

SPEAK

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WOMEN WORKERS



● **MUST ORGANISE**

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SPEAK members are: Gill, Helen, Jacqueline, Karen, Nise, Phumelele, Shamim, Sponi, and Vanessa. We welcome Sponi as a new employee to SPEAK. We wish Gill all the very best with the birth of her new baby.

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SPEAK readers

Speak out



SPEAK
P.O. Box 45213
Mayfair
2018

SPEAK
P.O. Box 45213
MAYFAIR
2018
SOUTH AFRICA

Dear SPEAK

Mine is not just a friendship or humorous letter. I'm very disturbed by the escalating number of rape cases, many of which are unsolved. The suspects walk the streets freely because police claim that evidence was not enough or there were no witnesses.

What worries me most is the traumatic experience our young girls go through after this insensible deed. More especially, that most of them don't receive any form of counselling. Some are even afraid to come upfront, fearing to explain this to a male detective. It's very embarrassing. I'm saying this for I had 'the honour' of spending the day at the District Surgeon's office recently. This is my story. My 12 year-old niece was forcibly dragged out of school and raped in a nearby house by a knife-wielding youth. She also had bruises on her forehead and left cheek which she sustained when she was beaten up. To make it worse there was a couple of middle-aged people in this house. They did nothing to try and stop this.

From there she was forced to board a taxi to Zola, and the rapist even told the driver her destination. She got off the taxi, however, and called home. This was on a Friday and she was treated at Baragwanath Hospital. The doctor then advised us to go to the local police station. We were told by the warrant officer to come back on Monday. On arrival, we were accompanied to the District Surgeon's office by two private detectives who made a joke of this all the way.

I was terribly disturbed by the number of women who were raped that weekend. The youngest being two years old and the oldest middle-aged. Of the about 30 victims, all from Soweto, two were dragged from school and about ten were raped inside school classrooms. The doctor arrived about two hours later than scheduled. From here, we were driven home by the detectives and they took a statement from the

victim. She had all the facts, the suspect's name, the address of the house where she was raped and we went through the pain of having to find the suspect's address from his school. Because the victim was a minor, we were transferred to the Child Protection Unit in Kliptown. After a long silence, the police called and informed us that the suspect had been arrested and that he denied everything.

A date for court appearance was made and the case was heard in closed circuit. The victim's friend failed to appear, for she feared victimisation. The case was postponed for a week. On the next date of appearance the doctor testified that the examination was painful and the hymen was broken. This was a very frustrating and humiliating task, having to explain to the victim the meaning of all this. The witness again never surfaced, and the suspect, obviously an experienced rapist, had all his facts very well. By the way, he had two previous convictions of the same crime.

The prosecutor couldn't come up with enough stories and conviction to satisfy the magistrate, who later asked why the suspect was arrested without the victim identifying him. He walked out of the court a free man.

A month later he tried this again, but the teachers at this school had to take this matter into their own hands. They beat up the youth. We never heard of him being arrested, anyway.

This very long letter shows how serious this issue is. I find the South African laws too lenient towards rape. I find this very embarrassing for most people go through the same humiliation and frustrations with no help at all from the police. Hence, today, you find a lot of people taking the law into their own hands. So I have a plea: let all sensible residents of Soweto come together and fight this, it must stop now. As for People Opposed to Woman Abuse (POWA): Stage another march, this time to a local police station and present a petition to the station commander. This way they will know that it is their duty to stop this filthy deed.

Angry and frustrated
Lorraine, Soweto

Dear Lorraine, the story of what happened to your niece is horrifying. We are very pleased that you have

written this letter to SPEAK readers. Rape is a crime against women that must be raised again and again, in as many different ways as possible. It is important that people realise that women are not safe from rape at any place, at any time, at any age. We have to fight to stop rape. We urge women to join organisations like POWA and Rape Crisis, and to campaign in their civics, women's organisations, and trade unions against rape. We must fight rape, and the unjust way in which rape victims are treated, mainly by male policemen and male magistrates. The more women discuss this issue, the more ideas they will come up with to stop rapists - SPEAK Collective.

Dear SPEAK

I became interested in the question of lobola. I disagree with the speaker who said lobola is essential because it is a custom. We have to preserve what is good in traditional society and discard what is no longer relevant. We should not stick to a value or custom in the name of tradition. Lobola is no longer relevant. People who feel this is still meaningful should continue using it but not because it is a custom, but because it is important to them. In order to progress, we must do what is good for us, not because it was done before. Let us do what will keep our nation together.

Yours

Nomtando Sapepa, Meadowlands

Dear Nomtando, many thanks for sharing your views with SPEAK readers. It is important that we debate these issues so we can come up with new traditions and cultures that do not oppress anybody in our society - SPEAK Collective.

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A time to push ahead!

COSATU women speak

SPEAK met some members from the Women's Sub-committee of COSATU's National Education Committee (Nedcom) at the COSATU head office in Johannesburg.. We met Comrades Maggie Magubane, Dorothy Mokgalo, Elizabeth Thabethe, Tiny Mabena, Toko Magagula, Ruth Matotong, Refiloe Ndzuta and Rachmat Omar. They told us they are determined to work hard to push their unions and COSATU to take up women's issues.

Now is the time

COSATU women believe now is the time to work hard at organising women workers in COSATU. They believe that women workers should play an important part in building a new non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa.

They said: "It is important to organise women in COSATU. Especially now with the reviving of the ANC and the ANC Women's League. The ANC is a multi-class organisation. If women workers are not organised, their voices will not be heard in these organisations. We cannot rely on the ANC Women's League to raise basic demands in factories and workplaces. Women's forums in COSATU and its affiliates must still remain on the ground."

Women's forums make a difference

The women comrades we met are members of unions that are part of COSATU. They work in union offices and factories in and around Johannesburg. Those who work in factories are shop stewards. They have positions in structures in their unions, and they play an important part in organising women workers through women's forums in their unions. The women were from the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA), Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU), South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU), Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU), Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU).

COSATU Women's Sub-committee

The women talked to us about their work on the Women's Sub-committee of Nedcom. They said: "The main aim of the Women's Sub-committee is to make sure that women are active at all levels in the unions, and in COSATU, and especially at leadership levels. The second aim is to encourage women to come to meetings to discuss their problems as women.

"There are very few women in leadership positions in most of the unions in COSATU. You can count them. Women also seldom take part in discussion. This means that women's issues are left out of discussions in the unions and in COSATU, or they are put at the very bottom of the agenda. At present women feel most of their problems and conditions are not being taken up seriously. This will change if women are organised and push for their demands. We are seeing some progress through the women's forums where women meet together and discuss the things that affect their lives."

The struggle against male comrades' attitudes

The struggle of the women in COSATU and its unions is not just a struggle against the bosses and the government. In addition to fighting the bosses, women in the unions find they have to fight the attitudes of male comrades. Most men in the unions do not understand the problems of women workers. Sometimes men laugh when a woman gets up to talk about women's problems in a meeting. Men do not know what it means to be a woman, and they take women's problems very lightly.

The women said: "Some male comrades are trying to do away with the women's forums. They say the only place women are seen is in the forums. They say women should stop working as a separate group, and that women's issues are not being made part of the unions

themselves. They say, for example, if sexual harassment is only discussed by women in forums and not in unions how will we reach men on these issues? These male comrades seem to be taking things backwards. But they don't admit this. Women's forum meetings are open to men as well, but men comrades don't come. In some unions male comrades criticise and discourage women from participating. Male organisers in some affiliates don't see why women should get together separately, and there are no women's forums in these affiliates."

A different standard for women

The women comrades feel male comrades are being unfair in how they judge the progress of the women's forums.

They said: "Not enough time has been given for the forums to develop. Within COSATU we are still having a problem developing education structures though these have been going for a much longer time than our women's forums. But

no-one is saying that education structures must close down. With the women's forums, after only a year-and-a-half, we are being criticised." The women comrades believe strongly that they must continue to fight for the right for women to meet separately.

