

https://dspace.org/

The resistance to the extension of passes to African women: 1954-1960

De Villiers, Richard

1979-09
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8662

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW
4.00pm SEPTEMBER 1979

Title: The Resistance to the Extension of Passes to African Women: 1954-1960.

by: Richard de Villiers

No. 085

THE RESISTANCE TO THE EXTENSION OF PASSES TO AFRICAN WOMEN: 1954-1960 (1)

Richard de Villiers

> "To force these pass laws upon women, says the ANC, would be to trample on the tail of an adder."
>
> Lilian Ngoyi.

(National President of the Federation of South African Women and the ANC Women's League and ANC executive member.)

At the annual conference of the African National Congress (ANC) in January 1959, a National Anti-Pass Planning Council was appointed, and the year 1959 declared "Anti-Pass Year". From the inception of the ANC, to its banning in 1960, passes for Africans is a continuous theme of ANC protest activity. Albert Luthuli writes of the early years of the ANC:

> ..... things were beginning to move. In the Free State in 1913 there were widespread anti-pass demonstrations and numerous arrests. In 1919 Congress organised an anti-pass campaign - in Johannesburg alone there were 700 arrests. (2)

But in 1959 passes have become the *major* focus of ANC opposition to Apartheid. It was this decision; to centre protest against Apartheid specifically around the issue of passes, which finally culminated in the shootings at Sharpeville in March 1960 and launched the crises of the early 1960's for the South African State.

This paper seeks to explain why the ANC adopted the Natives Abolition of Pases Act of 1952 as its major thrust of protest activity in 1959. It examines the Anti-Pass Campaign led by the Federation of South African Women (F.S.A.W.) *prior* to the

adoption by the ANC of an anti-pass campaign. Most previous efforts to explain the events leading up to the Sharpeville crisis have not looked at the campaign of the F.S.A.W., nor the general resistance to passes by African women, which began in 1955. The F.S.A.W.'s campaign is generally ignored as a factor influencing the ANC decision, and yet it is probably more significant than any other.

Explanations of the emergence of the ANC's anti-pass campaign must obviously take into account the conditions of capital accumulation which resulted in the State rationalising and strictly enforcing pass-laws after the 1948 elections. Some theorists have looked at the post-'48 State's policy of Apartheid, which includes the rationalisation of the pass system, in the light of the requirements of capital accumulation. For example, O'Meara has argued:

> By retaining the reserve system and restricted individual access to land, whilst simultaneously controlling the influx of Africans to urban areas (through legislation and the pass system), it sought to provide and control a supply of cheap labour through the maintenance of precapitalist relations of production in the Reserves.(3)

For Wolpe, Apartheid is seen as a response by the State to the decline in reserve subsistence production.(4) Webster, locating his arguement in a later period than Wolpe, argues that the increased enforcement of pass laws by the State is a response to high unemployment which stands at 1,2 million in 1960.(5) These theorists have emphasised broard structural factors, and taken on their own, they do not explain why it is that passes emerge as a major issue for the ANC. To correctly identify structural factors operating in specific historical periods goes a long way towards understanding the events of the period, but does not go all the way. If taken on their own, the implication one would draw from these theorists is that the ANC simply takes up passes in response to the State's enforcement of them. This does not, however, account for the reason the ANC takes up passes *again* in 1959 or why the campaign takes on the form which it does. In order to provide a complete picture one should look at factors within the organisation.

Karis and Carter, as well as Feit, have located their explanation of the emergence of passes as a campaign in terms of the response of African mass movements to State activity. Unfortunately they ignore the very significant role played by the resistance to passes by women. For example Karis and Carter have correctly looked at the PAC, as well as the ANC in their analysis of the origins of the anti-pass campaign. They have dealt with the particular pressures on the leadership of the Pan African Congress (PAC). These pressures are largely the result of their break-away from the ANC. They argue that because membership recruitment was well below expectations by the end of 1959, the leadership felt it necessary to adopt some programme which would create publicity and attract members to

the organisation.(6) The leadership was also under pressure to adopt a militant programme, from its rank and file membership. The PAC leaders had created the impression that they were more militant than the ANC and the rank and file were anxious to see some evidence of this. As Karis and Carter argue:

> When the national executive committee convened in Bloemfontein in September, (1959 - R.deV.) it decided to propose an anti-pass campaign for ratification by the organisation's first annual conference in December. The conference met in an atmosphere of anticipation. PAC headquarters had announced that plans for 'positive action' would be drawn-up, and the *Golden City Post* had mooted that the PAC was preparing to unveil a master plan for liberation. .... When delegates complained that the organization has been taking too soft a position on action, Sobukwe called for the conference to give the executive a mandate to launch an anti-pass campaign. The response, as PAC leaders had anticipated, was unanimously favourable. The movement, declared Sobukwe, was about to 'cross its historical Rubicon'.(7)

Where Karis and Carter fail is that although they deal with developments within the ANC and PAC, they make little attempt to deal with the enourmous groundswell of opposition to passes, or to the anti-pass campaign of the Federation.

Feit(8), whilst looking at Mass-organisations over-stresses the importance and the role of the PAC. He argues that the ANC had lost the initiative to the PAC in the months leading up to Sharpeville:

> The expelled Africanists formed the Pan-African Congress in April 1959. With them went the Orlando branch, the largest and most active in Congress. The weakened African National Congress remained, but the initiative passed to the fire brand Africanists, who adopted a more militant course. The Pan-African Congress launched an Anti-pass Campaign, which caught on rapidly, forcing the African National Congress reluctantly to follow suit. The result was Sharpeville.

