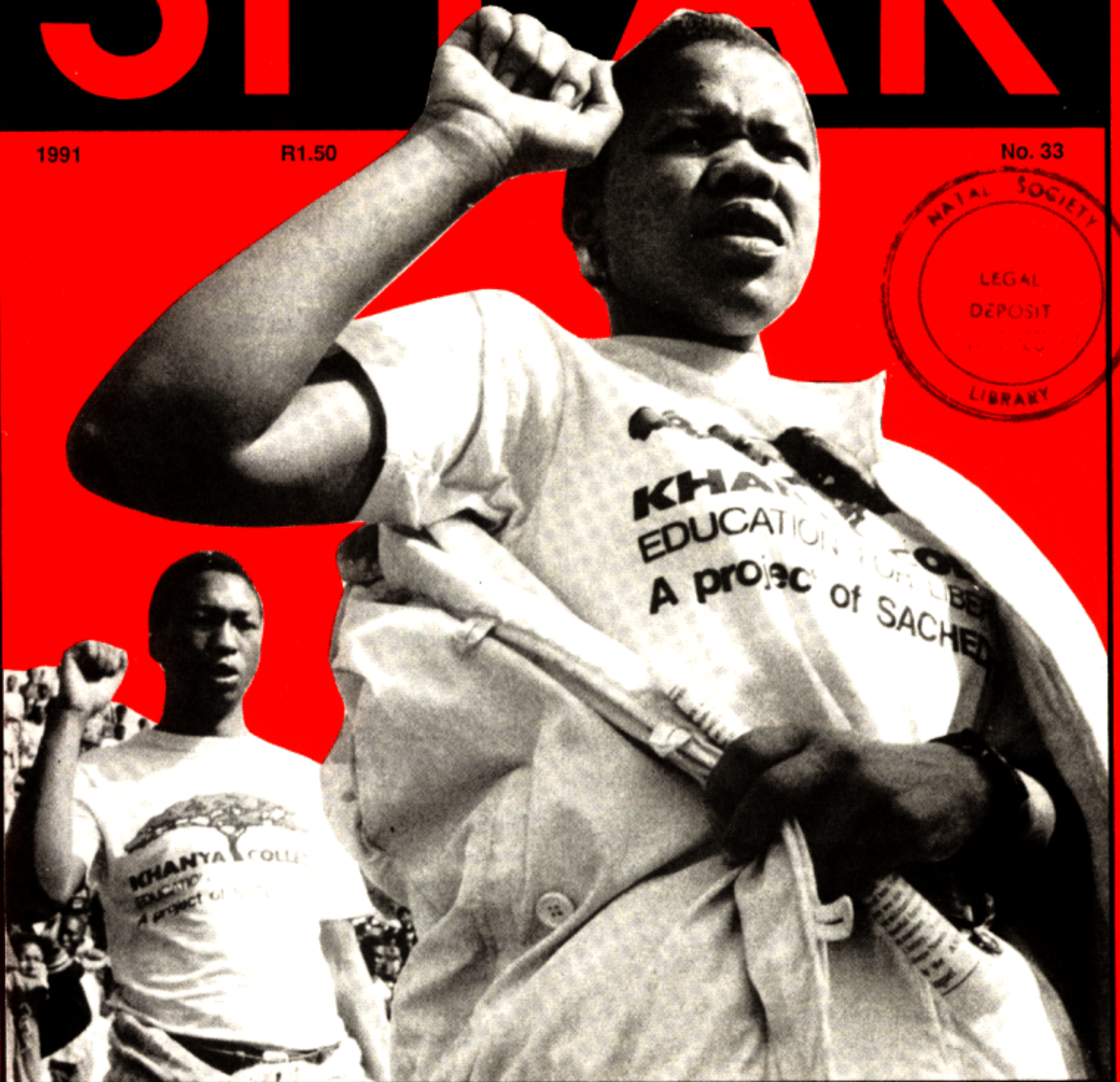


SPEAK

1991

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No. 33



YOUNG LIONESSES ROAR

- ANC Youth League women speak out
- Violence in teenage relationships
- Fighting sexism in the church
- ANC takes a stand on women's liberation

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SPEAK would like to pay tribute to our colleague, comrade and friend, Joan Wright who worked for Oxfam and was tragically killed in a car accident in October 1990. Joan, like us, believed that a nation would never be free until the women are free. Hamba kahle, Joan. ♦

SPEAK readers speak out

Thanks to all of those people who have written to SPEAK. We encourage all of our readers to write in and share what they have to say.

Single parenthood - see it another way

Dear SPEAK

I am a mother of two sons and divorced. My age is below 30 years. I would like to thank your magazine, which you have established for the sake of women.

I would like to encourage other single parents to change their disadvantage of being single to be an advantage. They must not think of their kids as a burden but a blessing. They must keep themselves occupied. They must not let the past destroy their goals. They must mix with constructive people.

Please SPEAK may I have the address of women's organisations around Durban. I would like to join them too.

Jabu Phakathi (Miss)

SPEAK reader

Umlazi.

P.S. I would like to wish SPEAK readers a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

From all of us, Jabu, Sensiekhaya and Qinisela.

Dear Jabu, thank you for your letter. We are sending you a list of women's organisations in the post.

Hungry for truth and thirsty for liberation

Dear SPEAK,

When I read about teenage pregnancy in SPEAK, I discovered that Africans are hungry for truth and thirsty for liberation. This article has made me shout and stand up for the truth and

liberation. I want to send this message from Cape to Cairo that Africa is in the condition it is in because Africa disrespects women. Women must play an important part in the development of the nation or the nation will go to hell.

Women must not be looked at as objects of pleasure and something with no intelligence to bear babies. Any nation that has uncultured women becomes an uncultured nation.

It is a foolish man who denies the struggle of women. When you push your woman down, you push yourself down. When you push your woman up, you and I go up, the nation goes up.

Our ancestors were the major contributors to the freedom of women. Unfortunately traditions that are foreign to Africa have cracked into Africa to push women out. These foreign traditions are telling us that parents should take their children to family planning clinics so as to prevent unwanted babies. This is absolute nonsense.

Alex Hailey has pointed out in the book "Roots" that the Africans are the people who civilised the whole world and if the Africans don't go back to their roots they'll go to hell. And, yes of course, the Africans are living in hell today because of the foreign cultures.

Another book available in the Arab states written by African black people reads thus: "the black man is the original man on earth before any other nations were here on this earth billions of years ago."

The true history of the Africans is not written in English or Afrikaans but is written in Arabic and Hebrew, the original languages of Africans from Cape to Cairo. The Africans must go back to their roots, back to their original God. Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica.

Respectfully yours
Ali Ebrahim

Dear Ali, thank you for your letter. We had to shorten it because of space.

Disappointed and shocked

Dear SPEAK,

I am very disappointed to see that you support the letter written by Morgan Gomati. I was under the impression that this magazine was created for ALL women in South Africa. I did not know that this magazine was biased towards any organisation, but rather concerned that:

* the women of South Africa believe the people of our country share sufficient ideals and values to create a peaceful and prosperous dispensation for us and our children;

* the intolerance, intimidation, violence, suffering and financial loss of ALL which disrupts and paralyses our society;

* women have a direct and personal interest in the creation of a new constitution;

* women claim the right to be heard;

* women call all leaders and governors to treat the above mentioned requests with the due responsibility and urgency.

I am referring to Morgan Gomati's remark that Inkatha should be disarmed. I am very shocked and saddened by this. How many people know that Inkatha has undermined the Government's apartheid policy since its formation?

The Inkatha Women's brigade is the single largest women's organisation in South Africa with a registered membership of more than 500 000. These women all fight for peace in South Africa. The violence in South Africa cannot alone be put in front of Inkatha's door. We all need to sweep our doorstep before we make an allegation that we cannot prove.

From this letter it shows that I am an Inkatha supporter, but this does not mean that I don't fight for the rights of all women in South Africa.
Yours sincerely,
Janet Khumalo

Dear Janet, SPEAK stands for principles of democracy, non-racism and non-sexism. We welcome contributions from all SPEAK readers whether we agree with them or not.

