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C.NPC DOCUMENTS

C4: Role and Place of Women in Society, the ANC and the Struggle

The question of the oppression of women is more often than not seen by both male and female components of society as a question of secondary importance within the whole issue of oppression. Due to various objective factors it is in reality a very small percentage of both male and female revolutionaries who correctly interpret the struggle of women and place it in its correct perspective. One of the primary tasks of our movement as the vanguard of the liberation struggle in South Africa is to ensure that every member of our movement understands the role of the emancipation of women in the struggle for National Liberation correctly and are able not so much to eloquently preach about it but to interpret its meaning in practice and in everyday life.

It is essential that the question of the oppression of women, not only in South Africa, but the world over is a product of the history of the development of societies. It emerged with the birth of division of labour as well as the introduction of private property and the division of society into classes. In its context, it was an inevitable stage in the history of humankind.

On the other hand the struggle for the emancipation of women as a specific struggle was just as inevitable as the revolt of slaves during the slave period and the independence struggles of the colonial nations. In concrete words: the struggle for the emancipation of women is nothing else but the struggle of the oppressed. In our case it is intertwined with the struggle for national liberation. This introduction of our contribution is deliberately stressing on the importance of our correct understanding of the question of the struggle of women because that is the only way to guarantee a strong base for more positive contribution of our cadres as individuals and as a collective towards our struggle

for liberation. Its correct understanding is one step and the implementation is another and more difficult one. Our task is to do everything possible to make reality the words of comrade O.R. Tambo when he made a call to move from revolutionary declaration to revolutionary practice. We believe that this is the greatest challenge before us not only in relation to the struggle for women but in all aspects of our liberation process.

Our contribution is based on the policy of our movement on the question of women as summarised in the message of our President, Comrade Oliver Tambo at the beginning of the ANC Women's Year, 1984, in the following words:

"It will be our special task this year to organise and mobilise our womenfolk into a powerful united and active force for revolutionary change. This task falls on men and women alike – all of us, together as comrades in the struggle. We wish to stress the need at the present hour, for the emergence on the political scene of a women's movement that is politically and organisationally united. Our struggle needs and demands this potentially might force..."

Our struggle would be less than powerful and our national and social emancipation could never be complete if we continue to treat the women of our country as dependent minors and objects of one form of exploitation or another. Certainly, no longer should it be that a woman's place is in the kitchen. In our beleaguered country the women's place is in the battle-front of struggle."

Comrades, the history of the struggle of our women at home is a familiar topic to the majority of us. However, the participation of our women in the struggle for liberation, the history of the birth and development of the female section of society, which roughly accounts for 50%

of the total population could never be repeated enough.

Women's participation in the struggle for national liberation has played an important role in strengthening all campaigns of the ANC since its early existence, hence the formation of the ANC Women's League in 1948. In 1954, women of all races came together and formed the Fedsaw Women's League; and fought back the regime's announcement in 1955 that they would issue African women with passes in the whole of South Africa.

Keeping our tradition, women organised the mammoth demonstration of 20,000 women on August 9th, 1956 at the Union Building like in Mangaung in 1913 and in other campaigns against passes in the form of permits which took place before 1956, the regime refused to meet these demands.

Our women, organised the ANC Women's League and the Fedsaw fully participated in the Congress of the People at Kliptown on June 26, 1955.

In the 1956-61 Treason Trial, among the hundred and fifty six (156) leaders accused 19 were women. Women also played a very significant role in looking after the Treason Trialists at all times organising food and transport during the period.

However, this participation was to grow with the development of time. The repression as affected black people in the country was more pronounced on the women. Thus the need for women to escalate their fight for total liberation for a non-racial country which would at the same time open more opportunities for the emancipation of women.

Today, the main objective of the different sectors of the oppressed society in our country is the liberation of our motherland. All the other struggles like the one of the workers and of the women, are subordinated to the main struggle - the liberation of our people without undermining the importance of these struggles. This step shows the level of development at which our struggle is and imposes upon us greater challenges in order to live up to the expectations of the demands of history on our part today.

The women's organisations, even the smallest women's gatherings at community level have been turned into a platform for political activity. There are more women's groups than at any other time in our history which have been formed as a result of the intensifying political

struggle in the country. Women have moved a hundred steps from the role of looking after the male participants in the revolutionary process to stage of active mass participation. The struggle of women has ceased to be the question of women's organisation alone just as the women's organisations no longer concern themselves with the struggle of women only. This struggle has reached such a level that it has become just as normal for a trade union with overwhelming male membership to discuss the issue of paid maternity leave for women just as it is for a woman's organisation to discuss the issue of the release of political prisoners or the so-called elections.

The Women's Section is an integral part of our movement charged with the special task of organising women for the struggle. It mobilises South African women to participate in the struggle and the international community, in particular, the women of the world to support our struggle. It is an arm of our movement dealing with 50% of our population.

