

# Rebel Girls' Rag

A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE 75¢

Vol. 2, No. 4 July/August 1988

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

## WOMEN ARE NOT CRIMINALS



## NO NEW ABORTION LAW

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## NO NEW ABORTION LAW FULL ACCESS TO FREE ABORTION

by B. Lee

The fiasco of the federal government's multiple choice resolution on abortion is now over. The government lost its nerve in the face of opposition procedural disputes and the fear that its own more reactionary backbenchers would defeat all the options in their zeal to ban abortion. The new resolution is what the government wanted all along -- the so-called compromise of open access to abortion in early stages of pregnancy and tight restrictions past some still undefined stage. The irony that MPs are promised a 'free vote' to exercise their conscience on this 'moral' issue while the women of Canada are ignored is lost on the government and its supporters.

### Restricted Access

At one level all the uproar around the resolution is just so much posturing, but the really significant thing is that the government still plans criminal legislation. What the promised legislation will most definitely not be about is guaranteeing equal access to abortion across the country; it will not be about ensuring high standards of quality for this essential health service; and it will not be about recognizing women's need to control their reproduction in order to live independently and with dignity. There has been much 'expert' speculation, including from members of the federal Law Reform Commission, that the cut-off point should be somewhere between the 12th and 16th week of pregnancy. The effect of such restrictions on women's lives and freedom is the real issue.

In the best of all worlds -- with comprehensive reproductive health care equally available to all -- most abortions would be performed early. But this is not such a world; needed services are simply not available to many. Let's start with some simple facts.

The 1987 Ontario government-commissioned report by Dr Marion Powell documented the striking inequality of access to abortion across the province. In over half of Ontario counties the majority of women had to leave the county to obtain an abortion. Women had to make from three to seven contacts with health professionals before obtaining the procedure; this, of course, caused particular difficulties for those many women who had to leave their community. Over half of hospitals provided no abortions at all in 1985.

One result of these inequities and barriers is that Ontario has a high rate of second trimester abortions: 11% of abortions are performed beyond the 12th week. This means that some 3,000 women in Ontario would be forced to carry their pregnancies to term against their will. The access situation is much worse in other areas of the country. Perhaps the policy makers have not done their sums.

Let's now look at some cases. Restrictions by gestational age would endanger those women who currently face the greatest difficulty obtaining access to abortion: young women who are afraid to tell their parent and did not know where to find counselling; women from rural and poorly serviced areas; women whose first language is not English for whom it is so much harder to negotiate the referral system; and women who lose a job, whose partner leaves them or becomes abusive, or who are confronted by other sudden crises that leave them feeling unable to cope with a previously wanted pregnancy.

These are not imaginary possibilities. Birth control workers see women in such circumstances every day. This shows the concrete suffering that would result from the arbitrary limits being proposed. No doubt many women would be forced to carry an unplanned pregnancy to term against their will. Even worse, would some resort to the horrors of self-induced abortions?

### Criminalizing Abortion

Now it is one thing if the federal government was also initiating a massive improvement of the existing health care system to eliminate inequality of access to abortion. But there has been no such commitment (in fact, there have been steady cutbacks of birth control funding). To propose time limitations while at the same time refusing to provide the resources necessary to guarantee speedy and equal access to abortion is irresponsible -- that is the real crime. Criminal restrictions on abortion amount to a direct threat to women's health and well-being.

The state's claim to balance the interests of the fetus against those of the woman have dangerous implications not just for abortion, but for state intervention and regulation of pregnancy and childbirth as well. Dramatic interventions such as forced cesarean-sections and court ordered apprehension of the fetus 'in utero' (two recent cases

in Ontario and B.C. and many in the United States) use the same argument of protection of the fetus to violate women's autonomy and bodily integrity. As medicine claims an ever earlier definition of viability with the development of newborn intensive care for premature infants, women will be increasingly vulnerable. Medical and state guardianship of the fetus could

legitimize extreme limits on pregnant women's behaviour.

### The Dangers

The dangers of legal regulation of abortion were further illustrated this week when an Alberta man sought a court injunction to prevent a woman who he claimed had agreed to have his child from having an abortion (a new twist on the theme of compulsory pregnancy). Fortunately, the request was denied and the woman had her abortion in the United States (a comment on inequality of access in Canada that went unremarked by the mainstream media). At the same time the federal government was trying to delay anti-choice fanatic Joe Borowski's Supreme Court appeal to have the fetus given constitutional rights as a person. The government's case was striking for its failure to argue the impact on women that such a declaration would have. That women are virtually absent from the legal debate on the status of the fetus is ominous.

What all of this means is that women's reproductive autonomy is very much under threat. A vital task for the women's movement is to prevent any recriminalization of abortion. And what is needed to ensure this is a major mobilization of pro-choice support.

### No New Abortion Law

A first priority must be the fight against any new federal criminal legislation. To this end OCAC is working with activist groups across the country to organize a second Abortion Caravan; like the first caravan in 1971 groups of women will travel from one end of Canada to the other spreading our opposition to criminal legislation and building support for freedom of choice. Last October, before the Supreme Court victory, OCAC initiated a coalition of union, women's, immigrant, student and other supporting groups to organize the binational 'Marching for Women's Lives' demonstration. This fall we are going to organize a second demo to keep the pressure on the state

to make the promise of the Court decision a reality.

We know that legal rights are not enough to ensure working class women and women of colour the right to abortion. We have to make sure that the facilities are in place so that every woman has full access to free abortion in her own community.

