

WOMAN

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Struggle

ISSUE NO. 63, JANUARY 1988

HUMAN HOUSING COOPERATIVE MADE BY COSTA RICAN WOMEN

In San Jose, Costa Rica, women are organizing a model community to provide shelter. The Heredia Housing Co-operative Project demonstrates how housing initiated, designed and managed by women can help solve the housing shortage.

In San Jose, escalating immigration has caused a severe crisis in housing. The government's response has been to fund low-income, low quality housing through the National Institute for Housing and Urbanization (NIHU). Residents of NIHU projects are isolated within their communities.

In resistance to the NIHU women started organizing. Six years ago Heredia began with a hunger strike staged by women demanding "dignified" living conditions. Specifically, they wanted to purchase government land, take over the design and construction of their community.

Their own studies showed that they could create welcoming, well organized, low-cost housing developments, in contrast to government-sponsored slums and they could do it at one-seventh the cost.

In 1985 the Costa Rican Ministry of Housing accepted the challenge and agreed to fund Heredia. The cooperative will eventually house 3000 families, 15,000 people. Most residents are cultivators, factory workers or work in the service industry. Fifty percent of the households are headed by women. Property will be held in the woman's name, whether or not her husband is present. A male member of the co-operative has

explained that this exceptional situation was well received by the men because of the women's leadership in the project. Eighty-five per cent of the non-hierarchical organizing group is female.

From Yutta Fricke in

Women and Environments, Fall 1987

COMMONWEALTH NOTICES EFFECTS OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT ON WOMEN

Commonwealth leaders have asked the Secretary-General to set up an expert group on the effect of structural adjustment policies on women. This endorses the recommendation of ministers responsible for women's affairs who met in Harare in August.

Leaders propose that the group should circulate its report to ministers for women's affairs, take on board their comments, and then put the report to finance ministers. Finally, Commonwealth leaders would themselves consider it, with any course of action proposed, at their next meeting.

Global recession in the early eighties, and the coming low prices for commodities coupled with high interest rates have severely depleted the financial resources of developing countries, forcing them to cut back heavily on public spending in what is euphemistically called 'structural adjustment'. Women suffer particularly as a result: cuts in health and childcare, housing and other social programmes leave them with additional family burdens. In addition, women are the principal food producers in many developing countries - providing as much as 80 per cent of domestic food in Africa - and cuts in agricultural support services and subsidies affect both the quantity of food they can produce and the cash they earn from sales in local markets.

In consequence, examining the effect of structural adjustment on women focuses attention on its impact on the majority in developing countries the poor and rural populations

Commonwealth Currents

December 1987

DOCTORS AND PATIENTS UNDER ATTACK FOR ABORTION

Brussels - Belgian authorities are continuing extreme harassment of abortion providers. Abortion is banned in Belgium.

In September, a doctor was given a month's suspended sentence, 11 defendants in Ghent (both doctors and patients) were acquitted and a family planning clinic was raided. In October, trials began for a doctor from a Brussels health centre and the 52 defendants of the Ghent contraceptive advice collective.

The doctor who was given a month's suspended sentence by a Mons Court of Appeal had been acquitted earlier by a lower court on the grounds that the evidence against him, a document showing the treatment given that belonged to an insurance company, was confidential and could not be used in a legal action. The Appeal Court judged differently. It held that the document was not part of the patient's file and thus not confidential.

In the Ghent case where the charges were dropped against three doctors, four patients and their partners, insurance documents also were not held to be confidential, but the court found it unacceptable that 300,000 documents had been gathered for the sole purpose of tracking down suspects, thus involving many people who had nothing to do with the abortions. The authorities have already initiated an appeal against this decision.

Committees in the Belgian Senate are considering a bill that would partially decriminalize abortions, but anti-abortionists have been lobbying intensely and holding showings of the film, "The Silent Scream".

Info from Crew Reports 10/87

in Off Our Backs vol. xvii #11 Dec.1987

WOMEN WORKERS BAND TOGETHER IN KOREA

A national organization to advance the rights and struggles of women workers has been founded in Korea. Called the Korean Women Worker's Association, this new group seeks to agitate against issues such as wage discrimination, forced retirement upon marriage/childbearing, the double burden of women, and the threat to health and motherhood posed by poor working conditions.

The group plans to conscientize women workers of their plights and unite them to fight against the myriad forms of oppression which affect them. It aims to conduct research and educational activities, provide counselling services and day care centres as well as to arrange cultural events.

Women In Action 1987/3

MATERNITY BENEFITS CURTAILED IN INDIA

Delhi - India's government has accepted the recommendation of a commission on pay that maternity benefits should be given only for the first two children to encourage small families. The new policy will be effective for five million women covered by maternity benefits, including government workers.

Women receiving these legally mandated benefits are granted six weeks leave before delivery and six weeks after delivery. They are exempted from arduous work during pregnancy and given breaks for nursing after they return to work.

Indian feminists are criticizing the new policy as unjustly burdening women with the responsibility for family size. Feminists point out that many women are not in any position to refuse more children to their husbands, who may want male heirs and large families.

Not being able to get maternity leave would force a woman to work until the last possible moment and return to work at the first possible moment, perhaps at the expense of her health or the child's.

In 1978, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that the purpose of the government's Maternity Benefits Act was to enable a woman not only to "subsist" but to help her regain her energy, nurse her child, preserve her efficiency as a worker and maintain her level of previous efficiency and output.

These curtailed benefits only apply to a minority of employed Indian women. According to a 1983 study, fewer than one percent of women factory workers receive maternity benefits.

Info from WIN News Summer 1987

In Off Our Backs Vol xvii No.11 Dec. 1987