

WOMEN ON THE MARCH

a woman's place is in the struggle



This picture was taken on 9 August 1956. These women from FEDSAW are determined to deliver their petitions against the pass laws to Strydom, the then Prime Minister.

On 9 August 1956, thirty-one years ago, twenty thousand women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to deliver a petition to the government. They were protesting against the introduction of pass laws for women. Powerful leaders such as Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Mary Moodley, Bertha Mashaba and others who led this protest emerged from FEDSAW.

Many of these leaders gained valuable organising experience in the trade unions such as the Food and Canning Workers' Union.

This was not the first time women resisted the pass system. In 1913 in Winburg in OFS and many other rural areas women successfully campaigned against the introduction of the pass system for women.

Black women suffer exploitation

and oppression in a much more ruthless manner than any other group of people in our country. Black women are oppressed as part of the oppressed majority, they are exploited as workers and they are also sexually exploited by men.

Women have borne the brunt of the evil system of migrant labour. The discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa has dramatically changed our quiet and peaceful tribal communities. The old men and their sons were dragged off to the mines for cheap labour. The women were left behind to take care of the children and the homes and as a result family-life was destroyed.

Many women only see their husbands who work on the mines for fourteen days every year. Mineworkers, under the leadership of the NUM, are

demanding thirty days paid annual leave so that they can spend more time with their families.

Our union is involved in a campaign to destroy the hostel system. We are demanding family centered accommodation.

In our union special effort has been made to encourage greater involvement of women members in our structures. In Namaqualand two conferences were held by the regional education subcommittee which focussed on the role of women in our union and in the struggle.

COSATU has recognised that little progress was made to implement its resolution on women. Our task now is to give special attention to this crucial area of struggle within the NUM and COSATU.



The march. Part of the 20 000 women who came from all over the country to march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

COSATU RESOLVED TO FIGHT WOMEN'S ISSUES

This federation noting:

- 1) That women workers experience both exploitation as workers and oppression as women and that black women are further discriminated against on the basis of race.
- 2) That women are employed in a limited range of occupations, doing boring and repetitive work with low and often unequal pay.
- 3) That due to overtime and night work women workers are subjected to many dangers while commuting.
- 4) That women workers often suffer sexual harassment in recruitment and employment.
- 5) That most women workers in South Africa lose their jobs when they become pregnant.
- 6) That pregnant women often have to work under conditions harmful to themselves and their unborn child.

Resolves to fight:

- 1) Against all unequal and discriminatory treatment of women at

- work, in society and in the federation.
- 2) For the equal right of women and men to paid work as an important part of the broader aim to achieve full and freely chosen employment.
- 3) For equal pay for all work of equal value - the value of work must be determined by organised women and men workers themselves.
- 4) For the restructuring of employment so as to allow women and men the opportunity of qualifying for jobs of equal value.
- 5) For childcare and family facilities to meet workers' needs and make it easier for workers to combine work and family responsibilities.
- 6) For full maternity rights, including paid maternity and paternity leave and job security.
- 7) For the protection of women and men from all types of work proved to be harmful to them, including work which interferes with their ability to have children.
- 8) Against sexual harassment in whatever form it occurs.
- 9) For adequate and safe transport for

workers doing overtime and night work.

Now commits itself:

- 1) To actively campaign in support of these resolutions.
- 2) To negotiate agreements with companies wherever possible as part of this campaign.
- 3) To actively promote within its education programme, a greater understanding of the specific discriminations suffered by women workers and ways in which these can be overcome.
- 4) To establish a worker-controlled subcommittee within its education programme to monitor progress made in implementing this resolution and to make representations to the education committee.
- 5) To budget for the workings of such a sub-committee.
- 6) To actively promote the necessary confidence and experience amongst women workers so that they can participate fully at all levels of the federation.