

Pat Horn



African Feminist Thinkers: Our Voices ^[1]

As a result of the awareness of oppression of women under the Apartheid system and the influence from radical feminists, Pat Horn joined student women's groups at Wits University in the 1970s. This was also a result of inspiration from radical feminist colleagues in the University Christian Movement (UCM) at the University. During this time she lived in Cape Town and participated in national student women's groups activities. Reading through the works of Juliet Mitchell, Sheila Rowbotham and others made her more aware of the exploitation faced by working class women.

During her 5-year banning order (1976 - 81) she joined the Marxist reading group to study *Das Kapital*, and the feminist reading group looking at the changing forms of oppression of women in pre-capitalist and capitalist societies from a dialectical materialist perspective. Some of the works she studied include the following; 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' by Engels, the works of Claude Meillassoux, Emmanuel Terray, Margaret Mead and other materialist anthropologists and the pre-capitalist matriarchal systems of the Iroquois and others, to explore social alternatives in contrast with patriarchal societies.

After her banning order expired in 1981, Pat Horn joined the United Women's Organisation in Cape Town. During the years 1982 - 1985 she organised women's groups in FOSATU unions while working for the Paper Wood & Allied Workers Union (PWAWU) in FOSATU. She also played a crucial role in identifying issues and areas where women workers had not yet attained equal rights or equal pay for work of equal value with other women members of FOSATU unions.

In 1990, Pat Horn was an Adjunct Fellow at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University, Montreal, while on sabbatical leave from CWIU where she studied the comparative status of women in societies undergoing social change (Mocambique and Nicaragua as well as India, Canada and Quebec) with a view to developing ideas on how to organise for the emancipation of women in post-Apartheid South Africa. During this time she met interesting feminists in different fields of work (including Sheila Rowbotham in person when she visited York University in Toronto). She also read works of Michele Barrett, Christine Delphy, Kumari Jayawardena, Maria Mies, Stephanie Urdang and collections of writings about the position of women in socialist countries and societies undergoing change. She also tried unsuccessfully to get to grips with post-modernist feminism while particularly impressed with Christine

Delphy's analysis of the domestic and economic modes of production.

Pat Horn then decided to define herself as a socialist feminist on the basis that this seemed to provide a better basis for praxis and organizing for social change, than the post-modernism which was more fashionable at the time. At the end of this she presented a paper on her work at the Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa at the University of Natal, Durban in early 1991. She also read about SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) and was impressed with the real-life example of a movement which was at the same time a union and a women's organization, addressing both class exploitation and gender oppression. She realised for the first time that informal workers can be organized as workers and that that is where the majority of women at the bottom end of the economy are to be found. This led her to start thinking about establishing a similar organization in South Africa.

By 2004, Pat Horn had established the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) in South Africa modeled on SEWA. She then visited SEWA and started to co-operate with them in international work such as ILO Convention 177 on Homework, the establishment of StreetNet International and an international network of waste collectors.

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