One of its major practical tasks is the political informal education, of our women, recruiting the women into the ANC and MK. In these tasks we coordinate with other departments involved in the same tasks.

Various problems have been encountered in prosecuting some of our tasks e.g. in the field of education, health of our women and internal mobilisation, on the question of coordinating with the various departments. We hope the conference will solve these problems.

Some of our experiences have shown that there are still traditional, conservative and primitive constraints imposed on women by man-dominated structures within our movement. Our movement has the task, as a vanguard of the liberation struggle of minimising these constraints as much as possible. Our movement has to seriously address itself to the women's question.

While we appreciate the advances made by the movement in an effort to give the question of women the seriousness it deserves as proved by the declaration of 1984 as the Year of the Women and other contributions, it is just as important to raise issues that should constitute the next challenge to us.

We shall have to draft **now** a Bill for Women so that women know what they are fighting for.

"The Bill of Rights should contain our immediate tasks and our aims which are to remove all traditional, conventional and statutory dis-

crimination against women.

Our task is to prepare men and women for equality; this means that we must fight against male chauvinism, male domination, we must do away with male domination in the home, village, town, factory, workshop, in politics, economics and religion. In particular, we must fight domination even within our movement. No society is free if women are not free."

The struggle for the emancipation of women should be, in practice the task of us all. It should no longer be that the Women's Section is considered as a body that just discusses and attends to women's affairs. This tendency belittles the contribution of the Women's Section in the work of our movement. The problems of the movement tend to be divided into "the problems of the women" and "our problem" or the "decisions of the women" and "our decisions". It might not be so apparent to all of us, but this problem has had very serious negative effects on our work as an organisation. It is just as important to pull along the less developed female sector of our society as it is with other sections because if this is not done, the enemy will pull them to its side. On the other hand the women have the greater task of refusing to remain behind.

In our situation, a Women's movement is as decisive as the imperativeness of a working class movement. Recent struggles and campaigns which we will mention more specifically later have proved that women are a very powerful force once proper ground has been laid and mobilisation has been done.

In the long history of the existence of our National Liberation Movement alongside it has been the existence of women's organisations such as the Bantu Women's League, later the ANC Women's League and then the Federation of South African Women. The aims and objectives of these organisations has been to carry out the programmes, and support the campaigns organised by the African National Congress. In 1955, the National Executive Committee of the ANC highlighted the importance of the role of women in the liberation struggle, the importance of their emancipation for the achievement of true democracy and the need to mobilise them by means of special political work. The 1955 Annual National Conference declared: "*... our women are proving themselves brave and undaunted politicians. Yet the women need special attention and training to assist them to*

become leaders of the people. The Women's League is much more than just an auxiliary to the ANC, and we know that we cannot win liberation or build a strong movement without the participation of women. The movement should create conditions that make it possible for women to play their role in the movement on an equal footing with men and help to emancipate them in the home, even relieving them of their many family and household burdens so that they be given an opportunity of being politically active. The men in the Congress Movement must fight constantly in every possible way those outmoded customs which make women inferior and by personal example must demonstrate their understanding of the equality of all human beings; of both sexes..."

Internal Mobilisation

The question of internal mobilisation of our women has always been one of our major concerns. As reflected in the duties of the Women's Section both in the old and the new structure presented to the Women's Section Council meeting of 1983, the Women's Section has time and again raised serious concern over our work in this field. In the Luanda Conference of 1981, our assessment then was that most of our work and energy has been concentrated towards international mobilisation. This was at the time of the Revolutionary Council in which we only served as a servicing machinery and we were not directly involved in the mobilisation and organisation of women inside our country. Since the setting up of the new structure by our leadership, the Women's Section has direct representation in the Political Headquarters. A sub-committee of Women's Secretariat liaises with the PHQ.

Since 1978 we have seen the revival of the women's movement inside the country. 1984, declared by our movement as the Year of the Women witnessed the mushrooming of new grass-roots organisations and the strengthening of the existing ones. This was in response to the call made at the beginning of the year by the President, of building a strong Women's Movement for revolutionary change. The movement called on women to "*Rise, Mobilise, Organise and Unite for People's Power*". Organisations have been set up even in some rural and bantustans areas. But what still remains is the formation of a national body to unite the different women's organisations and groups.

Among the organisations inside the country we shall mention a few prominent women's organisations and groups: the United Women's Organisation and the Federation still remain the major women's organisations. We view these two organisations as having a political perspective as their policy and objectives are for national liberation. Both organisations are playing a very important role in the mobilisation of women into active struggle.