There are a number of very serious problems with Feit's work on the ANC. For example he tends to rely heavily on the Treason Trial records (frequently evidence of State witnesses), the anti-ANC newspaper *Drum*, and individuals like Jordan K. Ngubame who were opposed to the ANC.(9) As far as the anti-pass campaign is concerned, he ignores the fact that the ANC launched its pass campaign in early 1959, almost a year before the PAC. The date, 31 March 1960, was singled out by the ANC to commemorate the ANC-led anti-pass demonstration of 1919 at its annual conference in Durban in December. It was a week later, at its first conference, that the PAC announced that it too would hold an anti-pass campaign.(10) Thus the PAC were in

fact responding to ANC initiative rather than *visa versa*, as the above quotation from Feit incorrectly suggests. But the major inadequacy of Feit's, like Karis and Carter, is that he ignores the role played by the F.S.A.W. within the Congress Alliance to once again bring the issue of passes to the fore. Not only did the F.S.A.W.'s campaign re-direct the attention of the ANC leadership to passes, but it also educated rank and file ANC members, and sympathisers to resist passes. Thus there is a tendency to completely ignore the emergence of grass root opposition and resistance to passes amongst women, as well as the important mobilising and general raising of consciousness about passes undertaken by the F.S.A.W. and A.N.C.W.L. This paper attempts to correct this tendency.

The F.S.A.W. has not been completely ignored.(11) Walker has recently written a comprehensive history of it. From her work it is clear that the pass issue amongst women was, however, not only significant in terms of the influence it had on the ANC. She has correctly argued that the pass issue was significant, in that it brought African women into the political arena:

> The most important campaign to involve women in the post war era was the Anti-Pass struggle. From 1950 when for the first time the pass laws net began to be drawn more tightly around African women, hundreds upon hundreds of them in many different parts of the country, asserted their deep felt opposition. The threat of passes aroused African women in a way that no other issue did, being regarded as a fundamental attack on themselves and on the security of their homes.(12)

Indeed, the anti-pass campaign, which became the major activity of the F.S.A.W. and the A.N.C.W.L., resulted in previously politicly backward African women emerging as a major political force which had to be taken into account by elements both within and outside the Congress Alliance. Unfortunately, Walker's work on the F.S.A.W. suffers from her decision to look at the F.S.A.W. as a women's rights movements rather than as an anti-Apartheid protest movement. Although it catered specifically for women, it was nevertheless very much within the Congress Alliance. For example she has argued that:

> Yet to see it (the F.S.A.W. - R.deV.)) as a mere appendage to the national struggle is to miss the significance of its campaign. From the point of view of a women's movement in South African today, this period (1950s - R.deV.) is of great interest. On an unprecedented scale, women were organising themselves, as women, to fight against an issue which affected them. African women, overcoming tremendous cultural and political pressures, emerged as a political force in their own right.(13)

Indeed, through the F.S.A.W.'s anti-pass campaign women did

emerge as a political force and the F.S.A.W. as an important component of the Congress Alliance. However, this does not validate Walker's basic assumption, implicit in all her work on the F.S.A.W., that it was a specifically women's rights organisation. This basic assumption results in her seeing the neglect of women's issues by the F.S.A.W. as a sign of failure. The F.S.A.W. was not a feminist orientated organisation and clearly was never anything other than an "appendage of the national struggle".(14) The fact that it did not take up feminist issues is not indicative of organisational failure on the F.S.A.W.'s part, rather it is a consequence of its perceived role within the Congress Alliance. She also tends to see differences over tactics etc. between the F.S.A.W. and ANC, as if they were differences between the "men's organisation" (the ANC) and the "women's movement" (the F.S.A.W.). But in fact the F.S.A.W. as a component of the Congress Alliance was organisationally subordinate to the ANC. The ANC led the Congress Alliance and acted as the dominant organisation with it. The F.S.A.W.'s position was no different from other components of the Congress Alliance, like the Congress of Democrats, who were compelled to follow the leadership of the ANC. The differences which existed between the F.S.A.W. and ANC were frequently expressed by the leaders of the F.S.A.W. as differences between men and women(15), but this does not mean that the subordination of the F.S.A.W. to the ANC resulted from patriarchal ideology expressing itself within the Congress Alliance through the ANC, as Walker tends to imply.

The F.S.A.W.'s Anti-pass Campaign was launched in response to the Government's decision, in 1955, to extend the application of the Natives Abolition of Pases Act of 1952 to include African women. The presence of women in the urban areas had grown from "4,9% of their total population in 1911 to 21,57% in 1951".(16) However, it was not only the actual numbers of women in the urban areas which the State found alarming, but also that the presence of these large numbers of women indicated a high degree of *permanent* urban African settlement. The Industrial Legislation Commission had described the decrease in the male/female ratio in the urban areas as:

> a clear indication that the Native population in urban areas is ..... beginning to assume a normal family structure which is indisputable proof of the growing tendency towards permanent urbanization.(17)

Whilst the State in South Africa, at least since the Stallard Commission, had been committed to limiting the degree of permanent African urbanization, under the Nationalist Government's Minister of Native Affairs this received new significance. The decline in reserve agricultural production indicated by the large numbers of women in urban areas, and the problems this presented for the reproduction of the work force were well grasped by Minister Verwoerd. He argued that the rate of urbanisation had to be controlled because it was:

> the *increase* in the Native population in the reserves and rural areas that would take place in future years that one had to provide for elsewhere, and keep out of the Industries in the present Industrial Cities in the European portion of the Union.(18)

On the one hand he proposed a three-point plan for the improvement of the reserve economies; whilst on the other hand, the State moved to control the urban influx of African women. By extending passes to women and thereby limiting their freedom to move from rural to urban areas, the State attempted to discourage permanent urban settlement by the African population as a whole.

