



ARGENTINA

Meeting and Fraternity Fete of Peasant Women and Women Working in  
the Countryside..... 25th/27th May, Rosario.

Introduction

In number 7 of the Information Bulletin, we gave a report on the First Meeting and Fraternity Fete of Peasant Women and Women Working in the Countryside of Argentina which took place from 25th to 27th May, in Rosario, Santa Fe Province.

In the Report we described the preparatory work, the programmes, the work of the meeting and the resolutions passed there.

Because of the great importance of the problems raised and stressed at the meeting, we present some extracts from the most important speeches in this supplement to Bulletin No. 7.

They will give some idea of the fashion in which the peasant women described their problems in the simple language of workers, mothers and women of the most exploited and backward categories. We have arranged them according to the subject with which they deal and so sometimes the same speech is quoted more than once.

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Great individual ownership of land.... expulsion from the land.... the exodus.

We have very often said that the great individual ownership of land is the barrier in front of the well-being, progress and security not only of the peasant population but of the whole country.

The delegate from Mendoza gave a few statistics from her region: "The delegates from our province come from San Martin, San Rafael and Maipu, districts which are very important as far as vine-growing is concerned.

"San Rafael comes first with 27,513 hectares of vineyards; then Maipu with 26,800, and lastly San Martin with 17,975.

"In addition, they are the principle producers of tomatoes, peppers and different fruits.

"In the province of Mendoza, most estates especially the vineyards, belong to small and middle landowners. In fact out of the 19,232 vineyard owners, 17,800 own from one to twenty-five hectares, and 990 own from twenty-six to 4,500 hectares. That means that from the point of view of numbers the small and middle landowners are in the majority.

"But if we compare the number of hectares that they possess with the number that the big landowners possess we can see very well in whose hands the greatest part of the land lies.

"17,800 small and middle landowners (let us take as the limit twenty-five hectares taking into account the price of the vineyards - 1 hectare is worth about 40,000 pesos, which means about one million for twenty-five hectares) possess altogether 75,000 hectares.

"990 big estates cover 55,000 hectares! (To mention only a few.... the "Arizu" monopoly - 5,000 hectares, cost 200 million pesos; "Gargantini", "Escorihuela", "Gabriel y Baldini", "Furlotti", "La Superiora", "La Vasconia", "El Globo", etc.... each cover more than 1,000 hectares and cost forty and fifty million and even more).

"It is unnecessary to add that if the small landowners are the greatest in number it is however the big landowners - also big wine monopolies, the majority of which are concerns run by foreign capital - who monopolise the production and preparation of wines and dominate the situation. That means that it is they who direct the economic life of the province imposing the prices and conditions that they want ..."

Let us add that Mendoza is one of the provinces where the land is most divided. The problem of owned land is terrible all over the country; this is what makes a national economy which could be very rich look poverty-stricken and precarious. In the province of Buenos Aires, where land is greatly exploited, one single landowner possesses more than 500,000 hectares.

One of these monopolies is "La Forestal" which covers 1,600,000 hectares. Present at the meeting were many women from villages of Santa Fe, victims of the ruin and exploitation brought by this monopoly. At the opening session, the delegate from Villa Guillermina said: "... We live in poverty because of "La Forestal". After having pitilessly exploited us for fifty years, it has driven seven to eight thousand people to starvation and poverty...

"It has devastated the whole of the north of Santa Fe. Villages: disappeared, ports were dismantled... it is lamentable to see under-nourished children selling lamps, cutlery, pots and pans so as to be able to buy a piece of bread... it is terrible to see whole families on the move to other provinces at the time of the cotton and sugar harvests.

"... 'La Forestal' took away railways, electric and telephone lines. After having filled its pockets it left us hungry and without work. We want sugar cane to be cultivated in our region. We want works to be made into sugar refineries. "La Forestal" says that our land is worth nothing; it does not want it to be worked...

(14)

"Our youth is the prey of corruption. Women live alone; husbands go off to look for work and homes break up. What is at fault? "La Forestal"."

Speeches like this were heard from the first day of the meeting. The hated name of "La Forestal" was uttered dozens of times; thousands of examples of desolation through deaths caused by this land and industrial concern were quoted.

The delegate from Villa Ana said: "... Now that "La Forestal" has decided to close its doors, the situation is still worse. It has exploited our wealth for the last fifty years in an unreasonable way; it has exploited the inhabitants, giving them wages on which they starve and creating inhuman living and working conditions. Then it had no scruples in thrusting thousands of families into poverty and famine so as once more to create conditions for making enormous wealth.

"... Our villages are becoming depopulated. People are going off in search of work. We, the remaining families, who are rooted down by love of the land, are in a dreadful state of poverty; we have no roof over our heads, no bread and we wander on the roads...."

"I want to tell you the dreadful story of one of these families. The father was sacked by "La Forestal", and the family, driven by hunger, went to pick cotton in the near plantations. To save a few pesos they drank water from the furrows in the fields. The water contained a poisonous fertiliser and five members of the family were poisoned. A little girl of three years died.

"We hold "La Forestal", a foreign, imperialist and criminal concern responsible for this death. We ask our sisters to help us to free ourselves from this yoke..."

