

Rebel Girls' Rag

A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE 75¢

Vol. 2 No. 1 November/December, 1987

Socialist-Feminist News and Views from the International Women's Day Committee



Photo by F. Rooney

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REBEL GIRLS REVISE RAG

WE'VE CHANGED!!
REBEL GIRLS' RAG HAS A NEW
FORMAT!!
IT'S BECOME A TABLOID!!
IT'S TWICE AS BIG!!
WE HOPE IT LOOKS TWICE AS
GOOD!!
WE HOPE IT ATTRACTS TWICE AS
MANY READERS!!

By adopting a tabloid format for Rebel Girls' Rag we hope we can produce a better looking newsletter, publish more and lengthier articles (and not in teeny-tiny print), provide more space for publicising community events and increase our outreach.

The purpose of Rebel Girls' Rag is to provide a forum for documenting our activities and struggles as socialist feminists and a vehicle for discussion and debate within the larger feminist and left communities.

The International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) is a socialist feminist group with a unique 10-year long history of activism on a number of issues. As socialist feminists we believe that the oppression of women on the basis of gender cannot be separated from oppression based on class, race and sexual orientation. Any effective program for women's liberation must be integrated with an anti-imperialist analysis, international solidarity, an anti-racist analysis and organizing and working in and with the trade union movement as well as including "women's issues" such as reproductive rights, pay equity and daycare.

Those of you who have had a long association with IWDC

will remember that we began publication in 1982 as the International Women's Day Newsletter. We decided to change to a larger newspaper format because the newsletter style limited the amount of material that we could cover, and had a 'club-ish' feeling which hampered its circulation. We wanted a paper which would be more accessible, and fun to read. In early 1987, we produced the first issue of Rebel Girls' Rag. Our name came from the 1915 song, "The Rebel Girl", written by Joe Hill for Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who, like Hill, was a member of the International Workers of the World (IWW). Flynn was a tireless agitator and organizer for women's liberation, workers' rights and sexual freedom; goals which are still among the priorities of socialist feminists today. We received a lot of positive response about our change in format and new name. However, the size of the paper was still constricting, and so we decided to go bigger still.

We encourage readers of RGR to submit articles for publication, and keep us updated on the work of organizations you participate in. Write to us and let us know what you think of our format and our content — we publish letters too. And please take out a subscription, or renew your present one. Subscriptions provide us with the capital to keep on publishing, and you get the convenience of having each issue mailed directly to you.

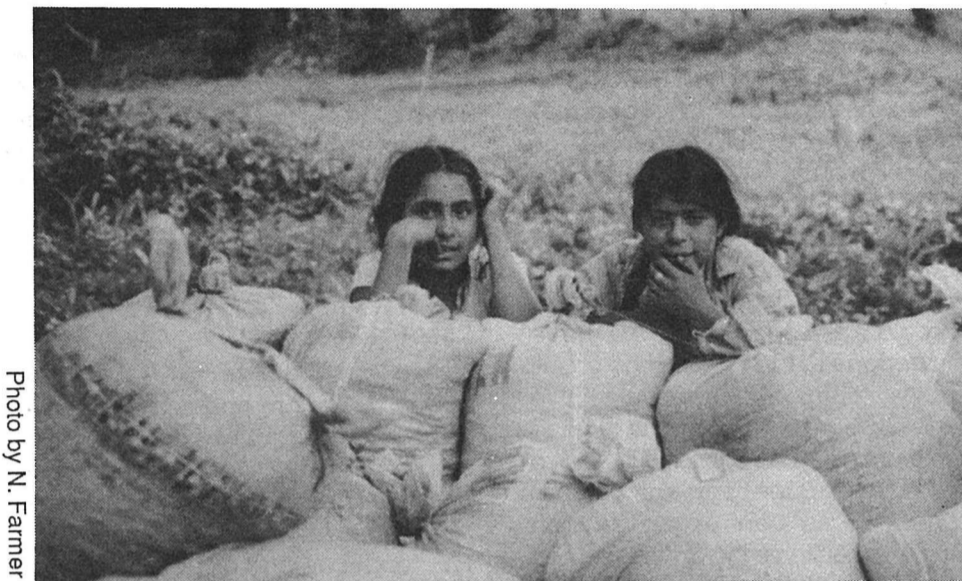


Photo by N. Farmer

GIVE REAGAN THE BOOT FOR AMLAE

by Nancy Farmer

This September AMLAE, The Louisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women, celebrated its 10th Anniversary, and although there is cause for celebration due to the advances made in the last 10 years, there is also much more that needs to be accomplished. The progress being achieved by women has not come just by chance. Nicaraguan women are advancing as they are increasingly taking on jobs traditionally done by men, work that would otherwise be left undone as more men are being mobilized for defence.

The programs achieved by rural women, although not universal, include technical training, greater participation in the operation of Co-operatives, the building of 37 daycare centres which serve 20,000 children, better health services, shorter working hours, collective laundry areas and the encouragement to start vegetable gardens for food self sufficiency.

Considering the forces against them, Nicaraguan women are moving ahead. However, simple supplies which we take so much for granted are missing because of the U.S. imposed Trade Embargo and because the cost of the Contra War, 50% of the National Budget, is endangering many of the social reform programs.

International support is crucial to the lives of Nicaraguan women. In Canada, campaigns such as Tools For Peace, have played a role in sending basic materials to the Nicaraguans. Last year alone \$2,000,000 worth of aid was collected — items such as hammers and saws, office supplies and sanitary napkins.

This year again we are asking you to dig deep, and support us in our effort to collect rubber boots for women agricultural workers. Small sizes, (8 and under) are critically needed. All the technical training and the daycare centres won't mean much if the women don't even have the most basic personal equipment. Many women are seen working in the fields in their bare feet as they don't want to ruin their only pair of shoes. Consequently they are taking in dangerous pesticides through the soles of their feet.

