

CAWN Newsletter

CENTRAL AMERICA WOMEN'S NETWORK

NO.20 AUTUMN 2005

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DR-CAFTA: Protecting labour rights in Guatemala?

by Jennifer Devine*

The protection of human rights for women took a threatening turn with the ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) by Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and the United States. The DR-CAFTA framework decreases already weak legal mechanisms designed to protect workers rights, making labour rights a specific area of concern for workers and activists. The main beneficiaries of DR-CAFTA are the export-oriented industries, *maquilas* and other non-traditional exports, are known both for labour rights abuses, and for employing disproportionately high percentages of female workers.

In March 2005 CAWN's brief on "Gender Perspectives and Women's Action on the Central American Free Trade Agreement" provides a succinct overview of the gender dynamics and implications of CAFTA. This article follows with a close case study of Guatemala in relation to women's labour in the apparel and textile *maquila* industry to provide an example of the larger, anticipated regional effects. The *maquila* industry is currently comprised of an estimated 220 factories, which employ nearly 115,000 workers, of whom some have estimated that 70-80 percent are women.

Prior to the ratification of CAFTA, one of the largest challenges to protecting labour rights in Guatemala was the lack of state enforcement of constitutionally guaranteed existing labour laws. These include a minimum wage, protection against race and

gender discrimination, and the right to maternity care. In the *maquila* industry, human rights abuses are rampant, and women are systemically discriminated against despite their large presence in the workforce. Yet, when cases are taken to court, the judicial system often provides impunity to violators.

A US trade organisation has estimated that between 50 and 70 percent of *maquila* workers are paid less than the minimum wage and often no option or remuneration for overtime. Other labour rights abuses include industry managers mandating that women take pregnancy tests to obtain employment, and the dismissal of workers if they become pregnant. An investigation by the Guatemalan Ministry of Labour found that 200 of 229 *maquila* factories exhibited instances of forced overtime, abusive and unsafe working conditions, substandard wages and dirty drinking water. Additionally, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported the frequent dismissal of labour activists by employers who 'blacklist' the workers to hinder future opportunities of industry employment. The conditions found in the *maquila* sector are a direct result of the lack of union bargaining power, violations of workers' constitutional labour rights, and the legal impunity of violators.

Given this dismal record, CAFTA further threatens rights with the eradication of the US General System of Preferences (GSP) program. The GSP program provided a mechanism that regional trading partners meet a set of internationally recognised labour standards to obtain preferential trade status. In order to have access to US markets duty free, countries had to regulate labour practices and hold violators accountable. On

an annual basis, organisations, for example labour unions, could petition the United States government to review a country's labour rights record. A country undergoing "review" was given probation status, which could result in the suspension of duty-free treatment on one or more products, or suspend altogether the country's free trade status. In short, governments were held accountable for the provision and protection of labour rights if they wanted duty-free access to US markets.

DR-CAFTA replaces the GSP program but provides no equivalent to the petition mechanism to enforce labour protections established by the United Nations and ILO conventions. There are neither legal channels to protect workers nor incentives to governments to enforce national and international labour law. Rather, DR-CAFTA states that member countries will merely "strive to ensure" compliance with international and national labour laws, but there are no provisions for legal recourse nor any threat of losing free trade status.

Concerns for labour rights are compounded by Guatemala's history of rights abuses. Guatemala has a long and dismal history of labour rights violations, which have often included violence, intimidation and plant closure, and the apparel and textile *maquila* sector is no exception. In 1999, after a six year struggle with the support of international solidarity and human rights organisations and the pressure of the GSP mechanism, the workers in the Phillips-Van Heusen factory in Guatemala City finally obtained a collective bargaining agreement. It was only the second factory to achieve such an agreement. However, the Phillips-Van Heusen *maquila* factory was shortly closed thereafter, not to be re-opened.

Subsequently, in 2003, the union in a Korean-owned *maquila* supplier to Liz Claiborne obtained a collective bargaining agreement, but only after the government

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EDITORIAL

Central America a land of structural inequality and devastation... it's time to act!

by **Rebeca E. Zúniga-Hamlin**

Recently, tropical storm Beta buffeted Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, the poorest region of the country, where the Miskito population already faces famine, and now faces the flooding waters of the Coco river.

