



# ANTI-APARTHEID REPORT # IV

NEW BRUNSWICK COALITION IN SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTHERN AFRICAN LIBERATION

## WOMEN UNDER APARTHEID

In recent months the attention of many Americans has turned toward events in Southern Africa. While news of South Africa has been on the front pages of newspapers across the country, many of us have been given little concrete information about the system of apartheid which governs all internal relations in South Africa.

This pamphlet focuses on one aspect of racial oppression in South Africa; the effects of the apartheid laws on women. Apartheid literally means "apart" or "separate development" and is a system whereby the white settler population in South Africa holds legal dominance over the Africans (officially referred to as "Bantu") and coloreds (the term for people of mixed white, black or Asian extraction). It is a system based squarely upon race and its laws pay careful attention to all aspects of personal, family and social life of the 20.7 million Africans, colored, and Asians who are governed by 4.2 million whites. It determines where an African may live and work, his or her educational level, salary and job classification.

## HISTORY OF APARTHEID

When the white settler population arrived in South Africa in the mid 17th century, they began to push the Africans off of their land and stole their cattle. After 1948, the system of apartheid was introduced, which established that Africans were temporary "sojourners" in the white area which was determined by the white government as being 87 per cent of the country, including all the major cities, towns, industrial and mining centers, the port, transportation and commercial networks. The Africans, over 70 per cent of the population, were relegated to the reserves or "Bantustans" which make up 13 per cent of the country and are isolated, arid, over-farmed areas far from the urban centers. This system, which has been developed by the government over the past 20 to 30 years, has resulted in the largest mass relocation of a population in peace time known in history.

Apartheid is thus a system that "permits" Africans to live in white areas only so long as they are productive laborers for the multinational corporations, the commercial firms, the mines, and in the private homes of the whites. When they are no longer of service, they must leave for the Bantustans. Accordingly, the system leaves no room for the meeting of anything but the most rudimentary necessities for those workers in the white areas. A definition of what is necessary and what is superfluous in the eyes of the white government is offered by Mr. G. F. van L. Frone-



man, Deputy Minister of Justice, Mines and Planning:

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"This African labour force must not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, children and dependents who could not provide service." (Debates of the House Assembly, 6.2, 1968).

#### MIGRATORY LABOR

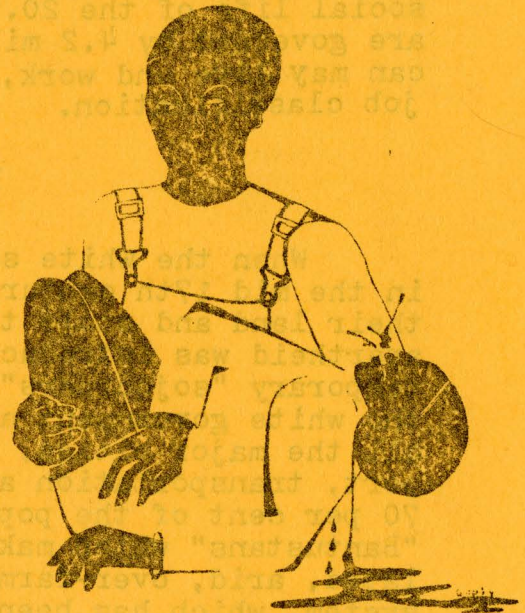
It is evident from the above that African women are relegated to a special category under apartheid: they are allowed to live in the white areas (the only areas where employment is readily available) so long as they do not have children.

This produces a complicated system of regulated migration. Many African men are needed in the white areas to work, but they are not allowed to live with their wives in most cases, should they be married, since such an opportunity requires that both men and women must have permission under Section 10 of the Group Areas Act to reside in the same area. Should a couple have children, the mother and child are often returned to the reserves, and the father may see them only during the annual 2 week vacation period when Africans may go to the reserves to visit their families. The reason is stated in the official circular of the Department of Bantu Administration:

"It is accepted Government policy that Bantu are only temporarily resident in European areas as long as they offer labour." (12/12/67)

"A mother may become infuriatingly inert and difficult to help because the struggle seems so hopeless. Often she struggles on --- it is uncomfortable to picture the sort of scenes where distracted women try to comfort hungry children in empty huts scattered through the reserves . . . Eventually she is driven to leave her children with whoever will have them and go the towns to work for them."

(Report of a South African mission doctor describing the problems of women who bring babies to the hospital for treatment for malnutrition.)



#### WOMEN IN BANTUSTANS

The system is clear in its inhuman objective. Women are considered an unstable workforce to the South African government since they always offer the possibility of being "useless" as workers for the whites, pregnant or needed to care for their own children. Fronman openly stated the rationale:

"There are single African women who could be usefully employed in the white areas, and, while there are white families who could not do without domestic help, the moment a Bantu woman starts a family, then she belongs in her homeland." (1960)



The 4 million women living in the Bantustans face a special set of hardships; they must assume total familial responsibility, but are also bound by customary and common laws especially designed to constrain their behavior and mobility to a greater degree than African men. Lacking the ability of men to leave the reserves and look for work in the cities, many African women are forced to eke out a meager existence for themselves and their families from the few resources available to them on the reserves. Often, the only means of subsistence is farming on land that is already worn and usually too arid to be suitable for cultivation.

