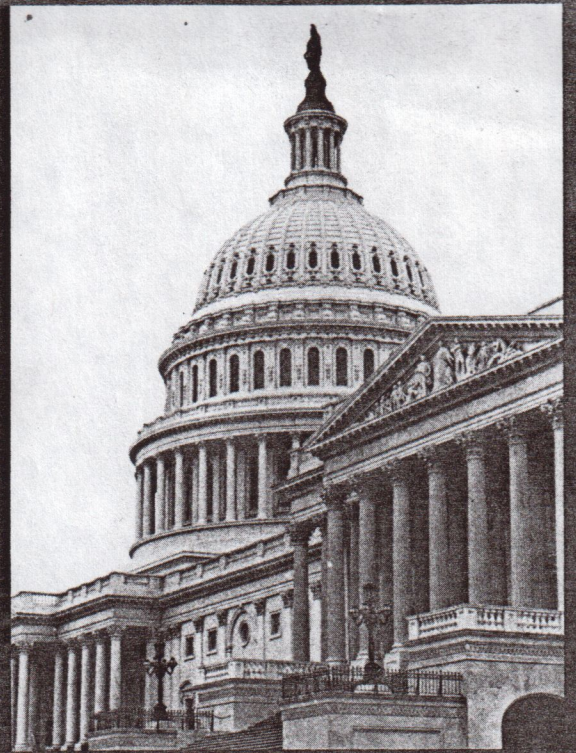
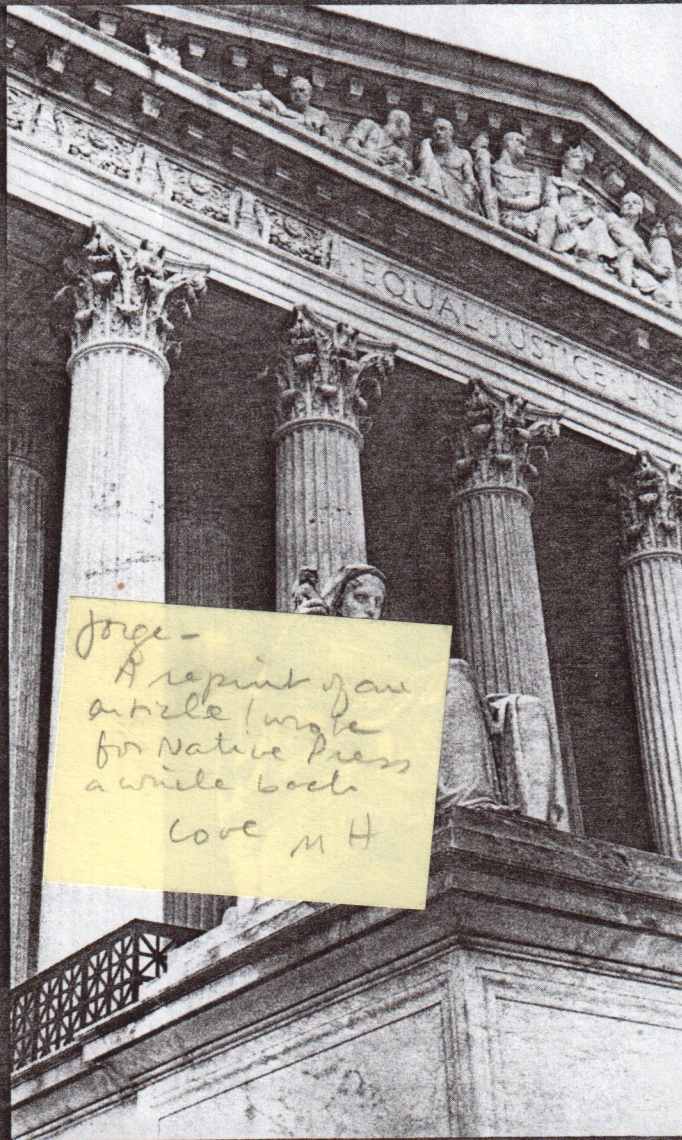


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the church woman

SUMMER 1988



POLITICS AND WOMEN OF FAITH
—adding sense to the symbols

transfer of arms destined for the Contras and the smuggling of Colombian cocaine into the U.S. Elsewhere, the operations have turned heroin profits to training paramilitary units of the Hmong tribesmen, who assassinated over 100,000 suspected of being "communist sympathizers" but who, in fact, were largely town leaders, school teachers and bookkeepers and other non-combatant civilians. ■

Marilyn Bauman, an active Lutheran laywoman, is CWU's Northwest Regional Coordinator. Formerly president of Church Women United in Idaho, she was the only representative from her state at the IMPACT briefing she reports on here. The event was the 15th annual NATIONAL IMPACT Education Fund/Washington Interchurch Staff Council briefing.

For those who would like to receive IMPACT's newsletters, which cover current issues before Congress, send \$15 to IMPACT, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Suite 502, Washington, DC 20002.

