

Women's International
Democratic Federation
Bulletin



Women in Action

No. 1/1985

WOMEN IN STRUGGLE FOR THEIR EQUAL RIGHTS

In industrialized capitalist countries women have been increasingly active in their struggle to promote their economic, social and political rights.

As a result of the mass actions of women and women's organizations and large sections of the public aimed at achieving the targets of the UN Decade for Women, new laws have been passed in a number of countries for the promotion of equal rights for women in different fields of life. However, in most cases such laws are not put into practice.

Day by day millions of women are confronted with problems such as the high cost of living, worsened by insufficiencies in the fields of housing, support infrastructures in favour of their families and increased costs of medical treatment.

The policy of draining off state funds for military expenditure and cutting back social security services and support programs deepens the economic and structural crisis in capitalist countries and has pushed millions of people into permanent unemployment, poverty, homelessness and food lines. Women and their families are the first to be affected.

The WIDF organizations protest against such policies, demanding the reduction of military expenditures and the re-allocation of the resources thus released to resolve the social and economic problems facing humanity.

Out of a multitude of activities this bulletin will give a few examples of what women in industrialized capitalist countries today are doing to promote their rights.

WOMEN IN ACTION FOR THEIR RIGHTS AS WORKERS -
MOTHERS - CITIZENS

Australia

Members of the Union of Australian Women (UAW), which has long traditions of co-operation with trade union women, participated in the Fourth Women and Labour Conference in July this year in Brisbane.

A new law was passed in Australia in 1984, the "Federal Anti-Discrimination Act". With certain exceptions it makes it unlawful to discriminate against people on the grounds of their sex or marital status or because of pregnancy. The Act covers the areas of employment, education, the provision of foods and services, accommodation, the activities of certain clubs etc. It will now have to be put into practice, and UAW is mobilizing women in action for its implementation.

Austria

A "Committee on Women's Rights" has been formed in Vienna to resist the efforts of conservative and right-wing extremist forces to abolish the rights won by the women. The Democratic Women's League of Austria, autonomous and other women's organizations, groups and movements, socialist and communist women, and youth organizations belong to the Committee. They stand for improvements in women's rights and working people's living conditions.

Canada

Canadian women have been very active in the struggle for child-care. It was a great victory for the Metro Toronto Day Care Coalition, to which the Congress of Canadian Women belongs, when the city of Toronto decided to grant one million dollars for day care in Toronto non-profit centres in 1984 and to increase the amount in the following years. This victory has been a great encouragement to women in all parts of Canada struggling for better day-care.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care is demanding that the government reverse its position and make the needs of children a priority. Similar coalitions operate in other provinces.

The fight-back by afflicted women, mostly immigrants, against the elimination of jobs in the textile industry in Ontario received wide support from women across the country. The Congress of Canadian Women, the Immigrant Women's Centre and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women expressed their solidarity. The militancy of the workers and the wide support given to them paid off, and consultations

were started between the union and company managers, bank officials and the local authorities.

Women of the Ligue de Femmes du Quebec are concerned about mounting unemployment, restraint programs and government cut-backs in the budgets for social affairs and education. The Ligue organizes discussions and various other activities on the right of women to work, education and organization and on peace and international solidarity.

Federal Republic of Germany

The activities of women's organizations, groups and movements in the FRG against the curtailment of social benefits by their government, which particularly affects the women and their families, are many and varied.

Various demonstrations, meetings and discussions called by the Democratic Women's Initiative and various other women's groups and movements dealt with disarmament as the most important precondition for ensuring peace and eliminating women's unemployment, social cuts and everyday discrimination.

One of the main objectives of women and women's organizations has been to form an alliance of all women's organizations, groups and movements to defend what was accomplished in the '70s by way of implementing women's rights. These achievements are being systematically done away with by the red-pencil policy of the Federal Government.

A number of women's groups in Schleswig-Holstein held a provincial conference in Kiel in November 1984. The working groups prepared activities on the following themes: "For voluntary motherhood". "The future of women's work", "Ruthless cuts in social benefits for women", "Women in Latin America" and "Women struggle for peace".

In Nordheim, a textile workers' town, more than 500 women pensioners demonstrated against the special disadvantages for women arising from the socially unjust pension policy of the Federal Government.

Finland

The SNDL celebrated its 40th anniversary by mobilizing its members for a "Day of Activities" in November. Tens of thousands of women supported the demands put forward by delegations and in letters to the Prime Minister and to several Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Demands were made to change the fiscal budget into a budget of economic and social security for women and their families, for the creation of more and better child-care facilities, and for the taxation of big firms instead of low-income working people.

The letter to the Prime Minister demanded the ratification of the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women".

A delegation to the Central Radio stated that more emphasis should be given in Radio and TV programs to progressive national culture, to the life of the people in the neighbouring socialist countries, and to the struggle of people in the third world countries.

The delegation to the Central Union of Finnish Trade Unions underlined the important role of the trade unions in the struggle for the rights of working women, for equal pay for equal work, for the resolution of the problem of low-paid women's jobs and against the negative effects of automation on the situation of working women.

France

The Union of French Women is actively preparing for its 15th Congress to be held in June 1985.

In its preparations for this important event the Union of French Women is focusing on women's political and social rights, on issues French women are particularly afflicted and concerned about, and on overcoming obstacles to the implementation of women's equality. Questions relating to employment, vocational training and the influence of new technologies, as well as childbirth, family policy, and peace are on the agenda.

