

AFGHAN WOMEN: highest maternal mortality rate

Despite the famous crocodile tears shed by both Laura Bush and Cherie Blair, the situation of Afghan women remains dire. A January 2002 report by Physicians for Human Rights (mainly concerned with conditions in Shebarghan Prison, west of Mazar-I-Sharif, now that the US has had its pick of prisoners they wish to interrogate and moved on) notes in passing:

'The recruitment and support of women health professionals, including midwives, doctors, and nurses, must be an immediate priority. Afghanistan has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, with almost half of deaths of women in their child-bearing years attributable to childbirth. Women's health is deeply compromised in other ways, too,

including their vulnerability to acute depression and suicide.

'The health sector in Afghanistan is grossly underdeveloped in every area and in recent years has been degraded even further by corruption, looting, banditry, and by donors' inability to carry out activities within Afghanistan. The health system is also compromised by the Taliban's restrictions on education for women and girls, and their prohibition on women in the work force. These restrictions, now lifted, have nonetheless assured that professional schools have graduated no women doctors and nurses, with no generation of girls ready to enter this year's class.'

From Women in Black

Meanwhile, in another religious fundamentalist state...

"Those who can afford to travel will do so, but this repressive amendment will hurt the most vulnerable, the most desperate cases, such as young girls too scared to tell anyone about their pregnancies, the poverty-stricken or women in psychiatric care." Catherine Heaney, the Irish family planning association

Irish women and girls considering suicide due to the country's fundamentalist anti-choice laws could face up to 12 years in prison should they try to get an abortion, if the government wins the referendum is on 6th March. And that goes for anyone helping to access one.

Currently the abortion laws in the Republic only allow a termination where pregnancy would physically endanger the woman's life. This hardly takes into consideration the many reasons why having a child might damage a woman's physical and mental well-being. The law is the only 'crime' other than treason (hmm...) included in Eire's constitution, and the sentence is longer than that given to convicted rapists.

Another major concern is that while 'approved' hospitals will be able to carry out abortions in the case of medical emergency, women who live in more rural, iso-

lated areas don't stand a chance of getting treated. So by giving abortion a different status to any another medical treatment, more women are having their lives endangered - and that's without all those who end up having unsafe, 'back-street' abortions.

And if there's any doubt that a referendum is in any way a fair method of making such a crucial decision, only 35% of people in a recent poll stated that they would vote in favour of the amendment. Which leaves two thirds of the country who are either against it or won't be voting at all - over half of whom are women who then have to live (or not, as the case may be) by this law. That's democracy for you.

Astoundingly, the main objection of some organisations and influential individuals in the Republic is that the amendment "doesn't go far enough". How much further can they go?!

Look! More books!

Manchester's new women's bookshop
Manchester has a new women's bookshop, based at the Pankhurst Centre and offering a range of feminist and women's

titles. The Pankhurst Centre is at 60-62 Nelson Street, M13, near the Manchester Royal Infirmary. It provides a range of other resources for women, including courses, workshops, meeting spaces, a creche and exhibitions.

Contact 0161 273 5673 for more info.

before we go... The copy deadline for next issue is **April 24th** (honest).

Send news, articles, information, graphics, listings, contacts.

Send postal/pdf address (you need 'Acrobat Reader' for PDFs) if you can distribute.

FYEO OFF!

Newcastle's first lapdancing club - For Your Eyes Only (FYEO) - opened late last year to a flurry of direct action against the club, both on the streets and on computer screens.

FYEO opened its doors for the first time in November, hosting a corporate night inviting Newcastle's finest - and sleaziest - businessmen. Eighty women with whistles, drums and banners took to the streets on a 'Reclaim the Night' march and took back Newcastle's City Centre as a safe space. The crowd swelled to 150 and made its way to FYEO.

On arrival at the venue protestors greeted the customers with loud samba drumming, whistling and chanting of slogans. Many entered into debate with those queuing about how the club exploits and degrades women; how the club is about corporate greed rather than local needs; about the lack of workers rights for the dancers; and about why women may choose to work at the club - including lack of student grants, most jobs in the area being very low paid, benefits being inadequate.

The following day saw the launch of www.theyhavetopayforit.com, a website displaying photos of men attending the club. The aim was to make customers accountable for their actions, and consider whether they were happy for their wife, boss, or daughter to know they'd been to the club - and if not, why not. The website generated much local and national press interest including Radio 4, Radio 1 and even *Esther*!