And this is only October 27th. The hurricane season began in June, and will last until the end of November. To date, the region has had 21 tropical storms, of which 11 have become hurricanes of up to level five in the Saffir-Simpson scale. The last time in history when 21 storms formed was 1933, and the current onslaught has been so severe it has exhausted the list of possible names and forced the National Hurricane Centre to turn to the backup list of Greek Letters.

These months bring a sense of *déjà vu*, rekindling memories of Hurricane Mitch

which laid waste to the region in 1998. The list of disasters is now long. At the beginning of October, El Salvador was affected first by a volcanic eruption and then the flooding caused by Hurricane Stan. In Guatemala, almost 20 departments were affected by Stan, and most of the western and central highlands of the Pacific Coast have seen severe devastation created by landslides and flooding.

Once again, the most affected are the poorest parts of Chiapas in Mexico, the Guatemalan highlands, El Salvador and the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. In Guatemala, the areas most affected are largely indigenous, with the village of Panabaj in Santiago Atitlán completely destroyed and declared a collective mass grave. Among the consequences survivors face are food scarcity, proliferation of diseases, limited medical attention, and poor, if any, state response.

The governments of the region claim the reconstruction process will cost more than three years of national budgets, yet for the moment they have only sought to adjust current budgets to face the emergency. Instead, they are more interested in tying a few dynamic economic sectors into the US market with CAFTA-DR. Leaders argue that trade agreements promote growth, but the pattern of growth is likely to widen the gap between rich and poor and increase inequality and discrimination, especially towards groups such as indigenous people, the poor, and women.

This excluded majority is massive. The

poor and extreme poor comprise the majority of the population in the region. In Guatemala, for example, two percent of the population owns 72 per cent of the land, among the worst ratios in all of Latin America. The ease with which disaster sweeps from the urban slums of one country to the marginalised countryside of another belies the notion that these are "natural" disasters. The environment is a collective challenge for which the people of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua must work together. This will require finally acknowledging that inequality and poverty are the root of vulnerability.

The reconstruction efforts will need to focus on the people. Although it is necessary to support immediate infrastructure reconstruction, there is also a need to go to the roots of social problems and promote a structural change in which public policies improve peoples lives, provide agency to the poor, offer opportunities to women and young people, the right safety and security is provided, and democracy is a reality and not a rhetorical process.

Now, when we expect further tropical storms, the land of beautiful highlands, impressive rain forests and cheerful people will once again be the setting of the most horrific example how structural inequalities exacerbate disastrous natural events. It is time to act against the powerful structures that generate injustice and poverty and struggle for equal rights and opportunities, access to land and basic services. Lets hope some day we will live in a better world!

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Break the Silence on Violence!

by **Nadia van der Linde**

25 November is the international day against violence against women

One in four women worldwide experiences sexual violence by a husband or boyfriend, and up to **one in three** adolescent girls report their first sexual experience as being forced. Violence against women causes mental and physical injury, exposes women and girls to diseases like HIV/AIDS and forced pregnancy, increases women's vulnerability and, in the worst cases, ends in women's deaths. Violence against women and girls is a human rights and public health emergency worldwide; it takes place in practically all communities, all classes, all cultures. The **25th of November is the International Day Against Violence Against Women**, when women around the world break the silence!

Paper, Policy, Practice

Many conventions and conference documents of the United Nations stress the urgency and importance of addressing violence against women and underline the state's responsibility to take action to end the violence. But violence against women continues to take place, gravely affecting women's ability to be healthy and enjoy their life and sexuality. The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reaffirmed its commitment to the *Beijing* agreements (the International Women's Conference, 1995) in New York in March 2005. The political declaration states that the full implementation of Beijing is essential to achieving the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals. These are important achievements for women's right to health. As a result of strong lobby and advocacy efforts by women's and youth rights activists, a resolution was adopted that calls on governments to take action against trafficking and all forms of exploitation of women and children. The resolution emphasises the importance of eliminating the demand, raising awareness and addressing root causes of exploitation such as poverty and gender inequality.

Gender inequalities

The reasons for violence against women are diverse, but worldwide the cornerstone is **unequal gender relations**. Traditional "female roles" in society leave women with little decision-making power, money, land and other assets compared to men. Men are regularly expected to "discipline" women and **control women's life** and sexuality. In

some societies men and women think that it is normal and acceptable for men to beat their wives if their wives neglect household chores or refuse to have sex.

