

# SIREN

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## LEAVE OUR RIGHTS ALONE!

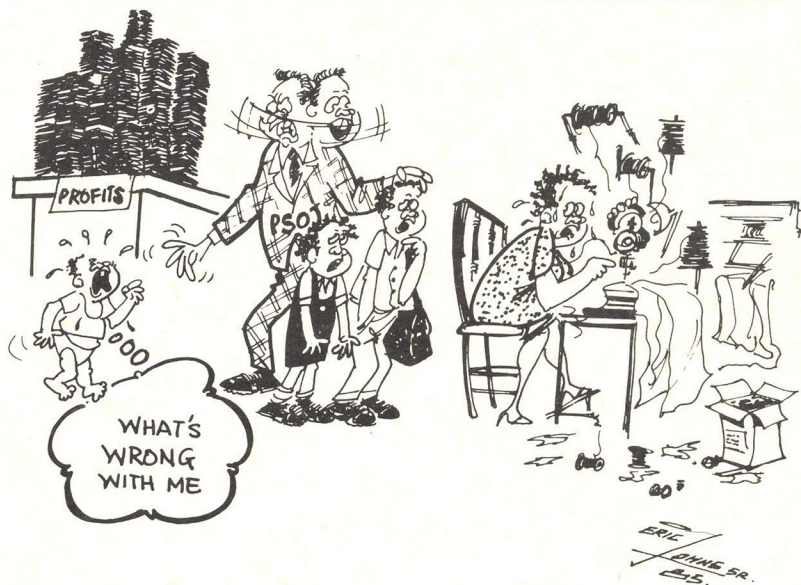
We are very pleased to observe that the drive by the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ) to cutback the Maternity Leave benefits of working women has received widespread disapproval from women's groups, as well as other organisations and respected individuals.

We note that there is no evidence of an increase in the birth rate amongst employed women since the passing of the Maternity Leave Law in 1979. On the contrary, the report of the "Jamaica Contraceptive Prevalence Survey" of the National Family Planning Board published in 1984 established that there was a dramatic decline in fertility from 4.5 to 3.5 between 1975 and 1983.

Of even more significance however is that the decline in fertility was at its greatest in the urban areas – that is the area of greatest concentration of employed women. The report therefore confirms the international experience that working women, those who are the beneficiaries of the Maternity Leave Law, have fewer children.

We also think the PSOJ's 'population initiative' is based on the myth that overpopulation is the basic cause of hunger.

In fact there is plenty of food in the world. In 1984 1799.2 million tonnes of cereal (wheat, rice, millet etc) was produced. So just in terms of cereal alone, each human being in the world could be provided with 3,000 calories per day, well over the recommended minimum of 2,500 calories per adult per day.



So what's the problem? The problem is in distribution, both within countries and between rich and poor nations. So in Jamaica, for example, 50 per cent of the land is owned by less than 1,000 planters while tens of thousands of small farmers, eke out subsistence living on plots of less than five acres each.

In Africa, which has the world's greatest food problem, only one quarter of potential arable land is being cultivated – a similar problem to that which we have in Jamaica whereby some 480,000 acres of arable land have been identified as idle, while the unemployment figure amongst women and youth has long since crashed the 50 per cent barrier.

The PSOJ goes further to say that Jamaica's Population growth, is of 'extreme concern' because the annual cost to government to provide education, health and other social benefits per child is J\$2,500

(less than J\$7.00 per day). This doesn't even begin to compare with the US\$800 million (or 44 per cent of the country's export earnings) which the government pays out each year to service debts!

We say to the PSOJ, – if you want to do something worthwhile for Jamaican working women, make representation to the government for renegotiation of the current IMF Agreement in order to re-schedule or cut down on our annual debt payments which is at the heart of the unemployment, the lay-offs and the high prices, and **LEAVE OUR RIGHTS ALONE!**

### SPECIAL FEATURES

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# ALL THE BEST FOR '86

To our friends and well wishers,

We the members of *SISTREN* thank-you for all the kind support you have given us over the past year whether in large or small ways.

We've really appreciated your company at the many events and activities in which we took part such as the **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY RALLY** at Scouts Headquarters and "**SISTER'S CELEBRATION**" at Zinc Fence, the first **CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE EXCHANGE** and **JAMFEST**, to name a few.

Your company was equally appreciated during our anniversary Festival, at performances of **MUFFET**, our first *Textiles Exhibition*, the premiere of "*Sweet Sugar Rage*" and our special Festival Workshops. We express appreciation also to those who have sent us invitations and helped us to give performances and attend various regional and international seminars, Workshops and Festivals. In this we have broadened our links and deepened our understanding and unity with sisters in Barbados, St. Lucia, Belize, Martinique, Argentina, Canada and America as well as from various other countries of the world at international conferences in Moscow and Nairobi.

Our special thanks to those who have helped to sponsor our various activities.

Kindly accept our very best wishes for a happy Christmas and a prosperous and successful New Year.

Lorna Burrell-Haslam for *SISTREN*

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Editor:** Joan Ross-Frankson

**Consultants:** Pauline Crawford  
Lana Finikin  
Honor Ford-Smith  
Lillian Foster  
Beverly Hanson  
Jennifer Jones  
Hillary Nicholson  
Delores Robinson

**Photography:** Homer Heron  
Ann Hodges  
Maurice Frankson

**Design/Art:** Baldwin Daley  
**Typesetter:** Coleen Donaldson

# WE 'RE MOVING

On taking one step inside the front door you bump into the textile table. Next, you are bound to knock against one of an assortment of objects — it may be a chair, a drum, a barrel of costumes or some unrecognisable theatre prop. You try to smile cheerfully at the various sisters squeezed between the 12' x 5' textile table and the walls. They should be Textile Team but they may well be Workshop or Theatre Team trying to steal a section of the table despite a stern notice on the wall forbidding such attempts!



