

# Report from a Seminar at the European Social Forum in Malmö September 19 - 21, 2008



Women in Europe from the North, South, East and West have formed a network for the building of a different Europe.

Europe today is ruled by the law of the market and economic competition, not by human needs. The EU/EMU strengthens this process, increasing unemployment, poverty and social division, policies which especially affect women.

For these purposes, any individual or organisation prepared to support our platform is welcome to join us.

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*Photo: Erni Friholt*

## Free Trade, Feminism and the Lisbon Treaty: the fight for women's economic rights





Due to the constraints of the ESF process and the fact that WTDE had already brought many speakers from across Europe, the seminar had rather too many speakers to allow time for joint analysis as hoped. However, some common themes did emerge that could facilitate future work:

- 1) the betrayal of the original promise of the European social model in terms of equal opportunities and pay, due to the EU emphasis on economic liberalism.
- 2) women are most affected by precarious work (particularly in the informal sector or 'labour black market'), the removal of proper contracts and conditions and the pursuit of 'flexicurity'.
- 3) women suffer from the undermining of public services, especially water, health and child care, education, social security.
- 4) mass migration within Europe (as well as globally) into positions of insecure and exploitative work with little access to state services. Eastern Europe seen as a labour pool without equal rights.
- 5) difficulties in organising unions, especially where low labour standards are used as a means to attract investment.

Seattle to Brussels is working on several of these areas in relation to trade (e.g. services, migration, labour rights) and highlighting the role of/impact on women in these areas could be useful in bringing these agendas together. The seminar was also strong in bringing together women from so many countries and several remarked on the similarity of the problems facing them.

In summary, the participants agreed that neo-liberal policies have had severe impacts on women globally, but while speakers from Nicaragua and Kenya emphasized widespread resistance in their countries and the need to link with European struggles, those from Europe focused on the need to educate and empower women to create similar consciousness within Europe. The central focus from European women's groups was that the EU is still a good thing, but they need to struggle to reclaim the progressive European social model in opposition to the Lisbon treaty. There is a strong emphasis on analysis rather than action. However, there could be potential to take this forward in relation to migration movements particularly.

## **Free Trade, Feminism and the Lisbon Treaty: the fight for women's economic rights**

**The Network  
Women Towards a Different Europe**

## **DAVE TUCKER, WAR ON WANT (BRITAIN)**

### **Free Trade, Feminism and the Lisbon Treaty: the fight for women's economic rights**

The Seattle to Brussels network, represented by War on Want and WIDE, and in association with the Gender and Development Network (UK), organised a seminar to examine the impacts of free trade policies on women specifically, as this gendered analysis is often not properly considered in trade debates. We joined with a seminar on the implications of the Lisbon treaty organised by Women Towards a different Europe (WTDE), together with IFE-EFI, EL-fem, Left Federation of Swedish Women (SKV), Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (Turkey) and IGSO (Russia).

More than 100 people came to discuss the persistent pay gap between women and men, cutbacks in public services, lack of employment rights especially for working women, and the huge migration of women from Eastern Europe to work in wealthier countries (women are more than half the 10m people that have migrated in recent years).

Although trade forms part of the women's networks' agenda in Europe, there has generally not been much interaction with groups working specifically on trade, at the EU level. There appears to be a willingness to engage, but limited common strategy or actions at this stage. Forging this link has been identified as an important part of Seattle to Brussels network outreach strategy in order to broaden the resistance to free trade deals through the extensive feminist networks, especially in Eastern Europe. The intention of this seminar was to link the experiences of women inside and outside Europe, and to relate them to a shared analysis of the central free trade project of the EU, and thereby find common positions and arguments that can be used to bring the feminist and trade networks together.

Given that women suffer disproportionately the casualisation of work, migration and undermining of services induced by free trade policies, this is clearly an important way to look at the negative effects of trade liberalisation. The speakers from feminist networks across Europe and beyond, brought a wide range of experiences from Germany, Spain, Norway, Greece, Poland and Russia, plus Kenya and Nicaragua. We were also joined by Eva Britt Svensson MEP who promised to take these voices into European Parliament discussions.

- Recent economic growth has been slow, volatile and unevenly distributed. It is concentrated in Free Trade Zones, and in non-traditional exports and is disconnected from the productive activities which employ the majority of people in the region.

- We fear that rather than taking seriously concerns over the environment and poverty eradication, ADA will only exacerbate them. For example, the social and environmental concerns put forward by the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development, (ALIDES) have been sidelined in favour of an economic agenda dominated by investment in infrastructure and opening the region to foreign trade.

- Countering the potential negative effects of the ADA will only be made possible through networks of solidarity between women in different countries; networks that could put forward feminist policies and help build alliances among the various strands of European and Central American civil society.

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Main themes of the seminar

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## Organisations involved

Women Towards a Different Europe (WTDE)  
Left Federation of Swedish Women (SKV, Sweden)  
EL-FEM (European Left – feminist network)  
IFE-EFI (Initiative Féministe Européenne pour une autre Europe – European Feminist Initiative for another Europe, France)  
IGSO (Institute for Globalization and Social Movements, Russia)  
Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (Turkey)  
Seattle to Brussels Network  
War on Want (Britain)  
Gender and Development Network (Britain)  
WIDE (Women in Development Europe, Belgium)

## Speakers

Annette Groth MP (Germany), Eva-Britt Svensson MEP (Sweden), Maite Mola (Spain), Torunn Kanutte Husvik (Norway), Beata Grudzinska (Poland), Litsa Doudoumi (Greece), Anna Ochkina (Russia), Monika Karbowska (Poland), Kathini Maloba (Kenya), Sandra Ramos (Nicaragua).

With financial support from the European Parliament.

## CAFTA's impact on women

### REDCAM predicts the following impacts on the lives of women:

- Higher unemployment among women. As CAFTA is likely to put many small and medium-sized firms out of business, unemployment is likely to increase. This could create more competition for work among men, who may be driven to accept worse labour conditions and lower pay, keeping more women out of the labour market.
- More women reduced to mere economic survival. Increased difficulties in finding work will force more women into employment in the maquilas or the informal economy, meaning no stable work contracts and fewer rights as a result.
- A general reduction or elimination of labour protection laws. Laws to specifically protect women will also be undermined, such as laws to prevent pay discrimination, the right to maternity leave and the right to breast-feed.
- Increasingly bad working conditions, including mistreatment at work, long working hours, low pay, and above all, less time to work.
- An increase in women migrating to other countries in the region in search of work.

Faced with the DR-CAFTA and the Association Agreement with the EU, (ADA) Central America, in particular Nicaragua, must confront a situation of economic dependence, massive internal and external debts, structural adjustment, inadequate and deteriorating technology and infrastructure and weak institutional management. These conditions put Central America at a complete disadvantage compared to the United States and Europe.

### Conclusions

- If the ADA maintains CAFTA's terms of negotiation – centred on trade liberalisation – without clearly incorporating a gender perspective which ensures the rights of Central American women, then the subordination of the latter will only deepen.
- The ADA could have the following negative consequences for the people of Central America: fewer employment opportunities and changes to types of work; less access to basic services due to privatisation; higher cost of living due to the effects of Agro-Industry; an increase in European imports which will create an unfavourable trade balance with the EU.

## Nicaragua's disappearing factories

No.	Date	Name of Company	No. workers affected
1	June '06	Uno Garment, S.A.	425
2	November '06	Nicamex, S.A.	300
3	February '07	Fortex Industrial, S.A.	676
4	July '07	K.B. Manufacturing	450
5	September '07	Everly Ltd.	366
6	October '07	Mil Colores, S.A	498
Subtotal			2, 715
1	Nieng Hsing	Shao Hsing	3,200
2	Consortium	Henry Garmente	2, 700
3		John Garment	2, 670
4		Alpha Textil	238
5		Nieng Hsing	2, 493
6		Ching Hsing	3, 000
Total: Nieng Hsing Consortium			14, 301
<b>Total affected workers</b>			<b>17, 016</b>

## Preface

The European Social Forum of 2008 took place in Malmö Sweden Sept 16-21 under its slogan Another world is possible! Organisations interested in participating initially launched individual projects of seminars and workshops which were eventually merged with others on a similar theme. The philosophy of the ESF is that while organisations as a consequence of merging have to compromise on their projects and accept limited space, cooperating with other organisations also widens perspectives and creates new contacts. A new title of the seminar was agreed among the key organisers and speakers:

**“Free Trade, Feminism and the Lisbon Treaty: the fight for women’s economic rights. How EU neo-liberal policies shape women’s economic rights and feminism.”** We decided to focus on (a) the new ‘Global Europe’ trade strategy and how it particularly affects women (b) how the same neo-liberal approach has disadvantaged women within the EU.

The speakers involved have wide experience and knowledge of the consequences for women of the neo-liberal economic policies and of the trade policy of the European Union, not only for those living in EU states, east and west, but also for countries in other parts of the world bound by EU trade agreements. Together they present a very critical view of the way the EU has developed. We believe that their interventions will be useful in our efforts to spread information and make our views known in order to mobilise public opinion in favour of a genuine commitment to building gender equal societies in which social justice, the welfare of the individual and a labour market offering equitable working conditions are the main goals.

