



# SPEAK



## CARNATION WOMEN SPEAK ABOUT THEIR UNION

This is the third SPEAK. Two articles are written by women involved in organising work.

- \* The Carnation article is written by women from Carnation.
- \* The Northcroft article is written by women who are involved in organising women in their community.
- \* There is an article on the recent bus-boycott in Clermont.
- \* There is an article on drought.
- \* The Health article looks at Depo Provera - "the injection".



SPEAK met some of the women workers from Carnation Foods, a factory in Durban organised by the African Food and Canning Workers Union. We asked the women to share with us some of their experiences at work and with their union. The following is what they told us.

"At the beginning when we were first approached to join the union we were afraid. We were afraid of the police and of losing our jobs. But we started joining up and now most of the workers in the factory are members of the African Food and Canning Workers Union. As a result of our membership in the union we are able to take up certain things with our bosses and get some things changed".

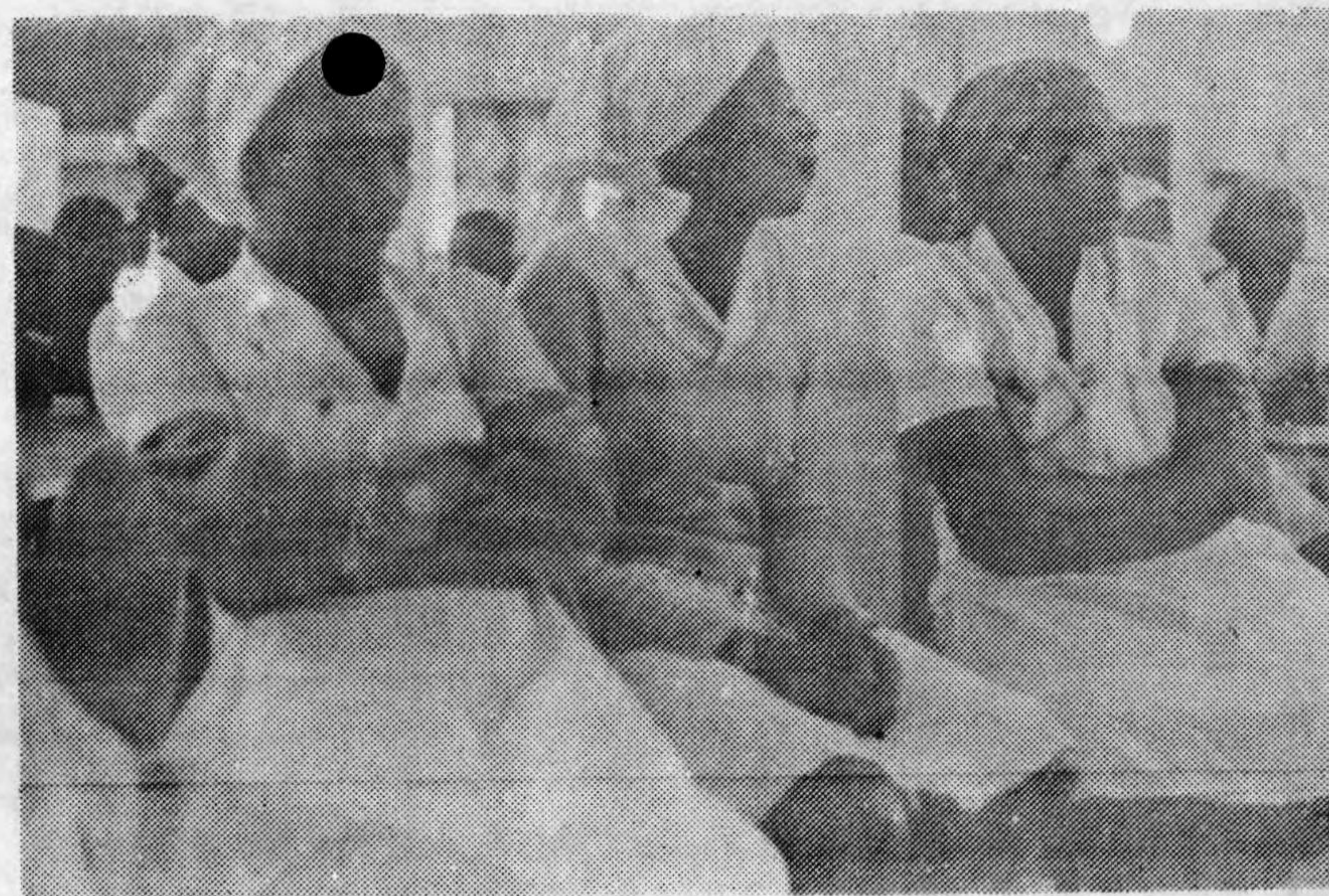
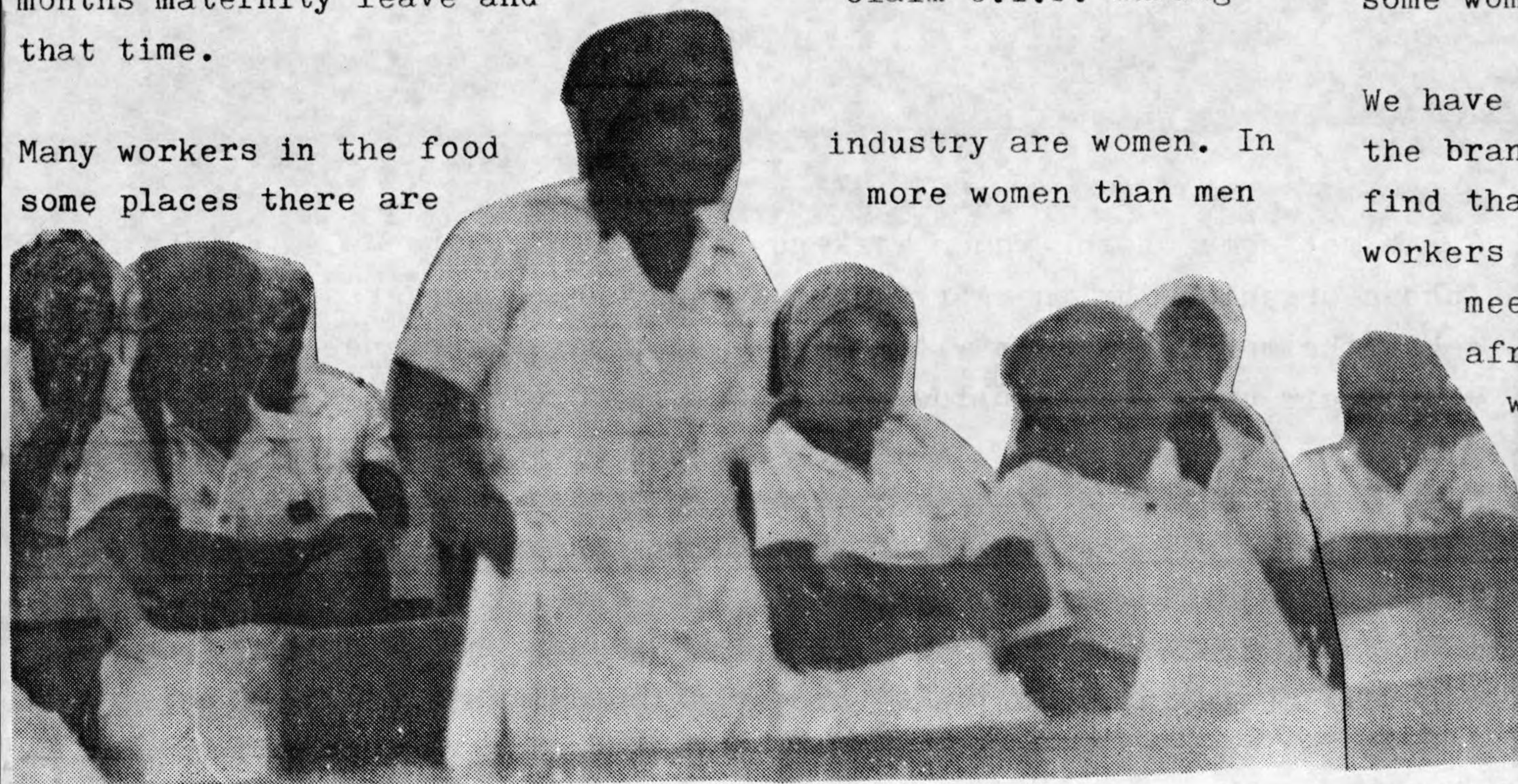


There are 36 women and 50 men workers at the factory. When more than half the workers had joined the union the workers elected shop stewards. The union then negotiated with the bosses and signed an agreement. The union organisers and the shop stewards spoke for the workers at negotiations. The workers were able to get some changes in this way.

