

“Forever Indebted to Women”

Inaugural HLSTUEI Regional Lecture Series on Outstanding Caribbean Trade Union Women

St. Kitts/Nevis

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His Excellency, the Governor General, Mr. Eustace John, Members of Cabinet, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Mr. Clement Liburd and other Members of the Liburd Family, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues, Friends

Let me begin by thanking you all for welcoming me to St. Kitts/Nevis and by saying how honoured I am to be the first speaker in this regional lecture series on outstanding Caribbean women introduced by my colleague, Ms. Marva Phillips, longstanding trade union researcher and educator who heads the Hugh Lawson Shearer Trade Union Education Institute of The University of the West Indies. The Institute’s mandate is to bring The UWI to the community and the community to The UWI, and it is doing so by spearheading this series. Ms. Phillips, in recognising the worth of women’s presence in history and their contribution to our lives and our being, envisioned the need for ongoing public recognition of that worth, hence, the idea of this regional lecture series on outstanding women who have made their indelible mark on the course of Caribbean history.

I must also mention that this series of lectures is sponsored by The UWI’s School of Continuing Studies and we wish to recognise the invaluable role played by our colleague, Ms. Olivia Edgecombe-Howell and her staff, particularly Ms. Grace Laplace and Ms. Cicely Jacobs who so willingly provided well-appreciated resources and support.

This evening is a very special one. It is special for three reasons. First, it marks the inaugural lecture of a regional series recognising women who have made a significant contribution to the making of Caribbean history and modern Caribbean societies. It is no secret that women have influenced historical processes which, in turn, have also influenced the lives of women for whom a new history has to be written since most historical records tend to either tack women on to a male-centred history or, simply, delete them from existing history. Hence, their lives, their work and their meaningful contribution to social and political life have been lost in the passage of time. Therefore, this lecture series which will take place in each country in the Anglophone space is an attempt to correct the imbalance in historical discourse and meaning. Second, this evening is special because it is a tribute to all women who have been active in the region’s trade union movement; those who have been visible and those who have been rendered invisible: all those women who have been the backbone of trade unions and political parties, since political parties in the region owe their existence, their support and their success to trade unions, from which most of them were born. Third, this evening is special because it is being held in St. Kitts/Nevis (then a triple state country: St. Kitts/Nevis/Anguilla) where it has been said that the labour riots for better wages and working conditions for women and men alike started in 1937, spreading to the rest of the Caribbean, marking a turning point in the socio-political relations between the colonising

British and an ex-slave population eager to raise their standard of living and to become 'somebody'. At that time, workers refused to accept the harsh conditions of colonialism, they rejected the inability to survive on meager wages and they rejected racial and class discrimination which characterised the post-slavery societies of the Caribbean. In addition, there were those women who rejected gender discrimination, embraced workers rights and rejected Eurocentric notions of woman, womanhood and womaness. These women were integral to the militant response of the majority classes against all forms of discrimination. It is to these women that we raise our hats this evening.

But before, we begin to pay tribute to our indomitable women, there are some false truths which we must consider. In every society and in all epochs of world history, the human and political nature of women's condition has only rarely been recognised and little attempt is made to understand this condition which has relegated them, as a social group, to the status of 'subordinate'. This status, which has been historically accepted by the various civilisations through which the world has passed, finds its justification in biological determination and physical limitations which see women as needing protection at best, and being neglected at worst. This, basically, explains women's invisibility in the history of human life and their marginalisation in the ideological space of many.

