

WOMAN SPEAK!

No. 26 & 27 1990

A MAGAZINE ABOUT CARIBBEAN WOMEN



**WORKING
HANDS:**

**CARIBBEAN
WOMEN
ORGANISING**

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WOMAN SPEAK!

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The embroidery seen in the photographs on the front cover was done by women of the Red Thread Women's Group, Guyana.

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DOUBLE ISSUE

WAND wishes to advise all subscribers that this issue of *WOMAN SPEAK!* is a double issue and will be the only issue for this year.

This special issue of Woman Speak! is dedicated to Arah Hector, first co-ordinator of Women for Caribbean Liberation, who was murdered nineteen months ago on her family farm in Antigua.

When Arah was killed, news headlines referred to her only as "Tim Hector's Wife". She was Tim Hector's wife, and by her own admission, came to the kind of political activism in which she was involved through him. What is important to us, however, is not how she began; it is what she was becoming, an activist of the Caribbean women's movement respected in her own right.

We wish so much that the love we are expressing for her today had been there with her as she faced that lonely terror on May 28, 1989.



The late Arah Hector (far right) participating in a session at WAND's Consultation, held in November, 1988. Others in photo are (clockwise) Wendy Hill, Linda Carty, Jacqui Alexander, Heather O'Garro, Judy Williams and Joyce Bynoe.

EDITORIAL

The WAND Consultation of Caribbean women activists held in November 1988 involved participants from a spread of women's groups in the Caribbean Community. Its main purpose was to assess the state of our organisations: their strengths and weaknesses, how much influence they are having, how widely they are reaching. We talked about these things in the context of the present economic crisis in the region and of the IMF/ World Bank 'solution' which our governments are imposing, the policy of structural adjustment which is based on the further exploitation of the poor and especially of the waged and unwaged labour of women.

The Caribbean economy is changing. More and more people, particularly women, are working in the informal sector. More and more women are doing paid work, often individually, in their homes. This development raises organisational issues to which our trade unions and political parties do not seem alert.

The growth of the Caribbean Community Women's Movement (CCWM) is the result of many factors: it comes out of a long tradition of Caribbean women's rebellion; it is part of a resurgence in the international women's movement; and it is part of the rise of non-government organisations in the region that is in the main, a response to the crisis we face.

It is also fuelled by something the Consultation did not discuss: a new growth in 'informal' organisations that the mass of Caribbean women are fashioning as tools of their survival and fight-back against the worsening conditions. That the Consultation did not discuss this is a reflection of the disconnection of many of our organisations from the women in whose name we claim to speak.

This issue of *WOMAN SPEAK!* is about the CCWM, past and present; the crisis in the region; and the response of women to that crisis. It reveals our uncertainties over where we are going and our disagreements over what are the most radically creative forms and bases of organising. It makes no proposals, but includes discussion of three types of organisation which women are attempting to build both here and internationally. It tries to carry out an essential task which Selma James of the International Wages for Housework Campaign talks about in the article which follows: to record and evaluate the history we are making.



Karen De Souza

Working Hands #1

MAKING TROUBLE, MAKING HISTORY*

By Selma James

Counting our victories we appropriate our own history. With the growth of women's power, the history of all kinds of contributions by women, as individuals and as a sex, - in literature, language, art music, politics, religion, agriculture, science, etc. - has at last begun to surface. For the record, women are not the only sufferers at the hands of historians. The Great Man theory of history hides not only Great Women but defines almost everyone out of greatness.

Specifically, the invisibility of women's work as organisers - which includes every woman rather than just 'Great Women' (writers, scientists, painters and so on) - itself reflects a class bias, a career bias, in the women's movement, itself perpetuates a historical censorship in another form.

The evaluation process is part of righting the historical wrong which condemns most of us, women and men, to an unimaginative and unproductive past and, by implication, to a destiny of more of the same, **by preventing the same thing from happening to the history we are making now, at this very moment.**

But grassroots women (and men) don't know ourselves the history we are making, and this is the greatest deterrent to our recording it. Such lack of self-consciousness is one of the most debilitating effects of the power of education and the media against us. We must regretfully add that the Left on the whole reinforces it. Having had it drummed into us from birth that we can't influence events and must submit to authority, and having almost always been forced to submit, we are trained not to appreciate our own effect or the effect of other people like ourselves. When we do succeed in breaking out, appreciating our experiences, articulating our thoughts, we can rarely get them into recognised and widespread channels; and even then, they are almost unrecognisable: hacked to pieces, stripped of essentials, and dismissed with a sophisticated phrase implying that they are irrational ravings. Later we see them regurgitated from the mouths of journalists or others on the make as if fresh from their minds; and we sit quietly grieving, tragically defeated: the product of our struggle, our gut and our mind, robbed from us and spouted by those who had scoffed and jeered, confirming our incapacity and backwardness.

This is a common experience. It is a matter of life and death for any working class organisation but especially a women's organisation not to allow itself to be subverted by such intellectual imperialism and plunder.

Our actions are under similar attack. What we do, we are told, has no impact since we are just a few, or a few dozen, or a few hundred thousandAnd yet governments adjust their arguments because of these 'few', but in such a way as to conceal our impact, to keep us from knowing our own power: how we made them shift, how the majority are moved by us, are like us, are changing the world; how in making trouble we are making history.

Our evaluation meetings aim precisely to record how much history we have made, how much power we have wielded and how much potential power we might have as a result of what we and others have done.

We and others. For in developing the habit of awareness of your own historical acquisitions and potential, you learn also to respect and understand other women's and men's struggles. You are aware, from appreciation and consciousness of your own experience, of the problems they had to overcome and what, despite these problems, their efforts have won, for themselves and also for you.....We have, after all, one history that we are reappropriating, protecting, recording; one tradition of struggle that we are advancing; from which common pool each of us draws our power and to which we all contribute.

But we can only protect the achievements of every sector of the movement by evaluating and quantifying from the bottom up. Although we are one, we are also many, which is less than one, less than unified. We can never afford to lose sight of the power divisions among us.

Taking what each of us does seriously enough to spend our precious time constructively criticising it, is another expression of our respect for each other's time and work, of our self-respect as women, and of our collectivity. In the process we set the terms of the relationships among us, adjust our tactics and re-examine our division of labour. Each individual trains her judgement and becomes more autonomous, more conscious of herself as protagonist with skills and capacities - more able to stand up for herself anywhere. If political life is not also personally rewarding in this way, is not individually educative, exciting, power- and confidence-building, it is just another piece of alienating work, just another capitalist tragedy, that can lead to burnout, dropout or careerism.

* From *Strangers and Sisters*, edited by Selma James.

Poor women, especially those with families, have had to bear the major brunt of the regional economic crisis and the structural adjustment policies instituted in the Caribbean. The economic crunch has hit women harder than men because women's disadvantaged occupational distribution, and more limited access to resources, makes them more vulnerable; moreover their roles as producers and consumers are different. In addition, women have always assumed a primary role in household survival strategies, securing and allocating usually meager cash and other resources to enable their families to make ends meet.

The economic crisis has made it extremely difficult for families to survive on a single wage, forcing additional women into the labour force to meet the rising cost of living and the decreased wage-earning capacity of men due to unemployment or wage cuts, or due to their absence as a result of migration. At the same time structural adjustment policies are forcing families to absorb a greater share of the cost of survival as a result of the cutbacks in social services, such as health and education, and the elimination or reduction of subsidies on food, transportation, and utilities. By shifting more responsibility for survival from the state to the household, structural adjustment policies are increasing the burden on the poor, especially women.

PACCA

Jamaican women have shown themselves willing to work long and hard to sustain themselves and their families. But many have balked at accepting sub-poverty wages and dangerous working conditions. Nor have they submitted meekly to abusive language by factory managers or to body searches carried out, factory operators say, to detect stolen cloth or thread.

For three days in March 1988, more than 2,000 women from the Kingston free trade zone demonstrated to protest conditions in the garment factories. Word of their movement spread to women in the Dominican Republic, Antigua, Montserrat and the Windward Island nations. When the government of Trinidad and Tobago announced a plan to establish export processing zones, it was met with strong protest by Trinidadian women.

NACLA, Report on the Americas,
Volume XXIII No. 5, February 1990.

CRISIS AND RESPONSE



Karen De Souza

TRADITIONAL GROUPS FALL DOWN*

In January 1985 a three-day protest broke out in Kingston, Montego Bay, Ochos Rios, and other Jamaican cities protesting price increases in foodstuffs and gasoline, the consequence of the government's following IMF recommendations to eliminate subsidies and to devalue the currency. The protest included street demonstrations by people from all sectors of Jamaican

society, barricades and the looting of stores in the poorer neighborhoods, and a large protest march on Government House. The Seaga government contained the disorder but ten people were killed and twenty arrested. The government also held firm on the austerity measures.



STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT MEASURES = Measures by which governments hope to

SPEND LESS and **EARN MORE**

by reducing or removing subsidies on food, transport and utilities, cutting social services like health and education and freezing wages

by devaluing currency to try to increase exports, encouraging foreign investment, and export-oriented production

Savings to go to service debt and promote exports

Slack left by cuts in social services to be taken up by private sector NGOs and household, ie, women

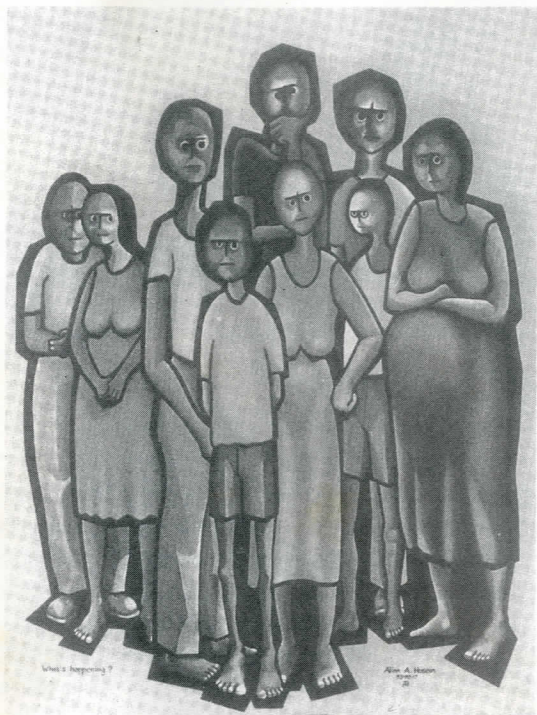
Throughout the region, existing political institutions have been shaken by such popular protests and, in many instances, have failed to find new ways to engage with the aspirations of the poorer sectors. Trade unions and political parties have not been able to channel popular unrest and propose a program for economic recovery and democratisation of Caribbean societies. Moreover, these traditional institutions have, for the most part, failed to move into the new arenas where the responses to the crisis are being articulated--poor urban neighborhoods and rural communities--and to incorporate into the problem-solving efforts those groups most affected by the crisis, particularly poor women and those in the mushrooming informal sector.

Not too surprisingly, political parties in many countries of the region have been losing credibility and legitimacy at the local level.

A further consequence of the implementation of structural adjustment policies in this period has been the relative marginalisation of trade union organisations within the political process. Government hostility to trade union representation in free-trade zones and the passage of anti-union legislation restricting the rights of public-sector employees to join unions in a number of countries, are important reflections of the effects of structural adjustment policies on working-class institutions.

* The material in this section was adapted from a draft document being prepared by Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America (PACCA). The title used here is ours.

UNIONS FAILING IN TASKS



What's Happening, by Alim Hussein

On the question of education, it has been one of my prime theories that the real source of popular education, that is, of an education that would redirect consciousness, should have been the organised labour movement. Because I have a view of the history of this region that it is organised labour that really democratised Caribbean society. Until 1935 or 36, there really wasn't much difference between the way most people lived just after Emancipation a hundred odd years or so before. And it was the eruption of labour and later of organised labour, coming into direct confrontation with the colonial power, that created the political directorates which we now see.

It was the organised struggle of labour that led to the legalising of the trade union movement. It was the organised struggle of labour that eroded racism in this region and made it possible for a black policeman to move beyond the rank of sergeant. It was the struggle of organised labour that made it possible for a black priest of what was then a racist church to secure a church of his own. The legacy of labour as a democratising force in this society has not been surpassed by any other struggle in this region. It is therefore very strange that organised labour has not taken the initiative in the re-education of our communities.

In fact, far from taking the initiative in the reorganisation of our communities, it is very doubtful that the trade union movement is today the most radical political force of this region.

George Lamming, Speech in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 1987.

Four factors have undermined the ability of organised labour to become effective mobilisers of popular discontent: the traditional umbilical cord between the unions and parties throughout much of the Caribbean; the effective penetration of much of the labour movement by pro-capital U.S. institutions; the lack of unions in sectors where the growing number of women workers are employed; and the inability to organise effectively in the informal sector.

Part of the timidity on the part of unions in pressing for the right to organise and bargain collectively in the zones may be that the majority of workers in export processing are women. The recent record of Caribbean unions in organising women workers in general has been poor.

The failure of Caribbean trade unions to organise women workers in the free-trade zones certainly has dampened the growth of union membership, since the zones have been the fastest growing sector of formal

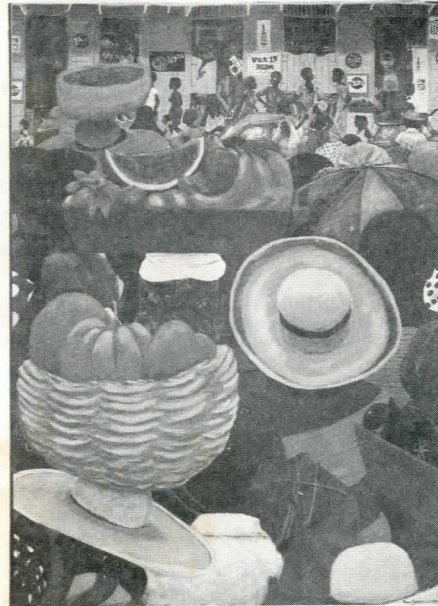
employment during the 1980s. The trade union movement has also been weakened by rising rates of unemployment and the mushrooming of the informal sector during the economic crisis. Trade unions have not adapted to this important change in the structure of the labour market and have remained incapable, for the most part, of organising individuals in informal economic activities.

While the growth of the informal sector has stymied traditional union organisation, it has led to new forms of organisation and new organisations. Some of these new organisations have been fostered by Caribbean states and international development agencies aiming to strengthen the private sector through support for the creation of "microenterprises." Others of the new informal sector organisations have arisen in opposition to state policies, often the result of the search for collective solutions to the economic crisis.

THE VENDOR WHO VENDS TOO WELL

These fruits like children you seem
to know so well you bought late
last night from a middleman
in time for the midnight rats.
But they're all good, they're all sweet
what else? You start to offer
'before I can wish you wouldn't'
choices to flatter my choosing,
always your hand flashing and
aiming, to become your pockets.

Brian Chan



The Fruit Sellers - Trinidad, Joan Camps-Campins

In the English-speaking Caribbean women and men in the informal sector, particularly in the marketing trade, have been forming their own organisations to confront state policies and the economic crisis. In Jamaica, street vendors, largely women, organised to counter police efforts to clear the streets of vendors and created the United Vendors Association, based in the main food market of Kingston. Among its aims and objectives is to protect the rights of vendors, to negotiate with the authorities on all matters affecting them, and to foster a cooperative movement for the export and import of foodstuffs.

The vacuum left by the failure of unions and parties to move into the community and household (where responses to the crisis are more and more being articulated) is increasingly being filled by new grassroots groups, local development organisations (LDOs) such as cooperatives, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), all engaged in pragmatic actions to defend the rights of poor men and women--opposing the austerity and sometimes repressive measures of governments--and usually creating new modes of generating livelihoods and new visions of alternative modes of development.

In both cities and towns and rural areas, the pressing economic situation of Caribbean societies has mobilised activists to develop strategies to relieve the short-term impact of the crisis on the poor and working class, while engendering a longer range consciousness of the need for more profound social change. In some cases, this work has been carried out strictly at the local level, and from

the grassroots, has led to the development of new organisations which sometimes take the form of NGOs or, in other cases, interest-based national organisations or loosely coordinated social movements. In other instances, the organisation of grassroots groups and LDOs has been the direct product of the work of NGOs. By developing income-generating projects, production and marketing cooperatives, health and nutrition campaigns, and promoting popular education --linked to the development of community consciousness and self-empowerment--the NGOs have supported and engendered grassroots groups, which together are slowly altering the character of Caribbean politics and society.

The relative success of the NGO/LDO sector tends to rest on its ability to respond to the immediate socio-economic needs of the people, with direct consequences for popular participation, improved economic conditions, and a heightened political awareness at the community level. The NGOs have also been critical actors in the emergence of new social movements in the Caribbean, including the women's movement.



IMAGE AND SELF-IMAGE



Karen De Souza

Working Hands #2

That man over there say that a woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me a best place

And ain't I a woman?

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me

And ain't I a woman?

I could work as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it, and beat the lash as well

And ain't I a woman?

I have borned thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery. And when I cried out with a mother's grief none but Jesus heard

And ain't I a woman?

Sojourner Truth

THE CARIBBEAN FEMINIST TRADITION *

By Rhoda Reddock

The title may come as a surprise to those of us who have been led to believe that feminism is a foreign ideology introduced to our region by interest groups bent on subverting the national interest or a pastime for "idle metropolitan housewives". In order to clarify what I mean by the term feminism I would like to put forward a definition of feminism as: The critical consciousness and awareness of women's subordinated and/or exploited position in society and the commitment to do something to change it. In this vein, two aspects to feminist struggle can be identified:

The day-to-day acts of struggle of individuals or groups of women to attain and maintain a degree of autonomy and control over their lives and the resistance against attempts to undermine this autonomy; and

The movement of women at a local, national, regional or international level for certain commonly defined goals, aimed specifically at the emancipation of women, i.e. the transformation of their subordinate position.

Caribbean history shows that women have been involved in both aspects of the struggle.

The historic origins of the Caribbean people in situations of forced labour migration through the systems of slavery of African women and bonded or indentured labour of Indian women for a while afforded women (not by plan or design) the possibilities of a life of relative freedom from the patriarchal control of individual men. And women, like men, were subordinated to the dictates of capital and the ruling class.

