

SPEAK

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LATE

HEALTH IS OUR RIGHT

union women are organising to fight cervical cancer



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SPEAK'S Offices

We have offices in Durban and in Johannesburg.

If you want to get SPEAK, please write to the Durban address.

SPEAK Collective Office 48 The Ecumenical Centre 20 St Andrew's Street Durban 4001 Phone: (031) 3011624	SPEAK Collective 3rd Floor, MGM House 127A Anderson Street Johannesburg 2001 Phone: (011) 3316100
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SPEAK Collective members are Gill, Helen, Karen, Nise, Phumelele, Shamim and Vanessa. We welcome our new employee, Glynis, onto the Collective.

The government's State of Emergency stops us from being free to write about many important things. If there was no State of Emergency, we would be able to write about these things.

Thanks

We thank those people who helped with this issue of SPEAK. They are Gill, Lesley, Laura, Nicholas and Sibonelo.

Cover photograph by Shirley Miller, Chemical Workers' Industrial Union. Back cover drawing by Gill Evill.

Published by SPEAK Collective

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Dear SPEAK

My name is Thandeka Dlamini. I would like to thank my union, South African Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU) because I have learnt lots of things. I can face any employer of mine to say what I want and what I need as a human being. We are exploited as domestic workers.

I worked for my first employer for nine years. I fell pregnant. Most of the employers they don't like us when we are pregnant. What they like is our power to work. Anyway I worked for them until my child was born. They were treating me like a slave, and I was that kind of person to tell them the truth.

I remember one day it was at Christmas eve. They called their old son and daughter from overseas. It was so hard to me. I worked from 6 a.m. all day and the whole night till 4 a.m. Just imagine when you are pregnant how you feel to stand like that? And they told me, "You have to work. You are lucky you are working with this child otherwise he or she would have no life and education." But there was a rat walking behind me. It was the lady who was working here years ago. She wanted the job back. Then I decided to leave the job but I told them the whole truth as I told you in my story how the union helps you to be brave.

I would like all those people who read SPEAK to help us organise those who are unorganised. I know your wife or sister, we are domestic workers. If we fight all together we will win.

But many domestic workers don't want the union. They say my boss or madam loves me. They give me lots of things. If you ask how much they earn monthly it is only R65 or R100. This is too little. Please people join your union. With the help from our union, now we

have literacy classes for free. We don't pay anything.

Back to my story. I left that job and I found a nice one. My son is lucky because the people I work for love him. They are looking forward to educating him.

Lots of employers read the papers about what our union says. But the union is not those people sitting in the office. We are the union ourselves. Thank you so much SPEAK magazine, you help us. Forward SADWU struggle forward.

From Thandie Dlamini, Durban.

Dear Thandie, Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with SPEAK readers. We know that many people will read your letter and feel encouraged to fight their problems. We are happy that you feel so strong about your union. We hope many other people will too - SPEAK Collective.

Dear Comrades

Two Scottish feminists, Joy and Daphne, are keen to receive articles, ideas, letters from South African women on "Feminism and boys." They intend putting together the experiences, ideas, joys and fears of women around the world on this particular subject. If women in your organisation or friends wish to contribute, or make further enquiries, I can be contacted at the following address:

Daphne Williams, 40 Hood Road, Crawford 7764. Phone (021) 6377068
Comradely Greetings
Daphne

Dear Sisters

I learned about your magazine SPEAK from the Women's Kit compiled by the Participatory Research Group/ICAE Women's Program in Canada. I'm most impressed with your work and would like to exchange our newsletter SCSNEWS with your SPEAK magazine. I believe your magazine would be most helpful to our

education work among the rural women of Sarawak (the Dayak - Iban). We hope these women will get organised to improve their lives and to defend their rights against the logging companies that are destroying their land and forests.

Hope to hear from you soon. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely
Ms Tan Lee Tin
Women's Programme
Society of Christian Service, 23, 2/F Long Bridge Road, 96009 SIBU, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Dear Tan, thank you very much for your letter. It is very encouraging to know that SPEAK is reaching women world wide. And it is exciting to have contact with women from Malaysia. We are giving your address to our readers in case they would like to have contact with women there. We wish you strength in your struggle for your land rights - SPEAK Collective.

Dear sisters,

Thank you for a great magazine like SPEAK. We are very proud of the work you do as women.

I hope that we will keep in touch. Included please find copies of all the issues of the Women Voice Newsletter given out so far. It would be good to also have contributions especially about what you would like to read about Namibian women.

Yours in the struggle for women's rights.
Salome van Wyk
Publicity and Information, Women's Voice
P.O. Box 7256, Katutura, 9000 Namibia.

Dear Salome, Thank you for your letter. We are glad that you like our magazine. Thank you very much for sending us Women's Voice. It is very nice to have contact with women in Namibia, especially because you are our neighbours! We include your address as we are sure that some SPEAK readers would like to receive your interesting newsletter. Solidarity in the struggle for women's rights - SPEAK Collective. ●



HEALTH IS OUR RIGHT

**union women are
organising to fight
cervical cancer**

"We demand PAP smears!" This is the demand that women workers in Chemical Workers' Industrial Union are making to their bosses. We asked Elizabeth Tabete, who works at Hipak plastics and is the union's branch treasurer, why they were taking up this demand. She said, "It cropped up in our meetings. At one factory a woman died from cancer of the cervix. She found she had this in the very late stages. We discussed this. We felt we needed more information about this cancer. We arranged for doctors to talk to women workers about this. We realised that if women had pap smear tests they could find out if they had this cancer early and they could be treated. We decided to demand that management provide PAP smears."



Cancer of the Cervix is a Killer

Cancer of the cervix is a killer. It has been found that many women die every year from this sickness. It is the biggest killer of women in South Africa. When women have this sickness they begin to feel sick only when the sickness is too bad to cure. But women will not die from this if it is found early and is treated. The test that tells if you have cancer of the cervix in the early stages is a PAP smear.

Elizabeth Tabete told us that the union was very concerned that women workers be organised around the things that affect their lives. The union has appointed co-ordinators in every branch of the union to arrange women's meetings and to see to it



Elizabeth Tabete talking at a Chemical Workers Industrial Union Women's meeting.

Photograph by SHIRLEY MILLER

that there is progress in the branch. The co-ordinators go to office bearers' meetings where they report on progress. Elizabeth is a co-ordinator in her branch. The women workers in the branch meet once a month on a Saturday for about three hours. They discuss the things that they see as important.

Union Women Meet

While we were talking to Elizabeth at the union's Germiston office, women were coming in to the monthly meeting. Elizabeth told us, "We get a lot of women at these meetings. We organise transport and each union woman contributes R5.00 towards transport, whether she is going to the meeting or not."

The meeting today was going to discuss progress with taking up the demand for PAP smears with the bosses. A woman doctor had been invited to the meeting to talk about contraception and cancer of the cervix and to answer any questions women workers had about these things.

There were about 50 women at the meeting. One by one each factory reported on progress made. At two factories the workers had won this demand. But at some factories there was the problem of men shop stewards not moving fast enough on this demand.

One woman said, "We asked the shop stewards to go to management but they are delaying." A woman asked her, "Is the shop

steward a man?"
She said, "Yes."

"You need to appoint a woman shop steward," the other woman said. "It's your duty next time there is an election to appoint a woman."

The other women at the meeting all agreed strongly with this. And this problem was explained by yet another woman who said this was the first time she was at a women's meeting. The male shop stewards in her factory had not given her messages about these women's meetings before.

Other Burning Issues

Women from some other factories reported that overtime and shift work were burning issues they were taking up right now but that they would be looking at the demand for PAP smears soon.

After the reports the woman doctor spoke and answered questions. The women were told that the results of PAP smears are a private and confidential thing.

Women Could Talk Freely

The women were free to talk at this meeting. And they could talk openly about the things that affect them. Elizabeth told us, "It is important that women meet together. On their own they feel free to participate in meetings. There are very few women in the Branch Executive Meeting (BEC) and they are not free to participate. Men are in the majority and the domination of men is present."

