

# SIREN

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CARIBBEAN TOUR 1989



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- Where is the Free Zone Report?
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## SISTREN OUT DEH!

Most of us were involved in the **Caribbean Tour** (pp11-14) during April, May & June, but those of us left holding the fort continued to be quite busy. \*Between May and July we had the company of workers from **Pioneer Construction**, who were renovating our offices. The place looks good with the fresh paint and new cupboards, but lawd we did suffer from the dust and general inconvenience! \*In May, **Lana Finikin**, **Lorna Burrell** and **Carol Simpson** took part in a week-long course for managers and coordinators of non-government organisations at the **Courtleigh Hotel** in **Kingston**. The course was organised by **CVSS** in collaboration with the **Manitoba Institute**. \*We thoroughly enjoyed **Groundwork Theatre Company's** 8th birthday party, held at the group's new offices on **Oxford Terrace** in **Kingston** in **June**. The cultural workers and **Association of Development Agencies** fraternity turned out in full to enjoy the moment with **GTC** members. Speeches were short and to the point with the emphasis placed on cultural offerings by the **GTC** troupe as well as

**Bello and Blacka** by themselves, the **University Folk Singers**, and members of the **Jamaica School of Dance**. \* In **June** also, **Bev Hanson** (de belly-woman) and **Bess Thompson-Rose** performed readings from **Lionheart Gal** for a visiting group of **US churchwomen**. Topic of discussion at this **Caribbean Conference of Churches** event was **The Gender Issue: A Church Perspective**. The **CCC's Hazel Byfield** led the discussion. Three cheers for **Rev. Herb Panton**, the only male who took up his invitation to attend! \*In **July**, the **Women's Creative Writing Group** met at our offices. The session was led by long-time member, **Lana Morgan**. \***Finikin, Hanson** and **Thompson-Rose** joined an **ADA** field trip to **St. Elizabeth** to view first-hand the projects of the **Mennonite Central Committee**, another founding member of **ADA**. The trip was part of **ADA's** on-going initiative to keep member groups in touch with each other's activities. A spice project called **E'beth Sales** and run by community youths, the **Maranatha School for the Deaf**, and the **Popeye Peanut Machine** (which takes its name from a community youth who showed interest in

building his own machine for 'trashing' peanuts) were all stops on this very interesting visit. \*By **mid-July**, when nearly everybody was back from the tour, we were in retreat at the **No Problem Villa** (note the irony!) at **Ironshore** just outside **Mobay**. Facilitators for some of the sessions in the week-long retreat, were **ADA** Coordinator, **Peta-Ann Baker** and former Director of **CANSAVE**, **Jennifer Brownell**. We examined our group and individual problems and tried desperately to see how everything we want to do can be fitted into our year-plan for 1990! One thing is certain - there will be heavy emphasis on local work over the next three years.

## SOLIDARITY ALERT

The violent political situation in Peru includes the persecution and assassination of leaders and activists in the popular movement for change. The women's movement is also affected.

In **March** this year a leading activist in the women's movement, **Consuela Garcia** was killed. Now another leader has received death threats and been forced into hiding. She is **Cecillia Olea**, a member of **Flora Tristan** whose life is threatened by the right-wing paramilitary command known as 'Rodrigo Franco'.

**Flora Tristan** is calling on women's movements worldwide to give their support and solidarity. The group asks that we send letters and telegrams with the following Spanish text to **President Alan**

**Garcia**, **Palacio de Gobierno**, **Lima**, **Peru**, and **Interior Minister**, **Agustin Mantilla**, **150 Plaza 30 de Agosto**, **Lima 27**:

Rechazamos amenazas y persecucion de dirigente feminista **Cecillia Olea**. Exigimos investigacion sobre el caso y garantias sobre su integridad y su vida. Permaneceremos vigilantes sobre vigencia de los **Derechos Humanos** en ese hermano pais.

(Translation: We denounce the threats against, and persecution of, feminist leader **Cecillia Olea**. We demand investigation of her case and we demand protection of her life and health. We are continuing to watch the human rights situation in Peru very closely.)



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# ACQUAINTED



*Viris 'Val' Gordon-Hewitt*

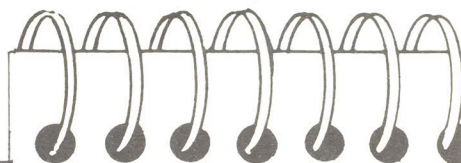
## SISTREN PROFILE

Introducing **Viris 'Val' Gordon-Hewitt**, resource person with **Sistren Textiles** for the past four years. Quiet, unassuming strength is the main characteristic of this Leo-born lady who lists reading and listening to music as her main hobbies. At age 32, Val is a wife and mother to two - 9-year-old Neszinga and 7-year-old Ryan. Husband Derrick is involved in auto-mechanics.

Working with **Sistren** has developed Val's skills and her confidence. Says she, "I didn't know anything about textile design or printing when I started with **Sistren**. On-the-job experience

and participation in a textile workshop in Canada has allowed me to get involved in all the various aspects of the process, although I would like to do more of the actual print work."

Confidence-building for Val has been the result of meeting and interacting with the public at craft fairs and **Sistren** performances at home and more recently during the collective's tour of the Caribbean. Her ambition for **Sistren Textiles** and for herself? "To see the work reach out to more people in different ways, like organising workshops where we teach the skills we have to other women like ourselves."



## PERSONAL NOTES

**RESPECT AND NUFF OF IT:** for media personality, **Fae Ellington**. In our tight, little society, it's not easy for a woman to stand up and talk openly and frankly about her personal experience of rape (**Round Table Talk**, JBC TV, August 15). Many were touched; many others have gained strength from Fae's brave stand.

**UNDERGOING MEDICAL TREATMENT:** **Andaiye** of Guyana's **Red Thread** grouping; in Barbados. Love, girl.

**FIRST IN THE FORCE:** Senior Superintendent of Police, **Winnifred Hall-Wray**, first woman appointed to the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police. We can all feel proud of our sister; triumph for one is triumph for all of us!

**ON THE GO:** **Carol Lawes** of **Groundwork Theatre Company**; directing **Pepper**, the new play by **Sonia Mills** and **Trevor Rhone** new play and co-hosting JBC TV's **Punchinella** as well as the million-and-one other responsibilities she has as GTC coordinator.

**BACK HOME:** 14-year-old, **Osale Levy** and 13-year-old **I'kori Swaby**, who took part in a regional symposium on **Children's Rights** in **Martinique** from August 7-11, largely on the initiative and efforts of **Sistren**.

**ON HER WAY:** **Imani Tafari** of **Sistren Research**, through **Europe** and **'Ithiopia'**, following studies in the **Hague, Holland**.

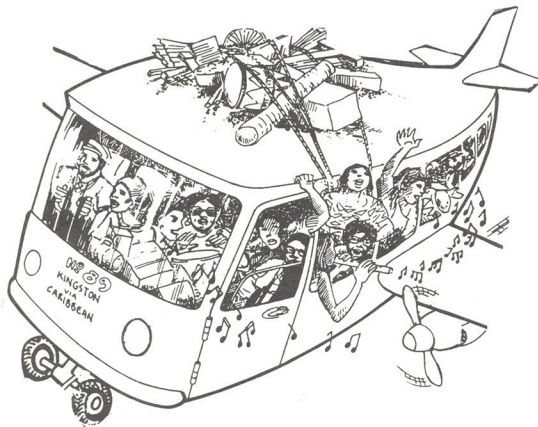
**HOME AT LAST:** For six members of the **St. Peter Claver Housing Co-operative** who have just moved into their newly refurbished units; at **Waltham Park Road** in **Kingston**.

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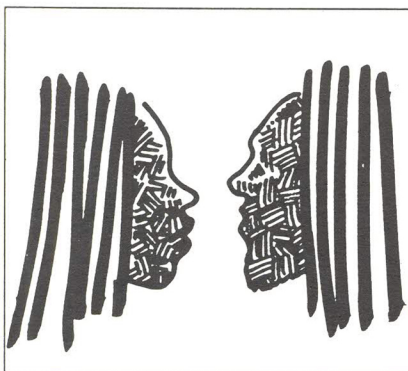
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*Pauline Crawford* with tongue in cheek, gears up for the Miss Jamaica Beauty Pageant!!

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**Caribbean Women give their views on marriage.**

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# Our Bodies: Our Right!

In recent times there's been a lot of talk about the pros and cons of abortion. Indeed, the subject is brought up every now and then by the media (at times, we suspect, when they are short of a 'hot' topic with which to catch an audience). Everybody takes the opportunity to beat their chests about whether abortions should, or should not be allowed and the controversy rages. The bible is quoted left, right and centre and headlines scream about the number of abortions carried out at the St Vincent Polyclinic in any given month. And, when the shouting is over (until the next time the media needs a 'hot' topic) many of us are left confused, guilty and afraid.

Well, we are fed-up with abortion being seen only as a moral question; with abortion being seen as something that 'bad' or 'loose' or 'fast' or 'unGodly' women do. We believe that abortion is a very personal matter; a very personal matter that each individual woman must be allowed to decide on for herself without fear or favour. Or to put in another way; a fi wi body so a fi wi business!

We are not comforted by the fact that in Jamaica many of us can find the means to have abortions in proper clinical conditions, in spite of the law governing the circumstances under which we can end an unwanted pregnancy. Some of us are just too poor or too confused by the moralising to be able to do what we would want to do.

We are also mindful of the fact that what little right we have in relation to the law can so easily be taken away from us. Our American sisters have recently had severe limitations placed on their right to abortion by a Supreme Court decision (July 3, in the case Webster v. Reproductive Health Services). What that decision means is each state can now introduce laws prohibiting the use of public funds, public employees and public facilities to perform abortions that are not necessary to save the life of a woman. The reality is if you are

pregnant through rape or incest, or because men take almost no responsibility for contraception and you forgot your diaphragm in the heat of the moment, or you just plain made a big mistake, or the and you man can't be trusted to help raise the child, it will be that much harder for you to get an abortion. And women on welfare or living on very low wages are going to have hell to find the money to pay for a private abortion under healthy conditions. For them it's going to be a retreat to the back streets by the cover of night in circumstances that can so easily cause their deaths.

