

NEW WOMAN Struggle

WAND's News Bulletin

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1994 has been designated 'The Year of the Family' by the United Nations and, as you might have guessed, there will be a big conference (this one in Malta) to mark the occasion. Preparations are on: magazines, meetings, posters and publications are being churned out and this issue of *New Woman Struggle* is one of them.

We take it for granted that the family is the core of the society but different folks have different ideas about the family, because, like all topics involving gender, discussion on the family is surrounded by politics. There is much alarm that the family is in crisis, is under threat. Often you will notice headlines to this effect; and often the blame is put at the door of women in general. For example, the Attorney General of Barbados recently commented: "The problems are accentuated in the single parent family, particularly where the parent is a woman."

We do not accept that changes in the family are necessarily bad. In the Caribbean the family appears in many forms. This should tell us something: its structure changes shape, size and composition depending on conditions in the wider society. "There is no universal definition, and perceptions of the functions of the family and notions of the ideal interpersonal relationships within the family differ among national societies, regions and cultures. Therefore, one major statement about the family concerns its diversity and dynamism." (Henry J. Sokalski, co-ordinator for the International Year of the Family).

This issue of *New Woman Struggle* looks at the question "Where do Caribbean families live?" The answer seems to be: "In hard times". The purpose of this issue is to illustrate how relationships and roles within the family are changing as a result.

FAMILY



"Family of Negro Slaves from Loango" - This illustration conveys "a romanticised and paternalistic view of slavery, but does draw attention to the survival of family bonds in the slave community". It was preserved with a commentary by John Stedman a soldier who went to fight the Maroons in Suriname between 1772 and 1777. An African woman, Joanna, formed an alliance with him and gave birth to a son. (Slave Women in Caribbean Society, Barbara Bush)

In some people's heads the ideal family is captured in a portrait composed of a breadwinning male head, his dependent wife and their children. In reality, where it does exist, this nuclear family is most often linked into a wider family network.

Inside:

- ♀ *How Children Survive*
- ♀ *Mother of All Work*
- ♀ *Movements Against Subordination*
- ♀ *Caribbean Feature*

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• Changing Families and Economic Change

In the Caribbean, women have always carried major responsibility for the economic survival of most families. Declining economic growth in many English-speaking territories during the 1980s was met with structural adjustment policies which were put in place by our governments who were acting in concert with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the purpose of correcting that decline. But structural adjustment policies (SAPs) set up a chain reaction of social problems: unemployment, political tensions, cultural alienation particularly among youth.

RISING UNEMPLOYMENT

In Barbados in 1981 there were 4.6 thousand men and 7.6 thousand women unable to find paid employment (total unemployment figure 12.2 thousand). By 1992 these figures had risen to 13.2 thousand and 15.5 thousand respectively (total unemployment 28.7 thousand).

■ Dept. of Statistics, Govt. of Barbados

Structural adjustment policies are being applied worldwide, and, as the reports here show, economic hardship is changing the organisation and values of family life.

HEAVY LOAD

The burden of housework and childcare has increased as a result of the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme. To take three examples: the growing gap between incomes and prices requires women to spend more time and energy in obtaining, preparing and cooking food; the large scale deterioration of the potable water supply system not only means that more people must fetch water longer

distances, but that water needs to be treated if it is to be safe for cooking, washing and drinking; cuts in government spending on health have shifted a greater responsibility for caring for the sick and the disabled back onto the household.

■ Analysis of the Situation of Children and Women in Guyana, March 1993, 2nd Draft

12-YEAR-OLD DREAMS OF BECOMING PROSTITUTE

Bangkok - A 12 year-old Thai girl, lured by the prospect of quick money and luxury, wrote in a school essay that her dream was to become a prostitute.

"My dream is to go south. If I can go, I will buy a present for Teacher. I am not kidding," wrote the girl from northern Chiang Rai province in an essay reprinted in the *Matichon* newspaper.

"Go south" is a widely-used euphemism in the villages of northern Thailand for travelling south to Bangkok to join the capital's thriving sex industry.

"But anyway I don't know whether I will be able to be one," the girl said in her essay, which was released at a seminar last week on the "Cultural crisis affecting the nation's economy and society."

The paper quoted research by the state-run Cultural Preservation Committee as saying parents in one district let their daughters become prostitutes so they could send back money for luxury houses and cars.

The committee told the seminar that parents voluntarily sent their daughters into prostitution after they had finished elementary school.

"When my daughter returns home she always wears expensive jewellery and expensive dresses, and she is always friendly with everyone in our village," a researcher quoted one

proud mother as saying.

