

Women Workers Uniting



Unite GPM Sector and USW Pulp and Paper Sector



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International Women's Day

www.internationalwomensday.com

Solidarity In Action: Nicaragua

by Alison Jones, Unite Regional Officer

As part of a solidarity campaign delegation, I was privileged to join six members from the GPM Sector of Unite and two other trade union colleagues, as we travelled to Nicaragua on 15th July to spend time in the country learning about the challenges facing workers. Battles between internal rival political groups and repeated foreign government interventions from Europe and the US have wreaked havoc on Nicaragua for much of the last two centuries. The popular insurrection and overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship was finally achieved in 1979 but aided by economic and military pressure from the US, the Sandinistas were defeated in 1990.

With the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberacion National) party back in government with Daniel Ortega running the executive branch, it was also a chance for us to take part in the 30th anniversary

celebrations of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979. After an introduction meeting we had an opportunity to have a brief tour of the sights of Managua, the country's capital.

Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America and with over 70% of employees working within the informal sector, it was a chance to find out what difficulties these workers encounter and how trade unions were operating to improve their conditions. We would also be meeting various community groups and co-operatives to hear about how workers are striving towards self sufficiency despite the ongoing pressures of globalisation.



In my view:

International Women's Day is a day to celebrate women's achievements. It is also a day to redouble our commitment to challenge the discrimination, exploitation and violence faced by women all over the world.



GPM women have a proud history of struggle for women's equality at the sharp end of industrial relations. Making sure there is a strong future for GPM women in the current global economic crisis, and for working women everywhere facing renewed attacks, is vital.

Pregnancy discrimination, bullying and harassment, pressures on working hours, safety and training with no recognition of women's working lives should be a thing of the past, but too many women still suffer.

Making sure 'Equality is at the heart of our union' – the theme of our first Unite National Women's Conference held in February – means action at every level. As Unite's Assistant General Secretary for Equalities, I am honoured to be part of that struggle with GPM members – both women and men.

Diana Holland Unite Assistant General Secretary
– Equalities and Organising

Want to get involved?

It is recognised that the influences on the working lives of Unite members now extend far beyond the borders of the UK and Ireland. Developments and decisions taken at an international level, often by multi-national companies, can have a serious impact on Unite and its members. Unite can no longer represent effectively the interests of its members, without being active on the international stage. Please visit our website and choose the link to the International Department as it illustrates the extent and variety of the international work Unite is engaged in.

For more information about Unite's international activities and events and to be kept informed of issues and campaigns please go to www.unitetheunion.org/resources/international.aspx and complete the form online, or why not affiliate to the NSCAG. Many projects, both trade union and community based, need your support so please visit www.nicaraguasc.org.uk for more details. You may also be interested in taking part in a delegation to Nicaragua. If so, why not invite a delegate to speak at your next branch meeting.

Union Equality Representatives

Becoming a union equality representative is a fantastic opportunity to work with other union reps to ensure people are treated with respect and dignity at work. Unite has worked hard to ensure that there are now over 700 equality reps across the union, who are well supported with information, training and networking to enable them to win a better deal at work. If you are interested in becoming a

Union Equality Representative there is a negotiator's guide on the development, recognition and the resources you will need to become elected in your work place.

This new guide has been produced as a tool that union reps can use to support the development and recognition of Union Equality Representatives. It gives advice to union reps on:

- the election, accreditation and recognition of union Equality Reps
- the role of union Equality Reps
- support and resources for union Equality Reps
- the union's equality networks and structures.

The Union Equality Representatives 5-day training course now forms an integral part of the Unite the Union education programme and is available for all Union Equality Representatives to attend on a regional and national basis. The course is a rewarding experience for all those who participate. If you want to gain an insight in to how to win a fairer deal at work for all Unite members, then this course is for you!

As well as getting to know other equality reps in your area, you will receive a level 2 qualification through the open college



network which is the recognised accreditation body for trade union studies. You can register for the Unite Equality Reps training programme by contacting the union's education department.

Unite has also commissioned a detailed research report which reviews the structures, mechanisms and methods by which equality issues can be promoted and negotiated in workplaces. This review includes both potential innovations, and existing good practices on equality and diversity which have been initiated by other trade unions and trade union organisations in the UK and elsewhere in the EU. The report is a useful tool for any rep who wants to know more about the best way to promote equality at work.

All the above documents can be downloaded from the union's web site at www.uniteunion.com/resources/equalities/equalities_resources/negotiators_guides_on_equalit.aspx or ordered from the union's publications department.

I would encourage all union members to consider becoming an equality rep, talk to your shop steward or workplace rep to find out how this would be possible where you work.

Siobhan Endean, National Officer



In my view:

International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate all the work which women do across the globe to make the world a better place, whether that's in their families, their local communities, their workplaces, their trade unions or in the wider political sphere.

It's also a day which reminds us that women still face many problems including discrimination, unequal pay and status, lack of affordable childcare, and sometimes domestic violence and abuse. In some parts of the world our sisters often face far worse: persecution, imprisonment and death. We need to continue working and campaigning for social justice both in this country and the world.

