

Trade Union Library & Education Centre

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7 Community House,
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WORKSHOP: WOMEN IN LABOUR: WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED ?

Saturday 5 December 1997

PROGRAMME:

REGISTRATION: 9.30 - 9.55am

1) Welcome and Introductions: (9.55 - 10.10am)

2) Assessment of Achievements and problems experienced by women:

SEMINAR SESSION - CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN: (10.10 - 11.30am)

+ International and locally - Input by Lungi Mbude (ILRIG)

+ Labour Legislation (LRA, BCOE and Employment Equity Bill)
- Input by Martin Jansen (TULEC)

PLENARY SESSION:

**1.2) Since we as women have been organising around gender issues and
womens oppression, how much have we achieved ?**

*** In our organisations**

*** In society - eg. laws passed by parliament, courts, our
communities etc.**

*** At the Workplace, the economy**

*** In relation to our families and communities.**

**INPUTS BY COSATU AND NACTU AND PLENARY DISCUSSION (11.30 - 12.30pm)
(Drawing up the Balance Sheet)**

Refreshments Break & briefing of TULEC in library (12.30 - 1pm)

4) WORKSHOP SESSION: (1 - 1.40pm)

Discuss in detail what we could do to confront the problems and challenges facing us:

NB. PLEASE SUMMARISE YOUR GROUP'S REPORT ON TRANSPARENCIES FOR PRESENTATION ON THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR.

6) REPORT-BACK AND PLENARY DISCUSSION: (1.40 - 2.15pm)

7) VIDEO - Bandit Queen, with introduction by Nirmala Nair (2.15 - 4.30pm)

8) BRIEF SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP AND CLOSURE: (Chairperson)

SOCIAL 4.30 - 7pm (Transport home provided)

CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN WORKERS **Locally and Internationally**

Lungi Mbude

International Labour Resource & Information Group

- ◆ Issues facing women workers
- ◆ Globalisation arrives in South Africa
- ◆ Living and working conditions of women workers nationally and internationally
- ◆ How can women workers organise themselves to fight against these conditions

Issues facing women workers

The majority of women in the world - women workers - have not only suffered from exploitation by the bosses, they also face oppression as women in society and from their husbands and partners at home.

According to the 1996 Human Development Report, of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty in the world, 70% are women. Twice as many women as men cannot read or write, and girls are 60% of the 130 million children who have no access to primary education. Women produce half of the world's food but own around 1% of the world's land. The number of rural women living in poverty has increased by 50% in the last twenty years, compared to 3% for men. Women also represent the highest percentage of the unemployed.

The problems of women workers are not personal, individual problems. They are social problems which women suffer as members of this society, as workers and as women. So, if we want to address and work towards solving women workers' problems, we have to tackle them as part of the problems of the whole society. These problems include :

- The double burden
- Violence against women
- Childcare
- Customary laws and traditions
- Health
- Unemployment and poor jobs
- Cutting down on state expenditure on social services
- Attacks on trade union and worker rights

It is necessary to point out that South African women are not homogenous. There are class and racial divisions amongst them. Therefore, while it is true that all South African women are oppressed as women, it is the working class black women that have been and continue to be the hardest hit.

Transforming culture and tradition plays an important role in the change that is necessary for a long-term shift away from discrimination. The sexist attitudes of both men and women are rooted in the way we live and produce in our society, but are also woven into our cultural attitudes. Past economic, social and political circumstances in our country contributed to a breakdown in family and the traditional notions of women's social role have restricted women.

The state, the legislatures, the Constitution, law courts, the private sector, the family and household relations, as well as other organisations in society, all oppress women in different ways. The struggle for women's emancipation must be fought on all these fronts. Women workers' rights, for example, maternity benefits, time off for children's medical and other needs, can be won through union struggles and through courts. Unions and political organisations should place women workers' rights on the agenda and develop strategies on how to challenge the bosses, the government or anybody else who wants to deny these rights.

Women are often located in employment sectors which are the lowest paid and hold little possibility of promotion and training. The kinds of jobs which women do in the formal and informal economy are related to their unpaid labour. In the formal sector, black South African women are concentrated in a small number of jobs, such as domestic work, teaching and nursing. A significant number of women in the manufacturing sector work in clothing and textiles. Many women who work in industrial sectors do "non-productive" jobs, such as cleaning and tea-making. In many countries more and more women are moving into the unregulated economy, the 'informal sector', selling goods on the streets and from their homes to earn an income. These women are almost all engaged in survivalist activities which are an extension of their unpaid work, such as providing hot meals, selling food, sewing and child-minding. Reasons for this increase in the informal sector are the decline in job opportunities in the formal economy and the overall shift in production away from permanent employment towards poor jobs in the informal sector. The global economy has brought about a growth in unemployment and an expanding informal sector. This trend is even visible in the industrialised countries. For example, in Britain, nearly half of all women's jobs are now part-time. Bosses prefer part-time work because it is cheaper and more flexible. Part-timers have very few of the benefits full-time workers have. They are usually classified as unskilled and have little chance of promotion. And it is more difficult for part-time workers to be in Unions.

