

Women Step Forward

ONE of the most novel aspects of Grenada's post-Revolution progress and one which goes a long way towards guaranteeing the success of the country's ambitious programme of social reforms, is its wholehearted involvement of women in all spheres of the rebuilding process.

To facilitate this harnessing of an often overlooked energy source, the Administration has created a special department of the Ministry of Social Affairs with the responsibility of encouraging women's participation and sex equality, and sanctioned the setting up of a National Women's Organisation which, with almost fifty groups, is one of the island's fastest-growing institutions.

Phyllis Coard, wife of Finance Minister Bernard Coard, is both Government Secretary for Women's Affairs (a post equal to Deputy Minister) and President of the National Women's Organisation. She told Caribbean Times of the outstanding success of Grenada's 'Step Forward Women' campaign.

"The National Women's Organisation now has about 1,500 members with groups in nearly half of all our villages. That is 46 groups throughout the country - a very large, dynamic and vibrant organisation of women who are definitely stepping.

"In all areas we find women - whether through the groups or not - going forward into the literacy campaign at the Centre for Popular Education (CPE), joining the militia along with the men and entering many other fields where women have not made a contribution in the past such as fishing, welding and furniture-making. "Our viewpoint is that

freedom for both men and women means that no job must by definition be a man's job or a women's job. Men can be cooks or chefs and women can be carpenters - it's a limitation on a person's freedom to debar them from a particular job on the grounds of sex when they may be very good at it. "I feel that we haven't really learned yet what a woman is truly capable of and we never will until we try. There is even an additional benefit when a woman does a job that has traditionally been done by men because it liberates her psychologically and given her a whole new confidence. Our attitude at this time is that women should dare everything, try everything.

"It should be said perhaps that in Grenada we see women's liberation rather differently than in, say, North America where it has more to do with independence. Here the liberation of women is no different from the liberation of farmers from exploitation or youth from unemployment or children from lack of education. In other words, we view all liberation as part of the total liberation of society. Therefore we both help other groups to gain their liberation and receive help from others, including male groups, in achieving ours."

Phyllis' co-worker Shahiba Strachan endorsed her views, adding: "We want to feel independent in the sense that we are making a contribution to the development and liberation of our country, not just to be free to do as we want as women."

Winning over the sisters to the cause of a brave new united Grenada became a relatively simple task once it was realised that the Government really meant business on the women's rights issue. Such measures as the introduction of maternity benefit and equal pay earned the eternal gratitude (and support) of women who, according to the tradition which prevailed right up to the time of the Revolution, had been forever deprived and exploited. As another of Phyllis' colleagues, Rita commented: "I believe the

PRG has always had a policy of equal opportunity for women. They've always made the women of the country feel a part of what they're doing."

In the vital area of health care also, the sisters were full of praise for the progress made. Said Phyllis: "The improvement of health care is another of the major achievements, not only for women but for children too. The tremendous stepping up of the number of doctors in the island to about thirty-seven is a great step forward.

"In the past many women who were will had no means to get better simply because they couldn't afford to go and see a doctor. They were prevented from playing an equal role in the society because they were at home sick when they could have been out working, attending community meetings or helping with the building of their local community. They spent their time worrying about their own or their children's health because as anyone with five children can tell you it seems that at least one of them is always sick. Women were always running from one worry to the next, whereas now all they have to do is go down the road to see the doctor and it doesn't cost them a cent. That is a major liberation for women.

"In fact all organisations in the country have made tremendous strides. For example, ten sisters who had never worked before in their lives are now building a bakery in the village of Bylands in St. Andrews. They've got a loan from the Co-operative Development Agency; they've got technical assistance and they're going to own their own business.

"The fact that we're building a strong women's movement is not just to bring women forward but to build a revolutionary democracy in Grenada."



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