Employment Laws "Top Ten" List

by Gerald Skoning

The selection of the "Top Ten" weekly employment cases has been a challenging task. Ever since the 1993 list was published, the selection committee has been deluged with nominations. Our litigious society seems to promise a judicial remedy for virtually every disappointed or angry employee former employee or applicant.With every passing year, it has be become easier (and more lucrative) to be a victim in the stranger than fiction world of employment law. But now, the ballot has been cast....the results tabulated.... here is employment law's top ten list for 1994.

10. Rudeness Not Covered By Title VII

A female accountant sued her employer for emotional distress because her supervisor verbally harassed her, including calling her fiancee (who is a lawyer) "a liar like all lawyers". The New Jersey Courts dismissed her claim, reasoning that, "a civilized community must be able to tolerate some friction between its members without resorting to litigation over every very bad **insult, sexual or perceived."**

9. "Pain the Neck" Not A Victim

A postal employee, who was fired for assaulting several co-workers, locking fellow employees out of their work areas, and repeatedly refusing to obey direct orders claimed that he was discriminated against on the basis of his race, sex and religion. He further alleged that he was retaliated against for complaining about the bias. A New York city judge ruled that : "this pain in the neck" employee had not been the victim of discrimination or retaliation.

8. No Right to Stress-Free Workplace

An employee who brutally assaulted his supervisor claimed that he had anxiety neurosis and was entitled to be placed in a stress-free environment as an accomodation for his "disability" bias claim because he was a threat to his fellow employees. For its recognition that stress is a major part of life in the American workplace and not an excuse for mayhem, we honor this Court.

7. "Meltdown" Not Protected

A waitress who was fired for failing to properly perform her duties claimed that the panic attacks and "meltdown" she experienced when the restaurant was crowded were "disabilities" protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A federal judge in Alabama dismissed her case, ruling that she simply was unable to perform the essential job functions. Restaurant persons should be grateful for this decision's protection of good service.

6. A Stinker Is A Stinker

An employee discharged for poor job performance claimed that she was fired for bad body ordor in violations of the ADA. Pretrial motions to dismiss the case were denied and after a full federal court trial, a San Francisco ruled that the ADA was not violated. After the trial some jurors questioned why body ordor had become a "federal case". Why indeed!

5. Psycho With Guys Maybe Protected

An employee fired for carrying a loaded gun to work claim that he was entitled to ADA protection because he was under psychiatric care. A federal judge in Florida refused to dismiss the case and ruled that he was entitled to a full jury trial. This is another example of the catch-22 of employment law. Imagine the corporate liability for negligently hiring and retaining the known psycho who uses the workplace as a shooting gallery.

4. Sensitivity Training by Uncle Sam

A male air traffic controller has sued the Federal Aviation Adminstration (FAA) for sexual harassment relating to a sensitivity training workshop in which male employees were subjected to a "Tailhook" style gauntlet exercise during in which they were pinched, groped and verbally taunted by female FAA employees. This year's award for creativity and imagination in diversity training goes to this innovative federal agency.

Air Pacific workers learn about family law and child abuse during a workshop organised by UNICEF in which FWRM's Ema facilitated.

3. A Talking Tooth Meets EEOC

A woman who had been denied a position as a benefits representative of a major corporation filed an ADA charge with the EEOC. In her charge she explained that she was turned down for the job after she told the interviewer that she has a micro-chip embedded in one of her molars and that the chip regularly speaks to her and others. The EEOC's Chicago office reportedly has launched a full investigation into her ADA charge. Perhaps she should have applied for a job in corporate communications or data systems where the talking micro-chip might have been a special job qualification.

2. The Long & Short of Discovery

A female employee has filed a sexual harassment suit in a Mississippi federal court alleging that a fellow employee repeatedly unzipped his pants and exposed himself to her and other employees. Her lawsuit alleges that the extreme emotional distress she suffered was based in part on the fact that the alleged harasser is prodigiously well endowed making the workplace "even more hostile". In pretrial proceedings, the plaintiff's attorney filed what has been delicately described as a motion to "inspect the person of the defendant" asking for an examination (complete with camera and tape measure) so that jurors could understand the unusual specimen she confronted and why she felt so threatened at work. A Federal judge in Mississippi denied that the plaintiff's motion as "frivolous and vexatious discovery abuse." This weighty issue is currently before the Federal Court of Appeals in New Orleans. Simply put, the Court must decide whether the value of the "evidence" outweighs the potential shock to the jury. The US Supreme Court will love this case!

1. Poison Ivy Blocks Backpay

A safety coordinator whose position was eliminated in a corporate restructuring claimed that he was ousted in reprisal for making safety complaints. The company argued successfully in a Connecticut appellate court that the employee was not entitled to recover lost wages because of his workplace misconduct (he spread poison ivy on a toilet seat used by his boss). This act of corporate sabotage resulted in the plant manager suffering a severe reaction that took two months to cure. For its sensitivity to this touchy workplace issue, we honor the Connecticut appellate court with the year's first place award, a year's apply of calamine lotion.

Body & Witchcraft: Victim Cremated

In Katmandu, Nepal, on Saturday May 11, 1997, the young woman Saraswati Adhikari died after being beaten, burned and denied food and water for three days. This was what her husband claimed to be "the proper treatment of a witch."

Saraswati's husband and the witch doctor who tortured her are under investigation and police custody. The victim's dead body was taken for cremation the day of her death by a rally of journalists, human rights activists and women's activists several of whom have tried to rescue her.

Saraswati was brutally treated by her husband after she was reportedly possessed by spirits. She was tied to a plank and kept in an outhouse above the toilet for three days. When she started complaining of excruciating pain, her husband brought the witch doctor to their home. This woman declared that Saraswati was a witch and needed treatment that could only be done at her shouse. When activists came to rescue her on Friday, she smelled horribly and was almost unconscious. She was in no condition to speak and only opened her eyes after her children called to her. After some time, Saraswati asked for water and after drinking the water she repeated, "I have not done anything," again and again. Shortly thereafter, she lost consciousness again and never recovered.

The acitivitists raided the witchdoctor's home with the help of the local police but Saraswati's neighbors remained silent spectators. Not one raised a finger to help her. Even the Police did not take the report seriously and arrived a half-hour too late. Since the victim was a woman, they did not take immediate action. In Nepal, 80 per cent of all women suffer from anemia and her

weakness only contributed to her suffering. Accusations of witchcraft are common in Nepal, where many ills are treated by traditional medicine and superstitions persistently scapegoat women. Perhaps most shocking of all was that this crime took place in Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, which enjoys the most abundant and most highly developed medical facilities in the country. Now the city with the best medical care in Nepal witnesses a woman killed for supposedly being a witch.

ACSOG Welcomes Legal Literacy Workshop

By Ema Tagicakibau

The workshop on "Human Rights and Family Law" held last year, Saturday 6th December 1997, was the third in a series of 4 one-day weekend workshops organised for the Adi Cakobau School Old Girls Association. Two workshops had already been conducted in Suva on November 8th and 22nd. The first western workshop was in Lautoka on October 18th but had to be deferred because of poor turnout. Nineteen participants including one male, expressed interest in the workshop. Their occupations ranged from domestic duties to civil servants. Kim Stanford-Smith, Director of RRRT assisted in facilitating the workshop and Zarina of FWRM provided administrative support.

The morning session involved Family Law and concerns were raised on how rural women lived in a culture clouded in pride and secrecy, a culture that says that no one should know that we have problems, and if a woman should break out of this code of silence then her family is at risk. The second topic touched on ***What is the Law*** and Kim explained the process of legislation and I translated in vernacular. There was a lot of discussion during this session as participants shared their experiences on legal issues familiar to them.

Gender & Discrimination

I looked at the definitions of Gender and discovered the lack of parallel words in the Fijian language. However, in my own words was able to put together a definition basic enough to be understood by the non-English speaker. It is basically defined as how male and female roles, behavior, attitudes, and expectations are determined by society, and not by our biological differences. Therefore gender roles and expectations can change unlike our sex (being male or female) which is biological/natural and can not be changed. Participants looked at specific examples of gender statements to test their application of the term.

One of the statements was: ***Women breastfeed their babies while men can bottle-feed babies.*** In previous training I had accepted participants' responses that the first part is a sexual function while the second part is a gender role. Kim corrected this impression when he stated that it was a sexual function because only women breastfeed. At least I learnt something new again.

The next activity was a group discussion on 2 case studies on Rape, which looked at gender bias in the law and the "Good woman/bad woman" myth, which influenced the Magistrate's decision. This was obviously enjoyed by the participants as it brought out a lot of other related issues and doubts in the participants' minds about the court system which Kim helped clarify adequately sum up the issues covered under Family law e.g. marriage, separation, cruelty and violence, maintenance, child custody and divorce. The discussion focused on personal issues like how legally literate they were by knowing what legal processes they would follow if they or people they knew faced similar situations.

The case brought home the reality that most women are apathetic to legal issues because of the knowledge that women react to situations instead of being proactive by learning about the law. The discussion looked at how a woman could go to Court and file for a married woman's order, something else that I learnt from the last two workshops. Kim also dealt with other issues like a Non-Molestation Order and the court process. An overview of the Family law, aptly covered all issues relating to the family. The case study, although very specific, summarized the main issues under Family Law. Participants were handed FWRM brochures on family law in both English and Fijian.

Imrana Jalal presenting to ACSOG women who attended the Suva workshop.

Family Law

At the beginning of this session, participants got into groups to discuss a Matrimonial case study which would

Human Rights

Because of very limited time, we were only able to present a very brief summary of what human right is. An overview of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted

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leading the way into ensuring that young female students are encouraged to take on "male" subjects as part of their training in the hope of accelerating the integration of women into all spheres of employment.

With the slogan *Girls Can Do Anything*, FWRM spoke to the Principal of Ballentine Memorial School, about the school's decision to incorporate "traditionally male" subjects such as technical drawing and agricultural science into the school curriculum. Ballantine Memorial School is an all-girl (non-coeducational institution) school.

Technical drawing and agricultural science was introduced into BMS's school curriculum in 1993 and according to Principal Aisea Rarokoliwa students have been showing increasing interest especially at the form five level with students opting to take these subjects instead of Physics and Foods. "Some girls have gone up to Fiji College of Advanced Education with the subjects. Hopefully, soon we will have some of our students taking this subject to USP." Mr Rarokoliwa said that despite students interests in taking on these subjects, parents still needed to be educated to influence a change in the pattern of choice of subjects for female students. He added that lessons learnt by students in Agricultural Sciences is practiced in the hostel vegetable gardens.

Environmental Health & Fiji Today

By Ruth Lechte

It is true that we have a responsibility for our own health: we should get plenty of exercise, reduce stress, never smoke and eat lots of vegetables and fruits. This will certainly reduce the risk of heart attacks, strokes, cancer, ulcers or whatever. But there is another part of healthy living over which we have little control – the environment we live in: the quality of the air we breathe, of the water we drink and food we eat. So we are not necessarily to be blamed if something goes wrong – the world has become full of cars, planes, nuclear reactors, chemicals and fast food. Progress in science and medicine has certainly improved life but at the same time the modern disregard of the environment is causing new diseases. Thirty years ago, the World Health Organization said that toxic chemicals in air, water and food caused 30 per cent of cancers worldwide. In the early part of the century, one in twenty people in North America contracted cancer, now one in three will be affected.

For women this is particularly serious. In the 1950s, one in every twenty women was at risk from breast cancer. Today it is just one in eight. Seventy to eighty per cent of the women with breast cancer have none of the "official" risk factors: a family history of breast cancer (5-10 per cent), hormonal and reproductive factors or high fat diet. The environment links are becoming more obvious every day and research is turning up more evidence. Health problems are linked to pollution, chemicals, pesticides, herbicides and more. For example:

- Reproductive problem, includingdeclining rates of fertility and lower sperm counts;
- Birth or other genetic defects;
- Interference with our endocrine (hormonal) systems, hormones are chemical messengers which control growth, development and behavior. Many chemicals mimic or block natural hormones causing a wide variety of health problems;
- Weakening of our immune system, the mechanisms that prevent asthma and allergies as well as cancer.

The International Joint Commission's definition of TOXIN is substances which cause cancer, behavioral abnormalities, genetic mutations, physiological and reproductive malfunctions and physical deformities. In Fiji we have poisonous incinerators burning plastics, garbage landfills leaching poisons into water tables and the sea, pesticides, week killers, toxins from exhausts of cars and buses and a whole lot more to say nothing of others we are unaware of. The sooner the Sustainable Development Bill is passed in Parliament, the safer we will be. But two problems remain: will the authorities supply sufficient resources to make sure the legislation is enacted and policed and how do we know that polluters will not lobby to have the laws watered down or use corruption to stop the inspectors, or blackmail our leaders? (A good trick for which there is evidence in Fiji is to say – if you close my business because I am breaching the environmental standards, so many jobs will be lost – this scares politicians and they may subvert the enforcers of the law). It is up to us; firstly to lobby the laws put in place and then be watchdogs to make sure they are enforced. Spare a thought for the litter laws and how ineffective they have been.

girls can do anything!!!

their door. I just ensure that I have my ID on and when I visit them, I announce myself as a Telecom technician answering to a complaint.

I am married (got married two days before I was to leave to come and start my studies) and my husband has been very supportive. He understands that this is the job that I do and my colleagues understand that as well.

My advice to young women who want to go into this field is that you have to have a special interest in Mathematics and Physics at school. You have to work extra hard because to justify your inclusion in any male dominated study, you have to show that you are just as good or better than the males. Telecom is not sending people for training but rather is hiring those already with Diploma in Electronic Engineering. I recommend that women interested in this job to do their own studies and try to earn a Diploma before they can begin to hope for a job like this."

Mother of five Fulori Kini decided to become a rugby league referee after spending all her adult life as a housewife. She works in the difficult position of having to control often fiery matches between men in a game only open to males in Fiji. Here she speaks

Fulori Kini, learning to take flak ont he job means developing a "thick skin." Photo: Courtesy of Mrs Kini

about the difficulties she faces as a woman controlling a male only game and as the only woman in the job.

"I applied for the job after reading about the advertisement in the newspapers in 1996. I spoke to the Development Manager (Iosefe Bele) and he said that women were also welcome to apply and after I was selected, I had to undergo physical fitness tests as well as written examinations about refereeing in rugby league.

I had to speak to my husband about it at first and after thinking about it, he gave me the go ahead. I had applied to become a policewoman in 1975 when the first batch of women officers were recruited but I think my parents had something to do with my not being selected. During our times, parents were stricter and made the decisions as to the kind of profession a woman should enter. Nowadays, young people are free to make their choices. I tried to do shorthand and typing but I lost interest along the way. So I

suppose, yes, I have always had a burning ambition to prove myself in a male dominated profession. Initially the males with whom we were selected for the job were surprised that I had got in. But after a while they got used to me and slowly the players as well as my colleagues are beginning to respect me and accept that I am here to stay and that I am serious about this job. But it came with a prize!

In some games that I control, I get sworn at by players and spectators but I have to be firm. With students, I suppose my motherly instincts come out and I keep reminding myself that I control the game and should not have anything to fear. Sometimes, people say rude things to me (players and spectators alike) and it seems that we women are our worst enemies. It is the women who shout out rude remarks and sometimes men say things like, "just go back to washing pots" but I have learnt to develop a thick skin and I am more determined now than ever to prove to them, that I am going to be around a long time. I have the support of my male colleagues and the Super League body and I appreciate it that they don't give me any special treatment. I get treated the same way as the males and given the same tasks. My advice to young women who share my ambition - there is nothing to stop them from getting where they want. Just work hard and prove to everyone that you can be just as good in a job that males dominate in."

BMS LEADS THE WAY

Women's organizations including the Fiji Women's Rights Movement is gearing up for the International Women's Day on March 8. Activities and events planned for the build-up to this event will be centered on issues of importance to women in Fiji. For its part, FWRM will be highlighting issues concerning women, employment and economic rights and will be campaigning for and promoting women's participation and involvement in areas predominantly (and "traditionally) held by males. FWRM will be launching a legal handbook written by Imrana Jalal as part of its 1998 celebrations. The book titled ***Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook*** is to be launched by the Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka. It is a product of six and half years of study, research and writing and covers the legal status of women in nine Pacific Island countries.

One of the most evident changes in the employment situation in Fiji is the increased schooling of females and the increased aspirations of women in paid employment. The general perception of the role of women in our society dictates the division of labor and employment opportunities for women. Women traditionally play a complementary role to men and their activities are more supportive than equal. Therefore in essence, the extent to which women are free to contribute to economic production depends largely on the compatibility of their economic and family roles. Highly industrialized societies with more extensive specialization provide women with more opportunities as active participants. It is encouraging to note that organizations such as schools are

Industrial Relations Course Benefits FWRM

By Reijieli Nicole

The *Industrial Relations and the Law in the Workplace,* a one day workshop, was organised by the British High Commission and Department for International Development (DFID). The training was facilitated by Ms. Joyce Ashcroft an industrial Relations consultant from the United Kingdom.

Participants in the workshop, included key players and strategic partners from Government (Manager Personnel, PSC & Ministry of Labour officials) and the private sector Fiji Employers Federation, Garment Manufacturers Assoc., Air Pacific, FSC), Trade Unions (FAWA, FPSA, FBEU, FTA) and only one NGO - which was Fiji Women's Rights Movement. The observers at the workshop were International Labour Organisation, Human Rights Education Fellow and Regional Rights Resource Team.

Recently appointed WEER Officer Reijieli Nicole gears up for the hard task ahead of advocating and lobbying for recognition of women's employment rights.

Objectives

The workshop was designed for people involved in industrial relations in Fiji where at the end of the course the participants would have the awareness of the following.

- Employment Law in the UK
- UK procedures for individual and collective dispute resolution
- Some UK working practices and then motivational and de-motivational characteristics
- Some alternative methods of dispute resolutions.

Content

- **Employment Laws in the UK**

We looked at the selected complaints ranging from Dismissal, Redundancy & Business Transfers, Maternity, Discrimination, Trade Unions & Union members and the qualifying periods of employment for under which the complaint can be considered in the Industrial Tribunal. We also looked at the Industrial Relations procedure in the UK. The main issue was that the Industrial Tribunal will always try in all cases establish that an element of **reasonable** decisions have been taken by the employer. We did an exercise on "Deciding Reasonableness" in terms of UK Industrial Tribunal decisions on actual cases.

- **Disputes Resolutions:**

The common labour-management relationship (i.e. between employers & Trade Unions) today is an Adversarial one where the rule ranges from collaborative to armed truce to open warfare. This relationship is based on Power, Rights & Interests. The recommended approach is CO-OPERATIONAL which is practiced in UK by ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service). The relationship uses the joint approach of building on mutual respect, establishing mutual interests, forgetting "zero sum games" and providing mutual assistance.

We played a game called "Win as Much As You Can". The objective of the game was to demonstrate that we can all come out with a 'Win-win' situation in negotiations which is built on co-operation rather than competition. (I must mention here, that the game had 10 rounds and we did not get the objective of the whole exercise until about the eighth round. The four teams played with fierce competition which is not the aim of the game!)

Motivational Factors in the UK Workplace. This was the theoretical session for the day with the workshop focusing on the different management and work styles that led to motivating a workforce. We very briefly looked at the characteristics of the following styles from Taylorism to Maslow's needs hierarchy, to Herzberg's 2 factor theory to team work and the idea TQM. The focus in UK is to look at various options of change such as Restructuring/Re-engineering, term sand Conditions of

Employment, Culture / employee Involvement, Working Practices and Substantive Agreements.

The group exercise on "What Might Enhance Industrial Relations in Fiji" and "What Benefits Needs Safeguarding" demonstrated that the integrated approach of co-operation addresses the needs of all parties who are all at one table.

Benefits For FWRM

The workshop provided me with an opportunity to gain an insight into the industrial relations procedures in the country and most importantly to network with people from different areas of the economy.

The fact that NGO's such as FWRM cannot be a "fixed" part of the industrial relations procedures (Disputes Council Machinery) makes it important that we continue to lobby and facilitate the stake holders to be sensitive to gender issues.

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by the Security Council on December 10 1948 and how the celebration for the 50th anniversary is coming up next year.

Since the ACSOG association also celebrates its golden jubilee next year, 1988, it would also be a good opportunity for them to lead the way to make women's human rights central to the celebration by highlighting the progress and achievements women have made, and also demand accountability for the violations that still occur.

Participants were reminded to spare a kind thought on Human Rights Day this year and also to support FWRM and RRRT and human rights organizations next year as they gear up for the celebration. Two landmark treaties that have brought the issues of women's rights and children's rights to the forefront of human rights activism are the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). There were handouts in their folders on CRC, CEDAW, and Vienna International Human Rights Conference 1993, which recognized that women's rights are human rights and the Declaration against Violence against women.

The session ended with a video extract on a documentary by UNICEF on the CRC titled: **First Call for Pacific Children** which looked at the case of Lewa, a young Fijian girl who died as a result of untreated wounds received from a beating by her step-mother for dropping a bowl. The response from participants at the end of the documentary was one of anger, sympathy, depression and an eye-opener on how children and women should be cared for and protected. Ema stated that this case brings home the truth that we need to re-look at our family values, and value each member for herself or himself, children, women or men. Kim reinforced this by saying that ultimately it is not about women's rights, or children's rights but it is about respecting the human rights of everyone in order to have a happy society.

Family Legal Rights Goes On Air

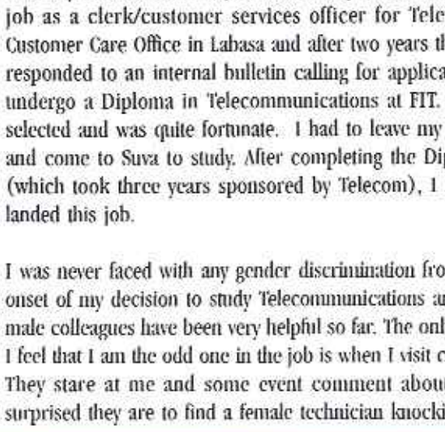
FWRM Legal Rights Training Officer, Ema Tagicakibau has been participating in a radio discussion with radio personalities Ulamila Kaisau and Vuli Salusalu at the station Viti FM. Audience Fiji-wide tune in to Viti FM whose program is mostly contemporary Fijian (Vernacular) music and issues. The station accepted Ema's proposal that FWRM initiate a half-hour radio program to discuss family issues in particular family law every second Monday. At the onset of the program, FWRM has been deluged with queries about family law matters such as maintenance and affiliations.

In her first program, the discussion were centered around maintenance and affiliations and both Ms Kaisau and Mr Salusalu questioned Ema on the laws pertaining to how women can apply for child maintenance. Ema found Mr Salusalu's views and questions quite invoking as it reflects a male's perspective on the issues concerning family law. The discussions were lively and informative and Mr Salusalu was able to put across to Ema some questions that have plagued many people particularly males about the rights of women who bear children and apply for child and/or maintenance.

Some of the questions raised were: when and why should a woman apply for maintenance? How are the modes of payment and when does it cease? What happens and what should a mother do when the father of the child(ren) fail(s) to make payments. Mr Salusalu asked Ema thought-provoking question such as: should the father still pay maintenance to the woman although the child(ren) does not live with her? The family law in Fiji states that only the mother of the child concerned is eligible to apply for maintenance. Until the death of the

system and include wider social and economic considerations.

Entering the urban planning profession part from the normal responsibilities will enable these young women to shape towns and villages to meet women's needs and help create an environment that works better for everyone in society. To shape an environment sensitive with an attitude of mind and awareness of differing needs



Suzie Yee Shaw, town and village planning need women. Photo: Courtesy of Ms Yee Shaw.

and help create an environment that works better for everyone in society. To shape and environment sensitive to the needs of women starts with an attitude of mind and awareness of differing needs."

Asenaca Nawaqalevu, creating impact for women in a man's world. (Photo: Courtesy of Ms Nawaqalevu)

I attended, it was not such a big deal that women are entering more and more into male dominated areas of study. my father funded my studies until I went to do a Post graduate when the Australian government sponsored me.

Now and again I tend to think that gender becomes an issue but I always try not to look at it that way. In my work, I am very open and direct and it is up to my male colleagues how they take it. I find though that I have had to work twice as hard to be taken seriously in this profession and sometimes it does come through although indirectly but when that happens, I tackle it head on.

For young women, my advice will be, just go for it, the sky is the limit. They should make sound choices and go into the direction where they feel they are best suited to judging from their areas of interest in subjects that they study at high school."

Suzie Yee Shaw aged 31 works as a Senior Town Planner for the Department of Town & Country Planning and comes from a family that runs a tourism business in Levuka and on Leleuvia island.

"My inspiration came from an interest in development issues like urban designing and land settlement patterns. I earned my first degree in Bachelor of Arts majoring in Geography and Spanish and went on to complete a Bachelor of Planning at the University of Auckland.

I did not encounter discrimination during my years of study. My PR status in New Zealand entitled me to a University bursary, which was sufficient for study and comfortable lifestyle. Gender is not a hindrance in current study. In Canada 40 per cent of planners are women. I am proud to say that in Fiji this figure is around 50 per cent and includes women of different ethnic groups, age and cultural backgrounds. The role of planning is diverse in that the needs of women can be addressed in every aspect of the formal and informal planning process, e.g. plan making, project development, design and implementation, development control and consultation and area based regeneration.

Equally, planners can achieve much through negotiation and encouragement. Planners are involved in a range of issues and activities that often go well beyond the statutory land use planning

Thirty year-old Urmila Karan is a qualified electronic Technician for Fiji Telecom and works for the Business Systems Section where her work involves installing and maintaining telephone and facsimile systems dealing mainly with corporate and business customers. Her father works as a businessman and she comes from Labasa, Vanua Levu from a family of five.

"After completing my secondary school years, I realized it was very difficult to find a job. I was lucky to have landed a job as a clerk/customer services officer for Telecom's Customer Care Office in Labasa and after two years there, I responded to an internal bulletin calling for applicants to undergo a Diploma in Telecommunications at FIT. I was selected and was quite fortunate. I had to leave my home and come to Suva to study. After completing the Diploma (which took three years sponsored by Telecom), I finally landed this job.

I was never faced with any gender discrimination from the onset of my decision to study Telecommunications and my male colleagues have been very helpful so far. The only time I feel that I am the odd one in the job is when I visit clients. They stare at me and some event comment about how surprised they are to find a female technician knocking on

GIRLS REALLY CAN DO ANYTHING!

An increasing amount of women in Fiji are entering into professions dominated by males. For these novel women, choices to enter these areas are often determined by the support each receives from her family, community acceptance, opportunities open to them from employers and the accesibility to education and training available to them. However, there is still much advocacy and awareness raising to be done in ensuring that women and parents are aware of the opportunities available in training and employment for young women interested in pursuing a career that is traditionally viewed as "male" types of employment. Communication Officer Rosemary Naivalurua interviewed five women proffessionals in male dominated fields of work about their dreams, their sources of inspirations and the difficulties they face during their years of study and work.

Olivia Solei Fong is a 27 year-old Fijian Chinese from Macuata, Vanua Levu and she teaches Technical Drawing at Ballantine Memorial School, an all-girls school in Suva. Prior to that, she taught at Marist Brothers High School, an all-boys school also in Suva and her first job was as a draghtswoman for the local JS Hill & Associates. Her father works the Fiji Institute of Technology. She said was inspired by the fact that she found challenge seeing that it is a male-Development/construction Company as Manager for Students Services at that the choice of her field of study Technical Drawing interesting and a dominated field.

Solei Fong, Technical Drawing expert teaching at an all-girls school. (Photo: Courtesy of Ms Fong)

"I found the training/study very hard worked was required. I did not, discriminatory practices at all and I was Firstly, while teaching at Marist Brothers helpful in the way they accepted me into industrial Arts teacher to teach in the classroom full of boys, I saw the look determined to prove that I was able to the boys realized that I knew my work, relaxed atmosphere between us. ask me why I chose this career. But it challenging and of course a lot of however, experience any on a scholarship during that period. High Schools, I found the staff very the school. Being the first female school, the first time I walked into a on their faces, which made more do my job. It didn't take long before which in the end created a more Occasionally I had boys come and was fun. Before joining the teaching profession, I worked for a while at a private firm as a draghtswoman. It was here that I noticed the looks man gave everytime I went out to the building sites to go through architectural drawings with the supervisor of the carpenter on site. Bu then, I realized that if you know your job, then you have nothing to fear when confronting your male colleagues. For inspiring young women – 'nothing is impossible. Be confident, a little more effort on your part will play off in the end."

Thirty year-old Asenaca Nawaqalevu from Rakiraki village in Ra holds the demanding position of City Planner for the capital city of Fiji.

This articulate young woman was educated in New Zealand and holds both Bachelor and Masters degrees in her field of work. She is the first female to hold the position of City Planner for the Suva City Council.

"I work as a city planner for the Suva City Council. My family was the biggest inspiration in my work. Gender has never been an issue or a constraint in my family, the men encourage the women to do whatever they feel is right for them and vice versa. My father has always been supportive of my career choice. In fact I have an uncle who is always urging me to try for go for a doctorate. Members of my family are quite intellectual and I have aunts and other female members of the family who have branched out into male dominated areas of work like an aunt who was the first woman to join the meteorology department and had to leave when she started a family. I have an aunt who is a music teacher at the Fiji College of Advanced Education (FCAE).

Also my personal philosophies have helped me a lot. I am of the opinion that women should compliment men, there is no such thing as women are better than men or men are better than women. I try to live and go about my work abiding by my principles, which is very simple if you follow Christian teachings. I respect men and hope that they respect me back. I find that if men do not have any respect for female members of their family, then it has a trickle effect to their attitude to other women in society.

The reason why I chose this job is because I have study background in many areas simply for the reason that I wanted to cover my grounds From politics to economics, geography, sociology etc and when I was at my third year, I decided to opt for town planning because in this job you have to be well versed on issues relating to virtually all aspects of life. What you implement today will have ripple effects and affect many people in many different way. For example in designing, you have to think about gender and women pushing prems and trolleys etc. and then there is the economic affect it will have in the community.

The training was not discriminatory at all. In fact out of the dozen people in the course, half were women. I suppose in the universities

mother, the custodian of the child then has the right to make an application. Insinuations were directed at women who made applications for maintenance not for child welfare but for other purposes such as a means of getting even with the father of the child or for her own profit. To this end, Ema replied that the Magistrate has the ultimate powers in granting an approval for payments of maintenance based on the environment in which the child is being reared and the father has the right to lodge an appeal against the judgement if he feels that the mother is making the application for reasons that are not considered by him to be genuine.

The Movement also has the stand that considering the current economic environment in Fiji, most mothers particularly working mothers resort to the extended family social system. Most mothers who are incapable of personally looking after the child may leave the child in the care of other family members such as sisters or mothers. However, she may continue to financially support the child. The custodian of the child however, may lodge a complaint with the Courts if the mother is receiving maintenance money but fails to direct the money to the welfare of the child. Also highlighted in the program was the inefficiency that women have to endure during their long waits to collect maintencnace payments. An appeal was made to Government to address the lack of privacy and confidentiality at the department of Social Welfare which contributed to women's reluctancy to visit the center to procure maitenance for children. The program continues every Monday on Viti FM and local members are urged to keep tuned.

FWRM's Communication Officer Rosemary Naivalurua (right) and Coordinator Gina Houng Lee (second from right) met US Embassy's First Secretary & Adminstration Officer Long Lee (left) and Second Secretary & Political Officer John Hennesey-Niland.

Maintenance Fever

By Mere Ratunabuabua (FWRM member)

Many of us at some stage or the other suffer from a typical fever - a typical case of maintenance fever. Standing waiting with my sisters all day, queuing outside the Domestic Clerk's office in Suva is not a favorite activity for most single parent mothers.

It is not a laughing matter if you have been there from 9am. It is a long queue that has been held up because the Court Clerk has had to run off to the bank to get more money because the money in the till has run out. Maybe it is just as well for him so as to give him a break from the stress of trying to deal with the cases at the counter, by telephone and from his superiors. An Indo-Fijian sister waiting with me that day was so fed up and irate. She had come in on Monday (yesterday) and was told to come try again tomorrow because the money had not come in yet. (There must be thousands of dollars at this point floating electronically through thin air from bank accounts of payees to the Social Welfare Department!)

It's Tuesday today and she has scrapped together her bus fares from her neighbours. She has to rush off and pick up her youngest daughter from school after collecting the money. She is already a week late getting some of her children's schoolbooks. Then the hammer pounds and once again she is told to try again the following day because the money has run out. By this time she is cursing and very angry. What is she supposed to do? She has used up so much of her time and energy already.

For the working sisters, it is just as inconvenient to have to keep ringing or coming in to find out what has happened to the money that is already a month late and still floating through the air from one account to another. Why should any of us be angry? After all, we have gotten this far having survived the physical, psychological and emotional stress of the break up of our relationships. Going through the long drawn saga of getting cases heard in Court, getting our men into Court and coming to some solution that they agree to pay to help raise their children and then have to continuously check whether or not they are still making payments. Or if it is just another case of the money still in transit out of their accounts?

There is some good news though. We have heard that the Domestic Court has received aid from the British Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) who have donated computers in the hope that it will hasten the work and make the service more efficient. But we have also heard that it will take at least another year before the staff are trained well enough to man the computers and have the system up and running. Why are we made to feel like a burden when all we want is to receive money for the kids so we can go back and look after the children and the family?

FWRM Attend Women in Marine Resource Management Workshop

by Aashu Singh (FWRM member)

The International Ocean Institute located at Lower Campus, USP organized the workshop held at the Townhouse Hotel from January 19th to 23rd, 1998 The workshop was funded through the Eco-Village Project. The Fiji Women In Fisheries (WIF) network who have a secretariat situated in the (environment group) SPACHEE office decided to run this workshop by inviting NGOs already involved in community work.

Participants were informed that only a handful of NGOs in Fiji focuses on environment protection particularly ocean/marine and coastal environment - major sources of livelihood for many people especially the rural communities and women. The workshop was appropriate considering that most Pacific Islands except for high mountainous ones are coastal and thus most people derive their livelihoods from these areas of the natural environment. However, communities living away from the coast also play an important role in coastal and ocean ecosystems with activities that have a major impact on these areas such as littering, water pollution, logging and agriculture and the use of fertilizers to name a few of the activities.

The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness of NGOs and individuals involved in community work on the importance of coastal resource management in the hope that these NGO personnel will learn about the special characters of coastal management. It was also envisaged that they learn about the vulnerability of the coastal and ocean ecosystem and thus take back the information and initiate appropriate action in their work with coastal communities.

Problems of Coastal Communities

Participants discussed the problems of coastal communities seen from various levels such as ecological, health, housing, economic, social, infrastrutural and communication. Possible solutions were worked out as the result of the discussions. It was discovered through the sessions and through personal experiences of the participants that women living in coastal communities faced a myriad of problems in terms of finances, health and education. The most important priority was meeting the cost of living such as purchase of basic household items and groceries and education. Education is fast becoming the most important priority in many coastal communities.

A major social problem, which existed within the coastal community, is the lack and/or absence of communication between the older and younger generations. As a result, vital traditional knowledge of environment and resource preservation is lost. Health problems such as malnutrition and diabetes were also common amongst coastal communities due the increasing dependence on canned foodstuff and processed food. Many women also suffered from body aches and aching joints dues to the cold and the prolonged hours spent in water whist fishing and foraging for food.

It was mentioned that to improve coastal resource management, there were issues and needs to be addressed and met respectively such as the need for education and awareness. To improve the status of women, there was a need for more technical assistance in terms of finance to enable them to possess assets such as refrigerators in order to be recognized as valid commercial players in the market. They also need access to micro-credit schemes and facilities.

Coastal Resource Management – Issues In Small Island Communities

During this session, Aliti Vunisea from the University of the South Pacific Biology Department educated

Newly appointed FWRM Coordinator Gina Houng Lee taking FWRM to new heights.

FWRM would like to thank Mr Ikbhal Jannif(pictured right handing the camera to FWRM Clerical assistant Zarina Begum), managing director of Caines Jannif, a local photo service for his kind donation of a Minolta camera valued at $160. The camera will go a long way in assisting the advocacy outreach of the Movement.

FWRM Prepares for IWD in March

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is gearing up for the International Women's Day celebrations in March. The theme for this year's celebrations is ***Girls Can Do Anything*** targeted at female students and young women aspiring to enter professions traditionally known to be male dominated. Engineering, welding, planning are few o fthe many areas increasingly penetrated by female workers. There is still much advocacy and lobbying work to be done in the area of women's employment and economic rights. Much of the activities planned for the month of March are in line with FWRM's main *project Women, Employment & Economic Rights* (WEER) to highlight women's employment and economics rights.

Under the WEER project, FWRM conducted a research on Fiji's employment laws resulting in a feminist critique paper of labor laws titled *Laboring Under the Law* by Atu Emberson Bain and Claire Slatter. The paper highlights the gender based cultural values placed limits on women's occupational mobility in particular their promotion to positions of authority. Women hold jobs which are more often than not low waged.

As part of celebrations, FWRM will be joining other women's organizations such as the theatre group, Women's Action for Change (WAC), Fiji Women's Crisis Center (FWCC) and the National Council of Women (NCW) in celebrating International Women's Day with activities planned to be held throughout the month of March.

Plans are underway to utilize the media in the campaign which include co-hosting a radio breakfast show on the first week of March, appearances on local TV and contributions to the print media to highlight issues on gender and employment.

A book launch will be held on March 8th by the Prime Minsiter of Fiji Sitiveni Rabuka. The book titled *Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook* written by Imrana Jalal is the result of six and half years of study, research and writing covering the legal status of women in nine Pacific Island countries including Fiji. The launch will be held at the British Ambassador's residence in Suva.

There will also be workshops to round off the celebrations. In addition, staff of FWRM will be inviting career women who work in predominantly male held fields to talk to schools as a means of raising awareness amongst students and teachers on these issues. Month-long awareness raising may culminate in TV advertisements on the theme ***Girls Can Do Anything***.

International Women's Day! How it All Began

It began on March 8, 1857 when women textile workers took to the streets of New York in protest against a 12-hour working day, low wages and inhuman working conditions. This was the first documented protest by women calling for a change. At a Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1910, March 8 was declared International Women's Day in recognition of women's struggle for equality and against oppression throughout the world. Since then, women have marked this day by organizing events on various issues important to them. A history of women's achievement is reflected in the diverse and wide-ranging global women's movements with campaigns and strategies, ever increasing literature by women on women for women and the continued fight against sexist oppression on many fronts. Governments and international organizations react to women's pressures for social change.

markets as foreigners were normally prohibited or at least very restricted in their equity acquisitions even in countries as large as Australia and Canada. But now, a stock market crash does matter because these stock markets or "emerging markets" as they used to be called last year (because they stopped emerging and started "melting down") are open to foreign investors. When the stock

"holiday destinations in SE Asian countries will be favored over our swaying palm trees and smiling faces"

market collapses, people not only move out shares of the country, they simultaneously sell the currency. So when the Bangkok market collapsed, the Thai Bank collapsed with it. If this had happened ten years ago in Thailand, this would not have happened because foreign investors, while they were allowed to establish direct investment were not allowed to hold substantial holding of Thai equities i.e. portfolio investments.

These portfolio investments that moved into stock markets throughout the developing world allowed this liberalization of portfolio investment was used together with very liberal amounts of money from the domestic banking system to invest in sectors that brought quick returns. This was generally in real estate. This sector collapsed throughout Asia as it was realized that many of the investment would never bring the expected returns.

As the stock markets melted down, so did the currency markets. In order to prop-up the currency, SE Asian governments have raised interest rates. This will worsen the recession that will be felt throughout Asia. There remains the absurdly optimistic view that the US will not be affected by this collapse in SE Asia. Certainly, a meltdown on Wallstreet in not imminent but US firms with massively appreciated dollar will have to compete with Asian firms. This must effect profits and stock values in sectors where the US still does compete with Asia.

What Now? For Women in the Garment Industry

The argument that in devaluating the currency Government had the best interest of the garment industry at heart is not unreasonable at all. If anything, the recent devaluation to some extent supports the viability and survival of the manufacturing industries. It could be fair to say that in view of the above, Government was compelled to travel down the same road as most affected SE Asian countries.