Women fight on

Women's forums are making progress. Since women workers started meeting separately in women's forums more women have been elected to leadership in COSATU and its unions. The women said: "There are more women shop-stewards in the unions now. There are women in some regional structures. We have a woman secretary in the COSATU Jo'burg local for the first time. We do still have a problem nationally, as only two to three working women are in national structures, but women are developing. Women want action. And women workers who don't have women's forums in their own unions are attending COSATU women's forums."



Photo: Afrapix

The COSATU Women's Sub-committee wants women to be active at all levels in the unions, and in COSATU.

As a result of the actions of organised women workers, unions and other organisations in the struggle are becoming more aware of women's issues. The women said: "For example, through women's forums in the unions we have won campaigns spearheaded by women. Without these women's forums unions would give up easily if bosses were not willing to agree on issues concerning women. For example, men comrades would not see it as important to put up a big fight over maternity leave. With these women's forums we did not allow them to give up so easily on maternity leave."

The women went on to say: "Because we as women are more organised and have made our voices heard, women's issues are being discussed more widely. There is a lot of discussion and debate at the present time on the future of our country. These debates today include the problems that affect women."

Problems attending meetings

It is not easy for women to get to meetings. But the women said more women are attending meetings since the women's forums were started. They said: "Women do not have enough time because of responsibilities at home. They have difficulties attending weekend and evening meetings. Male comrades can attend till midnight or the whole weekend. No one will ask them 'where do you come from?'"

A fight against cultural practices

The women see their real fight as a struggle against cultural practices. They said: "Lack of training and education for women is partly a problem. But the real thing is cultural background. Even though a woman is educated she is told: 'you are a woman'. And women have the idea that they are 'just women' and that men must be in the forefront. Men think they cannot be told what to do by women. Men also need education, so that they change the way they see women."

Need for a programme

The women know their struggle is a long and difficult one. They said that they need a clearer programme for the Women's Sub-committee, because it is through action that more women will get involved in the fight of women workers.

They said: "We need to work out a clear programme. The Women's Sub-committee worked out a programme linked to the COSATU programme, but it has not filtered through to all the regions. This is because there is not enough support of women's problems and women's programmes in COSATU."

Meanwhile, the women in some regions have seen the results of their hard work. In Johannesburg, women in COSATU showed their strength when they organised a march against the Labour Relations Act (LRA). The Women's Sub-committee also pushed for the Worker Charter campaign in COSATU to include the demands of women workers in a real way. COSATU sent out a questionnaire to get worker's views on the kinds of things they want included in a charter on worker's rights. The women said: "The first draft of the questionnaire had three lines on women. Now two sections have been added, and it is not only women discussing these rights. Men and women in COSATU are discussing women's rights in talks on the Workers Charter."

Women with active lives

We asked the women how they managed to be active in COSATU forums, in women's forums in their union, in the Women's Sub-committee, and in other committees in their unions. How do they cope with all this and the housework, childcare and the men in their lives?

"We sacrifice," they said. "We have commitment. We see this work as important." But they felt more women should be involved in this work so that a few women would not have to carry a heavy load. They said: "We should develop leadership at local level. We should share the jobs there are to do, otherwise we will get exhausted and we will not be productive."

Push ahead

The women push ahead in challenging the attitudes of the men comrades in their unions, and in organising more and more women workers. They are fighting for more women to be in leadership, for more women to talk out about their lives, to make sure that the problems of women workers will not be ignored in the planning of a new South Africa.

Women workers must organise!



Photo: Afrapix

Transport and General Worker's Union (TGWU), an affiliate of COSATU is building women's forums within the union. How important are these women's structures, and what role do they play? SPEAK talked to Comrades Sibongile Masangwane, Desiree Daniels and Kally Forrest at TGWU head office in Johannesburg. Desiree is the national education officer, Kally is the national information officer, and Sibongile is a senior shopsteward in the union, and chairperson of the national women's forum in the union.

Women's structures

Sibongile spoke about building the women's structures in the union. She said: "The union's women's structures are very important. That is where we learn to talk, approach issues, and to debate."

She spoke about how she first heard of women's forums. She said: "The first time I attended a COSATU women's conference, I was surprised to see ladies talking openly. They were not afraid, but I was so afraid and shy. I

was told to go and talk, but my heart was so afraid when I looked at the others. Afterwards, I asked Kally 'how come those other women were so free and talkative. So sure of what they are saying? Kally told me that they have women's forums in their unions, that is why they can talk. It's because they are used to it, they are practised in it."

The need for women to meet separately

Sibongile spoke about the importance of women workers meeting separately. She said: "Women need times when we can sit alone and discuss our issues. Some of the ladies are still very shy. They can't talk about rape, love affairs, abortion in front of male comrades. With ladies-only meetings we can discuss anything."

But it is not just women's issues that women workers find it easier to talk about when they are on their own. Kally said: "Women talk more when they are on their own, whether you are talking about the LRA (Labour Relations Act) or the Worker Charter. Women just feel more confident."

Accepting the idea of women's forums

Desiree felt that very often people do not understand why women need to meet separately. She said: "They accept it because it is accepted in all organisations, but people don't understand why. They ask why we are organising separately. They say: 'aren't you being sexist? Should we then go and have black trade unions?' - that kind of thing. We say that it is a way of getting women to be part of organisation - for women to develop confidence. At present men are the ones seen as saying the right things - and women find it hard to say what they feel."

The need for women's forums

Kally said the union was just starting to build women's forums in different parts of the country. She said: "It is really at the beginning stages. It is very urgent to set up women's forums, because a third of our membership is women. We are working in a very oppressed sector."

Kally said, that even though women make up one third of the union, women's participation in the union, and at a leadership level is very weak. "We have got one woman national office

bearer - the treasurer," she said. "That is also an interesting thing in the union. You find that women are elected as treasurers, then they don't have to play that active a role. They just have to give a financial report and that is that. Out of thirty-nine organisers, 2 are women. Otherwise women are administrators in the union."

Problems facing the women's forums

We asked about the problems facing the women's forums. Kally said: "I think one of the problems of women's forums has been that very few women come." Women find it harder than men to go to meetings because of the tradition. Sibongile spoke about this.

She said: "Most women are going to complain about children. That can be overcome by the union organising for children to be cared for at meeting places. That would help a lot. Both you and your husband can work, but it is the woman only who must come home and cook, see that the house is clean, the clothing of the children is clean. Even your husband's clothing, while he just sits and read the paper. He does not help. If our husbands helped us with house chores, then women could attend meetings."

The problem of women not going to meetings is linked to the attitude of men towards women. Sibongile said she doesn't have a problem in her own life. She said: "I like to attend meetings. I sit down with my husband and I say I am a shopsteward and to be a confident and clear shopsteward I must attend meetings. My husband agrees. He said if you attend meetings tell me in time so that I can get home." But many women do not have the support of their husbands or boyfriends.

Sibongile has a solution for this. She said: "We must start a strong campaign where if your husband doesn't want you to attend meetings, then you must stay at home, and not work. Let's see whether he is going to manage. This thing is serious. Gone are the days where the husband is looking after us, feeding us. We are buying groceries. That money is coming from where I am working, and where I am working I need to be a member of the union. And if I am a member of the union, I must attend meetings of that union."

Changing old ways

Women in TGWU held a national women's forum in May this year, where they talked about the things they would like to change. Desiree said: "Women felt very strongly that in the Workers' Charter there must be a law that we have men doing a certain amount of work at home so that women are released for other activities. People felt there should be grassroots structures, like street committees, to make sure that it does happen. Men should become outcasts if they beat their wives up for attending a meeting. Men who do share housework would be rewarded and men who don't would be punished."

Kally felt that it will take a long time to change old attitudes. She said: "You have to make people understand through community organisations. We need more things to make housework easier. For example, by getting electricity and water to all homes. The burden of housework needs to be taken off everybody. The state and employers should take responsibility for child care, and creches should be open in the night-time as well as the day-time."

