

WOMEN AND THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, 1912-1943 [1]

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For the first 30 years of its existence the exclusion of women from full membership in the constitution of the SANNC/ANC contrasted with the participation of women in the deliberations, decision-making and campaigns of the organization (though not in the leadership). This apparent contradiction arose from the actuality of African women's involvement in resistance and the peculiar structure of the ANC, which allowed for ways in which women could participate.

The exclusion of women was not surprising nor exceptional for the time. The societies from which the white settlers originated and the indigenous societies they encountered in South Africa were male-dominated and patriarchal. In 1912, throughout South Africa, government and politics were generally considered to be within the exclusive province of men, and all women, black and white, were denied the franchise. [2] That women were excluded from membership of the major political organization of the African people was to be expected: the more so as the formation of the SANNC was intended to unite the African people, and constructed to express an alliance between the traditional rulers and the educated petty bourgeoisie and aspirant middle class. The absence of women from political institutions does not necessarily lead to their absence in the political arena. The ways in which women worked with and in the ANC are complex, and it is not correct to say that the exclusion from full membership

laid the basis of the ANC's treatment of women for the next twenty five years, as a separate category of members outside the scope of its regular activities. [3]

While all Africans were subjected to conquest, colonial rule and dispossession, the way in which women and men experienced these differed, as did their political, economic and legal status. These differences shaped their particular response, helped to determine the issues they took up, and the methods of struggle adopted.

In the wake of conquest, there emerged a group of Africans, mostly mission-educated, who, turning their backs on traditional African society, sought entry into the colonial one. The liberal values as proclaimed by British imperial and colonial governments, and adopted by Africans, had led to a not unreasonable expectation that Africans would be admitted into the new society being established in South Africa. Though the expectations of the African people had repeatedly been frustrated, they continued to hope and form organizations to protect and expand African interests and rights from within the constitutional framework and institutions of the new system. These organizations adopted the style of the conquerors and addressed the authorities in ways that would be considered acceptable by whites, and would not alienate them. They saw the franchise as gateway to this society and focussed their political demands on it. As a consequence the leadership and membership of the organizations inevitably came from those who would qualify for the franchise: men of property and education.

While sharing the overall objectives, women and those without property and education did not feel it necessary to operate only within the parameters laid down by colonial society and were less inclined to comply with, or accommodate, settler rules and sensitivities. While some women saw themselves as gender images, "the wives and daughters" of the ANC leadership, most of those who participated in resistance differed in the issues they took up, their organization, mobilization and methods, as well as in economic status and educational

levels. To a greater extent than in the SANNC, women's resistance was shaped from below.

Because women chose to engage in issues of immediate and direct relevance to their daily lives, they found it easy to mobilize support and mount campaigns. In the context of colonialism and the nature of the oppression of the African people, these issues were relatively easy to resolve. But, as they were not linked to long-term goals, the campaigns did not lead to lasting organizational formations. Men assumed, and women conceded, that defining and achieving the long-term goals were their territory.

When dealing with officials women were handicapped by a lack of fluency in European languages, and a lack of confidence aggravated by the not infrequent refusal of white officials to meet with and listen to them. Men, sometimes national leaders, were requested to act as intermediaries or interpreters. Generally, they tried to control women's initiatives and steer them away from militancy and direct action. It was not so much that they were opposed to such methods in principle, but rather that they were concerned to ensure that an "acceptable" and reassuring image of Africans was always presented to whites.

Two cases in East London illustrate the kind of influence exercised by national leaders. In August 1908, *Izwi* reported a meeting in the Town Hall, at which women sat quietly and waited for the Cape leader, Dr Rubusana, to put their grievances to the Mayor. After he had done so, the Mayor promised to take these matters up with the Township Council. The editor of *Izwi* praised the women for the way in which they brought their grievances to the attention of the authorities and said their "activities were far more organised than any ever attempted by men". [4] A report of another meeting two weeks later presents a totally different picture. This time the women spoke through an interpreter. They said this was their birthplace and they had nowhere else to go. They told the mayor that if they were arrested for rent arrears they would have to resist. [5]

The issues around which women mobilized before and after the formation of the Union of South Africa were materially based. In the Transvaal, in 1910, women protested at the lack of employment opportunities:

