

ORGANISE! FOR WOMEN



FIGHT SEXISM! FIGHT WORKERS' RIGHTS!

"This badge is great - haven't you got more of this one?" asked a National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) member at the union's Wits Region Women Workers rally. Which badge was she talking about? The one that SPEAK was selling that said: 'You are talking to a FIGHTING woman!' And this is what the rally was all about. Fighting women.

The T-shirts women wore told stories of our times. There was a T-shirt for Jabu Ndlovu, the brave shopsteward from Pietermaritzburg who was killed by vigilantes. They also murdered her daughter and husband. 'Hamba Kahle, Jabu', says the T-shirt. Lots of women also wore 'Welcome Home, Our Leaders', T-shirts, reminding us of the huge welcome home rally for the African National Congress leaders released in 1989. And there were lots of NUMSA T-shirts showing the bold red star of socialism rising over Africa.

Every Woman an Organiser

The rally on 5 November 1989 was opened with strong words. Chairperson of the NUMSA Wits Region Women Workers Committee, Rain Chiya said: "We are exploited by the bosses, we are exploited by the regime, and we are exploited by our husbands and comrades. Every woman must become a union organiser and a community organiser."

Rain said: "We own nothing but our labour, our bodies and our energy. The bosses own the factories. Some women are bosses. Even those women are exploited by their husbands. They face the same oppression. As women we want to end capitalism. As women workers, we must be part of the unions. We want to fight for our rights on the factory floor. We must be part of women's organisation to struggle against high rents and housing shortages and the like. We

must be part of the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW)."

Rain said: "Women's voices must be heard at every level, from the grassroots to the leadership. Democracy is not only for men. Women must play an active part in controlling their organisations. Side by side we must fight for a future South Africa where women and men are truly equal."

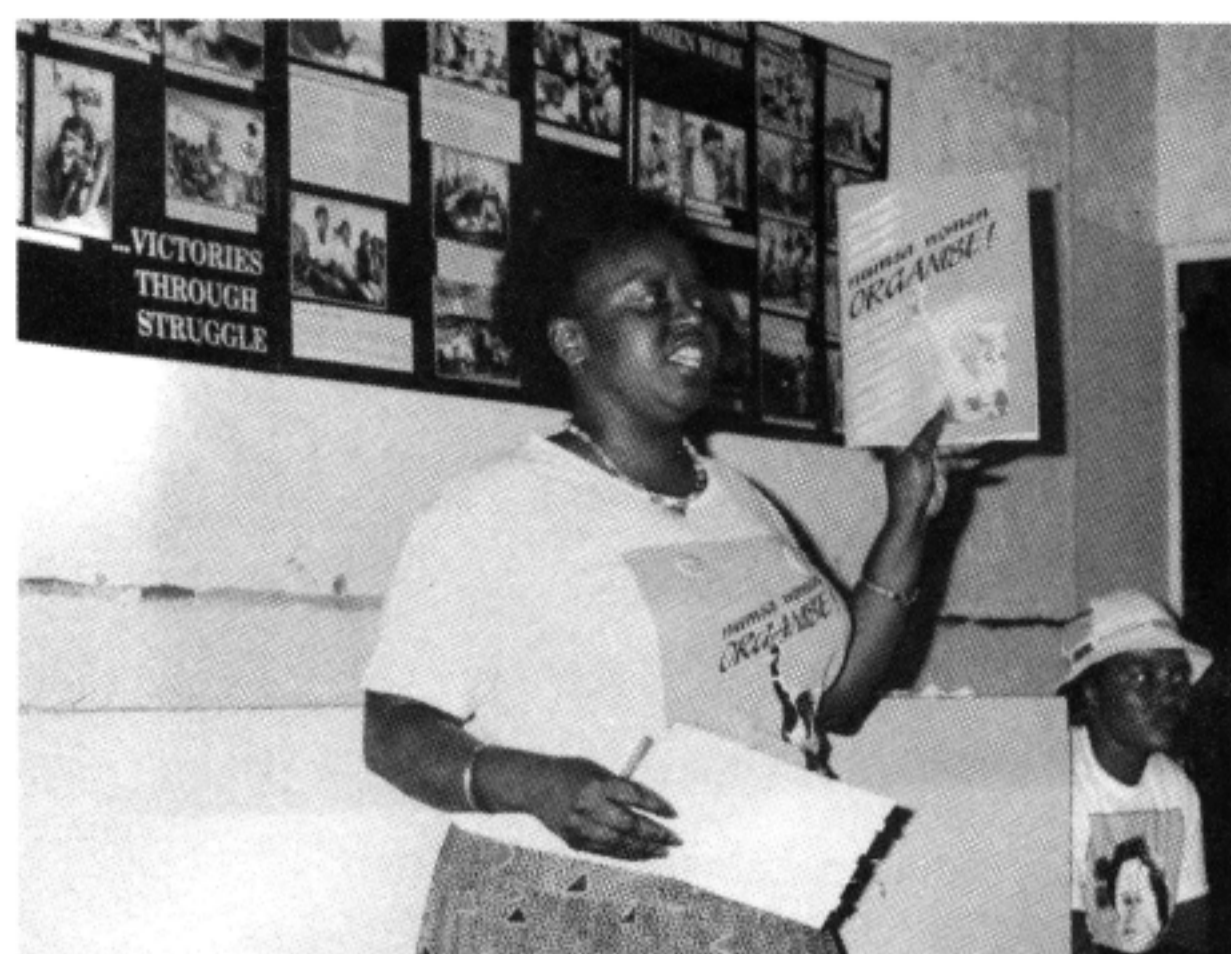
Let the Walls Open their Ears and Hear

Emelela Nkosi, from FEDTRAW, was invited to speak. She lives in Alexandra. She said: "Let the walls open their ears and hear that we are sick and tired of our oppression. This inferiority complex has been incarcerated in us women. When a baby is born it does not know if it is a woman or a man. A woman is not born inferior, but is made inferior. We cannot expect Mandela to take this inferiority out for us. We have to do that ourselves. It is our duty to liberate our minds ourselves. You are a human being and must face others as a human being not as a woman or a tool."