As quite a few organisations merged in this seminar, we had eleven speakers from eleven countries, among them one male from War on Want. Immediately after the seminar some of the organizers agreed to publish the speeches as this information is important to share with others and for all of us who organized this event. This booklet is the result of our endeavours.

Some of the speakers have submitted texts that could not be presented in full at the seminar because of the large number of speakers on the platform. Others have contributed their notes. All texts are available for printing at [wtde.wordpress.com](http://wtde.wordpress.com) The first text from Annette Groth (Germany), who was also the chair, is an

introduction to the seminar. There follow two contributions, Eva-Britt Svensson (Sweden) and Maite Mola (Spain), each analysing EU economic, social and trade policies from a gender perspective. Litsa Doudoumi (Greece) then looks at Eastern Europe and what membership of the EU means to the women there. Monika Karbowska (Poland) gives a personal account of what a liberalised labour market, specifically the tourist industry, can entail after enlargement.

Further east, beyond the present day EU, Anna Ochkina (Russia) describes how feminism is not an accepted concept even in socialist circles in her country, despite the tough lives women live bearing (as elsewhere) the double burden of underpaid employment to feed their families and traditional responsibilities as wives and mothers. Then, we have two reports from further afield. Kathini Maloba (Kenya) writes about the Export Processing Zones and the flower industry where cheap female labour is heavily exploited. Sandra Ramos (Nicaragua), gives an overview of the situation for women in Central America and how they are discriminated against in the labour market, with a focus on the effects of working in the Free Trade Zones. Finally Dave Tucker (Britain provides a brief summary of the seminar.

The main focus of the texts are on the analysis of present day EU policies and how these affect women. Conclusions point to awareness raising, also to the importance of solidarity, of organising, of mobilising, of networking and the shaping of alliances. Kathini Maloba calls for an international treaty to safeguard workers rights. Anna Ochkina does not believe that separate feminist movements will advance the position of women in Russia; this will only happen in the context of broad social change. Whether we believe in the European Union or not, we all face the challenge it presents and hope this critical analysis will help pave the way to reform and change.

This booklet aims to contribute to our understanding of the world we live in and the part we all wish to play in building a better world.

Thank you very much everybody!

Ianthe Holmberg  
Inger V. Johansen WTDE

## **Inside the maquila**

The complexity of the situation within the maquila industry has been recognised throughout Central America. It is a situation caused by several factors, including:

- complex changes of production
- competition between the countries of the region in terms of flexibility of labour and weakening labour laws at national level
- the supposed difficulty of national governments in demanding the application of labour rights

The right of workers to organise is often ignored by employers. Many unionised workers are represented by one of the 27 trade unions affiliated to five different confederations of labour. However, unionised workers represent only 10 per cent of the total maquila work force. Employers in the region have mounted fierce resistance to efforts by workers to organise.

REDCAM studies have revealed that labour laws and health and safety regulations are routinely ignored throughout the region, resulting in violations of workers' rights. These studies show that workers are often unaware of labour rights and employers' obligations expressed in the Central American Employment Code. Workers are often afraid to demand their rights as they fear being fired.

While the maquila sector respects workers' rights in theory, these often have to be fought for.

Common experiences include forced overtime, lack of medical provision, and denial of compensation pay upon termination of employment. Employers' policies have systematically weakened women's organised labour.

## **Introducing CAFTA**

Central American governments are flaunting the Dominican Republic - Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States (DR-CAFTA) as a panacea for all the region's economic ills. However, factories are still closing down in Nicaragua, supposedly the country to benefit most from the accords.

## Free Trade Zones in Latin America & the Caribbean

Country	No. Free Trade Zones	No. Companies	Total jobs generated	Exports (Millions, US \$)	as proportion of total exports, %
Brazil	1	408	93, 695	22, 341	16.2
Colombia	11	340	100, 000	800	3.2
Costa Rica	12	227	39, 010	5, 666	54.2
Ecuador	10	74	1, 480	51	3.2
El Salvador	13	300	60, 500	1, 801	45.3
Guatemala	15	208	50, 000	560	15.1
Honduras	68	306	134, 000	1, 000	50.5
Mexico	107	2810	1, 215, 125	10, 679	47
Nicaragua	32	119	85, 000	1, 088	70.7
Panama	9	2, 500	180, 000	4, 500	46.9
Dominican Republic	56	555	148, 411	4, 506	77.4
Argentina	7	2, 285	31, 900	277	9.4

## Industrial Free Trade Zones in Central America

Country	Total no. Free Trade Zones	No. companies operating	Employment generated	Average Salary per hour US \$
Costa Rica	12	227	39, 010	2.02
El Salvador	13	300	60, 000	1.35
Guatemala	15	208	50, 000	1.38
Honduras	68	306	134, 000	1.19
Nicaragua	32	119	85, 000	0.7
Total	140	1, 160	369, 010	1.33

## ANNETTE GROTH, MP, DIE LINKE, EL-FEM AND ATTAC (GERMANY)

### Bringing feminist and trade networks closer together

### Introduction to the seminar: "Free Trade, Feminism and the Lisbon Treaty: the fight for women's economic rights"

Poverty is female, out of the 1,3 billion poor 70% are women! Although 70% of the work worldwide is executed by women, they do not even receive 10% of the worldwide income! The group with the largest poverty risk in the EU are single mothers and families with many children.

There are in particular two EU strategy papers that will cause – and already have – more poverty and more unemployment, that is the Lisbon Strategy and the Global Europe Strategy – both closely connected with the Lisbon Treaty. The third dangerous EU Directive is the Services Directive, also known as the Bolkestein Directive which has to be implemented into national law in the EU member states by the end of 2009 and, I am afraid, will lead to much chaos and more female poverty as 80% of the workers in the service sector are women.

In March 2000, the EU summit adopted the "Lisbon strategy"; its objective: the EU will become "the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy" by 2010.

In order to achieve this goal, the overall strategy of the EU is aiming at:

- stepping up the process of structural reform for competitiveness in creating more favourable conditions for businesses and innovation and enhancing flexibility on the labour market
- completing the internal market, opening protected sectors such as public procurement; this is the Bolkestein Directive
- and modernising the European social model

The Lisbon strategy is the neoliberal framework for the destruction of the social welfare state in Europe.

The need for more "reforms" has been stressed at all the EU summits. These "reforms" comprise "an attractive environment for companies, the extension of life work-time, the reduction of state subsidies, more individual responsibility for pension, health care and education, and the "development of human capital." Since human capital is one of the most important assets in Europe, the competi-

tiveness of European companies should be enhanced by “life long learning, by the geographic and professional mobility of employees, as well as by new forms of employment and a greater diversity of labour contracts”.<sup>1</sup>

This year new reforms have been adopted, such as the flexicurity model.

In order to achieve the goals of the Lisbon Strategy the percentage of the employed population within Europe should rise to 70%, the target for women is a 60% female employment by 2010. At present 57,2% of women are employed in the EU, this is 14% less than men.

Women being cheap labour, companies have a keen interest to increase the number of employed women. On average, women earn 15% less than their male colleagues – for the same job!

Zita Gurmai, President of PES (Party European Socialists), said “The 15 per cent pay gap between women and men is an insult to women. How can Europe expect to attract more women into work – which is the aim of the EU’s Lisbon strategy - when women are so under-valued. The problem is not only women being paid less than men for the same job - after all that has been illegal for years – it is the fact that more women work part-time, work in the lower-paid public and care sectors, and do not get into managerial and other senior positions.”

Women and migrants are used as an “industrial reserve army” and are misused to further reduce wages. They are mainly employed in insecure working conditions with low salary and many of them can be fired from one day to the other, mainly in the service sector.

The Lisbon Strategy was drafted by a powerful lobby group called the ERT (European Round Table of Industrialists) and when it was adopted the ERT celebrated this as a major success for themselves. They regard neoliberal reforms in the EU as a “double revolution“:

“On the one hand we are reducing the power of the state and of the public sector in general through privatization and deregulation. On the other we are transferring much of the power of the national states to a more modern and internationally-minded structure at European level. The unification of Europe is progressing and this helps international businesses like ours.”<sup>1</sup>

In June 2007, the Council of the European Union adopted a new trade strategy with the title “Global Europe – a stronger Partnership to deliver market access for European exporters”.

This strategy aims at opening up the markets within the EU as well as in third

Women’s organisations in the countryside face even greater challenges than their sisters in urban areas: the highest levels of illiteracy, the largest number of children per woman and less access to social services. For urban women living in poverty and seeking to make an income, there are two main options: the maquila or the informal economy.