It is well known that our husbands are getting low wages and cannot afford to discharge their liabilities unless they get our assistance ... All classes of work formerly performed [by women] are now in the hands of men, e.g. kitchen or general servants work, washing and ironing, eating houses for natives, nursing in native hospitals ... [6]

In the two cases in East London referred to above, women complained that Indians and Chinese were taking over all the work as washerwomen and wanted the Mayor to put an end to this as they had no other employment opportunities. They further asked the Council for permission to start "coal and wood business". Other complaints were high rents and bus fares. The trigger for the militant Orange Free State Anti-Pass campaign was the enforcement of the regulation requiring women to purchase permits to use the municipal wash-house, which further limited their ability to retain economic independence. [7]

These were very different concerns from those that prevailed amongst the founding fathers of the SANNC, who met in Bloemfontein on January 8, 1912. They clearly conceived of it as an organization of men in which women's participation would be limited to their stereotyped "traditional" domestic roles. The draft constitution placed before the founding Congress refers to three classes of membership.[8] The prevailing patriarchal notions of women's role in society were inscribed in the constitutional provision for the duties of a category of "auxiliary" members, automatically enrolled without fee and hence with no vote.

All the wives of the members of any affiliated branch or branches and other distinguished African ladies where the

Congress or Committee therefore shall be holding its sessions shall *ipso facto* become auxiliary members of the Congress during the period of such session.

... It shall be the duty of all auxiliary members to provide suitable shelter and entertainment for delegates to the Congress.

“Ordinary membership”, on payment of a fee of 2s 6d, was open to “men who belong to the so-called negro or aboriginal African races South of the Zambesi”. Their duties were “to join some local organisation or in person to attend all the Annual sittings of the Congress”. Provision was made, however, for the participation of “exceptional” women. In addition to a class of Honorary Members composed of “Ruling Chiefs and Hereditary Princes of African blood”, honorary membership could be conferred on “Men and Women who shall have rendered eminent service to the native races of South Africa”. Honorary members paid an enrolment fee of 10s 6d and had two votes. [9]

By 1912, however, women had been participating in a number of the overtly political Associations and Congresses which were later to constitute the SANNC. In 1902 Charlotte Manye, later Maxeke, was one of three representatives from the Transvaal who was sent to the SANNC conference at the Cape. Her contribution was highly praised, but the franchise-orientated SANNC concluded that the time was not right for women to participate in political organizations. [10]

In the Afrikaner Republics there was no history of involvement in constitutional or electoral politics, and the focus of the Orange River Colony Native Congress (ORCNC) ranged over a number of issues, including passes for women. As Africans organized in opposition to the racist constitution of the proposed Union of South Africa, leaders such as Thomas Mapikela tried to organize local and regional groups and organize a permanent national organization. After the 1909 African delegation returned to South Africa, having failed to move the British Government on the constitution, Mapikela travelled around the Orange River Colony (later Orange Free State), explaining the results of his mission at well attended public meetings in most of the major urban centres of the province. He also used the occasions to organize support for the ORCNC. He asked local groups and people to submit statements on any matters they wished to be discussed at the annual Congress in January 1910. These would possibly be put to the South African Native Convention before being submitted to the colonial authorities. [11] This grass-roots mobilization brought women and the pass issue into greater prominence in the province.

The Anti-Pass Campaign

The Orange Free State Anti-Pass Campaign highlighted the different approaches of women and men in pursuance of a common demand, and serves to illustrate aspects of women's relationship with the male-dominated political organizations. Opposition to passes for African women had featured regularly in most of the representations that were made to the authorities, and the 1912 SANNC Conference passed a resolution urging the repeal of all laws which compelled African women to carry passes. Less than a month later, women in the province began collecting signatures for a petition which they decided to present directly to the authorities in Cape Town. Within weeks they had collected over 5000 signatures (no mean accomplishment) and began to prepare to go to Cape Town. [12]

The authorities as well as the political organizations were discomfited by women who took initiatives, especially at national level. The Minister of Native Affairs wrote to the President of the SANNC, John Dube, advising the male African leaders to prevent the women's deputation from coming to Cape Town, as he feared that such a deputation would lead to further agitation and excitement among the whites that would make it more difficult for the SANNC's other representations to succeed. However, the women would not be dissuaded, and in the event Walter Rubusana assisted in the presentation of the petition and

accompanied the women's deputation to the Minister. [13]

