



---

'We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward': ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982

Author(s): Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter

Source: *Feminist Review*, No. 12 (1982), pp. 11-35

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1394879>

Accessed: 30-07-2019 17:18 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Sage Publications, Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to  
*Feminist Review*

# **'We opened the road for you, you must go forward' ANC Women's Struggles, 1912-1982**

*Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter*

## **Introduction**

The oppressed peoples of South Africa have an outstanding record of courageous struggle and sacrifice, and a striking role has been played by women of all races, African, Coloured, Indian, as well as a small number of progressive whites. The activities of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) form a major part of this history. To commemorate the struggles of the ANC, which is currently celebrating its seventieth anniversary, this article will attempt to situate the history of the ANC women's organisations within the context of a discussion of the relationship between women's emancipation and national liberation. By examining the theory and practice of the movement over seventy years, we will try to demonstrate how this relationship has been seen by the South African liberation movement.

We believe that women in struggle in different parts of the world have a lot to learn from each other. We have been perturbed recently by the way in which Western feminists tend to see, and are in turn, seen by, national liberation movements. It is pertinent to examine what lies behind the notion of 'women's emancipation', and we have felt it necessary to preface our historical analysis with a more general discussion of the connection between feminism and national liberation struggles.

Immediately it has to be said that the question cannot be answered in the abstract. Both 'feminism' and 'national liberation' are terms employed in widely different contexts. In the first section of the article we clarify what we understand by 'Western feminism'; point to some perceptions of feminism from within southern African liberation movements; and draw out some criticisms of the Western feminist international perspective which can assist us in going forward to create a more meaningful basis for dialogue and solidarity. In the second section, we present some background information about the political economy of the country. In the third section we look at the ANC as a national liberation movement, the conditions from which its members have sought to liberate themselves, and what meaning has been given to the fight for women's emancipation.

## **Western Feminism and National Liberation**

'Western feminism' does not represent a homogenous set of ideological positions.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to the image presented by a generally hostile popular press, it is a term used very loosely to cover very different tendencies within the women's movement. In this article we are referring primarily to what might be called socialist feminism. That is, a feminism espoused by women who realise that women's emancipation is not fully realisable within the capitalist system, and who see their main allies as the left progressive forces in their countries. Such women might argue, for example, that even though certain very important material and ideological gains are possible under capitalism, such as health advances, housing, childcare facilities and education, these will never be secure gains as long as they are liable to be undermined by the repeated economic crises endemic to capitalism. They also would recognise the existence of difference class interests in society, and see the need to orient problems and goals towards the needs and possibilities of the oppressed and exploited sections of society, the working class and ethnic minorities. In conventional political terms this sort of feminism is a long way from other positions, such as radical separatist feminism, for example, which regards men as the main enemy of all women. Within the broad sweep of the women's movement, however, these different tendencies, along with many others, have worked together on areas of common concern, such as the struggle for contraception and abortion rights and the fight for equal pay.

This combination of different political orientations within the Western women's movement, although baffling to observers from elsewhere in the world, and sometimes said by 'sympathetic critics' to be responsible for the bad press received by 'Women's Lib', stems from more than a strategic unity. For western feminist analysis of the last twenty years has taken several steps away from the classical progressive tradition on women's emancipation. This tradition was primarily influenced by Frederich Engels' work *The Origins of the Family* which asserted that women's oppression was a problem of history and not a consequence of biology. Engels suggested that women's subordination was determined by the form of the family, which in turn was to be related to the level of development of the mode of production and class struggle. This analysis has provided the guiding light of socialist analysis of women's oppression for a hundred years (Engels, 1972; Delmar, 1976). In the conditions of full employment, mass consumption, the nuclear family and state welfare that characterised the post-war boom of western capitalism, a new strand in feminism pressed harder to explore the manifold characteristics of women's subordination and marginalisation. Rejecting the notion that all aspects of women's oppression were derived from exploitative class relations, arguments were made for the specificity of women's oppression, linked to their reproductive role and the sexual division of labour. Using the insights of studies in ideology and psychology the new feminists probed the hidden areas of the nuclear family, relations between the sexes and the institution of marriage. They exposed the role of family law, welfare statutes and even male trade union practices in reinforcing the crippling structure of a male breadwinner earning a family wage while a dependent wife earns 'pin money'. They focussed on sexual repression and raised demands for the rights of homosexuals and for free sexual expression outside marriage. Most importantly, perhaps, they insisted on the right of women to organise themselves and have a degree of autonomy in policy formation on areas directly affecting women (Molyneux, 1981: 11-12). In the conditions of western democracy activity on all these fronts has consistently involved the fight for legal reforms and recourse to ideological campaigns.

Women of the ex-colonial world have seen much of the substance of these struggles as irrelevant to them. Women struggling to liberate themselves from the burden of oppression by imperialism — a burden which manifests itself in extreme ways through poverty, disease, genocide — appear to find little point of comparison between their own goals and the concerns of Western women.<sup>2</sup> For them, Western women represent a privileged middle class elite fighting for sectarian aims, while

women in national liberation struggles are fighting on behalf of their whole people. This point is well illustrated in a moderate, but firm statement of the differences between the two struggles by Mavis Nhlapo, representative of the ANC women's secretariat:

Our women have never accepted the conception of legalistic and social reforms and demands. In our society women have never made a call for the recognition of their rights as women, but always put the aspirations of the whole African and other oppressed people of our country first (SED Committee, 1979: 241).

At times, the rejection of what is perceived as Western feminism can take the form of a denunciation. For example, Samora Machel, President of the People's Republic of Mozambique, justly famous for his claim that:

The emancipation of women is not an act of charity . . . The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the preconditions for its victory (Machel, 1974: 24).

In the same speech, to the founding conference of the Organisation of Mozambican Women, in 1973, he made the following allusion to Western feminism:

There are those who see emancipation as mechanical equality between men and women. This vulgar concept is often seen among us. Here emancipation means that women and men do exactly the same tasks, mechanically dividing the household duties. 'If I wash the dishes today, you must wash them tomorrow, whether or not you are busy or have the time'. If there are still no women truck drivers or tractor drivers in FRELIMO, we must have some right away regardless of the objective and subjective conditions. As we can see from the example of the capitalist countries, this mechanically conceived emancipation leads to complaints and attitudes which utterly distort the meaning of women's emancipation. An emancipated woman is one who drinks, smokes, wears trousers, and mini skirts, who indulges in sexual promiscuity, who refuses to have children. (Machel, 1974: 30)

This statement represents on the one hand a clear rejection of Western cultural imperialism. It is also a statement of the necessity for Mozambican people to relate the demands for women's emancipation to the actual conditions in society and the level of political struggle. At the same time, by reproducing a stereotype of the Western 'emancipated woman', Machel is making it possible for any Mozambican woman who smokes, for example, and who might defend herself on the grounds that 'you Mozambican men smoke too', to be accused of the reproduction of cultural imperialism in a way that does not apparently implicate Mozambican men. The source of male promiscuity, for example, is here not open to question.<sup>3</sup>

We quote Machel's comments here, not in order to attack or endorse them, but simply in order to draw attention to the complexity of establishing a relationship between women's emancipation and national liberation. It is clear from several quarters that women in national liberation movements acknowledge the justness of the Western women's cause, and recognise the gains they have made (Ford, 1979; Mambo Cafe, 1982). But it is important to observe that these women may not necessarily identify with either all the substantive goals or with the strategies and tactics pursued by the Western women's movements. A good example of such a difference arises over the family. Whereas women in the West have identified the family as a site of women's oppression, women in South Africa point to the destruction of 'normal family life' as one of the most grievous crimes of apartheid.

