

# WOMAN

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

# Struggle

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## CALL FOR SOLIDARITY

Maria Antonieta Saa, a feminist leader in Chile and thirteen other leaders of the Asamblea de la Civilidad (Civic Assembly) were arrested on the night of July 10. They are being charged with their part in calling a general strike on July 2 and 3.

The Asamblea de la Civilidad is an opposition organisation representing various sectors of Chilean society including women, labourers, peasants, public transportation, truck drivers, businesses, professionals and students.

Maria is the representative for Mujeres por la Vida (Women for Life) an umbrella organisation of feminist groups. She was the coordinator of the Women's Studies Circle in Santiago, Chile in 1983 and an active member of the Women's House "La Morada." For many years she has been working with women living in the poor section of Santiago, helping them organize consciousness-raising groups and self-help activities.

The Asamblea called the general strike at the beginning of July after the government failed to respond to a series of demands presented by the Asamblea in the name of the people of Chile. These demands included, within the overall call for the return of democracy in Chile and a stop to state violence, torture and arbitrary arrests, specific demands by women for fair wages and work opportunities, the reestablishment of maternity leave and protection of the basic rights for food, health, education, housing and participation in society.

An urgent appeal is being made for telegrams and letters to protest the arrest of Maria Antonieta Saa and the other leaders of the Asamblea de la Civilidad and to demand their immediate release. These should be sent to:

Corte Suprema	Comision Derechos Humanos
Magistrado German Valenzuela E.	Jaime Castillo Velasco
Teatinos	Huerfanos 1805
Santiago, Chile	Santiago, Chile

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#### BESSIE HEAD DIES

On 17 April, 1986, Bessie Head, Botswana's best known novelist, died in the Sekgoma Memorial Hospital in Serowe. She was 43.

Bessie was victimized by South Africa's racist state from the beginning. She was given away to 'coloured' foster parents at birth. Her mother, a white South African who had concieved her with a young black worker and who wrote her letters that she never saw, committed suicide when Bessie was six. Bessie came to know of her parentage at the age of thirteen when her foster father died and she was put in an orphanage in Durban.

Bessie took up politics in the sixties and later joined the ANC. Arrest, imprisonment and threats of sexual molestation from the police traumatised her so much that she decided to renounce politics; 'I am concerned with broad things that will help shape life', she wrote.

Her South African experience gave her severe attacks of mental illness, the theme of her novel A Question of Power (1974). Her other books include Maru (1978) and Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind (1981). The last novel recorded the history of the village where she lived and worked.

NEW AFRICAN No.225 in Spare Rib  
No. 168, July, 1986

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WOMEN'S SECRET LANGUAGE

A professor of the South China Institute for Minorities has revealed the existence of a written language used exclusively by women.

Locally known as "women characters" this ancient language used by women of Jiangyong County, Hunan Province is done with brush and ink on paper or cloth in vertical lines with no punctuation and is read from top to bottom, right to left. Six hundred individual ideographs have been identified and the language was an inverted form of grammar and syntax very different from Chinese.

Professor Gong made the discovery with the help of two survivors of a "family" of seven sworn Sisters". These women now in their eighties are "women characters" experts.

In the past young girls would form these sisterhoods and document the bond in women characters. After marriage they would communicate in the writing. There are songs, poetry and accounts of historical events in women characters.

The women of Jiangyong believe the script was developed by Hu Xiuying (concubine of Emperor Quinzong 960 - 1270) to relieve her loneliness at the palace. Later, it was brought back to her home, Jiangyong.

Professor Dong doubts it could have been created by one individual. He speculates it is older. In 221 B.C. Emperor Quing unified China, forbidding all languages but for his official script. However, some of the languages in remote areas remained. Gong suggests that in this area it survived as the women's language.

Spare Rib No. 168 July 1986

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PROTEST IN LONDON COMMUNITY

The Black community in Kent and South East London is protesting the verdict given in the trial of five white men who killed a young Asian woman in a drunken stupor.

One of the men was acquitted of the manslaughter of Kalbinder Hayre who died after being pinned against a wall by a transit van.

The friends who attended the trial wept bitterly at the verdict.

The five men had been drinking heavily and one of them said he saw three 'coloured girls' about to cross the road. They swerved the van to frighten the women and it crashed into Kalbinder giving her fatal internal injuries.

Friends of Kalbinder were also angered that important witnesses had not been called, for example a group that monitors racist attacks in the South London area. The group said that there had been a 72% increase in attacks on Asian people over the past year - information which ought to have been made available to the all white jury. Demonstrations against the verdict will continue.

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FRANCE ABOLISHES WOMEN'S MINISTRY

The new conservative government of France has abolished the Ministry for Women's Rights.

SUGAR DECLINE IN PHILIPPINES CAUSING SUFFERING

According to Philippine government statistics, 60% of all children in Negros Occidental Province suffer from some degree of malnutrition.

The Bishop of the Province, Antonio Fortich, has called the hunger crisis "socio-economic" and rooted in the structure of the sugar industry industry and its collapse.

Until the 1970's sugar was a major income earner. However, the decline in demand and price has cost planters and workers millions of dollars in earnings. Sugar production is estimated to have dropped over one-third in the past year. 300,000 workers are now unemployed.

Fortich has described the province also known as "Sugarlandia" as "a social volcano where our people are hungry and have no security."

Childworld July/March 1986

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Specs 11p 24 July 1986

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SUGAR DECLINE IN PHILIPPINE CAUSING SUFFERING  
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The Bishop of the Province, Antonio Fortich, has called the hunger crisis "socio-economic" and pointed to the structure of the sugar industry and its collapse.