Here in Ontario the provincial government has proposed legislation to bring the Morgentaler and Scott clinics into the public health system and to regulate independent clinics. We have developed a model of community-based women's reproductive health



LYNN LATHROP, OCAC SPEAKER AT POPULAR SUMMIT RALLY

centres as the best means to ensure that every woman has prompt and equal access to the highest quality reproductive care in her own community and we will be pressing the government to move in this direction. What is needed is a network of publicly funded non-profit clinics across the province working in whatever language women need, and providing comprehensive services; 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 struggled long and hard to overturn the old abortion law. We have shown that change takes place through the strength of a movement. With a new abortion law being debated by parliament, it is critical that we do everything possible to mobilize the pro-choice movement to stop the new law. We must continue mass actions across Canada and Québec in our campaign to stop a new abortion law and work for universal access to free abortion.

# Expose Government Racism!

## 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 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.

This issue put together by:  
Helen Armstrong, Sheryl Boswell,  
Debi Brock, Carolyn Egan, Nancy  
Farmer, Mary Gellatly, Shelly Gordon,  
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Our thanks to the Women's Press for the use of their facilities.

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

Parliament recently passed legislation severely restricting the access of refugees to Canada. Claimants may now be sent back to either their country of origin or an "allegedly" safe third country by refugee-determination officers at entry points. It is estimated that up 80% of all refugees will be immediately refused admission. The regulations have made an already difficult process even more restrictive.

Canadian immigration policy has always been motivated by labour needs of capital, not by humanitarian concern for potential immigrants. Its regulations are racist, sexist and class biased. For example, priority is presently being given to business and entrepreneurial categories, allowing entrance to those with economic resources;

the vast majority of women are still admitted as sponsored dependents of their husbands, with limited rights in this country; and Canada has made clear the systematic racism inherent in the process by limiting the number of immigration offices in third world countries. The Canadian government, representing business interests, views immigrants as desirable only if they meet perceived economic criteria, and refugees are seen as a threat to that controlled policy. It has used the rationale of protecting Canadian jobs, screening out "terrorists", and it has flamed racist sentiments to try to build support for its position.

Socialist-feminists must strongly oppose these controls on immigration. We must expose the government's racist hypocrisy, and make it clear that

we will not accept the scapgoating of immigrants and refugees as the cause of economic problems in this country. The real cause is the free enterprise system that puts no emphasis on human needs.

As socialist-feminists we will continue to fight for immediate demands today, but our longer term goal is to struggle in alliance with organizations of working class, people of colour and other oppressed groups for an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist, socialist society.



Nancy Farmer

Toronto Popular Summit Demonstration  
June, 1988  
Carmencita Hernandez (right)



Nancy Farmer



## Everywoman's Almanac 1989

Women's Press is launching the 1989 Everywoman's Almanac on August 25, 6 p.m. at 229 College Street, Suite 204 in Toronto.

Come and join in this celebration and meet members of the Press.

All women welcome! Please R.S.V.P. to Rosamund or Michele at 598-0082.

## The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics is having its 2nd Annual Garage Sale

books, furniture, toys, clothes, records, and much more!

Saturday August 27th

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W. (at Spadina)

Donations are still being accepted - pick up and delivery can be arranged. Please call OCAC at 532-8193.

# Crises in Sexual Regulation:

## How States Cope with Popular Sexual-Political Movements

by Mariana Valverde

The Canadian federal government has been promising a new abortion law since shortly after the old one was thrown out by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional, in January 1988. In March there were assurances that such a law would be introduced in Parliament "before Easter." Easter came and went: as did Victoria Day and Canada Day. Now it appears that the government will be lucky to get more than its free trade accord approved by Parliament before it has to call a federal election, thus putting all plans for new regulations on hold. An early election would mean the end (for the time being at least) not only of a hypothetical abortion law but also the anti-pornography Bill C-54, which has been languishing among the papers of the Justice Committee and is rumoured to have been put permanently on the back burner.

Prime Minister Mulroney had declared solemnly, in the wake of the Supreme Court Morgentaler decision, that what he calls "the country" and we call "the state" needed to be "protected" and thus a new abortion law was required. The source of the danger was unspecified: the thousands of Canadian women that have abortions every year - and which have included the girlfriends of Cabinet ministers -- couldn't possibly be all moral terrorists. But despite the difficulty in locating culprits, those in power clearly felt that a crisis of major proportions had erupted; this was obvious from the incredible contortions, stutterings, and sudden losses of speech of health ministers and attorney's general as they appeared on television to be questioned on this matter.

*There is a crisis indeed, a serious crisis in the system of moral regulation.*

There is a crisis indeed, a serious crisis in the system of moral regulation. The conservative, pro-family consensus of the Diefenbaker era no longer exists: but the glimpses of liberalism of the early Trudeau regime (partial legalization of homosexuality, partial legalization of abortion, decriminalization of birth control) never succeeded in giving rise to a full-fledged system of consistent liberalism. Today, such liberal spaces as do exist are not expanding, and in some places are contracting (e.g. British Columbia's AIDS-quarantine legislation, or moves to cut birth control and abortion services to young women). The moral conservatives may not have won the day in federal politics but they are in power in some provinces and exercise much interest-group pressure even in liberal strongholds.

The moral liberals are either fighting defensive battles around AIDS education and other issues, or have simply flown the coop and taken up non-sexual issues, such as fighting against free trade.

There is a vacuum at the top in the area of moral regulation. The best proof of this is the ridiculous multiple-choice option on abortion presented to the

Tory caucus, a non-policy which was an astounding admission of internal confusion. If even Tory MP's cannot begin to elaborate on abortion law, it is clear that the state as a whole -- which after all includes many Trudeau appointments and lefty-liberal professionals -- will not be able to generate policy in the area of sexuality and morality with any degree of confidence.