Sibongile said: "I believe that we should do everything together. Men must understand us. Some of our customs must be revised. This thing of saying a man is above me, it doesn't help because really we are partners. What we are doing we must do together."

Kally said another problem had been that there

was no clear direction at the women's meetings. Because of this TGWU decided to form the national women's forum. She said: "We had the first meeting in 1989 just to talk about some issues that we could raise and so that there was something that could be taken back to focus on and set up a women's structure."

Kally also said that she felt that a national or regional women's organiser is needed. She said: "You need somebody all the time to design material, and check that the structures are working." TGWU does not have anybody in the union at present who plays this role.

Things are moving ahead

Desiree said she felt very good about the way things are going. She said: "The women's workshop was very positive. The women are very keen. And they have got the energy to put their plans into action."

At the COSATU Special Congress in 1989, it was TGWU who brought two resolutions to the Congress on women. The one resolution talked about the importance of developing women leadership in the trade union movement. The second resolution raised the problem of male organisers and leaders sexually harassing women in the unions. With the move to build women's confidence and skills in TGWU, it looks like they could have more women represented at the next COSATU Congress and that they could be raising issues facing women in a strong way once again!

Transport and General Workers Union women want to make sure that more women become active in the union.

Photo: Afrapix

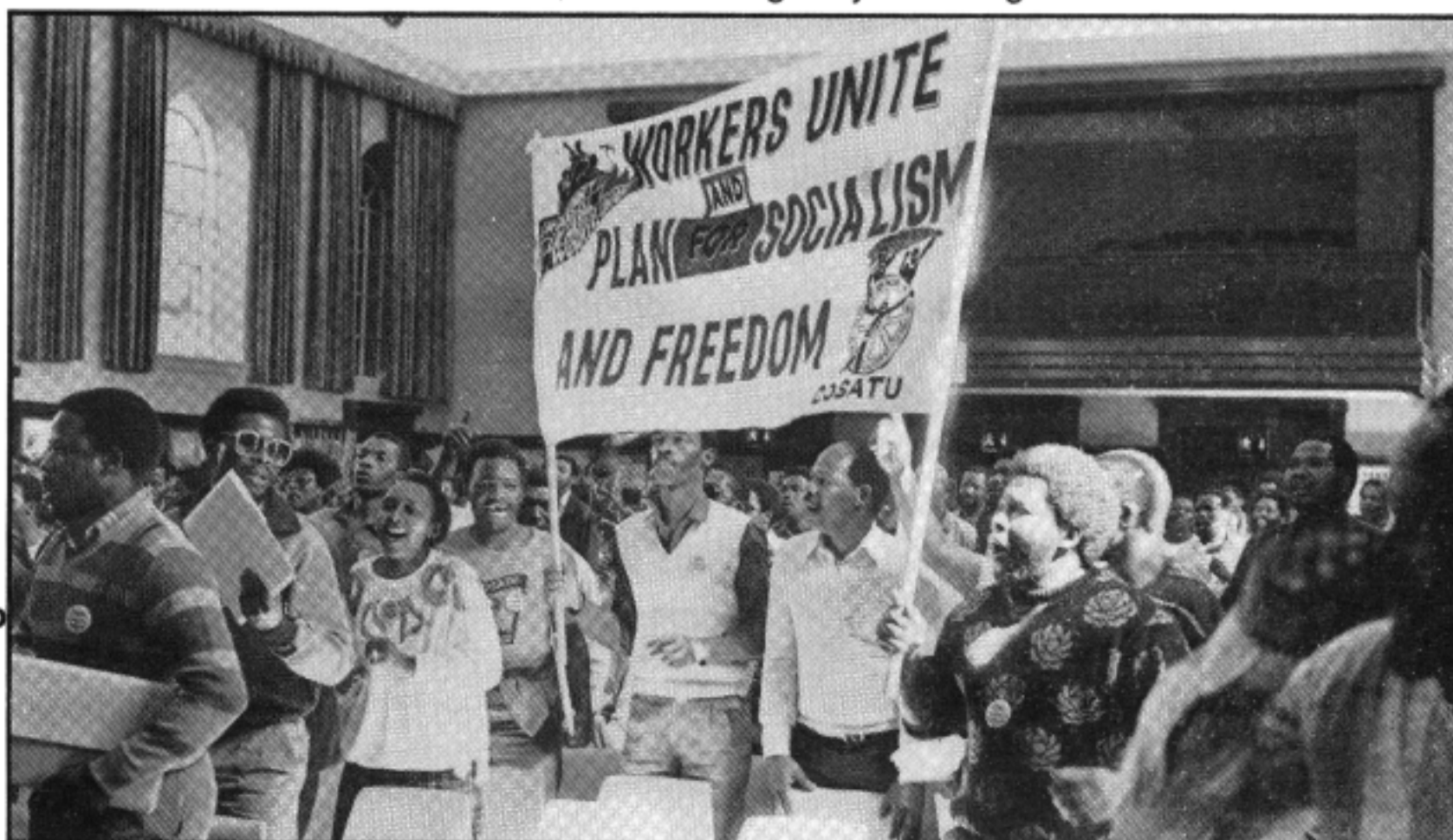




Photo: COSATU

Domestic workers on the move again!

South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) members on the move again! The Wits Region of SADWU organised a march from Berea to the Department of Manpower on 19 July 1990. Domestic workers were joined by other workers in support of the demand that, amongst other things, domestic workers be

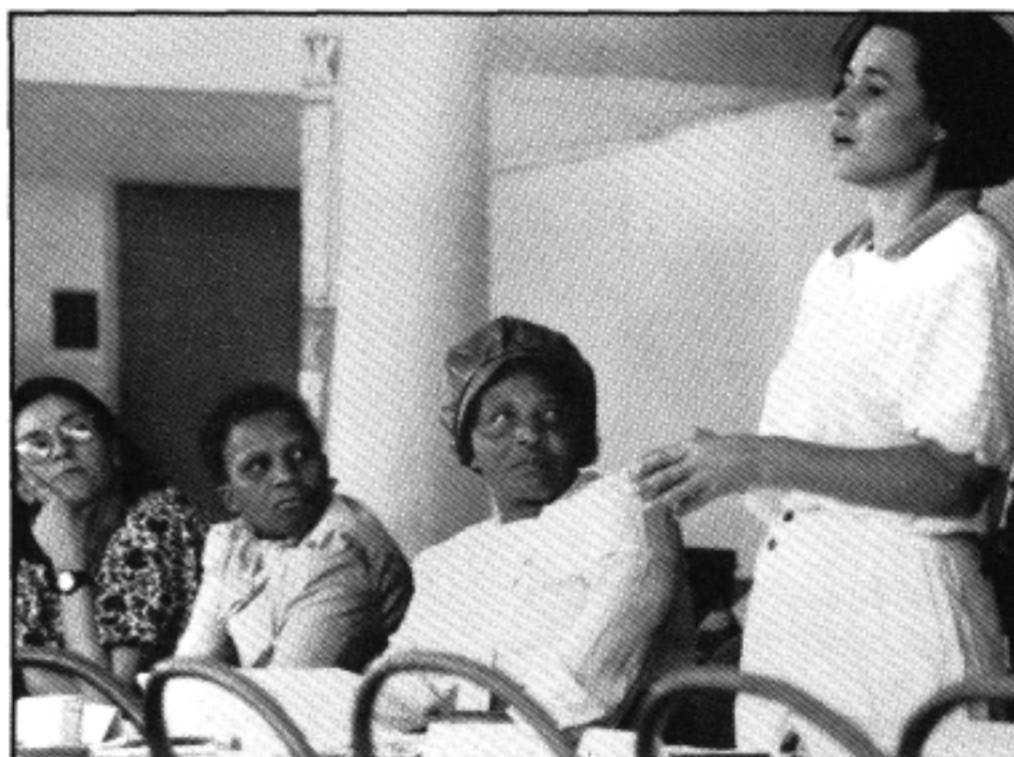
protected by the law on basic minimum wages and conditions of service. Domestic workers were also protesting against the Labour Relations Act. More than 8 000 people made the march one to remember as domestic workers militantly took to the streets of Jo'burg with banners and placards.