You can help Nicaraguan women by purchasing a pair of rubber boots and bringing them to us or sending a donation to Tools For Peace, P.O. Box 829, Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Z1. For more information please call 922-0852. Your support is urgently needed.

Other items being collected: notebooks, health and safety equipment, corrugated roofing and fishing gear.

TOOLS
FOR PEACE
OUTILS DE PAIX

Take a Tools for Peace flyer to Hercules (Yonge & Wellesley) for a 10% discount on rubber boots for the boat. (Buy men's sizes 4-6.)



Toronto Women's Bookstore

The TORONTO WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE would like to respond to the letter/article entitled "There's no Racism There" written by Pauline Peters, a collective member of Our Lives (a Black women's newspaper in Toronto) and a former staff member of the Toronto Women's Bookstore. This article appeared in the July/Sept 1987 issue of the newspaper.

We have been silent too long on this issue. We have a responsibility to the community that we serve, live and work in politically to give some background as to why this question of racism arose. As an organization that is actively involved in anti-racist work in Toronto, we know that it is important to clarify any allegations being made about us.

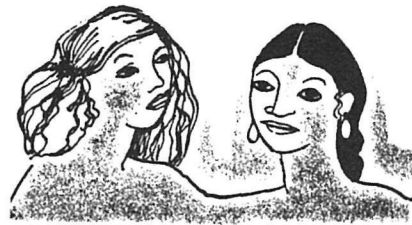
In January 1986 this non-profit organization became a collective after a long, hard struggle to gain recognition of important organizational and political issues. The new collective inherited an eleven-year legacy that included a vertical management, a small board of three, staff with no voting power, a huge deficit and a primary representation in the store of a liberal white women's movement perspective. The TWB was not transformed overnight when the organization became a collective, rather we have been in a state of transformation since January 1986. We are committed to struggle, and have been in continual process for change. Our ever present self-scrutiny recognises that there is a long way yet to go and a lot to be learned.

In forming the new collective in January 1986 one South Asian woman and two Black women came into the organization, one as staff and two as board members. Nine months after the formation of the new collective a part-time position came up. The advertisement encouraged non-white women to apply. In October 1986 Pauline Peters came into a nine-month-old collective that was very much in the process of change. At the time of her hiring we were preparing to set up mediation for the development of models for conflict resolution between co-workers.

Pauline came into the collective as a probationary member, (like all new employees) due for evaluation

within a certain period before she became permanent staff. At her evaluation in March she stated clearly that her interests were outside the store. She explained that because she was involved in so many other things she couldn't concentrate well on the job. Her own expectations remained unstated until shortly before she resigned in June 1987, when she said it was "just a job".

In February Pauline brought a proposal to the collective, in which she presented "ways of incorporating a non-white woman's perspective into the store". In contrast to Pauline's account of our response to this proposal it was not greeted with "cold criticism", her proposal was individually and collectively supported. What we did point out to her was that her proposal marginalised and also made invisible the previous contributions and work of the South Asian woman and the white working class staff members. She is correct in reporting that we said her label for us as a "white middle class collective" was inaccurate. We would like to make it very clear that before Pauline joined us we were not an all-white organization. Any information or implication that states otherwise makes invisible the work and contribution of the other woman of colour on the collective as well as the hands-on work of the rest of the collective with regard to race and class, and the hard-won changes that have actively been in process.



At present the Toronto Women's Bookstore possibly has the largest selection of any bookstore in Toronto of book titles by women of colour writers, (over 400). There has been a 300% increase in the book titles and stock items of Black women, Native women, Asian women, Latin American women and Immigrant women, from a few scarcely promoted titles that were in stock at the bookstore before January, 1986.

Although we strongly felt that these changes should be acknowledged, we also recognized that there was a long way to go in making the bookstore equitable in terms of representation. This was discussed with Pauline and it was agreed that we would actively work as a collective and continue making the TWB much more accessible to a larger community of women.



Pauline suggested that as a collective we meet regularly to talk about our experiences as women of different races. We welcomed the idea and felt that it would make us stronger as a collective. This was done in April at Pauline's house. Each collective member spoke about their personal experience of racism. Pauline who spoke last did not mention racism as part of her experience at the bookstore.

In setting up conflict resolution models to deal with accountability issues between co-workers and to provide better communication between us our meetings were facilitated by a mediator (a Black woman). We had the first mediation in March and a second session in April. It was at this session that issues came up about Pauline's work at the bookstore.

The day after this mediation we received a call from Dionne Brand, a collective member of Our Lives newspaper who stated: "we want to meet with you regarding Pauline who is having a hard time at the store". We were quite open to meeting with these women despite the suddenness of the request. However, the collective felt it was important first to meet with and inform board members of the existing situation at the bookstore. We set up a meeting with the collective (inclusive of Pauline) and the board, which would be facilitated by a mediator. This was to be a group of six white women and five non-white women. When Pauline arrived at this meeting she was accompanied by four Black women who she stated came in her support. She informed the group present that she had not come to participate but to read a statement.

The content of the statement was that she was quitting and that she wanted one month's compensation and a letter of apology. (This was the first time Pauline used the word racism). Then one of the women who had come in her support read a statement she had written on working in an all white collective.

As board and staff members of the TWB we were never against Pauline bringing the support of others to the meeting. We did find the way it was done was without respect in that:

1. The collective and board were not informed;
2. The content and implications of Pauline's and her supporters' statements made the South Asian woman on staff and the Black board members as well as the facilitator invisible. They left after they had said their piece and we did not hear from them again.