The power to impose various types of passes on the African population, both male and female, had been in the hands of local authorities since 1910, and there had been previous attempts to impose passes on African women before the Nationalist Central Government. These attempts, however, had lacked the determination and resources which the Nationalist Central Goverment was able to utilize. Local Government efforts to bring women into line with passes had met with stiff resistance and had often proved unsuccessful. For example as early as 1913, when it was announced that the Bloemfontein Municipality would require African women to possess residential passes, and later, that this would be extended to other municipalities in the Orange Free State, African women of the O.F.S. formed the Passive Resistance Movement:

> A crowd of 600 women in July 1913 marched to the Municipal offices in Bloemfontein and demanded to see the Mayor. Before the Deputy Mayor they deposited a bag containing their passes (issued) the previous month and politely signified their intention not to carry any more passes.(19)

Similar demonstrations were held in other towns until the idea was abandoned by O.F.S. local authorities. Cheryl Walker has argued that the origins of the F.S.A.W. and the A.N.C.W.L. can be traced back to this resistance by women in the O.F.S. to passes. In the wake of these demonstrations Charlotte Maxebe had formed the Bantu Women's League which affiliated to the ANC.(20) Intermittent attempts by other authorities had continued, however, and as the power to impose passes on women remained on the statute book, it is not surprising that at the Inaugural Congress of the F.S.A.W., held in the Trades Hall, Johannesburg, on 17 April 1954, the threat of extension of passes to women was a major concern of the delegates. The first speaker from the floor(21) raised the issue of passes, pointed out how women had resisted them and said that women:

> Were not only warriors but (anti-pass) compaigners determined to win.(22)

Florence Matomola of the ANC in Port Elizabeth said that:

> In Port Elizabeth women had such things as never before - passes. But the women had taken the passes and put

> them in a bag, and took them back to the Superintendent saying: 'Take your rubbish'. They would not carry passes.(23)

Amongst the aims of the F.S.A.W. which were adopted at the Inaugural Congress was a clear reference to the pass system:

> To strive to obtain the removal of all laws that restrict free movement.(24)

Thus the die had been cast; for in the years to come the F.S.A.W. would not only adopt resistance to passes for women as it's major political activity, but it also built upon the existing tradition of resistance by women to passes. It utilized the same methods of passive resistance which had been used in the past. The methods were petitions and deputations to authorities, as well as mass burning of passes, refusal to carry them and mass inviting of arrest. However, from 1956 it was a different and more determined, Central Government rather than local authorities which was extending passes to women.

However, in the early stages of its formation passes did not immediately become the central issue that the F.S.A.W. concerned itself with. Besides various organisational difficulties(25), which the leadership had to deal with, it also focused on rent increases, and, given its affiliations with the ANC, took up the Western Areas removal scheme. In addition it set about preparing for the forthcoming Congress of the People, and began convassing women's demands to be included in the Freedom Charter. During this period the ANC was fairly strong. The Defiance Campaign, which had focussed against "unjust laws", including the pass laws, had resulted in an increase in ANC membership.

Probably in the wake of the Defiance Campaign the Government had made assurances in Parliament to the Natives' Representatives, that passes would not be extended to African women. For example, Verwoerd, referring to Ammendments to the Urban Areas Act of 1923, in reply to a question from Sam Kahn, had stated in Parliament that:

> The old Act also referred to women just as this Bill does but in practice, although it was included in the Act, most Municipalities did not exercise that power in regard to the influx of Native women. The Municipalities have been informed that we feel the general statement should be included in the Bill just as it was formerly included in the Act, but that just as in the past we shall not now insist on an immediate application of that provision in regard to women.
>
> I repeat that notwithstanding the fact that these provisions are applicable to Native women it is not our intention to proceed with its practical application at the moment because we do not think the time is ripe for that. Now I hope the Honourable member will stop his agitation of telling Native women that we are

> introducing a law by which we are going to force them to carry passes because that is not true.(26)

By mid-1955 the Government obviously felt that the "time was ripe" for the extension of the Act to include women. Thus, in the year following its inauguration, the F.S.A.W. issued a number of pamphlets aimed at educating the public, both white and black, as well as its members, about passes. This was a major priority as Government assurances that passes were in fact being abolished and that all that was required were identity documents or reference books, had created much confusion around the pass question.(27) Pamphlets pointed out that passes were not identity documents as the Government alleged and also that:

> A pass is not a labour contract ..... under present conditions the pass becomes a means of preventing the worker from changing his job to suit himself or better conditions.(28)

The likely consequences of passes being extended to African women were also examined in pamphlets; the destruction of family life being the major concern, although treatment by police was also raised:

> Africans know only too well how they are handled by the police when arrested. The coarse and insulting language that policemen habitually use towards Africans is known to all. The rough treatment when being arrested, and in the pick-up vans, and in the cells before and after trial - these are things nearly all African men have experienced. Does anyone expect that they will behave any differently when it comes to African women? ..... The African people are most deeply apprehensive of what will happen to their women folk under the pass laws.(29)

The Government had not yet begun it's programme to enforce it's decision, but the F.S.A.W., aware of the impending extension of pass laws, kept attention focussed on them. Local branches passed resolutions condemning them, frequently indicating an understanding of passes as a major part of the Influx Control System whose function it was to facilitate a highly repressive system of labour allocation. For example the Transvaal Regional Branch, based in Johannesburg, noted that:

> The intensification of pass raids in recent months has reached alarming proportions and created an intolerable situation which has infuriated the mothers of Africa, thousands of whose sons have been thrown into jail every month, only to satisfy the demands of the labour shortage on European farms.(30)