If women in the third world have tended to deny an easy identification with the

feminist movement in the West, the converse is far from true. Socialist feminists have recently begun to look with great interest at the experience of women in the developed socialist countries (Heitlinger, 1979; Jancar, 1978; Lapidus, 1975). Developments arising out of successful liberation struggles in Cuba, China and Vietnam have, if anything however, captured their imagination more strongly. The capacity of the PAIGC, FRELIMO, the Viet Minh, to draw women in a revolutionary new way into the main struggle, both into political and military participation, deeply impressed many Western women. Hoping for so much from these liberation struggles many women in the West gave them positive support through solidarity organisations. Some began to coin the slogans: 'No national liberation without women's liberation; no women's liberation without national liberation.' They saw the symbol of the woman fighter as bound to have an effect on the rest of society, and to generate an awareness of the contradictions based on gender divisions. A considerable literature emerged, full of enthusiasm and optimism as to the possibilities for social revolution on the woman question (Rowbotham, 1972; Eisen-Bergman, 1974; Urdang, 1979).

Yet of late this optimism seems to have been replaced by a sense of grave disillusion, a vague sense of betrayal. The practical consequences of this range from a failure to comprehend the priorities of women in a national liberation struggle, to an absence of response to their concrete demands for solidarity. At its worst this can take the form of making support for such movements *conditional* on the degree to which they raise questions regarding the position of women in a way which is recognisable and acceptable to Western women's movements.<sup>4</sup> This bitter disillusion appears, as the other side of the same coin of the high aspirations of earlier years. They both seem to stem from a failure to engage with the actual conditions of the women, and an unwillingness to appreciate the general politics of the liberation movements.

One effect of this distance is that Western women cannot hear what third world women are saying. Thus, for example, when South African women clearly assert that 'Our struggle is not a women's struggle'; 'the enemy is not male chauvinism', they are making two important points. Firstly, they do not want to fight for mere equality with their men, since black men are themselves still subject to all the oppressive and exploitative legislation of the apartheid system. Secondly, they want to maintain the discipline of their political movement. The ANC is a united democratic movement, which accepts within its ranks communists and liberals, atheists and believers of all faiths, workers and petty bourgeoisie, white and black, men and women. As in any nationalist movement there is a continuing struggle over the political line to be adopted. But at no point does the main objective, the maintenance of principled unity in action, permit the public discussion of the problems involved in reconciling the differences of interest. Yet to the perceptive ear of the Western feminist these spokewomen of the national liberation struggle bear testimony in their own lives to the contradictions of their position. Some may have suffered enormous privations, such as choosing between motherhood and political duty. Yet their tremendous loyalty to the movement, the strength of their commitment to the necessity of unity in action at this phase of the struggle, makes it impossible for them to relate to the ways in which women in the West might distinguish between the interests of men and women. It is vital to identify women with the national struggle:

In our country white racism and apartheid coupled with economic exploitation have degraded the African woman more than any male prejudices. The contradictions that occur between sexes in any capitalist country are veiled by the hatred both sexes have for the regime. A community of interests springs up and this is one aspect in which the fascists have failed to apply their policy of divide and rule. The women have realised that the national liberation struggle is an important part of their social emancipation (M. Nhlapo, SED, 1979: 241).

We would like in this paper to suggest a way to deepen Western feminists' understanding of the character of the struggle in which South African women are involved. If we start from the position that only women are able to defend on a large scale, and in any significant way, their own emancipation, the point that arises is, what are the conditions necessary for women to organise themselves and defend their interests, as they define them, in relation to the broader struggles in their society? This is a very broad question, which encompasses discussion of economic, social, political and ideological issues. In this paper, we limit ourselves to asking the question in a more specific form so as to enable us to assess the history of a particular liberation movement. The questions we pose below of the South African liberation struggle are:

- i what has been the specific angle from which women have approached the liberation struggle?
- ii to what extent does the movement create conditions for the women to take the initiative in contributing to that struggle and in incorporating their own specific needs into the general programme of that movement?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to locate the different phases of the liberation struggle in South Africa. That the ANC is seventy years old this year is testimony both to the fact that the struggle has been long and hard, but also to the stamina and versatility of the movement. The face of the ANC has changed dramatically over the last seven decades, in terms of the tasks it has set itself, the forces it has mobilised, and its racial, sexual and class composition. We would suggest, as Madoerin and Kruks have done for Mozambique, that it has been primarily the way in which the overall struggle has been conceived which has determined the way in which the ANC has mobilised women and responded to their activity outside its own ranks. (Madoerin & Kruks nd).

## **Background to the political economy of South Africa, 1912-82**

Before surveying the history of the ANC and its various women's organisations we will briefly sketch the main features of the political economy of South Africa in the period 1912-82, and attempt to locate the material position of African women within this.

In 1910 the Union of South Africa was formed bringing together under a single legislature the four areas of the Cape, Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. At the 'national' convention which laid the basis for union no black South Africans were represented. The denial of the franchise to the black majority in South Africa has remained, to the present, a feature of the South African political system.

At the beginning of the century the South African economy was chiefly based on agriculture. However the mineral revolution at the end of the 19th century had led to the establishment of diamond and gold mines, financed by foreign capital and largely worked by black male migrant labourers. Migrant workers were controlled by the pass system. Each worker was issued with a pass which indicated where he lived and for whom he worked. The issue of passes, designated the influx control system, was designed to reduce the number of Africans resident in towns, and to direct the labour of those who did have residence rights. In this it was never totally successful and settled black populations grew up on the fringes of South Africa's cities.

Early South African legislation not only denied the vote to all but a handful of Africans, it also enforced the colour bar which prohibited Africans from taking skilled jobs on the mines and in industry, and segregated housing and education. In addition, the 1913 Land Act expelled African share croppers from white farms and decreed that Africans could only remain on that land as labourers and could only own land within

specified areas.

Political and economic segregation of the races within South Africa had thus existed for many decades before the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948. Their policies of apartheid entailed an elimination of the anomalies that had grown up in previous decades, a tightening up of the legislation on segregation, and the introduction of a more repressive state machinery. Thus influx control was more strictly enforced, pass laws were extended to women, the tiny reserves were decreed the 'homelands' of the African people and offered a spurious form of self government.

The inauguration of apartheid was also the period of the expansion of South African industry, investment in manufacturing, and the development of national capitalist interests. This trend has continued to the present. In the last decade, when the South African regime has felt itself under attack both from beyond its borders, and from popular discontent inside the country, the military has emerged as an important political force, and arms manufacture as a small, but significant sector of the economy. The election of the Reagan administration in the USA and the Thatcher administration in Britain brought South Africa important international allies and apparent licence for her military excursions beyond her borders.

The material position of women within the political economy of South Africa cannot be generalised across the races. African, Coloured, Indian and White women all have their own particular histories, patterns of settlement and employment, regulated by apartheid. In this article we are referring almost exclusively to the African women, who have occupied a particular position in relation to the structures of apartheid and migrant labour.

The ANC has throughout its history drawn its strength from a predominantly urban base. The mainly Christian, educated petty bourgeoisie, which was the cradle of the organisation to 1912, represented a small but significant section of the African population, male and female, living in towns. At the beginning of the century the majority of African women, however, remained on the land of the reserves, while their men were drawn into the migrant labour system.

The creation of a basis for secondary industry in the late 1930s and 1940s coincided with a manifest decline in the capacity of the African reserves to support their population. This led to mass migration to the towns, and for the first time the emergence of a small black female proletariat. African women worked mainly in domestic service and in light manufacturing, especially the textile, garment and food processing industries. The new proletariat of the 1940s formed a settled urban population, which was to become the nucleus of the mass campaigns of the following decade. Simultaneously, alongside those who were formally employed, a thriving informal sector developed, dominated by women who brewed beer and undertook other forms of commodity production. Hundreds of thousands of African women, however, remained on the land, under severe conditions of exploitation, either in semi-servile bondage to white farmers, or in the impoverished reserves.

