

Committee for a Workers'
International (CWI)

**WOMEN
FIGHT
THE
SYSTEM**

International Women's Day 1999

CWI Statement & Articles from Around the World

Join us / find out more about us:

The Committee for a Workers' International has affiliated parties and organisations in more than 35 countries on all continents. The way to contact our comrades differs from country to country. Some you can contact directly.

For others, it is easier to do it via the CWI offices in London.

... e-mail to the International Office of the CWI: inter@dircon.co.uk

or contact us at PO Box 3688; London; E9 5QX; Britain.

Telephone: + 44 181 533 0201 Fax: + 44 181 985 0757.

Our website is on: <http://www.clubi.ie/dojo/cwi/index>

- **Argentina:** Casilla de Correos 53; CP 1617; Los Polvorines; Buenos Aires
- **Australia:** Militant Socialist Organisation; PO Box 1015; Collingwood; Victoria 3066.
phone: + 61 3 9650 0160; e-mail: militant@mira.net
- **Austria:** Sozialistische Offensive Vorwärts; Kaiserstrasse 14/11; 1070 Wien. phone: + 43 1 524 6310;
fax: + 43 1 524 6311; e-mail: sov@gmx.net
- **Belgium:** Militant Links; Henrymortier Straat 55; 9050 Ledeburg. phone: + 32 9 232 1394;
fax: + 32 9 232 1394; e-mail: militant@altern.org
- **Brazil:** Caixa Postal 2009; CEP 01060-970; Sao Paulo S.P.
phone: + 55 11 277 2384;
fax: + 55 11 296 6237; e-mail: abctexts@uol.com.br
- **Britain:** Socialist Party; 3-13 Hepscoth Road; London; E9 5HB. phone: + 44 181 533 3311;
fax: + 44 181 986 9445; e-mail: campaigns@socialistparty.org
- **Canada:** e-mail: simone@interlog.com
- **Cyprus:** e-mail: adeadoro@zeus.cc.ucy.ac.cy
- **Chile:** Celso C Campos; Casilla 50310; Correo Central; Santiago. phone: + 56 2 622 9004
- **CIS:** 125167 Moscow a\Ya 37; Moscow.
e-mail: pabgem@glas.apc.org
- **Czech Republic:** e-mail: budoucnost@email.cz
- **France:** ECIJ; 17, Rue Armand Carrel; 93100 Montreuil.
phone: + 33 1 4851 9705; fax: + 33 1 4857 6862
- **Germany:** Sozialistische Alternative; Hansaring 4; 50670 Köln. phone: + 49 221 13 45 04;
fax: 00 49 221 13 72 80; e-mail: savbund@aol.com
- **Greece:** Xekinima; Odos Maisonos 1; Vathis Platia; 104 38 Athens. phone/fax: + 30 1 524 7177;
e-mail: xekinima@ath.forthnet.gr
- **India:** Dudiyoora Horaata; PO Box 1828; Bangalore 560018. e-mail: admin@horata.ilban.ernet.in
- **Ireland North:** Socialist Party; 2nd Floor; 36 Victoria Square; Belfast BT1. phone: + 44 1232 232 962; fax: + 44 1232 311778; e-mail: socialist@belfastsp.freemove.co.uk
- **Ireland South:** Socialist Party; 141 Thomas St; Dublin 8.
phone/fax: + 353 1 677 25 92; e-mail: dublinsp@clubi.ie
- **Italy:** e-mail: dond001@it.net
- **Japan:** CWI Japan; Urbain Higashi Mikuni 9-406; Higashi-Mikuni 2-10; Yadokawa -ku; Osaka-shi.
phone/fax: + 81 6 396 6998; e-mail: nixsc@d1.dion.ne.jp
- **Netherlands:** Offensief; PO Box 11561; 1001 GN Amsterdam. e-mail: offensief@offensief.demon.nl
- **Portugal:** e-mail: cwi_portugal@hotmail.com
- **Scotland:** CWI Scotland; 5th Floor; 73, Robertson Street; Glasgow G2 8QD. phone: + 44 141 221 7714;
e-mail: ssv@mail.ndirect.co.uk
- **South Africa:** Socialist Alternative; PO Box 596; Newton; 2113; Johannesburg.
phone: + 27 11 342 2220; e-mail: mnoor@icon.co.za
- **Sri Lanka:** United Socialist Party; 261/1 Kirula Road; Narahempito; Colombo 5. phone: + 94 1 508 821
- **Sweden:** Offensiv; Box 374; S- 123 03 Farsta.
phone: + 46 8 605 9400; fax: + 46 8 556 252 52;
e-mail: offensiv@stockholm.mail.telia.com
- **USA:** New York: Labor Militant; PO Box 5447; Long Island City; New York, 11105. phone: + 1 718 204 2506;
fax: + 1 718 204 2548; e-mail: FranAlan@aol.com. California: 3311 Mission Street; suite 135; San Francisco; California 94110. e-mail: progress@ix.netcom.com

If you want to know more about us in

Israel/Palestine, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Spain

..... then contact the CWI international offices as indicated above

Struggle, solidarity, socialism



**Committee
for
Workers'
International**

**PO Box 3688,
London E9 5QX,
Britain,**

e-mail:

inter@dircon.co.uk

Tel:

++44 181 533 0201

Fax:

++ 44 181 985 0757

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is a socialist international organisation fighting to defend the rights of working class people.

We fight against a society where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

We want a society based on the needs of all instead of defending the interests of the privileged few.

In more than 35 countries all over the world we fight for the ideas of socialism by taking part in the day to day struggle of working class people, by organising international solidarity and by struggling against the conditions of poverty which the majority of people live under.

★Join the CWI/CIO!

CWI/CIO

an alarming 52%. According to official reports alone, in the year 1997 more than 14,000 women were raped and 27,513 were sexually assaulted. The percentage rises in crimes against women between 1994 and Jan 1995 are:-

Rape - 16%; molestation of women - 78%; kidnapping/abduction - 27%; "Eve-teasing" - 68%. The latter is sexual harassment at work. The bosses use a convenient jargon to make light of the real cruelty.