"We pushed for higher wages and better overtime rates for all workers and we got this. On Fridays we used to knock off from work at 4p.m. We were not happy with this and took this up. Now we finish off work at 3p.m. on a Friday. We won 10 public holidays in a year. Now it is difficult for workers to be unfairly dismissed because the workers committee must be satisfied with the bosses reason first. Now we can have 5 months maternity leave and claim U.I.F. during that time.

Many workers in the food  
some places there are

industry are women. In  
more women than men



working in food factories. The union therefore has many women members and some women organisers.

We have women shop stewards and women on the branch committee of the union. We find that it is difficult for us women workers to attend union meetings. These meetings are at night and we are afraid of our husbands. To help the women shop stewards, some meetings are held at their homes. But then one husband still got angry with his wife. He said "Why do they all come to meet in our house? You must be a ring-leader if they all come here". We must still organise our husbands



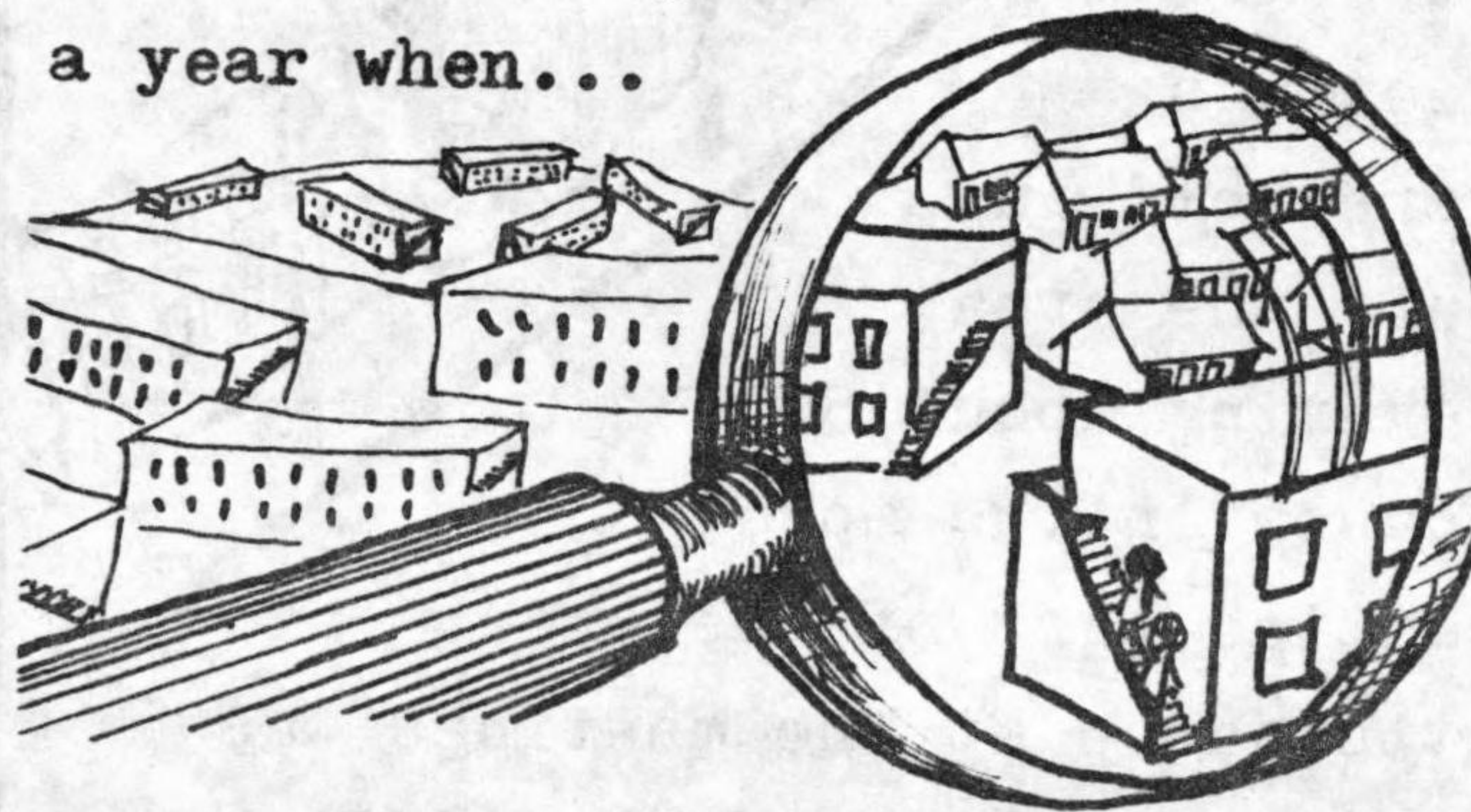
# NORTHCROFT WOMEN ORGANIZE!

The African Food and Canning Workers' Union is one of the unions in Durban that is organising workers to fight against low wages and bad working conditions. The union was founded 42 years ago by a woman named Ray Alexander, and today it has branches in the Cape, Transvaal and Natal.

The Durban Branch of the union held a conference to mark the 42nd anniversary of the union and to commemorate the death in detention of Neil Aggett and the death of organiser Peggy Dhlamini. At this conference there was a talk on women in the struggle. There was a lot of discussion on this. Everybody there was interested in the discussion.

There are many women workers in the garment, textiles and leather industries, in other factories and in shops and offices. SPEAK would like to hear from women workers about their experiences.

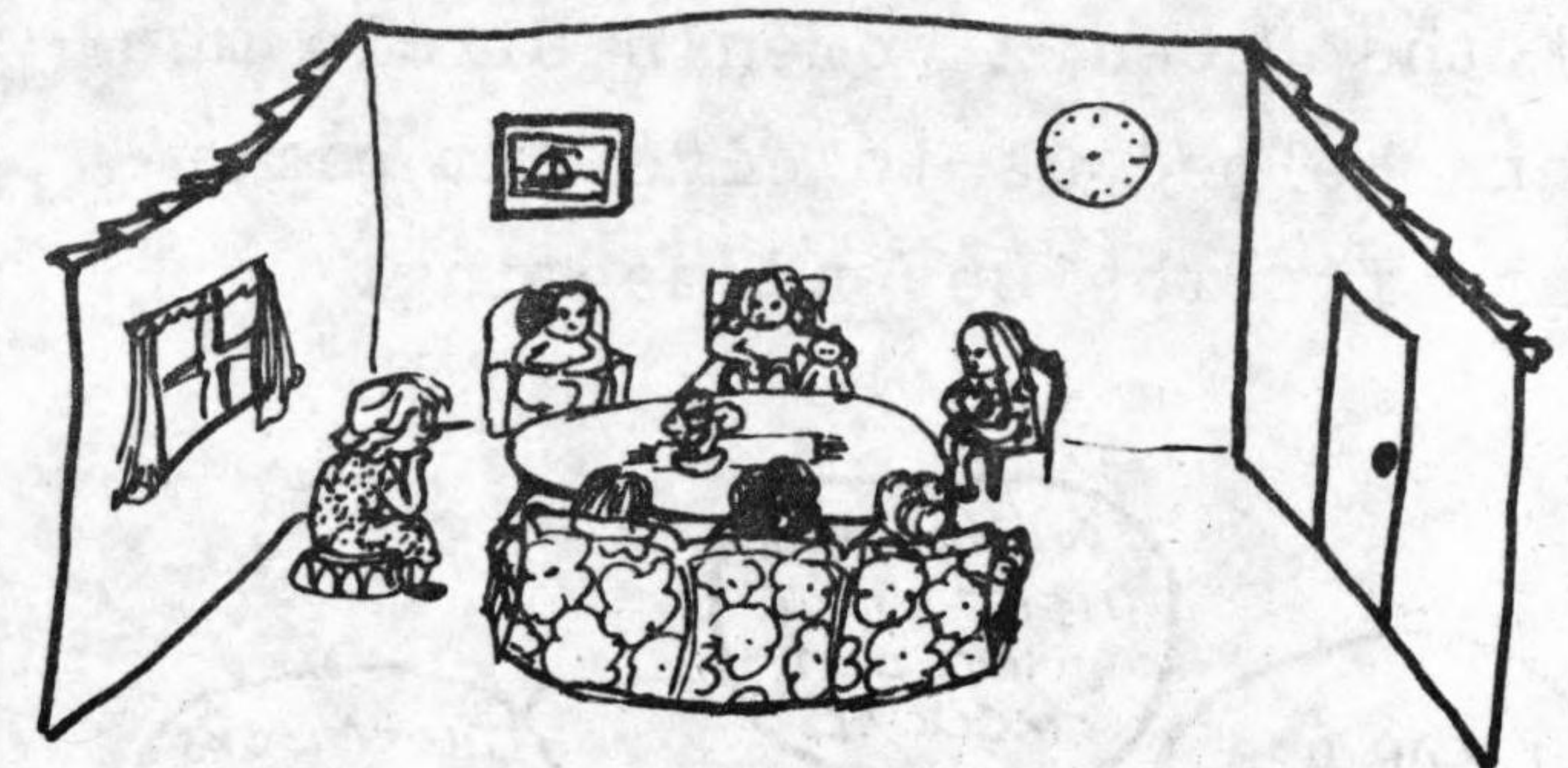
Northcroft, Unit 14, is a new area in Phoenix Township. We had been living here for about a year when...