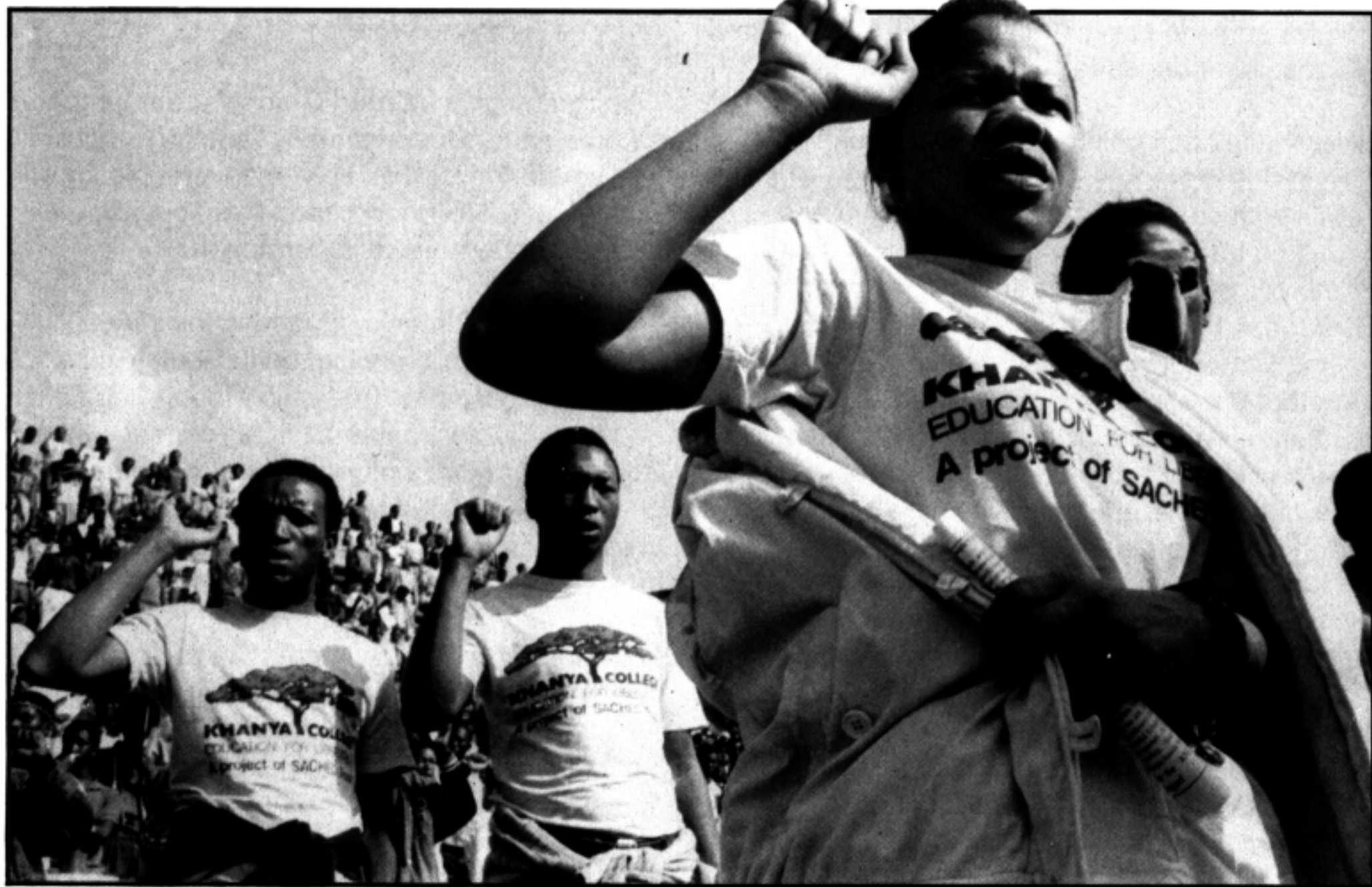
ROAR, YOUNG LIONESSES, ROAR!

The ANC Youth League was launched on 27 October 1990, in Soweto. Dipuo Peters and Lyndall Shope-Mafole are two of the five women on the 28-member ANC Youth League executive. Dipuo was the national women's organiser of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) before the Youth League launch. Lyndall was on the National Youth Secretariate of the ANC Youth Section in exile. The ANC Youth League launch made SAYCO and the ANC Youth Section into one organisation.

Getting youth involved

We spoke to Dipuo and Lyndall about the Youth League. The comrades said: "Structures like SAYCO, National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), South African National Students Congress (SANSCO), worked very closely with the ANC Youth Section while the ANC was in exile. Even before the unbanning of the ANC, we looked at the question of how to get youth involved in the ANC."

Women in the youth organisations made sure they raised the question of women as part of these discussions.



Young women in the Youth League fought for and won having non-sexism included alongside non-racism in the constitution. One of the objectives of the Youth League is to encourage and ensure equality among men and women in the Youth League and in society. ANC Youth League launch, October 1990.

Photo: Afrapix

Lyndall said: "When working out the role of youth in the future there was heated discussion on the role of women. In the Youth Section in exile there was the same culture as within the ANC. Men comrades would say that more women must be part of the organisation. They would say that the number of women at conferences and meetings was very few. They always brought this up as an issue. For the male comrades to put this forward at a meeting is very easy, but when comrades have to do something about it, it is not very easy."

"For example, when representatives were chosen to attend special meetings, it was always male comrades who were chosen. When we raised that a woman should be included, comrades treated this as a joke."

Dipuo said: "In SAYCO it took a few women to assert themselves to make sure that the question of more women being part of the organisation was given attention. In one women's workshop we said that all locals must ensure that one of the two delegates to a conference is a woman. This made a difference. At the SAYCO launching conference in 1987 there were only 8 women out of about 300 delegates. But at the first national congress of SAYCO in April 1990 there were at least 600 women of the 1 762 delegates."

Equality in the constitution

The comrades told us that the constitution of the Youth League talks about women's rights. It was young women in the Youth League who fought for and won this. They said: "The Youth League constitution says we are working for a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa. We had to argue for this and we have now included 'non-sexist' wherever 'non-racist' appears. We argued that if youth see non-racism and democracy as important, they have to see non-sexism as something to work for as well."

"One of the objectives of the Youth League is to encourage and ensure equality among men and women in our organisation and in our society. It took a lot of discussion before we agreed on this. Some felt this cannot be an overall objective of the youth. But we won this."

Women's department

A women's department in the Youth League will take up women's struggles. The comrades said: "The Youth League has a women's department. This will make sure we debate and discuss issues and push each other up the political ladder. We must work for a situation where this department is no longer necessary. Some women resisted the idea of the women's department. They felt they would be left in the dark. But we were able to push for this. The women's department will make sure we build confidence and self esteem among women."

Building a free South Africa

The comrades said: "The Youth League hopes to mobilise youth to take part in the destruction of apartheid and in the building of a new South Africa. We want to draw all youth in this. Working, non-working, males, females, professionals. And we want to see South African youth contributing to the world at large as students, as professionals."

Joining the League

We asked the comrades how youth could join the Youth League. They said: "Youth League membership will not be automatic to all ANC young members. Youth between the age of 14 to 35 will be able to join the Youth League. Membership will also be open to youth who are not ANC members. We want to ensure that all youth contribute. We do not restrict membership just to the ANC. The ANC must reach the younger generation. The Youth League can discuss the policies of the ANC and enlighten young people. The ANC can win over members of the Youth League. The Youth League believes in the general policy of the ANC. We try to spread the idea of the ANC. We believe in non-racialism, non-sexism and democracy."

Organising the Youth League

After the launch of the Youth League the youth have started a process of setting up branches. Provisional Regional Youth Committees have been set up in the different regions to coordinate regionally and to set up local youth committees which will be the force to recruit members at a local level. A Provisional National Youth Committee was set up to oversee the process of establishing the Youth League

nationally. A national conference of the Youth League will be held on 6 April 1991. This conference will adopt the constitution and elect office bearers. There are also plans to set up a youth front which will include all youth organisations. The Youth League has the following desks - Student, Women, Religion, Arts and Culture (which includes sport), Education, Political, Information and Publicity, Organisers, Labour and Pioneers. Pioneers are youth between 6 and 14 years of age.

New Constitution for South Africa

The Youth League sees the political education of youth as an important part of their work. They believe it is important that youth discuss issues like a new constitution for a free South Africa. The comrades said: "Youth are part of society. Youth are found in all spheres. As women, in relation to land, and the economy. It is important that youth take part in making the changes in the new South Africa. Areas that are specifically important for us to look at are women and education. Every person should have the right to education. We need to look at how the constitution can make sure that all young people get educated.

"Unemployment also affects the youth. The question of the economy is important. We support a mixed economy and the idea that the government must play a part to make sure that the needs of the people are being met. Young people are affected by the lack of housing. Young married couples and single parents need somewhere to stay. Land distribution is important. We need to look at how young people can get rights to land."

Youth and culture

The comrades said: "We have had discussions about culture and alternative culture, for example sexuality and the homosexual issue. People get very emotional about this. Among young people it is discussed more objectively.

"According to tradition young people can't be telling older people what to do. It is difficult to address older people to tell them your point of view. It is very important that we look at this. But it is especially important in the case of young women. Women are right at the bottom. It is

difficult to put your point across to your own mother because of respect for age."

The comrades felt these attitudes stood in the way of youth, and especially in the way of young women, playing a role in the struggle. They said: "This affects the youth. These are challenges which the Youth League must address."

Women must be liberated

The comrades believe it is very important that the Youth League takes up the problems of young women. They said: "We have the task of ending the exploitation of women in the shortest possible time. One of the ways to do this in the Youth League is to make sure that the Youth League not only has members of different races and classes but also equal numbers of men and women. There are very few women in the Youth League right now. If there are more women in the Youth League the problems of young women will become problems of the youth. Problems like teenage pregnancies, for example, will become a problem of the youth.

"It must be seen as a challenge that we get more women in the Youth League. We have a greater chance of freeing ourselves as young women than our mothers had. We should make sure we read. If we see our contribution in the Youth League as a challenge we will get there. Our confidence will increase and attitudes that men have will change by seeing that women are just as capable."

We asked the comrades if greater numbers of women in the Youth League will automatically lead to the changes they are fighting for. They said: "New women coming in might have traditional hang-ups. They might not see the need to struggle for women's liberation. It is up to us, who have been involved a long time in organisation, to reach out to these women. As we talk about the development of women, we as women must develop ourselves. We are working towards a situation where the Youth League will address women's issues as youth issues. It is a long process to educate a person. We as young women came in not being able to utter a word because comrades will say you are foolish. We grew in the organisation. We showed we were serious. It will take time to

work on the minds of comrades. In African tradition you are a child if you are a woman, even to your own son. It is up to us to make sure this changes."

Feelings about negotiations

We asked the comrades what the Youth League thought about the ANC wanting to start negotiations with the South African government.

They said: "The Youth League fully supports negotiations. People want to read differences between the youth and the ANC. In any country youth are the most militant sector of society. If youth think something is slow or not hard hitting enough they will question these things. We discuss and debate policies of the ANC. In our debates we get informed.