The Gray Panthers, a network of more than 70,000 Americans working to improve the quality of life for people of all ages, have called for the elimination of Medicare in favor of a new comprehensive National Health System. Maggie Kuhn, national convenor, explained that 37 million Americans—mostly the young and the old—have no health insurance at all. Because of their inability to pay, critically ill patients are being turned away from hospitals daily, many of them to die.

Even those with Medicare, Medicaid or private coverage are never completely protected, she said. A severe extended illness can wipe out a lifetime of savings, and the President's so-called "catastrophic illness" insurance program barely begins to solve the problem. Kuhn believes that a National Health System is the only way Americans of every age will ever be guaranteed quality medical care, which is their right.

TWO ELECTION DAYS —TWO STORIES

by MARIE-HELENE LARAQUE

The first Election Day I describe could have been just about anywhere in South or Central America or the Caribbean. Actually, it was in Haiti, where all but a few are extremely poor. For years, Haitians have watched their children die of hunger and sickness. Their youth and old people have been tortured for no reason, jailed, made to disappear, exiled. Most of the people have no power, no food, no land. Nothing but the sun that shines warm each day. Nothing but the kindness and faith in their hearts in spite of everything they have endured. Nothing but their songs and their drums—and the pain of 500 years of hope, misery, courage, starvation and death.

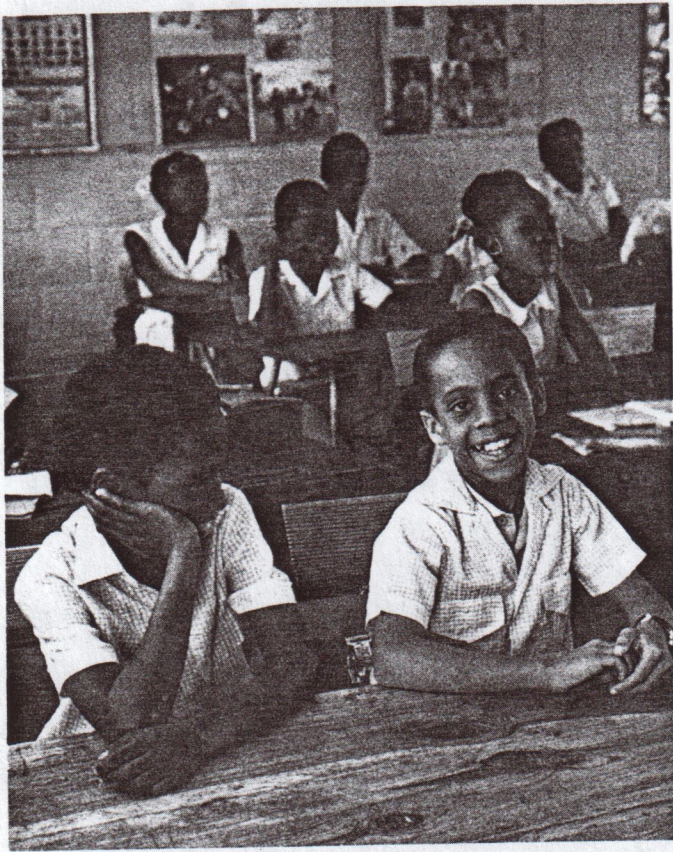
At one time, they knew the meaning of freedom, but that is a faded memory. How can there be freedom when you have nothing to eat, when you cannot work, when your land has been taken away by the rich and powerful? There is no freedom when you can be killed because of what you say, even for what you think. While the memory of the freedom of their ancestors is still alive, it is only that—a memory. Foreign powers came—first in the search for wealth, then in the name of God, and finally, supposedly seeking liberty and democracy—and subjugated the people to slavery, poverty and oppression. While, from time to time the Haitians rebelled, they knew few victories. Always they ended up experiencing the kind of brutal repression that people in the North cannot imagine or believe that human beings could do to each other.

The last election before the one scheduled to take place in

November 1987 had occurred 30 years earlier. Within a six-month period, three governments came and fell. The fourth, elected through fraud and manipulation, became one of the most violent and inhuman dictatorships the world has ever known. A whole generation of people grew up unable to speak for fear of what would happen to them, terrorized by armed men guided by the greed for power and revenge. A person might be taken away in his underwear for "questioning" by the authorities and never return. Twenty years later, his wife and children still wonder where his body was buried or if he can be alive somewhere. A person could be beaten to death for criticizing some minor government official. In one town, entire family clans—grandparents down to babies—were hauled out of their houses in the middle of the night, taken to a deserted road in the darkness and shot to death as a lesson to those who had dared to challenge the injustices. There have been many such stories.

However, because the government called itself "anti-communist" and allowed the United States and other financial interests free rein to exploit the people, this dictatorship received protection, military support and weapons from the U.S., the self-appointed "guardian of democracy" for the entire hemisphere. With this support, any opposition or legitimate effort toward true democracy were crushed. The usual weapons were fear, murder and torture.

In this way, the country was ruled for 29 years. Then [February 1986], the head of the dictatorship and



These children help carry the hope for a free Haiti—and the closing of the political prison that borders their playground.

some of his top butchers were removed from office. Under protection, they were whisked out of the country in a coup planned and engineered by the U.S. government—which also made sure they had enough money and protection to live very comfortably and never have to face their people or answer to them for what they did.