Since the 1960s, the focus of apartheid policy has been the creation of Bantustans out of the reserves, and the establishment of decentralised border industries. Women have begun to emerge as labour migrants, living in hostels. At the other end of the spectrum there has been a small growth in the number of women trained in teaching, nursing, social work and office skills. To date however the largest numbers of African women are those employed as domestic servants (Simons, 1968; Gaitskell et al., 1981).

## **History of Women in The ANC**

Resistance in South Africa since the formation of the ANC can be divided roughly into



IDAF

*Women in the Transkei bantustan eke out a living for their families. Their main income is the wages of migrant labourers.*

four periods. Between 1912 and 1939, there were attempts by several different organisations to take up the challenge posed by segregation. In 1912 the ANC was founded; in 1921 the Communist Party of South Africa was formed; in 1924 the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union began. The ICU had collapsed within a decade. The CPSA initially supported white workers while struggling to come to grips with a racially divided society. It ultimately adopted the position that the oppression of the national majority was the central issue (Harmel, 1972: 221-2). The whole period was characterised by a juggling of positions and perspectives by different organisations; no one movement could be said to have gained a position of dominance.

The 1940s was a period of challenge and revival, both organisationally and ideologically. It culminated in the third period, the 1950s, when an alliance of forces under the clear hegemony of the ANC began to form a national liberation movement. Both the 1940s and 1950s were characterised by intensive working class activity, and the development of militant unions, both black and white, male and female.

The 1960s saw a drastic reversal of the mass movement associated with the ANC, the bannings of the organisation and its allies, and the turn to armed struggle. It was a time of disarray, when the prisons of South Africa were filled with thousands of men and women militants.

In the 1970s there was once again a dramatic upturn in the struggle. The ANC, with its military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe, emerged as the leading force in the liberation movement. The three main tasks of the struggle in the current phase are the intensification of mass popular resistance on all fronts inside South Africa; the increasing international isolation of the regime; and an escalation of the armed struggle.

### ***'A National Vigilant Association', 1912 - 39<sup>5</sup>***

In 1912 a conference took place in Bloemfontein attended by Africans from all over South Africa. They had come together to protest that the Union of South Africa had been established as 'a union in which we have no voice in the making of the laws and no part in their administration'. The object of the conference was set out in the keynote address by Pixley ka Seme: to 'devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges' (ANC, 1982). The union formed out of this conference was the ANC. Its constitution provided for an upper house of chiefs, a lower house where elected representatives of Congress would meet annually in conference and an executive committee. Three types of membership were laid down: ordinary membership, which was open to all men over eighteen 'of the Aboriginal races'; honorary membership for those who had helped the African people; and auxiliary membership for women. Auxiliary membership denied women the vote in the Congress conference. (Walshe, 1970: 206)

Women members of the ANC were organised in the Bantu Women's League, which had been founded by Charlotte Maxeke, a young South African teacher who had graduated from Wilberforce College in Ohio (Xuma, 1930; Mweli Skota, 1932). The impetus for the founding of the League seems to have come from the militancy of women in the Orange Free State who were opposing an obligation placed on them by the Orange Free State municipalities that they carry passes (Wells, 1980; Plaatje, 1916; Walshe, 1970: 83-4). In July 1913 a crowd of six hundred women had handed in their passes to the Mayor of Bloemfontein, refusing to carry them in future. Similar demonstrations took place in Jagersfontein, Fauresmith and Winburg. The women were arrested and given sentences of imprisonment and hard labour. Despite the privations they suffered during their stay in prison, they declared they would never buy passes even if they had to return to prison (Plaatje, 1916: 95-6). The women who took part in these early anti-pass demonstrations came from the same background as the men who had formed the ANC.<sup>6</sup> They were educated, Christian and highly articulate. They read the newspapers, identified with the activities of the British suffrage movement and had shouted 'Votes for Women' as one of the slogans at the Bloemfontein demonstration (Wells, 1980). Congress took up their cause, protested to the Prime Minister, and later gave evidence to a commission that recommended the abolition of the Free State municipal pass. Out of this chain of events the Bantu Women's League was founded in 1918.

The ANC's response to the women's demonstrations in the Orange Free State was typical of the general orientation of Congress in this period. Its object was to constitute itself as a national vigilant association, to unite all existing political associations whose aims were 'the promotion and safeguarding of the interests of the aboriginal races' and 'to formulate a standard policy on Native Affairs for the benefit and guidance of the Union Government and Parliament'. Subsidiary aims were the education of parliament on the aspirations of Africans, the encouragement of self help, a uniting of all the tribes and races as one political people and agitation for a removal of the colour bar in politics, education and industry (Karis and Carter 1972: vol. 1, document 23). A great deal of Congress energy and attention was thus directed to sending deputations to the Union government and the Imperial government in London, where they believed a

spirit of greater fairness to Africans might prevail, and to giving evidence to commissions in an attempt to inform parliament of African views on proposed legislation.

Following this orientation in Congress the Bantu Women's League played a similar role. Thus in 1920 the Zoutpansberg branch of the Bantu Women's League wrote to the Minister of Native Affairs condemning the practice of local farmers who employed women to load heavy timber (SNA, 1920). In 1918 Charlotte Maxeke had given evidence to the Moffatt commission on the indignities women suffered because they had to carry night passes and undergo health inspections before they went into domestic service (City of Johannesburg Commission, 1918). In its early years the Bantu Women's League, like Congress, appears to have spoken up to defend the rights of women to be treated with propriety, and to be recognised as citizens of the Empire, worthy of respect. Charlotte Maxeke embodied the ideal of the organisation and was extolled by Dr. Xuma of the ANC as setting a high example and as a fit leader of the Bantu Women's League because of her education, her Christian way of life, her high standard of housekeeping and her gentle, kindly nature (Xuma, 1930: 24-7).



IDAF

*The executive of the ANC Women's League, c. 1950, left to right: Mrs Pbarsoe – Treasurer, Mrs Selematsela, Mrs M Pbutbi – Secretary, Mrs G M Masiloane – President of the Women's League, Mrs M D Malapo – Propagandist, Mrs Selbati – Vice President.*

The founders of the ANC believed that their intellectual abilities and civilized way of life would enable them to convince the Union government of the need to enfranchise more Africans, remove the colour bar, and repeal the prohibitions on land usage. In this way they were disappointed. Their deputations were either not received or ignored. The initiative in organising African people shifted in the 1920s from the ANC to the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU), which as a general workers' union which took up the people's day to day problems, enrolled a mass membership.

In 1934 the Hertzog bills were drafted in their final form. These were designed to remove male African voters from the common roll in the Cape, the only province where this limited franchise existed, and consolidated African land holding in the Reserves, which were delineated as only 13% of the total area of the country. These

bills were the greatest legislative attack made on African people since the 1913 Land Act. They were published at a time when African political organisation was in disarray. The ICU, riven by internal dissension, was in decline, and the ANC membership was at a low point. To attempt to formulate a response to the bills and to co-ordinate the opposition an All Africa Convention (AAC) was called in December 1935, which was open to all Africans, whether members of the ANC or not.

The Hertzog bills became law in April 1936. The ineffective and vacillating opposition which the ANC and AAC had been able to mount further weakened both movements. The 1930s were thus a period when the ANC was weak and struggling for survival. Its predominant concern, under the presidency of Pixley ka Seme, was self help, 'Buy African' campaigns and self advancement.