COSATU Natal Regional Women's workshop

Women from COSATU affiliates from all over Natal attended a Natal Regional Women's Leadership workshop held on 21-22 July 1990. They met to discuss the struggles that women face, and their links to the national COSATU campaigns, like the Workers Charter campaign and the anti-LRA campaign. They met to discuss the role of women in building the ANC, and to elect a Natal COSATU Regional Women's Forum.

Many issues were discussed, especially about the fact that there is very little women's participation in COSATU structures, and why this is so. There was discussion about the "talks about talks" between the ANC and the government, and what this means for the working class. The women looked at the question of what the future economy of South Africa will be. They spoke about the Worker Charter and the Women's Charter, and the

kinds of demands that women should make around them. The delegates set the task for the Natal Regional Women's Forum of building the women's structures in the region, and of linking women's issues to all the COSATU campaigns, such as the Worker Charter campaign and the anti-LRA campaign.



Comrade Pauline Stanford from National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) makes a point at the COSATU Natal Regional Women's workshop.

The silence must stop!

talking about abortion

Abortion is a very difficult thing to talk about. Most religions believe abortion is a sin. The law in South Africa allows women to have abortions only in certain cases, and most women do not qualify for these legal abortions. If a woman has an abortion without the consent of the law she is made to feel like a criminal. And the person who does the abortion can be charged. This makes it difficult for women to have a safe abortion in South Africa.

The law is trying to stop people from having abortions. But it doesn't stop them. It only forces them to go to the back-streets. About 300 000 women in South Africa risk their lives every year by having back-street abortions. They are forced to have abortions in back-streets by people who often use harmful and unclean methods. Many thousands of women die from such unsafe abortions, and many more women are scarred for life, emotionally and physically. Some women who have badly done back-street abortions are never able to get pregnant again.

The law today

The present law in South Africa says that a woman can have a legal abortion only under certain conditions.

- * if she is under 16 years of age
- * if she was raped
- * if the foetus is in danger
- * if the mother's mental health may suffer

Even if a woman falls in any of these categories it is a difficult and long process to go through to prove that she has the legal right to have an abortion. Because of this, only 4 out of every 10 women who apply for a legal abortion in South Africa get one. Most of these are white women.

But the Department of National Health and Population Development is thinking about changing the abortion laws in this country. They want people to write to them to tell them how they think the law should change.



The danger of back-street abortion

Lerato told us about her neighbour in Soweto who died from a back-street abortion. She said: "My neighbour was in her early thirties. She had four children. Her eldest child was twelve and the last one was about one year and six months when the mother died.

"Her story is a very sad one. She had just got a job after staying at home for a long time when she fell pregnant. The family needed her job, so my neighbour, her husband and her mother-in-law agreed that she must have an abortion. There was no way the family could look after another child."

But there was also no way to get an abortion through a doctor or hospital. Lerato said:

"I don't know where she went to get an abortion, but it did not work. She felt sick and I think she went to a private doctor. The private doctor advised her to go to the hospital but she did not do this. She was afraid.

"When she was six months pregnant the child was born but did not live and she was so sick she had to go to the hospital. At the hospital they wanted to know where the child was. They didn't admit her to the hospital because she wouldn't tell them the truth. So she went home and she became weak and much more sick. Then she went back to the hospital and they operated on her, but that very same day she died." The family was overcome with sorrow, but they could not admit what had really happened.

They were afraid of what people in the community would say.

Lerato said: "The family were trying to hide why she died but everybody knew why. They tried to say that she was on diet and she was not eating, but only drinking coke, and that's why she died. But people knew about it. On the day of the funeral when the coffin was coming out, everybody was crying and saying why should this woman do this? Now see she has left four kids."

Only one of the thousands who die

Lerato's neighbour is only one of the thousands of women who die everyday from back-street abortions. The law might stop women from having safe abortions, but it cannot stop women risking their lives by finding other ways of ending that pregnancy.

Why do women risk their lives?

Like Lerato's neighbour, a woman may have decided that she cannot cope with one more child. Or she may be worried she might lose her job. For many women in South Africa it is not always easy to get contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Contraceptives could also fail and she could fall pregnant. Some young schoolgirls are not aware of the risks of falling pregnant. They fall pregnant, and are faced with the choice of having the baby or of finishing their studies.

Often a death sentence

The law in South Africa will not allow such women to have abortions. Is it right that these women be forced to find a back-street abortion which is often a death sentence for the woman or young girl? If women could get abortions at hospitals, done by health workers using the

right instruments, many lives would be saved. It has been proved that legal abortions done by health workers very seldom lead to infection. It has been proved that back-street abortions often lead to infections which cause lasting damage or even death.

A Christian in the community

We spoke to Temba, a trade union organiser who lives in Alex township near Jo'burg. As a Christian, Temba has strong views against abortion, yet he sees what is happening around him and realises he cannot condemn women for having abortions.

He said: "Back-door abortions are very, very dangerous. I'll deal with two points, first, as a Christian, then, secondly, as a human being. I believe that the child is there to live. As a Catholic I believe that as soon as the foetus has been conceived, there is life in it and it is murder to get rid of it.

"But one should also look at abortion as a person who lives in this society. Before one totally condemns it, you must look at the background of the person who is having the abortion. I live in Alexandra township and there are many abortions there. Many women die. I remember there was a time I was woken up at night in Alexandra to take somebody to hospital. She had taken about three of these tablets, and she died. The tablets were too strong."

What can we do?

For a long time very few organisations in South Africa even mentioned this problem of abortion, even though it was known that it was a problem affecting women. Like many other things in women's lives, this was something hidden. But



abortion is now beginning to be discussed. In 1987, women from COSATU met in an education conference. They discussed many things affecting women's lives, including abortion. The women at this conference called on COSATU to run an education programme around abortion. They asked COSATU to link up with other progressive women's organisations to demand the right to safe, free and legal abortion when necessary. The women felt such action should be taken because of the many deaths caused when women have back-street abortions.

At a conference on health held in Maputo, Mozambique in April 1990, abortion was also discussed. Health organisations from South Africa, as well as women's and students' organisations and representatives of the ANC were at this conference. The conference agreed that a woman should be able to choose whether she wants an abortion and that safe abortions should be provided for any woman, with back-up counselling services. Having proper counselling services means that women who have abortions will have skilled people to talk to, both before and after, they have the abortion. This way they can discuss any kind of problem, either health or emotional, they may have with the abortion. And they will be certain whether they want to have an abortion or not.

In May 1990, the Wits Women's Movement, at the Wits University in Johannesburg, called a meeting of MDM organisations to discuss abortion. The meeting was called to discuss the views of organisations on the abortion laws. A woman doctor spoke on abortion. She said the law should be changed to allow women to have free abortions on demand. The abortion should

be given after one doctor, one health worker, a counsellor and the woman agree that this is what she wants. The doctor also said that education and discussion on sexual relationships, contraception and abortion should take place in schools and community groups.

Wits Women's Movement say they support the right of all women to decide if and when they want to have children.

"The right to decide," they say, "can no longer be ignored. We believe it is a woman's right to control her body and that the government should not interfere. An abortion is not something a woman will decide to have easily. If women in South Africa are able to get safe contraception easily, and if there is sex education for men and women, many women will not be forced to get abortions. Making women who have abortions into criminals will not make the problem go away. It will just put more lives in danger. Wits Women's Movement is calling on the South African government to provide safe, and legal abortion in a society where women's rights are fully recognised."

The silence must stop!

The silence around abortion must stop. The death of so many women forced into the back-streets must end. Women must raise their voices in all our organisations to make people aware of the need to change the law, so that we can pressurise the government now, and in a post-apartheid society to take women's lives and health more seriously. We must fight for a woman's right to decide!

