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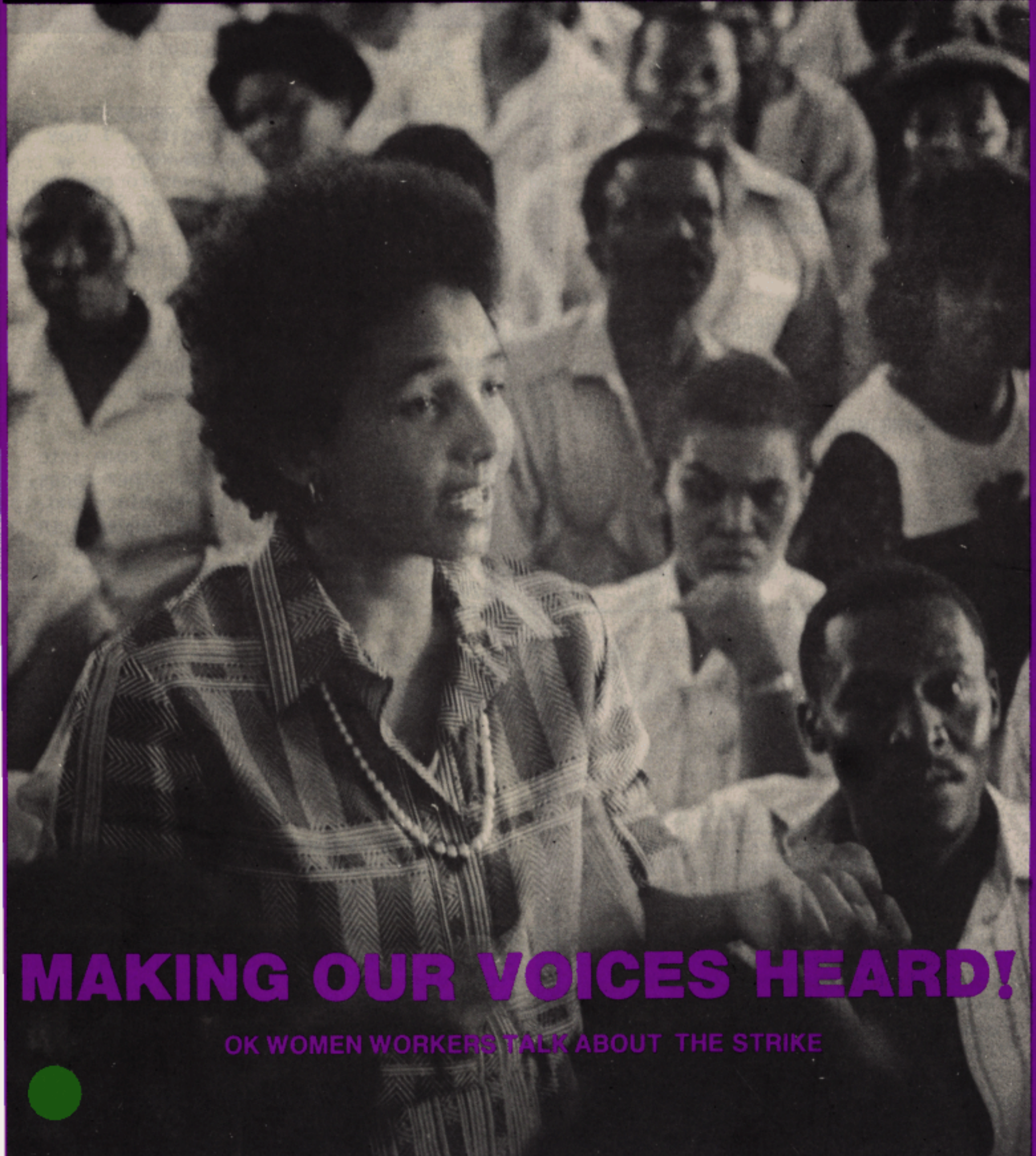
# OSPEAK



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JUNE - AUG '87

NO. 15



## MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD!

OK WOMEN WORKERS TALK ABOUT THE STRIKE



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SPEAK's office is in Durban. Our address is:

SPEAK Collective  
Office 14  
The Ecumenical Centre  
20 St Andrew's Street  
Durban  
4001

Our telephone number is: 3011 624

SPEAK Collective members are: Karen, Phumelele, Shamim and Vanessa. Thanks to Debby for helping with this issue!

