

# Rebel Girls' Rag

A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE 75¢

Vol. 2 No. 3 May/June 1988

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



Photo: N. Farmer

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# NOT AN EASY TASK

The following speech was delivered by Sofia Montenegro, a Nicaraguan feminist and journalist, to a Women's Studies class at Laurentian University in Sudbury last March. Sofia, 34 years old, and senior editor for the Barricada newspaper, was invited to Ontario in honour of International Women's Day, by Canadian Action For Nicaragua and Toronto Tools For Peace.

She toured the province for two weeks, visiting many smaller communities outside of Toronto. She had the opportunity to speak to broad sectors of the community ranging from high school students to trade unionists.

Sofia, a member of the FSLN, played an important role in the final insurrection that overthrew the bloody Somoza dictatorship in 1979. She ran safehouses and delivered messages.

Sofia begins her talk with a brief outline of the history of the women's movement in Nicaragua but quickly moves into an interesting analysis of the situation today.

Today, I'm going to discuss women's issues in Nicaragua, and perhaps we will discover some generalities that women share. First I would like to give you some background information that will help you understand our situation in Nicaragua today.

Capitalism came late to Nicaragua in the 1950's in the form of large plantations of cotton and coffee under the control of rich landowners. This had a wide social impact on our country as it disrupted the traditional peasant family. Men were forced to migrate from plantation to plantation according to the harvest. This created a nomad male population who created new families wherever they went. A great number of women, left behind with their children, became deeply impoverished and women then be-

came a very cheap labour reserve for the landlords. Often a woman's wages were included in her husband's salary as the family became a package deal. Women began to move to the cities where again they became exploited as cheap labour in the factories.

Middle class women were restricted to careers in the liberal professions such as teachers or lawyers. The seal of a Spanish and Catholic culture further restricted the rights of women.

Over 20 years ago, coinciding with the growth of feminism in western society, women began to organize. Women began to develop a political attitude towards equality and decided that they were one of the most exploited and impoverished part of the population.

By 1969 women were involved in the guerrilla movement, which finally liberated the country in 1979. They were first involved in traditional roles, such as messengers or running safehouses, but gradually women began to fight. The FSLN took into account the particular situation of women in Nicaragua and included their demands in its political program. An alliance was formed not only to bring down the Somoza dictatorship but also to change the structure of society, a change that would guarantee the emancipation of women.

By 1977 the women's movement took another step and organized itself into what was known prior to the revolution as the National Association of Women. Women took to the streets not only because of their demands but because their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons had been either killed or imprisoned and tortured by the Somoza regime. Women had begun to realize that to change their status it was necessary to change the system; this change had to begin with bringing down the dictatorship. This was a period when upper class women were not supposed to go out

without a chaperon; so you can imagine the shock when thousands of women took up arms and started fighting side by side with men. Transcending their role of servitude, women became fighters themselves.

Obviously this changed the men's attitude towards women; women had become a strong political force in society. For women it meant gaining a great deal of self respect.

After the revolution one of the first tasks was to make some sense out of the chaos. This meant the destruction of the old system and the rebuilding of a new one. First and foremost education of the population was undertaken. Women were central in this campaign that had one half of the population teaching the other half how to read and write. The more we advanced the more we were changing our vision of the world and women's consciousness evolved to an understanding that a nationalist and patriotic attitude was needed to solve the problems of the country. A new sense of alliance began with women from all classes and with men.

Our situation became a little more difficult when aggression against us increased in 1984 from the US

mercenary forces and remnants of the Somoza regime. The women's movement had developed under the direction of AMNLAE; however when the fighting increased, it centered its efforts in what we call "backing up the mothers". Our organization began to shrink as some began to think that we were treating all women as mothers and not as women. But time has proven that this was historically necessary. Mothers were the most important sector at the time as already they had often lost 2 or 3 loved ones before the insurrection, and once again young men were being called back to the mountains to defend our country. The mothers needed material and economic aid as well as moral support.

1984 was the worst year of aggression against our country as the Reagan administration had built up a force of 30,000 soldiers of fortune who were fighting against our revolution. They were destroying us and we had to change our tactics quickly. Usually it takes a nation 20 years to build up an army but we had only a few years, and this became a turning point in our plans for defense. Since 100,000

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Photo: N. Farmer

Sofia Montenegro brings solidarity greetings to International Women's Day

# REBEL GIRLS' RAG

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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 touch-  
es every aspect of our lives  
and that the liberation of wo-  
men 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  
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sarily reflect the views of  
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author.



# IWDC: ten year's of women's struggle

The International Women's Day Committee was founded in 1978 by a group of women who had worked in the coalition to organize Toronto's first International Women's Day march. (Hence the name.) For 10 years it has been an active multi-issue, socialist-feminist organization, unique in Canada and internationally, even if only for its longevity. Its history attests to the necessity for, and the richness of, an analysis based on class, race and gender, not merely for understanding the situation of women theoretically, but for the development of a mass action oriented political practice which seeks to liberate women.

We believe that the present class system maintains and perpetuates racism, sexism and heterosexism, and must be overturned before these oppressions can be FINALLY eradicated. But we also believe that the women's movement, working class movement, anti-racist movement, and all progressive movements must struggle against these specific oppressions as we work together for a socialist society.

As socialist-feminists we believe the concept of self-emancipation is fundamental. We want not only to win the immediate demands around which we organize, but we want to empower people through the process of change. This is why we take a mass action perspective. We build alliances with other oppressed groups in particular the organizations of the working class. We recognize that the state is not neutral and that women's liberation and the emancipation of all oppressed and exploited people will only take place through collective, mass action.

Our present political goal is to help build a mass movement of women with an anti-racist, class perspective, with the broad participation and leadership of working class women and women of colour. We view coalition politics as a step toward this goal, and have been very active in alliances such as the March 8th Coalition, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Women Working with Immigrant Women, and the Employment Equity Alliance.

In building alliances we want more than a united front in the struggle for socialism. We want more than



Some founding members of IWDC gather at the 10th Anniversary benefit: (L to R) Marg Moores, Linda Briskin, Maureen Hynes, Sue Colley, Charlene Ganage, Sandy Fox, Carolyn Egan, Sue Genge, Shelly Gordon.

simply to be supportive of each other's goals. We want to develop a truly integrated analysis and practice, so that the fight against racism and women's oppression is integral to the working class movement; so that the women's movement takes up a strong, anti-racist, class perspective in its programs and structures; so that the fight against sexual regulation is integrated into every movement for change. We believe that coalition politics can help us to gain the sensitivity, knowledge and experience to overcome the problems of isolation we are presently facing in our movements. We can learn not only how to integrate our struggles, but to develop the theory and strategy of working in common in practical and concrete ways.

During the last ten years we have faced the same questions and uncertainties affecting most political organizations. At times we have been unsure of how to consolidate the gains we have made, or how to move forward, but we have developed

a rich history, linking the analytical development of socialist-feminism with a clear political practice. This has allowed us to examine our perspectives and priorities, and has provided the foundation for our future directions.

We want to express our appreciation to the hundreds of socialist-feminists who have worked with us, as our sisters and our comrades, over the past ten years. Each of you has enriched the organization and participated in the development of its politics. Together we have made a significant difference in the fight for women's liberation in Toronto.

There are many questions which we are still seeking answers to. We intend to continue both our activism in the working class, anti-racist and social movements, and our analytical education and discussions. We hope our combination of activism and analysis will continue to develop and clarify our political understanding and strengthen our practice in political struggle.



## "Not an easy task" continued

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men a year were called to defend our country, it practically left control of the economy and production in the hands of women - women who were recently literate, women who were full of enthusiasm but who lacked experience. It also created another phenomenon; a triple work day. Women had not only to do their own work but also the work of the man that was missing, and domestic chores. This was very stressful for many women but slowly, slowly they became confident and acquired a greater sense of personal dignity. They also realized they were not as dependent on men as they had thought and this created another problem.

War doesn't civilize anyone and the men hadn't been living through the same process as the women. There was a large gap between the level of consciousness achieved by women and men. When men returned after two years of military service to their homes, they often didn't recognize the women they had left behind. This person and the old rules of the game had changed. Many men resisted these changes and the response has been violent. We have the social syndrome of "battered women" in Nicaragua. Part of this stems from the violent times we are living in.

So today we are not only facing a military and deep economical crisis, but also an equally strong emotional crisis between men and women. The foundations of our society have been really shaken and the old role models will not be tolerated. In time of war it is difficult to think clearly and sort all this out. It's an emotional crisis for men to discover that their relationships with women won't last. The divorce rate has increased and women are looking for another alternative to marriage. If they are going to get involved with a man they want to sign a "Peace Accord" first. Men are resisting the change and the new social roles women are playing. Many men are demanding that a woman choose either the revolution or him and, naturally, women are choosing the revolution. This trauma goes deep inside us, but at the same time women are still pressing for more change. It is true that the revolution has opened many doors for women; however we have found that there is an invisible barrier that prevents women from

getting ahead, ideological barriers of culture and customs. Officially we have equality established in our constitution. The problem is how to make it a social reality.

For the last three years the women's movement has been engaged in a hot debate with the government about the women's agenda. Of course there was a current that wished to postpone this debate until we have peace or until socialism comes (god only knows when that will be), but not now. Others would attack feminism and feminists. Others argued about how best to implement these demands. The challenge that the Sandinista Government has presented to us -- that is the women's movement -- is to devise a strategy, to create a proposal for feminism for an underdeveloped country, underdeveloped in the conditions of war, crisis and poverty, without endangering the national unity. This is no easy task! A major gain was won March 8, 1987 when the government established its official position on the women's question. It stated that "women's problems" weren't women's problems but were society's. It took the position that the struggle for emancipation should be continued together with the military task of defending the country. There are 14 political parties in Nicaragua from the left to the right; only the FSLN has included in their political program any propositions for changing the status of women.

The Sandinista Frente gave us a year to develop a blueprint for emancipation. For the last three years we have been studying the different experiences of women around the world. In the developed countries changes have been made by evolution. In underdeveloped countries which are subjected to foreign domination or repressive regimes, it has become clear to us that the only way is to change the system. We do believe that any gains made by women in the western countries have an impact; they will immediately be reflected in the social attitudes all over the world. In Socialist countries, perhaps the women have better conditions and better status but they still aren't emancipated. Socialist men are still machista, more refined, more eloquent, but in their souls still machista. Our advantage is that we have a type of laboratory to experiment in, to see what

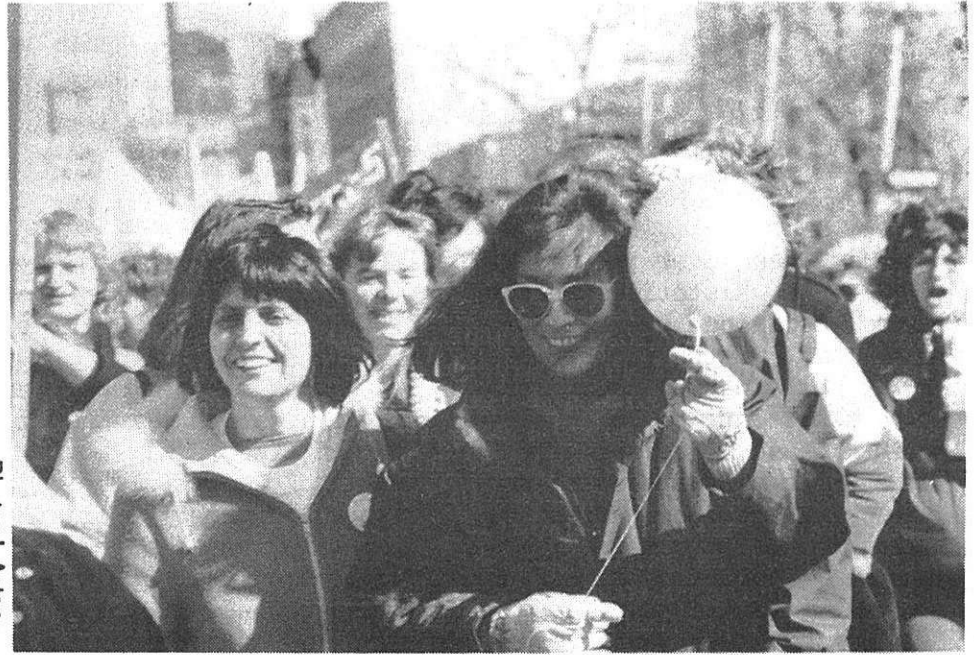


Photo: J. Action

Nancy Farmer (IWDC) and Sofia Montenegro march on International Women's Day

will work best in our situation, and we have a government that has no dogmatic attitudes.

So we have decided that our strategy must consist of three pillars:

1. In order to emancipate women, the revolution must survive, therefore we must defend it.
2. It is necessary to break the sexual divisions of labour as well as the class divisions.
3. It is necessary that women claim the ownership of their own bodies and the state must provide the conditions to make this possible, through laws and access to health care.

We see this plan of struggle for the next twenty years as moving from the most basic demands to the more complex. We must have a structure to ensure the sexual education of our society. In order to solve the problems of women there are three variables that must be contemplated and analysed: gender, class and age.

We are changing from an organization of women to a movement or a collection of movements. We want to understand the demands of different social sectors, such as peasant women and city women, and to establish links over single issues to have a greater impact or quota of political power. We will have a national assembly of women representing the different sectors in our society; the factory workers, the peasants, the intellectuals and the artists. We will meet and discuss our objectives and measure the advancement towards our goal of achieving full emancipation.

On the question of abortion, we cannot lead a fight for its legalization until we have educated the population. If it is not fought for by the base of women and is decreed from above it will mean an automatic confrontation with the vatican and more problems for the revolution. The state has

told us to start this campaign and it will back us up.

The political conditions and the vital experiences women have faced over the last decade have led to the appearance of a feminist consciousness. Even though it is still not very vocal it is ever present in our attitude towards our lives and society and towards men. We are beginning to complain about chauvinistic attitudes. We are asking for dignity. Just as we will not accept a larger nation's attempt to destroy us and hit us, we will not accept this from men either. We are beginning to monitor the media and public speeches made by our leaders. Women are encouraged to speak out against mistreatment. The Minister of the Interior, who is responsible for regulating the media, happens to be a woman. This March one of the smaller newspapers published an exploitive picture of a woman. This is against the law, so the publication was fined. Another newspaper which was critical of the government making such a fuss over a photo of a woman with almost no clothes on, reproduced it. They also were penalized.

This is more or less the way women are thinking in Nicaragua and now we must change the way men think. As women with our point of view we have the responsibility to devise an alternative way of thinking for men, something with which men can identify. This is necessary to establish a political alliance with men, to change the world. This is the way a new man, and a new woman will be born in Nicaragua. As women with our point of view we have the responsibility to devise an alternative way of thinking for men, something with which men can identify. This is necessary to establish a political alliance with men, to change the world. This is way a new man, and a new woman will be born in Nicaragua.

# DANGERS AND OPPORT

It has been over two months since the historic Supreme Court decision on abortion, two long months that have been alternately confusing and exhilarating. We knew that whatever its ruling, the Supreme Court was not going to be the end of the struggle -- that it is really only the beginning of the next stage.