It was a woman friend and colleague who first persuaded me to become active in the union and join my Chapel Committee. I urge all women members to get involved and speak up against injustice. Make sure women's voices are heard loud and clear!

Lesli Miller MOC Mirror Group, N.I.S.C. Member



WOMEN OF STEEL IN LIBERIA

USW Women of Steel is sponsoring a school supply and new-to-gently-used clothing collection that will be shipped to Liberia in early 2011.

School supplies include: pencils, pens, paper, books, coloring books, scissors and crayons. Because there are minimal opportunities for women to earn money, our clothing donations can become a source of additional income or barter materials to the plantation women. Please consider developing a plan to support this activity in your local unions. For additional information, contact Women of Steel through www.usw.org or by email at womenofsteel@usw.org.

A Women of Steel Leadership Course in Liberia



My Trip to Liberia

by Emily Jefferson,
Assistant to the Director of Women of Steel



I was proud to be a part of the recent USW delegation to Liberia as a representative of our Union and Women of Steel (WOS). The purpose of this December 2008 trip was to facilitate union-building training sessions with our Liberian sisters and brothers.

Our first training session was held at the Firestone Plantation located in the city of Harbel, just outside of Liberia's capital city of Monrovia. More than 30 women from the Firestone Agricultural Workers Union of Liberia (FAWUL); the Forestry, Logging and Industrial Workers Union of Liberia (FLIWUL) and the Liberian Labor Congress (LLC) participated in the WOS course. This two-day course was specifically designed to help our Liberian sisters grow their unions, grow within their unions, and to give WOS insight into how we can provide further assistance to our Liberian sisters.

Our union brothers and sisters in Liberia are hungry for education. During our training sessions, the students soaked up everything we had to offer and were eager for more. At the conclusion of classes at Harbel, the sisters were fired up and ready to build their women's networks and help grow their unions. When asked how we could further help them everyone replied: "Give us more education".

While in Liberia, the delegation was invited to meet with Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I had the distinct honor of presenting her with a bag full of WOS items. We also met with Minister of Labor, Kofi Woods, and other members of this ministry.

I thought I was mentally prepared for my trip to Liberia. I made it a point to study the country and view programs about Liberia and other African countries with similar circumstances to prepare myself for some of the conditions I might face. But with my preparation, I still was not ready for what I experienced. While our hotels had many of the simple comforts we're used to such as plumbing, electricity, air conditioning and satellite television, they are considered luxuries that the vast majority of Liberians only dream of having in their homes. The average family live in structures made with anything they can salvage to help protect them from the elements, including those who live on the Firestone Plantation. Although the company – one of the most profitable in the world – argues that it has begun to provide decent housing for their workers, the number of new units are the equivalent of one drop of water in a very, very large bucket.

Also, after 16 years of civil unrest, Liberia is beginning to rebuild its infrastructure. Some of the roads we travelled rivalled some amusement park rides. Power generating stations also took a hit during the war years. Currently, only larger businesses and elite citizens rely on gasoline-powered generators for electricity. Each

In my view:

International Women's Day is a celebration of women's achievements around the world past and present.

It is also a reminder of the fight that must go on in securing women's rights to equal pay, equal opportunities, equalities and the right to be treated with dignity. We will go on fighting for our rights to join a union and let ourselves be heard.

Helen Fitzpatrick Alcan, Cumbria

In my view:

On International Women's Day we must remember women everywhere.

On September 28, 2009, security forces from the military government, led by Captain Camara, attacked thousands of peaceful pro-democracy supporters who had assembled at the main sports stadium in Conakry, Guinea, to protest the military regime and his alleged standing in the presidential elections. They killed more than 150 people and also gang raped and sexually assaulted – in broad daylight on the streets – scores of girls and women who were at the stadium, often with such extreme brutality that their victims died from the wounds inflicted. In addition to the rapes committed at the stadium, many women described how they were taken to private residences where they endured days and nights of brutal violence.

Women are often victims of crimes and violations of their human rights and dignity, simply due to the fact that they are women. Organised rape is often used as a weapon of war with impunity. Indifference generates more violence, deprives women of their human rights and legitimizes these acts of violence. In this way, Guinea's history was tarnished with one of the worst forms of violence against women and girls. These rapes reverberate deeply for women in Guinea, Africa, and the rest of world. This why on International Women's Day we must remember women everywhere, because we are all someone's sister, daughter, wife, mother, friend.

Terri Miller De La Rue, Dunstable



evening in our hotel everything would go dark for a few minutes while they switched from one generator to another.

There is great unemployment in Liberia, so most are left to their own devices to earn a dollar. The country has what I would call a wheelbarrow economy. The streets are full of merchants selling everything from fresh fish to nuts and bolts from wheelbarrows. You also see many children peddling a variety of wares on the street.