Today our American sisters; tomorrow for us. While that law is in place, no matter

which dictated where, when or if men could be circumcised?

We are quite aware however that reproductive freedom for women, as with freedom of speech and freedom of association goes with a certain amount of individual responsibility. In the same way that it is hardly responsible for any individual or group to tell lies or carry 'su-su' about others in the name of freedom of speech, it hardly seems responsible for any women to use abortion as a means of contraception. The decision to have sex when we want to goes hand in hand with deciding whether we want to have a child at this time, with this particular man.



The society needs to help us make these decisions responsibly by giving us the means to achieve economic independence; by demanding positive images of womankind so we can feel more positive about ourselves and by encouraging frank, open discussions about male and female sexuality in our schools from the youngest age.

And we really do need to start this open dialogue among ourselves. Yes, we women want sex because it feels good, and yes, enjoying sex is a natural part of sharing in a loving relationship.

That is the approach we would like to see rather than a law which robs us of our basic human right to take responsibility for our own bodies; a law which when all is said and done, has no respect for the 50% of the population whose lives it controls.

how liberally it is interpreted, the little right it gives us can so easily be taken away. (Remember, in 1973 the same US Supreme Court established the right to safe and legal abortion in the case Roe v. Wade).

We believe that a women's right to choose whether, when and with whom to have children is fundamental. Our bodies should not be governed by law. They belong to us. Can you imagine the outcry if Parliament introduced a law



# MY SMALL

Hospitals, as well as the Mona Rehabilitation Centre, her experience is wide-ranging.

She attributes her achievements in life to the 'wisdom' of her mother's attitude to her blindness. 'My mother never treated me differently. We grew up in the hills of Clarendon, and I was given the same household duties as my brothers and sisters; carrying water to fill the containers, washing dishes, cleaning the house were all

part of my daily routine." Nila remembers also that her mother never hid her away at home. "Many parents treat blind children this way. Had I been closeted in that fashion I would not be able to function as independently as I can today. When you are denied social contact in your formative years, your perception of life becomes somewhat lopsided. Thank God for my mother's very enlightened approach."

Of her work, she says "Physiotherapy is a very satisfying profession. The fact that I can be an agent in restoring the body's normal responses, is a reward worth waiting for." ♀

## MY MOTHER WAS SO WISE

37-year-old Nila Latty is at home in her corner heading the Physiotherapy Department of the Bustamante Hospital for Children. Nila is blind, but she looks you straight in the eye with such confidence when she talks to you that you can hardly believe it.

Her career achievements to date are a model. She is a graduate of the Royal National Institute for the Blind School of Physiotherapy in England and, having worked at the Kingston Public and National Chest

## GRASSROOTS NETWORK

From Africa to North America, Asia to Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, grassroots women have much in common and are reaching out to each other in the Groots network. (Groots means Grassroots Women Organising Ourselves Together).

Earlier this year, the first planning meeting of the network was held in Kingston, Jamaica.

They come from all over. Mary, a market higgler with an unemployed husband, was from Africa. Leela from Asia, chops mongoes at a pickle factory ten hours a day for a wage that can barely feed her family. Yvonne from the Caribbean makes pillows which her five children sell on the



streets. Jane from North America is a single woman, a waitress whose salary makes it impossible to realise her dream of owning her own home. And they quickly overcame the many obstacles and inhibitions stemming from their different experiences in the

'developing' and 'developed' world, to concentrate on an agenda for realising their visions. Visions of designing, building and operating projects in housing, child care, recreation and education; exploring ways of generating income, and lobbying for local and central governments to incorporate women's real needs in development planning.

Groots doesn't operate in isolation from other women's networks. Says Jan Peterson, Director of the National Congress of Neighbourhood Women, "Groots is about transforming relationships between grassroots women and professional women. Generally grassroots women know all about middle and upper class women because they work for them, but the reverse is not true. Groots wants to change that because we all need each other."

Working Women's Forum will host Groots in India in 1990.

# CORNER

## SISTERS' CELEBRATION

is lang time now  
 we know sey  
 han mek fi do  
 wat mout talk about  
 so we linkin up  
 fram coas to coas  
 seven days a labour  
 an yuh wander wat  
 we shoutin bout  
 but  
 when yuh see woman  
 jumping up  
 rubbing up  
 soaking up  
 all de music  
 dem pitch out  
 in dem birt scream  
 is nat a orgy  
 is a mass  
 we lightin lamp  
 one by one  
 in de sun or in de shady  
 joy in de making  
 home sweet home

*Jean Binta Breeze*



## A Creative Development

Lana Morgan, a ward orderly at the University Hospital, is answering her call to creative writing by leaps and bounds. A founding member of the Women's Creative Writing Group, which meets at Sistren, Lana now leads the group.

"I am really enjoying it. I've never done anything like this before, but as a woman you have to stand up and answer your call.

I used to be in a group that made you feel that women are inferior to men, and we must take what men say. That wasn't me at all. That was killing me slowly. Since I joined the Creative Writing Workshop with other women I have got to explore myself and I feel better."

And things are really happening for Lana. She was recently selected to train as an assistant in the hospital's Central Sterilisation Unit and apart from having her work published in *Sistren* and the *Caribbean Women's Poetry Anthology* she recently took part in a Creative Writing Seminar in Trinidad and Tobago along with women from all over the region. The seminar was organised by the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action



(CAFRA). What did Lana gain from the experience?

"Better understanding about writing poetry. I didn't understand before that it was very important to read a lot and read other poetry. I never used to do that. Since I came back I keep a journal to record my daily feelings. I have bought Lorna Goodison's book and I am reading other poetry which really helps me. It inspires me.

Before I tended to write with a lot of rhymes. Most of these new poems don't have any rhymes, so I am exploring other ways of writing"

Being with women from all over the region also uplifted Lana.

"We developed a relationship that was really something to speak about. I didn't pay much attention to the place, to tell you the truth, but I paid a lot of attention to the people. I always pay more attention to people than things. So that is what I gained: how people can really be together and unite." ♀

# CRICKET, LADIES CRICKET

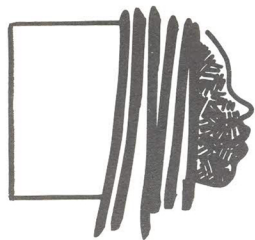
Ladies cricket is alive and doing well in Jamaica - despite sticky wickets! Says Dorothy Hobson, President of the Jamaica Women's Cricket Association, "We get plenty of goodwill from the media and private sector companies, (but) there's little encouragement in the schools and sometimes we get stick from our husbands and boyfriends because of the time we have to spend at practice and games. Fortunately we don't pay much mind to them!"

The Jamaican ladies have had a good showing in regional cricket being runners-up to Trinidad-and-Tobago in the last three seasons. Apart from that members of the national team have done us proud on the West Indies Ladies Team

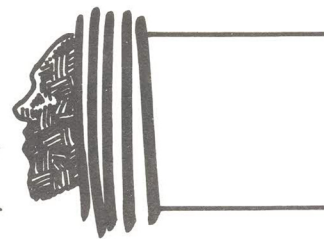
in Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Holland and India over the years.

Team members also work for a living holding down jobs as teachers, administrators and managers, or running small businesses as dressmakers and hairdressers, although one or two are unemployed.

Interested? Hobson, who is also President of the West Indies Caribbean Cricket Federation, says a main qualification is dedication, just like with any other sport. And you should start young. Just apply to any of the existing clubs - Melbourne Ladies, Kilowatts, Wray and Nephew, Jamaica Broilers Gator Crusaders and Mico. Each club has individual trainers.



# LIBERATION WITHIN THE FAITH



by Elaine Wallace

*Rastafari women have been making new strides towards their own self-definition. One such was their participation, along with many of their men, in workshops on man/woman relations in rastafari organised by Imani Tafari Ama of Sistren Research, in Kingston and Montego Bay. The workshop grew out of Imani's involvement as research assistant to Honor Ford Smith (former Sistren Artistic Director) on a UNESCO project on Women and Cultural Development in Jamaica. Rastafari sisters taking part said the main obstacle to their cultural development was an inability to express their own problems and seek solutions which would result in their own empowerment. There was also evident, an urgent need for them to share their concerns with their male counterparts. Imani, herself a rastafarian, took up the challenge to organise the discussion. This article is based on her final report of the series of workshops. Our thanks to Imani for allowing us to share with you some of the perspectives from her report: Editor.*

Rastafari sisters have begun to challenge the patriarchal traditions of rastafari and to come to terms with the implications of this challenge. They are challenging also the view that rasta women are passive and lacking in authority, and they are recognising more that parallels exist between their struggle within the movement and that of non-rasta sisters for equality between the sexes in the wider society. The patriarchal system in rastafari has been identified by many of these women as well as some men as an obstacle not only to the development of the women but also of the men and of the movement as a whole.

The rasta woman, her particular position in the faith and the question of gender relations in the rastafari movement have not in the past received much attention in the general discussion of issues affecting

women. Gradual changes taking place in the perception of the woman and her role in society and the struggle of women more broadly, are impacting on the rastafari community.

It is true that among rastafarians the habit is not to discuss matters of a personal nature in the open. But sisters and brethren of the faith are faced with the same questions in their relations with each other as are non-rastas: What are the qualities expected in a partner? On what basis does the woman enter into sexual relations with men and what are the concessions to be made by each partner in a union? To what extent can or should the woman be involved in public life? What should be the attitude to monogamy or to contraception? Does the woman have a right to develop and assert herself independently of the man?

Apart from these questions which affect women generally, the rasta woman must

***Many brethren were more open to change than were some of the sisters. . .***

contend with others which arise from how the teachings of Jah are interpreted within the rastafari faith. Should there be intimate relations between rasta men and non-rasta women? Do women have the same rights as men in worship?

