

## HEALTH AND EDUCATION AT ROCKBOTTOM

*The following represents extracts from the presentation of the Women's Sector, delivered by Mrs. Linnette Vassell, Co-ordinator of the Committee of Women for Progress (CWP) to the International Women's Day Rally in Kingston, Jamaica, March 9, 1986.*

Things have really hit rock bottom in health and education. Many of us still can't get over the "destructuring" of the hospitals, the closure of wards, like recently at Cornwall Regional, and clinics like in Greenwich Town and Trench Town. It is difficult to accept that National Chest Hospital is almost defunct.

In 1986 we have to pay fees for the most basic health services, from registration fees (\$5.00) to fees for blood test (\$10.00) to x-ray fees (\$30.00) not to mention the scarcity of beds, linen, food and most of all drugs. A serious problem for our women's health is cervical cancer. Jamaica has one of the

highest rates of this disease in the world, although the Cancer Society tells us that it can easily be prevented by early detection — a simple Pap Smear test at least once a year, for every woman over 18 years old. Right now in Jamaica, these Pap Smears are not available through the hospitals and clinics because the Government lab is not able to provide screening facilities.

Another painful area of deterioration in health is the high cost of basic hygiene, such as sanitary pads, soap and toothpaste. The high cost of food also undermines the health of our families. The children who died in St. Thomas recently did not die from food poisoning, but from the effects of having the meal they did, after not having eaten for days before. Growing malnutrition is reported at the University where the Health Centre estimates that 38% of students suffer from malnutrition of one kind or another.

Education is the ladder of the vast majority of poor black people of our country. Many of us who are now counted in the middle class, will remember how our parents — farmers, factory workers, domestic workers, higglers — would drum into our heads the value of education. What sacrifices they made to give us a good education so that today we can be accountants, managers, lawyers or politicians.

Unfortunately, some of these professionals are among the ungratefals that are now telling us that higher education is "a privilege". Just because they can afford it and they have their politician friends to give their children scholarships to go to America and Canada and Europe to study. Meanwhile, we as mothers and fathers, scrimp and scrape to find bus fare, lunch money, examination fees, books and uniforms so that our children can have a fighting chance in the future. But we seem to be fighting a losing battle. Today, 50% of the children who leave school at age 15 cannot read or write.

And who gets the biggest lick in this backslide in education? We the women.

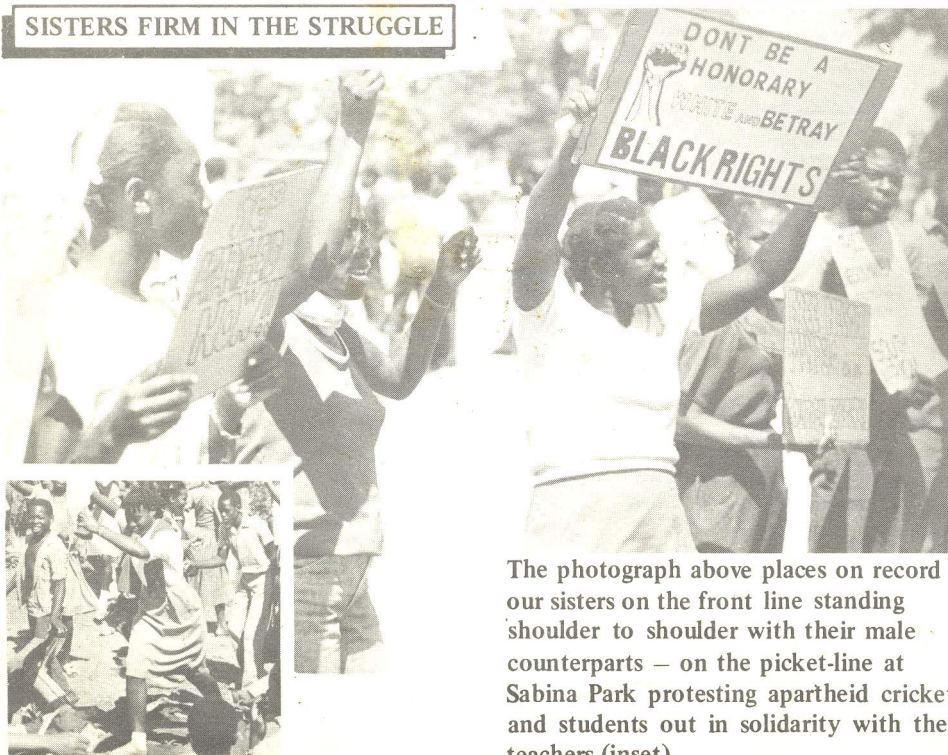
If a choice must be made in the family as to who must get the pitch, the boy is going to get it over the girl. Women who have the ambition to be managers, and of going into non-traditional areas such as engineering, or even medicine will find they have to do hairdressing or sewing instead. We can also expect growing dependency on men, as good jobs and the better paying jobs go out of our reach. We will have more teenage pregnancies, more prostitution, more degradation and abuse of women.

Is this the future we want? Is this the future we deserve? As women in our organisations, mothers and strugglers, we say, "No!", as we have been saying no to Mr. Seaga's policies over these years.

We have said no to the IMF/Seaga Policies through our news releases, our petitions, our hundreds of calls to Mr. Thwaites on Public Eye, our meetings, our resolutions and numerous demon-

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### SISTERS FIRM IN THE STRUGGLE



Joan Ross-Frankson.

The photograph above places on record our sisters on the front line standing shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts — on the picket-line at Sabina Park protesting apartheid cricket and students out in solidarity with the teachers (inset).



## DEAR FRIENDS,

We would like to express our appreciation to those individuals and organisations, here in Jamaica and overseas, who have dipped into their pockets and made such generous contributions to the publication of **SISTREN MAGAZINE** in 1986.

We make special mention of the ladies in Lana Finikin's community, Arnett Gardens, who gave their fifty cents and dollar to the Mickle, Muckle Fund; Michael Shepherd who's been collecting contributions among the West Indian community in Leeds, U.K. (see page 8); the Honourable Mrs. Edna Manley; the Honourable Louise Bennett-Coverly, Tess Thomas of the Ministry of Education and Barry Chevannes of the Workers Party of Jamaica who not only made contributions but also gave us such warm words of encouragement; Archie Lindo for his timely review of the magazine, and Fitzroy Nation of Inter-Press Service who holds the distinction of having made the very first contribution. We also thank those organisations who have so far made a contribution; the Press Association of Jamaica, the Young Communist League - WPJ, the University and Allied Workers Union, Committee of Women for Progress - WROC and CUSO. Thanks also to our friends in Barbados and Trinidad, the United States, Canada and the U.K.

Judging from the feedback we got on the last issue of **SISTREN**, however, we feel sure that there are many more of our readers who still wish to make a contribution, so we're enclosing another contribution form in this issue and look forward to hearing from you.

We also invite you to send your comments on the magazine to the Editor, not only for publication, but also any suggestions you may have for improvement. Hope you enjoy this current issue.

The Editor

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## MEN IN OUR LIVES

**THE CURRENT MEN IN OUR LIVES:** Our move to Kensington Crescent has brought a whole stack of new men into our lives, and of course old favourites are still around. Clockwise: the team of workmen who are busy refurbishing our offices (left-right) Stebert, Carlton, Cecil, Anthony, Quinston, Henry and Hubert; our Caretaker, Nehemiah moves forward to help the independent Lana with her load; Michael our driver hams it up with Cerene.



Ann Hodges

Ann Hodges



Honor Ford-Smith



## CONGRATULATIONS ON THE BABIES!

Our warmest wishes to Designer, Beti Campbell and CCC Co-ordinator, Rev. Marjorie Lewis-Cooper on the birth of their baby girls, and to **SISTREN** Lawyer, Arlene Harrison-Henry who had a boy - all born in February and March. Belated congratulations to Poet, Claudette Richardson who had a baby girl.

Next! Virginia Henriques, lead singer with **WOW** who's due in May.

**SISTREN THEATRE COLLECTIVE IS SEEKING A PART-TIME MARKETING MANAGER. EXPERIENCE AND ENTHUSIASM ESSENTIAL.**

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## WANTED

CAN YOU HELP WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS FOR OUR OFFICES?