"Let the big landowners be dispossessed of their land and let it be distributed among the peasants who have very little, and agricultural workers. We want to cultivate this land, make it fertile so as to create resources to build up new industries...."

The delegates of Cordoba also spoke of their worries on the subject of the distribution of the land. A peasant woman from Camp Anchora said: "We are the families of farmers and share-croppers of Camp Anchora, an estate twenty-five miles west of Rio Cuarto. This big estate covers 50,000 hectares and employs 157 families. But it does not rent any more than 100 hectares to each family, which means that 70 per cent of the land is not cultivated.

"Take my case for example. We are share-croppers of ninety-six hectares and in spite of the great need to cultivate more land so as to help us in our difficulties, the concern does not want to rent us a single inch of the 2,000 hectares which stretch around ~~the~~ fields. This fallow land is covered with weeds, insects and parasites which destroyed our oat harvest last year..."

One of the consequences of owned land is expulsion from the land. The delegate quoted above, putting forward some solution said: "If the land belonged to us then we would be more attached to it and we would not work in fear of expulsion - a threat which weighs heavily on 110 families of the 147 living in Campo Anchorena..."

Here is the whole speech of a delegate from Teodelina which briefly sums up what most of the delegates said: "I am a peasant woman from Teodelina, in the south of the Province Santa Fe. All the land owned in our region belongs to big landowners. Miles and miles of land are in the hands of two or three landowners.

"And as for us, we cultivate the land of others. We have never even had the slightest bit, and our situation is typical of the majority of Argentinian peasants. In our country, more than 200,000 families are cultivating land which does not belong to them.

"We all live under the threat of being expelled. I want to say at this meeting that more than 5,000 peasant families have had their notice. By the law on "free agreement" the landowners claim to be authorised to increase the farming tax higher than we can pay. Either we pay or are thrown out!

"Dear friends, I want to speak above all about the land; it is difficult to understand how we, the producers from one day to another live in eternal fear of finding ourselves on the road.

"I want to raise my voice with all my strength and say: Land! Land! for our children, for the agricultural workers who want to cultivate it.

"Argentina is big and rich. How can it be explained that there are so many hectares which are not cultivated and so many peasants without land?

"We have noticed with great emotion that the Argentinian Agrarian Federation the biggest peasant organisation, has appealed to peasants to unite. Let us join forces with our husbands, our sons and our brothers! Let women and mothers of the countryside have their place in this organisation also!

"We shall have the land if we fight for it, if we unite, if we demand it. We shall put an end to expulsions if we unite, if we oppose them, even by force if that becomes necessary.

"On behalf of the peasant women of Teodolina, I thank you for this meeting."

Great estates spread poverty, calamities and insecurity and destroy peasant families. Moving from one region to another goes on and on. Those who tread the roads look for work for they have no working contract. They go from one estate to another offering their labour. All the delegates spoke of this, but especially those of Santiago des Estero. Here is what a delegate from La Banda said:

"... I do not want to omit the description of the picture which anyone passing the station can see - whole families sleeping in places reserved for vehicles. These people are leaving for Tucuman, for the sugar can harvest, and are sleeping outside in the cold waiting for the arrival of the morning train. These poor people who should not have to abandon their homes are going because there is no work..."

The delegate from Nueva Francia said:

"... Our families live in expectation of the harvests in Tucuman, Santa Fe, Chaco and Santiago. Our husbands and our children of over 13 years go to these harvests. Sometimes even the smallest go to help the others. We do not see them until five or more months later. Sometimes they go without knowing where and months pass without news of them..."

Poverty..... precarious living and working conditions.....

Knowing something of the situation in the Argentine countryside from this brief description we can hardly be surprised that the delegates so forcefully exposed the poverty and the precarious working conditions of peasant women and women working in the countryside.

The delegate who gave information on the situation in the north of the province of Cordoba, based herself on scientific study when she said: "Everyone is noticing, and it is about time, that the race is weakening day by day; that the inhabitants of the provinces affected by famine are degenerating; that their strength is diminishing; that if two-thirds of the youth are considered not healthy enough for military service then they are also not much good for the physical effort that civil work requires; that a race of invalids is being created which will be a terrible burden to the economy of the country."

Speaking of the results of the investigation made into conditions in her province, the delegate from San Martin (Mendoza) added: "To give you some idea of the grief of the women who work in the vineyards, I want to tell you of the case of a mother of two little girls, one of nine months and the other of two years. She had to work to feed them and whilst she worked she left them to the care of her ten year old nephew who took care of them and fed them.

"Although living in an entirely farming region those little girls had not had a drop of milk since they were weaned; they only drank boiled "mate".

"After a serious illness they need special treatment and vitamins, milk and fruit; their lives are in danger. And here is the tragedy.... this poor woman has work for only a few months in the year and earns only nineteen to twenty-two pesos a day; how can she possibly pay for such treatment when a litre of milk costs 2.30 and a kilo of apples 5.50?"

The delegate from La Banda described the life of a farmer's wife in Santiago del Estero.... "First of all the house. After that the work with her family in the fields either sowing or bringing in the harvest. Then at night she must go to the town so as to be able to sell her produce early the next morning. In summer she arrives about midnight and sleeps wherever she can so as to find a place to sell her wares the following morning. The heat is more than forty degrees. Often mothers poison their babies because their milk is too warm.