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.

Cover photograph - taken by Cedric Nunn (Afrapix) at an OK Bazaars workers' strike meeting in Durban.

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## LETTERS

Dear SPEAK Collective

Congratulations on your super magazine. Our women have thoroughly enjoyed it and they have found it interesting and very informative. The article "I was forced to choose" in the March/May issue of SPEAK touched our hearts. Women also felt that the article on health should continue as it is very educational. We also liked your direct approach when writing your articles.

Our group is known as the Mahatma Women's Group. We are in Phoenix, Durban, and meet regularly at the Stanmore Library, as most of our women live nearby.

We would like, through SPEAK, to come into contact with women's groups of other races. We would very much like to meet black and coloured women's groups. We are engaged in various activities and also a fair amount of sport. The numbers to contact us at are: 596709 - chairperson and - treasurer - 594708

or write to us at:

Mahatma Women's Group  
c/o Stanmore Library  
Elf Grove  
Stanmore  
Phoenix  
Durban

We hope that as many groups as possible would try to contact us so that we can share our common interests.

Good luck to SPEAK from the Mahatma Women's Group.

From  
The Mahatma Women's Group

Dear Mahatma Women's Group,  
Thank you for your good wishes. We wish you all the best in your work

Dear Friends

I have read through many issues of SPEAK magazine and am really impressed by its focus on important issues concerning women, simple language and advice on health problems.

However I was deeply disturbed by the response from our brother on periods in SPEAK number 14. I find that section on health extremely important and educative. From each issue I have picked up something new about my body and how it works. From issue number 14 I have learnt how to treat vaginal infections, whereas previously I'd just worry about it and wish it would go away soon.

The articles on the health section are so much a reality, its part of our lives and we should not shy away from it. Its time that men faced up to reality as well. They too must know and understand how a woman's body functions. After all, women are part of their lives.

I'm sure many other women, like me, have learnt more about their bodies and understand them better. Please do not stop coverage on women's health issues as women want every means to education whereby they can progress towards total liberation. Keep up the good work!

Supporter of SPEAK Women's Magazine  
Glorine  
Chatsworth, Durban

Dear Glorine, thank you very much for your letter. We are happy to know that you like our health articles. We agree that men should know about women's health so that they can understand, support and care for us.

Dear Friends

We appreciate having this opportunity to write this letter to you.

We would like to inform you that we have received your letter and the four magazines of SPEAK. Since we are organizing the domestic workers and the domestic workers are the women, we have no problem with SPEAK. We like SPEAK because it is a magazine which can help our workers about the importance of them to organize other women to join our struggle.

We would very much appreciate it if we can get SPEAK so that we can sell it to the workers. But we don't know whether

Dear SPEAK

I would like to reply to my brother who is a shopsteward. He wrote to SPEAK complaining about an article on periods.

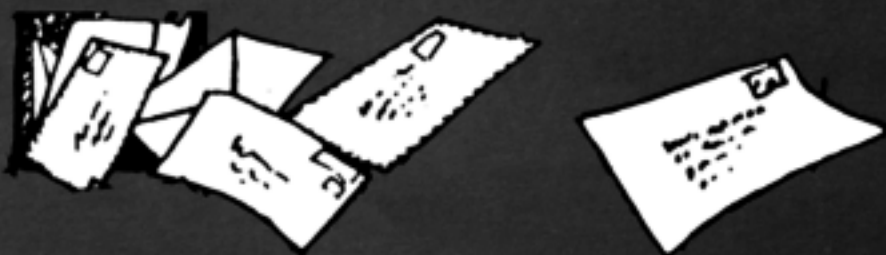
Brother, thank you very much for helping to sell the magazine. As a shopsteward you are a leader of the workers. I think it is a challenge to you to explain to people when they do not understand. SPEAK is a women's magazine. But men are also allowed to read it. It explains about the women's struggle and their health. Women are part of us whether we like it or not.