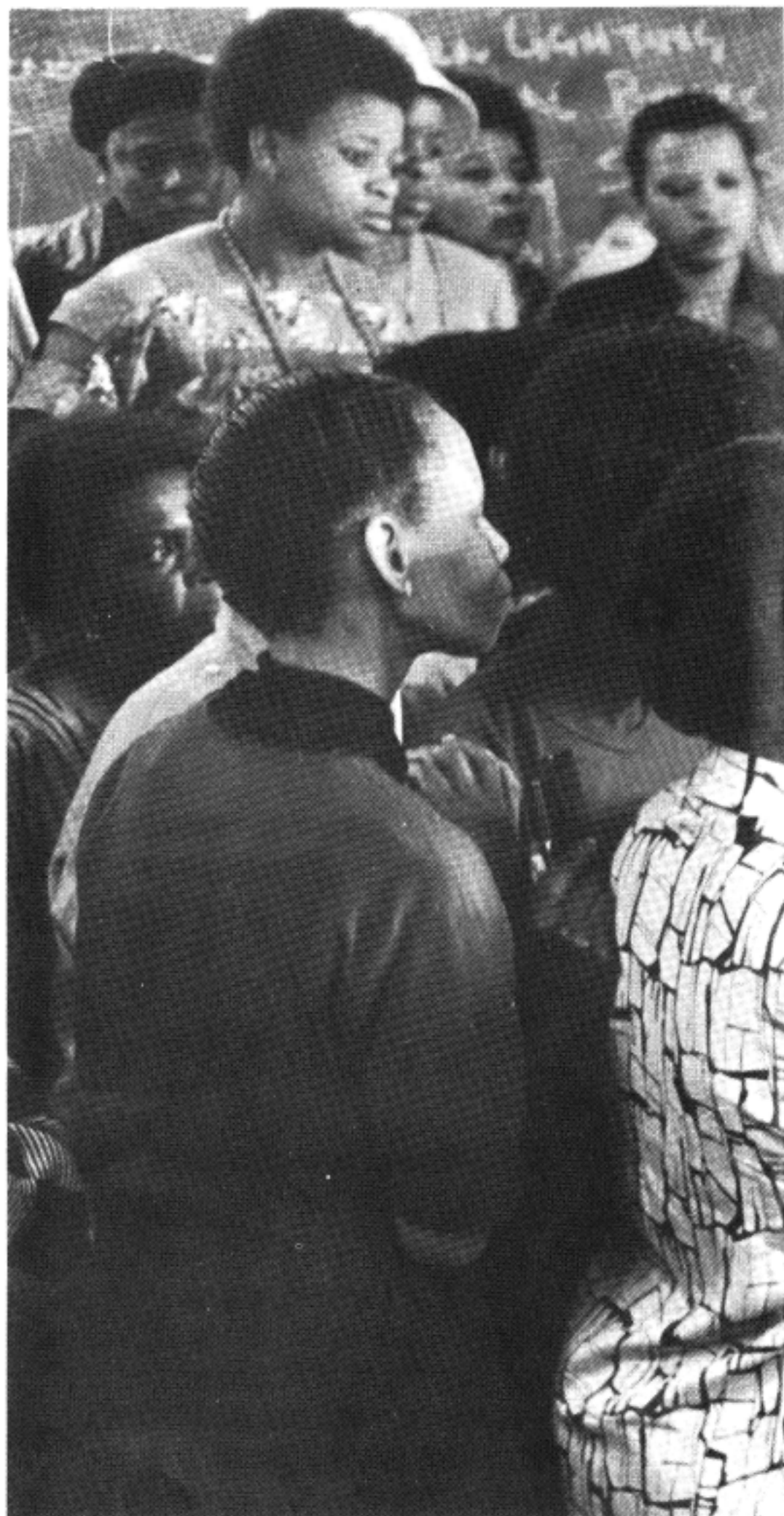
Elizabeth told us that it is not easy for women to get to meetings. She said, "There are problems. With married women husbands are not happy that they should go to meetings. Also there is no child care over weekends. And then there's the cleaning, the cooking and the washing. Men should try and share these responsibilities in the home. Women do two shifts and when she is a shop steward it is three shifts."

A doctor explains at a union meeting how PAP smears are done.

Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON

Now More Women Attend Meetings

But since 1987 more women have been attending meetings. Elizabeth said, "We decided we should pressurise organisers in companies to stress that women should attend meetings. We are seriously looking at things like sexual harrasment and including maternity agreements in each and every factory negotiation. And maybe because of the maternity agreements we have won women see that the union is for them and are now coming to meetings in bigger numbers."



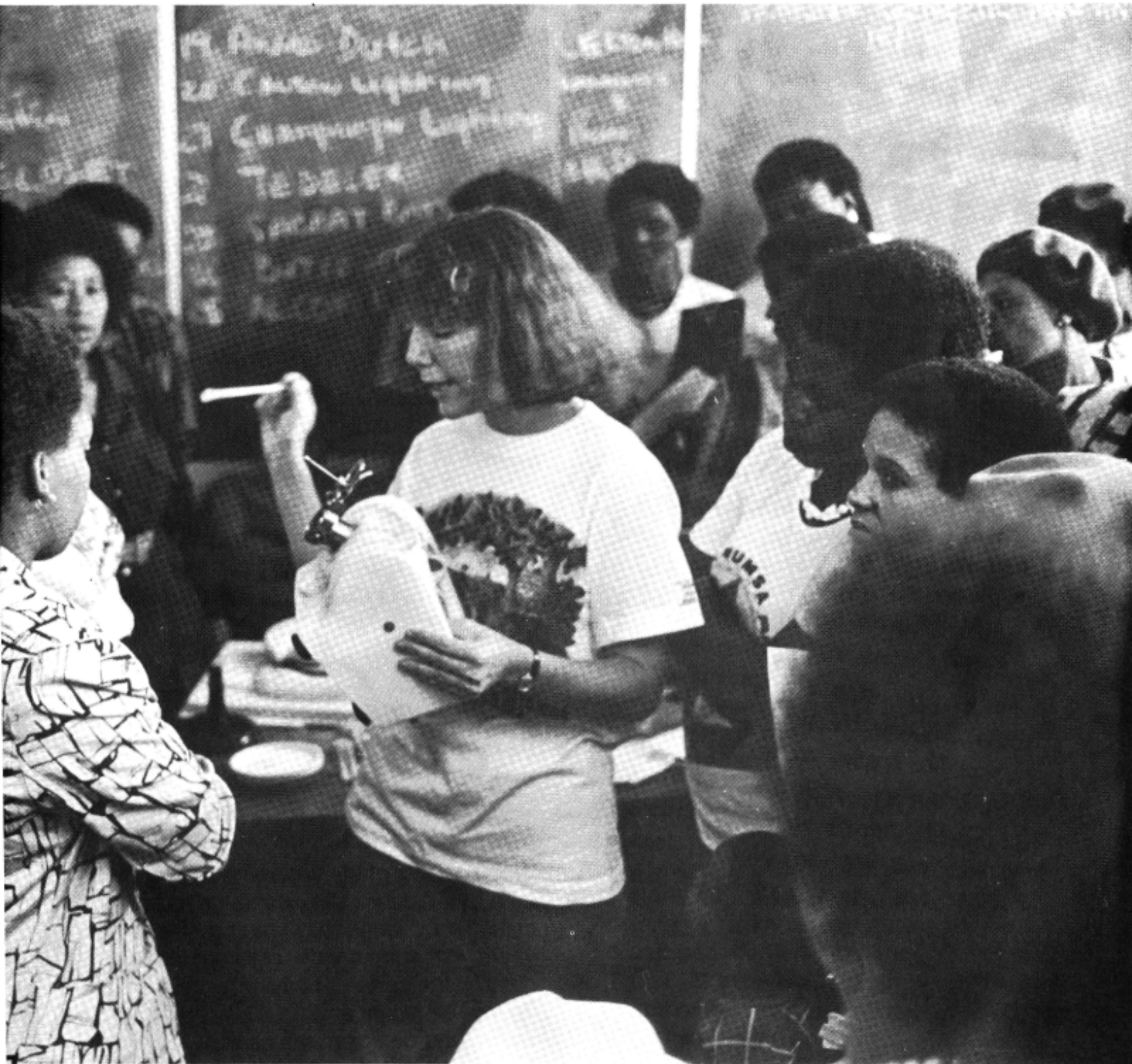
There are not that many women in Chemical Workers' Industrial Union. Elizabeth told us that women are about 6% of the membership. But the union is moving to see that these members are organising around the things that affect their lives.

More Unions Join the Campaign

Another union that has started looking at a campaign around PAP smears is NUMSA. Women in NUMSA have been meeting to