In the social and ideological matrix of all societies, then, women are decreed to be inferior, not by laws structured by society but by the laws of nature founded on some kind of cosmological explanation which is used instrumentally to inculcate notions of inferiority and superiority. This perception of women's natural inferiority in the relationships between them and men is, therefore, deemed as part of the natural order of history. We can draw some analogies here. History, both ancient and modern, is replete with examples of the inferior/superior divide where the inferiority of one group and the superiority of another have been described in many quarters as "natural". Whites embracing the ideology of racism claim that blacks are inferior because of their non-human qualities and whites rule over blacks by virtue of their "natural" superiority of intellect, morals and values; in ancient Rome, it was natural for slaves to be slaves and free citizens to be free citizens; in African slavery such as we experienced for 300 years, it was natural for Africans to be slaves because of their "closeness to animals" which made them incapable of human judgements of social and political life, the natural rulers then were whites; and even the class division of society is understood as natural because one group of people is naturally better than the other. So, in all societies, the "natural order" thesis persists, having translated itself, in the case of women, into an ideology of patriarchy, or as we commonly say, male dominance. This ideological construct which is expressed in a system and relations of male authority and control of the resources, benefits and rewards of society, maintains and reproduces itself through the established institutions of the church, political parties, media, trade unions and other private bodies as well as cultural traditions. This is no accident because securing the dissemination of ideas of male control and dominance is a necessity for the male superstructure to anticipate any challenge to its rule.

But, this challenge exists and it is an historical one. For centuries, women, black women, Asian women, African women, Latin American women and white women alike, secular

and religious women, have historically been challenging notions of their inferiority. They have in their movements, early and contemporary, developed doctrines of equal rights for women and an ideology of social transformation intending to create a world for women which goes beyond simple social equality. In this movement to attain women's rights, whether it is the right to vote, or freedom from domestic slavery, the right to education and proper health care or potable drinking water or the right to join trade unions, women have always sought to liberate themselves from the injustices they suffer, precisely because they are women.

Women in the Caribbean also have their own movement for change and they too recognise the need to speak on their own behalf and in their own interest because the "natural order" thesis and ideology are pervasive right here in a region where women and men shared the same circumstances and conditions only under the drudgery of slavery. In contemporary Caribbean societies, women, though central to the processes of reproduction and production, have been marginalised socially and ideologically. In this respect, they are devalued as human beings, their work is devalued, they usually get less pay for equal work, they are not usually respected outside the domestic sphere, they are more likely to be unemployed than men, and so on and so forth. If, then, our women are devalued as human beings, then it is hardly likely that their presence and contribution to the making of a society and a region will be recorded in the annals of history. We are not here saying that women's work and contribution are not chronicled, because they are in a number of instances. What we are saying is that for women and their work/contribution to be recorded it has to be done by women and not by the men who frequently provide accounts of the progress of time.

What we find, therefore, is that very often, in our reality, women are not recognised for their role in history or for their contribution to the making of society. We are treated as passive objects waiting to be led by our men, who have been given the role of creators of history and architects of our societies and essentially, the Caribbean region. Our historical records claim men's central role in the making of history and in the making of the Caribbean. Men are understood as the builders for eternity. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Modern Caribbean societies are indebted to women who have been active throughout the course of time: from slavery when they were involved in both active and passive resistance against the whip of servitude through post-slavery colonialism to contemporary times when we are still active individually and in our organizations, playing a critical role, as it is, in the process of sustainable development, environmental preservation, education and training for all disadvantaged peoples, caring for our children and the elderly, promoting and protecting our rights and the advancement of all women and working with our men to jealously guard the rights of all workers. In fact, in all historical periods, women have been at the forefront of social activity and social activism. One of those significant historical periods which we will address this evening is that of the 1930s when social protests laid the basis for the development of a 'new day' for the peoples of the Caribbean. That is to say, that collective response to post-slavery social and economic violence ushered in modern Caribbean societies. In 1937-38, social protests erupted throughout the region, resulting in the creation of political parties, the formation of trade unions and in making universal adult suffrage possible. Women were

active in these protests as they have always been in resisting colonialism. They, too, were in the leadership of a movement which laid the basis for political independence and which cleared the path which took us into the modern era with pride and dignity.

The labour riots were not accidental. They were the response of workers, peasants and the unemployed to the historical class and race oppression they suffered at the hands of the colonial government. These social groups were now demanding, of that government, greater participation in the civil and political processes of the country, better working conditions, higher wages and an end to racial and class oppression. The Moyne Commission, appointed by the British Colonial Office in 1938, to report on the causes and effects of the social unrest drew attention to the decline in the sugar industry, the main employer at the time, and the high levels of unemployment which resulted from the dismal social and economic conditions of the day. Based on its findings, the Commission expressed concern that the riots were quite different from any other previous unrest or revolt because it was a call for a new social order and a dismantling of the old. In order to prevent any further disturbance of that magnitude and in the interest of colonial rule, the Commission made a number of recommendations, chief among which were universal adult suffrage, a new constitution leading to self-government and the establishment of trade unions which became committed to representing, protecting and advancing the interests of workers