"As young people involved in township struggles we must be involved in looking at South Africa in a broader perspective. We in the Youth League feel we should be able to move with the ANC but also be ahead of the ANC. We want to move from a militant youth to a revolutionary youth. We want to maintain the militancy but we want to be more analytical. We want to make an input. We do not want to just leave it to the economists, the legal experts and so on to

make an input on the constitution. The Youth League to the ANC today must be what the Youth League of Sisulu and Mandela was to the ANC of that time."

The comrades told us that they work closely with the ANC Women's League. They said: "The Women's League want representatives from the youth on their structure. We have had a relationship in the past with women's structures. Women and youth are the major sectors to ensure that the programme of the ANC is taken up and implemented."

Challenge to young women

The comrades had a special message for young women. They said: "The Youth League wants to challenge young women. We sometimes don't give all we can. This is a challenge to us. We must try our best. Reading and informing ourselves is important. The task of the women's department is to provide reading material. The Youth League will have to address making it easy for women to take part in programmes. By organising child care, by making sure meeting times suit women. If women don't raise issues they won't be attended to. Young women should take joining the Youth League as a personal challenge." ♦



"Young women should take joining the ANC Youth League as a challenge."

Photo: SPEAK

Have boys lost the meaning of love?

Are love-relationships full of love for young people these days? Maqu Makhaye of Durban talked to some young women and men to find out. She discovered many unhappy, abused young women.

Gugu is a 16 year-old pregnant girl. She has a boyfriend who is the father of her child. She looks tired and has got a bruise on her forehead. One of Gugu's eyes is red as if she has pink eye. She looks miserable. Gugu is one of many young girls who have problems in their love relationships.

A problem for teenagers of all races

Teenagers of all races have problems in their relationships. Tina, a university student expressed her bitter feelings about relationships and violence in them. She is also worried about the fact that nothing is being done about this problem. She said: "I often think what a good relationship is supposed to be like. Is there a better boy out there who can bring me some happiness, or is there something wrong with me? My boyfriend is very pushy, but I love him. I cannot get him out of my life. It is terrible."

He beats her up

Zoliswa showed the blue marks around her eyes from the punches she has been getting from her boyfriend Mandla. Mandla does not work, he does not go to school either. Zoliswa said that sometimes she does not go to school because of him. He tells her she must not go to school and if she refuses to listen, he threatens to beat her up and uses abusive language. She said: "He always wants me to do as he wishes. Sometimes he comes home and demands that I follow him. When we are together, he expects

me to cook, wash for him and fetch water. I always do what he wants me to do. This I hate. But what can I do?"

Double standards

Many young girls we spoke to expressed their bitter feelings about the treatment they get from their boyfriends. Nomathemba, a Phambili High School student complained that most boys have lost the meaning of love. She said: "These boys expect a lot from us, and yet they never do the same for us. They expect girls to be honest and loyal to them but they will never do the same to the girls. They want us to have one boyfriend and yet they have thousands of girlfriends."

Nomathemba's friend, Zola, said: "If my boyfriend finds me talking to another boy, he beats me terribly and he will demand that I agree that there is a relationship between the two of us, even if there is none."

When asked what they think can be done about this problem, they looked at each other and smiled. They turned back and asked us if we think there is anything they can do.

Men who won't let go

Another problem the young girls talked about is that they find it difficult to part with their boyfriends. Tozi, an ice cream seller at Durban's Berea station, said: "Men do not know what they want. When you tell a man that you do not think that the relationship is working out, he will start harassing you and behaving as if the two of you are still in love. Then you end up sitting in a relationship that you no longer want. I know many people who have this problem."

In spite of all these problems, the young girls we spoke to said they do want to have

relationships with boys. When asked why, one of them said: "Others tend to look at you like a fool if you do not have a boyfriend. In fact they start teasing you and calling you names. It is not easy. At the same time there is a lot of pressure from the boys who will forever nag you about being in love."

Pregnancy is yet another problem that these young girls talk about. They say that all the boys demand sex from them and they find it hard to refuse because the boys do not expect them to. Others said that they get beaten up by their boyfriends if they refuse to have sex with them. Ntombi is 19 years old and she dropped out of school because she fell pregnant in standard 8. Now she is sitting at home looking after the baby. She said: "My boyfriend did not want me to use contraceptives because he said that I will sleep with other boys. Yet when I fell pregnant he denied that it is his child. He has never even come here to see this baby, let alone buying him clothes."

They don't allow contraceptives

This problem of boys not allowing young girls to use contraceptives was shared by many teenagers spoken to. Many of them said they have to hide pills and sometimes take an injection so that their boyfriends won't know about it. They have to do this because they cannot say no to sex either.

17 year-old Mazwi, gave his views about the issue. He said: "I have seven girlfriends. I have to use power to show them that I am a man, otherwise they will look down upon me. I agree that women should not be beaten, but I do not want a bossy woman either. A woman must respect me, then I won't beat her."

What is it all about?

Is this really what love is all about? It is clear that the problems of inequality, violence and pressure in relationships was serious. But no-one seemed to know the way out of this. We are busy addressing issues of democracy and equality in South Africa today. What exactly does that mean in our personal lives with others and how we treat each other in relationships? What do SPEAK readers think? Write to: SPEAK, P.O. Box 45213, Mayfair, 2018. ♦



A long and difficult road ahead

building the ANC Women's League

Branches of the ANC Women's League are being set up all over the country almost every week. By January 1991 there were 655 branches of the ANC and more than 450 branches of the Women's League in South Africa. But the ANC Women's League Task Force say there is still a lot of work to be done. They say there are many problems they face in organising the Women's League. We spoke to Khosi Xaba at the ANC Women's League office in Johannesburg about the problems faced by the Women's League.

The Task Force

The Women's League Task force is responsible for organising at a national level. There are 22 women in the Task Force and three organisers. The Task Force decided to put their time into organising in rural areas, and in Natal. They decided to have all three of their organisers working in Natal because of the problems of violence in Natal. The Task Force felt that they did not need to play that much of a part in organising in town areas as there were many comrades with organising experience in towns to organise the Women's League.

Not easy to organise

Khosi told us of the problems the Task Force has experienced. She said that in some areas it is very difficult for the organisers from the Task Force to reach women. She said: "Northern Natal is where Inkatha has its base. The ANC organisers who work in this area do not even live there. They work from the ANC office in

Durban. They have to do underground work from Empangeni to Maputoland in the north. It is very difficult in an area like this."

The Women's League Task Force want to focus on rural areas but they face difficulties doing this. Working in the bantustans is not easy, and money is needed for travelling. Khosi said: "In the northern and eastern Transvaal it is also very difficult. This area is very rural. People live far apart and most of these areas are in the bantustans. This makes organising a problem. To organise in rural areas we will need a solid car. But we face a serious shortage of money." The Task Force is busy trying to raise funds which are badly needed so that they can organise more effectively.

Autonomy

The problem of money is linked to another problem of how the ANC Women's League relates to ANC structures.

Khosi said: "Comrades do not understand what we mean by autonomy. Our autonomy is organisational autonomy. We need to be free to organise as we want to as women. We need funds of our own. We need our own bank account. Our organisation as women depends on organisational autonomy. We do have to get a certain amount of money from the ANC treasury. And we are working out how to go about fund-raising as the Women's League."

Then there is the problem that male comrades want to have a say in the Women's League. Khosi said: "Male comrades say they are not being informed. Male comrades want to have a

say in whatever women do. They think for South Africa it is a foreign idea that women should be doing things on their own. We disagree. Some male comrades say we want to destroy our traditions. We need to ask ourselves if all our traditional and cultural practices are correct. It is not correct to exploit women. 51% of the people are women and we will not have democracy unless we change things and ensure that women participate fully."

The struggle for women's participation

Another problem the Women's League faces is that male comrades in the ANC do not always understand the demands the women are making. And because of this some male comrades stand in the way of the Women's League.

Khosi said: "The Task Force agreed that 30% of the people on ANC structures must be women." The Women's League say that this demand is important because it is clear that women will not



Voting in Women's League Khutsong branch executive elections. The task ahead is to make sure that women take part in two struggles: the struggle for liberation of South Africa and the struggle for their liberation as women.

Photo: SPEAK

be at conferences, meetings or on committees unless it is agreed that there must be a set number of women serving on these committees. Khosi said: "At the organising conference of the ANC there were 52 people. Only 7 of these were women. Three of these women were in the planning committee, helping to run the workshops, and doing secretarial work."

But Khosi said this was not an easy struggle to win. She said: "The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC decided that 2 out of every 4 organisers in the ANC regional interim structures will be women. This has not been carried out. The Women's League is demanding that 30% of all committee members in the ANC must be women. But we have not seen this happening. We have still to get people to get used to this. We have to educate women and men on why it has to happen."

One step forward in this battle is the decision taken by the biggest and most representative meeting of ANC members held so far in South Africa. This was the meeting of representatives from ANC branches from all over the country who met at the ANC Consultative Conference in December 1990 in Johannesburg. The Conference agreed that it must be laid down that a set number of women must be on all ANC structures as a way of making sure that women are taking part in the ANC at all levels. The Conference directed all structures of the ANC to take this up. And the Women's League was called on to spearhead this process.

Problem of education

Khosi said one of the main things needing attention is the education of women. Many women in South Africa cannot read and write. People who cannot read have to rely on others for their information. This could mean that they will not know about important things affecting their lives. Or it may mean that they can be used by others. If women are to be a part of making the decisions about the new South Africa women must be aware and they must be informed. Khosi said: "Women make up half the people of South Africa. Can we say we have a democracy if one half don't know what they are voting for? A lot lies in having our women educated. Women must have the ability to



The Women's League is launched in Khutsong!
September 1990. Photo: SPEAK

compare, to analyze, and make independent informed decisions. This is the kind of freedom we want as women."