Our new backyard.

Actually, we've had some very good times at 100 Hope Road and it was a liberating experience to move into our own headquarters three years ago, but growth has turned that liberating situation into an increasingly frustrating experience. You feel you could scream sometimes — sometimes we do!

Impossible though it seemed, we decided we had to find a way forward — and that way meant finding a premises which we could own and which had space.

We are now in the process of converting the premises shown in the pictures into rehearsal room, offices, a textile area, including production, sewing and display areas, and a documentation centre/library.

Sistren is proud to have reached the point where our work with and on behalf of the grassroots women of Jamaica, starting from the humblest beginnings, has resulted in what we hope will be a cultural centre devoted to the needs and creativity of our women.



Front view of our new offices before refurbishing started.

We wish to publicly thank the funding agency which has made our move possible, even though they wish to remain anonymous.

We are now hoping that some enlightened businesses, despite the hard times will make a contribution to helping us make the necessary alterations and to paint and furnish our new premises which are five times larger than our previous location.

We need, among other things, the following, second or first hand:

- 1 typing desk
- 2 doz stackable chairs
- 2 full-length mirrors
- 2 filing cabinets
- 1 single bed
- 1 textile designing table
- 1 large reading table
- 1 two-burner gas stove
- 1 electric kettle
- kitchen/dining utensils

We don't want every room to have so little furniture that all you can do is rehearse or provide duppy lodging! If you have any contacts or suggestions or can help us with the above list, let us know. We move during January and we want you all to come and visit us, even before you get your invitation to "warm-up" the place at a date to be decided.

The new address is 20 Kensington Cres, Kingston 5. Tel: 92-92457. Check us nuh!!

# THE SPORTING LIFE

Half an hour after we checked Marcia and Sharon for an interview about their lives as prostitutes the police came. They bundled up eight of the girls and herded them off to the -----Police Station, about five miles away. Marcia hid in the bushes. Sharon had just gone off with a client so they escaped the dragnet.

But the Police station wasn't too bad. The girls got to stay in the station room (carpet, video and comfortable chairs) and took the bus back to town next day after being released on \$4.00 bail in their own surety.

It could have been much worse. Marcia and Sharon tell me two days later. "When the police have no money, them search every corner of New Kingston a look fi wi. Sometime, dem beat up de gal dem and tek way dem money. Some of dem come demanding p--- Dem say p--- or money else dem lock you up or carry you go lef' you in some desperate place; inna de bush up a Lawrence Tavern or outa airport; pon Spanish Town Road; all Tivoli Garden, and let you go two, three o'clock a morning."

Prison is dismal. Chinks. Cold concrete ground and filth; cussing between the 'sports' and the girls who are in for 'crotching' (shoplifting). "Dem go on like dem scorn wi . . . . say how wi a whore and wi have disease. But me have my doctor and mi go regular," says Marcia.

Marcia is 43 years old. Body fit, wiry and strong. She didn't get any education; doing domestic work from early. She's got five children, three girls and two boys. The eldest is twenty-three and the youngest thirteen. All of them have different fathers.

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**"THREE-QUARTERS WANT STRAIGHT SEX..... OTHERS GET KICKS IN DIFFERENT WAYS....."**

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She started 'sporting' when she had her first. "The father didn't own the child and I had life hard."

After twenty-three years in the business, Marcia is tired. "If I get a job right now at \$100.00 (a week), I'd stop. You come out on the street and you bleach all night and you don't even mek a dime. And you have to pay rent, water rate, light bill. When mi check it up is over \$500.00 fi dis month."

Sharon is 36. She looks ten years younger. Her skin is black and smooth and she laughs alot; a hearty laugh, very warm, very attractive. Her education was limited by the fact that she got pregnant at fourteen. She's got seven children, and seven baby fathers. She talks alot about her "German" daughter, Cindy-Lou. She's proud of her pretty skin and hair.

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**"THE POLICE ..... BEAT UP DE GAL DEM....."**

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Sharon is defensive about her children, they both are.

"Dem shouldn't mind wey de money come from as long as dem get it and dem happy. Dem not going school less dan dem should. Them don't feel themself less a mong the other children".

Neither Marcia or Sharon want to talk too much about whether their children know what they do for a living. It hurts.

Sharon says she's not getting out of the life until she gets something out of it. Despite the hard times she still makes money; enough to go to

the supermarket every week with \$200.00 and the market with \$60.00. Mid-week and she tells you proudly that her family is eating roast beef, rice and peas and sour-sop juice with lime.

Sharon still has energy. She forcefully maintains optimism for the future and some man or other setting her up in business.

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**"JUDGE, LAWYER, DOCTOR. . . . IS WHO ME DEAL WID'".**

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She wants to tell me about her clients. She leans forward and lowers her voice.

"Mi nuh deal with local. Judge, lawyer, doctor, the up to date people is who me deal with, and nice foreigners. Even movie stars, dem see mi and like mi and mek love to me. Woman check mi to. Sometimes a man and a woman will check mi and we mek love together."

She lowers her voice still further. "Three-quarters of dem want sex but some of them really don't want to have sex. Sometimes they just smell you panty and dem discharge. Sometimes them just mek you tek off your clothes and stand up and wine and dem come. Them just get kicks off dat. Some of dem you beat dem, tie dem up. Some want you fi walk like dog."

