

WOMEN IN THE APARTHEID SOCIETY

by Fatima Meer

INTRODUCTION

No significant change has occurred in South Africa in the last decade. Apartheid and racism continue their tyranny and the South African society is as far away from equality, peace and development as it was in 1975. In a society where the fundamental criterion for discrimination is race, it is unreal to consider the position of the one sex in isolation of the other. The enjoyment of the privileges of apartheid by white women differs only marginally from that of white men: likewise, while black women suffer more than black men from the violations of their rights, the violations are gross in respect to both. It is this reality that accounts for the very peripheral impact of feminism on South Africa.

The International Year of Women opened in South Africa with new introspection on the part of black and white women in their relations with each other and in their commitment to society. Despite the fact that black politics of the time was heavily underlined by black consciousness, black and white women met and discussed prospects of working together on some community projects. In Natal, I.W.Y.N. came into existence; other similar groups emerged in other parts of the country. But the honeymoon was short-lived. The children of Soweto, straining against inferior education set a new pace, and black women were drawn into the tragedy that pursued their children. White women could not empathise with black women and most were openly hostile, blaming the violence that erupted on the children.

In 1976, the police shot and killed schoolchildren, arrested and imprisoned hundreds on allegations of terrorism, many in solitary confinement. The officials of the Black Women's Federation were imprisoned without trial and the Federation itself was banned. State repression against the people's legitimate demands for a greater share in the country's resources continued unabated. Lamtonville in Durban has been in a ferment of unrest for the last two years due to high rentals. In the Transvaal, the protests of township residents against high rents, including electricity and transport costs and rising prices in basic commodities resulted in police shootings and 31 deaths during August 1984. The first legal strike by African mineworkers on the gold reef was similarly repressed with police fire leaving six dead. Mass funerals follow such killings, the Government sees them as further threats, police move in, there are the inevitable clashes, more deaths, more funerals... the cycle of violence continues. The press, already warned against "emotional" reporting, is blocked out altogether when temporary proclamations bar all whites from entering affected townships.

In August 1984 the Coloured and the Indian population were inflicted with a constitution they rejected. Faced with a poll so low as to question the legitimacy of the new tricameral parliament the Government was bent on inflicting on the people, it unleashed a new spate of detentions without trial. Six of the accused succeeded in avoiding arrest, sought refuge in the British Consulate in Durban and focussed world attention on the lack of freedom in South Africa.

In South Africa, the United Nations Decade for Women has in fact been a decade of increasing repression, increasing unemployment and increasing underdevelopment, with 13 per cent of South Africa's landmass allotted to the African people and carved into homelands. Land allotment per rural family has declined in size, livestock has diminished, and subsistence from the land has almost disappeared. This affected women directly, for they remained the last of the rural peasants and despite rural bankruptcy today, they are mainly responsible for the maintenance of the unemployed, returned to the homelands.

"REFORM"

There has been no shrinking in the gap between black and white in wages, education, or in social and welfare services. Minor reforms, such as extending home ownership to Africans on 99-year leases, licensing some hotels and theatres to admit all races, or quietening down on arrests of racially mixed couples for immorality, are quite inconsequential. They represent a response to the concerns of the white public opinion in Europe and in the Americas, as does in part the new tricameral constitution which was rejected by over 80 per cent of Indians and Coloureds who qualified for communal votes. Sport in South Africa continues to be segregated and unequal; players may not share common accommodations. There were two multiracial golf clubs in the country up to 1983 - now there is only one. Ninety-nine per cent of South Africa's swimming pools are reserved for whites only. While white children have all the sporting amenities they could possibly desire, black children have token facilities. In 1984, 49,000 African pupils in Port Elizabeth had only seven rugby fields and one cricket ground; 26,020 white pupils had 84 rugby fields, 35 hockey fields and 176 tennis courts. The government expenditure on sport for white children is 240 times higher than that for black. Beaches, hospitals and transport continue to be segregated.

Some changes have occurred in the statutory position of women in respect to marriage and divorce laws, but these do not extend to African women. Rape laws and maintenance claims against unmarried fathers continue to be skewed in favour of men and the vast majority of women avoid laying charges rather than suffer the humiliation of cross-examination and insinuations of sexual promiscuity. Although the last decade has been marked by a growing consciousness of the flagrant violations of industrial health in South African factories, no reforms have been effected.

Labour

The law legalising African trade unions was an important event. It has helped substantially in the organisation of labour. Whereas there were no registered integrated black (African, Coloured and Indian) or non-racial trade unions up to 1979, in 1982 there were 40. Membership of registered unions rose from 637,480 in 1972 to 1,226,454 in 1982. Total union membership, registered and unregistered, was 1,500,000, representing 15 per cent of the economically active population. However, agricultural and domestic workers, mainly women, still remain outside the fold of registration. In recent years, the Industrial Court has made judgments against unfair labour practices. These decisions have been beneficial to workers. But the State clearly protects employers against workers, whites against blacks, as police handling of even legal strikes demonstrates.

South Africa has experienced considerable economic growth since 1975, and foreign investments, particularly by firms from the United Kingdom, United States and the Federal Republic of Germany have increased, but so has unemployment and surplus labour.

The growth of the labour surplus, which began during the 1960s and 1970s steadily continues. Some economists argue that this surplus has in fact been fostered by economic growth. In particular youth and women who wait for jobs have been affected. Unemployment is likewise on the incline. It doubled between 1970 and 1977; economists estimate that at present between 10 and 22 per cent of the work force is unemployed and project that the unemployment will rise to between 19 and 26 per cent in the next decade. The Government responds to the unemployment by increasing the control over the movement of workers, particularly women workers, and by more stringent attempts to block urbanisation. The rate of African urbanisation in South Africa is calculated to be 60 per cent slower than in other developing countries. Arrests due to pass laws violations increased by 28.3 per cent

between 1981 and 1982 and fines paid by Africans so arrested increased by 45 per cent. A study of the activities of one court alone - Langa Commissioner`s Court - revealed that only in 1982 it had passed sentences totalling R250,000 in fines or 684 years in imprisonment on Africans (mainly women) who had attempted to live and work together with their spouses in the Cape peninsula.

Having substantially destroyed African family life, the State has proceeded to define it out of the South African system, legally and socially: that is the import of hardening influx control, increasing shortage of township homes, and persistent raids and arrests of those who strive to lead a family life in improvised shack settlements outside the homelands.