In winter it is heart-breaking to see her at the market, her baby sitting on a cover on the ground and a little fire by his side so that he will not suffer too much from the morning cold.

That is the life of peasant women. The years pass and they never have any spare time, distractions or joys.... The problem is becoming worse due to the fact that at the new market in our town there are wholesalers who take our produce for whatever price they wish...."

A cotton picker from the Chace region: "I am a cotton picker. I have not earned anything since the last harvest, the wage being six pesos the kilo. What can one do to feed and clothe seven children and buy them footwear when a pair of sandals cost 7.50?"

"When it rains weeks pass without work. Sometimes we work only one or two days in the week. But we have to eat every day. We lay out 100 pesos a week for the whole family to live on but this is not enough to feed children!

"We have no land, we have nothing; we do not know what happiness is. My children do not know what fruit is.

"When there is work twenty people live in the same room which is about 4x4 metres in size. There are children and adults, young boys and girls... how can our children be educated?"

"We have absolutely nothing. We, the Argentinian pickers, demand land where we can settle, we demand more pay for every ten kilos of cotton.

"We outcasts, the 'Indians' as they call us, have no right to the smallest part of land. When we have no work we are forbidden to go down to the villages. Luckily our country has some beautiful mountains from which they cannot drive us.

"I demand the government to help the children of the countryside, help the mothers, creators of all the wealth of our country.

"I am happy to be with you; I am happy to know the Union of Argentinian Women, this great friend. Before April 28th I did not know what to do to improve our situation, but now I know that we are not alone. We have the U.A.W. who is teaching us how to fight....

"We need tools. One cannot plough with finger nails and spades. I go from one hamlet to another; I speak with poor people and tell them: LET US BE BRAVE, LET US FIGHT, LET US MOTHERS FIGHT AND WE SHALL BE ABLE TO LIVE BETTER..."

(On April 28th a preparatory meeting for the national meeting was held; this woman came after having read a leaflet. To come she had to use flooded roads. A police patrol stopped her and so that she could continue on her way she said that she urgently required to call the doctor.)

The delegate from Tres Portenas (Mendoza) exposed dreadful working conditions. "We work like beasts of burden from dawn to dusk. We do the work of men so as to earn a hunk of bread for our children. Work in the vineyards is too hard for women. We must dig fifteen to twenty furrows or ditches each day. What would you say of a grape-gatherer who had to carry 70 to 100 baskets of grapes for an average distance of 150 metres? Then after this back-breaking work, household tasks are to be done in the evening..."

The women workers of different regions spoke and gave facts which were similar. For instance, the delegate from Pajas Blancas (Cordoba) said: "We milkmaids have to bear all the rigours of winter for we have to milk the cows in the open air because there are no milking sheds. We are not the owners so we have not the right to build milking sheds. But the squire - he is always warm and comfortable - does not bother to do it..."

Speaking about women working in the rice-fields, the delegate from Corrientes added: "During the rice harvest they must work with water up to the ankles, and when it rains, up to the knees. The dampness eats into the skin of the fingers and the legs are gashed by rice stems which are left in the furrows. After that the binding and grinding has to be done. All that has to be done for 423.40 pesos. Working from dawn to dusk we manage to cover five hectares in eight or ten days. We cannot do more, so we have to live throughout the whole year with 1,600 pesos..." (This sum is insufficient for one month's livelihood).

In addition to the primitive working conditions there is the very low selling prices of produce.... "There is no fixed selling price for our products. Last year we were not able to sell our harvest of oranges even at ten pesos for a thousand..." said a delegate from Misiones.

We must add that at the height of the season in town, this fruit costs more than two pesos a kilo for those of an inferior quality - six pesos for those of the best quality.

This is what a peasant woman from Villa Maria said: "... Suffering is unending. We are not even paid the amount our work is worth; irrigation, seeds and daily care - all this is not repaid by the price of the wholesaler. We need a market so as to be able to live better. Peasants go off with their carts full and come back with them full because they will not give the fruits of their labour for nothing..."

"I work with my husband and leave my children by themselves for we cannot pay a daily help. But what good does it do? The more we work, the lower the prices paid to us by the wholesalers. However, they sell our produce in the towns at a higher price every day."

The situation of the cattle breeders is very much the same. Only the big breeders can sell because of their connections with the refrigerating societies.

A delegate from Elortondo reported: "The difficult situation facing cultivators is also facing breeders, that is small breeders. Many bought animals two years ago on a bank loan. Today they have to sell these animals and what they have bred in the last two years without paying their debts. The cattle bought two years ago for 1,000 pesos the head is today being sold for less than 500 pesos. From this one would think that the price of meat had fallen, but no, on the contrary, it has risen..."

It should be noticed how these women fully understand the problem..... low prices for the producer and high prices for the public. This shows clearly the evil committed by the wholesalers, the refrigerating societies, the millers, etc.

The insufficiency of road networks... the high cost of transport....

One of the problems affecting the Argentinian countryside is the insufficiency of the road networks, the railway networks and the high cost of transport.