- FILING CABINETS - SMALL GAS STOVE -
- STACKING CHAIRS (OR SIMILAR) -



Within minutes of starting the interview with Isolyn, a large crowd had gathered. Men and women, from the air-conditioned offices on the Mall, downtown Kingston, going about their business, stopped out of sheer curiosity. They've probably passed scores of Isolyn's by on many other occasions without even batting the proverbial eye-lid. Maybe dropped her a coin to ease their conscience, or out of genuine sympathy, unable as they are from their own economically battered lives to spare much more.

This crowd doesn't contain the "ones without human feeling", as Isolyn describes the people, often youth, who "kick and lick" her down, spit on her and abuse her with "various words" she cannot bring herself to repeat. No, this crowd is full of sympathy. None of those gathered before Isolyn would have dreamed that this one-eyed begger woman, with her swollen leg, unhealthy smell, ragged dirty clothes, calloused hand outstretched — could speak in such a clear and intelligent voice. "She have more sense than nuff a dem weh yuh see walk 'bout the Mall with them nice clothes", comments one man. Another man runs back to his office and returns with a large bottle of ice water. He places it beside her. A woman brings her fruit punch. Others are giving her money — a dollar, a 'five shillings', a fifty cents. At the back of the crowd, a woman speaks. "Me sure is some man weh bring her down to this condition!" That starts a brief altercation as the men jump in to defend themselves.

From the story Isolyn tells, it's not a man that's brought her into this condition of begging, but a system which so easily discards those who cannot manage the race, in the name of "budgetary constraints", "structural adjustment" and "lowering the deficit".

Isolyn is 36 years old, but if you were asked to guess, you'd probably say 66. She has three children aged eight, nine and ten. She and the children's father lived for ten years. He was a cabinet-maker. Seven years ago he was killed, run down by a car and Isolyn had no one to turn to — no mother, father, sister or brother. Isolyn with her one eye also walks with a stick, through she "catch up baby cold" in one of her legs. When her baby-father died, she couldn't



Joan Ross-Frankson

**TAKING UP POSITION:** Many of the women who beg for a living, have a particular venue they go to each day. Other beggars respect their right of first choice.

go back into the domestic work she'd been doing since she finished school in sixth grade. It was because of the leg that she had to stop in the first place.

Higglering is a possibility but she figures she'd need at least \$40.00 to set herself up with "tomatoes, little seasoning, onion, destroyer, matches out by Spanish Town Road", along with the scores of other higglers selling tomatoes, little seasoning, onion, destroyer and matches. But it's hard for Isolyn to accumulate \$40.00.

Right now she owes two months rent, and the landlord has taken the bed that she and the children slept on. The rent is \$20.00 a month. On the rare "good day" she may get as much as \$20.00, but usually it is much less and she and her children cannot manage to eat even the smallest, most humble level of food every day of the week. "When I don't have anything we all drink a little water and ask God to keep us". Today is the second day running that she's had to drink the "little water" for breakfast. She had to come out to get "a little something" despite the leg feeling particularly painful.

She never considered prostitution as a source of financing, even when her body was up to it. "Saint Paul say every man to his own order. What a next woman chooses is not what me like. God didn't give me my body to specu-

late on it. I didn't come and see my mother living that way so I can't choose that role". Isolyn also frowns on stealing as a means of "financing yourself when you don't have any source in life".

"If you see this bag, through you are hungry, the devil tempt you to take the bag (but) then yuh life don't value nothing".

She's also adamant that her children must not be beggars. "Mother can't beg and children come to beg. It don't look proper. Is not a matter that they wouldn't like to wash the windscreen, but I don't give them that length. From they are child, they must act as child, and when you are a big person, you just act as a big person. I may be poor and cannot finance myself, but I believe that God will help me get them pass the worse before my eyes close".

The churches help Isolyn to send the children to school. From them she begs old uniforms and shoes. One of the children is at Denham Town Primary, the other two at Tivoli. "The teachers tell me they are getting on well in school and the school help out with the lunch and the books".

"As far as what I know, the more you live is the more you learn, and I learn that without education you cannot exist. Even the man pushing the cart, if he can't read and write, he can't

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push the cart because he don't know street from lane, and don't know a from b." She trusts in God and hopes they will graduate and choose a trade, "whether teacher, nurse or doctor, I don't mind".

We leave the young, aged Isolyn nourishing vain hopes for her children's future. The crowd turns away now; some of the eyes are wet. A sister comments: "Plenty more a we going to reach that condition under this economic situation".

Plenty of us already have. The streets of Kingston are full of Isolyns, some of them carrying babies in their arms,

begging a ten cents, scuffling in rubbish bins outside restaurants, sleeping in shop doorways, naked and dirty. They say some are mad. Isolyn is not mad. Neither was the young student in Liguanea who begged me tentatively for the bus fare to Half Way Tree. She'd walked from the Mona Campus of the UWI and she simply could not walk any further. Neither was the young woman recently made redundant, who risked her life to retrieve the ten cents she dropped in the middle of the rush hour traffic. She was willing to take the risk so as to stave off the day when she too will have to beg a ten cents to make up her bus fare home, or feed her children.



**REGULARS ON THE BARRY STREET BLOCK:** Aunt Becka and Miss Junie visit Barry Street each day and are helped by office workers who appreciate their sense of humour.

(Continued from page 1)

strations against high prices, lay-offs, unemployment and all manner of abuses. We came out in the streets in the just struggle of our teachers for better wages and improvements in education.

All this we have backed up with other practical actions to help out the situation. Look at the fundraising work we do in our schools and organisations, and churches. Look at the education services we provide through the Y.W.C.A., the W.R.O.C. and the churches to give some hope to young people. What we have said and what we have done are more than tongue can tell.

How come we the people, and we the women in particular who do so much cannot get the Government to meet us even part way? One part of the answer is that, frankly, this Government is not interested in the majority of us; the poorer class of people and the middle class are not on the agenda of the Government's priorities.

But we are also not making progress in budging this Government because of real weaknesses on our part. One weakness is that we have not been united enough as women. We still have that fear that if we unite people and the Government, they are going to say that it is politics we are dealing with. Too many of us also continue to be influenced by the view that we cannot get mixed up with communists. So we hold back ourselves, and therefore hold back the struggle.

We are not learning from our experience, what unity can bring. Look how last year for IWD, when we were united against Minister Bartlett going to Nairobi as head of the women's delegation.

What was the result? Minister Bartlett could not put his foot in Nairobi.

Another weakness comes from our fear of this callous and wicked Government — we feel we can't budge them. We feel that if we press them too hard, they will make things more difficult for us. So that when we are in a struggle and the Prime Minister comes on T.V. and makes a big speech, we back down and we drop our guard.

We are not recognising that we will have to press this Government to hold those very elections which are necessary to set the stage to change the present policies. Just like how the people of the Phillipines never backed down when Marcos was trying to hold on to power, we have to press this Government to get what we need.

The sum and substance of insufficient unity and our giving up our struggles too quickly is part of the source of our third weakness, which is that our opposition is too weak.

The PNP for example, with 60 percent of the support of the electorate has made another solemn agreement with this Government to delay the elections when everybody knows that legally local Government Elections are long overdue and fair and free elections have long been on the agenda. Look at the criminal imposition of \$250 for licence plates; the PNP asks us as "well-thinking people" to hold on to the horse's tail after the horse's head has gone through the gate.

And the WPJ, they are small, yes, but they must know that to grow bigger, they have to move more broadly amongst all classes of people — the business people, the middle class, more farmers and workers — so that they can have a

bigger impact in the organisation of the opposition of the Jamaican people.

A final weakness that we must overcome is that of not connecting and identifying the source of the distress now on the backs of the main classes of our people. We have to realise that Mr. Seaga and the IMF are the main stumbling blocks in our way.

Whether we want to get involved in politics or not, politics is affecting every aspect of our lives.

It is Seaga's IMF misplaced priorities of refusing to give an additional two and a half percent to junior doctors while spending \$250,000.00 on an old Mercedes Benz for the Bank of Jamaica (BOJ) technocrat, that holds sick people to ransom; of giving foreign capitalists a free reign in our country why they can get away with treating our sisters on the Free Zones like slaves and deny them trade union rights; of introducing fees in hospitals and schools, down grading our teachers and doctors and imposing unheard-of taxes on tertiary education, that is at the root of the difficulties we face sisters.

