

A New Way of Looking at Politics

By Regina Rodriguez

In the different countries in Latin America, after many long years of authoritarian regimes, democracy appears not only as a hard won reality constructed during different transition periods but also as a better form of organized social life.

However these successful democracies have marked weaknesses that stem from minimal participation of its citizens, and unceasing corruption and increasing violence.

Changes in world power structures and the long drawn crises that have reached international proportions project a picture of uncertainty that pushes one to think of creative ways to move forward in the midst of disharmony. In this context new initiatives have surfaced that allow women's voices to be heard on the political scene.

Even though Latin American women participate more and more in employment, education and culture; her political participation and above all her presence in public and in positions of power are minimal. This situation is similar to the rest of the world. The representation of women in parliaments for example do not surpass 10 percent, not even in European countries or the North.

After accumulating a wide variety of rich experiences over a long period of time, the women in the region who have become increasingly aware of current issues are faced with the challenge of mapping out new strategies that will allow a more participative role for women. An analysis and reflection about the

role of the State, ways of successfully implementing political actions that allow collaborative activities between government and social bodies, concepts on affirmative action and equal opportunities are just some of the discussions points being raised by women.

Many different initiatives have been undertaken recently. Because women do not have regular venues for public political debates, they have looked for alternative places to discuss problems and issues that will affect future generations in the region and to find effective means of addressing these problems. It becomes more evident each time that the perspectives encompass not just women's issues but a different way of building civilization and the indispensable role of women.

In Mexico the objective of the campaign "Winning Spaces" propelled by the women's movement, was "to establish concrete actions that will prove the constitutional postulate that calls for equal rights for both men and women". The campaign proposes legislative reforms that guarantee the existence of 50 percent men and 50 percent women on the job, in education, in training and in the distribution of housing, land and slots of political representation. The campaign proposes a new kind of society that will change the power relations in the country.

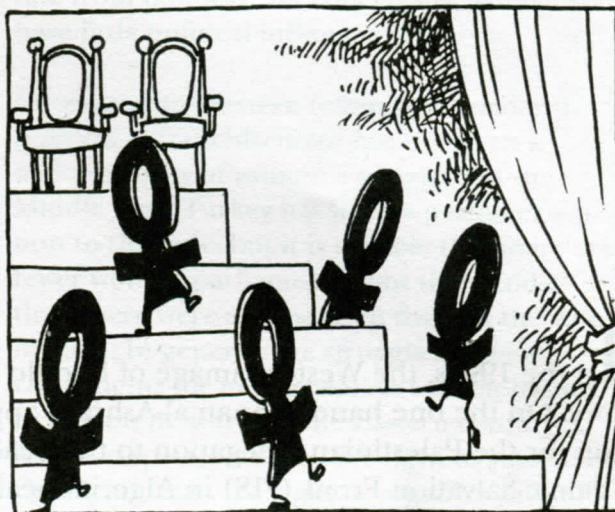
The Mexican women have appealed to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was ratified by Mexico. They insist that the interests of women center on equality with due recognition of cultural, economic, political and social diversities.

In Paraguay, the fourth edition of a Women's Forum, was called by the Coordination for Women in Paraguay, with the participation of peasants, militant political parties, labor workers, professionals and representatives from public and non-governmental organizations.

Included among the proposed tasks are consciousness raising training for women who hold managerial positions but lack a gender perspective, and the revision of the electoral system to facilitate greater participation of women in public roles. The organized Paraguayan women offered their support to Mavi Brusquetti, candidate for vice president of the Republic under the political movement "Encuentro Nacional," marking a historical milestone in Paraguay's politics. According to her, women can provide another perspective to politics and certainly women's participation opened discussions and debates to themes that might not be addressed otherwise. Unfortunately, the political party Colorado won, amidst grave accusations of fraud.

The work realized by the Paraguayan women during the last years of Stroessner's dictatorship and in the first years of the transition has had a tremendous impact in the legislative formulation of reforms and in terms of global political measures that it is probable that their successes will be quite significant in years to come.

In Argentina, recent events have provoked surprise and at the same time reflection and polemical discussions. President Menem decreed the formation of a cabinet comprising of eight women as part of a series of political measures by the Peron government which



began with the formation of the National Council of Women. Along with this measure is the signing of the law which requires political parties to carry 30 percent of women candidates in their electoral lists in areas where there are possibilities of their being elected.

In Bolivia, the women are celebrating the inauguration of the State's Women's Program. They feel that this has opened a venue for lively debates between women's organizations and government representatives. The reality of dictatorships such as Bolivia is that while women's organizations flourished, they had very limited participation at both government and State levels.

To achieve greater political participation for women, it is necessary to present more daring proposals and changes in social and political systems, not only in terms of choosing representatives but also in being able to freely express our sentiments in both private and public sectors. The latest initiatives and experiences in Latin America are very optimistic.

Source: "America Latina, Una Nueva Manera de Hacer Politica," *Mujeres en Accion*, 2/93, pp. 27-30. *Isis Internacional*, Santiago de Chile. Condensed version in English by Luz Martinez and Lourdes Alvarado.