In this regional upheaval, women's contribution should not go unnoticed because they were present from start to finish. Women were as active and as committed as the men in the resistance movement. They were active as leaders and they were active in all the support activities which kept our fearless and committed men going: strikers, leaders and others. In Jamaica, for example, it is interesting to note that on the Frome sugar estate in Westmoreland where the riots started, the first shot was fired by the British soldiers when one young 19 year-old woman, Hilda Buchanan, threw a stone at the soldiers, hitting one among their ranks in his head. In that attack, one pregnant woman was martyred.

We continue with this trend of thought and speak briefly to the situation of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago where the presence of women in and their contribution to the social upheaval and the labour movement of that period were quite significant and I hope the presentation will help to concretise our discussion.

In Jamaica, while women like Aggie Bernard were busy keeping the fires of change burning in the period of the unrest, there were other women who committed themselves to correcting the breach by representing women and their interests before the Moyne Commission, set up as it was, to "investigate social and economic conditions in Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica, Trinidad, Leewards Islands and Windward Islands and matters connected therewith and to make recommendations". The Commission, it is reported, worked for 15 months, hearing evidence from 370 individuals and groups in 26 centres and received 789 memoranda and 300 communications of individual grievances. If one were to take a cursory look at the representation to the Commission, one would have concluded that the only representatives were men. Not so. Jamaican feminist, author and social activist, Joan French, has provided relevant and

revealing information. Both black and white women appeared on behalf of a discontented people seeking leadership from among their own kind. Amy Bailey, (black) social activist and women's advocate of the early Women's Liberal Club: her mission was to provide young black women and girls with the tools of empowerment so that they could build their self-confidence and self-respect, and be both self-sufficient and self-reliant in a society where blackness meant inferiority, womanhood devalued and social disadvantage spurned; Una Marson, the first significant Caribbean woman poet, playwright, feminist and broadcaster and anti-colonial, anti-racist and feminist activist who later became the first black woman programme maker at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) recommended a tax on bachelors as a solution to the problems of child support; Edith Clarke, white, social worker of Jamaica Welfare Limited and author of the famous *My Mother Who Fathered Me*; prominent black educator and member of the Jamaica Union of Teachers, Edith Dalton-James who was involved in issues relating to women, children and the rights of workers, racism and anti-colonialism; May Farquharson, daughter of a wealthy white planter who initiated the movement for reproductive rights for women; Mary Morris Knibb, who in her testimony condemned the racism of the upper class women, criticising them at the same time, for stifling the leadership potential of black women. All appeared before the Commission as representatives and agents of change. Not only did women testify before the Commission, but they were included in its composition. Of a membership of 10, two were women: one Mary Blacklock, a specialist in tropical medicine who had served as medical officer in Sierra Leone and as Professor of Pathology at Lady Hardinge College, Delhi, India and a Dame Crowdy, an internationally recognised social worker.

But while some women testified before the Commission, there were other women who kept the anti-colonial fervour alive, making their contribution through their labour and political organizations: women who, in their own organisations, held the peoples movement together, numbering among the vertebrae of the spinal cord which braced that movement, forcing the British to stand up and take note of a people who respected all, but feared none. This was evident throughout the region where some people, both women and men, also came under the influence of the ideas of Garvey whose United Negro Improvement Association had the longest outward stretch in the history of the world, spanning all continents. Women were also influenced by the ideas of the international working class movement as they were by their own experiences of race and class bigotry and political disenfranchisement dished out to them by the British. This combination of ideas strengthened their social consciousness as these movements assisted in nurturing and providing ideological and political sustenance, not just to advance women's rights but also to wage war on capitalist relations of production, the exploitation of women and female unemployment. Worthy of mention here are Satira Earle and Adina Spencer, both Jamaicans, who were activists in the nationalist struggles of 1938. Earle, lady President of the St. Andrew Division of Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association attempted to organise a labour union among Garvey's supporters on his departure from the island colony in 1935. At the inaugural meeting of the union, she expressed impatience with the middle class leadership which she thought was too timid to give proper leadership. In addressing men specifically she said:

Wake up men, if you are afraid to carry on, I will organize a committee of women and launch out against capitalism in this island and leave you drowsy men behind [cited in Ford-Smith, n.d.: 13].