It is the Seaga/IMF policy of using 55 cents out of every one dollar we get from foreign exchange we earn, to pay back debts to the World Bank and IMF, which is at the root of our inability to meet the needs of the majority.

So we need to develop greater unity regardless of political affiliation; we need to develop greater consciousness; we have to help each other to build our organisation and our struggles so that we can stand up longer and stronger and so that we can overcome that fear of Seaga, just like the people of Haiti, the poorest of the poor.



# THE MUFFET EXPERIMENT ADVANCES

Rebecca Knowles



**COOLING OUT FROM THE RHYTHM:** Drummers, Joy Erskine and Michael 'Mbala' Bailey, take a rest during the interval between SISTREN SONG AND MUFFET.

A year ago *Muffet* and *Sistren Song* was staged for the first time at *Zinc Fence* as an experiment. *Zinc Fence* had not seen a reggae 'dance drama' with women playing the roles of gunmen, Anancy or ghetto rude-boy. Many people asked us what was reggae 'dance drama' anyhow.

Since then the *Muffet* experiment has continued and the show has grown. Audiences in *Jamaica*, *Martinique* and *New York* have seen it. Participants from nine Caribbean countries saw it during the *Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange*. These varied audiences responded enthusiastically — often loudly — and in different ways. Their different responses have helped us to polish and improve *Muffet* as the months have gone by.

Word obviously got around that the show is exciting and controversial. This can be the only reason why three months ago when we set about organising the current *Island Tour*, the requests from communities wanting to host performances, have come streaming in.

Some 30 communities islandwide have asked for the show and requests are continuing to come in. By mid-April we had given eight performances at venues in *Kingston*, *Westmoreland*, rural *St. Andrew*, *St. Thomas* and *St. Mary*. By the end of May, we'll have done a further seventeen shows in *Hanover*, *St. James*, *St. Ann*, *St. Mary*, *Clarendon* and *St. Catherine*.

Compared to the 1984 *Island Tour*, the 1986 run is formidable. All but one of the communities in which we performed in 1984 have asked us to return, and 13 others, from *Petersfield* (*Westmoreland*) to *Golden Grove* (*St. Thomas*) have invited us this year.

As in 1984, *Sistren* is continuing to delight audiences by dramatising some of the most crucial problems that concern ordinary people in their everyday lives. The unemployment, the street violence, the sexual violence are brought out into the open and 'discussed' with the audience through song, dance, and drama. The audiences shout their dismay, agreement, advice; join in the singing. They laugh, and finally they cheer when *Muffet*, who they have taken for their own, overcomes Anancy's tricksterism and exploitation.

HILARY NICHOLSON

## MUFFET APPRECIATED IN NANNYVILLE

Some 600 men, women and children brought the house down when *SISTREN* performed *Muffet* and *Sistren Song* at the Nannyville Gardens Community Centre on Mountain View Avenue, Kingston in March. Their appreciation was evident from their response, and was further conveyed to us in the following letter from Mr. Conrad B. Knibb, Vice-Chairman/Auditor of the Nannyville Community Council.

*"The patrons expressed their very genuine and sincere appreciation to the high degree of professionalism displayed by the cast and are making enquiries as to the possible return. The group has therefore won many new and dear friends."*

*"We from the leadership level of the Council join in communicating our warm thanks and gratitude for the very rewarding performance and show."*

*"May the sky be your height of success and your strong social messages continue to be the theme of your plays."*

## COMMENTS ON MUFFET FROM WOMEN IN SEAVIEW GARDENS

*"Me proud a di women dem! They penetrate what women haffi go through and how we have to stand up fi we rights"*

Laureen

*"The message was very good. It show the struggle women have to go through, but also that we have to keep up; we have to live up through the struggles. The singing was very good and di song dem alright too..."*

Clover

Rebecca Knowles



**MUFFET HITS PETERSFIELD:** A section of the large crowd that turned out to enjoy the *SISTREN* performance at the Venus Theatre in Petersfield, Westmoreland.

*"It was very lovely. The play is just wah happen in real life. The boss looking the woman worker, how hard it is fi get the little pay, working 6 inna di morning till 6 at night. Is just reality as to what is going on now"*

Donna

*"I am glad *SISTREN* come for the young children. They don't get out of the community much, so it is very uplifting for them. It teaches them about life and struggle. It brings more community spirit as well, and keeps the children doing things more on the positive side"*

Marian

## ALL FEMALE BAND JOINS THE MUFFET TEAM

Jamaica's first all-female band, *Works of Women*, has joined the *Muffet* team for *SISTREN's* *Island Tour*, 1986. The band has without doubt brought a new mood to the show and has been warmly welcomed by the communities. *Works of Women* (or *WOW* for short) was formerly known as *PEP* when they were under the management of *Junior Bailey*. However the group parted company with *Bailey* at the end of last year, and he decided to keep the rights to that name — a decision which was upheld by the *Jamaica Federation of Musicians*.

Despite the setback, *WOW* is moving from strength to strength. In a recent radio interview with *Narda Manderson* of *Radio Jamaica*, *Sandra Shelton*, bass guitarist, made the following comments about working with *SISTREN*:

*"It's a new experience for us. We have to be paying attention to the actresses, listening to ourselves, knowing when to stop and to start again, which we never usually incorporate on stage. After working with *SISTREN* we should be better musicians."*



# WOMAN WORK CAAN DONE

by Pauline Crawford &  
Rebecca Knowles

*SISTREN members, Pauline Crawford and Rebecca Knowles shared a day with Sarah a sugar worker of 14 years, living in Westmoreland.*

*Sarah is 45 years old and her man, a cane-cutter, 42. She has seven children, none of them fathered by her man, but only two of them – an 18 year old boy and a 15 year old girl – live at home. Home is a board house of two rooms, each about 10 foot square. The kitchen is smaller and situated a little distance from the main house. Sarah's house is not painted and the roof of rusty zinc leaks badly when it rains. There is no electricity and Sarah shares a stand-pipe with about seven other families.*



Rebecca Knowles

*The women field hands are more often than not forced to change their work-clothes in the field as the estate management don't provide changing-rooms.*

## AN EARLY START

5 o'clock and Sarah is up and about – opening the window to let in the morning air and tidying the room she shares with her man. She wakes the youths. The daughter gets up and tidies the room she shares with her brother, while Sarah goes outside to make the woodfire and prepare breakfast of mint tea and bread. She walks the fifteen yards or so to the standpipe, fills the plastic basin and the aluminium washpan and staggers

back with her load.

5:30 a.m. Sarah wakes her man. He washes himself in the water she has fetched and dresses. After eating the meal she has prepared, he climbs on his bicycle and sets off for work. Sarah organises the children's lunch money, examines their clothes and hair to make sure they are tidy. Time is on her now so she asks her son to tie out the goat on his way out. She usually does that too.

Swiftly now, Sarah clears the table, bathes, combs her hair, dresses. Keep up the pace, time is going, can't be late. She packs a plastic bag (it originally held manure) with the things she needs for the day: small plastic basin to eat from, piece of bread, a little sugar and molasses and a piece of yam for the collective lunch pot, a knife, a piece of cloth to tie her head and a wash rag. Close the windows, lock the door, hide the key in the usual place.

## THE LONG TREK TO WORK

6:35 a.m. Sarah starts the long trek to the farm she'll be working at for the day. From the parochial road to the main road and the farm office, two miles, then another one and a half miles to the farm. Today it's an easy walk. She sometimes walks up to seven miles depending on which farm she's going to. Pauline asks her if she can ride a bicycle. She says yes.

Pauline: "So why don't you ride one to work?"

Sarah: (laughing) "Poor me. Me caan even buy food much less fi buy bicycle".

Pauline: "You ever borrow your boyfriend's own?"

Sarah: "No sah".

Pauline: "Why?"

Sarah: "Him wouldn't len' me!"

At the farm office, Sarah joins the nine other women with whom she'll work for the day. More luck, the trailer carrying the fertilizer they'll be spreading on the fields of young cane is just moving off. They jump on. The fertilizer is dropped two bags at a time at the intervals between the fields. "Sometimes, dem drop dem too far apart an we haffi stagger wid dem go dung di interval", Sarah says.

## PREPARING TO START WORK

7:30 a.m. The trailer stops to let off the women at a small hut, which Sarah tells us she and her man built. "Oonu come when we have life little easy, because is not all a di time we have hut. Dem time we haffi wuk inna di burning sun, tek we break inna di sun, cook inna di sun, and eat we lunch inna di sun too. Sometimes me can feel me brains a melt".