In the Afrikaner Republics, no distinctions had been made between Africans and "Coloureds" and the communities lived together in the same locations and under the same restrictions. Coloured women, who were also required to carry passes, were involved in the campaign against them. Their independent actions caused the African People's (later Political) Organization (APO) to express its concern, and its paper chided them:

We think the deputation might have awaited the Native Congress. It is also regrettable that the Coloured women of the Orange Free State did not consult the executive of the APO Women's Guild. We feel sure that no deputation of coloured men of the APO would come to Cape Town without first acquainting the Executive with the object of its mission. [14]

The ORCNC, however, called a special general meeting of its members to hear a report from the deputation after its return from Cape Town. Later, many centres elected one man and one woman as their delegates to the Annual Conference, where one of the women's leaders, Katie Louw, reported on the progress of the anti-pass campaign. [15]

The Free State women did not confine themselves to making representations, and in May 1913 decided to stop carrying passes or buying permits. The action spread across the province and there were numerous confrontations with the police, as women went *en masse* to the courts in support of those being charged, and frequently engaged in physical confrontations with the police as they tried to rescue those being taken to prison after sentence. The women who went to prison for refusing to carry passes lived in the urban centres, but were not all from among the elite. While some of the leaders of the Native and Coloured Women's Association, formed during the campaign, were the wives of Congress leaders, three of the seven executive members of the NCWA were not literate. [16]

Initially, women had mobilized through *manyanos* (women's prayer unions), but, as the campaign spread across the province and the number of women in prison grew, women from the OFS Congress and the APO Women's Guild came together and set up the Native and Coloured Women's Association to oversee the campaign. [17] The NCWA tried to mobilize support, and raised funds to provide for those in prison and for medical treatment after they completed their sentence.

As the Free State campaign involved both African and Coloured women, there would have been a need for some co-ordinating body, but there is little information on how and why the new organization was set up, nor has it been possible to ascertain the precise relationship between this "women's" organization and the SANNC or APO or their provincial affiliates. The few surviving documents of the organization relate to its "solidarity work", i.e. petitions, letters in press, fund raising appeals, etc. This is precisely the sort of task that one would have expected the existing organizations to have undertaken. However, both the provincial and national associations were preoccupied with the recently enacted Land Act and may well have felt it inappropriate to divert their attention and scarce resources to the women's campaign.

As the campaign progressed, the earlier misgivings about women's independence and militancy had given way to admiration and a general pride in the women's achievement. The Secretary General of the SANNC, Sol Plaatje, visited the women in prison, expressed his admiration (and surprise) at their determination, and tried to publicize the resistance and mobilize support. The African press rallied to the support of those who were imprisoned, as did the APO journal and the Natal newspaper *Indian Opinion*.

The NCWA addressed an appeal to "many European friends in this province" urging them to use their influence to get legislation introduced in Parliament abolishing passes for women.

They also addressed a petition to the Governor General, Gladstone. These were initiatives similar to those of the SANNC, but there they were being undertaken in a context where women were continuing to go to prison for refusing to carry passes. Also, the content and approach in the representations differed from those made by men.

The NCWA addressed issues such as sexual harassment by police in enforcing pass laws, and cited examples in explaining their resistance:

A white Superintendent of the Location demanded a pass from the girl at her home and failing to produce one [she] was arrested and taken to the charge office. The Superintendent made improper overtures on the way to the girl. The latter resented these overtures, but she was ultimately taken by force and outraged by this man. [18]

This contrasts with the protests made by male leaders about the sexual harassment of African women:

I marry a woman in the church and I think I have done what civilisation demands and that as my wife she will be protected as a respectable married woman, but I find her being mauled by a man who is far lower in the scale of civilisation than she is herself and merely because the law gives him the power to do so. [19]

Women acknowledged the national leadership of the SANNC, and followed its general directive in suspending their campaign for the duration of the 1914-18 War.