If you would like to write to the Department of National Health and Population Development about the law on abortion, then write to: The Department of National Health, Private Bag, X63, Pretoria, 0001.





More than 26 000 clothing workers linked arms to form a human chain along main roads in industrial areas throughout Cape Town. The demonstration took place in heavy rain. It was the largest trade union demonstration ever in Cape Town. The chain was organized by the African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) to put forward worker rights to be included in the laws and c

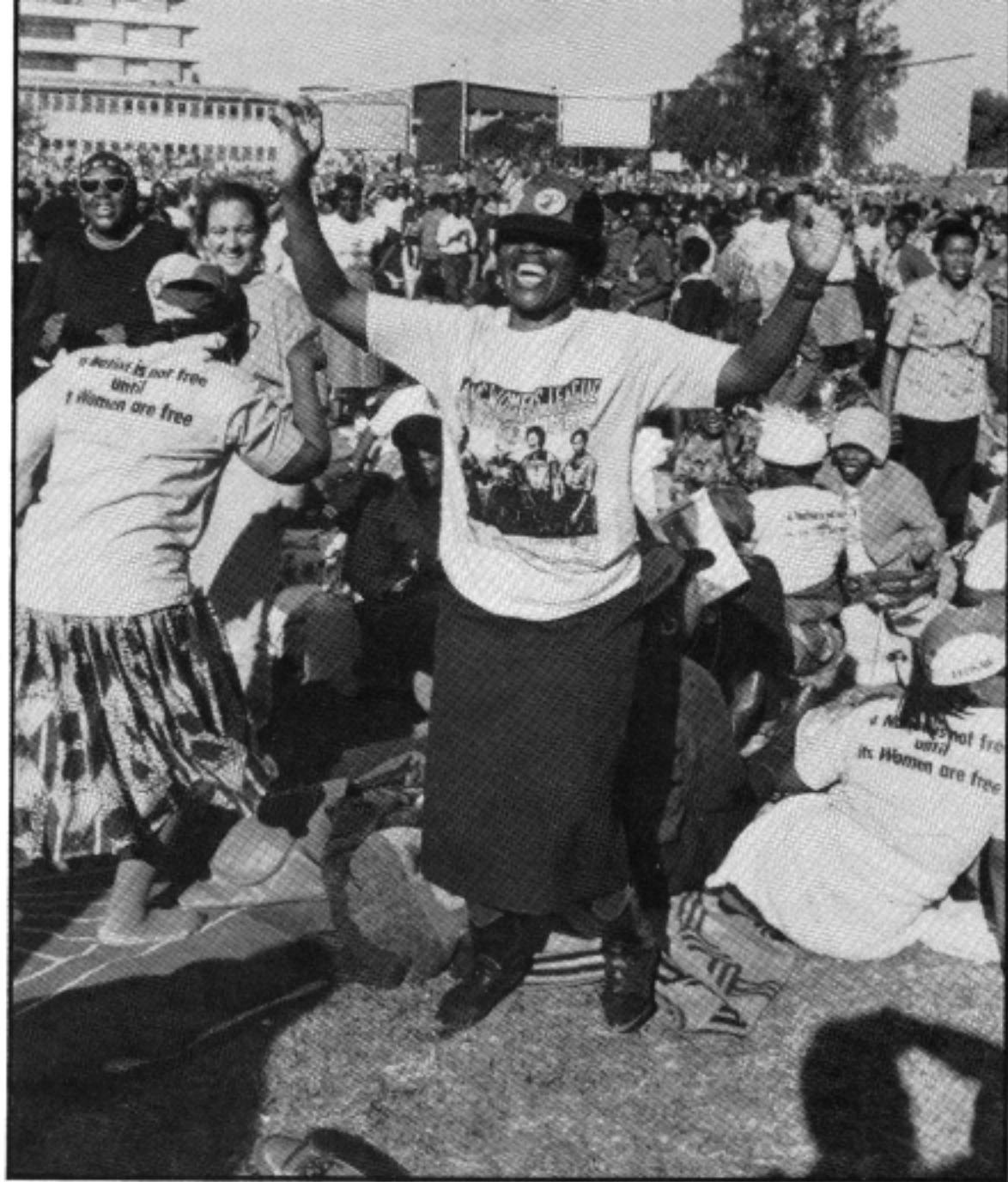
Thanks

Women in Act



out Cape Town recently. The
is part of a campaign by the South
constitution of a new South Africa.
South for information. Photo: Yunus Mohamed

tion!



Jumping for joy at the ANC Women's League rally held at Curries Fountain in Durban on 12 August 1990!

Photo: SPEAK



No need to be shy! A woman holds her message at the SACP Launch in Soweto on 29 July 1990.

Photo: Afrapix

Teenage pregnancy - a big worry

Teenage pregnancy is a big worry for many people. The lives of teenage schoolgirls who fall pregnant are turned upside down. They are the ones who suffer. The boys or men who were part of causing the pregnancy, often suffer little or not at all. Often the males even deny that they were part responsible for it. Patricia Molefe and Thembi Nyandeni from Khanya College, Johannesburg, spoke to a few people to find out what they thought about the problem of teenage pregnancy.

What is the cause of teenage pregnancy?

People had different views about the causes of teenage pregnancy. Some people thought that over strict parents are to blame. Freddie Jonkers, a 19 year-old Teli-operator, said: "Parents shouldn't keep their youth in the yards because when the youth get a chance to go out, they over use it."

He went on to say that parents should love their children because by not doing so, they will send them looking for love outside their homes. This is no real solution when the youth find themselves with unwanted pregnancies.

Lack of communication

Many people we spoke to felt that a great number of teenage pregnancies are caused by lack of communication between parents and their children. Neliswa Moyakhe, a 26 year-old student in Johannesburg said: "Parents are not telling their children about the facts of life, their sexual development, and how this affects their relationships with different sexes."

Sam Ndlovu, a 30 year-old electronics student, agrees. He said: "There should be communication between parents and youth in the home to prevent this pregnancy in teenagers."

Ignorance of both sexes?

Kgomotso Menyatso, a worker in Dobsonville, spoke about the problem of ignorance. He said: "Teenage pregnancy is caused by the ignorance of both boys and girls. They don't know about the means of preventing pregnancy by using contraceptives." Many males think that only women should use contraceptives - they see it as the woman's responsibility. This should not be the case because both parties have to be responsible for their sexual relationship.

Things have changed

Does changing tradition also play a role in teenage pregnancy? Mr Mdundu, a father of seven, and a security guard in Jo'burg, believes that the old way of life has changed and teenagers no longer respect the tradition of marriage. He said: "Girls and boys are no longer afraid of tradition. They just sleep with each other because they are in love. They should fall in love, but should not have sex before marriage. In the olden days, virginity before marriage was important. It showed the dignity and love of both partners."

Who is to blame?

Teenage pregnancies cause a lot of distress in

families. Fingers get pointed to try to blame either the teenagers or the parents. But can the blame be laid at only one door? Mrs N. Lekgwelang from Krugersdorp gave her view. She said: "The teenagers are to be blamed. They are stubborn and don't listen to their parents' advice. They see us parents as backward people who do not know the modern times. They become pregnant because they want to."

But Sam Ndlovu felt that parents are also to be blamed. He said: "The parents do not tell their children the right things about sex. And then the youth themselves are ignorant about it."

What can be done?

What can be done to try and prevent so many teenage girls from falling pregnant? Different people gave different suggestions as to how they think the problem can be solved.

Mrs Letta Mkhwanazi, a 55 year-old woman, said: "Parents should take their children to

family planning clinics so as to prevent unwanted babies."

Joel Seleke agreed with her, but felt that men should also take responsibility. He said: "Male youth should also use contraception. They should not think that it is only the female's responsibility and then at the end of the day blame her for the pregnancy."

Neliswa Moyakhe said: "Sex education should be introduced at schools to try and solve the problem." On the other hand, others felt strongly that this was the responsibility of the parents as well, to educate their children about sexual issues.