Another delegate from Elortondo declared: "We need roads. In my part of the country when four drops of water fall, the road from the village to the national road 33 is turned into a marsh. Transport of our produce is impossible and what is even worse is that if someone falls seriously ill, he cannot be driven to Venado Tuerto, the only centre where there are doctors for miles and miles.

"You ought to know that our region has the most fertile land of the whole country. The road and hospital which we need could be built by means of a special tax on the big landowners...."

A peasant woman from Colonia Dora (Cordoba): "The year when we had abundant rain to help us in our work, giving us the long awaited good harvest, our hopes were shattered by the lack of trucks to transport our produce to markets where the consumer pays quite a lot. For instance we must sell our hay to the middleman at four or five pesos per bale; he, somehow or other, hires trucks and transports it to Buenos Aires where he resells it at 30 pesos per bale."

Insufficient Irrigation.....

The insufficiency of irrigation in regions crossed by big rivers is a sad irony from which the peasants suffer greatly. A delegate from Entre Rios said: "... It is absolutely necessary to start fulfilling the plan for the construction of a hydro-electric station in Salto Grande. This would be a source of employment and would mean great progress for our agriculture, our peasants and agricultural workers. It would mean progress not only for our province, but also for the provinces of Corrientes, Santa Fe and all the towns on the borders of Uruguay..."

The delegates from Santiago del Estero, one of the provinces most affected by the lack of water, said: "... The government constructed a little dam to irrigate the region of Nueva Francia. But in spite of this the problem is not solved for us. The water flows for four or five kilometres before reaching us quite muddy and for this we must pay 50 pesos annually; over and above this, when men are not there, <sup>we have</sup> to volunteer to clean the little pool, otherwise the supply of water is cut..."

The delegates from Guasayan added: "... The water problem deserves particular attention. It is a problem concerning the whole of the Santiago del Estero countryside, a region with very few wells containing drinking water. The principal sources of water are from streams. That is where men and animals drink..."

At Cordoba, the situation is not any better.... "For years we have been saying that in the North East of Cordoba there are many people who are victims of hunger and thirst on the banks of a swift river. The project for a dam at Pichnas was studied and was settled a long time ago; funds were also granted. It was the radical solution to the problem, the sole, rational and logical solution. Everything has been ready for years, but construction has not yet begun, nor have the canals of the Cruz del Eje been begun, although this also is an all-important question for the inhabitants of this region..."



And in Mendoza: "... Because of its climate and its great possibilities of having water for irrigation purposes, Mendoza could be a province of immense wealth. But only two per cent of its surface is cultivated. They say that there is no other land improved because of the lack of water. Water? There is too much at Mendoza. What is lacking is the means of putting it into use: dams, canals, embankments, and in general all that is necessary to avoid loss of water..."

In Valla Atuel: "In some villages there are families who have no drinking water. They have to walk two to three kilometres to fetch water in buckets or pitchers..."

Housing accomodation... sanitary conditions... education....

Housing accommodation is worse than bad. All the delegates told of the "ranchos", the out-houses and huts in which agricultural workers and farmers live. For example here is what the delegate from Villa Atuel (MENDOZA) said about the big wine-growing estates:

"... The landowners have collective dwellings for daily agricultural workers. "ranchos" which were built more than thirty years ago, half destroyed and falling to pieces when a little rain falls. There are no baths, no running water, not even a common water pump for the sake of hygiene..."

Sanitary assistance is almost non-existent in most of the peasant regions. On this subject the delegate from Tres Portenas said: "They may say that there is a first-aid station, but in reality there is no such thing. What we do have is a simple little room which is opened for four hours in the week. Medicines have to be bought. In our region we have almost 4,500 workers with their families, most of them agricultural workers, and we have not even maternity clinics! The nearest hospital is thirty kilometres away and transport in an ambulance costs 30 pesos."

The delegate from Santiago del Estero: "We have a room for first aid. People come from a radius of 8 to 10 miles, some carrying sick people in their arms. But most of them go back home without having seen the doctor or nurse because it was closed before their turn came. We have no special ward for the birth of our children; our children are born in the "rancho", and we are assisted by one or another of the old women from the village - our lives are in danger. The doctor for the whole region comes from a town 70 kilometres away..."

The delegate from Clorinda: "We have no midwives. There is a hospital with 22 beds for 7,000 inhabitants; there is only one doctor; women give birth to their children with the help of an unqualified nurse. There is of course, a maternity clinic in Formosa, an important town, but this one has to be paid for. So women bring their children into the world by the grace of God..."

Here is part of the dramatic letter sent by a woman working in the "La Bovril" concern, Calchaqui (Santa Fe province)....

"There is no medical assistance nor midwife. We give birth to our children under the trees like animals.

"When the owner sack<sup>ed</sup> us, we <sup>began to</sup> wander over the countryside looking for work. Finding nothing I went from house to house begging for bread for my children crying with hunger. Some gave me stale bread, others said... 'Tell your husband to work'... where can one find work? There is none....

"Worn out with walking and tired of hearing these words I went to the station to spend the night there. At eight o'clock in the evening I brought a little boy into the world. I had nothing to cover him but luckily a good woman gave me a few rags..."

"I had given birth on the railway embankment and at midnight heavy rain began to fall. I had to look throughout the town for some shelter..."