The next few months are crucial, not simply for the abortion rights movement, but for the women's movement as a whole. If we are able to push on to win full and equal access to free abortion for all women, then we will have achieved a major victory. The fierce counter-attack from state and conservative forces threatens to set back all feminist struggles. So, what is the way forward to make the promise of the Supreme Court victory a reality for all women? Before looking at the tasks ahead I want to review briefly the strategy that brought us to this point.

## The Clinic Strategy

The Court's decision to throw out the abortion law was not simply a result of persuasive legal arguments or the "wisdom" of the judges. Rather, it was the result of a campaign begun in 1982, the work of thousands of reproductive rights activists and supporters in the women's movement, lesbian and gay groups, unions, immigrant organizations, churches and many other community groups. In a fundamental sense this is a victory for all of us in the struggle against state regulation of our reproductive and sexual lives. Moreover, it demonstrates that change can take place through the strength of a movement.

The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) was established in 1982 by activists from the women's health movement who were appalled by increasingly limited and unequal access to abortion and the demeaning treatment women were receiving. Our goal was the establishment of free-standing clinics as the best way to provide women-centred abortion and other reproductive health care and to force the repeal of the federal law. Feminists had been unsuccessfully lobbying the government with briefs detailing the crisis of access and pressuring hospitals to increase access for years. We looked to the experience of Quebec where feminists and

their supporters had been able to win far better abortion services through clinics.

With the strategy of opening clinics in direct defiance of the law, we had a number of goals. The clinics would first of all provide women with desperately needed services. In doing so they would highlight the crisis of access to abortion and the oppressive nature of the existing law. More importantly, we believed that setting up and defending clinics would provide a vital spark to galvanize and build the choice movement. By directly challenging the state, the clinics would be a living symbol of our determination and a rallying point for political mobilization. OCAC's political perspective integrated the demand for clinics, which arose initially out of the women's health movement, with socialist feminist principles of mass action, movement building and putting maximum pressure on the state.

## Strategy Into Practice

From the start we knew that once a clinic was established our movement would face an immediate counter-attack from the state. Clinic staff would be charged and that would put our struggle in the courts. But even when forced to respond to the state, we tried to construct a political agenda to our advantage. We used the court cases to put the state on trial by demonstrating the crisis of abortion care and its impact on women's health. We always believed that no jury would convict physicians performing safe abortions in clinics and so far we have been right. The failure to convict these physicians put the state in a difficult position: if it continued to prosecute doctors through acquittal after acquittal then the basic fairness and legitimacy of the legal system itself could be called into question. Sooner or later, either clinics would have to be recognized regardless of the federal law, as had been the case in Quebec for years, or the law itself would have to be changed.

This does not mean that we saw the legal system to be the site of our struggle to win abortion rights. We always saw the basis of our strength to be in building the broadest possible movement and in developing alli-

ances with other progressive struggles. We often had events in which 40 or 50 groups participated, showing the breadth of support for choice. That the Ontario Federation of Labour, the NDP, the NAC and other feminist leaders spoke at all our rallies and demos reinforced this show of support. We worked to maintain a visible presence on the streets in actions ranging from demonstrations of thousands to guerilla theatre.

Mass action has been the crucial strategy of our movement on several levels. In general, direct and spirited activism demonstrates our determination and resistance in the most visible way and serves to attract new people into the struggle. More concretely, we never let an attack against us go unchallenged, from the arson at the clinic that destroyed the Women's Bookstore to anti-choice harassment; specific actions can be crucial at particular points. We have heard that when a



close the clinics. The government's series of charges were laid in 1986 after the Scott Clinic opened in Toronto, some members of the provincial cabinet wanted to emment was deterred by the potential widespread opposition this would engender not least because we had organized an immediate highly-charged protest demonstration to put the maximum pressure on the state.

OCAC has organized a campaign with a very specific focus. However, we always posed our demands in the context of a number of interdependent struggles -- from autonomous midwifery to universal daycare, from employment equity to the capacity to de-

fine and live independent sexualities -- which must be fought and won for women to control their bodies and their lives. Reproductive and sexual freedom in the widest sense is our ultimate goal. We have found this broader reproductive rights perspective to be vital, not simply because it reflects the reality of women's lives, but because linking up these various struggles strengthens us all.

We knew the struggle for abortion rights would be long and complex, involving many different stages and difficult political decisions. For example, the Morgentaler Clinic was crucial to the whole campaign, not simply for the services it provided, but as a focal point for political organizing. This first clinic would not -- and could not in the circumstances -- fulfill our ultimate goal of comprehensive woman-centered reproductive care. But it was essential to challenge politically the existing state and medical regulation of abortion. If we had been defeated at this initial stage we would never have the opportunity to achieve our long-term goals.

Some argued that the first clinic should be owned and controlled by the women's community and run by a woman physician. But these possibilities and resources simply were not available. Others remembered the experience of Quebec, where the clinic campaign had the tremendous advantage of being part of a broad upsurge of feminist and left political movements, and doubted that we could succeed without these favourable conditions. Such dilemmas point to the fact that we cannot choose the political and ideological terrain upon which we fight. We could either wait for conditions to become perfect, or we could begin the fight to transform the political constraints and obstacles we faced. We believed that seizing the initiative through establishing and defending a clinic was vital in order to build a strong movement.

## The Supreme Court: Not the End of the Struggle

It was this strategy that brought us to the Supreme Court's decision. The ruling accomplished one of our major goals: the repeal of a law which, as we had been arguing for years (now to be

echoed by the Court), was profoundly inequitable and dangerous to women's health. The decision also legalized the clinics that we had been fighting to defend. We always knew, however, that repeal of the

In addition to state attacks, we have witnessed a vicious anti-choice backlash. Anti-choice organizations have been able to use their superior financial resources to launch a sustained propaganda blitz and lob-

will be a setback for all our struggles. That is why this is such a crucial juncture not just for abortion rights, but for the women's movement as a whole.

### Now Is the Time to Mobilize

How can we capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Supreme Court ruling to win full and equal access to free abortion for women in every community in Canada? How can we beat back the harsh counter-attack from state and anti-choice forces?

We are working closely with our counterpart reproductive rights groups from other regions and national feminist organizations, supporting each other in this critical period. We held a strategy meeting with activist groups shortly after the Court decision and a network of mass action reproductive rights groups is being formed. A series of coordinated protests against re-criminalization of abortion is taking place across the country in May 1988 and a major demonstration is being planned for September in Ottawa. We are also pressuring the federal government to fulfill its responsibility to ensure universal and equal access to health care, including abortion, across the country. We are demanding that the federal government penalize provinces refusing to provide universal access by holding back cost-shared funding, as they did to prevent extra-billing.

Here in Ontario the province has already been forced to drop the hospital committees formerly required to approve abortions and to provide OHIP funding to the existing clinics. OCAC is working with other reproductive rights groups, women's health networks and advocates, community health activists, women's centres and feminist organizations. We will be pressing the province to fund any community health centre that wants to provide abortions and to establish quickly a new network of community clinics providing abortion and related services across Ontario.

What is needed is publicly funded clinics in every community, working in every language and providing all the care women need, from safe and effective contraception to abortion, from birthing and midwifery to well-woman and well-baby care, and from sexuality counselling to reproductive

technology developed according to women's needs and priorities. We will settle for nothing less.

This struggle has also taken place at the level of moral discourse. Although one of the most significant lasting effects of our movement may be our popularization of the basic idea of choice, it has been far more difficult to define the overall terms of public debate around abortion. For example, in the post-Supreme Court period there has been much media and public concern with late abortion. While the spectre of irresponsible and reckless women having abortions up to the moment of birth has been seized upon by the more lurid anti-choice commentators, many liberal and some pro-choice supporters worry about an increase of late abortions without legislation. Our response has been to turn this question around, to argue that the answer lies in preventive measures -- especially in equal access to comprehensive care and counselling and in changing those circumstances that bring women to the dilemma of late abortions -- not in prosecuting women and their health care providers. We try to put the onus back on the state to take up its public responsibility for such preventive health measures and to ensure equal access to all needed reproductive care. And we try to put the focus back on women and the conditions necessary for their autonomy.

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abortion law would not guarantee full access to free abortion.

### Anti-Feminist Counter-Attack

The limits of even the most dramatic legal victory were quickly revealed. The Court decision did not grant unqualified right to abortion and it clearly left the way open for new, presumably less manifestly unfair, legislation. The Conservative federal government has stated that it plans to bring in legislation soon.

Several provinces declared that they would not expand abortion services or allow clinics. Most extreme of all, Premier Vander Zalm of British Columbia explicitly allied himself with the 'pro-life' reaction and tried to fund publicly only those abortions in which a woman's life was threatened. Activists and choice supporters in B.C. were outraged and quickly organized a demonstration of 3,000 choice supporters. The Civil Liberties Association successfully challenged the restrictions on public funding in the court. The B.C. Coalition for abortion clinics has intensified its work and its clinic should be opening shortly. Other provinces have attempted to maintain regulation of abortion by requiring the approval of a second physician. Obviously the struggle will still have to be fought province by province as well as on the federal level.

by of politicians.

### Crucial Period for Reproductive Rights

The Supreme Court decision offers the opportunity to make a real advance for women's capacity to control their bodies and their lives. But there is also potential danger. Abortion has long been one of the major mechanisms of state (and medical) regulation of women's sexuality and reproduction. Regulation of abortion is one of the key ways in which women are denied the capacity to control whether, when and under what circumstances they will bear children. And this lack of control is central to maintaining women's overall subordination. Moreover, abortion is a 'condensed symbol' of all that the right hates and fears from feminism, and has become the cutting edge of right wing attempts to roll back the women's movement's gains. This importance of abortion underlies the fierce counter-attack from state and right-wing forces.

There is much to win here --and there is much to lose. We have an opportunity for a tremendous advance if the legal victory of the Supreme Court can be transformed into winning free and equal access to abortion for all women. But if we are turned back here, if the state and right are able to prevent us from making the promise of the Court decision a reality in women's lives, then it



# I.S. Challenged

by Mary Gellatly

I found it ironic that Nancy Nicol, International Socialists (I.S.), closed the debate on "The Way forward for the Abortion Struggle" with the statement, "The I.S. has unconditional support for OCAC but brings criticism of its strategy." I understand "critical support" but this certainly is a new one. Nicol and the I.S. have consistently targeted and distorted OCAC's strategy in public forums; the effect, if not the intent, is to discredit OCAC. Political dis-

ussion and debate is essential; however, one is usually more successful if the criticisms are brought into a movement, rather than stated from the sidelines.