Gender relations and the status and rights given to rasta women are for the most part defined by the teachings of the Bible. Although for years rasta women have not objected openly to the inferior status accorded them as 'Queens' by their religion, they have been discussing their problems among themselves. Many have also been taking steps, like going in public with heads uncovered, to liberate themselves within the faith.

On the question of gender roles, the sisters from both Kingston and Montego Bay said they were interested in partners who are "upright ....with the ability to teach by living example, the ways of righteousness"; someone "to reason with and to show affection and emotions ..... (someone) with the time and experience to provide relaxation and affection, encouragement and support". The women want men interested in a relationship based on respect, maturity and honesty; men who were responsible about child-bearing, who share domestic work and help maintain for the family.

In many instances these qualities were absent sometimes for objective reasons such as the unemployment many rasta men face. But on the more subjective side some brethren still hold traditional views that women must be "humble", subject themselves to Jah and to man, and take no part in activities outside of the rastafari faith. The position of the man as 'King' has also determined that the woman alone has special responsibility for the children and for the household. It was the sister's experience that many brethren saw them as "competing" and did not like to see them excel. This inequality reflects itself both in the congregation where, only men as the 'head' are thought fit to communicate with Jah, as well as in interpersonal relationships.

The workshops revealed that the sisters as well as the brethren deal with these questions and problems with different levels of awareness and willingness to accept change. Interestingly, many brethren with what could be considered a traditional outlook, were more open to the sisters seeking to define their own behaviour and to changing the negative aspects in man/woman relations, than were some of the sisters themselves. There were also differing views on some issues between rastas from Kingston and those from Montego Bay and between sisters from urban areas and those who lived in more remote places.

# THE DAWTAS ORGANISE



*Mada Wadada stands for Movement for the Advancement and Development of Africa. Originally named King Alpha and Queen Omega Dawtas, it now has an active membership of 16 sisters and a similar number of brethren and children. Sistren interviewed Sister Eleanor Wint, a founding member, to find out more.*

**Why has the organisation changed its name?**

We are still under the guidance of King Alpha and Queen Omega because whatever we do, we have to keep that perspective. When we first started, the group was only rastafari sisters, but Mada Wadada is for anyone with an African orientation. Its a very broad group in terms of age, experience, education, occupation, economics - everything. Some people are positive about rastafari tradition but they don't want to join a rastafari organisation.

**Explain the perspective of King Alpha and Queen Omega.**

Our whole outlook on life, the guiding principle, is coming from His Imperial Majesty. His Majesty says clearly that the sisters should come out of the house and use their education for some purpose. In his time, girl's schools and colleges were established in Ethiopia.

**What is Mada Wadada's main objective?**

Education about our African heritage. We have been trying to establish a school with the emphasis on that black orientation. There are no agencies in the world that teach of His Imperial Majesty. We want to develop that orientation. The average black child in any school in Jamaica is flooded with information and material

from Western cultures that does not acknowledge the supremacy of African civilisation. They get white perspectives about everything. Even in the cartoons, the demon is always black. Good is white; black is bad.

**Has the rastafarian woman's image changed in the 70's and 80's?**

We are talking now. You can see there is movement; acknowledgement of the role the sisters have to play. Like how some of the older sisters went on a trod to America the other day and they came back and were full of the experience. They were official speakers at a gathering. First time, rastafari brethren would make the move. They never saw the dawtas as an official part of a delegation. We have plenty work to do; important work to make sure the children grow up with a certain cultural understanding.

In terms of our appearance, we are economically more viable. We travel and bring back cloth and trimmings that are more attractive. The uncovered locks is another change, although always properly fixed up, wrapped up on itself or with a cloth so its not sticking out like a mad-women. One time we could never put our foot out the gate without our head being completely covered.

**What about your relations with non-rastafarian women?**

Mada Wadada is open to non-rastafari sisters and brethren. The group is also a member of the Association of Women's Organisations in Jamaica (AWOJA). Whatever we are or believe, more time all the sisters are going through the same tribulations. Each of us just has to do what we can do so we can all advance and develop.

**Where does Mada Wadada want to reach in the next five years?**

We want to see the school established and to see the children develop a real sense of their African tradition; to recognise the struggles we have been through and to acknowledge rastafari faith as their own and to give it respect. ♀

Not only the brethren but also some sisters felt that "while the woman is essential to the man, he is naturally and creationally the leader; the woman is his support and inspiration", and that the woman takes on the "responsibilities of manhood" only when the man is not fulfilling his role. Equality between the sexes means, according to this view, that man and woman balance each other by performing their different functions in keeping with the teachings of the Bible. Like current versions of the Bible some even hold the extreme view that

***brethren and sisters of the faith are faced with the same questions in their relations with each other as are non-rastafari:***

women, as symbolised by Eve (in the Creation story), were basically evil and responsible for corrupting mankind.

Others, including many elders, were open to change and sought to encourage the sisters in the struggle for equality within the mansions and in the relationships with their brethren. This was in the understanding that rastafari cannot succeed in the long run if the equality between male and female is not recognised.

Apart from frankly and openly discussing the current status of gender relations, the groups in the workshops laid the foundation to continue dealing with the problems the women face as a basis for strengthening themselves and the movement of rastafari.

*Elaine Wallace a Jamaican journalist, is currently furthering her studies in the German Democratic Republic.*

FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW:

## GEARING UP THE 'BEAUTY' MOBILE

by Pauline Crawford

**M**y dear, I'm so happy about the fact that I'm one of the finalists in the Miss Jamaica Beauty Pageant! Each day I wake I still can't believe that all along I had a beautiful face and figure that could represent Jamaican people all over the world.

Dicky Caughton - Dames says he knows I am too short, fat and 'tucoo-tucoo', black, almost look like dwarf, hair picky-picky like June plum seed; but with all these minuses, I still stand a good chance because I will be the only working-class contestant.

I am getting beauty tips on how to walk gracefully - classes from three different beauty queens.

Dicky says I will have to lose 20 lbs to be able to wear the G-string bathing suit that will be made especially for me out of **genuine tiger's skin and siamese cat fur**. My evening wear will have a daring split going all the way up to my crotch, so I have to lose some of the weight especially from my legs and bottom. My evening wear was designed and made in Paris and was flown in on a special Air France private jet yesterday. It was so beautiful that Bess, my sistren, stripped herself naked and shouted, "Mi waan enter beauty contest too!"

My dear, I am getting clothes and perfume all the way from Greece. And, I have so much make up and accessories! Michael Jackson's make-up artist will put on my make-up for the night of the show, but for rehearsals, a beauty consultant from the U.S. is doing it for a fee of US\$2,000 per half-hour session.

I will undergo a mild operation on my feet sides so that I can wear the gold slippers that the Duchess of Denmark sent me.

My dear, everyday I'm on a different lunch or dinner date with men like Issa Jnr., Marley Jnr, Azan Jnr., Graham Jnr., Marzouka Jnr., Mr. R.N.A. Chin-Loy-Ping, and various little 'friers' like ganja barons and DJs. (I call them 'friers' because they don't own over one thousand billion dollars in assets.) And don't believe that it is in Jamaica I have lunch and dinner. I fly to Miami everyday since I wear the sash, "Miss Air Jamaica".



*Beauty Queen Scene: Exposing the way men and the male system use women's bodies to sell their products, in the Sistren play Muffet In A All A We.*

The other day five different companies approached Dicky telling him that it's the first time so many business men have taken such an interest in the contest, and it's all because I am one of the contestants. Then, my dear, the different higglers from the various arcades throughout Jamaica are gearing up themselves with rotten eggs, 10-days cabbage water, rotten tomatoes, puss, dog and hog and everything stink you can think of to throw on all the other contestants if I don't win!!

Pingsley Pooper from Throb Model Agency told me the other day that a modelling contract is waiting for me to sign if I win. The modelling agencies are based in Paris, Rome and Beverly Hills, California. I might not be able to take up the modelling offer because a **very big politician** in the society is going to divorce his wife and marry me. He is planning to run off with some party money and we will live on the

Ivory Coast or in France!

But the piece-of-resistance is my crown. It will have my name, Pauline Crawford, in diamonds and "Jamaica's only real Beauty Queen" will be in saffire. Oopps, my very rich, very big man is on the line. I'll catch you another time. He doesn't like to be kept waiting and it pays to keep him happy!!

*Pauline Crawford is a founding member of Sistren Theatre Collective and a member of the Workshop Team.*

# LEARNING LESSONS IN THE CARIBBEAN



*Joy enjoys Dominica*

*Between April 19 and June 29, Sistren Theatre Collective did a hectic Tour of the Caribbean - and we mean hectic!! In 10 weeks the team visited 10 countries, did over 20 performances of it's latest play *Bus Out*, and held over 30 workshops on topics from teenage parenting to Free Zone issues, women in tourism, and group building. More than 60 women's groups and community organisations were involved in hosting the group on the Tour - a joint project of Sistren and Caripeda (Caribbean Peoples Development Agency). Here's A first-hand perspective of the Caribbean Tour from **Jerline Todd, Pauline Crawford and Hilary Nicholson** in an interview with Sistren.*

**What kind of reception did the group receive on this tour?**

**Pauline:** Warmth and respect for the fact that we finally were in the Caribbean. Some felt that one week, the average time spent in each country, was not enough.

**Miss T:** All of it was wonderful - standing ovations, V.I.P treatment, receptions, interviews for television and radio. The people were glad to see us and to be involved with **Sistren**. In most of the territories men were involved in organising things. Men proved to us that they understand the things we are preaching about women. They didn't make being men affect them.

**Hilary:** We didn't get up and do this tour out of the blue. **Sistren** is well known in the islands and not only because we have been there. It's also who has been here and worked with us. Remember, for example in 1985 we cohosted the Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange which involved popular theatre artists from some 10 different territories. We first went to the Caribbean in 1981 for CARIFESTA and that's when our regional outlook started to develop. The tour is the result of eight years of solid work, of building friendships, working relationships, networks with other popular theatre organisations with women's organisations and with development organisations.

