

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR HEALTH, MS PEGGY NKONYENI
TO THE NEHAWU WOMEN'S CELEBRATION EVENT IN DURBAN,
COASTLANDS CONVENTION CENTRE ON 26 AUGUST 2006**

Comrade Programme Director

Provincial Chairperson

Provincial Secretary

Revolutionary Greetings to the progressive women in NEHAWU

And Guests

I am happy today to be here at this gathering to celebrate the Women's struggle over the past fifty years. You are also meeting in the month when we commemorate the 23rd Anniversary of the launch of the **United Democratic Front**. You also meet in the month when our eyes are tearful with tears of remembrance and contempt. It was in this month, in 1982, that the security apparatus of the apartheid government sent a letter bomb that eventually killed **Ruth First**. Her death was desperate measure by the apartheid government to silence a woman's voice that screamed for equality, freedom and human rights for all South Africans.

I need to remind you that the whole of 2006 has been declared the year of women. I am also glad to address a progressive Trade Union like yours as our country is abuzz with fly-by-night unions that exploit the genuine grievances of workers.

Comrades, I must inform you that I am here as your Comrade that you have deployed to serve the movement and ensure that the organizational policy and programmes, around Health, are implemented and that the people of our province live a better life. I am not going to abuse this

platform with technocratic jargon on health matters as if these do not have a political context that influence them.

Similarly, I do not expect you to conduct yourselves in a 'straight jacket' workerist manner divorced of political considerations. Like Comrade Joe Slovo had warned; in his input titled "**The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution,**" I too would like to warn you against this tendency. Part of the problem in the current conjuncture of our revolution is the workerist approach that some in the liberation movement use in their analysis of the challenges we face.

The workerists are beginning to challenge the vanguard role that the African National Congress is playing in the National Democratic Revolution. For them, the trade union movement should lead the NDR. For them, the site of revolution is reduced to the struggle between workers and bosses at the point of production. They are beginning to call for the Trade Union movement to form an independent political organization in opposition to the ANC. These issues need to be debated fiercely and opportunists must be exposed for what they truly are. Comrades be prepared!

You invited me here to address you on the contemporary issues around the women's day celebrations, and to be true to this I am not going to bore you with feminist jargon and phrases. On the contrary, I intend to engage you politically on the social context on the women's struggle. We also need to begin to engage around the newly launched Progressive Women's Movement. There are important ideological considerations that we must make as we organize to ensure that the Progressive Women's Movement becomes the voice of all women, rich and poor. This movement, as a matter of **MUST**, should have a working class bias.

Allow me to remind you that we are celebrating the women's energy, devotion and enthusiasm, their courage and intelligence during the illegal and semi-legal periods of our struggle. I cannot remember at the moment who said '**It takes inspiration to do great deeds.**' Women of this country have been an inspiration to all women in the world. We and the working people of our country still have great deeds to perform. What inspires you comrades?

There are indeed great challenges ahead for women in this country despite the greater progress made in the little 12 years of our democratic dispensation. We still continue to face double victimization by our capitalist society. We are victims, first, of the accursed property system and, secondly, of the accursed moral hypocrisy.

The capitalist system feeds on the subordination of the role of women, especially working women. I am reminded of a campaign that COSATU once engaged which was called "**Workers are Mothers Too.**" It was a campaign that spoke to the core issues that affect working women, in particular, and women in general. As I mentioned earlier, there are many challenges facing women ahead. We need to begin to challenge the family structure which is confirmed by custom and law. Where the official and legal servitude of women ends, the force we call "public opinion" begins. This public opinion is created and supported by the bourgeoisie with the aim of preserving "the sacred institution of property." The hypocrisy of "double morality" is another weapon.

Our society crushes woman with its savage economic vice, making her dependent on the man for survival. The woman is given only the gracious alternative of the bondage of marriage or the embraces of prostitution – a trade despised and persecuted in the public but encouraged and supported in secret.

I am not going to waste your time by narrating the suffering of many a woman in the married life and their suffering in relation to their present family structure and position. Literature and media is full of depressing pictures of the snares of married and family life. How many women are languishing in jail as result of abusive relationships where the woman dared to fight back and unfortunately the weak man dies?

The next logical question is could we transform the current family structure under the current of present society? NO! The only reason we seem to be in inertia on women's total emancipation is because the current politico-economic dispensation will never produce conducive conditions for total emancipation of women. Only when women are relieved of all those material burdens which at the present create women dependence on capital and on a husband can total emancipation be realized.

As we, women, go out to work and achieve some economic independence, certain possibilities of freedom appear. But the dependence of women on capital remains, and this dependence increases as more and more proletarian women sell their labour power. While the feminists enthuse about new forms of cohabitation, as an alternative to marriage, the working class is under discussion about these relationships and we refer to them as “**disorderly sexual relations.**” The crux of the family and marriage problem lies for the working wife and mother not in the question of the sacred or secular external form, but in the objective social and economical conditions that define the complicated obligations of the working class woman. Therefore, the women question cannot be divorced from the political programme to transform our society so that it uplifts the lives of the working people and the poor.

Unless we deepen and advance our National Democratic Revolution, the women question remains unresolved. I know that we cannot speak of the advancement of our revolution in this time when our movement is facing such challenges.

Lenin in April 1917 before the All Russian Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Party published a pamphlet titled *“The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution.”* In this input Lenin also speaks about the dual power of the Provisional Government that the Bolsheviks had supported in the March 1917 revolution that overthrew the Tsar.

