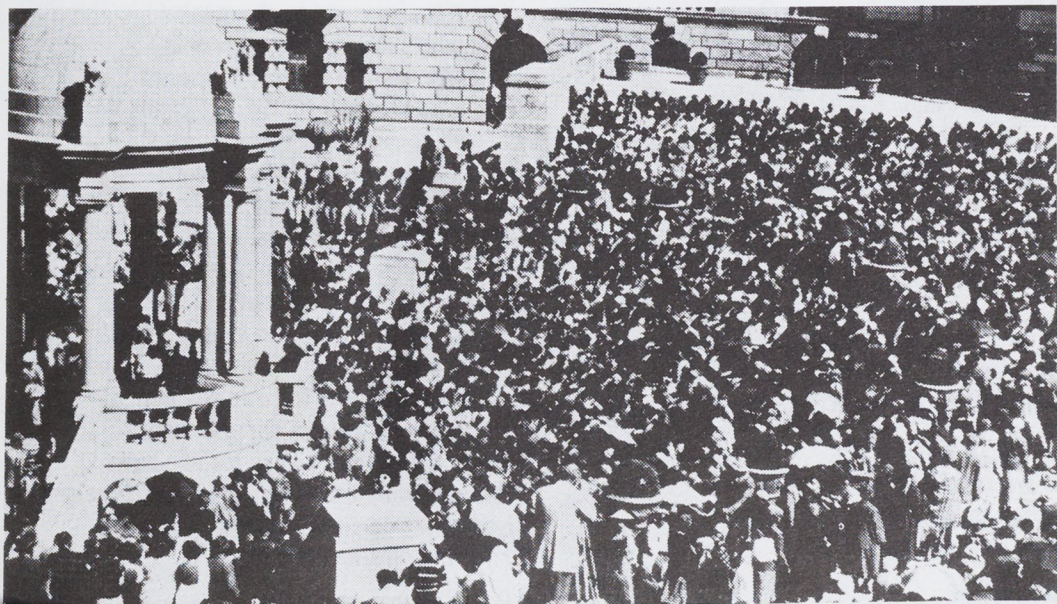
In Natal, the Cape, Orange Free State and the Transvaal, women are up in arms fighting together with workers, men, youth and children for equal education for all, against soaring transport costs and the increasing cost of living. It is well over two years now that the oppressed majority have decided to make apartheid unworkable. Rents and rates have not been paid, workers are using their effective weapon of strikes to force employers to reason in relation to the appalling working conditions and for a living wage. Communities have run consumer boycotts, refusing to buy at the shops of those who support the system. In schools, parents, teachers and pupils are planning a democratic educational programme for the people.

It is true that during the course of time many lives have been sacrificed as the regime murders, kidnaps and tortures our people. Nevertheless, there is indisputable evidence that despite all the repression against the people, the enemy has underestimated the will and might of the people. Their feverish attempts to deceive the international community with their 'reforms' has plunged them into an even deeper crisis. In the meantime, the country has become ungovernable as the ANC emerges as a force to be reckoned with.

As we link the struggle of the earlier years to the present and proceed to the future, we need to measure up to the challenging situations and to match our strategies and tactics with every changing step of our revolution.

'When women take up arms, the success of the revolution is assured', said the late Chief Albert Luthuli.

Amandla! Matla! Power!



Malibongwe Igama Lamakhosikazi Let the Women be Praised

Malibongwe, Malibongwe
Malibongwe, Malibongwe
Igama Lamakhosikazi Malibongwe
Igama Lamakhosikazi Malibongwe

Ziboshiwe, Ziboshiwe
Ziboshiwe, Ziboshiwe
Inkokheli zethu ziboshiwe
Inkokheli zethu ziboshiwe

Mazilandwe, Mazilandwe
Mazilandwe, Mazilandwe
Inkokheli zethu ziboshiwe
Inkokheli zethu ziboshiwe

Be praised, Be praised
Let the women be praised
Arrested, Arrested
Our leaders are arrested
Release them, Release them
Let's demand the release of our leaders.



Forget Not Our Mothers

Forget not our mothers
awaiting us with an assured patience

Forget not our fathers
languishing in jails
toiling in mines

Forget not our children
lying dead
dying on the streets

Fist of fury reach out
as we re-affirm:
Africa shall be free!
We shall free her!