She laughs at me. I think I look disgusted. She tosses her braids, is defensive again. "Is just you and him alone, so you don't feel anyway because you working fi money."

There are those men who brutalise the girls. Beat them up. Cut up their faces and bodies, take back their money. Marcia and Sharon don't want to dwell on the details

Cont'd on P. 12

# SISTA ANSA AND GRANNY CHAT BOUT... PEACE

PAULINE REALLY TEK UP A BAD FLU. DI DOCTOR GIMME A PAPER FI BUY SOME WHOLE HEAD A MEDICINE BUT WEH MI A GO GET DI MONEY FI BUY DI MEDICINE?!

**KNOCK! KNOCK!**

AH WHO DAT A KNOCK PON MI DOOR INNA DIS YA TIME, EEH?

IS ME, GRANNY. YU NUH HEAR SEH SOME WOMAN AH KEEP PEACE RALLY?? YU NAH COME WID MI?

GRANNY, MI CAAN GO NUH WEH AT ALL TODAY. MI HAFFI JUMP ROUN AN LOOK BOUT DI MEDICINE FI PAULINE.

AN FURTHERMORE, NO WAR NUH DEH BOUT YA SINCE COUPLE MONTHS NOW.

HOW YU SO HOT FI GO A RALLY WEN YU ALWAYS A SEM YU CYAAN GO NO WEH THRU DI ARTHRITIS AN DI PRESSURE?

IS DI MEDICINE FI DI ARTHRITIS AN DI PRESSURE REALLY MEK MI HAFFI GO...

WHAT MEDICINE HAFFI DO WID PEACE?!

WHOLE HEAD!! MEK MI TELL YU WEH MI FIND OUT...

'DI AMERICAN GOVT. SPEND A WHOLE HEAD A MONEY PON WEAPONS...'

'MR REAGAN HAFFI BORROW WHOLE HEAP A MONEY FROM DI BANK FI PAY FI DI ARMS...'

WE HAVE TO KEEP THE WORLD SAFE FOR U.S. BUSINESS BY BORROWING MORE TO PAY FOR A BIGGER MILITARY BUDGET... AND SPEND LESS ON HEALTH AND FOOD... THEN WE CAN HAVE PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH.

REAGAN ADDRESSING U.S. CONGRESS

DANGER STAR WARS RESEARCH CENTRE KEEP OUT

'WID IM BIG WAR BUDGET IM GIVE WHOLE HEAD A ARMS TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVT FI USE GAINST BLACK PEOPLE; ...IM BOMB GRENADA...'

AND IS REALLY WE WHO PAY FI IM BIG WAR BUDGET...'

HELLO THERE EDDY BADNEWS! THAT LOAN WE ARRANGED LAST WEEK WILL COST JAMAICA MORE IN INTEREST. THE U.S. GOVT HAS BORROWED MORE AND WE HAVE TO RAISE OUR INTEREST RATES ALL ROUND

AND SO WE HAVE TO CUT BACK ON EDUCATION AND HEALTH SO WE CAN PAY BACK THE INTEREST ON OUR LOAN...

SEAGA ADDRESSING THE NATION ON TV

'SO WHEN MI GO A HOSPITAL...'

**NOTICE**  
DUE TO SHORTAGE OF MONEY THIS HOSPITAL IS CLOSED.

DATS WHAT MEDICINE (AND EDUCATION TOO) HAFFI DO WID PEACE

HOLD ON DEH GRANNY ME A GO A DI RALLY WID YU!!

GERALD!! WATCH PAULINE, MI NOT HERE.

**PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO ALL MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN!**



# "MUFFET" HITS NEW YORK



SISTREN performed "Muffet Inna All A Wi" and "Sistren Songs" at the prestigious 5th Festival of Latino Culture in New York from August 8 - 18.

The festival is organised by America's leading theatre producer Joseph Papp, who is internationally renowned for creating the New York Shakespeare Festival and popularising innovative theatre. SISTREN had the honour of being the only cultural group from the English-speaking Caribbean invited to take part in Festival Latino.

"Even (those) who may have had difficulty understanding the creole, could not help but be swept up by the message of the songs".

Lisa Merrill, (THE VILLAGER)

"The audience got SISTREN's message but it also got a lot of fun, thanks to the upbeat reggae music, the colourful costumes and SISTREN's outstanding dance-performance."

Ute Buesing, (THE CITY SUN)

"These women have returned the art of making and enjoying theatre to the people from whom drama emerged in the first place."

Annette Walker, (GUARDIAN)

"SISTREN must be commended for the high level of theatre they brought to circle in the Square."

Hazel Beckles, (CARIB NEWS, N.Y.)



The "trickster", Beverley Hanson (l) is annoyed by arguments put by "rude boy", Lillian Foster (r) as they discuss a ganja deal.

Photography: Lydia Douglas

"SISTREN may not be creating universal masterpieces, but it is fulfilling theatre's primary function: it hits the nerve centres of its own community."

Eileen Blumenthal, (VILLAGE VOICE.)



TOURING THE RADIO STATIONS: (top) Ken Williams at WNYE (l) interviews (l - r) Hilary Nicholson, Sistren Resource and musicians Richard White and Eugene Hamilton.