The first object which attracted my compassion during a visit to the neighbouring estate, was a beautiful Samboe girl of about eighteen, tied up by both arms to a tree, as naked as she came into the world, and lacerated in such a shocking manner by the whips of two negro-drivers, that she was from her neck to her ankles literally dyed in blood. It was after she had received two hundred lashes that I perceived her, with her head hanging downwards.....

Upon investigating the cause of this matchless barbarity, I was credibly informed, that *her only crime consisted in firmly refusing to submit to the loathsome embraces of her detestable executioner.....*

John Stedmore, quoted in Caribbean Women, Labour Resistance; Text - Cecil Gutzmore



* A talk organised by SISTREN, August 23, 1984, Kingston, Jamaica.

...The women, exhausted by labour, have shunned conception and childbirth, so that work should not be heaped on them during pregnancy or after delivery; many, when pregnant, have taken some thing to abort and have aborted. Others, after delivery, have killed their children with their own hands, so as not to place or leave them in such oppressive slavery.

Eric Williams, quoted in Caribbean Women, Labour & Resistance; Text - Cecil Gutzmore



SLAVERY: "RUDDERLESS EQUALITY"

Orlando Patterson in his book *The Sociology of Slavery* bemoaned the fact that: "Slavery abolished any real social distribution between males and females. The woman was expected to work just as hard, she was as indecently exposed and was punished just as severely. In the eyes of the master she was equal to the man as long as her strength was the same as his".

Similarly, Dom Basil Matthews (a Roman Catholic Priest), writing in 1953 on what he perceived to be a Crisis in the West Indian Family, blamed slavery for the 'dead level equality' between women and men which resulted in 'rudderless equality' of the Afro-Caribbean females.

Afro-Caribbean women, like men, came to our region as labourers, not as housewives. Their labour, mainly in the fields and not in the houses as is commonly believed, also contributed to the accumulation of capital on which European industrial capitalism was built.

The experience of slavery has bestowed on Afro-Caribbean women a number of qualities which have afforded them a degree of social and economic independence, which subsequent colonial and neo-colonial ideological agents such as the church and the education system have successfully sought to destroy. The independence of Afro-Caribbean women was evident in their acceptance of the need to earn an income for

"The clerk of the market...is required to hire annually two able men...to apprehend any Negro or Negroes that come into the said town to sell, or dispose of any goods or commodities whatsoever without being licensed as afoersaid, either by having some white person with them, or a metal collar on his or her neck or leg."

An Act to Prohibit the Inhabitants of This Island from Employing their Negroes and Other Slaves in Selling and Bartering; Passed January, 1708, quoted in Afro-Caribbean Women & Resistance to Slavery in Barbados, by Hilary Beckles.

themselves and their children regardless of whether a man was around or not. The colonials taught them that dependence on one man was more prestigious, had a higher status and was morally superior, although this was realistically impossible for the majority of working-class women.

One characteristic of Caribbean towns during the late 19th and early 20th century was the higher proportion of females compared to males in the towns. Thrown out of the fields on to the plantations, many women drifted to the towns where they participated in what can be termed the 'independent professions' of working-class women of the period: as cooks, washerwomen, domestics, seamstresses and petty traders. In 1851 De Verteuil, writing on Trinidad, noted that while in the towns there were 100 females to 74 males, in rural areas the ratio was 100 males to 75 females. This situation continued well into the 20th century. For these women their arena of activity was the street - they ate there, worked there, and played there. Many women during the late 19th/early 20th century were arrested for behaviour "unbecoming of women or rather ladies". Each day women appeared in court cases, charged (according to Erna Brodber) with such crimes as - "riding furiously, flying kites in the street, leaving cart unattended and porting without a licence".

Sources also reveal that while many women did not marry for economic reasons, for many it was deliberate step for fear of losing ownership of children or for fear that "after marriage the man would treat you bad because then he know yuh can't leave him". Dom Basil Matthews noted with pride that the sense of shame at not being married was less, the further away the woman was from contacts with the Church and "civilisation" and that children felt no shame at carrying their mother's name.

It was these women in the streets and in the fields who were leading participants in the anti-colonial and labour struggles and movements of the early 20th century. Their lack of "femininity", the feminine softness and dependence of the protected housewife, made it imperative that they fight their battles on the street and not depend on their men to do so for them. Walter Rodney, writing on Guyana noted that:

"Women from all levels of the working people were involved in the 1905 riots..."

"Governor Hodgson tried to persuade the men of Guyana that the women were the ones causing the trouble and that they should be kept quiet".

Rodney noted, however, that:

"Whether the men were capable of carrying out such a task was itself debatable" (Rodney, 1981; 208).

I remember logies, barrackrooms,
ranges, nigga-yards. My grandmother
worked in the field. Honourable mention.

Creole gang, child labour. Second prize.

From: Mahadai Das, *They Came In Ships*.

INDENTURESHIP

In the case of the Indo-Caribbean family many myths perpetuated over the years, have contributed an ideology of the naturally subordinate and docile Indian woman. In addition, it has been contended that while the African family unit had been torn apart in slavery, the Indian family was not destroyed.

The reality however as recent research has shown was that:

Family migration was heavily discouraged until slightly before the end of the indentureship system in 1917;

The sex proportion (lower numbers of women recruited) prevented up to 50 per cent of the men from forming permanent relationships; and



Drawing by Abbyssinian

The majority of women did not come as wives but as labourers.

The majority of women recruited were already of an independent character - for example, many were women who had been deserted or had left their husbands, women pregnant without being married, Brahmin widows who were unable to re-marry in India; or prostitutes seeking a new life.

Many of these women refused to submit themselves to the dominance of their men who in their quest for upward mobility sought the secluded subordinate wives suited to the class and cast to which they aspired. In addition to their already dependent character, the shortage of women placed these women in a position where they could maintain an increased autonomy over their lives, marry if and who they wished or leave one man for another.

The response to these attempts in all Caribbean territories of Indian indentureship was violence. Murders of wives and female lovers became synonymous with the plantation and its weapon was the machete or cutlass.

Around 1880, for example, Indian men in Trinidad witnessed by three Presbyterian Ministers petitioned the Colonial Government to:

- Place more control on the movements of women;
- Penalise men who enticed away their women; and
- Force their women to return to them after the men are charged.

The reconstruction of the patriarchal Indian family has been promoted through the help of the Colonial State and the Church.

CROSS-FERTILISING

The late 19th and early 20th century Women's Movement spread to the Third World; for example, in Cuba during the early 20th century a feminist party was formed among middle-class women while the Nationalist Movement of the early 20th century among colonials educated in Europe was strongly influenced by the feminist movement of the time. Early struggles for Women's rights were supported by the Nationalists and male reformers of the period, and feminist demands of the time were incorporated into their programmes.

In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, the struggle for seats for women on the City Council was championed by A.A. Cipriani in 1920. In response the P.O.S. Gazette condemned this 'feminist movement' as 'a masculinist movement', which sought to reverse the natural order of things. It took seven years for the vote to be passed in favour. It was supported by the feminists of that time - mainly middle-class social workers. There was a need for middle-class women's organisations led by women such as Audrey Jeffers and Beatrice Greig to do social work as a

means of raising the status of black women to that of white women in colonial society. In 1936 the first Conference of Caribbean Women Social Workers was held, attended by women from throughout the region; men were excluded for most the sessions.

The Negro Welfare Cultural Social Association, a political organisation in Trinidad and Tobago with a large membership of women had links with Sylvia Pankhurst, feminist and member of the British Communist Party. It held definite positions on women, including the need for married women members not changing their names and for removing male domination before women could actively participate in politics.

One Caribbean feminist of international standing was Amy Ashwood-Garvey, first wife of Marcus Garvey and co-founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). She was a founding member of the International African Service Bureau (I.A.S.B.) in London with George Padmore and C.L.R. James which organised the important 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress. This Congress was attended by many of the future leaders of independent Africa, including Jomo Kenyatta, N. Azikwe and Kwame Nkrumah. The importance of Amy's contribution on Jamaica was her opening statement when she noted that earlier presentations had ignored the question of black women. In her presentation she spoke of:

- Poverty;
- Equal pay for equal work; and
- Education for girls;

She also called on the educated middle-class women to join the struggle for women's rights. As a result of her contributions and that of the one other woman participant, Alma Labadie, the West Indies Resolutions were the only ones to include statements on women. However, in the commemorative booklet hers is the only name omitted from the cover.

In 1953 Amy Ashwood-Garvey made a tour of the Caribbean: Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Surinam, Aruba, and Trinidad and Tobago to encourage the development of the women's movement in the region. Amy believed that the educated middle-class women were best placed to help their less fortunate sisters by participating in politics and the struggle for women's rights. In Trinidad Amy Garvey hailed Audrey Jeffers as the leading feminist and social worker of the Caribbean.

THE NEW MOVEMENT

Today the Feminist Movement in the Caribbean is emerging once more; but not out of nowhere. The tradition of consciousness of oppression and struggle for individual and collective autonomy is part of our history and our tradition. Today the movement is not



Danuta Redzik

Magistrate Higgins criticised the socio-economic system as it affected women under indenture. He noted that women often earned between forty-eight cents and sixty cents for a week's hard work. In a judgement in favour of a female plaintiff who sued for wages, Higgins went so far as to justify equality of the sexes before the law. "I know of no principle of law or equity", he said, "which would justify me in awarding to the female - forsooth she happens to be a woman - for the same amount of work, a less amount of wages.".....Discrimination against female indentured workers persisted, because planters assigned women to the weeding gang and other low-paying jobs and because women were given less when they performed the same field tasks as men.....

*Walter Rodney, quoted in Caribbean Woman: Labour and Resistance;
Text - Cecil Gutzmore*

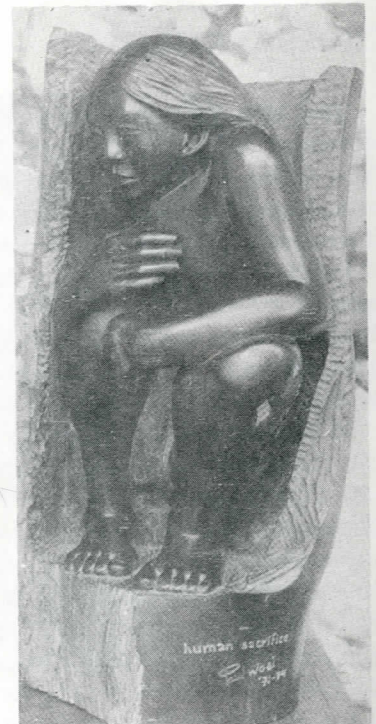
confined to the educated middle-class and does not use social work as a guise to hide its intent. But it is important for us to recognise this tradition, learn from

its mistakes and build on it for a future where sexism as well as race and class oppression are removed.

It is variously alleged in the Third World by traditionalists, political conservatives and even by certain Leftists, that feminism is a product of 'decadent' Western capitalism, that it is based on foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World, that it is the ideology of women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, or from the revolutionary struggle for national liberation and socialism on the other.

Feminism was not imposed on the Third World from the West, but rather...historical circumstances have produced important material and ideological changes which affected women; for example, there were debates on women's rights and education in 18th century China, movements for women's social emancipation in early 19th century India, while feminist struggles originated between sixty and eighty years ago in many countries of the Third World. The fact that such movements for emancipation and feminism flourished in several non-European countries during this period has been, in a sense 'hidden from history'.

Kumari Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World.



WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO TODAY *

by Rhoda Reddock

Women in the English-speaking Caribbean have been members of women's organisations since the 19th Century. In the main these have been religious-based women's organisations, especially of the various denominations of the Christian Church. In this region the organisation of women was particularly important as in the late 19th and early 20th century it was the main mechanism for transferring and inculcating Western European values of women's place, the sexual division of labour and social and domestic organisation.

Not surprisingly, therefore, some of the earliest recorded organisations of women were either charity organisations such as the Daily Meal Association of Trinidad, a committee of Anglican ladies who in 1938 distributed '100 substantial meals to poor persons and a Christmas meal of roast beef and plum pudding' (*Franklins Yearbook, 1938*); or domesticating or 'housewifising' organisations (*Mies, 1987*).

In relation to the latter, the Anglican Mothers' Unions, Mothers' meetings of the Baptist Church, Ladies Missionary Aid Sewing Classes of the Presbyterian

Church and the Guild of the Holy Family of the Roman Catholic Church all sought with varying degrees of success to inculcate 'respectable' standards of Christian family which in most instances ran counter to the practiced reality and remembered traditions of the majority of the African and to a lesser extent Indian people.

In addition to the denominationally based organisations, the umbrella organisation, the YWCA, has also had a long history in this region. Indeed in 1989 the Grenada branch will be celebrating its centenary (*Rainford, 1988*).

The large-scale organisation of women continues to take place within religious bodies. On the one hand religion represents a legitimate space within which women can freely participate outside of the home, without question or need for justification. On the other it provides that spiritual solace and community in a world in which hard work, social and economic and physical or emotional violence are the order of the day.



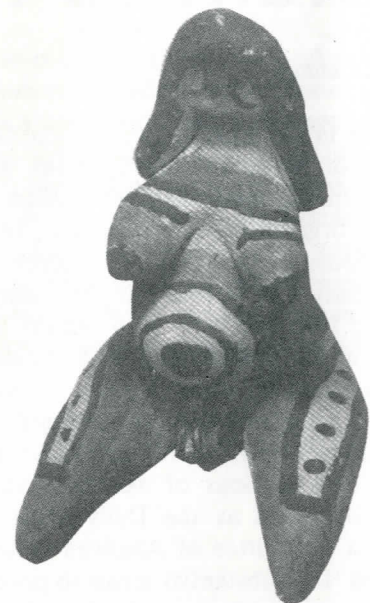
Karen De Souza

Working Hands #3

* Taken from *Women's Organisations and Movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean in the Context of the World Economic Crisis, 1989*.



Birthing Dolls, Artist unknown



Pregnant Woman, Artist unknown

Compañeras by Betty La Duke

Not surprisingly therefore, religious groupings of women many dating from this era, still survive today. The extent to which they have remained the same or have been transformed will be examined later.

WOMEN IN UNIONS AND PARTIES

The large-scale mobilisation and organisation of women has also occurred within the labour movement and political organisations. The early labour movement (from which many of our political parties emerged) was a much more amorphous grouping than present-day trade unions. In particular the very broad concept of 'worker' which was used facilitated the participation of persons involved in a wide range of economic activities. The Jamaica Federation of Labour for example led by Bain Alves around 1919 included unions of predominantly female banana carriers, coal carriers, hotel workers and barmaids (*French and Fordsmith, 1984: 269*).

This tendency which facilitated mobilisation of women workers spilled over into the early trade unions of the 1930s, where for example Daisy Crick, a housewife, could rise to the position of trustee of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU).

By the early 1940s, however, the introduction of 'responsible' trade unionism in the aftermath of the

labour disturbances of the 1930s put an end to this trend. The new trade unions were now to include only "real workers", e.g., wage employees, and unions were to be divided along industry lines. These developments proved to be a major deterrent to female labour organisation especially after World War II when increasing members of women were being excluded from wage labour. (*Reddock, 1988*).

In the 1950s with the emergence of significant nationalist, socialist and Marxist parties, women members of these parties were often recruited from members of middle-strata women's organisations, women like Amy Bailey of the Jamaica Women's Liberal Club, Ada Date-Camps of the Trinidad and Tobago League of Women Voters who joined the People's National Movement (PNM), and Janet Jagan of the socialist-oriented Women's Political and Economic Organisation (WPEO), still a leading member of the Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO) and People's Progressive Party of Guyana.

Today, women continue to be members of unions, especially in those occupations dominated by women. Nevertheless even in these unions few attain or accept leadership positions. Today the trade union movement, in spite of a significant female membership, continues to be a male-dominated institution not only in its leadership but in its concerns and style of operations.

The WPEO was created jointly by Winifred Gaskin, a Guyanese secondary school teacher who later worked with the Bureau of Publicity and Information, and Janet Jagan, a former nursing student who married a young Guyanese dentist named Cheddi Jagan. Mrs. Gaskin and Mrs. Jagan felt that the existing women's organisations did not adequately address the problems faced by Guyanese women and society. Women needed to have a wider outlook, especially regarding national and world affairs and to be encouraged to take a more active interest in development and social change. As early as February 1945, Mrs. Gaskin called on women to come together to promote national unity.....

Two dozen women met on the 9th of July, 1946 in preparation for the 12th July launching of an organisation "to ensure the political organisation and education of the women of British Guiana in order to promote their economic welfare and their political and social emancipation and betterment".....

The WPEO launching, held in the Town Hall, was even more impressive than foretold. The Hall was filled beyond capacity with over 500 women from a broad spectrum of racial and class origins.....Numerous speakers focused on universal adult suffrage, education, housing, health-care, plantation conditions, equal pay, and the grooming of women for the Legislative Council. After the meeting several women joined the new organisation.

In the following months the WPEO attracted not only the prominent to membership, but seamstresses, domestics, school teachers, nurses and other working women, single women and working class housewives of all ages, and from all over Georgetown.



Woman Grinding Maize, Diego Rivera

Roberta Kilkenny, The Radicalisation of the Women's Movement in British Guiana, 1946-1953.

NEW ERA IN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The re-emergence of the women's movement internationally in the late 1960s and early 1970s ushered in a new era in the Caribbean women's struggle. Unlike the earlier movement this impact has been broader and has touched many more aspects of personal and political life than its forerunner earlier in the century.

Interestingly enough many of the first women to be influenced were the stalwarts of the traditional women's organisations from the era of the 1950s, many of whom were heavily involved in nationalist political parties which emerged at that time. It could be said that the new consciousness seeping into the region reminded these older women activists of the marginal position they still had within their political organisations and societies as a whole.

Two developments are significant in this regard. In 1970 Viola Burnham, member of the People's National Congress of Guyana called together her colleagues from other parts of the region to form CARIWA - The Caribbean Women's Association with headquarters in Guyana. This organisation sought to link the various national-level councils or coordinating councils of women

to which most of the older women's organisations were affiliated.