Sexual harassment is a subject people do not talk about. Because of the lack of proper support from union organisations etc., women suffer in silence. Not only this, they are blamed for provoking men to "Eve-tease" by their provocative dress, style and behaviour. But all kinds of women - whether they are dressed in saris, Burka, Jeans or midis and whether they are educated or illiterate, beautiful or not beautiful, slim or fat - are victims of this sexual harassment.

Dowry deaths, abuse, domestic violence, etc., these kinds of incidents reflect the situation of women in this system. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution assures equality before law and equal protection by the laws. Articles 14 & 15 are supposed to guarantee a life of dignity without discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste or sex. Women know very well, that no kind of law or court will give them the required protection. Real justice remains very far off.

A fact highlighted in the 1995 UN Human Development Report is that "Liberal bail practice, low conviction rates and delayed trials make culprits bolder: they commit crimes with impunity". With corrupt people at the top, feudal justice and weak laws, the bosses' system has seen to it that it is very difficult for women to fight for their rights.

Adding fuel to this fire, the so called economic reforms have further worsened the day to-day living of women. The bosses and their system are trying to off-load their problems onto the backs of working class people by cutting their wages, retrenching workers and privatising the public sector industries and services. Liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation - the new jargon of the world's rich - have only increased the pauperisation of working class people around the world.

The brunt of all this is felt by women who are still slogging it out as house-wives. The crisis has increased tensions in working class homes. In the economies of the under developed world this means more wife-beating, destitution and forced prostitution.

In the cut-throat competition of globalised trade during the developing recession, millions of workers in India are being made unemployed. Again, women receive the stick first. In the garment sector, where traditionally tens of thousands of women were employed, today factories are being closed down. Hence the women workers are facing redundancies. Many of these workers who are suddenly facing this ordeal are taking to suicide.

In all areas, whether it is an organised or unorganised sector, labour is highly exploited, wages are low, hours of work are long and there are occupational health hazards, no job security or social security benefits. Because of this women are becoming increasingly frustrated with the system that pays them less than men and forces them to take more responsibility for everyone else.

Pay for women in Asia is only about 30% of what their male counter-parts receive. India has one of the most unbalanced sex ratios in the world with 1,000 males to 923 females. Only 39% of women are literate. Less women than men work for a living and for every three men only one woman makes use of health facilities.

No capitalist policy - the 'free market', 'globalisation', 'liberalisation' or 'new economic policy' - works to overcome these inequalities. It is only a system based on the equal distribution of wealth and resources under the democratic control of working class people - of which women must be equal partners - can change this wretched earth into a decent place to live.

One of the first duties of socialists, and especially of socialist women, is to reclaim the real traditions of international women's day. In the process it is the duty of the socialists to expose the so-called liberators. The urgent need is to link the struggle of women with various other class struggles both within the country and internationally. We of the CWI in India dedicate ourselves to build a powerful socialist alternative which will emancipate working women along with all other exploited sections of society.

With Red Salute, **Nirmala Shetti**,
(Dudiyora Hora'ta)

10. INDIA

From the end of the '50s International Women's Day lost its name and turned into the Holiday of the 8th of March! Now it is just the holiday when men give presents to their women, boys greet girls in schools, "heads of the family" try to wash dishes etc. So it's the only one day in the whole year when men remember that a woman must have a rest and a chance to be proud of being a woman. Russian women just don't know that IWD was founded to strengthen working women's struggles all over the world and to fulfil the real equality between men and women.

It's getting worse now. The attempts to restore capitalism in Russia have resulted in the increased exploitation of women's labour at all levels - as a workforce and as housemaids. Because of the domination of capitalist ideology, we can see a growth of sexism. Prostitution increases, women's wages decrease, there is no equality in admission to jobs and so on.

The economic system of the USSR was organised in such way that at the very beginning of the restoration of capitalism a lot of women lost their jobs. Mostly it was women with high education like engineers and social workers. Women constitute about 75% of the army of unemployed in Russia, but there is also an army of "hidden unemployed" - the so-called crisis professions such as doctors, school teachers and high school teachers.

80% of school teachers, 70% of medical personnel and 55% of high school teachers are female and almost all of these people are state employees. The average wage which they get is about \$12 per month - less than a living wage - and the state does not pay it on time.

Now we can see a rise of protest among the representatives of these professions. In January there were several big strikes of the school teachers all over the country. Unfortunately, these actions were not successful because their organising abilities were weak.

As for women's organisations in Russia, it is possible to say that there is no real women's structure which is massive and active at all. There is a Women's Party but it is made up of careerists and does not deal with fight the capitalists who are making the fortunes. Most female organisations are liberal and they were created after the western model. Being face to face with crisis has shown that such structures are absolutely of no help to the unemployed women and the poverty-stricken.

Thus it may be said that while working class women constitute a very strong social power which is potentially revolutionary, the main problem is changing their consciousness and organising their will to fight.

Anna Shvedova
CWI-CIS

Free Market Capitalism brings no end to women's suffering

Capitalist India - the land of a million festivals - has a unique trick up its sleeve to turn the most radical of events into a ritual to perpetuate its feudal status-quo. International Women's Day symbolises women's ongoing fight for emancipation while across the country thousands of young women are burnt alive and the only escape for victims of rape, sexual assault and harassment is a suicide noose. Poverty wages do not meet the cost of two square meals a day and sometimes can not even buy a minimum amount of milk for a woman to feed her kids. This too, can drive her to suicide.

In India, communal bigotry, caste wars and language strifes are a common feature in every day life, but it is women who take the maximum brunt. They become victims of these sectarian killings and massacres. In recent weeks we have seen number of horrific instances of such carnage in which women and children were the main victims. The private armies of all-powerful Bihar landlords are killing daliths (lowest caste) and women every day.

The present all-India government headed by the BJP (the rightwing Hindu Communal Party) has emboldened the communal gangs, such as Bajrangdal and Shivsena, who have started a genocidal campaign against the Christian and Muslim minorities. Here again, women are the worst victims. In Orissa and Madhya Pradesh Christian Nuns and missionaries are subjected to murder and rape which have become an almost daily occurrence.