The Bantu Women's League

The SANNC did not adopt a constitution until 1919. By then, women had established through the Anti-Pass campaign that they had a role in the political life of the nation that went beyond providing entertainment and accommodation. Though acknowledging this, the SANNC was not yet ready to admit them to full membership. At the inaugural Conference it had been resolved

that it was expedient and desirable that a well digested and accepted native opinion should be ascertainable by the Government and other constituted authorities with respect to the Native problem in all its various phases and ramifications. [20]

That opinion was to continue to be expressed by men. There appears to have been no demand from women for membership, and they did not consider the SANNC or its provincial affiliates as appropriate vehicles to mobilize for their own campaigns. A pattern had been established of grass-roots mobilization and participation by women, while dealing with the authorities at local or national level was to remain the province of men.

The SANNC leadership had encouraged the formation in 1918 of the Bantu Women's League [21], to organize women against proposals to extend passes to women throughout the Union. The Constitution adopted the following year provided that Auxiliary Membership of the SANNC

should be open to Women of the aboriginal races of Africa over the age of 18 years, who shall be members of the Bantu Women's National League of South Africa ...
Auxiliary members under the auspices of their League whenever

required shall provide suitable shelter and entertainment for members or delegates to meetings of the Association. [22]

There were two significant changes from the 1919 draft. The original reference to "wives of members ... and other distinguished African ladies" was altered to "women", and there was an acknowledgement that women were entitled to organize politically.

The Bantu Women's League pursued an independent course, and did not affiliate to the SANNC. [23] Nor did it function as expected. In Charlotte Maxeke it had a leader of national standing among the African people and one who was capable of dealing directly with legislators and officials. Women no longer had need of interpreters or spokesmen, but could articulate their demands and make their own representations. At a national level, the League made representations to the authorities through delegations meeting with the Prime Minister and other officials, or appearing before Commissions and Inquiries. [24]

At the grass roots, women's militancy was being encouraged by Charlotte's appearance and statements on the platforms of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) [25] and the radically oriented Transvaal ANC of the post-war period. The League formed branches across the country, some of the most active being in the Transvaal and OFS. These took up local issues and participated in campaigns initiated by political organizations and trade unions at local and national level.

Within days of the inaugural conference of the ICU, the Bantu Women's League of Pietersburg drew up a list of grievances of women farm-workers. Examples were cited of farmers making women do exceedingly heavy physical labour, even when they were in advanced stages of pregnancy, and detailed the case of a farmer who forced women workers to stand in a pool of cold water for half a day as punishment for complaining about conditions. The workers also objected to being forced to work until midnight without time off for meals. The League's representations were sent to Pretoria, where no action was taken, as the complaints were considered to be "exaggerated". [26]

Little is known about the other leaders or members of the Bantu Women's League, except for some names. Clearly Charlotte Maxeke was dominant. To a greater extent than the SANNC, the Bantu Women's League suffered from organizational weakness: the bulk of women were rural, poor, non-literate and inexperienced in western-style politics and organization. There was little financial support - money was raised from teas, etc - quite literally in pennies and occasional shillings. There were no full-time officials, and leaders had to find the time from their employment or professions and frequently also had to fund their activities themselves.

After the death of her husband in 1928, Charlotte Maxeke devoted more time to her career. She established an employment bureau and was later employed as a probation officer by Johannesburg municipality. She devoted more attention to welfare work and less to politics. The League remained in existence for some years, though mainly in the person of Charlotte Maxeke. She participated in the All African Convention, where the decision was taken to establish a new women's organization which became known as the National Council of African Women, with Charlotte Maxeke as its President.

The ANC Women's Section

It has not yet been possible to ascertain the date and manner of formation of the ANC Women's Section, nor to locate its constitution. It is likely that, as the Bantu Women's League asserted its independence, the Women's Auxiliary was revived as a subordinate body within Congress and renamed the Women's Section. By the 1920s the Women's Section had branches in a number of centres, and announcements of the officers of the Congress often included the names of the Chairwomen of the "Women's Auxiliary" or "Women's Section". The Annual Conference also appointed a Chief Organizer for the Women's Section.