Governments violating women's rights

Even many governments carry out acts of violence against women. Examples include the use of rape as an instrument of war, population policies aimed at limiting population growth of certain groups in society, jailing women who have been forced to undergo an unsafe abortion; and allowing and accepting acts of violence abroad as fitting the country's customs or social norms. Too few governments make **attempts to end violence** against women. A fundamental obstacle is that violence against women is still perceived as a "private family matter" instead of a human rights and public health problem. There are still 79 countries that do not have any legislation against domestic violence and sexual abuse and rape by a husband or boyfriend is considered a crime in only 51 countries around the world.

Breaking the silence

Regularly, cases of violence against women are not acknowledged, not officially recorded or not reported. **Breaking the silence** on violence is a big risk for a woman as she faces lack of understanding and stigmatisation ("she must have provoked it in some way") and possible violent repercussions. Especially young and unmarried women who face sexual violence often prefer to remain silent than to risk the discrimination and humiliation that results from disclosure. Repercussions can be severe. In Darfur, Sudan, women who reported their rape case to the police have been punished and jailed for "illegal pregnancy". Other women have faced rejection and expulsion from their family or community. Such cases can be found around the world and show the challenge women face to break the silence and seek justice.

Time for accountability

Paper commitments do not automatically lead to change. It is time to hold our governments accountable to end violence against women. Violence against women *is* preventable. A world without violence against women *is* possible! We call on you to join the Women's Access to Health Campaign and take action to raise awareness on violence against women as a global health emergency, lobby for changes in legislation and policies, pressure for implementation of programmes and campaigns within the health sector, and provide protection, care and support for survivors of violence.

Worldwide action!

Over 400 groups have already joined the Women's Access to Health Campaign to take action for women's health and against violence against women. On 28 May 2005, the International Day of Action for Women's Health, tens of groups organised marches, conferences and press meetings to end the silence on violence against women. In Iran, over 600 women and men united to discuss strategies to combat violence against women in the country. In Surinam, women, men and children marched through the streets to raise public attention to the violence women face. Young women and men in India went house to house to personally contribute to breaking the taboo on talking about domestic violence and raise awareness on prevention efforts. The youth organisation Coordinadora Política Juvenil in Ecuador managed to get three radio spots on violence against women aired on the radio. An organisation in the Cape in South Africa organised a day-clinic at the shopping centre in a local community with free health services and information aimed at women. At the recent Second People's Health Assembly that took place in Cuenca, Ecuador in July 2005 a plenary session

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Defining violence against women

There is no universally agreed definition of violence against women, but broad international support can be found for the description in the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993): "*Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.*" The Declaration further recognises violence against women as "*one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men.*"



Sunday 6th March 2005: ¡Empleo sí... pero con dignidad!

by **Lisy Minhardt***

Today, Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) organised their seventh colloquium for the sweatshop workers in Nicaragua. 1,500 female workers came together for the forum in the Crown Plaza Hotel in Managua to stand against the degrading labour conditions behind the walls of the so-called "*maquilas*". They pressed for increased employment under dignified conditions.

MEC is a Nicaraguan women's organisation. It lobbies for women's rights, the employed as well as the unemployed, and for their full integration and participation in Nicaraguan society. Some of its activities are centred in the *maquila* sector. A *maquila*, or sweatshop, is a factory owned by a large, usually foreign company, located in the free trade areas of a low-pay country. These factories, mostly in the textile sector, are drawn to countries like Nicaragua because of the fiscal advantages and the cheap labour force. The *maquilas* are owned mostly by Asian companies and a major part of North American multinational production is contracted out to them. They require quick

and cheap delivery, and it is not difficult to cancel an order if these demands are not complied with. Consequently, the sweatshops try to do everything to attain a high production level as cheaply as possible.

The victim of this liberal free trade is the common worker. Under these conditions, human rights are violated regularly. 80% of the *maquila* workforce is female. Women are cheaper than men, and the foreign investors believe they work harder and are more precise in the monotonous jobs repeating the same stitch or paste. During my stay in Nicaragua and the colloquium, I was really touched by the personal testimonies I heard from many women. They often start work at six in the morning until nine or 10 o'clock at night with just one break of 25 minutes for lunch. They spend all day standing or sitting, without the liberty to go to the lavatory when they want or to say a word, sometimes in extremely high temperatures without extractor fans or open windows, in noisy conditions. Overtime is compulsory, and feeling ill is no reason to leave the factory. Even pregnant women who feel sharp pains often are not given permission to see a doctor during working hours. To have a miscarriage in the lavatory is not unheard of. Workers can be fired without good reason, so taking a sick day can have dramatic consequences for the women (many of whom are single mothers). Workers are humiliated daily for insignificant reasons. It is not only a question of mental abuse, but also of physical maltreatment.

