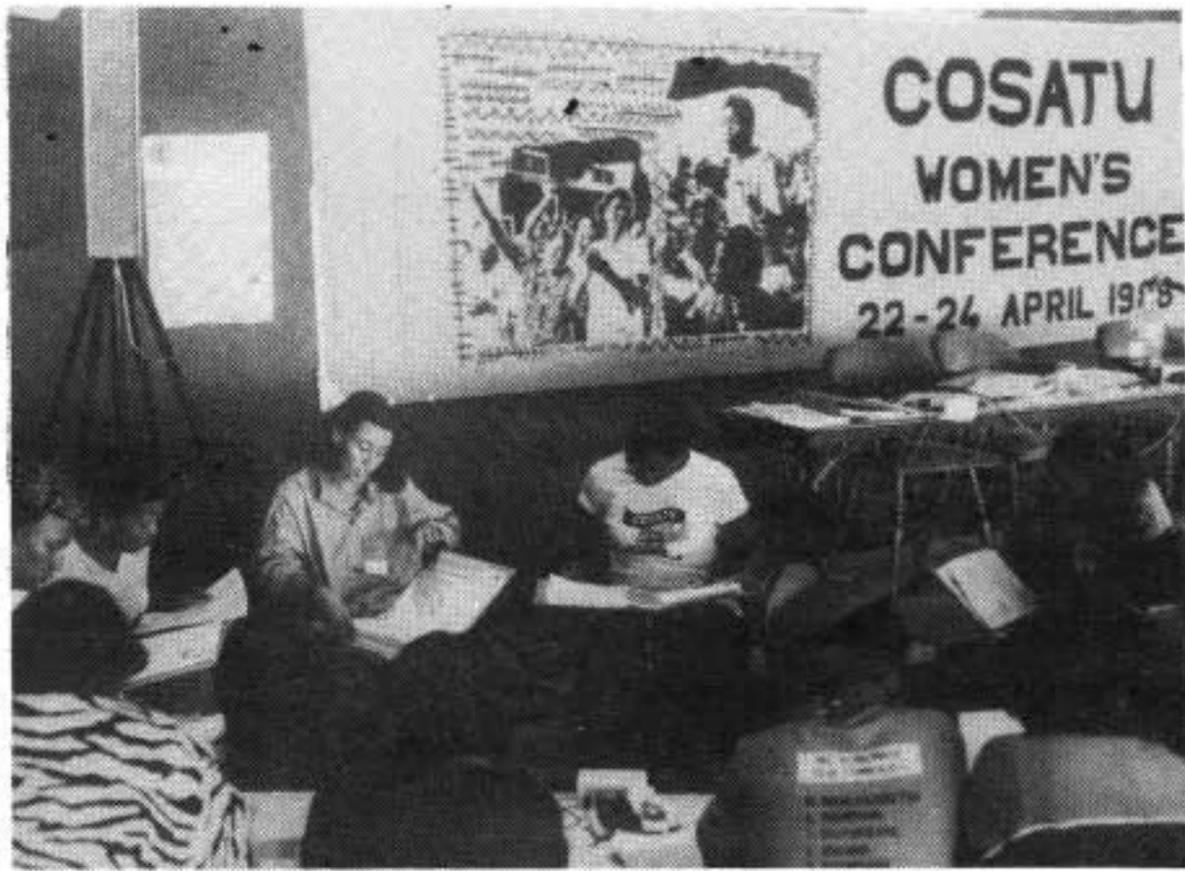


# VIVA ! COSATU WOMEN VIVA !



Photographs by Santu Mofokeng, Afrapix

*Over three hundred women came from their unions to the COSATU WOMEN'S CONGRESS. This was a very special time. Never before in South Africa had women workers from all over the country come together to discuss their problems as women. Women workers came from all the different unions affiliated to COSATU. There were also women from sister women's organisations in communities. SPEAK was there - selling magazines, badges and t-shirts.*

## **Women's lives**

The women at the conference looked at what is happening to women in the community, in the union and at work. They also looked at women and health and safety. The women decided that there were many things in their lives to fight and change. They met for three days. There was a lot of serious discussion. But there was also time to be enjoyed. One evening was set aside for plays, songs and dance.

## **Taking up women's struggles**

At times the women did not agree with each other. And so they spent a lot of time talking about things. They spent a long time talking about how to take up women's struggles in COSATU. And after much talking they decided to organise women's forums at a local level. This means that women will meet in the areas where they live and work. And they will talk about their problems. And they will decide what to do about them.