### Global distribution of Free Trade Zones

Area	No. of Free Trade Zones	No. people employed	No. companies
North Africa	20	455, 365	3, 615
Sub-Saharan Africa	52	437, 322	484
Indian Ocean	2	127, 509	693
Middle East	38	691, 397	7, 429
Asia	283	43, 738, 884	475, 347
North & Central America	489	2, 649, 535	8, 462
South America	68	354, 225	7, 465
Caribbean	120	355, 803	1, 823
Central & Eastern Europe	102	263, 619	5, 622
Western Europe	67	167, 832	5, 363
Pacific	14	50, 830	96
Global total	1, 245	49, 292, 321	516, 399

- forced work
- sexual harassment
- low pay
- precarious employment
- lack of freedom of expression or organisation
- work-place segregation

### **Development and gender equality**

Development policies have had the following impacts on women's lives:

- The growing number of women in the labour market does not diminish women's reproductive role or responsibilities as wife/mother. To the contrary, as power relations within the home have not changed, many women are now burdened with a double work load.
- Women receive less pay than men carrying out the same job. At the same time, it is women who have shouldered the bulk of the impact of the economic crisis.

Women constitute the majority of cheap labour in the maquilas, reflecting the systematic power inequalities of a patriarchal society. A lack of employment opportunities, resources and availability of credit leave women with few options for economic survival.

### **Development and gender cont.**

In addition to these economic problems, women's political organisations are often ignored by government, putting women at a disadvantage when trying to defend their rights. Violence against women, and the fear that many women live with on a day to day basis are a major problem. However, these issues are slowly being openly discussed in the public arena.

Central America has a poor record of defending women's sexual and reproductive rights. An example is the repeal of the right to abortion in Nicaragua. For women, having less autonomy over one's body means greater subordination, less access to employment and health care, and a restricted ability to organise within the workplace.

Studies by the FAO show that women make a significant contribution to agriculture. But this contribution is rarely reflected in statistics: women are often considered to be men's "help".

countries and aims to enhance competitiveness of European companies. Increasing external competitiveness also involves securing the provision of raw materials, a stronger presence of European businesses in the growing markets such as China and India, opening up and liberalising lucrative markets for public procurement, liberalising the investment regime in third countries and in the end, implementing legislative measures that promote free trade.

The declared goal is removing non-tariff trade barriers; which include environmental and labour standards. The right to maternity leave could thus be jeopardized.

Without consulting civilian community organisations and without involving the parliaments of the EU member states – even the EU Parliament is largely ignored – the EU Commission negotiates Free Trade Agreements aiming at the liberalisation of trade with goods and services and the reciprocal liberalisation of national public procurement markets.

Bilateral trade agreements are being negotiated with India, South Korea, Central Latin American countries, and the Andean States. Opposition to these Free Trade Agreements (FTA) is rising everywhere as they jeopardize the livelihoods of millions of people. Particularly in Korea there is great protest against the FTA, especially from workers, farmers and women who have seen trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement leading to job flight, decaying communities and increased social polarisation. But what really unites Koreans against the FTA is the undemocratic nature of the negotiation process and the threat to South Korea's national sovereignty.

Massive protest has developed in the last years against the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) which the EU Commission is pushing the 78 ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) to sign. All studies warn of the negative impacts of the EPAs. By signing an EPA, ACP countries will have to dramatically reduce tariffs on imported goods and open up their markets not only to industrial and agricultural products from the EU, but also to investment, services and public procurement. If developing countries are forced to undertake such a comprehensive market liberalisation, the effects on the local ACP markets will be disastrous, as ACP producers will be exposed to competition with European companies, which are much more competitive. Apart from jeopardizing food security, EPAs could also result in deindustrialisation and the collapse of entire local and national sectors of production. Women are most affected by the EPAs as it is they

who mainly work in the agricultural sector, e.g. as poultry and vegetable farmers, which will be most adversely affected by trade liberalisation and the EPAs. They will not be able to compete with highly subsidised cheap agricultural products from Europe and will thereby be driven out of business.

One of the strongest critics of the EPAs is Aminata Traoré, the former Minister of Culture of Mali, who labelled the EPAs in an interview with a German newspaper as “Europe’s weapons of mass destruction”. She said that “Europe demands competitiveness of us, yet, when it experiences competitiveness with China, it breaks out in panic; Europe sends us its chicken legs, its used cars, its out-of-date medicine and its worn out shoes, and, because your leftovers are flooding our markets, our craftspeople and farmers are being put out of business. Now China is sending its products to Europe – and these are not leftovers, but clean, competitive goods. And what does Europe do? It talks about tariffs. So I say that Africa, too, has a right to protect itself. Europe cannot panic about China and, at the same time, call on Africa to open up its markets... For us, these agreements are Europe’s weapons of mass destruction.”

Closely connected to free trade and open markets is the current food crisis which poses an additional danger, in particular for women. In April UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon propagated the use of genetically modified seeds as it allegedly produces higher yields. In this way the UN is acting as an agent of agricultural corporations pursuing the goal of the widest possible distribution of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The arguments for the alleged advantages of genetically-modified agricultural products are easy to refute. GM food is not cheaper; on the contrary, genetically modified maize is one third more expensive than conventional maize in the US. For some GM plants, the use of agricultural chemicals has to be increased because pests are resistant. The yield is often not higher either. Researchers of the Office of Technology Assessment of the German Parliament (TAB) concluded that a benefit of GMOs cannot be proven. The use of GMOs is therefore primarily about dominating the food market; a former employee at Monsanto once disclosed: “Monsanto wants world domination over all food production”. Back in the 1970s Henry Kissinger had already declared: “Control oil and you control nations; control food and you control people.”

About 70% of the world’s population still lives from agriculture. Around 80% of the agriculture sector in the developing countries is in the hands of women.

### Economically active urban population: 2025 projection

	Population (millions)	%
Total urban pop.	15, 169, 166	100
Men	8, 700, 661	57.36
Women	6, 469, 005	42.64

### Inequality in Central America

- In the last 10 years, social inequality increased in two countries in the region, remained the same in three and decreased in only one.
- Almost 20 million Central Americans live in poverty. Of these, more than half have no access to health services.
- The last decade saw a decrease in the poverty level of nine percent. Yet in 2001 there were 2 million more poor people than in 1990.
- 1 in 4 people in the region live in extreme poverty, lacking sufficient income to satisfy basic food needs. 3 out of 4 Central Americans in extreme poverty live in the countryside.

### Inequalities in education

- Access to education decreases as the rate of poverty increases. Conversely, educational assistance decreases as family income increases.
- Almost half the population without access to education is made up of children of 14 years or younger.
- Illiteracy affects 1 in 4 people above the age of 15. Illiteracy is concentrated among women and indigenous people and is higher in rural areas.

### Inequalities in work

In Central America, discrimination against women in employment can include being denied work due to age; being confined to low-paid occupations with low qualifications; or being offered low-wage work on the basis of one’s sex, religion, physical characteristics or skin colour.

In the case of Nicaragua, poverty and work-place discrimination make women vulnerable to abuses such as:

**SANDRA RAMOS, NETWORK OF CENTRAL AMERICAN WOMEN IN SOLIDARITY WITH MAQUILA WORKERS, REDCAM (NICARAGUA)**

**Highlighting the impact of Free Trade Agreements on the lives of Central American women**

**Introduction: what is REDCAM?**

REDCAM is a network of organisations made up of Central American women. It was formed in order to contribute to the movement for women workers’ rights in the region. The network is committed to defending and promoting human rights and labour rights. As well as promoting full citizenship among maquila (Free TradeZone) workers and serving vulnerable groups, REDCAM facilitates a process of empowerment and transformation of employment and public policy. The network maintains an autonomous stance with regard to official policy-making bodies.

**Facts and Figures on Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama)**

**Total Population: 2005**

	<b>Population (millions)</b>	<b>%</b>
Total	37, 268, 178	100
Men	18, 679, 592	50.12
Women	18, 588, 586	49.88

**Economically active rural population: 2025 projection**

	<b>Population (millions)</b>	<b>%</b>
Total rural pop.	10, 324, 733	100
Men	7, 409, 256	71.76
Women	2, 915, 477	28.24

With the introduction of GMOs their livelihood is severely threatened.

The food crisis illustrates the connection between hunger, financial markets and speculation on the stock market. US and European pension funds invest in raw materials. Besides oil, these include foodstuffs such as soya, wheat and maize. They may not directly buy these products, but purchase future contracts that are sold shortly before the due date in order to buy new contracts with new terms.

The EU Commission is also paving the way for GMOs, and the powerful industry is lobbying for the widespread use of GMOs.

The connection between lobbyists, the EU Treaty, the Lisbon Strategy and other directives such as the Services Directive as well as the EU Global Europe strategy, are hardly known to the European public. Any discussion of the necessity of “reforms” that replace the social welfare system with a “workfare” state takes place on the national level, the European dimension is hardly ever addressed.

EU officials as well as our politicians promote “growth and competitiveness” and are preaching a liberal and “open” market. At the same time, however, Brussels pays high subsidies to agricultural business and national governments pay high subsidies to companies in order to prevent closure and the transfer to a different country where wages are lower. Renault for example, decided to stay in Slovenia after being promised to get subsidies from the government that will cover the employees’ salaries for five years.