**But you don't get that kind of reception here in Jamaica . . . .**

**Hilary:** In Jamaica we are complacent about the level of talent, the professionalism of artists of various kinds. The level of professionalism and theatre skills is very much appreciated right throughout the West Indies because in many places they have not reached that level. We are also complacent about the strength and independence of Jamaican women. Nowhere else in the Caribbean is there anything like an all-female company. The fact that we've survived for so long - we in **Sistren**

take it for granted and Jamaica takes it for granted. The issues we attack are regional, so this explains some of the enthusiasm. But it also had to do with people coming from abroad. We do the same thing here. We were only in each island for two or three shows, so people responded to us by coming out in their hordes, absolutely mixed, from the grassroots, to intellectuals, everybody. When **Sistren** does a run in Jamaica we go for three months and people say, 'Cho, if wi miss them this year, we'll catch them next year'.

In every single territory there was excellent public relations done. They treated our visit as a major news event.



*Joan: strained*

**How strong is the entertainment field in these islands?**

**Pauline:** It varies from island to island. In Trinidad and Barbados they have a good amount of things you can go to over the weekend. But in Dominica, Antigua, Grenada, you only have one or two things going on.

Some authentic things remain intact. That is why I feel these people respect

Sistren and wanted to come out: Children still play ring games, men still play domino. Certain things that keep people together - the whole roots - remain intact. I don't know that if Sistren was there for the next two to four weeks we would have got the same impact, because the same crowd gone back to play their dominos, watch their TV's. They just get a one night feast. On a day-to-day level they love their culture. People dance to Dominican folk-songs; sing them with joy and forms remain that we only do at Festival. Like you could go into a little village and right there they call Miss Mattie, call Suzie, and they start to dance - an old woman and a youngster.

**Was the tour of any particular significance to the Caribbean Women's Movement or the Popular Theatre Movement?**

**Miss T:** It impacted positively. They say that Sistren is doing a woman's movement thing but not by going out there and one person stand up and talk and the rest take notes. It impacted on them to see how we use drama forms for construction. This is new to them.

**Pauline:** When they looked on stage and see Miss Foster as an older woman who plays children's parts, so energetic, so like the child, they are amazed and they respect that. In the workshop, Pauline and Becky are not people who went to university. . . . we talk patois and we can relate to certain things in common. So you find warmth and closeness. And certain little things.



*Didi: Speechifying*

You say you have kids but you are not married. That come natural to us. They felt a little intimidated but good that we talked about these things freely.

**How advanced are the two movements?**

**Hilary:** Popular theatre is more advanced in some of those places than it is here so I don't want to say that because we have all these skills that Jamaica is way ahead. Thanks to the work of the New Artist Movement in St. Vincent, Folk Research Centre in St Lucia, Movement for Cultural Awareness in Dominica, the popular theatre movement has blossomed. Since 1982

Grenada has its own and even Barbados where it's more establishment theatre. We had a lot to learn. There is less centralisation and they have small communities with strong groups of women doing their own thing. This is different from the way the women's movement seems to be developing in Jamaica, which kind of expects a national organisation to do everything.

In St. Lucia it is the 'Mothers and Fathers Joint Committee'. It is a women's movement, but it is not only made up of women. So that St. Lucia is miles ahead of anybody else in that there is women's interests being taken (care of) by both men and women.

**Pauline:** In terms of the women's movement you might say that they are a little slow, or behind. Why I say this is that the action part of their everyday living is not so immediate like (it is) in Jamaica, where things just reach you so you have to do something.



*Becky: Caught in the act*

**Miss T:** I don't feel that they are that slow because you find a lot of organisations out there that are working on women's issues. It mightn't be so strong but they are still doing their little part quietly.

**Hilary:** I think it is terribly difficult to make generalisations as to whether the women's movement is ahead or behind because it varies so much.



*On display, l-r Marion, Patsy, Pauline, Becky*

**What did you learn about the Caribbean as a whole?**

**Miss T:** We are all small in our own way (and) we live in the same kind of way. We are our own black people and even though we talk with our own distinct sound, it still sound Caribbean - not like when you go to the US or UK. Everything you see over there, you see it here - the one who dress good and the ones who half dress. You see the mad people on the sidewalk the same way. And the warmth is always there.

**Are there any significant political, cultural and social differences in comparison with Jamaica?**

**Miss T:** No, not to me. The politics may be different because they have different parties, but it works almost like Jamaica's own.

**Pauline:** Although certain things are the same, the strong class differences never struck me. Then the men don't have the harshness of the Jamaican men. The molesting is a different tone. In terms of crime and violence, the way it is in Jamaica, I didn't get that feeling (there). In terms of the deprived - in one or two countries children might beg you a money, but not how it just hits you in Kingston. I don't know if I didn't go to the right places, but that stark ghetto living is not there in comparison to Jamaica. Trinidad was the nearest (to Jamaica) in terms of how they portray women in the media. Barbados cover up their own (situation) in terms of the media image and so on. We were in St. Vincent for the election campaign and is like a fun thing, not violent like here in Jamaica. The most that might happen is that somebody fling stone or box somebody else - like in Busta\* time.

**Hilary:** The between-sex disrespect doesn't happen in the same way. There is much more respect for older people. We saw older people (in Dominica)

\*Sir Alexander Bustamante, National Hero

willing to show us traditional cultural forms and not feeling that the young people will laugh at them. People (there) are not as Rambo/Dallas oriented, even though it is there. There is a pride in Dominica of what is Dominican - their cultural heritage.

In Guyana . . . . people work hard, respect work. Work is not disrespected the way it is here. The freeness mentality . . . that hasn't happened as yet in some of the Caribbean islands. Whatever you do, whatever you have to offer



*Marion: Observing*

seems to elicit a positive response - in whatever little way you can do it. The other thing I learnt from and was fascinated by, was some of the social, cultural, racial populations in Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam. I just think of Surinam as this unknown gem, disowned by Latin America, Central America, the Caribbean and Europe and yet in Surinam many different racial, cultural, and religious communities live in harmony and keep their own traditions intact.

**Pauline:** Children in the Eastern Caribbean get a longer time to stay home than in Jamaica. Is just this whole family knit.

**What did you learn that can help Sistren as a group?**

**Miss T:** Each country live their different way, yet they still count themselves as one. You see different women's movements and what they are doing and Sistren can learn from that.

**Pauline:** The whole thing of daily living . . . the put-down, grabby-grabby jungle; I didn't get that feeling.

We can learn from that - the giving and taking. People go out of their way to do things without knowing whether they are going to get back money or not. We need to learn the lesson that when it comes to popular theatre and people - you have to think about the impact of the work before the money.

**Hilary:** We have to be very, very careful if we call ourselves a group that speaks on behalf of Caribbean women that we make sure we really are in touch with them. What we learned? How to be aware of regional political issues and how they affect women; a lot about the socio-political conditions in the islands. And this could tie in with workshops that we are doing on political issues like Free-Trade zones, tourism, unemployment, domestic violence.

It's really a slap in the face for those who work in the regional movement to see how political games can undo and



*Hilary and friend: Enjoying*

# WHAT THE PRESS SAID

## An Education to Welcome Sistren

*Judy Stone  
Trinidad Guardian*

“ There were more than a few moments when I was not perfectly sure what was being said, or sometimes what was even being done on stage in **Sistren's Buss Out**...But there was not a single moment when I was not utterly engrossed in what was going on. . . .

Despite the excellence of the cast, my vote for outstanding performer goes to versatile musician Bertina Gamp, to whom I can pay no higher compliment than that (she) brought to mind our own Andre Tanker.”

## Buss Out - Defying the Conventions of Society

*Dennis Nichols  
Family Magazine, Guyana*

“ This poignant, exuberant, strange bit of Jamaican theatre for two nights blew across the National Cultural Centre stage like 'Gilbert' harnessed and honed to a fine zephyr.

Every character was a heroine, (or hero). Seven gusty Jamaican gals dished out a performance that must rank among

the better ones seen at the NCC.

**Buss Out's** appeal is easily understood. Chiggerfoot Lane is any Guyanese urban ghetto-type dwelling situation. Auntie Bev (the warrior) and Miss G (The uptown do-gooder) are any two Guyanese women, seemingly separated by barriers of class and consciousness. And there are squatters, unscrupulous landlords and their agents.”

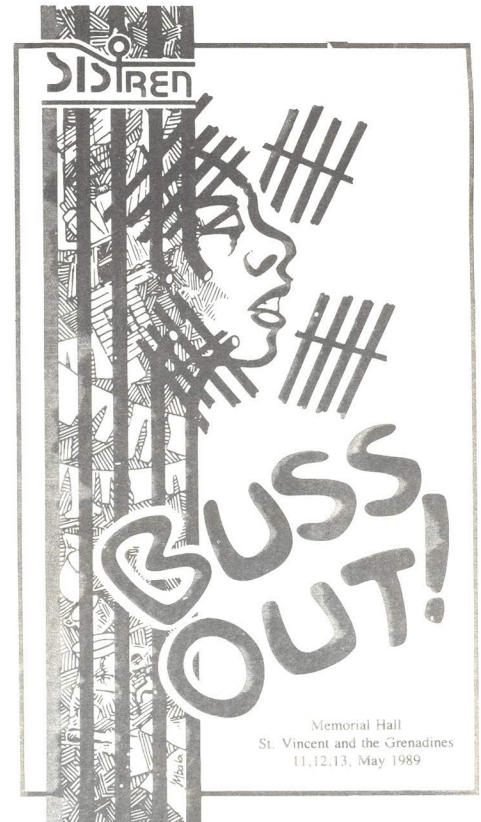
## Buss Out - A lesson for T&T's Artistes

*Ken Jaikaransingh  
Trinidad Express*

“ The qualities of **Sistren's Buss Out** that arrest the viewer are its power and honesty, and the ingenious ways in which these have been given dramatic form and texture.

Their props become symbols not merely of Jamaican women but of all oppressed women - a house broom becomes alternately a weapon and a sceptre, a bright red scarf the bloodknot that unites all women, a bicycle wheel the symbol of the cycle of suffering that is their common inheritance. The music and songs that punctuated the action emphasised this sense of the rhythm of life, though there is little joy in much of the music. We are

meant one thinks, to be haunted not only by what we see but by what we hear, and **Sistren's** message in **Buss Out** is strident, clear and unequivocally challenging.”