The campaign continued with the same the following week, when two men were noted to be taking photos of protestors but refused to explain why. The campaign was obviously starting to get right up the nose of corporate giants SFI (Surrey Fine Inns) who currently own FYEO. The website was temporarily shut down - how much clout do these big business have? Not only can they override public opinion they also seem to be able to challenge freedom of speech.

The mystery of the male photographers was solved when another website appeared, called www.thesewomen-can'tevengiveitaway.com. The site displayed photos of women protestors, claiming the reason they were against the club was because they were themselves were unattractive and were therefore jealous of the dancers [yawn]. Being totally defamatory, when the potential for legal action was explained to the hosting company the site was rapidly removed.

The campaign continued with a silent vigil and placing of flowers to mark International Day Against Violence Towards Women on November 26th.

BELLOW

instigated by Women Speak Out

IT'S A
WOMAN
THING

Welcome back - and no, you haven't missed one, but we did. But hey, they just make these dates up, you know, those patriarchs.

If you can print/copy and distribute Bellow in your area, send us a postal address so we can send you an original copy (or just do it with this one). If you like the content and would like to see more/longer articles, send us some money - cheques/postal orders payable to Bellow. **THANKS** to everyone who's sent money in - very much appreciated.

bellow1@bigfoot.com, Box 35, c/o Green Leaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB

No 3 Vol 1 Mar/April 2002

Donations more than welcome

Palestinian Women Between Fire and Smoke - Until the end of Occupation



Pic: www.amnesty-usa.org/women/about.html

danger several times, but show no signs of regret or retreat. She added, "Several times, bullets have fallen very close to me, but whoever takes part in the confrontations knows very well that he or she may not return home."

Um Hatim, from Ramallah, does not show any signs of possible retreat from the responsibility she assigned herself to, even though her children have tried over and over to prevent her from going.

She said, "My children ask me not to go to the confrontations fearing for my life, but how can I stay at

give them confidence. Dawoud has seen too many being killed by occupation forces, but she says her strong belief in the continuation of resistance against occupation eases her pain.

She said, "I saw youths being killed in front of my eyes, but freedom from occupation will not be achieved except through resistance and sacrifice - and this applies to us. For the sake of getting rid of the occupation, everything seems relatively easier, we have to continue with our uprising and resistance until we free our country and establish our independent state with Jerusalem as its capital."

From Hear Palestine

Voice of Women (Ramallah) - "We cannot watch our sons sacrificing themselves for their homeland without doing anything," said a 50 year old woman. "My heart cries for these youths. Despite the fact that I cannot do much, I make sure to remain by their side to help as much as possible. Our help centres on breaking stones and passing them over to the youths."

Um Hatim (not her real name) is among a group of women who have been present at the confrontations in Ramallah and al-Bireh since the beginning of the Intifada. She and other women were subjected to

home when our sons and daughters are sacrificing their lives for their homeland?" She added: "I will continue with my role in the confrontations until the end of the Israeli occupation."

Other women fully shared Um Hatim's sentiments. Ayshea Dawoud, from Qadoura refugee camp, Ramallah, said, "What pushes me to take part in the confrontations is my strong feelings for the Intifada, I feel this is my duty." Dawoud sees that what is even more important than her role in breaking stones is her presence at the confrontations with the young people, to encourage them and

Nigeria: Sharia hypocrisy

Safiya Hussaini Tungar Dudu has become the first woman to be sentenced to death by stoning under the Nigerian state of Sokoto's new Islamic sharia law. Despite the fact that Dudu claims to have been raped she stands accused of adultery, although her alleged assailant has not been prosecuted or punished. The court claims it does not have enough evidence to bring the man to trial. A Nigerian sharia court of appeals granted a stay of execution in Dudu's case in early November. She has recently gave birth to a daughter.

Halima Abdullahi, director of Help Eliminate Loneliness and Poverty, HELP, a non-governmental organisation, also faulted the verdict. In a statement she said "it was a thorough embarrassment" to majority of Nigerian Muslims. The group argued that the judgment was wrong because Safiya was accused of adultery instead of fornication since she was a divorcee. The verdict was passed because Safiya comes from an under-privileged class, the organisation argued, also describing the verdict as "gender discrimination of the highest order". The group

called on Governor Attahiru Bafarawa to intervene to save Safiya's life.