The Bantu Women's League appears to have disintegrated in the 1930s. Some attempts were made to revitalise the women's organisation within the ANC during the decade. At the annual ANC conference in 1933 Minnie Bhola was appointed head organiser of the women's section and the President, Seme, said: 'No national movement can be strong unless the women volunteers come forward and offer their services to the nation' (Umteteli, 6/1/34). There were resolutions on the need to establish local women's committees and Mrs. Bhola declared that women should participate fully in organising Congress (Umteteli, 13/1/34, 24/1/34). Later in the year she was echoed by the ANC general secretary who wrote: 'No people or nation can rise to its legitimate aspirations without the aid of the women' (Umteteli 14/7/34).

The stress on building the women's section seems part of the general concern of the ANC to revitalise itself in this difficult time. The women's committees were seen by both Minnie Bhola and the ANC executive as a means of drawing women into the ANC to further the organisation's aims of national self help.

The extent to which this concern with organising women was seen as central to the opposition to the Hertzog bills is illustrated by this resolution drafted by women delegates to the AAC in 1935 and adopted by the AAC as a whole:

We feel that the time has come for the establishment of an African Council of Women on lines similar to those of the national councils of other races, in order that we may be able to do our share in the advancement of our race (Karis and Carter, 1972: Vol. 2, 38).

But the resolution appears to express a hope rather than a definite programme. In 1936 Xuma was writing that he wanted to build a strong women's section and that he wanted to meet women in Bloemfontein who might help (Xuma, 1936). This suggests that the intentions of the AAC and the organisation established by Minnie Bhola were floundering. The limits of the ANC as a 'national vigilant association' appear to have been reached with its failure to mount effective opposition to the Hertzog bills. Despite the attempt to draw women into Congress the organisation could not yet speak to the majority.

### *The Rebuilding of the ANC, 1939-49*

The outbreak of World War Two coincided with a resurgence of ANC activity and an expansion of membership. The reasons for this await adequate historical analysis but some possible contributing factors may have been the following: the decision by the Communist Party of South Africa at a conference in 1939 to build a united front of the Party with the ANC, thus bringing the African working class membership of the Communist Party into the ANC; the development of secondary industry in South Africa partly as a result of the war; the expansion of the black working class, both male and

female, and their engagement in politics through the squatter movement and strikes (Harmel, 1972: 213; Bernstein, 1982).

Against this background Dr. Xumu, then President of the ANC, reoriented ANC policy towards a general condemnation of all aspects of the structure of racial discrimination and further to an enunciation of the doctrines of African nationalism (Walshe, 1970: 262-5). The earlier concern with deputations and self help was replaced with the intention to create a political party that could organise mass support for legislative change and enfranchisement. In 1943 the ANC adopted a new constitution which expressed the aims of the movement as achieving the unity of the African people, the advancement of their interests, an ending of discrimination, and the participation of Africans in the government of South Africa. The organisation's structures of branches, conference and executive were left unchanged, but women were admitted to full individual membership with voting rights and the status of auxiliary membership was abolished (Walshe, 1970: 379-80).

The pressure for this change in attitude to women's participation seems the result partly of Xuma's reformulation of the ANC as a nationalist party open to all and partly from the agitation of women members already active in ANC branches. At a meeting of the Western Province Central branch of the ANC in October 1940 Minnie Bhola had raised the question of the women's section and was supported by several speakers (Inkokeli, Nov. 1940). The question of women's organisations was placed on the agenda for the annual conference in 1940 (Inkokeli, Dec. 1940). Women's activism within ANC branches may be gauged from the list of ANC Western Province office bearers in 1942 which included a woman as assistant organising secretary as well as a women's organiser (Inkokeli, Dec. 1942). The groundwork for the 1943 constitutional change appears to have been laid in a conference resolution of 1941 which declared:

This conference recommends to the parent body the necessity of reviving the women's section of the Congress in terms of the provision of the constitution.

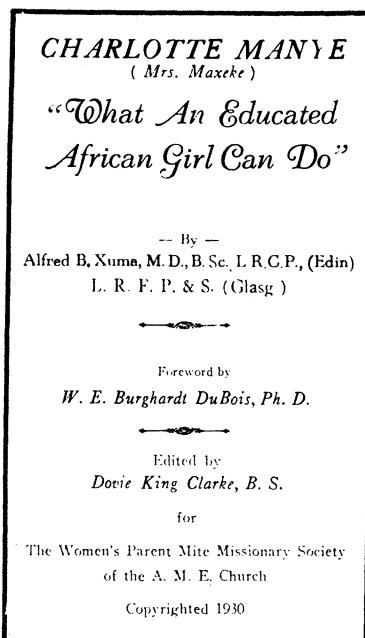
Further that the women be accorded the same status as men in the classification of membership (Inkokeli, Dec. 1941).

Xuma's reforms and the new spirit in the ANC were given direction by the formation of the Congress Youth League in March 1944. The Youth League, in which many of the ANC leaders of the 1950s like Mandela, Sisulu and Tambo, were prominent, stated in its manifesto the need to build Congress from within 'as a national liberation movement'. The Youth League would be an organisation 'where young African men and women will meet and exchange ideas in an atmosphere pervaded by a common hatred of oppression' (Karis and Carter, 1972, Vol.2, 306). In 1948 the Youth League issued a Basic Policy Document which explained its fundamental aim of African nationalism as the creation of a united nation out of the heterogeneous tribes, the freeing of Africa from foreign domination and the creation of conditions which would enable Africa to make her own contribution to human progress and happiness. Europeans should completely abandon their domination, agree to an equitable and proportional division of land and assist in a free people's democracy (ANC, 1982: 39-40). The document concludes:

The historic task of African Nationalism (it has become apparent) is the building of a self-confident and strong African Nation in South Africa. Therefore African Nationalism transcends the narrow limits imposed by any particular sectional organisation. It is all-embracing in the sense that its field is the whole body of African people in this country (ANC, 1982: 41).

In the new formulation of nationalism women were to play their part, particularly in inculcating children with nationalist aspirations and in agitating against oppression

as it manifested itself in the specific areas of child rearing. Dr. Xuma wrote in March 1944 of the need for a strong organisation of Congress women 'through which we may speak'. In the organisation the women would agitate for the abolition of pass laws, better wages and houses and the development of family life (Xuma, 1944). A Youth League meeting in September 1944 included an address by Miss Ncarkeni on 'The part of women in our struggle' (Karis and Carter, 1972: Vol. 2 309). It seems that initially this searching for a new form of women's organisation to express the national liberation struggle did not conceive of women having specific demands apart from those of building the nation for their children.



### *The Era of Mass Political Mobilisation, 1949-60*

In 1949 the initiatives of Xuma and the Youth League were formulated into policy for the ANC, the Programme of Action. This rejected participation in collaborative bodies with the government and demanded mass action, strikes, demonstrations and protests in pursuit of the demands of the national liberation struggle (ANC, 1982:42).

The first campaign launched was the Defiance Campaign of 1952, organised and carried out with the assistance of the Indian Congress. This was a passive resistance campaign in which Congress volunteers broke the laws on segregation and invited arrest to protest at the unjust laws of the country. The campaign, which resulted in 8,000 volunteers jailed, was enormously successful in spreading the views of the ANC and increasing its membership. For example in the Transvaal the ANC branches had a registered membership of four thousand before the Campaign; three months after the Campaign began membership had risen to nineteen thousand (ANC, c. 1970).

The Defiance Campaign was followed by a campaign against Bantu education in 1954, in which parents were urged to withdraw their children from state run schools into ANC alternatives. Because of lack of resources this campaign did not have widespread success.