No proper social security system exists, and dismissed employees or victims of labour accidents do not get a payout. They sweatshop salaries are very irregular. There is no minimum wage and their salary depends on the amount of production they do. If one day there is no work to do, they do not earn any money. A woman told me that there are days that she earns six córdobas. Taking into account that she had to pay five córdobas for the bus, this means that only one córdoba remains, being worth 0.033 GBP.

Labour unions are hardly given a chance. They are either dissolved or directed by the sweatshop management. In the latter case, the union leader is often more interested in the money he gets from the management than in the plight of the employees. The *maquilas* are always notified in advance of any impending inspection by the Ministry of Employment. At the time of the visit, there is suddenly toilet paper in the lavatories, soap, masks to protect the respiratory tracts during the work, and other necessary requirements. It is agreed in advance who will talk to the inspectors, usually the few women who earn a little more than the rest. Freedom of speech does not exist. There is clearly a need for more neutral and above all unexpected inspections.

If someone dares to complain, they may be fired and placed on black lists that circulate between the different sweatshops, making it very difficult to find another job in the *maquila* industry. If protest grows, the company may leave the country to settle in another. As it represents one of the biggest sources of employment in Nicaragua, and due to this easy relocation, the government protects the *maquila* industry. However, by allowing them fiscal advantages, employment is the only positive thing they bring to Central America. No added value remains the country because everything they import is exported back to the United States, without paying any taxes. They are exonerated from paying taxes for the first 10 or 15 years. After this period, they can simply change their name and 'start over again'!

Fortunately, not everyone accepts these practices, and both national and international protest is growing. One of the biggest organisations in Nicaragua fighting this system is MEC. They not only lobby for better labour conditions, but also inform the workers about their rights and have some lawyers who work *pro bono* to help with cases of human rights violations. On 6th March, MEC invited 1,500 *maquila* workers from across the country to Managua to participate in their seventh national colloquium. Even the President Enrique Bolaños (*Partido Liberal Constitucionalista*,

1. Employment yes... but with dignity!

*Lisy Minhardt is a Belgian student active in the Nicaragua Solidarity Committee – Belgium. CAWN put her in contact with Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) when she visited Nicaragua. Lisy witnessed and participated in MEC's seventh colloquium for the *Maquila* workers. The colloquiums provide an opportunity for the *Maquila* workers to discuss and participate in the struggle to improve their working conditions. Here she writes her thoughts on her experience in Nicaragua and the forum.

Solidarity Committee Nicayuda-Belgium:

www.nicayuda.rootbash.be

Maria Elena Cuadra: www.mec.org.ni



PLC) was present. Personally, I considered his speech rather weak and felt it did not meet the purpose of the colloquium. He began by saying that he had a lot of respect for women (he has a wife, a few daughters and granddaughters, and he also appreciates the new Miss Nicaragua, apparently), and then he talked about the competitiveness of Nicaragua. He said he had brought employment to the country, as he had promised in his election campaign (he literally stated, "Con Bolaños más empleo... sí se puede!"²) He did not mention the inhuman labour conditions, 2. "With Bolaños more jobs... yes, it is possible!"

and not a word about the outrageously low salaries which underline the competitiveness of Nicaragua in the region.

Aside from this, the day was really well organised. The workers were divided into subgroups, and various small colloquia took place. They were informed about their rights, and afterwards were given the opportunity to speak out for themselves. MEC asked them for their ideas on how labour conditions could be improved. All their suggestions were written down, and at the end, all the workers were reunited for the last big colloquia: a summary of the suggestions of the different groups.

MEC Lobbies UK and European Women



The WIDE Annual Conference celebrated this year in London between the 24th and 25 of June brought together many feminist and women's movements activists. The title of the Conferences was: 'Poverty, inequality, insecurity: What solutions does feminism have?'