The Women's Section was represented on the Executive through the Provincial President of their Sections [27], and branches were supposed to be self-financing and self-sufficient. Members paid an annual subscription of 3 shillings, on which branches could draw for their subscriptions. After the Transvaal ANC had incurred a debt of £110 in 1926 to fight the imposition of passes on women through the courts, a circular letter was sent urging Women's Section branches to send whatever monies they had in their possession to pay off "this debt incurred on their behalf" (author's emphasis). [28]

The Women's Section and the Bantu Women's League operated as separate organizations, but had an overlap of members and leaders. Charlotte Maxeke was considered to be an "ANC leader", taking a full part in proceedings and appearing on platforms at public meetings. *The African Yearly Register*, published in 1930 by the Secretary General of the ANC, Mveli Skota, lists a number of women who were founder-members or officers of the ANC Women's Section, and a number who were also active in the Women's League. Mrs Nuku of Beaconsfield, Kimberley, is described as a social worker and a leading member of the church temperance movement, who had been "Chairman of the local branch of the Women's League and Women's Section" (p 230). Two sisters, Mrs M Kondile and Mrs M Bobojana, were foundation members of the "women's Section of the African National Congress" (pp 166 and 133). The elder, Mrs Kondile, who at one time was in charge of a grocery store and a news agency, is described also as a "prominent member of the Women's League" and one of the best women's organizers in the Transvaal. Charlotte Maxeke, who assisted in preparing the biographical sketches for the volume, is described as "founder and President of the Bantu Women's League" (p 195).

In the late 1930s, in the context of the attempts to revitalize and reorganize the ANC, the role and function of the Women's Section was debated.

Women in the ANC

As we have seen, women were active in the provincial congresses before the formation of the SANNC, and continued to be involved at branch level, particularly in the Free State and the western Cape. Women participated in the Annual Conference which was the highest decision-making organ. The majority were elected as part of the provincial Congress delegations. Others represented affiliated women's groups, such as Daughters of Africa and Zenzele. [29] They spoke on a range of issues, rarely on matters affecting women exclusively. On the first day of the 1937 Session, celebrating the 25th Jubilee, the lone woman speaker criticized Congress for its extensive attention to festivities when it had no money for organization. [30] Later in the same session a Mrs Peters moved a resolution urging that the Wages and Conciliation Act be amended to make all wage determinations apply to African workers in all industries. The following year, Mrs Benjamin, leading the debate on National Policy of Congress, appealed for support for the low-paid African workers in the Bloemfontein water works who were earning only 1s 9d per day. Their contributions, particularly in these years, made constant reference to the need to reorganize and strengthen the ANC. The Conference Minutes of 1938 report the intervention of a delegate of the Cape African Congress, Mrs L P Nikiwe of Port Elizabeth, who advanced "several interesting arguments to prove that the African women were interested in Politics". Among her recommendations was one "To acquaint Congress with the Masses".

Women also served on important Conference Committees, such as Resolutions and Finance, and voted on all resolutions as well as for the Officers. The extent to which women's *de facto* participation in the ANC was considered unremarkable is illustrated in the course of the disputes over the re-election of Pixley Ka Seme as President in 1933. Three years earlier he had ousted the radical James Gumede, who, on his return from the Soviet Union, had proposed radicalizing the ANC by organizing mass demonstrations and forming an alliance with the Communist Party. In the interim the ANC had become moribund. In 1933, when

Seme was due to stand for re-election, he packed the Annual Conference: 37 of the 69 delegates were from Bloemfontein, the majority of them women; of the 27 delegates who voted to re-elect Seme, 22 were women. The speaker declared the proceedings unconstitutional, but Seme continued in office. Seme was attacked and accused of not getting the necessary votes from all the provinces, but none of his critics challenged the right of women to vote and determine the leadership of the organization. [31]

As the ANC went into decline, so did the Women's Section. But many of the women who were prominent in ANC conferences appeared at the meetings of the All Africa Convention between 1935 and 1938: Charlotte Maxeke, Minnie Bhola, Mrs Mahabane.

The NCAW and the Revival of the Women's Section

Over 30 women attended the All African Convention in 1935. Among the women's organizations in the participants' list are the Pimville Women's League and the African Women's Self-Improvement Society.

The women delegates met separately during the Convention, and resolved

that the time has come for the establishment of an African Council of women on lines similar to those of the National Councils of other races in order that we may be able to do our share in the advancement of our race.

Their decision was later endorsed by the AAC. In the following years, several branches were set up and a national organization launched in 1937 with the name National Council of African Women.