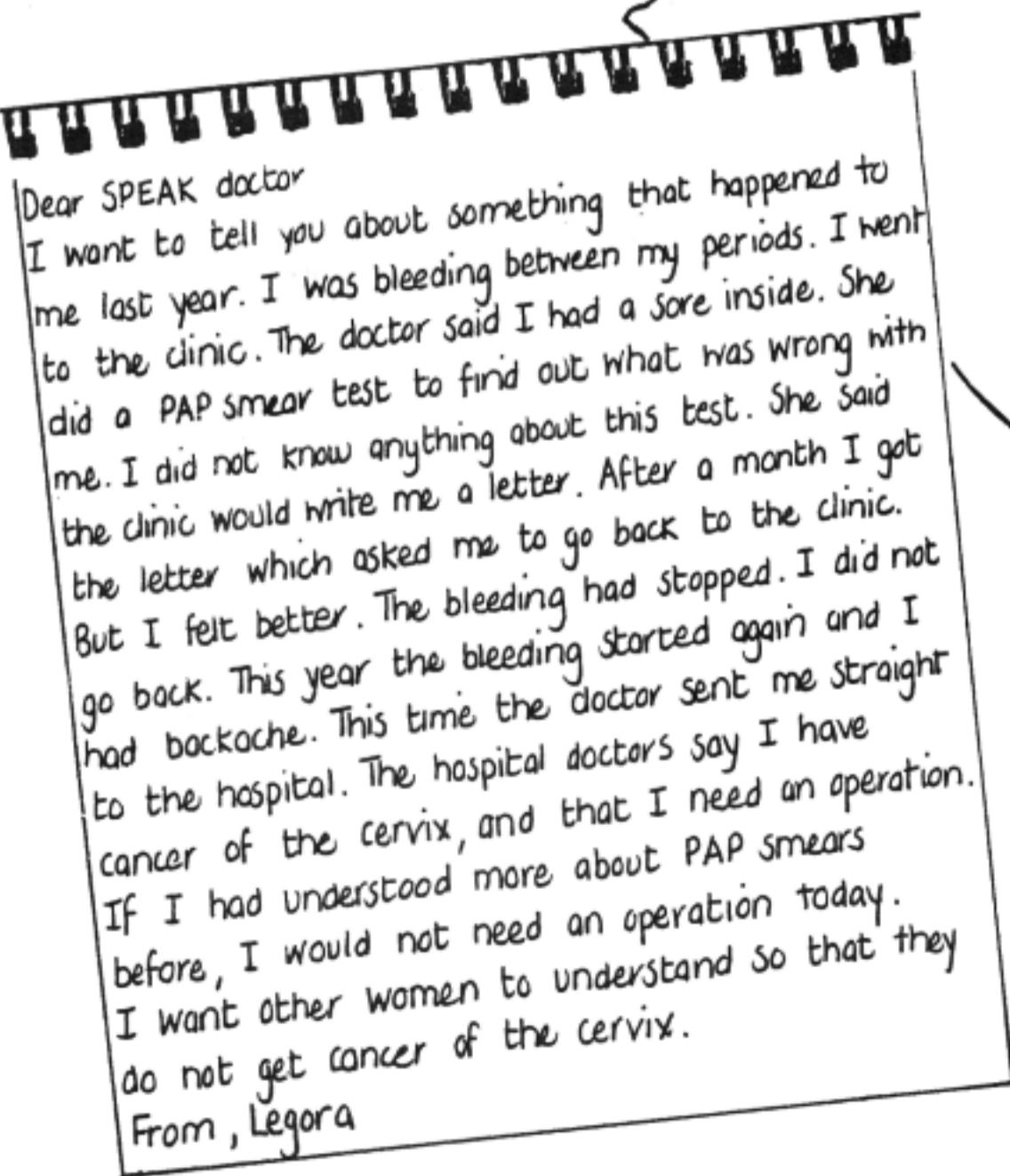
discuss this issue. They have had talks by doctors. And they will begin to take up the demand for PAP smears at factory level.

Union women are fighting for the right to have good health. And more and more women are finding out about the campaign for PAP smears and organising around it. They know that only through a united demand will they win their struggle against cervical cancer. ●

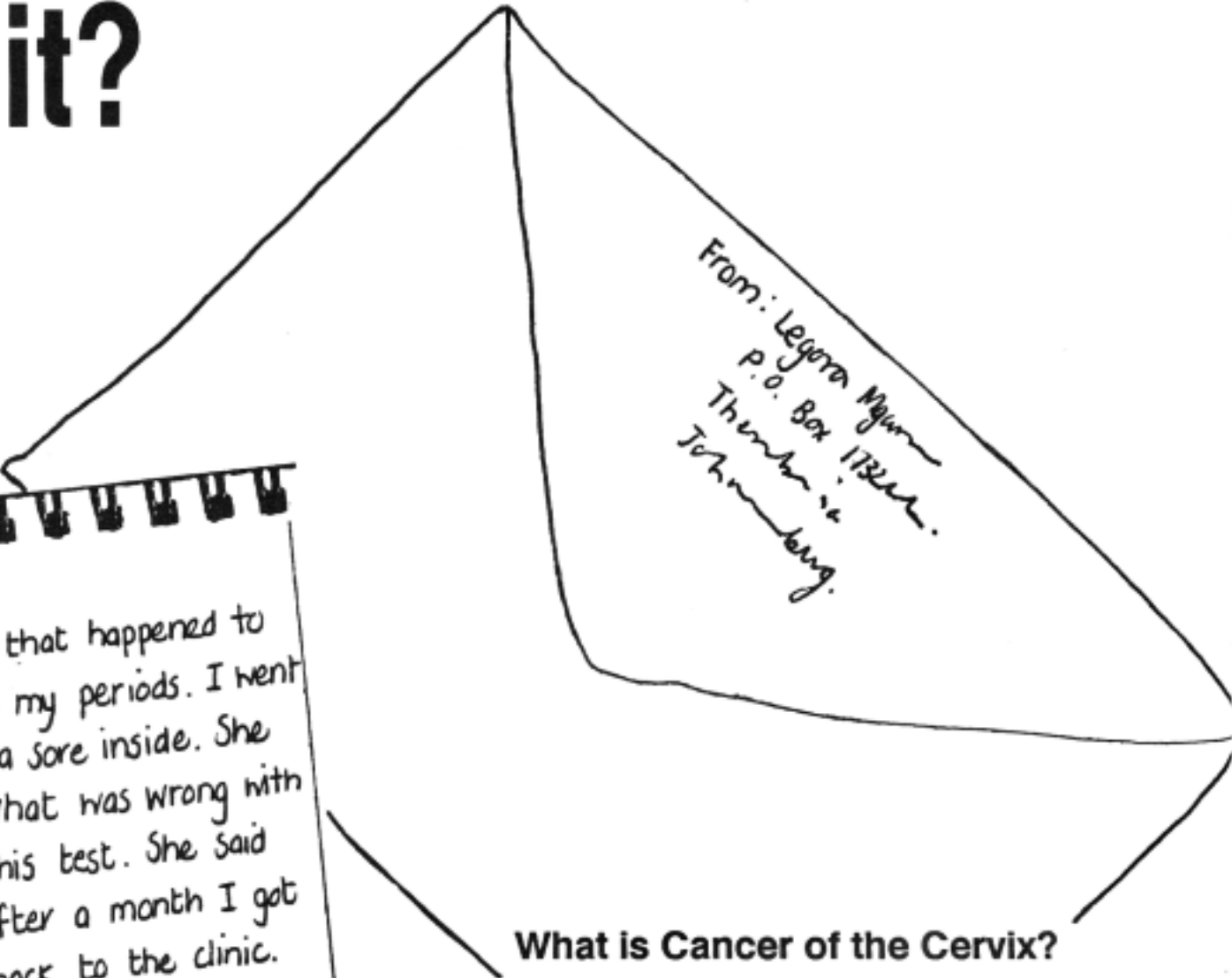


CANCER OF THE CERVIX

What is it and how can we prevent it?



Dear SPEAK doctor
I want to tell you about something that happened to me last year. I was bleeding between my periods. I went to the clinic. The doctor said I had a sore inside. She did a PAP smear test to find out what was wrong with me. I did not know anything about this test. She said the clinic would write me a letter. After a month I got the letter which asked me to go back to the clinic. But I felt better. The bleeding had stopped. I did not go back. This year the bleeding started again and I had backache. This time the doctor sent me straight to the hospital. The hospital doctors say I have cancer of the cervix, and that I need an operation. If I had understood more about PAP smears before, I would not need an operation today. I want other women to understand so that they do not get cancer of the cervix.
From, Legora

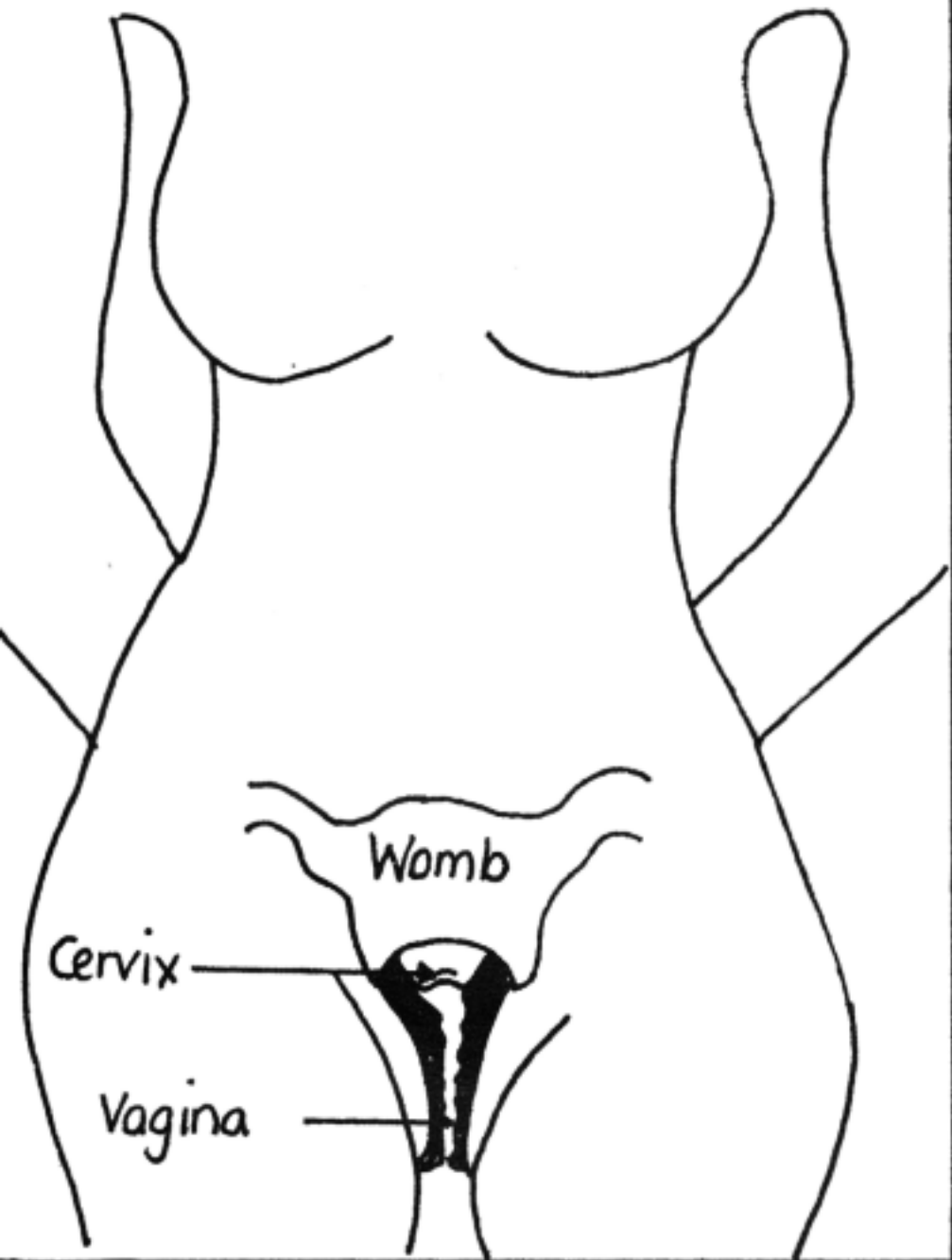


From: Legora Mjwani
P.O. Box 17224
Thunderbolt
Johannesburg.