We need to demystify the myth that enhanced economic growth and trade as well as competitiveness create jobs. This is not true. “Competitiveness” is the code word for neoliberal, patriarchal capitalist politics which we have to combat. The gap between poor and rich is widening and has reached worrying dimensions. Many frustrated and angry people turn to right wing political parties.

Xenophobia, racism and neo-Nazism are on the rise in all European countries. Very worrying is the situation in the Eastern European countries where ethnic minorities such as the Roma population suffer severe discrimination and poverty. According to studies, 30% of the students in Eastern European countries are far right and appear to share the Nazi beliefs and convictions.

Almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the former Soviet Block the impact of the restoration of capitalism in the “ex-communist” countries is quite clear. Far from bringing democracy or improved social conditions for all, the introduction of the market economy has plunged broad layers of the population into social misery. The extreme right is attempting to

channel widespread frustration over social crisis into nationalistic fantasies and racist hysteria. This tendency can be observed in all European countries.

Social and civil rights are sacrificed in order to protect the rights of capital and the rights of the free market. This undermines democratic values and social systems as well as Human Rights.

The EU serves the interests of business. But, what is good for business is increasingly harmful for the environment and for poor people, and in particular for women who are affected most by poverty and unemployment.

The increase in productivity that enables companies to produce more with fewer workers, calls for a radical change in policies, reduction of working hours and a redistribution of work. But, the EU Commission and our neoliberal governments are just doing the opposite: extending working hours and retirement age. Ultimately all of these strategy papers and trade agreements have only one goal: to further increase market access for European companies, to liberalise all profitable economic sectors such as water, energy, health, education; to secure natural resources; to increase profits by privatising public goods and services and by using the cheapest labour, the lowest taxes and standards; in other words to implement neoliberal and imperialistic policy.

Destruction of social systems goes along with increasing militarization within countries, such as the build up of sophisticated surveillance systems directed against other countries. This militarization costing billions of dollars which we need for social services such as health care, education and so on is justified by the alleged threat of terrorism. If we protest against unjust social systems we may be labelled as terrorists since we want to destroy the capitalistic system.

The prevailing capitalistic and patriarchal system will further drive us into misery and possibly war. As Jean Jaurès, a French Socialist politician, once said: “capitalism entails war, as the cloud entails rain”. This is the big danger in our world.

We need a feminist peaceful new global world order free of patriarchal capitalism and that is why we are here and we want to fight for this aim!

<sup>1)</sup> European Council Brussels – 22 and 23 March 2005 – “Presidency Conclusions“, 23/3/2005 ( English ) Nr: 7619/1/05 REV1, II. Relaunching the Lisbon Strategy: A Partnership for Growth and Employment, [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/84335.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/84335.pdf)

<sup>2)</sup> <http://www.trilateral.org/annmtgs/trialog/trlgtxts/t54/jan.htm>: “The Pace of Economic Change in Europe”

ing agreement. It also negates the very principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **What needs to be done**

The women workers in flower farms and the EPZ have suffered all forms of discrimination. They can not therefore be expected to fight this war alone. There is need therefore to mobilize support from the civil society movements, trade unions, consumer organizations, women organizations, labour based NGOs and any other group that can make a difference to free the women from the bondage of exploitation of their labour and violation of human rights.

As for those flower companies that are making efforts to improve conditions, I applaud them. Companies like Homegrown, Sher, Oserian, Redlands, Valentine, Penta, theirs is to keep on improving and maintaining standards as the they continue engaging in labour related issues. There is a need to join in this group.

The principle has to do with all adopting the policy of social responsibility beyond being policed by civil society or auditors.

As for the consumers, they need to be concerned with social standards in the production of goods they consume, lest we all be guilty of condoning the system.

As the power games are played in the business of the International Supply Chain the women are squeezed at the bottom of the chain, and like the slaves of centuries ago the situation calls for an international treaty. Let's join the campaign for Decent work and more specifically, for a LIVING WAGE.

For more information on women workers in the flower farms and in the export processing zones in Kenya you may visit our website: [www.kewwo.or.ke](http://www.kewwo.or.ke)

Statistics are available in the various studies that have been carried out by KEWWO and even organizations in other African countries.

A global network (Global Horticultural Workers and Environmental Rights Network-GHOWERN) was formed in March this year to raise awareness among the public, consumers, human rights organizations and trade union on environmental matters and labour rights. Five countries in Africa are currently active in the network and more have shown interest to join. The network is currently hosted by KEWWO.

are yet to observe the international labour standards. There are those that subscribe to a code of conduct, but some codes of conduct need policing by the civil society, including trade unions and labour based NGOs.

This is necessary because the workers are ignorant of their rights and too weak to engage the employer about their employment matters.

The EPZ on the other hand are still using an authoritarian system of labour relations. Protected by the law that established the zones and the operations there in, the companies that operate in the zones treat their workers like slaves. For example:

The workers are not allowed to talk to each other while on duty

They need a pass to go to the toilet

The workers including male workers experience sexual harassment at work

Abusive language by the supervisors is common in all the EPZ companies.

The workers often do 48 hours continuously without a break resulting in accidents with machines.

Overtime pay is often miscalculated to cover up extra hours that were worked.

### **Development or cheap labour**

Whether the flower industry and the EPZ have contributed towards addressing the millennium development goal no. 1, namely poverty reduction, and to development in general, remains to be seen.

In a country where half of the population lives below the poverty line, any kind of employment is better than nothing. In Kenya 13.4 million people lived below the poverty line in 1997, thus over 50% of the country. It is no surprise, therefore, that investors run away from the informed labour force and agitating civil societies of the North to find fertile grounds in the southern countries such as Kenya, Mauritius, the Philippines, etc. Such countries in the South, concerned with the rising unemployment which may cause political instability, accept these investors at any cost, including giving them incentives such as tax holidays for 10 years and only paying 50% of the tax due for the next 10 years. In some countries such as Ethiopia, tax holidays apply also in the cut flower industry. On the other hand, trade unions are not freely allowed to organize workers in the Zones, which is a violation of trade unions as proscribed in the ILO conventions no. 87 and 98 on freedom of association and the right to organize and to collective bargain-

## **EVA-BRITT SVENSSON, THE LEFT PARTY (SWEDEN), MEP, CHAIR OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

### **The lack of a gender perspective in the Lisbon Treaty and EU policies in general**

A gender perspective is often lacking in all the different issues within the EU system. This is true of all three institutions, the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. This is also so despite the fact that in the general provisions of the treaties it says that the Union should be governed by diversity, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and the principle of equality between women and men. Yet when it comes to translating the general principle into concrete measures difficulties immediately arise, since the gender perspective, as often as not, is missing. The Parliament, especially the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, tries to persuade other parliamentary committees to integrate the gender perspective in their legislation, but when we come to trade and security policies, the influence of Parliament is minimal.

According to the Lisbon Treaty all authority concerned with issues covering common trade policies is the exclusive competence of the Union, which means that all such issues will be agreements at Union level only and that the Union and its member states will no longer negotiate agreements between themselves or with other countries. The role of the Parliament in trade agreements will be limited to receiving information and to acting in a consultative capacity. The Council expects the responsible Commissioner to negotiate trade agreements within a certain framework and this confers a great deal of power on this Commissioner. Both Parliament and member states have incredibly little to say in the outcome of the agreements.

But even when the Parliament has had the opportunity of pronouncing on the Lisbon treaty and trade policies, there is not a trace to be found in its report of gender perspectives, equal rights or of the effects of trade agreements on countries whether they are rich or poor, nor on men and women respectively.

Free Trade is the guiding principle of the EU – and free trade is always presented as something positive and good for one and all. In the real world, however, the issue is more complicated. Trade and the rules that govern it are not pursued in a social vacuum. They are influenced by the surrounding world with its different power relationships and varying interests. It is a question of relationships between countries and between groups within individual countries. But it is also frequently an issue of relationships between men and women, between those who have power and those who do not. Different structures provide men and women with different roles and responsibilities in the economy. International trade currents, power and ownership, patterns of production and rules governing them therefore often have a different impact on men and women respectively. Trade policies that do not recognize that decisions affect men and women in different ways are at risk of reinforcing existing gender unequal power structures in which men are systematically favored at the expense of women. It is, therefore, a serious thing that the connection between trade and gender is not acknowledged in EU politics and consequently it is a formidable task for a feminist to incorporate a gender perspective in trade policies. Hence feminists inside the Parliament must cooperate with women's organizations that are based on a gender analysis of society. Together we need to work inside as well as outside of parliament to influence public opinion in such a way that men in power are obliged to face the fact that the world needs trade policies that take development seriously, to face the challenge of redressing the unequal balance between the rich world and the poor, between men and women.