*cont'd from pg. 13*

change. It is a big reminder that we can't stay out (of politics). You have to be in the forefront, overcoming the partisan thing. Why can't there be a political party of women? We are more than half of the population in the Caribbean.

We in **Sistren** have to maintain an awareness of the link we are between popular theatre - that is the cultural-artistic expression of the ordinary person - and professional theatre as a recognised expression.

**What was the most memorable occasion to you personally?**

**Miss T:** Coming off the plane when there were the TV and radio, the snapping (for photos). Then we went to the VIP lounge and there was another set of radio and TV people wanting to question us.

**Pauline:** It's so much really to extract one. But one was that of being so embarrassed by your own preconceived ideas because the whole thing was just different. It showed that you mustn't set your mind. You have to have a certain hope.

**Hilary:** In Surinam you don't see postcards with female pin-ups. The pin-ups are sexy males. What a change! The spontaneity of the cultural exchange workshops was another high point for me; unrehearsed, spontaneous participation by rural community groups in which no one was embarrassed or reserved.

In Trinidad the Jamaican High Commission arranged a reception - the entire diplomatic corps - very stush. But it was de-stushed by having dance-hall music. It was an incredible gathering of people. Didi and I did selections from **Lionheart Gal**. It was received as though they had never heard anything like it before, and they loved it.



THE INDIAN FAMILY IN TRINIDAD:

## Myth and Reality

Most Trinidadians would either have heard (or maybe themselves have the view) that the Indian community in that country is one with many 'quaint' customs, and one in which 'peculiar' family relations prevail.

### TRANSFORMATION

But the truth is that over the past 30 years, the Indian family, like the family as an institution, has been transforming in keeping with changing economic and social conditions. Many of the present day concepts about Indian family life are therefore outliving reality - becoming myths.

### GETTING SMALLER

The current myth of the Indian family being generally larger than that of other ethnic groups was based on old traditions wherein the Indian woman was expected to show evidence of her fertility and achieve 'doolahin' status by having many children. It was also commonly believed that the more children a woman had, the less likely she would be to encourage other men. But the reality is that in the last few decades educated and urbanised Indian women have become more comfortable with the idea of contraception, of working outside of the home and of having smaller families.

The economic security offered by having different generations in a family sharing the same space - be it house or compound - was one way in which many older

Indian families maintained their stability and found inspiration for their cultural and ethnic identity. As a result traditional joint family living has been seen as a peculiarity.

However a new network of relations has emerged as sons and daughters seek to realise their different ambitions outside of any constraints or emotional pressure from the close living of the extended family setting.

### SEXUAL POLITICS

Patriarchal authority in the Indian family is one area where changes have most definitely taken place. A few decades ago the father had final authority over his wife and children. He determined whether his sons and daughters were educated or not. He arranged marriages for his children and even determined where they lived and worked. It is quite likely that there was dual power in the household, with the man maintaining his authority with domestic violence. Many women also took the initiative in business and domestic arrangements even though the 'sexual politics' in the Indian household continued to ascribe a very submissive and passive role to the woman.

These relations have changed. Younger Indian women find their own partners, determine their own careers and in general conduct their lives far differently than their mothers did. And the other side of the coin of course, is that some of the

young Indian men are beginning to be freed from the traditional patriarchal expectations.

### DIFFERENCES WITHIN

Within the Indian community itself there are differences in how women are seen. Hindus - the vast majority - allow the women a range of possibilities. Here she is likened to the goddess Lakshmi, (sexual temptress) and given importance for motherhood and for her essential role in religious rituals. Although needing more research, it can be said that within the Muslim family the position on women has been more inflexible.

Truth is the Indian family today like that in other ethnic groups, is in a continual state of evolution. It is a process which for the Indians does not unfold without its contradictions and particular difficulties. Seventy-one years after East Indians came to the Caribbean as indentured labour, a sense of rootlessness still remains among them and they feel as a group unsure of their status in Trinidadian society. At the same time they are maintaining their culture and facing the new circumstances which define changes to ethnic and gender divisions.

*(This article was prepared from a Paper presented by Patricia Mohammed to the UNESCO/Department of History/Faculty of Social Sciences Conference, UWI, St Augustine, Trinidad)*

# Freezone Diary

compiled by Jennifer Jones

FREE ZONE ENQUIRY:

## Where is the Report?

From June to September 1988 the Board of Enquiry into terms and conditions of employment at the Free Zone heard submissions. Sole Enquirer Dan Kelly handed in his report to Government earlier this year. The Minister of Labour, Portia Simpson, has direct responsibility. (She also has special responsibility for women's affairs which falls under her Social Security Portfolio). Ms Simpson has announced that the report has been reviewed by Cabinet. *Sistren* magazine understands that it has since been made available to the Labour Advisory Council, on which the trade unions are represented, and to "the employers". As usual, women are last on the list.

Conditions at the Free Zone need urgent attention, all the more so since the new government has made clear its intention to expand the Free Zones.

And so we ask, when are the women's organisations going to have a chance to see Attorney-at-Law Kelly's recommendations? When will the public be informed? Are the new contracts with new investors going to include clauses which ensure safer, healthier, better working conditions? Or are all the contracts going to be signed before the public can see and assess the Enquiry's recommendations? Is this why Government is taking so long to release it? Answers please!

## Breaches of Industrial Safety Regulations

At the final sitting of the Commission of Enquiry on September 7, 1988, the Industrial Safety Division of the Ministry of Labour presented a report based on a routine factory inspection in June 1988. Sole Commissioner Dan Kelly was informed of the 101 breaches of Jamaica's Industrial Safety regulations found among 16 garment factories. These factories belong to: Afascia Textiles, Jamtex, Bagutta Garments, Just Brands Associates of Jamaica, East Ocean Textiles, Lawrence Manufacturing, Fine Line, Magma Enterprises, Gazapati Jamaica, Sinotex Jamaica, Jamaica Needle Craft.

These breaches covered regulations relating to:

### 1. Failure to Make Adequate Provision for the Safety of Workers in Case of Fire

The negligence indicated here is horrifying. Breaches included:

- No effective provision made for giving warning in case of fire (Afascia, Jamtex, Lawrence).
- Some or all of the fire exits kept locked during working hours (Afascia, East Ocean, Gazapati, Jamtex, Just Brands, Lawrence, Sinotex).
- Insufficient fire extinguishers (Gazapati).
- An additional means of escape not provided from the mezzanine floor where lunch room is located (Sinotex).

Readers are reminded that International Women's Day was initiated after demonstrations to protest the tragic death of hundreds of female garment workers in New York during a factory fire in 1907. Those

women died because they had been locked in the factory.

### 2. Failure to Ensure Proper Ventilation and Reasonable Room Temperature.

- Failure to protect workers against inhalation of dust.
- Failure to maintain a reasonable temperature in workrooms.
- Non-examination of air-receivers by competent persons.

The report also noted that in factories where dust masks are provided, workers often fail to use them. They complain that they are uncomfortable. *Sistren* Magazine wonders if another reason may be that they are unaware, and are not informed, of the health hazard to which they are being exposed.

### 3. Failure to Provide Sufficient Clean Drinking Water.

- In four factories the supply of wholesome drinking water was inadequate.

### 4. Failure to Make Adequate First Aid Arrangements.

- Inadequate first aid equipment.
- No trained first aid personnel in charge of first aid equipment.

### 5. Failure to Adequately Protect Workers from Injury.

- Dangerous parts of machinery not guarded including needles, pulleys and belts of sewing machines, pulleys and belts of lathes and Cutting Cross Rolling machine.

● Machinery not examined, tested and reported on by a competent person. Specific equipment named included steam boilers, air compressors and hydraulic lifts.

6. Failure to make adequate provision for basic needs.

● No rest room for female workers (Gazapati, Just Brands, Sinotex).

● Poor sanitary conveniences for

female workers.

● Insufficient wash basins for female workers.

● No facilities for changing of clothing for female and male workers.

**WE ASK: HAVE ANY OF THESE BREACHES BEEN CORRECTED SINCE THE REPORT OF JUNE LAST YEAR?**

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## Free Zone Stress and Strain

*"Like cigarettes, there may need to be a warning on the package that 'This May Be Hazardous To Your Health'..."*  
*Attorney-at-Law, Sonia Jones*

*Dr. Frank Knight is a registered Medical Practitioner and Consultant Psychiatrist. He is a Member of the Royal College of Psychiatry and is Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at the University of the West Indies. The following is a summary of his testimony before the Enquiry. Dr. Knight was called by Attorney-at-Law, Sonia Jones, as part of her submission on behalf of the Women's Action Committee.*

### Job Security and its Effect on Stress

Arbitrary dismissal or the possibility of such action causes stress and can never work to an employee's benefit.

### Physical Effects of Stress

Emotional and psychological diseases associated with stress include anxiety states and depressive reactions which can show themselves in lethargy and fatigue at work. Emotional illness often manifests itself in a physical ailment such as headaches, body pains, backache, peptic ulcers, bowel disorders, and skin complaints.

### Long Term Effects of Stress

Women under stress are less able to give adequate parenting, resulting in adverse behaviour and neurotic disorder in their children. There is also an adverse effect on the relationship with partner/spouse. All this, of course, affects productivity.

### Industrial Illness and Disease

Excessive noise can affect hearing in the long term. Conditions of lighting can affect

eyesight. In the case of textiles there is a lung disorder, associated with breathing in fibres, called pneumoconiosis.

### Effect of Repetitive or Monotonous Factory Work

Attention-loss, more mistakes, increased risk of accidents.

### Furniture and its Effect

Much research has gone in to the design of chairs and tables, the way workers sit and the tools with which they work. The purpose is to make conditions more acceptable to workers because the ultimate result of comfort is an increase in productivity.

Dr. Knight ended his testimony by saying, "If a sizeable proportion of the female population of family rearing age is employed in conditions which are liable to affect their health adversely, there could potentially be serious effects on the family."