Foreign investors, faced with a need to square within their own consciences, argue that they are a force for change and find support for this from liberal economists. Records show, however, that racism, State oppression and economic deterioration in the reserves have coincided with their entry into the South African market. The post World War II South African infrastructure which boosted the country`s manufacturing industry was substantially financed by the United Kingdom and the West. It has bloated Afrikanerdom and apartheid and brought practically no improvement in the conditions of workers who continue to be exploited miserably whether working in foreign or in local firms. Reform measures, as expressed by special codes, such as the American "Sullivan Principles", bring insignificant amelioration precisely because they touch an insignificant sector of the population. Foreign companies are usually capital-intensive, and have the effect of increasing unemployment among the unskilled and semi-skilled ranks. The educational structure is pointedly geared to keep Africans under-educated: almost half of the African children leave school within the first three years. In 1983, there were only 72,168 African matriculants (excluding Transkei) and only 9.8 per cent attained university entrance passes. White matriculants in the same year totalled 56,000 and well over half qualified for university entrance.

Health

Motherhood, often without adequate financial and emotional support, continues to be a source of great pain for most South African mothers. The country as a whole has one of the largest infant mortality rates in the world, 90 per 1,000 live births.

Reported cases of some diseases (2)

	1977
Cholera	0
Trachoma	12
Typhoid	2,624
Tuberculosis	45,298

Regulations against abortions have been tightened. In 1982, a total of 454 legal abortions were allowed, 324 for white women. As against this, social welfare workers estimated at least 75,000 illegal abortions performed on black (African, Indian and Coloured) women. The South African Medical Research Council reported 33,421 incomplete and septic miscarriages in the same year.

Cholera, hypertension and mental illness are on the incline, being particularly concentrated among the African people, and being highest in the homelands. It is estimated that two and four per cent of the population of Ciskei and the Transkei respectively have tuberculosis.

Medical personnel and services are particularly inadequate. There is one doctor for every 330 whites, 730 Indians, 1,200 Coloureds and 12,000 Africans. Moreover, there is one nurse for every 14 whites, 549 Coloured, 707 Africans and 745 Indians.

Only 5 per cent of the doctors are practising in rural areas where the incidence of diseases is ten times higher than in urban areas. A total of 27,205 hospital beds in urban areas are available to whites (18 per cent of the population), as against 43,935 for Africans, Indians and Coloureds. Average bed occupancy rate for whites is 59 per cent, while for Africans it ranged between 90 and 100 per cent. King Edward Hospital in Durban with 2,000 beds often has 2,600 patients.

Health facilities break down completely with forced removals and forced resettlement. A four-year-old camp in the Orange Free State with an estimated population of 200,000 to 300,000 had six doctors, one dentist, 38 country health workers, and three health centres.

Malnutrition and related diseases are on the incline. The Bureau of Economic Research in Stellenbosch estimated in 1983 that 2.9 million children in the country were malnourished. Other agencies reported dramatic increase in pellagra, and a 200 to 300 per cent increase in kwashiorkor among rural families in the Transvaal.

In relation to national income, South Africa continues to have one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. The rate for whites is 13 per 1,000 live births; for Africans it is 80 per 1,000 live births overall, and as high as 240 per 1,000 live births in some homelands.

Welfare

Discrimination in welfare grants and services remains unchanged, and in some areas State subsidies and grants to African institutions have actually declined. Not only are blacks paid less per person than whites, but the number of persons covered in proportion to the total population is also very much lower. The fact that welfare is administered by 24 uncoordinated regional and racial boards aggravates discrimination. The extent of such discrimination is reflected in the following comparisons for 1982-1983:

	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Africans</i>
per capita state grants for foster homes	R106	R36
of children covered	40,897	17,164 (3)
to day care centres per day, per child	80c	7,5c(*)
of centres	45	4 (4)
nce grants per month	R179	R60
nd places of care	869	195
sions per annum, per person	R1,467	R429

(* withdrawn in 1983)

Non-governmental organisations

The Government is very cautious about non-governmental organisations and the Special Branch of the police keeps a close eye on them. There is constant suspicion that they are fronts for "subversive" activity. Organisations have to be registered under the Welfare Act to canvass for public funds.

Eighteen black consciousness organisations, many of them engaged in valuable community work, were banned in 1977 and their assets, estimated at approximately R1 million were confiscated by the

Government. This, however, has not deterred voluntary work and there has been no decline in interest and activity, both by blacks and whites.

It is against this background of repression, non-development, and in many areas almost planned underdevelopment, that one must view the position of South African women.

SOCIAL AND LEGAL STATUS

South Africa`s women of all races take their positions within the framework of male domination in the family, in the polity, economy, and society in general. It is difficult to assess which of the component cultures, African, Indian or European, was the most repressive before the advent of industrialisation. Coloured and white women share a common cultural system, which appears to be less repressive of women than the Indian and African ones. Coloured women, however, are not as liberated as white women are in their relations with men. The difference is largely due to the economic factor. White women attain a very much higher standard of education and are able to reach out to a far more varied and relaxed life. The "patriarch" plays his role in moderation and even if overbearing at times, compensates by his effective role as "provider" and "protector".

Coloured and African women appear generally to experience male domination without its compensating and complementary services; increasing numbers of Indian women are facing the same problem. Failing to find adequately paid jobs and therefore unable to fulfil the positive aspects of their patriarchal roles, they lean on the negative, aggressive part. Women often make equal cash contributions to the household and at times even greater than men, yet are all too often ignored when it comes to major issues.

Traditional African society accepted women as equal producers in the self-subsistent economy. Married women possessed land and livestock and controlled the products of their labour. Though subordinate to men, they were no more dependent on them than men were on women. The rights of both were in the final analysis entrenched in their undeniable claims to family and tribe.

Modern capitalist society, underpinned by materialism, defines rights in terms of accumulated property. The fact that women have poorer access to property than men places them at an immediate disadvantage. African women, the bottom of the pile, have the poorest reach in this respect, that reach being further attenuated by the law which places their property right in the custody of men. South African law and/or tradition defines a woman as subordinate to a man. This definition reaches its penultimate excess in the 1891 Bantu Code which until a few years ago was operative throughout the Natal province. It has now been replaced by the KwaZulu code.

The black working class family, not having the intellectual reach to trace its problems to their roots outside of itself in society, often locates them within itself, and aggravates the physical ravage with the emotional. Women blame the men for depriving them of their "rightful" roles as mothers, and the men burdened with their role as breadwinners, and unable to win the whole loaf, blame their failure on "natural" bad luck and retreat into the bottle. The rate of alcoholism is very high among Coloured and African men.

Conflict of law and custom

South African law and custom founded on European principles substantially modified African and Indian definitions of the rights of women. While the general impression prevails that this has improved their status, the reality is far more complex.

The legal position of African women is finally made all that more complicated because they are positioned between the two systems, white and African, and it is left to the discretion of the "Bantu Court" to determine which will be applied in a particular instance.