While women continue to face physical and mental torture the establishment of India every year celebrates March 8th with all the fanfare. Of course, in the statutes and the constitution of India, women are equal to men. The system claims time and again to give her a dignified life. But in reality she can be sold for half the price of a buffalo, and can be beaten up and treated like a slave. She can be burnt alive for not bringing with her a huge dowry when she gets married and she can be made homeless for not bearing a male child. The kinder spouse will simply force her to have repeated abortions.

She has to face all of this because she has an inferior or second class status in society. Women are forced to silently accept it because they are made to believe that they are biologically inferior to men. The Hindu fundamentalist bigots boast that their culture and tradition place women on the status of goddesses, but the facts speak more realistically. At least 76% of women in the country suffer from sexual abuse. Of these, 40% are abused by family members and 31% by known persons. These figures come from a survey conducted by a Delhi-based women's support group (RAHI).

Marital violence against city women has increased by

has compelled every woman to seek employment just to bear house-hold expenses. The majority of women have become economically less dependent and that has raised their position vis-à-vis men in society.

On the other hand, women are being exploited extensively as their jobs are at lower grades and mostly of an unskilled or semi-skilled nature. The professions of teaching and nursing are also more than 70% female as these jobs are traditionally considered as appropriate for women. However, here also a comparatively low percentage of women occupy higher positions.

The Sri Lankan constitution of 1978 formally guarantees equal legal rights for women. Nevertheless some traditional laws such as thesawalamai (of Northern Hindus) and Muslim law still discriminate against women as do immigration laws. If a Sri Lankan woman decides to marry a foreigner, she will not be able to get him citizenship rights whereas a Sri Lankan man will get citizenship rights for a foreign wife automatically, 'ipso facto'.

The darkest side of women's lives is the alarming increase in violence against them reported in the last few years - rape, other forms of sexual abuse and even murder. A particular scandal is that young working girls in the free trade zones have become prey for the perpetrators of sexual crimes including many soldiers of the Sri Lankan army.

Though there is a new awareness and emphasis on women's rights, violence against women has not abated. Domestic violence is traditionally accepted as a part of married life.

There are now a considerable number of house-holds where the only bread-winners are women and many of them are single parents. This has increased as a result of the war in the north and the east of the country where a Tamil minority is fighting for the right to self-determination and also of the youth rebellion in the south in the late eighties. There is no proper social security network for these women, apart from some ad hoc measures.

Though women's role in the economy and society has become more and more important, her position is still vulnerable. There is no clear and general identification and recognition of women's rights as human rights. The previous UNP government published a women's charter embodying various women's rights recognised internationally. The present PA government, led by two women, pledged at the elections in 1994 to legalise that charter. However, no action has been taken in that regard, despite there being a Women's Affairs Ministry led by a woman.

Unfortunately, the traditional left movement and trade unions also have not taken up women's issues seriously and effectively. They have had the concept that women's rights and problems are only a part of the social issues in general, many saying that the social transformation of society will automatically resolve them.

However, women's issues have surfaced prominently now and Non Governmental Organisations have become the main bodies active in this arena. They have played a useful role but they have not been able to address the real issues of the exploitation perpetrated by capitalism. Also, NGOs never put the class issues forward.

There is an urgent need for the left movement to take up women's issues as a priority matter and fight for equality, for an end to discrimination, exploitation and the oppression of women.

Dhamika de Silva and Srinath Perera,
United Socialist Party

9. CIS

International Women's Day

The 8th of March is a very significant date in fighting for a socialist future. This is the day of international solidarity of working women in the struggle for their economic, social and political rights.

The decision to celebrate this day was accepted at the Second International Congress of Socialist Women in Copenhagen in 1910, after the proposal of Klara Zetkin. In 1911 IWD was celebrated in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Denmark for the first time. Meetings and demonstrations organised by the female activists of the Bolsheviks' Petrograd City Committee of became very important events in the February Revolution.

One of the first Bolshevik decrees, signed by Lenin, declared the equality between men and women and equal rights for sexual minorities. International Women's Day became an official holiday in Russia. Indeed, it was a considerable step forward!

Unfortunately, the better part of these gains were completely forgotten during the period of Stalinism. In that period the institution of the family was restored in soviet ideology to support the authoritarian tendencies in society. Leon Trotsky wrote that it was one of the main means in the totalitarian system for enforcing authority and enhancing the personality cult of Stalin.

So, in the period of Stalinism there was little real equality although there was a lot of talking about it. Women had the possibility to go into higher education, to enjoy equal rights in some professions like doctors and teachers but, in practice, most economic, social and especially political rights belonged to men.

So-called "equality" meant women doing the same or even harder jobs as men. It is hard to believe, but a working woman might return to her job only one month after the birth of her child. But young girls were always told about the equality between 'soviet' men and women and it made them very proud.

8. SRI LANKA

For Sri Lankan Women - A Long Way To Go

Women constitute half the population of Sri Lanka and play a crucial role in the affairs of the country. On the one hand, both the president and the prime minister are women and the world's first woman prime minister was produced by Sri Lanka. But this has not helped to enhance the situation of Sri Lankan working class poor women.

More importantly, the country's economy rests to a very large part on the shoulders of women. The Sri Lankan economy's main foreign exchange earners used to be tea, rubber and coconut cultivation for export. Apart from these commercial crops, paddy (rice) cultivation has been the mainstay of the rural economy. Women's labour plays an important role here, but in most instances is not taken into account.

The traditional economic pattern has completely changed during the last 10-15 years. Remittances from Sri Lankans employed in the Middle Eastern countries are now the no.1 net foreign exchange earner and women constitute more than 80% of this work-force. In earning this money, women have to go undergo a great deal of hardship.

Firstly, even to leave Sri Lanka for these jobs, they are exploited by the so-called employment agencies. Sometimes they charge Rs.30-40,000 (£3-4,000) to send a woman abroad for a housemaid's job. But the real trauma only starts after they reach the country and start the job. The women have no fixed hours of work, proper health care facilities etc. They are at the mercy of their employers.

