

# WOMAN

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

# Struggle

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### WOMEN IN SOLIDARITY

A call for action has come from the International Council for Adult Education in support of women Detainees in South Africa.

Women in prison in South Africa are in need of our support. The problems that women detainees and convicted prisoners face vary from prison to prison, but many women prisoners have reported:

- lack of sanitary conditions and little or no provision of proper supplies while they are menstruating;
- poor quality and not enough food;
- inadequate medical attention during pregnancy and in the event of a miscarriage while in prison;
- sexual assault as a form of harassment;
- rape and torture;
- lack of adequate facilities or time for exercise;
- no access to books, newspapers, letters, study;
- no contact with the 'outside world'.

Groups in South Africa are organising campaigns to support women in prisons. The aim is increasing public awareness in order to demand the improvement of conditions in prisons, and ultimately, to end the detention and imprisonment of women educators and activists.

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March 1989, p. 19

PACCA'S ALTERNATIVE VISIONS PROJECT

Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America (PACCA) is an association of scholars and policy makers dedicated to promoting humane and democratic alternatives to present U.S. policies towards the region. Of particular interest to the regional women's movement is PACCA's project entitled "Alternative Visions of Development in the Caribbean", in which PACCA is preparing a development policy alternative informed by the experience and analysis of women in the Caribbean.

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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WOMEN THROWN OVERBOARD

As a present to the women of Trinidad and Tobago for International Women's Day 1989, the government has thrown away the portfolio "Status of Women".

There is now no government structure which addresses the specific problems facing women as a group in our society.

In his address to the nation on the evening of February 23rd, 1989, the Prime Minister A.N.R. Robinson announced that what used to be the Ministry of Community Development, Welfare and the Status of Women would now become the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

One of the outcomes of the U.N. Decade for Women was that countries around the world agreed to set up special machinery at government level to deal with improving the status of women. It was widely recognised that women were a disadvantaged group in society, and that their situation needed special attention. The setting up of Women's Bureaux, Women's Desks and even Ministries devoted entirely to the advancement of women was seen as a necessary step towards making women equal partners in development.

Trinidad and Tobago was the last country in the English-speaking Caribbean to set up such machinery, and now it is the first to dismantle it. We have gone back to chucking all women under welfare cases, invalids, old-age pensioners or child minders.

Is this how our country is going to move forward with the "revolution" to which our Prime Minister referred in his address?

This is a backward step. The issue of the status of women is not one to be lost under some vague thing called "Social Development"; nor is woman only to be seen as part of a family - like a fan-belt or an oil filter in a motor car engine - with no identity of her own.

A government structure which focuses on women is essential at this stage of our history. Whether or not that structure has so far done anything useful is another issue. The fact is that it was there, and could have been turned into something effective. The Women's Movement in Trinidad and Tobago could have made it develop into something effective.

And there lies, perhaps, the reason for this move. Women's organisations are beginning to be too vocal, too uppity - making demands, putting pressure on the government, speaking out loudly on government's policies. This might well be a way of putting us in our place: back to the kitchen, girls.

That's telling us where to get off!

THE WORKINGWOMAN, Issue No.4  
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"WOMEN MUST TAKE ON POLITICAL STRUGGLE - Liz Nicholas

In the Commission on the Political Dimension (at the Third Women's Continental Front Conference held in Cuba), most delegates emphasized the fact that many women still did not realise that life itself is a political issue and that there is no separation of private life and political life since they are intertwined.

It was also pointed out that even though women are often the driving force and do much of the "dog" work in political parties, they are hardly found in seats of Government. The concensus was that women's problems are seen as trivial and thus not given the attention they deserve.

It was agreed that more women have to take part in the struggle and make their demands known to improve the conditions of women and to reduce exploitation. Women have to become more aware of the right and the power we have to change the conditions under which we live. There is also a great need for more unity among women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The final papers of the three Commissions (Political Dimension, Economic Crisis and Communications Media) were presented on the final day of the Conference, with each Commission sending solidarity messages to the peoples of different nations such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, Chile, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Panama, Jamaica and other countries.

