

# "AS WE ARE WOMEN WE MUST GO FORWARD."

SPEAK spoke to women from Lamontville about their women's group. The Lamontville woman's group is a branch of the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW). NOW is a new organisation in Natal - mainly in Durban and surrounding areas.

## FORMING THE WOMEN'S GROUP

The woman's group in Lamontville was formed in November 1983. That time we were planning our woman's group as things were so bad.

Every thing was upside - down.  
Nobody knew where they  
were going to get help.

Things had been very bad in Lamontville in 1983. There was fighting in Lamontville after Mr Dube was killed. Mr Dube was a popular leader in Lamontville. He was fighting against rent increases. He showed up how badly the administration board had been dealing with house repairs. He also showed how the community councillor's did not represent the community. His killing was an

injury against the community because he supported the struggles of the community. After Mr Dube was killed many police came in with tear gas.



They were coming in the houses of the people and shooting tear gas. The police were driving around Lamontville shooting tear gas. It went on day in and all night. Police camped up in the hills by the clinic the whole month until July. People could not be on the streets at night. The police would come into the houses - kicking the doors and hitting people with shamboks. One of the members of our woman's group came home one night and there was blood all over the house.

The police had hit her son. Women tell of being raped by police at that time.



It was really bad. Then there was the rent increase and the bus boycott as well.

## HELPING EACH OTHER

Our woman's group spoke about the problems - children with no place to stay, no food, no work. At first 15 women joined the group. Each paid 50c a month to save up to help each other in the group who has problems. Maybe some children can't go to school, maybe somebody is sick and can't go to work.



We held our meetings in one woman's

home. After two months we moved to the church. Now we meet at the church every week. We elected a chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer, vice-treasurer, secretary and vice-secretary and two organisers.

### TALKING TO THE ADMINISTRATION BOARD

In March we decided to go and see the superintendent of Lamontville, Mr Turner, of the Port Natal Administration Board, as he was prepared to close doors on people who had no money to pay rent.

We organised as women because we would be safe from tear gas and shooting as woman and children. We could appeal on behalf of our children. We wrote a letter to take with us. When we came there to Port Natal Administration Board, the policeman at the gate said: "You are not allowed to see the superintendent."



We told him: "You're not allowed to stop us at the gate."  
So he said: "Alright, you can carry on."

Mr Turner said he would not see all of us. We said that we were all together. He asked us what we were complaining about. We asked him why the rents were going up when the houses were cracked and broken. Why are they closing houses when people can't pay rents. They should speak to the people first and ask them why they are not paying rent before closing houses and taking furniture.



While we were at the Administration Board office we saw policemen gathering around with their guns. But this did not worry us - nothing happened with them.

Mr Turner said he would take our complaints to Mayville. But we knew he did not take our letter there. Instead he took it to Ms Nxasane, who is a councillor. He said we must talk to the councillors and not to him.

There is no point in going to the councillors. We can't speak to them because they do nothing for the people.

Nothing has happened about the letter. We have since asked Mr Turner where the reply is, and he said: "They can't reply from Mayville, and I don't know why." When we said we want to go to Mayville, he said: "You can't see them. You have to wait until I tell you."

### REPAIRS USED TO GET DONE

Things were different before. This was about 1960 when we were under Durban Corporation. The buses from Lamontville to town were only 5c, and return was 10c. The rent for a three roomed house was R1-25 per month in the 'New Look' section. Flats cost

R5-00 plus 20c for the school levy. There were no community councillors at that time.



Mrs Luthuli of the Women's Group shows an unrepaired hole in a house in Lamontville.

The houses were painted every year. When the windows were broken they would go to the office and they would be replaced. Now they just put plastic in. The toilets when they jammed, the plumbing people would come and fix it without charging. Now they don't come at all. Even the doors, when they were broken - they would come and bring new doors and take the old one back. If there were holes in the roof they would come and fix them. When the owner of the house was sick they would tell the office. The family would not have to pay until the owner was well again. When a person lost his job he was supposed to report

until he got one. Now they just move the people out and take the furniture away.

And as we are women we say, "We must move forward, WE cannot delay while things are so bad in Lamontville.

We have discussions. For example we discussed that we do not want Lamontville to go to KwaZulu. We will lose our rights if we do.



We want to do sewing and knitting and crocheting so that we can sell what we make for money. A lot of women cannot do it and others will teach them. We will use the money in the treasury to buy wool. Many women in the group

are domestic workers and others are factory workers.

We work with other organisations in Lamontville - JORAC (Joint Rent Action Committee), JCC (Joint Commuters Committee), Malayo (the youth organisation) and COSAS. There is a joint co-ordinating committee where there are representatives of the women's group, JORAC, JCC, and Malayo. If there is going to be a meeting or an issue in the community we all work together at it. We share costs too - say of a loud speaker for a big meeting. Each organisation must raise money for it.

When there is any meeting we ask to speak for 5 minutes to tell the people about our women's group.



Another thing, the women said we must write a letter to the women of Hamba-

## Lamontville

nati and we have to ask the women of Chesterville and the women of Klaarwater. And all these women said we have to go and see Mr Kornhof about Lamontville incorporation into KwaZulu. We do not want to go to KwaZulu. We will lose our section 10 rights, and then belong to a 'homeland', and have to pay R1-00 at the labour bureau to get a job - like Kwa Mashu.



We are thinking of taking a full bus to see Mr Kornhof - we will go as women and mothers. He can't shoot us.

A lot of women are finding it difficult to make meetings at night (6 o'clock) because they have to cook for children and husbands. Some men do not like their wives to come out. We are talking about changing our meetings to a Saturday or Sunday instead of a weekday - so that more women would be free to come.

## THE NEXT ISSUE OF SPEAK IS LOOKING AT CHILDCARE

SO PLEASE WRITE TO US ABOUT:-

- who looks after your children while you're at work?
- how far away from home do you have to take them to the place where they are cared for during the day?
- how much do you pay for day-care?
- how many children are looked after at the same place as your child?
- what do you feel about your child's day-care?

Please send your reply to: SPEAK COLLECTIVE, P.O.Box 19375, Domerton, 4015, Durban.