What is Cancer of the Cervix?

This is a very common disease that kills many women in South Africa every year. The cervix is the neck of the womb (uterus). It is at the top of your vagina. Cancer is a disease which destroys healthy cells in the body. Once the cancer starts spreading it is difficult to treat. If it is discovered early it can easily be cured.

When cancer of the cervix starts, the healthy cells of the cervix slowly change to cancer cells. This change may take months or even years. Once the cancer cells are there they destroy the cervix. The healthy cells all change into cancer cells. They spread to the womb and other organs nearby. When this happens it is very difficult to treat the cancer.



What Causes Cancer of the Cervix?

When a man and woman have sex different germs may be passed from one partner to the other. The germ which causes cancer of the cervix comes out with the man's sperm, and travels through the cervix and into the womb. The germ moves into the cells of the cervix and can live there for many years before causing cancer. In younger girls it is easier for the germ to get into the cervix. This means that teenage girls having sex are more likely to catch the germ. And women who have many partners are also more likely to catch the germ.

How Do You Know If You Have Cancer of the Cervix?

To begin with you may not know that you have cancer of the cervix. When it spreads, it causes different problems. You may get bleeding after sex, bleeding between periods, a discharge, pain or backache. If the cancer is found before you have these problems it can be cured.

How Can Cancer of the Cervix Be Found Early?

The PAP smear is a test done to find early cancer of the cervix. In a PAP smear the cells are scraped off the cervix. The cells are sent away to the laboratory. In the laboratory they look at the cells to see if there is an early cancer. They will send a letter to the doctor with the results of the test. If the PAP smear shows only healthy cells you will be told to have another routine test done in one year. If there is anything wrong with the PAP smear the doctor may ask you to come before next year for another PAP smear. She may send you to hospital for more tests. Ask the doctor to explain anything that you don't understand.

How Is a PAP Smear Done?

The PAP smear should not be painful. It may be uncomfortable. You are asked to take your pants off and lie down on your back. The doctor or nurse will first feel your tummy. Then she will ask you to bend your knees and let your legs drop open. She will put a metal instrument called a speculum into your vagina. It is closed when it is put into the vagina. When it is inside the vagina it is opened so that the cervix can be seen through the speculum. To help see the cervix clearly a light is shone into the vagina.

A small flat wooden stick is put through the speculum. The stick is used to wipe off the loose cells of the cervix. This does not hurt. The stick is taken out and the cells are wiped on a glass slide. The slide is sprayed and sent to the laboratory. The speculum is gently taken out of the vagina. Then the doctor or nurse will put their fingers inside your vagina to examine your womb to check that it is healthy.

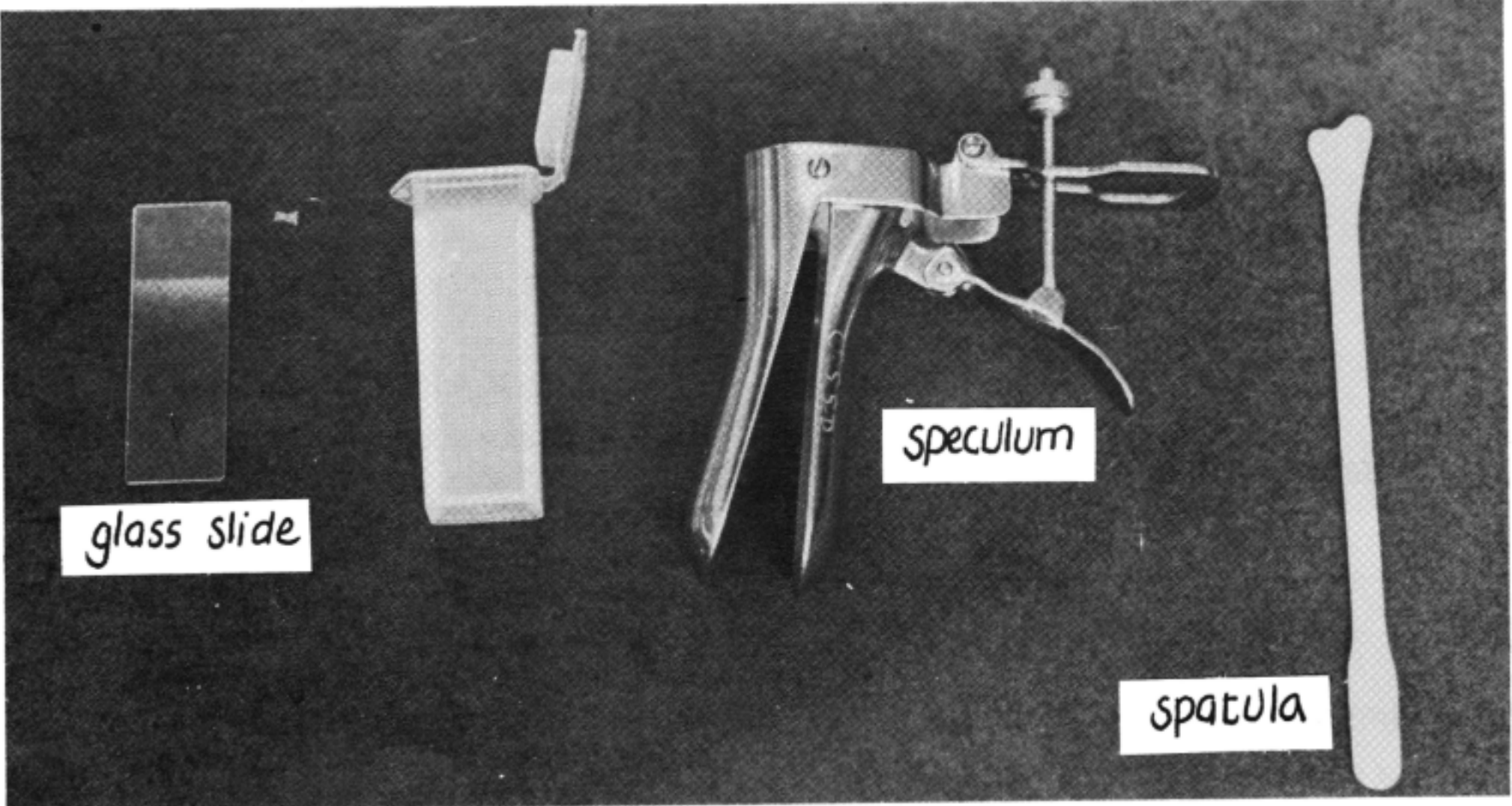
Where Can You Get a PAP Smear Test Done?

All hospitals and clinics should offer women PAP smears every year. But in South Africa today, most hospitals and clinics have stopped this service. Although PAP smears can save the lives of many women, health authorities are not prepared to spend money on this service.

HAVING A

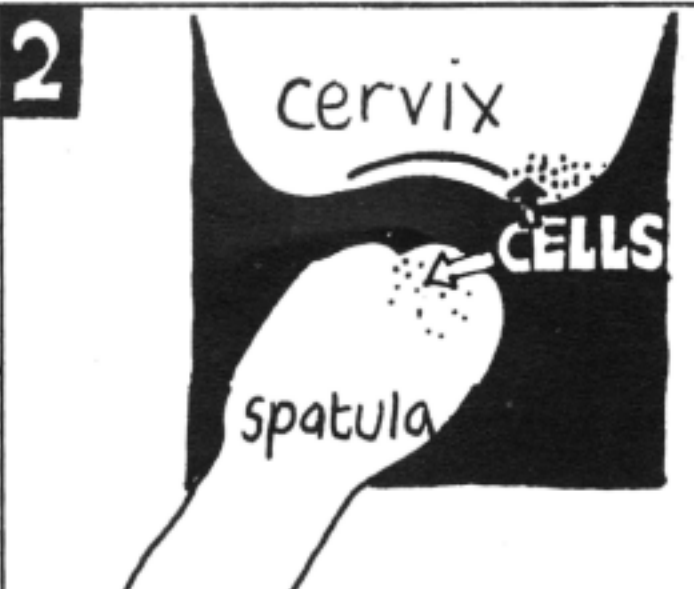
PAP Smear

TEST



Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON

1 When you go to the doctor for a PAP smear test she will ask you to keep your legs apart. She will put a speculum into your vagina. Then she will use a spatula to scrape some cells from your cervix.