Spencer, dubbed as “an important figure in the strikes of 1938” spoke vehemently against what could be construed as the mass unemployment of poor women who were willing to work but was denied the chance to make an honest living. According to Spencer,” there is no work for us to do nor other economic opportunities enabling us to rise to a higher standard of life, thus uplifting our womanhood”. [cited in Ford-Smith: n.d.: 13].

But in 1939, no doubt, an unsettling period of tensions, women in continuing their anti-colonial activity held the country’s first women’s conference. At that conference, they made trade union demands on the colonial authorities. According to Honor Ford-Smith [n.d.: 16]:

[The conference] pressed the demands of women for wider jobs in education, the police force and the civil service and the judiciary. It demanded political rights for women on the same terms as men, called for registration of fathers and the enforced contribution of men to their children’s financial maintenance. It called on government to encourage birth control propaganda and to permit medical officers of the government to be allowed to spread birth control propaganda and to include birth control in their services for women.

After receiving a delegation of women to discuss these demands, the colonial authorities granted their demand for political rights in the context of the reforms which came in the aftermath of the unrest and with the recommendations of the Moyne Commission.

In Trinidad and Tobago, women were also critical to the formation of trade unions and the consolidation of the labour movement as they actively worked alongside their men to protect workers’ rights as well as their own. Names like Elma Francois, Daisy Crick and Daisy Atwell hold prominence in a country where the first trade union was registered in 1936, although there was the presence of labour unions from as early as 1919. At that time, The Assistant and Pupil Teachers Union was started and it seemed to have evolved into the Trinidad and Tobago Teachers’ Union which had three women in its executive body: Maud Reeves, lady vice-president, P.W. Henry, secretary and H. Alexander as treasurer. Women’s involvement is also recorded in the organisation of the Union of Shop Assistants and Clerks with a membership that was predominantly women who were poorly paid shop assistants and store workers. Though the leadership of this union was dominated by men up to 1935, in 1936, one Miss M. Cazabon was elected first vice-president and “six other women were elected to the committee of management” [Reddock: 1994: 144].

Elma Francois is a woman of note. Born Vincentian in 1897, she migrated in 1919 to Trinidad and Tobago where she and her partner Jim Barrette were founding members of the National Unemployed Movement, founded on the basis of social justice for all. Influenced by the ideas of race and racial dignity promoted by Garvey, and the working class consciousness of communism, Francois, the worker, the trade unionist and political activist, was deeply involved in workers, class and race issues as she worked alongside

outstanding labour and political leaders, A.A. Cipriani as member of the Trinidad Working Men's Association and with Uriah 'Buzz' Butler through her own organisation the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association, the new National Unemployed Movement in terms of content. Of Francois, it is said, "[She] is a heroine because she personified timeless truths that many women nowadays should practice".

Daisy Crick, one of the earliest and leading members of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union worked and spoke earnestly in favour of women's activism. Reddock [1994: 145-146] records a meeting at which Crick spoke in an area called Parrylands in 1938.

Comrade Daisy in forceful style implored the women present to stand firm under the banner of Trade union and Blue shirt Movement....She advised the womenfolks (sic) not only for Parrylands but for Trinidad and Tobago and the West Indies to divorce themselves at times from the kitchen and join issue with men in that great struggle for social revolution and working class self-respect.

In the case of Daisy Atwell, Reddock informs:

[T]his mobilization of women in 1938 culminated in a mass meeting of women unionists on November 13, hosted by the women of Fyzabad at Central Hall, Fyzabad, it was attended by three hundred women. No men were admitted. Women traveled from Point Fortin, San Fernando, La Brea, Cochrane and other parts of the southern area. Eight women were on the platform and the meeting was chaired by Daisy Atwell.... [who] in her speech referred to the need for women to struggle for their rights as women.