In that context consider these facts:

● The Free Zone workers are generally younger than workers in the garment industry as a whole. Of those under 25 years, over  $\frac{4}{5}$  are Free Zone workers, while of those over 30 years,  $\frac{3}{4}$  are employed in factories outside of the Free Zone.

● 75% of women Free Zone workers have children, the majority of whom are under 12-years-old.

● 20% have 1 child, 44% have 2-4 children and 36% have 5 or more.

## Women's Action Committee: Recommendations to the Enquiry

● Re-examination of quotas, to fix reasonable and attainable production targets, thereby reducing the stress levels and increasing the productivity for the good of all.

● Persons in Jobs on the Free Zone should be formally appointed after a reasonable probationary period, to ensure greater job security.

● If there is dismissal, where appropriate there should be compensation commensurate with the length of service and the position of the person within the employment structure.

● Opportunities for women to be informed of their rights and responsibilities in relation to labour laws.

● Increased Incentives for those who exceed targets.

● Opportunities to improve skills, including supervisory skills, so that the technology transfer can ultimately ensure the benefits of the island.

● A Group Health Scheme including improved health facilities.

● Free eye-testing periodically and the cost of remedial treatment in relation to eye deterioration to be the cost of the employers.

● Subsidised meals.

● Modification of the schedule, to allow some time for personal business and medical attention. We are aware that some of the factories have already started that process, but it ought to be a condition in the future.

● A minimum wage of J\$165 and minimum pay per piece to be fixed in such a way that no-one earns less.

*Jennifer Jones is a freelance journalist and researcher with special interest in women and development.*

# WOMEN & MARRIAGE



*Ferguson*

“ I almost go there to getting married but decide not to. I was engaged for a year or so but after living with him, I found we couldn't make it. He thought that after we were married he would own me. His attitude was that I wouldn't be able to “run up and down” after were were married. I told him that I would be the same person; I would not change after getting married, and that he shouldn't expect me to. The married couples I have seen, the man treats the woman as property and the community would always view you differently when you get married. Is like yuh different when yuh married. But if you live with a man for ten years and get married in the 11th, you are is still the same.

Then again he wasn't a communicator; he didn't want to sit down and plan for anything or talk through anything. At 45 years old I am very particular. At this time I need a companion, a friend and a lover to be my husband. Also, I don't want to say the words, “Until death do us part” or “For better, for worse” because when you get into a relationship it can start out good but it can go bad. I wouldn't want to make a pledge like that because you don't know how you will feel in years to come.”

**Monica Ferguson**

45 years old

Acting President Organisation of Women for Progress, Kingston, Jamaica.

“ I've been married two times and have had a couple of marriage-like relationships. I got married at first because I wanted to have sex but when I wanted to become a person, the marriage ended. My husband could not deal with me being a person because that was not in the contract into which he entered.

I see the need for relationships and love and connections but certain kinds of women will always choose to be true to themselves, and therefore alone. This is because in a relationship with a man, whether they are married or not, she is required to be second, unless it is with an unusual man.

Caribbean women who have not been married or who are not marrying, often say they don't want to get married. A lot of this ambivalence about marriage stems from the fact that the relationship exists essentially on the man's terms regardless of race or class or religion. The person who really makes that final decision to get married is the man, and the woman responds to that (although this is not to deny there are very



*Haniff*

independent women who don't think about marriage at all). A sophisticated, educated, urbane, white woman still goes home from work and makes the supper. It happens to all my feminist sisters. It happens to me as well.

But there is also a contradiction. It's a man's world but in a marriage the woman really runs things. In the Eastern Caribbean being a married woman is the ultimate. It gives you status and real legal rights - access to property, recognition from the society; a right to the man's things and a right to demand certain things from him. And the woman is really in charge of the day-to-day operations of married life. But publicly she cannot be in charge. The public image is that he is in charge. The result is the tradition that people call 'manipulation'. She wants x but she has to figure out a strategy wherein he perceives that he is getting x. Why can't she simply say, “Husband, let us get x?”

This is a very important feminist issue; that although she has the visible and decision-making power, the appearance must be that she has none. Men have really fragile egos which need to be constantly augmented by women, so we must be second. God forbid if she is first or equal! His ego is instantly diminished! Marriages that have lasted have nothing to do with male effort. They last because of the woman's efforts and the level to which she is secure about not losing herself while making the necessary compromises. Now that I am older, I have a deeper insight into women who used to seem to me to be weak and not in control.

In economic matters it is humiliating that the woman has to stretch out her hand to the man. Things should be set up in such

a way that we don't have to do that. It must bother any woman to ask for something that is her right.

Having children is not just our choice. Children have a right to both parents influences. If the union doesn't work out, that's a different thing, but having a child by yourself is not fair to the child. In a study I did, I interviewed a number of men and some of the women with whom they had relationships. The women were enormously cynical about the men. Investing in a man is, in a way, investing in pain. In order to protect themselves from that pain they had as little expectation as possible, whether it was for the man to know the child's name or to help raise the child.

As much of a feminist as I am, I feel we should demand male involvement with our children whether we are married or not. What feminism has done in a strange way is distance it a lot more.

Men should know their children's name; walk with the child, hold his hand; understand how he feels about life. Many men don't experience these things. They are losing out but neither the male system or women encourage them. Men who are interested in nurturing, who are gentle, are not valued at all by women or society. Many women call such men "soft man". Men must be involved in child rearing or we are losing the battle. We are still going to continue in the same roles and they in theirs."

**Neisha Haniff**  
41 years old  
Researcher/Author  
Guyana



Vassell

“What is it that people say? ... 'Marriage hav' teeth.' It is a way in which society organises itself and within that women are kept down.

I think about marriage as a union, as a partnership, as working together to bring out the positive things of living together. Marriage is not a fixed and frozen thing. It

“When people get married they must think of their children and the future. They must trust each other, think about each other and try to solve each other's problems.

I don't want to marry because of what is happening to wives and husbands these days. When people are married they should do things that their children can adopt. Children must be able to talk to parents. Some men have women and some women do the same and some men have sexual intercourse with their daughters. There is no trust.”

**Donna Grant**  
17 years old  
Student  
St. Ann's, Jamaica

is different in different societies. We should not get stuck on the name, but on the idea of partnership, with love, commitment and working together - a partnership as the form in which to nurture the children together.

I am interested in the new forms of marriage, but no legal binding thing. Under marriage we expect the law to do what we should do. Marriage is a social contract in which ideas of the nuclear family, the power of men and the role of women are strictly defined. It is a contract which governs feelings and this is what turns off many people. We have to shed this force and construct relationships based on love and respect. And we must respect other forms of marriage.

In my nearly 20 years of marriage, and with a child, there has been a definite zone of struggle to build and maintain independence and support. We have both grown and it continues to be positive. But it is not like the traditional marriage in many ways.”

**Linnette Vassell,**  
44 years old  
Researcher/Consultant,  
Kingston, Jamaica

“Marriage is good but it didn't come my way. All I did and even my mother - because I grew up in the church you see - it didn't come my way. The man I was with for 15 years treated me good, but I wanted a christian life. He was not into that because he was a hotel man (waiter) and had lots of girlfriends. He had six children.

This commonlaw (union) was not a marriage. I had to leave the church and not take communion. And if I was married that would not happen.

Those who accept commonlaw and think that it is good for them, then it is good for them. It was not good for me so I leave it out 20 years ago.”

**Ena Archer**  
60 years old  
anchilliary worker  
St Ann's, Jamaica

# EASY-TO-ACCESS INFORMATION AND REAL ALTERNATIVES

by Leone Ross

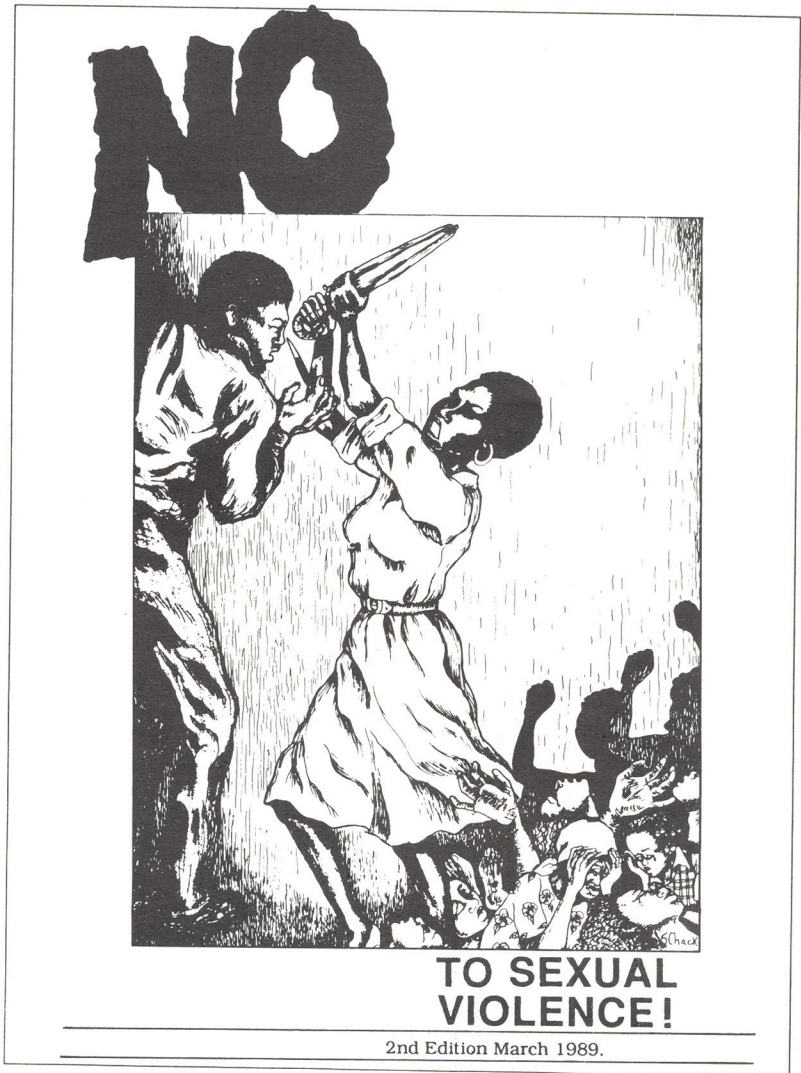
## No to Sexual Violence

by  
Joan French & Ann-Marie Bonner

The very title of the booklet introduces it for what it is: a real weapon in the hands of the abused in our society. One of the first reasons why the publication is so effective is its basic accessibility. Utilising lively illustrations, the publication presents Jamaican life and society in a particular context: it shows us a country where sexual abuse begins on the streets, in the way men address women. (Page one: "Hey Johnny, you no see de ting a get wey? Go get it no man")

From this basis, **No to Sexual Violence** goes on to present a broad examination of this situation and its implications. What 'makes' a rapist? What part does the media play in creating an image of women as sex objects to be exploited? How do some of our popular songs make men feel they must treat women? What role does unemployment and economic dependency play in fostering unhealthy or oppressive sexual relationships? And where should you go, how should you feel, who should you talk to if you are raped or otherwise abused? These are only a few of the important questions that **No to Sexual Violence** begins to answer.