Meanwhile the Government under Strydom had been moving against the common voting roll rights of coloured men.(31) After a number of politically embarrassing and constitutionally illegal attempts to remove the coloureds from the common roll, the Government proposed the enlargement of the Senate, to achieve

its end. The all-white women's organisation, the Black Sash, protested vigourously against this move and finally mounted a forty-eight hour vigil outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria. According to Helen Joseph[32] who attented the vigil, the example of white women protesting outside the Union Buildings encouraged the women of the F.S.A.W. to undertake a similar protest, not to protest against the enlarging of the Senate only, but to protest against all unjust laws, including the pass laws. Thus the Transvaal Branch of the F.S.A.W. undertook to organise a mass demonstration of women at the Union Buildings. The task of organising this protest fell largely on Helen Joseph who was both Transvaal and National Secretary of the F.S.A.W. Working closely with the ANC and A.N.C.W.L. and utilizing their organisational networks she was able to mobilize some 2 000[33] women to go to Pretoria on 27 October 1955. Her account of the preparation for the protest is worth quoting, as it clearly shows the importance for the F.S.A.W. of links with the ANC:

> The African National Congress had many branches, and we made contact with hundreds of women.....
> Bertha Mashaba was Transvaal Secretary of the A.N.C.W.L. and we worked together, driving night after night in my car to women's meetings in the African townships..... The women we sought were waiting for us patiently. The night meetings were always in a little house, in a small room, packed to the ceiling with women, wives, mothers, old and young, ... we began with a prayer and ended with a Congress song. .....On some nights we would have to go to several areas, and would come only late at night to the last meeting, but the women were always waiting for us. There were the Congress women; their task was to take the leaflets which we brought them and persuade the women of their area, whether members of the ANC or not, to join us in our demonstration in Pretoria.[34]

It was decided that a petition would be drawn-up and delivered to the Prime Minister. Letters were sent to other members of the Congress Alliance inviting them to participate and to send delegates. The ANC Women's League and the F.S.A.W. formed a joint Planning Committee. Letters were also written to the Ministers of Labour, Interior, Justice and Non-European Affairs as well as the Prime Minister, requesting them to receive the leaders of the mass protest and accept the petition, all of whom refused through their private secretaries.[35] The Pretoria City Council refused permission for the F.S.A.W. to hold a meeting and a procession and so, rather than simply presenting a petition, the F.S.A.W. decided that each woman would carry her own individual written protest to the Cabinet Ministers. This would circumvent the legal definition of a procession and a meeting. On the day of the protest, despite police threats to arrest women going to Pretoria, the ten shillings train fare, and even booking clerks refusing to sell tickets to Pretoria (which resulted in women buying tickets for Johannesburg and then paying excesses on the train), the protest happened as the F.S.A.W. leadership had planned. After the

protest forms had been delivered to the Prime Minister's secretary, the women sang *Nkosi Sikelele* and went home.

This first Pretoria demonstration of the F.S.A.W. received widespread publicity and served to establish the organisational credentials of the F.S.A.W. The four leaders, Lilian Ngoyi, President of the A.N.C.W.L. and the F.S.A.W. and representing African women; Rahima Moosa[36], representing Indian women; Sophie Williams, representing Coloured women; and Helen Joseph representing white women; had presented their piles of individual protest forms at the Prime Minister's office, despite the various Government attempts to stop the demonstration, and even opposition from some of the men. For example, on the Tuesday before the demonstration (which was scheduled for the Thursday) the Transportation Board refused permission for licences for the buses which had been engaged to drive the women to Pretoria. Helen Joseph frantically drove to the townships on the Reef and told local branch organisers that the women must go by train. This meant that women had to pay much higher fares. Opposition from men tended to centre around their concern that women's traditional roles would be neglected. Helen Joseph writes:

> Although the African women were emerging rapidly and making their influence felt, the men were not always quite happy about the idea of a women's demonstration, one from which they would be excluded. 'What about the children?' they would ask, and we would reply: 'That day the men must be in the kitchen, they must make the food for the children, while the women go to Pretoria.' This was indeed a new idea for African men![37]

The ANC itself, supported the demonstration. In Brakpan, when it was announced that £200 was needed for train fares for the women because of the refusal of licences for buses, the local branch of the ANC raised the money.[38] Protests were also held in Durban at the Native Affairs Department, and in Cape Town women marched through the streets[39], on the same day.

However, whilst this first Pretoria protest was an important organisational coup for the newly-formed F.S.A.W., the demonstration failed to make any impression on the Government. A few weeks before the women had gone to Pretoria, the Government had announced that women would be compelled to carry passes and thus the extension of passes to women began in earnest in 1956. Areas were declared prescribed in the Government Gazette and mobile pass units would then visit these areas, travelling through them and issuing passes.

The first area in which passes were issued by these units was Winburg in the O.F.S. At first, the women of the town accepted the passes and by March some 1 429 African women had passes. Benson[40] argues that the women were "tricked" into accepting the passes. Certainly it seems as if the implications of the

new 'Reference Books' were not clear to these women, as when the ANC sent Lilian Ngoyi to Winburg to explain the position to the local women, the result was that the women who had previously accepted passes marched to the Magistrate's offices and publicly burnt their passes in a huge bonfire. Though it was not yet illegal to refuse a pass, it was a crime to burn them, and the women were arrested. The F.S.A.W. collected money for their defence.(41) This spontaneous action by the women of Winburg caused some consternation among the ANC leaders at the time, as they had specifically ordered that illegal action should be avoided.(42) It was a clear indication of the depth of opposition by women to passes.