In the rest of the Caribbean, women were as active as ever keeping the flames of social revolution in the period of 1937-1938 burning so that both women and men could achieve the rights and freedoms embraced by modern societies, and that women could have equal rights with men. We respect these pioneering women as we etch their memories on our minds' pages: Willamae Bridgewater of the Bahamas; Bertha Mutt of St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Vivienne Surrey of Guyana; Thelma Williams of Trinidad and Tobago; Marie Louise Wiltshire of Barbados; all the unnamed housewives of St. Lucia who lit the spark of change as well as those nurses and teachers of Grenada who helped to clear the pathway to progress; and Maggie O'Brien of St. Kitts/Nevis, the country to which we will now turn.

In the case of St. Kitts/Nevis, history here too is really his-story. Vincent K. Hubbard's *A History of St. Kitts*, published in 2002 is bereft of any reference to women's participation in the labour movement. In fact, a woman's name is mentioned only three times in the whole text of 182 pages: Lady Hawkins, a passenger liner, HRH Princess Margaret of Britain and one Mrs. Dasent who lived at Dasent estate in Nevis and who had loaned a pair of dueling pistols to a Barbot who was locked in a dispute over the settling of a bankrupt Nevis estate. In addition, while preparing for this lecture, I came across a poem entitled "A Tribute to Our Union on the Achievement of its Fiftieth Year of Existence". It was a tribute to the St. Kitts Nevis Trades and Labour Union and all the stalwarts of the trade union movement since its birth in 1940. Written by one Charlotte Salters, the tribute was not one that recognised all the players responsible for the existence of the labour movement because the glowing tributes were reserved only for the men. Let me give you an idea. It reads:

God bless the St. Kitts Nevis Trades and Labour Union
Which fought for workers rights in this very nation
The struggle was no easy task, yet the leaders never surrendered
And in this fiftieth year by us they shall be remembered
Thank God for brave men who caught the vision
That every ordinary worker could enjoy life in this federation.

Salters goes on to mention, by name, the pioneers of the movement: Thomas Manchester, Matthew Sebastian, Edgar Challenger, Charles Halbert, Robert Bradshaw (who later became the country's first premier), Paul Southwell and Nathaniel France. While we recognise and cherish both the work and the memory of these leaders, we must also recognise, cherish and appreciate that of those great women who helped to fan the flames of change which brought social, political and economic benefits which we, as citizens of the Caribbean, now enjoy.

Local Kittian historian, Sir Probyn Innis has told us that we should, indeed, recognise the critical role of women in the country's history. In his recent lecture, "The Roots of the 1935 Buckley's Riot", presented here at the University Centre, Sir Probyn indicated that both women and men "put their lives on the line in the cause of justice in which they believed". Women and men, he said, "affirmed their rights, their dignity and their equality as human beings". Women and men as leaders, he continued, made people aware of what they were fighting for. We can conclude, then, that these women and men were able to combine trade union and political demands in a way which testified to their ideological clarity and political prudence. It was a kind of revolutionary consciousness born of their support for the cause of justice, spoken to earlier.

It is precisely because of the lack of information on her-story that we feel it is necessary to remember those other unsung women who fought so selflessly to ensure the social advancement of the peoples, of their country and of their and region. In this respect, we now pay our respect to one of those women: Ann Eliza Liburd whose life's work was committed to erasing the inequalities experienced at the workplace and in society in a period where black meant disadvantage, class assumed prominence in social, professional and working relationships and woman meant discrimination.

Ann Liburd, respectfully and affectionately called "Lady Ann", has been described as "a woman of class"; "once twice three times a lady", "fun loving, cheerful, always ready with a beautiful smile and laugh"; "God fearing"; deeply involved in social activities and willing to take on leadership positions. But, whatever the description, there is no denying that Ann Eliza Liburd, Antiguan by birth and Kittian by adoption, having moved here in 1946 after she married health worker, Clement Liburd in 1944, was a woman of the people, a stalwart of the local and regional trade union movement and a champion for the cause of all women, regardless of their station in life. Combining trade union activity with women's activism has placed Liburd in a class of women who dared to confront the *status quo* in an attempt to alter the foundations of women's and workers' exploitation and sometimes the two are one since women are also workers and some workers are

women, women who are in the majority in some areas of industry, like the hospitality industry. It is in this way that Ann Liburd gave meaning to women's lives as women, as workers, as trade unionists, as activists, as citizens and as leaders in their households. Hers was providing for women the tools of empowerment through education and training, social upliftment, commercial activity and shrewd business practices. Like Amy Bailey, Lady Ann encouraged women, particularly young women, to be self-reliant and self-sufficient and to respond to social and economic situations as well as their own circumstances with confidence and pride.

