

Rebel Girls' Rag

A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE 75¢

Vol. 3, No. 1 November 1988

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



Photo: Julia B.

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BELL: The strike may be over but the battle continues

by Jennifer Stephen

During the past 17 weeks, the mainstream media has sensationalized the Communications & Electrical Workers of Canada (CWC) strike against Bell Canada as a drama of sabotage and labour strife. Meanwhile, the real story behind the strike rarely received any attention. This has been a strike which has cost individual workers more than 600 working hours. It has not been a strike over wages, leaving the media with only stories about anonymous acts of sabotage. This has been a strike about working conditions and job security, primarily affecting women workers.

The key issues in the CWC strike were job security, stress in the workplace, indexing pensions, and health & dental benefits. Job security included the critical issues of contracting-out and the increasing use of part-time work.

The most important fight for operators is a shorter work day. Ann Newman, president of Local 50 (Operator Services - Ontario) saw this issue as the most effective way of addressing both job security and stress in the workplace. The current 7 hour day for telephone operators means up to 2 hours at the boards without a break. In a work environment which includes the constant pressure of maintaining a rapid job pace, processing one call every 15 - 28 seconds, connected to the computer by an electronic 'umbilical cord', 120 minutes at a stretch is devastating. Those who work an 8 hour tour receive a one hour lunch which is unpaid. Those who work for 7 1/2 hours get a half hour for lunch, also unpaid. The CWC proposed a reduction to a six and a half hour workday, to allow people to get in and out of work as fast as possible, and to alleviate some of the stress reaction, physical and psychological. In turn, more jobs could be created to make up the difference. Reducing the work day, even if the company refused to recognize stress in the workplace, would have been a reasonable compromise. Bell refused. Its only offer was to reduce the night shift to 6 1/2 hours from the current 7 hour tour, a small concession since that only covers 25 - 30 members of the bargaining unit.

Bell has consistently refused to recognize stress as an Occupational Health & Safety hazard, despite mounting evidence of its tremendous physiological and psychological effects, and the number of illnesses which have been linked to stress. Studies have been conducted and arbitration cases won,

all on the evidence of stress-related conditions, illnesses and diseases as-

sociated with the organization of work and technologies and equipment used in the process. Nowhere is the evidence more implicating than in Bell's own offices. The level of stress associated with Operator Services continues to increase, particularly in conjunction with the rate of technological change in that division. All calls are monitored electronically; the operator barely has time to breathe before the next call comes through, at a rate which is controlled by the computer, not the worker. Management techniques of coercion to maintain a high level of productivity, and discipline for those who fail to keep up to company levels of 'performance', have exacerbated already existing stressors associated with using the equipment itself. The company has introduced several procedures which quantify and further divide the work, creating a computer-driven work pace with greatest emphasis on reducing labour costs and increasing productivity. This drive is backed up by a litany of electronic and physical surveillance and control.

Bell has led the pack not only in technological change, and job loss, but in Quality of Working Life programmes as well. While the CWC has been pushing for recognition of stress in the work place, Bell has countered with a campaign of Absenteeism Control. Many operators have taken sick leave and personal leave as a direct result of stress-related illness. Bell claims that stress is a personal matter, particularly when related to women. Meanwhile, the QWL propaganda waxes eloquent about 'teamwork' and how much you're missed when you're not there. Under the absenteeism campaign, a worker who is absent for a length of time deemed unacceptable by 'company standards' will receive a 'letter of intent.' The letter threatens dismissal, although the company claims it is not a disciplinary procedure. Whatever Bell might claim, the letter remains in the worker's discipline file, and people have been 'fired' under this procedure. QWL is a popular method of union-busting, and has had great success in some industries, particularly in the US.

Bell has also led in the reduction of full-time work through attrition. "New" jobs have been classified as regular part-time rather than full-time. Again, in combination with the introduction of new technologies, this has meant the unchecked loss of jobs, as regional offices have been closed down and operations centralized. The CWC attempted to gain some control over the classification of regular part-time jobs. Bell

refused the CWC proposal, and agreed instead to re-classify a mere 900 part-time jobs in all of Ontario and Quebec to regular full-time. Although the figure might sound high, it is a mere drop in the bucket, given that some offices are run with up to 80% regular part-time jobs.

Contracting-out has affected technicians and craft-workers in particular, where its use has been more obvious. Outside contractors have been hired for everything from telephone installation to cable repairs. Bell has developed a

undertaken by the CWC to bring Bell clerical workers into the union. Clerical workers are currently part of the company-directed Canadian Telephone Employees Association. Although the organizing drive was lost by a slim margin, it reinforced the resolve of CWC members to win their demands against the company.

The success of any strike is measured by more than the number of proposals gained and the number rejected. When CWC members rejected the recommendation of the bargaining



Photo: Julia B.

series of loopholes to by-pass whatever safeguards exist in the collective agreement. In addition, Bell has contracted-out all of its Dining Services (cafeterias). Given the company's approach to job security, the issue of pensions takes on even greater significance. The pension plan has been indexed at 1979 rates, at 50% of the Consumer Price Index to a maximum increase of 2%. Workers retire at full pension once they reach the age of 65. The CWC demanded an increase to 60% of the CPI, to a maximum of 4% increase per year, with retirement at 55. The majority of Dining Service workers are women, and many are close to retirement. Some were offered cash by Bell, instead of their pensions. These are the people who will be most immediately affected by Bell's refusal to accept the CWC proposal.