### **Pregnancy, Health and Safety**

The women at the conference said that pregnant women should have at least nine months paid leave. And this leave should be for all women even if they have just started a job. They said pregnant women should not do jobs that will harm their health and the health of their child. And there should be paid time off to attend clinic.

### **Contraception (prevention)**

They said that the injection -depo provera- is very harmful to womens health and should be banned. They said men should take an equal part in using prevention. Men can use condoms. The women want schools to have sex education. And they want women to get proper medical check ups before they are given contraceptives .

### **Abortion**

They said that many women die from abortions that are not done properly. They want COSATU to educate workers about abortion. And they want Cosatu to work with other organisations to fight for the right to a safe, free, and legal abortion whenever necessary.

### **Unemployment Insurance (UIF)**

The women want UIF to be given to farm workers and workers who work in peoples homes. These workers do not get UIF benefits.

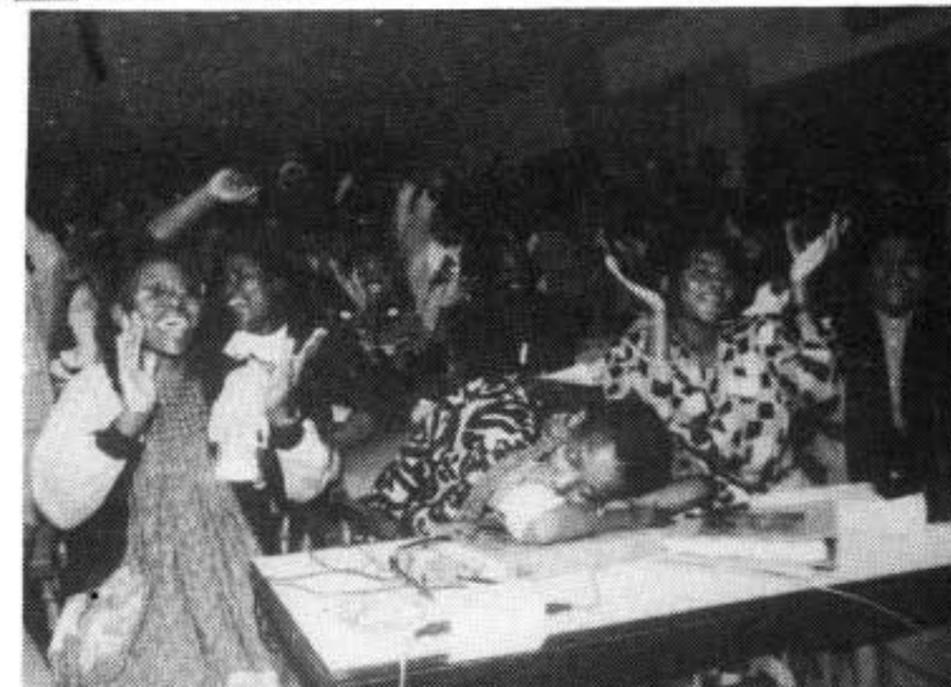
### **Cancer of the cervix**

They said that many women are dying from cancer of the cervix. This is cancer at the opening of the womb. If women have tests called pap smears this cancer can be found out early. And if it is treated early it can be cured. The COSATU women want the government to provide free information about this cancer. They want free pap smears at clinics. And they want companies to give women workers time off to have these tests.



### **Violence and women**

The women want COSATU to give its members education on rape. They want



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COSATU should look at training women in self defence so that they could defend themselves against attacks by men.

**Sexual harassment**

The women said that they are sexually harassed by men in the union, at work and in the community. They said that women must discuss these problems freely.

**Child care and maternity**

The women said they would fight for free child care for their children from the government and the bosses.

**Women in the family**

The women talked about how difficult it is for women to take part in union work and attend meetings because they have to attend to housework and childcare. They said that men should also take part in caring for children. And that housework should be shared by all those living in the house. They said COSATU members should be educated so that there could be equal relationships between men and women in COSATU and in the country as a whole. The women said that they would fight for these ideas in the union. And they said they would not allow COSATU members to hold ideas that keep women in the home.

**Taking these decisions forward**

There are lots of things to change in women's lives. The women spent much time at the conference working out what these things are. They talked with strong voices. And they looked at how COSATU could take up these problems.

Now is the time for these words to be put into practice. We wish the COSATU women well in doing this. If they are able to change these things in COSATU they will be also making changes for all women in the country. Then we will be able to say in even bigger voices - **VIVA COSATU WOMEN VIVA!**

COSATU to fight for the courts to take rape seriously. They also want COSATU to educate men and women on the problem of men beating their women. They said that