Trade and gender are connected together in a wide variety of ways that need to be studied closely in order to understand how people in different places will be affected by an increase in international trade and trade agreements. Gender relationships influence the distribution of, and access to resources such as employment, income, wealth and power. Gender influences our behaviour as actors on the economic scene. Men and women can react differently to changes in the economy, and can, on account of their allocated roles, choose different priorities. Economic institutions (as well as the EU) are not only dominated by men – they uphold gender structures in the economy. Men and women's labour is valued differently and women's work in the reproductive sphere is unrecognized and unpaid. These are some of the factors that explain why women and men are affected differently by increased international trade and trade agreements.

## **KATHINI MALOBA, KENYA WOMEN WORKERS ORGANISATION (KEWWO)**

### **Squeezed at the bottom of the international supply chain: women workers in the cut flower and export processing in Kenya**

#### **Introduction**

The concept of ethical business practices and decent work are taking root in societies across the globe. On the other hand there is an increase in capital flight, as labour becomes aware and aggressive. Business has tended to move to countries where citizens are less aware of their rights or where governments can still control their citizens through some undemocratic practices.

The cut flower industry has flourished in several African countries over the last three decades with Kenya claiming the longest experience in the industry. Other countries include Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia to mention but a few. Whereas Export Processing Zones (EPZ) are much more recent, they have also taken root in Kenya and a few other countries in Africa such as Mauritius. In Kenya the EPZ were established in 1997 by an act of parliament. The two sectors have provided jobs to the tune of approximately 80,000 and 28,000 respectively. This by extension means that more than half a million citizens depend on income from the two sectors.

#### **Labour and social conditions**

The two industries are similar in a number of aspects:

Labour is drawn from fairly young women between the ages of 18 to around 25, forming between 65% and 82% in all flower farms and EPZ companies.

Most of the workers are on casual contracts of employment.

The workers are at work for very long hours, apparently due to purchasing practices by buyers in the global north.

The salaries range between 83p and GBP 1.25 a day.

A considerable amount of time and resources have been spent in research, campaign and advocacy in the flower industry and some positive changes have been recorded in a small number of flower farm companies. However, the vast majority

movement of women campaigning for specific rights, not as a movement aimed against men in the name of an abstract concept of freedom, but as an organic part of a social movement striving for full-blooded social welfare policies and for transformations of a socialist nature. Specific women's movements are inevitably limited in their social effectiveness. As local social movements, they cannot make a political impact, since they are unable to advance a clear and rounded political program. Women already possess a full range of formal rights. Social projects aimed at ensuring real rights for women can only be implemented within a context of broad social change. Partial and limited initiatives in this case turn into a caricature of the very concept of sexual equality, discrediting feminism as an idea and as a project.

The problem of the left in Russia lies in an organic failure to accept feminism in any form. There is an almost complete failure to conceive of gender problems within the context of the left movement and of the tasks of social change. For the most part, the left limits itself to declarations on equal rights, the rights of women, and so on. This cultural peculiarity of the Russian left has the result that questions of gender, and acute social problems linked with gender disproportions and contradictions, are not discussed at all at the source of left politics. Consequently, the official interpretation of these questions often remains the only one, while the initiatives of the authorities in the field of so-called demographic policy rate as the sole constructive proposals, despite their one-sidedness and the complete lack of any sign that they are socially effective.

An authentic equality of the sexes is possible only through realising the specific needs of men and women as natural and inviolable human requirements. Engels understood the movement for the rights of women not as a "special women's movement", but as "the women's side of the workers' movement...". Hence the task of the left in the first instance is to discuss the problems of women as questions of universal significance. Abortion, violence within the family, and questions of child-rearing are not specific problems of women, and require a thorough reorienting of social policy if they are to be adequately dealt with. Secondly, it is essential that women be drawn into political activity as partners with equal rights. Their problems must be addressed as general ones, and their occupational, social and sexual rights must be defended within the context of realising the universal rights of human beings.

The requirements that stem from the EU and other sources to privatize and liberalize the service sector, not only in member states but also in other countries bound by trade agreements, makes life more difficult for women. There are a number of studies to confirm this, yet nothing has been done to review policies of privatization. On the contrary, as trade agreements are negotiated, there is increasing pressure from the EU on developing countries to privatize whole service sectors. The Lisbon Treaty further emphasizes EU ambitions to privatize all services, private as well as the so-called public services. These are what we otherwise call the public sector. EU policies thus keep heading in the same direction. In Parliament I have repeatedly called for measures to be taken to subject the Lisbon Treaty to gender analysis before it is adopted.

We often hear about gender mainstreaming, that decisions should be preceded by an analysis of the ways in which gender equality is affected by various policies. But when new treaties are adopted – treaties that spell out practically all policies for the foreseeable future – no gender analysis has taken place. I can also understand why the real decision makers deny us the opportunity to analyze the consequences of the treaty from a gender perspective.

The reason is, of course, that such an analysis would show that through the EU treaties, including the Lisbon Treaty, a European state is being built largely by men and for men.

## **MAITE MOLA, EL FEM, IZQUIERDA UNIDA, PCE (SPAIN)**

### **The way to inequality**

*The following text is from a power point presentation. It has the objective to define the different elements in the present economic and labour market policies that influence the way to gender inequality.*

### **Construction of the European social model**

Term used at the meeting of European Council at Barcelona in 2002 “European Social Model”

Theoretical components:

- 1) Employment and general social protection.
- 2) Equal salary distribution.
- 3) Negotiation between developed trade unions and enterprises and governments.
- 4) Public services for all.

### **Neo-liberal model**

Is based on the following elements:

Public Debt

Delocalization of capital

Deregulation of labour

Fostering of inequality

The function of the State: to favour the logic of the Market instead of the social logic

Financial hegemony

The principles of competition and competitiveness

Consumerism as a personal and isolated fulfillment

Conflict and aggressiveness, individualism

### **Guide to the European Neo-liberal Model**

Key steps since 2000:

Lisbon Summit and Strategy (2000), EU Constitutional Treaty (2005)

Bolkestein (Services) Directive (2005), Lisbon Treaty (2008)

Working Time Directive (2008), “Return” Directive (2008), Flexicurity (2008)

the press are discussions of the moral significance of abortion, and of the possibility of banning it or of equating it with murder – that is, of once again outlawing it. Meanwhile, it is essential to note that we are now losing even those gains in the area of support for mothers and children that were made earlier. In light of the standards of contraceptive and sexual behaviour that have become established among us (and of the prices of contraceptives) such trends in social policy, or even simply in public opinion, can result in the harsh exploitation of women’s reproductive function.

In Russia, the economic pressure of the market is thus combined in dramatic fashion with patriarchal (and at times simply barbaric) cultural stereotypes. Nevertheless, the need which our women have for feminist theory is an objective reality. Women in Russia are energetic, educated, and capable of independence. If women in this country show a certain reluctance to accept feminism, this is in the first place a reaction to the distortion that feminism suffered during the socialist period. Secondly, it stems from the weight of the social and economic problems that women often find unbearable, and that force them to rely on support from their families and from men. Also of importance are feelings of emotional powerlessness in the face of social traditions and stereotypes. It should be noted that because of their greater social vulnerability – which is objectively determined – and because of their status and role in the economy (including in the sphere of unpaid reproductive labour), women also have an even greater objective need than men for radical social change. As a result of their role in the reproductive process; of the historically established gender disproportions in the assigning of social roles, power and resources; and of the existing gender structure of employment, women may be subject to dual or even triple exploitation compared to men. This, however, does not in any way turn men and women into enemies. What it does is to make the majority of women objectively the enemies of capitalism and of capitalist exploitation. In politics, and on the left, it is still less true that men and women are enemies. Here too, one must look to the gender distribution of roles and status in all areas of social life, and to the existing stereotypes of social behaviour.

Feminist theory requires renewing, so that it can become adequate to the needs of women and of all of Russian society. The theory must take into account both the social changes that have occurred and the objective necessities which have manifested themselves. The feminist movement must develop not as a separate

are disillusioned with the patriarchal family. As early as the mid-1990s sociological studies were finding that for most women family and career were values of equal significance. The family has not lost its importance, but work and the chance of professional development have become vitally important to women. When combined with the super-exploitation of labour in modern-day Russia, where simply ensuring survival and satisfying the most elementary physical, mental and social needs demands a huge work effort, the persistence in society of near-traditional attitudes toward the rights and obligations of women and men in the areas of family and work has driven women into a dead-end. Women are forced to dash continually between work and family, while in order to achieve and maintain their professional status, they are compelled to work twice or three times as hard as their male colleagues. Meanwhile, sociological research shows that working women who are married with children constantly feel guilty toward their families. In the prevailing social consciousness, for a woman to neglect her family and parental responsibilities, even for the sake of work and a career, is almost criminal. For a man it is almost a mark of honour, or at least is considered natural. This is the case even though women are now the main or sole breadwinners in 40 per cent of Russian families.

During the period of market reforms, the ideological pressure imposed by society on Russian women has increased rather than diminishing. Surveys thus show that women experience professional and career discrimination, along with growing anxiety at the burden of combined family and occupational responsibilities. The fact that the status of women as “second-rank” workers is vanishing into the past has brought few changes to the gender structure of employment, especially at points higher up the scale. The areas of the economy that are most “feminised” are those in which the need for high qualifications is combined with relatively low wages – education, culture, health care and social welfare. Even in these spheres, however, the top posts are usually held by men.