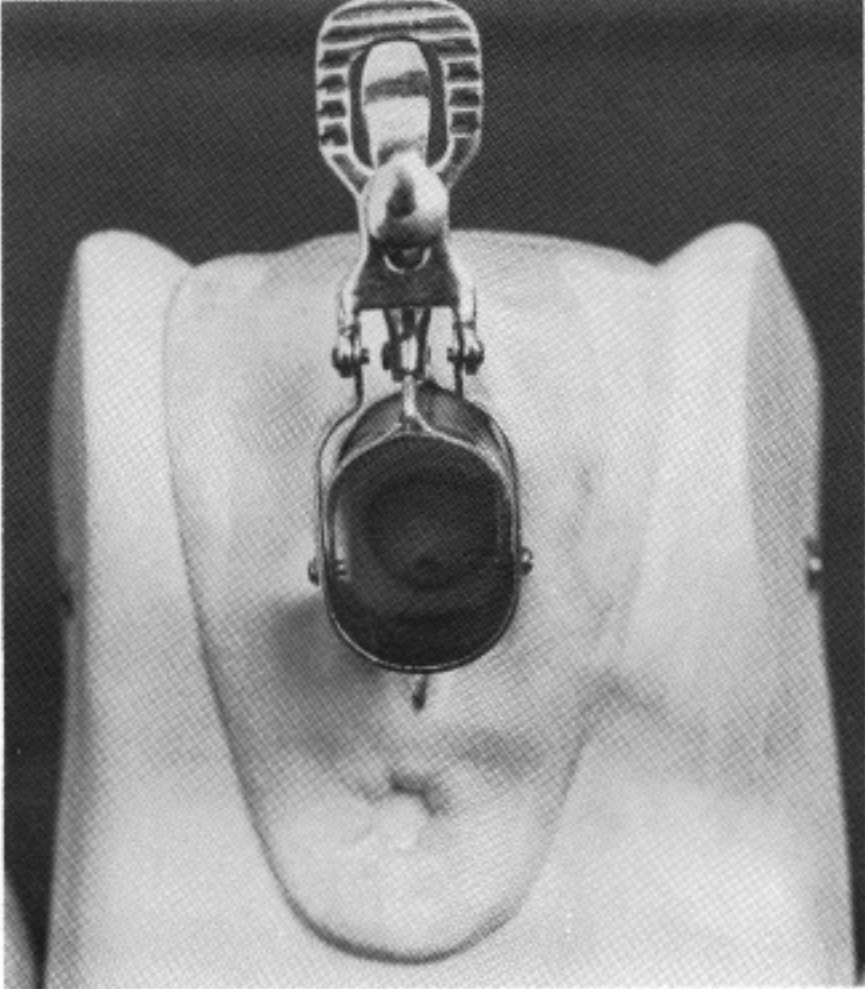


3 The doctor will smear the cells on to a glass slide. This is the PAP smear.

4 The PAP smears may be sent to another place for testing.

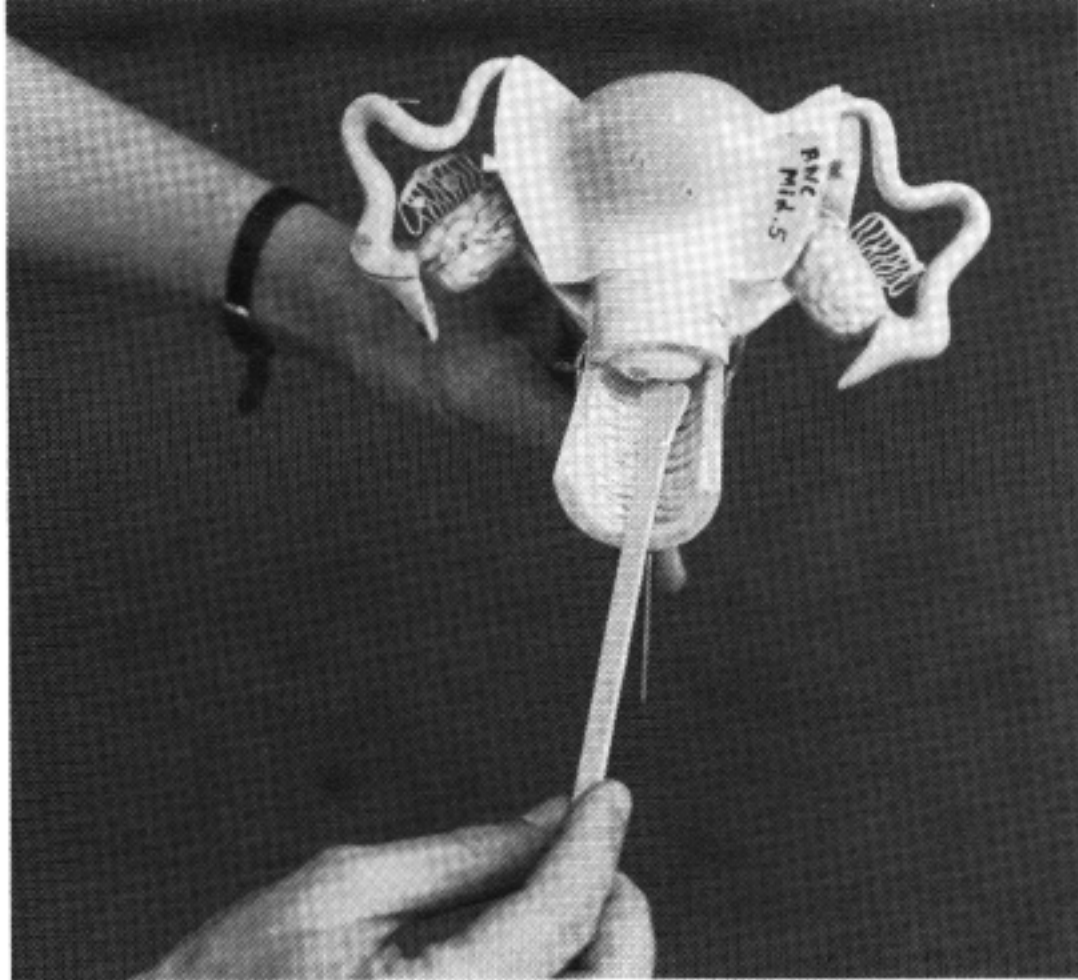
5 Ask the doctor when the results will be ready.

CONGRATULATIONS
 you can tell others about your PAP smear test



This shows part of a woman's body. It shows the speculum in the vagina. You can see what the cervix looks like when you look into the speculum.

Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON



This shows part of the inside of a woman's body. It shows the wooden spatula that scrapes the cervix to get cells for testing. The wooden spatula reaches the cervix through the vagina. Above the cervix is the womb.

Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON

As women we must organise and demand free yearly pap smears from all state hospitals and clinics.

We must go to our local clinics and hospitals and ask for a PAP smear. If you cannot get a PAP smear done, contact the National Cancer Association. In Johannesburg they send nurses to your workplace or into your community to run a PAP smear clinic. In Transvaal telephone Sister Chakane or Sister Sinclair at the National Cancer Association (011) 4033300. Not all the branches of the National Cancer Association are able to offer PAP smear clinics. But they will all give talks, or help you to get a PAP smear if you are having problems getting one. Here are the phone numbers of the National Cancer Association branches:

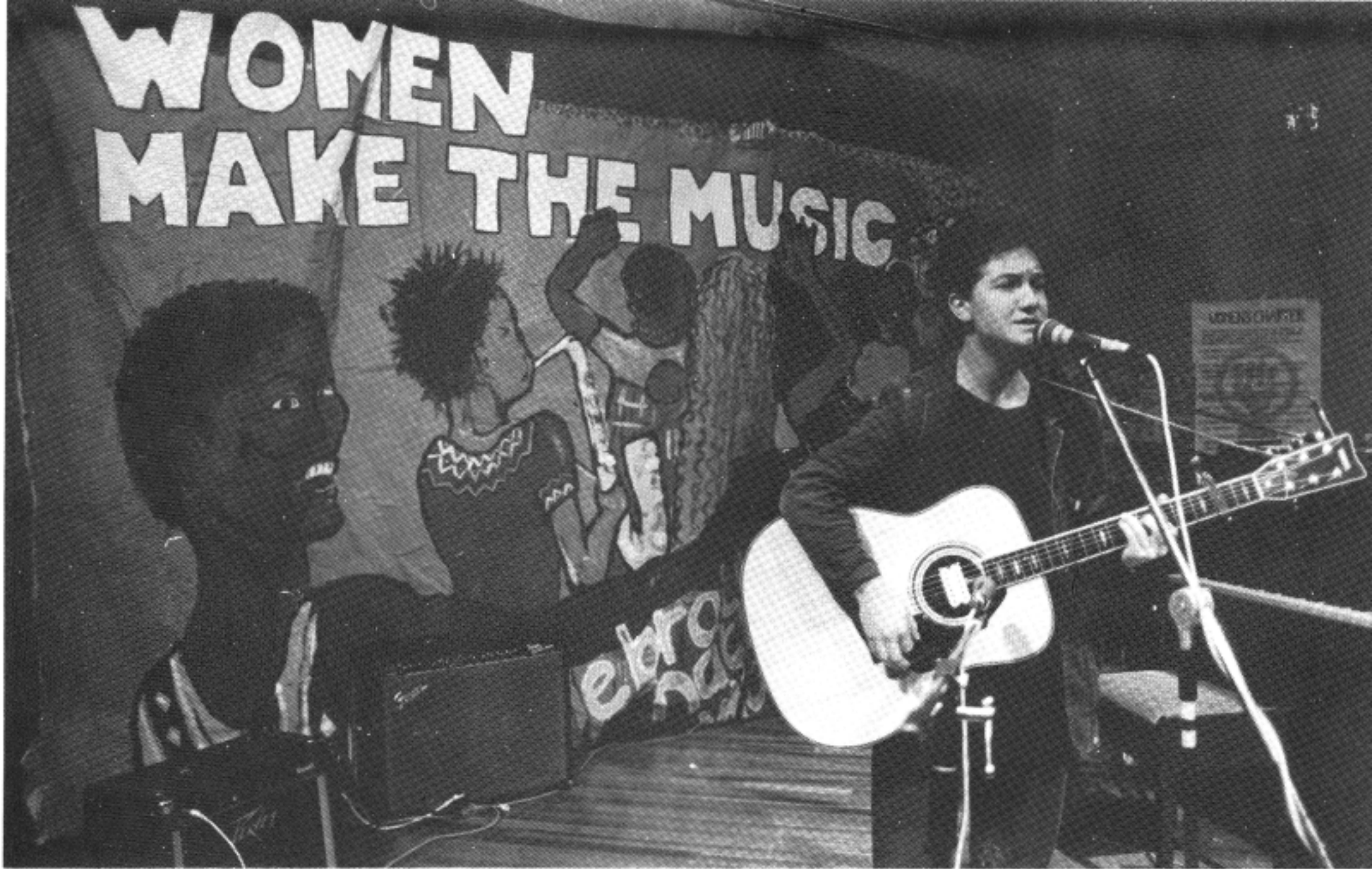
Durban (031) 259525
 Pretoria (012) 3300051
 Cape Town (021) 6895347
 Port Elizabeth (041) 351212
 Bloemfontein (051) 477535

If you want a doctor to come and teach your union or organisation more about cancer of the cervix, please write to SPEAK.

How Can We Prevent Cancer of the Cervix?

- * Have a PAP smear done every year
- * Always use condoms
- * Think hard before you sleep with a lot of different men
- * Spread the message to young women that teenage sex may cause cancer of the cervix.

In the interests of women's health we must organise around PAP smears to save our lives.



Wendy Newstadt sings and plays at the 'Women make the Music' concert to celebrate National Women's Day.

Photograph by ERIC MILLER, Afrapix



Thandi Claasens sings at a Women of Africa Tribute Concert.
Photograph by ANNA ZIEMINSKI, Afrapix

**WOMEN
MAKE
THE
MUSIC**



Thembi Mtshali and Shadii

Photograph by ERIC MILLER, Afrapix



Busi Mhlogo sings her heart out.

Photograph by CEDRIC NUNN, Afrapix

12th March 1989



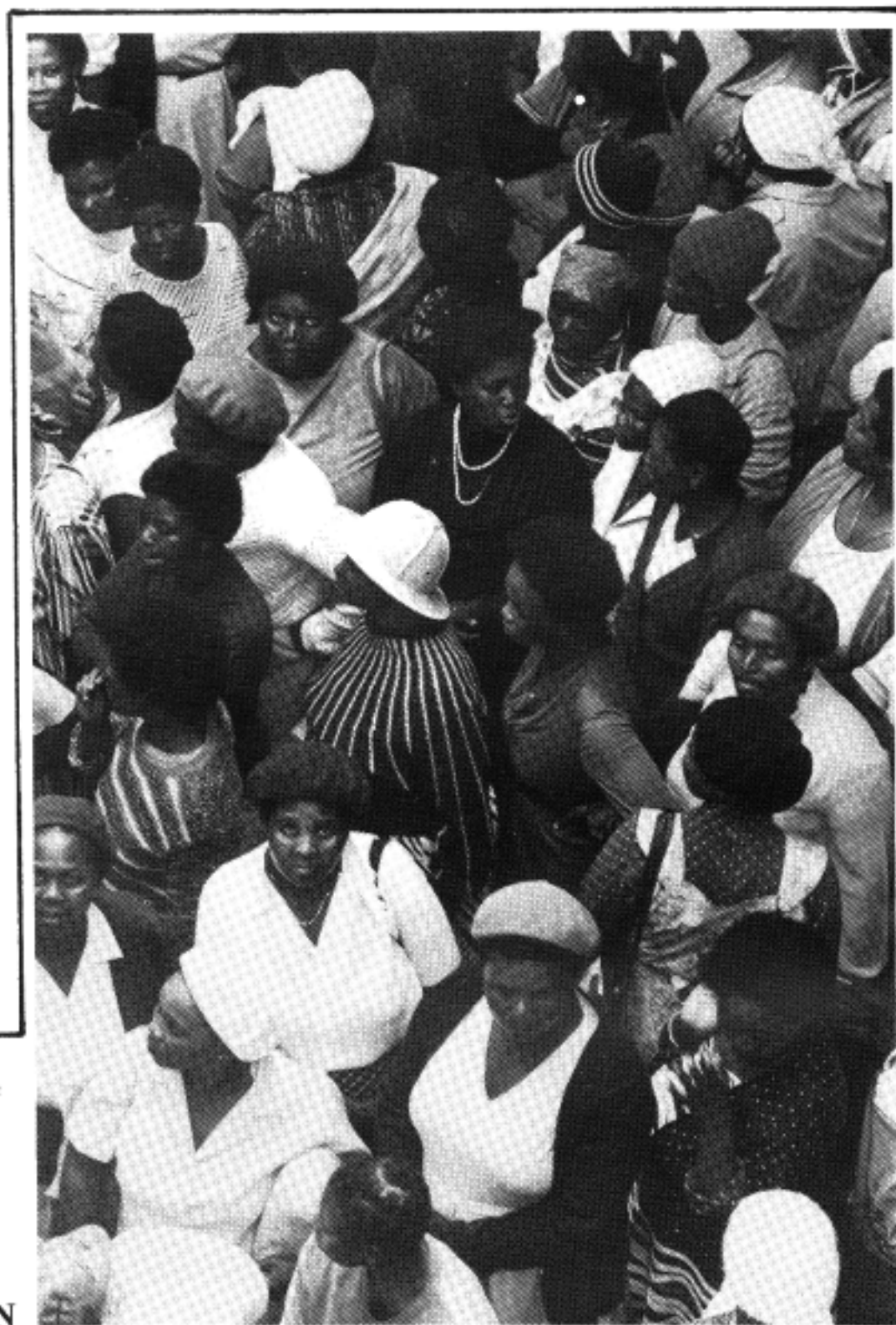
Issued by the South African Council of Churches

Freedom-loving people all over South Africa are thinking every day about those in detention. Many detainees have had enough. The government has held them behind bars for too long now. Many detainees have gone on a hunger strike to make their voices heard. Being on a hunger strike can cause damage to the body for ever. That is how bad things are inside the prisons. The detainees are prepared to risk their lives. The Minister of Law and Order, Vlok, met with church, community and trade union leaders to talk about the hunger strikers. He is scared that some of the detainees will die on the hunger strike. He is scared of how angry the people of South Africa will be if that happens. So he promised to start releasing big numbers of detainees within two weeks. But he said that he would

"Asibafuni - We do not want them" said the women of Mpumalanga loud and clear. They were protesting about the kitskonstabels who are trained for two weeks and sent to the townships to keep law and order. The big problem is that they are the ones who cause trouble. The women won their demand. The kitskonstabels have been removed from Mpumalanga.

Women from Caluza, in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg came together to protest about an attack on their area by Inkatha. They were also protesting about the police being part of this attack. In December 1988 the women went to the local Progressive Federal Party offices to write statements containing the complaints.

Photograph by MIKE MATHEWMAN



only release detainees once they had stopped the hunger strike. He has released some detainees. But not as many as he promised. So some detainees have gone back on the hunger strike. Many people have supported the hunger strikers. They have fasted for some days in solidarity. And meetings are being held. But the government wants to hide the truth. They have banned a meeting on detention in Durban. But the government cannot try and hide things forever. Freedom-loving people are saying: release all detainees, stop detentions and start negotiations.