This has been a critical strike for the CWC and the fight is not over yet. Although Bell has refused to recognize many of the CWC's most critical demands, particularly workplace stress and job security, it has to recognize that relations in the workplace have been permanently changed. Many of us will recall the massive organizing drive un-

der the National union and voted down the first contract offer, they took on the leadership of a strong and vital strike action. The bargaining committee refused to make a recommendation on the second offer, and instead declared that a mandate for direction was needed from the membership. Operators and craft workers organized strong pickets throughout Ontario and Quebec. Morale was high and stayed that way throughout the strike, even while strike funds began to dwindle. Bell Security continued to harass and attempted to intimidate strikers and anyone else who honoured the picket line. After 17 weeks, twelve workers have been fired and 132 workers disciplined.

Whatever actions Bell might take, however, the solidarity built up throughout the strike and the organizing drive before that has reinforced a high level of militance and determination. 'Rank and file' courses run by the CWC during the strike examined management tactics and developed methods to counter them. As Ann Newman has stated, "We'll continue the battle inside."

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A Forum of Women's Resistance

Vol. 3, No. 1
November 1988

Published by:

International Women's
Day Committee

P.O. Box 70, Station F

Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4

Date of issue: October 20,
1988

Published five times a year
in Toronto, Ontario,
Canada. Second class mail
registration number 7769.

We are a socialist-feminist
group which operates on
the principle that mass ac-
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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.

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Our thanks to the Women's
Press for the use of their
facilities.

Signed articles do not neces-
sarily reflect the views of the Inter-
national Women's Day
Committee, but those of the
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Prison Justice Day:

Charging the Cops with Murder

by Julia B. and Laurie Bell

In 1974 Eddie Nolan was found slashed to death in solitary confinement at Millhaven Penitentiary. Prison Justice Day was established to commemorate his death and all those who have died while in detention.

Prison Justice Day is marked each year by prisoners who fast and refuse to work, calling attention to the appalling conditions in prisons which cause so many deaths and injuries each year. Prison Justice Day is also an occasion for people on the outside to show solidarity with men and women in prison and to draw public attention to the oppressive situations existing in our jails and prisons.

This year on Prison Justice Day, August 10, solidarity actions were held in Ottawa, Kingston, Vancouver and Toronto. In Toronto the Prison Justice Day Committee was comprised of families of prisoners, ex-prisoners, Native people, feminists, political groups, community and human rights activists and staff members of halfway houses. The committee wanted to raise public awareness of racism, brutality, and police violence that is built into Canada's Criminal Justice System. The demands for the day were:

1. Remember those who have died in prison and police facilities.
2. Let the public in. Let the truth out.
3. Stop cultural genocide against Native prisoners.
4. Ban solitary confinement, close Special Handling Units and end forced transfers.

An important issue for the Toronto Prison Justice Day Committee was the police killing of Gardiner Myers at 55 Division just two weeks before the August 10 activities. Participants joined

Gardiner's family and friends in calling for an independent investigation. In addition, the slaying of Lester Donaldson on August 9th at his home on Lauder Ave. by police from 13 Division demonstrated the same racist brutality that the committee has been trying to stop.

An afternoon Caravan to a number of prison and police facilities gave people a chance to let men and women in local prisons know we were acting in solidarity. At Vanier Centre for Women demonstrators were able to briefly communicate with some women before guards intervened. At the East End Detention Centre prisoners were banging so loudly on bars that the clamour could be heard outside. At the Don Jail more than 60 people gathered for a rally condemning the police murder of Gardiner Myers and Lester Donaldson, unacceptable prison conditions, and the States refusal to provide condoms to promote safe sex.

An evening public meeting called "Prisons, People and Popular Struggle" brought together activists from many social movements who made links between their struggles for liberation. Speakers from South Africa and from the Irish Freedom Association discussed the international scope of the situation. The international scope of the situation was brought home by a speaker from South Africa and a speaker from the Irish Freedom association. The oppression of Native People in Canadian prisons was addressed by a member of the Leonard Peltier Support Committee. Imprisonment and abuse of Native Peoples in Canada is part of the cultural genocide campaign being waged against indigenous peoples. Patrick Worth, a representative of People First a self advocacy movement of people labelled "mentally retarded", spoke about the incarceration of people on the basis of "dis-

ability". He reminded everyone that institutions and psychiatric hospitals are in truth prisons.

Prison Justice Day is really a call to take action against the ongoing systemic racism, violence and abuse that is at the foundation of our judicial system. There is a disproportionate representation of Native People, Black People, and Immigrants in Canadian prisons due to the racist, sexist and class structures which organize and divide society.

Members of IWDC and participants of the Prison Justice Day events joined hundreds of protesters from the Black Community on August 13, and marched to 13 Division where members of the Black Action Defence Committee and others from the Black Community talked about the racist murder of Lester Donaldson and police brutality in their community. As in the racist police murders of Albert Johnson and Anthony Griffin, the public complaints commission will meet with appointed individuals such as Cardinal Carter and Roy Williams some time in January. Following the Prison Justice Day events and the actions led by the Black Action Defence Committee for Lester Donaldson it is clear that the need for a united, anti-racist, militant movement is needed in the city of Toronto. We plan to commit ourselves to such a movement.

Next year we hope Prison Justice Day will be marked in many more communities in Canada. In Toronto we hope more people will be involved in planning this day so that we can strengthen our call for solidarity with our brothers and sisters in prisons and our protest against the injustice of the so called "Justice System". Let us "Charge the cops with Murder", as a spokesperson from the Black Action Defence Committee demanded.

Letters

September 20, 1988

Honourable Chaviva Hosek
Minister of Housing
777 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2E5

Re: Firing of John Sewell

Dear Minister Hosek:

We are writing to express our outrage at the recent developments over the position of chair of Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority.

The firing of John Sewell is a loss to the community. The downgrading of the position from full-time to part-time is evidence that the government is not committed to the reforms needed in its housing projects. Our communities

were heartened by the manner in which John Sewell listened to their concerns and cared about their quality of life in public housing. John Sewell, they said, "gave us hope that our days of being ignored and treated like second class citizens were over". It is a compliment that few in public office have received and a testimony of his dedication to the job at hand.