The lack of possibilities for the education of children is an agonising problem for mothers in the countryside. A country teacher of Santiago del Estero pointed out the principle reasons:

"... The number of illiterates and semi-illiterates is astounding. Although there is a law which makes education compulsory for all children it is not put into practice. This is a result of several reasons; firstly, the distance of schools from the homes of some children (sometimes as much as 10 kilometres), secondly the lack of the means of transport to go to the schools (some children have an ass or a horse but they are in the minority), thirdly the most important reason - the moving of peasants at the time of the harvest, that is the four or five months in the year when people move to a different part of the country taking their children with them for help. So the majority of children go to school for only three months in the year..."

The delegates from Alcorta, Corrientes and the province of Buenos Aires also spoke of the lack of schools and secondary and professional education institutes.

To make up for the lack of schools the delegate from Villa Maria lets two teachers use her "rancho" in which to hold classes for children and adults.

These important problems are urgently needing to be solved.

#### Sources of Work.....

Speaking of the great problem of sources of work, the delegate from Alcorta proposed: "In this big village, centre of a region important in the production of maize, sun-flowers, wheat and other cereals, the future of girls without resources is the following... either they go off to the city to look for a situation which they seldom find or they take a post as a servant for a rather small wage and in many cases with conditions which are not good.

"It would be very useful to create sources of work for women; for example, weaving and embroidery factories, distilleries, factories for extracting the oil from sun-flowers, etc. It should be noticed that our sun-flowers are sent to San Lorenzo or Rosario to have the oil extracted. It would be much more economical in general and for each village in particular, to extract the oil near the place of cultivation..."

The participation of women in the Argentinian Agrarian Federation has often been demanded. All the delegates from agricultural regions are conscious of the existing injustice; they work like men, but are excluded when it comes to decisions on their struggles. They want to put an end to this injustice.

The peasant woman from Alcorta said: "... I want to conclude with a few recollections. Alcorta, my village, was where the peasant strike which carries its name began; it was from this strike in 1912 that the Argentinian Agrarian Federation sprang....

"There is an empty space in the ranks of the A.A.F. Women must take their places by the sides of their husbands and their sons.... From Alcorta rises our appeal to all women to defend more than ever the land, their bread and the happiness of their children."

The delegate from Tucuman gave voice to the feelings of women working in the countryside: "Women are not admitted into the trade unions. Our work is part of our husbands work, such is my case, or our son's work. We neither have the right to a pension nor anything else to which our husbands have the right...."

The YOUTH.....

At the national meeting the problem of the youth was also examined. One delegate said:

"The girls of Villa Campodo not know what a cinema or a festival means. We cannot buy a dress. Most of the girls do not work because they cannot find situations and those who do have situations work as servants as this is the only kind of work they can find. They begin their working day at 7 a.m. and finish it at 8 p.m.; they earn 60 pesos a month...

"We dream of getting married and setting up a home. We cannot make our dream come true for we do not have any land on which to build a "rancho". We want the government to give our parents land; then they could help us to build a home.

"The girls of Villa Campo want to have clubs, theatres, cinemas, dances and stadiums like girls in the city...."

Women from the town were also present at our meeting. Their voices too were heard. First of all there were women workers; delegates from the Movement for the Democratisation and Independence of Trade Unions and some friends from the town who spoke of their work at the factory.

They pointed out that it was the same employers, owners of great stretches of land and big concerns, who exploited women workers by giving them low wages and keeping them in inhuman working conditions.

They said that most of the women workers were peasant women who had left the countryside to come to town because of their poverty and lack of work.

They also said that it was necessary to give the land to those who cultivate it in order to raise the standard of living of all women workers.

It was for these reasons that they said they were in full agreement with the struggles and demands of women from the countryside and ready to support them.

But women living in "shanty towns", most of whom are originally from the country, also spoke from the platform. The delegate from Villa Argentina (Avellaneda) said:

"Neighbours helped us - some with 0.50 pesos and others with 1 peso. That is how four delegates from Avellaneda were able to pay their journey. I had no jacket, but the friends of the Union of Argentinian Women helped me.

"Neither do we women of the town live well. We live in a miserable district; our dwellings which are made of old sheet-iron are near the railway. The children do not go regularly to school. My children almost never eat their fill - I have not the means of giving them enough food; my husband is a docker, but he is out of work at the moment. When he has no work he looks after the children whilst I go out and do laundry for people. We have seven children to bring up!

"We have to go far to fetch water. The children fetch the water, but it is very dangerous. Trains pass near the well. When the whistle of an engine is heard, all the mothers leave the "ranchos" seized with fear to see if their children are on the track....

"They want to drive us out of this "shanty town"; they say they will set fire to the old huts. If ever this threat is carried out, then where shall we go?

"Ever since I got to know the U.A.W. I seem to have new strength. By taking up the fight altogether we managed to have a new water pump installed.

"I go all over the district with my bundle of "Nuestras Mujeres", asking people to help me by buying a copy or signing a petition. That is how we learn to work in unity to have a better life for poor people...."

The delegate from Villa Rey, another "shanty town": "We too have problems. For us the most urgent problem is that of floods. There are floods three times each year. Sometimes we spend five days at a time in water. The children stay in bed, with bricks under the mattresses so that the water does not reach them.