Up to 1983, all marriages in South Africa, excluding customary unions, were in community of property, unless preceded by an ante-nuptial contract. This implied that whilst becoming joint owners of the estate, administration was vested in the husband and the wife's status was reduced to that of a minor. The new law accords equal status to the husband and wife but it does not apply to African women. Islamic law has always protected a woman's right to property; she moreover retained her identity on marriage and kept her own name. In South Africa this is subsumed by State law. Muslim women who do not register their marriage, however, are subject to the local interpretation of the Islamic divorce procedure. It is the husband's prerogative to set aside a wife by pronouncing, "I divorce thee", three times. Women in such cases, as well as in the case of Hindu marriages that are not registered, may sue only for seduction and expenses incurred for the wedding.

The new law simplifies divorce, but it is still expensive. Since most women are not economically independent and rely on their husband's salaries, they are unable to institute and conduct the proceedings themselves. Moreover, divorce still continues to be regarded as a slur on the woman. Women are far more vulnerable to emotional and physical deprivation because of the socially cultivated dependence on men that exists in all South African cultures.

Women, particularly the poorer, under-educated and unskilled ones, are vulnerable to a range of sexual exploitations, rape being the extreme. In cases of both paternity and rape claims, the law operates to protect the male, and women undergo humiliating cross-examinations in court and are often required to establish impossible evidence to succeed.

Polygamy is traditional in both Indian and African societies: South African law recognises only one legal marriage, and neither the second non-legal marriage nor the children of a non-legal marriage have any legal status. This creates severe problems for the women who have been taken as second wives when their husbands cannot cope with additional responsibilities and abandon them.

Unmarried African women are further pauperised through the high incidence of pregnancy. It is rare to find a teenager who has not borne a child: it is common for school girls to fall pregnant and to have their babies, and quite uncommon for the fathers to maintain them.

Interviews with 212 girls in a recent Durban study revealed that damages (not maintenance) was paid in only 14 per cent of the cases and 54 per cent of the fathers blankly refused to bear any responsibility. (5)

As a result, the girls often leave school and look for employment in order to raise their babies, having neither the training nor confidence for anything else. Some eventually marry and gain some level of stability and security, but just as many go through a series of short-lived affairs and as many children; most never recover from the debilitating effects of an early, unmarried motherhood.

Pregnancies of unmarried women were matters of abject disgrace in the traditional African society, imposing cleansing ceremonies on peer groups, and equal opprobrium on both partners. The close supervision of relations implied that there was little opportunity for fathers to escape their responsibilities. In the urban environment, however, African women have been deprived of their traditional protection.

All South African women are grossly disadvantaged by the prevailing law, but black women, and African women in particular, are the worst sufferers. It has become customary not to sue for maintenance. The

State will make an order for the maintenance of the child if the mother can establish paternity, which is difficult under existing law: the State, however, can rarely compel the errant father to pay maintenance and looking for him is an ordeal imposed on the mother.

Subjugation of African women

The perpetrators of apartheid have grasped in some insidious way that the foundation of their system finally rests on the subjugation of the African woman. Her isolation in the reserve where she becomes conditioned to bearing and raising children and caring for the aged and ill, abandoned by industry and forced back into the homeland by law, is imperative to the monopolistic accumulation of wealth and power in the white sector. The only differential in the South African economy that yields the high profits essential to attract capital, foreign and local, which in turn sustains apartheid, is the uninterrupted flow of cheap labour - South Africa's black gold, as one homeland leader puts it. That kind of labour is in the final analysis dependent on the continued subjugation of women, not only through law, but through the manipulation of traditional attitudes of sexual dominance and subservience.

Large numbers of African women in Natal continue to be subjected to the 1891 Bantu Code, which makes them perpetual minors and lifelong wards of men - their fathers, husbands and in the absence of these the closest surviving male relations, including sons. The women may not marry, continue in employment, defend nor bring any action in court without their authority. Their male guardians can claim their earnings and control their property. Upon marriage, the wife's assets automatically revert to her husband, but she does not acquire any right over his property. On his death, the family estate, including her contributions to it, automatically goes to the closest surviving male relative, and she becomes his ward.

African women throughout the country are more severely restricted from entering urban areas than African men are. Laws dating back to the 1930s made such entering dependent on the qualifications of their "guardians" - husbands. Wives of men who qualify for urban rights through ten years of continuous service with one employer or 15 years in one area, as well as their children under 16, may live in locations outside the homelands provided they have acceptable accommodation. Women never acquire these rights on their own and are forced to send their children to the homelands.

The result of such stringent controls over the urbanisation of women has meant that there has always been an imbalance in the male/female ratio in both urban and rural areas - women outstripping men in the reserves and men outstripping women in the towns. But the imbalance is declining due to the conjugation of economic and legislative factors. Whereas in 1936 the male/female ratio in urban areas was 3:1, in 1981 46 per cent of the total African male population as against 43 per cent of the female was residing outside the homelands. Increased pressure on the land, compounded by the "dumping" of labour tenants and so-called "squatters" who had lived for generations on white farms as labourers and part-time cultivators, has compounded that pressure. It is estimated that by 1981, 13 million people had been uprooted by the Nationalist Government in order to entrench racism.

In Natal, land holdings per family declined from 100 acres in 1846 to between 2 and 5 acres in 1980. Official estimates consider 3 to 8 hectares, depending on the availability of water, as the minimum requirement for subsistence. Two sample surveys conducted by the Institute for Black Research in 1973 and 1978 respectively in the KwaZulu area of Nqutu revealed that 25 per cent of the 150 families interviewed in 1973 had no land; that in 1977 the proportion of the landless had risen to 30 per cent

(200 families interviewed). Land holdings of those with land averaged seven acres in 1973 and five in 1978. (6)

While today rural survival is almost wholly dependent on the cash remitted by migrant workers from the cities, the surveys revealed that approximately 17 per cent of the sample families in 1973 received no cash remittance and those who did received R15 per month on average to support families averaging six members. In 1978, average cash remittance had increased to R30 per month, but the cost of living had also risen proportionately. Sustenance raised through gardening, sale of poultry, eggs and handicrafts had an average value of R2 per month. Interviews with 200 migrant workers living in single men`s compounds established that after meeting their own subsistence needs in the cities, they could spare only 20 per cent of their earnings for families in the homelands.

African women must work and subsidise family incomes to save the family from starvation. Primarily on white farms, they find work as agricultural labourers or as domestics: 18 per cent and 50 per cent respectively of all gainfully employed African women in 1982 had that kind of employment.

WAGE LABOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Until the discovery of mineral wealth in the last century most South Africans, white or black, tribalised or Christianised, pursued a self-subsistent agricultural economy, the blacks depending on their own labour, the whites on highly exploited slave labour, and the labour of the tribes they conquered and displaced from the land. Wages were rare: the conquered tribespeople invariably worked as family units for white farmers in return for the privilege of being allowed to continue living in their ancestral kraals.