The Conference ended with closing remarks by President Fidel Castro, who congratulated the delegates. He expressed his regret for being unable to attend the individual workshops.

The Conference was indeed a fantastic experience for all of us present, more so for us from the English-speaking Caribbean; for although we may have read of the problems of Haiti, Nicaragua, Chile and other nations, none of us realized how grave these problems really were until we heard about them from people who actually live these experiences daily.

We heard anger and pain in voices of people whose husbands, children and fathers were unfairly and inhumanly treated. We saw tears as they relived the experiences, we heard of people's human rights and freedoms taken away.

We of the English-speaking Caribbean realized that though our problems are not as grave as in other nations, we must guard against our nation reaching such a stage, as it is a very real possibility.

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#### TRINIDAD ORGANISATIONS FORM COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Recently (about a year ago), three organizations all serving the same cause decided to join together in one body. The Rape Crisis Society, The Shelter and the Halfway House are voluntary groups which offer help to victims of domestic violence.

The Rape Crisis Centre, located in Port of Spain, offers counselling and other forms of assistance to victims of sexual abuse. The Shelter, located in Port of Spain, and the Halfway House in San Fernando both provide a temporary refuge for women who have to flee their homes because of violence.

The three groups have now come together to form a Coalition Against Domestic Violence. They decided that it would be useful to work under one umbrella in order to strengthen their efforts by supporting each other. Up till then each group was struggling on its own, against great difficulties. The San Fernando group was even forced to close its shelter for a few weeks last year because of a lack of funds as well as a security problem.

It was also felt that in coming together they could avoid duplication of effort. If they pooled their energies they could make more headway, especially in the area of fundraising.

The major aims of the Coalition are education and fundraising.

They have mounted activities designed to create an awareness of domestic violence and to teach young people in particular that violence is just as unacceptable in the home as on the street. The Coalition declared October 1988 Domestic Violence Awareness Month, officially launched by the Minister then responsible for the Status of Women, Hon. Gloria Henry. During this month the Coalition set up small displays and conducted lectures in schools. The firm Queensway donated 10% of its sales for one week during the month.

There are plans to make Domestic Violence Awareness Month an annual affair.

Fundraising is a crucial question. It costs \$8,000 to \$9,000 per month to successfully run a shelter for abused women. The Port of Spain shelter has to operate without a full-time matron at present because there is not enough money. None of the organizations involved receives any government subvention.

The Coalition Against Violence is run by an organizing committee of five people. The group is in the process of becoming legally registered and getting its Articles of Association.

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#### MARITAL RAPE

The South Carolina state senate has passed a bill that would remove the husband exemption from the state's sexual assault law. However, the law would only allow women who are living apart from their husbands to bring rape charges. Women who are living with their husbands at the time of the rape may bring charges of "spousal sexual battery",

a lesser offense, if the husband used force. The bill has been weakened even further by an amendment that requires some evidence other than the woman's testimony for conviction. Gilda Cobb Hunter from the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault said they will fight for a stronger measure. "The bottom line is that it singles out married rape victim survivors for special treatment, and they should not be singled out".

In Indiana, The House has approved a bill that would repeal the marital exception to Indiana rape law. Currently, rape charges may only be brought against a husband if the couple is living apart, legally separated, or in the process of getting a divorce. Rep. R. Jerome Kearns argued against the bill, saying it "further complicates the relationship between a husband and wife".

Finally, the Maryland state legislature is also considering a bill that would modify its rape law's marital exemption. The bill, approved by a House Committee, would allow a wife to bring rape charges only if she could prove force was used. Women's groups are arguing that there is no justification for treating husband rapists more leniently than other rapists. The bill was introduced in response to a case where a husband abducted his wife and child, took them to a park where he raped and beat her, and then threw her out of a speeding car. Under Maryland law he could not be charged with rape.

Info from: Washington Post (2-26-89)  
Indianapolis Star (2-8-89 )  
The State (1-27-89)  
Washington Times (1-16-89)  
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