"But we shall change this state of affairs. United we demand prefabricated houses; we can pay the rent...."

Mme. Rosa Franco, speaking on behalf of the Buenos Aires branch of the U.A.W. stressed how important the unity of women was in town and country: "This meeting between women from the country and us women who earn our livelihood within four walls instead of earning it in the open air, between women who know the humid heat of the earth and those who, because they always work surrounded by papers and books, dream of fresh air, this meeting is the realisation of an old wish.

"Yes, we have long wished to meet one another. We think that it is only by listening to the problems of these women from the country that we can really understand their economic and social needs and their social demands. We need this meeting, for it does not only aim at changing ideas, no, we want this cordial and fraternal exchange to pave the way for demanding the authorities to pass laws to benefit peasant women and peasants' mothers, sisters, wives and daughters, whether they themselves work on the land or not.

"In our days, students struggle just like peasants' sons struggle for land. Mothers from the towns experience as many sleepless nights as mothers from the country; they have to make the same efforts to obtain wages.

"Each one in her category has her cares and her sufferings. We all struggle; teachers in their classes, office workers in their offices, lawyers before the bench, workers in the factories and doctors in the hospitals to create understanding and full respect towards women and for her rights....

"We fight and work for the common good, for justice. We believe that in making love and justice reign a country starts on the way to a good understanding between its peoples.

"We work and fight because we want all children to grow up healthy and well fed; we want all mothers to be sure that their children's future will not be at the mercy of a tyrannical landowner or an exploiter for whom they are nothing but machines.

"We want decent and comfortable living accommodation for you and for ourselves, for you cannot imagine what kind of drama the housing problem is in towns. We want comfortable homes for the family maker the nation, and we want a nation that is honest, healthy and sheltered from economic insecurity.

"We want to be able to have work, a secure wage, adequate medical assistance, and the education which we and our children should have.

"We want, each one of us, to feel like something real, and living the friendship and affection which should unite us above all barriers..."

#### PEACE.....

At the meeting the desire for peace was also expressed. That is why the support and delegation from the Argentinian Peace Council was so warmly welcomed. Maria Rosa Oliver was enthusiastically applauded when she said:

"We must work for peace, for the manufacturing of agricultural implements, for the construction of houses and schools in place of the buying and making of weapons.

"We are fighting for disarmament. And if we obtain it better days will follow. Days when Argentinian peasant women will be among the first to be able to give your children the best bread, the richest milk, the freshest meat, the greenest vegetables and the most golden honey...."

The delegate from Cordoba added: "... The military budget allows for the expenditure of 11 million pesos every day. How many dams, canals and houses could we construct with this sum..."

#### UNITY.....

Above all else, one could feel the deep desire for unity, expressed hundreds of times, which permeated our meeting.

Cordoba - Camp Anchorena.... "We are sure that all victories will enable us to encourage peasant women and women working in the countryside to struggle united with women workers from the town for a lasting peace and for a greater fraternity..."

Mendoza.... "We women agricultural workers, industrial workers and housewives of our province, understand that we must follow the road together for the winning of a better future. The solution of problems in the countryside will not only change the life of peasant families, but also the life of women workers in the town..."

Misiones.... "... We know for sure that the only thing that can solve our problems and those of all Argentinians is the unity of our people. That is why we are in the ranks of the U.A.W. The Union did not question us as to our religion or our political beliefs. Above and beyond all beliefs there is the common desire to win peace and happiness for all our sisters...."

#### Continuation of the work of the Meeting...

The peasant meeting of Rosario has had great repercussions all over the country; it was even followed with interest in governmental circles.

The work went on after the holding of the meeting. The Union of Argentinian Women went, to mention only one example, to the national authorities to demand the construction of first-aid stations and schools in different peasant districts.

Moreover, the meeting was greatly publicised. In the region dominated by the "La Forestal" monopoly, two local meetings took place with the participation of all the inhabitants and a big regional meeting was prepared.

In Mendoza, the delegates to the meeting from the province of Rosario made a report at a big assembly of the Argentinian Agrarian Federation. Delegates from three provinces representing thousands of peasants took part in it. The women were very well received by these delegates, and they took it upon themselves to support the resolutions of Rosario. In Mendoza also a regional meeting is being prepared for which the Argentinian Agrarian Federation will co-operate.

Five of six peasants' regional meetings are being prepared, preceded by other meetings which are taking place all over the country. These regional meetings will be new evidence of the progress made by peasant women and will form the basis for the preparation of a great National Congress of Country Women in the future.



# Information BULLETIN

PUBLISHED BY THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

No. 8

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### CONTENTS

#### ... FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS -

- South Africa: Against passes
- Tunisia: One step forward

#### ... FOR PEACE -

- France: Against the high cost of living
- Iceland: Culture and Peace
- German Federal Republic: After the passing of military laws

#### ... SOME ORGANISATIONAL PROBLEMS -

- Argentine: Towards the Extraordinary National Congress of the U.A.W.
- Holland: The struggle for peace and the Emancipation of women.
- Italy: "Noi Donne" - the means of aiding the progress and broadening of the united movement for the emancipation of Italian women.
- Senegal: Women's Association has just been formed.