The research and seminar were conducted as part of new government policy to eradicate child prostitution within six months.

A child rights protection group estimated about 800,000 young girls were working as prostitutes in Thailand in 1989. (Reuter)

■ The Barbados Advocate, Feb. 15, 1993

RETRENCHMENT BLUES

"I feel like kicked out of life". Twenty-nine year old textile worker Regine Schumann is one of two million women in the former German Democratic Republic who lost their jobs during the last one and a half years.

The massive retrenchment of workers is part of the ongoing structural adjustment of the former socialist, state-planned economy to the West German free market economy. Many of the state-owned companies are closed down because of low productivity and out-dated technology or they are sold to private owners who immediately start by reducing the labour force.

More than half of the 9.7 million employees in the former German Democratic Republic are today a surplus working force. After the reunification in October 1990, industrial production decreased by 70%. It is a process of de-industrializing East Germany still to be continued.

Women are the ones who economically pay the highest price for German reunification. They constitute 62% of the now unemployed labour force of 3.2 million.

For Regine unemployment means a severe cut to her self-esteem, a kind of erosion of her social identity. She was used to cooking and quickly cleaning her flat, where she lives with her husband and their two children, after coming home from the textile factory.

(Continued on Page 4)

MIGRATION IN THE CARIBBEAN - A Story of Family Woes by Veronica Gaston

This year marks CARICOM's 20th anniversary as a regional organisation. Many treaties have been signed and summits held, but after two decades we seem no closer to real regional integration than we were back in the 1940s.

Unfortunately for many of the inter-Caribbean immigrants, "foreigner", "small islander" and "mud head" are not merely empty words, for they are often accompanied by intolerant and insular attitudes, the major cause hindering the growth of regional integration.

So why do so many people still migrate and settle outside of their birthplace?

There are two types of migration, one is permanent and the other temporary. Although some migrants who thought they were temporary found themselves adopting their new countries! The major reasons which come to mind for permanent migration are the search for a better standard of living (including job opportunities), marriage and further education. These permanent migrants continue to play a very critical role in their countries of origin, very often as breadwinners to their families by sending back remittances on a regular basis.

The main goal for some temporary migrants is to "get rich quickly" and return home with their new found wealth, whether their gains be in the form of money or education. This dream is sometimes realised, as happened when the Trinidad & Tobago oil boom provided an opportunity for many West Indians to make good.

Many temporary migrants are engaged in trading between territories. These hucksters (who are

mainly women) are often faced with serious problems with officialdom, transportation of their goods and their own accommodation.

The vigorous trading they do must be able to support their families. Some must spend anything from a day to two weeks at a time away from their families. Many women leave their children with their mothers, in some cases their husbands or an older child who may miss school.

There are also the situations where people have to travel to other territories for medical care, thereby creating upheavals in the immediate family.

Very often these trips are costly especially if follow-up care is prolonged. The host country does not allow such patients to engage in temporary employment or at least meet part of their daily living expenses.

The patient may or may not be accompanied by another family member. In addition to medical and travel fees they also have to look for housing and food, which often tends to be in an urban location where prices are high.

But what happens when a woman decides to migrate? The family structure of which she is an integral part is disrupted. She may be leaving behind her spouse, children, parents, relatives, those support systems to which she would normally contribute to, as well as rely on. She is often faced with changes such as decline in independence and emotional support, career changes or simply standing out because of an unfamiliar accent.

This maybe quite frightening particularly for a woman who through marriage joins a whole new family

and experiences the "in-law syndrome".

Pregnancy is one particularly difficult time. The emotional support which is so desperately needed seems so hard to secure in her adopted homeland. Much pressure is placed on the married woman to produce a sibling or two. This is where the support of the transnational extended family* plays a critical role in such functions as economic and emotional support and decision making.

Given the reality of this contemporary form of family, the Caribbean is in a position to forge ahead with the plans of making migration easier. There are already some structures being planned to facilitate this process: abolition of travel documents and work permits for Caribbean nationals in the OECS.

Even without the presence of North America Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the Caribbean stills needs to come together on issues other than economics. The rich cultural heritage is a bond through which despite the economic downturn and political nightmares in the region, the family continues to survive!

* Transnational family is a nuclear or extended family unit which spreads across national boundaries. It is characteristic of many Caribbean families (*The Caribbean Transnational Family* by Rosina Wiltshire, November 1986.)



Veronica Gaston works in the Media Productions Unit of WAND. She is a St. Lucian by birth and is married to a Barbadian. They live in Barbados with their eight month old daughter.

