

# Workshop to Train Women towards effective Participation in Syndicates

organized by Suzanne Abu Fadel



Ms. Suzanne Abu Fadel

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**Suzanne** Abu fadel is an employee at the Coral Oil Company and a member of the Executive Council of its employees' and workers' syndicate. On another level and under the support and sponsorship of the Friederich-Ebert Foundation, she trains women in syndicate organization, activities and laws in order to prepare them and promote efficient and effective participation in their respective syndicates. We met Ms. Abu Fadel at our recent conference on Women and the Environment and spoke to her to get a better idea about her work.

She told us that her skills stem from a six months course in syndicate work followed by workshops in Italy, Switzerland and Belgium. "In those workshops I saw and learned how women's demands and rights are organized and incorporated into syndicate and union agendas. I realized that women are not effectively participating in our syndicates and unions in Lebanon because they do not have sufficient knowledge about their rights and duties; about employee and employers rights and duties, nor about the purpose, role and procedures of syndicates demands and activities. When I came back from Europe I proposed to conduct seminars which

would teach women and train them to take an active role in their respective syndicates."

She provided us with the proposal she prepared for the workshops where she depicts the background of women's involvement in Lebanese syndicates and the obstacles, solution and methods to promote women's effectiveness in syndicate activities.

In the section examing the history of women's participation in sydicates she reports that the first appearance of women occured in a strike by the Tobacco Syndicate in 1947. The women confronted police fire which caused one women, Ms. Warda Butros Ibrahim, to be killed and many others to be wounded. By 1967 the number of women in the Lebanese Worker's Union reached 250. This number has increased significantly on a national level but women remain absent from decision-making positions. The most prominent woman in a Lebanese syndicate, today, is Ms. Mary Leila Khoury, who was elected President of the Syndicate of Lebanese Pharmacists in August 1991.

Nevertheless, membership alone does not mean an active involvement and women are still relatively inactivite, Ms. Abu Fadel points out. Women must participate and be active to secure their demands and their employment and economic rights. "Even in the European countries that I visited where women have secured equality under the law, syndicate activities and participation serve the purpose of supervising, lobbying and activating for the implementation of these laws." she reports.

The obstacles preventing women from Syndicate work are:

1. Lack of time allocated to the

relevant training.

2. Abundance of responsibilities and duties in the family,

3. Lack of family participation in public issues

4. Inside the Syndicates:

a) Inconvenience of time and place of meetings

b) Men's monopolization of administrative and leadership positions

c) Absence of women's representation

d) Interest in general issues and neglect of specific issues related to women such as: discimination on the job, unequal pay for equal work, absence of day care centers.

The suggested solutions involve:

1. Conducting workshops, meetings and training programs for women in syndicates.

2. Training in the organization and division of labour in the family

3. Convincing husband and other family members to participate in public panels and social activities,

4. Inside the syndicate:

a) Choosing convenient places and time for meetings

b) Conducting seminars and workshops training men to include women and cooperate with them at work and in syndicate duties.

c) Giving women an equal share in leadership positions

d) Creating awareness with

respect to women's rights and needs.

The workshops discuss all of these problems and solutions. They offer the candidates knowledge in syndicate rights, duties, work, purpose and activities; review the work and activities of syndicates; prepare agendas of demands and needs as well as strategies to meet them; train in syndicate activities, educational requirements, environmental issues, etc. ...

Thus far, there have been two workshops for women , the last being in October 23-25 and a third is scheduled in November 13-15, 1992. If succesfull, the trainees themselves are bound to mobilize more women to join and take active part in the syndicates. Ms. Abu Fadel's work and emphasis are relatively new in the country. The need for such programmes is trumendous and Ms. Abu Fadel may be a pioneer and a catalyst for promoting, even further, women's participation and development in society •

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