In the early 1970s, both the Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSB) of the PNC in Guyana and the Women's Auxiliary of the People's National Party of Jamaica worked vigorously within their parties for the establishment of national machinery on women's affairs. Thus in 1973 in Guyana the council on the Affairs and Status of Women in Guyana (CASWIG) was instituted and by 1973 Jamaica became one of the first countries in the world to establish a Women's Bureau. This was largely the result of action by feminists in the party, Lucille Mathurin-Mair and Mavis Gilmour, who in 1972 presented a paper to the party leader entitled "Women and Social Change". This paper argued for the establishment of a coordinating agency which was 'empowered to initiate, promote and review through the relevant Ministries those urgent needs of girls and women' (Henry, 1976: 12). According to Maxine Henry, this document embodied the women's policy platform of the 1970s. It led to the establishment of a four-woman advisory committee which recommended the

establishment of a Woman's Bureau based in the Prime Minister's office. (Henry, 1976: 12-13). Its future development however was far from smooth.

In 1977, the PNP Women's Auxiliary was transformed into the PNP Women's Movement and on March 8, 1978 joined with the Committee of Women for Progress (formed in 1976 and aligned to the communist Workers' Party of Jamaica) in the first recorded observation of International Women's Day in that country. Today many of these older political activists are still at the forefront of the regional women's movement, but the impetus for the radicalising of the movement came eventually from the smaller feminist-oriented groups and organisations.

Through the efforts of these party-affiliated women's organisations, a number of regional structures were established in June 1977, on the initiative of Peggy Antrobus, former director of the Jamaica Women's Bureau, and women of CARIWA and the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), a meeting was called in Jamaica to develop a regional position in relation to the United Nations Decade of Women. Participants at this meeting included representatives of twelve Caribbean governments, the UWI, CARIWA, regional and international development agencies and other Jamaican government and non-government organisations.

Out of this meeting a regional Plan of Action emerged. Among other things, this plan called for the establishment of national women's machinery, a women's desk within the CARICOM Secretariat and a programme of activities within the Extra Mural Department of the UWI.* Between 1978 and 1980 the following were established: in 1978, the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the Extra Mural Department based in Barbados; in 1980 the Women's Desk of the Caricom Secretariat based in Guyana; and in 1979/80 the Women and Development Programme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN/ECLAC) based in Trinidad and Tobago.

These regional institutions have collaborated mainly with the various national machineries (desks, bureaux, commissions etc.) established by national



Karen De Souza

Working Hands #4

governments as well as with non-governmental organisations. WAND in particular developed a five-point programme of Training, Technical Assistance, Communications, Networking and Collaboration with Government and non-governmental organisations focusing especially on the OECS countries.

Since 1981 its work has focused more on the use of participatory methodologies initially with communities, then with community development organisations. Since 1985 there is a new emphasis on work with women's activist organisations through training programmes and other activities.

SMALL GROUPS WITH LARGE IMPACT

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, also small groups of women began to meet and discuss their situation, many influenced by the ideas emanating from the radical black power; anti-war, new left and women's liberation movements of North America and Europe. The contradictions among the various strands of this new left politics were felt most by the women of these movements. One writer recalls the launching of the women's section of the National Joint Action Committee in 1971 (at the suggestion of the brothers). This encouragement she noted had the 'cautioning clause that this auxiliary, supportive arm was to have nothing to do with what they labelled 'white women's liberation' in North America and Europe' (Henderson, 1988:).

* Now the School of Continuing Studies.

HOW WAND IS CHANGING:

The 1988 consultation led the unit to the confirmation of:

The need to change WAND's goal from one of "integrating women into development" to one which seeks to "empower women for social change";

The need to reflect this change in programme strategies, focus and methodologies, and especially in the selection of programme participants and partners/allies; and

The need to place greater emphasis on advocacy, and to re-conceptualise WAND's programme so that it reflects a recognition of the integral link between "communications" and "field work", both part of a single programme which seeks to promote a dialogue about development and women's role in the process, and to advocate

alternative approaches which reflect the reality and creativity of women at the base of the society.

*De Caterpillar's death
De butterfly's birth
Is only a miracle
If you doh know
de story
Is only a mystery
If you doh know the history
Is only truly
a puzzle
If you can't find
the pieces
If you can't explain
de changes*

Merle Collins

WAND will give priority to cooperating with those organisations which work from an analysis which recognizes the need to change the systems which oppress and exploit the majority of our populations by challenging class and racial oppression, along with WAND's central concern with gender. In the context of the present policy throughout the region this means that WAND will seek to work more closely with those women's organisations and NGOs which seek solutions to the continuing economic crisis

(with its devastating social, cultural environmental and political consequences) by exploring alternatives to the current economic, foreign-exchange-oriented approaches to development.

WAND Annual Report August 1, 1988, July 31, 1989.

Many of those small groups like the Jamaica Association for the repeal of Abortion Laws (JARA) in Jamaica and the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Women in Trinidad or even Women Against Terror in Guyana, comprised middle-strata women, many members or associates of small left-wing political parties but many not. It is interesting that at both levels the Caribbean women's movement has been activated and propelled by women schooled in the male-dominated political culture.

In spite of the strong radical bent in Trinidad and Tobago one of the earliest of the new women's groups to be formed was the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago. Launched in 1975, its objectives included 'the task of encouraging the exchange of information and ideas for the promotion of joint action among women in the national interest' (Henderson, 1988:365). In its short active life this group was able to mobilise a national membership (including Tobago). And although it concentrated on consumer issues its main contribution was a published survey on the conditions of work of domestic servants.

In 1977 the Sistren Women's Theatre Collective, one of the first of a line of feminist-oriented autonomous

women's groups was formed. Unlike many others it had a predominantly working-class membership and used drama as a workshop and performance tool for consciousness-raising and entertainment.

MISOGYNY THROUGH THE AGES

"As far back as 2500 B.C.," says Jeannie Ferris Pirro, Assistant District Attorney for Westchester County, New York, "if a woman was verbally abusive to her husband, her name would be carved on a brick, which would be used to knock out her teeth."

As sociologists Murray Straus and Richard Gelles note, during the Middle Ages, women were burned alive for threatening their husbands, talking back to or refusing a priest, committing adultery, bearing a child out of wedlock, permitting sodomy (even though the husband or priest who committed it was forgiven), for masturbating, for scolding and nagging, and for miscarrying, even though the miscarriage was caused by a kick or a blow from the husband." And Assistant DA Pirro reminds us that "not until 1977 did New York State make it a crime for a man to shoot, stab, beat, or brutalise his wife." In some states those acts are still legal.

Cosmopolitan, April 1990.

EXTENDING POPULAR EDUCATION SKILLS

"The Indo-Guyanese group in Meten Meer Zorg has been most successful in its use of the method. The Wismar group is progressing but finds the discussion process difficult to handle.

In all the groups there is a tendency to copy rather than create out of the SISTREN methodology. This is least marked in Meten Meer Zorg and most marked in Victoria.

There is a separation between the "educational sessions" and the "internal problems" being faced by the groups, including those related to their income-generating activities.

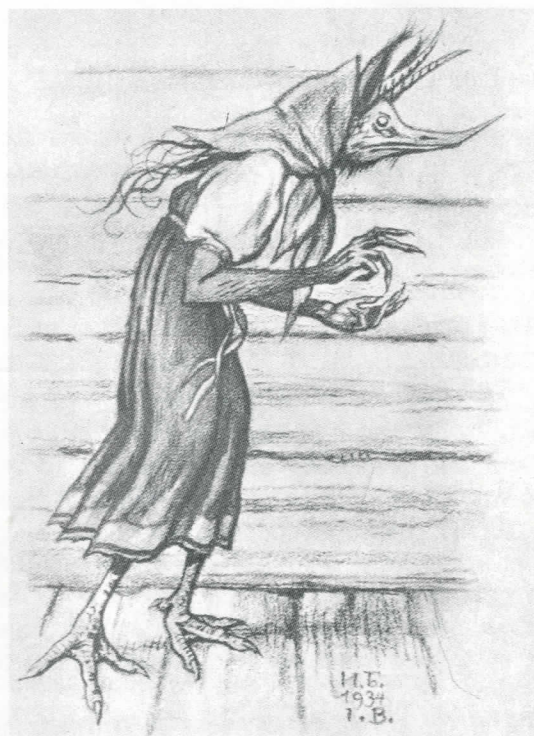
The situation in Guyana has been unstable. A national strike and civil unrest followed the announcement of yet another devaluation and more price increases after the conclusion of a formal agreement with the IMF. The quality of the response of the women in the groups in the face of

"At first the sky was very close to the earth. But every evening woman cut off a piece of The sky to put in her soup pot, or as in another version, she repeatedly banged the top end of her pestle carelessly against the sky when she pounded the millet or, as in yet another rendering.....she wiped her kitchen hands on the sky's face. Whatever the detail of woman's provocation, the sky finally moved away in anger, and God with it".

Story of our ancestors, quoted in Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe

such a situation has been described by Committee members as nothing short of a revolution. The Wismar group started a soup kitchen. The Meten Meer Zorg group visited to observe, help and learn, and all stayed overnight to attend a fete arranged as a celebration. Such a step for women from an Indo-Guyanese village is unprecedented in the history of the groups. Victoria also visited. Meten Meer Zorg offered to go to Wismar to help them meet targets on an exercise book project, and did. In the words of Karen de Souza of the Red Thread Committee, "All of this is not separate from the movement caused by the workshops".

Excerpts from a Report on a Joint SISTREN/Red Thread Project



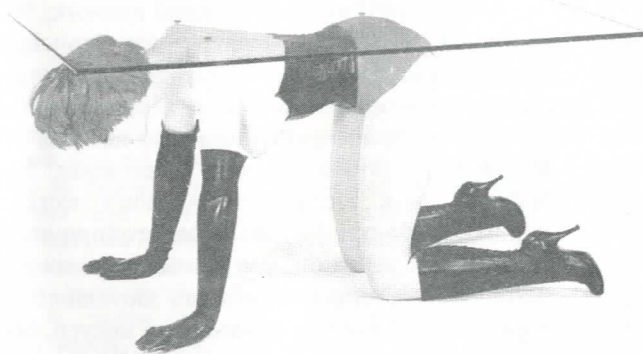
Kikimora: female domestic divinity in Slavonic mythology

Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology

By the 1980s small radical or feminist-oriented women's groups mushroomed throughout the region, beginning with BOWAND in Belize in 1979, an outcome of a WAND Workshop, and followed by the Concerned Women for Progress in Trinidad and Tobago which by 1985 had spawned The Group (1983) and Workingwomen (1985).

Other organisations include the Committee for the Development of Women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (1984), the Belize Rural Women's Association (1985), Sisi Ni Dada of St. Kitts/Nevis

(1985), Red Thread of Guyana (1986) and most recently the Women's Forum of Barbados (1988). The activities of these organisations, many of which have quite a small membership, have been concentrated on consciousness-raising internally and among the wider public through activities in popular education, income-generating projects, skills-training (in both traditional and non-traditional areas), media watch and development or alternative media - radio programmes, videos, newsletters, films, exhibitions and slide-tape shows.



Controversial coffee table by artist Allen Jones, one of a limited edition produced in London; the top rests on the back of a woman in fetishistic clothing and in debasing position.

From: *Working Women*, by Jessica Strang

FIGHTING SEXIST IMAGES OF WOMEN

As its name suggests the Women's Media Watch has a system set up for monitoring the media specifically for sexist images of women which are pornographic and derogatory. As SISTREN has said so often, it is these types of images which desensitise the society to the gravity of sexual violence against women and children.

Women's Media Watch also aims at raising the level of public awareness and concern about sexual violence through an education programme including letters, talks, production and dissemination of informative material. In addition, Media Watch is taking action by lobbying those who advertise, dramatise and report in the media, as another means of changing the way women are portrayed.

Women's Media Watch (Jamaica)

Although small and voluntary in membership the impact of these groups has usually far surpassed their size. This influence has usually been achieved through campaigns on relevant issues which have been able to draw in a wide cross-section of women including women from the more established and traditional women's organisations. Among the more successful of these were the campaign against violence to women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1985-86 and the campaign over the Sexual Offences Bill in Trinidad and Tobago during the same period. The issue of sexual violence has been a key factor in mobilising women throughout the region. This issue which includes domestic violence - sexual abuse of children, rape in unions, wife-battering, rape, incest, sexual harassment in the workplace and other

forms of sexual assault has served to be the one issue capable of uniting women of all classes, races and ethnic groups. In the Caribbean region it has been the one factor which has brought to women some understanding of body politics and its relationship to the wider socio-political and economic system. As noted by Patricia Mohammed, the impact of this new consciousness was felt in the media where the lyrics of calypsoes, one of the popular indigenous musical genres of the region began to reflect women's resistance to and men's rejection of male violence towards women.

These developments have served to radicalise the established women's organisations and force them to refocus away from charitable works to their original concerns, the emancipation of women. Changes can be

AWOJA: JAMAICA'S UMBRELLA GROUP

Another significant factor of the work in Jamaica is that it demonstrates the potential of the creation of alliances of women - focused on issues of poverty and social change - which transcend the usual boundaries of class and party. This process has recently been taken a step further with the launching of the Association of Women's Organisations in Jamaica (AWOJA) - Jamaica's first umbrella organisation for women's groups. Its membership is representative of the widest cross-section of women's organisations anywhere in the region. Its aims and objectives make it clear that it intends to pursue an activist role, and the presence in its membership of groups like the Organisation of Women for Progress (OWP) and SISTREN, along with the women's arms of the two main parties, will help to ensure that it makes a significant contribution to the process of social change.

Peggy Antrobus, Survival Strategies and Women's Organisations, Cornell, 1988.

discerned (for example) in the activities of the YWCA which at least at a regional level began to concern itself much more with issues of women's health, young women and world peace; and among women in church groups (mainly of the established Christian churches) where, for example, the Barbados Mothers Union (Anglican) has taken up the issue of sexual violence and the ordination of women priests. In Barbados and in Trinidad and Tobago, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs have both established institutions to assist battered women while the Soroptimists have concentrated their efforts on women and work.

Among the non-Christian religions the influence has also been felt. In Jamaica women within Rastafari have begun to assert their identity and while one representative of the organisation Mada Wadada (Mother Love) found it impossible to conceive of a women's group of women and for women, she noted that - 'More and more internationally the sisters adopt new strategies to achieve economic independence and consequently independence of their children' (Mada Wadada, 1988).

Similarly in Trinidad and Tobago the Hindu Women's Organisation formed in 1987 seeks to mobilise the Hindu woman, and 'deal specifically with matters affecting the Hindu woman and her relationship with the wider society' (Gopeesingh, 1988).

Suffice it to say there has been some influence on the labour movement but much less than in other areas. Women's committees have been established in some unions to replace women's auxiliaries but in spite of an ILO/DANIDA regional programme for women trade-unionists real change has been minimal. Individual women and groups of trade union women have been active in the movement, but they have not really been able to check the male-dominant core of the labour movement.

In 1985, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) was formed. It filled a long felt need for a progressive feminist-oriented network of Caribbean feminists and feminist organisations. The significance of CAFRA lay in its decision to challenge head-on the prejudice and negative assumptions traditionally associated with the concept of feminism. In so doing it sought to define a Caribbean feminism which links women's subordination with other systems of subordination - race, class and nation and to go beyond traditional boundaries of language and culture. CAFRA membership now includes the Dutch-, English-, French-, Spanish- and American-speaking Caribbean as well as women in the Caribbean diaspora.

Programme activities include support to women's groups/organisations in the region in research/action on women in agriculture, women's history and creative writing; communication/information and collaboration across linguistic barriers; and the establishment of a

documentation base for use by individuals and organisations.

Around 1987 another regional network, Women for Caribbean Liberation (WCL) was launched in St. Vincent. Headquartered in Antigua this group initially emerged as a network of women associated with socialist-oriented political organisations who had met in Antigua for the First Caribbean Women's Encounter. So far their activities have focused on women's work and the popularisation of information on developments in Haiti.

From the above one can get the impression of a well-developed and effective women's movement within this region. Developments however are uneven, both within countries and within the region. Daily, women activists are coming to terms with the fact that achievements so far have only scratched the surface and the lives of the majority of women are yet to be touched. The impact of the present world economic crisis does not make our task any easier.

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OUR WEAKNESSES AS WE SEE THEM *

I have been a party political activist for the last 11 years, but as I have explored more gender issues and feminism and different approaches to power, I've become more and more convinced that the party approach cannot work for women. No party in the Caribbean is taking an approach which puts people's views and their empowerment on the front burner. We continue to act as though we are doing people a favour. My ideology has changed; it has made me take a different approach to people. **The way the party system is set up in Jamaica, once you get into it, you have to start firing shots, taking over territory, being part of the tribalism. This has nothing to do with women and their empowerment.**

Joan Ross Frankson,
SISTREN, Jamaica

Women's objectives are fragmented because of their fierce party loyalty. We are so committed to the party agenda that we lose sight of the shared objectives of women and the common ground badly needed.

Maizie Barker-Welch,
Democratic Labour Party,
Barbados

As a mass women's organisation we would like to win over a wide cross section of women to our organisation, but partisan politics which unfortunately has racial overtones hinders this development.

Indra Chandrapaul,
Women's Progressive
Organisation, Guyana

PARTY TRIBALISM

In February 1984, the Collective was asked to provide 10 to 15 women for a factory building project. The WCC could have expanded its membership with new recruits from Western Kingstown. This, however, would have resulted in the Collective being clearly identified with the political party to which the community was allied, and would make us vulnerable to charges of political partisanship which would threaten our long term developmental prospect. We finally agreed that the best approach would be to identify additional feeder communities with different political affiliations.

Sandra Francis,
Women's Construction
Collective (WCC), Jamaica

I am a political activist and I want to say that party political groups divide women. We only attract party women, only do work with women who are receptive to our ideas. **In every forum we are pressured by the party to project our party's position,** yet within the party we are still only seen as a fund-raising arm. That does not mean women of a political party should not congregate as women within the party, to assess our position as women within that party, but party women should be free to form any other all-women's group.

