

Rebel Girls' Rag

A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

Vol. 3, No. 4

May/June, 1989

75¢

News & Views from Toronto Socialist Feminist Action



Bearing the brunt of the Tory Budget

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Hydro Gets a Shock Solidarity on the Lines

by Joyce Nobel
CUPE Local One

The victory achieved by CUPE Local One in our six week strike against Toronto hydro is a testament to the solidarity among the membership and clear-eyed leadership. It provides an important opening for all workers engaged in collective bargaining in the city of Toronto.

First a bit of context. Toronto Hydro is a municipal corporation, responsible for the purchase and distribution of electricity to the city of Toronto. At the top is the Toronto Hydro Electric Commission, composed of four appointees from city council, two politicians and two citizens. The chairman is appointed by the province.

For several years now, workers at Toronto Hydro have been feeling the quality of working conditions deteriorate. We've watched management change long-standing practice with respect to incoming tradespeople, probationary employees and the promotion to foreperson (yes, they're all men); all issues of promotion and seniority. We've already seen how inadequate seniority rights pit workers against one another, leaving management much more room to implement its program of complete control over the workforce.

We've seen people fired for "innocent absenteeism" and staved off threats of dismissal of disabled workers. The implementation of an attendance management program has been part of an unrelenting attack on our sick plan.

A major takeaway demand on the table was the removal of foreperson from the union. This would have meant the elimination of the rights of union membership to some forty members. Having that many qualified tradespeople in management would severely hamper future bargaining strength. (Witness Bell Canada's ability to survive a four month strike with the help of the trades knowledge of their supervisory staff.) The impact of production-oriented forepersons on health and safety would be quite detrimental in view of the nature of our work. Our position of improved seniority rights for forepersons was in direct conflict with the Hydro's position. However our members clearly



saw it as fundamental to our continued ability to positively affect our workplace.

In addition to our opposition to any concessions we agreed on the necessity of moving forward on wages and working hours to take into account the reality of our lives as workers in Toronto. Our proposals for a wage increase were made to reflect the fact that because of the rising cost of living our wages have slipped backwards over the past few years. The proposal of a compressed work day would benefit Hydro because the compressed day would result in more time per day at the job site and less travelling time. The compressed work day would make life easier for our many members who commute to work from out of town.

Our strike was solid and well organized. Our slogan of "Toronto: A great place to live but I can't afford to work here" certainly struck a sympathetic chord. A very important discussion ensued in the mainstream media of the impact of Toronto's present prosperity on the average worker. If life is tough for Hydro workers it is much worse for the unorganized, the minimum wage worker, and unemployed workers to name but a few. It is our hope that our struggle has opened doors for other workers to demand that their employers respond to the negative impact of the economy on the real value of wages.

As a result of our strike we achieved a wage settlement of 14%

compounded over two years. This sounds impressive compared with recent wage settlements in other bargaining, it is however, very close to the cost of living.

On the issue of a shorter work day we have agreed to begin work half an hour earlier for the outside workers and take just half an hour unpaid lunch. Inside workers on a forty hour work week also have the option of working these hours.

The issue of promotion to forepersons is addressed in a letter of intent attached to the collective agreement. It stipulates that all relief foreperson spend 600 hours in a relief capacity plus 120 hours of training before being eligible for promotion to foreperson. The promotion to relief is strictly by seniority.

As well as a positive solution to these major issues various gains were made in the quality of life issues including improved healthcare benefits, improved maternity leave, a new

paternity leave provision as well as an allowance of leave for parental duties!

While the agreement reached was obviously not everything we hoped for it is an impressive gain and we went back to work with our heads held high.

TSFA Postscript

This strike is an important milestone in current labour struggles. At a time when the labour movement is under increasing attack, CUPE Local One took the offensive, challenging management and building strong strike solidarity. TSFA salutes this initiative and views it as a model for other workers in their contract struggles with management.



Photo: Karen Chapelle

On April 19, marchers from across Ontario arrived at Queen's Park to demand government action against poverty and the adoption of the SARC recommendations. Organized by the Campaign Against Poverty, the rally condemned the Liberal Government's stall tactics on social assistance reform.