Sociologists also note the so-called “guilt before society” felt by single and childless women. The mass media and mass culture put about the image of women as sex objects and commodities. There is also the counterposed tendency to extol the “natural” destiny of women to be mothers. At the same time, no real initiatives are being taken in social policy, and the efforts to stimulate the birth rate are having, and will have, contradictory social consequences. Quietly being circulated in

### **Consequences for women (I)**

Important differences in salaries. On an average, women’s salaries are 15% – for each working hour – under men’s.

Female employment is more precarious or centered in social professions. Most women work in unregulated sectors with low productivity and low salaries, in difficult working conditions and with limited or nonexistent social protection.

### **Consequences for women (II)**

32,6% of working women in the EU have part time jobs. A third part of women with one child and half of those with three or more children are part time employed.

The risk of poverty is higher for older women and for single parent families with children – who are mostly women.

### **“Something is moving in Europe”**

Popular reaction against neo-liberalism:

European Social Forums since 2002, after World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (2001)

The “No” to the EU Constitution Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005, creating a discussion and debate among the people – unlike in Spain.

A decisive argument in the “No” campaigns: the Bolkestein Directive

The Feminist Movement plays an important role in the “No” campaign to the Treaty in Spain.

### **The Bolkestein (Services) Directive**

In May 2005: debate in the European Parliament. The Directive is modified but gives preference to the free establishment of companies and services over labour and social rights.

Labour deregulation. Precariousness. Lowering of salaries.

General privatization of services. Delocalization.

Worsening of labour conditions. Government control is prevented.

More unemployment and precariousness for all but women’s situation of deep inequality will be maintained and increased.

### **Foreseeable consequences**

Public administrations are forbidden to make policies to foster schools, hospitals, socio-cultural services and other essential services for people. This will especially

affect women.

Standards of services deteriorate and become more expensive. Again this will affect women very strongly in particular.

### **The “65 Working Hours” Directive**

Still in the European Parliament. Will come into force in September 2008.

Is it meant to increase productivity or to reduce salaries?

### **The “Shame” Directive**

It only applies if there is a contract of employment and not to individuals or families. This is worse for women.

Support the European Manifest against the Directive. The feminist movement participates.

Need to fight the idea of EUROPE as a FORTRESS.

### **Flexicurity**

EU Commission June 2007: “Towards the common principles of Flexicurity: more and better employment through flexibility and security”.

Lisbon Treaty, December 2007: Flexicurity with an economy of knowledge for a “dynamic and prosperous” EU.

It means lower quality of employment and salaries, more precariousness. The weakest people suffer the consequences.

### **The necessary Alternative**

Equality before the Market. The State as a guarantee of salaries, pensions and public services in Europe.

Start an information and social awareness campaign among women to explain the meaning of this situation for us. Intensify all contacts within the European Feminist Movement.

### **Campaign against precariousness EL FEM**

Prevent the “65 hours” Directive from being approved.

October 7th Demonstration

October 25th Demonstration at 2pm in Brussels

To fight for another Treaty with the goal of a social Europe of Peace and Democracy.

change their own behaviour in the family and in intimate relationships.

The reasons for this cultural renaissance of patriarchal gender ideas were the following. In the first place was the rejection of state-enforced stereotypes, which, moreover, were in continual contradiction with women’s real dilemmas – the material problems of the family, arduous work, and the unbearable “double shift” of hired work and domestic labour. The problems of the consumer market in the USSR drained the strength of women above all. In addition, there were two more reasons for the rebirth of patriarchal ideas: the disproportion in the numerical relationship of the sexes that resulted from the Second World War, and the extremely harsh socio-economic conditions in which the emancipation occurred. Russian women simply had no choice; they found themselves not even consciously desiring freedom, when that freedom was imposed on them and turned into hard labour, in many cases accompanied by loneliness.

The shift to market mechanisms did not relieve the problems of Russian women, but exacerbated them. Occupational and economic discrimination grew stronger with the problems with the economy, with the fall in the number of jobs that were well paid (or which even paid more than the subsistence minimum), and with increased competition between workers in the labour market. The sharp reduction in the financing of social welfare brought increases in the cost of health care and education at all levels, affecting women most of all. It also turned out that the years of occupational emancipation of women had not made men completely equal partners in marriage; instead, men had been freed of moral responsibility for the material and social well-being of their families.

In post-Soviet Russia, the poverty and disempowerment of state-sector workers has been mainly a problem of women. In the USSR education, health care, social services and culture had already been extensively feminised. The marked decline of earnings and job prestige in these sectors thus affected women above all. It is perfectly justified to talk of economic discrimination against women in Russia. Statistical and sociological data show that in Russia, poverty is mainly a problem of women. Meanwhile, in 40 per cent of Russian families women are the main or sole breadwinners.

Many researchers in Russia have identified a crisis of the family. This crisis has appeared statistically in the growing divorce rate, declining number of marriages, huge number of abortions, and falling birth rate. Sociologists testify that women

obligatory. Workplace discrimination is evident in the fact that women are invariably forced into the lowest-paid job categories.

The changes enacted under socialism, in other words, gave women a whole set of formal political and social rights, but at the same time the actual policies that were implemented failed to ensure women their specific rights, especially those associated with their particular role in the reproductive process. Discussion of women's problems was forced onto the margins, becoming the province of specific women's movements that were totally subject to the official ideology. There was no broad consideration of such questions as the division of gender roles within the family, the equal responsibility of fathers for looking after children, the consequences of sexual freedom for women, the need to create a new culture of sexual relations, and so forth. Moreover, traditional and even patriarchal approaches to these questions gradually became established. Along with economic difficulties, the contradictory nature of social policy in the USSR presented an obstacle to the exercising by women of their rights in all areas of social life. The official ideology also evolved gradually in the direction of the traditional understanding of "femininity" and "masculinity". In one way and another, these stereotypes were supported and developed by the system of child-rearing and education. In the schools, training for work remained segregated, with girls learning housekeeping while boys were taught trades. It was also mainly girls who were involved in tidying up at school and performing domestic tasks at home.

Nevertheless, the social and economic changes that had led to the emancipation of women and to their participation in the social sphere of production proved irreversible. Women had been educated, had obtained qualifications, had acquired career ambitions, and were exercising their sexual freedom. But while society was ready to make use of women's professional knowledge and skills, it was not fully prepared to recognise their equal rights with men in all areas. Society did not accept women in leadership roles, and a woman's standing was linked not only to her professional and intellectual attributes, but also to her family status. Gender discrimination existed on the level of stereotypes in the areas of the workplace and professional life. In the areas of family and intimate personal relationships, extremely free and modern forms and rules of behaviour became combined with traditional stereotypes of the division of roles and responsibilities, in a manner extremely disadvantageous to women. In other words, men were ready to accept materially independent and sexually liberated women, but were not prepared to

## LITSA DOUDOUMI, EL-FEM, SYNASPISMOS (GREECE)

### **Consequences for women's rights in Eastern Europe of EU neo-liberal strategies**

In East European countries today it has become quite clear that the change from a planned economy to a market economy has to a considerable degree been effected at the expense of women. As the orientation towards the market has become more pronounced, differences between women and men from an earlier period have been reinvented and strengthened. The situation for women has deteriorated in terms of gainful employment and social security.

Unemployment amongst women is very high, above all amongst those over the age of forty. It is difficult to specify their number, since many of the women who have been out of work for long have withdrawn from the labour market and are no longer registered in the statistics.

Lack of opportunity and widespread poverty have led to great waves of migration, as we already know. Women generally come to Western Europe both by legal and illegal means. They do all sorts of work, house cleaning, child care, care of the elderly and disabled. They work in restaurants or in the entertainment industry, in any number of occupations. And for this they are paid completely inadequate wages, often accompanied by sexual harassment. Many of these women have left children behind to be looked after by grand-parents and do not see them for years.

More alarming, however, is another consequence of living without hope for the future in Eastern Europe, prostitution. Even today half a million women a year from Eastern Europe are trafficked and exploited in the prostitution business. Eastern-European women's networks define poverty and destitution as the reasons behind trafficking.

Amongst the women who do have a job, most of them work in the service sector or in social services in which pay is below subsistence level. In order to ensure the survival of their families, many women, even highly qualified, work in miserable and unhealthy conditions in textile, clothing and sport equipment industries. These are to a large extent feminised industries, 90% of employees being women.

The countries that have joined the European Union are undergoing so-called shock therapy. The worst forms of precarity and flexicurity are prevalent, privatization is being carried through everywhere, public assets and resources being

put up for sale. Think of it – how much does a woman earn working part time, when the legal minimum wage for an eight hour working day is 190 Euros (as in Poland). This is not Holland, this is hell.

The situation is even worse in Eastern European countries that are not members of the EU. There foreign firms do not need to worry about work place and safety legislation. They do not care about the environment. The minimum daily wage in Moldavia was in 2004 26 Euros, 80 in Serbia. Working hours can be up to 14 hours a day.

