



Workshop ... Global Solidarity

by Alice Sebastian

I took part in the Global Solidarity workshop and really enjoyed it... There were a group of women from all different walks of life. Sandra Ramos from Nicaragua was with us and she is one very special person. She talked of how the women in her country worked in the Maquiladoras and the awful conditions they worked under

We were asked how we felt Global Solidarity had affected women.. We discussed things such as how this was effecting health and education, democracy, loss of jobs etc.. Discussions were held on the things we have lost.

Natural resources. National Sovereignty... Social programs... Quality of life...

We broke off into groups and each group had a subject to discuss and then present to the rest of the workshop. We discussed the Free Trade Agreement and all the things we have lost because of it and the threat Human Rights.

We all felt there was a pressing need to let all people know of the danger of Free Trade and what we stand to lose.

We determined that we need to make a choice of either we want a world controlled by the corporate rights being established in free trade agreements or a world built on a foundation of human rights and accountable to the democratic will of the people.

CEP Western Regional Women's Conference

March 8th & 9th , 2002 Vancouver

by Kelly Mazur



I wish to start off by thanking the Executive and Membership of Local 191 for allowing me the honour to attend the First CEP Western Regional Women's Conference held March 8th and 9th of this year in Vancouver,

British Columbia.

As most of you know a great deal of work goes into the planning of such conferences and without the dedication, hard work and cooperation of all those involved it simply would not be possible for us to attend such worthy conferences allowing us to share in so many ways. So to all those who made this conference possible I thank you as well. Your hard work is much appreciated by all the Sisters and Brothers.

I personally felt that the conference could have handled 3 days rather than 2; this would have allowed us to complete our workshop. The Workshop I participated in was full of information and we simply ran out of time to complete it.

The first guest speaker to the conference was Sandra Ramos who spoke early on the morning of March 8th, 2002. Sister Ramos is a powerful sister filled with much knowledge and emotion. She emphasized the importance of the Humanity Fund and how unfortunately only those who evaluate the fund actually see the fruits of the money. Sister Ramos is kept very busy leading the (MEC) Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Working and Unemployed Women of Nicaragua. This organization assists women who work in factories specifically training them on the rights and how to better understand their rights. Sandra Ramos has been an activist for sometime now. Prior to the MEC she held the position of Director of Women's Programmes at the Main Central Labour Body of Nicaragua. It was alarming to hear about working conditions for women in Nicaragua, and how Free Trade and the recent wars in her country have made their situations every worse then they were before, if that is at all possible. With the present economic crisis causing the prices of sugar, coffee, cotton and even gold to fall has meant extreme hardships for these women. They have gone through the privatization of their health care, education system and even their telecommunications. And now like many other countries they are after the water supply. Women working in the sweatshops earn 65-75 dollars/month but a food basket costs 500 dollars, which means they are living in poverty. In closing Sister Ramos shared this information with us: 1 billion worldwide have no work, and most of these people live in the 3rd world countries.

Later in the morning we broke into our chosen workshops, the workshop that I choose was Tools for Troublemakers. I love workshops that really get the group involved and this workshop did just that. Our first task was to create a Date/Time Line. We each had to mark down a specific situation in our life that makes us what or who we are today, we then were asked to stand up and explain it to the group and place it on the wall which had a Date/Time Line just waiting to be filled. It certainly was amazing to see what events made many people what they are today. We heard how many went through things such as divorce, job changes, deaths in the family, elections, and how these events made many feel so much more powerful and determined to overcome obstacles in their lives.

Next we broke into groups and were given the task of saying who we are, this task was called I AM . . . mom, wife, dedicated, friend, organized, activist, etc. you get the picture now.. lets move on.

Now we went onto Strategic Campaigning. This activity again had us working in small groups to develop a plan. The campaign my group choose to work on was the CEP Campaign To Save Medicare, during this exercise you learn the importance of planning properly in order to have a successful campaign from Goal Setting, to Objectives, and then the actual Plan Activities and who you can turn to in the community to assist you with your campaign. By identifying the people in the community as either Active or Passive Allies, and Active or Passive Opponents a wonderful tool we used during this period was a Social Barometer, I certainly learned a great deal on this portion of the exercise itself, frankly it really makes you think about who you can count on and why, and how best to use them. The information I gained during this session would certainly be a benefit to the Local in regards to Organizing Committees, and Strike Committees.

Unfortunately I did miss approximately 2 hours on the 1st afternoon of the workshop due to the fact I was stuck in an elevator for 50 mins. due to the elevator falling 3 floors, along with 10 Sisters & Brother Carlson, and 1 innocent courier who was simply delivering a package as a favour for a co-worker. We were simply on our way up to the 16th floor office of the President of the Saskatoon Radisson Hotel's Head Office in Vancouver, to present a letter in the hopes of meeting with him to discuss a matter involving a grievance that came out of employees being disciplined some months after the Company had used secret Shoppers to trick staff into making mistakes. Since we were going to be in the elevator for some time we took advantage of our time and had Karen Friesen the President of the local that was presenting the letter read the letter out loud to the elevator crowd, we then broke out into song by singing Solidarity Forever, and Stuck in the Elevator with you. What really helped us with the singing was that Lori Probst from Local 1S is a singer in a band. These activities did help in relieving some of the tension that was mounting with a few of the nervous and somewhat scared sisters and the one sister who was insulin dependent, as well be this time we were all getting very tired of listening to the alarm ringing in the elevator for the full 50 mins. And to think this ever so special event took place on International Women's Day. In the end we did get out of the elevator and took a different elevator to continue on our mission. Once we arrived in the Corporate Office the President wasn't in, imagine that. But the Vice President of Operations did agree to meet with Karen and a smaller delegation consisting of Ron Carlson, Donnie McNeil, and they did manage to convince them to look into the matter further.

We did participate in the International Women's Day Rally held in Thornton Park and heard speeches from Angela Schira, Secretary Treasurer, BC Federation of Labour, Libby Davies, MP for Vancouver East, Jenny Kwan MLA for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, and were entertained by the Ginger Group. During the evening we were treated to a Sweatshop Fashion Show, at which time we were reminded of the working conditions of companies such as The Gap, Wal-Mart, Disney and many others. It is always good to keep this out in the public so we are all aware of the horrible conditions these factory workers work in. After this fashion show in speaking with other sisters we discussed the idea of preparing a list of companies that we should be supporting.

The last day of the conference opened with guest speaker Azam Kamguian, who is an Iranian writer and women's rights activist. She has been arrested twice for activism and as a result of repressions and threats to her life she currently lives and works in London, England. Azam has written several books and continues to write and organize several campaigns dealing with Women's Rights in the Middle East. During Azam's remarks to us, she made mention that women in the middle east have no right to choose their clothing, they require the written consent of their husband to work; and have no right to choose their husband without the consent of either their father, brother or grandfather. Sister Kamguian also said that since 9/11, the public is more aware of what women in Iran deal with on a daily basis, and that women are tortured to save the family honour. And why is this somehow acceptable by others simply because of geographical border, culture, and religion. . A collection was taken up to assist Sister Kamguian in her cause and 406 dollars was raised to take back with her.

Carol Wall our closing speaker shared a statement with us made by her 81 year old mother after Carol called her to wish her a happy International Women's Day, her mother replied, It Should Be Everyday Until We Receive Equality. Wow, what a powerful statement and so true. Carol touched on what globalization has done around the world, and how the countries in the South are victims of globalization. She also spoke on the need to see the growth in the Humanity Fund. In closing, Carol thanked all those involved in the Conference Planning and to the Delegates who attended to make this conference such an exciting event.

In Solidarity

Kelly Mazur