CAWN invited Sandra Ramos and Josefa Rivera, members of the Maria Elena Cuadra Womens Movement (MEC) of Nicaragua, to build on their capacity to influence activists and policy makers from the

CAWN directors and MEC. From left to right: Rebeca E. Zúñiga-Hamlin, Jane Turner, Marina Prieto-Carrón, Josefa Rivera, Sandra Ramos, Mandy Macdonald and Marilyn Thomson

UK and Europe. Their participation allowed them to raise awareness amongst a variety of women and women's organisations of the demands and concerns of Nicaraguan women; and to build strategic alliances with those facing similar problems. Of particular importance was the meeting held between MEC and Banulacht, an Irish organisation that works with poor UK women on economic literacy.



The conditions I have related are just a small part of the stories of these women. Personally I found it outstanding that, although these women know a lot of misery, they stay positive. Really strong women! I can call this day a success, but I really hope the suggestions of the sweatshop workers will be listened to, so that this day will mean more than just words. ¡Hay que luchar para una Nicaragua mejor!

The Multi-Fibre Agreement – MFA

by Tessa Mackenzie

1 January 2005 saw the beginning of a new era in the textile industry. It was the end of quotas to protect Northern textile producers that had been established in 1974 by the Multi-Fibre Agreement. In addition, commercial preferences to regulate import taxes have also been negotiated in free trade agreements such as CAFTA (Central America Free Trade Agreement). The end of quotas does not mean an end to import restrictions in the textile industry; 'safeguard' restrictions may well be used to limit imports from China for at least several more years. Still, the end of import restrictions on clothing and textiles to the USA, Canada and the EU has a series of implications for producers in the South, where the industry is likely to be consolidated.

Overall production will rise but will be based in fewer countries. A study shows that brands being produced in 40-50 countries will now concentrate only in 12-15 countries. Large, multinational producers will increase in size and influence, while smaller factories are likely to go out of business. Clothes prices will fall as companies choose producers that offer lower-cost garments.

Working conditions and benefits for workers will be substantially affected, particularly women workers. Governments will likely bend to pressure to allow poorer working conditions. An example has already been seen in El Salvador where companies are calling for a reduction in the minimum wage for *maquila* workers in rural areas.

For further information on Post MFA and actions in relation to it visit www.maquilasolidarity.org or www.ethicaltrade.org/Z/actvts/other/index.shtml

Show Solidarity for Salvador's Double Disaster!

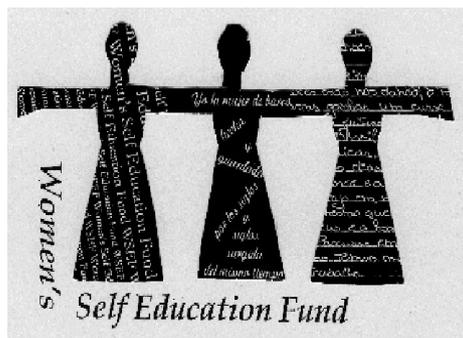


Photo: Eduardo Espinoza



Photo: Hugo Icaú / ASECSA



On Saturday October 1st the Santa Ana (Ilamatepec) volcano erupted in El Salvador causing catastrophic mudslides. On the same day, torrential rains from Hurricane Stan began to further soak already saturated soils with over 600 millimetres of rainfall in some places (average October rainfall 155 mm). The result was widespread flooding. Thousands of families were affected. With world attention focused on the Pakistan earthquake, the disaster in Central America was hardly noticed by the outside world. The rain is likely to continue for several weeks. Overflowing rivers have engulfed communities, destroying secondary bridges and roads. 58,000 people have been evacuated.

Two years ago, the Women's Self

Education Fund supported a free-range chicken farming project in the Lower Lempa region of Usulután. On Tuesday, October 4, 35 communities there were submerged under 3 metres of water as the Lempa River flooded through the opening where the Salvadorian Government has not completed 9.9 kilometres of levee, a project initiated after Tropical Storm Mitch in 1998 and left incomplete since 2001 despite continued pressure by communities on the Salvadorian Government.

Nearly 2000 hectares of crops have been destroyed according to initial estimates as well as most household belongings. 1383 families are affected. Local community organisations have been at the forefront of evacuation,

coordinating the shelters and now seeking emergency food relief and developing plans for reconstruction. They desperately need support and solidarity.