The United Women's Organisation is a multi-racial organisation formed in 1978. Since then it has developed to encompass eighteen branches throughout the Western Cape. It is the main organising force in the Western Cape and continues to be strong. Mama Zihlangu, chair person of UWO and a stalwart of the women's movement said that the organisation has targetted itself to the strength of the Federation of the 50's. In the Cape Province several women's groups exist with UWO as the major organisation. The Women's Front came up around the same period of the formation of UWO. It was intimately known as the Federation, the Fed. The front is affiliated to the UDF. Due to certain problems the two organisations in the Western Cape have failed to unite in their struggle. Only the formation of a National Women's Movement will solve the problem. It is here where both organisations will be able to work together under one umbrella. It must be noted that these divisions have hampered a lot of work. Other organisations that exist in the Cape are: the East London United Women's Organisation, the Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation, the Border Region Women's Association and the Uitenhage Women's Organisation.

In the Transvaal the major organisation existing is the Federation which came up around 1978/79 referred to as the Women's Federation of South Africa and not as the Federation of South African Women (name of the 50's). But of late it is referred to as the Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw). This has posed a lot of problems as according to our view it is not operating like the Federation of the 50's. It does not have organisers from other provinces affiliated to it. It operates in the Transvaal and, to be specific, before the foundation of Fedtraw it was based around the Reef. Since the Hammanskraal meeting at the end of 1983, a number of women's organisations have since mushroomed in the Transvaal e.g. the Vaal Women's Organisation (VOW) Molapo Women's Group (Soweto), Thulamashe House Wives

League in the Mhlala District, Acornhoek (North Eastern Transvaal), Pfunanani Women's Group in Nkowa-Nkowa, (Tzaneen), Lenasia Women's Group, Jodac Women's Section (white women) Azapo Women's Section (in black campuses) Nusas Women, Lenz Women's group, Eldorado Women's group, Soweto Women's group, Manyana Women (in Kagiso) Newclare Women's group, Westbury Women's group, Women's Cultural Association, Laudium Women's League, Tembisa Women's group, Celukadaal Women's League, University of the North Women's Club, Pietersburg Women's group, etc.

A provincial body called Federation of Transvaal Women was founded in December 1984. At the founding conference 20 women's groups from all over the Transvaal attended. Since the Hammanskraal meeting the Federation has seriously addressed itself to the various issues affecting women which include forced removals, lack of child care facilities, education, high cost of living, high rentals, marking of August 9th March 8th, etc. The Women's Charter has been adopted by the voice of women from all walks of life.

In the Transvaal there seem to be no problem of working together as seen in the formation of Fedtraw. Women's organisations and groups in the Transvaal work very close with civic, youth, workers' organisation and other democratic organisations. They are members of the UDF. Most of the organisations in the Transvaal started as project groups, but as time went on they brought up high militant fighters of such calibre as could be involved in bringing about the situation of mass upsurge in Sebokeng and other areas, which presently has instilled fear and panic in the ranks of the enemy which has brought the army into the townships.

Since 1980, August 9th has been observed on a massive scale throughout the country. In 1983 committees in Natal organised August 9th rallies. The Durban women's organisation later named, the Natal Women's Organisation was formed. There is still room for improvement to bring it to the level reached by the Transvaal and Cape Women's organisations.

The Orange Free State has unfortunately not been sufficiently organised by the movement in general and particularly when it comes to women. The activities of the movement and Umkhonto we Sizwe have been mainly concentrated in the Transvaal, Natal and the Cape thereby assisting in raising political consciousness in these provinces to the exclusion of the

OFS. In this province, Women's mobilisation is still very rudimentary. There is some women's activity in Manguaung (Bloemfontein) and Onverwacht resettlement camp. Much work still has to be done to raise the OFS to the level of the other provinces.

The Black Sash is one of the oldest liberal white women's organisations in South Africa. The Black Sash advocates political neutrality; it is affiliated to no Party and it is against none (at least formally). However, the organisation has been and is doing a lot of work exposing the evils of the apartheid system.

Recently though, because of the stepped up repression of the racists against its opponents, the Black Sash has become increasingly political. Some of its branches have even affiliated to the UDF.

Their magazine carries a lot of excellent articles on various political questions; the illegal occupation of Namibia, the end of conscription campaign, imposition of pass laws and forced removals. The Black Sash gives legal aid and humanitarian assistance to the victims of repression. Other organisations are: National Council of Women, Professional and Business Women's Association, Kontak, Inkatha Women's Brigade, Black House Wives League, Women for Peace, etc.

Presently there are three domestic workers organisations in Durban, Cape Town and the Transvaal. In 1983, these organisations came together and submitted their demands to the racist Department of Manpower. There is a dire need to mobilise these women taking into account also the potential they have in underground work.