...Phoenix Women's Circle and Child Welfare members visited two women they knew in the area. They told the Unit 14 women about Phoenix Women's Circle and asked them if they would like to start womens groups. They discussed people's needs such as creches, child-care, and pre-schools.



The Northcroft women were keen on the idea and agreed to invite more women from the area to a meeting to get more views and more support for the idea. A meeting was held at one of the women's homes. She invited her immediate neighbour and a few other women she knew. There were about 10 people at the meeting.

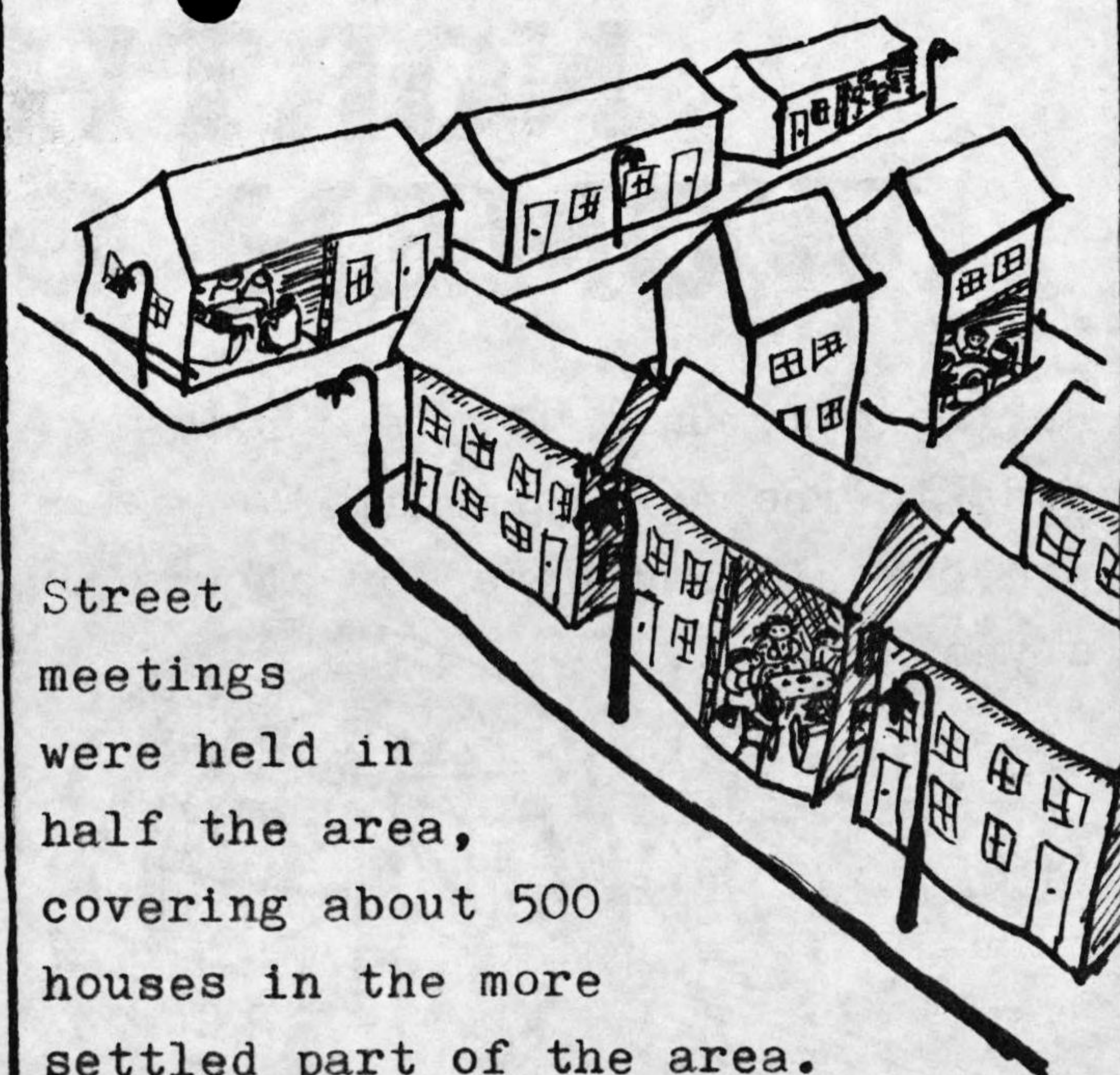
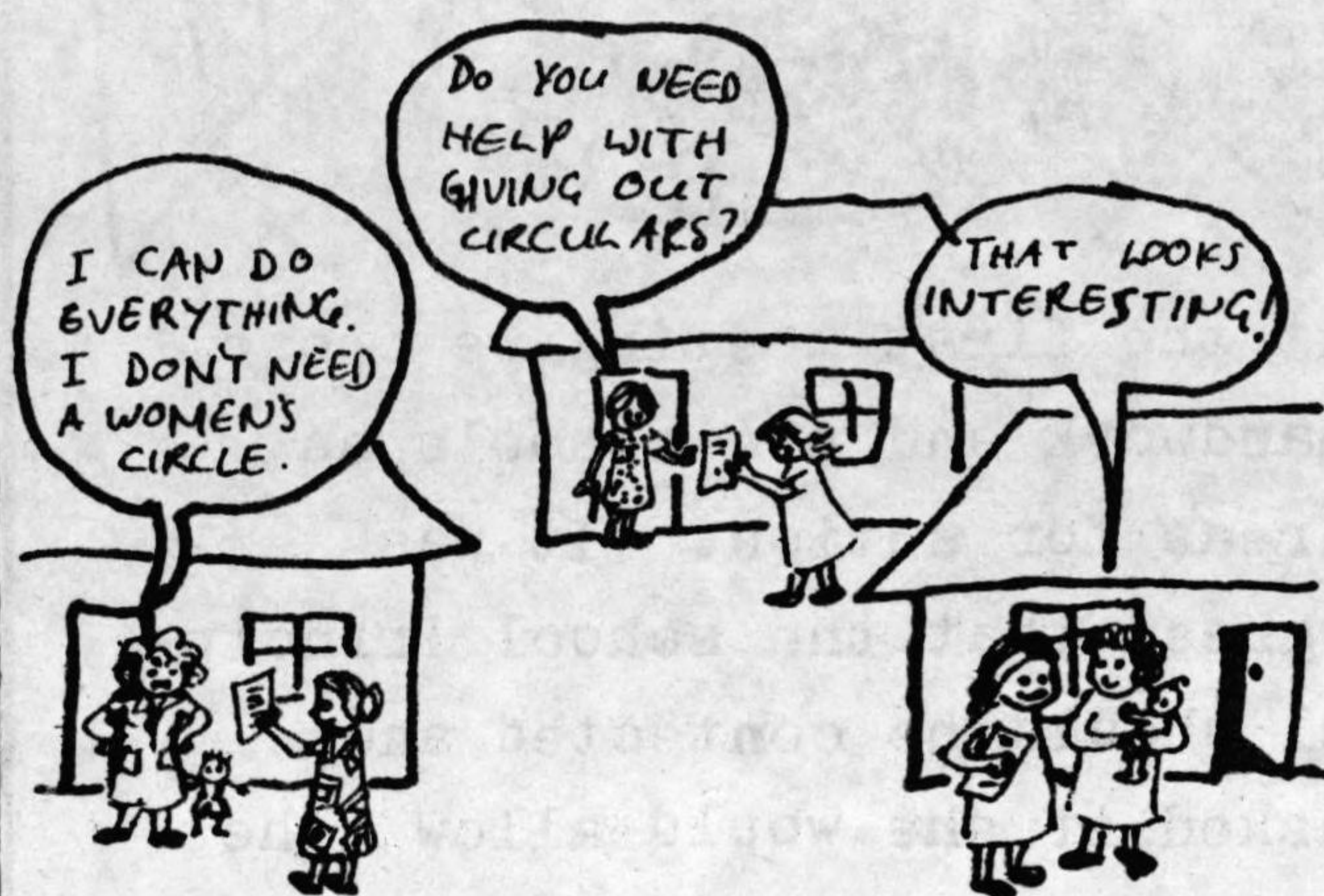


At the first meeting we chose handwork and pre-schools as areas for action. It was agreed that the school Principal should be contacted and asked if she would allow the school premises to be used for



the pre-school. We agreed that the best way of starting would be to involve more people from the area. Some people invited to the meeting couldn't come because of the distance of the venue from their homes. To reach all women, it was decided to have meetings on each street and to take circulars to each woman to invite her to the meetings.

