

# Freedom Means Equality And No More Lies!

## Progressive Arts Project Women's Group

### Woman's Warning

I am a woman and my name is Nonhlanhla  
I come from Natal.  
I would like to speak about women's problems.  
Most of our problems is with men, the way I see  
it.  
Lots of women fall in the same deep hole.  
Women, be careful of men.

They make so many lies  
They promise you so many things,  
Things that will make you happy  
But they do not do them.

He can say to you: Make our baby, if you make  
it we will be married.  
After you have the baby he will disappear like  
water into the ground.  
You will never see him again.  
Then you will suffer alone.  
And then the person you work for will say there  
is no more work because you are pregnant.

I say to young girls:  
Do not run with the boys  
Run with your education because it is your  
future these days.  
I say devils are hunting us, but we can run from  
them now, because we have seen them.  
I wish we can run away from them all, all of us  
women.

by Thandi Khoza

Thandi Khoza is a member of the Progressive  
Arts Project (PAP) Women's Group in

Johannesburg. The group has more than ten  
women in it, and one man. This group is  
making its voice heard. They raise women's  
issues with strong voices through poems,  
songs, and stories that they themselves have  
written from events in their own lives. They are  
black women and white women, domestic  
workers and professionals. They write most of  
their poems, songs and stories themselves.  
They are colourful and lively, and very exciting  
to watch! The group has performed in many  
progressive venues, like Federation of  
Transvaal Women's (FEDTRAW) National  
Women's Day rally, and at other cultural events.  
SPEAK wanted to find out more about how they  
came together.

### Women Have Many Stories To Tell

Irene Stephanou is an actress and she was  
involved in getting some of the women together.  
She had contact with women working as  
domestic workers, and through listening and  
talking felt that there were many stories that  
women had to tell about their lives. She said: "I  
met Mary who makes tea and generally has a  
hard time at a doctor's surgery. Thandi who is  
also a domestic worker lives in a house nearby.  
There was so much to talk about and so much  
to discuss. I know that growing up with domestic  
workers, there is the very real apartheid at work.  
I thought that there was a wealth of different  
experiences that could come together. I thought  
it would be good, as we all have stories, to hear  
them. So I approached Irene Mvelase who is  
also a domestic worker, who wrote a story."



**The PAP Women's Group raise women's issues with strong voices. These are some of the members in action!**

Photo: Afrapix

Photo: SPEAK

At first the women didn't have the idea of performing these stories, just writing them. But then ideas just started growing. Barbie Schreiner is a member of the PAP women's group. She said: "Last year some of us did a performance for National Women's Day." South African women celebrate National Women's Day on August 9 each year. August 9 1956 was the day when 20 000 women marched to Pretoria to protest the carrying of passes. Barbie said: "It was coming up to National Women's Day again, and we thought it would be nice to get a group together again." The seeds of the group were already there.

### Getting It Together

Penny Slascis said: "Everybody brought the

things that they had written. Barbie brought a poem that she had written, and Mary brought two songs. We learned to sing!" One of the things the group performs is a rap. Penny said: "We wrote a rap that we started by saying 'He says ...' Everybody threw in their ideas around what they felt around the words 'He says'. We put these all together, and had a rap. Then we split it up and rehearsed it. The rap came from experiences that have happened to everybody."

Here is part of the rap:

He says: 'My father had wives - two of them  
I want two - just like him'  
He says: look dear - I don't mean to moan  
I can't look after children - I've a life of my own'  
He says he wants five kids - I've given him 3

I say who goes into labour? - not you but me!  
 The policeman says: 'No money woman? Well  
 sleep with me  
 Do what I say and you can go free!  
 I say: 'Freedom?' and look in his eyes  
 Freedom means equality - and no more lies  
 Freedom means saying what one needs to say  
 Freedom means obeying who one wants to  
 obey  
 Freedom means learning what needs to be  
 taught  
 Freedom is priceless, it cannot be bought!