There followed a further initiative in mass mobilisation in 1955. ANC volunteers organised meetings in townships and factories to formulate a set of demands for a free



IDAF

*Florence Matomela, a delegate from the Eastern Province, addresses the founding conference of the Federation of South African Workers, April 1954. Internationalism and the search for world peace were major themes of the conference.*



IDAF

*Natal Indian Women's delegation arrives at the Congress of the People, Kliptown 1955.*

South Africa and arranging for delegates to be elected to a Congress of the People. On June 26 1955 the Congress of the People, meeting outside Johannesburg, adopted the Freedom Charter, a document based on the popular demands the volunteers had assembled. The Freedom Charter affirmed that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people'. Broadly the demands were that the people should govern; all national groups should have equal rights; the people should share in the country's wealth; the land should be shared among those who work it; all should be equal before the law and enjoy equal human rights; all should be free to join trade unions; workers should have full unemployment benefits and working mothers should have paid maternity leave; education should be free, compulsory and universal; there should be houses, security and comfort; there should be peace and friendship with Africa and the rest of the world. The preamble ended with the observation 'that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief' (ANC, 1982).

On the basis of the Freedom Charter the ANC continued consolidating its branch structure throughout the 1950s and organising on the basis of a commitment to mass struggle. This was done despite the arrest and trial of 156 leaders on charges of treason. Of cardinal importance in the drawing up of the Freedom Charter had been the establishment of the Congress Alliance through which the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation, the Congress of Democrats (with a white membership) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions all endorsed the Freedom Charter. It was this alliance which gave direction to the mass mobilisation of the people in a period of great militancy.

The widespread organisation of the people by the ANC during the 1950s had drawn many women into the ANC (Joseph, 1963: 165-6; Karis & Carter, 1972: vol.4). The ANC Women's League became a thriving organisation with numerous branches. For example in Johannesburg alone in 1958 there were over eleven branches (FSAW, 1958a). The ANC Women's League joined with other women's organisations in 1954 in forming the non-racial Federation of South African Women (FSAW).

In the discussion preceding the founding conference of the FSAW there was considerable debate as to whether the organisation would be based on individual membership or be a federation of existing women's organisations. The ANC Women's League wanted a federation because this would mean no new organisation had been founded to divert away their membership. This line was adopted by the founding conference. It was acknowledged that any organisation which did not have the backing of the ANCWL would have been of limited significance as a national body (Bernstein, 1982).

The FSWAW drafted a women's charter setting out 'what women demand' for the Congress of the People in 1955. The demands included nurseries and child welfare centres, compulsory, free and universal education, proper housing and shopping facilities, subsidisation of essential foods, fair distribution of land, sufficient food for all people, abolition of child labour, proper care for the aged, workers' benefits, the right to vote, equal rights with men in property, marriage and guardianship of children, peace and freedom for children throughout the world (ANC, 1980). As can be seen from the summary of the Freedom Charter above some of these demands were incorporated into its clauses. The spirit of the Women's Charter which stressed equality between the sexes is reflected in the preamble to the Freedom Charter where distinctions between the sexes are one of the areas singled out for change in a free South Africa.

The FSAW, with the ANCWL as the major member, led the resistance of women to passes. Passes for women began to be introduced in 1955. Immediately there were



*A demonstration against the pass laws in the mid 1950s.*

demonstrations throughout the country and these were to go on for four years and involve thousands of women. The greatest demonstration of this campaign took place on August 9th 1956 when twenty thousand women gathered at the Union Buildings in Pretoria to present the Prime Minister with a petition carrying more than a hundred thousand signatures opposing the pass laws (Bernstein, 1975: 45-9; Benson, 1966: 179-188).

The NEC (National Executive Council) of the ANC had formulated the task of the Women's League in 1954 as involving the mass of women in the ANC, seeing that the interests of women were reflected in ANC programmes and that women were participating in 'the nation building tasks in which the principal body of the ANC is engaged' (Karis and Carter 1972: vol. 3,146). At this point the organisation of women followed the lines of general Congress organisation and the role of women was seen primarily as that of nation building. However the following year as the women's anti-pass demonstrations began in earnest Oliver Tambo, on behalf of the NEC addressed the ANC Conference:

The Women's League has grown rapidly . . . Yet the women need special attention and training to assist them to become leaders of the people. The Women's League is not just an auxiliary to the ANC and we know that we cannot win liberation or build a strong movement without the participation of the women. We must therefore make it possible for women to play their part in the liberation movement by regarding them as equals, and helping to emancipate them in the home, even relieving them in their many family and household burdens so that women may 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 belief in the equality of all human beings of both sexes (Karis and Carter, 1972: Vol. 3, 257).

Clearly the political mobilisation of women threw up its own contradictions for women in the household and broadened the area of struggle. The politics of the national movement had itself here begun to acknowledge some of the contradictions

of sexual politics.

Yet these observations aside, the tone of appeals by both the FSAW and the ANC was to women in their traditional roles as mothers and wives. The content of these roles was not questioned. Thus in a statement presented by the FSAW to Native Commissioners in various centres throughout the country on 9 August 1957 in protest at the issue of passes the women declared: 'As wives and mothers we condemn the pass laws and all that they imply' (FSAW, 1957). A letter written by Mrs. S. Sibeko of the ANCWL to the editors of the Johannesburg papers said:

The Government knows that in spite of all kinds of oppression our menfolk are still happy and consoled by their wives and children as soon as they reach the shelters which are their homes. Indeed their wives will go so far as arguing with the police, who are not contented with asking an African for his pass in the street, but will knock loudly on the door at dawn when the poor man is resting.

The pass is the same for a woman. Must an African woman really suffer the same as a man? Must an African man really come home to find his wife has been arrested because she has forgotten to hang her pass around her neck when she went to the shop . . . The government is now working with terrific speed to see that a man will return to his home to find that no fire is burning (FSAW, 1958b).

In a letter issued to white housewives urging them not to force their domestic servants to take out passes the consequences of the pass for women were spelled out – arrest leading to abandonment of children. The question was posed: 'In the name of humanity can you as a woman, as a mother, tolerate this?' (FSAW, 1958c.) This stress on women as mothers and wives was partly an appeal to traditional notions of womanhood because this was how women perceived themselves (Bernstein, 1982). But the appeal to the common experience of South African women of all races in the FSAW was itself a revolutionary stand under the conditions of apartheid.



IDAF

*A woman is arrested for failing to produce her pass, c. 1960. Such incidents were foreseen by the anti-pass demonstrations of the 1950s and made the subject of their speeches and letters.*

Side by side with the invocation of women as mothers also ran a perception of women's immeasurable strength. This may be seen in Mrs. Sibeko's letter quoted above and in the song of the 1956 Union Building demonstration, 'Strijdom, you've tampered with the women, you've knocked against a rock' (FSAW, 1958d). The women saw themselves as the bedrock of the society.

As a result of women's political activism older mores began to be questioned and challenged. In 1959, a year of mass women's action in Natal, Zulu women were present at the ANC conference. For the first time they broke an old taboo on Zulu women speaking in public (Karis & Carter, 1972, vol. 3, 367).

The experience of political action also led to a disagreement with the ANC NEC on the tactics of a campaign. In 1958 when passes began to be issued to women in Johannesburg the ANCWL and FSAW called for volunteers to go to the pass offices and explain to women taking out passes that they were not yet obliged by law to carry the pass; that an employer could not force them to have a pass; and that by accepting a pass they would become liable to arrest at any hour and might be given a heavy fine or hard labour. There was an enthusiastic response to this call and for volunteers and women set out for the pass offices in large numbers from the Johannesburg locations. The police promptly arrested them. By the end of the second week of the campaign close on two thousand women had been arrested. The ANC executive in the Transvaal argued that as the women had not been prepared for arrest and long stays in jail they should be bailed out.

The executives of the ANCWL and the FSAW opposed this saying:

Strongly and unanimously we felt no further bail should be paid and demonstrations to the pass office should continue as long as the support of the women could be maintained (FSAW, 1958e).

Only when the imprisoned women appeared before a magistrate and were given a long period of remand before their trials came up did representatives of the ANCWL and FSAW decide in discussion with the ANC that efforts should be made to bail out the women who were ill or had young children and those who could not find bail for themselves (FSAW, 1958e).