Salvadorian broadsheet La Pagina de Maíz says: "The people most affected are those who live in marginal communities, on river banks in houses made of flimsy materials. People live like this because they don't have the means to live safer places nor to construct better houses"

This is an urgent appeal for help to friends and supporters of the Women's Self Education Fund. We would be grateful for any money you can donate.

Please write cheques to Women's Self Education Fund and send to 30a Campbell Road, Walthamstow, London E17 6RR, marking the envelope 'El Salvador Appeal'.

Asda Wal-Mart: Cutting Costs at any Cost

by Joe Zacune

Wal-Mart is the world's largest retail company and is more familiar in the UK as the supermarket chain Asda. It has built a global empire of supermarket stores on an image of 'always low prices.' This price obsession has led to poverty wages, ever-worsening sweatshop conditions and the destruction of local businesses and communities. These policies are well known but now new evidence has emerged on how Asda senior management are planning to deliberately "chip away" at workers' rights and working conditions in the UK.

War on Want has seen a leaked document titled "Warehouse Chip Away Strategy 2005" that outlines how Asda senior management are planning to drastically undermine labour standards. Asda management plan to breach these rights despite openly acknowledging the risks of trade union opposition and health and safety violations.

Work breaks are to be cut, grievance

mechanisms removed and health and safety conditions weakened. The document also proposes removing the right to take individual grievances to external arbitrators. Asda management plans to include "single man loading" despite the fact that their own "risk assessment says 2 men (are) required for loading". Line managers are advised to "lead by example, not taking all the breaks that hourly paid colleagues get" in order to "take credence away from breaks".

Of the ten richest people in the world, four are members of the Walton family, heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune. Wal-Mart documents released in April 2005 reveal that the company's CEO Lee Scott was paid over \$17.5 million in total during 2004.

Not content to pay its employees wages that are on average 20% lower than the industry standard, Wal-Mart seeks to cut costs through the routine violation of workers' rights. Wal-Mart requires that labour costs be kept to less than 8% of each store's sales. In addition, managers must reduce the labour costs at their stores by

0.2% each year. This drives managers to stretch their workforce to cover chronic staff shortages, and to break the law by employing children and undocumented migrant workers.

One internal audit of 25,000 employees in 128 Wal-Mart stores in the USA found 1,371 violations of child labour laws, including minors working too late, too many hours a day and during school hours. It also found 60,000 instances where workers were forced to work through breaks, and 16,000 where they worked through meal times. Wal-Mart's model is fast becoming the industry standard, as other firms slash employee wages and benefits in an attempt to compete with the retail giant.

Wal-Mart is vehemently anti-union. Its anti-union policy is a central part of its obsession with minimising costs. Wal-Mart provides managers with its infamous 'Manager's Toolbox to Remaining Union Free' that states: "Staying union free is a

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NEWS & ACTIONS

NO Sweat Conference

Sweatshops, workers and international solidarity

Saturday 26 November, 12 to 6pm, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London

Tickets £8 (waged) and £4 (unwaged) book on-line at www.nosweat.org.uk

More details from admin@nosweat.org.uk or phone 07904 431959

Latin America 2005 – Making Another World Possible

Saturday 3rd December 2005, 9.30am to 5pm, NUT, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1

From the southernmost tip of Patagonia to the Mexican-US border at the Rio Grande the continent is fighting back. Progressive forces are on the offensive and people are challenging the US neoliberal agenda for the region. Latin America 2005 brings together trade unionists, NGOs, academics and progressive movements from Latin America and the UK to explore recent developments across the region through films, music, and discussion.

Registration £8 waged (£6 unwaged)

To register contact: Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road London N7 7QG or Register by credit card at 0207 263 6452

NEWS:

The Impact of Hurricane Stan: Several Central American countries have been devastated by Hurricane Stan in the beginning of October 2005. The storm created severe winds, flooding and massive mudslides which have taken lives, displaced families, destroyed homes, bridges, livestock, food crops, communication infrastructure and local industries. The heaviest hit areas include Guatemala, Chiapas in Mexico, and El Salvador with significant damage in Honduras and Nicaragua. The death toll is estimated as high as 1,600 and still rising, including entire communities like the village of Panabaj in Guatemala that was declared a mass grave after being buried by a kilometer wide mudslide. There are still nearly 1000 missing persons, 110,000 people living in temporary shelters with an estimated 3.5 million people displaced. The impact of Stan will be felt for years to come for those who survived, as many economic livelihoods were also washed away in a region that already suffered from immense poverty.