--oooOooo--

SOUTH AFRICA: Women fight against passes

The African people know well what the pass laws have meant to them throughout the years. They have experienced oppression and miseries, but few as bitter as the working of the pass laws. Travelling to and from work, going out to buy a loaf of bread, visiting a friend only a few blocks away; all these innocent and normal activities have become a nightmare for the millions of men who have to carry a pass book and produce it on the demand of the police.

A pass for being out late at night, a pass to enter a location, a pass to leave the countryside to find work in the city, a pass to look for a job and another before taking on the job, a pass to prove that you are not a foreign native, and one to prove you are exempt from carrying a pass - the list is endless.

Till now African men have been the victims (though women have been affected by the curfew law) but the burden is to be doubled, the suffering increased, for women too were supposed to carry passes as from January this year.

But the African women have resisted this, and below we give only a few of the spirited actions which the African women are organising to register their opposition.

Port Elizabeth...

"We object to the pass system because it makes slaves of the African people, because it denies us the right to move about freely, to sell our labour freely," declared a statement presented by the women of the Eastern Cape to the Native Commissioner on July 19th. The statement continued, "Under the pass laws our men are exposed to merciless treatment at the hands of the police. Our husbands are taken from us without warning, not for crime, but for the lack of a piece of paper - a pass. We wait in vain for their return at night." The women ask, "what is to become of our tiny children, if we are to be torn from them failing the production of a pass? Must we subject our daughters to intimidation and humiliation at the hands of the police?" The statement concluded with a pledge, "We shall not rest until we will have won for our children their right to freedom and security."

Unitehenage...

Here 500 women demonstrated and went to the Native Commissioner. They were told the commissioner could not see them and that in any case he would not see more than five women. They left determined to have a bigger deputation next time.

Johannesburg...

A delegation of more than 100 women also waited on the Native Commissioner in this town, to protest against the passes. They had previously received a letter from the commissioner saying he would not meet them. The delegation said that they did not believe the letter and had come to see for themselves. The commissioner was very displeased and said that this was the "same person" again "instigating the women". The commissioner then withdrew these words and asked to be excused as he had had large numbers of women all saying and demanding the same thing.

Cape Town...

Hundreds of petitions of protest addressed to the Native Commissioner are being signed, declaring women's opposition to passes "which are an insult to human dignity." Special committees have been elected in many areas to take the petition from house to house. The response has been tremendous. These activities are part of the great fight which the women of South Africa are waging to prevent the recent Pass Laws for women being put into operation.

In a statement received from South Africa on these activities they say.... "two thousand women gave up a day's wage to fight for the right to be free to earn their wages wherever they choose; they gave up their day's wage in order to register their solidarity with the growing forces that have set their faces against the pass laws that threaten to enslave the whole people."

TUNISIA: One Step Forward for Women's Rights

The Union of Tunisian Women which has always fought for the defence of the rights of women and children, against unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and for peace, is now seeing the realisation of one of its demands, very dear to Tunisian women - the abolition of polygamy and the institution of divorce procedure.

On making the announcement the President, Bourguiba, said: "It is a reform which many Moslems have been demanding for a long time, for polygamy is incompatible with a sound outlook in this the twentieth century."

The minimum age for Tunisian women to marry will henceforth be fifteen years and every Tunisian on reaching the age of twenty will be entirely free to choose her husband, the agreement of a legal agent being no longer necessary.

The marriage ceremony in future will be made before a representative of the law and the husband will lose the right, which he hitherto had, of leaving his wife just when he wished. Legal divorce will take the place of this practice and will be pronounced only by a court of law.

Another step forward is that the next municipal elections have been called for and Tunisian women will take part in them. It is a great step forward along the path of social progress. Women's organisations are witnessing the opening up of increasingly greater possibilities of work.

The Union of Tunisian Women continues with greater energy to put forward women's demand so that the First Tunisian Constitution may recognise women's rights in full; their political and social rights. There is still much to be done in a country just liberated after seventy-five years of colonial rule, and it is up to Tunisian Women and mothers to ensure that the political victories won by the people mean the possibility in each home of more and better food and clothing, healthier housing conditions and an education for all regardless of social origin.

..... FOR PEACE .....

FRANCE: Against the High Cost of Living

For most families in France life is becoming increasingly difficult. After the severe winter, food prices continue to rise in such proportions as never before reached (10 per cent). Rents have also risen by 20 to 30 per cent. Everything is rising except wages and family allowances which have not been revaluated since 1954.

Many families are deprived of a wage-earner their husbands and sons having been called up and sent to Algeria. Thousands of working people, old-age pensioners, small businessmen and farmers live in poverty and misery.

An immediate solution must be found for these families and for this reason the Union of French Women have issued a national petition against the high cost of living, one of the causes of which is the latest expense of 300 Billion francs for the war in Algeria.

Illustrating this situation by figures the Union of French Women makes the following appeal:

"Mothers of families, housewives,  
Let us unite!



(17)

Let us Unite - against new income tax and purchase tax, causes of the high cost of living,  
- for wage increases,  
- for the increase of family allowances and the additional "thirteenth month".