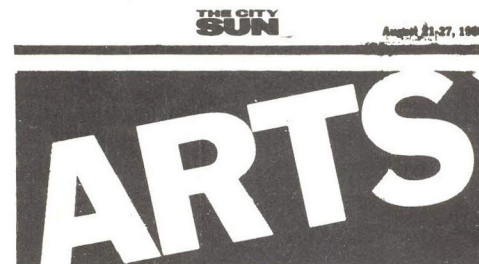
(Below)

Lana Finikin (l), and Beverley Hanson (r) pose with Muffett Director, Eugene Williams (seated) and popular West Indian DJ, Habte Selassie in the studios of WBAI, following the West Indian call-in programme, "Labrish".



"We nah loose wi dignity": The four "Muffett" characters (l-r) Lana Finikin, Lillian Foster, Beverley Elliott and Lorna Burrell-Haslam, declare their intention to struggle on.

Photography: Lydia Douglas



Sistren members were interviewed by several local newspapers.

## "MUFFET" - COMMUNITY PERFORMANCES

Sistren will be performing "MUFFET INNA ALL A WI" in communities across the island during January, February and March, 1986. Groups wishing to arrange performances in their communities should contact:

Lana Finikin  
Sistren Theatre Collective  
20 Kensington Cres. Kgn 5.  
Tel: 929-2457

# 1st. Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange

## RESEARCH IN ACTION



60-minute piece which the participants had developed through collective creation in only four weeks of work in Kingston.

"**IDA REVOLT**" was performed to six different communities in Jamaica. 2,500 people, mostly working class, saw this piece of "street theatre". The central theme of the play was that working class women make history when they struggle for autonomy for themselves, and against those who exploit them, and not merely for a share of this system as it is.

Two days after the final performance on October 6th, the first CPTE came to an end with a call on governments of the region to facilitate popular theatre work which affirms the cultural identity and independence of the Caribbean in the face of increased imperialist activity in the region. In their final declaration participants also called for popular theatre work to deal specifically with the concerns of women and youth.



**WARMING UP FOR ACTION:** Rebecca Knowles of Sistren Theatre Collective leads participants in the Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange in 'Manuel Road', one of the warm-up games used by the group in workshops sessions. With her at right is Diane Haylock of the Professional Theatre Repertory of Belize while Janis Jarvis an observer from the Cockpit Theatre Group in London, looks on in obvious enjoyment.

Photography: Heron

Women's Movements and Organisations in a Historical Perspective.

Now Ms. Campbell is about to reaffirm the play's message with her true story.

"Tell us your story", shouts Actor Boy in the dim light from one floodlamp. Ms. Campbell describes the conditions of the 1930s.

"Just de same as nowadays", says one woman in the audience.

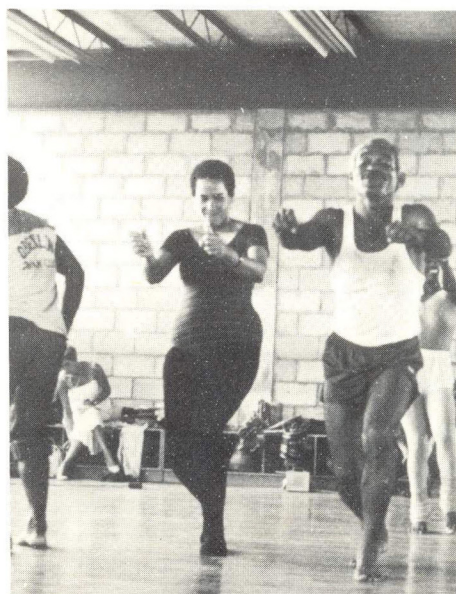
"Tings worsen now!", says another.

Graphically Ms. Campbell describes the participation of women in the uprising — laying to rest the idea that women are docile and subservient, and adding her words to the process of bringing out of the shadows the little known story of the activism of women in the 1930s.

"Is people like dem we need today", concludes an old lady as the actors applaud the audience, making the connection between the struggles of the past and the problems of the present.

The actors are from nine different Caribbean countries — St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Belize. In Petersfield we had completed the last performance of a

Interpreter, Joan French (l) and actor, Homer Heron, take part in warm-up exercises at the start of another hectic day.



"Actor Boy" Winston Bell of the Graduate Theatre Company (centre) holds the attention of the audience at Petersfield, Westmoreland.

Photography: Hodges.

### WOMEN AND HISTORY AMONG THE PEOPLE: THE CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE EXCHANGE.

by Honor Ford-Smith

"There is a woman here among us who was in the 1938 uprising at Frome," shouts the man dressed as the traditional Joncunnu character, Actor Boy.

Around him and several other colourfully dressed actors is a crowd of about 800 who have gathered outside the Petersfield Secondary School, Westmoreland to watch participants from the first Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange (CPTE) perform "**IDA REVOLT INNA JONCUNNU STYLEE**".

The crowd waits quietly as Hortense Campbell, a retired sugar worker, makes her way to the platform. Her testimony was one of those which formed the basis for the play the audience had just seen. It had been uncovered in interviews with women for the research project



**STREET THEATRE ALIVE AND WELL:** Scores of adults and children jumped-up with the rival Joncunnu bands to the rhythms of drums, shakers, graters, fife and "iron" bell during community performances of "Ida".

Photography: Frankson

**LILLIAN FOSTER.**

"This was a wonderful experience for us as Jamaicans being able to invite people from various countries to share in an exchange of cultures. Time was our greatest enemy, and limited the extent to which we could share our experience."

**BEVERLEY HANSON.**

"It was a good idea sharing each others views and seeing how each person works; to see how serious theatre is to the actors and actresses. The language barrier was there but this was not too much of a problem to us."