Taking a circular to each home was an interesting experience. Most women were very interested - but some weren't! But they didn't put us off. We still continued. Some of the Phoenix Women's Circle members helped us to give out circulars for the second meeting.



Street meetings were held in half the area, covering about 500 houses in the more settled part of the area. Attendance at the meetings was very good. Many of us didn't know other women in the neighbourhood before, so this gave us a chance to meet each other. We introduced ourselves and were able to speak freely to each other at the meetings. Noone was really shy and the meetings went off well with almost everyone having a say. At each meeting someone would offer her home as a venue for the next street's meeting.

We talked about the idea of starting a pre-school, and there was

general agreement that we should start a preschool in our area.

We asked for volunteers to teach at the pre-school and found two women who were keen to take on this responsibility.



We were able to report at the house meetings that some of us who at the very first meeting had seen the school principal about the use of classrooms for the preschool. The principal had agreed that we could use the classrooms every afternoon from 12.30 to 2.30. We also talked



about the problem of busses, and the problem that was no baby and family clinic in



our area. We felt something should be done about this.

We immediately started handwork groups in each street. The groups met once a week and those who knew how to crochet, knit and bake agreed to teach the others what they knew. We felt that everyone would know something which she could share with the others.



Since each street group met on its own we only knew the women from our street. The groups felt that we should meet together and form a women's group for the area. We organised a big meeting for all the street groups and for all the women in Northcroft. The members of each street group went to every house on their street with circulars for this

big meeting. The circulars told women about the handwork groups and pre-schools and invited them to a meeting to discuss forming a womens group in Northcroft. The meeting was held at the football grounds as there is no hall in our area. About 60 women attended the meeting. It was very windy and the water-sprinkler made some of us a little wet! We also had to shout to hear each other.

But the meeting went on and everyone agreed that we should have one women's group joining all the street groups. We also felt that we should have meetings in other streets in the newer part of Northcroft.



After this meeting a smaller meet-

ing of 2 people from each street group was held to work on a constitution for the group. We then had a big meeting at the library at Unit 11. It was a bit of a walk but we felt that it would be better than the grounds. At this meeting we passed our constitution and elected our officials. We named our group the 'Northlen Women's Circle'. We have a chairperson, secretary, assistant-secretary, treasurer, and assistant treasurer.



We also have 2 working members from each street who keep members on their street informed of meetings and the progress of the women's circle.

Our first meeting after this was a meeting of the new working



committee to go over the duties of each official. We decided to have membership forms, a joining fee of 50c, and subs of 20c a month. The working members go out on their street to collect subs and encourage more women to join our group.



The working committee meets once a month at least and we have a meeting of all the members of the group every month.

We are also the newest group of the Phoenix Women's Circle, which is an umbrella body with women's groups in many Units in Phoenix. So, in addition to working in our Unit, we meet and work with women from other Units in Phoenix.



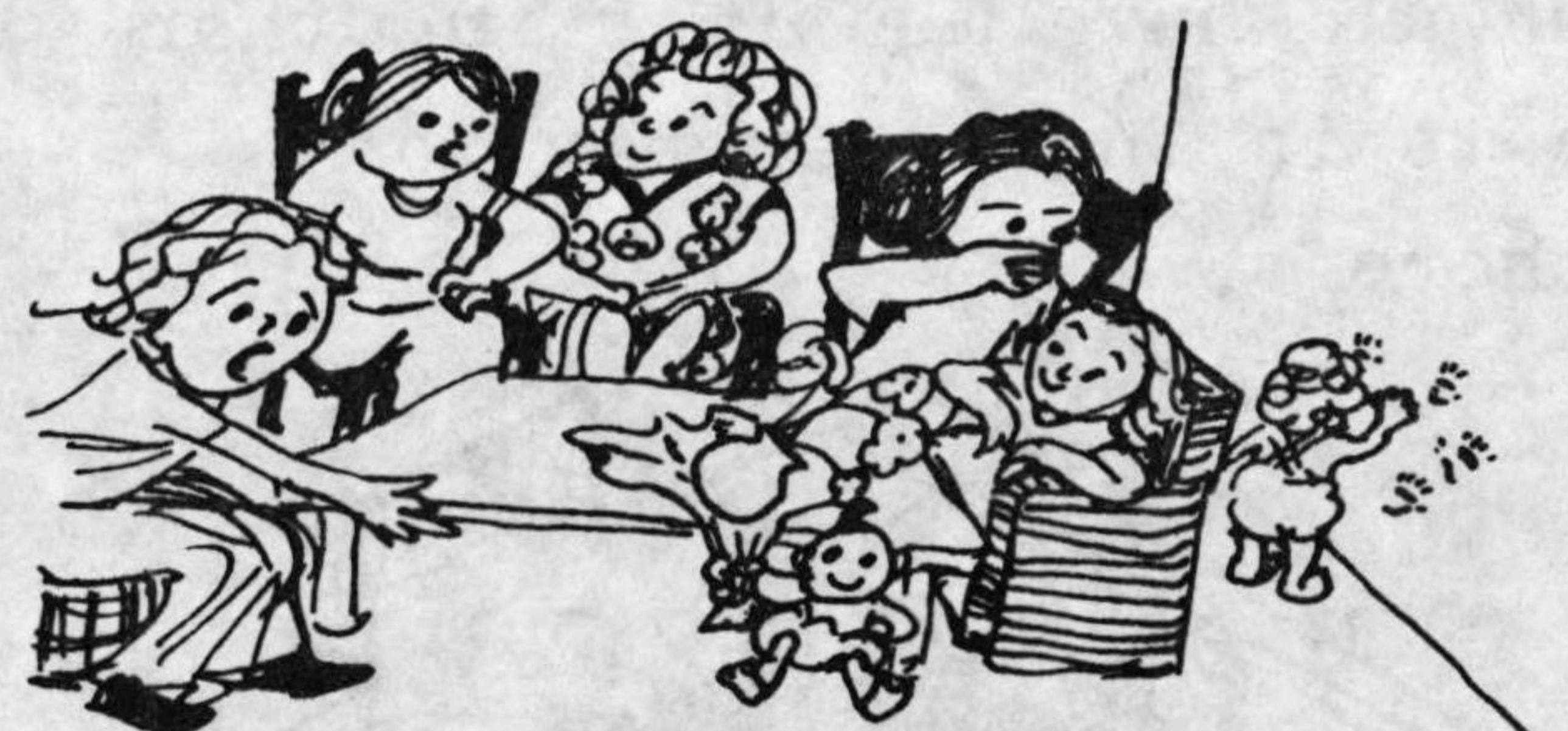
Our pre-school is running well. We have had two cake sales, a jumble

sale and a variety show to raise funds. We want to work towards setting up a creche in our area where working parents can leave their children while they are at work.

We have got a lot out of the group. Some of us didn't know how to crochet - now we know.

Others have improved our crocheting.

We've made new friends from so many streets and enjoyed going to each other's homes for handwork.



But also, some of us with small children felt bad about taking them to other people's homes. Because of this many members have



dropped out of the handwork groups. We need a venue like a classroom for our handwork to be more successful - people would prefer this.

Our husbands are happy with what we are doing. They are very proud. As long as food is there, there is not problem. On a fasting day one meeting carried on and on and one woman was late getting home. She had not cooked supper. Her husband didn't mind since this only happens once in a while. Some husbands feel we are too slow and should be moving faster.



Others have given lots of support.



One husband couldn't believe his wife had crocheted something, as she couldn't even hold a needle before!



