

"I am calling all our trade unionists to join hands and give attention to gender issues. It is quite evident that problems relating to this are always being discussed, solutions are suggested, but somehow never implemented."

- Edna Sethema, SACCAWU

My election as the first vice president of the South African Commercial and Allied workers Union (SACCAWU), as well as the employment of a woman to do full time gender organising work in the union are but a few steps in the correct direction. Our aim is a situation whereby all can participate fully in the union irrespective of sex.

As a member of SACCAWU, I am first of all calling all our trade unionists to join hands and give attention to gender issues. It is quite evident that problems relating to this are always being discussed, solutions are suggested, but somehow never implemented.

During the early stages of my membership in the then

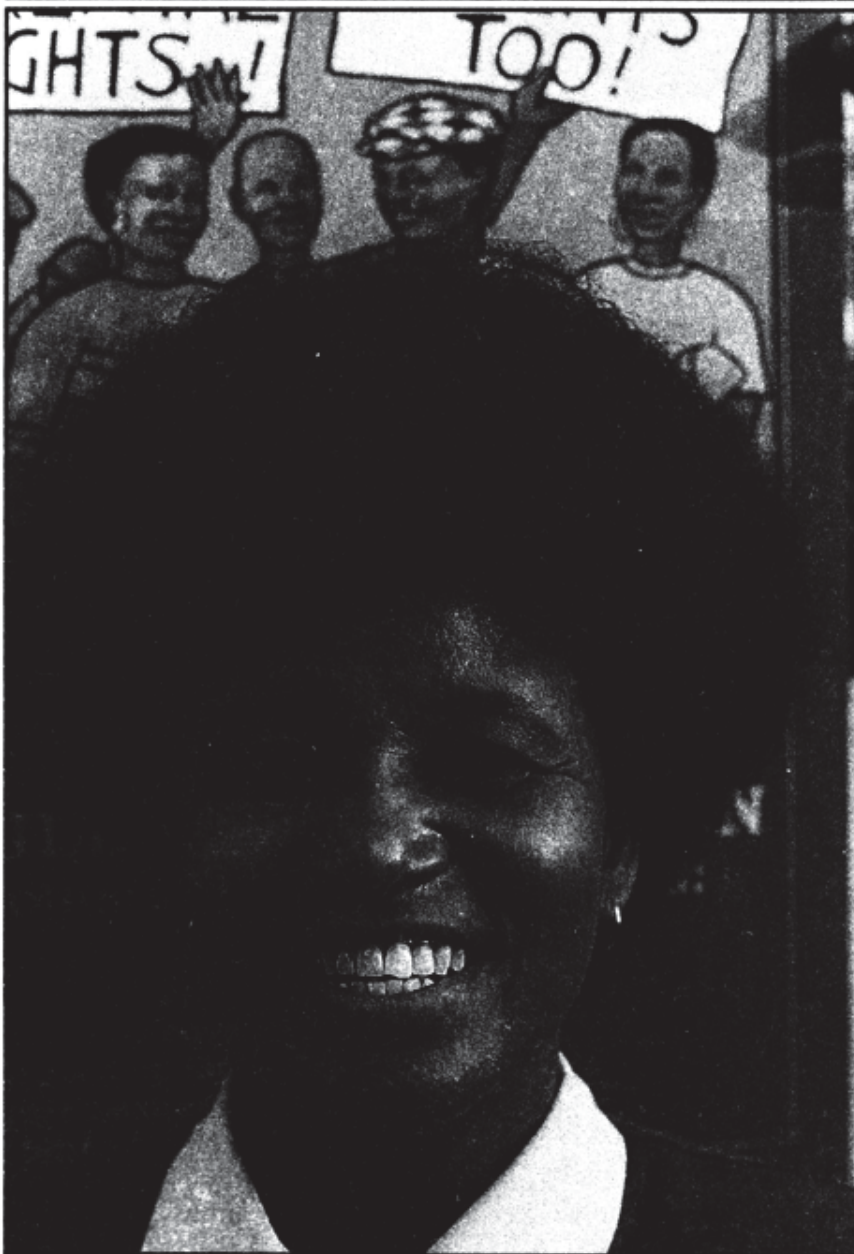
CCAWUSA, we used to have the strongest and most resistant leadership positions at shopfloor level occupied by women. To get our campaigns and actions consistent and effective we needed - and we still need - strong leadership moving with workers especially at this level.

The main problem our women members had was attending meetings. This part of the problem is supposed to be improving noticeably as our struggle continues and our enemy becomes more sophisticated day by day. However, there is very little improvement. Instead, committed women start striving for leadership positions, rather than the full participation of all women.

I was thrilled by the resolution taken at our last COSATU Congress on gender issues. This is an opportunity that women will have to use. They have to fight against anything that displaces gender related issues from the agendas of meetings and make sure that decisions taken are implemented. I believe women have to take the initiative to ensure that their voices are heard.

Our women can be sure that we will develop the understanding of men. The most important thing is that we need to see men as our fellow comrades, develop with them, and together face our struggle.

Women are the back bone of our organisations and yet



Edna Sethema

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

they keep to the back seats. SACCAWU has a potential membership which is dominated by women. This is because our sector of organising is at companies and stores whose *modus operandi* is based on work which is classified as so-called 'female work'. What surprises us is that, irrespective of the above fact, our leadership is predominantly men.

Our union is organising a national gender seminar,

which will be held on 15-17 May 1992. It will be attended by delegates across the sex barrier. My few recommendations for the success of a gender campaign would be as follows:

1 All trade unions and democratic formations should first and foremost embark on an education campaign, which will be intended to get rid of the sexist mentality from the male persons in particular and the community

in general.

2 Meetings of unions, as well as other democratic formations, should be held at times, days and venues, which are convenient to both men and women.

3 Parents, when bringing up their children, should be advised to stop or avoid inculcating the idea that men are physically and mentally superior to women. They should start to teach and practically involve girls in doing gardening, wood work and looking after the live stock. Boys should be taught and also be practically involved in cooking, washing clothes, carrying babies on their backs and cleaning the house. The idea of selecting dolls for girls, toy cars for boys, and bright clothes for girls and dark and tough clothes for boys should be stopped.

4 To close the gap which has been created by the long legacy of female oppression, domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning the home and looking after the kids should be done by both men and women. Men should especially do so to allow their women to attend discussions, reading and attending education work shops.

5 The total solution to the problem, however, is when the capitalist system is totally destroyed and replaced by a more just society.

Unless the above mentioned problems are addressed, the gender campaign will end up as mere rhetoric. ☆