This conflict was discussed in the ANC NEC report to the annual conference in December 1958:

On the question of the women's demonstrations some people simply said 'No bail, no fines'; this approach did not take into account the actual conditions. A large number of women went to jail not in the same way as people did in the Defiance Campaign, that is having prepared themselves to serve. Many women did not expect arrest; this created a problem because whether you liked it or not relatives were ready to bail them out and pay fines . . . It therefore became necessary for the leaders to act, in order to prevent confusion and chaos which might have followed.

When a spontaneous movement takes place the duty of the leadership is not just to follow spontaneously, but to give it a proper direction. We hesitated to do this in the women's demonstration and the results were not of the best (Karis and Carter, 1972, vol.3, 443-4).

The FSAW had reluctantly been forced to accept the position of the ANC. It may be argued that the political conclusions of the ANC executive were influenced by sexual politics. Given the sexual division of labour the absence of wives and mother from a household threw extra responsibilities on fathers and husbands. On the other hand it seems that a tactic of this kind should not have been pursued by the women alone. Nonetheless at this point the women clearly felt themselves ahead of their men in the

struggle. In their report on the campaign the FSAW observed acerbically: 'Women await with impatience the active entry of men into the anti-pass campaign' (FSAW, 1958e).

1960 marks the end of what we have identified as the third historical phase of the struggle in South Africa, both in terms of the development of the ANC and its women's organisations. It is a convenient point at which to review the history in terms of the way in which the relationship between women's emancipation and national liberation was conceived. Theoretically speaking, we can distinguish three aspects. First, how the ANC itself conceived of the link; second, how the liberation movement explained the exploitation and oppression of women; and third, what did the movement consider the essential steps in any strategy for women's emancipation?

On the first question, as has been shown, before the 1950s, there was little discussion of 'women's emancipation' as such, by either the ANC or its women's organisations. In general, moreover, this was not a question raised by women in South Africa at this time, with the exception of the white Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (Walker, 1979). During the 1950s, the issue was raised implicitly, but not formulated explicitly as 'emancipation'. Thus, the Women's Charter, drafted by the FSAW in 1955 contains many demands for women's emancipation from the burden of solitary childcare, low pay, lack of political participation, and unequal access to property. The political practice of the ANCWL, especially through the activities of the FSAW, placed a question mark over the sole responsibility for housework and childcare belonging to the women, a point clearly reflected in the speech quoted by O.R. Tambo in 1955.

The degree to which *some* of the demands of the Women's Charter are present in the Freedom Charter bears witness to the women's own struggle and the space they had created for themselves. But it must also be said that in the 1950s, the ANC made no general statements on women's emancipation: the question was subsumed under that of national liberation, and the contradictions raised by women's political activity were thus left rather amorphous and unresolved. However, it must be remembered that the political project of the ANC in this decade was precisely to unite a vast range of sectional activities under the banner of a national liberation struggle – a tremendous achievement in South African history.

On the second question, it is easy to see that in the early period there was no specific analysis of women's oppression. Their exploitation, as of all Africans, was explained in terms of the colour bar, the lack of political rights, and the harsh views of government administration. In the 1940s and 1950s, as Congress came to develop a theory of national liberation, women's oppression was generally conceived of as one of the results of national oppression, and from this point of view, the extension of the pass laws to the women was an intensification of that oppression. The Women's Charter and the documents of the FSAW do not reflect on the origins or sources of women's particular disabilities, and in their anti-pass agitation the FSAW and ANCWL singled out the apartheid regime, in the guise of the police ready to arrest anyone and break up family life, as chiefly responsible for the hardships women would suffer.

On the third question, we can see that in the earliest years, the ANC did not pose the question in such a way as to formulate a particular strategy – but this was true of the aims of the organisation as a whole. By the 1950s, because of the way the general points of the Women's Charter had been incorporated into the Freedom Charter, and the way in which the ANCWL pressed for a federated structure to the FSAW, it seems that national liberation was considered to be the first necessary step before the specific demands of either of the Charters could be met. Again, it should be emphasised that this was an implicit assumption and not a stated aim.

### *The ANC Underground: 1960-82*

The decade of mass politics, the 1950s, came to an abrupt end in the year 1960. Following the shooting of anti-pass demonstrators at Sharpeville, near Johannesburg, a state of emergency was declared by the government. As the movement leadership had anticipated for some time, the ANC, along with some of its fellow organisations in the Congress Alliance, and together with the breakaway organisation the Pan-Africanist Congress, were banned. The ANC was forced to go underground. It was at this point that the organisation took the momentous decision to completely transform the nature of the struggle against the apartheid regime. On 16 December 1961, organised acts of sabotage against government installations took place, marking the emergence of Umkhonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation), which was later to become the armed wing of the ANC. MK (as it is popularly known), announced its formation on that date in a leaflet widely distributed in the country:

... the people's patience is not endless. The time comes in the life of any nation when there remains only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future, and our freedom (ANC, 1969a; 1982).

From the beginning, MK was organised in terms of individual recruitment, and this included both men and women as militants.

The period after 1960 presents certain difficulties for analysis. We are dealing with a contemporary situation and a movement which is operating clandestinely under conditions of illegality in South Africa. Obviously not all documents are published, nor are the extent of organisational structures and activities within the country made known. What follows is based almost entirely on articles written, and speeches and interviews given, by members of the ANC external mission, in London and elsewhere in Africa. (It should be borne in mind that the external structures are continually being replenished with newer and more recently expelled activists as militant opposition escalates inside South Africa itself.)

The move of the ANC underground in 1960, and the arrest of the High Command of MK (which included many of the ANC leaders) in 1963 threw the movement into some confusion. At the same time the South African state greatly increased its repressive powers through the police, army and law courts. A regrouping and restructuring was needed. The basis for this was laid a few years later at the Morogoro Conference, held in 1969 in Tanzania. It is fair to say that the document produced by this conference has provided the ANC with its guiding 'Strategy and Tactics' since then, and it has proved a very far-sighted document. According to the conference:

The main content of the present stage of the South African revolution is the national liberation of the largest and most oppressed group – the African people. This strategic aim must govern every aspect of the conduct of our struggles whether it be the formulation of policy or the creation of structures. Amongst other things, it demands in the first place the maximum mobilisation of the African people as a dispossessed and racially oppressed nation (ANC 1969: 197).

Organisationaly, the two main structures of the movement were identified: the mobilisation of international public opinion and solidarity was made the province of the external mission, while the armed struggle and work within South Africa fell within the scope of a new structure, the Revolutionary Council. The work of MK it was stressed was not only a military seizure of power, but a political mobilisation and education of the people. In another significant move, all the former member organisations of the Congress Alliance, except SACTU, dissolved themselves and were in-

corporated into the ANC, which was now open to membership by all races (ANC, 1969b).

MK had always been open to women as well as men, and they had both trained side by side (IDAF, 1981; Nhlapo, 1981). But the women's section of the external mission was weak in 1969, and one of the resolutions taken at the Morogoro Conference was that insufficient attention had been paid to the proper organisation of the women's section of the ANC, and that proper provision must be made in personnel and resources for this (ANC, 1969b). As a result the Women's Section began publishing its own magazine, *Voice of Women*, in 1971, and the women's external section began activities in exile. The numbers of ANC members in exile began to grow from the mid-1970s after the uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere in 1976, and the women's sections were greatly strengthened by the arrival of new members.