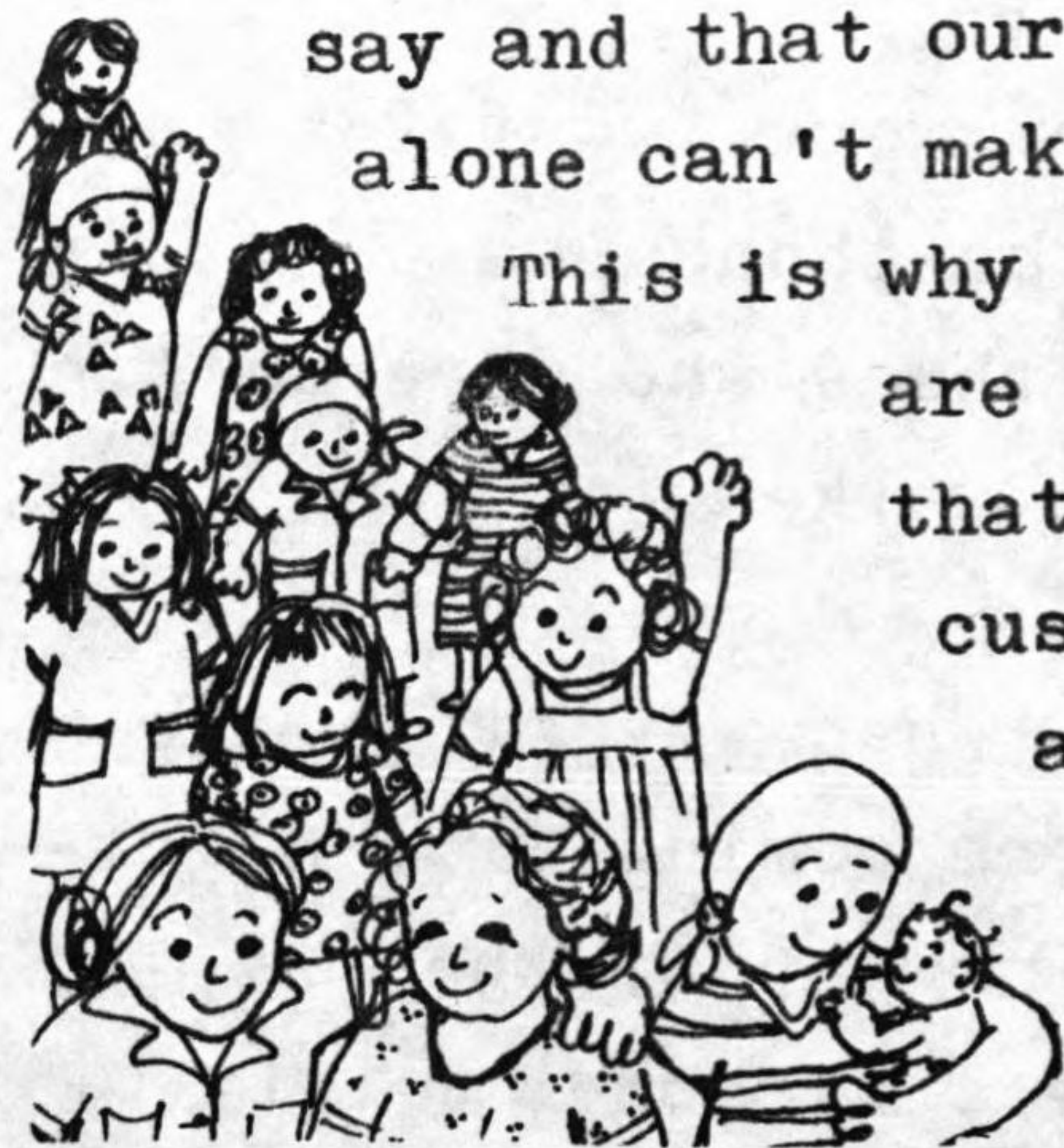
But sometimes we feel that things are going to flop - when very few people come to meetings. Many times



some of us have wanted to drop off, but then we think: "Never mind - the Women's Circle will come up". We are making sure we keep to these words.

We are working hard and we feel that each member has an important part to play towards building the Women's Circle. We want more women to join so that we can work hard for the good of the community.

We feel that everyone must have a say and that our officials alone can't make decisions. This is why our meetings are important. So that we can discuss things and all have our say before we decide anything.



## IF YOU'VE GOT NO MONEY YOU DON'T GET CARED FOR

Working-class women from all over the world have similar problems. Here is a story from a migrant woman worker in France.

I came to France first of all to work at a canning factory. But I didn't get a work permit. So then I said I'm not staying and I got something as a housemaid. My husband died a long time ago. The three children were very small, the two boys are dead, I hadn't a penny to take care of them. You know, with us if you've no money, you don't get cared for, and then when you do go to a hospital, it's too late. So I left my daughter and I came to work where I am now, I'm fine, I've got my papers and everything.

What about your daughter?

Oh, she's married near here.

Did she choose her husband?

No, I went home and married her off four years ago. She was sixteen, she didn't know her husband until the wedding day. You know, at home you've got to marry them off before they get up to mischief, if not you can't marry them to anyone. Her husband is thirty-five, it's all right, he's a builder. But she has four little girls, the last two are twins and the eldest is only just three. It's too much for her. I told her to have the coil put in but you can't get it done in her village, she'd have to come here.

If you had to do it over again, do you think you'd do the same thing: marry her to someone without asking her opinion?

Maybe I would, maybe I wouldn't. But you can't really understand. With us, when you're poor, you've got to do it like that and afterwards you work all your life long.







## THAT MONTH WE WALKED

The new bus-fare increase was coming at a very bad time. In December, people spend a lot of money, then immediately thereafter schools open and we have to pay school fees, buy school books and school uniforms - which change every year.

Everyone I met spoke about the new bus-fares. I was worried about what I'd do to make ends meet should I be retrenched as there were so many losing their jobs.

I work in New Germany, which is not too far away, so I decided to try walking to work. I wanted to see if I could manage, as I could not afford the bus-fares anymore. I went to sleep tired, as usual, and worried.

Waking up at 4.00am to prepare to go to work, I heard the sound of music. It could not be a radio and the music was getting louder and louder. When I listened more carefully, I heard women's voices singing "ASIGIBELI ASINAMALI" - "WE ARE NOT RIDING, WE DO NOT HAVE MONEY". Hurriedly, I prepared myself for work. Outside the bus-stop was empty. I joined the thousands of other workers walking to work. Even those who were waiting for buses joined in, and we all walked.

The buses drove past us empty. When we got to the main bus rank, we met the workers coming from night-shift. Even those who didn't know about the bus boycott quickly got the message. A crowd, mainly of angry women, was throwing stones at the buses.

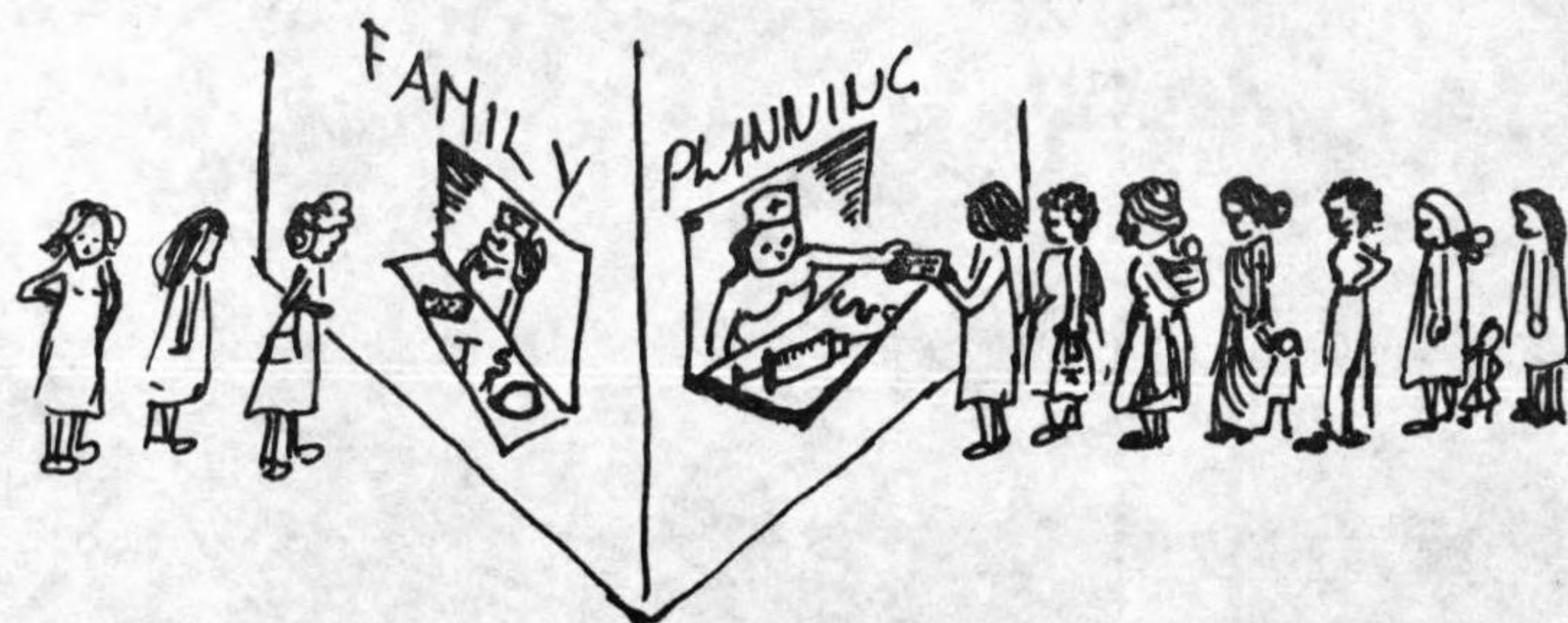


## LOOKING AT CONTRACEPTION



Unless we are to spend the rest of our lives having babies, we need contraception. Here in South Africa we mostly get our contraceptives from the Family Planning clinics. While this is a help to us, for different reasons, the services are not always as good as they could be. These are some of the reasons why:-