With the development of mining, wage labour became prevalent. Rapid industrialisation during the Second World War resulted in rapid "urbanisation" of the African people in response to the demand for cheap unskilled labour. The 1960s saw a reversal of this process with mechanisation and concentration of monopoly capital. The demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour declined and unemployment increased. (7)

The young job seekers entering the labour market for the first time and women were the chief casualties, predominating in the "surplus" population redundant to the organised economy.

Black women in wage labour

African, Indian and Coloured women worked as farm hands and domestics until the Second World War. Indian women were imported as indentured field labourers, and paid 5 shillings a month, half the wage paid to indentured men. Non-slave African women were often paid in kind alone; they were given rations and the right to live on farms.

The trend has been for both men and women of all races to move away from agricultural and domestic work to production, and then to commercial and professional work. Today whites predominate in the latter two areas as well as in managerial and technical jobs, while African men, Indians and Coloureds prevail in production. Africans, and especially African women, have been the least successful in escaping the stranglehold of menial and poorly paid jobs under conditions of unprotected employment. Their employment is dependent on other races not being available for the work at the offered wage rate.

According to official estimates, South Africa`s population was approximately 25 million in 1980, of which just under half (12 and a quarter million) were women. Of those, 66.6 per cent were African, 18.3 per cent were white, 10.7 per cent were Coloured and 3.3 per cent were Indian.

Whites had the highest rate of gainful employment: 56 per cent of all white men and 27.8 per cent of all white women were gainfully employed. Employment ratios for Indian and Coloured men were slightly higher (46.5 and 44 per cent respectively) than for African men (43.5 per cent). Indian women had the lowest employment rate amounting to 15.9 per cent, as against 21.2 and 26.8 per cent respectively for African and Coloured women.

Whites do not only have the lowest dependency rate but they also have substantially higher income, both being the functions of apartheid which constitutes the white population into a clearly observable privileged class.

The 1981 Manpower Survey (8) records a total of 1,331,052 women employed in industry. Almost half, 47.3 per cent, were white women; 30.7 per cent were African, 17 per cent were Coloured and approximately 9 per cent were Indian. The highest concentration of black women was in clothing industry, followed by textile and footwear industry; 78 per cent of the labour force working in the clothing industry, 43 per cent in textile industry and 41 per cent in the footwear industry was made up of black women.

In 1921, 98.6 per cent of African, 67.9 per cent of Indian and 90.4 per cent of Coloured women in gainful employment worked in agriculture and domestic service, by far the greater proportion of African and Indian women being in agriculture (88.4 and 41 per cent respectively). By contrast, 23.1 per cent of white women worked in these categories. Agriculture has in fact never involved Coloured and white women substantially. In 1921, 5.5 per cent of Coloured and 4.8 per cent of white women worked in agriculture. In 1980, the proportion of gainfully employed African women in agriculture and service had declined to 57.2 per cent but these lowliest and practically unprotected fields of employment still accounted for over half of the employed African women. By contrast, only 7.8 per cent of Indian and 6.2 per cent of white women were recorded to be working in these categories. In 1980, production engaged only 10.7 per cent of the employed African women, as against about 40 per cent of the Indian and 27 per cent of the Coloured women. The proportion of white women in production had declined to 2.8 per cent, white women being concentrated in the sales and clerical sector (65.4 per cent) and in professional categories (20.8 per cent). Indian women participated in high proportion in the sales and clerical sector, both in 1921 and 1980 (41 and 45 per cent respectively), primarily because of the relatively high presence of small, family run shops among them.

Profile of black women in industry - Durban 1983

The Institute of Black Research interviewed 988 women in industrial employment in the Durban-Pinetown region in 1983. (9)

The following is a summary of some major findings.

Seventy-four per cent of the women were in their working prime, between 21 and 44 years of age. Fifty-four per cent had a lower secondary school education, standard 6-8. They lived in the main in council housing where the right to receive visitors, take in lodgers and have married sons live with parents was formally controlled.

Their day began long before sunrise with household chores, and continued well into late night with cooking of suppers, washing of dishes and minding of children. They put in an average of 8 to 10 hours in the factory, and spent an average of five hours travelling to and from work.

Their job routine was dull and exhausting, they complained of headaches and backaches and refusal on the part of management to allow them time off to see a doctor. Less than half were covered by a medical aid scheme, and only half by any pension fund. They experienced little job satisfaction or

security, many were pressurised to produce stipulated rates, forbidden to talk while working, and watched for time while going to the toilet. Maternity leave was inadequate, and sick leave depended on too many formalities requiring proof.

Promotions were few and far between, firing and retrenchment a constant anxiety. Few were able to remain in continuous employment, and practically all married women had interrupted their careers to take time off to have babies and care for them.

Yet many preferred working to staying at home, particularly the single women, since the alternative - household drudgery and family control over their movement - was worse.

Their work relations were generally good. Most believed that their working had not changed their relations within their family and in the neighbourhood. They were most worried about their children who remained without care, and complained about demanding husbands. Few had access to creches, most were obliged to depend on relations, older children and neighbours to keep an eye on their children, and most returned home to cook dinners for exacting husbands.

Poor family income and overbearing husbands whose hostility was often aggravated by drink, were their main problems. A fair number complained of torment by other men, thugs and rapists, and sexual harassment.

They had little free time and when they did, they usually used it in family activities. A minority belonged to trade unions, but even these had little understanding of their organisation and functioning. They did not attend workers' meetings and believed that management alone could improve working conditions and wages. They had little time or inclination for community activities, though most agreed that women could unite to constitute a power for reform.

They identified a whole range of problems in the work situation, ranging from low wages to too much control and work overload, yet they saw little possibility of redress. Only 26 per cent thought that workers should exert pressure for improved conditions, 33 per cent thought management could be prevailed upon to institute reforms; the majority thought nothing could be done. Yet most of them took their problems to shop stewards rather than to the management.

Most had made friends at work and about half of the friendships extended beyond the workplace. Yet sex and race remained an inhibiting factor. Few friends were made across the sex lines; and while most Indian and Coloured workers were positive about relations across race lines, almost 70 per cent of the African women were inhibited about contact between themselves and Indian and Coloured women.

South Africa's black women in wage labour are driven into wage labour by the poverty of their families. Their contribution to the family income makes the difference between starvation and subsistence. Young girls leave school early, partly because their parents can no longer afford to keep them there, but primarily because the family desperately needs the money they can earn, or help to earn while their mothers work and they take care of the house and younger children.

The State's educational policy has been deliberately manipulated to ensure a large supply of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, much larger than required by industry at any particular point. This surplus helps to keep down the price of black labour and to ensure against major industrial dislocation through labour unrest. At the same time, it maintains a chronic state of unemployment, the real rate being much larger than the official recorded one since the latter excludes the vast numbers of youth and women in the reserves prevented from seeking employment.