In spite of this change in leadership, however, conditions in Haiti remained as bad as ever, the institutions of repression still in place. But there have been some positive changes. The people are tired and their resources are wearing out, but they have already gone through so much that they are not afraid of being hurt anymore. They know that they cannot be held down forever; one day they will win.

Running for election in November 1987 were many candidates, though no one unifying leader or platform. It was expected that the U.S. would

send ships to patrol the coasts again and make sure no one got into office that they could not control. While no one thought that real changes would come about through such an election, the people looked forward to it, even if with some apprehension.

That fear of violence proved to be justified. Before what was to be the first election in 30 years, two presidential candidates were killed. Another was attacked by secret military police and hacked to death before his body was burned. Still another was shot while speaking at a public meeting—in front of everybody, including the press. There will be no investigation or charges or punishment. Anyone who challenges the system in Haiti still risks exile or death.

How different from Election Day in the Northwest Territories of Canada. Here, in a small town on Baffin Island in the Eastern Arctic, a

feeling of hopeful expectation was in the air. All day, people dropped in at the hamlet office to vote. They were relaxed, talking and joking. There was no rush. They knew the candidates personally. They would be voting both for the person and that candidate's ability to represent their concerns. While voting on paper is not the traditional way they had chosen leaders, these are different times, and they have no problem using the new system. A lot of people came out to vote. In a mock election in the school, students in grades six to ten picked the same representative for Territorial Council as the adults did.

In the running were a young man and an older man. They were not strangers to each other. Over the years they had worked together, hunted together, taught and learned from each other, and shared many cups of tea. Still, in spite of their friendship, something now separated them, which neither wished to talk about. This was that they both wanted to win.

So it was natural when the people elected him, the younger man wondered what was going to happen when he received a call from the older man the evening after the election saying he wanted to see him the next day. The winner was still anxious when he arrived at his friend's house, and the two men and their wives sat down at the table to talk. Not until then did the loser say anything.

When he did speak, on his face there was a look of happiness and peace, a radiance that had never been there before. "When you won, I didn't like it at all," he began. "I went to sleep and when I woke up, right away I thought of you. I hated you. It was a pretty strong feeling, kind of scary. I never hated you before. But you had taken something away from me and I hated you for it.

"That feeling really bothered me," the older man continued. "I didn't

like it, but it was there. The people chose you—and that was the truth. I couldn't run away from the truth. I decided to go out on the land with my wife and some friends. While we were out there jigging for fish I felt something lifted out of me, and then I realized it was that hate. It was amazing. All of a sudden I was happy. I wasn't mad anymore. I wanted to see you. I was happy for you. And I was happy for myself. I couldn't wait to see you and tell you!"

He took out a small book then and asked the young man to read something out loud. The passage was about humility and acceptance and willingness to step back and let someone else lead the way. After that, when the older man asked the others to pray with him, each gave thanks for the beautiful clear and cold day; for the special gift they had shared; for each other and for the people. When they finished, the young man's wife brought out seal meat and tea, and the friends sat together taking in the peaceful good feeling and the new bond between them.

In a simple, inspiring way one man had experienced the power of forgiveness in the spirit of his true Christian faith. It was a measure not

only of that spiritual faith, but also of his own personal growth. On Thanksgiving and during the days that followed, the older man shared his experience openly with the people of his community, who in turn honored both the young man and his elder.

Two elections, but what completely different stories. In one, the

people were still dreaming of freedom. In the other, they had achieved it. ■

Marie-Helene Laraque, a Haitian by birth, lives in Yellow Knife in the Northwest Territories with her husband, a native of that region. She is the author of "Breaking Free of an Imprisoning Addiction" in the Winter/Spring issue of this magazine.

UNITED NATIONS



The presidential election 30 years ago was the first time that Mexican women were allowed to vote for their country's President. Women from all walks of life, including many with young children, proudly joined the voting lines to slip their ballot into the box.

SO THAT JUSTICE MIGHT BE ACCESSIBLE

by ANNE CRAIN

On January 20, 1986, Joyce X was served with a warrant charging her with communicating threats. Before those charges were dismissed 13 months later, Joyce would walk through the courthouse doors approximately 55 times in an effort to meet her obligation to the court. Attending superior court some 55 times from June through February is no small matter for a single parent of three young children. Joyce's trips to Lumberton from her home

just outside Pembroke entailed more than 1650 miles. At a cost of 21 cents per mile, Joyce spent about \$346 just for travel. Then there's the matter of meals away from home and something neat and presentable to wear to court. Joyce is an ordinary woman. As far as we know, nobody at the courthouse has any reason to cause her undue inconvenience. Joyce simply experienced the system: the DA's approach to the court calendar and the system's

approach to counsel for the poor.

In July 1987, Carolyn X and her daughter were stopped at night by a deputy sheriff who told her there were warrants for her arrest. He ordered Carolyn to leave her car and daughter and come with him to the police station. Carolyn refused to leave her daughter unattended, but offered to follow him in her car. He rejected that proposal. A heated discussion ensued. At one point Carolyn drove her car several yards