Male villagers interviewed by a local newspaper said Safiya was not deserving of much sympathy because, according to them, she has a despicable moral profile [sic]. They said that "because she is beautiful, she has had difficulties imposing moral restraint on herself" [really sick]. **Eh?! How fucking hypocritical is that?** And, let's face it, how familiar? For more outstandingly unfair decisions made by men about women's sexuality - and lives - see the back page.

Ffi and addresses to send appeal messages:
www.feminist.org/
www.onlinenigeria.com
<http://allafrica.com>

DIRECT ACTION: Tried and Tested

On March 2nd hundreds of women kicked off in the streets of London's West End. Armed with stones and hammers they smashed windows in Regent Street, Piccadilly, the Strand and Oxford Street, causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. Three women leapt out of a car in Downing Street and threw stones at the Prime Minister's house and the home office. Around 120 women were arrested, 80 years ago, in 1912.

March 2nd marks 80 years since this mass suffragette demo. Protests took over the streets for nine months before women realised they would have to step up their militancy to get



JUST TO CLEAR UP ANY
CONFUSION ON THE ISSUE...

their voices heard. Women started burning the turf of golf courses with acid spelling 'Votes For Women', breaking street lamps, torching letterboxes, chaining themselves to Buckingham Palace gates and attacking politicians on their way to work. Women planted bombs in empty houses and unused railway stations. They started massive fires. In February 1913 women blew up part of David Lloyd George's house [WOW! Ed] (he was probably Britain's most famous politician at that time).

By June 1914 over 1,000 suffragettes had been sent to prison for destroying public property. The women went on hunger strikes, and after the policy of force-feeding started looking too hard-line, the government watered down their response with the Cat and Mouse Act. This stopped the force-feeding, allowing the women to go on hunger strikes, and to get weaker and weaker. When they were very weak they were kicked out of prison so any deaths would not embarrass the government.

Forty years of peaceful protesting failed to win any changes for women. Women's suffrage only became a national issue when the suffragettes turned to violence.

Sadly, once British women had gained the vote - a token gesture in any democracy - the struggle continued.

From *Schnews*, March 2002

GLOBAL WOMEN'S STRIKE 2002

International Women's Day, 8 March 2002 will celebrate the third Global Women's Strike (GWS). Never before so much wealth - yet so many of us with so little. The Global Women's Strike is women's answer to globalisation and militarisation which prioritise the production of things over caring for people, and therefore threaten our lives and the planet. Women demand a total change of social and economic priorities for women and therefore for men:

- Payment for all caring work
- in wages, pensions, land and other resources
- pay equity internationally
- paid maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks and other benefits
- don't pay 'Third World debt'
- accessible clean water, healthcare, housing, transport, literacy and information
- non-polluting energy and technology to shorten our hours and burden of work
- protection and asylum from all violence & persecution
- freedom of movement.

INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

ARGENTINA: The Sindicato de Amas de Casa (Housewives Union) in Santa Fe is holding daily women's assemblies in the poorest neighbourhoods as part of the popular uprising. Co-ordinating GWS actions, 'The Sweep' will press their demands to deal with the Argentinian crisis.

IRELAND: Women in Media & Entertainment holding a 10-hour vigil outside a church in Galway to exchange music, poetry, other "creative contributions".

GUYANA: Red Thread multi-racial women's group holding a 'Cacerolazo' (pots & pans protest) in Linden bringing together Indigenous, Indo and Afro-Guyanese women calling for an end to exorbitant prices for electricity, phones and water, and for affordable land and housing materials for single mothers.