I am a man and a worker. I do not think that men should avoid anything that talks about periods. It is just like growing a beard. Because of periods we are able to get children. Right now we are busy fighting for maternity rights for women workers. This is because of periods which are natural.

I do not see any danger in men knowing about those who are part of them like women and children. Knowing about women's health will promote understanding and caring for both sexes.

Yours,  
A shopsteward from Pinetown.

Dear brother, we were pleased to receive your letter. It is encouraging to hear your views. We wish more men thought the same way as you do.



we can send money before or if you are going to send it to us and we sell it and then send you the money.

Thanking you  
Thoko Dlamini  
South African Domestic Workers' Union  
Newcastle

Dear Thoko, we are thrilled that you think SPEAK will be useful in your union. Thank you for your encouragement. It is good to know that SPEAK will be reaching more women in different parts of South Africa. We will post SPEAKS to your union, and once they have been sold, you can send us money. Best wishes in your work.

SPEAK COLLECTIVE.

# MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD!

## OK WOMEN WORKERS TALK ABOUT THE STRIKE

The workers at OK Bazaars and Hyperama really did something big. Everyone is talking about it. They went on a legal strike for 10 whole weeks and this turned their strike into the longest strike of shop workers ever in South Africa. There were 11 000 workers on strike from 137 stores around the country. The workers are all members of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA). CCAWUSA is part of COSATU. Many, many women workers went on strike. Some of the OK workers meetings in Durban were held in the same building where SPEAK has an office. So we would hear much singing "Hlanganani basebenzi" while we worked. It makes work very much more interesting! So we miss the OK Bazaars workers' strength and singing here now that they are back at work. But we are very glad that they won against the bosses!

While the strike was on and workers were meeting, we would ask the women how they coped with their 'striking lives'. There were husbands, families and friends to deal with. There were the army, the police and the bosses. And right now times are very tough with unemployment and the State of Emergency. We wanted to meet some of these striking women again, to find out how it was to be on strike and whether the strike has changed their lives!

### WHY DID OK BAZAARS WORKERS GO ON STRIKE?

Ruby told us: "We went on strike for a living wage." Abigail said: "We were not

getting our rights. It was especially with pay that we went on strike. In 1986 we did not get the increase promised us." Ask OK workers what they think of the OK bosses. "The bosses? They are hard. They don't care for their workers." As Colleen said: "Making money is what they are interested in. Their profits, they're not interested in their workers."

### "WE ARE ALSO FIGHTING FOR YOU!"

OK strikers found that they had a lot of support from the communities they live in. Many people stopped buying from OK's during the strike. In some areas committees were set up to support the workers. Many of the workers organised to speak about the strike in the churches in their areas. Sometimes there were food parcels for the striking workers. But a strike is a hard thing when there are no wages coming in.

### WAS IT DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN TO BE ON STRIKE?

For many workers it was their first time to strike. And many did not believe that the strike would last more than a month. We asked some of the women how people in their lives felt about them being on strike. Was it harder for them, as women, to be on strike than for men?

Abigail is a shop steward. She is 50 years old. She works in Pinetown, lives in Clermont and supports her mother who lives in Zululand. She is a widow, and has two sons of 26 and 28 years old. She got lots of

support from her sons who are both union members where they work. "My son used to come to the office in Pinetown, collect stickers and pamphlets and distribute them together with his friend. My mother knew I was on strike. She is 81 years old. She said to me: 'No, you must keep onto that thing you are doing there!' My sons said to me: 'No, ma, you must just go forward with this strike. We are there to assist you.'" Abigail's husband died many years ago. When he was alive he did not want her to work even. "If my husband was still alive, I don't think it would be possible for me to be as involved in the union as I am. My husband didn't want me to move at all. Only to go to church and the market here in Durban. That is all. I didn't feel happy at all."