Nevertheless the pass units were increasing their activity, and by choosing rural areas where the women tended not to be organised, they attempted to avoid any serious opposition. In the urban areas, where the F.S.A.W. and A.N.C.W.L. were active, many protests and demonstrations occurred, at Native Commissioners' and Magistrates' offices:

> By May (1956 - R.deV.) 1 200 women in Germiston had demonstrated, 2 000 in Sophiatown and Newclare, 4 000 in Pretoria, 350 in Bethlehem ..... in Evaton, near Vereeniging, 2 000 women walked seven miles to leave 10 000 protest forms with the Native Commissioner.(43)

In June the F.S.A.W. and A.N.C.W.L. lead a deputation to the Native Affairs Commissioner in Johannesburg. Their protest showed a clear understanding of the effect of passes on their position in the labour market:

> We object to the Pass System because it makes slaves of the African people, because it denies us the right to move about freely, to sell our labour freely.(44)

However, the F.S.A.W. was not satisfied with these localised protests, and no doubt inspired by the success of the previous protest in Pretoria, decided that a larger mass protest would once again be held at the Union Buildings. This time the protest would be specifically against passes for women, and women from all over South Africa would attend, rather than just from the Reef. This time Helen Joseph, together with Bertha Mashaba, Robert Resha and Norman Levy, toured the country rather than merely the Reef townships. Helen Joseph writes:

> A thousand miles to Cape Town, and then six hundred on to Port Elizabeth where we found that the women had taken over the Congress offices. 'We are nothing but typists and clerks' complained the Congress men. The women have gone mad. Where will they get the money to go to Pretoria?'
> 'We'll raise it ourselves', said the women.
> 'And if you don't raise enough?'
> 'Then we'll sell our furniture!' said the women, firmly, and those serious, responsible Congress men of the Eastern Cape bowed to defeat and for the first

> time in their whole political history fell in behind the women.(45)

Indeed the women of Port Elizabeth do seem quite remarkable. More than seventy women finally came as delegates from this Port Elizabeth branch. They booked a railway carriage for themselves which cost seven hundred pounds.

On 9 August 1956 the F.S.A.W., with some 20 000 delegates from all over South Africa, in one of the largest single gatherings of women, protested at the seat of Government against the extension of passes to women:

> In October 1955, 2 000 women - now, a year later, ten times as many. Twenty thousand women converged on the grassy slopes below the Union Buildings. Then thumbs up, they moved up the hill between the pine trees. At their lead were (once again amongst the others - R.deV.) Lilian Ngoyi, ... Helen Joseph ..... Rahima Moosa and Sophie Williams ..... It took two and a half hours to file up and assemble in the amphitheatre.(47)

When Strydom refused to meet the eight demonstration leaders, the crowd stood for thirty minutes in a silent protest. Then they sang: "Strydom, you have tampered with women, you have struck a rock."(48) On the same day demonstrations were also held in Durban, Queenstown, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, Cradock, East London, Grahamstown, Paarl, Winburg, Senekal and Bloemfontein.(49) This impressive spectacle which the F.S.A.W. organised was the high-point of it's anti-pass campaign. It demonstrated that the F.S.A.W. was a major political force, and increased it's credibility within the Congress Alliance. This mass protest proved to be a focal point for F.S.A.W. anti-pass activity during the following years, and annual anniversary demonstrations were held to mark the day. Then, on 5 December 1956, General Secretary Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi the President, Vice-President Martha Mothlakoana and executive members Frances Baard and Bertha Mashaba, of the F.S.A.W., were arrested with many other key figures in the Congress Alliance, and charged with treason. This proved to be a major set-back in the administration of the F.S.A.W. and the loss of the dedication and experience of these leaders meant that the F.S.A.W.'s efficiency and effectivity was reduced.

Protest activity against passes did not only occur on the scale of the two Pretoria demonstrations and was not the only strategy of the F.S.A.W. Despite the arrests, the F.S.A.W. continued to organise on a local level. Many thousands of pamphlets were distributed and many meetings held, primarily aimed at informing both men and women of the consequences of passes. As already mentioned, the role of passes in preventing free choice of employer to African workers was stressed, and much was made of the history of resistance to passes, particularly by women. The particularly distressing consequences which the extension of passes to women would have on family life were also emphasised in highly emotional, and no doubt effective, terms. For example, it was argued that passes for women would have the following results:

1. That homes will be broken up when women are arrested under pass laws.
2. That children will be left uncared for, helpless and mothers will be torn from their babies for failure to produce a pass.
3. That women and young girls will be exposed to humiliation and degradation at the hand of the pass-searching policemen.
4. That women will lose their right to move freely from one place to another.(50)

The F.S.A.W. and the ANC Women's League attempted to send organisers to areas where passes were being issued, and, as this was not always possible it distributed "Notes to Speakers" largely compiled by H.J. Simons and Ruth First, in an effort to maintain a nationally directed campaign, and attempted to keep local branches in touch with new developments. In addition to the arrest of the leadership the State adopted various methods of intimidation in order to get women to accept passes. For example, in Balfour(51) the Native Commissioner threatened that husbands of women without passes would be dismissed from work; business licences would be cancelled; doctors would refuse to tend sick women without passes, as well as their children; pensions would not be paid and even dead women without passes would not be buried. Baton charges to break-up public demonstrations were common. In Standerton 1 000 women who refused passes were arrested, in the little town of Lichtenberg 113 women were arrested and in Uitenhage, two babies were born in the cells after the break-up of a mass demonstration and the arrests which followed. Police claimed they "had to protect themselves against the women".(52) Nevertheless by July 1957, *Dagbreek* could report that 300 000 women had been issued with passes. However, almost half of these were in the O.F.S. where the F.S.A.W. had little organisation, except in Winburg, Bloemfontein, Bethlehem and Kroonstad and in these districts there had been no attempts to issue passes. In Natal only 4% of women had passes and in the Transvaal and the Cape 12% of women had passes. This was only concentrated in small towns and rural areas, and in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and the Witwatersrand there had been no sign of the pass units:

> "At this rate", Lilian Ngoyi pointed out, "of fifteen months to issue passes to 11% of women it would take the Nats 10 years - if it remains in power that long (to issue passes to all South Africa's African women)."

