

COMMENTS

National Women's Day

ON August 9 1956, more than 20 000 women from the cities, towns and villages all over South Africa stood in silence for 30 minutes outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Their protest was against the pass laws. But that was not all. They demanded equal pay for equal work, £1 a day and better housing and living conditions.

Today, very little if nothing has changed. Women still suffer the same hardships that they faced then. Their demands for equality of all women in a genuine South African democracy still stands.

This year we will be commemorating the 26th anniversary of National Woman's Day. In different centres around the country, programmes are being planned to pay tribute to those who organised and participated in the mass protests against the pass system.

As we prepare for National Woman's Day this year, there are important lessons that we can learn from the past. The spirit of Women's Day is one of unity among all women, an identification with all oppressed people in our country.

It has taken us almost twenty years to regroup and to organise ourselves after the government's action against all people's organisations. Once again, women are making their voices heard. In our community organisations they have thrown their weight behind the struggles for better housing and living conditions.

In the trade unions more and more women are standing with our men for their rightful share of bosses profits. And, in our women's organisations, they are learning the skills of organising and building awareness of their position as women in the struggle.

But, the seeds have only been planted. In our women's groups many more questions have been posed than answers. The most crucial question is how do we organise and draw in women in a more active way. Our experience in organising women is still young.

Because of this, there are often different opinions, but we must not allow these to become divisions. We must not forget that it is in the communities, in the on the farms and in our homes, through active organising that we will be able to test our ideas.

The way forward to a strong mass based democratic women's organisation is a long one.

The message of National Women's Day goes still further. It is a reminder to all of the power of united action. It is also a reminder that we must not allow ourselves to be divided. There are many conditions which foster divisions among us.

The government's harsh laws such as the Group Areas Act, Pass Laws, Job Reservation and many other laws are designed to sow disunity among us.

We must unite to fight all these divisions, also within our own organisations. The call is for women to come together on Women's Day.

It is for these reasons that the message for Aug. 9 is a very special one. Let us take the struggle forward in the spirit of unity that National Women's Day was born almost 26 years ago.

Unjust fare increases

TRANSPORT is an essential service. It is used in most cases by people to go to work or to do their shopping. It therefore should not be run by private companies for profit.

For most of our people, transport has always been a big problem. The reason for this is not hard to find. In most countries of the world, the poorest people live near their places of work. In South Africa, the Group Areas and other acts have moved people against their will to townships far from their places of work. As a result bus fares have always been high and the people have always strongly resisted any further increases.

And now City Tramways have asked for another increase, even though their last annual report shows a profit of over R3 million. Do they really deserve an increase? Can the people afford an increase? How must the people and their organisations respond?

So far a number of organisations have rightly decided to oppose the bus fares application when it comes before the National Transport Board. In this and in whatever other further action planned by organisations, it will be very important for as many people as possible to take part and show the bus company that the fare increases are unjust.

Organisations must prepare themselves in such a way to ensure such participation occurs.



LETTERS

NO TO THIRD CLASS CITIZENSHIP

DEAR Grassroots - On May 28 this year, I travelled on a train from Cape Town to Salt River.

On my way to the toilet at Salt River station, I was stopped by a barrier guard who told me to produce my ticket. I was on the platform and was about five metres from the barrier gates.

I showed him my ticket and tried to move towards the toilet but he stood in front of me.

He told me I was not allowed to use the toilet and I needed a first class ticket before I could do so.

I explained to him that as a South African citizen, I was entitled to use the toilet but he challenged me to a fight

if I used the so-called white toilet.

I ignored him and went into the toilet while he stood at the door, waiting for me to come out. It is naturally second-nature for him to wait for his wife while she uses the toilet at home.

The so-called toilets of the railways are very filthy. There are not even health inspectors who are looking into the matter.

When I came out of the toilet, he stood in front of me again and directed me to a third class exit. That's what they think of you; "a third class citizen must associate with third class facilities".

I brought the matter to the attention of the station manager by

handing in a written report. He explained to me that he had no authority over the barrier guards.

I then walked through the gates and was again stopped by the barrier guard. He addressed me as a third class citizen and saw himself as a first class citizen.

Barriers

At that moment the inspector (a Mr van Zyl) came along and informed me that the barrier guards were entitled to ask any person for a ticket on the platform.

Mr van Zyl then requested the police to lock me up. His reason for this was that I would not listen to his instructions.

It was actually my duty to lay a charge against them but I knew this would not be accepted.

The apartheid signs are down on all the platforms, but there is another form of apartheid, because they know as well as you and I that only Black people make use of the third class section while Whites don't.

So they might as well put back the apartheid signs. The South African Government never does anything to try to do away with apartheid, but they just introduce it in other forms.

The time has come for us to be treated as South African citizens

and not as third-class citizens.

Change

Things have to change as far as the Government is concerned before it can be taken to the people. There should be higher wages, better pensions for old people and equal education.

From a member of
The Bonteheuwel Civic
G P Ismael
15 Teak Road
Bonteheuwel.

P.S.
I work myself half to death selling Grassroots so please publish my letter. I will also be glad, in the name of CAHAC, if the letter is placed in other newspapers by Grassroots.

High rents but poor maintenance

DEAR Grassroots,

I am a member of the Lavender Hill Youth Group which was formed recently.

About two weeks ago I spoke to a woman who stays in the same court as I do and she told me about the big problems she had with her house when it rained recently.

The woman, Mrs Brown, of Aspeling Court told me about her life in Lavender Hill with all its hardships and suffering.

This was her story: "We have been living

here in Lavender Hill for the past eight years and our rent has gone up many times and now we pay R40 per month.

"For the last eight years we have lived in agony, because whenever the wind blows we watch how the roof lifts from its original position. After we complained, the Council came to repair the cracks with polyfiller.

"The walls began to crack from the floor to the roof.

"In one room we can see what goes on in

the flat below us and the people have already started to complain about the water running down the walls, but how can we help if our house is flooded and the council refuses to give us better housing.

"It is no longer a pleasure to go to the toilet because the cistern is broken and every time you have finished you have to throw a bucket of water into the pan.

"The door frames are all loose and the handles of the windows just seem to break off

whenever you want to open the window.

"There is a hole in our roof and I stuffed a rag in to keep the birds from falling on the bed or the children.

"We are afraid to ask the Council to do any repairs for they charge a fortune for maintenance, and already we have been paying for maintenance all these years. It is included in our rent, but what do they repair?"

"This place is not fit for anyone to stay in and even animals would

not stay here. All my children are small and I cannot keep up with the hospital and doctors' bills.

The question about all this is:

Is the Council going to wait for something tragic to happen to our family before giving us a proper place to stay or even repair the house though the house seems to be irreparable and can only be demolished and then rebuilt!"

From Achmat Ismail
(with the help of
Mrs Brown)