Ruby works in Pinetown and lives in Marianridge with her three children. She is a shop steward. She is 40 years old. Her children were happy with her being on strike. "We went on strike for a living wage. My son is a FAWU member and would not take goods to OK during the strike. My daughter used to have friends say, 'Tell your ma to go back to work.' And she would

say, 'My mom's fighting for her rights!'" Ruby said: "I find it easier as a single woman. No-one to bother me. Its not as easy to attend meetings if there's a husband. There are fewer hassles. I don't want to be bothered with men where you have to ask permission for where you're going."

#### IT WAS NOT EASY FOR MANY WOMEN

It was not so easy for all the women. Many had husbands who did not want them to go on strike. Wendy is 35 years old. She lives in Wentworth with her three children and husband. She is a shop steward. She said: "Its worse for women to be on strike. Because the man feels he wants to be a head of the home, with the woman being under." Wendy's husband did not even want her to be a shop steward. When workers elected her to be a shop steward he was up in arms. He said "Now that means you won't be here to see to us." Her husband will not allow her to go to meetings in other places. She said: "Yes I do feel frustrated that I wouldn't be able to go to those things. You know, you get so much more experience from going out ... it's just that he doesn't want me away from home. I would not have married him if I had known



Photo by Cedric Nunn, Afrapix

that he was like this! If I say to him, 'We've run out of milk,' he'll say, 'Go ask your union,' and 'I never asked you to go on strike,' and it goes on and on. Most of the time I just keep quiet. Its easier to keep quiet, I've learned to. Otherwise it leads on and on till I can see that we're going to end up in blows."

Marian lives in Sydenham and works at OK's in Durban. She is 24 years old. "Those who didn't have the backing of their husbands must have gone off to hell every single night," she said. She told us a story. "There were two women who joined the strike late. Their husbands went to OK's to find their wives weren't there. They realised they must be on strike." They came to the place where the striking workers used to meet. "Next thing, one of the OK workers, a rather hefty woman, went up to these guys and said: 'You see, you lay your hand on any one of these women, or you even force them away from here. Have you ever caught a ladies hiding in your life? You will get one now?!' These guys didn't know what to do so they just walked away! I think they were terrified!" Those two women wanted to join the strikers, but they ended up going back to work during the strike. But there were lots of husbands who were very supportive as well. "That touched me a lot. There was one husband who used to come to the hall. He used to talk to the workers and uplift their spirits a little. That was very touching to see a man take a role like that."

#### "WE NEED TO CHANGE MEN, BUT HOW?"

Ruby said: "We need to change men, but how? Its very hard for them to change their ideas. I remember when we were on strike there were some husbands that didn't like their wives to be involved in the meetings and so on. I used to phone their husbands



and tell them: "Listen here, this is the struggle, they've got to be at meetings whether you like it or not. We are not playing around, we are not jorling around, we are working!" I never had a problem, they let their wives go. Husbands may allow

their wives to go to meetings because of the strike, but other than that they won't allow them to go to meetings. Its very hard to do anything about this situation, because some women have got excuses besides their men - children, washing on weekends, cooking for their husbands and going to church. You'll never get a man to cook for you."

Wendy said " Oh I wish there was a solution. I do think about it. It seems to me to be quite difficult. The only solution I could think of is if the men would come with us to these meetings. Stay, you know, right through the meeting to see what time we start, what time we finish, what discussions we come up with, why the meetings take so long. Even if they've just got to come once or twice. I think then that would make them support the women more. There are husbands that have done that - come and sit and listen a couple of hours and then go."