The crew of women change their clothes outside the hut. There are no changing rooms. The old clothes they wear make them look like scarecrows – long pants to protect their skin from the mud, skirt and blouse, tie-head, hat and waterboots. "Di only ting di management provide we wid a di fertilizer", Sarah says. "We haffi provide everyting fi weself; clothes fi work inna di field, waterboot, basin fi carry di fertilizer, lunch, everyting . . ."

One woman on the crew is responsible for the day's cooking. Each of the other crew members give her their contribution towards the lunch. Before they move out into the field, they put their belongings into the hut under the cook's "watchful eyes".

## WORK BEGINS

7:45 a.m. Sarah cuts the first bags and each woman fills her basin with the fertilizer, then begins the walk down the row tossing it sparingly onto the roots of the young cane. Sometimes they do two rows at a time to get the work done faster. Today there are 86 bags to be spread, but sometimes there are as many as 110. They have to work fast because if rain falls, the fertilizer will get hard.

Sarah says, "One day we see di rain set up so we mek haste spread di fertilizer and by 2 o'clock we spread 84 bags. About 2:30, di rain start to fall and since we neva have no hut we run go over di market fi get little shelter, and yuh know sey di bookkeeper cut we pay fi half day". She is indignant but doesn't see the sense in raising the matter with the union. "Nutten nah change because di union representative dem woulda dweet to; dem in league wid it".

As the women work, row by row, they joke alot. They talk about their families, church, funerals, sex, anything and everything that affects their personal lives. "We haffi chat and laugh



meanwhile we a work. It help fi cheer up we spirit”.

## LUNCH BREAK

**11:20 a.m.** Break for lunch. The women spread the empty fertilizer bags on the ground in the hut. Much moaning and groaning and sighing as they stretch their tired bodies. Lunch is served in small plastic bowls — corn pork, rice, dumplings, dasheen, yam and coco. Drinks — sweetened molasses. Meat is a rarity. Rebecca and Pauline “helped us” the money to buy the pork. The women snatch at each others meat and dumplings jokingly. Sarah reads aloud from the Bible and as she does so, Edith is eating up her dumplings. Shrieks of laughter. “The Bible seh watch an pray”, says Edith as Sarah realises what is going on. Some of the women save the smallest morsels of the meat to take home for their children and grandchildren.

**1:05 p.m.** A cane-cutter passes by and shouts to the supervisor. “Wait, a after 1 o’clock now yuh know. Weh yuh no mek di women dem go back to work?”

Sarah is not amused. “Galang, Henry. Yuh think a how yuh ride Melva whole a last week and when Friday come an yuh fi give her a money outa yuh pay, yuh walk through cane piece and hide go weh lef her siddung a wait pon yu. Go weh yuh wutless wretch yuh!” He slinks off.

**1:15 p.m.** Time to go back into the field. Pauline and Rebecca can’t make



Rebecca Knowles

*A typical board house for sugar workers. These houses used to be given to the*

*workers free of cost, but nowadays are leased or sold to them.*

it. Unaccustomed as they are to such backbreaking work. They complain of aches in every part of their bodies and their eyes hurt from the brutal glare of the sun. Their fingers are sore from the fertilizer.

**3:22 p.m.** The women return having finished spreading the fertilizer. One of them turns to Rebecca and Pauline, who are still flat out on the ground of the hut. “Oonu feel weh wi go through a day time? Yuh tink dis ya work easy missis. A 13 years now me a work pon disya estate. Yuh see how me skin black and dry? A di sun dweet”.

Pauline asks if they would want their daughters to do that work. The reaction is negative. “Yuh mad! Dat is why me mek sure an send my three to school, because me waan dem fi have life easier when dem tun- big woman”, says one woman. “A \$12.40 a day we get, an when dem dun draw out all kind a sin-ting, most time we caan even cook dinner a Sunday daytime, muchless inna di week. Den if yuh borrow money from management like inna Christmas, dem draw out \$20.00 at at a time so sometime me go home wid \$28.00 fi di week”.

“One week me get \$17.00 fi me pay and di way how me bex me neva change it till di Monday and when me change it me buy a lunch and carry home \$10.00”.

“Sometime me start to trust from Monday and by di time me get pay me trust more than weh deh pon di check, so me always have a shop bill weh neva

dun pay, and me a wok over 11 years now”.

Pauline asks why they don’t leave the work since it’s so hard and they get so little money. Sarah laughs, “And do wha — go home and dead fi hungry? Nutten else deh fi we fi do. The money small but it stop a gap”.

**4:09 p.m.** The women pick up their bags and clothes and walk down to the market — the only nearby facility to wash the mud from their feet and change their clothes. Then follows the long walk back to Sarah’s house.

## BACK HOME

**5:30 p.m.** Sarah brings the goat back to the yard and opens the door and windows of the house. She decides to fix something light for the evening meal as her man planned to eat lunch that day and the children have gone to Sports Day. Wash the plates, wipe the table, sweep the yard, take in the pail and chimmy she’d washed and left outside from morning. Juice the soursop, prepare the sardines and bread.

**6:15 p.m.** Sarah lights the kerosene lamp. Her man comes in. He has worked overtime. He bathes, eats, then leaves to play dominoes. Sarah then eats, clears the table, washes the plates.

**6:55 p.m.** The children arrive from school, eat and go down the road to watch T.V. Sarah reads from the Bible and waits for them all to return.

**9:00 p.m.** The family is in bed. Sarah sleeps and waits for the dawn and a new day.



Rebecca Knowles

*The cook for the day puts together all the contributions of the work gang to make the lunch for the day. Everything, including the shelter, pots and pans are provided by the workers.*



March 8 and 9, 1986, saw the widest variety of activities ever staged in Jamaica's annual celebration of International Women's Day. Jamaica's commemoration of IWD started eight years ago on the initiation of the Committee of Women for Progress and the PNP Women's Movement and has gone from strength to strength ever since. This year's main activities included a rally and seminar, a cultural show, a jumble sale, a radio broadcast by Woman '85 and messages from women's groups and political parties.

Our pictorial captures some of the enthusiasm generated by the hundreds of women and men who turned out to renew their commitment and confidence in the continuing struggle of our women for their survival and rights and the survival and rights of their children.

## RALLYING FOR HEALTH AND EDUCATION

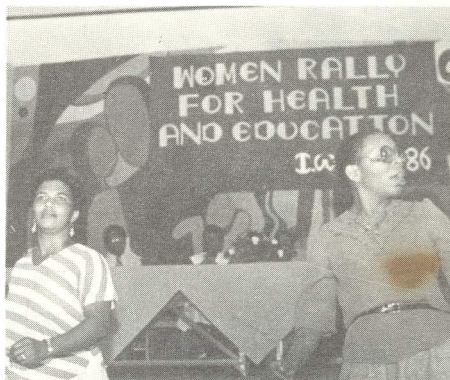
The Committee of Women for Progress, YWCA (Ja.), Sistren Theatre Collective, Ms. Elaine Rainford of the YWCA and Beverley Anderson-Manley were co-sponsors of the now traditional IWD rally which had as its theme — **WOMEN RALLY FOR HEALTH AND EDUCATION**, the particular concerns of women in Jamaica at this time.



Ann Hodges

Beverley Anderson-Manley at podium chaired the rally. Looking on is Mrs. Linnette Vassell, CWP Co-ordinator. They were joined on the platform by representatives of the Medical Association of Jamaica (MAJ), National Union of Democratic Teachers (NUDT), Jamaica Union of Tertiary Students (JUTS) and the UWI's Department of Economics.

# AN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEKEND



Ann Hodges

*SISTREN members, Cerene Stephenson and Lorna Burrell-Haslam led the audience in the singing of a collection of SISTREN songs. Other popular cultural items included poems by Jennifer Williams and Elean Thomas.*



Ann Hodges

*A section of the enthusiastic audience that turned out for the rally.*



Ann Hodges

*SISTREN TEXTILES set up a stall of screen printed items in the foyer of the Little Theatre. Cerene Stephenson is seen above with two interested patrons.*

## SISTERS CELEBRATION

For the second year running, a team headed by **SISTREN** resource personnel, in collaboration with **SISTREN**, organised a cultural show to commemorate IWD. Various artists again volunteered their services for this **SISTERS CELEBRATION**, which was staged at the Little Theatre. There was reggae and african drumming, dance, poetry, song and comedy a-plenty, but the show did suffer somewhat from lack of organisation.