Homework, another way of super-exploiting women workers, is increasing. In the UK there are at least 1 million home workers, 90% of whom are women. They work from their own homes and their work is not recognised as "real work", even though they are part of the industrialised production process, working for a boss.

Globalisation arrives in South Africa

The present world economy is characterised by an extremely uneven distribution of resources and wealth. International competitiveness has now become the overall ideology guiding economy and social policies in almost every country in the world. For industrialists and bankers, competitiveness has become the short-term goal as a way of achieving profits in the long run. Governments want to make their countries competitive in order to attract investment, hoping that this will solve the burning problems of unemployment and poverty. As a result, countries compete with each other by offering increasing concessions to foreign investors.

Developing countries, especially, compete with each other to attract investors by lowering labour and environmental standards. South Africa has also been affected by these changes.

After the 1994 elections South Africa integrated rapidly into the new global economy by following the usual neo-liberal policies which are reflected in the government's macro-economic GEAR strategy. The government is committed to shift economic production away from servicing the national market towards producing for exports. As a signatory to the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the government has also committed itself to phase out protective tariffs over the next few years. As a result imports to South Africa are increasing and some industries have been severely affected as they were unable to compete with cheaper imports from elsewhere. The government believes that in the long run these policies will force industries to become more efficient and internationally competitive. However, this seems to be rather wishful thinking as tariff reductions have resulted in 'downsizing' and restructuring of industries which leads to more job losses. During 1996 a total of 100 000 jobs were lost in South Africa.

International competitiveness means attracting investment on the basis of sacrificing wages and working conditions, and even providing investors with incentives like tax holidays, physical and social infrastructure. These conditions are a common feature in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) which have been established in many developing countries and are now being introduced in Southern Africa.

Living and working conditions of women workers

Women are often drawn into export oriented manufacturing in Export Processing Zones. In many countries development of the export-oriented model has led to an increase in female labour. This is particularly true in Asian countries and in Mexico, whose EPZs depend particularly on women's labour. For example, in Mexico, 70% of workers in the Maquiladoras are women. Employers hire women rather than men because they can be paid less. Employers view women as being more obedient and more nimble with their fingers than men. They use sexist stereotypes to exploit women. While the women perform dead-end manual jobs, almost all supervisory and management positions go to men. The increase in the female workforce in these countries has been achieved at the cost of low wages and extremely bad working conditions for women workers. By the time these women reach the age of 30 they are often considered to be too old for work. Labour laws make it very difficult for them to organise themselves to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. Neither EPZs nor the race to become 'internationally competitive' have benefited working people in other parts of the world.

Like World Bank strategies and suprisingly similar to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) followed elsewhere in Africa, GEAR suggests that South Africa's economy needs to be transformed into a competitive outward-oriented economy.

GEAR expects economic growth rates of 6 per cent and 400 000 new jobs per year if the following measures are implemented :

- * an acceleration of the fiscal reform process (including a tighter fiscal stance)
- * relaxation of exchange controls
- * trade and industrial policy reforms such as lowering of tariffs, tax incentives and competition policy
- * public sector restructuring (privatisation)
- * expansionary public infrastructure investment programme
- * flexibility within the collective bargaining system
- * and a social agreement to facilitate wage and price moderation

Like GEAR, SAPs are based on cuts in government spending. This often means doing away with state-subsidised child support, health care and educational programmes for women and children. In Tanzania, health care spending per person fell from \$7 in 1980 to \$2 in 1990 after the introduction of a Structural Adjustment Programme. Not only has this made women work harder to care for their families, but women suffer a disproportionate share of the health consequences themselves. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that death during childbirth rates are increasing across East, Central and West Africa. In Zimbabwe, after the World Bank introduced medical 'user fees', death during childbirth rose from 90 per 100 000 live births in 1990 to 168 per 100 000 live births in 1993. SAPs have rolled back the gains that the developing countries made from the 1950s to the 1970s. Central to the economic achievements of these countries was an active state. With the implementation of SAPs, these governments lost all control over their own economies. Instead, these economies were controlled by the IMF and World Bank and the private sector.

Cuts in governments' spenditure on social services directly hit women as it is them who take care for children, the old and the sick. This responsibility is then shifted away from the state onto women.

Globalisation reinforces the unequal and oppressive sexual division of labour. The majority of women workers work in the unprotected and unregulated informal sector. In the formal sector the sexual division of labour remains where women workers are drawn into economic sectors such as textiles and garments, tourism, entertainment and the service sector. Also, women form a large part of the non-permanent, temporary and casual workers that are less organised and less protected. Women's oppression continues in our society as women's work remains unrecognised and undervalued.

How can women workers organise themselves to fight against these conditions

In organising themselves, women workers have encountered the following problems:

- * Double shift
- * Resistance from men at home
- * Union activities and meetings not suitable for women
- * Men in the union undermining women
- * Lack of confidence of women

Rights in the Constitution will not end women's oppression. But these rights can be used as a mobilising tool by women and workers' organisations.