In the absence of internal cohesion and strong principles, whether of the conservative or liberal persuasion, the state might well resort to deriving policy by absorbing and/or co-opting policies developed outside the state, and presenting them back in changed form as 'found art', or in this case found consensus. This is precisely what the Fraser Committee did with the thorny question of regulating pornography. Admitting that Canadians were somewhat split on their views on this issue, the Fraser Committee pulled an ideological rabbit out of a hat and stated that the feminist position on pornography was the reasonable middle, midway between the 'conservative' and the

*the Fraser committee pulled an ideological rabbit out of a hat and stated that "the feminist position" on pornography was the reasonable middle,*

'liberal' positions. Various tricks were used to reduce the rather large variety of feminist positions on pornography to one (for instance, socialist feminist opposing censorship were simply reclassified as socialists, not feminists); but even more astounding was the placing of feminism as a whole not as oppositional to patriarchy but as the happy middle between nasty moral conservatives and frivolous sexual liberals.

The Fraser Committee's manipulation of feminist discourse was followed, not surprisingly, by a hearty endorsement of the principles of the feminism invented by the Commissioners. These principles were of course rejected as too close to capital L-Liberalism by the succeeding Tory government, which ignored the Fraser Committee in its own frankly conservative Bill C-54; all of which goes to show that perhaps the pendulum that swings between liberalism and conservatism cannot be stopped by simply arbitrarily labelling the middle point 'feminism'. But be that as it may, a similar co-optation tactic

may well be employed by the state -- particularly if the Liberals and NDP are stronger in Parliament after the next election -- in regard to the thorniest moral question of the late 20th century, abortion. I do not know what the Liberal position on abortion is; if they have one, it is not well publicized. They may be as divided as the Tories: but, unlike the Tories, they have a small but

significant feminist presence in the party apparatus, and fewer ethical dinosaurs in their backbenches. If they form the next government, particularly if the NDP holds the balance of power, we may see an attempt to co-opt the feminist language of 'choice' in a law that permits some, or even many, abortions but at the practical level does nothing to facilitate access or foster reproductive freedom. Choice, as abortion activists never tire of pointing out, can mean many different things, and in the hands of the Liberals it could mean an abstract and limited legal right (as they have in the US) which grassroots feminists then have to fight to make real -- especially in the face of antagonistic provincial ministries of health.

If the spectre of co-optation is a frightening one, perhaps we might

cheer ourselves up by contemplating the alternative, as embodied in Britain's Clause 28. The wholesale attack on human rights posed by the anti-gay Clause, which has already become law, is an example of what a post-liberal state does: crush the popular forces, defund their organizations, ban their texts and images from schools and public places, delegitimize their living arrangements. Canada's version of liberal democracy certainly has its repressive features; but Thatcher's government (which totally controls the country in a way that could not happen in a federal system) shows what the Canadian Tories might do if they were not (a) subject to liberalizing pressure from without the party (b) in general disarray about social policy.

*Co-optation and repression of popular forces are the two alternatives of bourgeois states facing a crisis in sexual regulation.*

Co-optation and repression of popular forces are the two alternatives of bourgeois states facing a crisis in sexual regulation. Repression cuts away the democratic rights which are necessary to all popular and working class movements; but on the other hand it unifies the opposition beautifully. Co-optation divides -- as seen in the feminist splits over what to do about government efforts to suppress pornography -- but on the other hand it gives some legitimacy to popular claims. What we need to do is reflect on the strategic pros and cons of our particular situation -- potential co-optation by a state in regulatory disarray -- and decide how to be more forceful and less passive, how to take advantage of the enemy's weak points.

*This is a revised version of a talk given at the International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal, June 1988.*

**South African Women's Day**  
A day to commemorate the fight of Women in South Africa  
Picket: Tues. August 9, 4-7 p.m.  
South African Consulate,  
(King & Bay)  
Women's Dance  
Saturday August 6  
Cecil St. Community Centre  
Proceeds to ANC Women's Section & MWIC -- \$7.00/sliding scale  
Tickets: Glad Day, Indigo, Bookworld, Letters, Third World Bookstore, Women's Bookstore  
Wheelchair accessible  
Childcare: phone 658-9719

# TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

By Miriam Jones and Jennifer Stephen

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women is generally regarded in the political and social mainstream as the 'flagship of Canadian feminism.' As such, NAC plays a significant role in communicating, and at times co-ordinating, the demands of various organizations and currents in Canadian feminism. In structure, NAC is a massive umbrella organization with a membership of 576 separate groups representing more than 3 million women. Policies are developed through a network of committees which work in conjunction with, and sometimes independently of, individual member groups. NAC does not work on a coalition model. Instead, it operates as a general assembly, following the model of a constituency association much like any trade union or the NDP. It is quite hierarchical in structure with a powerful executive. A woman new to the convention procedures (laid out by Robert's Rules of Order) and new to the informal networks of communication operative at NAC, would indeed feel isolated and silenced. It seemed, then, a good idea to review NAC's structure, with the goal of democratizing the organization and, we thought, the 1988 Annual General Meeting was to be the place to do it.

Organizational Review was not a priority limited to the NAC executive. In fact, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) and the International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) submitted a proposal calling for the adoption of an alternative structure in 1986. The need for alternative operating procedures and structure has been a priority of member groups of NAC for some time. It was left to the Organizational Review Committee (ORC) of NAC, chaired by Lorraine Greaves, to canvass the NAC membership and develop a workable model for presentation at the 1988 AGM, held last May in Ottawa.