OCAC co-sponsored the debate, held March 31, because it finally gave us the opportunity to directly address and discuss the I.S.' criticisms, levelled at us in their paper, (*Socialist Worker*, March/87 and March/88) and Nicol's construction and critique in the video, "The Struggle for Choice" (see discussion, *Rebel Girls*, Vol.1 No.3). After having worked in OCAC a number of years, I was particularly interested in the opportunity to discuss and understand what the I.S. really means when it says we have a "legal strategy".

Carolyn Egan, speaking on behalf of OCAC, outlined the rationale for the clinic strategy. Launched six years ago at a critical period of state and medical cutbacks on access to hospital abortion procedures, the clinic strategy was a major offensive to directly challenge state regulation of women's reproduction. The campaign was not based on the defense of the doctors, but on the longer term struggle for women's reproductive and sexual freedom -- women's liberation. Not only was the strategy contextualized in a whole range of demands, but it was predicated on the understanding that a legal right to abortion will never be enough. In a gender, race and class divided society, the right to choose will remain an illusion unless real access is provided regardless of race, class, age, disability or geographical location. While we knew the doctors would be charged, the campaign did not rest on the legal parameters established by the court proceedings. Like striking workers who defy back-to-work legislation, we can mobilize around state attacks. The clinic strategy was a tool, a catalyst to building a broad-based movement -- a movement with the capacity to mobilize.

Nancy Nicol's presentation left many questions unaddressed. She referred briefly to OCAC's "largely legal strategy" but did not respond to Carolyn Egan's walk through history. So maybe this was not the real point of contention....

Nancy went on to argue that the struggle for abortion rights must be a working class struggle (who would argue?) located in the

unionized health care and social service workers. Now Carolyn, a long-time health care worker, had just described how, after 9 years of fighting unsuccessfully against decreasing hospital access and cutbacks, health care workers had launched the campaign. Moreover, she had outlined among our support base, the public sector unions, Ontario Nurses Association, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, Alberta Nurses and so on. The question must not be so much "who" but "where" and "how".

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**"It is imperative to build a broad-based movement that not only has the capacity to mobilize, but speaks to the realities of our lives.**

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The I.S. argues that reform on abortion rights can only be won through the struggle of the working class -- part of a struggle that "will build the confidence and capacity to eventually challenge capitalist rule." Many of us working in OCAC also believe that the struggle for choice is part of a larger struggle against class oppression. However, unlike the I.S., we believe that we must integrate an analysis of gender and race oppression and support an autonomous women's movement in order to build a united movement. How we experience class oppression is mediated by our race and gender -- this must be central to our analysis and our struggle. It is imperative to build a broad-based movement that not only has the capacity to mobilize but speaks to the realities of our lives. It means not only working in trade unions (which is fundamentally important), but also in the women's movement, lesbian and gay communities, anti-racism organizations; and building alliances with other popular movements.

The I.S. points to the gains made in Quebec during the Common Front as the model for OCAC's way of organizing. No one would argue with the fact that the Common Front struggle set the stage for the victory in Quebec which saw the federal abortion law declared unenforceable and the establishment of free-standing and community health clinics providing medically insured abortions.

Yes, reforms are won during periods of militancy. A question that I have for I.S. is, Why do they fail to address the fact that Ontario was at a totally different conjuncture when the campaign was launched? We did not have the same kind of working class militancy. Organized working women were, however, playing a significant role through major strikes and placing broader social and ideological issues on the agenda. A potential for mobilization was there. OCAC felt it was important not to wait for a more "favourable climate." Would the I.S. have waited for an upsurge in working class militancy?

A more pressing question, perhaps, is how they view transitional/transformational demands and reforms during periods of downturn. And why is the I.S. not in practice in popular movements during these periods? The fact that they claim the Supreme Court ruling which struck down the federal abortion law, was a product largely of the struggles and gains of the Common Front during the mid-1970's, rather than the continued mobilization and campaigns in Quebec and Ontario, implies that they do not believe reform can take place during a downturn.

The I.S. views the Supreme Court decision as proof that a "legal strategy" does not work (i.e. the decision did not provide "abortion on demand") and further that the decision has led to deteriorating access in some provinces. Nobody ever said that the repeal of the law would win full access to free abortion. Nonetheless, it was a fundamental victory of one stage of the struggle. Moreover, it represents a historic victory demonstrating how the strength of a broad-based movement can challenge and win reforms even during a period of attacks on workers. The I.S. should think again about their claim that the state and right wing attacks are a result of OCAC's strategy. The state and rul-

continued on page 8

## Freedom Ride

by Carolyn Egan

Canada has a history of racist, police murders. Buddy Evans in 1978, Albert Johnson in 1979, and most recently Anthony Griffin on November 11, 1987 in Montreal. He had been taken into custody by P.C. Allan Gosset for an alleged disagreement with a taxi driver. Outside the station house, Anthony Griffin began to run, he stopped, turned back, and was shot in the middle of the forehead. Gosset, who had a history of racist incidents, was acquitted of the charge of manslaughter.

