

WOMEN WORKING FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS (Workingwomen)

14th Anniversary Celebration - January 1999

CITATION

Clotil Walcott - Activist, Grassroots Woman and Intellectual

It is not often that someone from the working class, especially a woman, is able to empower herself and rise above her circumstances without the benefits of high formal education sufficiently, to make outstanding contributions to her society. In the past, whenever this has happened, society and intellectuals have often taken a very long time to recognise the value and worth of the contributions of such persons, often waiting until it was too late. In addition, History has illustrated that the social and political irritation which often accompanies true activism for profound social change - challenging authority, confronting power, etc. sometimes obscures the vision, brilliance and greatness of those who strive for such change, until after their deaths.

Clotil Walcott is a living example of someone who has made a tremendous contribution to her society, and to the cause of women in general through her activism, investigation and writings (including numerous letters to government ministers and to the press). She has been indefatigable in her championing of the rights of women in general, and more specifically, of the household worker waged and unwaged. As a trade unionist, she has ventured into uncharted waters to have household and low income workers recognized as workers, unionised and properly remunerated for their labour. For this, she has been placed under tremendous pressure, with obstacles specifically placed in her path to prevent her from achieving her goals. This however did not prevent her from educating herself in trade unionism and industrial relations and forming a trade union - as yet not able to represent their main clientele because in Trinidad and Tobago domestic or household workers are not recognized as workers. Nevertheless, Clotil Walcott, has been successful in lobbying for the passing of the laws, pertaining to minimum wages of household workers and assistants.

She has also been in the forefront of the legislation passed by the parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to add to the National Accounts the previously uncounted, unwaged work of thousands, including that performed by housewives. In achieving this Trinidad and Tobago became one of the first countries in the world to pass such legislation. The Trinidad and Tobago legislation was then used as the model for negotiations on the recommendation on unwaged work included in the Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference of Women held in Beijing, China in 1995.

What is so very special about Clotil Walcott however, is that she has done all of this as a grassroots, working class woman and single mother. Mother of five, she was born in St. Joseph and spent most of her life in St. Joseph and Arima. Clotil used her life experiences, her concern for others around her, boundless energy, native intelligence and intellectual ability to do what many have done after having spent a number of years in the formal schooling process, at higher levels of education. She is president and founder of the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE), a member of the International Wages for Housework Campaign and its local representative, and is a founding member of the International Network of Domestic Workers, formed at the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing, China. In addition to this she has been a committee member of the National AIDS Committee and a founding member of the National Women's Caucus. Clotil has participated in a number of international fora for the advancement of women, and is continuing her tireless work in the advancement of her various causes. The publication *Fight Back Says A Woman*, published in 1980 by the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, includes four of her early pamphlets which she used to type on her personal typewriter, have printed by gestetner and sell at various events including political meetings and outside parliament.

Since 1979 she has traveled and spoken internationally. She attended and presented at the End of Decade Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, and the Fourth World Conference. She addressed the House of Commons in London on Counting Women's Work; she attended the Extended Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in Vienna, Austria in 1990 and was Feature Speaker at the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Wages for Housework Campaign in London in 1997.

In 1998, one of Clotil's dreams came true when a Conference of Domestic workers was held in Arima, Trinidad and Tobago, jointly hosted by the ILO and NUDE. This was another beginning in her longheld wish to see domestic workers organised. This dream continues.

For this outstanding work, Clotil has been recognised locally and internationally and received a number of awards and honours. These include - The Bank and General Workers Union(BGWU) Grand Certificate of Honour for Service and Dedication to the Trade Union Movement in 1984, the Peoples' Popular Movement Star Citizen Award in 1985, the Council of Progressive Trade Unions, Servant and Hero of Labour Gold Award, and the Network of NGO's for The Advancement of Women honour for Outstanding Contributions to the Women's Movement. In 1995, she was honoured by Partners of the Americas for 30 Years of dedicated Service which achieved world recognition of the value of women's work.

In 1998, on the recommendation of Workingwomen and the Labour movement Clotil received the Humming Bird Silver Medal in the Annual National Awards Ceremony on Independence Day. This was a great day for the women's movement, unfortunately, however, it was not highlighted in the media. Working women has therefore taken the opportunity of this occasion to, on our own behalf and that of the women and progressive men of Trinidad and Tobago, congratulate Clotil on the receipt of this national honour. In doing so we acknowledge the immense contribution which she has made to the advancement of women and improvement in the quality of life of low income workers in this country.

Clotil we love you, we are proud of you and some of us secretly wish we were more like you. Thank you for every thing which you have done for us. May you have many more years of struggle and success, good health and happiness. And may your hard work bear many fruit in the future.

THANK YOU!

Workingwomen,
January, 24 1999