There had been no organized mechanism for member groups to review the ORC proposals, beyond reading the 'pink booklet' most of us had received about 3 weeks before the meeting. It was our view that the proposals for organizational review were proceeding apace, and that we would have the opportunity to discuss them when they arose on the agenda. Discussion took place and the proposals were received and endorsed in principle. You can imagine our

surprise, then, when Greaves suddenly stood before all 500 (or more) of us and announced her resignation from the presidential ballot amidst a flurry of acrimony and controversy. The ensuing

chaos and whirlwind of insinuation has been amply, if sensationally, documented in the mainstream media. Various plots and conspiracies at power have been constructed and reconstructed, none of which correspond with our experience of the event.

When Lorraine Greaves announced her resignation, she gave a compelling speech regarding the necessity for a new structure at NAC. In her view, the current structure was inimical to "feminist process." Greaves asserted, "I have sacrificed myself because it is a fantasy for my supporters to presume that any one person can transform this organization." Of course, few would dispute that claim, particularly when dealing with massive organizational change in a democratic organization which must remain accountable to its sizable feminist membership. In such a milieu, political leadership is a shared task which must be representative and accountable to its grassroots constituency. Still, that did not account for Greaves' decision to resign. Instead, Greaves indicated that her decision was based on her perception that a "small obstructionist group" had undertaken to stonewall her plans for organizational review. This, it seemed, underscored her observation that NAC was becoming a battleground on which this as yet unidentified group was exploiting the current structure in the attempt to take over NAC and control its political direction. These allegations of obstructionism were later pinned directly on the left caucus. Greaves stated that she had not expected "that group" to "monopolize the meeting" and attempt to sabotage the agenda.

Shortly after Greaves' resignation, we were informed that the entire staff, with one exception, were resigning in protest: to what, we were not certain. The Executive Director had earlier announced her resignation for personal reasons, entirely independently of the mass resignation of the others. What we were able to understand was that the staff were applying for union certification and had been blocked by some members of the Executive Board in their bid to include the position of Executive

Director in the bargaining unit. Among those members of the executive who had blocked the staff proposal was Lorraine Greaves! Although the protest resignation was timed to appear as an action in support of Greaves, the only reason which was clearly articulated had to do with the struggles around the union question. The staff spokesperson, Marylou Murray, also suggested that the executive was riding roughshod over the membership. What this had to do with Greaves' concerns wasn't clear. What did emerge, however, was the implication that Lynn Kaye, by now the new president of NAC, had participated in the bid to block the staff's certification bid. Murray stated that Kaye had served as the lawyer for the Executive Board and had presented the Executive's case to the Labour Board detailing why the position of executive director was a management position and should not be included in the bargaining unit. As it turned out, although Kaye had been approached to take on the task, she had refused to do so. Since that time, Kaye and the new executive have completely restructured the staff operations at the Toronto and Ottawa offices in a non-hierarchical way, and included the disputed position in the bargaining unit, in order to address the real labour practices at issue.

The upshot of this cacophony of intrigue and innuendo is that few of the policy resolutions submitted to the AGM were ever dealt with, the rest of the meeting was derailed by chaos, there was a complete absence of direction and control, and the media enjoyed a heyday of sensationalism.

## What Was At Stake?

In 1986, OCAC and IWDC submitted proposals for organizational review at NAC, foreshadowing the concerns later expressed to the ORC. Committees, which carry out the work of NAC between AGM's, are centrally controlled by the executive: an executive member must chair each committee, and is sometimes selected for that position by the executive and not by committee members. The Executive Board is empowered to act unilaterally and to control, even set, the political direction of NAC by setting priorities for each year. Although the membership can, through the resolutions process, attempt to influence these priorities, that category of resolutions are typically the last to be dealt with at the AGM and rarely 'make it to the floor' at all. Even when they are passed, it remains an executive prerogative to bump such priorities lower down on the agenda. Women of colour, Native women, working class women and immigrant women are vastly under-represented at NAC, although repeated bids for affirmative action in representation on the executive and committees have pressed acknowledgement of that fact. In the past few years more working class and women of colour organizations have been joining NAC. Francophone women, in Quebec and English-speaking Canada, are marginalized within the organization. Women who are new to the AGM often feel cut adrift in the maze of Robert's

Rules.

To some, these issues represent the attendant problems of size: the organization has outgrown its old structure, and requires a new structure which can accommodate the many demands which are straining its resources and capacity. What that new view obscures, however, is the question of why NAC does not represent the political and class perspectives of women of colour, Francophone women, im-



migrant and Native women, disabled and lesbian women, and working class women. Many in the leadership had faith in the capacity of what was presented as an allegedly politically neutral organizational process to accommodate all of these concerns. Certainly, the initial proposals for restructuring, decentralization and greater emphasis on participatory democracy, were seen as central to the continued viability of NAC. The final proposals of the ORC presented a new set of problems.

The first problem was that it was incomprehensible. Try as we might, we couldn't get a picture of how the proposals would be implemented or what the new 'NAC' would look like. Although this might not have been such a critical issue, it soon gained significance when it became clear that these proposals were being rammed through the AGM with no room, or time, for discussion. Greaves, running for president, campaigned on the review proposal. Her close identification with the issue meant that, in effect, a vote on the review and a vote on her candidacy were one and the same. Any questioning of the review process was seen to be a questioning of her integrity. It became very personalized. That certainly made discussion more difficult than it need have been. And discussion was just what we needed, to sift through and understand the ORC's proposal, and just what they were getting at. Later in the day, when the review resolutions came to the vote, we were informed that the Quebec members had drafted a separate brief about the organizational review. This draft was available in French only: it had not been translated, despite NAC's constitutional and operational requirements to do so. This, and the fact that

# NAC Annual General Meeting, 1988

we experienced translation problems throughout the meeting, is again symptomatic of how inaccessible NAC is to Francophone women inside Quebec and throughout English-speaking Canada.