### **A Man's View**

Anthony Stevens is the only man in the group. How does he feel about being part of the group? He said: "From my point of view, I'm talking to the men. That's why I wrote this song 'Don't take a woman like a man.' Because men don't treat women like people - for them women are there to have babies, work, it's all that thing you know. Women have got no say. So if I can say something as a man, maybe it will get through to a couple of men. Some men have problems with women but it is not like that all the time. It's not the same kind of thing. A man has always got that thing that if there is a disagreement or whatever, at least he can resort to violence because he is stronger. It's hard for a man, because of that thing of 'being a man'. Men are first. Women are second. It's like that with Zulu's. It's like that with Moslems. The men eat first. Whatever is left goes to the women."

The group had five or six rehearsals before they performed. They rehearsed in each other's homes. The women spoke of what the group meant to them, and why they were part of it.

### **Telling It Like It Is**

Mary Thibedi felt that she wanted to be able to educate people through her songs. She said: "The songs I wrote are all about the problems people are facing. People are dying in South Africa. Some people don't even know what is going on, so I would like to sing a song so that people can know what is happening."

Another member of the group said: "I wrote the poem because I wanted everybody to know about how the men treat the women. How men



**PAP challenges the traditional roles of women through poems, stories and song.**

Photo: SPEAK

take us as slaves. I hope that it will make people change how they behave - especially the men. I want them to understand that women can be friends. Men play with the women. Men think they are only the heads and we must be down. Women can do the things that men can do."

### **Challenging Lip-Service Paid to Women's Liberation**

Barbie said: "I think that within the national democratic movement a lot of lip service is paid to women's liberation - gender liberation. To a large extent it is side-lined until after liberation. If you look at the majority of people who come to National Women's Day it's youth groups from the townships, to a large extent, male-dominated groups and women's issues aren't

actually raised on women's day. That's why it is really good that we as a group of women stand up and say: 'this is what we as women feel.'"

Sometimes the group gets heavy comments from a few men in the audience. But they have never had any bad comments from women in the audience who cheer when they hear the line in the rap song that goes: 'who goes into labour? Not you, but me!' and 'hear our silence, give us voice!' But the group has found that many men are very supportive of the message that they are trying to get across.

### Women's Voices Must Be Heard!

Irene said: "I think that for me the most important thing about this group is that I think it is important that the women's voice be heard. Not because it is more important or more sincere, but because it is different to the male voice. And secondly with this group I think that it has taught me that the voice that is most important and the most sincere is the voice that comes from the people."

Penny said: "When we listen to the real stories and the real pain and the real issues, then you can understand how the feminist theories are born out of that."

The PAP Women's group meets regularly. They plan to get more women to join them. And they want to work on new poems, songs and stories for their performances. They are starting to get booked up for some performances for the new year. They are making sure that the women's voices will be heard in 1990!

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# ANC, SACP UNBANNED

People are singing and toyi-toyiing with joy all over South Africa! The organisations of the people have been unbanned! Comrade Nelson Mandela is out of prison!

February 1990 is a month that will be remembered in South African history. The African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, and the Pan African Congress were unbanned after almost 30 years of being banned and banished into exile and underground. All the bannings and restrictions on organisations like COSATU, UDF and SAYCO have been lifted. The unbannings of organisations and the release of Comrade Nelson Mandela have come after 27 years of bitter struggle by people in South Africa. Hundreds of people who have been restricted are now free to continue their political lives. People are celebrating in South Africa and all over the world!

But this is only the beginning of hope for a free South Africa. There is a long way to go before apartheid and exploitation is totally done away with. So many lives being lost and so much suffering by millions of South Africans is the price that is paid for gaining our path to freedom. Even during the celebrations in some cases police have responded with violence.

We remember and salute all the comrades who have given their lives for the struggle for justice in South Africa. We salute comrades throughout the world who have given their support to our struggle. We pledge support for the ongoing struggle on all fronts until liberation is finally ours. Forward to a non-racial, non-sexist, non-exploitative South Africa, forward!