Education is far from being free and compulsory for the mass of black South Africans. African parents have to provide the first half of school buildings themselves and employ their own teachers to some

extent. Up to 1960, 80 per cent of Indian schools were community schools. The principle of free and compulsory education has only recently extended to Indians and Coloureds, and its application with regard to Africans is very much in its infancy. Black parents, particularly African, are consequently forced to withdraw their children early from school. Over 40 per cent leave by the time they have reached the second standard, in an illiterate or semi-literate state. The level of education attained by girls is even lower than that attained by boys.

Black women consequently enter the labour market even less educated than black men. Moreover, taught to accept the concept of subordination to men, they appear on the market with greater diffidence and lower self-evaluation. They are thus even more exploitable than black men. South Africa's low wage structure persists not only because labour is black, but because it is underpinned by what black women will tolerate.

If the family implanted equivalent expectations in children of both sexes, black women would not constitute an alternate and even cheaper supply of labour. Moreover, this attitude has for a consequence an even more depressing effect on the overall price of wage labour. But the working class black family is trapped in a vicious circle; because it is trapped in poverty, it cannot afford to educate its children, still less its female children, and so it continues to perpetuate sexual inequalities even though these react against its economic interest.

Employers will pay the minimum that labour will bear. Labour cannot be exploited beyond the point of subsistence because that would result in the elimination of labour itself. But women are prepared to accept lower wages because they are nurtured in the family to see themselves as inferior to men.

Generally speaking, they cannot see their labour as supporting their families, only subsidising them.

They enter the world of men, but they do not by that fact become "men". Their admission into the labour market is a result of the capital's need for an even cheaper and more exploitable labour force than the one they already have access to.

In addition to their new vocations in the labour market, women remain responsible for family and child care. The entire weight of tradition, nurtured in the family, ensures that they do so.

Men and women do not constitute a single class. Both biology and tradition conspire against this. The women's reproductive, child-caring and housekeeping functions, whilst fundamental to the perpetuation of family and society, are devalued in a money economy. In the traditional African society women were actively involved in production; their economic role was substantial and at least equivalent to that of the men. They had access to land, owned livestock, and had control over their produce, as well as of that which the men brought in from the hunt. The ruin of the tribal economy reduced women to consumers dependent on their men's cash wages; it made them valueless, since value in a money economy is derived from the cash earned. Incongruously, the very work deemed valueless when performed at home, gains value when performed outside of the home because of the wage earned.

Whatever the value placed on "woman's work" in African society, industrial society deems it inferior and transfers this concept to the work place, so that even when women do the same work as men, and with equal competence, it is considered inferior because they do it, and they are accordingly paid less. When such discrimination is challenged, the rationalisation offered is that women do not have the same need for money, since they are not responsible for the maintenance of the family. The tragedy is that women themselves internalise and perpetuate these values. A third of the black women working in factories believed that men should be paid higher wages; 70 per cent of the 988 women interviewed in

the Institute of Black Research survey stated that unemployment was worse for men; 56 per cent felt that men and women should not do the same work and felt they should not get the same pay. Sixty-nine per cent said men needed jobs more than women.

The tyranny of the traditional patriarchy is compounded by that of the Western, industrial, capitalist. Many black women continue to experience gainful employment as "unnatural", and to suffer feelings of guilt for "deserting" the home. They hand over their wages to their husbands or elders as if they had no right to them, as if atoning for the desertion.

WOMEN`S ORGANISATIONS AND ORGANISED WOMEN

Women are not organised along sexual lines in South Africa. Feminism is almost entirely absent from the social fabric, and this is primarily due to the race factor. White women share with white men in the exploitation of blacks. The wages and incomes brought in by their men and the social security provided by the State afford them comfortable to affluent lives. While sexual discrimination exists, it is offset by the fact that the status of whites is infinitely higher than that of the black men; and this not only invalidates an anti-male movement, but underlines the fact that to preserve their existing privileges white women must close their rank with white men as a class.

Black women, on the other hand, have an intuitive understanding of the exploitation and devaluing of their men which rebounds upon them. Their wages are too low to both maintain them and their families; they are drawn into the cities where often they are lost to them, and in the final analysis, the Government, not their men, prevents them from joining their menfolk and seeking employment outside the homelands. Black women support and join black men, even when they appear to be attacking them, as when they raid the beerhalls: it is to shake them out of their "collaboration" with the system by spending their money in municipal outlets.

Women`s organisations in South Africa must be viewed in terms of this dichotomy which inhibits sex or simple class fraternities and reacts against feminist coalitions. Even when women focus on disabilities peculiar to women, they interpret them as due to some malfunctioning of the social process rather than blame the men.

Women have a far lower propensity for organisation than men and this is due to their subservience, both imposed and internalised. As a rule, black women need the permission and approval of fathers, husbands and other guardians to step outside the family for practically any reason, and may feel in themselves that it is against the nature of women to belong to groupings other than the kinship unit. In a sample survey of 1,000 black women (African, Coloured and Indian) in industrial employment in the Durban metropolitan area, approximately 80 per cent had to seek permission for doing practically anything apart from their domestic duties and their wage labour. Sixty-two per cent believed that this was right and proper - a further 17.5 per cent felt that it was right and proper for some things, not all. It can be safely assumed that the subservience of other women, those in domestic and agricultural labour and those confined to the house, is even greater.

Only 32 per cent of the 1,000 black women belonged to any community or women`s organisations, most (70 per cent) belonging to religious organisations. While 52 per cent belonged to trade unions, only 13 per cent attended meetings. A small minority, 3 per cent, expressed a desire to join existing community organisations though 59 per cent (the African response being the highest, 78 per cent) desired to join a women`s organisation, and 85 per cent believed that there was a need for women to organise. (10)

It is therefore hardly surprising that women are conspicuous by their absence from the executives of welfare, educational, political and labour organisations, that the South African Parliament has never had more than four white women at any particular time, and there are no women on the recently "elected" Indian and Coloured chambers of the Parliament; and when active in public life, they tend to support and follow programmes and policies introduced and implemented by men.

In some sectors, such as the garment industry, employees have become overwhelmingly women, yet managerial and supervisory posts and the executive positions in trade unions are filled predominantly by men. Women undergird political campaigns and have often given them their most volatile expression, yet few hold executive positions. Their exclusion from the main power blocks and the sense of inadequacy this cultivates in male company has, in the final analysis, driven the more enterprising and relatively less repressed women to form women's organisations. Many of these are in fact subordinate wings of male dominated bodies, encouraged by the men to provide tea-making, fund-raising or some similar services.