We find the manner in which John Sewell was fired and attempts to paint him as abrasive and not a team player, offensive. We are appalled that as former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), you would use a black woman to take the flak for the government's error in judgment. We are afraid that this type of action will fan the flames of racism and create a backlash in the community.

While we fight for full participation and representation on Boards and Commissions and have been vociferous in our efforts at government instituting employment equity for visible minority

women, we see the process under which the appointment of Jean Augustine was made as a quick and callous remedy to a situation which should have been better managed. The appointment pits a black female against a white male who has championed the cause of the poor and the working class.

We feel that if the government is serious about addressing the concerns in public housing and committed to the reforms started by John Sewell, the position of Chair of the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority should be maintained as a full-time one as a necessary first step, and we call on the government to do so.

Sincerely,

COALITION OF VISIBLE MINORITY
WOMEN

Akua Benjamin, Margaret Gittens,
Carmencita R. Hernandez, Barbara
Isaac, Winnie Ng, and Maria Wallis

Letters continued on page 6

Civil Disobedience: Strategy or Tactic?

by Carolyn Egan

The International Women's Day Committee recently had a discussion on how change takes pace, and what strategies we must adopt if we are to be successful in our fight for a transformed society. This article reflects the conclusions of that discussion.

As socialist-feminists we believe that the present class system maintains and perpetuates racism, sexism, and heterosexism, and must be overturned before these oppressions can finally be eradicated. But we also believe that the women's movement, the working class movement, the anti-racist movement, and all progressive movements must struggle against these oppressions as we work together for a socialist society. The question is how do we best do this? What strategies and tactics will achieve this goal?

position, being able to withdraw its labour power, has a crucial role in any movement for change. We have different interests than those who presently control our society, and we have learned that we have an independent power that can serve our interests. But in order for that change to be real and lasting, it must come from the base. No one can make fundamental change for us.

There has recently been debate in the women's movement on whether we should use mass action, the process of bringing many people into public political action around issues which affect their lives, or civil disobedience, refusing to obey the law as a way of winning demands. We do not feel that they should be counterposed. Mass action is a strategy or long term process of

rested, dramatic as it may appear to those involved, is not empowering or mobilizing if it leaves hundreds or thousands on the sidelines or at home. People will risk arrest on a picket line when they know their jobs are at stake, or in a sit-down strike over unsafe working conditions, or to challenge an unjust abortion law, when something concrete is to be won or lost. We must assess each individual situation. Self-emancipation must be our goal, and we cannot take up an elitist or individualist response to a problem that can only be changed by mass involvement.

Our guiding principle must be to organize in a manner that ensures that people have control over their issues, their protests, and their movements. It is they who must make change. We know that it is the policy of the state to disorganize and divide us. We want to build a unity among women and men, workers and students, people of colour and whites, lesbian/gays and heterosexuals. In building alliances we want more than a united front in the struggle for socialism. We want more than simply to be supportive of each others 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, and the fight against sexual regulation is integral to every movement for change. Through coalition politics we can learn not only how to integrate our struggles, but to develop the theory and strategy of working together in practical and concrete ways.

We should therefore put forward strategies that strengthen unity and do not lead to further division. We must not insist on a tactic that in some instances may disallow access to the process of change, to many who support the same goals, but don't feel that they can participate in civil disobedience. We cannot be cynical toward those whose personal situation, job, immigration status, or lack of economic resources (to pay legal fees) prevent their participation in what they may view as an unnecessary arrest. We have to work to bring more and more people into our movements based on our political program, and not put forward a strategy that may only speak to the already radicalized. Civil disobedience must be based in the working class and social movements; individuals putting themselves on the line, no matter how noble, can't make fundamental change for other people.

During the Viet Nam war it wasn't just the hundreds who were arrested in direct actions, but the hundreds of thousands who marched against the war, who helped to defeat US imperialism. It was they who created the climate and support for the massive resistance to the draft and the popular sentiment for troop withdrawal which forced the hand of the government. They "brought the war home". Civil disobedience is a tactic that must and will be used, but it must be placed within the larger political context, the

relationship of forces and the overall goal of self-emancipation. Our main objective must always be to reach out, to bring large numbers of people into action on issues which affect their lives, to deepen understanding through struggle, and to learn the power of collective action. If this is our guiding principle, we then decide the best tactic for the specific circumstances.



Black Action Defence Committee rallies against police murders

In IWDC our objective is to be part of building a mass movement of women with an anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, class perspective, a movement that will fight together with other movements for change. This movement must have the broad participation and leadership of working class women and women of colour. We believe that the concept of self-emancipation is fundamental. We want not only to win the immediate demands around which we organize, but we also want to empower people through the process of change. That is why we take up a mass action perspective. We want to bring as many people as possible into ongoing actions through demonstrations, rallies, and other types of public protest. We try to build alliances with other oppressed groupings, particularly organizations of the working class.

We recognize that women's liberation and the emancipation of all oppressed and exploited people will only take place through collective mass action. This organized strength is what changes the balances of forces at particular junctures, and forces the ruling class to retreat and concede to certain demands. Overturning the abortion law, winning a strike, whatever the struggle, it is when the masses of people organize to change the balance that we make gains. We also recognize that the working class because of its objective

involving people in making change. Civil disobedience is a tactic, an immediate method that can be used in doing this. It is one tactic among many, such as public meetings, rallies, marches, boycotts, etc. It has been used successfully in many instances. We were certainly involved in civil disobedience when we stormed the Eatons Centre on International Women's Day, or when blockading a work place in order to stop scabs from taking jobs from striking workers. But civil disobedience cannot take precedence over the strategy of mobilizing, empowering, and involving large numbers of people in the struggle for change. This is what we must keep in mind when we are determining the best tactic for a particular situation.