- \* the Family Planning clinic staff often don't have enough time to check up on a patient's
- \* the Family Planning clinic staff often don't have enough time to check up on a patient's medical history properly;



- \* the Family Planning clinics are funded by the government and they obviously prefer cheap methods of contraception, although these aren't necessarily the safest for our health. In some clinics women don't even get offered some methods of contraception. For example, at some Black clinics only the injection, pill and loop are offered;



- \* there is a general lack of knowledge about the various contraceptives and their side-effects. Some of the clinic sisters don't even seem to know - let alone the patients.

So, the easiest way for us to start doing something about this state of affairs is at least to get more knowledge ourselves so that we are in a better position to choose which contraceptive we would like to use. In this and the next few issues of SPEAK we will look at the different methods of contraception.





That day, 1 December 1982, the month long boycott of Corporation buses began. We had thought the problem would be solved in a short space of time, but it took much longer than we thought.

We still had Christmas shopping to do. Neighbours grouped together to go shopping so that they could help each other carry groceries. Those who had transport shared it. In fact this shopping arrangement has never stopped.

There were public meetings where people said what they thought. I'd never before been to a meeting where women stood up and spoke out like that.

The boycott is now over. But we remember well what happened in that month- people fighting side by side and standing together.



# SPEAK

WOULD LIKE ALL WOMEN  
TO SHARE THEIR EXPER-  
IENCES WITH US.

SO, PLEASE WILL YOU:

★ LET US KNOW WHAT YOU  
WANT TO READ ABOUT;

★ DISTRIBUTE SPEAK IN  
YOUR AREA;

★ SHARE SPEAK WITH  
YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY  
AND NEIGHBOURS

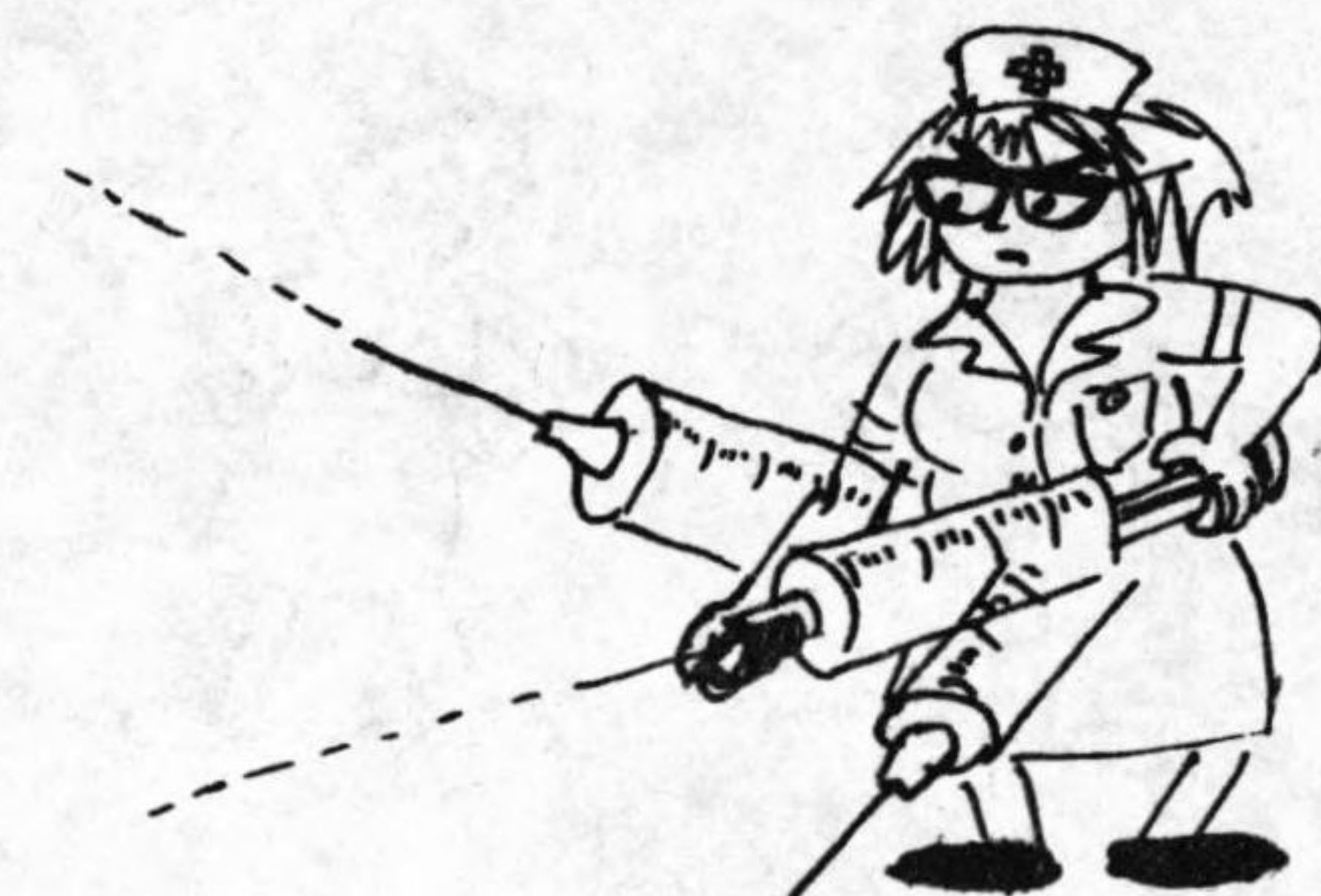
★ SEND US ANY  
PICTURES, POEMS  
AND STORIES THAT  
YOU OR OTHER  
WOMEN WRITE OR  
LIKE.

WRITE TO: SPEAK COLLECTIVE  
76 WALMER AVE.  
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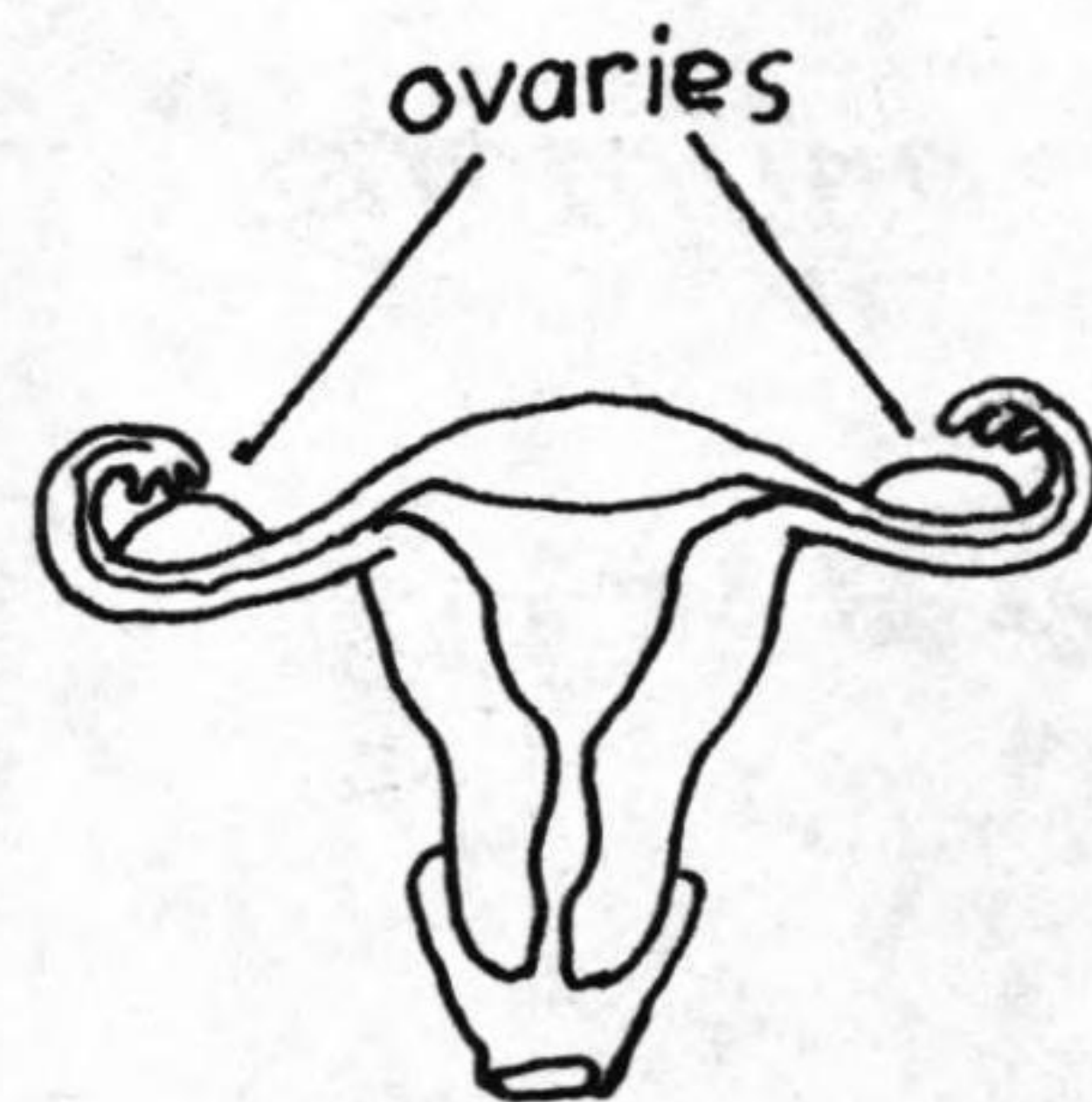
## DEPO PROVERA—"THE INJECTION"