The NCAW did not regard itself as primarily a political organization but rather one involved in "non-European welfare". Most of its members were teachers or nurses. It took up issues of teachers' salaries, education, provision of creches, widows' rights of inheritance, delinquent children, etc. The NCAW immediately came under the influence of white liberals such as Mrs Rheinallt-Jones, and many African women attacked it as being run by white women. [32]

The AAC had expected the new organization to be responsible to it. In 1936 the Convention resolved "that the women be authorised to form branches of the NCAW in terms of the decision of the last Conference" (author's emphasis). [33] However, the NCAW did not affiliate to the AAC, though some branches did. The reluctance to affiliate arose from the NCAW desire to speak for itself, and not subordinate itself to the AAC. The AAC had not approved of the women making direct representations to the authorities. Divisions over this issue within the NCAW almost led to Mina Soga losing her seat on the Council. [34] Mina Soga was a founding member of the NCAW and its first Secretary General and Organizer.

The ANC welcomed the formation of the NCAW, but eventually found itself with the same difficulties as the AAC. The NCAW sent greetings to ANC Conferences and promised to work together, but steadfastly retained its independence. In May 1939, the ANC invited the NCAW to participate in a Joint Deputation to the Minister and Secretary for Native Affairs. ANC President General Mahabane voiced his concern that although the NCAW had not come to Cape Town nor joined the delegation Charlotte Maxeke had been there earlier and seen the Minister independently. [35]

When the NCAW was formed there was some uncertainty about the continuation of the Women's Section. The appointment of the Chief Organizer of the Women's Section in 1937 was deferred until the final constitution of the new organization was known. The following year brought a significantly larger number of women to the ANC Conference [36], and Mrs

Nikiwe spoke on "The Organization of African Women as a section of Congress". A suggestion that the Women's Section affiliate to the NCAW was not taken up.

Even before the formation of the NCAW, a debate had begun among women about the nature of a new women's organization. Some, like Charlotte Maxeke, had been calling for an organization dealing with the growing welfare needs of the African people in the 1930s. Others felt that priority should be given to an organization with a strong political orientation. Josie Mpama was the most articulate spokesperson for this view. Following the Urban Areas Act 1937, which further restricted the mobility of African women, she urged

We women can no longer remain in the background or concern ourselves only with domestic and sports affairs. The time has arrived for women to enter the political field and stand shoulder to shoulder with their men in the struggle. [37]

She also attacked the NCAW for its ineffectiveness and called for an effective organization that would bring women into the general political struggle.

In 1941, the ANC resolved to revive the Women's Section and that women "be accorded the same status as men in the classification for membership". The resolution recommended further

That the following means be made to attract the women (a) to make the programme of the Congress as attractive as possible to women (b) a careful choice of leadership. [38]

In the absence of records of the debate, it is not possible to clarify what kind of leadership had to be avoided. The revival of the Women's Section was part of the process of reorganizing the ANC. A draft document on organizational structure dated 1942 indicates that the Women's Section was seen operating "under the supervision and direction" of the parent body. [39]

In 1943, the ANC resolved that a Women's League be formed. The debate on the status of the League continued with the women calling for autonomy and the men wanting greater control. In 1945, a resolution from the Executive which read

that the women of this Congress be allowed to organise autonomous branches wherever they so desire within the ANC

led to protests from some men, and statements of appreciation from women delegates. But the following year the *ANC Bulletin* warned that the granting of permission to women to set up the League "does not mean parallelism but co-operation and mutual assistance in the building up of membership and funds for both sections". [41]

When women were accepted as full and equal members of the ANC, there was a consensus that women's mobilization was necessary to strengthen the organization. While recognizing some of the practical problems faced by women in participating fully, there appears, however, to have been limited understanding of the inherent problems in simultaneously providing for a separate women's organization.

In 1942, a draft constitution explained the need for a women's section:

In the Congress women members shall enjoy the same status as men, and shall be entitled to elect and be elected to any position including the highest office. Notwithstanding this fact, however, and without in any way diminishing the rights to women members, the Congress may, recognising the special disabilities

and differences to which African women are subjected and because of the peculiar problems facing them, and in order to arouse their interest and facilitate their organisation, create a Women's Section within its machinery, to be known as the ANC Women's Section. [42]

Further on, the same document contains this telling sentence: "... the relations between the Women's Section and the men's section shall be on the basis of co-operation and ..."
(author's emphasis).