If we are trying to build a movement with broad working class and people of colour involvement, we have to be aware that the reality of many people's lives mitigates against arrest as a political strategy. The consequences of arrest may be dramatically different for a working class person or person of colour, who is at greater risk of losing a job or getting badly beaten, and is much more familiar on a regular basis with police violence. The goal of political organizing must be the involvement of people in struggle for change. This must inform the tactics chosen. Fifty or one hundred people deciding to be ar-

Just Released...

Social Movements/Social Change, the fourth annual edition of Socialist Studies just published by Between-the-Lines, is a collection of articles by activists in many social movements about the politics and practice of organizing for radical change.

There are a number of articles on campaigns that socialist feminists have been deeply involved in: "The Politics of Transformation" analyzes key turning points and struggles around race, class and sexuality in the March 8th Coalition; "Marching for Women's Lives" is a history of the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinic's fight for publicly funded free-standing abortion clinics and to overturn the federal abortion law; "Kids Are Not For Profit" discusses the struggle for high quality universal day care; and "The Bath Raids and Gay Politics" analyzes the development of the lesbian and gay liberation movements. All of these articles address the strategic and concrete complexities of feminist organizing and engagement with state power.

The book also contains many other interesting pieces on labour, the peace and ecology movements, the self organization of disabled women and visible minority women, and other struggles.



Feminists Organizing for Change

by Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, & Margaret McPhail.
Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Reviewed by Debi Brock and
Cynthia Wright

Back in the spring of 1984, three Toronto-based socialist feminists, Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Marg McPhail, joined the Women's Liberation Working Group (WLWG). This organization of women was interested in building a permanent coalition to coordinate feminist action in the city. The WLWG collapsed before it ever really got going, but as a way to sift through their experience as feminist activists and (one suspects) as an antidote to political burnout, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail began writing *Feminist Organizing for Change*.

Feminist Organizing for Change is one of the most ambitious books yet to come out of the Canadian women's movement. In a clear, accessible style, the writers attempt to outline the historical, theoretical and organizational aspects of contemporary Canadian feminism. Written from an explicitly socialist-feminist perspective, the book is certain to generate discussion both within the socialist-feminist current as well as among the broader feminist community.

Part One of *Feminist Organizing for Change* introduces some of the basic themes of the book by way of a brief history of the second wave of the women's movement in Canada. Part Two forms the book's theoretical core. Part Three, the lengthiest and most substantial section, looks at feminist organization, practice and strategy -- all areas which have been relatively neglected in previous Canadian feminist theoretical work.

Part One is not a comprehensive history of the re-emergence of feminism in the 1960s (such a history is not likely to be attempted for some time!), but an historical overview of the origins of the three main "currents" of the women's movement: institutionalized feminism (of which the National Action Committee on the Status of Women is the leading example), and the more grass roots (and less visible) currents of radical feminism and socialist feminism. The authors contend that the three currents owe much to their nineteenth-century feminist counterparts. Feminist historians have made this point about the American and English women's movements, but this is probably the first time it's been argued well for the Canadian case.

However, only one paragraph is devoted to the activities of Black women's organization in nineteenth century Canada and an even shorter paragraph sketches in the contributions of immigrant women. While it is true that "the full extent of their [Black women's] involvement has not yet been researched", the writers have by no means exhausted the existing secondary sources in Black history. For example, there is no mention of Mary Shadd Cary, educator, newspaper publisher and lawyer, who championed abolition and the rights of women. (Her life is documented in

Shadd, NC Press, 1977). Native women are not mentioned at all, despite the fact that organized opposition to the clauses in the Indian Act which discriminate against women dates back to the 1870s (to name only one struggle).

In their discussion of the women's movement since the 1960s, the writers make good use of many unpublished documents deposited in the Canadian Women's Movement Archives. They explore the history of the grassroots sectors of the Canadian women's movement which get relatively less attention in more conventional histories.

This heavy reliance on archival documents to the exclusion of other sources, most notably oral history, ultimately weakens this first section of the book, however. Much of the flavour and the passion of these years is missing. The first-person fragments in the book, describing the writers' own personal/political histories, are interesting and suggest how much richer the book would have been if they had spoken with others. They might also have avoided some historical errors. For example, the Artistic Woodwork strike took place in Toronto, not Vancouver, and the 1972 strike at Toronto Western Hospital was led by hospital workers and not by nurses.

More importantly, there are weaknesses in the historical accounts of the three currents. Half of the section on the emergence of radical feminism is devoted to Ellen Willis' analysis of the changes within *American* radical feminism, while there is no mention of *The Other Woman*, a radical feminist newspaper which existed in Toronto in the 1970s and which is amply documented in the Archives.

The overview of socialist-feminism completely neglects the history of the encounter with the Waffle or the New Democratic Party. While two of the three writers were members of revolutionary socialist organizations, there is no discussion of the complex and often difficult relationship that socialist feminists have had to the organized left. Admittedly, as the writers argue in Chapter 3, the relative weakness of the social democratic and revolutionary left in this country has meant that Canadian socialist feminists, compared to their Western European counterparts, have not been heavily preoccupied by debates about our relationship to the left. This is no reason to ignore it; the collapse of much of the organized left in the early eighties also set real limits on the political space of socialist feminists.

Similarly, while some of the key women's strikes of the late seventies and early eighties, such as Fleck and Puretex, are mentioned, the reader is given little sense of the vibrancy of working-class feminism during these years and the consequent possibilities for socialist-feminist organizing.

The tremendous impact that the mobilization of Asian, Black, Native and other women of colour is having on the contemporary women's movement is dealt with in a cursory manner (a page and a half). It is discussed, along

with "The rise of the new right", under the common heading "New Challenges" -- a very unfortunate juxtaposition, to say the least. We read that the women's movement's success will depend on our "understanding and incorporating an anti-racist position into our feminist politics", but in the end we are left with little sense of the issues and debates involved in this challenge. An analysis of the March 8th Coalition in 1986 in Toronto would provide insight into the challenge to the women's movement by Black, Asian, Native, and other women of colour.