Wendy also spoke about the future: "When the sons get to a certain age, you just have to be open with them. So that should this kind of thing crop up with their wives or girlfriends they will understand and support them. Because without a man's support, I tell you, its very tough on a woman. Very tough. Because you're sort of in a tight spot. It's like you've got a choice to make between the union and your husband and it shouldn't be like that at all."

### "THE STRIKE CHANGED MY LIFE"

All the women said the strike had made them stronger. Ruby got arrested on the very first day of the strike. How did she feel? "I was so brave! I never ever thought I'd be as brave as I was during the strike. The policeman said 'I'll arrest you.' I said, 'It's up to you!'" Colleen is a shopsteward.

She is 29 years old. "I didn't know what I was capable of - getting out there and talking in meetings, or helping the next person to sort out their problems. I didn't think I was capable of that. It developed me as a person," she said.

Abegail said: "Being on strike changed my life a lot. Now I can feel that I am a hard-hearted woman. Whenever I step in those doors (at O.K.) my heart just tells me now I am in another place, I must change my attitude and everything. So many things we haven't achieved in this strike. There's still lots of struggling to do."

Wendy told us: "If we had to go on strike again, I would know what to do. We should have organised a strike fund. I gained experience from the strike. I'm not shy anymore. I used to be very shy. But there comes an extent where you've got to push that aside. And we used to go up, us shopstewards, and sit there at the table in front and you've got to address this meeting. At first, it took me long to get used to seeing all these 101 people, and others coming in. You don't know what they are going to say to you. But I got used to it. I think I can do it."

### BACK TO WORK, AS DIFFERENT WORKERS!

"The strike was organised and I learnt many things in this strike, especially it taught me I must be brave," said Abegail, "I must be brave just to crack the hard nut, ja, because those bosses have got so many tricks." The problems that women workers face as workers and as women are hard. And there are women who mean to change things. Like Colleen, and many women who agree with her: "These things will be overcome. Most definitely they will. How? By us going out, and making our voices heard."

# Priscilla's Day

Priscilla lives in Wentworth, which is in Durban, and works in Clairwood. She works in a clothing factory. Her day is a Double Shift. She has to attend to the house, her children and her husband. She works a full day. And then back again to attend to housework and family. Her eldest daughter is a big help. Priscilla's day is like the days of working women everywhere. The photographs that show her day are from a book "Factory and Family - the Divided lives of South Africa's Women Workers". The book was written after the Institute of Black Research had interviewed almost 1 000 women working in shops and factories. Myron Peters of Afrapix took all the photographs. The book costs R2.00. If you want to know more about the book, or would like to buy one, write to SPEAK.

