



**Nora  
Castañeda,  
President of the  
Women's  
Development  
Bank**

## We won our rights in the constitution

*We made ourselves part of the Constituent Assembly. Every day, for as long as the Assembly sat, two movements were on permanent visit there: the Indigenous movement and the women's movement. We came not to beg but to submit our proposals. We had been discussing all this for years, and now our time had come. And there, in the Constituent Assembly, on picket duty, we won the inclusion of our rights in the constitution. We won Article 88, recognising that housewives create added value, and must be compensated with social security.*

### Article 88

**The State guarantees equality and equity between men and women in the exercise of their right to work. The State recognises work at home as an economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth. Housewives are entitled to Social Security in accordance with the law.**

*Articles of the constitution are printed on milk cartons and food wrappings.*

*And in the Land Act we won Article 14, giving women heads of household priority in land distribution. Women have always been part of the economy but most of the time their work has been invisible. Article 88 of the constitution is based on this. There is no woman in the world who is economically inactive. The fact that our work is done in the home and produces use values, values which are not put on the market,*

*is no reason to make us invisible. We women add value to the economy, to society, and therefore society has an obligation to return something to us so that we also benefit from this economy. It's only fair that the whole of society should contribute to us through social security: healthcare, education, pensions, housing.*

*So we share the Strike's perspective that all our lives women are part of the economy and the point is to make this fact visible and to pay us for what we have done. It's not about a gift, a donation, it's about payment. Recognition that unremunerated housework generates added value is a way of winning a choice for women; she can opt to do this work and be paid for it without having to do another job for the market. Our aim is to eliminate these triple workdays. Community work [the third job] should also have its recognition, a payment to women.*

### **The economy must be at the service of human beings**

*The Women's Bank has a fundamental purpose: that women living in poverty become independent protagonists in the revolutionary struggle. We believe that the economy must be at the service of human beings, not human beings at the service of the economy. We want to create an economy based on co-operation and mutual support, a caring economy. We are not building a bank. We are building a different way of life.*

*Interview with the Strike, April 2003*

**The poorest are the native people because they have been relegated to the most inhospitable areas. Throughout colonisation their land was taken from them. Once slavery was abolished, the population of African descent settled in or near the cities. They are often much poorer than Mestizos [mixed race] but don't live separately from them. As a Mestiza I don't face as much discrimination as a Black woman who is discriminated against for being poor, Black, and a woman. If I say I am Black, people tell me, "No, you're not Black, you're Mestiza," and when they call me Mestiza they are saying that I don't face as much discrimination as a Black woman does. But I am Black, because there is Black blood in my veins, and I will not forget it.**

**Nora Castañeda**

## Making a co-operative, making a revolution

### How was the co-operative set up?

Nora Castañeda gave us the Women's Bank loan. Here in the Ministry of the Environment we were working for a private company called Superlink, that was cheating us. So we all decided to take action because they owed us money. There was a strike and that's when we set up the cleaning co-operative, "Mano Amiga" [Friendly Hand]: 8 men and 54 women.

### How much were you paid then, and what do you get now?

Before, we were exploited. There was just one girl per floor, now there are two. We used to be paid 144,000 bolivares, and now it's 300,000 a month.

### Double, that is, for half the work?

Yes.

### What did you do on 13 April 2002?

At the time of the coup we were all here at the ministry with our dream shattered. We thought it was all over. A group of us went to Miraflores. I went to Fuerte Tiuna with a group from Valle, to demand to see Chávez, because he was kidnapped, he was held hostage. We asked to see him, to speak to him, to see if he was alright. My compañeras were at Miraflores until he came back. Imagine what it was like when we saw the President come back, how glad we were.

### So it was you who saved Chavez and the revolution, you and the millions of other people who were there?

Yes, yes! . . . Supporting the revolution!

### And the Bolivarian Circles?

The Bolivarian Circles are organising on community problems – housing, loans, public services, schools – we're sorting them out and making them Bolivarian – problems of land . . . There are many people who want to leave Caracas. They're starting to organise to see how they can leave. They're heading for the interior with loans from the banks, to set up rural co-operatives and work the land. The Circles are for discussing things, to learn more and to educate yourself. You see?

Lots of people are in the Tupamaros: the bikers' circle. When there's a march or when a problem comes up, like in December with the strikes, some of them had to go to defend the PDVSA [national oil industry] buildings. That's where the guys went, they

needed men's muscle more there because those people were some really bloodthirsty "golpistas".

Of course we women were there as well, because for years now women in this country have shown how strong we are. We're single mothers, we've been both mother and father to our children.

Many compañeras have brought up children on their own. They've done well with them, right? And here they are, many past retirement age who should be at home taking it easy. But they're still here, working for the struggle.

In Venezuela women have been prominent, because we're a bit woman and a bit man. So they won't crush us. There's not going to be some "golpista" coming along like that joker who came and thought we women wouldn't come out to put him in his place. No, we'll all come out.

### Were you involved in the schools when the opposition closed them?

Yes, many of us. The mothers and representatives took over the schools, and gave lessons themselves because a lot of the teachers and administrators didn't want to teach. That's how people dealt with the strike in December.

In Miranda State there's a "golpista" governor who closed various schools, and the teachers who are with him refuse point blank to teach. They won't do it. That's a problem we have with many of the governors and mayors, they won't do what they're supposed to do.

### How will you get rid of them?

Well! We'll put a referendum on them!

### All in a day's work

#### How long do you spend travelling?

*An hour and a half. I live in Ocumare, I come and go. I look after the house, I'm a mother, I work here and I look after my children. From Monday to Saturday. Saturday is half-day, Sunday is off because the President sets a day aside for a little partying. Because there's time for everything, it's a matter of wanting to do it.*

#### What time do you get up?

*I get up at half-past three in the morning. I get here at half-past six, start work at 7 am, I leave at 12, I eat, I come in again, I leave work and get home at 6-7 at night. I put the pot on the fire, otherwise I don't eat. I do the housework, the cleaning, and off to bed. I go to bed early, 9 o'clock.*