Part Two moves from the historical to the theoretical. It offers an overview of socialist-feminist analysis and explores the obstacles to radical social change. The writers argue for an integrated vision of socialist feminism in which "neither class, gender, nor race is privileged as the primary source of oppression" but which "understands class, gender, race, and sexual orientation in a complex and contradictory relation to one another". The strength of such a theoretical approach is that it can take into account the objective differences among women while at the same time recognizing that such differences do not carry with them automatic and fixed conclusions about the possibilities for shared political work. Difference can be the focus of positive political struggle.

However, the trouble is that the authors of *Feminist Organizing for Change* write as if this unified vision of socialist feminism were virtually in place. They assert what they should problematize, since there is no satisfactory theoretical understanding of the complex interplay among class, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Contemporary socialist-feminist theory developed, in part, from a critique of the failure of traditional Marxism to account for women's oppression.

Socialist-feminism does not have an adequate theory of racism other than what it has inherited through the socialist tradition. Socialist feminists are just beginning to integrate systematically an analysis of racism into our theory and political practice. We are not berating the writers for their failure to present a theoretical breakthrough in this regard, but rather for their oversimplification of the theoretical and practical work that has yet to be done. Their reluctance to struggle directly with the issues bedevils this section of the book.

The discussion of socialist-feminist theory and the state outlines some of the complexities of women's relationship to the state. The authors oppose the right-wing position that the state's role should be limited, arguing that women need many of the services, such as daycare, that the state can provide. Despite the "criticisms of its functioning, socialist feminism does not argue for less state. Our concern is to get the state to work for women rather than against them". But surely socialist feminism has more to say about the state than whether we want more or less of it. We also need to ask what the state is fundamentally about. Can the state "work for women"? They write that "the state is not a monolith; it does respond to pressure". Fair enough; we do need an analysis of the state which is more nuanced than "Smash the state". On the other hand, we are talking about the Canadian state, not the Canadian Labour Congress. Within the existing political system, could women's demands be met by an NDP-style social democracy, or are we talking about a more revolutionary model of empowerment?

Part three, "Analyzing the Women's Movement", is an attempt to grapple with some of the key concerns of feminist organizing for change, and to present some 'conceptual tools'



The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada



Jewels Graphics/Sarita Johnson

developed to undertake this process. This is indubitably the most ambitious section of the book, and it is sure to spark debate among feminist activists. While it contains quite useful discussions of feminist organizing (for example, the authors present an excellent critique of the ideology of the women's movement, focusing on the use of the concepts, 'the personal is political' and 'sisterhood is powerful'), we have limited ourselves here to focusing on three points of concern to us. First, the authors' use of their conceptual tools; second, the place of the book in developing feminist strategy; and finally, the issue of the book's intended audience.

The authors find that the distinctions made between feminist theoretical frameworks (radical, liberal and socialist), as well as categories of experience (i.e. whether one is working or middle class, white or woman of colour, lesbian or straight) are not in themselves sufficient to articulate the differences in feminist practice. Instead of using these classifications as starting points for analysis, they identify two approaches to feminist practice, 'mainstreaming' and 'disengagement', as the place to begin to look at the politics of the women's movement. Disengagement has developed out of feminist criticism of existing social and political institutions and a desire to replace them through a view of what society could look like without women's oppression. The authors suggest that

any critique of the system can be seen as a form of disengagement...[it] is the part of feminist practice that speaks our critique of the existing society, whatever the nature of that critique might be.

Mainstreaming, in contrast: represents the part of feminist practice that attempts to engage with women around concrete issues arising directly out of their personal experience rather than out of an overall feminist agenda for social change...[it] focuses on what is, rather than on what should be...[and] acknowledges how important it is that women themselves set the agenda for change.

As the authors assert, feminist mainstreaming demonstrates that we

must engage with existing institutions and ideologies, since "change requires that these ideas be accepted and acted on by the majority of people". Both approaches are necessary to feminist practice, regardless of theoretical approach, but to be successful, feminists must maintain a balance between them. This balance must be determined by the particular issue and circumstances within which we are organizing. If we put too much emphasis on disengagement, we risk marginalization, while if we focus too much on mainstreaming, we fall prey to institutionalization.

These definitions are therefore much broader than feminist 'commonsense' understandings of the terms, which would have the practice of disengagement synonymous with separatism (and therefore some forms of radical feminism), and mainstreaming synonymous with adding equal rights for women to the status quo (like liberal feminism).

However, when they move from discussing methodology (theory) to strategy (practice), the authors often slip back into the narrower use of these terms. While they have begun the task of clarifying the problems of marginalization and institutionalization, this slippage demonstrates the complexity of negotiating this process. Our main concern with these terms is not their use as a methodology but as a strategy. How do we determine the appropriate balance between the two if we are already structurally marginalized, as we are when we organize around lesbian rights? What does a politics of disengagement look like in the context of liberal feminism? What if it is not only 'the public' which is marginalizing a group of feminists organizing around a particular issue, but other feminists? How does geographical context affect practice and strategy, given the tremendous differences between working in a large urban centre and a small community? An attempt to demonstrate how we can use these tools in our future practice and thus avoid or minimize some of the pitfalls of feminist organizing would, we think, have been a really useful contribution.

Part Three would have been strengthened had the authors presented more concrete examples as illustrations of their points. Greater use of case studies of feminist organizing, with all of their contradictions, succes-

ses and failures, might have better informed the reader how feminists have grappled with the problems of organizing, including concerns which they raise around determining the kind of organizations we want to build, internal processes most appropriate to a group's goals, and how we deal with sources of tension like unacknowledged leadership. This too would help us to develop our politics. In particular, building coalitions has had enormous impact in the development of feminist politics (particularly socialist feminist) and in shaping our future strategies. The discussion of coalition politics could have been a much fuller and richer one had women who have been active in building coalitions (for example, the March 8th Coalition, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, or the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare) been invited to contribute their experiences.

Finally, there is a real confusion of audience throughout the book, which is most pronounced in the Part Three. *Feminist Organizing for Change* is an ambitious book not only because it tries to present some of the history of the women's movement and analyze currents of feminist theory, but because it addresses this material to two audiences. It is directed to both activists engaged in the ongoing work of organizing for change and to persons new to feminist theory and practice (for example, women's studies students).

However, at times the reader hears the voice of activist speaking to activist, while at others the impression is one of teacher to student. This can be disconcerting, but the clashing of the double audience is one which the reader must simply bear with, in recognition of the authors' goal to have the book be acces-

sible to as broad an audience as possible.

This is a book which will be read quite differently by women new to or unfamiliar with feminist activism and by activists themselves. The former will read it as a factual introduction to the complex history and politics of feminism. Because of its scope and accessibility, presenting as it does complex debates in a straightforward manner, we can expect to find this book on many women's studies course lists.

The latter audience, however, may be less satisfied, remembering events differently than the authors and disagreeing on points of analysis. As well, activists are bound to point to gaps in feminist history and practice, expecting more attention to issues and events which we have been immediately involved in and/or consider to be critical developments in feminist practice in Canada.

This book is testament to the growth and complexity of our movement and difficulties presented in analyzing it. The diversity and power of the Canadian women's movement is such that no one text is enough to encompass it all. That the authors, as feminist activists, took on writing this book is no small feat. Too often, the task of recording and analyzing our practice falls to feminist academics who have not participated directly in shaping these politics, while activists, immersed in the daily activities of making change, are too busy (and exhausted) to take on the task of recording our practice.

This book is an important read for anyone participating in or interested in the politics of feminist organizing in Canada.

Thanks to IWDC for input on this article



Abortion Update: On the Hustings & On the Streets

by B. Lee

It is just under nine months since the Supreme Court threw out the old abortion law. Whether or not greater reproductive freedom for women will be born as a result is still far from clear. Anti-choice fanatics have been mobilizing to ban abortion all together. Provincial governments have either done as little as possible or have actively restricted access. And while the federal government's ludicrous multiple-choice resolution on abortion is over, the threat of a new law remains grave. All of this puts the struggle to win full access to free abortion and the full range of reproductive care still very much at the top of the women's movement's agenda.

One important step towards this goal occurred in late September with the opening of the third free-standing clinic in Toronto. Women's Choice, a feminist cooperative, established a clinic to provide abortion and related services. The cooperative stressed that it was unfortunate that they were forced to charge women for their care and called on the provincial government to immediately fund their operations. They echoed the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics' demand that the government must quickly move to establish a network of publicly funded reproductive health care clinics across the province.

However, the enemies of choice have been busier than ever. Anti-choice

organizations recently had a demonstration of 15,000 in Ottawa. Main drawing card Mother Theresa declared that women having abortions should be jailed. A few weeks later the Supreme Court heard Joe Burowski argue that the fetus should be given legal and constitutional protection. The main goal of such legal arguments, of course, has never been concern for the fetus, but rather to outlaw abortion. History shows us what would result: women would still seek abortions, but they would do so under dangerous and deadly conditions. How many would die were the anti-choice goals to be realized? Feminist lawyers representing the Legal Education and Action Fund pointed to further ominous implications of Burowski's pleas: invitro fertilization and alternative insemination could be banned or severely restricted, tests and surgical procedures could be forced on pregnant women against their will (obstetricians have proven all too willing to play the role of guardian of the fetus), and extreme state regulation of pregnant women's behaviour could be instituted. In response to these critical issues the government lawyers merely waffled.

Whatever one thinks of electoral politics and the mainstream parties, there is no doubt that abortion will be a key issue in the current federal election. The anti-choice have been deploying their considerable resources to pressure and harass candidates. The pro-choice position must be heard as well. The Na-

tional Action Committee on the Status of Women has made abortion and reproductive choice one of its main themes and is planning women's canvassing days and other public education. Other pro-choice activists will be going to meetings and telling candidates (and more importantly, the public that follow the campaigns) that there must be no new abortion law (only the NDP is against new legislation) and that the federal government must move to ensure equal access to abortion regardless of where women live or how much money they have.

Whatever the result of the election, we will still have much to do to prevent

any new law being brought back and to force both levels of government to set up the community reproductive health clinics needed to guarantee equal access to abortion.

The reproductive rights movement must still demonstrate its strength concretely. On November 19, pro-choice groups are holding a series of coordinated actions across the country. In Toronto there will be a rally at City Hall at 1:00 pm and a march to the headquarters of both the Liberal and Conservative parties (truly non-partisan, we will fight any opponents of women's reproductive autonomy).

Benefit for OCAC
David Ramsden & The Consequences
Lorraine Segato
Notre Dame
& others....
Wednesday November 30, 1988
8:00 p.m.
Lee's Palace 529 Bloor St. W.
Tickets \$9.00 & \$6.00 unemployed

Phone the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics
for tickets; 532-8193.

University of Toronto Women's Centre Letter to T.W.B.

August 3, 1988

Rebel Girls' Rag
P.O. Box 70
Station F
Toronto, Ont.

Rebel Girls' Rag,

The enclosed letter is in response to a letter we received from the Toronto Women's Bookstore last November. Their letter was in reference to the allegations made by Pauline Peters in an article she wrote for Our Lives Newspaper. The TWB letter was published in its entirety in your newspaper.

