

Los Angeles – a historic coming together of grassroots movements

On November 17th, 2005, the Strike brought to an enthusiastic audience some of the movements we are part of. The meeting at Holman United Methodist Church was chaired by Margaret Prescod of Women of Color in the Global Women's Strike and host of "Sojourner Truth" on KPFF radio.

Reverend Edward Pinkney, Black Autonomy Network Community Organization (BANCO) in Benton Harbor, Michigan described the devastation of this overwhelmingly Black city with an average income of \$8,000 a year, plagued by police brutality, poverty and unemployment, and the home-base of multinational corporation Whirlpool. Across the river is the city of St. Joseph's – 99% white with an average income of \$41,000 a year.

In June 2003, Benton Harbor rebelled for three days following the police killing of yet another young Black man, and was occupied by police with armored personnel carriers, helicopters and dogs. The grassroots responded with a successful recall election of a corrupt city commissioner backed by Whirlpool. But a judge ordered new elections, and Rev Pinkney was charged with election fraud!

The people of Benton Harbor have called for a boycott of Whirlpool which plans on outsourcing 5,000 jobs to Mexico at poverty wages.

Sharmini Peries, International Relations Advisor to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, has been working with the Strike and Vanguard Public Foundation to provide resources to Gulf Coast survivors. She explained the discounted heating oil program for low-income communities in the US, started this winter through Venezuela's oil company CITGO. She also reported on the recent Summit of the Americas: "President Bush's free-trade proposals were buried there."



Bolivar Ramilus, Pierre Laboissière, Margaret Prescod and Sharmini Peries

El Sereno resident Roberto Flores from Eastside Café Echospace, called for support for the South Central Farmers facing eviction from 14 acres in South Central Los Angeles where dozens of families have small farming plots. Flores, who works to bring Black and Latino/a youth together, opposes the criminalization of young people, the removal of community murals and gang injunctions.

The struggle of **New Orleans** evacuees touched everyone. (See article below)

The revolution in Haiti is like Venezuela

Haiti is a mainly rural country whose crops have been decimated by US-imposed free market policies. Women struggle to keep their children and neighbours alive in the face of starvation and executions by occupying forces. The grassroots have refused to give in to the US-UN occupation or to recognize the murderers they put in

power when they forced President Jean Bertrand Aristide into exile. Corrupt elections were recently cancelled.

The Strike has been working with the grassroots in Haiti and their spokespeople in the US, especially women, to get recognition and support for this, the least acknowledged revolution.

Bolivar Ramilus was Commissioner of Peasant Affairs in the Haitian Parliament under Aristide. From his speech, translated by Pierre La Boissière of the Haiti Action Committee:

"The people who are struggling all over the world ... need to build our own networks for our own message, to provide our own education and training, to build our own struggle that will result in the changes that we want.

We have to put our own economic structure in place and the methods we use. In Haiti, I as a leader in the peasant movement and former member of parliament, worked with the peasants to strengthen and control their own

economy, to make money so that we do not go to the enemy to ask them to lend us money.

In a capitalist system, those who work get nothing. And women are a good example – women do all the work in the home but their work is not counted officially [Applause and cheering], and that represents over \$16 trillion dollars in the world economy ...

The more the women can organize and mobilize the wealth that their work generates, producing thriving societies and quality human beings worldwide, they will be a formidable power that will defeat the kind of armies that the Haitians defeated – the army of Napoleon.

Only 5% of the population in the world controls 95% of the world's resources. And 95% of people are struggling to survive with 5% of the resources. This 95% is us. It is not only us. People in other parts of the world, France for example [the rebellion of young people of colour against police racism and lack of resources], are people who have nothing at all and are fighting.

In Haiti they call them "chimères", in other countries rebellions. Isn't that justice, that people who need food demand to have food? That people who need healthcare demand to have healthcare? If Jesus Christ were alive today, he would be a "chimère" too, because he wouldn't agree that some people can eat and others cannot.

*Let me put my hand which is Haiti in your hand which is the United States, and Venezuela, so that all together we can be a Lavalas. * Not the Lavalas only of Haiti but a movement of all of us people all over the world who are fighting to win this struggle so that the poorest can eat."* [Applause and cheers]

* Lavalas, flash flood, is the name of President Aristide's party.

Chávez: Our debt to Haiti

"...But beyond Venezuela, I am thinking about the integration of this Afro-America scattered all over these lands, all over these waters...I have brought this book about Haiti, a present from a friend from the Global Women's Strike, which has come to me from London: *Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution*, by CLR James. How they've made Haiti pay for having been the first Black republic, an inspiration to the revolution in South America and the liberation of the slaves. There's Haiti, living today what it has lived throughout these centuries. We have a debt to the Haitian people and to the Black peoples of the Caribbean and of South America..." 8 May 05



Aló Presidente

Katrina: Cleaning up sexism and racism

"This was an attempt to kill us all," said a survivor of Hurricane Katrina. She was talking about the US government's criminal and racist neglect of people with little or no income – Black, Indigenous, immigrant and other Brown women and men, many of whom are older and/or disabled – who were left to suffer and die in the toxic, filthy water that filled grassroots neighbourhoods as the whole world watched.

Some say the levees were blown up so that land grabbers and casino marketers could take over New Orleans, the birth place of jazz and one of the oldest Black urban populations in the US, reducing it from 70% to 36%.

Survivors are shunted from place to place, and face eviction by FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency), and banks that are demanding mortgage payments on destroyed homes whose owners no longer have an income.

Survivors are struggling for relief and reconstruction, setting up community centers such as those run by Mama D, and Malik Rahim and his partner Sharon to provide food and

other necessities; legal teams to stop evictions; collectives to keep affordable housing; residents blocking bulldozers from razing homes; marches and protests.

Survivors invited the Global Women's Strike to be part of the formation of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Network (PHRF). Strike coordinator Margaret Prescod convenes the Women's Caucus of PHRF and the Women's Reconstruction Network (WRN).

Despite the lowest incomes and least resources, women are doing most of the life-saving survival and justice work: hands-on cleaning under toxic conditions; caring for traumatized children, elders and the sick; fighting insurance companies, FEMA, the Red Cross and other bureaucracies that are sitting on the money that should be going to survivors; trying to find and hold on to housing that is never secure, and to a unique cultural heritage; holding to account all those responsible starting with George Bush.

"Unless the real work of reconstruction is made visible, it will be attributed to

corporations which will be paid handsomely for what women are doing at the cost of their own lives and without payment."

The Women's Caucus and WRN have been organizing speakouts; self-help; an international Action Alert; a Clean Up project to get protective suits and clean-up equipment; support for a women's health clinic.

The Strike in San Francisco has helped convene the Hurricane Evacuee Council-Bay Area (HECBA), to stop evictions and press for a central space where evacuees can get what they need.

In September Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez offered relief to those hit by the hurricanes. The Strike has been helping to co-ordinate this, bringing together the Venezuelan oil subsidiary CITGO and the Vanguard Foundation.

Cuba also offered help – doctors for the worst affected neighbourhoods – but was turned down. Unlike the US which abandoned those who couldn't afford to get out during hurricanes, Cuba provides transport for people and pets. People's lives are the priority, not scavenging corporations.