Branch activities

We asked Khosi what activities the head office encouraged branches to take up. She said: "We see three main issues we need to look at. The constitution and discussion around this, the Charter of Women's Rights Campaign and the Literacy campaign. We would like projects to be educative and income generating so that branches can support themselves.

"The key issues for branches are to grow and develop. Branches should try to gear their thinking towards projects that would liberate them. For example if a branch is involved in making cakes and nothing else this is not going to play a part in liberating women.

"Organising a creche, for example, would mean that women will have time for things like attending literacy classes. The national office needs to give guidance on things like this."

Tension

One problem that has caused some tension among women in the ANC is that most of the 24 women in the Women's League Task Force are returned exiles. Khosi said: "It is a bit of a problem. People are saying the Women's League is from outside, that we are bound to make mistakes and we are out of touch with the situation. It is a problem we cannot solve as people from outside. The Task Force is saying that to resolve this people must build branches and regional structures, and have elections.

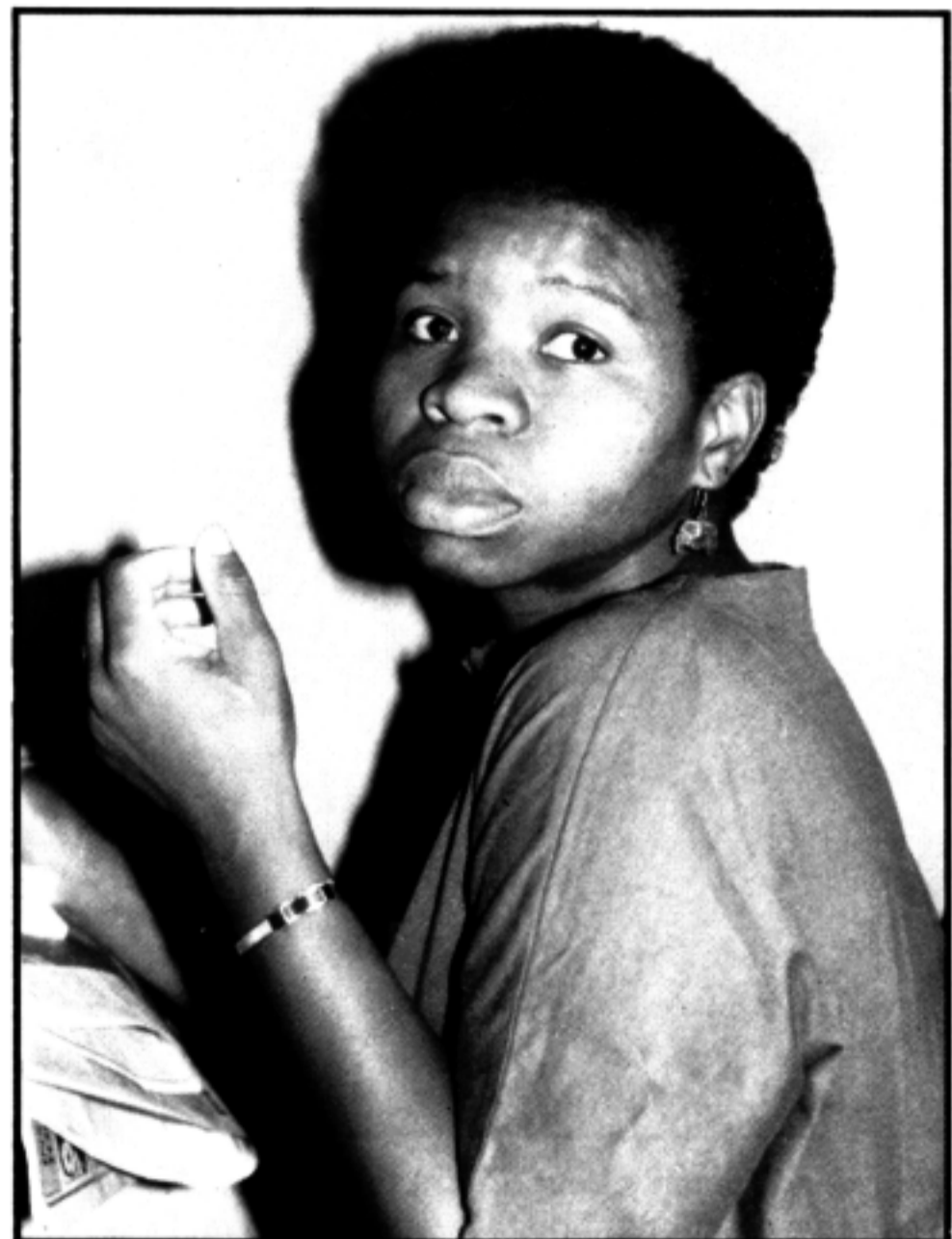
Lets work towards this. The Task Force wants to facilitate. We will not give instructions. People must chose their representatives."

Forward on the difficult road

It is clear that one of the main reasons for forming the Women's League is to make sure that women take part in two struggles: the struggle for the liberation of South Africa and the struggle for their liberation as women.

The Women's League believe that the ideas and practices which oppress women and treat them as inferior to men must be fought. They see the need to fight the battle against these ideas inside the ANC and in the country. The Women's League wants to see women play their part in the ANC. Not just as secretaries and as cooks. But as leaders alongside men.

It is clear that the road ahead is a difficult one. There is a lot to be done, from branch level to national level, to build the Women's League into a strong organisation that can spearhead the struggle for women's rights in the ANC and in the country. ❖



Khosi Xaba of the Women's League says that the Women's League is demanding that 30% of all ANC committee members must be women. Photo: COSATU



Take back the night!

Cape Town women on
the march!

Photo: Carol Smith, FEDSAW

In November 1990 thousands of women from the western Cape took to the streets at night to make a statement: violence against women - rape, wife and girlfriend beating, and sexual harassment - is a crime against humanity. Tammy Shefer was there and wrote this report.

"We decided to take to the streets of Cape Town at night to show that violence against women affects all of us. We will no longer keep silent about it. We want the community at large to take it seriously, and we want our organisations to put it on the agenda."

This is what Beatie Hofmeyer, the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) Western Cape Education and Training Officer, said after marches by thousands of women in Cape Town and Stellenbosch in November 1990. FEDSAW organised the marches.

Women's right to be safe

On the night of Friday 30 November 1990, people on the streets of Cape Town were surprised by the singing, candle-lit marches of the women. They were marching to take back the night. Even the rain did not dampen their spirits. The women carried placards and banners demanding their right to be safe from violence by men. Some male comrades also joined the march, some of them carrying

children. Women from many organisations - like the ANC Women's League, Black Sash, Rape Crisis, COSATU, the trade unions, SAYCO, Call of Islam were part of this march. There were eight different marches that night. In Gugulethu 2 000 women marched. In Claremont 600 women met after the march to have a cultural evening. In Khayelitsha 2 000 women marched from one end of the township to the other. Women from Mannenberg, Heideveld, Surrey Estate and Athlone joined together and marched through the side streets of these areas. In Stellenbosch, 150 women marched from Khayamandi to Cloeteville.

Marching through the darkest streets

On the night of the marches the women went out into the darkest streets. Streets where no woman feels safe to walk alone. The women said they wanted the right to walk these streets without having to fear attacks from unknown men. The women were protesting all forms of violence against women. They want to break the silence around the rapes, the beatings from men they love and live with, and the sexual harassment that women face in the community and at work every day of their lives.

The women say that the community and their organisations must open their eyes and take action against this violence against women. ❖

I told them I was here to help my wife

Some unions are pushing hard that bosses should give men and women workers time off when a new baby is born. Leave for the mother - called maternity leave - will be longer to allow her to recover and take care of the baby. Leave for the father is shorter and is called paternity leave. This allows the father to help with the care of the baby and mother while the mother is still weak and recovering from the birth. William Matlala works at COSATU head office in Johannesburg. His job is to take photographs for COSATU publications. His family live in Mphahlele location in Pietersburg. We spoke to William, whose wife, Alinah, recently had a baby. William has just come back from his first paternity leave. We wanted to know all about it!

It was nice

William went home on six days paternity leave. We asked him what it was like.

William told us: "It was nice because it gave a lot of help to the family. It gave a boost to the relationship - to my wife and the children. It is important, especially for us from rural areas, we don't see the family often. It is important to have this time. You bring love to them. It is very important to share this with the family. When a woman has a baby she is weak. She needs

someone with whom she has a good relationship - especially one who is in love with her. She can tell you things she can't just tell anybody. You can get to know how to care for the new baby.

"As the father you shared bringing this baby into the world and you should know how the pain is, how the baby is and how she is coping. It is important that we ask for paternity leave not only from the bosses, but also from the unions so that workers at COSATU and its affiliates also get this leave."

This new baby is William's fourth child. But this is the first time he has had paternity leave. William said: "I did not get paternity leave for any of the older children. The others I saw when they were about one year old - just for the weekend - maybe spending a day at home, bringing money home, finding someone to help, like my mother and hers. With this baby I got paternity leave. I saw this baby when she was two weeks old. I spent 6 days at home. I did everything that was needed."

I looked after the baby

We asked William how he spent his time and what his family felt about his being at home on paternity leave. He said: "I looked after the baby. I changed nappies. I fetched the water. I was prepared to bath the baby, but my wife did not want me to do this. She had some hesitation

on giving up the job. It was new to her. "The grandmother said, 'okay Mfo, you are here now we are going.' I told them I was here to help my wife, so they left. But they were near enough to call if we should ever need them for something we could not understand. The older children enjoy me. They like to see me at home. Even when they go to school they want me to wash them, prepare their food, take them to school."