The line-up for the evening included Jamaica's only all-female band **Works of Women** and **Carlene Davis** who were well-appreciated by the large audience. **Edi Fitzroy**, always willing to give the ladies his support was brought back on stage for an encore and the great **Mutabaruka** brought the house down with his brilliance, particularly when he read his excellent poem, **THIS POEM**.



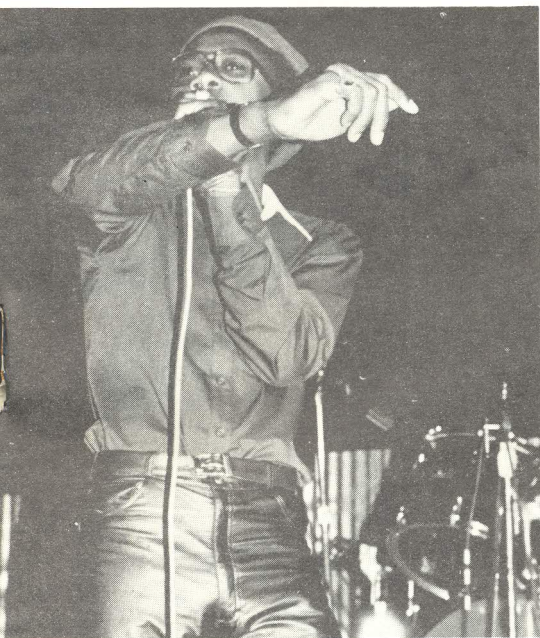
Ann Hodges



Janhoi Jaja



# REMEMBER

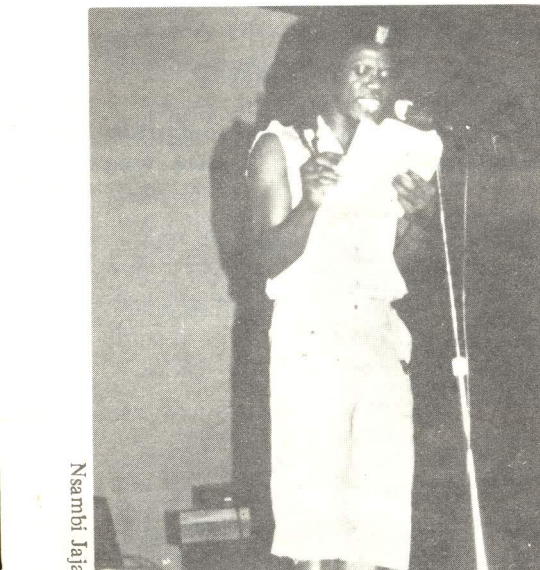


Ross-Frankson

## PEACE SEMINAR

The PNP Women's Movement IWD Committee sponsored a day-long seminar with the theme, **PEACE — A PRE-REQUISITE FOR DEVELOPMENT** at the headquarters of the Jamaica Women's Federation. The seminar examined several areas within the context of the theme including the law, education and the roles of artists, the church, the Women's Centre and Family Life Education.

**PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES TOO!** The ever-practical Women's Resource and Outreach Centre (WROC) organised a jumble sale where women could pick up cheap, good quality items of clothing, household articles and food for themselves and their children.



Nsambi Jaja



Ross-Frankson

A section of the large crowd of seminar participants.



Ross-Frankson

Mini-exhibition of posters mounted at the seminar.

"On this day all women join hearts and hands in the struggle for peace and progress". This popular IWD card was designed by Lucy Brown-Hutton for CWP.





## SISTREN RESEARCH

Honor Ford-Smith and Joan French have now completed the document setting out the findings of their research on the subject **WOMEN'S LABOUR AND ORGANISATION IN JAMAICA 1900-1944**.

The research takes as its focal point the participation of women in the labour uprising of 1938. It compares the position of women in the labour force and their level of organisation before and after the riots, and in particular examines how the situation of women after the riots was related to the policies which the British colonial administration consciously directed towards them in its attempts to prevent a recurrence of 1938.

Over the next month or two, **Honor and Joan** will be seeking critical comments on the research from a range of readers including community group members, Sistren members, and University lecturers. The aim is to test interest and readability at various levels, as well as to submit the research findings to the rigours of intellectual scrutiny.

Plans are also being made to publish sections of the research in popular format.

**TIME OUT FOR ALL THE FUN OF TRINIDAD CARNIVAL:** *SISTREN's Joan French (l), Rhodda Reddock of ISER/UWI Trinidad (r) and American writer and poet, Gloria Hull (seated), took time out from more serious matters to play mas in The Great Zulu Dawn presentations of the Burrokeets Band during Trinidad Carnival. Joan and Honor Ford-Smith were in Trinidad for the final workshop on the History Project for which they've been doing extensive research (see Sistren Research). Joan and Honor also led a drama workshop with combined women's groups on the theme of Women and Class.*



Ford-Smith

# SISTREN MOVEMENTS

## BARBADOS: NEW PROJECT

Lana Finkin, our Co-ordinator, was in Barbados in March to take part in a seminar sponsored by the **Women and Development Unit (WAND)** of the **University of the West Indies (UWI)**

The seminar was aimed at promoting an integrated approach to development, and marked the launching by WAND of a new phase of activities in the Caribbean region. Subject of the seminar was **Women, Men and Development**, and discussions focussed on and examined gender as an important aspect of development. There were 23 participants from nine countries working in a wide variety of fields including health, agriculture, community development and education.

The WAND programme is one part of a three-pronged approach to **Women and Development Studies** which is being launched by the UWI. Other aspects will centre on research and teaching and be implemented through the academic programmes of the UWI.

## ST. VINCENT: POPULAR THEATRE WORKSHOP

Pauline Crawford, Workshop Director, represented **SISTREN** at a Workshop on Popular Theatre in St. Vincent in January. Pauline was one of four women among the 20 participants from nine countries including Dominica, Antigua, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Barbados, Canada, Nigeria and Jamaica.

The objective of the workshop was "to share experiences and compare strategies among animation groups". The participants felt this objective had been met and that the exercise helped to clarify their work and point them in the direction of what needs to be done, but during the evaluation said they also thought the time was too short to make it as meaningful as it could have been.

Pauline reported that she learnt a lot and has already started to use some of

the games and exercises she was introduced to in her work for **SISTREN** here in Jamaica.



Hodges

**SISTREN WORKSHOP TEAM ON LOCATION:** *Members of the SISTREN Workshop team, Recording Secretary, Delores Robinson, Director, Pauline Crawford and Rebecca Knowles (far right) linked up on location with a production crew from Oxfam (U.K.) seen above filming the Frome Cultural Group. The Oxfam team were in Jamaica in February working on a documentary about the sugar industry.*

## UNITED KINGDOM: GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Jennifer Jones, **SISTREN** Co-ordinator between 1983 and 1985, has just returned from three months study leave in the United Kingdom, where she participated in a course on **WOMEN, MEN AND DEVELOPMENT** organised every 15 months by the **Institute of Development Studies** at the University of Sussex. Jennifer was funded by the Nuffield Foundation of the U.K.

Course participants included 21 women and three men. There was Caribbean representation from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Surinam. Other countries represented were Peru, Nicaragua, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Norway.