It is not strange, then, to learn that this woman of strength, who also found time to raise a family of six and care for her partner, was one of the anchors of the largest, most comprehensive, most inter-disciplinary and most significant women's and trade union projects ever undertaken by the Trade Union Education Institute and The UWI. The three-year project (1982-1985) was intended to improve the capacity of women to provide public leadership, to train them in the craft of trade unionism in order to enhance their status, respect, recognition and effectiveness in the trade union movement which denied them the achievement of equality and the equitable distribution of position and power. Ann Liburd was integral to that training exercise and research project which forced women to examine those factors which hindered or promoted their personal and professional development, as well as those which held them back from assuming leadership roles in trade unions.

The Trade Union Education Institute was not the only beneficiary of Liburd's insight and experience. The Women and Development Unit (WAND) can accurately say that Liburd and WAND had established a symbiotic relationship which lasted for years. This relationship which started with Peggy Antrobus, WAND's first Tutor/Coordinator, was one in which ideas were exchanged and support given, on both sides, to the promotion and support of activities in the interest of the improvement of women's lives. Perhaps you should know that Ann Liburd and her work are documented in Nesha Haniff's piece, *Blaze a Fire: Significant Contributions of Caribbean Women*. In this book, Liburd, with her spirit of determination, solidarity and hope, is numbered among some pioneering and outstanding women of the Caribbean.

Liburd, was born in Antigua/Barbuda in 1920, 17 years before the start of the social unrest of 1937-38 and 20 years before the formation of the St.Kitts/Nevis Trades and Labour Union, two years after the end of World War 1, and in the period of the Great Depression which plagued the United States of America with devastating effects on the peoples of that country and the countries of our region. Growing up in this social milieu, it is no surprise that Liburd developed a sense of social consciousness and a social conscience, which would lead her to embrace ideas of social advancement, change and a better life for all the peoples of the region she called home. It is no surprise when she stated that "I believe not in superiority, but in equality" [Haniff: 1988: 155].

During her service to the young, the old, men and the women of St. Kitts/Nevis which lasted over 60 years, she was the first president of the women's umbrella organisation, Caribbean Women's Association, a position to which she was elected three times. In this

organisation she enjoyed an eight year stewardship. Longtime associate of trade union and political giant, Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw and recruiter and organiser for the St. Kitts Nevis Trades and Labour Union, she was propelled into the position of president of the Labour Women to which she gave dedicated service. As president of the National Council of Women here in St. Kitts/Nevis, she pioneered the formation of other women's groups to serve the interests of particular groups of women, giving them agency and control over their own lives and destiny, teaching them at the same time to 'tun yuh han' mek fashion' (to be creative under your existing circumstances).

Her work has not gone unrecognised by international organisations and their players who, no doubt, were influenced by her relentless commitment to women's upliftment through self-reliance, economic independence and educational advancement as they admired the tenacity with which she advanced the cause of all workers. The Partners of America Award in recognition of outstanding service for partners in The Partners in Development Workshop for Women in Haiti in 1983; The Women of the Year 1991 America Biographical Institute's recognition of her leadership of the Caribbean Women's Association and her commitment to labour issues; and the 1996 Member of the British Empire distinction, all speak to Liburd's sterling contribution to a people still struggling to throw off the bonds of colonialism and the yoke of patriarchy.

Anne Liburd, firmly rooted in the tradition of trade union and women's activism, is numbered among those great women to whom we will be forever indebted for their bravery and their heroic stance against racial inequality, class discrimination and gender disadvantage. When the new history of St. Kitts/Nevis/Anguilla is written, and indeed, that of the Caribbean, Anne Liburd's name will be written in bold letters of gold.