The burden must be on our shoulders

William is sorry that he was not at the birth of his new baby. He said: "I was a little late to be at the birth. I would have liked to be there. If she was staying with me I would have been there. Yes, I would have been afraid. But I would have been as brave as I can. It is very important to know when the baby is due then we can be there at the birth. To get there after the birth is not enough. The burden must be on our shoulders for our wives."

William said that it was a very new idea that men should take paternity leave and look after children. He said: "Paternity leave is something new. Workers know it is written down in some agreements with some companies but they don't take it. And many men don't have it. When they have it they will take it and enjoy it."

The message will spread

Some women workers are saying that men would take this paternity leave, but very few would use it to care for the baby. They would use it to have a good time for themselves. We asked William what he felt about this. He said that he could see the problem, but that in time men would realise the importance of spending time with their children.

He said: "We know we are dominant as men. We know we are the superior in the house. From here it will be a long way to reach equality. It will be difficult for men to accept this. When a tree is old it is hard to make it young. Men will have to accept that the old way of operating is wrong. Then they will change. They must get convinced. Men will get enjoyment from helping their baby, their wife. This is their family. They can bring love home to the wife and family. Instead of seeing the children taking their father as an enemy. As someone they

don't know. When the father comes in they leave and must sit outside. A man becomes a superior. As someone always demanding and commanding.

"Paternity leave will be misused at first. But if a man is at home people will ask 'why are you here?' He will say 'because I am on paternity leave.' They will ask 'what is that?' Then he will explain and they will ask 'then why are you not taking care of your wife and baby?' And other women will ask their husbands 'why don't you get this leave?' And the message will spread. People will get to know about this leave. More will ask for it at work. And people in the community will make men feel ashamed if they are not using this leave to care for the wife and child. It's a process to change things. It won't happen easily."

William is back at work in Johannesburg, far from home. He misses the new baby, his wife, his older children. But his eyes and voice tell us how happy and excited he is that he was able to share the new baby with his family. ❖



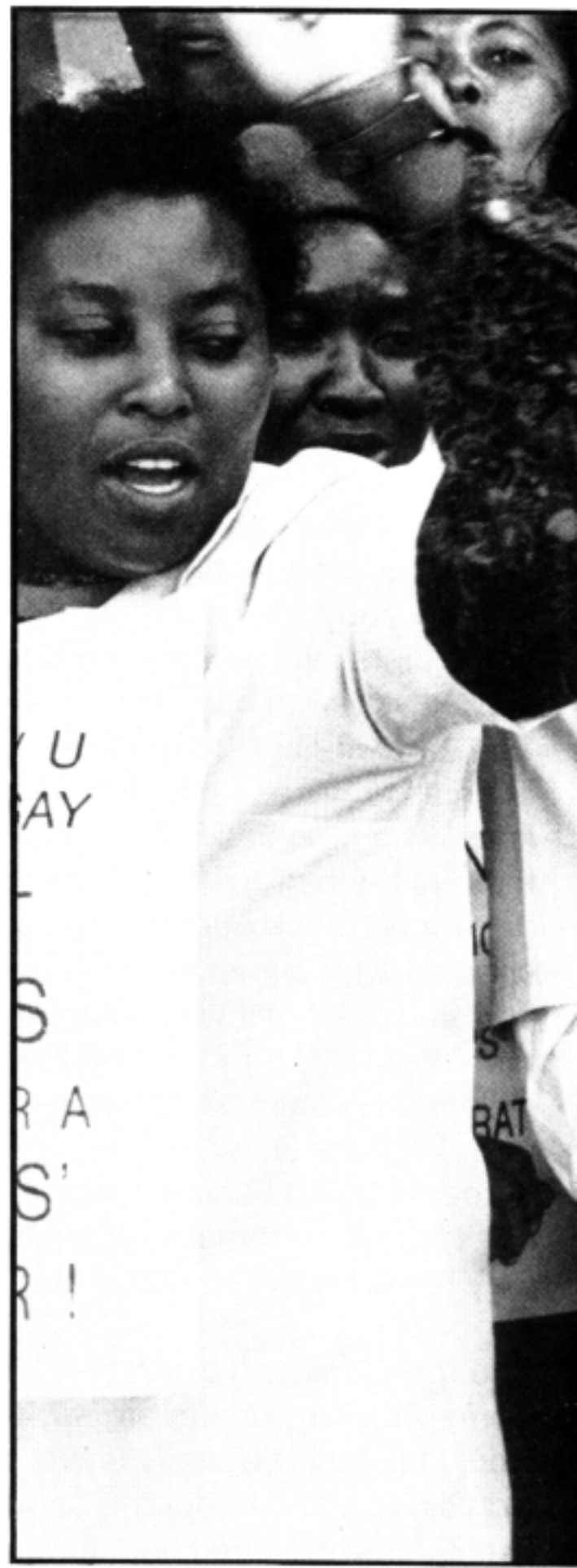
Alinah Matlala took this photograph of her husband, William, taking care of his baby while on paternity leave.



1990 - the year of the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations. A year which began with great hope.



But 1990 did not bring peace. Women from Pola Park outside Jo'burg had to flee their homes in September after an attack on their shack settlement by hostel dwellers and other unknown forces. Hundreds of people were killed in Natal and the Transvaal in the ongoing war.



Members of the South African Clothing Workers Union rights in their national campaign.

1990 - a year of mass mobilisation, militancy, surprises, war and building of people's organisations in South Africa. SPEAK hopes that the struggle towards non-sexism, non-racism and democracy in 1991 bears sweet fruit for all to taste.



Workers are parents too! And fathers should share the responsibility of their children. COSATU's Childcare Campaign, September 1990.



ing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) demand more
 n. October 1990.

COSATU Childcare campaign photo: Tammy Shefer
 Other photos: Afrapix



omen delegates attending the ANC Consultative
 nference in December 1990. Let's see more women
 leadership in 1991!



In November, angry Soweto women organised a march to the
 police station to demand, among other things, that police take
 tracking down and arresting rapists seriously.

Fighting sexism in the church

Many people are coming together to discuss the new constitution for a new South Africa. People are talking about what they want it to say. Women have been left out of politics for a long time and are tired of this. The Ecumenical Decade of Women held a conference where women from all over South Africa could discuss the constitution. Many of the women were from the churches, and they found there was a lot of sexism to fight in the churches as well as fighting for non-sexism in the new constitution.

A conference to remember

There was singing, laughter, talking and serious debate at the women's conference organised by the Ecumenical Decade of Women in September 1990 in Durban. Women from all over South Africa came to discuss issues that affect them as women. And to debate how they can make sure that a future South Africa has a constitution that makes it possible for women to fight their oppression.

The Ecumenical Decade of Women

The Ecumenical Decade of Women is a women's organisation which brings together all the women from the churches which are under the South African Council of Churches. These women had a conference in Durban which ran over three days. The theme of the conference was: "Christian women participating in the shaping of the new Constitution of South Africa."

Women together are organised

It was a well organised and exciting meeting. All the participants, except Rev. Mgojo, who gave an opening address, were women. The

chairing, panel discussions and facilitation of discussions was all done by women. But most important, it was all about women! The women were disciplined and everything started on time.

A wide range of organisations

Ruth Mompoti from the National Executive Council of the African National Congress, Crecentia Mofokeng from the women's wing of the Pan African Congress, the African Women's Organisation, and Rose Ngwenya from Imbeleko, the women's wing of Azanian People's Organisation, were all there. Women from many organisations who have an interest in women's issues were there. SPEAK was there selling and taking part in the lively discussions.

It was exciting to listen to the discussion. Every minute of the discussion over the three days of the conference was about the issues that affect women so badly. These issues were not just being discussed, women were also saying what they want done away with in a future South Africa.

Spirit of no compromise

The discussions were hot and frank. Women said that the church encourages their oppression. They looked at the things in Christian practice that oppress women and they said they want these done away with.

They said there are things said during the marriage ceremony which suggest that women are inferior. They want these things to be taken out of the marriage ceremony.

One woman said: "It is obvious that the church has not been taking the issue of women's emancipation seriously. The church has been assuming that a marriage relationship will last till

either of the partners dies. Meantime, many people are getting divorced everyday. The church must take into consideration the reality which people face."

The women did not want to compromise. They are tired of being kept down by ideas of the church.

Fighting the stigma against unmarried mothers

They talked about how the church discriminates against unmarried mothers.

One woman said: "A woman can choose not to be married. But a woman who wants to be married cannot force anyone to marry her. Therefore, let there be no fuss about anyone who is a parent outside marriage."

Women spoke about the way the church treats unmarried women who became pregnant. The churches do not allow unmarried women to take part in the church when they fall pregnant. The women felt that if the church decides to punish unmarried mothers, then men should be treated in the same way. It was agreed that the church must respect the right of unmarried individuals to choose whether to be parents or not.

Family relations

The women talked about the kind of family relations they would want to see in a future South Africa. They talked about lobola. They agreed that lobola must be done away with because it gives the impression that women are things to be bought, and this makes women's lives in relationships difficult.

They talked about men's relationships with women. There was a strong feeling about men who are allowed to have as many women as they want. The women said this is oppressive to women. There was much laughter when the slogan 'one man, one wife' was raised by one of the women!

Women's desks

The women agreed to go back and encourage the forming of women's desks in their churches to make sure that women's issues are taken up. The women's desks would also make sure that

women's problems are on the agenda in all church matters.

The right to political affiliation

The women spoke about their worry that some churches and ministers of religion were wanting to keep church-goers away from politics. These ministers were saying that members of their churches must not become card-carrying members of political organisations. After a discussion, the women agreed that church members have the right to be members of political organisations. The women agreed that they believe in one person one vote and a political system which upholds principles of democracy.