NEW ZEALAND: Auckland International Women's Day Group holding a 'Value Women's Work' rally and march, demanding equal pay, support for National Caregivers Day, free childcare, support for nurses and against the

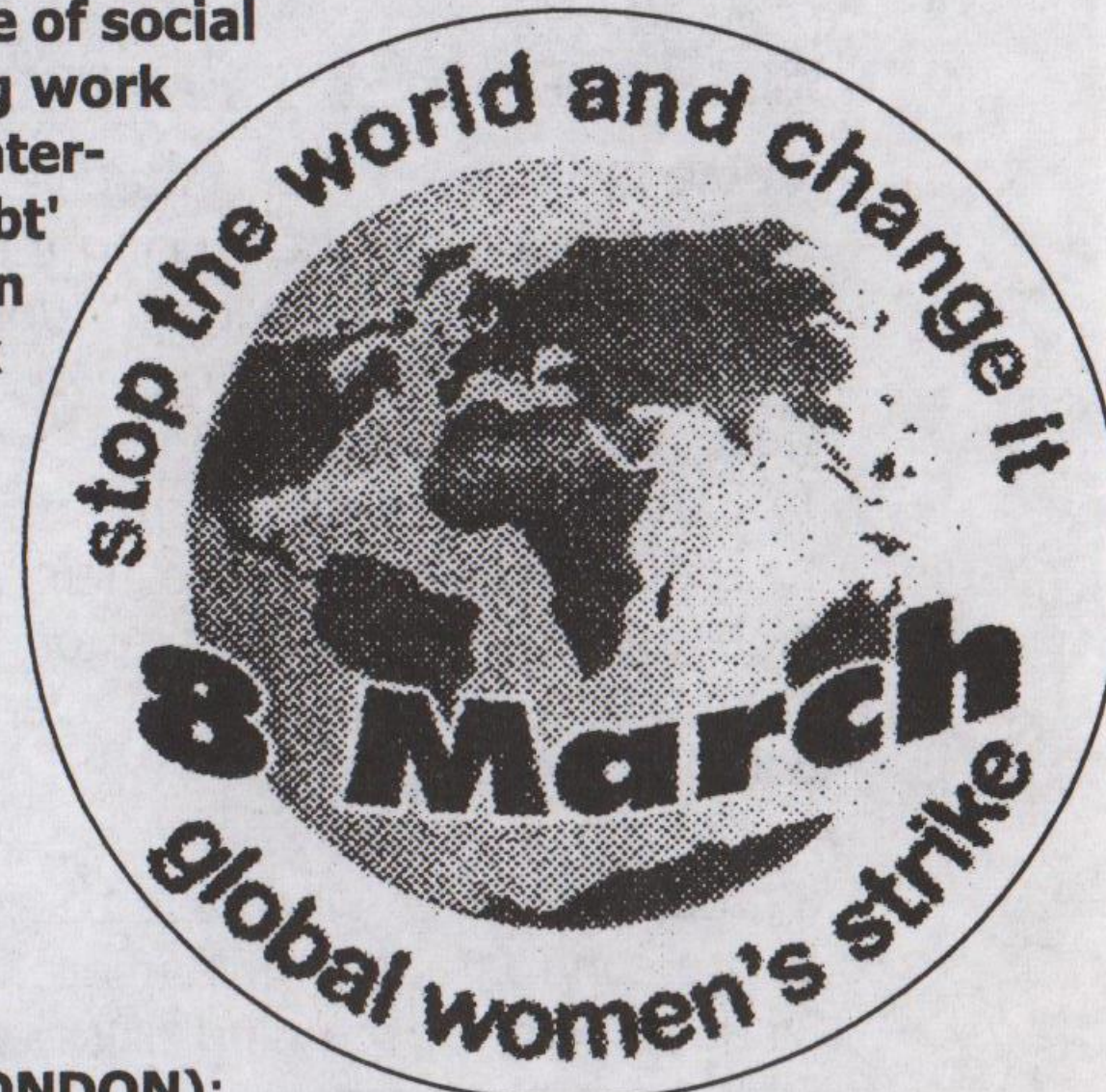
oppressive conditions conditions of immigrants and refugees.

PERU: Aymara Centre 'Pacha Aru' co-ordinating activities in Aymara and Quechua communities in the Andes; working closely with the Domestic Workers Centre which is pulling together a network of grassroots women's groups and trade unions in Lima and the rest of the country.

SPAIN: WFH Campaign co-ordinating national events, including 'occupation' by women of Barcelona's main Plaza San Jaime, demanding welfare benefits for all women, including immigrants; several branches of National Union Confederacion General del Trabajo (CGT) supporting Strike actions

BASQUE COUNTRY: Feminist collective calling a one-hour stoppage.

UNITED STATES: events in San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, Boston, Los Angeles, Wisconsin - opposing war-mongering and corporate thievery, and ending welfare 'reform' which is cutting mothers' money, forcing them to take any job anywhere at any wage.