When you think about it, devaluation of our currencies ensures that we remain competitive with our number one competitors in SE Asian. Otherwise we will become too expensive for the export markets especially in the garment industry. The fact that much of the raw material for use in the garment manufacturing industry is still imported from abroad makes the dreaded scenario of massive job losses in this industry ever so real. For a garment exporter, s/he will now be required to fork out an additional 20-30 per cent to meet basic costs of raw material.

Reliable sources from Government told *Balance* that for the garment industry, the 50 per cent local content requirement stipulated by SPARTECA would pose problems for exporters. What this means is that with devaluation, the value of the Fiji dollar is weakened by 20 per cent hence the value of local content under the SPARTECA Rules of Origin (ROO) falls below the stipulated 50 per cent. Unless Australia agrees to grant derogation on the status quo, local garment firms will have no alternative but to close down, leaving more than 7,000 women garment workers jobless.

What Now? For Women in the Hospitality Industry

Recent newspaper reports highlighted current dilemma facing hoteliers in meeting their targeted occupancy rates for the year. The effect of the Asian crisis, which resulted in the devaluation of our currency, is such that holiday destinations in SE Asian countries like Bali in Indonesia and Penang in Malaysia would be favored over our swaying palm trees and smiling faces. In terms of returns for dollar, more can be gained from SE Asian than Fiji, though some agree that the devaluation puts Fiji in a slightly better position to compete with SE Asian markets.

Fiji has to regain its international competitiveness in exports and tourism at least artificially and only devaluation will ensure that. While there are some downsides to devaluation, other policy alternatives would have proven more costly to the country in the long run. Our economy is already weak and this could have worsened further had Fiji not devalued its dollar. Devaluation would in fact improve the productivity thus increase the outputs of exportables.

For our women in the tourism industry, low occupancy rates in our holiday destinations can only mean one thing – reduction in working hours or worse still, redundancy!

What Now? For Budget Holders

It is an understated fact that in most middle to low income households, women inherit the dreaded responsibility of budget holders for the family. What this means is that women are left with the usually frustrating task of trying to make ends meet. A rise in imported items and foodstuff will cut down consumption, which will also result in loss of purchasing power (meaning that consumers will not enjoy the choice of imported goods because they will more expensive to buy). This will also mean that women (and men) will now buy less consumable imported items on the same budget as last month.

UNDP studies tell us that more than 60 per cent of the current population live below the poverty line in pre-devaluation period. For some of us, it is difficult to imagine just how life will be for those who already exist below the poverty line.

Possible solutions by Government:

- Deduct tariff/import duties on items especially food
- Lobby Australian Government to exempt Fiji from existing ROO of SPARTECA
- Reduce income tax income tax for those earning below $6,000 per annum

In a recent interview with FWRM Coordinator Gina Houng Lee, she stated that "women will untimely be the ones who will pay for the price of the devaluation."

Acknowledgement: the following people contributed to parts of this article – Dr Roman Greenberg (Asian Crisis), Sakiusa Tuisolia (SPARTECA)

participants about the threats to the coral ecosystem due to unsustainable fishing methods, which lead, to destruction of the coral ecosystem. The led to destruction of the marine habitat and thus affecting mankind. Management methods like keeping a seagrass nursery, introducing coastal protection and alternate fishing bans in selected areas were suggested.

Integrated Coastal Management

Participants were taught about Integrated Coastal Management, a dynamic process of decision making where agreements are reached through a consensus by identifying problems and acquiring and analyzing the necessary information regarding the problem. There is a need to understand the problems and alternatives and also accept threat the solution may need a modification of the current management style. ICM also needs inter-agency cooperation, coordination and leadership skills.

As FWRM was represented at the workshop, facilitators requested that FWRM include coastal and marine conservation and awareness raising in their programs when outreaching to women through the planned workshops and education programs. FWRM also hopes to increase networking with other women's groups and NGOs to work in cooperation with them and incorporate the issues learnt at the workshop in their programs.

The Housewives Moment of Truth

By Jane O'Rilley - Ms Magazine September/October Issue

It is the click of recognition, that parenthesis of truth around a little thing that completes the puzzle of reality in women's minds - the moment that brings a gleam to our eyes and means that the revolution has begun. Those clicks are coming faster and faster. They were nearly audible last summer, which was a very angry summer for American women. Not red-neck angry from screaming because we are so frustrated and unfulfilled-angry, but clicking-things-into-place angry, because we have suddenly and shockingly perceived the basic disorder in what has been believed to be the natural order of things.

In Houston, Texas, a friend of mine watched her husband step over a pile of toys on the stairs, put there to be carried up. "Why can't you get this stuff put away?" he mumbled. Click! "You have two hands," she said turning away. Last summer I got a letter from a friend who wrote: "I do not agree with your last article, and I am canceling my wife's subscription." The next day I got a letter from his wife saying, "I am not canceling my subscription." Click!

Last fall, my neighbor - named Jones, - had a couple named Smith over for dinner. Mr Smith kept calling his wife to get up and help Mrs Jones. Click! click! Two women radicalized at once. A woman I know in St Louis who had begun to enjoy a little success writing a grain company's newsletter, came home to tell her husband about lunch in the executive room. She and planned a funny anecdote about deeply humorous pomposity of executives, when she noticed her husband rocking with laughter. "Ho, ho my little wife in an executive room." Click!

Last August I was on a boat leaving an island in Maine. Two families were with me and the mothers were discussing the troubles of cleaning up after a rental summer. "Bob cleaned up the bathroom for me, didn't you honey?" she confided gratefully patting her husband's knee.

"Well, what the hell, it's vacation," he said fondly. The two women looked at each other and the queerest change came over their faces. "I got up this morning at six to make the sandwiches for the trip home from this "vacation"," the first one said. "So I wonder why I have thanked him over six times for cleaning the bathroom?" Click! Click!

In an office, a political columnist male, was waiting to see the editor in chief. Leaning against the doorway, the columnist turned to the first woman he saw and said, "listen, call Barry Brown and tell him I'll be late." Click! It wasn't because she happened to be an editor herself that she refused to make the call. In the end, we are all housewives, the natural people to turn to when there is something unpleasant, inconvenient or inconclusive to be done. It will not do for women who have jobs to pretend that society's ills will be cured if all women are gainfully employed. In Russia, 80 per cent of the doctors and 20 per cent of the construction workers are women, but women still do the housework. Some revolution. As the Russian women saying goes: it simply freed us to do twice the work.

It will not do for women who are mostly housewives to say that Women's Liberation is fine for women who work but has no relevance for them. Equal pay for work of equal value is only part of the argument - usually described as "the part I'll go along with." We are all housewives. We would prefer to be persons. That is the part they don't go along with. They tell us we are being petty. The future improvement of civilization could not depend on who washes the dishes. Could it? Yes. The liberated society - with men, women and children living as whole human beings, not halves divided by sex roles - depends on the steadfast search for new solutions to just such apparently trivial problems, on new answers to tired old questions. Such questions as:

Denise works as a waitress from 6am to 3pm. Her husband is a cab driver,. who moonlights on weekends as a doorman. They have four children. When her husband comes home at night, he asks, "what's for dinner?"