This similarly applies to our current conjuncture. There is a lot of discussion and debate within the liberation movement around the transition. I know that at the COSATU 7th Congress, you unanimously resolved that Socialism is the Future. What then becomes contentious is the advance to socialism. Some believe that under no circumstances can the ANC lead the struggle for Socialism nor can the current conjuncture build elements of, capacity for and momentum towards Socialism.

Lenin, in analysis the dual power of his time which could be equated to the meaning of the 1994 breakthrough, asserts that; *“the Russian revolution of March 1917 not only swept away the whole Tsarist (in our case apartheid) monarchy, not only transferred the entire power to the bourgeoisie, but also moved close towards a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.”*

This is true for us in that post the democratic breakthrough we made significant advances in building organs of people’s power. In my department alone, we have hospital boards that are supposed to be lead and constituted by you comrades. We have significantly transformed the

Professional Boards, such as the Nursing Council, the Health Professions Council of South Africa, etc. But most importantly together with the progressive trade unions we are transforming the public service.

The class significance of this dualism is that the people are constantly engaged in and with the transitional trajectory. There is also a remarkable feature that is peculiar to our transition. Whilst we have government governing, we also have a strong working class movement that is continuously engaging the masses on the ground and keeping the government on check. Your role in leading popular campaigns of the people is an example of this.

In a revolutionary development this peculiar dual power merely expresses a transitional phase, when it has gone further than the ordinary bourgeois-democratic revolution but has not reached “pure” dictatorship of the proletariat.

The class significance (and class explanation) of this transitional and seemingly unstable situation is that: like all revolutions, our revolution requires the greatest heroism and self sacrifice on the part of the people for the struggle against decades of colonialism. It also immediately draws unprecedented vast numbers of ordinary people into our movement.

We are seeing droves of petty-bourgeois wave that is sweeping over everything and is overwhelming the class conscious working class, not only by force of numbers but also ideologically; that is, it has infected and imbued very wide circles of workers with the petty bourgeois political outlook. This we are already seeing in our African National Congress. However, this is as a result of workers not playing their role in the ANC. If I may be mischievous and ask you

to be honest with me; how many of you are members of the ANC? How many of you are in the BEC?

Whilst the expected response is a overwhelming number, the reality is that you have deserted the movement and surrendered its ideological orientation to the bourgeois.

As we move forward and advance our National Democratic Revolution we need to begin a cleansing process. This process should not only be done within the African National Congress, but the entire Alliance. Our organizations need to be cured of the general *“petty-bourgeois intoxication.”* This is evident in the news that we have to read as you prepare for the COSATU National Congress in September. Again, the current challenges in the ANC leadership are a typical example of this “petty-bourgeois intoxication.” Whilst others may believe we face an image crisis, I contend that these are nothing more than practical revolutionary challenges. There is no advancing in a revolution that has come to a standstill that has choked itself with personal in-fights. We can only overcome these challenges through ideological, comradely persuasions, and by pointing to the lessons of experience. We need to set ourselves free from the prevailing orgy of revolutionary phrase mongering and begin to really stimulate the consciousness of our people to the dangers that lie ahead if we do not defend, deepen and advance our revolution.

I am reminded of one of the revolutionary intellectuals who spared no thought for himself but shared everything he thought of for the benefit of his fellow comrades. Comrade Mzala contributed to the ideological development of our theoretical and ideological understanding of our tasks as a people’s revolutionary movement. I am reminded of his contribution in June 1989, in *Sechaba*, titled; **“Omelets cannot be made without breaking eggs.”** In this intervention Comrade Mzala was engaging with the fierce debate that had ensued in exile just before the negotiation process

began. In his romantic, poetic and well read manner he so titled his engagements with the negotiations process. Whilst my point is not so much around the article by Mzala but more about us realizing that there is no easy road to freedom. Eggs will definitely be broken enroute to our logical destination.

Comrades, I must share this with you. Another peculiarity of our transition is the mushrooming of petty-bourgeois serving trade unions or staff associations. You would know that my department is currently receiving bad publicity as a result of the so called KwaZulu Natal Nurses Committee. Opportunism is another peculiarity of our transition.

NEHAWU represents health workers in the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) where issues around working conditions are dealt with. You also know that such issues are not the competency of the Premier or me as the MEC. So, why do n't you advise your fellow workers of the correct route to take. My department and I, are custodians of the legal framework that governs labour relations in the health sector, *albeit* at a Provincial level. I am therefore never going to succumb to unreasonable threats by dark forces who do not understand that Comrades paid with their lives for the current Labour dispensation.

I therefore call on you, progressive labour organizations, to assist in educating the nurses who are part of the illegal demonstrations under the banner of the KZN Nurses Committee. Tell them that the Department of Health under Ms Peggy Nkonyeni will never engage in *kangaroo* meetings with *agentes provocateurs*.

Lastly comrades, I must indicate to you that our movement is facing the greatest challenge in its long history. Part of the causes of these challenges is our surrendering the movement to the

whims of bourgeois dictates. Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Let us regain control of our organizations. Workers must, at the coming Congress, dictate the marching line. The African National Congress policy conference as well as the 52nd Conference must be representative of the class orientation of our organization, that is more than 70 percent of the delegates must be workers and the working class.

Comrades, one again I thank you for this opportunity of political reflection. I am one person who hates these glamorous Woman's day workshops. Their intention has nothing to do with what we are doing today. Today we have reflected on the struggle in general and the women's struggle in particular. Without a comprehensive reflection on the struggle we will never be able to see the bigger picture into which the women's question is an integral part.

Malibingwe

Igama lamaKhosikazi

Amandla!

Thank you.