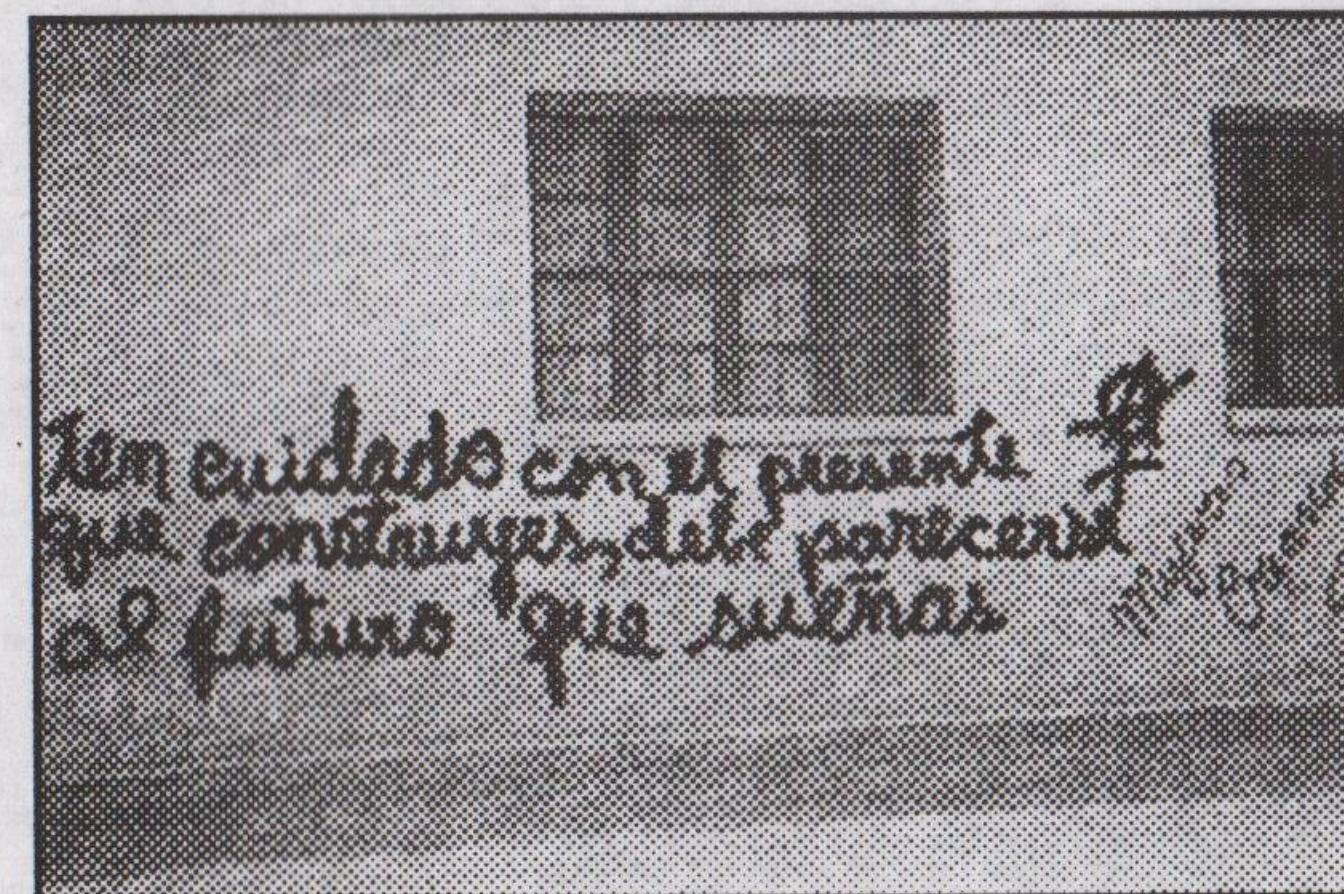
UK (LONDON):

Invest in Caring Not Killing: Whistle-Stop Tour and 'Cacerolazo' to Sweep Out the Global Killers Giant puppet, drummers, dancing and chanting. Bring your brooms, pots and pans to bang. Wheelchair users, kids, cyclists... All welcome. Assemble: 12 noon, Shell Centre, York Rd, Waterloo Starting: 12.30pm; then to Ministry of Defence - women of different faiths will bear witness; Institute of Directors; Ending: 3pm, World Bank, Haymarket, Piccadilly.