**JERLINE TODD**

"It was a wonderful experience to see the different cultures. It was only a pity that we did not invite more countries and that we could not get to travel to the other countries to do the performances."

*The CPTe design team was headed by Keith Agard, Design Tutor, Jamaica School of Drama and set designer Michael 'MBALA' Bailey, seen below working on "horse-head".*



Rosanna Ramirez, Director Esclavas del Fogon.

**'FEMALE SLAVES OF THE FIRESIDE'**

Esclavas del Fogon (The Female Slaves of the Fireside) is a community-based women's cultural group in the Dominican Republic.

The aim of the group is two-fold: to combat the influence of North American Culture in their country and to liberate themselves as women. The ten artistes and 70 other women making up the group use Popular theatre, music, song and poetry to advance their aim.

The Director of Esclavas del Fogon, Rosanna Ramirez represented the group at the Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange.

Following are extracts from her introductory remarks about the group.

In the Dominican Republic, we have the same problems of trans-culturalisation. Our way of being is heavily influenced by North American culture. All African cultural influence is denied.

It is very difficult for a group like ours

that is working for the liberation of women and of the people, to work in my country. The economic, political and social conditions of women generally speaking is slave-like.

In our work, we expose the situation of the peasantry, the situation of workers, the situation of children, of women and of the people in general. In Santo Domingo and in the whole of the Dominican Republic, they call us a protest group and we have been rejected by all of the bourgeois sectors. They have tried to destroy our group because of this and so it has been really difficult to stay together, and taken a lot of personal sacrifice on the part of each individual group member. One of the ways in which they have tried to destroy us is to deny us access to the means of communication, which are controlled by the North American companies. We receive pressure through our parents, some of whom are employed by those companies. We have been fired from our jobs.

In six years we have done more than 300 presentations all over the country. We are recognised as the group which represents the eastern section of the country whenever there are national competitions.

*Master classes were given by poet, Dennis Scott, (below at right), Professor Rex Nettleford, Cabildo Teatral members, Ramiro Herrero, Rogelio Meneses Celeste Garbey and Milan Gali, and oral historian, Margaret Bernal. Seen in discussion with Dennis, (l - r) Lana Finikin; Jean Small, Director; Beverley Hanson and Ras Moses of the Movement for Cultural Awareness in Dominica.*

Photography: Heron



# SISTREN MOVEMENTS



*SISTREN Textiles took part in the Jamaica Ladies Circle Old Tyme Fayre. Picture shows Cerene Stephenson (l) and May Thompson (r) at the SISTREN stall.*

## BELIZE

Our trip to BELIZE in November to take part in an exchange of skills and experiences with the Belizean grassroots women's group LU FULURI represented many significant 'firsts' for us.

It was our first visit to BELIZE and it was the first time SISTREN members have travelled independently of resource personnel. So for the first time a SISTREN member, Stage Manager, **Lana Finikin** was co-ordinator of an overseas tour. In addition **Pauline Crawford** was appointed Workshop Director. A feather in the caps of both **Lana** and **Pauline**.

Another first — **Cerene Stephenson**, Textile Manageress, toured as a teacher, leading workshops in printing techniques used by SISTREN.

We also conducted workshops in our Popular Education and theatre techniques and had two showings of our film, "SWEET SUGAR RAGE".

We in turn learnt first hand about the various uses the women of LU FULURI make of cassava. We all agreed **Rebecca Knowles**, was the SISTREN who made the neatest cassava bread, but all of us tried!!

We also learnt alot from the GARIFUNA peasant women of LU FULURI, about their work in retrieving and presenting GARIFUNA cultural traditions and the role of women in these traditions, which is the main focus of the group.

Pauline Crawford



*Pauline Crawford (l) and Rebecca Knowles (r) learn how to reap cassava.*

## NEW YORK

**May Thompson** was well received at the Second Annual Conference of the CUNY Association of Caribbean Studies which had as its topic "Pan-Caribbean Transformation. . . At home and abroad".

**May** received long and enthusiastic applause for her presentation on SISTREN's work, which included audience participation in a workshop piece.

The event took place from September 20 - 21 at the **Brooklyn College Student Centre**.



*Drummer, Joy Erskine (2nd right) gets down to the task of washing the cassava along with members of LU FULURI.*



*Garifuna peasant women of LU FULURI take part in a traditional dance, PUNTA, which is based on African rhythms.*

## BARBADOS

**Cerene Stephenson** represented SISTREN at a three-day regional consultation on **Communication for Human Development** at **St. Phillip** in Barbados from September 3-5. The consultation was jointly sponsored by the New York-based ecumenical agency **Intermedia**, the world **Association for Christian Communication** and the **Caribbean Conference of Churches**.

## ST. LUCIA

**Jennifer Jones** took part in the second meeting of the Regional Seminar on **The Media, Communication and Development in the Caribbean**, from October 9 - 13.

The meeting noted that regional governments had made no progress in counteracting the massive penetration of our societies by foreign culture and political thought, through new communications technologies.

In this regard participants called for the terms of licensing of broadcasting facilities to include a requirement for an increased percentage of programming originating within the Caribbean region.

## WOMEN '85

Crisis centres for raped and battered women are important resources. Women have fought for these services as part of their struggle for independence and self-worth.

For two years, the organizers of **Women '85** have worked to build up crisis centres in Jamaica and we commend them for this.