Work that remains unpaid is the rule and at times female workers are locked inside their factories in order to ensure the completion of an order. Sexual harassment, verbal abuse and humiliation are the order of the day. Under age 14-15 year olds work as unregistered employees. Anyone who joins a union gets kicked out.

There is also gender discrimination. The few men employed in these sectors are treated preferentially and are better paid.

In the countries that have become members of the EU or are waiting to join, many women still believe in the promises of their governments and of the EU that gender mainstreaming and policies of equal opportunity will improve their situation. We know, however, that these programmes only yield limited results, because of the lack of political commitment and the necessary financial resources. I am convinced, besides, that when the neo-liberal EU talks about equal opportunity for women, the result will inevitably be precarious and insecure living, poverty and social marginalisation.

In contrast, the multinational trade corporations and well known brand companies that control the production and trade in clothing in Eastern Europe, make huge profits. Puma doubled their profits in 2005 and Adidas beat their own 2004 record with a surplus of 314 million euros. Similar results can be seen for other enterprises such as C&A, Marks and Spencers, Carrefour etc.

In the prosperous parts of the EU, in the original 15 members, similar patterns of poverty can be observed as in the impoverished countries of the south. 60% of the working poor are women.

Eastern Europe is one of the regions in the world with a dramatically growing number of poor people.

This is the effect, amongst others, of the Lisbon strategy and of the world trade in textiles on the life of millions of women.

In order not only to survive, but to live a life in dignity, we must offer tough resistance and launch our own counteroffensive.

## **ANNA OCHKINA, IGSO (RUSSIA)**

### **Social policy in the context of neoliberal reforms and the rights of women in present-day Russia**

In the Soviet Union feminism was elevated to the status of official state policy, and ultimately, was destroyed as an ideology and a social movement. The dominant concept was one of a general, global equality; as a result, a separate movement for the rights of women simply could not exist. The feminist reference-points of Soviet social policy took the form of a set of rights for women: employment in the workforce on an equal basis with men; political rights; equality before the law, and so forth. The gaining of formal rights, however, resulted in the restricting of particular, specific rights of women, which in practice proved very difficult to realise.

The reproductive rights of women were recognised in actual social policy only in the 1970s, when extended maternity leave was introduced, and later when women were granted child-raising leave of up to one and a half years with pay and three years without. It was only quite recently, however, that the equal obligations and rights of parents in child care matters were spelt out in detail in the legislation. While these rights had been recognised long since in the formal sense, exercising them in practice had been almost impossible. Fathers were unable to take paid leave in the same way as mothers to look after sick or newborn children. Rights of both women and men were denied in the case of divorce. The divorce laws did not allow spouses to resolve in adequate fashion questions such as access to children and the fair division of property. Nor were there adequate provisions for securing justice in this regard. In other words, even bourgeois family law did not operate fully, and neither was there any guarantee that the justice possible within its bounds could be obtained.

Despite the official ideology, discrimination against women in the areas of work and politics remained in the USSR. In post-Soviet Russia, this discrimination was strengthened as a result of the universal breaching of labour laws and social entitlements. The dictatorship of the employer that operates in present-day Russia allows him or her to stipulate that newly-hired workers will not give birth during a certain period, or will not take paid time off to look after a sick child. In the new labour code all the provisions intended to help women combine careers and motherhood are subject to the discretion of the employer, and are no longer

life in general. But women are today free to come and go and men are also lonely, the system recreating itself out of the loneliness of individual people.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion is obvious. We must rally to organise the struggle against the slave agencies without delay in order to put an end to the ongoing depreciation in wages and working conditions in Greece as in the rest of Europe. We cannot afford to wait to alert workers in the countries concerned, help them to organise protests against the trafficking of the agencies, referring to codes of work of the respective countries, of the European Union and other international agreements. We must organize demonstrations in front of the agencies and write leaflets in several languages informing the workers of their rights. Greek trade unions must regain lost ground in relation to their employers. It cannot be possible that on an island as international as Santorini there is not a single union office to spread information on workers' rights and provide support when problems arise for people who are out there on their own. It is clear that change needs to be effected in Greek society as a whole, as a step towards stopping the decline in all of Europe.

Nor would it be amiss to inform the tourists themselves of the working conditions amongst those who provide holiday service so that they do not go around thinking that nothing has changed and all is well with the world. The tourist sector in Greece provides almost a caricature of how far down the road of ultra-liberal deregulation Europeans have gone. Westerners are obliged to be consumers of mass tourism of a type they previously rejected. They must bow before the superior numbers of Russian tourists, because the spending power of the Western middle classes is not what it used to be, something of which the Greek entrepreneurs are well aware. Besides, this mass tourism can only be maintained by means of mass slave labour from the most recent EU member states. The poor working conditions of these workers put pressure on local wages, as well as on western workers who nowadays have to go where the jobs are located. So the way western middle class people spend their holidays makes them contribute towards the decline in their own situation. It is imperative to stop this downwards spiral and rebuild a European Union that cares about the well-being of its citizens instead of promoting the interests of the international capitalist elite.

*Please observe: this text has been shortened. The speech is also available in French and German on the website [wtde.wordpress.com](http://wtde.wordpress.com)*

## **MONIKA KARBOWSKA, POLAND, IFE-EFI (FRANCE)**

### **Work, capitalism and migration on the Greek islands – a travelogue**

#### **My reasons for travelling**

I have visited Greece regularly during the past ten years as a tourist, having fallen in love with its beauty, but also being interested in its language and prestigious past, as well as in contemporary society and politics. I was also in Athens for the ESF 2006.

This year I decided to work in Greece and despite the fact that I was aware of the reverse side of the tourist facade, I was far from imagining the extreme violence of human relationships in a society completely overtaken by ultra-liberal values of power, money and consumerism. Greece has retained an image of being a country where maybe the level of income was lower than in western Europe, but that this was compensated by a quality of life and of human relations not to be found elsewhere. What I experienced as I looked for work, however, was a society falling apart, composed of individuals fighting for themselves, shady nationalism making them hostile to all foreigners, wherever they came from.

It struck me how migration for the tourist season plays an important part in the creation of a large class of small private businesses that forms the social and political core of the Nea Demokratia, the conservative party. They work partly for tourism, but also provide services for the upper middle classes. As far as tourism goes, they own restaurants, hotels, tourist agencies, boats and coaches, trucks for delivery, shops and small production units for local food products. They could not flourish without access to cheap labour, people working under slave-like conditions, mainly originating from the eastern European countries, whether EU or non-EU members.

#### **Negotiations with TUI**

I knew from previous contacts and experience that it would not be too difficult

to find work for the tourist season in Greece. I had just negotiated a contract for a job on the magnificent island of Santorini with the big German tourist agency TUI, even though I did not find the prospect of 600 Euros net a month, plus a commission on boat trips, particularly attractive. So I asked for a room, meals and one day off a week. With no answer from the TUI, I soon found myself replaced by an English girl who had found the offer quite in order, as indeed, it appeared to be from the point of view of a Greek or even other West Europeans, as I found out later. I could not understand how people could make ends meet with rents at 300 Euros minimum and meals expensive in the smallest taverna. But this was not the end of surprises in store for me.

### **Amorgos**

I then arrived in Amorgos. When offered a job in a supermarket where conditions were 30 Euros for a 14-hour working day without any day off, breaks to be spent in the neon-lighted premises without windows, I began to wonder if there existed such a thing as a code of work, a normal 8 hour working day, compulsory breaks, necessary working conditions guaranteed by BIT and consequently included in EU anti-discrimination directives. Impossible to pay for a room and eat out on 30 Euros a day.

### **The "Grand Bleu".**

The following morning I was offered employment in the famous café on the island named after the film of Luc Besson who had stayed there with his film team in the eighties, thus making this island known to the world. This was considered an honour, but I had already noticed a waitress, from Slovakia as I later learned, who stayed on the job from nine till 2 o'clock in the morning. I was supposed to clean hotels rooms "at a high standard" in a new concrete building next door destined for influential guests, 30 Euros for a 12 hour working day. My employer was expecting a Slovakian girl who had not arrived as promised by the agency, therefore I was needed. I was offered a trial period. What made me flee after a single day's work was partly my employer's snobbish and unfair attitude towards the guests which dictated the standard of cleaning according to the status of the guests.

No one asked themselves if their employees might have other qualifications to offer. No, I was just a kind of domestic animal expected to carry out menial tasks, like the young Slovakian girl, who it turned out could speak five languages and

hear English. It is up to them, according to their employers, to adapt and learn what they need of Greek, quite a difficult language to master. When we had the meeting with the employers to reach an understanding, we were able, however, to use English to our own advantage. But so many Greek employers just see tourists as people who have come to enjoy the sun and take pictures, ignoring the fact that most tourists are middle class educated people with an interest in the problems of the island such as the supply of water and energy, fires, storms and shipwrecks like the Sea Diamond that sank in Santorini harbour in April last year.

