

Obituary

A Leading Woman in the Worker

Struggle

IN March, the African Food and Canning Workers Union was hit once again - this time by the tragic death of its Durban secretary, Peggy Dhiamini. Peggy suffered a brain haemorrhage on March 23, soon after giving birth to a daughter.

Both at a memorial service, and at her funeral on April 3, numerous trade unionists and community leaders spoke of the contributions she had made in her short active career: a firm believer of unity within the trade union movement, her death had been a setback to the progressive trade unions in Durban. Tribute was paid to the courage she had shown, particularly at this time of increasing state harassment, especially for the AFCWU, who recently lost another committed organiser - Dr. Neil Aggett.

Peggy was born on 29 January 1953 in Durban. She schooled in Clermont, and later at Inanda Seminary. After attending the University of Zululand for two years and training for a short time as a nurse, she joined the trade union movement.

In 1980, she worked for Saawu as secretary. When the African Food and Canning Workers Union established a Durban branch in mid-1981, she became its secretary. She played an important role in the formation of the Natal Ad Hoc Trade Union Solidarity Committee. In February of this year, she was elected its secretary.

Although organising workers was Peggy's main priority, she was active in a number of other organisations, including SASO (1972-77), Clermont Residents Association (Solomzi) as secretary and the Durban Women's Group.

She felt particularly strongly about women's rights and the role of women in the struggle. On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of South African Women's Day in August 1981, Peggy noted that "Traditionally, the women's place is in the home - in the kitchen to be precise. This has inhibited women in all spheres of life. Men do not have confidence in their womenfolk, so much so that they do not see the role women can play in the labour movement.....women should look back at their history and see what the Lilian Ngoyis and Helen Josephs have done in the past and continue from where they left off. The potential is there but women should be encouraged to take the initiative in the labour movement and spread their wings to the struggle as a whole" (Interview in the Sunday Tribune, 16/8/81)

Because of Peggy's involvement in the struggle, she has spent some time in detention. She was also interrogated on a number of occasions but this harassment never weakened her commitment.

A fitting tribute to her work would be to follow her example. As a speaker from the Natal Ad Hoc Trade Union Solidarity Committee said at the memorial service, her spirit shall be an inspiration to continue in the struggle of the workers.