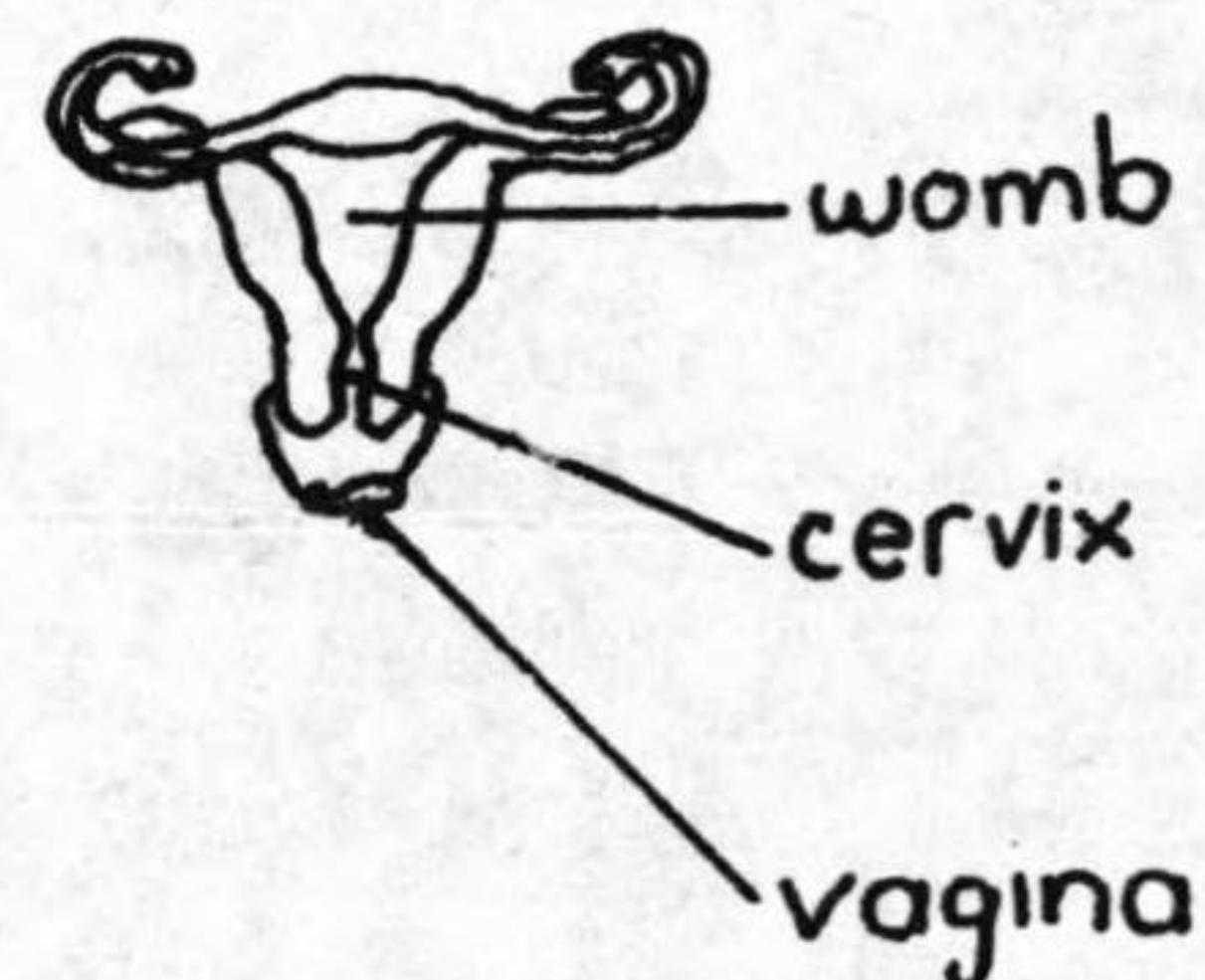
In South Africa a very widely contraceptive is Depo Provera - the injection. From the point of view of the government Family Planning clinics

this is probably because its the cheapest and easiest way to stop women falling pregnant.

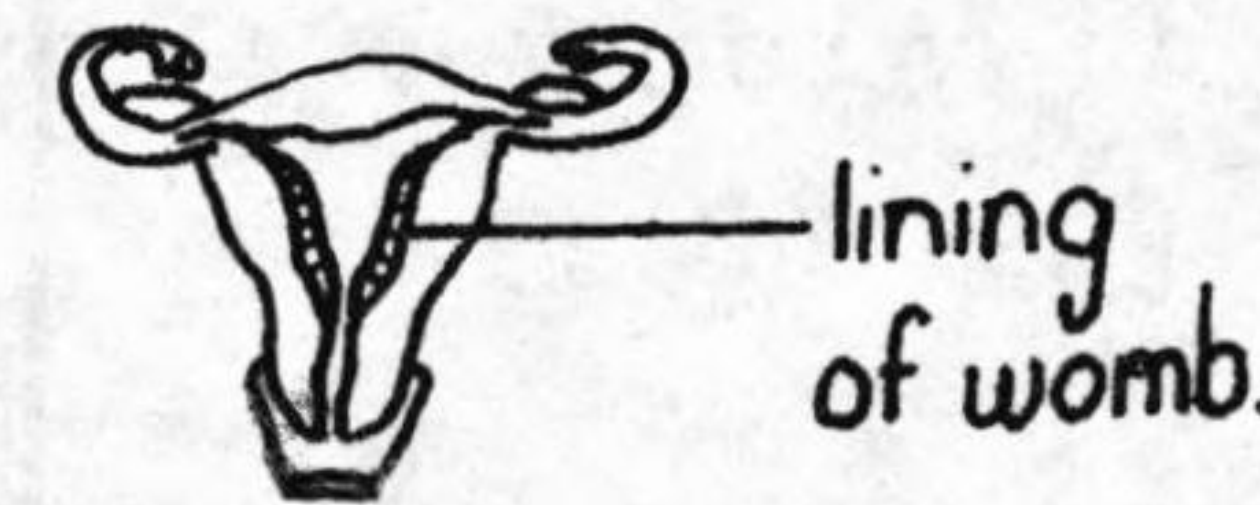
The injection does the following things to stop women falling pregnant:-



1) The injection stops an egg from growing in a woman's ovaries. When there is no egg to unite with the sperm from the man, no baby can start to develop.



2) The injection makes a sticky covering over the entrance of the womb (the cervix) so that sperm can't easily travel into the womb.



3) The injection stops the lining of the womb from developing properly. This means that the womb won't be ready for an egg to grow in it.

Depo Provera is a contraceptive that some women choose to use. It is easy to use, it is safe against pregnancy, and the fact that one is taking it can be hidden from parents, boyfriends, and husbands.