This situation is not only limited to housemaids. Recently a Sri Lankan employee of a garment factory in Saudi Arabia was suspended from work. The other workers, mostly women, walked out in solidarity, though they were not organised in a union. All of them were instantly dismissed. The Sri Lankan authorities took no action to protect these workers on the pretext that striking was illegal in Saudi Arabia. The actual reason was that the Sri Lankan authorities did not want to offend the feudal rulers and big business in the Saudi kingdom.

There have been numerous other instances where women employees have been victimised, beaten, sexually abused and even killed. Most women are afraid to divulge the incidents due to the stigma attached to them.

Even when they are reported, little or nothing is done by the Sri Lankan government but in February this year it had to intervene to bring back about 200 Sri Lankan women from Lebanon. They had been stranded after being dismissed by their employers after just 3-4 months employment. They had not been paid their salaries and a considerable number arrived in wheelchairs, showing the trauma they had undergone at the hands of their employers or agencies.

The tea plantations in Sri Lanka account for two thirds of all plantations and employ a very large number of women but almost all in unskilled or semi-skilled work such as plucking tea-leaves, sweeping and collecting tea dust etc. Up to mid-1980 women workers were discriminated against, receiving lower wages than men for the same type of work. Although that has been formally remedied, they still work in semi-slave conditions - comprising illiteracy, malnutrition and improper sanitation. Almost all plantation workers are organised in trade unions but the number of women holding positions in them is negligible and they have not taken up specific issues affecting women workers. The garment industry, which has spread throughout the country during the last 10 years, is another sector where a large number of women are employed - constituting about 80% of the work-force and occupying the lowest grades. The basic salary of a machine operator is between Rs.2,500 and Rs.3,500 - very low by comparison with other comparable vocations and with the magnitude of the income and profit of these enterprises. This industry is hugely invested in by foreign businesses simply because of the greater possibilities of exploiting an educated work-force.

Although Sri Lanka has a relatively strong trade union tradition, the garment sector does not allow trade union rights. These workers have still not been organised and the left movement has not been able to fill this vacuum.

There are several 'Free Trade Zones' (or Export Promotion Zones) in the country where foreign investment has concentrated, originally mainly in the garment industry but now also in others like diamond cutting, footwear and rubber-based industries. The FTZs, which allow investors huge tax benefits and other concessions, employ women to a very large extent. The Korean and Japanese firms - the main foreign investors - only want to collect a big profit in a short period. Thereafter they vanish, abandoning the factory and workers without paying their salaries and other statutory payments due to them.

At present there is an agitation by a group of workers in this situation - the majority of them are women in a Korean-owned establishment called Kabool Magnetic. The government is not taking any action over the dispute.

In these FTZ factories, working women's rights are zero - not only trade union rights but basic human rights. One example is that women workers wanting to go to the toilet have to wait to get a card and mark the time on it. They call it the 'piss card' and many women get health problems because of the system. There is a continuous agitation taking place against these inhuman practices.

The stereotype woman still promoted by some in Sri Lanka is the house-wife and mother who cares for the husband and children by cooking, washing and house-keeping. But the changed situation, after the economy was opened up to 'free' market forces in the late '70s,

The average wage of the workers - mostly nursing assistants - was \$7-8 per hour. If registered nurses' wages were included, the average would increase to \$9 an hour. Conditions, safety and respect had deteriorated over the past few years. Women workers struggled with 2-3 jobs and with families to look after and feed.

At Oakwood Care Centre (re-named 'Sunrise' during the strike) 74% of the staff were Haitian. The rest of the nationalities divided between Pakistani, Jamaican, Barbadian, Irish and African.

From day one of the strike, children were always present on the line. The frustrated thugs were relentlessly taunted by the children. Several times they accused the women of neglecting their children and reported them to the state child protection agency in order to scare them into keeping them away. The union brothers and sisters at these agencies delayed the paperwork!

The women stood strong and continued to bring their children with them. Many of them were together so often that new and wonderful friendships were formed. Overhearing a derogatory remark one day, an 8 year old child angrily said to his mother, "That's racist!" Solidarity may have been a tough word to roll off a young child's tongue, but then actions speak louder than words.

At the other nursing home involved in the action - Glenwood, before the strike happened, the staff had been as divided as night and day. The earlier shift workers were American women while the evening shift were African. Tensions had often been noted in the everyday running of the workplace. One worker had referred to "those people" during a labour/management meeting.

Suddenly, when the strike began, tensions melted away when everyone realised that, in order to win, they would need to stand together - AS ONE! Again, strong relationships were formed in the struggle against the bosses.

If this strike is an indication of events to come, then the bosses have tough adversaries to face. Internationally, women workers will stand tall and fight back. And their children will benefit from the sense of justice they learned early on in life.

Martha Root, (Service Employees
International Union Local 285)
Labor Militant

7. BRITAIN

Campaigning for a decent wage

Eighty percent of low paid workers in Britain are women. They are the cleaners, cooks and hairdressers forced to work in poor conditions with no legal minimum wage. In the public sector, low pay is rife.

Women's wages have fallen back so far that the gap between men and women's wages has widened for the first time in 10 years. At this rate it would take 43 years to achieve equal pay!

So the establishment of a decent minimum wage is very important for women workers. When the New Labour government announced that it would introduce a legal minimum, many women expected an end to poverty wages. Some hope!

The minimum wage is to be set at such a low level - £3.60 an hour - that most will still be trapped in poverty, dependent on state benefits to survive. Young workers will receive an even lower rate - £3 an hour - and those under 18 years will not be covered by any legal minimum at all. Young hairdressers can receive as little as £1 an hour, working 40 hours a week!

If they get their way, the bosses will be able to continue super-exploiting workers, making huge profits at their expense. The bosses say they cannot afford a higher minimum rate of pay, but the president of the Confederation of British Industry - the bosses' own club - gets £7 a minute!

All we are demanding is £7 an hour - the European 'decency rate'! Not much to ask for as we enter the new millennium.