Weeks later, after this meeting we received a letter from the Ontario Coalition of Black Trade Unionists on Pauline's behalf requesting we pay her compensation and produce a letter of apology. In our response we stated that Pauline was hired on a probationary basis as are all employees of the TWB: that her evaluation was informal as it was with the other new employee present at the same time. Moreover, as a co-worker in the collective she was part of the process that set up procedures to review personnel. During the course of the informal evaluation it was brought to her attention that there were concerns with her work; these were fully discussed, she was aware of them and said they were legitimate charges due to her over-extension outside the bookstore. In our view we felt we had dealt fairly with Pauline and that she terminated her employment with us of her own free will. In those circumstances we did not feel we owed her any further compensation. We never heard from the coalition again; and there was no further communication from the individual who called regarding Pauline. Therefore we were very surprised when we saw the two page article in Our Lives, and its call for a boycott of the TWB. We felt that we could not carry this particular issue on our shelves not only because it

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BATTLE CONTINUES FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

Photo by N. Farmer



by Mary Gellatly

The struggle for full access to free abortion will be shaped by events over the next few months. On the provincial level, the recent liberal majority does not bode well for women. Federally, we face the Supreme Court decision which may come down any day. Only by building strong, visible actions can we continue to push for women's reproductive freedom and prevent the state from taking measures to undercut the movement.

During the recent provincial election, we heard the liberal government pay lip service to abortion. While it may have appropriated some of our language, access to abortion services

has continued to deteriorate. The Liberal's position is clear. Greg Sobara, Minister responsible for women's issues, wants to retain the federal abortion law under the criminal code. Elinor Caplan, Minister of Health, has stated that she believes equal access to abortions can be achieved under the framework of the existing abortion law. This flies in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. Moreover, David Peterson and Attorney General Ian Scott have both stated they are prepared to move against the clinics.

The liberal government may tinker with the hospital delivery system of abortion services in order to be seen to respond to the movement's demands. Clearly, anything

they do will be in compliance with the federal abortion law and therapeutic abortion committees. Such action will only serve to perpetuate state and medical control and regulation of women's reproduction.

On the federal level, the Supreme Court decision on whether to uphold the jury acquittal of Drs. Morgentaler, Scott and Smoling or send them back for another series of trials will be handed down any day. The pro-choice movement has continued to push demands for repeal of the law while the Supreme Court deliberates.

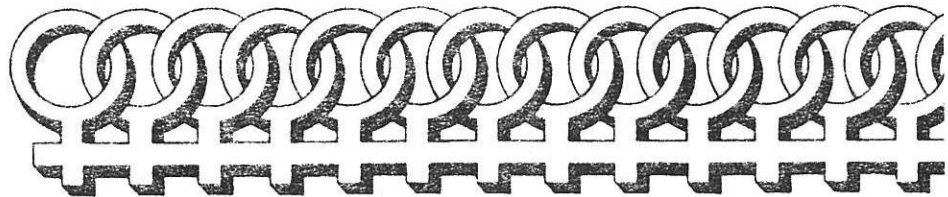
Regardless of the nature of the Supreme Court decision the struggle will continue. Even if the decision calls the federal abortion law into question, we must be prepared to put forward our demands for decriminalization of abortion and provision of medically insured abortion services in free standing community health clinics which provide a

range of reproductive health services accessible to the whole community. As demonstrated in the U.S., the court's recognition of women's right to have an abortion (based on a right to privacy) does not, in and of itself, win women's reproductive freedom. The 1973 *Rose vs. Wade* decision gave women a "right" to have an abortion but did not assure access to such services.

It is vital that we be prepared to immediately and forcefully demonstrate our demands when the Supreme Court decision is handed down.

Come down to the Morgentaler Clinic, 85 Harbord Street, the day of the decision at 5:30 p.m. to show your support.

The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) is organizing a rally at Queen's Park one week after the Supreme Court decision. Please come out. Phone OCAC at 532-8193 for further details.



Toronto Women's Bookstore Letter Cont'd

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made serious and false allegations about the bookstore but it invalidated the life experiences, work and struggle of women of colour on the staff and board.

The women of colour on the board and staff take strong exception to the articles "There's no Racism There" and "Anatomy of Working with a White Collective" in *Our Lives* that call into question our integrity. We find it particularly offensive that another group of Black women can sit in judgement and discredit the work of other women of colour on the basis of whether they choose to work with white women. We hesitate to think that because we have chosen to work in racially mixed groups we are automatically Branded as sellouts and Uncle Toms. We resent our work being belittled and being referred to in this way by Black women who do not

share our vision of a multi-racial women's movement working together for political change.

The metaphor of the "necklace" when applied to women of colour in these times is not an innocent one. We are not "sellouts". We have experienced racism. We know what it is. We name it. Because we have chosen to work in a racially mixed group does not mean that we "lack consciousness of our own origin." It does not make us less Black. It does not make our lived experience in the world any less harsh.

In this political climate of conservatism it is alarming to see this waste of energy between two progressive alternative groups. This hostility, this discredit, this name calling of other women of colour makes us very tired. We cannot help but ask who is the beneficiary of all this? Is it the state?

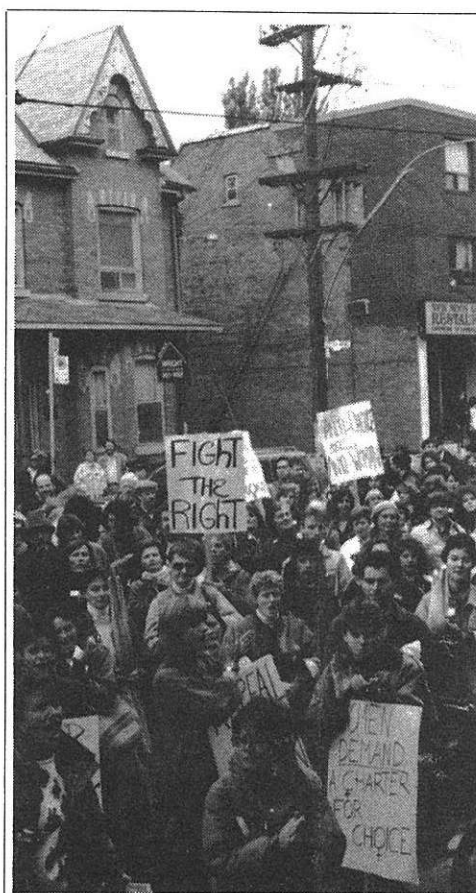


Photo by Julia B.