Earlene Horne,
National Farmers
Union, St. Vincent
(Speaking here as a
member of a political party)

What were the problems in relation to the Party and the mass organisation, the OWP? I'll start by mentioning that there were not only problems and weaknesses, but strengths as well. One of these was that the OWP, because of the links that many of us had with the communist WPJ, developed a clear ideological perspective of what we thought was essential in the struggle: the business of class, the business of the fact that women's struggle is not separate from the struggle of men for a better life, but is a part of that.

The weakness here was that because we had that focus on class and that analysis we underplayed the gender thing. At a time when

SISTREN, for example, was talking a lot about discrimination and physical abuse, sexual abuse, OWP was generally silent. I think that because that analysis was so much a part of our ideological armour we underplayed the specifics of gender discrimination, maybe to preserve unity in the party.

A second area of strength was our identification with the interests of the poorer classes: OWP was known for that and I think that is a strength. Another area of strength was that as our influence grew within the OWP and within the country

PARTY CONTROL

as a whole, we had some level of strength to turn back to the Party and say "We say we're revolutionary, but look at the position of women in the Party".

The first weakness in my view is that we **adopted the agenda of the Party too much as our agenda,** in a sense. In our club building work for example, elections were coming. The Party wanted to contest several areas and so the decision was taken (and the Women's Committee was a part of the decision-making structures) that yes, we wanted to go out and build clubs, but where we would build clubs were the areas in which the Party's

electoral thrust was positioned, although there were other areas where other people wanted to have OWP. And when we went in there we made the fundamental error, which I am only seeing now after having backed off over the past two years, of not building the clubs in the interests of women primarily - even although we used to say "The work must be seventy percent practical and thirty percent education". But we were following the Party's agenda much too much and not building the clubs sufficiently on what the women wanted.

Another weakness is a level of centralist direction in the Party, which the Party

* All contributions except for Honor Ford-Smith's and the piece on CARIWA were taken from the record of the 1988 WAND Consultation. Honor's contribution was taken from her study of SISTREN, *Ring Ding in a Tight Corner*, and the piece on CARIWA from WAND files.

Party Control (Cont'd)

has criticized itself for, and which the Party is seeking to reform because it has seen the consequences. We were subjecting the OWP, apart from other mass organisations, to this centralist direction, so for example, when you had to make a phoric call on the conditions of women, you sweat, Jesus you sweat, because you say "Lord, am I carrying the class line?" And after you have spoken, you die until somebody calls you and gives you an analysis and says, "Well that wasn't too bad, but you never carry the class line". And I used to say to myself "What the hell is this class line?" The fact is that we were so stereotyped in our approach, so rigid in our conceptions at that stage that we felt that if everything we said was not for the defeat of imperialism and the victory of working class rule, then we weren't carrying the class line. What we should have been doing instead was to project the concerns of the people and give some idea of how the problems could be overcome. So that the stiffness, the over centralist direction that we have begun to criticise ourselves for and to do something about in the Party itself, reflected itself in the OWP.

The last weakness which I think is fundamental is the whole Party's error in not focusing on the question of race. The fact is that as black women we cannot deny that racial oppression is a part of our oppression and therefore racial dignity has to be part of our efforts at liberation.

*Linnette Vassell,
Organisation of Women for
Progress, Jamaica*

CLASS CONTRADICTIONS

I asked Becky and Pauline*, before I came here "Is SISTREN really working class? It's often described in our literature as a working class group", and Pauline and Becky said, "Yes, SISTREN is working class with a minority of middle class people". I am happy to hear that we have got to the stage where the sisters feel that. It is a reflection of the sense of power that the sisters have got to in our time, but I think that we need to say that there are problems related to class relations within the group. There is one side of it which has to do with the building of working class women's power, but I think that that empowerment has been possible in SISTREN because of a particular kind of mix which middle class people do not want to recognize. In the 70's when SISTREN came into existence, you really didn't want to say that you were middle class or to call anything you were into middle class. You know, "working class" was in vogue and to be in middle class was something bad. But I think if we look objectively at SISTREN we have to recognise that much of what has been possible has been possible because the middle class women who got involved in SISTREN were not average middle class women - these were middle class women with a feminist commitment and progressive views, a commitment to class change and a commitment to the empowerment of grass-roots women, and I think that if we recognise that that kind of middle class input was critical to the survival of the Group then it will lead to some kind of meaningful

debate about how the Group managed to survive. If we deny, as many of us in the Group have tended to do out of our middle class guilt and out of our wanting to draw behind and say "Oh no, no, we're not there, it's just the working class out there", then we will not be doing this truth-speaking process any service. I think it is really something that we need to look at carefully. When the Government changed in Jamaica and there was the danger that SISTREN would actually disappear because there was no funding, the women had no jobs and the programme was being phased out, had it not been for the fact that there were middle class sisters with that commitment who were determined, and who had the knowledge and the exposure and the contacts and the know-how to find out about how to get the money to keep this Group going, I do not think that SISTREN would have survived and I think that we should honestly recognise that input.

What was done to overcome some of those problems? We have developed all kinds of structures in the Group which attempt to be democratic and to deal with the question of power. One of the things about SISTREN that I think is unique is the stark recognition that there is this class problem, that there are issues of power and the effort to deal with them. I will just use one example, because there's not enough time to go into the whole thing. We designed a thing called a general meeting where all of the major decisions and policies were made and everybody was there and we voted and would feel happy. But we found that that would not solve the problem of democracy, because democracy was not only

related to the business of having a structure where everybody theoretically had a voice and theoretically had a vote; there are certain in-built problems of power which have to do with the very exposure of middle-class people, simple things like language and the ability to argue a point. I remember being accused by one of the sisters once, who said "Ya see you Joan, yuh always a try fi tie me up with words". She was expressing the feeling that the fact that the middle-class person could articulate and argue her point left her disempowered because she could not find the words to answer back from her position and feeling. This was the feeling of most of the working class sisters in the group, and it led to a lot of what to some people would appear to be strange behaviour; people would say "yes" in a meeting, then go outside of the meeting and organise a little posse and deal with their things and come back and undermine the decisions, and I think it was their way of resisting, it was their response to a level of domination and a level of over-powering that they could not confront in any other way.

*Joan French,
SISTREN, Jamaica.*

Even where it goes right down to parish level committees, there is still that argument that the educated women who are feeding information into the women's bureaus on which policy interpretations are developed, are, in fact, gatekeepers for the poor.

*Dorienne Wilson-Smillie,
formerly of the Jamaica
Women's Bureau.*

* Rebecca Knowles and Pauline Crawford, two of the working class founding members of SISTREN.

The National Farmers' Union has a membership of males and females in the ratio of 1.5 in favour of the men.

Our Executive body is elected by a general assembly. On our present executive of eleven we have only one woman - myself. We have about twelve branches and of these only one has a female chair and representation. We have a credit union within the farmers union and I have recently analysed that only 12.5% of the recipients of credit are women. The whole management structure of the credit union is male dominated. However, the material which is given on credit to our members, which is basically farming books and tools, goes to men and women equally.

We have two kinds of exchange programmes: one is in collaboration with

another Farmers' Union in the Windward Islands. We also have an exchange with Canada, and a regional exchange among ourselves. The exchange programmes fortunately have a compulsory part which speaks about equal participation of women. So if we are sending six people on an exchange programme we make sure there are three women and three men. The education programme when it is organised is mainly through our bulletin, but we also operate seminars, workshops and so on: about 25% of the participants in the seminars and workshops are women.

Looking again at the composition of our staff, we have a full-time staff of seven of whom only two are women - the typist and

myself. Our field officers are all male.

What I have observed over the last seven or eight years as General Secretary of the Union, is that where a female heads a farm family, she becomes a member of the Union, but where you have a male-headed family, he becomes the member of the Union. When the women are approached to join the Union, they would say "My husband is in the union already, so we are in it".

But when we have meetings these women would not come.

Whenever women attend branch meetings they sit in the back and their participation is minimal. Sometimes they are not encouraged to participate because often the chairperson is a man.

We have also noticed that generally, ownership of the land is in the hands of the man. I would conclude then that the economic independence of women strengthens their participation in the struggle for total emancipation. If they have a regular substantial income, they feel free to be part of the wider struggle, and from all these observations I conclude that there is a need to find some way of women coming together to discuss their problems, survival and strength among themselves with confidence, so that when we attend a meeting of men and women we are a little more comfortable in raising our issues and our problems, discussing them forcefully and coming to some proposals for solutions.

*Earlene Horne,
National Farmers
Union, St. Vincent*

MALE PATRONAGE AND CONTROL

We hear a lot about the inadequacies, about the burdens, about the problems and the dysfunctioning of women from our male counterparts and very little about our contributions and the vital role that women play in meeting the growing demands of society.

*Vereen Thomas
Montserrat Allied Workers
Trade Union*

Then there is the problem of leaders of "progressive" organisations

who abuse the women in their personal lives; and the church men who are for

justice but against women priests. How can these men be our co-workers or allies?

Several Participants

Another problem is that in the party, women are expected to do certain tasks - like prepare food for party functions.

*Arah Hector,
Antigua Women's Movement.*



Drawing by Serguei

Guardian Weekly, February 25, 1990

In the OWTU, the women struggle alongside of the men. Women's issues are not separate from those of their husbands' or boyfriends' struggle for day care services are given the same priority as struggles for better pension schemes or health services. Struggle for improved maternity benefits are given the same priority as COLA allowances.

Wendy Whyte,
Oil Workers' Trade Union,
Trinidad

WOMEN'S INVISIBILITY IN MIXED ORGANISATIONS

Q: The pension is calculated on the basis of the last salary paid to the person. However, women are usually in a lower salary bracket -

has this issue been addressed?

A: The OWTU categorises workers and

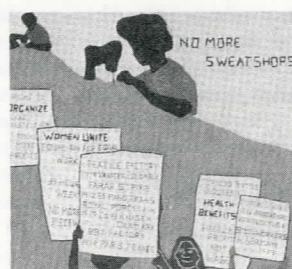
within any category, men and women receive the same pension levels.

Q: What about social security benefits for non-wage earning spouses?

A: This has not been addressed.

Q: How are the problems of older women addressed, for example, with reference to economic security, pension, etc.

A: The OWTU is presently engaged in a pension struggle. We have been able to get the same pension benefits for men and women.



As political women we have found that it is not an easy task at all, because a political woman must be able to combine her job, her family and home life plus her involvement in politics. It is very hard to combine all three, thus many women have to reduce emphasis on one or the other. Many times it is the political work which suffers, which makes it impossible for women to advance rapidly as against their male counterparts.

The steady increase of migration is also a source of concern for us since we are losing many talented women and this has created vacuums in the areas where they were living and the groups they were functioning in.

WOMEN'S LACK OF CONTROL OVER THEIR LIVES

Migration from rural to urban areas and marriage often disrupts the functioning of the groups thus a period of renewing and developing has to start all over again.

Combined with that is the deterioration in all spheres of life in Guyana which makes it necessary for more and more women to go out in search of some type of employment.

Indra Chandrapaul, WPO,
Guyana.

It is important that the disabled organise themselves.

Societal attitudes, reflected in the attitudes of women's groups, marginalise the disabled.

The practical effects of this is the denial of the rights of the disabled to education, for example - even to access to public buildings. Disabled women are the disadvantaged of the disadvantaged.

Natalie Giradel,
Dominica Disabled People's
Association

EXCLUSION OF DISABLED AND OLDER WOMEN

The issue of aging is a woman's issue because women live longer, are often left by men for young women, or have

lived and therefore age outside of any stable relationship to a man. In

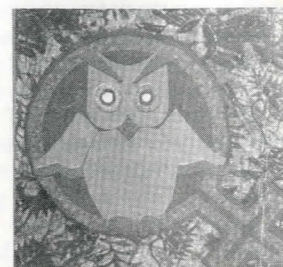
each case this means women aging on their own. The major issues for aging women are material security and emotional well-being.

Sybil Francis,
UWI, Mona

← Women's Labour Strikes Around the World.

OLDER WOMEN: The owl symbolises the wise old woman. →

From: Women in Struggle, quilt



The years have taught us that we cannot raise a woman's consciousness in isolation of her other needs, be they social or economic, and that therefore today our goal must be to work at empowering her while at the same time addressing her need to survive, to put bread and butter on the table.

Our experience during these years has also taught us, indeed humbled us, to accept that we cannot come in with some grand scheme to move women into non-traditional, "less domesticating" areas as a form of empowerment, but that we need to begin wherever women are, which means even validating

DIFFICULTY RECONCILING WOMEN'S PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC NEEDS

activities that we've looked at as domesticating and looking at them as mediums through which empowerment can take place.

Diane Haylock,
BOWAND, Belize.



Women, the Poor of the World, Struggle To Break the Chains of Poverty

From: Women in Struggle, quilt

CARIWA has been operating on an essentially ad hoc basis since it was formed. This is not surprising since it is made up essentially of voluntary women's organisations which operate on contributions, the hard work of a few and on a special target basis, for example, raising funds for a hospital ward, for an indigent family, or for a trip somewhere. Their contributions and services, although valuable, work best within a parish or within a country where the resources are known, links have already been made and communications are easy. A regional organisation like CARIWA cannot run efficiently on an ad hoc basis. It needs enough money to spend to meet the needs of its members. There is a membership fee for CARIWA which is paid

A second major problem which confronted SISTREN was the effect of international funding policies on the organisation. Agencies funding projects in the Third World have an enormous amount of power. One only has to glimpse the files of any agency involved in so-called development to recognise the enormous amounts of information they have accumulated about progressive organisations and the amount of power the dispensing of funds gives them over people's lives all over the world. They are able to shape the lives of the organisations they support, not simply because they fund them, but also because of the processes they require the agencies to become involved in. The term "partner" currently being used by donor agencies to describe their

by some members. It is difficult for most of its member organisations to pay. CARIWA's financial state represents the financial state of its members who are plague by insufficient funds.

CARIWA's membership embraces women's organisations such as the Mother's Union, Women's Voluntary Service, Home League, 4H, Parent Federation and many other organisations of this nature. This makes CARIWA an organisation that represents the traditional forms of women's organisations. The women who belong to organisations like 4H and Mother's Union are often women who are labourers and farmers or vendors.

Although this is not the only type of Women's organisation affiliated to CARIWA it certainly represents the largest number of women's organisations in all the territories. What this means is that CARIWA has a cross section of women in its affiliates. Organisations like

the Toastmistress Club and the Business and Professional Women's Organisation also form part of CARIWA's profile. CARIWA, then, has an essentially Caribbean base, for its backbone is among the organisations of working class women, with a fair representation of professional and other women.

The Association however faces the following problems:- the lack of an institutional base to serve its members; the inability therefore to liaise with other Women in Development agencies in the Caribbean; the lack of a reliable communication system between CARIWA and its members; the lack of skills, leadership and other educational programmes geared towards the CARIWA membership; and the lack of short-term financial and technical support for a variety of women's projects which are initiated with good intentions but die because of this lack.

CARIWA

MONEY AND THE POLITICS OF AID

relationship with recipient organisations only obscures what remains a very real power relation. This egalitarian label does not change the reality.

One area which women's groups need to face squarely concerns the tendency on the part of agencies to prioritise material production over educational and cultural processes and to see these areas as separate and distinct. This separation in the long run serves to entrench dependency because it means that internal processes of organisational development and transfer of skills are always subsumed under the "more important" process of production. In fact production and education are inextricably linked.

On the other hand, to prioritise educational cultural processes over so-called production is to ignore the importance of building up some form of self-financing. Any single issue or set of issues which come to be prioritised for funding by agencies can be used against the development of effective organisational processes. International funding agencies often determine priorities which are applied in a blanket way. Our experience has shown that very careful attention has to be paid to local conditions. The political and cultural context, available skills and resources are all areas which need very careful consideration and which will enormously affect what is possible for any organisation. When local

factors are not taken into consideration, choices about programme activities can be made which have long term negative consequences for local organisations. This is especially so when organisations are young or operate in a conservative context in which there is little capacity for negotiation with more powerful international agencies. When an organisation's survival is at stake, the criteria of international agencies will always take priority over developing processes of accountability to its constituency.

Such mistakes cannot be waved away. Their implications mushroom into new difficulties which are often harder to deal with than those problems they were originally meant to solve. They involve people's lives, hopes, energies,



Women in a State of Agony, Maria Lipu de Morveli.

From: *Compañeras* by Betty La Duke.

Money and the Politics of Aid (Cont'd)

investments and resources in deep ways. The disillusionment and bitterness they create deeply affect an organisation's potential to have an impact on its community and to build a healthy working culture.

Finally, the emphasis of international agencies on funding "grassroots" women seems to be contradictory and simplistic. Grassroots women are not miracle workers and like anyone else need to study and understand a situation before they can work effectively in it. Agency policies sometime emphasise the delivery of funding to grassroots women while ignoring the many complex processes in which both gender and many classes are involved, processes which reproduce the conditions the funding is meant to alleviate.

RED THREAD started in 1986 as a women's development project producing embroidered household items, something which I first opposed, to my lasting shame. I can no longer see why I thought the production of beauty (for pleasure and money) was not as much production for basic need as the areas we want to move into: food, clothing and small housing materials.

Shortly after the project started, two groups proposed that we introduce the idea of membership and they elected community committees, but the transition from a project to some form of membership body is very difficult. What kind of membership body? How structured? What would be the terms or the relations to this body that would bind women together in their shared interests, but without excluding those who could not meet the terms?

The effect often does not contribute to social transformation. In fact, as was the experience of SISTREN, it can reproduce relationships of dependency and domination both internally inside groups and between aid agencies and recipients.

Organisations like SISTREN are not at the stage where they can do without these foreign funders. Neither is it the first time in history that organisations working for radical transformation in one society require the support of richer groups in conservative societies. It will be a long time before we cease to need foreign funding. Nevertheless we are at a stage where women's organisations working together internationally can use their lobbying power collectively to make these agencies accountable to the groups they are supposed to be serving. Just as we need to be accountable to those

we serve so they also need to take on board their accountability to those whom they serve. Collective dialogue is key if groups are to have clear channels of communication and clearer input into the policies of these agencies and the way in which these are implemented regionally.

In many funding agencies there are members of staff who are genuinely concerned about issues of dependency and democracy. These women want to work internationally around some of the struggles we face. The power of the agencies does not exist in a monolithic institutional sense. It operates through people who have a degree of leverage at their disposal. It is up to us to build alliances that are genuinely internationalist in order to bring about changes.