What do you feel about teenage pregnancy and how we can prevent it? Write and tell SPEAK readers. Write to: SPEAK, P.O. Box 45213, Mayfair, 2018, Johannesburg. We would also welcome letters from young women who fell pregnant as teenagers who would like to share their story.



Photo: Afrapix

Teenagers having fun on a school outing. But those outings come to an end for teenage girls who fall pregnant.

The League is launched!



Women celebrate the ANC Women's League launch in Durban on 12 August 1990. Photo: Afrapix

The ANC Women's League is launched once more! More than 8 000 people from all over the country celebrated this national event at Curries Fountain in Durban on Sunday 12 August. ANC Women's League branches have already been launched in different parts of the country. And the League is planning a national conference in October this year.

At the rally

Gertrude Shope, a member of the ANC National Executive Committee and head of the ANC Women's Section, was one of the speakers. She said they decided to hold the re-launch in Durban because of the war in Natal. She said: "We wanted to pledge solidarity with our sisters, our menfolk, and our children. People of our country live in fear of death and destruction of normal family life."

Another speaker said: "The ANC Women's League is re-launched today. We want to fight for a new life - a non-racist, non-sexist life. We are here to struggle for emancipation. We meet here under the banner of the ANC Women's League - for the liberation of the women of our country. Women make up more than one half of our country. To play a role we must be organised as women. We must organise ourselves into a powerful movement for democracy."

Albertina Sisulu said: "Women should be in the front line of the struggle. We have to fight for women to be freed from the shackles. Women must be freed so that they can act."

What the League is all about

The Women's League wants to unite all women, black and white, young and old at a political level. So that women can take part in building a future South Africa that is free of sexism and oppression. The Women's League wants to build branches so that women's voices and demands will be taken seriously. ANC women say that black women are at the bottom of the ladder. They are oppressed and discriminated against as a people, at work and in their communities. The most oppressed women are those who live in rural areas. They are very poor and family life is made even more difficult by the fact that many of the husbands are away in towns and cities working for most of the year. The Women's League feels that it must not just talk about women's struggles for their rights, but that women need to work actively at it. The Women's League wants to make sure that women's rights and demands are in documents on the laws of the country, in the future constitution, at the workplace, in the community and at home.

The Women's League wants to make sure that positive action is taken on all women's issues. For this to happen, they say, women need to be clear on these issues, and to have strong organisation to back these demands in the struggle for liberation.

The ANC Women's League Workshop

A national workshop of 450 women from 16 regions, met on 11 August, the day before the League's re-launch. The women discussed many issues. The Women's League Task Force reported on their work in setting up the Women's League. The women discussed the war in Natal, the ANC Women's League Draft Constitution, and the campaign for the Charter of Women's Rights. The women who attended the workshop were sent from the different regions, and they will go back to their branches to report on the discussions at the workshop.

Women's Charter Campaign

The Women's League wants to take up the Women's Charter campaign so that women can say which demands they want in the future constitution of South Africa. Demands will be collected from women all over South Africa. Gertrude Shope said: "We want the Women's Charter to be mass-based, just like the Freedom Charter. We want women to go door to door to collect the demands of women in South Africa. Many women have said the ANC's constitutional guidelines only have a few lines on the emancipation of women. The Women's Charter is one way of making sure that women's demands are heard and that women's rights are guaranteed in a future South Africa. To do this, women must lead the campaign for a Charter of Women's Rights. They must spell out the issues that affect women."

Baleka Kgositsile, acting administrative secretary of the Women's League said: "The Women's Charter campaign is one of the major campaigns that we would like to throw our full weight behind." She said: "We want to encourage women to say exactly what it is that affects them in their lives wherever they are, be it in the township, the factory. They have the right to say this is what we want and this is what we would like to change." The campaign would involve other women's organisations as well.

The ANC Women's League Draft Constitution

The Women's League wants to adopt their constitution at their conference in October this year. They want ANC women all over the country to discuss the draft constitution. Elections will take place at this conference.

UDF women's organisations

Before the ANC was unbanned it was the UDF women's organisations that brought women together in the struggle against apartheid. These were organisations like United Women's Congress (UWCO) in the Western Cape, Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) in Natal, and Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) in the Transvaal. Since the ANC has been unbanned, these organisations have been looking at what they should do. There have been meetings in branches and at all levels of these organisations to discuss this. In July 1990, all the UDF women's organisations came together to discuss what the membership has decided about their future. All the UDF women's organisations have decided to build the ANC Women's League. They will work towards bringing more women into the ANC and the ANC Women's League. And once the ANC Women's League is strong, these organisations will close down.

Setting up Women's League branches

Once there are 20 women who belong to the ANC in a branch or area, they can form a Women's League branch. Women who are members of the ANC are being urged to build the ANC Women's League on the ground. Any woman who has joined the ANC and is over the age of 18 can join the ANC Women's League. Women who join the ANC can decide whether they want to join the ANC Women's League. Gertrude Shope said: "We won't be issuing women with membership cards. Women who are Women's League members will have a Women's League stamp on their ANC membership cards."

The Women's League wants women ANC members who are committed to the aims of the Women's League to join. They want women who are willing to work actively in their branches, and to fight for the development of all

women in their struggle for freedom.

ANC women on the move

Women in the Eastern Cape are moving on organising women into ANC Women's League branches. At New Brighton in Port Elizabeth more than 1 000 women recently met to work towards setting up an ANC Women's League branch. A branch has been launched in Zwide. Girlie Pikoli, a member of the ANC's Women's Section in Lusaka, spoke at the branch launch. She said: "Dual membership is allowed. One can be a member of Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation as well as being a member of the League. There are many other areas of common interest on which there will still be a need to work together."

ANC Womens' League has a big task ahead. And it is an important task - to make sure that women's demands are heard loud and clear in our future South Africa. To make sure that women are treated as equals with men. And to make sure that women's oppression is done away with!



Comrade Adelaide Tambo reads a message of support from Comrade Oliver Tambo to the ANC Women's League at the rally in Durban. Photo: Afrapix



At the SACP launch! The SACP wants to make sure women are involved in all levels of the Party. Photo: SPEAK

The South African Communist Party launched!

The South African Communist Party (SACP) was launched at a rally in Soweto on 29 July 1990. Thousands of people, armed with ANC and SACP flags and lots of singing spirit, came to celebrate. This was a launch of the Party after many years of exile and secret underground work. For the first time people were told the names of the Party leadership who have the task of building the Party as an open organisation. Of the twenty-one names, only two were women. They were: Ray Alexander and Cheryl Carolus.

SPEAK wanted to find out how the SACP saw women's oppression and how they intend fighting this oppression. We spoke to Comrades Geraldine and Essop at the SACP offices in Johannesburg.

They said: "The SACP is very aware that black women suffer triple oppression, as blacks, as women, and as workers. Over the past year, women's issues have been looked at more than in the past in the SACP. We have recognised

for some time that there can be no real liberation without the liberation of women. But to act on this might take longer than we would like it to. The SACP believes that there must be action to make sure that women play a leading role in all Party structures. We want to get more women into the Party as members."

The SACP has not counted how many women are in the Party now. But they say they are making progress in getting more women recruited into the Party. For example, more women were at the 7th SACP Congress than at any other Congress in the past. They say that there is still a lot more work to be done to make sure women are really involved in the Party at all levels.

They believe that men have a part to play in taking up women's oppression. They said: "Women's issues are not seen as separate issues affecting women. Both men and women should fight women's oppression."

Women teachers want equality!

Teachers in South Africa are working towards launching a new teachers union in October this year. The National Teacher Unity Forum (NTUF) claims to represent 200 000 teachers. They want one teachers' union for all races and to organise across the different education departments. The new union will be called the South African Democratic Teachers' Union. Some women teachers in this union are talking about their rights as women.

The Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA) is part of NTUF. Women members of TASA want to make sure that their oppression and exploitation as women teachers is put on the agenda. They organised a workshop in Durban in June on the position of women teachers in schools and in teachers organisations.