Women workers are fighting back.

In Tameside, Manchester, care-workers have been on strike for over a year. The boss of their privatised company wanted to lower their wages down to the proposed legal minimum. Some women faced losing as much as £2 an hour. They said, "Enough is enough!" and walked out on strike.

The biggest trade union in Britain is UNISON which organises 1.3 million public sector workers. 70% of these are women. At the union's national conference, socialists moved a resolution demanding a national demonstration to force the government to increase the level of the minimum wage.

Now over 20 national unions are supporting the demonstration in Newcastle on April 10th. It will be the first national protest organised by unions in opposition to the openly pro-big business New Labour government.

This demonstration could act as a focus for all the anger that is building up from below against a government that is privatising public services, attacking welfare and undermining workers' jobs and conditions. Women are worst affected by all these attacks and we will be on the demonstration in our thousands demanding a decent living wage.

Chris Thomas,
Socialist Party

such an attack. It is about flexibilisation of work, security, increasing precarious working conditions etc. One example especially affecting women is that, according to the act, a worker will lose the right to holidays over and above ten days, if he or she is missing one single day from the work-place. (Ten free days annually was all that was allowed in the time of fascism so the Pacote Laboral threatens the gains made by its overthrow). This will affect women more than men. When a child is sick, usually the woman will stay at home to care for him or her. This is not just about unequally distributed family responsibilities, but also about the lower payment of working class women.

Torge,
Colectivo "Luta Socialista"

5. GERMANY

Rosa Luxembour- Revolutionary and fighter for socialism

Rosa Luxembour was born on the 5th.March, 1871, in Poland. As a school student she became politically active and at the age of 16 she joined the "Revolutionary Party of Poland". After finishing school, she went to Switzerland and later to Germany in order to escape the danger of getting arrested.

In Germany, Rosa immediately became active in the workers' movement and very soon took up an important position in the Social Democratic Party, already a mass party. She played an important role in the political confrontation inside that party, especially in the fight against centrism, reformism and opportunism. The representatives of these trends maintained that the revolutionary strategy of Marx was outdated. Instead, they thought that it is possible to achieve socialism with a tactic of step-by-step reforms and a concentration on parliamentary work.

Luxembourg fought very hard against any illusion in the reformation of capitalism. At the same time she supported fully every fight of workers for the smallest improvement. She emphasised the importance of such struggles, because through them workers learn to organise themselves and to recognise their power. Also the bureaucratic tendencies inside the party and trade unions and amongst the Social Democrat MPs were always a thorn in Luxembourg's side.

In 1914 the first world war broke out and millions of workers paid with their lives for the capitalists' interests. They were betrayed by the leaders of all social democratic parties in Europe, who went over to the side of their national bourgeoisie and supported the capitalist war.

Rosa Luxembour was one of the few who fought from the beginning very hard against the war and for the united international struggle of the working class against the warmongers. But she also explained the

necessity of the building of a new workers' international.

Immediately, she began to organise an opposition, spoke therefore at hundreds of party meetings and wrote leaflets. For that work she was arrested in 1915 and had to sit in prison until the outbreak of the German revolution in November 1918.

Together with Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxembour was at the head of the 1918 revolution and fought with him for a full seizure of power by the workers' soviets. At the turn of the year 1918/19 she was one of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany; she wrote the basic programme and led the editorial department of the party-paper.

On the 15th of January, 1919, Rosa Luxembour and Karl Liebknecht were brutally killed by order of the SPD leaders, who hated the revolution. The German working class lost their main leaders. Their murder marked the beginning of the smashing of the revolution which began in 1918. In the next months, the workers' and soldiers' soviets in the whole country were bloodily suppressed; in the next two years, tens of thousands of workers were killed.

As socialists, we become today the political inheritors of Luxembour's legacy. That means for us the construction of a new international workers' party, fighting without any compromises for a socialist transformation of society.

Antje Zander,
Socialistische Alternative

6. USA

Striking Sunrise. Low wages, Children and International Solidarity

An indication of coming struggles recently manifested itself in a strike at two nursing homes in Massachusetts. Significantly, as a result of it, wages were increased more than ever before. (There was a stipulation that further union organising should be limited to one nursing home per year, but this shows how much the management fears the strength of organised labour!) Even more extraordinary was that low-paid women from a variety of nationalities - and their children - came together in solidarity to courageously fight for better conditions and wages.

When the bosses of Sunrise Corporation, which owns 600-some nursing homes world-wide, decided to only offer a 30 cent wage rise, workers took their labour onto the picket lines for a total of 10 weeks. The bosses paid millions of dollars to a thuggish private security firm, as well as the local police, to protect the scab labour who were entering the homes in rented vans.

4. PORTUGAL

The gap between women's and men's income is widening nowadays. The sexist picture of women in advertisements and magazines is getting worse accompanied with increasing porn consumption among youth. The porn industry is making billions of dollars every year from women's bodies, by putting out a degrading picture of women and teaching young boys that a woman is just an object, something you can do what ever you want to with.

Elevkampanjen in Stockholm conducted a successful campaign to close a brothel called 'Studio Anna'. We took up the shocking fact that the brothel had people outside the schools trying to recruit girls into prostitution. We managed to do this by getting great support from the neighbours and got all the teenagers who were targeted involved.

We had demonstrations outside the brothel at night time which, of course, discouraged the sex purchasers from coming near. The profits for the brothel were not big when we did that. There was a lot of discussion about this brothel at the time, but we were the only ones who did something about it. The campaign became even more successful then we had thought it would and the brothel was eventually closed down.

An important reason for the hard climate in the schools is all the school cuts there have been in recent years. A lot of the welfare clinics in the schools have lost their jobs. Girls in school are never listened to; boys go first.

When it's okay to be called a whore this leads to low respect for women. The step from calling a girl a whore to starting to sexually harass her is a short one. The sexual violence against young women has increased in recent years. One third of female teenagers are afraid to walk outside in the night; ten percent feel clinically depressed.