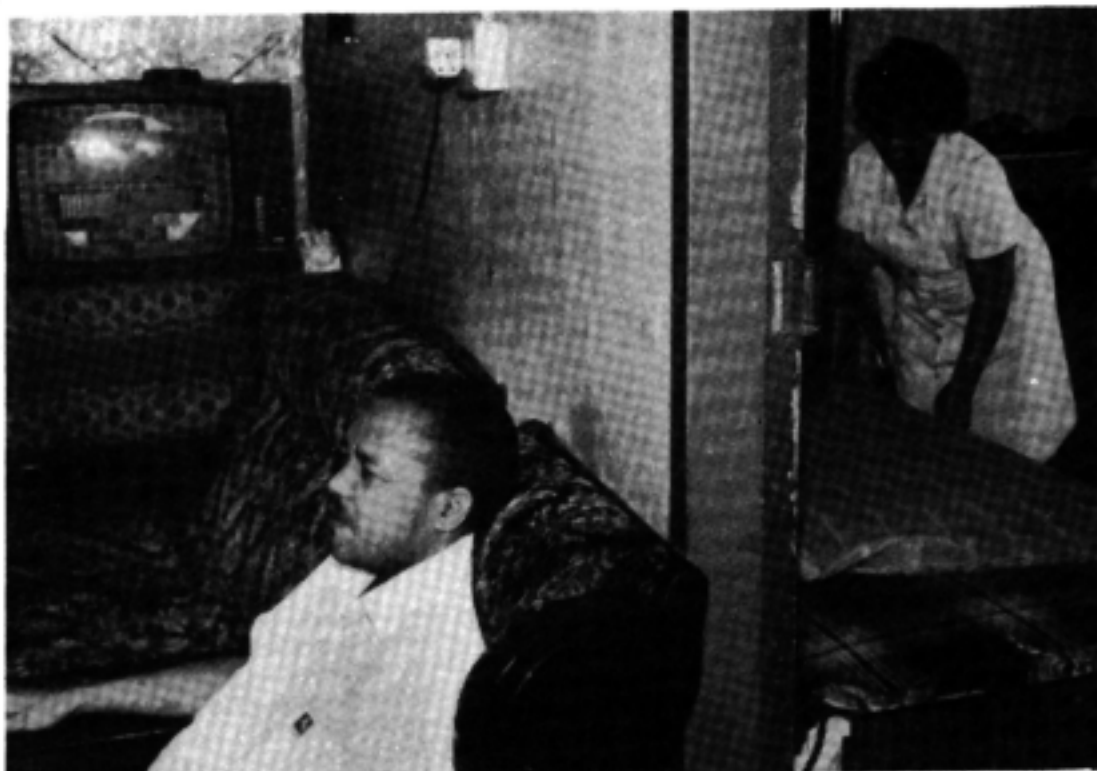
Priscilla's day starts at 5am when she starts with housework. Her husband is still asleep while she washes the clothes, hangs them up, makes breakfast and sandwiches for lunch. While her husband has his tea she tidies up the house. She gets the children ready and then goes off to work. her children lock up after her and go to school. At work she worries about her children. They will get home before she does and will be on their own. In the evening she gets back while her family are watching T.V. She cooks, cleans, helps with homework, puts the children to bed, and soaks clothes for the next morning wash. Many women everywhere work this double shift. But what about the men? Shouldn't they do some of the home shift too?



Priscilla's family



Priscilla starts washing at 5a.m.



She tidies up while her husband has his tea.



She gives the children breakfast and gets them ready.





She waits for the bus. The children are at home and will lock up the house.



Priscilla works at her machine. She worries about her children. They are left on their own too much.



Back home in the evening there is more housework and cleaning.



Priscilla checks the children's homework and puts them to bed.



Her husband also works in a factory. He relaxes, tired from his day's work.



Her family are asleep. Priscilla finishes the housework and soaks the clothes for the morning wash.

# YESTERDAY TODAY &

# TOMORROW



International Wages for Housework Campaign, London

## ICELANDIC WOMEN FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS

In 1975, Icelandic women went on one day's illegal strike. Young and old, thousands of Icelandic women walked out from their workplaces. They threw away their aprons in the fish factories, left their sewing machines, their typewriters, the shop counters, closed the nurseries, the schools and their homes - and started a whole day's illegal strike!

It was not easy to organise the strike. At first, not all women were keen. It took lots of meetings and discussion. Every women's group, union, organisation and club in every town, village and rural community in the country were reached. Even where there was no organisation, women were contacted. And the strike came off! It was called a 'Women's Day Off.' And it was! Women went on strike from housework and workplace. The men had to take their children to work with them. In fact, they were quite unable to work!

The women held demonstrations and meetings. They spoke about how they are fighting and want to fight more for equality with men, and for a better future. All this was part of their action to mark 1975 as the year declared 'Women's Year' by the United Nations. Ten years later, in 1985 the idea for a 'Women's Day Off' had lots of support. In less than two weeks everything was organised and the strike took place. This time the strike marked the end of the United Nations Women's Decade. Women have got lots to fight for. Women still hold the lowest paid jobs, still have a double workload, and still have not got the decent childcare they have been demanding for years. But the women of Iceland have shown that they are ready to fight. They know that they can stand together when needed. They are aware of the problems that they face daily as women. And they know that they are a force to reckon with!