BRIDGE pack on Gender and Trade will be available in December. It can be downloaded from www.bridge.ids.ac.uk or

requested from Bridge, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK, Email: bridge@ids.ac.uk

The International Gender and Trade

Network – IGTN has recently published an advocacy document to address the key issues for the upcoming World Trade Organisation –WTO Sixth Ministerial meeting to be held in Hong Kong next December. Find the document at: www.ignt.org/page/387/1

The Inter-American Development Bank

– IDAB launched the Information System of Social Indicators and Equity which uses household surveys to estimate disaggregated social indicators, in particular those proposed to measure progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals set with the United Nations. Indicators are disaggregated by income quintiles, gender, race and ethnicity, as well as urban and rural areas. The system includes information about 20 Latin American countries. For more information go to: <http://www.iadb.org/xindicators/>

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: Community Theatre Project

April 15th to 30th 2006

This two week project is a unique opportunity for those involved in community theatre in the UK to work alongside Nicaraguan theatre practitioners to share techniques, to develop cross-cultural understanding and to collectively create something new. The two weeks will be spent with community theatre groups in rural and urban areas sharing skills, experiences and methodologies. Throughout the trip you will learn about how cultural expression plays an important part in the political struggle of the Nicaraguan people.

Application form and information pack email NSC or phone. For any queries before filling in the application form please contact Helen in the NSC.

NSC, 129 Seven Sisters Rd, London N7 7QG; phone 0207 272 9619; e-mail: nsc@nicaraguasc.org.uk or visit www.nicarguasc.org.uk

Rights Action: "Fair Trade" Delegation to Guatemala: Working towards justice in trade

November 27 to December 8, 2005 A new trade network has formed in Guatemala to confront unregulated "free trade". The Red Alternativa de Intercambio Solidario, RAIS is composed of small scale producers who have organized to promote greater equality in trade through the creation of alternative markets that take into account

economic and the environment. The trip will provide participants with intimate interviews and meetings with local groups, organisations and cooperatives, Guatemalan producers, facilitate trading relationships, and take part in a newly formed conscious trade network. The Delegation will focus on issues such as:

- * Historical and contemporary analysis of international trade relations between Guatemala and "northern" countries, how they developed, their inequalities and the possible alternatives.

- * Get to know where your food and elaborated products come from, how they are made, and at what socio-economical costs.

- * The effects of hurricane Stan on small producers.

For further information: Karie Boone or Mariko Patti: coguatejusto@yahoo.com or visit www.rightsaction.org

In the UK or Europe, contact Jane Pelly 02076026694 or rightsactionuk@yahoo.co.uk

Act NOW! Time Warner Exploits Child Labour in Mexico

Don't Let the World's Largest Media Conglomerate Get Away with It!

A group of young, mostly female workers in Hidalgo, Mexico, some as young as 13 years-old, who have made Harry Potter and other Halloween costumes with Warner Brother logos, have been illegally locked out for protesting child labour violations, unsafe and unjust working conditions, and the company's refusal to recognize their collective bargaining agreement. Time Warner, the world's largest media conglomerate, through its subsidiary Warner Brothers, has given worldwide rights to all Warner Brothers properties to Rubie's Costume Company of New York City, the world's largest costume company, to produce Halloween costumes such as "Harry Potter", "Star Wars" and "Lord of the Rings". Rubie's exports the Warner Brothers brand costumes to North America and Western Europe.

Despite the workers' limited engagement with Time Warner, the company has not taken strong steps to insist that Rubie's fix the violations and solve the labour conflict. Rubie's has not reemployed the locked out workers seeking reinstatement and has ignored its previously-signed collective bargaining agreement with the workers' democratically-chosen union. Worksite violations such as child labour, forced pregnancy testing, horrible sanitary conditions and frequent workplace accidents have yet to be addressed through the workers' union. Further information about the case and the children abused can be found at: <http://www.usleap.org>

For more information and how to take action please visit: http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/solidarityforever/show_campaign.cgi?c=59

DR-CAFTA

threatened it with closure due to abhorrent labour rights abuses. This is the only active collective bargaining agreement in Guatemala.