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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 in different constituencies.

We welcome new members. For more information, phone Debi at 962-8242.

This issue was put together by: Helen Armstrong, Susan Beaver, Laurie Bell, Debi Brock, Julia B., Karen Chapelle, Leah Darke, Carolyn Egan, Nancy Farmer, Mary Gellatly, Shelly Gordon, Miriam Jones, B. Lee, Gillian Morton, Jocelyn Piercy, Cindy Ripley, Jennifer Stephen, Vicki Van Wagner, Cynthia Wright.

Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the Toronto Socialist Feminist Action, but those of the author.

Editorial

Fight the Tory Agenda

After the federal election the Tory government showed its contempt for women by promising to bring in a new abortion law. It has now revealed its economic agenda, and it means real hardship for the vast majority of people in this country. Our reproductive freedom, our right to services, and our economic security are all under attack. We have outlined in past issues of *Rebel Girls' Rag* the effects of a new abortion law on working class women, rural women and women of colour. The new budget will make every day living even harder and will take an estimated \$1,700 yearly from the average household. There will be severe cutbacks in health, daycare, education, unemployment insurance, international development, and a dismantling of VIA Rail, which will result in significant layoffs. Transfer payments to the provinces for health and education will be cut by 200 million dollars. The Conference Committee of Canada is estimating that 97,000 jobs will be lost.

Business is calling the shots, and corporate taxes are continuing to fall. The poor and the working class, which includes the majority of women, Native people, and people of colour will bear the brunt of this attack. Hard fought gains are being eroded in every area.

Even before the budget was announced we were given a taste of what was to come. The federal government showed its callousness and total contempt for the needs of people by its

racist cutbacks of funding for Native students. The Native community has shown the way forward by staging demonstrations and sit-ins across the country. This resistance has to be broadened. It must be taken up by the working class which has the power to withdraw its labour power, and bring the government to a stand still! It must be fought by a broad coalition including the women's movement, visible minority communities, lesbian and gay organizations, and every sector that is

affected by these attacks. We must build a strong movement that will fight these cutbacks, and the introduction of any new abortion law. The pro-choice movement will be organizing with its allies a cross country protest against the recriminalization of abortion in the fall. Other sectors must also begin organizing grass roots opposition within their communities, and work together to build a broad based movement with the collective strength to stop these vicious attacks.



The Big NAC Attack

by Jennifer Stephen
& Miriam Jones

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 and important role in communicating, and at times co-ordinating, the demands of various currents in Canadian feminism and feminist organizations to the mainstream. In structure, NAC is a massive umbrella organization with a membership of 576 separate groups: this represents a total of 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.

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.

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 the Tory attack on NAC funding and the massive growth of the organization and complexity of our political differences, 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. TSFA 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.

At the same time, NAC and women's organizations across this country are under attack from the Tory Government. The proposed slashing of NAC's budget by 50% over the next three years uncovers the Tory agenda to role back the gains we have made. NAC must take a leadership role in joining with with labour, visible minority communities, lesbian and gay organizations and the pro-choice movement to build a broad coalition to fight the federal cutbacks.



What is a rebel Girl?

by Jennifer Stephen

We are a socialist feminist group which works on the principle that mass action is our most effective tool for radical social 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.

As socialist feminists we are committed to developing an analysis which takes into account multiple sites of oppression. We believe that the class structure maintains racism, sexism and heterosexism and must be overturned before they can finally be eradicated. But they must also be specifically struggled against as we fight together with the working class and other oppressed groups for a socialist society. Class exploitation and oppression based on race, gender and sexuality are integrated, and fighting them requires an integrated analysis.

TSFA is not a single issue group. As a multi-issue activist organization, TSFA provides a solid base from within which members work in varying areas of practice. This is perhaps one of TSFA's strongest features which has helped to maintain the group over the past decade. While we believe that it is critical to our work to develop socialist feminist theory, it is our political practice which guides strategic and theoretical discussion.