But unfortunately Depo can also have bad side-effects. Although women are sometimes asked about high blood pressure and such things at the clinic, this is not enough. Depo can still harm other women. We are not told of all the possible problems that Depo can cause. Some effects of Depo can be seen or felt immediately (or early on) but there are other very dangerous side-effects which only appear a long time later. Some of these long term side-effects are that women may get cancer of the breasts, the cervix, or the lining of the

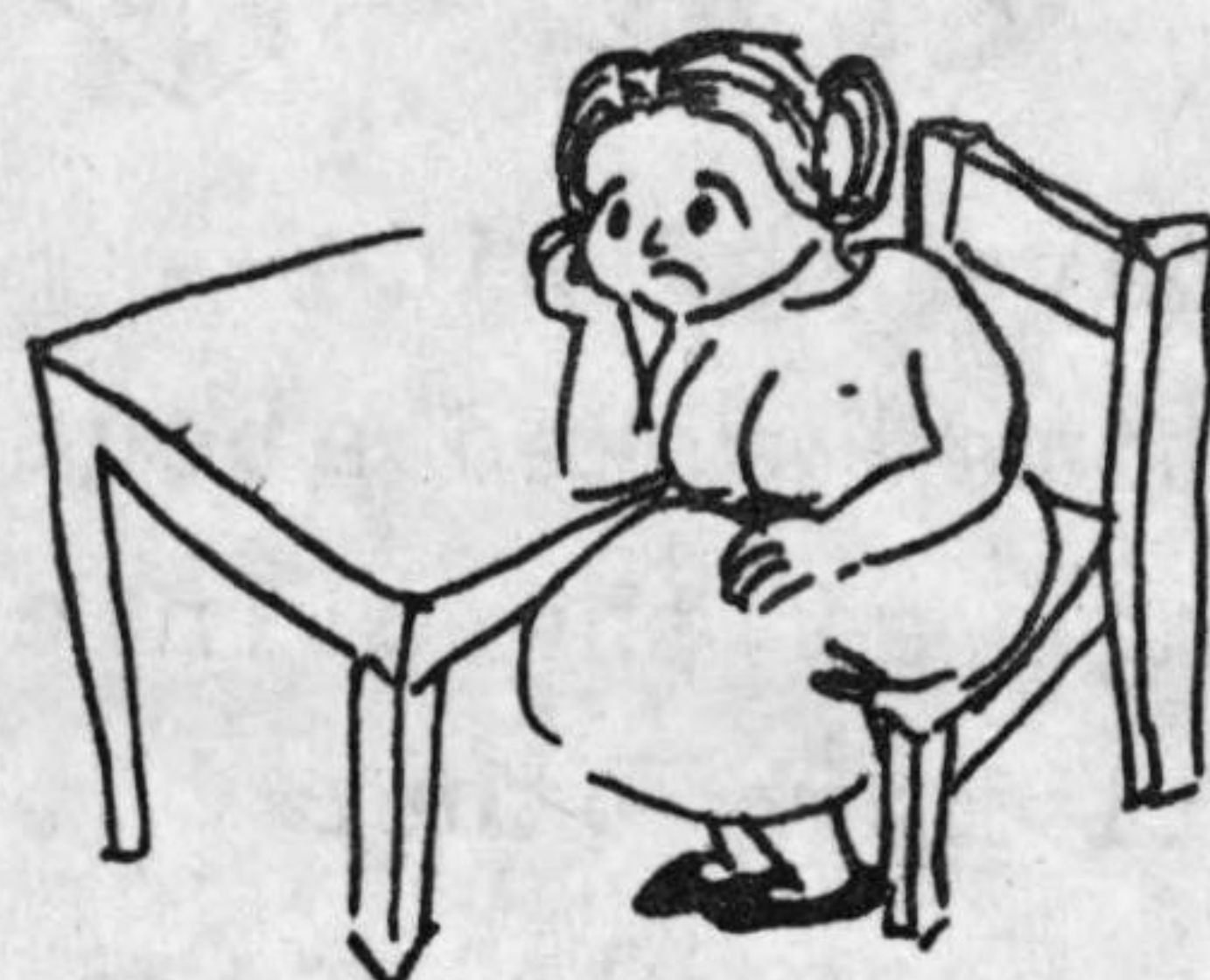




Womb. A woman's clitoris might also grow bigger. Even with the immediate side-effects, the very bad thing about them is that they don't stop as soon as the three month period after the injection is over.

Here are some of the possible side-effects that Depo Provera can have:-

The most common side-effect is bleeding from the vagina at any time of the month. On the other hand, periods may stop altogether,



Women may put on weight and feel bloated.

*"My worry when my periods don't come is that I'm going for my change of life."*



*"The rotten blood is accumulating inside me. I even thought I could smell it and feel it. Then the clinic sister told me that Depo stops periods being made."*

Depo can cause nausea, dizziness, cramps, loss of hair, back-ache, irritability, headaches and depression.



It can also result in a loss of sexual desire.



*"My husband thought I was sleeping with other men because I didn't want sex anymore."*

Some people's skin is affected by Depo. They get acne or patchy colouring.



*"I got patches on my face, almost like I was pregnant. So I was told to stop using Depo."*



Mothers milk helps babies to stop getting sick. But Depo in the milk destroys this quality in mothers milk which stops babies getting sick.



"I had a lot of milk after my last baby. This was good as the baby had milk to drink even when we had no money to buy food. But I was worried that the baby might be drinking some of the injection through the milk."

In fact, mothers are sometimes given Depo without their knowing it.



"When I was in hospital with my last baby they came and gave me an injection. It was only later that I found out that they had given me Depo."

So, while Depo can be useful for stoping pregnancy, it can also be very dangerous to womens health. WE NEED TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE AND EASY TO USE CONTRACEPTIVE, BUT ONE THAT IS ALSO SAFE FOR OUR HEALTH.

## DEPO AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Depo Provera is made in the U.S.A. But it is not used in the U.S.A. or in Britain. This is because in these countries the health authorities have been forced to agree that Depo is bad for women's health. But this does not stop the American company, Upjohn, from selling Depo to other countries.

## AN EXPERIMENT WITH DEPO

This same company, Upjohn, did experiments on dogs to see what effects Depo had. Some dogs were given a dose of Depo 25 times more than which women are injected with. In a short space of time all these dogs had died. Out of 4 dogs given the same dose as women are injected with, 2 died. The other 2 dogs were only saved by operations in which their whole uterus and ovaries were removed. (these operations are called hysterectomies.)

AND THIS IS THE INJECTION THAT SO MANY WOMEN ARE GIVEN BY STATE HEALTH AUTHORITIES.



# DROUGHT

DROUGHT IS AFFECTING EVERYONE VERY BADLY. SPEAK SPOKE TO SOME WOMEN ABOUT IT. THIS IS WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY:

"This year the drought is very bad", a woman migrant worker told SPEAK. "Before, I just sent money back to the farm for ploughing and seeds. But now, with the drought, I have to try and find the money to send for food as well. All the money put into the land is lost. I don't know where the money for food will come from. Wages are low".

"It is bad", a domestic worker told SPEAK, "the cattle are dying, the mielies are dead, people are struggling to survive. The rivers have dried up, so women have to walk for many hours to get water. Even then that river is used by animals and people. The water is dirty and makes people sick."

A woman who works as a cleaner at a school said: "The cholera has got worse. We know many people who are suffering from cholera. They die quickly. It would be good if the drought would end."



WE WERE VERY HAPPY TO RECEIVE THIS LETTER FROM THE WOMEN OF SUNDUZA.

SPEAK OFFERS A PLACE WHERE WOMEN CAN WRITE TO EACH OTHER ABOUT MANY THINGS TO SHARE THEIR PROBLEMS AND IDEAS. WE HOPE THAT THIS WILL GO SOME WAY TOWARDS HELPING TO OVERCOME PROBLEMS. THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN IN REPLY TO THE CHATSWORTH SCHOOL TRANSFERS ARTICLE IN THE LAST SPEAK.

Dear Women

As we are aware of your determined stand for the right thing, we have felt that we should write to you and explain our difficulties.

Firstly, we have a school that goes only as far as Standard IV. Beyond this standard, our children have to attend a school situated on the other side of a big river. When it is full, they miss their examinations.

Only last year some school children were drowned.

Would you please give us help and advice.

Yours faithfully  
Women of Sunduza

c/o Nosuwalala Mvelase  
Sunduza H.P. School  
P.O. Jozana's Hoek  
Sterkspruit 5561

IF THERE ARE ANY WOMEN WHO WOULD LIKE TO REPLY TO THIS LETTER, JUST SEND IT TO THE ADDRESS ABOVE. WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO SEND US A LETTER TOO, SO THAT WE CAN PUBLISH IT IN SPEAK FOR EVERYONE TO READ.