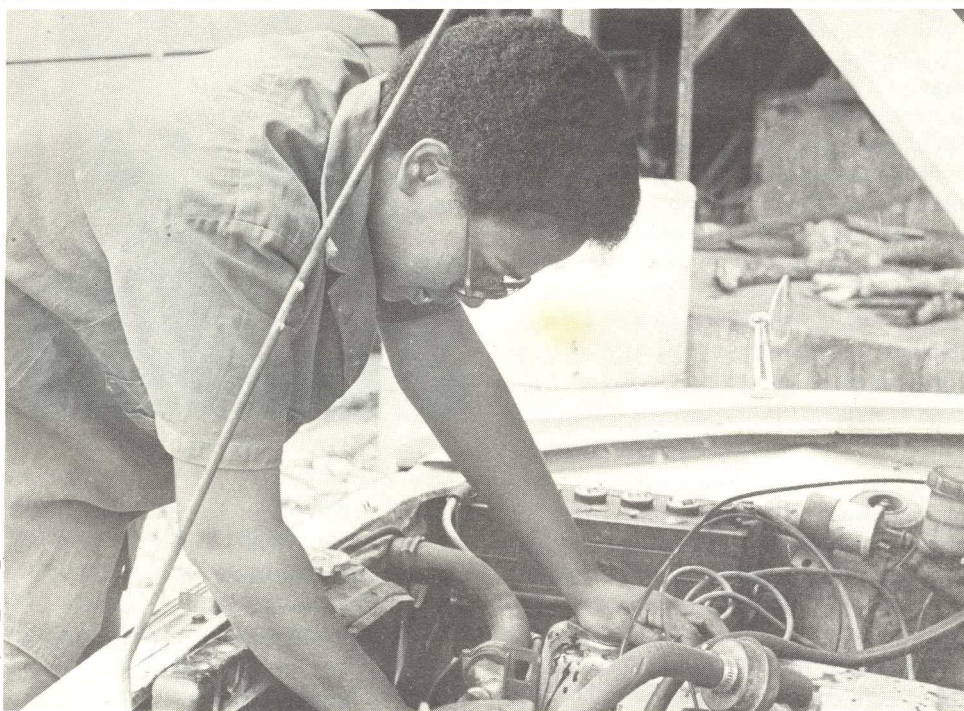
The course reflected many of the conclusions reached in the general analysis of the Decade of Women which ended last year, including important commissions which many have come to realise were made. Jenny noted that throughout the Decade it was often assumed that the main problem facing third world women was insufficient participation in the process of development. Further analysis has challenged this and other assumptions. For example,

*(Continued on page 11)*



# On The Job -IN A MAN'S WORLD

Ross-Frankson



**GETTING DOWN TO BASICS:** Audrey in a typical working pose – under the bonnet of a car at her garage.

Audrey Hamilton has set herself a challenge in life – to take the mystery out of auto-mechanics, particularly for women.

This 30 year-old self-styled “eccentric and cynic” is a trained machinist, production engineer and tool and dye maker. She runs a motor mechanics and machine shop in the Cross Roads area, working along with her father and three other male mechanics.

About a year ago, Audrey heard some man or other make the age-old comment that women drivers have no sense for the umpteenth time and decided to do something about it. “The challenge is to bring auto mechanics down to simple basic rules, to get away from complex jargon”. And that’s just exactly what she has done. She now offers a five-class course for women which shows them exactly how their car works, how to identify a problem and in some cases, fix the problem. She’s now completed the fifth course of 15 hours over five Saturdays, chalking up another batch of positive results.

Asked about the greatest influence in her life, Audrey has no hesitation in picking out her father, a machinist, plumber and wood-worker. “I grew with him alot, always taking the chance at weekends and in the evenings after school to do things with him. What my

mother was doing was woman’s work which didn’t seem interesting to me”.

As to the question of coping with working in a male-dominated profession, Audrey recalls her first job as a maintenance technician after College with one of the bauxite companies. She admits to being quite bitter when her probation was extended on a flimsy excuse, which could not cover up the real reason – her refusal to give in to passes from one of the bosses. Her complaints fell on deaf ears and she moved on to the Bureau of Standards as a Lab Technician in the Mechanics Inspection Laboratory, where she worked for five years. There were those men who believed she should be at home having children, but in the main she has received respect from her male counterparts.

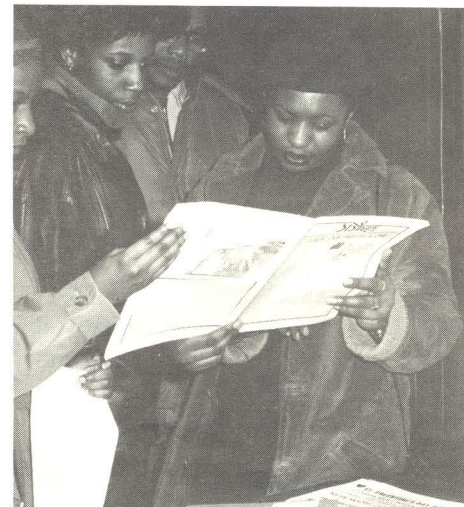
“I find that once you show them you don’t come for preferential treatment you can have a good relationship with the guys. They may run their little pranks, but first chance I get, I cuss them and run the joke back on them”.

As far as the business is concerned, Audrey is expanding little by little and seeking to build it up to act as an agent for particular customers. “In this way”, she explains, “we would deal with the customer’s car from contact-

ing them for servicing when it’s time, to dealing with engines and gear boxes, which we specialize in, but also obtaining other services such as ducoing, front end and so on. In other words taking the headache out of car maintenance”.

Audrey Hamilton can be contacted at 8 South Monterey Drive, Hope Pastures. Telephone: 92-79646.

(Continued from page 10)



Shepherd

**SISTREN MAGAZINE APPRECIATED IN THE U.K.:** Visitors to the West Indian Community Centre in the British city of Leeds took a keen interest in reading our last *SISTREN* magazine (above). They were introduced to the magazine by Friend of Sistren, Mike Shepherd, who has also been organising donations for the publication during 1986.

women’s rights are directly related to the development process in most third world countries which is not necessarily beneficial to the people living there, when long-term economic processes are so often indifferent to the needs of the poor, and in fact lead to increased impoverishment. It is no longer felt that women’s equality is merely a matter of increasing resources and facilities which often means an ever-increasing burden of work for the woman, but that the whole matter of gender relations, that is relations between men and women, is at issue.

Jenny also spoke glowingly of the high standard of lectures, the skilful, participatory and supportive teaching methods used, and of the international solidarity that comes from sharing such a rich experience with other women and men from all over the world.



# CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE PROFILES

## SISTREN PROFILES



**PAULINE** leads her audience in the singing of **SISTREN SONGS**.

Introducing **Pauline Crawford**, **SISTREN** founding member and Workshop Director. Twenty-nine year old **Pauline** is an Aquarian who loves to travel, listen to music, meet people, talk alot, be quite humourous and admire the simplicity of nature.

On being a member of **SISTREN**, **Pauline** says, "It has helped me to be able to share my joys, pain, achievements, disappointments, aims and the will to survive with working-class women like myself".

While recognising the strides she has already made as a teacher/actress in the years with **SISTREN**, **Pauline** is now concentrating her efforts on obtaining CXC and 'O' level examinations in English Literature, English Language and History, "so that in the near future I may be able to write short stories, plays and articles on my own". **Pauline** also wants to improve her skills in the production of slide shows, which she sees as a good medium for bringing out the situations being faced by women in Jamaica and abroad.



**DIDI** in rehearsal for **MUFFET**.

Say Hi to Beverly "**DIDI**" Elliott, founding member and teacher/actress of **SISTREN**. **Didi** is a 34 year-old Piscean, who has four children to her credit — a 17 year-old boy and three girls, 16, 14 and 3-plus.

**Didi** says she likes to swim, dance and teach drama. Her pet hate is being interviewed before a T.V. camera. "Anything me haffi put cross, me prefer dramatise it", she says.

Her favourite role is the part of **Queenie** in the **SISTREN** award-winning play, **Q.P.H.** "The part just fit me. On the night of the (Eventide) fire, (on

which the play is based) I was living nearby, and I ran out and saw everything. So, especially when we do the play at night, it reminds me of the fire and me just put everything into it".

**Didi's** ambition is to go further in improving her reading skills. She's just started a literacy course and she says, "I will not stop going to school until I know the English enough to step on further and learn a next language. I would also like to go far in me dancing so I can teach **SISTREN** movements, and we don't have to go out and get a next teacher".

## EASTERN CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE ORGANISATION (ECPTO)

The Eastern Caribbean Popular Theatre (ECPTO) comprises three dynamic groups in the Windward Islands. The **NEW ARTIST MOVEMENT (NAM)** of St. Vincent, **Movement for Cultural Awareness (MCA)** of Dominica and the **Folk Research Centre** of St. Lucia. The Ministry of Education and Culture under the former Revolutionary Government of Grenada was another group which helped to form the ECPTO but has not participated since the US invasion of that island in 1983.

In St. Vincent, **NAM** began as a performing group in 1973, but by the early 80's, started to respond to a growing number of requests from community based groups for assistance in producing their own drama. Thus **NAM** took on a new role — that of animateur, organiser and trainer.

The **MCA** of Dominica was also formed in the early 70's, but unlike **NAM** was not a performing group. Its members were drawn from a number of different cultural groups, and each had specialised



**Ras Moses** of the **Movement for Cultural Awareness** in Dominica paid tribute to the memory of Micky Smith at a rap session in commemoration of the life of the renowned dub-poet last year.

expertise in various performance skills. Their aim was to train and mobilise.

The **Folk Research Centre** in St. Lucia was experienced in cultural research but was also spearheading local efforts to revive and revitalise people's culture, when the group joined ECPTO.

ECPTO was formed as a common platform of action and communication aimed

at addressing the following common concerns of these groups:

- \* the need to rescue and revitalise their peoples' own forms of expression;
- \* the need to strengthen people's participation in the development process;
- \* the need to resist the growing influence of foreign media (in particular American Cable TV) which promotes consumerism, individualism, sexism and other negative values thus undermining the processes of popular organising and action.

The aim of ECPTO grew out of these concerns, and it was formed specifically to provide a common platform of action and communication to address them, as well as for each of the participating groups to support each other, especially in times of crisis.

ECPTO representatives at the **Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange** held in Jamaica last year were **Janice King** of **NAM**, **Ras Moses** of the **MCA** and **Stephen Joseph** of the **Folk Research Centre**.



# PROSTITUTION TOURISM

*The question of prostitution tourism is not simply an issue of personal morality, but a far deeper question linked to fundamental, economic, political and cultural issues. There now exists for the first time comprehensive documentation on Prostitution Tourism available in the English language. This book DOCUMENTATION: TOURISM, PROSTITUTION, DEVELOPMENT, is a publication of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism in co-operation with the Centre for Development Education. It is available in the region through the Caribbean Conference of Churches, P.O. Box 616, Bridgetown, Barbados. The following introduction to the book is by Dame Nita Barrow, President of the World Council of Churches.*

"Tourism plays an important part in the economies of some poor countries, particularly those whose natural resources may otherwise be limited but which have favourable climates and natural beauty as an asset.

In the past two decades it has assumed major proportions as part of the develop-

ment earnings of these countries. It was taken for granted by many that it was the beauties of nature — climatic and physical — that were the attractions for visitors.

However, through women's groups mainly in Japan and Korea in the 1970's, attention was focussed on another element in tourism and its effects: that of the exploitation of people, particularly of women. This highlighted for many the question of prostitution and its encouragement through sex tours, which were rapidly developing mainly unnoticed by the majority of people in the countries most affected.

Previous assumptions were that prostitution tourism was a phenomenon of certain parts of the world. Research and further study show that it is much more widespread than originally envisaged. In some areas it has been the exploitation of young girls and women often lured from their villages and rural homes with the promise of jobs in big cities and towns, as is shown in this documentation.

The employment was not of the kind

anticipated. They often become unwitting and unwilling victims of prostitution exploiters.

In other countries it was the development of male prostitution which was new to those areas.

The struggle against prostitution tourism is made more difficult because of vested interests involved. This hinders us from really examining and dealing with the root causes, which would help to free people from the deep poverty which exists.

The work of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism and its search for alternative tourism is to be highly commended and assisted by people who care. The World Council of Churches is of real importance in emphasizing the commitment of Christians to be concerned for their sisters and brothers in a non-condemnatory but constructive manner. To that end all of our efforts on a worldwide basis should be addressed."

## to the Editor



Dear Editor,

I am greatly worried by the increase in violence, both locally and worldwide. It is amazing to me the reluctance of those in control of the three main media (television, cinema and newspapers) to admit to any connection between the material we are served and what is happening in our society. At least three quarters of J.B.C.'s programmes are basically violent; if you omit killing or the threat of it, there would be little

left. This begins with cartoons shown to the children at 5:00 p.m., which usually depict a situation where one character physically abuses another, to the amusement of all. These cartoons are the only programmes specifically for children. Whatever happened to *Sesame Street* and the good European cartoons sometimes shown on a Saturday morning, and even more importantly, local television? Plus I really object to the timing of the evening's preview before the children's T.V. as this inevitably means children are being exposed to the "choice killings of the evening".

Why is it that those in charge of the programmes at J.B.C. choose so many violent programmes for us and leave out the comedy, light entertainment, cultural and educational programmes? Are these second rate American serials and movies cheaper to obtain or what? I am convinced the programme directors are not aware of the damage being done to our youth and society as a whole, by watching so much of it. Look at the American society, which is increasingly violent and which is producing increasingly violent, sadistic and masochistic movies. **Must**

we embrace everything American with such open arms?

As for the cinemas, we may as well say 100 percent of that is violent — 'Rambo', 'Commando', 'View to a Kill', etc., or plain sexual violence with such movies as 'Friday the 13th', 'Halloween', etc. Do we really live in such a "gun-worshipping culture"? Do the people in charge of what we view have any moral conscience at all? Do they not see any connection between what is shown on the screen and the ever-increasing violent crimes of the gun, and the violent crimes against women and girl children? Over 800 cases of rape and carnal abuse reported in 1984 alone and it is estimated that only one in twelve of such cases is reported to the police. Lastly, how much longer are we to be served the U.K. pin-up in the *Star* newspaper? When will the Editor see the connection between pornography, even light porn, and sexual violence against women?

Please do us better, media men!

Yours truly,

Samere Tansley  
Kingston 9



# CHALLENGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN ACTIVIST AND ARTIST

by Honor Ford-Smith

*Sistren Artistic Director, Honor Ford-Smith, reviews the first book by Elean Thomas, journalist and Central Committee member of the Workers Party of Jamaica, in an open letter to the author. The book, WORD RHYTHMS FROM THE LIFE OF A WOMAN, is a KARIA PRESS publication.*

Dear Elean,

When I was asked to review your book, WORD RHYTHMS FROM THE LIFE OF A WOMAN, quite frankly I was terrified. "Suppose I hate it", I thought. "What will I say?" Anyway last night I took a deep breath and plunged into the manuscript.

I like the way you have challenged the divide between activist and artist. You write, "There is not a separation between the brain, the hand, the feet. They are not in contradiction with each other. That is how I see my profession, my political activity and my attempts at creative writing". Nevertheless, the artist and activist have been so polarised that we are often forced to put one before the other. The insistence of middle class critics on "universal art" has subtly damned the work of anybody who dares to make "politics" a subject of their art. For us women, it is also a means of denying the relationship between the personal and the political.

The best of your work says the unsaid: charts new territory. I think you do this best in prose form. JOSINA brings out the unrecognised heroine for acknowledgement in the portrayal of the struggle of a dread sister some thirty or so years ago. Of the poems, LOOKING GLASS also offers fresh insight. It insists that a woman's sexuality is part of her self-expression in the world; that the parts of a woman's body which produce life are not simply part of "animal nature", but respond creatively to society. AIN'T IT A SHAME works because it uses the contradiction between poetry and prose to show us the spirit of a woman activist who is fighting to unravel the contradictions in her personal situation as a woman and revolutionary.

We can imagine the fight you must have had with yourself and with others to win the space to write. You tell us a little of it in THOSE SUBTLER CHAINS, and perhaps that is the reason



*Elean Thomas — no contradiction between her profession, political activity and creative writing.*

you write cautiously in your Testimonial, "I call my pieces "Word Rhythms". I honestly believe it is pretentious to call them poems. They are merely word sketches, word photographs".

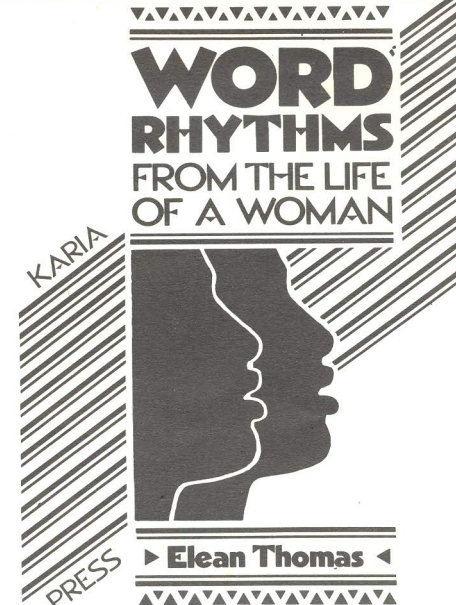
Well, I don't think they are merely anything, or that you would be "pretentious" to call them poems. You are a writer, and the merit of what you put down on paper is not mediated by your inventing some new category of literature qualified by the adjective "mere".