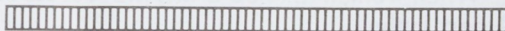
Ilya Mackay



Hey Strydom

We! Strydom
Wathinti 'mbokodo
Wathinta' bafazi uzokufa

Hey Strydom
Now you have touched the women
You have struck a rock
You have dislodged a boulder
You will be crushed.



Women Unite and Fight!

You who have no work, speak.
You who have no homes, speak.
You who have no schools, speak.
You who have to run like chickens
from the vulture, speak.
Let us share our problems so that
we can solve them together.
We must free ourselves.
Men and women must share housework.
Men and women must work together
in the home and out in the world.
There are no creches and
nursery schools for our children.
There are no homes for the aged.
There is no-one to care for the sick.
Women must unite and fight for these rights.
I opened the road for you.
You must go forward.

Dora Tamana. April 1981



'If I die, I'll die a happy person because I have seen the rays of our new South Africa rising'.

Lilian Ngoyi, 1974



'Go well, my son. I am proud of you because you are to die for your people. You must know the struggle will not end even after your death'.

Sarah Mosololi's parting words to her son, Jerry, who was executed on June 9th, 1983



'All those years when we were being kicked out of schools because principals got scared, when we feared being known as Mandela's kids, when my mother was in prison and my father was where he is, I feel that has given me a special insight into human suffering which I can write about for others. Not to make them cry, but to give them strength'.

Zinzi Mandela



I have called for total sanctions, mandatory sanctions ... Those whose pockets are filled with gold from Pretoria's coffers obviously oppose sanctions and hypocritically pretend sanctions will hurt blacks. We bury people every day — we see blood flowing around us. With all that is happening we are still supposed to suffer when sanctions are applied to this land, when we have suffered so much ...'

Winnie Mandela, 1986



'The Hippos hide in dark corners and shoot our children. We cannot even send them out to the shops without fear ... The week after the massacre, they drove through the streets just shooting at people in KwaNobuhle ... We decided we had had enough. It was time the women united against the brutality our families face; to be a mouthpiece for women who suffer so much under apartheid; and to participate in the struggle as women ...

We started by holding house meetings but as the numbers grew we had to use church halls. We discuss the hardships we face, and the struggle to end those ...

We women work in the white homes in Uitenhage. Every day I go there and look after a white baby. I do so with no harmful thoughts in my heart; I care for that baby and bring him up. And when that baby grows up, he comes into the township and shoots my very own children, playing in the street where I have had to leave them to earn money for their food'.

Women from the Uitenhage Women's Organisation which was formed in response to the massacre at Langa in 1985 when 29 people died.

WE NEED YOUR ACTIVE SUPPORT!

The African National Congress calls on you to:

- Campaign for the unconditional release of all South African political prisoners and detainees.
- Campaign for prisoner-of-war status for captured freedom fighters like Thandi Modise under the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the Additional Protocol One thereof in accordance with Paragraph 17 of the UN General Assembly Resolution 37/69A of December 9th, 1982.
- Publicise the plight of women political prisoners and demand that, pending the release of all political prisoners, they be fully informed of their rights, get proper medical attention, exercise, visits and letters; be allowed to study and have access to news material and enjoy adequate recreational facilities.
- Campaign for the complete international isolation of the apartheid regime politically, culturally, diplomatically, and, above all, militarily. To this end focus international attention in particular on the nature of the police state in South Africa:
 - The African majority is denied all political rights in the land of their birth.
 - A battery of repressive legislation makes it a criminal offence for any expression of opposition to injustice.
 - Security legislation allows for indefinite detention incommunicado in solitary confinement and torture is widely used by the security police who are immune from prosecution for the atrocities they perpetrate.
 - So-called fair trials of opponents of apartheid are based on evidence extracted during prolonged solitary detention and by means of torture.
 - The laws under which the opponents of apartheid are convicted define opposition to apartheid as a crime.
- Pledge all-round support for the ANC in its fight for the elimination of apartheid and the establishment of a free and democratic South Africa by all means possible, including that of armed struggle.
- Increase political and material assistance to the ANC, the vanguard movement of the oppressed people of South Africa and recognised as such by the OAU.
- Invite us to address your meetings and participate in discussions about the conditions obtaining in South Africa and what can be done to assist us in our fight for liberation.