*Cont'd on P. 9*

# WOMEN'S STUDIES: ACADEMIC CARROT?

Eleven years ago, when I went to university, there was no such thing as Women's Studies. If you wanted to find out anything about what was happening to women, you had to spend hours pouring over so-called "general" material – searching, often in vain, for the odd fact that related to women. Today Women's Studies is offered in many universities.

But whose interest does it really serve to devote special attention to the study of women? Does Women's Studies help to give women power? Or does it merely entrench their exploitation, by confining it – apartheid style – to a ghetto area of knowledge.

These were some of the questions that were in my mind when I attended the recent forum on Women and Society which was part of a workshop in social history organised by the department of History, U. W.I., Mona.

Women's experiences in society as trade unionists, as higglers and as plantation workers were examined, and it was impressive to see the amount of information that women scholars from the Caribbean have unearthed about women.

A paper on the Emigration of East Indian Women to Jamaica and Their Experiences in the Plantation Society 1845 - 1945 by Verene Shepherd was of

particular interest.

The paper demolished the racist and sexist stereotype of Indian women as innately submissive and sexually insatiable. It showed concretely that many of the Indian women who had migrated to the Caribbean, far from being submissive, had in fact worked side by side with men on the sugar estates – often for less money than the men. They had come to the Caribbean with the hope of bettering their lives and the lives of their children. Shepherd herself was not present at the forum and Brian Moore, another scholar was asked to discuss her paper.

In a "cavalier" tone of voice as if serious discussion of the issue was really beneath him, he emphasised the traditional view that East Indian women were prostitutes and manipulators of men.

Overlooking ample evidence of the intention of the colonial authorities to further "housewife ideology" in the Caribbean, he even denied that women were paid less for doing equal work with men on sugar estates. Moore's arguments confirmed the stereotyped view that "coolie woman a white liver".

When he was finished a few women raised their hands to refute his position, but they did not get the chance as the focus of the discussion was unfortunately

shifted by the chairperson.

Apart from sloppy scholarship, the incident illustrates one of the dilemmas of the movement to establish Women's Studies on university campuses. As yet there is no clear framework which allows us to examine how the exploitation of women is reinforced or which emphasises the connection of this exploitation to the struggles of women outside the campus.

If this connection is absent, Women's Studies will never be an academic field which empowers women.

Rather at worst it will provide career openings in a new field for publications and grant-getting which allows a certain class of men and women to make their name while continuing to re-inforce old stereotypes. It could also develop a new form of the sexual division of labour which in effect gives the women who protested about sexual inequality in academia, a carrot to shut them up.

We need Women's Studies, but we need a women's studies that will help in the process of building a network of women strong enough to speak out against limited visions of our humanity and which will serve us in our struggle for an alternative vision of the world.

HFS

Cont'd from P. 8

However, Woman '85 – as an exposition – seemed to be in contradiction to this struggle for independence and self-worth.

As we squeezed through the crowds we saw a sprinkling of small business exhibitions among huge displays from Life Insurance companies and large manufacturing concerns. Many booths promoted beauty products and hairdressing.

Nowhere in the exhibition itself was it clear that all this was in service of fundraising for women who have been battered and raped. The displays themselves did not address this issue at all and so any stereo-typed views on the question of sexual violence we might have held, went unchallenged. In fact the image of women as promoted was that of the fashion doll and the consumer. For the majority of Jamaican women, this image



Women from many different countries viewed SISTREN'S exhibition, "Dutty Tuff" – Women's Labour and Organisations, 1900 - 1944, at the Institute of

Social Studies, in Holland. The exhibition was based on research by SISTREN Resource person, Joan French and Artistic Director, Honor Ford-Smith.

re-inforces our passive dependency on men and on big business, which profits from the money we spend as consumers.

While commending the organising committee for starting the crisis centres and for the skill displayed in bringing off Woman '85, we feel that an exhibition of that magnitude needs to promote a more positive image of the strength of Jamaican women and to relate more to

the day to day reality of ordinary Jamaican woman.

The contradiction between the aim of the exhibition and the means it used to raise money, leads us to ask – does the end justify the means? Or is it the means – that is, promoting an image of woman as a fashionable consumer – really an end in itself?

HFS.

# WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

The WOMEN'S CONSTRUCTION COLLECTIVE is a special project of the CONSTRUCTION RESOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE in Kingston Jamaica.

The project was started on an experimental basis in September 1983. Initially, it aimed at training ten unemployed women from the ghettos of Western Kingston in construction skills, finding them jobs on construction sites and documenting their progress.

However, response to the project was extremely positive, and as a result the intake of trainees was expanded.

Since 1983, thirty-four women have been trained in construction skills and the project has achieved a ninety-three per cent job placement rate. Members of the Collective have received further training ranging from driving to book-keeping and blueprint reading.

The Collective is now marketing its skills in new areas, as a result of the current slump in the Jamaican Construction Industry which has led to a shortage of new jobs as few new building sites are starting up. These new areas for the Collective include the initiation of a repair and maintenance business, which specialises in home repairs and extensions. Members of the Collective are also playing a key role in a new project which is



— WCC members helped to construct this apartment block on Old Hope Road.

Photography: Frankson



— Preparing to mix cement.

Photography: Frankson

aimed at reducing the weaknesses of non-engineered wooden housing to hurricanes.

The following comments are from a wide-ranging interview conducted with 22-year-old Sandra Hall, 22-year-old Lorna Perry and 18-year-old Pauline White, all of whom have been working with the Collective for over a year.

#### Relations with Male Construction Workers:

"The older ones are very sympathetic and they assist us with the benefit of their experience. (But) the younger ones are prejudice against us. . . . they feel the woman is taking over their world."

