

WOMAN

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JAMAICA'S GARMENT WORKERS PROTEST

Hundreds of women from the Kingston Free Trade Zone took to the streets in a dramatic march on the eve of International Women's Day in this the officially declared "Year of the Worker" in Jamaica.

The marchers converged on Jamaica House, the Prime Minister's office. Whereas previous gatherings of protesters outside Jamaica House had evoked little acknowledgement from inside, this time Mr. Seaga suspended his day's schedule to meet a delegation of workers.

Garment workers' complaints about adverse working conditions have been chronicled by women's groups (e.g see Sistren Magazine Volume 8, Issue 2), by trade unions and opposition politicians to little effect.

In 1986, after the first outcry about conditions in the Free Trade Zone, Labour Minister, John Smith, visited two of the eleven garment factories there. He concluded that things were not as bad as the people had been made to believe. After the March 7 protest, Smith promised to tell employers on the Zone about the need for workers to be represented on the Joint Industrial Council. This move was acclaimed by the unions but denounced by the Free Zone companies saying it would lead to unionization of their plants. Smith then announced that instead of establishing a Joint Industrial Council, an inquiry would be held into the situation in the garment industry. In fact the situation of workers in the Zone has been clearly documented.

Some 20,000 Jamaican women are employed in the Zone. They stitch clothes mainly for the US market in what has been described as the most high-profile area of the Jamaican economy. Meanwhile the unemployment of women has reached over 60% among women under 25 years old.

In 1983 the value of Jamaica's apparel and textile exports were US\$12 million. By 1987 the figure had jumped to US\$174 million.

(Caribbean Contact Vol.15 #11 April 1988)

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH DOES SURVEY ON GARMENT INDUSTRY IN JAMAICA

A survey which was carried out in 1987 by St. Peter Clavier Roman Catholic Church in the Waltham Park Road area of Kingston showed that almost 80 percent of Free Zone Workers from that area earned less than 100 Jamaican dollars (US\$18.18) per week. After subtracting work-related expenses, two-thirds took home less than 50 Jamaican dollars per week.

In the report written by Dr. Patricia Anderson of the University of the West Indies based on personal interviews with 101 workers from 12 factories in the Kingston Free Zone, almost 70 percent of these workers had to supplement their weekly earnings by doing overtime work. Of the 101 workers surveyed, 100 were women, of which 80 percent were responsible for the support of children.

Prime Minister Seaga himself, in a speech, suggested that conditions in the Free Zone were not satisfactory and better must be done bearing in mind that workers in the garment sector are predominantly women.

Caribbean Contact, April 1988, P.5

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR NAMIBIA

1988 marks the 40th Anniversary of the UN Resolution 435 which calls for a ceasefire and free elections in Namibia. May 4 marks the 10th Anniversary of the Kassinga Massacre when 200 paratroopers from the South African army descended on a refugee camp in southern Angola overwhelming the few guards and killing 612 people.

The World Day of Prayer for a Free Namibia was commemorated on May 4. The YWCA has described the event as "a time to remember the survivors and families of the murdered victims of Kassinga".

Meanwhile in Angola, the presence of Cuban troops had provided South Africa with the excuse for a high military profile. The South African Defense Force speaks of fighting communist "expansionism" in order to save western values and democracy. The YWCA has also said that recent announcements that the Cubans will be withdrawn indicate that the Angolan government and people have been seriously debilitated by Pretoria.

Common Concern No.57, March 1988

UNILEVER DESTROYS TURKISH HOME-LANDS FOR TEA

Nine million people, mainly Kurdish communities, will be evacuated from their home-lands in Turkey to make way for the multi-national Unilever to set up tea plantations, staffed by ten pluckers. Tea pluckers are paid the equivalent of 95p a day for picking 14kg of green tea and 1p for each additional kg. Most tea pluckers are women and Pakistan and India are the largest producers where 75% of branded tea sales belong to Unilever.

Outwrite Issue 65 May, 1988

CANADIAN ABORTION LAW OVERTURNED

Toronto--Canada's Supreme Court January 28 ruled unconstitutional that country's abortion law and said it was a "profound interference with a woman's body". Canada's federal law had prohibited abortion except when a hospital board determined that a woman's life or health was in danger.

The court ruled in a 5-2 decision that the law unconstitutionally denied abortions to poor women, because well-to-do women could get around the law.

Canada now has no law restricting abortion. However, parliament is likely to pass restrictions on abortion that may be upheld in court.

The justices had different opinions. Chief Justice Brian Dickson took the strongest position. He wrote that the law violates Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was adopted six years ago.

Dickson wrote, "Forcing a woman by threat of criminal sanctions to carry a fetus to term unless she meets certain criteria unrelated to her own priorities and aspirations is a profound interference with a woman's body..."

Another justice in the majority said that the provision requiring hospital committees to approve all abortions was unconstitutional, but he said the government could regulate the later stages of pregnancy. Two other justices in the majority said a different version of hospital committees would be acceptable.

Under the law that was struck down, women who obtained illegal abortions could be sentenced to two years in prison, but there were no known prosecutions of women receiving abortions. Doctors performing illegal abortions could be sentenced to life imprisonment.

The decision was reached in the case of Dr. Henry Morgenthaler, who operates abortion clinics in Toronto and Winnipeg and has performed abortions in Montreal. He was acquitted four times in cases in Toronto and Montreal. However, the Quebec Court of Appeals in 1984 overturned a lower court acquittal and sentenced him to 18 months in prison, of which he served 11 months. This is the case in which the court ruled.

Middle class and upper class women have gone to one of Morgenthaler's clinics or the United States for abortions, but poor women were not able to go, as the Supreme Court noted in ruling the law unconstitutional.

Info from Washington Post 1/29 in Off Our Backs vol xviii no.3, March 1988

PALESTINIAN, ISRAELI WOMEN PROTEST

Many Palestinian women and some Israeli feminists are protesting the Israeli government's policy of cracking down on Palestinians on the West Bank. Many Palestinians have been killed by troops or injured by beatings; some refugee camps have been held under siege by long curfews which make it difficult for people to obtain food.

On December 28, more than 300 Palestinian women from different refugee camps in the Gaza Strip participated in a three hour sit-in at United Nation's Relief (UNRWA) headquarters in Gaza. The strike was organized by the Palestinian Women's Federation. In Jerusalem on the same day, women's organizations and mothers of detainees held a similar demonstration at the International Committee of the Red Cross headquarters.

On February 10, 70 Israeli feminists demonstrated against the government's treatment of Palestinians. Israeli peace groups also are protesting the policies.

Info from Washington Post Al-fajr, 1/3 in Off Our Backs vol. xviii no.3 March 1988

ISRAELI WOMEN IN BLACK PICKET

Israel - In three major Israeli cities, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, pickets of women dressed in black take place each Friday afternoon under one slogan: Down With the Occupation!

In each of the cities the women, identified only by the name 'the women in black' have chosen a major intersection where they are visible to hundreds of motorists stuck in the weekend traffic jams. The picket attracts about 150 women each week and is one of the most effective actions of the anti-occupation movement in Israel.

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