MARCHING FOR WOMEN'S LIVES

Thousands of pro-choice supporters took to the streets across the country to demand repeal of the federal abortion law, legalization of free-standing clinics providing medically insured abortions and an end to anti-choice harassment on October 18th. Drawing wide support from the women's movement and labour, demonstrations took place in St. John's, Quebec City, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. As we prepare for the Supreme Court decision, solidarity across the country is strong.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY!

A planning group of native women, women of colour and white women has met to begin planning the initial meetings of the Coalition of International Women's Day, March 8, 1988. The first two meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, December 2, 7:30 p.m. and Wednesday, December 9, 7:30 p.m. at 252 Bloor St. West.

All women are invited to discuss the structure, basis of unity, decision making and political direction of the Coalition. Bring suggestions for themes and issues.

The fragile nature of our links does need mature thought and consideration by all of us. To realize any vision of a world changing we must acknowledge our differences and work together in our struggles against racism and imperialism. A separate closet can only stifle change.

In solidarity,
The Toronto Women's Bookstore Staff and Board:

Sharon Fernandez, Betty Julian, Jude Johnston, Chris Lawrence, Beth McAuley, Marilyn McCallum, Stephanie Martin, Joanne Opperman, Esther Vise, Wendy Wine ♀

"SOLIDARITY IS THE TENDERNESS

[This article is excerpted from a speech M. Valverde gave to a conference of women's centres in Thunder Bay.]

by Mariana Valverde

I would like to begin by relating an anecdote, a common incident, and using that to get at the larger problems of trying to organize women's collectives in a social system that encourages neither women nor collectives.

A few years ago I went with a couple of other women from IWDC to open a bank account. We were first asked if we were a business. "Not really" was the sheepish answer. "We're more like a non-profit organization, and we're not incorporated." She looked at us and said, "Well, all right. Then I only need the signatures of the president, vice-president, and secretary." So we looked at each other, smiled, and quickly came to an arbitrary decision about who would put her name to each of these alien categories. The clerk, needless to say, couldn't understand why we were amused.

Two conclusions arise from this. First, the bank does not exist to serve customers like us. It is there to make profits by providing a service, primarily to other businesses and secondarily to individuals. With the remarkable flexibility of modern capitalism, it does allow for the existence of alternative forms among their customers, such as non-profit, non-incorporated groups; but in doing so it has to symbolically destroy our collective structure and replace it by the hierarchical form.

In the incident I have described, gender was not the main dividing line. The crucial contradiction here was not between women and patriarchy but rather, between a highly sophisticated capitalist structure (the Can. Imperialist Bank of Commerce, to be precise) and a small organization based on the rejection of both individualism and hierarchy, the twin organizing principles of capitalist social relations. It's important to realize that many of the problems we experience in trying to work according to feminist principles are not caused by our own failings as individuals or as groups, nor are they due to inadequacies in feminist theory. Rather, most of what we think of as "our" problems are inevitable results of the social structures of bourgeois society, which I would define as a society in which the economic and cultural values of the bourgeoisie appear to be everyone's values, universal values.

Bourgeois society imposes serious limitations on our ability to organize. It does not do so (usually) by the use of brute force against groups like ours. (Although it must be noted that force is always there in the background - for instance, police action and legislation against CUPW strikers). But direct force is seldom used in our society. The structures of capitalist economic relations and bourgeois social relations are like the walls of the houses we live in, or like the design of streets and sidewalks -- we are so used to them, and they are so cleverly disguised as aids to facilitate safety and order, that we forget that they confine us, that we forget to ask who put them there and for what purpose. It is by surrounding us with social structures that appear as natural and normal that the bourgeoisie can continue to rule with the consent of the ruled. This process of disguising what is good for business as what is good for everyone is what is known in Marxist theory as "hegemony" - the subtle process by which a ruling class generates consent rather than opposition.

Patriarchy too is most effective when it can rule through hegemony, rather than through the direct coercion of women. And in a capitalist patriarchal system as sophisticated as the one in which we live, it can take a great deal of effort to expose the mechanisms of hegemony (like the bank incident).

There are some women, some feminists, who are not interested in challenging the mechanisms of hegemony. Some feminists want to be allowed access to the system as it exists, to share the economic and social power now exercised primarily by men. But most of us here are more interested in changing the sources and the structures of power, the very nature of power. And that will involve destroying the structures that have determined and limited our political work, and replacing them with truly democratic structures that empower people. Our goal is women's liberation (not merely participation in the status quo). This goal necessarily involves not only modifying but revolutionizing the economic structure of our society.

In our society human needs are only met if meeting them happens to create a profit for corporations. The profit motive needs to be replaced by the only legitimate motive of economic life: meeting human needs. Once we determine our main goal in economic policy, we can devise new structures that facilitate this goal.

This does not mean that we all have to take Karl Marx for our Bible or believe that the Soviet Union is paradise. Marx himself said that to be a socialist was "not to create recipes for the kitchens of the future" but rather to clearly oppose the inhuman aspects of capitalist society. Feminists may or may not be Marxists, may or may not think that so-called socialist societies have improved the condition of women: but any feminist who wants to change the structures of power as opposed to participating in them has to be anti-capitalist.