Lessons from other countries

A woman advocate from Namibia, Bience Gavands, was there to share their experiences in the formation of a new Namibian constitution. Bience is on the board of directors of the Central Bank of Namibia.

She said: "Yes, we are independent, but independence does not bring about the liberation of women. It is not enough to campaign for women to be represented in the decision-making structures. We must prepare



Photo: Tumi Mofokeng

Ruth Mompoti (ANC) and Virginia Gcabashe (South African Council of Churches vice-president) listen as Crecentia Mofokeng (PAC) addresses the Ecumenical Decade of Women women's conference in Durban.



The women in the family relations workshop said that men who are allowed to have as many women as they like are oppressive to women. "One man, one wife!" said one of the women.
 Photo: Tumi Mofokeng

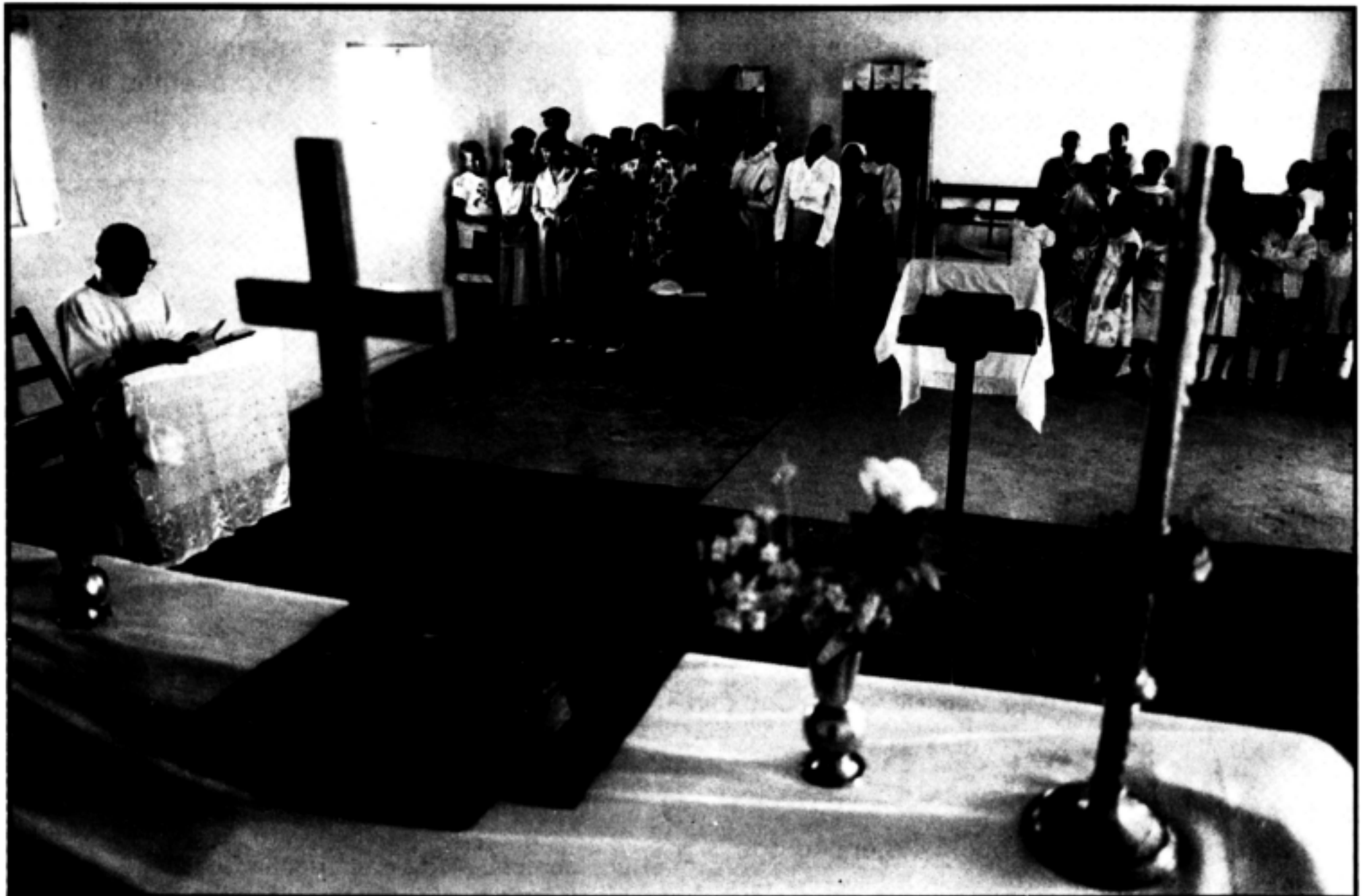
the women now to take that challenge. It is not enough to say that we must vote. We as women must use that vote to achieve what we want."

Laws on their own cannot bring equality

Bience also pointed out that the law alone cannot bring about equality. The law creates conditions for equality to take place. She said

equality will only come about if we fight for it. All the women agreed to go back to their churches and continue the discussions around a future South Africa and the position of women.

There was a strong spirit of fighting sexism within the church and in society. The church women are seriously taking up this fight. ❖



In churches in South Africa most of the church-goers are women, yet most priests and ministers are men. Many church women are starting to challenge male domination and sexism in the church.
 Photo: Afrapix

Feeling great about her book!

"I feel great about my book!" says Elizabeth Ndaba, "because if you are a woman you must battle to get something right. And after that, you know you are going to win!"

There is a new book in South Africa that tells a moving story. The book is called: 'I Told Myself I am Going to Learn.' It is written by Elizabeth Ndaba. Her story is told with words and photographs.

From a story into a book

Elizabeth works as a domestic worker. In the book she tells the story of her own life and how she struggled to learn to read and write. Elizabeth is a learner in a literacy class run by English Literacy Project (ELP) in Johannesburg. We asked her how she came to write the book.

She said: "Last year in my class we had a discussion. And then I wrote a story. I said that I thought there could be a nice play from the story. We made a play. We practised. We acted the play in Rosebank. Learners and some visitors came to watch. Then my teacher said that if we could write a book from the play it would be great. The learners thought the book would encourage other people to come to literacy classes. I said it would be a lot of work to write a book, because I had never done that before. We talked about this in the class and then the teacher said I must write the story. I had to write and rewrite the story using easy words. Three times I wrote that story!"

Elizabeth worked with literacy teachers and learners from ELP on her book. After the story was written they talked about how they wanted the book to look. They decided they wanted to use photographs to go with the words. Elizabeth said: "We had a meeting with my

learning group to draw the pictures for the book. We decided what kind of photographs we wanted on all of the pages. My group worked together on this. Another class also came because they wanted to talk about the book."

Then it was time to start looking out for a place to take the photographs for the book. They decided on a house in Katlehong, a township outside Johannesburg. They took some photographs just to practise with. And then they got a photographer to go back with them to Katlehong to take the final photographs. The photographs in the book are of Elizabeth and of another learner from ELP, George Baloyi, who acted the part of her husband. Elizabeth said: "Then we sat again and talked about the photos when we got them back. We discussed where we wanted which photographs."

It is hard when you can't read

Elizabeth's book is written especially for people who are learning to read and write. We asked Elizabeth about the problems that people have when they cannot read and write. "It is very bad not to be able to read and write," said Elizabeth, "because sometimes you can get a letter from a relative that says somebody



Elizabeth Ndaba hopes her book will encourage women and men to go to classes to learn to read and write.

Photo: Lesley Lawson

is sick in the family. You have to ask someone else to read it. Or you go to the bank and you must fill in slips to deposit or withdraw money. You have to ask someone else to do it for you. They can steal money from you."

Harder for women

Elizabeth spoke about the problems that women have when they want to learn. She said: "It is harder for women to learn than for men. In the morning you have to go to work. You come home at night and have to do everything. The man just sits and doesn't help. You must fight until you get everything right. It is a bad problem. What can you say? Your husband just gives you a big smash in your face and asks where the food is, and why you have come home so late.

"Men go to the class and have the time to do the homework. They come home and just sit down at the table. But for you, as a woman, it is maybe eleven o'clock at night, after the cooking is done and the children are asleep, that you get a chance to do homework."

Elizabeth's book talks about this problem that faces women in South Africa.

A special book

There are not enough books written for adults who are learning to read and write. And there are not enough books written by black South African women. This book is very special because it is both.

Elizabeth hopes her book will encourage women and men to go to classes to learn to read and write. She said: "People mustn't be shy to go to the class. Oh, they think people will think they are stupid. To sit at home, you don't do anything, you'll stay stupid the whole of your life. My message is that people must come to classes. They mustn't be shy. If they all come to classes, maybe one day everyone in South Africa will be able to read and write."

SPEAK hopes that 'I Told Myself I am Going to Learn' will inspire more women to try their hand and heart at writing!

You can get Elizabeth Ndaba's book, 'I Told Myself I am Going to Learn' from English Literacy Project, 314 Dunwell House, 35 Jorissen Street, Braamfontein, 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa. Their telephone number is 011-3392864. ♦

SPEAK

SPEAK puts women's liberation on the agenda of the South African liberation struggle.

Through interviews, photographs, poetry and stories, women speak out about their oppression as women, and how they are fighting to change it.

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ANC takes a stand on women's liberation!

On 2 May 1990 the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the African National Congress put out a statement on the struggle to end women's oppression. SPEAK has rewritten the statement to make it easier to read. We believe that this ANC May 2 statement is important to discuss because of what it says about the struggle for women's liberation.