Historically, women have played a significant role in Trade Unions. This pattern continues to date. Our women play a leading role in most food and textile unions like the AFCWU, FCWU, the Allied Workers Union and others. Through struggles waged by unions, they have won major victories of paid maternity leave, higher wages, equal pay for equal work and other victories. On our part as a Women's Section, we share the mobilisation of women in the trade union movement with SACTU as a specialised body for the organisation of workers.

Women in rural areas face the most difficult situation and bear the brunt of hardships in our country. The Movement has now and again expressed concern over the mobilisation of the rural population. Recently, we have seen the

emergence of women's self-help groups which are project oriented and concerned with welfare in these areas. We need to practically address ourselves to the concerns of the people in the rural areas as we do with the concerns of people in the urban areas to stir them into action on their bread and butter issues. Mobilisation can be done rallying women on questions of forced removals, poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, lack of health and educational facilities, the question of land, etc.

The mobilisation of rural women is made particularly difficult by the high rate of illiteracy. We should be vigilant and guard against reactionary forces stealing the show by including such ideas as 'appropriate technology' which in Africa and other developing countries drives a wedge between the urban and rural women. Rural women are divided materially from the urban and this renders united action difficult.

Women on a nationwide scale need to coordinate their activities and form a front against apartheid oppression and exploitation. In 1984 a call for such a front was made when the year was declared the Year of the Women. The practical situation on the ground has made it not possible to create such a front at the time of the call. There still remains much spade work to be done. Various efforts are underway to bring together all women's groups and organisations. A revised version of the Women's Charter of 1954 will be put forth as a guiding document. A national women's committee charged with the launching of such a federation has been formed by the women inside the country.

The task of establishing grassroots women's organisations and groups is still continuing to lay a firm base for a national women's federation.

Executing the above task has not been an easy task taking into account the political climate in our region and the offensive of the regime on our allies. The need to consolidate the Women's Section within the ANC politically and numerically becomes a decisive factor in fulfilling the greater responsibilities lying ahead of us.

It is important at this stage before we come to recommendations to put forth some of the obstacles that have confronted us in our work as a Women's Section. Many of our problems are basically the same as many of the problems that confront our organisation.

One can note with pride that the Women's Section in the ANC is an organised organ of the movement that has endeavoured to carry out its

tasks and remains solid as an organised body. In spite of that there are many obstacles that hamper the proper functioning of our body in carrying out its programmes.

Recently time has not made it possible for regular political discussion at women's meetings. Every year the Women's Section is offered two places in Cuba in a political education school run by the Cuban Women's Federation.

There is also a six week course on leadership training in Bulgaria. The army also has on occasions sent a number of women to party school. The basic problem here is lack of intensive political education on our own politics which renders party school programmes too academic.

* Recommendations made by representative meetings of the Women's Section have taken too long to be approved, sometimes never approved.

* Relationship at departmental and administrative levels has tended to underestimate the work of the Women's Section. One would expect at this level a politically matured understanding of the role of women in our struggle.

* Lack of proper and coordinated administrative facilities has caused inefficiency and disorganisation not only in our section but with all of us. And of course the tendency has been to sit on such problems and not solve them. The issue here again would be - who must organise such facilities?

* Planning of logistical needs has been unsatisfactory. It has varied from two extremes; shortages of essential items and abundance of non-priorities including the buying of some items not because of their value but availability. Logistical frustration has a lot to do with our political morality and should not be allowed to consume our precious time. Planning is the key in this regard.

* The ever-growing demands of our struggle are imposing more and more tasks on our shoulders, more personnel is being required. This does not only relate to the women but to all our organs. We need to be more systematic in our work and coordinate a lot more than in the past.

In conclusion, it would be quite in order at this stage to make some more general recommendations which will be subject to our discussion and improvement. Out of that discussion more recommendations on the specific questions raised will be made.

We need to build a core of women cadres from the existing women membership which we can rely on in giving political direction. This

would also imply recruitment of more women into the ANC and the ranks of MK. Recruitment of women into the movement will also be a prerequisite for a strong front in mobilising and engaging women in the struggle. We must acknowledge the fact that more women in the ANC will help improve our work.

More than half of the VOW produced has not been distributed. Publications have been piling up in the front areas and are never channelled home. Perhaps we will need to review our methods in producing publications for internal consumption. We recommend that the movement gives serious consideration to the production of our publications inside the country. We further recommend that elderly and experienced women be deployed in the front areas to deal with people from inside the country who come to consult the movement. Both young and old are required in these areas to fit the demands of any situation that arises in handling people from home.

For the proper execution of all tasks which lie ahead of us, it is necessary that from now on, regular consultation between organs of the movement be done especially in areas where offices and departments are located in a single locality. A constant review of our achievements and problems in executing the decisions of conference will have to be taken more seriously than at any other period in our history. The day of victory is in sight. When we seize that power we must be able to maintain it. Let us prove the colonisers wrong that we cannot run our lives now.

AMANDLA!

MAATLA!

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE