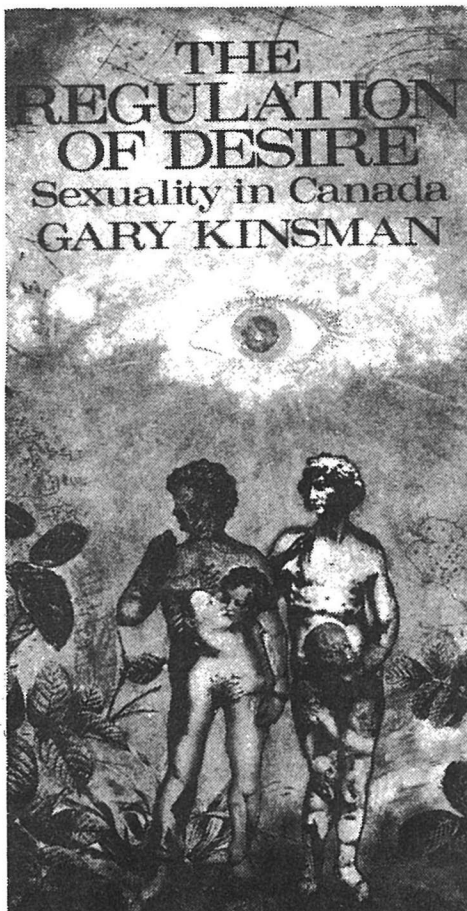
racism cannot be reduced to a side-effect of either capitalism or patriarchy: it has its own reality and its own dynamic, and the struggle against it is not a subset of some other struggle. Theoretically this caused me problems: just as I was beginning to glimpse how one might combine a feminist analysis with a socialist one, I realized that there was a third term which could not be reduced to the two I already



had. It was at that point that I gave up my pursuit of the perfect theory, and decided to undertake (in my scholarly work) concrete analyses of the interrelations between racism, sexism and capitalism at particular points in history - seeing how they actually interact in a specific context, rather than trying to freeze history and come up with an abstract map of the structural connections between them.

This is what I think 'the class question' in the women's movement is fundamentally about. There has been an unfortunate tendency to think of class merely in personal terms: am I middle-class? do I have privileges because I live in a nice house? I am certainly not denying that personal privilege is important -- for instance, if women lawyers and academics are thought of as natural spokespersons, then class privilege is at work and must be challenged. However, much energy can be wasted in excessive personalizing of issues such as class. When we coined the slogan "the personal is political" we didn't mean that the political should be reduced to the personal.

Class is not a personal attribute, even if it is linked to personal attributes; class is a structure, a basic structure of our society. It should furthermore be pointed out that the obsessive personalizing of political issues is a particularly middle-class and North American pastime. An anti-capitalist women's movement is not one dedicated to the personal criticism of middle-class lifestyles, but rather one dedicated to building strong links with labour, with socialists, with anti-imperialist



In this struggle, women of colour are playing an increasingly key leadership role, both in Canada and elsewhere. This is a crucial difference between the movement of five years ago and that of today. As a movement, we have barely begun to integrate an anti-racist perspective into our work, so I am going to speak more personally about what I have learned from listening to and working with people of colour. I first learned that

OF ONE PEOPLE FOR ANOTHER"

groups here and in the Third World, with a view to creating a powerful coalition for the defeat of both capitalism and patriarchy.



I began to see that the hitherto usual practice of "including" women of colour here and there was reinforcing the ethnocentric and racist structures we were supposedly attacking. I noticed women of colour being put in the position of telling personal experiences, experiences which were interpreted as the particular problems of women of colour - the general books on motherhood, sexuality, etc., were still written from a white and usually Anglosaxon perspective. I concluded that I too had been guilty of seeing women of colour as having particular experiences that could be narrated for "our" enlightenment. I learned that white experience is just as particular, and should be analysed as such: for instance, how did Adrienne Rich's whiteness affect her experience, and therefore her analysis, of motherhood? How did the whiteness of Nellie McClung affect the Canadian suffrage movement? Women of colour have often been "included": but the inclusion has usually meant that they were forced to play the role of inspiring "us", of enlightening us about what it's like in far-off places and in 'unusual' social locations. This kind of inclusion makes the brown and yellow and black women who make up the vast majority of the world's women into objects for the white feminist gaze.

Some organizations are now, for the first time in the history of feminism, consciously trying to change this: women of colour are taking their rightful place as active subjects, not objects, organizing the movement, defining the issues, and using their experience to draw conclusions about gender oppression.

Some white feminists are beginning to attempt to integrate an anti-racist perspective not only into the more obvious issues (e.g. the situation of Native women in Canada's North, women in South Africa) but into our work as a whole. I personally have done some soul searching because I now realize that my

book on sexuality (published in 1985) did not make a serious effort to think through the relation between race and sexual identity. What I was probably thinking when I wrote it was that the sexual experience and sexual consciousness of women of colour is obviously intertwined with their experience of race and racism: but it did not dawn on me that whiteness is as much of a colour as brownness, and that one's feelings about one's body -- which underlie all sexual experience -- are to an important extent determined by the social construction of one's race.

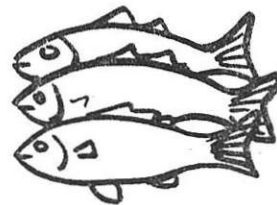
In collective terms, I am sure that many of you are currently going through turmoil around the question of whether white feminists and women of colour can or should work together, and if so how. I certainly have no recipes, but as a historian of feminism perhaps I can give you the comforting thought that what we are all trying to do, under the leadership of women of colour, is truly unique in the history of the women's movement.