*Honor Ford-Smith,
SISTREN, Jamaica.*

After all, one of the limitations of many "progressive" parties in this region is that they demand a degree and kind of daily activism that is quite impossible for most working class women.

Our original resource persons were self-appointed and the first community organisers were appointed by us. How to move from there to something democratic?

The originators of the project were also all from the same (opposition) party, although few of the community women are, a key point to us in our party-dominated, patronage-oriented culture. But it is still difficult for RED THREAD not to be used for patronage purposes; those community organisers who are party members are often guilty of this. But RED

THREAD is not an arm, section or mass organisation of any party.

There is also still a rural/urban and a class divide. The original resource

persons were all middle class and urban; the community members

working class and rural or semi-urban. Our culture feeds on hierarchy, sometimes more difficult to fight in working class members than among the middle class. And of course, the experience of Guyana over the last 20 odd years is an experience of more direct authoritarianism than in any other country of the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Race relations are quite good; half the groups are Indo-Guyanese and half Afro-Guyanese and we have informal relations with Amerindian sisters. The



Mother and Child, artist unknown.

From: *Compañeras* by Betty La Duke

PROBLEMS OF ORGANISATIONAL DEMOCRACY

community organisers are of different race groups. None of the original resource persons was Indo-Guyanese but this is no longer true.

Somebody once said that social movements are like street theatre; they write their own scripts as they go along. Our thinking so far is that what we would like RED THREAD to become as a large and relatively loose network of women, each relating to the network as her circumstances allow - but a network that is more and more guided by a common understanding of where we are and what kind of development we want for ourselves and for Guyana. The popular education work we're involved with with SISTREN is part of our whole process of all of us in RED THREAD moving to some critical understanding of the questions of organisation and power.

*Andaiye,
Red Thread, Guyana*

Problems of Organisational Democracy (Cont'd)

From the beginning, a major problem was the way in which the group SISTREN came in practice to equate democracy with a single notion—that of collective decision making.

The undifferentiated collective form has a number of problems. It can be antithetical to productivity and service delivery because it tends to substitute internal practice with a single notion—that of collective decision making. Where it functions in the conservative capitalist third world it often masks the continuation of the central contradictions of capitalist societies—such as race and class. Where ideological variety or differences exist within a group these become obstacles to sameness rather than opportunities to develop the richness and complexity of the group's work. The undifferentiated collective structure lends itself to the exercise of power by informal leaders whose roles can never be clearly defined, who are not clearly accountable internally in the group, and who tend to operate covertly. Real processes of decision making then become masked and the organisation becomes bogged down in the morass of endless meetings, low productivity, a sense of diffused responsibility and low morale.

...In SISTREN's history the phase of intense collectivity was a necessary one, [in that] it unquestionably exposed members to areas of decision making involved in running the organisation and acquainted everyone with the skills of advocacy. At this point in the organisation's growth however, the movement toward some specialisation and differentiation also seems necessary and inevitable if its problems are to be solved.

What shape then can be envisioned for a democratic organisation which is not a collective? There can be no dogmatic answer to this question. Just as the collective decision making model works in some situations, but not in others, there can be no one true democratic organisational form, which will work effectively across cultures and in different political and economic contexts.

In this search, two concepts in need of fuller discussion are those of management and leadership.

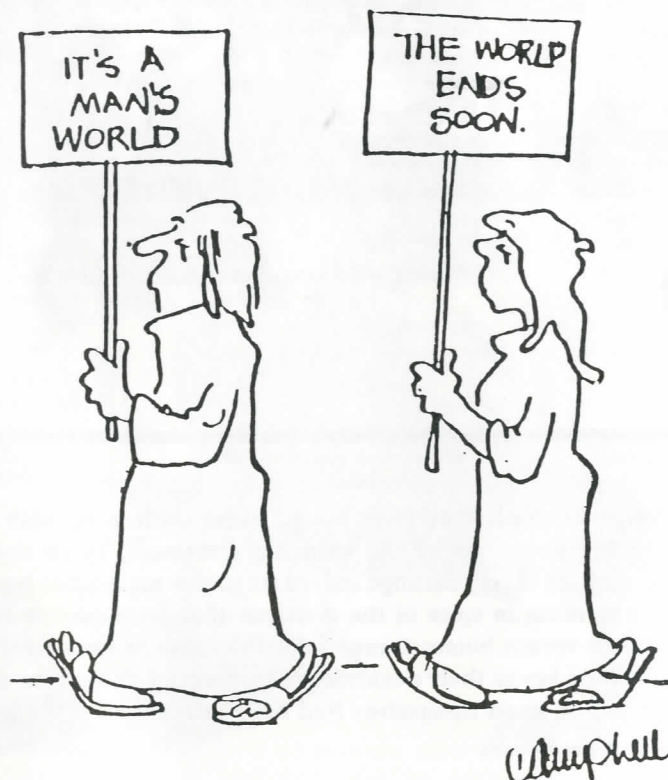
In the effort to throw out the idea of the personality cult and the charismatic leader, the progressive movement has not really defined alternative forms of leadership. For women's groups it is perhaps especially difficult to grant and accept leadership from other women. Historically women have been excluded from the processes by which power has come to reside in

particular people or groups of people. Male, white, middle-class privilege has been so founded on hierarchy, division and specialisation that the women's movement has been cautious about reproducing forms which seemed to imitate these models. At the same time, in organisations where women have been granted leadership, maternalism and the dominant form of race and class power are often reflected. In the Caribbean it is particularly difficult to come to terms with the issue of leadership because of the way race and class and skill are tied and because resistance to these forms of domination are often covert, informal and unnamed. However to avoid the discussion of leadership is no solution at all.

The term management also tends to be interpreted as an authoritarian big boot, squeezing the life blood out of its underlings.

Management in our setting carries the connotation of exploiters from "the evil empire" of capitalism...But in rejecting the worst of capitalism we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water. Management and leadership, whether they reside in individuals or in groups of people need to be controlled by defining both what they are to manage and how they can be accountable and removable at different moments in an organisation's life. Issues of skills transfer and education could then be addressed in a systematic and consistent way. A key concept in thinking about democratic management then is accountability—a concept which can be applied differently both within an organisation and externally with those it serves.

Honor Ford-Smith,
SISTREN, Jamaica.



Off Our Backs, June, 1989

ORGANISING WHERE WE MEET



Compañeras by Betty La Duke

Sharing a Common Pot of Food, by Dina Loagos

Strange to think that even today, when confronted with the autonomy of the black movement or the autonomy of the women's movement, there are those who talk about this "dividing the working class". Strange indeed when our experience has told us that in order for the working class to unite in spite of the divisions that are inherent in its very structure - factory versus plantation versus homes versus schools - those at the lowest levels of the hierarchy must themselves find the key to their weakness, must themselves find the strategy which will attack that point and shatter it, must themselves find their own modes of struggle.

Selma James

Caribbean women meet in many places: at centres of worship; in the market-place; over the standpipe; at places of entertainment; on social occasions. In some of our territories they also meet in lines (see box below).

In some of the places where they meet, Caribbean women self-organise so they can get their work done by pooling their resources.

Yet when people talk about "organising" women, they talk only about organising them in the office, field and factory; or about pulling them out from where they already meet and self-organise to organise them "properly".

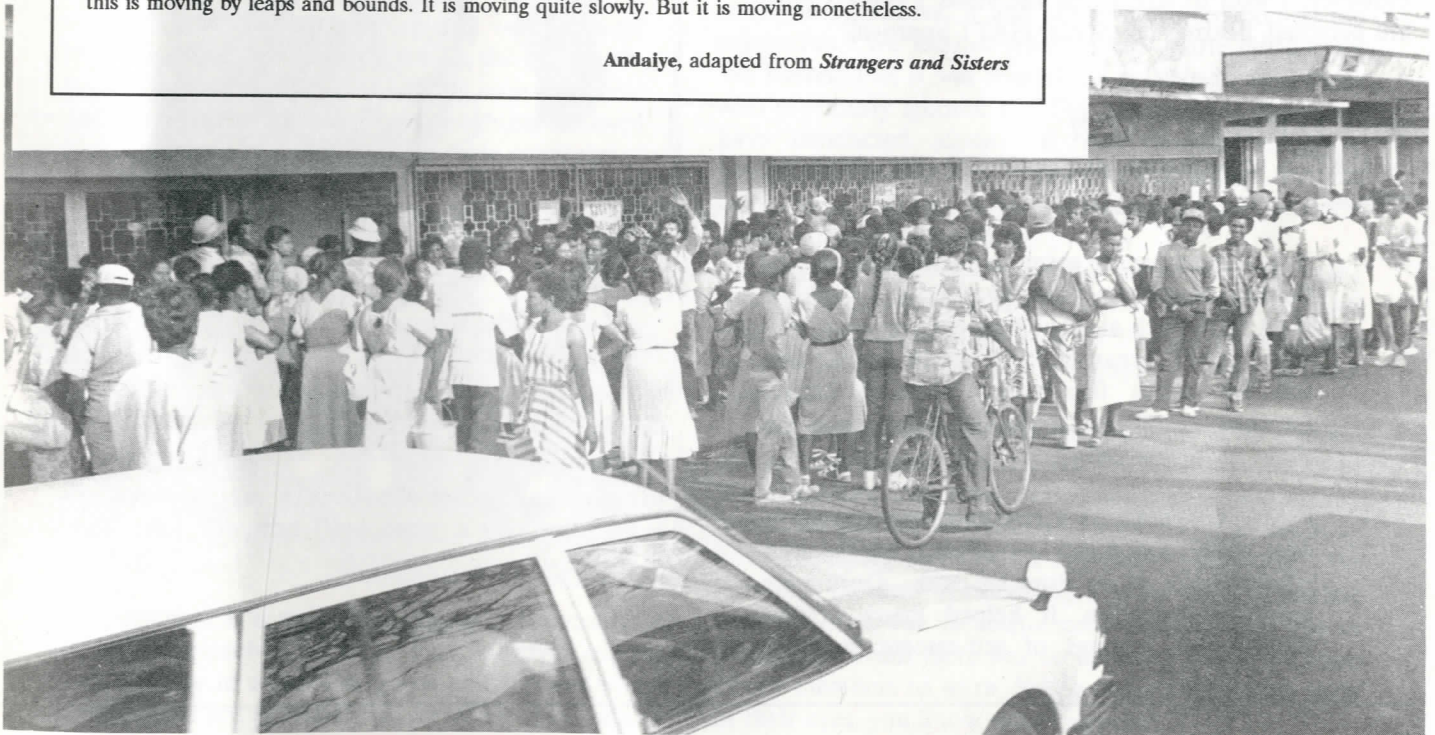
We can talk about where women meet not only physically but in another way: they meet as housewives in the sense that all women are housewives whether or not they have waged work outside the home.

One of the pieces which follows is about organising from the base of Trade Unions and political women's groups. The other three are about three ways of organising women where they meet: one, as consumers, i.e. as the waged and unwaged workers who have to carry out the harder and harder tasks of getting goods and services for themselves and their families; two, across different kinds of work in the informal sector where, as Rhoda Reddock has pointed out, Caribbean trade unions once organised until it was decided to organise only in the office, field and factory; and three, from the perspective of the unwaged housework that all women do.

Since the daily issues are the issues of food and water and electricity, obviously we are talking of women being in the front line of struggle in Guyana. And women on the front line of that struggle have found out who else is in the front line: by the very nature of women's work, the food line is where you find women.

What is happening on the food line, which I insist on calling the front line in Guyana, is that African and Indian women standing on that line have begun, not in abstract terms but in real concrete terms, to understand, one, their particular oppression as women; and two, that they share that in common with each other as women. That they are powerless as individual women, that they have some power as women acting collectively. Obviously I am not going to pretend to you that this is moving by leaps and bounds. It is moving quite slowly. But it is moving nonetheless.

Andaiye, adapted from *Strangers and Sisters*



Karen De Souza

ORGANISING AS CONSUMERS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOUSEWIVES ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO*

By Faith Wiltshire

There is no justification when discussing consumerism in distinguishing between women who work in the home, meaning housewives (and household workers) and women who work outside the home. In fact consumerism is everybody's business - men included - and an ideal consumer movement would include men. However, I agree with the thinking that since women are the largest group operating in the market place, special emphasis should be placed on how effective we can be out there.

I will use this opportunity to draw on concrete, personal experiences which I feel are relevant to women living and working in the eighties.

These experiences are all bound up with my activities as a member of the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HATT). In this presentation, I will not focus on the day-to-day problems consumers face, nor will I deal with the special concerns of women who work at home.

What I will attempt to do is to provide a framework within which we can conduct our discussions, so that I am really using HATT's experiences as a case study. However, I wish to stress that the views I express here are personal, bearing no official HATT approval.

WHY LOOK AT HATT?

HATT's experiences are valid for the following reasons:

- If as women we are going to decide how we will function as consumers in the eighties, I think we must look back at what happened to us in the 70's. HATT began in 1971 and its impact was felt for about five years. Then it began, imperceptibly at first, to decline. Now it is at the point of inertia. Why?
- HATT was not just a consumer movement. It was really a women's movement which used consumerism as its drawing card. During its years of operation, it helped many women achieve high feelings of self-esteem. Perhaps,

the single most important success story is this feeling of self-worth it engendered among women, through the unprecedented scale of its operations.

Why then did such a vibrant organisation, the benefits of whose activities are still enjoyed today by the society in general, why did such an organisation go under?

I think that some of the answer is rooted in the following considerations:

- That when any group of citizens forms a consumer movement, that group immediately begins to involve itself in an exercise of POWER.



Karen De Souza

Working Hands #5

* Adapted from a presentation at a seminar on "Women in the Eighties" sponsored by the YWCA, Port of Spain Branch, on June 13, 1981.

- That Consumerism is a form of political activity - call it pressure group politics - and depending on the national climate, pressure group activity can become limited, with only short term effectiveness. It can only be as good as the society in which it functions.
- That the question of leadership in such a movement must be seriously considered from the very beginning and the succession question taken care of.
- That any group of women gathered together in the name of any special interest, in this case Consumerism, becomes transformed into a group of women concerned about their own status as women in the society. In this context the man/woman relationship is brought to light for scrutiny.

In remote times women sat in the bow of the canoe and men in the stern. It was the women who hunted and fished. They left the villages and returned when they could or wanted. The men built the huts, prepared the meals, kept the fires burning against the cold, minded the children, and tanned skins for clothes.

Such was life for the Ona and Yagan Indians in Tierra del Fuego, until one day the men killed all the women and put on the masks that the women had invented to scare them.

Only newly born girls were spared extermination. While they grew up, the murderers kept repeating to them that serving men was their destiny. They believed it. Their daughters believed it, too, likewise the daughters of their daughters.

Quoted in Memories of Fire, by Ecuadro Galeano

CONSUMERISM AND POWER

Let us look briefly at each of these considerations.

- When any group of citizens forms a consumer movement, that group immediately begins an involvement in an exercise of POWER.

To illustrate this I need a working definition of consumerism. The one I am using is very loose, very elementary:

Consumerism is a movement into which consumers organise themselves so as to have effective control over the way in which the goods and services which they require are provided. In so doing they seek to

obtain the best choices and to get the most for their money in goods and services.

In undertaking this activity, consumers become engaged in a contest or more strongly put a power struggle between themselves and those who provide these goods and services. To think of it as anything else would be to delude ourselves.

In a modern society, the struggle is not just between the consumer and the business community, it extends to include the Government and its various agencies which through price control, quotas, monopolistic practices, also exercise power over us; a special kind of power, bearing in mind the vast resources at the Government's disposal.

In 1971, when HATT came on the scene, the distribution of power looked something like this - Government and the business community sitting in one of the scale pans and consumers (the Consumers' Association of T&T notwithstanding) sitting in the other scale pan, high and dry, up in the air, exposed to the elements.

HATT's first moves were tentative, ladylike, signifying almost absolutely nothing. Like all other consumer groups, we quickly learned that nobody gives up power without a fight and the only way we could ever hope to succeed was to broaden our strategy to include swift action, secrecy and above all aggression. We learned that a consumer group not afraid to be aggressive gains more respect than those prepared to sit in boardrooms pleading. We learned that having demonstrated that we could be aggressive, it was not always necessary to use aggression. We learned when to use gentle persuasion. We learned that it was possible to collaborate with those who previously ignored us. For example, we could not have conducted alone our now famous BREAST FEEDING CAMPAIGN, because of our limited financial resources. In a novel partnership the business community worked with us.

If you think the case for aggression is being overstated, consider that the Consumer Guidance Council with all the so-called backing of the Government had tried before us to get such a campaign going, without success.

What effect did this strength have on us as a group and as individuals? We realised just how many of us in the beginning had been brainwashed into fearing the possession and use of power and were taught to shy away from displaying any type of aggressive behaviour. We faced this problem by discussing it in meetings, sometime stormy. After our successful confrontation with one of the multinationals there was no need any longer for some of our members to warn, "when women get onion juice in their eyes, you know what happens".

We felt exhilarated by our self-confidence and were freed to work more effectively. Our successes had a multiplier effect. Individual consumers fought and won their battles in the market place.

But we paid a price. We lost some of our members as a result. Our detractors included women who were embarrassed by our tactics; women who felt it difficult to deal with the changing image of women. Our changing image also discouraged others from joining.

PRESSURE GROUP POLITICS

Let us look at the second consideration.

- That Consumerism is a form of political activity - pressure group politics. Depending on the national political climate pressure group activity becomes limited with only short term effectiveness.

At some point we had to do battle with government agencies. However, this action caused some of our members severe guilt feelings. They felt a peculiar loyalty to the Government and declared themselves unwilling to get into political activity: a statement which indicates how sadly lacking we were in political education.

Fear of power, fear of political involvement equalled loss of membership.

If you are really assessing where you are going, it inevitably becomes clear that pressure group politics loses its validity when the whole political fabric of the society begins to come apart. In the seventies the political fabric was indeed falling apart and the activities of groups such as HATT were only serving as plasters for sores.