YESTERDAY

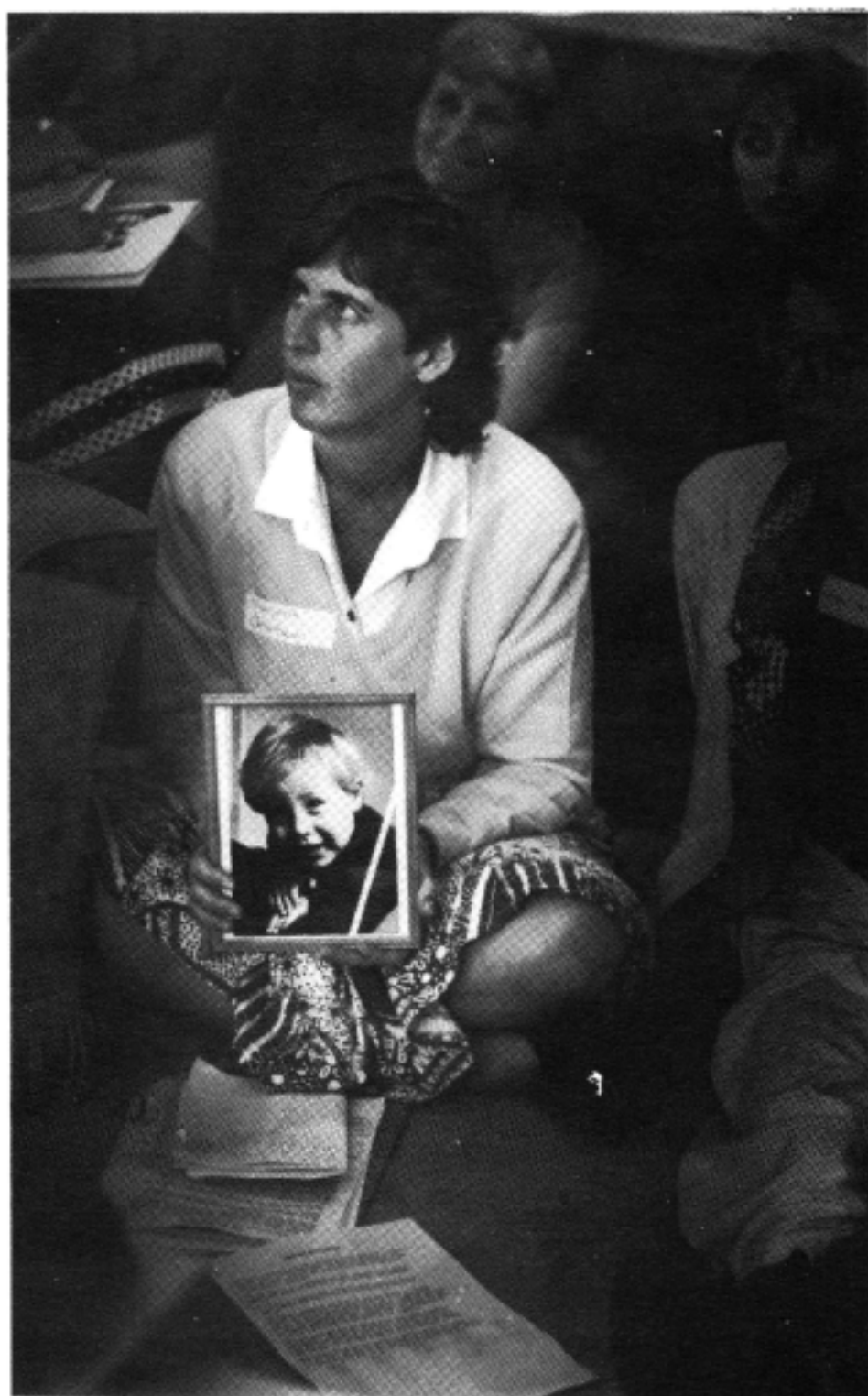
TODAY &

TOMORROW

More than 1000 women have signed a petition against the army. They are angry because the army takes away young white men for two years - sometimes more. The men have no choice. On February 11 this year Virginia Gcabashe spoke at a Prayer for Peace organised by Women Against War in Durban. Virginia is president of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). She said, "Our protest is not to protect our young white men. We as mothers must say no to our children on both sides of the colour line being sacrificed at the altar of apartheid. The time comes when we say enough! No more!"

"Women are fed up about the way the government has decided to use the lives of our young people. Our young people are expected to kill one another in support of a system which they had no part in creating," said Virginia. At the prayer service, women said the money that goes to buy guns should be used for housing and health. They protested because young men who refuse to be soldiers in the South African Defence force must leave the country or spend six years in prison.

Marjorie Graham is holding a picture of her three year-old son Benjamin. "He is a peace-loving child," she says. Marjorie does not want Benjamin to go into the army and learn how to kill people. She wants a choice!





WOMEN SPEAK

"Kulumani Makhosikazi/ Buang Basadi / Women Speak" was the theme of the conference organised by the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), Transvaal Region.

The conference was held over three days in November 1988 in Johannesburg. It was an exciting conference. Women writers spoke about their work. Both women and men from the audience gave their views about women's oppression and the difficulties facing women.

COSAW says that they decided to have a conference on women and writing because "it seems as though there are times when the issue of the oppression of women is pushed to one side in the battle against the apartheid government. But it is an issue we have to deal with if we hope to achieve true liberation in South Africa. We need to understand why there are so few women in leadership positions in trade unions and the democratic movement as a whole in South Africa. We need to understand why there are so few

black women writers, actresses, musicians and artists in South Africa. And when we understand these things, we need to find ways of changing them so that women play an equal role in the development of South Africa."

The conference opened with a talk by Amanda Kwadi of the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW), followed by poems and prose by women writers. All sessions looked at the difficulties women experience as women. Three women writers - Nise Malange, Rozalin Napo and Itumeleng Mofokeng spoke about their experiences as women writers.

Another session looked at the very big problem which is that most women in this country have never had the chance to learn how to read and write. Women from the English Literacy Project (ELP) and Use, Speak and Write English (USWE) talked about this problem. It was felt that teaching people to read and write was an important part of our struggle for liberation in South Africa. SPEAK

Collective talked about our magazine and the difficulties of reaching women as readers and writers. The session on images of women in literature looked at how women are shown in writing. The point was made that women are often shown as sex symbols, or as mothers, but very seldom as people with a life, dreams and feelings of their own.

The feeling was strong that women's position in society must change so that women are free to participate in society as a whole. It was agreed that problems like women's involvement in organisation, women's literacy and the way women are seen, are all problems that must be taken up by organisations fighting for a new South Africa.

Unfortunately even though the focus was women, most of the audience was men. One speaker from the audience said to the men, "Next time you all come to a meeting ask the women you know to accompany you."

The audience had a lot to say about many of the things discussed. And many people came up to the front to read their poems. One speaker from the audience told people to take these problems about women's lives seriously. He said, "Very often women stand up at meetings and say they want freedom. But they do nothing to challenge their oppression in their own homes. And there are men who do the same. They say a lot at meetings about women's oppression but then go home to be big oppressors themselves."

The conference was a beginning. It raised problems faced by women in writing. We hope COSAW will continue to have such discussion and that they are able to take some action to ensure that women speak in many more voices throughout South Africa. Of the members of COSAW in the Transvaal very few are Black women. This must change so that women are seen and heard in greater numbers in COSAW and all progressive organisations in South Africa. ●



Mpoetsi from ELP and Shamim from SPEAK talk at the COSAW Conference.

Photographs by KOBIE FOURIE, SPEAK

"WE WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY"

say women from Phoenix

The Mahatma Women's Group end of the year exhibition was great. The General Activity Room of the Stanmore Library in Phoenix was just buzzing. More than 150 women packed the little hall. Children rushed around. Women were talking and laughing. And then the music started and the Mahatma Women's group and the Palmcroft Women's Group started with some dancing. The clapping from the audience told the story. Everyone was having a good time. Then Peggy, from the Phoenix Working Committee, spoke about the role of women today. She said that women are used to being housewives, looking after children, husbands and homes. But now things are changing in Phoenix. Women are coming out of their homes and are getting involved in community action. Women are challenging the old way of seeing women. Everyday in our townships we hear of high rents, increase in bus fares, murders and rapes. Women are asking how they can help. How can they take up problems? And women are saying if we come together in groups we can achieve something. And this is true. There are five different women's groups there who were all involved in community work. As Peggy said, "Women are very strong and have to move ahead."

One of the members of Mahatma Women's Group said to us: "You see all the craft work

on the walls? Well, those are things we do at home on our own. We don't meet to do craft work. We used to. But now we meet to do community work. And although you see us dancing and having fun today, when we meet in our women's group we are very serious. People say women's groups are for gossiping. It is not true with us. We work for the community." The women's groups work with pre-schools, pensioners, they fight high rents and evictions. They also run a keep fit group.

A woman from Phoenix Child and Family Welfare came to speak about child abuse. Everybody listened carefully as this is a big problem in many areas. She said that thousands and thousands of children are treated badly, either sexually, emotionally or physically by adults everyday. She said that it is important that we teach our children that they have a right to live lives without being hurt in any way. We need to teach our children how to protect themselves.

After this talk one of the women said: "You haven't seen half the fun yet. Hold on to your seats because here is more!" Some women in beautiful saris and bells on their ankles did classical Indian dancing. One woman was very nervous. "I'm nervous!" she said loudly and laughed while she was dancing. It

added to the spirit of the day. Everyone in the audience laughed with her.

After the entertainment there was biryani for lunch, and everyone took the opportunity to talk and share ideas. You could just see that people were thinking "What a perfect ending to a lovely morning!" ●



Mahatma and Palmcroft Women's Group jiving it up at their end of year celebration.

Photograph by SPEAK Collective



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I am Pregnant.

what can go wrong in labour?

Most women worry about their labour. They worry about the pain. They worry about something going wrong in labour. They worry about the baby being alright. We have all heard stories of women who have had problems in giving birth to their babies. Most of the time women do have normal labour and their babies are fine. But there are things that can go wrong.