Women's workshop

The workshop was hosted by the Women's Interim Committee of TASA. More than 300 delegates met to discuss many issues that affect women in education. There was lots of lively debate and it was very clear that women teachers had had enough of being treated as second-class citizens.

The Women's Interim Committee presented a paper that had been written by a group of women from the Committee. The women said

that to understand women's problems in education we have to look at women's position in the broader society. Only then can we come up with real ways to change the discrimination women experience in nearly every part of their lives. Women teachers are discriminated against through legislation and in other hidden ways.

The women said that the laws in South Africa allow men and women teachers to be treated differently.

Women teachers earn less

Most women teachers earn less than their male colleagues even though they are doing the same work. This is because the state believes the male of the household is the chief breadwinner of the family. So what happens in the case where the husband is unemployed? And anyway, why should women be paid less for doing the same work? This also discriminates against single women.

Men teachers get the houses

In 1981 the government said that single women could now get housing subsidies. Married women teachers still do not get housing subsidies. This means that if a woman teacher's husband is unemployed, or is in a job that does not provide a housing subsidy, then the family can't get help to buy a house. Because of this, many women teachers, together with their husbands, have decided to get divorced on paper, and carry on living together, so they can get a housing subsidy.

The women felt it is unfair that married women teachers should have to get divorced to get a housing subsidy while their male colleagues get housing subsidies whether they are married or single.

Pensions are unequal

Men pay more pension money than women and get more when they retire. The difference in the amount of pension money contributed every month is because men give money to the 'widow's pension fund'. This fund is for the wife and children of a male teacher who dies. If a woman teacher dies, then her husband and children get no benefits from this fund. This



Durban women teachers make their voices heard on a march to the House of Delegates. The march was organised by TASA in June this year.

Photo: Afrapix

shows that the government has not recognised that the wife's income is not just to 'add to' her husband's wage, but that it is necessary for the family to survive.

Maternity benefits

When a teacher falls pregnant, she does not get paid maternity leave. If she wants to earn a salary during this time, she has to use her well-earned long leave. Women have to suffer for being the ones who bring children into this world. Also, there are no paternity benefits so the husband or partner cannot be part of the birth or have time off to share the responsibility with his partner during this time. This supports the idea that this is women's work and that men do not have to share it.

Some of the hidden discrimination

The women also spoke about many other, more hidden ways that women are kept down. One way is with promotions. Very often women are kept down just because they are women. They may have earned a promotion through hard work, but if there is a male teacher also waiting for promotion, he will be chosen before a woman, just because he is a man.

Sexual discrimination

Women also suffer sexual harassment. The principal of a school or an inspector may try to bribe a woman teacher by touching her or asking her out. If she refuses, then she will not get a promotion. It is often very difficult for a woman teacher to raise the problem of sexual advances made by male teachers, because she may be accused of encouraging it.

'Women's work'

Another hidden way in which women teachers are kept down is in the type of work that women teachers are asked to do in the school. For example, if there is a school function, the women are expected to do the baking or to decorate the hall, while the men are asked to do more 'important' work such as organizing, planning or management. This is because women are seen to have 'natural' skills as home-makers, but not as thinkers and planners. The idea is supported when women agree to do these things. Women teachers need to change this.

Training for the future

The women also spoke about how boys and girls are treated differently in the classroom. For example, boys will be asked to carry boxes or to clean the board, while girls will be asked to hand out books and collect money. The subjects that school children choose also prepares boys and girls for different roles in society.

For example, it is seen as more important that boys do science subjects, while girls are encouraged to do domestic science and typing. In other words, boys are taught and encouraged to be the leaders of tomorrow, while girls are taught to be the supporters of the leaders of tomorrow. The language that is used in the classroom, in the text books, and the way women are shown in history and literature, push the idea that women are inferior.

After the paper was delivered, the women teachers at the conference broke up into groups and had more in-depth discussions on all of these issues. The idea was to discuss ideas on how the situation of women in teaching could be changed so that it was a better working place for women.

After the group report backs, school children put on a play called "Superwoman" where they showed the many ways that women are put down. It was very encouraging to see school children taking up the issue of sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment. Many resolutions were taken as a start to looking at the problems that women teachers face within their own teacher's organisation and within education as a whole.

Act now!

The conference ended on a high note with the teachers present resolving to continue the fight for non-sexist education for a non-sexist future South Africa. The message from the women was clear. They said: "Act now! We don't want to wake up in years to come and find that the women have been left behind in the struggle for change!"

SPEAK would like to invite women teachers to write to tell us about their experiences in their schools.

Preventing pregnancy



Some men hide their partner's pills.

What is contraception?

People use contraception to avoid pregnancy. Contraception allows men and women to have sex without the worry of pregnancy. Some people call contraception 'prevention'. Not all people know about prevention or about how babies are made. Many young teenagers whose bodies are mature and who want to have sex

with their boyfriends or girlfriends, do not use contraception. Often no-one has explained to them about the risks of sex or about prevention. They are not encouraged to go to clinics or doctors to get contraception, and there is no sex education at school. The result is that many teenagers get pregnant while they are still at school.

Men and women can use contraceptives

Most people believe it is the woman's responsibility to use prevention. This is wrong. Preventing pregnancy is a shared responsibility between a man and a woman. When women prevent, they stop themselves from getting pregnant by using pills, injections or loops. When men prevent, they use condoms.