In the following year, 1943, the constitutional hurdle had been overcome, but there was, and is today, a long way to go towards the realization that

... the socialist revolution needs women's creative participation at least as much as working-class women need full liberation. {43}

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Notes

- 1 Before 1923, the African National Congress was known as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC).
- 2 White women were enfranchised in 1930. The Hertzog Bills which proposed enfranchisement of white women also proposed to abolish the Cape African franchise. The majority of African leaders (male) rejected the connection being made between the enfranchisement of white women and the further disenfranchisement of Africans. However, a few supported the view that giving white women the vote would help to assuage white fears and proposed "that the Government should enfranchise all European women as a safeguard against any possible swamping of Europeans by Natives, and then extend the Cape Native Franchise to Natives of the Northern Provinces": Proceedings and Resolutions of the Governor-General's Native Conference 1926, in T Karis and G Carter, *From Protest to Challenge: documents of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Vol 1 (Stanford, 1972), pp 184-87. Subsequent to the enfranchisement of white women, the view that African women were also fit to have the vote was expressed on a number of platforms.
- 3 Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London, 1982)
- 4 *Izwi laBantu*, 18.8.1908.
- 5 *Izwi laBantu*, 1.9.1908.
- 6 Petition by Ellen Leeuw and 122 Native Women to the Mayor of Johannesburg, 23 March 1910.

- 7 Julia Wells, "The History of Black Women's Struggle Against Pass Laws in South Africa 1900-1960", PhD, Columbia University, 1982, provides a detailed account and assessment of the 1913 Anti-Pass Campaign, pp 120-50.
- 8 The SANNC did not adopt a constitution until 1919. A draft constitution prepared by Pixley Ka I Seme was circulated to various African organizations, Kings and Chiefs, prior to consideration at the inaugural Conference of the SANNC on 8 January 1912. André Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1919* (Cape Town, 1984). I am grateful to those who helped locate two pages of a copy sent by Seme to Chief Silas Molema on 3 November 1911, in Molema and Plaatje Papers, C c 9. Quotations are from this copy.
- 9 At that time a number of women would have fallen into this category, but there is no evidence that they were so recognized by the SANNC. Among these must be counted some of the Orange Free State women leaders as well as Charlotte Maxeke and Mrs A V Kinlock. Until comparatively recently, there was a widespread belief within the ANC that Charlotte Maxeke had been elected to the National Executive Committee in 1912. Little is known about Mrs Kinlock apart from a report that she was elected as Treasurer of the African Association, the organization established in London as the precursor of the Pan African Movement. She did not attend the Pan African Congress in London as she had returned to South Africa, but there are no reports of her activities after this.
- 10 'Intlanganiso ye South African Native Congress, *Izwi*, 14.10.1902, cited in André Odendaal, "African Political Mobilisation in the Eastern Cape 1880-1910", PhD, Cambridge, 1983.
- 11 André Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*, p 232.
- 12 Wells, *op. cit.*, p 101.
- 13 *Ibid.* This was not the first representation organized by the women of the Orange Free State. In October 1899 the "Vrouwen van Huishouders der lokatie van Bloemfontein" presented an illuminated address to President Steyn. This framed address is kept at the Steyn family farm, Onze Rust, in Bloemfontein.
- 14 *APO*, 6 April 1912.
- 15 Wells, *op. cit.*, p 101; Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*, p 282.
- 16 The Executive Committee included Chairwoman Catharina Simmons, Secretary Kathrina Louw, Members Jane Moroka, L Mosiaks, Rachel Talka, Mietha Kotsi, Helena Louw. The last three were unable to sign and "made their marks" on the Petition of the OFS Native and Coloured Women to the Governor-General in 1914.
- 17 *Tsala*, 27 September 1913, cited in Wells, *op. cit.*, p 127.
- 18 Petition of the OFS Native and Coloured Women to Governor-General, 1914.
- 19 Joseph Twayi, in Minutes of Interview between Mayor and Natives, Bloemfontein, 1913, quoted in Wells, *op. cit.*, p 85.
- 20 Constitution of the SANNC 1919.
- 21 Wells, *op. cit.*, p 172. Walshe gives two dates for the formation of the Bantu Women's League. He says "By the second half of 1913 this Free State unrest was widespread and led directly to the formation of the Bantu Women's League" (p 80). Later,

referring to a meeting between Charlotte Maxeke and the Prime Minister in 1918, he describes her as the "President of the newly formed Bantu Women's League of South Africa" (p 81). He has confused the Native and Coloured Women's Association with the Bantu Women's League.