Our goal is to be involved in building a mass movement of women with the broad participation and leadership of working class women and women of colour. Over the past 11 years, TSFA has participated in widening the social and political base of the women's movement. TSFA has participated in the formation of broad-based coalitions, including the March 8 Coalition and the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics.

We have worked closely with working class feminists in trade unions, to forge strong alliances and to encourage trade union activists to take up an analysis and understanding of gender oppression. The major involvement of trade union women in the March 8th 1985 Coalition demonstrates the importance of trade union participation and commitment to the women's movement overall.

In TSFA we have recognized that it is essential that we take up an anti-racist politic and work to implement that politic in our practice. We participated in the 1986 March 8th Coalition, which was the first time the women's movement in Toronto was forced to respond to the reality that racism is one of the greatest barriers to achieving full unity among women. It is crucial that we as socialist feminists incorporate a systematic analysis of racism into our

politics. That is why TSFA supported the Albert Johnson Committee and continues now to support the Justice for Wade Lawson Committee and the Black Action Defense Committee.

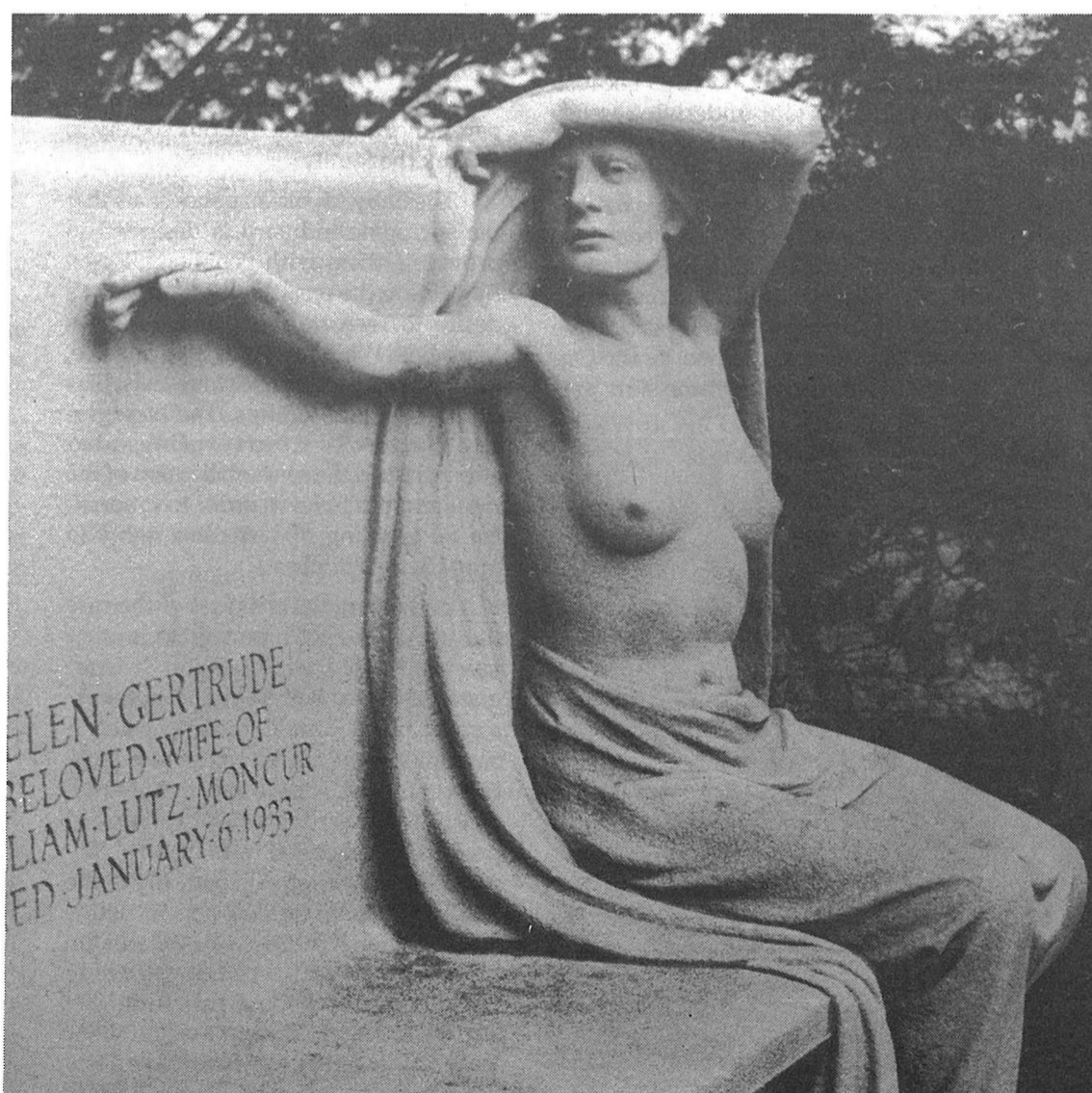
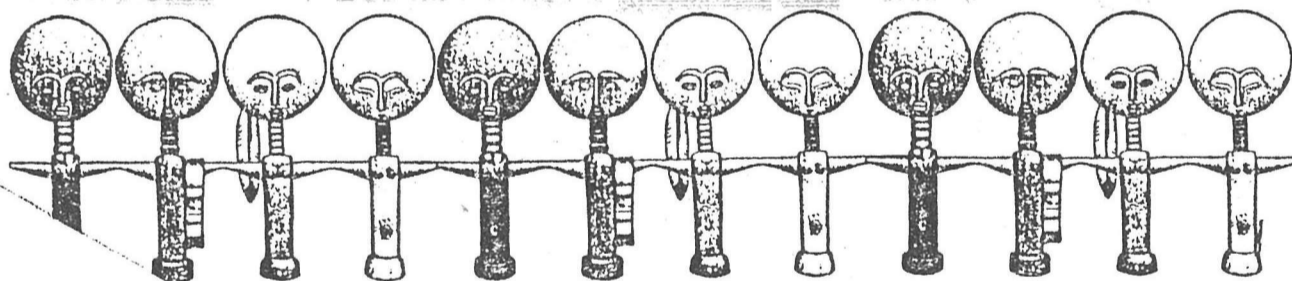
Throughout its history, TSFA has always sought to encourage our allies to take up a socialist feminist perspective. Trade union support in the struggle for reproductive rights, specifically to fight Operation Rescue, is indicative of TSFA's efforts to forge and maintain that alliance.