(International Labour Reports March/April 1986)

## WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

COSATU held an education day for workers to talk about the health and safety problems that workers face at work. A women's workshop held as part of this day. Workers talked about contraceptives and about the family planning clinics that the bosses and the government are bringing into the factories. There were displays up for everybody to look and read. It's good to know that women's health issues are being talked about in the unions!



10.



Photo by Eric Miller, AP/WIDE

Women workers in the metal industry have won a big victory. The Metal and Allied Workers' Union fought hard to win South Africa's first maternity agreement that will be for all women in an industry. All women workers in the metal industry will now get six month's paid maternity leave. Women will also get their jobs back when their leave is over. Most women workers live in fear of losing their jobs because of pregnancy. This agreement will certainly make their worries less. A new, bigger metal union has just been launched. MAWU is part of it. It is called National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa. Now even more women will benefit from this!

## WORN AWAY BY WASHING

For many years Ms Selina Hialele could not get an identity document because her fingers did not have proper prints on them. This meant she could not get her pension money. Ms Hialele had been a domestic worker in the Transvaal doing lots of washing for many years. The work was so hard that the prints on her fingers have been worn away.

## NO TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT



Hundreds of school girls and teachers blocked the busiest street in New Delhi in India on 20 February this year. They were very angry. They were protesting against what is called 'Eve teasing' or sexual harassment that happens to women on the crowded city buses. This is not the first time women in India have held protests about this. A few years ago women took over a bus. They forced the driver to drive to the police station. When they got there they handed over the men who were guilty of harassing women to the police!

From Deloria, a British Women's Newspaper

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# YESTERDAY TODAY &

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International Wages for Housework Campaign, London

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From Deloria, a British Women's Newspaper

11.

# UDF Women's Congress is launched



PHOTO FROM SOUTH

Women from organisations who are part of the UDF met in Cape Town recently. They met to launch a new national organisation for women - the UDF Women's Congress.

The Women's Congress believes in the Freedom Charter and the Women's Charter. These two charters talk about the changes people want to make South Africa a better place for everyone. These two charters were drawn in the 1950's by many organisations.

At the meeting in Cape Town where the UDF women's Congress was launched, the women talked about the problems people in South Africa have. They especially talked about the problems women have. Amongst the things they decided to do, they decided to:

- \* teach men and women comrades in the UDF about women's oppression.
- \* train and increase women's skills and confidence in their organisations.
- \* do away with all forms of discrimination based on sex
- \* talk about the problems women have in all UDF meetings and organisations.

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Dunbarton 4015



# OPENING MEDICINES

## THE HARM THEY DO

A recent newspaper article made us aware of the number of babies dying from medicines that are used to make the stomach run.

One of the doctors, a child specialist, feels that people should not be blamed for using these medicines. He said most diseases children suffer from affect the way the stomach works. When a baby has an infection of the ear or throat, the stomach usually runs. It is not easy for the mother to see into the ear. So she gives something for the running tummy. Babies cannot say when their ears or throats are painful. The mother gives medicines for what she thinks is wrong with the baby.

Our health services are bad. We all know what it is like standing in long queues in hospital with crying sick babies. We have all tried to take time off work. Sometimes bosses are very hard. They do not expect our babies to get sick. Our health service does not give enough education on health. So when mothers are faced with sick children they are not sure what to do. They use medicines from shops and chemists not knowing how harmful they can be.

We also talked to a skin specialist doctor about the use of opening medicines. She told us about problems adults have when they use opening medicines. She works at a skin



Photo by Cedric Nunn, Afrapix

clinic. Many people come with sores and blisters as a result of taking opening medicines. Sometimes adults die from these sores. In most cases people did not realise that it was the opening medicines that cause the problems. There seem to be many different reasons why opening medicines are used.