It is always good to know about these things. Then at least if something does go wrong we can understand what it is, and we can cope with it much better.

What Can Go Wrong In Labour?

These are some of the things that can go wrong in labour.

The baby could be lying in the wrong position in the womb (uterus).

The labour could be too slow.

The waters could break early in labour.

The baby's heart could slow down.

The baby may have to be delivered quickly.

What if the baby is lying in the wrong position in the womb?

Most babies are born from the vagina with their heads coming out first. Their heads are in your pelvis and their bottoms are under your ribs. But when a baby is not lying in the normal head down position the birth is always more difficult and more dangerous. Some babies lie upside down. This is called a breech baby. The baby's bottom is in your pelvis, and when you give birth this comes out first. Although a breech baby may be delivered through the vagina, the doctors may decide that it is safer to do a caesarian section operation to deliver the baby. Other babies lie sideways in the womb and they are always delivered by a caesarian section operation.

What happens if the labour is too slow?

Most women have their babies within 24 hours of starting their labour. But sometimes the contractions come slowly and are weak. And sometimes the contractions feel strong



normal



breech



sideways



What happens if the baby's heart slows down during labour?

When you are in labour, the midwife listens to the baby's heartbeat. She does this often with a special stethoscope that she puts on your abdomen. She counts how fast your baby's heart is beating. It normally beats at about 140 beats each minute. If there is a problem, and the baby is not getting enough oxygen, the baby's heart beat slows down. When the baby does not get enough oxygen, there can be damage to the brain and the baby may even die. So if the baby's heart beat becomes slow, this is a danger sign. The baby must be delivered quickly to prevent brain damage and death.

What can the doctor do if the baby needs to be delivered quickly?

There are different things that the doctor can do to deliver the baby quickly. If you are still in the first stage of labour then the neck of your womb is not open enough to let the baby come through. You will have to have a caesarean section operation to deliver the baby. If you are in the second stage of labour and are pushing the baby out there are 3 different things the doctor can do. If the baby's head is near the entrance of the vagina, she can do an episiotomy. If the head is still high up in the vagina then it needs to be pulled down with forceps or a vacuum extractor. Let's discuss all these things in more detail here.

What is an episiotomy?

Just before a baby is delivered, its head must push out of the vagina. The birth opening usually stretches a lot for the baby to come out. But if it does not stretch well, or if the baby needs to be delivered quickly, then the midwife may cut the birth opening. This cut is called an episiotomy. It sounds very painful, but at that stage of labour the mother does not feel the cut. This is how an episiotomy is done.

After the baby is born, the skin around the cut is injected to stop any pain. The cut is sewn up with stitches. These dissolve after a

but the neck of the womb (the cervix) does not open up. If these things happen, the mother becomes tired and weak. The baby may also get tired and distressed. Then the midwife or doctor may put up a drip. The drip has a drug in it which makes the womb contract well. But the contractions from this drug are often more painful than normal contractions. You may need an injection or gas and air to breathe to help you during the labour.

What happens if the waters break early in labour?

Sometimes the waters round the baby burst at the beginning of labour. Usually the womb starts to contract after this happens. But sometimes it does not. If the baby is not born within 24 hours of the waters bursting then germs from outside can cause an infection in the womb and even in the baby. When the baby is born she may be very sick and may even die from this infection. To stop this happening the baby must be born within 24 hours, so the midwife puts a drip up to make the womb contract. When the drip is put up a needle is put into a vein in your arm, a medicine is run through the needle straight into the blood. The blood carries the medicine to the womb and makes it contract. This makes the labour happen more quickly.

few days. These stitches may be painful. The pain is helped by salt water baths or icepacks.

Forceps Deliveries and Vacuum Extraction

If the baby needs to be delivered quickly or if the mother is very tired, the doctor may decide to pull the baby out. They can only do this in the second stage of labour when the cervix is wide open. The woman's legs are hung up in slings. She is given injections into the birth canal to take the pain away. Then the doctor can use either metal forceps or a vacuum extractor to pull the baby out. The metal forceps are slipped around the baby's head, so that they surround it like a cap. Then the doctor pulls on the handles and the baby moves down the birth canal.

A vacuum extractor is like a cup that sucks onto the top of the baby's head. It is used to pull the baby out of the birth canal.

Sometimes the baby's head has a swelling on top after this has been used. But this swelling goes away after a few days.

An episiotomy



Although forceps and vacuum extractors look frightening, they do not harm the baby.

Caesarean Section Birth

Sometimes something can go wrong in labour before the cervix is fully open. The baby's heart may slow down, or the baby may be too big to pass through the mother's pelvis. In these cases the woman has to have an operation to get the baby out. This operation is called a caesarean section.

The woman is either given an anaesthetic to put her to sleep, or an injection in her back. The injection is called an epidural. This is to stop all the pain in her womb and abdomen. Then the doctor cuts through her abdomen and into the womb and pulls the baby out. After this operation, the woman is sewn up. She has a drip in her arm for the next day and she feels uncomfortable for the first week. But this soon gets better.

After a caesarean section birth.



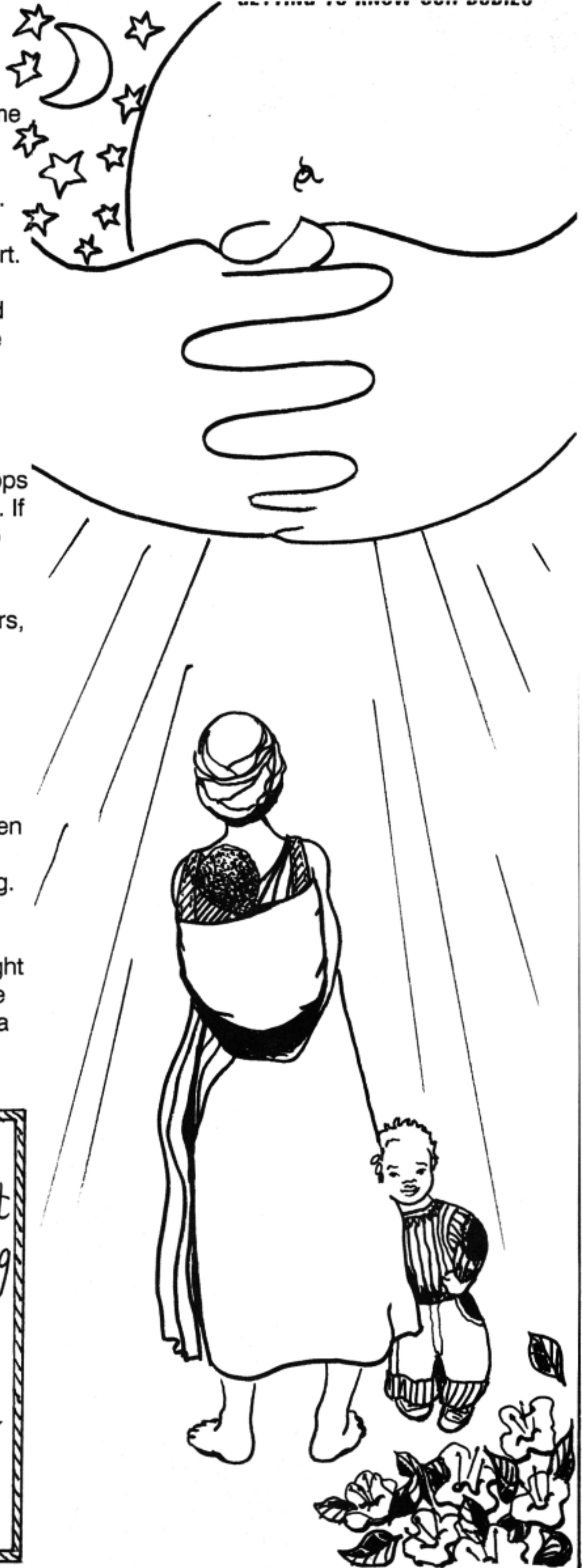
Pain Relief in Labour

Some women find labour very painful. Some women have very long labours. These women need something to help them with the pain. There are 3 things they can have. Nitrous oxide is a gas that is breathed in through a mask when the contractions start. This is often used in transition and in the second stage of labour. Women who need pain relief in the first stage of labour will be given either an injection of pethidine or an epidural. Pethidine is a painkiller, but it makes you feel sleepy. With an epidural a drip is put up into your arm. Then you are given an injection into your back which stops all the feeling in your abdomen and uterus. If you are offered any of these things to help with the pain in your labour just ask if you really need them. Although the things that help with the pain are good in some labours, but sometimes they make it difficult for the woman to stay in control of her labour.

We wrote more about the things that help with pain in SPEAK 22.

Labour is a complicated thing. Many women need help to deliver their babies. But it is important to understand what is happening. It is your right to expect the doctor or midwife to tell you what they are doing to you and why they are doing it. It is your right to be allowed to ask the question "Why are you doing this?" And it is your right to get a good answer. Your body belongs to you. ●

Would you like to ask the SPEAK doctor about a problem you are having in your pregnancy? Or even another health problem you have? Write to: The SPEAK Doctor
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MARCH 8TH 1989



TO ALL THE WOMEN

AND ALL THE WOMEN OF THE WORLD

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