This blatant example of racist violence shows how deeply racism is integrated into the laws and structures of this society. A rally and march of over 1,200 people took place on March 19, 1988 in Montreal with four buses from Toronto. The Anthony Griffin Committee for Justice (Toronto) organized the Freedom Ride. They can be contacted at 657-1472.

This Is the Way to Fight Back

The women's movement has had a lot of conferences recently on racism, discussion groups have formed, and there has been an attempt to integrate an anti-racist analysis into feminist politics. It is equally important to involve oneself actively in anti-racist campaigns such as this one. Racism is not merely a question of "attitude" or a "few bad cops", it is part and parcel of the class structure in which we live, fully integrated into every aspect, as is sexism and heterosexism. We must make a priority of fighting racism in all of its manifestations, and strongly support the fight backs that are developing in the community.



# INFORMATION ABOUT CONTEMPORARY BRUTALITY.

## A Review of "Nationalism: Women and the State"

by Gillian Morton

An exhibition at A Space, April 2-23, featuring work by Jamelie Hassan, Mona Hatoum, Barbara Louder, and Lani Maestro.

A young girl in the video portion of Jamelie Hassan's installation reads haltingly, "Information about contemporary brutality remains based on imagination until many years later when the locked hearts were opened to me, explaining the mysterious events that I failed to understand when they were taking place." What each of the works in the exhibition Nationalisms: Women and the State depicts is the experience of the "locked hearts", of oppressed and often silenced peoples.

More particularly, the art explores how nationalist ideologies are used both by repressive states and by some popular struggles. In the hands of the state, nationalism is usually a racist doctrine of national supremacy which justifies torture and oppression and cannot tolerate diversity. But the art works also point to the emancipatory possibilities of nationalism, of na-

tionalism as an ideology of self-determination which mobilizes resistance to imperialism, racism, and exploitation.

The artists deal specifically with the relation of women to nationalisms. Hassan's Meeting Nasser, based on a photograph from her family archives of a young girl presenting flowers to Nasser, a symbol of Arab nationalism, alludes to the "protection" provided by the pseudo-benevolent paternalistic state. The image of the young girl's political innocence is played off against a video image of another young girl who reads an adaptation from an Arab text dealing with the interrogation and torture of intellectuals during Nasser's presidency.

The work of Lani Maestro, a Filipina artist, portrays the violence which lies beneath the smiling surface of the work Meeting Nasser. Maestro's art grows out of her experience under the Marcos dictatorship and her resistance to the "low intensity conflict" maintained by the Aquino regime. Her work is composed of paintings, done on bed-sheets, of fragments of the human body. The fragmented body parts are juxtaposed

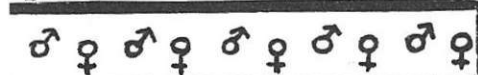
with a poem depicting details of domesticity and torture which coexist in the home life of a Latin American colonel, whose dinner party ends with the colonel dumping a grocery bag of human ears on the table as a warning to his 'guests': "As for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck themselves." Some of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground."

Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian artist, emphasizes women's resistance to the terrorism which Maestro so powerfully portrays. Her poster "Over My Dead Body" is a humorous but forceful statement about women's opposition to the military. The work is part of a tour of bill board art in the U.K., taking art out of the galleries and into the streets.

Barbara Louder's work shares this critical perspective of galleries' exhibition of art; her work deals with how Inuit art has been appropriated and transformed, first by colonists, and currently by Canada's art market and institutions. Louder's art shows the workings of state sanctioned

Canadian nationalism, forging a connection between more overtly oppressive states and our own. Canada's concern over the protection of its borders and national sovereignty is contrasted to its reluctance to recognize the rights of the Innu, Inuit, and Dene Nations.

Although Louder's work raises critical questions about Canadian nationalism, unfortunately the exhibit does not include any work dealing with the struggle for self-determination in Quebec.



The work Nationalisms: Women and the State generates an awareness of the specific histories of current political struggles and questions the assumptions the audience might have about nationalism and its representations-- the artwork, as Hatoum notes, is meant to be "a thorn in the side of complacent western audiences." The works represent and validate the experiences of the disappeared and the tortured, those who are marginalized yet manage to resist the dominance of the state by struggles for their own emancipation.

## Amandla Ngawethu

by Sheryl Boswell

Awaiting execution in Pretoria, headquarters of the apartheid regime, are over 31 men and one woman. Their crime? -- demanding a South Africa that is democratic and non-racial, one in which people are able to have freedom of movement and freedom of expression. We can't possibly know the number of those who have been killed, injured, detained or forced into exile as a result of repression in South Africa and resistance to the structural inequalities of apartheid. The violent repression unleashed on township communities by armed police and army forces since 1984 has resulted in the deaths of hundreds and in the detention and arrest of over 36,000. A state of emergency, imposed in 1985, continues today.