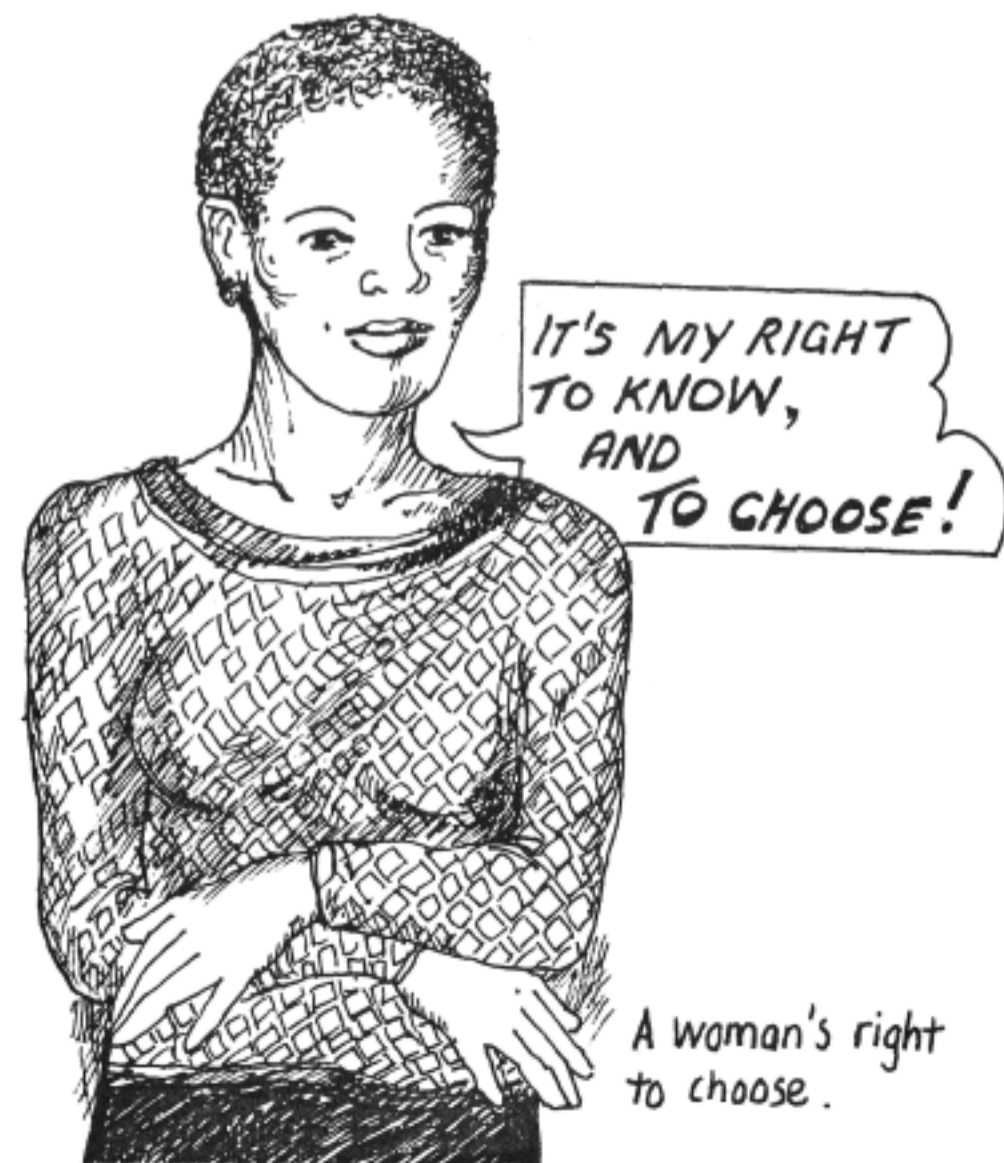
Why some couples don't use prevention

There are many reasons why some women do not use prevention. Some women don't know enough about contraception. And they have fears and worries about the different kinds of prevention. Other women find it difficult to get to the clinic when it is open, especially if their employers don't give them time to do this. Some women just don't believe that they will fall pregnant.

Another problem is men! Some men believe that their partners should have lots of children. We hear many stories of men who hide their partner's pills and refuse to use condoms. Education about prevention must be available not only for women, but for men as well.

Can contraception be forced on women?

When contraceptives for women were developed, the idea was to free women from unwanted pregnancies. But, unfortunately, the



very same contraceptives that can free women, can also be used against them. In the poor countries of the world, where governments are worried about the large numbers of people that they have to educate, feed and house, there have been family planning programmes that have forced women to use contraceptives. The problem is that the woman herself is not asked if she wants a contraceptive or allowed to choose which one. It is the health worker who decides. Health workers often decide that they know what is best for the women, and sometimes, without explaining what they are doing, they give a contraceptive injection, or fit a loop. This also often happens in hospitals after women have given birth to their babies. Many women do not realize they have been given prevention, but believe the injection or pill was part of the delivery of their baby.

There have also been reports of employers in Natal and the Western Cape who insist that women working in their factories must have regular prevention, or else they will lose their jobs. This happens to poor women, which in South Africa means black women.

What are the different types of contraception?

There are four main groups of contraceptives.

Hormone contraceptives

The first, most commonly used, group of contraceptives, are called the 'hormonal' contraceptives. Hormones are found naturally in our blood, and in women these hormones make us look and behave like women. Contraceptives such as the pill, the mini-pill, and injections like

depo, are all hormones. They change a woman's normal hormonal balance, and so stop her from getting pregnant.

The loop

The second method is the loop. This is a small thing made of plastic. Sometimes it has a piece of copper wrapped around it. The loop is put inside the woman's womb. It is left there for up to five years. It stops fertilized eggs from attaching themselves to the wall of the womb.

Barrier methods

The third group are called the 'barrier' methods. This means that there is something that comes in between the man and the woman which stops the sperm swimming up into the womb. Condoms are an example of this. A good barrier method women can use is called a diaphragm. This is a piece of rubber that the woman puts

inside her vagina before she has sex. Unfortunately this method is not always available from ordinary family planning clinics in South Africa.

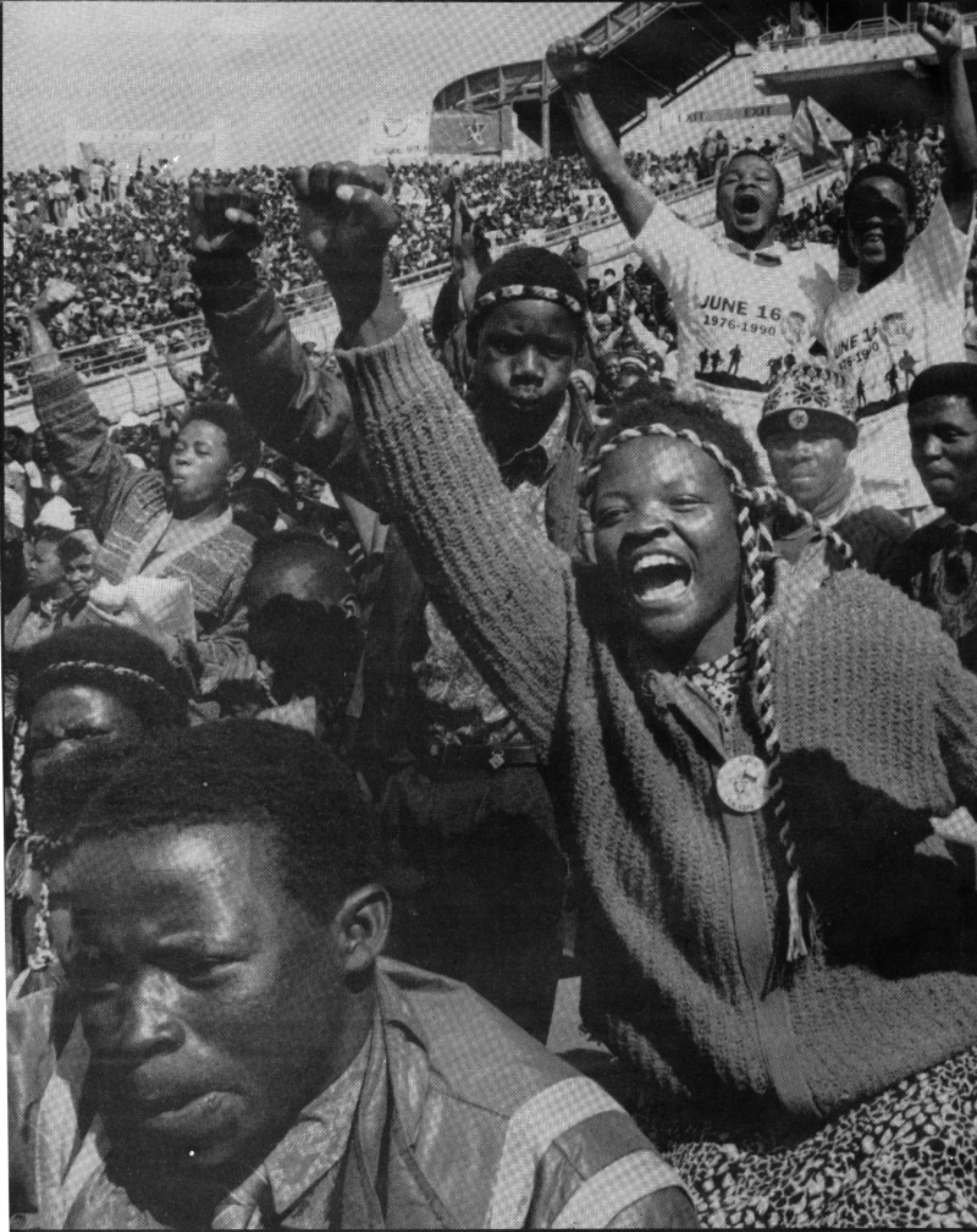
Rhythm method

The fourth way that pregnancy can be prevented is by the 'rhythm' method. This means that the couple doesn't have sex in the middle of the month between the woman's periods because this is the most likely time for her to fall pregnant.

None of these methods of prevention are perfect. There are good and bad things about all of them. In the next few issues of SPEAK we will look at these different methods of preventing pregnancy in more detail. So get every issue of SPEAK in the future. And if you don't want to fall pregnant, be careful!



Preventing pregnancy is a shared responsibility.



At the SACP Launch in Johannesburg in July this year. Photo: Afrapix

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE STRUGGLE!