Now she misses the contact with the co-workers of her brigade in the factory, where they produced 1000 coats per day, the chats and celebrations, and the feeling of being part of the production process in society.

Whereas in western Germany, only 49% of all women in the economically active age group have their own income, in the former German Democratic Republic, 91% were employed, and most had children. As the socialist state provided creches and kindergartens in every village, factory and agricultural cooperative, women could combine working and motherhood. Most of them earned enough to make their own living and therefore enjoyed the status of a bread-winner for the family, equal to their husbands'.

A survey of jobless women found that the sudden retrenchment means an experience of being unprotected, replaceable and dependent upon the market and their husbands - something they had never experienced before reunification.

■ WIDE Bulletin - 1992:3



New York Times Book Review

• How Children Survive

"Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

CHILDREN OF MIGRATION, MOURNING

A Caribbean Regional Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect held in Port of Spain in October 1990 drew painful attention to the range and nature of the problems of some children from the English speaking territories and our migrant communities in other parts of the world. Children, left in the West Indies in the care of grandmothers and aunts, mourn in silence. If and when reunited with their parents in Britain their mourning may continue, only this time for the friends and relatives left behind. Racism compounds children's sense of alienation, as many teachers in British schools have low expectations about the abilities of West Indian children.

The lack of involvement by the Caribbean male in the socialisation process of young children has been identified as a contributing factor in the problem of sexual abuse, especially in cases of incest.

A workshop facilitated by Elaine Robertson, a counsellor for Caribbean migrants in the United Kingdom notes: "many black West Indian women in the 30-year age group have been diagnosed as being schizophrenic. In reality, these women are experiencing a delayed reaction to the mistreatment and abuse they suffered as migrant children. The men do not usually attend therapy centres, but a high proportion of black men react in aggressive ways."

■ Breaking the Cycle. Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Trinidad & Tobago in collaboration with UNICEF, 1990.

ADOLESCENT PARENTING

Studies being done with adolescent mothers in Latin America and the Caribbean look for the effects of absence of fathers in the lives of children of adolescent mothers. In Barbados a child's physical well-being seems not to be affected by a father's absence, but his continuing role in the child's life, particularly through contributions and frequent contact appears to be associated with better child school performance. The suggestion is that the father's absence contributes to the social disadvantages that are passed on to the children of unpartnered adolescent mothers.

The importance of the mother to the welfare and life opportunities of the child is also revealed. In Barbados 47% of the young mothers in the study are employed while 37% continue with education or skills training after the birth of their children. In Chile the study notes that mothers with more schooling have children with better nutritional status and in both countries who perform better in school. The conclusion drawn is that to increase young women's educational and economic opportunities is key to preventing disadvantage being passed on to the next generation.

■ From: International Centre for Research Women and the Population Council - Information Bulletin, August 1992.

CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is on the rise according to a news feature published by the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre in November 1992.

A ten-year old boy starts his day as early as 5 am every day. His task begins by escorting his blind father and mother into the city centre where they spend the day begging.

Five years ago, he was too young to do anything other than serve as an escort but at age ten he now spends his time guarding cars, selling sweets or cigarettes to supplement the family's income.

He and his parents meet again at 6 pm to return to a waiting room at Mbare Rural Bus Station, their only home.

Problems of child labour and long working hours, often in hazardous conditions, were some of the issues discussed during a five-day seminar on Child Labour in Harare, Zimbabwe late last year.

The seminar was told that more than 25 percent of children in the 10 to 14 age group in Africa were illegally engaged in some form of work.

"In many countries, child labour is a hidden phenomenon as employers do not admit that their children are working," said Assefa Bequele, manager of the Inter-Departmental Project on Elimination of Child Labour at the International Labour Organisation.

A number of areas have been identified for priority attention: children trapped in prostitution; working on the streets as beggars; guarding cars; vending; and children in domestic service, mining and commercial farms. A large number of Zimbabwean children are employed on large-scale farms, weeding, picking cotton and using insecticides.

The seminar's immediate objective is the protection and welfare of working children and the eventual elimination of child labour. Although the seminar agreed that children's work was a long-standing tradition, it becomes a problem when education, health and social development are affected.

■ CNIRD Rural Link-up,
Jan - Mar 1993 vol 2 # 1

● Power in the Family

The family has been the major organising tool of society for thousands of years. While the family appears in many forms through time, there has always been a division of labour and status between people based on a combination of age and gender.