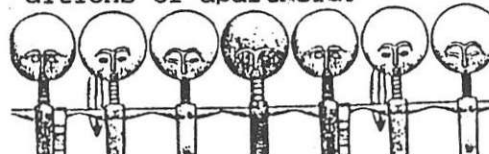
The police and SADF (South African Defence Forces) have carried out massacres in Soweto, Uitenhage, Duduza and Mamolodi, to name but a few places in South Africa, as well as in the Front-Line States of Mozambique,

Lesotho, Zimbabwe and most recently in Gabarone, Botswana. The attempt to silence resistance to apartheid has also resulted in last month's banning of seventeen popular organizations, including the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

Repression is not limited to the Southern African region. Last month, a member of the African National Congress in Paris was brutally assassinated. The ANC office in Belgium was bombed. The presence of South Africa's Secret Police internationally is a result of the increasing pressure on the apartheid state.

The announcement that the "Sharpeville Six" would be executed on Friday, March 19, with less than a week's notice, resulted in international condemnation, effectively forcing a one-month stay of execution. From May to September, 1987, a coalition of women's, church, non-governmental and community organizations, and the South African Women's Day

In December 1985 Theresa Ramashamola and five others were sentenced to death by hanging for their alleged involvement in the murder of Mr. Khuzwayo Dlamini. As an official in the puppet township government, Dlamini was complicit in the repression of his own people. His killing took place in September 1984, at the onset of the uprising of the Vaal area townships. This period heralded a new wave of massive popular resistance and opposition to the oppressive conditions of apartheid.



The trial of Theresa and the other "Sharpeville Six" was characterized by testimony of torture, coerced witnesses, and shaky evidence. Theresa - 23 at the time of her arrest and a worker in a roadhouse - was tortured and later suffered further injuries while in police custody. These are not isolated circumstances in South Africa.

Committee, organized a campaign around the trial of the "Sharpeville Six". The campaign focused on Theresa Ramashamola, the first woman in South Africa to be on deathrow. This campaign was the theme of the commemoration of South Africa Women's Day, August 9.

A campaign to save their lives has been launched in South Africa by the South African Youth Congress, the United Democratic Front, the Release Mandela Campaign, the National Union of Mine-workers, the South African National Students' Congress and the National Education Crisis Committee. The international campaign to save the "Sharpeville Six" has been successful in staying the executions to date. International pressure on the South Africa regime must be maintained. If you want to get involved or want some more information, contact Rally Against Apartheid, 651-5627. Join the "Freedom Ride Against Apartheid" to Ottawa, Saturday May 14. Phone 657-1472 for information.



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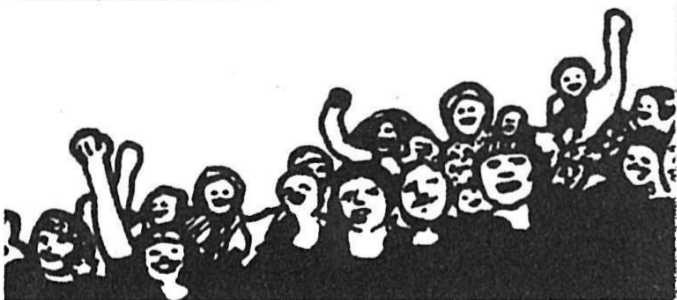
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## ABORTION

continued from page 5

### Final Word

Abortion has been one of the key political battles between the women's movement and the state. When we worry about the fine print of the Court decision or think about all the work still to be done across the country, it is easy to forget what a major victory we have won. For the first time, the highest court has had to recognize women's right to control their bodies. Whatever the next stages of this struggle bring, this recognition of women's basic rights gives governments far less freedom of action in their attempts to regulate reproduction. This initial victory for abortion rights is a victory for us all. Our particular success has only been possible through the broadest alliances; we are all strengthened when a progressive movement is able to force a significant advance from the state. If we are able to use this initial victory to push on to win free and equal access to abortion for all women, then it will be a highly significant advance for all our struggles. Now is the time to mobilize.

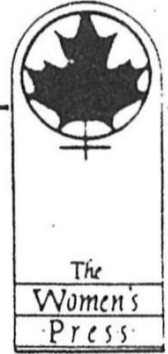


**I.S.** continued from page 6 from the debate -- it is critical that we continue mobilizing to press forward in the struggle for full access to free abortion. Political discussion and debate is essential, but so is practise. The I.S. participated in building the rally on April 16 and we would hope they will continue to be actively involved.

ing class fear the confidence and rising expectations of people when we are able, through our collective strength, to win a fundamental demand. It is no surprise that they would mobilize to roll back this major gain.

The debate left many questions and issues unaddressed. Little time was spent actually discussing "the way forward." Certainly one of the key issues to be addressed is the I.S.' focus on direct mobilization against the anti-choice. They have long advocated counter-picketing of the anti-choice at the Morgentaler clinic. Clearly we must address the anti-choice and their right-wing support but to focus on direct confrontation does two things. First, it sets up a polarity between two supposedly "equal and fanatic forces". It allows the state to claim to be a "neutral mediator", thus legitimizing its role as the regulator of abortion and women's reproduction. Secondly, it does not allow us to address the larger political mobilization of the right wing and its agenda to roll back our gains. More important, however, is the fact that it does not place our demands squarely on the state -- a state that serves the interest of capitalism. Where does the I.S. see demands for reform being located?

One thing remains clear



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