On top of this comes the fact that some political parties and parts of the establishment are trying to make these a question of morality. They object to teenagers having sex or knowing too much about it. They increase the oppression young women feel by preaching 'carefulness' etc. Elevkampanjen preaches struggle - a fight against all these forms of harassment.

Every day we are getting pumped with information on how we should look, how we should act, what we are supposed to be. But there is a resistance growing. Every day young girls and boys are signing up to join Elevkampanjen, because they want to do something and fight for justice.

On March 8th we are going to have a whole day (studiedag) in my school, where we are going to talk about these issues with the students, and with the teachers. After that we will all go to our demonstration for international women's day.

Carolyn Evander,
Rattvissepartiet Socialisterna

The situation of working-class women in Portugal.

Much has changed since the revolution of 25th of April 25 years ago. Working class women gained through the revolutionary process very advanced constitutional rights by comparison with the rest of Europe. Before 1974 women counted for nothing in the eyes of the law. The husband was her master and ruler, e.g. having the right to sexual abuse whenever he wanted. Afterwards, the universities opened for women and nowadays 56,4 % of high school students are women.

But also in Portugal constitutional rights and reality are two different things. Unemployment is feminine: Women are working in the most precarious conditions, e.g. as shop assistants. The unemployment rate for women is about 50% higher than for men - at this moment about 6%. (For women from the age of 14-24 it is over 10 %!).

Women are paid less: female factory workers earn 31 % less than their masculine mates. In the public service it differs about 21%. (Even female directors earn 24 % less than their male counterparts).

Home-working

A very special Portuguese problem is women working at home. Especially in the North of the country, working class women have to look after the children and to work at the same time. In that part of the country a high proportion of women are doing work at home for the textile and shoe industry. It is difficult to obtain any figures about this; there is no trade-union or other kind of organisation organising these women.

On the island of Madeira (autonomous region) there is the tradition of embroidery. In 1976 the women doing work at home for this industry began to really build their own trade-union. One had existed since 1856 but, until the revolution, it was hardly organising anyone. The first achievement was made in a fight of embroidery workers in 1979 when they won the right to be covered by social security - pension rights, family extra-pay, illness payment.

In 1980 the embroidery women of Madeira achieved general workers' rights like Christmas bonuses. annual pay increases etc. This achievement strengthened the union-movement in this sector. Nearly 4000 embroidery workers became very unionised in the 80's but there is still a long way to go. Home-workers are still badly paid, even in Madeira. In 1995 they received 500 Escudos (5 Deutschmarks) for an 8-hour working day, only one quarter of the minimum wage in Portugal.

Working class women's rights under attack

The socialist government is carrying out a "reform of labour rights" called "Pacote Laboral". This has to be seen as the biggest attack on workers' constitutional rights since 1976. The former conservative governments were not able to undertake

even one rest day in a week. Over 67% of rural workers say that they have never been informed of the high risk of agricultural fertilisers. As many as 63% of them continue to use the drums or barrels that contained these chemicals to store water, groceries and cereals.

One of the basic demands raised by the Movement of Rural Working Women is the right to free registration for identity documents, which are vital for citizens' rights and for survival generally. Without identity documents, access to retirement pension is very difficult and it is estimated that about 500,000 women missed getting retirement benefit last year, mainly for this reason. Today, only 3 million of the 18.5 million rural workers have a formally recognised job skill. Most rural workers only have their voting card (compulsory in Brazil) and their birth certificate.

Only 1% of rural properties are in the name of women. Rural women tend to do jobs in the more informal sector, making cheese, preserves, manual crafts, selling greens and vegetables, eggs, etc. So they have no social legislation or retirement rights.

Despite so much inequality and oppression, rural workers are in the front line, struggling against exploitation. Women with kids in their arms or hanging onto their skirts have played leading roles in land occupations and in clashes with the big landowners' thugs. They are courageous women, exemplary and determined fighters and their struggle should be commemorated this 8th of March!

Eliana Maciel,
Socialismo Revolucionario

2. JAPAN

Company unions and harmonious labour-management relations? Japanese culture is different and Japanese women are obedient? That is not at all what Japan is about. There are working women with some guts!

Twelve women from the gigantic Sumitomo group of companies took their employers to court or sexual discrimination against women. Yatani-san, who works for Sumitomo Chemical Industries, is one of them.

"We have taken Sumitomo group of companies to court for their discrimination against women in wages and promotion.

"I have been working for Sumitomo Chemical Industries for 29 years. All my male counterparts have been promoted to become managers, and are getting paid accordingly, while I have been kept on clerical work at about half their wages.

"I have asked my superior about my prospects for getting promotion, but was only told 'you have not shown any results'. So I asked him to put me in a job where I could prove my ability, but nothing changed. I just felt like I belonged to a different class.

"I appealed to the company union to take up the issue of sex discrimination, but I was just told that 'because I

am a woman, I did not have sufficient skills, or I was just not talented enough, therefore I should not expect my superior to recommend me!'

"I also applied for mediation through the Ministry of Labour's Women and Young Workers' Office. They took up my case, but the company simply turned it down.

"We have been trying every avenue we can use to publicise our case and raise awareness of discrimination against women at work. We took our report to the ILO and the UN Human Rights Centre. Last year, we participated in the Japan-EU Symposium even though we weren't invited.

"Government representatives claimed at this symposium that the government has been making efforts to eliminate discrimination against women in Japan, but Japanese culture is different and Japanese women do not work for many years. They also claimed that Japanese people do not like fighting in the court. So we got up and told the symposium that we are fighting our case in the court, because after working for 20-30 years, we are not getting fair treatment - just because we are women.

"We had a very positive response on all these visits. Also, in Japan, the Human Rights Defence Committee of Japan's Lawyers' Association issued a recommendation to the trade unions of the Sumitomo group of companies to provide information to their members fighting in the court to end discrimination against women as requested. This is very significant as it is not common that they issue a recommendation in relation to a specific case in process, and also it is the first recommendation issued to trade unions!

"We are determined to see it through. This is not about just our promotion and wages, but for everybody. Our victory will open ways for all other women to win equal treatment. Please give your support so we can end discrimination against women in Japan."