Optimistically, she went on to say that:

> The resistance of women will undoubtedly continue and strengthen, for it is not isolated from the struggle of the people against the whole pass system, on which depends the cheap labour system of South Africa, a struggle which has gone on for many years. Today it is the women who are in the forefront of that struggle.(54)

In mid-1957 it seemed as if the women's resistance to passes would indeed "continue and strengthen". In 1957 there were anti-pass incidents and demonstrations in Pietermaritzburg, Randfontein, Zeerust, Pietersburg, Rustenburg, Queenstown, Kimberley, among others. In Brakpan 2 000 women took part in a mass protest to the City Hall chanting "we want the Mayor", in Bloemfontein 900 women marched to the Native Commissioner, in Port Elizabeth in August 2 000 women took part in a half-day work stoppage which included coloured women, in Springs women marched to the Mayor's office and in Carletonville 1 000 women demonstrated to the Native Commissioner who threatened that women would be dismissed from jobs if they refused passes.(55) On August 9 between 6 000 and 7 000 women took part in anti-pass demonstrations throughout South Africa to commemorate the anniversary of the second Pretoria demonstration.

Despite the fact that most of the F.S.A.W. and A.N.C.W.L. activities were centred in the towns, in some rural areas the pass units also met with stiff resistance. Frequently the message of the F.S.A.W. and A.N.C.W.L. was carried from the towns to these rural areas by male migrant workers.(56) The Zeerust anti-pass campaign(57) is an example of where the ANC and F.S.A.W. were able to keep in touch with the rural women through their migrant husbands and sons. Lilian Ngoyi also secretly visited the area(58), but the main channel of communication between the women of Zeerust and the F.S.A.W. leaders were their men. In Zeerust, the anti-pass demonstrations which lasted for over a year resulted in hundreds of women being arrested. A commission of inquiry was established to investigate the causes of the unrest and at one stage people walking from the reserve to the hearings were scattered by eight *Harvard* aircraft of the South African Airforce. In Lichtenburg, two African anti-pass demonstrators were shot dead by police.(60)

The final showdown was obviously looming for both sides. Clearly this would be in Johannesburg where the largest concentration of urban African women lived, and where organisation amongst them was the most extensive. Before the pass units appeared in Johannesburg, the General Laws Amendment Act was passed. Just as the State had hoped to prevent further Defiance Campaign-type of activity by passing the Public Safety and Criminal Laws Amendment Acts(61), so it hoped to curtail anti-pass protests with the General Laws Amendment Act. Through this Act all meetings of Africans outside the townships were prohibited. By passing legislation in response to Congress Alliance activity the State hampered both planning and recruiting. Feit(62) has argued that:

> Every new campaign was met with legislation not only making the continuance of the campaign impossible but further restricting the field of Congress action. Such legislation made Congress appear illegal, compelling leaders continually to reassure potential members that Congress was not an illicit organisation,

> and that no legal sanction attended acquiring membership. But in the course of time the legislation directed against Congress activity formed a closely meshed web and made Congress activity possible only at the risk of heavy penalties.

Armed with new legislation, and given the gradual success of the pass units, the State changed strategy in 1958, and began to issue passes in the urban areas.

In Johannesburg, the State moved cautiously and instead of issuing passes to women generally, chose specific sectors of the female work-force as targets. The first such target was African nurses. The Nursing Amendment Act made it compulsory for identity numbers to be furnished by women who intended training as nurses, and also made the registration of trained nurses with the South African Nurses Council dependent on the furnishing of identity numbers. Needless to say, the only way an identity number could be obtained was by taking out a pass. Thus women who intended training as nurses, and those who were currently training, needed passes. This legislation was enforced in January in Durban and in February in Johannesburg. The F.S.A.W. organised a demonstration at Baragwanath Hospital in March. The demonstrators were met by large numbers of heavily armed police. This demonstration received much publicity and soon after it was announced that the State would relax the requirement of identity numbers for nurses.

With the ban on meetings, the Johannesburg branch of the F.S.A.W. together with the A.N.C.W.. held "tea parties" and prayer meetings. Badges were also made with "women don't want passes" on them. An open-air meeting was planned in Fordsburg, to commemorate August the 9th. However, the meeting could not be open to African women. The F.S.A.W. was concerned to stay within the law and requested the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress to provide volunteers to keep African women away from the meeting.(63) The meeting was poorly attended and clearly it was amongst African women that the F.S.A.W. have to concentrate its anti-pass activity. The F.S.A.W. had been conducting a campaign to select half a million pledges from African women which stated:

> I ..... hereby condemn the whole pass system, which seeks to make slaves of the African people in the land of their birth, which will inflict unbearable humiliation and suffering upon African women, in addition to the hardship and indignities which African men already suffer under the vicious pass laws. This insult to African women is an insult to all women, and I declare that I shall oppose the pass system in all its forms, that I shall play my part in the struggle against the issuing of passes to African women, and that I shall not stop until the pass laws and all forms of permits which restrict our freedom have been abolished.(64)

In September the Johannesburg branch of the F.S.A.W. felt that compulsory issuing of passes in Johannesburg was still remote. Then in October the State moved against a new target in Johannesburg, namely domestic workers. A notice, from the Non-European Affairs Department of the City Council was sent to all white housewives, beginning in the suburb of Mayfair (a Nationalist Party stronghold) stating that:

> The registration of Native females in terms of Act No. 67 of 1952 in the district of Johannesburg will commence during 1958. Will you kindly send your Native female servants to the Pass Office of the Native Commissioner ..... in order that she may be registered for the Native Population Register and issued with a reference book.(65)

Domestic workers formed a particularly vulnerable target. They are traditionally cut-off from the mainstream of political activity and difficult to organise because of the isolated nature of their work. Now the State, by requesting employers to assist them in pass-issuing was clearly linking the pass question with job tenure. Women who refused passes were no longer merely opposing the State, they were now confronting their employers and endangering their livelihood as well.