For a country in such disrepair, Liberians are really happy people. They welcome you with open arms and go to great lengths to make sure you are comfortable and all your needs are met during your visit. Their hospitality reminds me of what we call southern hospitality. And the children are beautiful! Their ever-smiling faces makes someone like me, who doesn't smile a lot, want to smile.

I feel very blessed to have made this journey. My stay in Liberia has caused me to look at things in a different light. I learned many personal lessons from a country of people who have so very little – but are so rich in spirit. Thanks to the USW and the AFL-CIO for making my trip possible.

In my view:

For me International Women's Day is a celebration of the past, present and future achievements of rights and equalities for women.

Although much has been done it is our duty to maintain and better these rights for women across the globe.

Linda Pollock Harper Collins, Scotland



The Courageous Story of “Frente Femenil Cananense”

In May 2008, 14 Women of Steel from across the United States and Canada met in Arizona and travelled into Cananea, Mexico, to meet with local women that have taken the lead in support of the Los Mineros – members of the Mexico Union of Mine, Metal and Allied Workers.

Cananea is located in the Sonora Mountains, 50 miles south of the U.S. border, where one of the world’s largest copper mines, is operated by one of the largest mining companies in the world, Grupo Mexico. Women of Steel met with Cananea union leaders and supporters and learned that Los Mineros struck for health and safety reasons after a deadly explosion occurred in another mine. USW Sisters reported that the Cananea women exhibited extreme strength and willingness to fight for social and human rights for their communities.

Visiting United Steelworkers sisters, interviewed by a local radio station, spoke out on behalf of the miners and their families while the Cananea women anxiously waited outside. The Police descended upon the group waiting outside the radio station. Once the USW interviews were completed, the Women of Steel were quickly escorted away from the scene by the union supporters.

Miners continue to strike in protest at the dangerous health and safety conditions. The strike has been met with inhumane retaliation from both Grupo Mexico and the Mexican Government. Stories of intimidation, harassment and physical abuse were told. Grupo Mexico and the Government use violence and manipulation in their attempts to force Los Mineros to return to unsafe working conditions.

In January 2008 the miners and their families were brutally attacked by 1,000 Granaderos (Federal State Police). The Granaderos were armed with tear gas and used helicopters to drop gas bombs in an attempt stop the strike. As a result of that violent day, the community women organised – and so was born “**Frente Femenil Cananense**” (Cananea Women’s Front). The organisation is committed to supporting whatever action is necessary for a successful strike.

Women of Steel report: “Our trip to Cananea, Sonora was eye opening, soul shaking and anger inspiring – to see first hand, the injustice and indignities that Los Mineros are suffering. It was hard to see the desperation on their faces and hear the anguish in their voices as they told their stories. And yet, at the end of the day, as we sat down to share a meal, I could see hope in the eyes of the Frente Femenile Cananense.

“These women are articulate, passionate, creative, strong and fearless leaders. They are young and old, and do not fear for their own lives as they fight to protect their families against the multinational conglomerate, Grupo Mexico, and the Mexican Government that sends troops to intimidate, conquer and divide. Los Mineros and their families say they will fight **Un Dia Mas!** (one day longer).”

The women have asked for monetary help and diapers for their babies, but most importantly, they ask for help sharing their stories. They have urged the Women of Steel to tell all about Los Mineros and the Frente Femenil Cananense and what they have endured. They urged the group not to leave out the shameful role of the Mexican Government, which has repeatedly “buckled to the pressures of the mighty dollar.”

The USW Women of Steel collected over \$500 among themselves during their trip so their Cananean Sisters could buy diapers for the 190 babies in need.

The local government, along with alleged involvement by Grupo Mexico, continues to shut the gas off to the community with



the intent of turning the whole community against Los Mineros attempting to pressure them into returning to work without the dignity and respect they deserve. Cananea’s electricity and water supplies are being manipulated also.

“I am very tired but full of energy to continue the struggle for my pueblo...and now it’s all my pueblo”

– Rosa (from Frente Femenil Cananense)

In April 2009 Frente Femenil Cananense organised a PEACE march in support of their families and community to insist and demand that the estimated 600-1000 troops leave Cananea immediately and to show solidarity with their loved ones that have been standing vigilantly at the strike picket location for (at that time) 21 months. The children of Los Mineros led the march carrying a banner used in the U.S. to protest at President Felipe Calderon’s visit to Chicago in February 2008. During their earlier 2008 visit, Women of Steel had delivered the banner to Los Mineros to hang in their Union Hall. The powerful Cananea women have never given up as they continue to fight right along with Los Mineros lending their support in so many ways – with their children right beside them.

President of the Mexico Union of Mine, Metal and Allied Workers, Napoleon Gomez, reports that Los Mineros has been on strike against Grupo Mexico for 30 months now and there is concern that local and federal armed forces may be used to remove strikers from their workplace. The workers are prepared to stand up against the Army itself as they have no fear of the consequences and are ready to fight if necessary.

Women of Steel has committed to telling the story of the families of Cananea and urge solidarity and support. More information is available on the at www.usw.org