But the booklet is not merely a passive source of information. It provides the basis for real alternatives to our far too violent society. A large section of the publication is devoted to methods of defence. This defence begins within. Women are encouraged to feel good about themselves and their sexuality, and are encouraged to take control of their bodies and lives. Another way of attacking the situation is to form pressure groups to lobby for increased sen-



sitivity in the police-stations and courts of the country, and to promote educational systems aimed at giving children alternatives to violence.

The best thing about **No To Sexual Violence** is the fact that it addresses all of us. It is not merely a survival manual for those who have been abused. It is for families. It is for judges who hand down sentences in rape cases. It is for men who will rape and women who will condone that rape. It is for women in oppressive marriages. It is for men who seek to understand the abused. It defines and explains. It offers comfort.

And it makes clear that sexual violence will continue in our country until the entire society gets up and says NO!

**No to Sexual Violence** is a second edition produced by **Sistren Research** in collaboration with **Sistren Theatre Collective** and **Women's Media Watch**. The booklet is available at Sistren, 20 Kensington Cres., Kingston 5 at \$10.00 per copy (rates are cheaper if you buy in bulk - 10 copies or more).

*Leone Ross is a final year Arts student at the University of the West Indies*

# A Day for Action

## What will your contribution be on November 25, The International Day Against Violence Against Women?

**T**here are many possibilities for education and peaceful protest to highlight the crime of violence against women and their children on November 25 - the International Day Against Violence Against Women. Let's take a stand on an issue that affects us all as women regardless of class, race, religion or ideology. Organise awareness-building workshops, seminars, pickets, letters and phone-calls to the media, petitions, special church sermons, exhibitions.

### .. And what about a Tribunal Against Violence?

The Democratic Movement of Portuguese Women organised such a tribunal in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, in March. The Tribunal involved 'hearings' into a 'case' of a man's ill-treatment of his wife.

In the following interview, Luisa Amonim, President of the MDMP, talks about the Portuguese women's novel and powerful idea.

#### Where did the idea of the Tribunal come from?

We see violence, both against women and against children, as a problem that has been growing in our capitalist countries. We wanted to find a creative way of approaching and exposing violence. We saw it as a forum that would deal with all kinds of violence.

Unemployment is a kind of violence, for instance, because it prevents women from achieving the economic independence that is their first step towards emancipation. In Portugal women are particularly affected by rising unemployment. But there is also the problem of sexual harassment on the part of employers who exploit women's fear of losing their jobs. And of course there is the abuse women are subjected to in their own homes.

#### How Was the tribunal organised?

The forum was in session all day, from morning to night, listening to women's complaints. The Tribunal as such was held in the afternoon, with professional judges present. There was a jury as well.

The "case" that was handled in the Tribunal was that of a woman who had been beaten by her husband. Two actors played the roles of husband and wife. The husband was the defendant, but there were three vacant seats in the dock, for society, the state and the employers' representative. We wanted to make it clear that it is not just the individual who is the guilty party, although he does bear responsibility for his deeds, but society, the state and management as well, who all practice violence against human beings.

In our case the husband was unemployed and had to stay home and look after the children while the wife went out to earn money to support the family.

#### Were there attorneys for the prosecution and the defence?

Yes, there were. Everything was arranged. The husband said in his defence that his children were driving him crazy; that they had no respect for him. At one point he said, "Your Honour, my wife wants me to stay home all day and look after the kids. She wants me to do the cooking, as if I were a woman. Your honour, she even expects me to wash my own clothes!" He said all this to justify his maltreatment of his wife. In our patriarchal, hierarchic, macho society the man, too, is a victim of the pressure exerted on him to show he is boss in his own home. And for him having to live on his wife's wages is a form of violence.

The wife told the judges that her husband had accused her of making their private problems publicly known. "And even my family - my parents and brothers - were upset because I had told the police that my

husband had beaten me". This is another thing that is typical of our society: women do not dare complain about the violence they are exposed to because it belongs to the "private" sphere. This is something the women's organisation should concern themselves with.

#### What was the final verdict?

The Tribunal found society, the government and the employers guilty of being responsible for violence. Society, because it accepts these acts of violence against women without exerting pressure to bring about a change; the government for not providing such conditions as full employment and introducing services that help women perform their mission as mothers, citizens and workers; and the employers for being preoccupied with making profits and not caring about the lives of the working people.

The government's 'punishment' was having to enact laws to protect women, set up shelters for battered wives, introduce women's departments in the police force to deal with cases of women who are mistreated, and establish support structures for women's work. Society was "condemned" to transform the thinking of men and women to make them share domestic chores and to combat the sexist mentality.

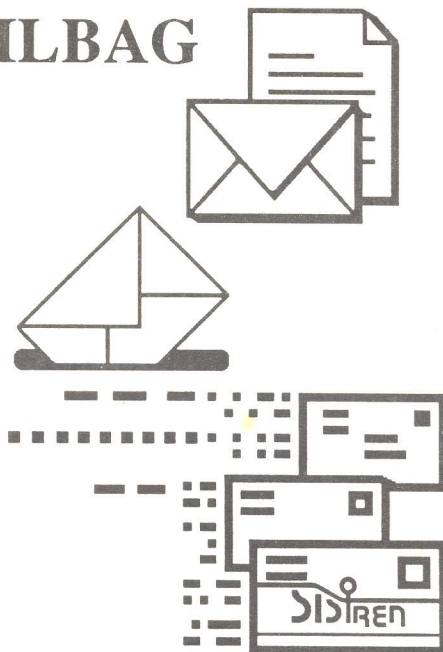
The husband was granted "conditional release", and here something extraordinary happened. The public protested loudly, saying that as soon as the husband got home he would revert to his old ways and start beating his wife again. Actual problems of daily life had been dealt with in such a lively way that the people reacted as if they were real.

#### Is there to be any kind of document published on the Tribunal?

We are going to issue a document containing the many complaints we received about violence against women in connection with their work, sexual harassment, and the maltreatment they receive in their own homes.

We think it would be a good idea - and we shall be discussing this shortly in the MDMP - to arrange an International Tribunal against Violence, because we are sure that the problems of violence against women that we face in Portugal exist in many other countries as well.

# FROM OUR MAILBAG



## MORE ON FEMINISM

Dear Sistren,

Thanks for sending me the most recent issue of the magazine which I immediately read from cover to cover; it made me positively homesick.

I was surprised by Patricia Mohammed's statement: "Since calypsonians are mainly male and of African descent, it is not surprising that, traditionally, women have been portrayed as manipulative sex objects and figures of ridicule" (p 22). What weight should we attach to the designation, "of African descent"? How does the factor of race/ethnicity colour our analysis of gender issues in the Caribbean?

Many Caribbean feminists are sensitive to the mix-up of race, class, gender and age as gauges for measuring the well-being of women in our part of the world. See, for example, Andaiye's tentative statement on pages 19 and 24 of the same issue of the magazine. I think we should be cautious about how we disentangle these complex issues so that we don't simply end up reinforcing ethnic/racial stereotypes in the name of feminism.

Yours sincerely,  
Carolyn Cooper  
University of Birmingham, England

Dear Sistren,

In your last issue (Vol 11, #1, 1989), Tina Johnson of CAFRA speaks of a humane and realistic form of feminism (p. 19). It is refreshing to hear it acknowledged that despite the abuses women suffer from some men, women and men are all human beings together and that to survive and prosper, we have to learn to work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. This view allows for the variety and complexity of us all and leaves a place for realistic optimism. For the long term good

it is essential that we analyse and treat the roots of our societies' problems. No superficial 'solution', such as apartheid of the sexes, can ever be the answer.

If men's attitudes to women are wrong then it is imperative that women be made aware of their latent power and (of their) duty to challenge and change those negative attitudes. It is essential that women get out of the traditional role of taking humiliation and an unfair share of life's burdens without complaint, and instead grow accustomed to speak out and act against inequity and disrespect. It is good to hear you say these things.

I too am concerned about the way that women are used in advertising as sexual allures or role models to try to persuade us to buy goods and services. The press and the advertising industry here are so big and powerful that progress on this front, if there is any, is almost imperceptible. Women are daily insulted in our tabloid press, in TV ads, on advertising hoardings and almost everywhere one cares to look. It is sad how easily our exploiters can grow fat and sleek by conditioning us to feel comfortable in shackles. If we were all more aware of social, economic and ecological issues, perhaps the producers would feel some obligation to give us what we actually want

instead of all the rubbish we have been made to feel satisfied with at present.

Yours sincerely,  
Rajan Naidu  
Amnesty International British Section  
London, England

## YES WE ARE STRONGER

Dear Sistren,

I have just finished reading your article Stronger and Broader about the Caribbean Women's Movement (Sistren, Vol II, #1, 1989) and I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed it. I really liked the ways in which the past experiences of our foremothers are linked to our collective efforts of the present. Your article really made me feel that we are stronger and broader. I hope it did the same for others.