There are few jobs available to women in the reserves beyond occasional domestic service and seasonal farm work. The vast majority of women depend on money sent by their menfolk working in the cities, a form of support which often becomes more and more sporadic the longer the families remain separated.

#### Officials Discriminate

African women face further hardships in the discrimination they experience from local officials who consistently refuse to allocate land to women, even though historically, women have been the cultivators of the land. As reserves become more and more overcrowded from the massive relocation programs, the scarcity of land, such as it is, has become a major problem.

Even though the law states that any married person or "kraalhead" (head of household) may be allotted land, local officials most often ignore land requests made by women. Only widows with children have a chance of being allocated land, but usually they only receive half the allocation made to men.

A widow occupying her late husband's land, forfeits her right to use the land if she remarries or leaves the homestead, or refuses to live at another place agreed to by her late husband's family. A widow is expected to pay taxes and support herself and her children from the yield of her land.

The extreme deprivation of reserve life leads inevitably to diseases of malnutrition and poverty which commonly end in death. These diseases take their toll among those children who manage to survive, in the forms of stunted physical and mental growth. It is estimated that 50 per cent of all children raised in the reserves die before the age of 5. There is approximately one doctor for every 44,000 black Africans in South Africa.

From this discussion we can see that all black Africans suffer beneath the oppressive weight of the apartheid system and its laws, but it is the African woman who suffers most.

#### TRADITIONAL CODES

In keeping with their apartheid justification of separate development and preservation of indigenous cultures, the white government of South Africa has attempted to blend ancient tribal structures and laws with the conflicting requirements of a modern, industrialized society. The result is a code of regulatory laws imbued with the patriarchal and authoritarian attitudes of the white men who wrote them.

#### Women's Role Inaccurate

The white regime's interpretation of African women's traditional roles, as demonstrated in these laws, does not accurately reflect the position and rights of women in tribal society. though women



occupied a subordinate position to men in traditional African society, it was within the context of a classless, non-competitive, kinship group oriented culture which had no conception of individual ownership.

In this way of life African women were accorded status and rights that were eventually denied them under apartheid laws. The white legal system retained only the forms of patriarchal dominance and ignored the privileges and rights women held in tribal society while the communal culture which created and gave meaning to these customs has been destroyed.

Thus, male dominance and authority, as they are embodied in apartheid laws, are an anachronism and contradict the modern attitudes and needs of women in industrialized society.

#### Women Repressed

Although the laws vary from province to province there is a consistent pattern of a special repression of African women above all. Most African women in the reserves are subject to the customary laws (as described above). Beneath these laws women are kept as perpetual minors under the guardianship of their husbands.

An African woman cannot own property in her own right and any money she earns or property she acquires becomes the property of her husband.

Women do not have the same inheritance rights as men and must have their guardian's consent in order to enter into a valid contract. In the province of Natal women who have been separated, divorced or widowed can never obtain custody of their children.

Clearly, apartheid has fashioned an especially oppressive role for black women within the framework of customary laws. These laws have distorted the basic social relations of traditional African society from which they were drawn and have helped create the double bonds of racist and sexist discrimination under which African women suffer today.

#### WOMEN IN URBAN AREAS

African women who are living lawfully in an urban area may only obtain work through the municipal or district officer, from whom they must obtain a permit. Labour officers can refuse to issue a permit for many reasons, or they may refuse a permit for a specific job that a woman wishes to take and refer her to another somewhere else; or they may require women, with their dependents, to leave the area.

A work permit may also be refused to a woman if she is unable to find housing, and houses are not usually available for women. Hostels and compound accommodations are for men, and women are prohibited from becoming registered tenants in the townships. Women are therefore only allowed legal residence status so long as they live with their husbands. As a result, many unhappily married women suffer, unable to take any action, knowing if their husbands desert or divorce them, they





will lose the right to live in the urban areas. A woman who is fortunate enough to be married and living with her husband in a town lives with the possibility of having to leave the area if he should die. Considering the rate of industrial accidents among African laborers owing to barbarous working conditions (3 men per SHIFT in mining), death of the husband is not unlikely.

As stated earlier, African women are considered "useless appendages" by the white government, and it is very difficult for them to obtain permits to live in the urban (white) areas. However, because there is little employment in the designated reserves, women are forced to leave their children in the Bantustans and attempt to find work, illegally, in the white areas. Women who come to the towns and have not been able to qualify for residence may stay only until they are found out. There is no way in which such women can legalize their position, since even marriage to a man who lives in the white areas does not alter their legal status. For the Africans a family unit is often never formed, and when it is, it is always subject to rupture according to the designs of the labor regulation policies.

The total system of apartheid - traditional codes, migratory labor, barbaric conditions in the Bantustans, and forced resettlement - must be viewed as the most oppressive in the world today. It is systematically depriving millions of African women of the most fundamental rights and means of human existence.

Much more needs to be said about life for women in South Africa and for all Africans there. For more information, contact CISSAL at either 745-1423 or 247-5086.