#### Equality with the Male Workers:

"We do all the heavy work just like them. . . we push our wheel barrows ourselves, we mix our own concrete. It's not true (that women are the weaker sex) because right now, with what we are doing, we are stronger than most men. Of course this is because, with this work we are doing, most men who are not in the business couldn't help themselves."

#### Attitudes of Contractors:

"The only complaint we get from the Contractors is that they need more women! They say they find the ladies do more work, there is less violence amongst them and they sort of pull together. The

men them cuss them badword and them chop up them one another, but you don't find the ladies doing that. They say you have less idleness among the women."

#### Qualifications & Training:

"Each of our ladies do basic tests in maths and english and then get at least five weeks training at the Vocational Training Development Institute (VTDI) near Gordon Town. Then when you go out on the site, you're generally out there as a grade 3. So the site supervisor puts you to work with a grade 1 worker. That way you working and earning money, and asking questions and learning at the same time. When we first started, none of us knew anything about construction work. (For the future) we have decided we want new members to have at least a basic knowledge of the construction work. When they are in if there is need for them to do further studies we will send them."

#### Getting the Jobs:

"Before any of us started out, Mrs. Ruth McLeod, (WCC Co-ordinator) told the contractors about us. After we worked with them, they in turn passed on our names and addresses and you find that a next person call us in. So we are sort of spreading. Even though we've been working now for two years, you find some people still don't know about us. We'll have to do more publicising, but first we want to set ourselves on firm ground."

#### Relations within the Collective:

"Working in the Collective is like building a whole new family. We work even, share the work equal. We try to assist each other and if it is fun time, is fun time and when its work, we just work."

"We get encouragement to talk out our problems, and the Collective is very understanding about this. For example when one member didn't have anyone to stay with her child, they arranged for her to get money to have it looked after."

Contact the Women's Construction Collective for further information and services at:

Construction Resource & Development Centre  
166½ Old Hope Road  
Kingston 6, Jamaica.  
Tel: 92-73678

# WOMEN IN THE ARTS

## Dawn Scott



Artist Dawn Scott, famous for her fine art batik pieces, has shaken up the local art scene with an entirely new form. "It's all of Jamaica's most negative aspects condensed . . . " said one visitor to the National Gallery, where Dawn's environmental mixed media installation "A Cultural Object" has caused a high level of interest.

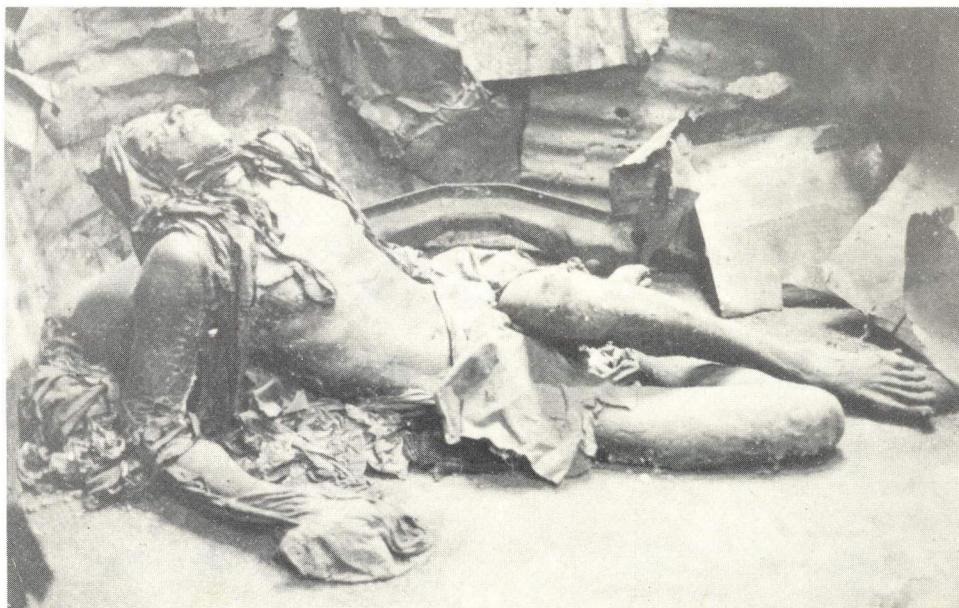
Dawn says of the piece, a large realistic ghetto-like environment into which viewers must walk, "The emphasis is on waste; how peoples time and lives are wasted, and how we are all bombarded with it everyday."

Dawn is seen at left standing in one

section of the piece. The photo below shows the "madman" who didn't have enough stamina to stand up to the bombardment.

The piece was first exhibited along with other environmental sculpture by David Boxer, Laura Facey, Colin Garland, Joyce Scott and Sam Gilliam in the first such exhibition put on in Jamaica. The art form is used a lot in the advanced countries where there are more subsidies for artists. Dawn says she couldn't afford such a peice normally. It took two months to complete at a cost of \$4,000.00.

Photography: Hodges



## Collective Poster



Female artists, Judith Salmon, Rachel Fearing, Joan Bellow and Sharon Chacko combined their talents to produce a poster in commemoration of the end of the United Nations Decade of Women (above). The poster is on sale in most book stores, pharmacies and gift shops.

## Beti Campbell

Designer Beti Campbell had her second major exhibition upstairs the "Upstairs, Downstairs Gallery", Harbour Street, at the end of November. Beti's introduced a beautiful new range of designs based on plant and landscape forms in subtle pastels which adorn a variety of pieces for home and office including wall hangings, bedspreads, cushions, screens, rugs, tablecloths and hammocks. Designs in brighter colours are also available.