To ensure that our response reaches the same audience as did the TWB letter, we are requesting that you print it as an open letter in the next issue of your paper.
Thank You

In Sisterhood,
University of Toronto Women's Centre Collective.

July 31, 1988

Toronto Women's Bookstore
Collective:

In early November, the University of Toronto Women's Centre received the letter you sent to us and to various organizations and newspapers throughout the community. Your letter was in response to the article written by Pauline Peters which appeared in the July/September 1987 issue of Our Lives Newspaper. As a result of many collective meetings at which the Toronto Women's Bookstore and the Pauline Peters issue was the main focus of dis-

cussion, the Women's Centre collective decided to respond to the TWB letter.

The first meeting at which the TWB letter was discussed was a disaster and uncovered a very poor level of consciousness among individual collective members. The racist responses of some were bitter recognitions of the absence of anti-racist work that women of colour expected of white women but was not being done by all collective members. After the first collective meeting at which your letter was discussed and the urgent need for anti-racist education within the collective became apparent, we put much energy into learning from our mistakes, ad-

ressing our shortcomings, and growing in the process.

While like the TWB, the Women's Centre collective - and the volunteer network through which the Centre operates - is large and open in structure. The collective numbers about 25 women at present and we have about 70 active volunteers. Our collective meetings are open to all women, and as the majority of our members are students, there is considerable turnover every year and even from one meeting to the next. To maintain continuity and to build on past work is difficult.

Since we received your letter, we have been discussing the issues it raises and developing a response. Through intensive discussions in our collective meetings, our women of colour caucus, our non-women of colour group as well as in the multi-racial working committee formed, by collective decision, we have drawn up proposals both for our response to you and for improving our own process. The last nine months of discussion are evidence not of delay but of the seriousness with which the collective has treated the problems and issues raised by the publication and distribution of your letter.

Although developing an anti-racist perspective, and doing anti-racist educational, cultural and political work have been important priorities at the Women's Centre since our beginnings in the Spring of 1985, the process of dealing with your letter has taken us through painful and self-examination.

While the TWB letter was certainly a catalyst for further action, there are white women in the Women's Centre collective who, for some time, have been consciously responding to their commitments to anti-racist work. This has been evident since the establishment of the Coalition for a women's Centre, the members of which were determined to organize a centre which reflected the needs and concerns of all women and not only those of white women. Certainly white women were involved in the planning of the Women's Centre Women of Colour adoption of a policy of active anti-racism, and the establishment and use of employment equity policies at the Women's Centre relied on the participation and commitment of white women as well as women of colour in the collective. There had been an anti-racism working group in existence since December 1986. The first summer series of workshops at the Centre focussed on issues of race and racism, and the Centre continues to develop supportive working relationships with groups combatting racism, both on and off campus.

We cannot afford to be complacent. The result of having examined this issue is a deeper analysis of our own policies and processes. This includes the establishment of a second anti-racist working group. We have also addressed the procedure and structure of collective meetings in order to ensure an ongoing anti-racist discussion and we must continue working to en-

courage the participation of women of colour and to assure all women that even in our absence, our differences will be reflected. By no means is the women's Centre attempting to appear as if we have done all our work because of course, we have not. Making the Women's Centre a place for all women is a daily struggle and we try to learn from our mistakes.

We understand that you are an organization actively involved in anti-racist work; certainly you can see the need for openness to recognizing mistakes and continuing work regardless of past accomplishments. Regardless of your involvement, are we to believe that some members of the collective of the TWB are incapable of racist actions? No organization, including the TWB, is above criticism and accountability for its actions.

We at the Women's Centre feel very strongly that the issues brought forward in your letter are not simply an internal matter for the TWB. By circulating your letter in the women's community and publishing it in *Broadside* and *Rebel Girls Rag*, you have brought this issue into a public forum. Furthermore, the types of issues raised in the letter have been a cause of division throughout the women's community, here at the Women's Centre and in our own women of colour caucus. Here we have different views on the nature of our response to your letter and how best to accommodate further dialogue with Pauline Peters, the TWB and other women's organizations towards the eradication of racism in the women's community. Towards this end, this letter is in representation and access to women of colour raised in and by your letter.

The facts which have been presented in your letter for your own defence, instead of undermining Pauline Peters' allegations in *Our Lives Newspaper*, give credence to them. Your letter is extremely defensive, and you make confusing and implausible statements. For example, considering all but two members of your collective prior to Peters' resignation were white women, how could every collective member have a "personal experience of racism" to speak about? Also, while your letter states that you know there is much work still to be done, your tone and emphasis on accomplishments are signs of complacency.

You ask for acknowledgement of a "300% increase in book titles and stock items by Black women, Native women, South Asian women, Latin American women and Immigrant women". This brings the total titles of five separate groups of women of colour and immigrant women writers to "over 400". In a women's bookstore of over 7,000 titles, 400 represents only 5.7% of your total collection. This does not reflect your commitment to an equitable representation of your works by women of colour and immigrant women to those of white women.

The great under-representation of women of colour as paid staff and collective members of the TWB is also of concern. Although the women's Centre is primarily a volunteer organization, we do have some paid staff. Since discussion of your letter, we began evaluating our own hiring



This past summer, marchers protested the murder of Lester Donaldson

Photo: Julia B.

policies. We recognize that both our hiring policy and the enforcement of such, has been ineffective in terms of employment equity for women of colour. The TWB is also an employer who can be more accountable to the community and hire in such a way that the needs and demands of all women are given a voice within your structure. For the TWB to advertise in the Black community newspapers and "encourage non-white women to apply" for positions is not enough. Such passive recruitment of women of colour is vague and empty. The TWB must be seen to reflect the community it serves as well as the larger community in which it operates. Therefore, we encourage more active recruitment of women of colour.