While we hold these women, who have gone before, in high esteem and thank them for creating a space for women and a pathway to progress for both women and men, we must with concern, understand that women have not benefitted from the equality they fought for; they do not have equal decision making powers, nor do they have equal access to material resources and the benefits and rewards of society. In the case of the labour movement, the organisational structure of trade unions and the historical attitude the relative positions of women and men still do not allow for the recognition and, hence, the advancement of women in the labour unions and the movement. This is so because the balance of power and, hence, the balance of social relationships have not changed over the years in their favour. They have remained in favour of men who, hithertofore, were equal to women only under slavery, a system of undisguised exploitation with a legal and social framework which relegated all women and men to the status of capital.

However, in the post-slavery period, particularly in the aftermath of the 1930s, this change resulted from the way in which women were conceptualised and understood by the British male superstructure which saw women as the property of men and which mandated that property owned by unmarried women should become the property of their husbands when they changed their marital status. Nonetheless, the period of the 1930s were significant in that it ushered in reforms which were to benefit women and men alike, and very importantly, women raised their voices in their own interest even if our struggle

today against marginalisation and discrimination in the labour movement and in the wider society continues.

Today, despite the progress we have made as women, much remains to be done. Almost everywhere in the world, women's concerns and issues are still not given priority. Women still face discrimination and marginalization in subtle and obvious ways. Women still do not share equally in the fruits of their labour or, more generally, the fruits of the production process. Women and men still live in an unequal world in which women constitute 70 percent of the poor. We, as women, must continue, in the tradition of our foremothers, to work towards eliminating those social disparities and unacceptable inequalities which we consider a blot on humanity's forward march.

But, as we continue to move forward, we need to be careful that we are not sidelined by the present insertion of 'gender' into our thinking. While we are not opposed to gender analyses, we, as women, need to be careful that we do not embrace gender in such a way that it sidelines our issues and betrays our own forward march, which is proving difficult at this time. In our view, the concept of 'gender' seems to suggest that women's issues are all solved or resolved and therefore, there is really no need for further attention to these issues: that women have equal access to the resources society has to offer and that they are enjoying the benefits and rewards of society in the same way their male counterparts do. But that is not the case as we have stated above. When 'gender' is substituted for women, both the focus and debates are shifted away from an understanding of patriarchy and male-centredness as a system of dominance and control, and women's marginalisation as a consequence of this. Hence, women and the women's movement are shifted away from challenging the male superstructure to a more acceptable one which seeks to sensitise women and men. There is nothing wrong with this, but when examined critically, such a practice must logically render women and their movement invisible at a time when women are being further marginalised in the social process. In fact, most Caribbean women and men are more comfortable with the term 'gender' because it is said to be more inclusive, but actually it is not, because our thinking and attitude remain the same.

Related to this whole issue of 'gender' as an analytical category, we often tend to mainstream gender in both the academic and non-academic spheres. If, again, we critically examine this whole issue of "gender mainstreaming", we will see that the term 'gender' is being used in a way which clouds the social inequalities which exist between women and men, women and women and men and men. This is of concern because there is no essential woman and no homogenous man. For social and economic policies have a differential impact on women and men of different classes and races. That is to say, women and men are as divided by class as they are by race. Therefore, any analysis of 'gender mainstreaming' must recognise race and class differences within the two social groups under discussion. Furthermore, in the gender mainstreaming process, one must be mindful that only those who are marginalised are subject to being 'mainstreamed'. In the social and economic matrix of the Caribbean, men are not marginalised for one simple reason: they hold power. Women, at the same time, do not hold power.

Finally, given all that have been said, and given that we need to locate ourselves centrally, in social, political and economic life and thought, and given that we need to share our lives and our worth through the collective consciousness of our people, I urge all Caribbean women to get involved in writing their history, our history, in all spheres of social and political life so that the history of our own countries and that of the region can be complete.

It is in the spirit of Ann Eliza Liburd and all those worthy and remarkable women, who paved the way so we could progress, that I leave you with the words of Anna Regina's song "Women Come Out", a song which is seen as the song of trade unions.

Women know that you are not inferior
You can always take the place of your superior
You will make it though you know little about the Union
Call out other women
And build a stronger fusion.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues, Friends
The movement is alive and the struggle continues.

Judith Soares
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