While such organisations involve a minority of South Africa's women, the impact of some is considerable. They may be classified broadly as those serving the recreational needs and developing the skills of members, those focussed on welfare work, and those that are overtly or apparently political and engaged in protest activities. Middle class and white women's organisations are usually of the first two types, whereas the last are predominantly African.

The influence of religion

Religion, in particular Christianity, is an important factor in bringing women together. The more progressive denominations have in recent times succeeded in bringing about some racial integration. The Christian Women's Movement formed in 1982 under the auspices of the South African Council of Churches is overtly anti-apartheid and faintly feminist in outlook. It has stated:

"Our vision and our dream is to work for the realisation of a new community of women and men in the church and for the total liberation of all people in South Africa. We have made a commitment to work for the eradication of apartheid and all structural inequalities in the church and society... Our struggle for equality therefore cannot be separated from the political liberation of all people."

On the feminist level it asserts:

"We are concerned about the church's reluctance to allow women to participate fully in the life of the church. We are recognised as fund-raisers and tea-makers but the gifts and skills we can bring to policy-making bodies of the church are seldom recognised."

This "Movement", however, has yet to make an impact on South Africa's women.

The older church organisations go back to the beginning of the century. They include upper class white church groupings helping the poor, at first the white poor, but later including blacks. The church has also cradled the most prolific African women's organisation, the *Manyano*. The *Manyano* bonds African women in the urban areas drawn from a diversity of tribes giving them an identity manifested in the distinctive uniforms of members, self-confidence and security. In the depressed townships where men as the main bread-winners often have neither the means nor the will to respond to needs defined by women, and the State turns its back on them, the *Manyano* serves as a welfare pool. It organises *stokvels* or saving clubs, rotating among members the benefit of the capital accumulated each month to help with such emergencies as payment of school and university fees, down payments and demands from creditors.

Non-political on the face of it, the *Manyano* has a potential for quick politicisation inherent in a non-tribal, Christian, but intrinsically African grouping. It funnels grievances which though not intellectualised are expressed "intuitively" as rooted in racism. "White people do these things to blacks"; "They happen because whites make them happen".

Manyanos have converted temporarily into protest groups against apartheid. They defended women's right to brew beer in the 1940s, resisted the extension of passes to women in 1913 and in the 1950s, and agitated against the expropriation of African-owned property and forced removals in 1954, as well as against statutory inferiorisation of African education in 1955. The *Manyano* remains the most authentic African women's organisation and it undergirds women's activities in the overtly political organisations. The African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL), for instance, appears not only to have been modelled on the *Manyano*, but to a considerable extent to have been supported by it. The success of the 1956 Pretoria pass demonstration likewise was largely due to *Manyano* networks. The Young Women's Christian Association is the other side of the coin of the African churchwomen. Where the *Manyano* represents the relatively uneducated, unskilled worker, largely in domestic employment, the Young Women's Christian Association represents the relatively educated and economically better-off African churchwomen.

Beginning as a body of white women concerned primarily with the problems of white girls entering industrial employment, the Young Women's Christian Association began incorporating black chapters towards the middle of the present century. By the 1940s, the African component was the largest, composed almost entirely by the *Zengele* clubs. Their president, Mrs. Xuma, (11) who was simultaneously president of the National Council of African Women and the African National Congress Women's League, encouraged this incorporation. The large black membership provoked tension and eventually split the body into two: white and non-racial. The latter, largely African-dominated, is affiliated to the world body and is by far the more important.

The Young Women's Catholic Association has never taken a direct political stance because its members prefer to use other organisations for such purpose; its main contribution lies in the educational and welfare service it provides in the townships. It is a well organised national body with regional and local committees throughout the country.

There are numerous groups related to the white, Coloured and Indian churches; most are consciously ethnic. Some groups extend services to other communities, some are self-centred attending to their own needs, raising funds for new amenities, etc.

Other religions inspiring women's groups are Hinduism and Islam. The first involves Indian women, the second Indian and Malay women. The groups are small and their interests range from the purely ritualistic and theological (studying of the Scriptures), to education and welfare. Women are largely responsible for running extra school classes in language and religion. The Women's Cultural Group, primarily Indian and Muslim in membership, organises lectures, has published a best-seller cookbook, raises funds for welfare services for all races, and has established an educational foundation which provides bursaries for young black women. Radical forces within Islam are also challenging the Muslim women to take political positions.

Social groups

The better known, non-church linked, white dominated women's bodies in South Africa are the National Council of Women, the Housewives League, the Business and Professional Women, the Women's Institute and the Toast Mistress. Most of these groups are affiliates of international

organisations. Apart from the National Council of Women, all other organisations until very recently excluded blacks from membership. Today, most organisations allow for separate black affiliates. Their interests are centred around improving the competence of members in housewifery, gardening, crafts and public speaking.

The National Council of Women in South Africa, established in 1913, is an affiliate of the International Council of Women. In recent years, it has adopted a clear stance against apartheid. Its 47th conference in 1981 affirmed that "South Africa is one country and one people" and rejected racial discrimination as "morally unsound and a dangerous obstacle to the peaceful development of our country".

Though racially integrated today, this was not the position of this organisation in earlier years. In 1936, African women founded their own National Council of African Women. By 1953, this organisation had four branches on the Reef and one each in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The National Council of African Women, like the Young Women's Christian Association, differed markedly from the *Manyano* both in its Western orientation and in its upper class membership. Considering itself as a parallel to the white "Council", it emulated white women and tended to see African problems as due to ignorance and illiteracy. It was up to the African women and to the African people to liberate themselves from tribalism and take their position alongside the whites.

The Daughters of Africa and the *Zengele* (Home Makers) Clubs were similar in approach.

The *Zengele* Clubs became integrated into the Young Women's Christian Association.

The oldest Indian organisation is the Indian Women's Association, operative since the time of Gandhi in the early part of the century. Clearly political at the time of its founding in Durban and Johannesburg, and supportive of Gandhi's passive resistance campaign, it toned down into a small group of middle class Indian women in Durban, with educational and welfare interests.

Political groups and the mass protests

It is the political arena that has drawn the most volatile response from South Africa's women. White women, English and Afrikaner, have joined their menfolk in their conflicts with each other and against indigenous blacks, and some have been enshrined as heroines in white annals. Generally speaking, white women defend the apartheid system and resist change. The Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union, established soon after the Union of South Africa came into existence in 1910, finally won the franchise for white women in 1930, but it did so mainly to stir up the white franchise against the blacks and gain in this way the necessary two-thirds majority to abolish the Cape Native vote.

The most impressive white political group is the Black Sash, founded soon after the Nationalist Party took power in 1948, specifically to protest against the excesses of the system against human rights. The organisation has grown in stature and work and it now runs valuable advice bureaus to assist black women.