As the TWB is "in a state of transformation" it is difficult to comprehend the collective's negative reactions, criticisms and rejection of a non-white women's proposal for further change at the bookstore. That this proposal was viewed as having "marginalized and also made invisible the previous contributions and work of the South Asian women and white working class staff members" instead of enhancing their work seems to be a disguised form of rejection. Such action undermines the stated commitment of the collective to show concrete anti-racist leadership.

Your letter suggests that these proceedings were not just a rejection of Peters' proposal but of Peters' as well. Your whole evaluation process previous to Peters' termination of her employment at the TWB is confusing. You state that she "was due for an evaluation within a certain period of time before she became permanent staff". The absence in the letter of this set period suggests to your readers that there was no such probation period in effect. Peters' evaluation in March 1987 came after five months of employment and based on your letter, appears to have been a subjective decision made as a result of her proposal submission in February.

Also confusing was the sudden establishment of conflict resolution models between co-workers which "at the time of (Peters') hiring we were preparing to set up...". In your letter there is no mention of stated co-workers complaints about Peters' work throughout an entire six month employment period. Which began in

October 1986 and extended beyond the first conflict resolution meeting in March. Surprisingly, at the second conflict resolution meeting only one month later, several concerns were suddenly raised and discussed followed by Peters' termination of employment two months later.

One of the most serious causes of concern for the Centre is that the TWB has engaged in a most dangerous and grave act of censorship in its removal of the *Our Lives Newspaper* from its shelves. As women we all know the degradation and indignities of exclusion and silencing from the general community. For Black women this oppression, as you know, is compounded by race. Therefore when Black women have devised a forum and safe space for discussion and exchange it is imperative that such a medium be encouraged, nurtured and made accessible. Equally important, it should be supported by all women. Therefore, that the TWB should see fit to curtail the distribution of this exchange by an act of censorship is disturbing and unacceptable to us. To have removed from your shelves the only Black women's newspaper in Toronto because "...it made serious and false allegations about the bookstore..." is tantamount to silencing an opposing opinion which threatens to damage the reputation of the TWB irrespective of the rights of expression which are violated in the process. Instead, points of contention raised in the July/Septem-

ber 1987 issue of *Our Lives Newspaper* should have been directly addressed and responded to through that same medium. The TWB had a responsibility to provide access to Peters' opinion and by this act of censorship that access was denied, specially to Black women. To act on your perception that this issue of *Our Lives Newspaper* "invalidated the life experiences, work and struggle of women of colour on the staff and board" by censoring the issue attempts to deny the right of women of colour to criticize and call to account other women of colour working in feminist organizations. It is a part of the responsibilities of those women of colour on the collective and board to respond to such criticisms of their work because they are both accountable to, and entitled to support from, the women of colour community in and for which they work.

We are aware that the article entitled "Anatomy of Working with White Feminist Collectives" and the ensuing postscript in *Our Lives Newspaper* had a major impact on the collective and board. We also agree that the reading of that same article at the meeting at which the collective, board, mediator, Peters and her supporters were present was used to attack the TWB and make more powerful Peters' request for an apology and compensation. We acknowledge that one reason for the TWB letter's tone and defensiveness is that the women of colour staff and board members were made invisible by that presentation in person and by the printing of that article. Both Donna Barker and Pauline Peters must accept responsibility for those actions. Donna Barker's article makes erroneous generalities, is unsupported in its presentation as a 15 year study and omits verifiable scientific data. It further leaves open the opportunity for division among women of colour and undermines and dismisses the work and contributions of these women. Certainly Barker is deserving of a response to that article that is not buried within the response to Peters' allegations. Despite all that was wrong with the article "Anatomy of Working with White Feminist Collectives" and the way it was used to attack the TWB, the decision to censor and remove from the TWB that particular issue of *Our Lives Newspaper* is still indefensible and reprehensible.

Continued on back page



Rallying Against Racism

Photo: Julia B.

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Equally disturbing is the unequal use of power by the TWB to ensure access to a wider and greater audience than that reached by Our Lives Newspaper. In choosing to mail your letter to each of the major feminist organizations and groups in Toronto, the TWB was assured that many more women read the defence than the allegations. In fact, you took grave liberties of your community access and financial resources in an attempt to undermine those allegations. Though the TWB chose not to submit its letter to Our Lives Newspaper for publication, you further polarized and caused more damage to the women's community by having your letter published instead in both Rebel Girls' Rag and Broadside, two highly circulated feminist newspapers in the city. An issue of questionable journalism is raised as both printed the TWB letter in their December 1987 issue as an open letter and therefore denied Peters an equal voice to that of the TWB. Furthermore, that Broadside should see fit to add the headline "Process and Politics" to that letter, undermining the issue of racism, is further evidence of their insensitivity with respect to issues which touch the lives of women of colour.

The TWB is an organization which benefits directly from serving the women's community. Like the Women's Centre, you must be held ac-

countable to the concerns of this community and many concerns were raised as a result of the distribution of your letter. You are certainly accountable to those which question your failure to substantiate your commitment to equal representation and access to women of colour. To have silenced your accuser does not extinguish the allegations of racism made. We at the Women's Centre feel that your letter was meant not only to provide a defence but also to publicly discredit Pauline Peters. To have abused your resources for this end is appalling and disappointing.

It is hoped that the most important result of this publicized communication is that further dialogue around the issues raised by the Pauline Peters and TWB letters is taking place within women's groups and collectives throughout the community. The Women's Centre would like to engage in discussions with Pauline Peters and the TWB about this issue and further proposes that a committee be struck to initiate discussion on holding a forum which will focus on issues central to mixed collectives like the Women's Centre, the TWB and others. The letters and responses generated have raised specific issues of racism and anti-racist work of interest to us all. It is crucial that the opportunity for further community dialogue be made a priority.

University of Toronto
Women's Centre Collective