It is true that in some cultures identity is passed down to the next generation through the female line (eg. to be Jewish is passed on through the mother not the father). In many societies (eg. West Africa) women are active in trade and therefore control much liquid wealth, and there are individual women who have accumulated great wealth, but nowhere in the world do we see a handing over of authority from men to women. Everywhere men control the key institutions of political power and the disposal of wealth.

There are women's organisations worldwide addressing discrimination against women in the law. One item in this section illustrates this. However, perhaps the most extreme form of gender and age subordination is through violence directed toward women by men and through child abuse by adults of both sexes.

These extreme forms of violence and the growing movements against violence, we believe, are signs that the systems mankind has developed to ensure control over youth and women's sexuality have reached their limit as methods of social

what evidence it chooses to submit and what kind of sentence it may call for. If a plea of guilty is given for wounding with intent, no jury hears the evidence: it is purely a matter between the lawyers for the state (CPS) and the judge.

Justice for Women campaigner Julie Bindel said, "Women like Ro

"RESCUE AMERICA" MOVES TO BRITAIN

When it emerged a few weeks ago that Don Treshman and 24 other dedicated American anti-abortionists were coming to Britain to support the picketing of clinics, US pro-choice advocates contacted their counterparts in London and warned them to prepare for war.

The stark message about anti-abortion organisations Rescue Outreach and Rescue America were not far-fetched. Both groups have been involved in arson and other attacks on American clinics.

Earlier this month, a member of Mr. Treshman's Rescue America shot a doctor outside a clinic in Florida. Mr. Treshman issued a statement saying that his death was unfortunate but he pointed out that dozens of "babies" would have died at the hands of the gynecologist.

British direct-action anti-abortionists have, in their efforts to overturn the 1967 Abortion Act, been armed only with harsh words, songs, Bibles, rosaries, holy water and tiny foetal dolls.

Father James Morrow, the founder of the Scottish-based Rescue UK, which has 3,000 members, is a veteran anti-abortion campaigner who has been arrested more than a dozen times and was convicted in 1989 of assaulting a pregnant clinic manager. Like his American Rescue counterparts, Fr. Morrow cites the Book of Proverbs, quoting its command to "rescue those who are unjustly sentenced to death" as the philosophical rock upon which direct action is justified.

■ by J. Dettmer, *The Times*, March 31, '93

• Movements Against Subordination

Most families in the Caribbean and elsewhere all caught between two forces. On one hand there is a well-financed, religiously committed global movement aimed at reaffirming a traditional family culture, probably ten thousand years old, where women have a monopoly on domestic work, raising children and "caring" and men have control of everything else. The men and women behind this movement are in direct conflict with a political force for change in which women and men believe that the family, which is the major organising tool of society no longer requires the subordination of women and the emotional deprivation of men as a basis for its continuation into the future.

FIGHTING BACK

The women in my region were fighting back. There were movements since thousands of years when the patriarchal system and slave system started in Egypt. We have our own analysis, our own problems. Of course we exchange ideas - I come here, I listen to you, I learn. But for mutual grounds: you come to us, you learn from us also. A lot of people think that women in the Arab world do nothing, this is not true.

My mother was a feminist, so was my grandmother. We are against oppression of any type: political, economic, sexual, social.

Some of the reactionary men who are against women's liberation try to distort our image by saying that it is something alien to our society. This is not true. They are ignorant of history. But most men, don't welcome the activities of women, because they want women to serve them in the house. They are threatened, they want to keep their

wives obedient. So when they find a woman who is free they are afraid.

■ Nawal El Saadawi being interviewed in UK - *Bad Attitude* Issue 1, Dec/Jan 1992/93

SPEAKING FOR WOMEN THROUGH CLASSICAL INDIAN DANCE

The classical dancer, Ratna Roy portrays the multi-faceted reality of women's lives by addressing issues of social justice, and particularly the oppression of women.

Her innovative choreography wins the respect of art lovers and social activists wherever she performs. Her dowry death dance is one of the most powerful indictments of the dowry system in art.

Dance as art form was developed by women in a matrilineal tradition which was female-centred and did not recognise the divisions of caste. It celebrated sexuality as a form of realisation of divinity.

This goddess-worshipping tradition is much older than the patriarchal caste-based system of the Vedic Age, which was introduced by the Aryans in 1700 AD-500 BC. It is this *devdasi* tradition (the independence of women who have control over their bodies, their sexuality, and their property) which is at the heart of Ratna's work.

