

# LA MUJER: AL FRENTE DE LA LUCHA POR LA LIBERACIÓN DE LA RAZA



*Cathy Espitia, Erendira Ramirez, Bridgette Castillo, Myra Rodriguez, and Isabell Peña.*



*Keynote Speaker: Wendy Arroyo.*



*Pablo Aceves translating presentation.*



*Isabell Peña, foro facilitator.*

Unión del Barrio –an organization that for over 30 years has struggled for the self-determination and liberation of La Raza, and other oppressed poor and working class people– held a community forum on Thursday January 19, 2012, at the Memorial Senior Center. The Center is located in Memorial Park, found within a mostly Mexican and African American community in San Diego. The objective of the forum was to address the critical issues facing our community and the importance of the participation of women in these particular struggles.

## TOWARDS A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The forum was also part of Unión del Barrio's ongoing work to build a liberation movement that can challenge the oppressive and violent system known as capitalism that controls most of the world today.

The forum, organized under the theme of "La Mujer: Al Frente de la Lucha por la Liberación de la Raza", brought together more than fifty participants, which included men and women, teachers, mothers, students, and community organizers. Also, the Save Our Barrio Committee (SOBC), Association of Raza Educators (ARE), Lindsay Community School, and the Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) displayed information and art, and sold their group's material (pamphlets, calendar, pins, etc.)

The program began with a welcome and review of the day's agenda by Compañera Isabell Peña, a leading member of Unión del Barrio. Compañera Isabell explained to the audience the importance of participating in events like the forum, which provides a space for ideas to be exchanged and to have a dialogue with different sectors of our community. She stressed that forums help us develop the knowledge and creates the unity that will move our struggle forward. Compañera Isabell specifically referred to the forum as part of the work to build a mujer national liberation conference that will be organized by Unión del Barrio on March 10, 2012, in Los Angeles, California.

The keynote speaker of the forum

was Wendy Arroyo, member of the Frente Popular Revolucionario (FPR) Baja, California. A member of the State Committee of the FPR, Compañera Wendy's main area of work has been working with labor unions, focusing on the defense of workers' rights. The FPR, a Marxist Leninist organization is part of a nation-wide network of revolutionary organizations south of the military "imposed border" that fights against capitalist oppression and imperialism.

Compañera Wendy spoke on the role of women in the struggle for national liberation and against capitalism-imperialism. Her presentation began with a personal narrative that describe her participation in an International Women's Day march. On one of the main banners that day it stated ¡Viva Las Mujeres! Compañera Wendy made a comment to another member of her organization asking why not add the word "trabajadoras" [workers] to the banner? She wanted to include trabajadoras, so that the all mujeres involved in the struggle understand that capitalism exploits both men and women alike.

Compañera Wendy also felt that by including the class struggle in the banner it would serve to reclaim the victories and contributions of women –not just based on their gender– but also on their dedication and sacrifice to better the economic and political conditions of the whole of the Mexican nation and other oppressed peoples of the world.

## ONLY UNITED CAN WE BE FREE

Compañera Wendy also spoke, again using personal narrative, on the fact that women face oppression and exploitation both at the home and at the work place. Women are not only expected to work 8 hours or sometimes longer at work, but also to come home and fulfill gender roles imposed on her by society, taking care of the household maintenance.

Compañera Wendy concluded her presentation making clear that women and men can only liberate themselves by overturning the capitalist system and

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creating a socialist-communist society where there will not exist any forms of oppression or inequalities. Central to her position on this matter was that the struggle against oppression cannot be one based on gender, but one based on class, and thus only united can both men and women win their freedom.

## PRISONS ARE TOOLS OF OPPRESSION

The second part of the program was a panel of four women that participate in local community organizations. These women shared with the audience their experiences in organizing and why it is important for women to be part of an organization. The panelists were: Cathy Espitia, a member of Unión del Barrio who was coordinator of the CMPP (Chicano Mexicano Prison Project) for more than five years. Compañera Cathy spoke on the mass imprisonment of Raza and its effects on women and their family. Prisons, she explained, serve to oppress people of all nationalities, specifically Africans and Mexicans, and make a profit off of their imprisonment. She stressed that the role of women is to raise the consciousness of our community and educate ourselves on the real reasons why there is a mass incarceration of Africans and Mexicans.

## CREATING RESPECT AMONGST ALL

Also on the panel were two student leaders from Lincoln High School, Bridgette Castillo and Mayra Rodriguez, who actively participate in school organizations. Compañera Bridgette is a founder and member of Women's Empowerment Organization, and Compañera Mayra is vice president of Lincoln MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). Both young ladies shared with the audience their perspective on why youth should be involved in the social justice movement. They spoke on the importance of an education that teaches Raza their true history and raises consciousness as a form of empowering youth. Compañera Mayra specifically addressed the need to overturn the cultural dynamic that is so derogatory towards women and the need to create respect amongst young men and women, so that united all can participate in creating

a better society.

## A REAL EDUCATOR IS A ROLE MODEL OF STRUGGLE

The last panelist was Erendira Ramirez, an English teacher, and member of Unión del Barrio and ARE (Association of Raza Educators). Compañera Erendira spoke on the role of educators in the struggle for the liberation of la mujer. She expressed that there is an urgent need to be positive role models of struggle for our youth and create a relationship based on respect and equality between the teacher and student. Compañera Erendira explained that a "real educator" enables the student to become critical thinkers with the means to analyze their problems and find ways to resolve them.

Judy de los Santos, Central Committee member of Unión del Barrio and head of the organization's Women's Commission, gave a brief update on the Women's Conference (of March 10, 2012). One of the aims of the conference will be to commemorate International Women's Day. Judy invited all to attend the conference so that we can promote the participation of women as leaders in a social movement that will destroy the capitalist system that oppresses both women and men alike, a system that does not discriminate by gender only, but exploits all people.

## WE ARE LIBERATING A NATION

Unión del Barrio believes that the absolute and unequivocal liberation of women is fundamental to any revolutionary organization or social movement. The subjugation of Raza women is a major part of the overall oppression of our people under capitalism and imperialism, and the only solution is organization. Raza-Mexicano/as will not see equality between genders until we are free as a class and are able to self-determine our future as a nation.

We urge all to join an organization, get involved and participate!

¡Que viva las mujeres trabajadoras!

¡Que viva las juvenes!

¡Que viva las mujeres en lucha!

*¡Unidas venceremos!*



*Panelists answering questions.*



*Students from Lindsey School with teacher and ARE member, Dawn Miller.*



*Judy de Los Santos reviewing Conference On La Mujer.*



*Students and Staff, San Pascual Academy with teachers Erendira Ramirez and Juan Orozco.*