The most spectacular records are those of the mass resistance of black women, African, Indian and Coloured. In 1912, all campaigned against passes: Africans and Coloureds as a single body in the Orange Free State against residential passes; Indians in Natal and in the Transvaal against provincial barriers and poll taxes.

The resistance in the Orange Free State was provoked by an 1893 law which required all African and Coloured women to produce work permits on request by the police in order to establish their "right" to be in the area. The women, supported by the menfolk, pleaded for years with the authorities to abolish the law which humiliated them, and obliged young girls to leave school and seek employment or be

removed to other areas. Their pleas ignored, they finally formed the Native and Coloured Women's Association and openly defied the law, marching on the local administration offices, dumping their passes and facing arrest. Over a thousand were arrested. In 1918, the movement spread to the Transvaal: in 1923, the passes were finally withdrawn.

At the beginning of the century, Indian women in Natal and the Transvaal virtually made Gandhi, and proved the efficacy of the new liberation dialectic of *satyagraha* that he introduced. The South African Indian resistance movement remained by and large an elitist protest, until the women *satyagrahis* from the two *ashrams* in Natal and the Transvaal, the Phoenix Settlement and the Tolstoy Farm respectively, converted it into a mass movement. In 1913, they defied the anti-Asiatic law, crossed the provincial border from both ends and provoked the miners of Newcastle to lay down their picks and strike. Two thousand workers thereafter began the epic march, led by Gandhi, across the Natal border into the Transvaal and the entire Indian labour force of Natal went on strike, bringing industry to a standstill. Arrests and imprisonment followed, and the Government was forced to modify some of the hardships against the Indians. The great figure of that struggle was not Gandhi, but the emaciated young Valliamma, who refused to surrender despite her fatal illness that developed as a result of imprisonment. She died in the struggle.

In 1946, the Indian women again took the lead in launching the second passive resistance campaign against the anti-Indian Land Act: at the end of that campaign, almost 2,000 Indians had been imprisoned for defying segregatory laws.

Persecution of African women 1940-1960

The militancy of the African women has moved in a continuous stream throughout the century. This is hardly surprising since they have been the hardest hit by the system. Their movement, however, has been severely restricted by two elements: traditional patriarchy and State's influx control legislation, since they are the last component of the South African population to be considered for jobs even of the most menial type. Yet, at least a third are the sole supporters of their families because of the high incidence of children born out of wedlock (about 50 per cent of all African births) and because of the system of migrant labour and wages that ignore the needs of worker's families. The vast volume of racist laws that have accumulated since the Nationalist Party came into power finally attack the family and its welfare for which women find themselves personally responsible. Educational laws condemned their children to servitude; laws that reduced African land-holdings took away land traditionally allotted to women; laws against urban "squatting" resulted in women being arrested because they attempted to join their husbands, or to seek employment in the towns.

In the face of such persecution, African women have taken desperate measures to force the authorities to concede to them the basic right to protect their children. Sample surveys conducted by the Institute for Black Research in Butterworth and Durban reveal that a third of the African women in industrial employment are the sole supporters of their families.

African women in urban areas began constituting a problem for the white system in the late 1940s and 1950s. The reserves ceased to be productive about this time. They no longer provided an economic base due to the declining fertility of the land, and due to increased density aggravated by government legislation.

Economic recession, and mechanisation on the other hand increased unemployment and piled even a greater burden on the homelands and on the women living there. Women therefore began moving in greater numbers to the cities in search of work in order to relieve rural distress. When they moved to

the cities, however, and congregated on rented plots, restructuring family life in urban slums, the authorities clamped down upon them, declaring such settlements illegal and subjecting the women and their families to constant police raids and heavy fines. And, being "illegal", civic authorities ignored them and provided no amenities. Night soil and refuse accumulated, rodents scavenged the gulleys between the houses, and the people became exposed to disease and death. The situation continues today. In the 1940s on the Reef, the anger of the women burst bounds: they organised resistance and marches, and clashed with the police in numerous townships. They demanded houses and better living facilities.

A 1908 law prohibiting the domestic brewing of beer, a traditional right of African women, was another issue which enraged the women. In the urban townships, brewing and selling of beer provided the women with a source of income and the family savings, since beer bought at the municipal beerhalls was so much more expensive. Women boycotted the beerhalls and picketed the men. They also demanded that the municipalities use the profit from the sale of beer for housing and developing other amenities in the townships. Attacks on beerhalls and demands for reinstating the right of women to brew beer broke out fairly consistently throughout the country during the 1940s and 1950s and only subsided after 1960, when the liquor laws were somewhat relaxed.

Transport was another major issue. Poor and costly transport promoted boycotts in which women played a prominent part.

All the issues were basic, the response spontaneous, and it was left to the affected people, as continues to be the case today, to do whatever they could to protest this situation. When outsiders assisted, the gesture was in the final analysis symbolic. The *Manyanos* and the African National Congress Women's League were the important inspirational elements.

In 1952, passes were extended to African women throughout the country. Up to 1918, when they had been withdrawn in the face of stringent resistance, they had been applied to African and Coloured women in the Orange Free State alone. The intention was to contain the women in the reserves, to leave them there to starve with their dependents, the unemployable young, the sick and the old. There was spontaneous resistance to the imposition of passes throughout the country and the resistance continued for eight years. Thousands of women were repeatedly imprisoned. In 1954, 2,000 were arrested in Johannesburg, 4,000 in Pretoria, 1,200 in Germiston, and 350 in Bethlehem. In 1955, 2,000 women marched to the Native Commission's office in Vereeniging.

The African National Congress Women's League founded in 1943 played the most important role among women's organisations in consolidating these issues and in giving them national prominence. The League set up branches throughout the country and identified its membership through its own distinctive uniform.

Durban and District Women's League

Women from the Natal Indian Congress and the African National Congress joined their forces and established the Durban and District Women's League in 1952. In doing so, they went ahead of their parent bodies, the African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress which operated in consultation but not as a single body. The League had taken stock of the manipulation of Africans against Indians in 1949, and saw its prime object as that of restoring mutual confidence. It therefore concentrated its activities in Cato Manor, the area worst hit during the disturbance. A creche and milk distribution centre was established in a church hall and League members were bussed out daily to administer and to teach. The League was actively engaged in the 1952 Campaign of Defiance of Unjust

Laws. When passes were introduced for African women, it organised a vigorous protest movement culminating in a mass march on the Department of Native Affairs in Pietermaritzburg and the arrest of 600 women, mainly African, but including a significant number of Indian women and a few white members of the Liberal Party.

League representatives were among the founding members of the Federation of South African Women in 1954, and Natal sent a deputation of 156 members to the historic march of 20,000 women on Pretoria in 1956, organised by the Federation of South African Women.