Home at last and with a promise to keep! In 1985, ANC President OR Tambo, together with Namibian President Sam Njomo, made a promise to the women of Namibia and South Africa that our struggle would be won only when women are fully liberated.

Photo: Afrapix

The ANC May 2 statement of the ANC NEC
The ANC must take up the struggle for the liberation of women, because we are committed to end racism, oppression and exploitation in our country. The majority of South African women are black and suffer the worst types of racism, oppression and exploitation. If we want to truly free our country we must seriously concern ourselves with the liberation of women.

In South Africa, we have learned a lot from struggles in other countries. We have learned that freedom for women does not come automatically from struggles for democracy, national liberation or socialism. The struggle for women's freedom must be a special struggle. It must be a special struggle in the ANC, the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and everywhere in society.

A promise to the women

In 1985 Presidents Sam Nujoma and Oliver Tambo together made a promise to the women

in Namibia and South Africa. They said that our struggle as a people would be won only when women in Namibia and South Africa are fully liberated.

We should have set up principles and practices in our organisation a long time ago to guide us in giving more attention to women's liberation.

The ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) has written down its views on women's liberation. The NEC wants to make sure that the freedom and development of women is made a part of all struggles now and in the future in South Africa. The NEC wants all people to discuss these ideas.

Real equality

To make sure that there is real equality we must work to make a society where women can be free in their daily lives. Our policies must be based on a real understanding of women's oppression in our society. The oppression of

women starts from their poverty and dependence on men for money. This weak economic position in families and society has allowed traditions to be built up which keep women down. Among all the people in South Africa, black and white, women are placed in a lower rank than men. As a result women suffer in every way. The inferior economic situation of women and their inferior position in society is kept in place by a system of laws made by the rulers of this country and by a system of customs of our people. It is only when we understand this that we will be able to work out ways of freeing women.

Laws, customs and traditions

In South Africa the laws of apartheid, as well as the customs and traditions of the people, oppress women.

African women have suffered more harshly than anyone else. The South African government has stopped African women from moving freely. Bosses can employ cheap migrant labour because women work for no wages in the homes. The mining bosses have made even more profits because of the unpaid work of African women.

The apartheid government sees African women only as the mothers of future workers. When the bantustans were formed many African women were stopped from coming to the towns. Without land, life is very hard, and many women have to depend on money sent by the men who work in the towns. Women are left alone to care for the sick, the old and the children. It is the women who keep the family alive. The men are not there but it is still the men who are seen as the heads of the family. It is still the men who are given the power.

Women have been oppressed for hundreds of years. They have been oppressed in many different ways. Women have the worst health, the lowest education and the smallest number of skills. Most women work in the home. Men do not share the housework and childcare. The work of women in the home is an important part of making the wealth of this country. But this is not recognised. Women's work at home is not paid. Most of the unemployed people are

women. And those women who work outside the home are in the worst paid, and lowest grade jobs. Black and white women do not play a part in making decisions in our country.

An important contribution

Women have made an important contribution to the liberation struggle. But if we look at the youth, the people's army and other parts of our organisation we will see that women are not playing a full part. We have not yet made the problems of women and women's liberation a really important part of our liberation struggle.

More than half of South Africa's people are women, but in all our own organisations women are treated as inferior. There are very few women in our organisations, especially in committees, where important decisions are made, and we do not have a strong mass women's organisation in South Africa. So women's problems are not raised when we decide on our strategy and tactics, and, as a result, our struggle has suffered. President Tambo summed up the problem when he opened the ANC Women's Conference in 1981. He said that the struggle is made much more difficult for women because of the traditional ideas and man-made structures that oppress women within our movement. And also because women themselves accept these traditional ideas and their oppression.

We can only reach a non-racial and democratic society if we mobilise all the people of South Africa - women and men.

ANC policy

The ANC is now unbanned. The ANC is now making changes within the organisation to meet the tasks before it. While we are doing this it is very important that we take action to end the inequalities women face within the ANC. If we do this, millions of women will join our struggle and help to liberate themselves.

The NEC, with the National Executive Women's Committee (NEWC), is looking at the work of the ANC Women's Section. We want to make sure that what we do is in keeping with what we say. We want to make sure that all parts of our movement are aware of how women are

oppressed. And that they will try to end that oppression. The ANC Women's League is an important way to mobilise and organise women in the liberation struggle.

We want to appoint a National Commission on the Emancipation of Women. This Commission will make people aware of the position of women, and will concentrate on the struggle for women's liberation.

It is most important to find a way for women to participate in the struggle. We must make sure that women participate in all the sectors of the ANC - the political, administrative, military and at all levels, from grassroots to the NEC. To do this we must specially promote women. We must take affirmative action - that is, act positively and have educational programmes based on full equality between men and women.

Start a programme

The ANC has told its Department of Political Education to start a programme to make people aware of the oppression of women, and to make people aware of the importance of making this struggle a part of our broader struggle. The ANC Education Council has been asked to make sure that its education policy does not

promote ideas of women's inferiority and that it includes training for women and men to take up all kinds of jobs.

We must deal with women's oppression everywhere because it is to be found everywhere - in the economy, in the laws, in the new political bodies we will form. Oppression of women is found in our culture and the way we think about men and women. The NEC is looking at the recommendations made at a special seminar which looked at what we need to do to liberate women. One of these recommendations is that we need to include clauses on women in the ANC Constitutional Guidelines. Some of the clauses people at the seminar suggested we include are:

* South Africa must be a non-sexist state;



Men don't share the housework and childcare.

The work of women in the home is an important part of making the wealth of this country. But this is not recognised. Women's work at home is not paid.

Photos
Top: Pauline Stanford
Bottom: Afrapix

- * laws, customs and traditions and practices which discriminate against women are illegal;
- * everything that gives men power over women, whether in the family, or over land, or other parts of the economy must be removed

The seminar recommended that the government in a free South Africa must find ways to make sure that women do have equal rights and opportunities. But in the new South Africa women will not immediately have the education, skills and resources to claim the rights the new laws will give them. The courts can help in this by attending to the needs of all the people and by acting in the interests of the people. We must make it easy for everyone to go to the courts and get justice and we must choose magistrates and judges who the people will be able to respect and trust. People should discuss the recommendations from the seminar so that we can make policies that will help to end women's oppression.

The Charter of Women's Rights

Men and women are both responsible for ending women's oppression, but women must lead the struggle for a non-sexist South Africa. Women must make sure that the ANC and the MDM get more women to take part in the struggle that still lies before us. Women must

make sure that the policies and ways of organising the ANC help to bring in more women.

Women must lead the discussion in South Africa for a Charter of Women's Rights. In their own voices, women must tell of the things which concern them and how their oppression can be ended. This Charter should be part of our new constitution.

We call upon the ANC Women's League to lead a campaign for the Charter. The campaign should involve millions of women. Everywhere women must discuss how their rights should be protected in a new South Africa. This will help women break the silence about their oppression as women, and allow us to practice democracy. This process should prepare over half the people for full citizenship and equality. Men must also be involved in this process so that we make sure that all the people support the Charter.

Men gain from women being at the very bottom. It will be difficult for men to give up their privileges and habits. In the long run, however, men will gain from living in a world in which the health, happiness and welfare of all is guaranteed. ❖



It is the women who are the ones who are left to run the homes and look after the young, the sick and the old. But it is still the men who hold the power.

Photo: Afrapix

Happy to sell SPEAK

Dear SPEAK,

I am a boy in standard ten and twenty-one years old. I am a reader of SPEAK and I am interested in reading this kind of magazine. I would like to sell SPEAK to people who are interested in reading it. We have people who are interested in the struggle of this country. I would be happy to see our people reading and being updated on the struggle of our country. I will be happy to sell SPEAK in 1991.

Your comrade

Mohapi Tieho Kleinbooi
Ntha Location, Lindley

Dear Mohapi, we are very pleased that you wish to sell SPEAK. We will send you our rates and terms.

Don't forget the easy English

Dear SPEAK,

I have supported SPEAK since it started. I have always liked the easy English in SPEAK. SPEAK was the only magazine all women could understand. But now I am worried. The English in SPEAK is getting harder. There is no Zulu SPEAK or other languages. I know you have to rush out some issues of SPEAK but don't forget the easy English. It is important that SPEAK is read by all women.

Don't go backwards. Keep SPEAK open to all women.

Yours in the struggle,
Brian Cooper
Durban

Dear Brian, thank you for your comments on the language in SPEAK. We see it as very important that SPEAK articles can be read by as many people as possible. We will try to move forwards!

Good work for women's liberation

Dear SPEAK,

We would like to subscribe to your magazine. We receive it regularly and read it with great interest. You do really good work for women's liberation and its an encouragement for us to see all the dynamism of women in South Africa. Special salutations to Phumelele. In solidarity,
Sylvie Desautels for Cinquieme Monde Collective, Canada

Focus on mental institutions

Dear SPEAK,

I am a woman and a health worker. For many years now I have been working with mentally ill people. Most of the time these people are neglected by family members, friends and community.

I have, however, had the opportunity of talking to a few parents who visit their people in the institution. One thing that comes up clearly is that parents are not always satisfied with the care their people receive. And sometimes when a patient relates events that are hurtful to relatives, such as assault, or the stealing of a patient's property, parents do not know what to do.

The facilities for African patients are particularly inferior. These include poor diet, clothing and poor heating system. The health workers are not satisfied with this. But, because of the fear of being dismissed, nurses have not been able to expose these problems. The parents, on the other hand, are experiencing a fear of expressing their dissatisfaction because between parents and health workers there is no trust and openness. Both groups have together failed to advocate for the rights of the patients effectively.