## What Were We Voting On?

After sifting through the various documents about the review proposals, we concurred that a university degree in advanced organizational systems theory was required to understand what was going on. In short, the language used and the format of the various documents made them confusing and inaccessible. It was not clear what was being voted on. The resolutions to be voted on were approval in principle of the review, and were separated from the actual procedures which would implement the changes. The documents outlining procedures for implementation were available at the AGM in limited number, and only after they had been requested. This became an important issue, once it was made clear that we were talking about major changes to NAC's operation. Even if we had been given sufficient information, we were given no opportunity for discussion. Any efforts to discuss these proposals was considered an obstructionist attack, which is a complete distortion and undermining of democratic process. This was unfortunate since there could have been mechanisms that allowed for complete discussion; women could have been given all of the necessary information and documents well in advance. Regional meetings or workshops prior to the discussion could have been planned so that we would have been fully informed, and welcome to participate in a thorough discussion of the review. Although questionnaires were sent out, and surveys conducted, none of us actually saw the final draft of the plan until the AGM itself. The opportunity to make the review a thorough, participatory process did not happen.

## Where is our feminist process?

For many of us, 'feminist process' is a much discussed phenomenon which we strive to understand and use. Overall, while we might find it easier to work according to feminist principle on a personal level, feminist practice and political work varies according to the size, purpose, direction and political perspective of the organizations we work in. In general, 'feminist process' is not well defined. In the discussions which circulated at NAC and since, this process is referred to as though it is apolitical in construction, an appeal to neutrality and homogeneity which is intricately linked to the notion of a unified 'sisterhood.' As is clear from our anti-racist work and our work in the working class, the women's movement is not an amorphous, singular, homogeneous unity. To assume such unity and sameness, is not only racist and heterosexist but it ignores the white

middle class hegemony and it reconstructs all difference as a threat and all dissent as a challenge.

The view of feminist process which takes homogeneity as its standard, does not permit recognition of real political difference as viable, healthy or legitimate. Such a model has no apparatus or mechanism which is thought of as necessary to address political differences in a constructive way. This, it seems, was what lay at the basis of the construction of the "small obstructionist group" which was deemed to threaten the viability of NAC, and the subsequently agonizing soul-searching which some heralded as the 'death throes of the second wave.'



Jewels Graphics/Sarita Johnson

What began as a question of procedure -- "can we discuss this thing or not" -- quickly escalated into a massive debate over 'feminist process' and accusations of political intrigue and manipulation, all in the spotlight of the national media. The concepts of self-emancipation, democracy from below, and active involvement in the process of change were not present. The ORC solicited our input through questionnaires during the year, but then constructed a new model for us, denouncing any questioning or suggestions as sabotage. This is not democratic process.

## Tempest in a teapot

Given the fallout from the 1988 AGM, we feel that the issues of individualism and accountability need to be addressed. While it is the prerogative of any individual running for elected office to choose to withdraw at any time, before, during or after election, the question of accountability to the membership and responsibility for the aftermath of the decision must be considered. While Greaves indicated that she had chosen to "sacrifice herself" and that it was a fantasy to anticipate "that any one individual" could transform NAC, the individualism that seems to have informed that decision remains in question. In leading the bid for organizational review, and using that review process as the basis of her campaign, Greaves had garnered a political base which was accompanied by some degree of power and influence. Instead of using that base constructively, Greaves chose to "shock" NAC into revamping itself, thereby acknowledging her power and influence and turning it to a destructive end. Many observers feel that she withdrew because she thought she might lose the

vote for president.

Such actions suggest not only the individual and single-minded use of position and influence, but also raised the very question of NAC's viability which Greaves held as her stated purpose and goal to secure. What began as an effort to strengthen, revitalize and democratize NAC ended in its near-sabotage. Were these actions representative? If there was opposition to the plan of the ORC: What was it? Where was it? Was this the only manner in which it could have been addressed? Greaves' resignation, an individual decision, could have had serious impacts on NAC's future. These actions may well have had serious impacts on NAC's credibility. They certainly left

behind a trail of unanswered questions.

Despite the view that NAC was unable to function effectively for reasons which were never clearly articulated, the AGM came together twice to unanimously approve two important resolutions: choice on abortion and Meech Lake. The emergency resolution calling for no new abortion law, jointly submitted by OCAC, the BC caucus and women from Quebec, was passed unanimously, and with a standing ovation. A resolution on the Meech Lake Accord at first looked like a possible collision course between women from Quebec on the one hand, and Native women, immigrant women and women of colour on the other. Instead, what could have been a disaster was turned into a unified political position, resolved by a creative mechanism suggested from the floor in which the groups came together and worked out a common position. These were the only areas in which the membership could do what we had come to do. We were sidetracked from getting on with work which had been a year or more in the making by committees and member groups, by a debate which few of us had access to or understood, and in which the central actor acted without accountability or explanation. Yet we were all affected by those actions.

## The Cabal in the Kitchen

It was interesting that the left caucus at NAC was implicated in the debate and even held responsible for trying to 'sabotage' the meeting. The left has variously been scapegoated by a silent minority at NAC, called everything from male-controlled to male-influenced, and considered completely organized and disciplined. For this

reason, regular left caucus meetings which provide the only opportunity for socialist feminists, feminists on the far left, and feminist social democrats across Canada to come together, are instead seen as sessions designed to plot some conspiratorial endeavor or another. Many feminists active in NAC, including most trade unionists, identify with various currents of left-feminism. However, there is no unity or unanimity in our analyses, nor is this necessary. Some common positions are arrived at on specific issues through the use of a coalition model. Often, the coalition model is extended to include other progressive groups which may not have an explicitly left politics at all. This approach is in stark contrast to a feminist process based on the 'sisterhood of sameness.' While we do work in solidarity with women to build the basis for united action, it is that apolitical identification of feminist process which sees the coalition model, by implication, as a threat: while the one encourages discussion and acknowledges political differences, the other would regard such differences as unfeminist. Outlining a political position and engaging in political debate on the floor is considered "grandstanding", whereas it is the true representation, not of individualism, but of a position developed in democratic process. The myth of sisterhood is oppressive when it rules out differences of race, class, ability, language, political perspective and sexuality. And yet, because of its apolitical, ahistorical and homogeneous construction, to argue against it is portrayed as arguing against motherhood and womanhood - where motherhood and women are similarly ahistorically, apolitically and homogeneously defined.

The left caucus, called by IWDC, was accused of acting as an obstructionist group bent on blocking Greaves and the review: the left caucus had not discussed the review at all. The only time available to meet was after the debate! The left caucus was accused of working surreptitiously in an attempt to sabotage NAC and undermine its democratic process: it was similarly accused at the 1987 AGM. The 'left caucus' as it is constructed by those who view political difference as a threat, does not exist: while there is a viable and proactive caucus mechanism which allows socialist-feminists to meet, discuss and act together where we find common ground, this mechanism is participatory and democratic in design and operation. It is a structure which NAC would be well put to implement, since it is grounded in a model which allows us to acknowledge the various currents of liberal, radical and socialist-feminism and work out our direction for future common action.

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# VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

## Lesbian & Gay Pride Day, 1988

by Nancy Farmer

Last month, close to 20,000 supporters of the lesbian and gay community participated in Lesbian & Gay Pride Day, making this year's event the biggest ever. In fact, this year for the first time it was necessary to expand the area needed by several blocks to contain the festivities and a second stage was added for performances. This year's theme was "Vive La Difference"

The march, traditionally a celebration rather than a demonstration or a protest, attracted many who had probably never before taken to the streets. It was a flamboyant parade led by Svend Robinson, the first Canadian federal member of parliament to "come out" and Karen Andrews, a member of CUPE and the March 8th Coalition, who is currently pushing the provincial government to include her women lover and her lover's children under her OHIP plan. The march, which wound it's way from Church St. across to Yonge St. and then back, was dominated by floats covered in flowers, Queens dressed in satin and sequins, balloons, music blaring from loudspeakers and lots of pink. Except for the occasional sign or banner protesting the lack of funding and research being channeled into the Aids crisis, one was hard pressed to get a sense of any demands being made at all.

Lesbian & Gay Pride Day hasn't always been like this. Although we now associate it with a sunny day late in June, Lesbian & Gay Pride Day was actually born on a blistering cold winter evening in 1981. Earlier in the day 150 police officers had busted their way into Toronto's four largest bath houses and arrested some 300 men. The Gay community was stunned, and decided that enough was enough. The protest began to mount around 6 pm, and grew to 2,000 people. Toronto's Gay community had decided to fight back. Out of this impromptu demonstration a committee was formed

and our first celebration of gay pride took place the last Sunday in June, 1981 - an internationally sanctioned date to

commemorate the first open gay rebellion at the Stonewall Inn in New York on June 27, 1969.

We may feel that we have come a long way since our first pride day 7 years ago. We are now supposedly protected from discrimination, by provincial legislation, except of course, if we wish to have our loved ones covered by our benefit plans. Recall some of the slanderous remarks that were used to describe our behavior by some of the members of parliament during the debate. We were labeled as sick and as misfits and compared to animals. Attitudes are impossible to legislate. Heterosexism and homophobia are not against the law. As socialist-feminists, we know the limitations of legal rights under a bourgeois democracy. While the state was forced to provide some legal protection from discrimination, the state has a vested interest in maintaining the structures and institutions of heterosexism.

While we on the left may feel somewhat sheltered from harassment it's very homophobic world. For many gays and lesbians it's simply not worth the hassle, (let alone the threat of being fired) to come out to employers or co-workers. Continually we are forced to deny our life styles. Too often we must hide our affection for one another. And how many custody battles are lost, simply because the mother is a lesbian.



Debate is raging in the United Church on whether to permit the ordination of openly gay and lesbian ministers. There has been such an uproar over this possibility, that it appears that the leadership may back down. In a far reaching survey of United Church Observer readers, 2/3 of those polled rejected the ordination of practicing homosexuals;



2/5 of the respondents replied that gay ministers already ordained should resign. One compromise that has been put forward, is that a homosexual person could become a minister as long as he/she does not practice his/her sexuality preferences. This heated discussion will be brought to a conclusion at the church's general council meeting in August. Let's not forget that the United Church is probably the most progressive church in the country. We are talking about a congregation, that on the whole supports the church's liberal social policies. This includes support for the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and opposition to the strict refugee bill that has now been passed. But when it comes to gays and lesbians; well I guess that is too much to tolerate.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the "promotion" of homosexuality has been outlawed. On May 23, Section 28 (formally Clause 28) officially became law. This hated law bans local councils from funding, endorsing or allowing anything that encourages or favors homosexuality. One part-time lecturer at a London college has already been fired because she discussed Section 28 and her lover with a class of adults. Many artistic and community groups which portray lesbians and gays positively, will be threatened as they will be forced to comply with the law if they seek funding.

The massive protests aimed at blocking this bill, at this point, have appeared to have failed. 30,000 people marched through the streets of London on April 30. Direct action, most of it lesbian inspired, has been popular. Last

spring, several lesbians dressed as commandos, managed with the help of mountain climbing equipment, to swing across the House of Lords, shouting "stop the clause" as the bill was being debated. In April, four women chained themselves to gates of Buckingham Palace, on the day the Queen was to give Royal Assent to the bill.