- 22 Constitution of the SANNC 1919.
- 23 Cherryl Walker is incorrect in claiming that the League was affiliated to the ANC: *Women and Resistance*, p 32. In 1923, the ANC was still calling on the League to affiliate, and Conference resolved that "... it is in the best interests of the African people that all existing Bantu organisations such as Interdenominational Native Ministers Association, Native Teachers Association, Native Farmers Association, Workers Union, Bantu Women's Leagues, Vigilance Committee and so forth, shall be affiliated with this Native National Association."
- 24 Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa. The African National Congress 1912-1952* (London, 1970), pp 81, 84. *South African Outlook*, January 1921.
- 25 At Charlotte Maxeke's instigation, the ICU accepted the principle of equal pay for equal work. The full resolution read: "That the time has come to admit women in the Workers' Union as full members, and that they be allowed to enjoy all privileges and receive the same rights as the male members, and there should be female representatives to our Conference. Further, that women workers receive equal pay, men and women, for the same work done, and that all members of the Conference should do all they can to get women to join the Workers' Unions of the different towns." However, despite the commitment to equality, women were marginalized in the ICU. Wells, *op. cit.*, p 185. Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom* (New Haven, 1987), p 90.
- 26 Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, "'We opened the road for you, you must go forward': ANC Women's Struggles 1912-1982" in *Feminist Review* 12.
- 27 *National Gazette. A record of Congress activities, resolutions and decisions*, Vol 1, No 2, September 1927 (Johannesburg).
- 28 Circular letter to Provinces and branches.
- 29 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from the Minutes of Annual Conferences of the African National Congress, 1930-1945.
- 30 Dr Ralph Bunche, unpublished Diary of visit to South Africa in 1937, p 308. Manuscript placed in Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library, thanks to Dr Robert Edgar.
- 31 *Cape Times*, 22 April 1930. *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 29.4.1933.
- 32 All African Convention. Proceedings and Resolutions of the AAC 1935. Cherryl Walker, *op. cit.*, pp 35-36. Dr Ralph Bunche attended the 1937 Meetings of the AAC, the ANC and the African Women's Council. He expressed his concern at the level of influence of "Europeans" on African organizations: "They are now counselling extreme moderation among the natives so as not to inject the native issue into the coming election, and also so as not to offend the Afrikaners and thus make their task more difficult in Parliament ... There is the same tendency as in men's organization to lean heavily on the advice of Europeans. I wonder to what extent this is a deliberate effort to draw women away from the established African organizations, thus weakening

them. Ma and Pa Jones have worked hand in glove on moderating and splitting tactics." Bunche, *op. cit.*, pp 309, 316. "Ma and Pa Jones" were Mr and Mrs J D Rheinallt-Jones.

- 33 All African Convention, Minutes 1936.
- 34 All African Convention, Minutes 1940: Statement by Mrs C Kune.
- 35 *Cape Times*, 16 May 1939.
- 36 Further restrictions on women entering the urban areas may have been the stimulus. Under the Urban Areas Act 1937 women were required to obtain permission from magistrates in their home areas as well as from local urban authorities before coming into the urban areas.
- 37 *Umsebenzi*, 26 June 1937.
- 38 African National Congress, Minutes of Annual Conference 1941.
- 39 African National Congress, Draft Constitution 1942.
- 40 African National Congress, Minutes of Annual Conference 1945.
- 41 *The ANC Bulletin*: "Our Task for 1946".
- 42 African National Congress, Draft Constitution 1942.
- 43 Clara Zetkin: *Nur mit der Proletarischen Frau wird der Sozialismus Siegen!* quoted in S Hassim, J Metelerkamp and A Todes, "A Bit on the Side? Gender Struggles in the Politics of Transformation in South Africa", in *Transformation*, 5, 1987, p 10.