Each improvement won, had the indirect effect of bolstering the Government, but did not always deal with root causes of problems. Our activities seemed to be plugging leaks. Take, for example, our environmental campaign, and all our efforts to clean up our country. Things looked good for a while. But at the beginning of the eighties, the state of the environment left much to be desired.

When the frustration level became high and we realised that we were going into a tail spin, we agreed to back one of our members as an independent member in the last general elections. This was our token stand to launch consumer representatives into Parliament.

That decision rocked the organisation. Some of our membership felt we had moved out of our depth by giving one of our members that kind of support.

A powerful woman's group living in the 70's was afraid to take the logical step. Should such an opportunity arise in the 80's I wonder if women will balk at it!

ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The third consideration:

- The question of leadership in such an organisation must seriously be considered and the succession problem taken care of.

So often in organisations, the position of leader is left in the hands of one person or a clique for what seems an eternity. HATT recognised that women needed to be trained to be leaders. It was also concerned that no person should dominate the scene for more than a certain period of time. It therefore wrote this into its constitution. But it became increasingly difficult to find women willing to come forward and do their share of leading.

To be successful HATT had to engage in the type of activities it organised, and by the very nature of these activities, it became the kind of organisation that not many wanted to lead or considered themselves capable of leading.

REJECTING STEREOTYPES

Although the three considerations which I have mentioned above had adverse effects on the life of the organisation, I do not believe that these were as disastrous to our well-being as was the last consideration.

- Any group of women gathered together in the name of consumerism, becomes transformed into a group concerned about their own status as women and in this context the man/woman relationship is challenged.

Many men who sent their wives to join HATT, encouraged them to do so because they saw some hope of fighting rising prices. But women will begin to bond together once they reject the stereotypes of themselves. You know, some women did not join us because they could not "stand being with a bunch of women", and others because we were considered another variety of tea-drinkers. Paradoxically we only started drinking tea when we began to lose our vibrancy.

WOMEN VERSUS WOMEN

Bonding meant looking at our relationships with each other. Naturally female employers and their household workers would have to examine their relationships. When in HATT we began to do this the bonds were not strong enough to hold some of us who were employers. Some of us employers questioned whose side the Association was on when it championed the cause of the worker. We had become a Trade Union, they said, and used that as the cue to make their exit.

It was difficult to show that we were really on the side of all women when we tackled the household worker problem. These members who left (female employers) refused to accept that the bad relationship, which so

often exists between female employer and employee, is determined by the relationship women have with their menfolk and their children, especially their boy children.

I mentioned before that men sent their women to join. Well some of them were equally quick to tell them unjoin!. These men held a key to the future of HATT.

The tragedy is not just that these women left. It was also that they did not feel free to say "loudly" that: "my man is afraid of what I am learning when I am with other women; he is afraid that I have interests outside him and the children; he is ashamed that I belong to an organisation of militant women; he swears that my activities will hinder his chances of promotion; he swears that some of the women who lead HATT are husband beaters".

So this group of insecure women, cowed by their equally insecure partners, told anything but the truth when they left. Sometimes they whispered the truth to a close friend. But this is a matter we have to talk about loudly, especially in the face of evidence that so many women end their days alone through one of the three D's -desertion, divorce or death.

How then about practising to stand up for ourselves?

What the future requires of us is that we learn to be strong, so that we will not weaken easily in the face of adversity. It also requires of us that we help to enhance the self-esteem of the male of the species. Strong women deserve strong men.

WHERE WOMAN = BIG

Musuo society is one of the few matriarchies remaining in the world...

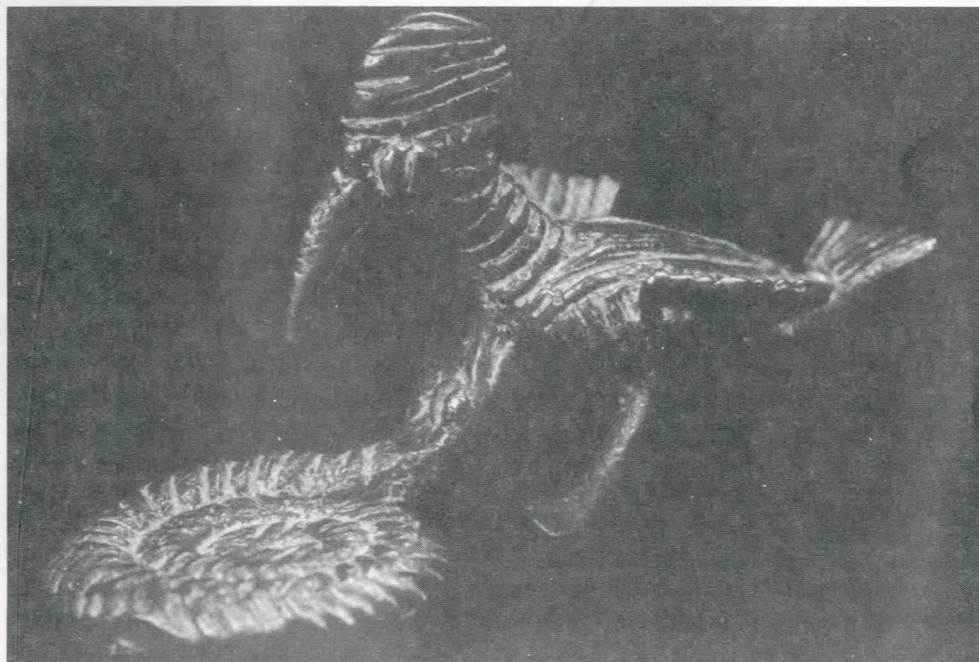
...perhaps half of the 40,000 Mosuos, who live in south-western China, practice traditional *ah-asia* marriage, in which young women take lovers who return to their mothers' homes in the daytime.

The Musuo language has no words for "father" or "marriage" because children traditionally live with their mother and her brothers. The father belongs to his own mother's household, where he works in the daytime. Siblings often have different fathers, and sometimes children don't know who their father is. "We just don't feel the same way about marriage," says one Musuo girl. Reflecting the society's matriarchal traditions, the Musuos add "woman" to a word to signify "big" and "man" for "small".

Newsweek, April 23, 1990
Women in Action, March 1988



Brass Weight: A measure for gold dust. The bird is often synonymous with a woman's power, Akan of Ghana.



ORGANISING ACROSS INFORMAL SECTOR WORK: THE EXAMPLE OF SEWA, INDIA *

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a trade union of over 5,000 poor women workers in Ahmedabad, India. The Union was established in 1972 when a group of women headloaders, used garment dealers, junksmiths, and vegetable vendors came together to form a worker's association. At the time, they faced a great deal of scepticism from the outside community. How could illiterate women participate effectively in such an organisation? How could their husbands permit it? When would they have the time? What could they possibly organise for or against without specific employer-employee relationships? How can unorganised workers in various occupations and scattered throughout the city be reached by one organisation? In sum, what role could a union play for the self employed? At the time, neither the members or the leaders had a clear idea of what it meant to form a union.

Today most of these questions have been laid to rest. During the past decade thousands of poor women workers in Ahmedabad have been involved in the activities of SEWA. The union organises struggles for higher wages and improved working conditions and defends members against harassment by police and exploitation by middlemen. It provides further supports through a women's bank, skills training programme, social security schemes, production and marketing co-operatives, and other programmes for developing their trades. As it meets the continuing challenge of organising the "unorganised" sector, SEWA provides a modern history of struggle and development among self employed workers.

SEWA was registered as a trade union in 1971. Its members include women in a wide range of self employed trades, including vegetable vendors, hand cart pullers, carpenters, wastepickers, agricultural labourers and women in other small-scale, independent occupations. The Union's activities have centered in the industrial city of Ahmedabad, located in the western Indian State of Gujarat. The Association grew out of the activities of the Women's Wing of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), one of the oldest and largest unions of textile workers in India founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1917. SEWA was started largely at the initiative of the head of the TLA Women's Wing, Ela Bhatt, and the president

of the TLA, A.N. Buch. It remained a part of the TLA until April of 1981 when under pressure from the TLA leadership it separated to become an independent organisation.

The textile industry is the base of Ahmedabad's economy and directly employs over 150,000 workers. Almost 90% of these workers are members of the TLA which has struggled over the years to secure fair wages and decent working conditions for millworkers. However, a large and increasing portion of Ahmedabad's labour force (at least 45%) is comprised of unorganised workers who depend on the informal sector for employment. This is particularly true for women workers who have limited opportunities for wage employment in the organised sector. The severe decline in the proportion of women millworkers in recent years illustrates this. While in the 1950's they comprised over 25% of the workers in the city's mills, by 1980 they had dropped to less than 5%. Although there is limited data on the sectoral distribution of the female labour force, existing information indicates that most women workers in Ahmedabad depend on self employment in the informal sector where they are relegated to the lowest level, lowest paying occupations.

SEWA was established to represent the interests of self employed women. Building on a Gandhian approach to social change -- which focuses on both the work and family life of the community -- SEWA's two-fold objectives are economic regeneration and social uplift. Economic regeneration means improving the quantity and regularity of women's income in current occupations, strengthening their production based, and maximising their returns. Social uplift recognises that many problems associated with poverty and being a woman call for action on non-economic fronts as well. As the problems and needs of its members have become clearer, SEWA has focused its goals on bringing recognition and visibility to women's work, raising their incomes, and increasing women's control over income and property.

SEWA members typically fall into one of three occupational groups: small-scale sellers, home-based producers, and casual labourers and service workers. These categories encompass women working in a broad range of occupations, from selling old clothes, to rolling

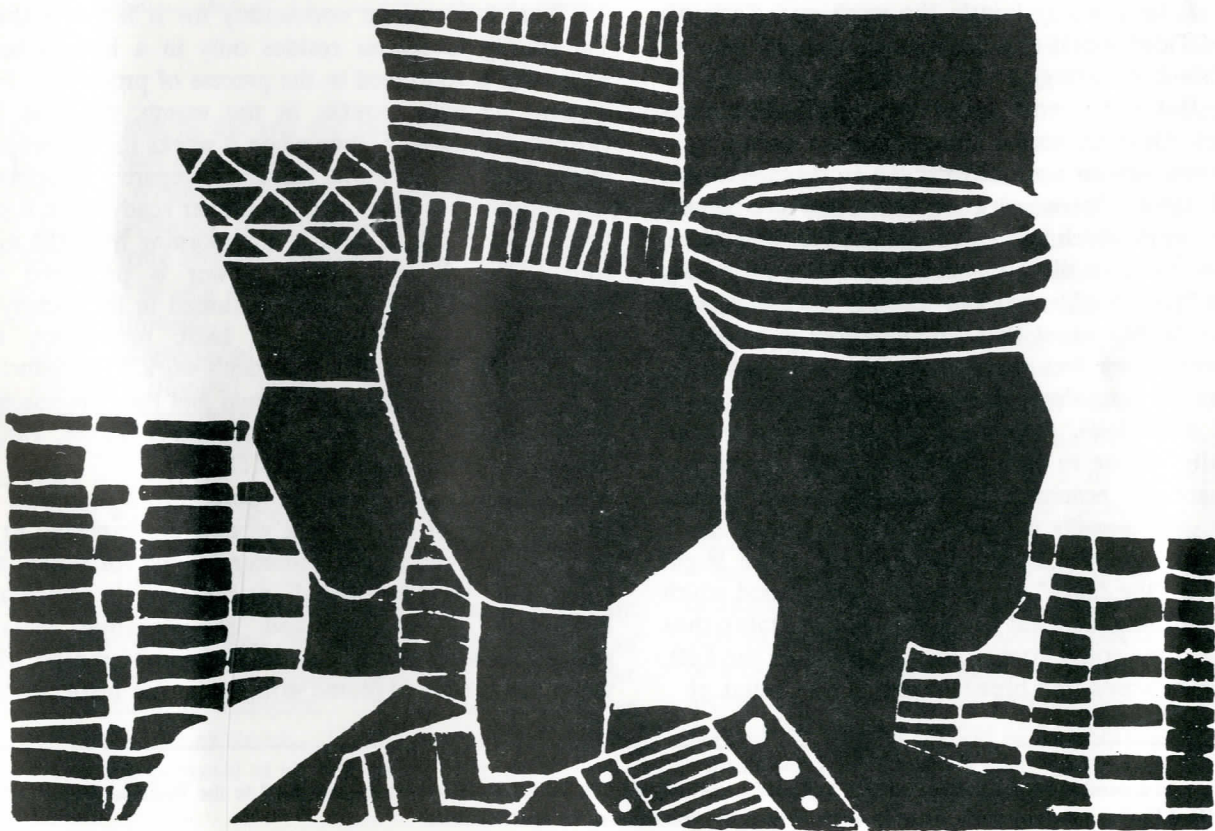
* From Struggle and Development Among Self Employed Women: A Report on the Self Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad, India, March 1982.

incense sticks, to tending cattle, to pulling cart loads of grain. Members live and work throughout Ahmedabad and in a cluster of villages about 50 kilometers from the city. Within SEWA they are represented by local trade group leaders as well as full-time organisers.

Despite the wide range of occupations within the membership, the problems of these women workers converge in many areas. While no doubt there are unique problems and needs within each trade, many are shared among the trades. Small-scale sellers frequently are forced to borrow working capital from private moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates; and as street vendors they are continually faced with police harassment and difficulties in establishing their right to a fixed selling spot. Home-based producers similarly have limited access to credit in addition to problems in securing stocks of raw materials, markets for their goods, and

space for production. Exploitation by wholesale merchants and middlemen is high. Home-based producers who are paid on a piece rate basis receive extremely meager wages from those who hire them. Self employed labourers also face exploitative wages, but suffer from irregular and insecure work opportunities and sub-standard working conditions as well.

As a group, the self employed are outside the scope of protective labour laws and policies which establish minimum wages, hours of work, social security benefits, and insurance schemes. Unlike some women working in the wage sector, the self employed do not qualify for maternity benefits, nor do they have access to child care facilities for their children. Their young infants are often exposed to unhealthy and hazardous conditions in market places or at construction sites or are left in the care of immature siblings.



Vendors by Arlette St. Hill, 1989

ORGANISING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF UNWAGED HOUSEWORK - THE INTERNATIONAL WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK CAMPAIGN.

By Selma James

Trinidad and Tobago is one of the locations of the campaign; the organiser there is Clotil Walcott.

In 1980, at the Mid-Decade World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in Copenhagen, the UN declared that women do 2/3 of the world's work for 10% of the income (the ILO says 5%) and own 1% of the assets. This figure tells us much.

First, by quantifying women's work and what we receive back for it, the UN, a supremely male-dominated institution, has given us a superb materialist definition of sexism: whatever attitudes women, or men, may have to themselves or each other, women work twice as many hours as men and are decidedly poorer. Here is the first international quantification of the economic and social weakness of the "weaker" sex.

Second, to quantify jointly the work and (lack of) wealth of Third World and metropolitan women implies a sisterhood of struggle against that overwork and poverty. But is that work quantitatively or qualitatively the same? Or even comparable?

Wherever women are, whatever the technology, we are expected to do "housework" - which we are finally defining - work which we can't seem to shed even when, in addition to it, we till the land, often to feed the family, or take a "liberating" waged job. Despite the assertion of the women's movement that "the personal is political", the "personal" services women provide without a wage have usually remained "personal" and "private" in feminist definitions, disparaged as something women "personally choose to do"; dismissed as a sign of low consciousness; economically insignificant or at best marginal; and socially demeaning. This is usually men's view. It is also the Establishment view. The Right romanticises "the home" and a saintly motherhood which demands nothing for itself (from men or the State); thus collecting some votes from women despised by the Left, which romanticises "the breadwinner" at the "point of

production". All over the world, in fact, the woman who does unwaged housework - "the housewife" - is despised. And since women are identified with this work, we are all in varying degrees branded as "lesser".

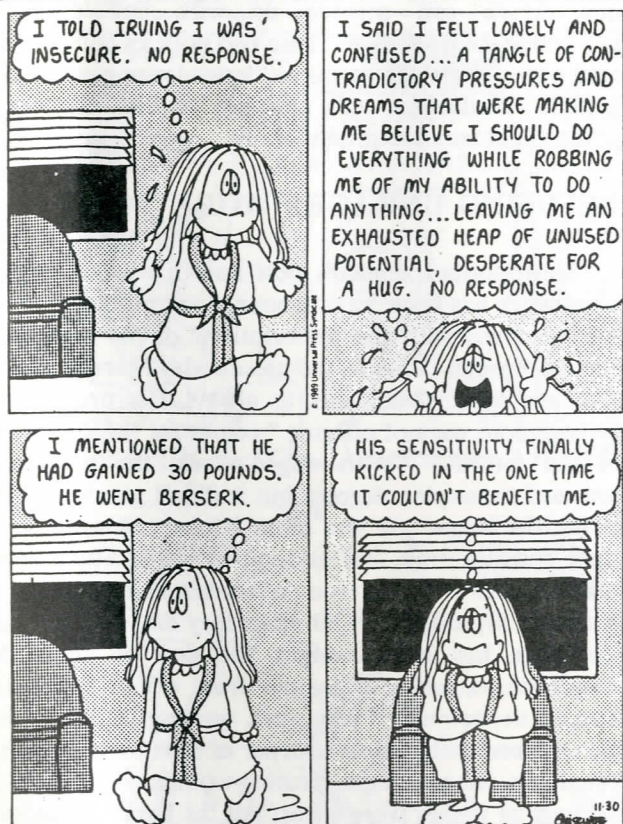
The International Wages for Housework Campaign was founded in 1972. Our starting point is the housework women do. From industrial metropolis to Third World countryside, all economies need a workforce. Women are trained, and pressed by economic necessity, to serve these economies with housework which produces and daily reproduces the producer: labour power - the working class - the commodity basic to all industry and all profit.

"This is a strange commodity for it is not a thing. The ability to labour resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing. First it must be nine months in the womb, must be fed, clothed and trained; then when it works its bed must be made, its floors swept, its lunchbox prepared, its sexuality not gratified but quietened, its dinner ready when it gets home, even if this is eight in the morning from the night shift. This is how labour power is produced and reproduced when it is daily consumed in the factory or the office. To describe its basic production and reproduction is to describe women's work.." (Introduction by S. James, The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community, M. Dalla Costa and S. James, Falling Wall Press, 3rd edition 1975, p.11).