This petition has received the full support of many women and mothers. Active members of the Union of French Women are indefatigable in their campaign from door to door and to the markets collecting signatures which will be sent to the Presidium of the Council.

GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC: After the passing of military laws

The fact that laws on compulsory military service have been passed in the German Federal Republic does not at all mean that their application will be easy for promoters of the cold war. The great majority of the population, particularly women and mothers, is hostile towards these laws and expresses opposition in many different ways.

The German section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom supported an appeal made by the German Union of Students against recruitment by protesting to the Federal Government against the introduction of compulsory military service.

The West German Women's Movement for Peace, under the leadership of Professor Klara-Maria Fassbinder, is doubling its efforts to show women and mothers how they must take up the struggle to prevent a fratricidal war in Germany and world conflict.

The Democratic Union of German Women of the German Federal Republic, which opposes the introduction of compulsory military service with all its might is always in the front ranks of the struggle. It raised strong protest, on behalf of all women and mothers, against the rebirth of German militarism and the introduction of compulsory military service, and pointed out to women and mothers the best way of protecting their husbands and sons from the threat of recruitment.

The most different organisations and movements are organising meetings and assemblies; demonstrations are taking place and signatures are being collected. They have sent messages to committees of different concerns asking them to make decisions within their committees so that young people may be supported in their actions against the call-up.

Catholic and Protestant mothers go to their priests and ministers, to demand that their parish take steps to prevent recruitment. All parliamentary representatives have been urged and obliged to take decisions to protect the youth from militarism.

ICELAND: FOR Culture and Peace

The little country of Iceland (144,000 inhabitants) with its ancient culture has recently been the centre of world opinion, especially when the new government asked the United States to withdraw the occupation troops stationed there in Iceland.

We are very happy to be able to give you a brief account of the activities of the Icelandic Women's Unity for Culture and Peace, which is affiliated to the W.I.D.F.

The Unity includes four women's associations. The board of direction consists of six women including the President, Mrs. Halldors B. Bjornsson, well-known poet and writer.

It works for the maintenance of peace in the world, for the defence of children and for the rights of women, such as the right to work, equal pay, social security, etc. It has sent many appeals to Parliament concerning these matters.

The board meets about three times each month and prepares the general meetings. A part of each general meeting is devoted to cultural matters. Between the last two Council meetings of the W.I.D.F. (1955-56) the Unity held a series of meetings at which different problems were discussed.

On March 8th 1955, International Women's Day, Mr Rhorbjorn Sigurgeirsson, famous scientist, President of the Republic's Board of Scientific Research and Iceland's greatest authority on atomic energy, lectured on this subject and on explosions and experiments with the atomic bomb. One of the members of the Unity who is President of a workers' association, talked about the standing of women in the Icelandic Republic and what had been gained in the struggle for equal pay.

In April the Unity took part in a public meeting held by the Icelandic Peace Committee.

The meeting in May centred around the preparatory work of the World Congress of Mothers. The problem of modern literature in Iceland was also discussed. - two delegates from the Unity were present at the Mothers' Congress... Vice-President Mrs. Asa Ottesen and Mrs. Drifa Thoroddsen, writer. On her return Mrs. Ottesen held a press conference; her report was published in most of the daily papers and was also broadcast -

At the first autumn meeting Mrs. Ottesen made a report on the Mothers' Congress and read its manifesto. The meeting voted unanimously to send an appeal to Parliament asking for an end to American military occupation thus contributing to the fight for disarmament and the maintenance of world peace. There was a performance of Icelandic musicians and Russian artists.

The November meeting discussed the new laws on social security which were being debated in Parliament at that time, and the Unity took up the struggle for the rights of women and old people and elected a Commission to study the problem. The Tenth Anniversary of the W.I.D.F. was also celebrated and a lecture given on dramatic art.

In December the Bill of the new social security law was discussed. It was pointed out that this Bill was especially unfair to unmarried or divorced mothers, widows, their children and to old people. The board sent a letter to Parliament appealing for changes in the Bill.

In January 1956, there was a report on living conditions in the countries of the Middle East. At the same meeting it was decided unanimously to send a message to Parliament asking for Iceland's withdrawal from NATO.

On the occasion of March 8th 1956, an open meeting was organised where speeches were made about housing accommodation in Reykjavik. Mrs. Sigrídur E. Thorvaldsson, the Icelandic representative in the World Peace Council, spoke on the work of this organisation. Poems were read by the Nobel prize winner Halldor Kiljan Laxness.

#### SOME ORGANISATIONAL PROBLEMS

##### ARGENTINA: Towards the Extraordinary National Congress of the Union of Argentinian Women.

An extraordinary session of the Executive Commission of the Union of Argentinian Women took place recently. There was a long discussion on the new situation created by the growing anxiety and fighting spirit of women and, consequently, on the necessity of intensifying the work, broadening the activities of the organisation and establishing and tightening the bonds of co-operation with women of other organisations and opinions.

It was in this spirit that the Executive Commission re-affirmed the improvement in the work by the creation of five commissions; these commissions include young women, members and non-members, interested in one point of the programme of the organisation; they play their part in the organisation with a certain degree of independence, having their own plan of work and initiating their own activities.

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**TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961**

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