Since 1970 the character of the mass struggle in South Africa has developed dramatically. It has been a decade in which workers, youth, and women have distinguished themselves by their militancy. The great Durban strikes of 1973 signalled an unprecedented burst of activity by a black working class showing its muscle, both on issues related to wages and conditions, and on their relations with the state. The youth set the townships on fire and 1976 in their protests against Bantu Education. The women, who have been fully involved in the strikes and education boycotts, have led the community boycotts of products from striking factories. They have also been in the forefront of resistance to 'removals' and 'resettlement', demolition of shanty town houses, and rent rises. It is not possible here to do justice to the depth and range of mass activity which has taken place, nor to the extent to which popular protests have begun to identify increasingly with the slogans and symbols of the ANC. 'The enemy has banned the ANC, but the people have unbanned it', Gertrude Shope put it (1982).

In the contemporary period, much more explicit attention has been paid by the ANC to the question of the emancipation of women and the role of women in the national liberation struggle than was ever the case formerly. This development has gone in line with an increasing discussion and awareness of the role of the working class in relation to the liberation movement. Both developments are clearly responses to the mass actions of the 1970s. The heroism and actions of the women in the early period remain a rich history from which inspiration is drawn, and which is used to point out that women have 'organisational talents' and have always played their role (Sechaba, Aug 1981). The ANC annually commemorates the FWSAW demonstration in 1956 of twenty thousand women to the Union buildings as South African Women's Day; and the creche established in Tanzania for the children of refugees is named after the early militant, Charlotte Maxeke.

In an interview on International Women's Day, 1981, Mavis Nhlapo, representative of the Women's Secretariat, canvassed the three questions we raised earlier about women's emancipation and national liberation. On the question of sexual politics and male prejudice against women, she said:

Of course this is typical of all societies that have so far been subjected to the domination of men over women. But in the ranks of the ANC, we do not give primary attention to this type of struggle, because we believe that this is secondary to the primary goal of our struggle, which is the uprooting of the system that is existing in South Africa itself. Of course we believe that as part and parcel of the overall struggle for national liberation, we have to struggle for women's rights. Although women can be equal participants men also have to be taught that they have to get rid of the old conceptions of the role of the women . . . We have seen evidence of women becoming equal participants with men in the revolutions . . . in Mozambique and Angola. But as those revolutions have shown . . . even if



MAP

*Morsgate resettlement camp, Western Transvall. Women have agitated against their removal to these bleak dumping grounds.*

women participate in the struggle, these old ideas . . . still persist. Therefore these have to be fought and we are doing exactly that in the ANC (Sechaba, March 1981:17).

ANC women have begun to develop further their analysis of the oppression of women. They argue that black women's oppression stems from apartheid with its preservation of the most repressive forms of tribal rule, its perpetuation of law codes that regard African women as minors, and its denial to women of housing rights and adequate land (Ginwala, 1982; Bernstein, 1975). The special disabilities of women are seen as constituting their triple oppression – a national oppression, a class oppression and an oppression on the basis of sex – over and above the hardships suffered by all South African blacks as the result of apartheid (Hope, 1982; Tambo, 1981). This new stress on class oppression is increasingly apparent in the discussions of women emanating from the South African working class organisations (SACTU, 1981; Workers Unity, 1981; African Communist, 1981).

On the third point, of the essential steps to be taken towards the emancipation of women, the ANC Women's Section is true to the tasks of the movement set by 'Strategy and Tactics' in 1969. Mavis Nhlapo makes it clear:

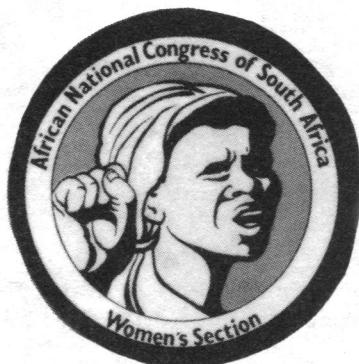
We believe that in the main course of the struggle for national liberation, women will assert themselves and will assume their rightful place in the struggle and in society (Nhlapo, 1981).

The movement itself invokes women as belonging within all the different sections of society:

. . . as Blacks, youth, workers and women, in our people's army in trade unions, and community organisations, in the churches, South African womanhood is playing a decisive part in the all round struggle . . . (Sechaba, August 1981; 10).

It is therefore still implicit that it is primarily *through* the main struggle that women will gain their 'rightful' place. Yet in practice, it is clear that this very process will itself

continue to throw up all sorts of questions as to what exactly this 'rightful' place will, and should, be. The 1970s has seen an unprecedented expression of popular activity inside South Africa, and a proliferation of above-board but often short-lived legal organisations.<sup>7</sup> The ANC recognises, encourages, and catalyses this activity. This means that the organisation is committed to support popular initiatives by women inside the country, whether they take the form of attempts to revive the FSAW, or of organisation of domestic workers. In a recent statement on the 70th anniversary, the ANC NEC called for mobilisation of all sections of South African society: 'our working people . . . our people in the bantustans . . . our youth and students . . . our woman-folk . . .' (Sechaba, Feb 1982). The Women's Section of the ANC in exile is engaged in strengthening its own structures, mobilising women in and out of the movement, and finding space to discuss and articulate its own specific contribution to the struggle.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the historical material shows that the South African women have approached the liberation struggle from several different angles over time, based primarily on their own immediate experience as victims of apartheid legislation. The 1950s created political conditions in which African women, on a platform of unity with women of other races, began to generate a distinct set of demands designed to emancipate themselves from the heavy burdens imposed upon them by the sexual division of labour. These demands were never isolated as specifically 'women's struggle', however. They were always situated within the broader struggle against the major source of oppression—apartheid.

We can also conclude that the ANC, as a liberation movement, has been responsible for creating conditions for women to take the initiative in contributing to the broader struggle. It has always accorded its Women's League, or Women's Section, a degree of organisational space. And it appears that generally this has been as a result of the initiative of the women within the movement. Indeed, the movement as a whole has often been forced to acknowledge the dynamic, advanced and disciplined contribution made by the women.

The tremendous sense of revival at present in the external women's sections gives cause for optimism that the women are still actively seeking space within the liberation movement to articulate and incorporate their own specific interests. There are signs, too, of the former confidence characteristic of the Federation era. Leading a recent discussion of the role of women in the liberation movement, a key woman representative of the ANC who had participated in the FSAW in the 1950s commented:

Name any period when women were not active both as members of the organisation and as women. Why has it always been so necessary that women must be

part of the struggle? Because we are too impatient to see men sitting around. We need our own organisation where we can move ahead. Are we women in the ANC Women's Section doing enough? (Mompatti, 1982).

It is a good question, and it is good that South African women are posing it. A programmatic statement of the tasks that lie ahead was recently spoken in the form of a poem by Dora Tamane, an 80 year old member of the FSAW, still actively campaigning inside South Africa:

Let us share our problems so that we can solve them together.

We must free ourselves.

Men and women must share housework.

Men and women must work together in the home and out in the world.

There are no creches and nursery schools for our children.

There are no homes for the aged.

There is no-one to care for the sick.

Women must unite to fight for these rights.

I opened the road for you.

You must go forward

(IDAF, 1981:40).

What can this history of the ANC tell us about the relationship between women's emancipation and national liberation? We think that the material presented here confirms our most general observation that the response of the national liberation movement to women's struggles is largely determined by the way in which the overall struggle is conceived. It is thus vital to look both at the conditions of women in a concrete historical situation and at the direction of that overall struggle in order to appraise the role of women in a particular movement. Neither we, nor many current spokeswomen for the ANC, believe that their struggle has nothing in common with those of feminists. On the contrary, the actions we have illustrated here show how many demands and evaluations recognisable to Western feminists have been part of the ANC women's fight. But we think that the analysis and objectives of Western feminism cannot be applied abstractly and universally. It is also important to recognise that there will be specific differences between struggles, as identified by the participants themselves — and that Western feminists should not ignore, condemn, or exaggerate those differences. Rather they should have the patience to understand the source of these differences, and where possible learn from examples from women's struggles elsewhere.

