

# Giant step for 20 000 women

Today — August 9 — is the 32nd anniversary of the day that 20 000 women marched on Pretoria to protest against the extension of pass laws to women.

The Star of August 9 1956 described that event as follows: "The leaders of the women stood out in green blouses and there were gay splashes of colour from a few in traditional dress notably from the Eastern Province.

"Later in the afternoon the leaders tried to present their protest to the Prime Minister, Mr J G Strijdom, who had twice refused to see them."

The reporter covering the event said that although the concourse was visible from the Prime Minister's window he did not go out to see the women. He remained working at his desk.

## PICNIC ATMOSPHERE

"The gathering had a picnic air as women opened flasks of tea and ate sandwiches and biscuits. There were many children and here and there a baby was being fed under the shade of the pine trees."

As each woman entered the turnstile to the grounds of the Union Buildings, she was handed a copy of the protest which she signed and handed back to one of the leaders of the Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw), who organised the march.

The Federation of Transvaal Women (Fedtraw) has seen to it that the women's struggle has not waned.

"It is only now that women are beginning to take their rightful place at the forefront of the national democratic struggle," says Fedtraw member Ms Firoza Adam.

Women's organisations have had a history of bringing women together since 1956.

"We have had situations where mothers of soldiers in the townships meet mothers whose children have been shot and harassed by the soldiers. Many of our women's eyes have been opened by these historic meetings," said Ms Adam.

Women from all over the country gathered on Sunday to commemorate National Women's Day. (The officially recognised day is August 9.) This day marks the march to the Union Buildings in 1956.

Ms Adam said Fedtraw was



Thirty-two years ago today 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest to the then Prime Minister, Mr J G Strijdom, against the extension of pass laws to black women.

By SALLY SEALEY

Women have had to struggle hard to gain their rightful place in South African society. Today marks the anniversary of a march by thousands of women on the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956. That was a protest against the pass laws. Today there are other battles, but apartheid — and its manifestations — is still the principal foe.

launched to organise women so that they could become independent and assert themselves not only in the workplace and at home, but also in South African society.

"Women are socially discriminated against. Thus there is a need to develop their confidence, which in turn enables women to make their own decisions," she said.

Fedtraw does not organise around women's issues exclusively.

Ms Adam said: "Women are always good organisers in the home but what Fedtraw tries to do is extend the sphere of influence of women generally.

"Women are also oppressed within their home. There are men who perceive that a women's place is in the kitchen or with the children and often women are socialised to accept this position".

After the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress in the 1960s there was a definite lull in political activity even within Fedsaw.

The 1980s saw a resurgence of women's organisations. In December 1984 the Federation of Transvaal Women was launched.

Ms Adam said: "We were involved in a number of success-

ful campaigns, particularly those relating to the cost of living."

The uprisings and school boycotts in the Vaal Triangle in 1984 severely weakened the organisation when much of the leadership was detained.

"The rest of us struggled on," Ms Adam said.

Despite the emergency, Fedtraw managed to hold a conference in 1986. Last year the women organised a very successful cultural day and managed to reunite with many of the groups with whom they had lost contact during the state of emergency in 1986.