(Continued on back page)

From the Editorial Desk

Staff at FWRM has been busy organizing and working to put together activities planned for the month of March being International Women's Day (IWD). As you can see on page 3, the month is going to be filled with activities to look forward to (local members can keep an eye out for *Girls Can Do Anything* TV advertisements to hit your screens next month). Ema is scheduled to appear on Fiji One TV's *Talanoa* program on Sunday afternoon March 8th on which day our ads are also expected to commence viewing. She will be discussing issues in line with our campaign and also on the Convention of the Rights of the Girl Child as indicated in the Declaration of Human Rights to which Fiji is a signatory.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Canada Fund for agreeing to fund FWRM's Communication program with a generous donation of F$29,200. With this funding, FWRM is going to organize and hold a human rights awards event towards the end of the year so members are asked to submit names of persons and/or agencies promoting human rights to enter the competition.

FWRM also thanks the photo service Caines Jannif for donating a Minolta camera to boost FWRM's communication and documentation. For more information on any of the articles published in this issue, do not hesitate to call or write to the Communication Officer, Rosemary Naivalurua on the number and address listed below.

Interested persons and current members are also asked to please forward subscriptions to:

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P O Box 14194
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Telephone: (679) 313156
Fax: (679) 314466

Subscription rates:
Local – F$5
South Pacific Member Countries – F$10
Australia & New Zealand – F$15
Asia & Americas – F$20
Europe & Sub-Sahara – F$25

Join the Movement and Support Us Now!!!

Tentative Calendar of Activities Planned for the Month and International Women's Day.

March 6th - Breakfast Show with Tukini Cama on FM 96

March 8th - Appearance on Talanoa Program Fiji TV

March 9th – Book Launch by Prime Miniter Sitiveni Rabuka

March 24th to 26th – WEER Workshop with Garment Manufacturers Association

March 31st – Training Workshop with Fiji Association of Women Graduates

Members are invited to participate in implementing these activities. Please come in and see us at the office or call us on telephone number 313156.

Jonathan and Joane are both doctors. They have identical office hours. They come home in the evening to a dinner cooked by the housekeeper. When they go to bed, he drops his clothes on the floor and she picks them up. In the morning he asks: "where is my pink and orange stripe shirt?" In moments of suburban strife, Fred often asks his wife, "Why haven't you mended my shirt and lubricated the car? What else have you got to do but sit around the house all day?" How dare he asks such a question? According to insurance companies, it would cost Fred $8000 to $9000 a year to replace Alice's services if she died. Alice being an average ideal suburban housewife works 99.6 hours a week - always feeling there is too much to be done and always guilty because it is never quite finished. Besides her work does not seem important. After all Fred is paid for doing whatever it is he does. Abstract statistics make no impact on Alice. "My situation is different," she says. Of course it is. All situations are different. But sooner or later she will experience - in a blinding click - a moment of truth. She will remember that she once had other interests, vague hopes, great plans. She will decide that the work in the house is less important that reordering that work so she can consider her own life.

The question of housework is not a trivial matter to be worked out the day before we go on to greater things. Men do not want equality in the home. A strong women is a threat, someone to be jealous of. Most of all, she is an inconvenience and she can be replaced. They like things as they are. It's pleasanter. I have never realised how seductive the role of master is until the other day. I was tearing a plant and the water began to run on the floor. I stood where I was and moaned about the puddle until the live-in-baby-sitter dropped what she was doing and brought me the rag it would have been easier for me to get. She, at least, was not saying, "don't worry darling, let me take care of it." But my excuse was.....I had more important things to think about other than housework.

Women's Employment & Economic Rights

Balance

FWRM

Newsletter of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement

Balancing the Scales — *January/February 1998 Issue*

DEVALUATION & ITS EFFECT ON WOMEN WORKERS

By Viniana Seeto

News of the devaluation of the local currency a few weeks ago came as a shocking blow to all –except, I suppose those in the corridors of power who are privy to economic plans/policies of Government. Weeks later, debates and discussions on the issue continue at al levels of economic and social activities. Even the business fraternity is at awe to understand why, in devluating the dollar, Government had not made allowances in other areas of its economic plans to cushion the blow.

"There was no other way," was Government's reply to the recent events – simple enough for those who undersdtand the dynamics of the currency markets, yet for the majority of us who don't, Government reactions to the recent market crisis is found wanting. Why devaluate the currency. A question most economists at the highest order can only make conjectures on – most admit that the true cause(s) of the Asian crisis is beyond them. Associate Professor Dr Roman Greenberg an economist by profession issued a two-pager bulletin on the recent causes of the Asian crisis to his friends and to interested individuals.

As contributors to economic development (though our situation has been stagnant for sometime) of this country it is important for women as income earners and household budget holders to understand the basis on why devaluation came to be. Here are some thoughts by Dr Greenberg I wish to share with you in the hope of demystifying this economic phenomenon:

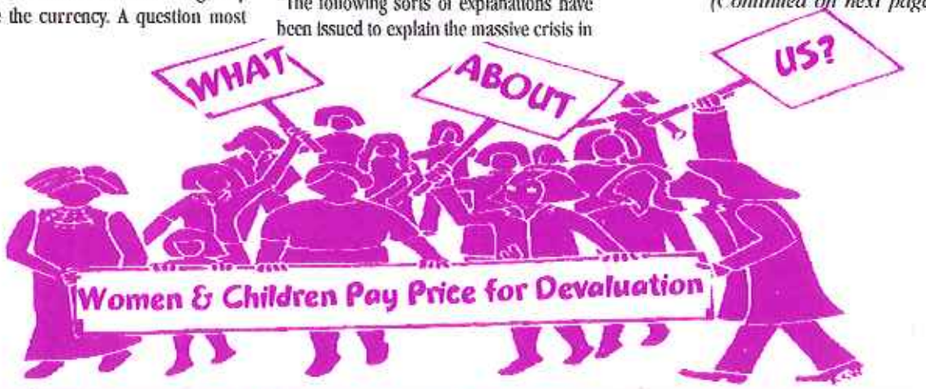
"The following sorts of explanations have been issued to explain the massive crisis in SE and North Asia that last week resulted in our devaluation:

- Asian economies were overheated and their stock markets collapsed
- The Governments were corrupt (Indonesia) and this was the source of the problem
- The Fiji Government did not manage their economies prudently and this caused crisis

What went wrong?

The answer is that the stock markets in Asia collapsed. What has to be kept in mind is that ten to fifteen years ago, this did not matter because a collapse in the stock market did not mean a collapse of currency and money

(Continued on next page)



What's in this issue:

* Devaluation Crisis Hits Fiji *International Women's Day *Interviews with Women in 'Male Dominated' Careers *Women's Health *Women & Environment *Women from Around the Globe *Staff Reports & Events Attended