In Toronto, we should feel proud of the increasing numbers of people who come to march each Pride Day. We have made progress in accessibility and now have facilities in place for childcare, attendants for differently-abled and interpretation for the hearing impaired. Organizers have taken correct positions in boycotting Carling-Okeefe beer and showing support for South Africa. Lesbian participation is both encouraged and welcomed.

But are we not forgetting something? We should not forget the militancy of this movement around both Stonewall Inn and the bath house raids. With such a major mobilization in the streets, we should take the opportunity to clearly put forward our demands. Our slogans and banners could address our demands for funding for aids research, more support for people living with aids, and for the end to heterosexism. We should protest the fact the five young murderers of Kenn Zeller, a gay man who was beaten to death, in High Park in 1985, will soon be released on parole. In the judge's opinion they were simply 'typical young males,' letting off a bit of steam, and not a threat to society.

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# Material Girls

by guest columnist  
Lotta Little

Conversation between women overheard on a boat tour of a coastal, sparsely populated area of Canada: "Where do they shop?"

No, this is not yet another put down of the homemaker as consumer, whose main objective in life is ostensibly to blow the old man's paycheque. I could picture my own mother in this group, pondering the possibilities of rural life without a shopping mall nearby. My mother has been to every shopping mall within a hundred mile radius of her home in small town Ontario. She greeted the opening of the Woodbine Mall (complete with indoor amusement park) with the same degree of enthusiasm that I would express at the overthrow of capitalism.

Shopping malls have assumed the role of the town square in rural areas and small towns in particular. My mother and her friends cannot go bowling every day or go to the local Legion Hall to play cards every night. They take their jobs as full-time homemakers seriously. But they can hop in the car and drive to a mall on an almost daily basis. Friday's run is to pick up a couple of 24's of beer for their partners to put back on the weekend, while 'the guys' wander in a pack from driveway to driveway giving advice to one another on car repairs. Thursdays are reserved for grocery shopping. Trips on other

days can be for a number of reasons; picking up a gift or something for the house, or keeping a friend company on her shopping excursion or visit to the doctor.

Of course many of these tasks could be accomplished in the same trip, (and even at one mall), but the purpose of the trip is not for practical reasons alone. Shopping malls may be taking on the role of town centres, but not as discreet malls. Rather, a number of them in a geographical area fill the function. It is the institution of the mall which is as significant as any one mall's location. The further away from home one ventures, chances are lessened of bumping into a friend while shopping, but the purpose of the trip is not necessarily to chat either. What I suspect is a key draw to the mall is that one will find, at any given moment, hundreds of other women. Old women and young women, pushing baby carriages, laden down with parcels, or simply window shopping.

But all of these women have something in common. They are, by and large, not in the full-time labour force. They prove that you and your friends are not the last homemakers left in the country: a demeaned and vanishing type. All of them are at the mall for a particular purpose, purchasing the goods for their families' well-being and thereby fulfilling their tasks as homemakers in the 1980's.

You see, over the years the neighbourhood has changed. The woman next door to the right began to work part-time and eventually full-time as her children grew older. The woman across the street started to work full-time, and as soon as she had enough money of her own, packed her bags and left her husband and the neighbourhood behind. The woman next door to the left is a stranger; she has worked full-time since she moved to the area. It is no longer necessary to get up at 7:30 a.m. to open the living room curtains before going back to bed for another hour's sleep. No one else is home to know whether you are out of bed by 8:30 or not. But you do wonder if your now invisible neighbours wonder what you possibly manage to do with yourself all day. And you know that no one at the mall would ever think of such a question.

## Sail the S.S. SANDINO

Around Toronto Harbour on a benefit for  
TOOLS FOR PEACE

Help launch the fall campaign to collect material aid for NICARAGUA!

Friday Sept. 16, 1988

Tickets \$12 advance, unwaged \$10 and \$15 at the boat.

Tickets available from: Drum Travel, The Big Carrot, Tolls for Peace, Canadian Action for Nicaragua, SCM Bookroom, DEC Bookroom, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples and Women's Bookstore. Call Tools for Peace for info: 922-0852

## All Out For

# Prison Justice Day!

Wed. August 10th is Prison Justice Day.

Three events will be taking place.

First, a caravan of vehicles will stage protests at prisons and police facilities in the Metro area; starting at 12:30 gathering in front of Bickford Park High school opposite Christie Pits.

Second, there will be a Rally at 5:00 p.m. when the caravan will join everyone in front of the Don Jail at Gerrard and Broadview, to observe Prison Justice Day.

The third event will be a public meeting at the Ralph Thornton Centre, 765 Queen St. East. at 7:30 with speakers from community groups, Native rights, political prisoners, women's and international solidarity organizations.

Four main demands from the Prison Justice Day Committee are:

- Remember those who died in prison and in police custody.
- Let the public in: Let the truth out.
- Stop cultural genocide against Native prisoners.
- Bar solitary confinement: Close "Special Handling Units": End forced transfers.

Organized by the Prison Justice Day Committee.

Phone 868-6535 for information

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## Why do socialist feminists work at NAC?

NAC allows the various currents of Canadian feminism to come together around action and policy discussion, to review past failures and successes, and to discuss various regional and bi-national priorities. Above all, however, NAC is a public organization which has historically put pressure on elected officials to understand the demands of and be accountable to women. Socialist-feminists have been moving NAC slowly beyond this narrow focus to a more participatory mass action approach. NAC sponsored demonstrations and strike support pickets in recent years to indicate a broadening understanding of the need to mobilize women for change.