Members of the Congress Alliance rallied around the F.S.A.W., with the Congress of Democrats distributing pamphlets in white suburbs pointing out that passes were not yet compulsory; the City Council notice was only a request for co-operation. The Sophiatown branch of the A.N.C.W.L. organised numbers of women to march to the Pass Office to protest. Within days over a thousand women were in jail, and in the following week they were joined by a further thousand women from Alexandra. 1 200 Were held in Johannesburg Fort, with some 170 babies. As the courts were too small, hearings were held in the cells, most of the women being charged in terms of the Criminal Laws Amendment Act of 1953. For two months the cases went on, and the Congress Alliance collected bail for the women. Finally, of those women arrested, 915 were found not guilty and 926 were found guilty and fined.(66)

The Johannesburg pass campaign brought the ANC more centrally into the women's struggle against passes, and into direct conflict with the F.S.A.W. leadership. The massive civil disobedience campaign which the Johannesburg women had engaged in was largely organised by A.N.C.W.L. local branch leaders.(67) The extent of the civil disobedience took the F.S.A.W. and ANC by surprise, and was indicative of the success of the groundwork which the previous five years of anti-pass campaigning had achieved. The F.S.A.W. responded enthusiastically to the initial arrests and proposed a target of 20 000 women in jail. They said that no fines or bail were to be paid. But over the previous five years the situation had drastically changed. The F.S.A.W.'s stand was unrealistic and ignored the strain which new laws would place on the women. They were to be charged in terms of the Criminal Laws Amendment Act and faced

the prospect of lengthy trials with prolonged stays in jail if no bail were to be paid. There was the additional problem of defence fees and lengthy jail sentences if fines were not paid. The ANC, always cautious, felt that the F.S.A.W. was not organisationally strong enough to handle the demands of an open confrontation with the authorities. It was also under pressure from rank and file men to allow the women to be released either through bail or payment of fines. The ANC further felt that the resolve of some of the protestors not to pay bail or fines would fail once the full implications of a long period in jail was realised. The ANC decided that bail should be paid, and mass courting of arrest stopped, thus directly overruling the F.S.A.W. From October 23 no more women presented themselves to the Pass Office for arrest. This was due to the ANC's decision to refrain from courting imprisonment. It's opinion was that emphasis should be placed on "educating and organizing" women against passes rather than directly confronting the authorities. On 5 November the ANC decided that all demonstrations at Pass Offices should stop completely. The joint executives of the F.S.A.W. and A.N.C.W.L. met, and expressed regret at the ANC decision; nevertheless, the authority of the ANC in the Congress Alliance was acknowledged. The F.S.A.W. decided to launch another phase of the protest and it was decided to concentrate activities on a delegation to visit the Mayor of Johannesburg, I. Maltz.(68) In November a delegation of the F.S.A.W. went to protest to the Mayor of Johannesburg, emphasising particularly the "conniving of the Johannesburg City Council and its Non-European Affairs Department" with the Central Government in issuing passes. It was pointed out that permits for houses were made conditional upon the presentation of passes, reference numbers were demanded when rent was paid and work permits were only given to those who had passes. In a more specific way the location Superintendent, and employee of the Johannesburg City Council:

> Sent forms to women arrested in the protests at the pass office requesting them to call at his office, and when they did so they were questioned about their residential position in the township. Possible banishment was also mentioned.(69)

Despite the protest activity over 1 000 passes had been issued in the first week, and although the resistance met with some success; for example, in Roodepoort the pass unit had been stationed in the township for three days and only eighteen passes were issued, and so the unit was withdrawn; it was clear that the F.S.A.W. was loosing the battle and could not stem the tide. Thus it was that in January at the ANC annual conference, the ANC directly intervened in the anti-pass campaign; and took over directing it. The clamour against passes was such that the ANC could not ignore it as a protest issue, and within the Congress Alliance the F.S.A.W.'s pressure could not be ignored. Pressure from the F.S.A.W. leadership forced the ANC to take up passes, and the existing rank and file resistance meant that it was assured of a good response. A National Anti-Pass Planning

Council was established and given a mandate to compile a report which was to be presented at a National Anti-Pass Conference. The report of the Council stated that:

> The year 1958 has seen heroic and inspiring resistance of women-folk against the further extension of passes, a law which has become a symbol of white domination, exploitation and oppression. Conference is aware of the fact that the pass laws are the very roots of South Africa's slave labour system, without them the whole structure of cheap labour, Apartheid and white domination would be seriously shaken.
>
> It is therefore of the utmost importance that every Congressman should be aware of the dangers of creating the illusion that every demonstration and protest will make the Pass Laws crumble. The enemy facing us is strong and will not readily make concessions on the Pass Laws. We must therefore prepare ourselves and our people for a long and bitter struggle against the main pillar of our oppression and exploitation.(70)

The ANC was able to claim that:

> Never before has the opportunity for action been so ripe ..... never until now have the people been so indignant.(71)

Clearly the ANC had no alternative but to respond to this wide-spread "indignance", which was the culmination of the campaign of the F.S.A.W. The F.S.A.W. had succeeded in bringing African women into the political arena and in the process had not only raised women's political consciousness, but that of their men as well. Walter Sisulu, ANC Secretary-General, who witnessed the 1956 Union Buildings protest asked of Helen Joseph:

> How could you dare?(72)

The reply from Lilian Ngoyi was:

> Men are born into the pass-system, and it is as if it has become a life tradition that they carry passes. We as women have seen the treatment our men have - when they leave home in the mornings you are not sure they will come back: We are taking it very seriously.(73)

Thus it was through the womens' campaigns that in 1959, a 'way of life' to African men once again became the major focus of Congress Activity, and 1959 was declared anti-pass year.

NOTES

1. My thanks to Eddie Webster for suggestions concerning this paper and to Helen Joseph for making available to me her material on the F.S.A.W. as well as for the many interesting discussions we had on the F.S.A.W.