The Union of French Women is carrying out around these issues activities throughout France. It has initiated a post-card action among women in connection with the deterioration in purchasing power and living standards. In this campaign women will be demanding respect for their right to work, employment guarantees, decent wages, pensions, a price freeze, the granting of family allowances beginning with the first child and higher allowances. Thousands of women have already signed the postcards and sent them to the French Prime Minister.

More than 300 miners' and steelworkers' wives from several departments in northern and northwestern France, afflicted by pit and plant closures, took part in a march organized by the Union of French Women in June. The participants in a women's meeting organized by the UFW proclaimed their right to live and work in their home communities, demanded the preservation and creation

of jobs in the metal industry and rejected the closure of mines and mills. The Union of French Women submitted a corresponding petition to the Prime Minister.

Greece

The Federation of Greek Women recently presented a Memorandum to the Greek Government about the improvement of maternity care.

The Federation urged the Government to reintroduce in Parliament the abortion bill which had been withdrawn in response to the pressure of reactionary forces.

A new Family Code has been passed in Greece, and the Federation is actively publicizing it amongst broad masses of women so that women will be able to benefit from their new rights.

The picture given of women in the mass media and especially in TV programs is often distorted. The Federation has made a proposal to the Government to set up a Women's Committee for TV programs.

The Federation of Greek Women works closely with the trade union movement to promote women's rights to employment and in employment. The question of women's piece work is on top of the agenda.

The Federation has translated into Greek the WIDF Memorandum concerning the critical review and evaluation of progress made and difficulties encountered in achieving the aims and objectives of the UN Decade for Women (Council Meeting 1983). The Federation has invited all other Greek women's organizations to discuss the preparations for the Nairobi Conference and NGO Forum -85, and also to remind the Government delegation to the Nairobi Conference to bring out the progressive positions of the Greek Government on the question of peace at the Conference.

Japan

The Federation of Japanese Women's Organizations (FUDANREN) has been carrying out a campaign against the vicious circle of depression, low consumption, the general increase in taxes and substantial cuts in spending on social welfare.

FUDANREN has also conducted activities with other women's organizations and women's sections of progressive trade unions for the complete ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM) organized a one-day vigil in September outside the Belfast city hospital and distributed a leaflet on "Welfare not Warfare" in support of the National Health Service and against cuts in budget and defense spending.

The NIWRM is collecting signatures for a campaign to have Belfast city stores cater for parents with small children. In this way it is making itself known to the general public.

In co-operation with the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union, NIWRM has been supporting and giving practical advice to the hairdressers in Belfast on starting a trade union.

NIWRM is campaigning to make known and to implement its new Charter for the rights of women to education, employment, health, family, legal and social rights, personal security and peace.

Portugal

The Democratic Movement of Portuguese Women (MDM) adopted a Women's Rights Charter at its Second Congress in May this year and is now carrying out a multitude of activities in cities and villages all over the country for the rights of women and against the erosion of social and democratic gains.

Great interest was aroused by a photo exhibition in public squares in Lisbon and other cities. Members of the MDM distributed documentary material showing who is responsible for the steadily worsening plight of women and their families.

At the popular Ladra Fair in Lisbon a play was performed by members of the MDM dealing with the problem of rent increases and showing ways of struggling against them.

There was a seminar in November this year on "Three Generations of Women in Struggle against Fascism and for Peace".

In November the MDM initiated a fresh campaign for legal abortions, within the context of which another seminar was held.

Sweden

The Swedish Women's Organization (SKV) arranged a seminar in September to discuss "Women's struggle - which road shall we take". SKV is demanding the right to employment for women, a shorter working day, the defense of public services, rights for young women, and action to stop prostitution, pornography and violence against women.

USA

A Coalition on Women and the Budget has come together to analyze the fiscal budget of the USA and its effects on women. The Coalition is composed of nearly 80 organizations including the WIDF-affiliated Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE). The Coalition is demanding that the government cut back unnecessary military spending and put those funds into jobs, child care and better housing.

Under the Reagan administration's push to do away with every entitlement won in the past 50 years, WREE is waging a new struggle on the basis of its Women's Bill of Rights and documents advocating "Jobs and Affirmative Action", "National Child Care System", and "Peace and Solidarity". WREE encourages its members to work at every level: neighbourhood tabling, community discussions and forums, city-wide and national public hearings, mass lobbying.

Examples:

WREE and CLUW (Coalition of Labor Union Women) have collected tens of thousands of petition signatures to help push toward a bill on comprehensive federally-funded child care.

WREE is organizing women to struggle for jobs around a proposal for a new and historic Amendment to the US Constitution stating that "The right to employment opportunity shall be guaranteed to each person by these United States".

WREE distributes lists of several progressive bills to cut the military budget and to restore and add to social services.

WREE urges women and women's groups to write letters to legislators and editors of local newspapers on topics such as affirmative action and the rights of women and minorities in the work force.

WREE actively supports the campaign initiated by NOW (National Organization of Women) to end violence by right-wing terrorists against abortion clinics. In the early part of this year at least five fire bombings of abortion clinics in various parts of the USA have occurred. Swastikas and Ku Klux Klan symbols have been painted on clinic walls and there has been all kinds of harassment against the clinics, their personnel and their patients.