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THE WOMENS' CHARTER

PREAMBLE:

We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, Africans, Indians, Europeans and Coloureds, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women.

A SINGLE SOCIETY:

We women do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both men and women. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress.

WOMEN'S LOT:

We women share with our menfolk the cares and anxieties imposed by poverty and its evils. As wives and mothers, it falls upon us to make small wages stretch a long way. It is our lot to keep and care for the homes that are too small, broken and dirty to be kept clean. We know the burden of looking after children and our land when our husbands are away in the mines, on the farms and in towns earning our daily bread.

We know what it is to keep family life going in

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN:

We resolve to struggle for the removal of laws and customs that deny African women the right to own, inherit or alienate property.

WOMEN WHO LABOUR:

Thousands of African women, like Indian, Coloured and European women, are employed today in factories, homes, offices, shops, on farms and in professions such as nursing, teaching and the like. As unmarried women, widows or divorcees, they have to fend for themselves, often without assistance of the male relative. Many of them are responsible not only for their own livelihood, but also that of their children.

Large numbers of women today are in fact the sole breadwinners and heads of their families.

FOREVER MINORS:

Nevertheless, the laws and practices derived from earlier and different states of society are still applied to them. They are responsible for their own person and their children. Yet the law seeks to enforce upon them the status of a

pondokkies and shanties, or in overcrowded
apartments. We know the bitterness of children
taken to lawless ways, of daughters becoming
unmarried mothers whilst still at school, of boys
and girls growing up without education, training
or jobs at a living wage.

POOR AND RICH:

These are evils that do not need to exist. They exist because the society in which we live is divided into poor and rich, into non-European and European. They exist because there are privileges for the few, discrimination and harsh treatment for the many. The women have stood and will stand shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk in a common struggle against poverty, race and class discrimination, and the evils of the colour-bar.

NATIONAL LIBERATION:

As members of the National Liberation Movement and trade unions, in and through our various organisations, we march forward with our men in the struggle for liberation and the defence of the working people.

NEED FOR EDUCATION:

We also recognise that large numbers of our women folk continue to be bound by traditional practices and conventions, and fail to realize that these have become obsolete and a brake on progress.

It is our intention to carry out a nation-wide programme of education that will bring home to the men and women of all national groups the realisation that freedom cannot be won for any one section or for the people as a whole as long as women are kept in bondage.

AN APPEAL:

We appeal to progressive organisations, to members of the great National Liberation Movement, to the trade unions, and working class organisations, to the churches, educational and welfare organisations, to progressive men and women who have the interest of our people at heart to join us in this great and noble endeavour.

1984 Year of the Women

SEXISM IN EDUCATION

BECAUSE WE'RE WOMEN

Because woman's work is never done and is underpaid or unpaid or boring or repetitious and we're the first to get the sack and what we look like is more important than what we do and if we get raped it's our fault and if we get bashed we must have provoked it and if we raise our voices we're nagging bitches and if we enjoy sex we're nymphos and if we don't we're frigid and if we love women it's because we can't get a "real" man and if we ask our doctor too many questions we're neurotic and/or pushy and if we expect community care for children we're selfish and if we stand up for our rights we're aggressive and 'unfeminine', and if we want to get married we're out to trap a man and if we don't we're unnatural and because we still can't get an adequate safe contraceptive but men can walk on the moon and if we can't cope or don't want a pregnancy we're made to feel guilty about abortion and for lots and lots of other reasons we are part of the women's liberation movement. "

Anon

Up to now we have been viewing women's issues as a mere element of the national liberation struggle, as

- i. one of the problems we have to face in our struggle,
- ii. one of the sites of struggle amongst others - the factory floor, the universities, schools, colleges, the community.

When we view it in this way, we are presented with certain problems. When do we organise women? How does the organising of women fit in with students' struggle, workers' struggle?

At which stage can we concentrate on organising women? How do we do this in a way that doesn't detract from organising around the basic contradictions in our society? How best can we do this, so that our struggle is taken forward, and activists are developed in the best way possible?

When we see women's oppression, not only as an element of struggle, but as a phenomenon which existed before capitalist society developed, then we begin to see that the oppression and exploitation of women is one of the most basic forms of oppression in our society.

Women have been exploited and subservient even before the advent of capitalist society. Before any sector of humanity was exploited in a class-based society, women were oppressed.

Working class leadership in many countries where struggle has been waged, stated most emphatically that the index of the emancipation of a nation is the extent to which its women are liberated.

Because education, both formal and informal is the most significant process of socialisation, it is important for us to understand how women are formed and moulded to serve the capitalist machine.

The foundation for the smooth running and reproduction of capitalist society, is the nuclear family (mother, father and children) where agents for the processes of capitalist production are fed, clothed and housed.

It is in the family that children are prepared for their role as future factory worker, bureaucrat, business manager, teacher, nurse, engineer or simply as future mother and reproducer of labour. The mother is the central figure in the family. She bears the children, looks after them, and she is responsible generally for seeing that the family functions well as a unit.

It becomes clear then, why it is necessary in every sphere of life to perpetuate the myth that it is the natural calling of women to get married, have babies and raise a family, it becomes clear why it is necessary for women to believe that they were born weak, subordinate, moulded to serve fathers and husbands; and why they should be happy in the background of humanity, and in the kitchen of the world.

In capitalist society division developed first and foremost on the grounds of sex - men as the shapers of history, the active agents, the force; and women as the passive, silent (but strong) support group. This is the basic framework within which we have to view divisions on the basis of class, and - in South Africa - of race.

To keep women in their subordinate position and men in their dominant position, society has to believe that there are fundamental differences in nature, temperament and inclination between men and women and that these differences have always been there and will always exist. The justifications and reasons given for the eternal differences range from religious to physical grounds.

Exploitation and oppression of women is necessary to keep the wheels of capitalism turning. If all women rebel against raising families, who is going to see to the maintenance of the steady flow of labour for the market? Capitalism needs mothers to nurture its labour until it is ready for the market.

This is why sexism is a vital tenet of capitalist ideology. A working definition of sexism includes the factors of discrimination, stereotyping and judgements of a person's ability, capabilities, personality and behaviour. And above all, prejudgements about the POTENTIAL of men and women.

At an early age, in the home, we learn that we have a defined role to play as a male or female. Girls play with dolls and tea sets, at being nurses. Boys play with guns and cars. When children play housie-housie together, the girls are, naturally, assigned the role of mother who cooks and cleans, and waits for father to return home at night.

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