Thank you,  
Rhoda Reddock  
Women Working For Social Progress  
(Workingwomen)  
Trinidad and Tobago

## SISTREN PULLED ME THROUGH!

Dear Sistren,

Your magazine (Vol 11, #1, 1989) arrived today at a point when I was feeling low because of a personal problem. It pulled me through because I realised that I was reading about women who have been there too - and who came through it all. Thanks Sistren! Keep sending me your magazine.

I would also like to be involved in distributing Sistren. I know of several co-workers who are impressed with the work your group is doing for women. Send information about how I can go about doing

it. I am very, very interested.

Georgia Hemmings  
Kingston

*Thanks for your offer Georgia. We will be in touch. Editor*

### MISSING "WOMAN WARMTH"

Dear Sistren,

Is always such a pleasure to get yuh magazine, especially so far away from base. Up here, ah really miss woman warmth. Yuh kyan just go in de backyard wid yuh washing an chat to Aunti cross de fence, or lap yuh frock in de front yard an ketch a likkle breeze, an three, four woman stop and chat bout anything dem please. No sah! Here yuh have to use de telephone and search each odder schedule fi a likkle time alone. But still, is a real joy when ah go to do a reading or a workshop an de sisters so please fi see a woman come, especially dose wid parents from back home, an to see dem leave wid strength cause yuh stan up mongst de crowd.

Last week ah was in Italy, an a group a woman abduc me. Dem seh dem following reggae an dub poetry lang time an is de fus time dem see a woman come, and dem grab me an chat all night, despite de language problem.

So is work all bout, mi sistren; different calls from different parts. But ah have to remind yuh weh Honor (Ford-Smith) sey; "Don't forget de rebel cause . . . . Hard road to travel an a mighty long way to go . . . ."

Love yah,  
Jean Binta Breeze  
London, England

*Good fi hear yuh news chile. Yuh a travel far fi spread de word an keep up "woman warmth." An tanks fi de poem yuh send. We sharing it with odder readers on page 7. Editor*

### COLLECTION

Dear Sistren,

In my **Introduction to Feminism** class this past week (at the University of California,

Santa Cruz), I talked about the work of **Sistren** and had the students read some of your materials. We took up a collection, and here enclosed is a cheque which, though smaller than we would wish, I hope you can use to advantage. What you are all doing is so vitally important. Thanks very much. Take care and good luck.

Warm best,  
Gloria T. Hull  
California, USA

### INSPIRATION

Dear Sisters,

Special thanks for the constant supply of **Sistren** news magazine. It is a great inspiration to our sisters here in Africa to learn of the experiences of their counterparts in the Caribbean. We at the Amokhosi Women's League place **Sistren** volumes in our library to enable a wide range of women in the community to read them. Keep up the good work.

Hlengiwe Dube (Ms)  
Bulawayo  
Zimbabwe

### ARE THEY SERIOUS?

Dear Sistren,

I have read **Lionheart Gal** and picked up **Sistren** on the newstand. Impressive! I have been most concerned with (indeed 'angry' would be a better word) the quotations printed in the Sunday Gleaner's magazine under the title **Men On Women**. Is it tongue in cheek or are they serious?

Sincerely,  
Mildred Henry  
Kingston

### SUPPORT

Dear Sistren,

Enclosed find my subscription plus a contribution towards publication of your magazine. As an ardent feminist whose background includes dance, performance and teaching, I am glad and relieved to find this support for my social views. While I do not always agree, and feel that much is left

unsaid, I do heartily respect and endorse your work and commitment to this extremely important aspect of life on this earth. While I have yet to see a **Sistren** performance, I regularly read your publication and have enjoyed and learnt a great deal about this country from your book **Lionheart Gal**, a gift from my then-to-be husband.

I would like to note that I brought the issue **Women At Work** (Vol 10, #2 & 3, 1988) at a bookstore in New Kingston for Ja\$10.00. How is it that a three copy subscription (to individuals) is also Ja\$10.00? I wonder also if you have local chapters of **Sistren** groups, particularly in Mandeville?

Sincerely yours,  
Chrisstalia O Volaitis  
Williamsfield, Manchester

*Dear Chrisstalia,*

*Thank you for your interest in **Sistren**. At our recent annual retreat, we had quite a discussion about our distribution and marketing systems (such as they are) and are pledged to upgrade this area to put right some of the things we have been doing badly, including a revision of subscription fees!*

*Unfortunately we do not have local chapters of **Sistren** groups. If however, you are interested in knowing which women's groups are based in your area, we suggest you write to the Association of Women's Organisations in Jamaica (AWOJA), c/o 42 Trafalgar Road, Kingston 10, for a comprehensive listing from which you can begin exploring possibilities for getting involved. Editor*

### POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Dear Sistren,

Irie! Just received the most recent issue and was uplifted once again. The magazine is wonderful as are all of **Sistren's** works. I took my daughter to see **Muffet Inna All A We** and have the book **Lionheart Gal**. As the mother of a Jamaican 'dawta' I am proud to show her what Jamaican women are doing. You are a positive influence for the young girls and us older women alike.

Give thanks and praises,  
Trish Kornats  
Winnipeg, Canada

# SISTA ANSA AND GRANNY A CHAT BOUT...

## THE DEVELOPING CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT



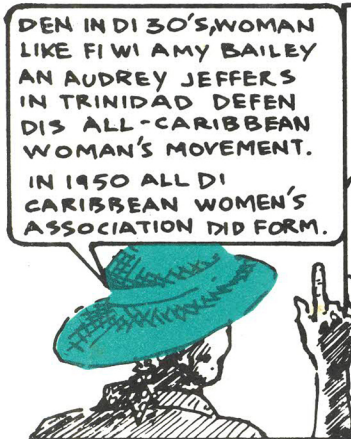
WELL...! DI WOMAN DEM INNA DI CARIBBEAN FORMING UP DEMSELF GOOD GOOD, GRANNY!

MM-MM... DON'T TINK DAT IS A NEW TING THOUGH.



FROM BEFORE 1900 WOMAN HAVE 'SELF-HELP SOCIETY IN JAMAICA TRINIDAD AND BARBADOS.

MAINLY WHITE AN BROWN WOMAN, BUT STILL...



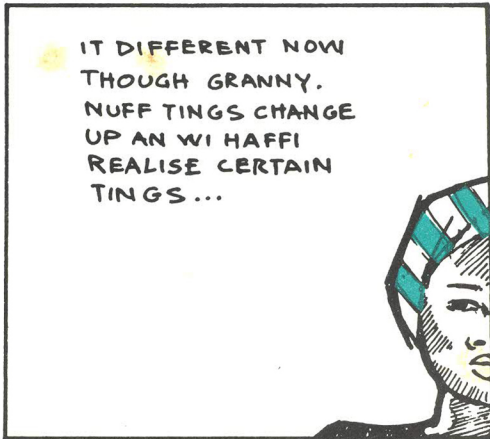
DEN IN DI 30'S, WOMAN LIKE FI WI AMY BAILEY AN AUDREY JEFFERS IN TRINIDAD DEFEN DIS ALL-CARIBBEAN WOMAN'S MOVEMENT. IN 1950 ALL DI CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION DID FORM.



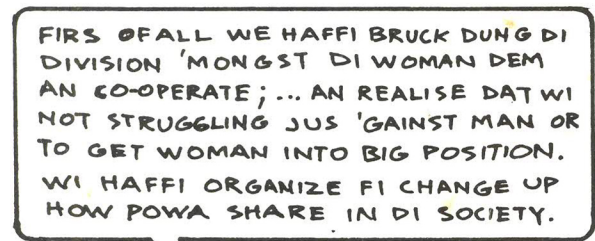
AH KNOW BOUT DAT BECAUSE SINCE 1970 IT NAME 'CARIWA'.



YU DID KNOW TOO DAT AMY ASHWOOD GARVEY DID TOUR DI ISLAN DEM FI MOBILISE? AN DID SHOW DI INDIAN WOMAN DEM DAT DEM HAFI JOIN UP WID DEM BLACK SISTA DEM AS ONE?



IT DIFFERENT NOW THOUGH GRANNY. NUFF TINGS CHANGE UP AN WI HAFI REALISE CERTAIN TINGS...



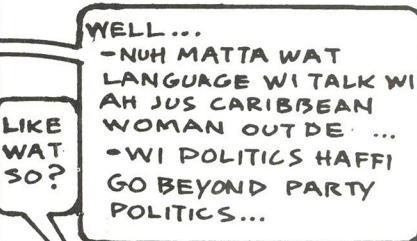
FIRS OF ALL WE HAFI BRUCK DUNG DI DIVISION 'MONGST DI WOMAN DEM AN CO-OPERATE; ... AN REALISE DAT WI NOT STRUGGLING JUS 'GAINST MAN OR TO GET WOMAN INTO BIG POSITION. WI HAFI ORGANIZE FI CHANGE UP HOW POWA SHARE IN DI SOCIETY.



DAT SOUN LIKE OONU HAVE NEW VISION 'BOUT DIS MOVEMENT YA!



YES... AN WI WILL HAVE TO TINK MORE BOUT SOME TINGS...



WELL... -NUH MATTA WAT LANGUAGE WI TALK WI AH JUS CARIBBEAN WOMAN OUTDE' ... -WI POLITICS HAFI GO BEYOND PARTY POLITICS...



-WOMAN HAFI GET INNA DIS SCIENCE AN TECHNOLOGY BUSINESS AN MEK IT WORK FI WI...  
-WI HAFI PROTECT DI ENVIRONMENT...

...AN GRANNY, WI HAFI SHOW DI MAN DEM DAT DEM WAAN LIBERATE TOO AN DEM HAFI STRUGGLE TOO.

WELL MI GIRL, MIDEH YAH FI SI DIS YA MOVEMENT GROW BUT WI HAFI KNOW DAT IS NOT A EASY SOMETING.

TRUE TRUE GRANNY... AN IT NEED ALL A WI...



LIKE WAT SO?