One thing we have learned is that we cannot naively think that all women are potential members of all women's groups. Native women, black women, Asian women, disabled women, women in particular sectors of the economy will have certain interests in common and will want to use autonomous groups both to put forward their specific politic and to give their members a safe place, a circle of non-oppression. How these collectives or organizations will cooperate still remains largely a question mark.

The mainstream women's organizations (e.g. NAC) are certainly changing, but the heritage of racism and bourgeois hegemony weighs very heavily on our collective shoulders, and it will be years before we all think of 'the leadership of the oppressed' as the normal process to deal with class and race differences. The tokenistic approach is still the usual response: we don't want to look bad, so we find a visible-minority woman to speak in order to avoid having an all-white cast (which is assumed to be the normal outcome unless one specifically plans otherwise). We have to think hard about the organizational questions that are often dismissed as either boring or bureaucratic: an anti-capitalist perspective, an anti-racist perspective, will not flourish in the women's movement unless there are consciously designed structures to make it

happen. We can't pretend that structures are neutral.

In trying to organize both small collectives and larger coalitions, we also have to be aware of how deeply the state structures our interactions. This does not happen only when direct funding is given for a particular project or organization. It happens even before we ask for funding, even before we form a group. The state sets out a framework for social and political life. It divides society horizontally into competing "interest groups" -- instead of exposing the vertical relations between oppressed and privileged groups. Labour is not seen as representing the claims of the working class as a whole against capital: it is seen as just another pressure group, on a par with REAL women or with the National Citizens' Coalition. Women too are not seen as the oppressed majority but as merely an interest group, and not an especially powerful one at that. Women are further subdivided and set off against each other through a myriad of programs which claim to help us but, in the long run, divide us: mothers on family benefits are put in one department, Native women seeking Native rights are put under Indian Affairs, mothers needing day-care are told to speak to this other ministry, and so on. The state is not neutral: among other things, it fragments and disorganizes us right from the beginning, even while apparently giving us certain benefits.



Let me now try to move toward what I hope will be an upbeat conclusion. The structures of racism, of patriarchy, and of bourgeois society make it extremely difficult to work non-competitively. If we spend eight hours a day in the imperialist bank, obeying orders or giving them, silently competing for scarce promotions and so on, we cannot leave all that at the door of our women's meeting. What we can do is recognize it and try to subvert it -- but a utopian, naive denial of the basic individualist and hierarchical structures within which we function during most of our lives will only result in resentments, silent recriminations, feelings of disappointment and betrayal, and other problems which have plagued women's groups.

We also need to face the difficulties we have, as women in a patriarchal society, in building solid relations of work and friendship -- as Adrienne Rich has pointed out, men have had "a man's word" a man's honour, and gentlemen's agreements to help them bond with each other in business and in war; but women have been told that our only loyalties are based on our instinct as wives and mothers, instincts which create bonds to men and children. We have thus not bonded with other women. We have not been used to making intelligent (as opposed to instinctual) commitments to work and to politics. The absence of traditions of female bonding, together with the lack of self-confidence in our work and our thought, can create an unreasonable desire to sweep all conflicts under the carpet; we fear that any expression of disagreement will lead to volcanic eruptions in our groups and in our psyches. It is true that there are some women who are as egocentric and obnoxious as the worst man; but in my experience, for every one such woman there are twenty who do not speak up when they should for fear of appearing to be egocentric. The ethic of politeness and self-sacrifice does not work in the long run: rather, it leads to burnout, which is significant problem in the radical women's movement today.

Let me end by giving a small practical suggestion to deal with these difficult questions of personal interactions in groups: I propose that we abolish "niceness" in the women's movement. Let me explain. When I moved to North America at the age of 12, my siblings and I were quite struck by the constant use of the term "nice" among North American adults, particularly ladies. We commented on the fact that the word nice did not seem to have any stable meaning, and it certainly could not be translated into Spanish.

But after twenty years of life in North America I have finally figured out what "nice" means. It means: let us pretend we are all unselfish, while firmly supporting our husbands' ruthless struggle to get ahead. It means: politeness is more important than truth or justice. It means: we don't care if false politeness makes for stilted interactions and destroys any possibility of working together, for after all, women don't really work toget-

continued on page 6

REBEL GIRLS' RAG

A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

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November, December 1987

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International Women's Day
Committee
P.O. Box 70, Station F,
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4

We are a socialist-feminist group which operates on the principle that mass action is our most effective instrument of change. We believe that the oppression of women touches every aspect of our lives and that the liberation of women will require fundamental changes in the structure of society.

We hold bi-weekly meetings where our policy and overall direction are determined. Smaller committees work on specific events or issues or in different constituencies.

We welcome new members. For more information phone Nancy at 531-6608.

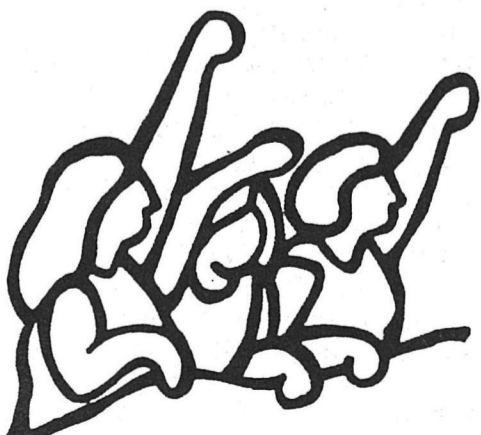
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Shelly Gordon 247-7181.)

This issue put together by:
Sheryl Boswell, Debi Brock,
Carolyn Egan, Nancy Farmer,
Sandy Fox, Mary Gellatly,
Gillian Morton, Catherine
Glenn, Shelly Gordon, Lynn
Lathrop, N. de Plume,
Jennifer Steven, Mariana
Valverde, Ellen Waxman, Cindy
Wright.