2. Albert Luthuli - *Let My People Go* - Collins - London, 1962, Pg. 32.

3. D. O'Meara *The 1946 Mine-Workers' Strike* in P. Bonner (ed.) *Working Papers in Southern African Studies*, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1977.

4. H. Wolpe - *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power*, Economy and Society Vol. 1, No.4, 1972.

5. E. Webster - *Stay-aways and Black Working Class Since Second World War - the Evolution of a Strategy.* Unpublished African Studies Institute Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1979.

6. Karis and Carter - *Challenge to Violence*, Vol. 3 - Hoover Institution Press - Stanford University.

7. Ibid., pgs. 326-9.

8. Feit - *South Africa*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962.

9. Ibid., Pg. 11.

10. Karis and Carter, *op. cit.*, Pg. 329.

11. Unfortunately Cheryl Walker has refused to allow her major work on the F.S.A.W.; her Master's Thesis, to be made generally available by the UCT Library. She has also refused permission for it to be quoted, thus I have had to rely on her published work for this paper, namely: Cheryl Walker - *Suffrage and Passes* paper presented at seminar held at Stutterheim in September 1975. Published by NUSAS.
* And Cheryl Walker - *The Federation of S.A. Women 1954-1962*, paper presented at the "History of Opposition Conference", University of the Witwatersrand, January 1978, Pg. 198.

12. * Ibid.

13. * Ibid.

14. * Ibid.

15. For example; in a document entitled "Report on the Anti-Pass Campaign" by the F.S.A.W. the failure of the "men" to enter the anti-pass campaign actively was bitterly condemned. Walker tends to see this reference to "men" as a reference to the ANC. At times Walker even interchanges the "ANC" with "the men". See for example pgs. 339-342 of her thesis.

16. Quoted from R. de Villiers - Honours Thesis 1978.

17. Ibid.

18. Commercial Opinion, September 1951.

19. Sol Plaatje - *Native Life in South Africa.*

20. Walker, *op. cit.*

21. Henrietta Ostrick of the African Women's Association of Durban.

22. Ministers of the Inaugural Congress of the F.S.A.W.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. These are dealt with in depth by Walker in her thesis. They relate to the establishment of an individual or affiliated membership.

26. Hansard 9254, 17 March 1955.

27. For example, in reply to a letter from Helen Joseph, General Secretary of the F.S.A.W., the Private Secretary to Verwoerd, then Minister of Non-European Affairs, claimed that "The Pass system has been abolished, even for men, but the law of the land provides for a Population Register of all races and both sexes, and this is incorporated for the Bantu in a Reference Book system which serves many useful purposes for the Bantu themselves and was generally welcomed by them." Letter dated 24 October 1957.

28. Pamphlet entitled "Discussion Notes on Pass", issued by F.S.A.W.

29. Pamphlet entitled "Women in Chains", issued by F.S.A.W.

30. Minutes of the Transvaal Regional Branch of the F.S.A.W.

31. When the vote was extended to women in 1930 coloured women were excluded.

32. Helen Joseph - *Tomorrow's Sun*, Pgs. 63-85, and interviews.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Correspondence of the F.S.A.W.

36. Rahima Moosa was pregnant at the time. Helen Joseph *op. cit.*, writes: "She was to lead the Indian women, and there was some anxiety over her, for she was expecting a child within days. But she declared that she would be strong enough, that the future of her child was the future of all South African children, and that her place was there, part of the protest." Pg. 72.

37. Helen Joseph *op. cit.*

38. Ibid. and interview.

39. F.S.A.W. report entitled "Resistance of African Women to Passes".

40. Mary Benson - *The African Patriots* - Faber and Faber, London, 1963, Pgs; 217-231.

41. Ibid.

42. Interview with Helen Joseph.

43. Mary Benson *op. cit.*

44. F.S.A.W. document dated 7 June 1956.

45. Helen Joseph *op. cit.*, Pg. 20. In an interview with Helen Joseph she said that the "serious, responsible" Congress leader who said the women had demoted him to the role of typist was Govan Mbebi.

46. The ANC subsequently declared 9 August as "Women's Day".

47. Mary Benson *op. cit.*

48. The F.S.A.W. subsequently issued a pamphlet with this song as its title.

49. F.S.A.W. report on the resistance to passes by women 1957 and 1958.

50. Resolution passed at National Conference of F.S.A.W., 4 August 1956.

51. In Balfour one woman claiming to be 100 years old was refused her pension because she failed to produce a pass. F.S.A.W. report.

52. Reports from F.S.A.W.

53. *Dagbreek*, Johannesburg, 28 July 1957.

54. Lilian Ngoyi - untitled report/pamphlet.

55. Report of F.S.A.W. on resistance to passes by women 1957 and 1958.

56. Interview with Helen Joseph.

57. See Charles Hooper - *Brief Authority*.

58. Interview with Helen Joseph.

59. Cheryl Walker *op. cit.* Pg. 6.

60. Ibid.

61. T.R.H. Davenport - *South Africa - a Modern History*, McWilliam, South Africa, Johannesburg, 1977, Pg. 277.

62. Feit *op. cit.* Pg. 6.

63. F.S.A.W. correspondence.

64. F.S.A.W. document entitled "Anti-pass Pledge".

65. Notice from the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department entitled "To All Housewives".

66. F.S.A.W. document entitled "Report by the F.S.A.W. on the anti-pass campaign.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. From notes of speakers in delegation to the Mayor of Johannesburg.

70. ANC document entitled "Anti-Pass Planning Council Report". Duma Nokwe was chairman of this council.

71. Resolution, ANC Annual Conference 1959.

72. Interview with Helen Joseph and in Mary Benson *op. cit.*

73. Ibid.