Women mental health system survivors protest outside a psychiatric hospital based near Shell.

From Global Women Strike

The following is an extract from an interview with Julieta from *Mujeres Creando* in Bolivia, in which she also talks about their involvement with the group of small-debtors that occupied bank headquarters with dynamite in La Paz in July '01. (See Bellow 1)



'BE CAREFUL WITH THE PRESENT YOU ARE CREATING. IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE THE FUTURE YOU DREAM OF.'

How did you become politically active and involved in *Mujeres Creando*?

The group has been going for 10 years, but I got to know them 9 years ago through some of the activities that the initiators of the group were organising at the university, like murals and different actions. I was very curious about what they were doing. It was a completely new kind of group. There was absolutely no talk about that kind of feminism at the time - a militant, radical feminism, a feminism of the streets, of everyday life. Of course the government was talking about the rights of women on the radio and in the papers, and about certain laws for women, but never about a feminism which engaged you in any form of struggle or politicised you. By contrast, I was very attracted to the feminism of *Mujeres Creando*, precisely because it was so real and tangible, in terms of the way these women presented feminism.

By the time I began to get involved in *Mujeres Creando*, I was realising that political activity does not only happen in political parties or in organised groups; it happens as soon as you are conscious of your actions and your decisions - an intuitive kind of feminism. Within the university, there were a lot of groups on the left Trotskyists, Maoists, Guevarists but none of them appealed to me, or let me feel as though I could be myself in those groups. It was very different with *Mujeres Creando*. I think that through feminism, women come to know themselves and each other, with all our potential, our strengths, our weaknesses, and we discover a freedom that we keep on developing.

What kind of actions have you organised, and how?

We have a long history of actions! A fundamental element in our group is creativity. We've worked a lot around this theme

BOLIVIAN ANARCHO-FEMINISTS

and reflected on it. We are street activists, we are creative women, but we are not artists, and we don't want to covert ourselves into an artistic elite. We take up our right to create and to do new things. This goes hand in hand with our struggles. Creativity is not separate from but complements our political practice. After we brought out our newspaper eight years ago, we then moved into graffiti, and into street actions, or 'creative actions' as we call them. The street is an important centre of political activity, because it allows us to interact with and be in permanent contact with people. Our actions don't only take place in the streets, sometimes we occupy other spaces.

At the beginning, we focused a lot on the dictatorship. We mainly use symbols, rather than being explicit. We also use theatre: to symbolise blood, we use red dye; for death, we use crosses; for joy, we share bread and flowers with people. We've been doing these kind of actions for a long time. Another time we did an action at the Palace of Justice where we went in and filled the offices with rubbish. We've also touched on lesbianism, Barbies, racism, NGOs.