## Notes

Both authors are members of the Anti-Apartheid Women's Committee. Judy Kimble is currently researching early colonialism in southern Africa at the University of Essex. Elaine Unterhalter has done research on the history of Zululand and co-authored a book on South Africa's foreign policy. She teaches history for London University Department of Extra Mural Studies.

Those interested in finding out more about the current situation in South Africa should consult the following publications available from the Anti-Apartheid Movement, 89 Charlotte St. London W1 or the ANC office, 28 Penton St. London N1: *Anti-Apartheid News*, *Sechaba*, *Workers Unity*, *Voice of Women*. Those wishing to help with solidarity work should contact the Women's Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement at the above address. The Women's Committee publishes its own newsletter.

<sup>1</sup> We are referring here to British feminism and the British women's movement, although there are many parallels with similar developments in Western Europe and the USA.

- 2 This was notable at the United Nations Conference marking the Decade of Women in Mexico (1975) and Copenhagen (1980).
- 3 Obbo (1980) explores the way in which elsewhere on the continent, African women are frequently identified as the agents of reproduction of either an authentic, or a corrupted, culture.
- 4 For example at Anti-Apartheid solidarity meetings the question is sometimes posed: 'What is the attitude of the ANC to abortion?' in response to appeals for material aid.
- 5 We gratefully acknowledge the help of Deborah Gaitskell in providing research material for this section.
- 6 For example, Sol Plaatje, one of the founders of the ANC, who visited them in prison, was a friend, well known to them.
- 7 In 1977 following the murder of Steve Biko, the Vorster regime banned 18 black consciousness organisations at once. Since then, numerous other organisations have flowered.

## References

- AFRICAN COMMUNIST (1981) 'Of Maids and Madams', No.87.
- ANC (1969a) 'Strategy and Tactics of the South African Revolution' in LA GUMA (1972).
- ANC (1969b) *Mayibuye*, Vol.3, No.10.
- ANC (c.1970) *Excerpts from the Policy and Programme of the ANC* 1Dar es Salaam: ANC.
- ANC WOMENS' SECTION (1980) *All power to the People* London: ANC.
- ANC (1982) *Unity in Action* London: ANC.
- BENSON, M. (1966) *The Struggle for a Birthright* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- BERNSTEIN, H. (1966) *For their Triumphs and their Tears* London: IDAF.
- BERNSTEIN, H. (1982) Interview recorded in London, May.
- CITY OF JOHANNESBURG (1918) Commission re Native Strike, Vol.88 A 823 Minutes of Evidence. State Archives, Pretoria, Typescript.
- DELMAR, R. (1976) 'Looking again at Engels' Origin of the Family Private Property and the State' in A. Oakley and J. Mitchell (eds.), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- EISEN-BERGMAN, A. (1974) *Women of Vietnam* New York: Peoples Press.
- ENGELS, F. (1972) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- FORD, M. (1979) 'Interview' in *Spare Rib*, No.83, June.
- FSAW (1957) Papers of FSAW Campaigns, 1957-9. Statement presented to the Native Commissioner, Aug.9 1957. School of Oriental and African Studies. Microfilm.
- FSAW (1958a) Papers of FSAW Campaigns, 1957-9. Letters of thanks from the Secretary of the FSAW to 11 Johannesburg branches of the ANCWL, 23 Nov. 1958. School of Oriental and African Studies, Microfilm.
- FSAW (1958b) Papers of FSAW Campaigns, 1957-9. Letters Mrs. S. Sibeko to the Editors, Orlando, 7th Nov. 1958. School of Oriental and African Studies. Microfilm.
- FSAW (1958c) Papers of FSAW Campaigns, 1957-9. Pamphlet issued by FSAW 'To all Housewives' Schol of Oriental and African Studies, Microfilm.
- FSAW (1958d) *Strijdom . . . You have struck a Rock* Johannesburg.
- FSAW (1958e) Papers of FSAW Campaigns, 1957-9. FSAW Report on the Anti-Pass Campaign, 1958. School of Oriental and African Studies, Microfilm.
- GAITSKELL, D., KIMBLE, J., MACONACCHIE, M., UNTERHALTER, E. (1981) Class, Race and Gender: Domestic Workers in South Africa' Paper presented at Conference on Women and Work in Africa, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford. (Publication forthcoming in Review of African Political Economy.)
- GINWALA, F. and TALBOT, S. (1982) 'The Legal and Economic Status of African Women'. Talk delivered at ANC Women's Section Educational, London, May.
- HARMEL, M. (1972) 'The Communist Party of South Africa' in LA GUMA (1972).
- HEITLINGER, A. (1979) *Women and State Socialism* London: Macmillan.
- IDAF (1981) *To Honour Women's Day* London: IDAF.
- INKOKELI YA BANTU (1940-2) Cape Town, Newspaper.
- JANCAR, B. (1978) *Women under Communism* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
- JOSEPH, H. (1963) *If this be Treason* London: Andre Deutsch.

- KARIS, T. and CARTER, G. (1972) eds. *From Protest to Challenge. A documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* Vols 1-4. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.
- LA GUMA, A. (1972) ed. *Apartheid* London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- LAPIDUS, G. (1975) 'USSR Women at Work: Changing Patterns' *Industrial Relations* 14:2.
- MACHEL, S. (1974) *Mozambique: Sowing the Seeds of Revolution* London: MATIC.
- MADOERIN, M. and KRUKS, S. (nd) 'Revolutionary Struggle and Women's Emancipation: The Case of Mozambique' OMM File, MAGIC office, London, Mimeo.
- MAMBO CAFE, M. (1982) Interview recorded in Brussels, May.
- MOLYNEUX, M. (1981) 'Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress towards Women's Emancipation' *Feminist Review*, 8.
- MOMPATI, R. (1982) Talk delivered at ANC Women's Section Education, London, March.
- NHLAPO, M. (1981) 'Interview' *Sechaba*, 17.
- OBBO, C. (1980) *African women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence* London; Zed Press.
- PLAATJE, S. (1916) *Native Life in South Africa* London: P.S. King.
- ROWBOTHAM, S. (1972) *Women, Resistance and Revolution* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- SACTU (1981) 'Working Women in South Africa' Mimeo.
- SECHABA (1980-2) London, Monthly.
- SED COMMITTEE (1979) International Conference to mark the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of August Bebel's book 'Women and Socialism', Berlin.
- SHOPE, G. (1982) Paper presented to International Conference in Solidarity with the Women of South Africa, Brussels, May.
- SIMONS, H.J. (1968) *African Women* London: C. Hurst.
- SKOTA, T.D. MWELI (1932) *The African Yearly Register* Johannesburg: R.L. Esson & Co.
- TAMBO, O. (1981) 'Speech to the Luanda Conference of the ANC Women's Section' *Voice of Women*, 4.
- UMTETELI WA BANTU (1934) Johannesburg, Newspaper.
- URDANG, S. (1979) *Fighting two Colonialisms* New York: Monthly Review Press.
- WALKER, C. (1979) *The Women's Suffrage Movement in South Africa* Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, UCT.
- WALSHE, P. (1970) *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* London: C. Hurst.
- WELLS, J. (1980) 'Women's Resistance to Passes in Bloemfontein in the Inter-War Period' *Africa Perspective*, 15.
- WORKERS' UNITY (1981) 'Domestic Servants', 25.
- XUMA A.B. (1930) *Charlotte Manye (Mrs. Maxeke) 'What an Educated African Girl can do'* New York: AME Church.
- XUMA, A.B. (1936) Xuma Papers. Letter to Mrs. J.S. Nkoane, Bloemfontein, 5 Dec. 1936. Box H. University of Witwatersrand Archives, MS.
- XUMA, A.B. (1944) Xuma Papers. Letter to Mrs. Macabatsha et al., 8 March 1944. Box 1, University of Witwatersrand Archives, MS.