



Members
of the
Organization
of Aymara
Women of
Kollasuyu



BOLIVIA

Women Organizing In Urban And Rural Areas

In Bolivia, a country of over six million people, at least four million are Indian. The following article, which focuses on La Paz and surrounding high plateau communities 12,000 to 13,000 feet above sea level, resulted from a meeting of Quechua and Aymara women organized by Centro Chitakolla in January, 1986. It was published in Spanish in La Mujer en el Mundo Andino, which can be purchased by sending \$2.50 to Ediciones Chitakolla, Casilla 20214, La Paz, Bolivia.

The Organization of Aymara Women of Kollasuyu (OMAK, *Organización de Mujeres Aymaras del Kollasuyu*) was created because we saw the need for a woman's organization. In the cities there is real discrimination against women. We suffer from various forms of discrimination, as members of the Aymara nation, as women, and as economically disadvantaged people. In rural communities, the educational system, the churches, and the media create a situation where our traditional ways and the role of women are increasingly under attack. Previously in our culture, when our society was free, Aymara men and women had equal rights. Women had authority. We continue to have it in most communities, but it is being attacked by the present system, which tries to impose the idea that men are superior to women. We believe that it is necessary to rearrange each part of our community in order to restructure it in its totality. The colonialism and the social, economic, and cultural domination which we suffer have created conditions such that even in a fight for liberation only the male side gets the privileges. Our task is to give value to and to organize the female half, in order to transform our entire society.

This reality is clearer if we understand what happens in the cities, where the situation of women is dramatic. Aymara women in La Paz are in a long-suffering position. The markets are full of Aymara women who try to sell a little something every day so that their children can eat, and for this they also suffer the discrimination and insults of those who think themselves superior. In the upper class neighborhoods our mothers and sisters work as so-called servants. They work all day in the bosses' house doing domestic chores and their salary is

minimal. They are practically slaves. Women who are at the service of their exploiters 24 hours a day receive approximately \$10.00 a month. This is not work, but servitude which converts women into a form of tax paid to an invading people. There are servants who are maids from the time they are little girls without any economic compensation. There are city families who travel to rural communities to find themselves a young maid, telling her parents that they will take care of her education, when in reality they take her away to serve them virtually as a slave.

Aymara women in the city meet among themselves in the shanty towns, in cooperatives, in associations, and in unions. At the same time, the oppressors also meet in their political parties and organizations. Unfortunately, when there is contact between the two worlds, it is negative, characterized by either open oppression and exploitation or by manipulation and paternalism. So we believe that Aymara women have the right to our own experiences at organizing. The right and also the obligation, since we believe this is the only way the liberation of our people can be advanced.

OMAK is made up one hundred per cent by Aymara women. We do not have tutors or foreign coordinators. We do not believe this is reverse discrimination, but rather that it is normal and legitimate. We have organized ourselves into a group of women because we are conscious that we belong both to a definite people, the Aymara people, and to the female half of that people. To organize by ourselves does not mean antagonizing Aymara men. We believe that the nature of the attack upon our society has imposed this response. We have seen that even the most combative forms of struggle for our people have been predominantly masculine. Colonization has disturbed the traditional balance and the perspective of a united struggle. It is necessary to rebalance the feminine side.

Currently the most important part of our work is in the Aymara communities. We work in the 18 provinces of the department of La Paz, and we also work in Oruro and in certain Aymara areas of Cochabamba. We try to develop the potential of the Aymara women by strengthening traditional organization and work systems, including the *ayni*, *mink'a*, and *yanapana*, which stress exchange labor, communal labor, and reciprocity. We try to strengthen the *ayllu*, the community, because we believe that Aymaras will create more just forms of social organization and work only on the basis of our ancestors' experience. On an educational level, we have conducted short courses in various communities to try to eradicate alienation and to generate consciousness of our own values. At the same time we want to contribute to the participation of Aymara people in all cultural, social, and political aspects of the Bolivian nation to promote our survival as a self-determined people.



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