International Women’s Day Celebrates 100th Anniversary

This year will mark the 100th anniversary of the declaration of March 8 as International Women’s Day. Today we pay homage to all those women who ensured the entrenchment of International Women’s Day when it was first celebrated in 1911 in Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland, countries where Marxism and social democracy held political prominence.

Although International Women’s Day was introduced by a socialist party and is a product of socialist logic, it is being celebrated by all women, regardless of class, colour, race, culture, political hue and ideological predisposition, including some of those women who have now distanced themselves from anything socialist or Marxist. Embracing International Women’s Day as the women of the world continue to do, then, could be seen as an indicator that, perhaps, there was something good in the ideas and principles of socialism and, today, given the dominance of market fundamentalism and globalisation, there is still need for a project of social justice, even if it is for women only: a project of social justice, which goes beyond the simple age-old demand by women for “women’s equality” and now, in recent times, the demand for an amorphous “gender equality”.

Therefore, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of International Women’s Day 2011, The Women and Development Unit, in conformity with the “Mission Statement” of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, renews the call to political and civil societies to remove “all obstacles to women’s active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making” (p. 17) by providing a context of social justice where women’s rights are acknowledged as human rights which will be respected by all. (Excerpt from WAND’s IWD Message March 8, 2011)

Tutor/Coordinator Speaks at IWD Public Forum, Jamaica

Judith Soares was one of three presenters who participated in the public forum hosted by the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions, Women’s Committee, to mark the 100th anniversary of the declaration of March 8 as International Women’s Day. Her presentation was entitled, “A Socio-Political and Religious Analysis of the State and Condition of Women after 100 Years of the Declaration of International Women’s Day”. The theme of the forum, held on March 3 in Kingston, Jamaica, was International Women’s Day: Celebrating 100 Years, Where are we Now? ...Cont’d Page 2
The other presenters were Ms. Taitu Heron, Lecturer, Institute of Gender and Development Studies, UWI, Jamaica and Ms. Linette Vassell, Gender Specialist, Activist, Women’s Advocate and Community Development Specialist. In her presentation Judith Soares noted that:

“IWD was first celebrated...in Jamaica in the 1970s, a period of ‘national liberation’, when some women’s groups led the way. This period of national liberation which saw the democratic socialist programme of development, introduced by the PNP administration led by former prime minister and trade unionist, Michael Manley, provided the context, for the first time in the country’s history, for addressing directly the concerns of women and children, on the agitation of local women’s groups which, themselves, had embraced ideas of social change.

“The democratic socialist reform programme, packaged in liberal Christianity and popularised as “Christianity in Action”, “Socialism is the Christian way of life in action” and “Socialism is Love” rested on the basic principle of “belong in the equality of every human being before God, the government and the law and, therefore, of the right of every human being to equality of opportunity, equality of rights and entitlement to security and social justice.” It was a radicalised Christian doctrine which provided the context for social justice.

She left the audience with a few questions for consideration: “In our Jamaica, how many gains have women made in this country since the 1970s? How many gains have women as workers made since the 1970s? How many gains have women as human beings made since the 1970s?”

When we consider the little progress women, generally, have made since the 1970s, the neutralisation of the feminist movement, the potential demise of the labour movement, the inability of gender and genderism to advance women’s issues, the dominance of religious fundamentalism and the absence of socialism (even with its weaknesses) it becomes even clearer that there is even more a need for a project of social justice. However, the question is: can there be justice in a framework of injustice.”

WAND’s annual “Theologising Women” Conference held during the month of March to mark International Women’s day and International Women’s Month was held on March 18 at the Hillcrest Diocesan Retreat Centre of the Anglican Church of Jamaica. Under the theme, “Theologising Women: Women, Spirituality and Healing”, the conference heard seven papers from medical practitioners, a motivational speaker, church officials (Anglican and Baptist) and a therapist and energy healer. Cecelia Batson-Rollock, WAND secretary, also participated in the conference.

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