#### CLEANING OUT A DIRTY SYSTEM

Mothers often give newborn babies opening medicines. This is because newborn babies pass greenish stools. A greenish stool is thought to be caused by a dirty system. It is normal for a new born baby to first have



Many babies are admitted to hospital after taking opening medicines. This is because they lose a lot of water from their bodies.

black stools. After that the stool is greenish then yellow. When the child is old enough to eat solid food, stools turn to brownish. People do not know what colour of

stools to expect. When they see a greenish stool they think that the system is dirty and it needs to be cleaned out. So babies are given opening medicines without realising the harm it causes.

In adults pimples are thought to be caused by a dirty system. Many people take opening medicines to clean their systems and stop pimples from coming out. Letting the tummy run does not treat skin problems. In fact you are likely to have worse problems. People die from losing a lot of water from their bodies.

#### CONSTIPATION AND OPENING MEDICINES

It is very important to know what constipation is. Not passing a stool for one day is not constipation. We worry a lot when a baby has not passed a stool for one day. Many people give opening medicines or an enema. But somebody is constipated only when she passes hard, painful stools. So if a baby passes a soft stool every second day there is no need to worry. It is normal for breast fed babies not to pass stools very often.

Adults use tablets like SS, supertabs, regulets and medicines, like castor oil, for constipation. These medicines have a very dangerous thing called phenolphthalein. It makes the tummy run heavily. It is a problem to use opening medicines for constipation. The bowel gets used to not working on its own. This means that the bowel becomes lazy. It works only if an opening medicine has been taken to make it work.

#### WHAT TO USE WHEN CONSTIPATED

The best treatment for constipation is to eat rough food. Fruits and vegetables are rough food. Fine food like white bread cause constipation. It is better to buy brown or whole wheat bread. It also helps a lot to

drink water, at least six glasses a day. If constipation gets worse, it is better to see the doctor than take something to make the tummy run. If a baby is definitely constipated, the safest thing to use is half a teaspoon of milk of magnesia. A spoon of syrup in half a glass of warm water is can also be used. This treatment may be given just once not all the time.

#### TEETHING AND THE USE OF OPENING MEDICINES

Babies start to get teeth as early as four months. They get teeth until they are two years or older. Children can get many sickness in their first two years. These sicknesses do not have anything to do with the child getting teeth. But some people think all of babies' problems are because of teething. The only problem when the baby is teething is sore gums. Sore gums can be rubbed with glycerine to make the pain better. Babies who are teething might not pass stools often. This is because it is sore to eat anything. It does not mean that the baby is constipated.

#### THE DANGER OF ENEMAS

When you give an enema you put something up the baby's back passage. Then medicine is put in the back passage to make the stomach run. Enemas are dangerous in two ways. First, whatever is used to give the enema with might hurt the baby's back passage badly. Second, medicines that are used do not only make the stomach run badly. But they can also get to the body and damage the liver. Many babies die after getting enemas.

In some societies it is a cultural habit to give enemas to purify the system. This has been happening for many generations. People who belong to older generations still feel that enemas are good. But what people used in enemas those times were mild herbs. It is

very difficult to get those now. People now use strong poisonous things like dettol and sheep dip.

#### TAKING OPENING MEDICINES TO LOSE WEIGHT

It is true that a person feels lighter after taking opening medicines. This is because water is lost from the body. This water comes out with important vitamins that we get from food. People become very sick and weak after losing these vitamins.



Opening medicines can cause sores to come out all over the body. This is because of the poison in them.

We need a health system which will provide care to people everywhere. We need enough hospitals, clinics and doctors. Then there will be no need for us to go to the nearest shops and buy anything that we think might help us. Our right to have proper health care is one of the things that organisations who wish for a just South Africa demand daily.



Kwa Mashu women street sweepers at May Day in 1985, in Durban. These women joined the Transport and General Workers' Union to get better wages and working conditions. They worked on dances and plays to tell about their lives. This year the government banned May Day rallies. But workers went ahead and organised small meetings to celebrate May Day.