Nahoko Isu,
CWI Japan

3. SWEDEN

"Don't call me a whore!" - Campaign against sexual harassment in Swedish schools.

A report has come out with shocking figures. 47% of girls in the nine-year compulsory schools are sexually harassed. The climate against young women has become harder in society and has reached the schools in a new way. Girls are being called names like 'whore' and 'cunt' every day in school and nobody reacts. Our Elevkampanjen (school students' campaigning) wants to organise girls and boys to fight discrimination.

Women's position in society is getting weaker and weaker. 90% of public employees in the community are women. All the cuts that have been done in healthcare, welfare, education etc. have had big effects on women's position in society, because several thousands of women have lost their jobs and have become dependent on their husbands and dependent on state benefits.

Committee for a Workers' International

Articles from Around the World

Included here are ten articles commissioned by the Committee for a Workers' International for use on and around March 8th - International Women's Day. They have been circulated to the sections and groups of the CWI in all five continents of the world to be used in their publications, in leaflets and at meetings or events being held around that time.

We hope you will find the material informative, inspiring and useful for discussion with people around you - especially, of course, working class women and young women in the schools, colleges etc. Everyone is welcome to send us their comments and ask for more information about our work.

Above all, we invite everyone who feels angry about the plight of women under capitalism and is prepared to fight to change things, to join our International. Join us in the fight for a better deal for women and an end to capitalism and all its attendant evils. We fight for a socialist society, where women can begin to breathe freely - where they and their partners and families are no longer humiliated and exploited and where the talent and abilities of all will have a chance to develop as never before.

Clare Doyle

Committee for a Workers' International

PO Box 3688,
London,
E9 5QX.
E/Mail: inter@dircon.co.uk
Tel: ++ 44 181 533 0201
Fax: ++ 44 181 985 0757

CONTENTS

1. Brazil 2. Japan 3. Sweden
4. Portugal 5. Germany 6. USA 7. Britain
8. Sri Lanka 9. CIS 10. India

1. BRAZIL

March 8th around the world is the celebration of International Women's Day. For us, this is not just a celebration, it's more a day of struggle, of fighting spirit. The struggle to end the oppression of women is a fight against the capitalist system which means exploitation for us and making profit for the bosses.

In Brazil, the workers as a whole have been hit by a series of government attacks, as they attempt to take away historic conquests of the class, to continue with their corruption and with fattening the bank accounts of international speculators.

Women are the hardest hit. In the debate on Pensions Reform, for example, the government wants to eliminate women's earlier retirement, claiming that this "privilege" involves huge problems for the country's finances. The government refuses to acknowledge the fact that toiling women in fact are often doing two jobs, work overtime at housework, and are much more exploited than men.

In the rural areas, this is still worse. About 57% of women begin work before they reach the age of 10 and 90% before they are 15. So they have to take care of the home, wash and iron clothes, make meals and take care of children. These women have no access to contraceptive information and methods. They become pregnant very young (61% before they are 21) and they have large families: 50% have five or more children, 24% have nine or more.

In addition, women's health is ignored by the authorities. In cities, 10% of women suffer a miscarriage and in the rural areas, 42% due to the lack of adequate prenatal and health services. Even during pregnancy there is no let-up in their lives of hard physical labour. Half the women surveyed didn't have

Fighting Demands

As we outlined in last year's CWI Women's Day pamphlet, inscribed on our banner must be the basic rights that would dramatically ease the burden of women:-

Free education, free health facilities and decent housing

Free good quality child care

Maternity and child benefits to cover the cost of bringing up children

Free contraception and abortion for those who want it.

Such gains would at last give women the freedom to choose whether or not to have children and what to do with their lives.

Included in the programmes of our parties as we go into elections - in Europe in Asia or any other part of the globe must be those for:-

Equal pay for work of equal value; an end to discrimination, harassment and violence against women; a reversal of all cuts in welfare spending and the sharing of work to provide real jobs for all on decent living wages.

International Socialism

Throughout last year, the 'Asian Crisis' of capitalism wreaked havoc with the lives of millions of working women - in Korea, in Indonesia, in the Philippines, Malaysia and China - indeed throughout the region. In all these countries women have been amongst the first to move into action against the bosses and the dictators. Women were to the fore amongst the students and the workers who brought down Suharto in the revolutionary events in Jakarta of April and May.

We salute all those women, through history and in our time, who have given their lives in struggle, who have been imprisoned or simply, through sheer determination, have overcome all obstacles to participate in the workers' and socialist movement. The best tribute we can pay to them is to redouble our efforts in the fight for international socialism as the way to eliminate the scourge of capitalism from the lives of all.

March 3rd 1999

CWI

PO Box 3688, London, E9 5QX

E/Mail: inter@dircon.co.uk

Tel: ++ 44 181 533 0201

Fax: ++ 44 181 985 0757

berated France's socialist leaders - Millerand, Jaures and co. - not only for not "directing all spears against the body" of the class enemy but for even coming to its defence (Millerand took a ministerial position and Jaures, after two years, dropped his campaign against amnesty for the scandal's perpetrators!).

Capitalism rotten to the core

This example is not unimportant for today. The dismissal in 1996 of a judge in the de Trou paedophilia affair in Belgium provoked an outburst of anger, not least amongst women, and provoked a movement reaching general strike proportions. The skilful intervention of a revolutionary party can win recruits to the struggle for socialism and, with sufficient backing, turn such crises into a movement to transform society. Our task is to build parties of the working class that can fight battles on these issues, and fight them to the finish.

Capitalism is heading into deeper crises. If, in many countries, it is enjoying a short respite from major class battles, it can nevertheless be engulfed by scandals which totally discredit national governments. Appearing out of an otherwise clear blue sky, they turn rapidly into a pre-revolutionary situation where the question of who runs society is posed. They reveal the seamier side of a system based on the exploitation of the overwhelming majority by the privileged and indifferent few and the total absence of justice for those without wealth and property.