Much of the past struggles, and the present necessity for struggle which you write about has to be communicated to its audience in a fresh way, if we are to be moved beyond acceptance of the daily experience we take for granted.

The form that brings me closest to that fresh awareness is contained in JOSINA. JOSINA shows rather than tells. It deals in specifics. It doesn't speak in huge abstract philosophical concepts, like those contained in A QUESTION OF WORDS, which does not work for me as a poem.

JOSINA gives us character and action, but I have a problem with the point of view from which the story is told. The story is explored through the eyes of an adult woman, but it is also being told from within the persona of the child. It is one person, but sometimes the persona of the child and of the woman get mixed up. It is a matter of structure and flow but also of meaning.

LITANY OF A HOUSEWIFE has the strongest rhythmic quality of all the poems but also the same technical problem, despite its climatic build and a sense of newness. The persona is estab-



lished as someone oblivious to national production and social revolutionary targets. How does she then make the leap to recognise that social revolution alone can free her from staying in the house "from morning till night"? Technically it goes against common sense.

If revolutionary vision means creating new relationships between people, then the language which expresses it must also communicate that newness. I am therefore disappointed when you use safe and predictable phrases like "beating hot sun" and "blasting wind", phrases which I have heard many times before and which belie the newness of your subject matter.

I am also disappointed when your use of language fails to question certain concepts. "Femininity" is one such, which you use in relation to Indira Gandhi. I think the word "femininity" was developed by advertising agencies and fashion magazines for marketing a certain vision of the passive, doll woman, alienated from herself and from her body.

For me, the language works best where it uses fresh images to communicate. In the prose pieces, it works best where concrete detail, characterisation and action carry meaning. For example, the personification of the scorpion in INDIRA gives us a clear physical object which carries the meaning of the poem. The search for the new image as a means of expressing new subject matter, guards against the possibility of cliché.

I think the work will be of great interest to women. We will read it out loud to each other saying, "Yes, I have felt that too", gathering strength.

Your commitment to getting it done gives us the courage to want to do the same in our working lives. I look forward to more.



# ART AS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

by Judith Salmon

The poster produced by a group of female Jamaican artists in tribute to the United Nations Decade of Women is significant of what can be achieved by artists working in a collective way.

The idea first came up in March 1985 amongst a number of women



**END PRODUCT OF A COLLECTIVE APPROACH:** Artists and other participants in the creation of the poster (l-r) Rachel Faring; Graphic Designer Camille Parchment; Project Co-ordinator, Margaret Bernal of the Frame Centre Gallery; Judith Salmon and Sharon Chacko.

artists who wanted to make a contribution to the End of Decade conference in Nairobi, Kenya. They decided to collaborate on the production of a poster — a medium they felt could carry an effective statement and at the same time be accessible to a wide cross-section of people.

A core group of five artists met regularly in the months between April and June. They first presented individual sketches, then enlarged drawings based on the topics slated for discussion at the Nairobi Conference — health, education, shelter, violence against women and

disarmament. At every stage, the project was marked by lively discussions and interaction between group members. They also sought and incorporated the opinions of other women on the status of women in the Caribbean, based on their experiences in community work, theatre and education.

The final image to evolve features the symbolic three stages of the development of woman within a global framework, supported by two outstretched working hands. The sun/wheel motif crowns this central core of the design. The crescent/basket/boat shape supports the global image from beneath. The whole is framed by a blue border symbolising hope and peace.

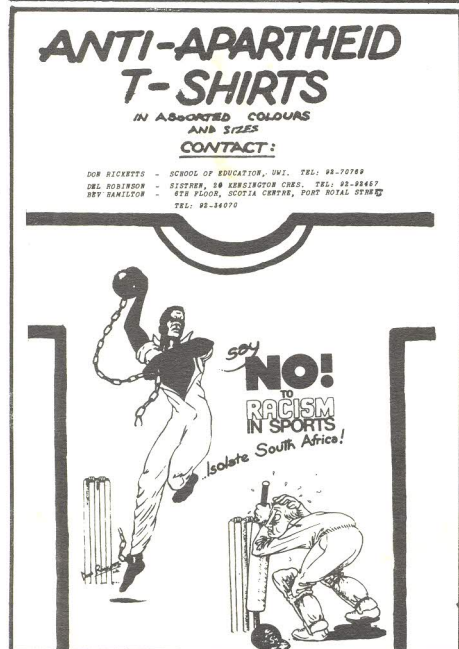
**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Recently a group of women artists have begun to examine ways in which they can co-operate on mutually beneficial activities. The group is still a fledgling one but there is scope



**LIVELY DISCUSSION AND INTER-ACTION** marked the collaboration between women artists who worked on the *End of Decade women's poster*. Photo shows, Rachel Faring (left) and painters, Samere Tansley (centre) and Judith Salmon (right) as they discussed the first drawings submitted. Looking on are Rachel's daughter, Naomi, Samere's son, Jomo, and art student, Lily Gibson. Other artists who contributed to the poster are June Bellow and Sharon Chacko.

and promise for maturing into an energetic functioning unit. We wish them well and hope to carry further news on this collaboration in a future issue of *SISTREN*.

**ART AGAINST APARTHEID:** Over 25 of Jamaica's leading artists exhibited their work at a major exhibition and auction staged at the Gallery Makonde in March, to raise funds for the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The exhibition was opened by Mr. Don Mills (below at left). Looking on is Ms. Yvonne McLymont, owner of the gallery. *SISTREN* wishes to express its deep regret at the recent fire which gutted the gallery and destroyed several works. Yvonne is fighting up with the situation and has found a temporary home for Gallery Makonde in one of the Waterloo Colony units. Above, a visitor to the exhibition views a joint painting of South African revolutionary Nelson Mandela, by Coleen Wakeland and Allison West, and screen print by Beti Campbell.



Ann Hodges



# WOMAN ROOTS: HIGGLERING

by Joan French



GROUP OF MARKET WOMEN IN PORTLAND.

Photograph courtesy of CANSA VE-JAMAICA

Higglering is one of the main areas in which Jamaican women work. But how many of us know that our higglering tradition goes right back to the days of slavery?

In the old slave days, there was a time when the slaves used to depend on the slavemasters for all their food. The slavemasters used to import the 'salt things' and so on, from abroad, especially America. But then America went to war to seek independence from Britain, and it wasn't so easy to import the food anymore. Many of the slaves were underfed and they started taking over idle plots of land to grow their own food. The situation became very embarrassing for the slaveowners, even abroad, and to save face they were forced to officially give plots to the slaves to grow their own food.

The slave owners didn't want the slaves to sell any of what they grew. That might make them too independent. They just wanted the slaves to grow enough to eat, so they could do the plantation work. But our slave mothers and fathers "nevva mek joke" to grow things to sell

on their little grounds. And guess who was head cook and bottle-washer in the selling? The women, of course. In those days they had their own grounds just like the men, because every slave, woman or man, was entitled to their own piece of ground. So the women used to sell their own produce, and they used to sell for the men too, and sometimes even for the slave owner! Some of the slave owners got smart, and said to themselves — "If you can't stop them, the best thing is to get them to sell for you too".

## AFRICAN TRADITION

In the towns, the higglers took over the markets. In this they were following a tradition from back home in Africa, for higglering was one of the main occupations of African women, especially in West Africa. The white people tried to fight them down, but no matter how hard they tried these women stood firm — they wouldn't budge. The colonial rulers passed laws, they brought out police, they complained in the newspapers. Just like how they try to clear higglers off the street today. But finally they had to give up and the black women

took over the markets from them altogether.

One of the things the white people disliked most was Sunday market — and you know Sunday was the only free day the slave had to do business. The slave masters wanted them to go to church instead to learn that every person had a place in life and slavery and poverty would always be with us — so the best thing to do was to be a good negro and accept your place. So they continued to pass the laws and harrass the people until Sunday market did die out, and now you notice we only have one or two.

Higglers didn't only go to market in the local towns and the city. They used to travel by boat to the other Caribbean islands and Central and South America to sell their goods. So when people try to make out that going to Panama and Haiti to buy and sell is something new, tell them it's a long time Jamaican woman have been travelling all about fighting for survival for themselves and their children — from slavery till now.