Photography: Frankson.



# Poetry

Cracked hands  
Drop down hands

Big hands

Fain Tek over

The hands are very stiff

Rough Hands

Swell hands

Working hands

Nervous hands

Hard working woman

The hands dem corn up

Sick and tired

Dropping the fertilizer has caused  
These hands to sore

Hard work mek the hands rough

Dem swell; dem have Arthritis

Finger dem swivel up

Finger dem swell

Through di hard work, fertilizer

Mek di hands dem rough

Old age tek place with the hands

Using the bill, the hands corn up

Finger dem sieze up  
The joints dem numb and shaky,  
Pressure cause dat  
Years of exploitation takes the poor

These two hands do a lot of work

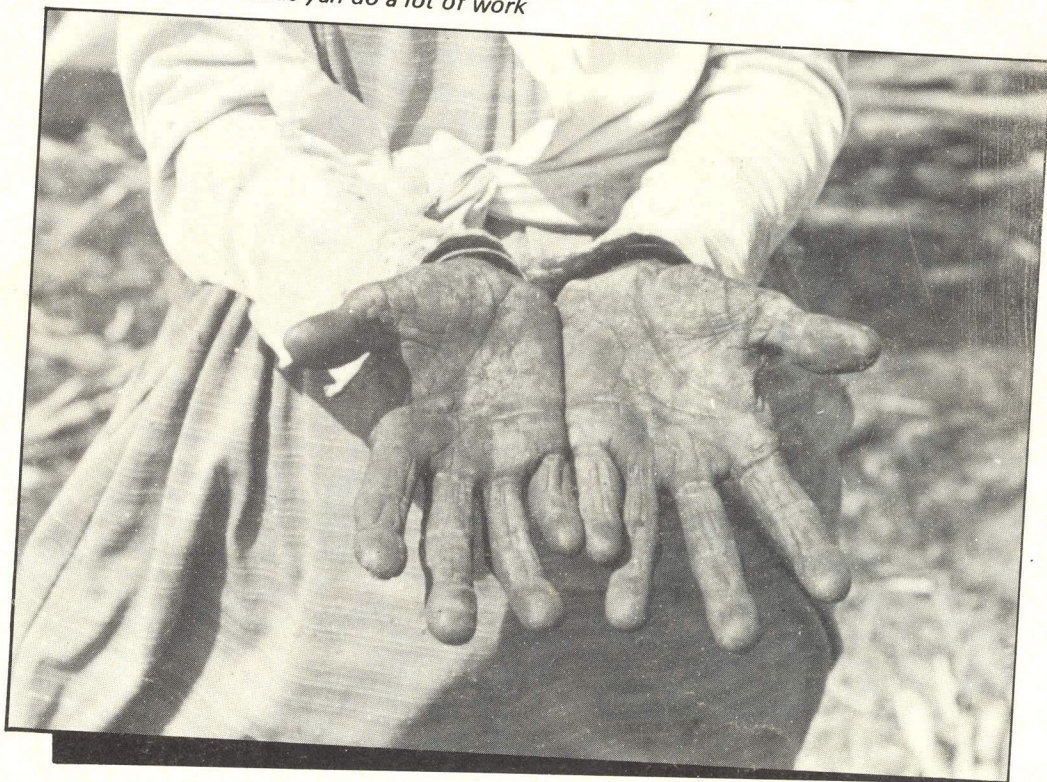
These two hands yah do a lot of work

Collective Poem

Written by

Members of FROME

CULTURAL CLUB



Cont'd from P. 3.

of dealing with those men. It's one of the hardships of the life, like police brutality and prison. Like f----- in the bushes or in the back of a car. Like catching sex-related diseases.

Neither Marcia or Sharon have a stable relationship with a man.

"I always say, if a man love a woman, he doesn't want to know that another man going to bed with her. And, in this life you not home at night to look after him . . ."

They describe the ladies who go into the 'sporting' life.

"You have high-class, second-class, middle class, low-class, everybody. You have some type of girl that even though I'm a prostitute, when you look pon dem you wonder if man really go to bed wid dem".

There's a nurse on the block they tell me. They found out she was a

nurse when one of the girls had to go into hospital. She can't pay her bills on her nurse's salary. Another is a 'strong christian'; goes to church every Sunday. She specialises in 'blow jobs'.

One middle-class girl they know, who has her own apartment in a 'good' area, gets a taxi to the Pegasus every evening, buys a drink and settles herself. Soon enough they'll see her come out again, perhaps with two or three men, who she'll entertain at her apartment for the night.

But, the girls on the street don't have it officially to go and sit down in the clubs and the hotels and buy drinks.

Marcia and Sharon are getting restless now. It's past ten-thirty. The week so far has been bad. In a good week they say they make up to a thousand dollars. But times are hard. Economic crisis is hitting the trade. Even the lawyers and doctors

can't afford to check them like they used to. They admit that tonight even a 'local' would do.

They fix themselves up to go back on the job. They don't dress up too much in case potential clients think they're too expensive.

I drive them to their block. They greet the other girls. Business is slow, Marcia looks desperately up and down the empty street. Sharon laughs and tells me the other girls think I'm a client.

I wish them luck and leave them to the night. Tina Turner belts out "Private Dancer" on the car radio, and I think about the system which has created the thousands of Marcias and Sharons and condemned them to the sporting life.

JRF

The above is based on an interview with two prostitutes. All names have been changed to protect their identities. Ed.