Similar to the experience of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), manufacturing of goods like apparel and textiles for export are expected to rise. This trend, the gendered nature of the industry, Guatemala's history of labour rights abuses, and DR-CAFTA's lack of legal channels to protect workers creates great concerns regarding the future for women workers in the country. Continued and increased pressure from women's, labour, and human rights organisations will be critical to protect labour rights in the *maquila* industry as the DR-CAFTA free trade agreement alters the playing field of Guatemala labour issues and politics in forthcoming years.

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Break the silence on violence

addressed various aspects violence against women, including honour killings in Pakistan, femicide in Juarez and Guatemala, as well as the poor response of many health service institutions to domestic violence. The panellists and participants called on activists and social movements around the world to tackle gender inequalities and join in the actions against violence against women.

But the action should not stop. **25 November is the international day against violence against women.** Let us know what your plans are or get in touch to link up with other initiatives already taking place nearby.

The **Women's Access to Health Campaign** mobilizes all those concerned with women's health and stresses the importance of women's sexual and reproductive rights to achieve the right to health. To join the global Women's Access to Health Campaign and to get your free copy of the Call for Action: "Violence Against Women: A Global Health Emergency" (also available in Spanish and French) please get in touch with: wahc@wgnrr.nl or www.wgnrr.org

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Angela Hale, her struggle will continue inspiring us!

Last 6th September our colleague and friend Angela Hale left us. To learn about her sudden death was a shock to many of us. Nevertheless, Angela's legacy and commitment to social justice will continue to motivate many of us. Her strategy to put women first and promote empowerment with a bottom-up approach will continue to be a beacon for women's grassroots organisations around the world, and especially in Asia, where she dedicated most of her work.

Angela continued support to grassroots women workers was driven by her feminist commitment to facilitating dialogue among women from around the world. This was embedded in a gender analysis which was developed and articulated in her long established academic work since the 70s. This is well reflected in her two latest publications. One is a brilliant essay on women workers and the cut flower commodity chains with Kenyan academic Maggie Opondo "*Humanising the Cut*



Photo: www.sociology.mmu.ac.uk

Flower Chain: confronting the realities of flower production for workers in Kenya" for the journal *Antipode*. The other is a co-edited book with Jane Wills "*Threads of Labour*" by Blackwell Publishing that brings together action-research projects by organisations supporting

women workers in Asia, Europe and Mexico with insightful academic analysis. It is above all an excellent compilation of bottom-up research, bringing workers' voices and their perspectives on the workings of the garment industry supply chains.

Improving women's quality of life was Angela's ultimate goal, and her efforts provided access for poor women to influence policy by opening spaces for active participation. Her commitment will stir our engagement in the struggle for women's rights from our communities to our national and international policy arenas. Her dreams will continue through our work!

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Asda Wal-Mart: Cutting Costs at any Cost

full time commitment. Unless union prevention is a goal equal to other goals and objectives in the organization, management will not devote the necessary day in, day out attention and effort." If there is any evidence of moves towards unionisation, managers are ordered to phone the Wal-Mart Union Hotline immediately.

In the UK too, workers at Asda have come up against Wal-Mart's anti-union culture.

Following Wal-Mart's 1999 take-over of Asda, the company has sought to restrict the role of general union GMB. After four years of negotiations, a new agreement between Asda and the GMB came into effect in 2004, which does not provide for collective bargaining. In the words of GMB senior manager Harry Donaldson, "We believe that, since the take-over, Wal-Mart has tried to stifle union activity at Asda." Managers at a unionised Asda distribution depot offered workers a new terms and conditions package which included a 10% pay increase and the requirement that

workers give up collective bargaining representation by the GMB. When workers rejected the proposal, Asda withdrew the 10% pay increase.

War on Want is encouraging Asda employees in the UK to contact GMB if they wish to find out about their rights or start a union. More generally we are calling on the UK government to support a binding framework of corporate accountability to regulate the activities of corporations such as Wal-Mart.

In the global economy huge multinationals are only accountable to their shareholders. If we are concerned about workers' rights throughout the world, corporations like Wal-Mart need to be reined in and unions need to be strengthened.

For more information and to join War on Want's campaign to rein in global corporations go to: www.waronwant.org/asda or email jzacune@waronwant.org

Subsequently leaked documents to War on Want led to the following article in the Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/story/0,,1593697,00.html>