The lack of friendship leads to loneliness, loneliness in turn invites dependence on different protectors: the number of men who wanted sexual relations with me was quite astounding. My landlord, for example, kept on insisting in a way which anywhere else would be called sexual harassment. I finally gained his respect and was left in peace when I succeeded in obtaining the pay from my employer that was my due. I had to struggle to achieve this, using strategies such as talking widely about his tightfistedness, contacting unions and left parties. In the end the police intervened and forced him to pay. I heard that even the captain of our boat who was both a union member and an islander with experience had had similar problems. The only effective measure that could have made any difference in such circumstances would be a strike in mid-season.

Beyond the issue of wages, the loneliness and ubiquitous presence of ultra-liberal values focused on making and spending money, tend to lead to the commercialising of all human relationships. The family becomes sacred, but foreign workers do not have one, at least not where they are. So sexual relations become the last resort for hopes of finding company and support, but even here money perverts relationships. In Santorini as in most parts of Greece a man can buy a Russian, or Moldavian or Ukrainian woman for the modest sum of 50 Euros in brothels that may be discreet but are generally known, mainly frequented by native Greeks or foreign workers. There they are provided with sexual services that they later find normal to expect from other "free" women, for the price of a meal or a cinema ticket maybe. In their case feminine sexuality thus becomes a cheap commodity.

Also pornography renews patterns of dominance between male and female. So a woman can go along with a sexual relationship and accept dependency on these new terms or find herself alone facing the tough demands of work and of social

## **Competition from the East**

Two factors are particularly significant for the life lived by this new type of migrant worker: loneliness and pressure from Eastern European competition. My employer did not hesitate to say that next year he would employ a Polish or a Slovakian girl who would be able to speak three languages, work for 600 Euros a month and cause no further problems. He would provide her with a book on Santorini so she could start work on arrival. (He could have problems, however, with his own islanders, who are also interested in jobs). I heard of one employer who at the end of the summer told his employee that it had been a poor season and so paid her only 700 Euros instead of 800. The following year he would pay a maximum of six for employees with high qualifications. Thus work is gradually being devalued in Greece. The only way seasonal employees on Santorini could counter this development was by hiring themselves out to all the different agencies on the island, one in the morning, a different one in the afternoon or evening. But at the end of the day you are on your own, no one shows solidarity, because no one wants to find him-or herself in the bad books of the employers. They, on the other hand, stick together, being the former farmers and fishermen of the island who now have become rich through the tourist trade.

## **The issue of language and social ties**

What with the absence of trade unions, of any institution concerned with social issues or parties to the left, feudal and patriarchal relationships are easily resurrected. Who will help me if my employer refuses to pay me? Those who rely on my wages, my landlord, for example, is the answer. Thus migrant workers come to be dependent on others and the risk of abuse is directly connected with their loneliness, despite the thousands of tourists surrounding them. On Santorini no one really talks about anything serious with a foreign worker or with a tourist. One never talks politics, or environmental problems, or social life or the history of the island. An islander is encased in a narrow nationalism, uninterested in a foreigner or how he perceives Greece and its history, even though many tourists have been coming to Greece for years and might even speak Greek. It even annoys the Greeks themselves when as tourists in their own country they are addressed in English.

The language issue is not unimportant since it touches on how social relations are built in this country divided between conservative feudalism and unbridled capitalism. In fact, workers behind restaurant and hotel walls do not usually even

was far superior in intelligence and culture to her employers. She felt exploited, above all, underestimated and despised and was exhausted from her long working hours without days of rest. To leave was an option that might make her indebted to the agency who had conveyed her in the first place, in accordance with the pattern adopted by those who traffic prostitutes. She did not know. She had only heard of groups of the same nationality, who could support each other, moving on to find better conditions of work. To go on strike never occurred to this young woman, a pure product of the last twenty years of the cruel ultra-liberal systems in our countries of origin.

To have the employees at hand like an inanimate object, lies at the base of this aggressive type of lower middle class on the make. Asked when the working day was at an end, the answer was – there is always work to do. You stay at the hotel – you can water the garden when the rooms are cleaned. It's up to you to do your best now we have given you a job. Not if I could help it for 30 Euros a day. I was given my 30 Euros and left.

## **Recruitment agencies in Poland and Greece**

Looking for further employment I was offered a cleaning job in Mykonos, 12 rooms to clean for 800 Euros a month, which I calculated would mean 15 hours a day without any days off. So I declined this tantalising offer, an example of what is offered people like me arriving without a contract from an agency in Eastern Europe, of which there are so many. The Polish media are full of offers of work abroad, encouraged by the government of the Kaczynscy brothers. Fewer unemployed in Poland means fewer problems, while the 3 million Poles who have left their country the past two years get no help whatsoever from Polish consulates abroad, apart from the one in Britain.

## **The slave drivers of Santorini**

Since I was advised to go to Santorini, I set off for the island where I had spent magic times eight years ago and returned to four years ago. I knew that under the influence of mass tourism this peaceful island had been transformed into a tourist factory. The contrast between the beauty of the volcano and the fact of the exploitation of the island disheartened me. The hotel I had stayed at, once a quiet little jewel nestling among the vineyards, was now surrounded by hideous half completed concrete buildings. During my first visit local Greeks or Greek nationals were in charge of the tourists industry. Working conditions were tough,

but offered a three hour break per day and the atmosphere was friendly, the hotel owner treating employees as equals. Four years ago a Polish woman was in charge, who was allowed the freedom of going to church on Sundays and meeting up with other Poles. Today Romanians and Albanians run the hotel, the cleaner being a cultivated Albanian, also exhausted, who was well aware of being exploited. East Europeans are employed all over the island, in shops and restaurants, as well as at harvest time.

I found three Polish girls working in a newly constructed hotel with a magnificent view over the volcano. They did all the work, cleaning and cooking with the aid of Albanians. They did nothing but work from eight in the morning till two o'clock at night, with a two hour break in the afternoon. They were tired, but resigned, considering their 800 Euros a month very good pay. Since they had never been to the beach, I promised to take them there. When I arrived on my scooter to fetch one of them the following afternoon, her break had been cancelled, her employer suspecting I might be a journalist, talking and writing notes. The next day they were not even allowed to leave the hotel to make their phone calls home. They were afraid, suggesting also that they were being sexually harassed. What more is there to be said? Where are we living? In the European Union of the 21st century or in times of slavery at the beginning of the 19th? How come the nearest Greek trade union office is in Athens?

### **The migrants from the West**

I understood then that the main difference, qualitatively speaking, between a normal emigrant who is a respected human being, in spite of being exploited, and a slave from the East or the South, lies not in the wages, but in being granted the blessing of time to rest. Time off, preferably a full day, allows one not only to recover from fatigue, but also to live, to create relationships with other human beings, if needs be to organise and to defend oneself. At the end of the day that was the chief difference between the West Europeans together with whom I finally spent a month working and the sub-humans from the East. It is the absence of a day of rest that prevents the Greeks employed in the tourist business from organising effectively against the import of semi-slaves from Eastern Europe. How the pressure of this Bolkenstein import puts a downwards press on wages I was to learn in my new job.

On my third day on the island I was employed by a local agent as a guide in three languages, German, French and Polish, sent on a day excursion to learn the

job and started work. I guided tourists who mainly came for the day from Crete, the trips organised by the owners of the ferry company. Thousands of tourists crossed an often choppy sea, arriving at Santorini seasick and unhappy. Further trips were organised up the volcano, several hundreds at a time, mostly Russians. It was up to us local guides to deal with every situation without any form of training or support from the local employers.

I was thus quickly integrated into the working community of Europeans from Western as well as Eastern Europe. The difference was that westerners worked an eight hour day, whereas the East Europeans often worked between twelve and fifteen hours for the same wage, that is 40- 60 Euros a day. Employment was on a daily basis, the employer calling the evening before to book for the following day. Those of us without contracts were not paid for the days when our services were not needed for various reasons. Not having the support of a union, I only managed to negotiate 40 Euros a day, when locals were paid 50. The competition between the workers and their individualism was meticulously maintained by the employers, even though we badly needed each other's support, especially at the beginning, for example to borrow a book on the island in order to do our job better. Towards the end of the season we nevertheless managed to gather quite a crowd of different nationalities working on Santorini at a taverna where an agreement was reached that guides bringing clients to a tavern would get a free meal, or even a commission if bringing a coachful, an important addition to our meagre wages. Together with personal contacts with individual tourists, these common meals were my best memories from the island.

We did succeed in putting some pressure on our employers. We were all people with experience of working in western companies and some of us were beginning to develop a strong anti-Greek mind-set, even speaking of the Santorinians as "donkeys who have progressed from the stable to luxury cars", thinking that all of Greece was tainted by this greedy mentality excluding the outside world. When chaos peaked in the Santorini harbour because of the thousands of tourists embarking and disembarking every day, the employer's son called a meeting. We demanded to be treated more fairly and to be better informed. After some bargaining a compromise was reached whereby our right to commission in the restaurants was recognised and how tips on the coach were to be shared with the drivers was regulated.