Physical labour is not all there is to housework. A vital component of the work women are expected to do in the family and in the community, and for bosses and colleagues in the waged workplace, is emotional housework: repairing and compensating violated personalities, repressed creativity, and trampled wills, which are produced (some would say from birth) by "our

* Edited from a combination of excerpts from 2 papers - one entitled *The Personal is Economic*, presented to the Feminist Forum on the Economy, West Berlin, February 1989; and the other written for this issue of *WOMAN SPEAK*!

cathy



real conditions of life and our relations with our kind". This emotional repair work is labour-intensive; and we know of no technology which can abolish it. Similarly, no vacuum cleaner or dishwasher can do childcare - though lowering levels of pollution would cut dusting and laundry time as well as time spent nursing a multitude of man-made illnesses.

Many analysts seem determined to reduce housework to unskilled physical labour. Thus they need never mention that to cut down on emotional housework, we must completely transform the lives we live which mass-produce madness.

Doing unwaged housework has always been the basic relation of women to the military-industrial complex (US President Eisenhower's excellent phrase used in his farewell address in 1960 to tell Americans what to beware of). In producing and reproducing their armies - of workers, of soldiers, of unemployed - we reproduce the military-industrial complex. It is dependent on housework for its existence. When we refuse housework, we shake the pyramid at its very base.

ATTACKING HOUSEWORK vs ATTACKING HOUSEWORKERS

There is no biological relationship between giving birth to babies and changing their nappies or understanding their cries. Nevertheless such physical and emotional work has been the context of all our relationships: to do it is to be defined as a "real woman". Thus, whether expressed as scrubbing, sympathy or sexual titillation, service work - reproductive work - is the foundation of "femininity": "femininity" which negates our individuality, exhausts our possibilities and usurps our time - which happens to be our life. Femininity, then, is at the heart of profit and of war to protect and extend profit.

Here we come to the nub of the international "domestic labour debate". To attack slavery is to attack the master and strengthen the slave on whose labour the economy depends. To attack housework as slavery does the same for women; it strengthens women against our work and against the masters of the economy whom we serve even in our own homes. To dismiss the massive contribution of women to every economy hides the work, the skills it requires, whom we work for, and why. Thus it weakens women's refusal and give credibility to those who hold us in contempt. It undermines our confidence and our organising to get what we are owed for that work. It also undermines the support for our demands which we are entitled to; even our children whom we work like hell for, think we "don't work" unless we have a second, waged job. Because our work is so fundamental and because we are owed a great deal for it, academia and other State institutions offer a career to those with feminist credentials who will retard the movement by dismissing the work and attacking the worker. For example, few feminists have challenged the prevailing definitions of work, where those who make bombs are "economically active" and those who make people unwaged - mainly women - are not.

While technology can liberate humankind from the need for physical strength as a necessity of survival, millions of Third World women spend four hours a day fetching water or fuel or both. Yet Third World women - the majority in the world - are often left out of the definition of housewife. The effect of this racism is not only to leave Third World women out of considerations of how to reduce housework, and not only to keep Third World and metropolitan women divided, but also to demean housework further as a "luxury" of metropolitan women who are too backward or too lazy to "work".

UNWAGED WOMEN AND THE WAGE RELATION

The housework women do carries no wage, in a world where wage labour predominates. The personal here, is not only political. It is economic, and therefore political in the widest sense.

"Though there is no wage [for housework], we are neither serfs nor slaves. For this work is not outside of the wage relation. The wage and the wage relation, often in the form of a man's wage, commands the work we do; the wage and the wage relation dominates the society we do this work for, and thus most directly dominates us."

"Integral to the wage relation is the power relation between those workers who do and those workers who do not have wages. This is the basis of the social antagonism between the sexes". Whether or not we are in a relationship with men, let alone a dependent relationship, women's dependence in the society generally frames the relationship between all men and all women. Whether or not money passes hands between any particular individuals, the "cash nexus" binds the sexes to each other and into society. Women, the poorer sex, are the socially weaker sex; men, the stronger, are able to exercise power against us". ("Marx and Feminism", S. James, Third World Book Review Vol. 1 No. 6, 1986, p. 45).

In Britain at the present time, the government is brutally cutting health and other services and promoting "community care" - that is, more work for women. At

the same time it is cutting or at best freezing (while inflation rises) every cash benefit women have won up to now which can provide us with any economic independence from men. These two policies complement each other. Women's economic dependence guarantees a greater availability of unwaged work, on which government cuts are premised.

REFUSING UNWAGED WORK

Metropolitan women's best known weapon against housework has been wage labour, a second job. In this we concurred with the prescriptions of the Left, from Engels through Lenin to the present-day Marxist parties, East and West. (Marx was, as always, less prescriptive: he was more wary of offering "recipes for the cookshops of the future".) With waged work, the housework lessened in varying degrees but it didn't go away. First of all, the waged job was often housework again - the same despised work, and at despised wages, which meant that many if not most women weren't able to shake off economic dependence. And when they did, even partially, the wage has often bought the end of intolerable relationships, losing a partner from whom to demand shared housework. The work waiting at home has always been the greatest usurper of time to organise for equal pay. Men workers, treating women who are fellow workers as if they were wives, felt "at home" when they scabbed on women.

The birth strike, divorce legislation, emigration, and an infinite variety of other demands and refusals, cut down on housework while increasing bargaining power, mobility and choice (sexual choice, size and type of family, if any, etc.). In metropolitan countries as women's power grew, so did demands for money while refusing an additional job - money from those men who had plenty, and from the State, especially when the men were working class. From allowances for soldiers' wives to widows' pensions to child allowances, to paid maternity leave - women fought for and won from the



Chattels, chair by New York sculptor Alan Siegel

Working Women by Jessica Strang

WAGE DEMAND FOR CARE OF ELDERLY - Norwegian Women's Group

"Wages for Women Caring for Elderly Relatives" runs a demand from a Norwegian women's group gaining notoriety within that country. It is their assertion that "However much work you do for the family there's no wage. It is unfair that the work does not even count towards our old age pensions."

A movement to demand that work done in the home - which up to this has fallen primarily on women - be actively evaluated and remunerated, had its start in London and is breaking out in every part of the world. It is circulating methods to calculate and laws to pay for that work, and calls for some discussion.

Kyoko Matsui, (Feature Writer),
Asahi News (Japan), Thursday 18 May 1988

THE LIE OF THE LAND



Agroforestry Today, Vol. 1, No. 2

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF HOUSEWORK

Analyses of domestic labour have identified the following components of housework:

Reproduction of the Labour Force	(1.	The production of new labour -	child-bearing and child birth
	(		
	(2.	The training of new labourers including housewives	- child-rearing
	3.	The daily reproduction of labour-power replacing energy lost in the day's work	- housework - cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, repairing, sewing, tender loving care, etc.

Studies have shown that the family and the wife present the cheapest possibilities in most instances for the accomplishment of these tasks. Few governments even consider seriously the possibility of transforming these into income-related tasks. And those which attempt to through social welfare arrangements often revert to this system in times of economic crisis as we witness today.

It is important to stress here the economic value of housework to the entire society and economy. The privatisation of housework and the increasing individualistic relations of the nuclear family hide this fact. When it is done it is not seen, only when it is not done. In Iceland around 1981 the one-day warning strike of all women ended there once and for all the debate on the value of housework. For one day the country stopped. Nothing happened, no food was cooked, hair was not combed, typewriters stopped and so on. Yet to the present the hours, days, months and years spent by numerous women go unrecorded in national statistics, unrecognised and grossly undervalued.

Rhoda Reddock, unpublished lecture

State cash recognition for housework, at times using as a lever the State's idealisation of motherhood.

By the 1960s, mass movements in a number of countries were led by single mothers demanding wages for housework in the form of welfare payments and, together with other unwaged women and men, a guaranteed income for all. The movement in the United States was spearheaded and brilliantly led by Black women who were confident that the history of slavery entitled Black people to reparations. Not only Black women - and not only the unwaged - benefitted. At the height of the movement, in 1968, the minimum wage was also at its height, and the military budget (for Vietnam) was constrained - a lesson in women's potential power: **in demanding our money back, we can challenge what governments are spending it on, beginning with "defence"** - which has promoted violence against women, not defended women from it.

In Britain at about the same time, Claimants Unions appeared: self-defence organisations of all who claimed government benefits, from pensioners to the unemployed. Again women's leadership was central. "Unsupported Mothers" demanded a wage from the State for the work they did raising children. Claimants were learning how to organise across race, gender and age divides when few others were. (This is the most important survival skill we can learn). Their consistent activity and their leadership helped ensure that women's demands would never be neglected. In fact the political experience, power and boldness women gained in Claimants Unions helped launch the women's liberation movement, though claimants were given little credit for this.

As in North America - the United States and Canada - so in Britain as well as other parts of Europe, Welfare Mothers/Unsupported Mothers/Ohne Lohn Mutters were not acknowledged as an integral part of the new women's liberation movement. "The personal is political" was rarely if ever applied to women whose struggle for liberation took the form of political organising for money - and therefore financial independence - from the State. Rather, feminism became identified with directing women to waged work. But demanding economic independence and refusing waged work on top of unwaged work, challenged every official definition of work, productivity and economic priorities. The radicality of this route to liberation seems to have resulted in included welfare mothers who adapted if being excluded from the feminist mantle.

COUNTING WOMEN'S WORK

In 1985, 16 women from the Campaign in five countries, including Trinidad, attended the final World Conference of the UN Decade for Women in Nairobi, with the aim of getting governments to agree to count

women's unwaged work in the gross national product. We were armed with The Global Kitchen, the case for counting women's unwaged work, and with our Women Count - Count Women's Work petition in many languages, including Swahili, the language of East Africa. We were warned not to expect that governments would agree to count women's work, but we couldn't afford to believe that failure was inevitable. We got widespread support from Third World women in particular at the non-governmental Forum, and lobbied doggedly at the government Conference. Para. 120 with our amendments, which calls for women's unwaged work in 'food and agricultural production, reproduction and household activities' to be counted in the GNP and other economic statistics, was passed. Our amendments were put forward by a woman from the Sierra Leone delegation, and seconded by Jordan and Uganda. The Self-Employed Women's Association of India, street workers who, like domestic employees, have been trying to win the status of 'workers', were among the most enthusiastic.

Since only goods and services exchanged for money enter the gross national product, and since most of the work women do in the home, on the land and in the community, is unwaged, it does not enter official statistics. The Third World woman who spends up to four hours a day fetching water or gathering fuel, and more hours pounding plantain or maize, appears in statistics as 'economically inactive'. It was no surprise, then, that Third World women understood first and most clearly the implications of counting women's work. Nor that the US delegate (a Black man), who opposed Para. 120 and tried to block it, avoided casting a 'no' vote by being out of his seat. His argument, off the record, had been that if the value of Third World women's work was quantified, they would claim that value from the US. Too right!

The demand that governments count women's unwaged work is the focus of an international movement to achieve the implementation of Para. 120, uniting women with more power and women with less, quantifying and making visible the workload of each. The demand makes visible for the first time how much all economies are based on this work. The visibility of women's enormous contribution - the modern UN estimate is $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world's work for 10% of the income - is a lever of power making an unanswerable case for women's entitlements, from being called 'workers' to equal pay and comparable worth; from appropriate technology to land and inheritance rights; from clean, piped water to health care and housing; from the right to safe birth control and safe abortion to the right to refuse sterilisation and the criminalisation of rape within marriage.

While counting women's work undermines men's power over women by making visible women's enormous contribution, men's unwaged work also surfaces as an arena of struggle. Counting women's work makes visible that on an international level only a tiny minority of workers are waged. *Unwaged work not only underlies all industry and all profit - the international economy - but also the unity to transform that economy: unwaged work is what all the workers of the world can unite against. Organising on unwaged work can reverse the terms of class unity, the more powerful uniting with the less powerful, from the bottom up - men uniting with women, metropolitan with Third World, waged with unwaged.*

It's one thing to count the value of women's unwaged work and another to demand wages for it - though once the work is counted women and all workers are in a stronger position to demand all the services and wages we are owed. Even the US figure that women in the home produce 25-40% of the GNP prompts women to ask who's been getting the money they didn't get. In Third World countries women's production of wealth would be an even higher proportion of GNP if it were included: President Nyerere of Tanzania indicated that it is women's work which is paying off foreign debt keeping the economy going. And African women's unwaged work produces an estimated 80% of the food on which that continent survives.

How can Third World women consider a political perspective which demands more than local capital possesses?

But how can Third World populations limit their demands to what remains after imperialism has bled them dry? Liberation may begin with political power but it collapses without economic power. Must the Third World's only perspective be endless poverty, and the repression which enforces it? Why can't Third World countries demand the return of wealth from metropolitan capital - Fanon's word is 'reparations' - rather than yet another redistribution of poverty, which is all that changes with a change of government?

Fundamentally two political strategies fought for domination of the West Indian independence movement. On the one hand there were the politicians, both government and opposition, offering independence defined as replacing the British with themselves. On the other hand, there were the aspirations of the working class for more money and less work. (Workers all over the world, no matter what sex, race, nation or language, etc., always have that as their perspective, though the demands vary from time to time, place to place, industry to industry.) Working class people at the time saw Federation as a strategy which could mobilise the power to achieve economic as well as political independence. Working class internationalism versus the careerist nationalism of the middle class whose ambition needed Afro-Asian and island divisions.

The appetites of those who were to replace the white man (and to a lesser degree, woman) were the enemies of West Indian and Afro-Asian unity; they promised that the working class would be better off with the local middle class than with the foreign ruler, but their economic programmes never even hinted at any claim to the West Indian wealth accumulated in London, Paris, Amsterdam or New York. Rather, they presumed that with independence people who have been overworked for centuries would have to work harder to earn the 'charity' of aid and loans.

The same alternative faces women everywhere; either the quick route to a few careers and general defeat, or the painstaking route of fighting for the to all the exploited, beginning with women and children, of the wealth stolen from us. Either some women, in the West Indies or anywhere, will replace some men (this is called the elimination of discrimination) while most women work harder (this is called equality); or women will place on the political agenda a claim to reparations for centuries of unwaged work, which - as it builds power - men will see it is in their interest to support. This is called building an international movement from the bottom up for back pay and for an end to waged and unwaged slavery.

"I have done a great deal of work - as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. What we want is a little money. When we get our rights we shall not have to come to you for money, for then we shall have money enough of our own. You have been having our rights so long, that you think, like a slaveholder, that you own us. When woman gets her rights man will be right. Then it will be peace on earth and goodwill to men."

Sojourner Truth, Former Slave, in 1867.

A PETITION FOR ALL WOMEN TO ALL GOVERNMENTS

WOMEN COUNT - COUNT WOMEN'S WORK

WHEREAS women do 2/3 of the world's work, receive only 5% of the income and own less than 1% of the assets;

WHEREAS women are the poorer sex, Black and Third World women are the poorest of all, and the poorer we are the harder we are forced to work;

WHEREAS women produce all the workers of the world, yet this is not considered work and we are not considered workers;

WHEREAS women, with the help of children, grow at least half the world's food, yet we are denied the technology of our choice;

WHEREAS though women do the work of caring for children, yet we are often threatened with the loss of child custody;

WHEREAS we are often forced to cross national boundaries for economic and political survival, and do the invisible work of resettling ourselves and others in new and hostile environments;

WHEREAS most of the work women do is invisible and unpaid, and any welfare, pensions, benefits or services we receive are considered not a right, not a wage but a charity;

WHEREAS despite our enormous contribution and despite lip service to women's equality, women everywhere are denied equal pay, occupational safety, health, housing, food, education, information, childcare, birthing conditions and birth control of our choice, in other words, our basic human rights;

WHEREAS there is no peace as long as people anywhere, beginning with women and children, are struggling to survive the holocaust of overwork, ecological devastation and famine;

WHEREAS according to State definitions, raising a child is not counted as "work", but being in the military and killing is;

WHEREAS because of women's pressure internationally, in 1980 the United Nations called on all governments to count "the contribution of the unpaid work that women do in the farms, at home and in other fields" (UN Decade for Women Draft Program of Action);

WHEREAS at the final World Conference of the UN Decade for Women in Nairobi in 1985, governments agreed that: "The remunerated and, in particular, the unremunerated contributions of women to all aspects and sectors of development should be recognised, and appropriate efforts should be made to measure and reflect these contributions in national accounts and economic statistics and in the gross national product. Concrete steps should be taken to quantify the unremunerated contribution of women to agriculture, food production, reproduction and household activities" (Paragraph 120 of "Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women") and this was ratified by the UN General Assembly on 6 November 1985;

THEREFORE we petition every government to implement the UN decision and to count the contribution to the economy of all women's work, so that it is recognised and reflected in every Gross National Product.

(The Gross National Product - GNP - is supposed to be the total value of goods and services produced, but so far includes only goods and services exchanged for money. Women's unwaged work, estimated to produce as much as 50% of the GNP, has been left out.)

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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CAMPAIGNS *

Joan Ross-Frankson, SISTREN; Linnette Vassell (OWP, Jamaica); Cynthia Satney (St. Lucia Teachers Union) and Rawwida Baksh-Sooden (CAFRA)

JOAN I thought we'd start with Cynthia and just try to look a little more closely at campaigns we have waged and establish the contexts and the differences between them.

CYNTHIA Let me start off by saying that the St. Lucia Teachers Union is a very small unit; we have just over a thousand members and our national executive consists of full-time teachers, i.e. they do full trade union business on a kind of part-time basis.

The Teaching Service Commission Regulations of 1977 came into effect at a time when most of our schools were more or less controlled by the Catholic church. I will just try to summarize Article 23 of these regulations.

- (1) Unmarried teachers are suspended from the teaching service if pregnant and would be allowed to resume duties immediately only if marriage is contracted. If they do not marry, they have no automatic right of re-instatement.
- (2) An unmarried teacher who becomes pregnant shall be dismissed on the second pregnancy if still unmarried.

The union tried to work the whole issue pertaining to maternity leave for unmarried female teachers into the '83-86' collective agreement.