Many acknowledge the historical importance of socialist-feminism to Canadian feminism and the women's movement. Hopefully, few would permit this history to degenerate into the cynicism of red-baiting. It is critical that we recognize the historical significance of each current of Canadian feminism. Although we may politically disagree, we must defend each other's right to express differing points of view. Ours is not a homogeneous movement in terms of race, class, experience, education, language, sexuality, national origin, ability or perspective. While NAC faces a critical juncture, brought about by its massive growth, problems of representation, and the increasing rigour, depth and complexity of our political differences and movement, now is the time to develop constructive mechanisms by which these differences can be acknowledged, recognized and addressed. If NAC is to truly represent the needs and aspirations of the majority of women in Canada and



Quebec, it must continue the process of restructuring and create an accountable and democratic structure with the broad participation and leadership of working class women and women of colour. IWDC will continue to work with others to develop a strong, anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, class perspective within the membership, which will hopefully become integrated into the programmes, policies and structure of the organization.

Whatever the opposition to one proposal for organizational review (and we are still unclear about what that opposition was or where it originated) surely that can be addressed in a participatory, constructive manner that does not seek to scapegoat and then castigate any one group as the 'hidden enemy within our gates.'





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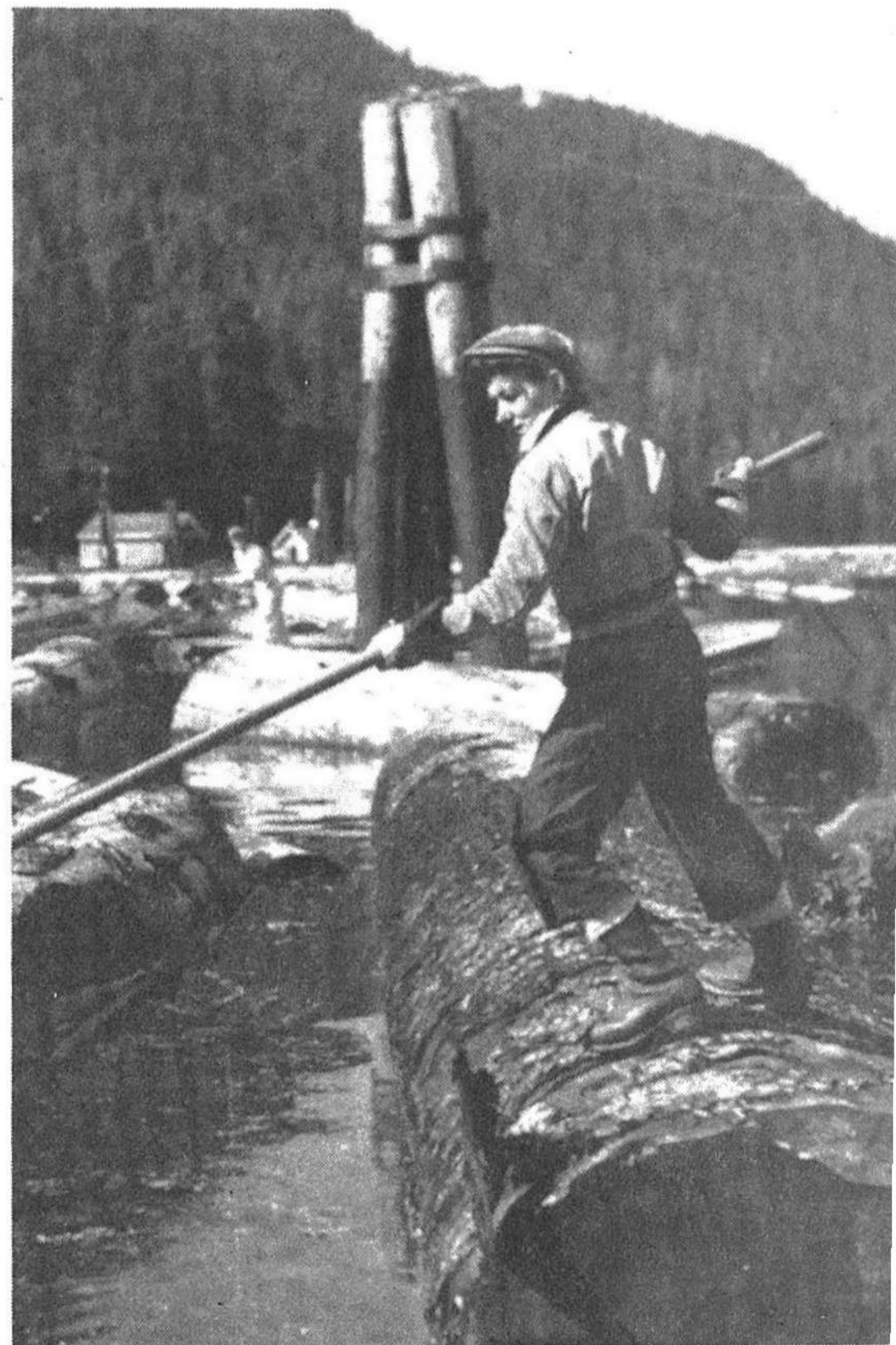
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We must continue to organize within the lesbian and gay community to struggle against homophobia, heterosexism and the structures that maintain them. Empowerment through mass actions, such as Lesbian & Gay Pride Day, are key to moving forward. We must, however, move beyond declaring our right to our sexuality and fundamentally challenge heterosexism.

In fighting lesbian and gay oppression we are questioning fundamental tenets of this society, one of which is the regulation of sexuality. As socialist-feminists, we believe that there will never be lesbian and gay liberation under capitalism. The class structure with its laws and institutions maintains and perpetuates heterosexism, racism, sexism and class oppression.



WOMAN LUMBER-WORKER, CALLED A "LUMBER-JILL", HEAVES LOGS IN BC IN 1943.