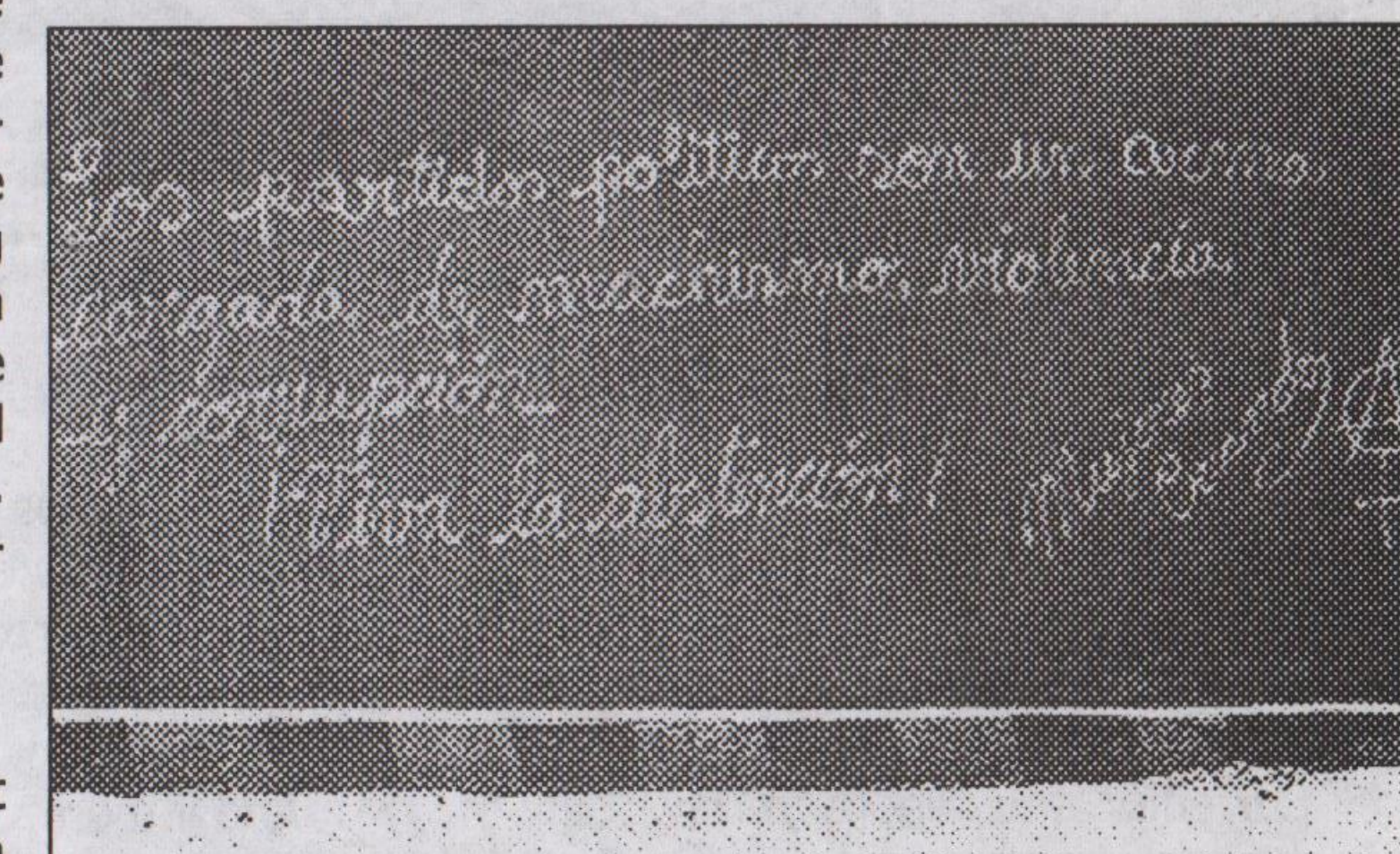
Do you feel part of a global movement?

Yes, I think so. We know that we'll change society with other organisations around the world and in Bolivia, and even though we disagree with many forms of organisation, we know that it is a common struggle. We also realise that we have to take action here where we are, in our own society.

What we want fundamentally is to co-ordinate with other autonomous feminists

around the world. In 1998, we organised the first meeting of autonomous feminists from Latin America and the Caribbean which was open to European women, with some limitations, of course, as it was primarily a meeting of Latin Americans, but we saw it very much as a global struggle. There are also things that feminist women from Europe, from the North, can be active on - for example on the question of funding which comes to Latin America in the name of women but which is always mediated by big NGOs and by governments. This type of solidarity is helpful to women in Latin America and helps to combat colonialism - not as a form of charity, but as part of a joint struggle.

Ffi: *Mujeres Creando*, Casilla 12806, La Paz, Bolivia
Email: creando@ceibo.entelnet.bo
OR pgabolivia@yahoo.co.uk



'POLITICAL PARTIES ARE A WEAPON LOADED WITH MACHISMO, VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION. LONG LIVE ABSTENTION!'

This interview will appear in a collection of inspiring interviews with women activists from around the world recorded at the People's Global Action meeting in Cochabamba, Bolivia last September hopefully in print by the summer.

WOMEN SPEAK OUT

A network of DIY anarcho-feminists and radical anti-capitalist women. Coming together to organise direct actions, discussions, films, constructive larking and opinionated exchange. Gatherings attract women from all over the country.

NEXT ONE: LONDON (HACKNEY) MARCH 8/9/10

Sleeping space available at venue or with local women.

A creche will be available - please let us know if you'll be bringing children.

Access: Limited - please phone/email for details.

ffi: 017985 365 992

wso-london-subscribe@yahoogroups.com