"There must be something wrong"

In the words of a popular poem published in the American "Factory Girls' Album" of 1847, "There must be something wrong". As it says: "When earth produces free and fair / The golden waving corn /...Whilst thousands move with aching head, / And sing the ceaseless song - / 'We starve, we die; oh give us bread' / There must be something wrong..."

We can say today that when, as the United Nations Human Development Report estimates, the 225 richest people in the world have a combined wealth of \$1 trillion, while this is the same as the annual income of nearly half the world's population - 2.5 billion people and while just 4% of that - \$40 billion a year - would provide "universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all and safe water and sanitation for all"... **THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG!**

When, as statistics show, women produce half the world's food while they constitute 62% of the world's starving, when they do two thirds of the world's work and constitute 70% of the world's poor, when, in countries where equal pay laws exist, the gap between women's and men's pay is still 30 - 40%, when 1 in 13 women die in pregnancy or childbirth in Sub Saharan Africa while only 1 in 7,300 in Canada, then indeed, **THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG!**

When women, who form half the population receive 10% of the world's income, when wars and civil conflicts leave tens of millions of women as single parents and refugees, when 66% of the world's women are illiterate and 34 million women are 'missing' because of selective abortion...**THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG!**

Indeed there is! It is capitalism that is wrong - it robs and maims and kills to keep a pampered few in untold luxury!

This is what makes us angry and what also means that international socialist revolution is not a fantasy but a necessity. Ending capitalism is, as Marxists have long insisted, the only way to eliminate all that is wrong in the world. In the process of preparing for the revolutionary upheavals to come, the parties of the CWI must support and champion the daily struggles of working class women for a better deal.

celebrate the triumphs as well as remember the huge sacrifices made by women in their struggle to change the world around them.

The first March 8th protest demonstration was in 1857, when thousands of women left their factories to demonstrate on the streets of New York against hunger and low pay. Later in the century, working women in America took their place in the courageous mass struggles for an 8-hour day. Along with the martyrs of the Haymarket, Chicago, they challenged the bosses and their system in the teeth of vicious state repression against trade unions and against socialist and revolutionary organisations.

The appalling wages and conditions in the mills and sweat-shops of a rapidly industrialising USA in the 19th century were not far different from those of women workers in early 20th century Russia or, for that matter, in late 20th century Asia and elsewhere.

Russia - February, 1917

In the war-torn Russia of 1917, it was the action of women in the textile industry that set off a revolution. Desperate to feed their children and amongst the most most down-trodden and oppressed, they could wait no longer. Worker-leaders in Petrograd - many of them revolutionary Bolsheviks eager to see the end of Czarism - had nevertheless decided not to call for strike action on International Women's Day (February 23rd by the old calendar). But, as the day dawned, thousands of women walked out of the textile factories. They sent delegations to the giant manufacturing plants of the Vyborg district and rapidly persuaded the workers' committees to change their minds. 90,000 were on strike before the end of the day.

Trotsky in his History writes, "A mass of women, not all of them workers, flocked to the municipal дума (local assembly) demanding bread. It was like demanding milk from a he-goat". The following day, half the industrial workers of Petrograd held work-place meetings and walked out, making their way in numerous demonstrations to the centre of the city. The slogan "Bread!" was replaced by "Down with autocracy!" and "Down with the War!". The February revolution was underway.

Rosa Luxemburg

On International Women's Day this year, the name of one of the greatest revolutionary women in history cannot be forgotten. 80 years ago this January, Rosa Luxemburg, along with her comrade in arms, Karl Liebknecht, was murdered on the orders of the German Social Democrat minister for military affairs, Gustav Noske. The power of her ideas and her influence amongst the German masses, were a direct challenge to the abject defenders of the rule of capital within the mass workers' party that was the SDP.

At the time of the 1905 revolution in the Russian empire, Rosa had striven might and main to get from Germany to her native Poland in order to participate - "To feel the wind of revolution about my ears" which was for her the greatest joy in life. At the time of the February revolution, this 'eagle', as Lenin and Trotsky called her, was a caged bird - locked up in a German prison for railing against the imperialist war. Unable to see clearly all the processes, she nevertheless greeted with great enthusiasm the October 1917 uprising in Petrograd. It was, as she wrote, "Not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism".

Amongst Rosa's many writings are her comments on events at the turn of the last century in France. She saw the scandal of a totally rigged trial of a Jewish officer - Dreyfus - as offering an invaluable opportunity for exposing all that was rotten in capitalist France and for gaining mass support for its overthrow. Like the Russian revolutionary leader Lenin (with whom she did not always agree), she

WOMEN FIGHT THE SYSTEM

CWI INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY STATEMENT - 1999

The committee for a workers' international commemorates International Women's Day 1999 - Monday 8th of March - by calling on all socialists and class fighters to help restore the true significance of this day in the calendar of the workers' movement.

It is a day for remembering that women constitute half the world's population but carry much more than half the burdens of everyday life. Now, as the world economy enters recession, it is working women of town and country who suffer disproportionately. Women's labour - paid or unpaid - becomes the shock absorber for falling incomes, growing unemployment and shrinking or non-existent welfare provision. Where they organise and fight back - be it at RTFC Ceramics in Manila, Hillingdon Hospital, West London or Johnson's Textiles in Santiago - women show a legendary determination and tenacity. Why should they pay for the problems the bosses have created in their scramble for profits?

For March 8th, we extend our greetings to all women involved in struggling against the system and pledge whatever support we can give in building their fighting capacity and organising international solidarity. We will work for the maximum participation of working and young women in the struggle for socialism and in the building of our International.

Women and struggle

This year we have commissioned and made available for publication articles written by comrades of the CWI in ten different countries. They give a glimpse of what life is like for working class and young women around the world in the run-up to a new millenium. They cover their involvement in struggles ranging from land occupations in Brazil, campaigns for union organisation and against low pay in the US, Britain, Sri Lanka and Chile. There are harrowing accounts of the plight of women in Portugal and India and a tribute from Germany to the heroic life of Rosa Luxembourg. They all bring home the need to revive the real spirit of International Women's Day - a day to