Article 14 of this Collective Agreement states that maternity leave shall be granted to all female teachers regardless of marital status. The battle really began after this Collective Agreement was implemented; this was sometime around '83-84'. Two teachers applied for maternity leave under the section in the Collective Agreement. They were denied that and instead they were dismissed because both were in their second pregnancies without being married.

After this, the Union decided to take the matter to court because it was a violation of the Collective Agreement and of course, it seemed to be undermining the whole essence of collective bargaining.

JOAN Just a minute, Cynthia, could you just say who it was in the Union who pushed for it to be taken to court? Was it the women themselves or a Union initiative?

CYNTHIA Well, I think it was a Union initiative, in that the entire membership wanted this to happen; it wasn't only the two teachers involved in the issue. So the matter was brought before the court and after about three or four months, the results came out and the Union was victorious, something that surprised and shocked many St. Lucians.

About a month after this, government decided that it would appeal the decision and of course I don't need to tell you what happened afterwards. We lost, and from since then there has been a continuous struggle. I must say that our organisation is not a women's organisation and so it is difficult to outline any campaign that we as women have started; for example, after women lost the appeal case with the government, nothing much that was concrete was done, say, setting up some kind of committee to deal with the issue or mobilising teachers.

* Presented at the WAND Consultation.



Some people felt that the next step was to take the matter to the Privy Council, but of course this costs a lot of money and the Union doesn't have that type of funds.*

JOAN Are the majority of the union members women?

CYNTHIA Yes, the majority of teachers are women. I think out of the thousand or so of our teachers, probably between 70 - 75 percent of the general membership are women, but then the entire Executive is male.

Of course, I think that there are several reasons for this: for one thing, the fact that to be on the Executive and continue as a full time teacher takes a lot of time, and a lot of the women do not have that kind of time to play with.

JOAN Perhaps you can say when your next Executive election is?

CYNTHIA Well, the new Executive was elected sometime this year, about August 18, so the next election will be held in two years time - 1990.

JOAN So you have time anyway to organise the 70 percent. Rawwida, do you want to speak on the campaign against Free Trade Zones in Trinidad and Tobago?

RAWWIDA The government of Trinidad and Tobago won power in 1986 with a vast majority in the parliament -33 to 3 - and it therefore is a lot of control over what is happening at the super-political level in the country. Early this year it decided to introduce two export processing zones into Trinidad and Tobago as part of its structural adjustment strategy.

Now what happened was that an organisation called 'Working Women', which is one of two feminist organisations in Trinidad and Tobago and which is now accustomed to fighting on platforms and organising campaigns, called a consultation on the economy as part of the International Women's Day celebrations. We were not talking about the Free Trade Zones at that point as a single issue; we were calling a consultation on the economy because we didn't want the issue of Free Trade Zones to be so focused as to deflect us from how it linked to all the other things that were happening at the macro-economic level.

We called the consultation on the economy of thirty plus women's organisations, trade union organisations, Mothers' Unions, i.e. church groups: different levels of organisations operating in society with their own networks. This is the kind of thing that had happened with the campaign against the Sexual Offences Bill.

A couple of months later when the issue of Free Trade Zones obviously had escalated and the government was talking more publicly about it, we thought that it was important at that point to focus specifically on Free Trade Zones. Working Women called another consultation and this time it focused on Free Trade Zones. So it was the same group of organisations that had been invited to the previous meeting who came; we were armed with information because Free Trade Zones, as you know, are present in many of the other Caribbean territories, the Eastern Caribbean territories, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Some of us are involved in CAFRA which has been pulling together documentation coming out of the region and the international setting; since 1984 we had been in contact with organisations internationally, both in the first and third world as far east as the Philippines, Sri Lanka and so on, around the issue of export processing zones. So we were poised with information about the conditions operating within Free Trade Zones, as well as about how those conditions relate to the larger structural frame in the country.

* By the end of 1990, the issue was provoking a great deal of debate in St. Lucia, and the St. Lucian government had appointed a Commission to solicit the views of teachers, the churches (who are responsible for the schools) and the wider public.



And this is how it started: we got together, we decided that out of these thirty organisations five to twelve women would be selected to wage the campaign on behalf of these organisations with their support, of course, as the mobilization of people and resources took place.

JOAN Would you say what proportion of those five to twelve women were in fact working class women who would be employed on the Free Trade Zones?

RAWWIDA Well, this is one of the accusations that was levelled against the Committee by the Minister who is in charge of Women's Affairs. She looked at us as the bill was being debated in parliament and she said, "It is well and good for middle class women who are employed to talk about Free Trade Zones, when they are in fact not only employed but probably exploiting their household help at home". This is the kind of attack that has been made against the group.

JOAN Where does the campaign stand now?

RAWWIDA We have fought the campaign on different levels, especially through the media. We are a small group of women even though we're representing this broad base of thirty plus organisations and have been strongly supported by the Trade Unions throughout; in fact, members of the Trade Unions formed part of the Action Committee against Free Trade Zones.

At this point, it is impossible to talk about what the situation of the campaign is without taking a little jump in between. Because while we were pushing opposition to the idea of Free Trade Zones, exposing both the conditions that operate in the Free Trade Zones and that structural relationship with what is happening at the larger level, both in Trinidad and Tobago as well as in the larger international arena; while we were popularising the issue and people were beginning to respond very positively, the government was going ahead and doing things which were so affecting the psychology of the population of Trinidad and Tobago that they were torn in two directions. On the one hand you had us exposing what was happening in Free Trade Zones, and on the other hand you had the government further devaluing the dollar. We were \$3.60 Trinidad and Tobago to US \$1, we then moved down to \$4.25 and now even as we speak, the government is talking with the IMF and there is an imminent devaluation to about 6.00 TT to \$1 US.

In addition to this, there has been massive retrenchment taking place: the economy is crumbling, so businesses are closing down, people are being retrenched, the unemployment figures are rapidly escalating to between 14 and 20 percent: -we are not sure at this point what exactly the unemployment statistics are. So there's one dynamic of a campaign being fought, while on the other hand you have the dynamic of a government that has so much control over what is happening because there is a more or less dead opposition since there are so few of them in parliament.

So while the parliament was debating the bill on whether export processing zones should be brought into Trinidad, the Minister in charge of State Enterprise was in Hong Kong wooing investors. This shows you the kind of dilemma that the campaign was facing. At this point we still fighting.

JOAN Linnette, do you want to go into the experience that you had in relation to the campaign for a maternity leave law in Jamaica?

LINETTE I want to briefly describe the context within which we embarked on this campaign for three months maternity leave for working women. The campaign was launched for International Women's Day 1978 and the law was secured in December 1979. I want to describe the constraints of the situation in which the campaign was launched. The government had entered a line up agreement in 1977 which had all the constraints in terms of social services that we have spoken about. It was launched in an



environment where most women who went on maternity leave had to return to their work place in six weeks or so with very great consequences if they didn't. There was no law in relation to job security; the situation in the case of the garment workers was particularly bad.

In terms of what one would see as enabling conditions, we also had a government that had showed a measure of commitment to women's rights, in terms of passing the Status of Children's Act, in terms of passing an equal pay law; a government which was operating within an environment which Joan French of SISTREN describes as giving a democratic opening. Also on the enabling side we had active women's organisations which had begun to have a closer unity among themselves around broad issues and of course, we had the general lead and expectations of the majority of working women themselves who would want a law like that.

So the basis was there for success, although the constraints were also there. As I've said, it took two years and it took a variety of strategies.

JOAN

With the democratic opening, it still took two years?

LINETTE

Yes, inspite of the democratic opening it still took two years because when we look at the question of reservations and difficulties, the government itself was always in the position of having to assure the private sector that they weren't going to run them out of the economy. It was a time of intense propaganda against the government in terms of its position towards the private sector and it had to balance our demands as women against the demands of other sectors.

It had to balance our demands as a broad section of women against the concerns that other women had; it had to balance our demands with the question of costs: how were these benefits to be paid for? So it was never seen by us or by them as an automatic and instant thing but something we had to struggle for as women.

JOAN

Okay, one of the things you brought up was that this democratic opening was there and a certain level of consciousness and a certain level of working together among women's organisations, which also existed for you Rawwida. Now this doesn't exist for you, Cynthia: when you're at the level where nothing exists, there's no tradition in St. Lucia of women campaigning for women, what is it that you can do, what are some of the reservations that are stopping women both in the Trade Union that you represent and within the women's movement generally from getting together?

CYNTHIA

Well, as you said, I think there has never been such a big issue in St. Lucia pertaining to women and I think the problem is that people, whether they are teachers or even St. Lucian women generally, do not seem to have the strategy to organise the whole thing. You get the feeling that people are prepared to do something, to move forward but then nobody is really sitting down and saying, "Well, how do we do it? What will we do? I also get the feeling after hearing from so many individuals here that the women's organisations in St. Lucia have not reached the stage that most of our Caribbean countries have reached.

We have women's groups, for example Mothers' Unions, we have school Parent Teachers' Associations which are usually made up of women and other groups in society but they do not really address issues pertaining to women.

We also have a problem concerning relationships between organisations. There is not that kind of unity or togetherness, so it is difficult to mobilize to make the issue a national issue. Unless we can mobilize our own members, I think we will have difficulty to get the public at large to even listen to us.



JOAN Would it be fair to say that you women involved in organisations and individually haven't yet reached the stage where you are willing to really kick against the norms and the status quo, the church, for example? Would it be fair to say that?

CYNTHIA Yes, I think so.

JOAN Rawwida, if Cynthia came to you and said "Rawwida, at one stage inside Trinidad and Tobago there wasn't this consciousness", what kind of practical advice could you give her in relation to this particular campaign within her Trade Union?

RAWWIDA Well I would start by suggesting that a small group of women who have been very much involved with what has been happening and who are conscious about it and want something to happen, should get together and start. Maybe they can't call a consultation the way that we women in Trinidad can, not at this level of their development, but I don't get the sense of the kind of tribalism within the trade unions in St. Lucia that we've heard talked about in other places in the Caribbean.

So if three or four or five women from the different trade unions can get together to start with, and talk about what they as individuals can do about the situation and find spaces within the media, but first of all discuss it among themselves because that is the first barrier that has to be broken.

JOAN And then, as you say you need the media informing national opinion because it seems to me she's mentioning reservations which need to be broken down.

RAWWIDA Well, the whole business of reservations is interesting because when, for instance, the Sexual Offences Bill Action Committee was fighting clause 4 in Trinidad and Tobago, what we found was there once we took the thing to the media, once we were the ones who were reaching people on their televisions and through the radios and therefore on a one to one level, the government propaganda was being neutralised to a certain extent and so women who had themselves had the experience of being single mothers in the larger society, who are proud of the fact that they are single mothers, and who would see that as the only form of family relationship they want, would begin responding to what we were saying about how the bill affected them.

So by throwing the issue open to the larger society, you are drawing out support which comes from quarters that you never thought support would come from people from the Mothers' Union, people from all kinds of places, because they themselves are in their own Mothers' Union; many of them are women who have been stigmatized in the church because they did not have the acceptable family form. They have been fighting this internal battle themselves and put in a situation where even anonymously they are able to give support to a cause like this, many, many women will respond.

JOAN It seems to me that in your own particular campaign now, the Free Trade Zones, there is a different level of reservation there; one thing is that the women who would work in the Free Trade Zones aren't part of the campaign to any large degree.

The second indication of there being reservations in the society is the fact that the Minister, whoever he is, could be in Hong Kong, in other words is going ahead ignoring you; you can have your say, as democracy demands.

I think I would like you to speak about the reservations in relation to the working class women who would be employed in the Free Trade Zone.



RAWWIDA There have been different levels of response. On the second hand, you have people who are saying on behalf of the working class, "But you women are employed and here you are trying to prevent your sisters in the working class from getting employment". There have been letters in the press from people in a southerly village in Trinidad saying "Look, set up a Free Trade Zone here, we need employment". So what we need is research into how working class women themselves feel about Free Trade Zones.

JOAN I remember Barbara Glouden this morning making mention of the crown and the cape. I quite agree with Barbara, you know, but there is the other level too, the quarter crown and nothing.

RAWWIDA Exactly, but the point about the quarter crown and nothing is that when you continue to look at Free Trade Zones only in the context of employment, when that is the basis on which you are going to introduce Free Trade Zones into the country regardless of what other people are saying, it means that you are refusing to look at the larger things. You are continuing to perpetuate a dependency syndrome where our labour is exploited as part of something larger and international and I think we have to make this point. We cannot fight this campaign simply on the level of employment. To do so would undermine the whole basis on which we got involved in a debate on the economy in the first place.

JOAN I'm just going to play the devil's advocate. One reality is that the government is ignoring you, you said so yourself; the other reality is that you are making a demand that says 'we do not want Free Trade Zones in this country at all'. And the third reality is that the women who are unemployed, who would be working in this Free Trade Zones, are not joining in your campaign regardless of how much you tell them they're only going to earn \$50.00 a week or whatever. Isn't it time to make some kind of compromise? Now before you answer, I just want to ask Linnette about compromises within the struggle that was waged for maternity leave law in Jamaica. As far as I remember, I think you were asking for six months or perhaps it was three months with pay, and the victory then was for less than that. Perhaps you could just deal with the question of compromise and taking a step back in order to be able to make some gain in a particular moment.

LINETTE Before I touch on that can I just say something about reservations, because you have to make compromises in life, but you have to answer reservations. We had a number of reservations, I remember the Marie Baileys of the church said maternity leave would make women have a lot of children and we can't afford that. As though three months can make up for eighteen or twenty years of taking care of a child! The business people said "we are not going to pay maternity leave until all machines breed".

The employers of domestic workers, women who themselves are going to benefit from the law, were saying "Who is going to pay for the domestic worker? I can't afford to pay for my domestic worker". And you have to answer those reservations because that is the reality and you're talking about people's bread and work, people's lives.

Now in terms of compromise, our experience shows that you have to compromise. Whereas we would have liked three months with pay we had to say, in the face of the garment industry's reservations about where they were going to get the money, "Okay, we'll take two months but we want you to give us a guarantee that the jobs of the women will be protected up to six months in case of illness or whatever. If they can't return to their job after the two months women must have their jobs guaranteed for a certain time".

It is critical to make compromises in order to secure some gain and that is the basis on which we are going to be able to strengthen women, achieve some practical benefit. And just while you're on that, there are so many areas that you can exploit, like when the business men said they wouldn't



pay until machines breed, we immediately made a conflict out of that, we put it on the air. Everything they said we carried.

The involvement of the women that Joan is asking about: we had to make sure that the people that we were talking for and with were a part of the campaign so we went and collected nine thousand signatures among women and men in order to say " So Mr. Manley, here we have nine thousand people who are in support of this".

RAWWIDA I think we underestimate the extent to which the press and media dominate the struggle, and the issue with the Free Trade Zones has to be seen in the context of a very unsympathetic press that will sway the issue in the government's favour, because Trinidad newspapers are completely controlled by the present party in power. What we have to do is to mobilize the kind of support which takes the issue away from the media. One of the reasons why the Sexual Offenses Bill campaign took off was simply because that was a very sensational issue. I mean Clause 4 on marital...

JOAN ...Sells newspapers!

RAWWIDA Right, so essentially by covering it the media created dialogue that raised consciousness.

JOAN A question which has been raised from the floor which you could perhaps answer very briefly is whether in fact the campaign that you're waging has put forward any alternatives for large scale employment for women.

RAWWIDA What we have been trying to do is challenge the government to call a consultation of the public to deal with alternatives. It is one thing for the committee to sit up and pull alternatives out of a hat, that is what the government has always done, sat down in its little forum, created a bundle of policies and strategies and imposed them on us. We think that is wrong. What we have been demanding for a long time now is that people, the communities, the action groups, the trade unions - all the people who have been involved for years and years within the struggle in Trinidad and Tobago come together and discuss alternatives. We know there are alternatives.

JOAN Just one final question to help to advance Cynthia's planning when she gets back: What would you two (Rawwida and Linnette) with your experiences say is the importance of building alliances, and how far should these alliances spread?

LINETTE I would say that in all instances we had to have broad alliances. First of all we organised ourselves into the Organisation of Women for Progress, first called the Committee of Women for Progress. We made an immediate alliance with the PNP Women's Movement and we constituted ourselves into a body called the Joint Committee for Women's Rights, and then we built alliances across the board -with the YWCA and as soon as the YWCA had a position we would incorporate their views in terms of our propaganda.

We had a meeting at Jamaica House with a broad grouping of women's organisations. At that time Beverly Manley was the Prime Minister's wife and it gave us latitude. So we had all these ladies there, and we could use the opportunity to deal with their reservations, to draw on research to say for example, the law is going to make the Family Planning programme and the Health programme effective because the mother will be home for three months.

It is absolutely critical to build alliances because it is not only women themselves who are going to benefit, but the children and the families. In Cynthia's context, I think it sounds so much like a straight legal matter, but I think the women within the Trade Union ought to sit and listen to the reservations of those other women and to hammer it out with them. That's going to be a very critical thing.



I think that this would bring home to women the fact that the campaign would not only be for unmarried teachers, but pertains to all women.

I just want to summarise what we've done so far. We've seen that we often have to start at rock bottom, as in Cynthia's case, in organising around women's issues and that it moves forward in stages because I think that there's a difference between the stage that Trinidad is at, and the stage that Jamaica is at.

Where there are reservations towards a particular campaign one has to look at making compromises and when compromises have to be made, one should not of course, bend over backwards and make those we don't have to make, but certainly, we have to think about meeting reservations, so compromises must be made at some point.

I think that we have stated very clearly the importance of building practical, real and genuine alliances with other women and with other organisations that deal with women's issues and also with those men who are willing to join us.

The importance of research has also been touched on, not only in relation to doing our own research on our own situations, but also using the networking system that we're building stronger and stronger to obtain research already done in other Caribbean territories. The need to share the research that we have is very important and related to that is the need for different countries to let their experience be known to each other.

The last thing I want to say is that campaigns can be won. In Jamaica, the campaign around maternity leave law was won, but the extent to which we can win depends on the system and the government in place. I think the situation in Trinidad shows that very much: if you have a non-progressive government, well you know you can only reach so far, but we ought to say, too, that if we have a progressive government we're still going to have to battle hard.



One Speaks, One Listens by Carol Grigg



Working Hands #6