I am asking your magazine to focus a little on mental institutions and the role of the parents and concerned health workers. The care of people in the institution reflects other political, sociological and cultural problems in society. A lot of parents are ignorant and are not aware that they have the right to advocate for their own people. I hope your magazine facilitates a voice for the mentally ill people in the institutions so that parents and the community can take action on the ill-treatment of patients. Yours
Concerned Mental Health Worker

Dear Concerned Mental Health Worker, we hope your letter helps to make SPEAK readers aware of this important problem. SPEAK will try to plan a focus on the care of the mentally ill for a future issue. Thank you for raising this problem. ♦

Preventing pregnancy



The mini pill and the injection

It is important to have information about the different kinds of contraception so that if you want to prevent pregnancy, you can make a real choice about the kind of prevention you would like to use. In this article we talk about the mini pill and the injection.

The mini pill and the injection are contraceptives for women. But prevention is not just women's responsibility. We must make sure that it is men's responsibility too. They also need to understand this. Men and women must share the responsibility for prevention.

The mini pill

The mini pill is made of a chemical called progestogen. It is different from the pill, which has oestrogen and progestogen in it. To understand how the mini pill works we must first remind ourselves about the menstrual cycle.

The menstrual cycle

Each woman has two ovaries. In each ovary there are thousands of eggs. About 14 days after the woman starts her last period an egg leaves one of the ovaries. This is called ovulation. This is the time of the month when it is most easy for a woman to get pregnant. A woman can get pregnant if she and her man partner do not use any form of prevention when

they have sex. For a woman to get pregnant, sperm from the man's penis must move through the woman's vagina up to the entrance of the womb called the cervix. Special fluids in the cervix help the sperm move into the womb and tubes.

For pregnancy to take place the sperm must meet the egg and join together with it. This is called fertilisation. This is the beginning of a pregnancy. If the woman's egg is not fertilised, she will not get pregnant and she will get her next period as usual.

How does the mini pill work?

The mini pill stops women from getting pregnant in 2 ways. Firstly, it changes the special fluids that the entrance of the womb (the cervix) produces. These fluids usually help the sperm to move up into the womb. The mini pill makes it difficult for the sperm to get through the fluid.

Secondly, it changes the lining of the womb. When an egg is fertilised, the lining of the womb is like a welcoming blanket for the fertilised egg to grow in. But the mini pill changes the womb lining and makes it hostile to the fertilised egg. This means that the egg has nowhere to attach itself and nowhere to grow. In both these ways the mini pill prevents pregnancy.

How safe is the mini pill?

The mini pill is not as safe for preventing pregnancy as the combined pill we talked about in SPEAK 32. Between two and four in every 100 women using the mini pill will become pregnant each year.

Who should take the mini pill?

Any woman can choose to take the mini pill. But there are some women who would be better suited to the mini pill.

* women who cannot take the combined pill for whatever reason, may prefer the mini pill.

* women who have been on the combined pill, but are now over the age of 35 years can change to the mini pill.

* women who have just had a baby and are breast -feeding should take the mini pill but not the combined pill.

Remember!

The combined pill is much better at preventing pregnancy than the mini pill.

How do you take the mini pill?

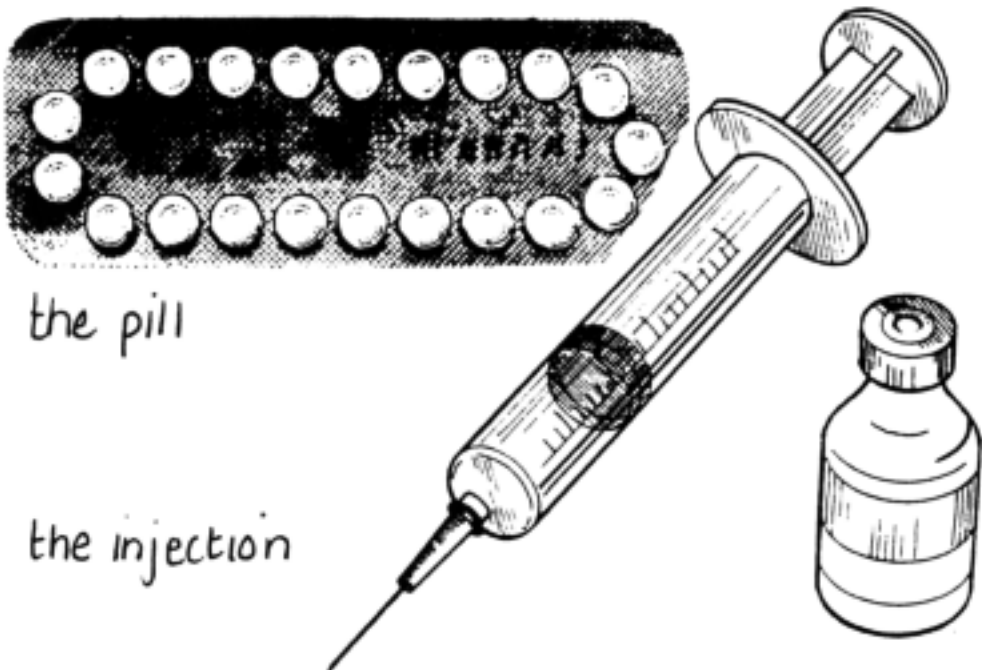
The mini pill comes in packets of 28 pills. Each packet gives one pill a day for 4 weeks. Most packets have the days of the week marked on them. It is important to take the mini pill at the same time each day. This could be in the morning or the evening. A woman can decide which suits her the best. But if she forgets a pill she may get pregnant. If she forgets a pill, her partner should use condoms for prevention and the couple should go to the doctor or clinic for advice.

What are the problems with the mini pill?

The side effects of the mini pill are not dangerous. They are a nuisance. This is different from the pill, where the side effects can sometimes be serious and dangerous.

The two main side effects with the mini pill are increase in weight and irregular periods. Periods may start either too late or too early. The amount of blood lost may become more than normal or less than normal. After a woman has been on the mini pill for a few months her periods may stop completely. This can become a problem as many women worry that they might be pregnant. When a woman stops taking the mini-pill her periods always come back. But it may take a few months longer for them to settle back to normal.

The only way to find out if the mini pill suits you is to try it out for at least three months, and see how your body reacts to it.



The injection allows a woman to prevent without her husband or boyfriend knowing it



The contraceptive injection

There are two kinds of contraceptive injections commonly used in South Africa. One is called nurostenate and the other is called depo-provera. Both of them are injectable progestogens which prevent pregnancy for the three months after they have been given.

How does the injection work?

The injection works in 2 ways. It stops a woman from releasing an egg every month. And it makes the fluid that the neck of the womb (cervix) produces unfriendly to sperm. This means that it is difficult for the sperm to move through the cervix and up to the womb.

How is the injection given?

The injection is given every three months. It is injected into the top part of a woman's buttocks. The fluid injected is thick so the nurse or doctor often uses a large needle to give it. This can be a bit painful.

What are the medical problems with the injection?

There are a number of problems with this kind of prevention.

* Many women gain weight on the injection. Most women gain a little weight but others gain a lot.

* Periods can change. Some women find that they bleed almost all the time. Others find that in the first six months they have irregular periods and these periods are often quite light. When this happens women sometimes find that after their third injection their periods stop altogether.

Some women find that after they stop the injections their periods may take up to a year to come back again. And a few find that they still don't have periods after one year. These women often need tablets from a doctor to start up their periods again. The injection does not cause women to become permanently unable to have children.

A few years ago women were worried that the injection caused cancer. This is not true. There is no risk of getting cancer from the injection.

The right to decide

It is very important that women are able to decide for themselves which contraception to use. But to make a proper decision women must know about the different kinds of contraception. Women must know how each one will affect her body. Before deciding to use the injection a woman must understand what the injection is, and what its side effects are. She must understand what other choices of prevention there are. And then she can then choose whether she wants to use the injection. This is called 'informed consent'. No women should be given the injection without informed consent. And the right to informed consent is something all women must fight for.

Women may choose to have the injection because it suits them. Some women say the injection suits them better than the pill because with the injection she doesn't have the worry of remembering to take a pill every day. Other women may like the injection because their husbands don't want them to prevent, and the injection allows them to prevent without their husbands knowing about it.

A big problem with the injection

A big problem with the injection is that it is abused by health workers and government health departments who decide that they know what is best for women. Health workers and governments like the injection because it works well. There is no problem of waste and forgetting like with the pill. It is given every three months so the health workers can forget about the patient until the three months are up. But this kind of thinking sees women as things and not as people who have a right to decide

about their bodies. Often women are given the injection without any choice, and sometimes without even knowing what is being given. Often nurses and doctors tell women they must have the injection if they don't want to get pregnant. They do not explain the side effects and they do not explain all the other methods of contraception. So the woman is given no choice. Worse than this, many women are given the injection straight after they have had a baby, without being told what they are being given.

Health workers who do this take the choice of prevention out of women's hands. They think they know what is best for women.

The right to be consulted

Sometimes governments think they know what is best for women. After independence, the Zimbabwe government banned the use of depo provera. They said that depo had been used by the Smith government to oppress women. Even if this was true, the government was



wrong to make a decision for women without asking women what they wanted. No government should have the right to do this.

In South Africa today we see the abuse of the injection both by the state health services and by health workers. But in a free South Africa the government must not just ban injections. It must first find out from women what they want. And it must set down guidelines for health workers about how and to whom these injections will be given.

In South Africa it is the injection that is the commonest kind of prevention given to black working class women. All over the world it is the poorest countries that use the injection a lot. It is the governments and health workers of these countries who are doing the deciding. They believe that poor women must have fewer children and the injection must be used to see to this. This control over women must stop. Women must shout out about these things and demand the right to decide for themselves. ❖

Discuss.
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Demand your health rights!



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