It is through the organisations of the working class that working class women can end their oppression. But structures alone will not solve problems. Unions need to address gender issues through concrete actions. These include :

- ◆ Setting up women/gender structures in the union
- ◆ Challenging the resistance to gender structures
- ◆ Challenging and educating men
- ◆ Sharing domestic work
- ◆ Ensuring that Trade Union work allows for domestic responsibilities
- ◆ Building women's leadership
- ◆ Taking up gender issues in negotiations with bosses
- ◆ Taking up gender issues in the community

It is worthy to note that, through their struggles, women workers and their organisations have won some rights for women. Maternity rights, the right to legal abortions, protection against sexual discrimination, equal opportunities and affirmative action have become part of government law in a number of countries. These rights need to be developed, implemented and linked to the broader struggle for gender equality and an end to exploitation.

LIST OF SOURCES

- Workers' World, Vol.14, 1994. International Labour Resource & Info. Group [ILRIG]
- South Africa in the Global Economy, 1997. Trade Union Research Project [TURP]
- Economics after Apartheid, 1997. Herbert Jauch
- Women and Globalisation, 1996. Althea MacQuene
- EPZs: Solving the Problems of Southern Africa?, 1996. International Labour Resource & Information Group [ILRIG]

THE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT AND WOMEN:

- * LRA is concerned with organised workers. Less than 30% of women workers are organised into unions. Many women are mainly employed as casual and part-time workers in the informal small business sector.**
- * These forms of employment and small business have the worst conditions of employment.**
- * The LRA only makes provision for those workers and unions which are "sufficiently representative" to gain organisational rights - meetings, access for union officials, stoporder facilities for union subscriptions.**

DOMESTIC AND FARMWORKERS THEREFORE HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING ORGANISATIONAL RIGHTS.

- * The right to have union meetings at work is restricted to after working hours. Women experience problems of domestic work and violence in communities which prevent them from meeting at work after working hours.**
- * Centralised bargaining is not compulsory in the LRA. Through centralised bargaining unorganised workers benefit by agreements being extended to them. Most of these workers are women. Also how are farmworkers and domestic workers ever going to gain centralised bargaining?**

EVEN WHEN WOMEN ARE ORGANISED INTO UNIONS WHERE THEY ARE THE MAJORITY LIKE IN SACCAWU AND T&GWU THEY STILL DO NOT HAVE CENTRALISED BARGAINING.

THE BASIC CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT BILL AND WOMEN:

- * Casual and temporary workers, home based workers, farmworkers, domestics and those employed in small business are predominantly women.
Home based workers are not covered by the the bill.**
- * Due to the majority of women workers being unorganised they will be more vulnerable to flexibility and downward variation - longer working hours, shifts etc.**
- * Shorter rest periods (72 to 60 hours) and allowance for this to be taken during the week means women will spend less time with their families.**
- * Travelling home late at night will expose women to violent attacks.**
- * The BCOE Bill does not provide for parental rights such as paid maternity and paternity leave.**

HOW MANY WOMEN WERE PART OF THE UNION DELEGATIONS AT THE NEDLAC AND ALLIANCE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE LRA AND BCOE Bill?

WERE WOMEN WORKERS FROM THE AGRICULTURAL, DOMESTIC AND INFORMAL SECTORS REPRESENTED ?

EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL EQUITY: GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS: (Green Paper)

Aims to reduce imbalances and end discrimination at the workplace based on race, gender and disability.

The paper emphasises that black women are particularly disadvantaged.

It also outlines several contributing factors and obstacles to employment equity at and outside the workplace.

BARRIERS OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE:

- 1) Discrimination in education and training**
- 2) Unequal distribution of wealth and assets (land, capital and credit).**
- 3) Distances from the workplace and transport inequalities.**
- 4) Lack of access to household infrastructure (water, electricity etc.)**
- 5) Household division of labour.**

FACTORS AT THE WORKPLACE WHICH CAUSE INEQUALITIES:

- 1) Procedures and discrimination in hiring, promoting, selecting, training, transferring and retrenching employees.**

2) Inequalities in pay and non-wage benefits for equal work.

3) Not accomodating language and cultural diversity.

The green paper also notes the importance of consultation in workplace restructuring and an equal national education and training system unlike that under apartheid.

HOW IS EMPLOYMENT EQUITY TO BE ACHIEVED?

1) Prohibiting harassment on the job and the use of discriminatory criteria for recruiting and selecting employees.

2) Organisational changes at the workplace starting with a workplace audit with guidelines provided by the Department of Labour.

This would cover:-

- Levels of employment and grading.**
- Benefits to employees**
- Programmes and policies on human resource development, also accomodating language and cultural diversity and lower formal qualifications for jobs.**
- Physical facilities particularly to accomodate women and the disabled.**
- Transport, housing and caring arrangements ie. working hours and day-care facilities.**
- Grievance and internal procedures**