In 1960, the League organised a protest march of the women and children of those detained in Durban during the state of emergency. Some 60 women with their children were arrested and charged, the charges being withdrawn after a short spell in prison and an appearance in court. The League organised a weekly vigil outside the prison to keep the public mind focussed on the inequity of detention without trial. This was the last of League's activities. The banning of its secretary in 1954 and the detention of its chairperson in 1960 had weakened the organising committee, but it was the banning of the African National Congress and of key members of the Natal Indian Congress that spelt its demise.

Federation of South African Women

The Federation of South African Women was founded in 1954 in Johannesburg in an environment of seething discontent and country-wide protests against passes, inadequate housing, high transport costs and inferior education. A number of regionally-based African women's organisations had emerged and the African National Congress Women's League, considerably strengthened by the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign, provided a national unitary base. There was a need, however, to draw in women of all races throughout the country and the Federation was conceived for this purpose.

The initiative for the establishment of the Federation of South African Women came from the white women of the Congress of Democrats. It was inspired by the Women's International Democratic Federation established at about the same time. Its success was indisputably due to the activities of the African National Congress Women's League. If there were ideological differences, they never touched the rank and file. Even the fact that most members of the organising committee were white and that there was no general white membership did not produce any tension that was not contained within the structure of the organisation. With the African National Congress as its mainstay, with support from the women of the Coloured, Indian and white Congresses and from the Food and Canning Workers' Union, the Federation focussed above all on the current issue of passes. Its activities, unlike those of the more local and spontaneous groups, were strictly within the framework of the law. In 1955 it led a protest of 2,000 women to Pretoria, and in 1956 another one with the participation of 20,000 women. Apart from these two momentous events, and the preparation of a women's charter identifying the fundamental demands of South African women for complete equality in colour and sex, the activities of the Federation were relatively low key, supportive of the Congress Alliance and protesting against high rents and poor amenities.

The pass issue was particularly an African issue, concerning both men and women. In 1958 the African National Congress questioned the advisability of protests organised by women only and grew alarmed at the increased victimisation of African women suffering imprisonment and fines. In 1960, both the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania took up passes as a national issue. The massacre of Sharpeville followed, emergency was proclaimed, and the two African organisations, as well as the Congress of Democrats, were banned. This development led to the end of the Federation.

The arrest of five members of the Federation on a charge of treason in 1956, following the Federation's participation in the organisation of the Congress of the People, had already dealt a blow. It held its third and last conference in Port Elizabeth in 1961.

The weakness of both the Natal League and the Federation was that, organisationally, they were much too centralised and did not develop sufficient grass-roots responsibility. More serious, however, was the fact that neither were independent women's organisations. Both relied on the African National Congress Women's League, which in turn was a unit of the African National Congress. Apart from other implications this had on their activities, it was inevitable that both would collapse with the banning of the African National Congress unless they organised in the underground, which neither did.

Federation of Black Women

In 1972, Natal began organising the women anew on a non-racial political basis with the founding of the Women's Federation, Natal. There were, however, strong feelings against the inclusion of white women and when the Federation became national in 1975, it did so as the Federation of Black Women. The national three-day conference in Durban focussing on the black family drew 300 delegates representing over 100 women's organisations and groups. Ministries were organised into such key areas as education, franchise, housing, women's disabilities, etc. Branches began to be set up in rural areas, and a blueprint for a black women's magazine was mapped out. The Federation became actively involved when violence erupted in Soweto in 1976.

An open air mass rally planned in Durban was stopped by the Government by placing a blanket ban on all outdoor meetings, a ban which continues to be operative to this day. The President of the Federation was banned within six months of its founding and then imprisoned without trial, together with five executive members. The Federation itself was banned following its second conference, and its monies were confiscated.

New initiatives

United Women's Organisation in the Western Cape and the Natal Organisation of Women in Natal have been inspired by and trace their roots to the Federation of South African Women. They have been in existence for the last two or three years and are growing in organisation and membership. As their goals, they identify the elimination of race and sex discrimination, as well as the organisation of a joint general campaign for full and equal democratic rights for all in South Africa. United Women's Organisation significantly includes a "consumer committee", "workers' support committee" and "9 August committee". The Federation, which was never actually banned, has been revived and if the Government does not come down heavily on the present black organisations as it is threatening to do, new developments on the women's front can be expected.

Whereas past political organisations drew membership from older married women, the new initiative is coming in the main from younger women. Though the focus remains broadly liberatory, there is consciousness of ideological issues of feminism, class and race. While these have as yet not been significantly articulated, the chances are that they will give to the new movement the intellectual dimension that the organisations lacked in the past.

Women and liberation

Exploitation is unbridled in a racist society because oppressors can isolate themselves from those they oppress. In a class society isolation can never be complete. The lines of class distinction are forever mixing and mingling, and the upper class can never hope to remain uncontaminated by the lower. Moreover, where the classes share common political rights, the demands of the lower classes for

redress and a more equitable share in the accumulated goods and services cannot be ignored. Consequently, capitalism is modified by socialism as is the case in the United Kingdom and other European countries.

In South Africa, those in power as a white class have effectively quarantined the blacks into homelands and group areas. They can therefore tolerate to a very high extent the social aberrations wreaked by economic deprivation. The fact that blacks have no power whatsoever to influence legislative procedures and obtain redress for their condition secures that quarantine.

But no quarantine lasts forever. The ghettos today seethe with discontent, resistance is high, and revolution is a matter of time. The women are a fundamental part of it, because they suffer the consequences of apartheid in a way men never can. They are trained to care, to bear responsibility and guilt, and when they cannot care, and cannot be responsible, then the guilt is too overwhelming to be locked within themselves. That guilt explodes, it is externalised, and placed where it rightly belongs, in the system that suppresses and oppresses. The liberated women become the driving force for societal liberation.

As long as racism continues and a people, not a particular sex, is the object of oppression, the women will continue to overlook their own discrimination and dedicate themselves to the liberation of their people

(1) From "Notes and Documents", No. 4/85, April 1985

(2) The source of these statistics on health is the South African Department of Health and Welfare.

(3) Outside "homelands"

(4) Outside homelands

(5) Craig, A.P. and Richter-Strydom, L. M. "Unplanned pregnancies among urban Zulu schoolgirls" in *South African Medical Journal* , Vol. 63, March 1983

(6) Meer and Mlaba, *Apartheid, our Picture* , Institute for Black Research, 1982

(7) The unemployment increased from 1.25 million in 1960 to 2.25 million in 1977.

(8) *Manpower Survey* , No. 14-24-04-81

(9) Included in the survey were 452 African, 428 Indian and 108 Coloured women.

(10) Institute for Black Research, *Black women in industry 1983* .

(11) She was the wife of Dr. A. B. Xuma, President of the African National Congress of South Africa in the 1940s.