Our thanks to the Women's
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facilities.

Disclaimer:

Signed articles do not neces-
sarily reflect the views of
the International Women's Day
Committee, but those of the
author.



FIGHT CONTINUES FOR THERESA'S LIFE

by Sheryl Boswell

THERESA RAMASHAMOLA IS STILL
ALIVE!

In the last issue of Rebel
Girls' Rag, we wrote about
the impending death sentence
of Theresa Ramashamola. She
is a twenty-four-year-old
South African woman and the
first woman to be on death-
row in South Africa. A vig-
il was held on September 9th
to protest her sentence.

Her appeal has been post-
poned until early November.
On September 2, two men out
of the thirty-two presently
on deathrow, were executed.
As a result of launching the
campaign to stop the execu-
tion and save the life of
Theresa Ramashamola, the
South African Women's Day
Committee has collected over
2,100 names. The signatures
were sent to the Mulroney
government demanding that
the Canadian government in-
tervene, to stop Theresa's
execution, to protest the de-
tention and arrest of all po-
litical prisoners in South
Africa.



Solidarity Cont'd.

continued from page 5

her, we just chat. It means:
let us never admit that we
feel passionate about our pol-
itics about our ideas, about
our loves -- for passion is
destructive and nasty. It's
not nice.

But I don't want you to go
away thinking I advocate nasti-
ness as a replacement for
niceness. My point is that
those two modes are not the
only possibilities - in fact,
niceness and ruthless competi-
tion are the two sides of
the same Anglosaxon bourgeois
cultural coin.

I am suggesting that we
look somewhere else for a new
concept of how to interact.

Where I personally have
found a very different, and
truly useful, model of collec-
tive political and personal
interaction is in my visits
to Nicaragua. The very first
day I was there, I was struck
by the constant references to
"love", "affection", and "ten-
derness" (amor, carino, ternura).
I was translating for
a group of trade unionists,
and I had to tell them (in
English, and in embarrassed
tones) that this important
male trade union leader was
actually saying that "solidar-
ity is the tenderness of one
people for another". The Can-
adian trade unionists, typic-
ally, did not make the slight-
est facial expression. But
by the end of the trip, even

the most hardened Anglo was
giving impromptu speeches end-
ing in heartfelt shouts and
even hugs and kisses. Solidar-
ity really had become the
tenderness between peoples.
This tenderness, this
kindness, does not sweep con-
flict under the table as nice-
ness does; but it makes sure
that the conflict is talked
about with respect and love.
This process, this way of be-
ing and working with people,
is absolutely essential in
the struggle of the Nicara-
guan people against an incredi-
bly powerful enemy. It is
this love and tenderness, for
one another and for oppressed
people the world over, which
keeps them going, keeps them
joking even in the midst of
death. It is this love and
tenderness which helps them
to survive the burn-out of
eight years of constantly
swimming upstream in the
mighty river of imperialism.

I have learned a lot from
Nicaraguans. I have learned
how to work so that we are em-
powered in and by our strug-
gle instead of being exhaust-
ed by it. I am bringing to
you neither souvenirs nor rec-
ipes: I am bringing these
words-- love, tenderness, af-
fection-- and hoping that you
will be able to feel their
meaning, and let it empower
you in your struggle. ♀

HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

THE "FIRST CONFERENCE ON
HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN
AMERICA" will be held on the
weekend of the 20th, 21st
and 22nd of November 1987 at
the Ontario Institute for
Studies in Education
(O.I.S.E.) Toronto.

The Conference will cen-
tre on the historical and
contemporary situation of
Human Rights in Latin
America.

The Conference will be
divided under four headings:
the right to life, individ-
ual freedoms, political
freedoms and the violation
of human rights as an instru-
ment of the doctrine of na-
tional security.

LESBIANS OF COLOUR CONFERENCE

LESBIANS & GAYS OF COLOUR
TORONTO - We are currently
planning an international
conference for lesbians &
gays of colour. We are an
organizing group of 10 - but
the more the merrier. You
don't need to know how to
plan a conference to join
us. We are informal, fun,
and productive. For more
information, call Michelle
at 588-2930.

ART IN THE STRUGGLE

Ontario Coalition for
Abortion Clinics
Box 753, Station P
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Z1
416-532-8193

Fuse Magazine
183 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Fuse,

The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics would like to explain its public response to the video, "The Struggle For Choice" by Nancy Nicol, and clarify our position on the importance

and integrity of political art.

OCAC strongly supports, and has great respect for the independent artist. Political art is an integral part of political change. It is not only a valid, but an absolutely necessary form of struggle. The artist has a responsibility to bring a critical eye to the social movements, and clearly must be free to do this, protected from censorship. All of us involved in activism must be open to commentary and analysis. OCAC welcomes con-

structive criticism and dialogue on our strategy and tactics, and appreciates the right to a differing point of view.

At the same time, the political artist has a responsibility to the movement she participates in. Accurate portrayal and documentation is part of that responsibility. OCAC's views have been misrepresented in the mainstream media for five years. It is even more upsetting when a progressive artist does the same. Public, community response to inaccurate and misleading documentation is not censorship. We are the disempowered, and have no other means through which to put forward our views, and engage in dialogue.

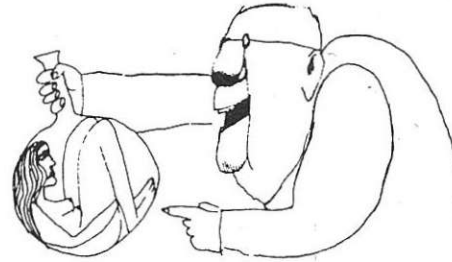
Nancy Nicol would not meet with OCAC after the premier to discuss the video -- a video which includes misleading editing, for example the segment with Carolyn Egan, interviewed as a health worker dealing with the problems of limited and privileged access to abortion. She spoke extensively of the past struggles to broaden access which failed,

strategy, not a part of a broader struggle for reproductive rights.



The video also includes false statements. Nicol states that the escort service, which provided escorts to patients entering the Morgentaler clinic was stopped by OCAC because it harmed our "legal strategy". This is totally incorrect. The service was suspended temporarily because the anti-choice harassment had significantly decreased, most patients were not requesting escorts, and the coordination was a huge task. It is interesting to note that the service was resumed earlier this year when the harassment once again increased.

OCAC fully cooperated in the production of the video, knowing that Nancy Nicol had significant disagreements with us. We did this expecting a critical viewpoint, and supporting the artist's right to it. We also expected an accurate representation of our strategy, and this we did not get. OCAC was not allowed to speak for itself. Nicol chose not to include any part of a long interview with three OCAC activists. She instead decided to interpret us for the viewer, and the interpretation was not accurate. We are not afraid of an honest and critical exchange of views, but we do feel that she should have allowed us to put our own position forward. This is the crux of our concern with the Nicol video, not a difference in political perspective. For full access to free abortion, The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics.



the origins of the clinic strategy, and the objective of building a mass based campaign speaking to the needs of working class women, rural women, immigrant women and women of colour. A campaign that would involve the women's movement, trade unionists, immigrant organizations, lesbians and gays fighting to put pressure on the state, and winning full access to free abortion for all women. None of this is in the video. Instead we only hear her speak of the legal dimension, as if the trials were the core of our

I.S. INVITES DEBATE

International Socialists
Box 339, Station E
Toronto, Ontario Canada
M6H 4E3

September 11, 1987

An invitation for a public debate on the Way Forward for the Abortion Rights Movement

An open letter to the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics

In recent months a debate has occurred through the pages of various journals (NOW magazine, Broadside, Rites, etc.) and at various public events concerning the content of the video "The Struggle for Choice". The video is produced by Nancy Nicol an independent video artist and also a member of the International Socialists.

This debate is welcome. Abortion rights are under attack across Canada and the women's movement is on the defensive. It is extremely important to argue through differences in order to develop the most effective strategy to defend women's rights that do exist and extend them where possible.

However, some aspects of the debate have been confused, clouded with innuendo and quite apolitical. It is necessary to put the debate onto a political level. The video was not a production of the I.S. However the International Socialist stand completely behind the key political arguments contained in it. "The Struggle For Choice" is a video presentation of some of the arguments contained in many of our pamphlets and our paper Socialist Worker over the years -- that the struggle

for abortion rights is fundamentally a class issue, that it is working class women who have suffered most from the limited access to abortion rights in Canada, that the struggle for abortion rights was only as successful as it was in the 1970s because of the links consciously made between the women's movement and rank and file trade unionists within a general climate of political upturn, and that the setbacks faced by the women's movement in recent years are intimately linked with the setbacks faced by the workers' movement in Canada as a whole.

We are therefore proposing to OCAC that our two organizations engage in a public debate, jointly sponsored and conducted, on the way forward for the abortion rights movement. Nothing would be more fruitful than an open, public, comradely airing of differences and criticisms in the context of a genuine search for an effective strategy to further the struggle for choice in Canada. We believe it is a debate that would attract considerable interest among those looking for a way forward in today's defensive climate.

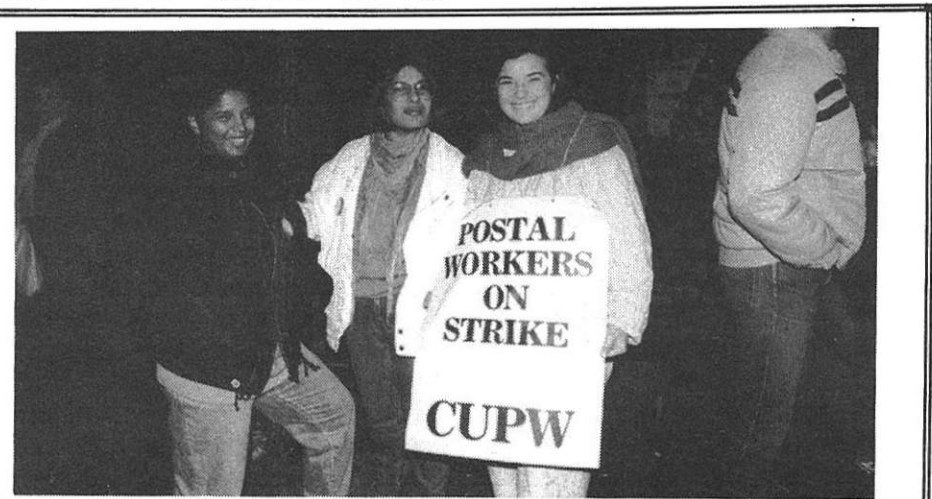
Should OCAC agree in principle, then representatives from our two organizations would meet at a mutually convenient time to work out the details of location, format, etc.

Looking forward to your reply:

Steering Committee,
International Socialists



Photo by N. Farmer



Members of Women Working With Immigrant Women show support for Postal Workers on the picket line.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE REBEL GIRLS' RAG

Rebel Girls' Rag provides a vehicle for socialist-feminist activists to analyze, discuss and report on our political work and our visions. It is the voice of an activist organization. If you subscribe you will be kept in tune with the key issues women are dealing with, and at the same time support a socialist feminist group. **Subscribe now!**

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05/88 MAL 218

First Class Première classe

Photo by N. Farmer



Women protesting outside U.S. Embassy against U.S. intervention in Central America