Around 2 AD, the Smiriti writers of the sacred law clearly defined good women as women that men could marry. Dancers were among the other women. However, they were respected, their knowledge was recognised, their political advice sought, and their status was valued. The *devdasi* owned land, would learn to read and write, unlike other women, and their funeral rites were carried out by their daughters.

■ by Sunera Thobani - (originally in *Kinesis* 9.92) *Isis International Women in Action* 3/92

* Sometimes called "the Pope's battalions", supporters of Youth Defence, a militant anti-abortion group wear knuckledusters at a Dublin pro-life demonstration.

■ IPPF Challenges 1993/1

• Mother of All Work

Some students of social change believe that industrialisation will make it unnecessary for women to be confined to domestic labour but others see no signs of change. "There is relatively little evidence of increase in men sharing in domestic responsibilities. If housework is 'women's work', then the traditional sexual division of labour will persist."

(Dorien L. Powell)

THIS WORK IS NEVER DONE

Women in the pilot study often did several tasks simultaneously: for example cooking, sweeping and washing clothes. They shifted frequently between different tasks, often spending only a few minutes at a time on each. During what they defined as their "leisure time", they were usually still working: examples included sewing, breastfeeding and taking children for a walk.

This burden of housework and childcare falls so decisively on women that it impacts negatively on them in all areas of their lives. The context is one where there are few facilities in the public or private sector that perform tasks of either housework or childcare (e.g. laundromats or daycare centres). Housework and childcare therefore remain a question of individual arrangement, largely among women, or between women and children, within households and between households.

■ Analysis of the Situation of Children and Women in Guyana - 2nd draft.

The most important understanding of power to emerge in this century

concerns the link between how society is organised (social organisation) and the difference between the roles of men and women (sexual division of labour).

Political movements for the emancipation of human society made a leap forward when we grasped the knowledge that the unwaged labour of women is the economic base on which society and culture presently stand. The struggle to bring awareness of this domestic arrangement between men, women and the state (structure of subordination) has been most specific in the politics of the Wages for Housework Campaign. It is due to the efforts of the Campaign to draw attention to the economic basis for gender inequality that in 1985 the United Nations decided to count women's unwaged work in every countries gross national product. (see New Woman Struggle, Vol. 2, No.4 - Nov. 1991)

HER VOLUNTEER HOURS ARE WORTH MILLIONS

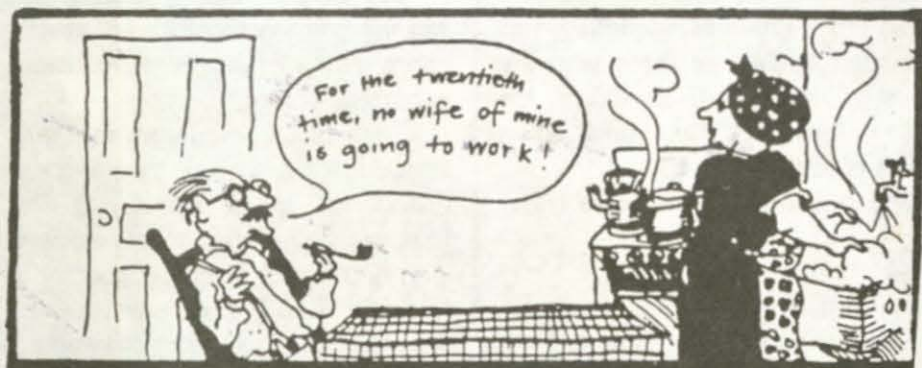
More recently, efforts to realise this mandate (Counting Unwaged Work) in the United States take the form of a campaign for the Unrenumerated

Work Act of 1993 (introduced by Barbara Rose Collins, Democratic Party representative, Michigan State). The measure calls on the Bureau of Labour Statistics to do time-use surveys on the waged and unwaged work of women and men and include this data in gross national product (GNP) figures. The bill would recognise previously invisible and undervalued contributions to society, which are sustained by millions of hours of unpaid labour. In calculating the GNP, says Margaret Prescod, a long time activist in the Wages for Housework Campaign, "we have been looking at the end product and ignoring the earlier stages of production." Women who dedicate themselves to home and community, or who experience the "double-day" - low waged work outside the home and unwaged work within - contribute to the value of goods and services too. They deserve to have their entire workload counted and not be treated as charity cases.

"As women, our unwaged work is seen as unproductive. Like this is nothing! Like we're not producing the labour force in the first place!"

Counting women's work will reveal how much women are producing and will thus engender political power.

■ By Anna Ganahl,
Participant (Pitzer College), Spring, 1993



From: Conditions of Women,
Feminist Books Ltd