Everyone at the rally cheered. All clearly agreed that women must fight to end their oppression. What Emelela said next was not in praise of women, but women there agreed that it was honest. Emelela said: "Women are gossipers, we cannot run away from that. Why? Because we have been made into gossipers. We must stop gossiping and being jealous. We need to correct each other constructively. Men criticise us for having cliques. Let us not criticise destructively."

Feminism is a Fight Against Sexism

Emelela said: "We must wage a war against sexism. Not a war against men. Women and men should fight sexism. With feminism you don't have to burn your bra or jol with tsotsis.



Dorothy Mogkalo spoke about the book called 'NUMSA Women Organise'. She said the women workers should use the book to help build their structures.

Photo: SPEAK

That is not feminism. Feminism does not mean being bossy. It means fighting sexism. We have got to fight for respect. For example, Ma Sisulu respects her husband and her husband respects her. Let us not wage a war against men, but against sexism."

Women agreed that organisation is important in the factory and in the community. Emelela said: "People ask why women need organisations. They ask, 'why don't we feel free with men'? No-one owns the struggle. And no-one will ever own it. If we have liberation and women are still being used, exploited and oppressed, that is not liberation. Women must also get involved in structures outside of the factory. The factory is not divorced from the community. We fight for a living wage because the costs of rent are high. It is time for women to be involved in community structures. Now is the time."

Take Up Women's Health Problems

Emelela spoke of the need to take up women's health issues. She said: "Everyday we see women having womb or breast cancer and now AIDS is coming. We are being blamed for spreading the disease because we are seen as sex objects. When do we have time to do these things? When do we have time to read, to educate ourselves about these things? We are not allowed time off for PAP smear tests, to go to the clinic. You stay with these diseases until they kill you because there is no free health care. We pay taxes, but where do they go? Not

to us. To the Defence Force which does not protect us."

Amilia Mhlangu from the Food and Allied Workers' Union spoke about other problems facing women workers. She spoke about the trap that women workers are caught in when they have their babies. She said: "We get maternity leave which the union negotiates, but we go back early because of money the bosses refuse to pay, not because of our family and ourselves."

Be Yourself

Nomonde Jafta from Imbeleko, a community women's organisation in the Transvaal, said that women should not grow up trying to learn how to be good marriage partners, but they should grow up to be themselves. She told the meeting of the many projects Imbeleko organizes on the East Rand, including projects which teach women they too can be carpenters and welders!

Maud Khumalo, a shopsteward from the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union, spoke about the campaign against cervical cancer that her union is involved in. She told the meeting how women workers are demanding the right to have PAP smears during working hours, and of how they are winning their demands! She spoke about sexual harassment, and the way that men abuse paternity leave. She said that men tell the bosses that their wives have had a baby, and

then they go off and get a girlfriend.

NUMSA Women Organise!

Dorothy Mogkalo from NUMSA spoke about the book that NUMSA women have produced. It is called 'NUMSA Women Organise!' She explained how thousands of women workers helped to write the book by discussing their problems and answering questionnaires. The aim of the book, she said, is to educate women workers. Women should use the book to help build their structures.

1990 Demands - Women Workers Prepare Themselves

Maggie Magubane is the co-ordinator of the Wits Women Workers Region Committee. She reported back on the achievements that NUMSA made for women in 1989. She said: "I must say in NUMSA as a whole we have not achieved a lot. We are still faced with more work to do. In the engineering sector we did win some demands. We will have to work hard to win similar demands in even the motor and automobile sectors, because we are all NUMSA. I therefore appeal to comrades in other sectors to fight very hard at their factories. Discuss the issues with your shopstewards."

Maggie told the women which demands have been won in the engineering sector. They have won 6 months maternity leave, without loss of any service and benefits if a woman has worked for one employer for two years. She can also get payment from the sick fund - 50% of her

wages for 6 months. Together with her UIF payments this adds up to 95% of her wages for 6 months. There is a limit of 3 pregnancies with 2 years in between each pregnancy, to get the sick fund money. From her 4th pregnancy her job is secure but she will get no money. NUMSA also won a new procedure that women can use to fight sex discrimination in the Industrial Council.

COSATU Resolutions

Maggie reminded everyone about the COSATU resolutions on women leadership, on building national women's organisation, on the consitutional amendment on non-sexism, and the resolution on AIDS.

The task that lay ahead was to decide on what demands NUMSA women want to make for 1990. Everyone agreed to go back to the factories to discuss these demands with the other workers. After discussing 1990 demands at the shopfloor, NUMSA women will bring them together and include their demands into the national NUMSA Living Wage Campaign.

More than 300 women and a few men attended the rally. This was the second regional general meeting in NUMSA. It helped to build unity between NUMSA women from different factories in the region. Spirits were high. And the message from NUMSA women was clear. Organise. Fight sexism. Don't allow women to be used as tools!

SPEAK sold many T-shirts that say 'Women Together Are Strong!'

Photo: SPEAK