Working in coalition is based on the understanding that we are fighting against linked oppressions, and that no one oppression is privileged above another. The anti-choice fanatics, for example, are as racist as they are heterosexist. Their interests are, in turn, the same as those of the National Citizens Coalition. It is only by linking the working class struggle with lesbian and gay organizations, working with the disabled and people of colour as we do in the Alliance for Employment Equity, for example, that we can build a mass movement capable of achieving fundamental change.

We recognize the importance of winning key demands. Our interventions and participation in the National Action Committee on the Status of Women provide a concrete example of

TSFA's strategic decision to work within a mainstream organization around a limited agenda. For example, we saw the potential to advance the fight against sexual regulation, supporting autonomous sex trade workers' organizations in their demand for the decriminalization of prostitution, to fight against state movement toward forced HIV testing and quarantining for AIDS, and to mobilize for full access to free abortion. While NAC is a liberal feminist organization, it remains an important site for connecting with other women's organizations, for doing educative work, putting forward a socialist feminist analysis and strategy, and building a bi-national base of support for the decriminalization of prostitution and against the implementation of a new abortion law.

Our limited energies continue to go toward extra-parliamentary activities which, we believe are more consistent with the principles of mass action and coalition politics. We have an important function as socialist feminists in helping to build the popular movements in which we are active, and put forward a mass action strategy whether it is in the struggle for reproductive rights, anti-imperialist solidarity, trade unions, or the women's movement. Working together as socialist feminists in TSFA provides a base for our own political development and for the development of socialist feminism in this city. Our primary objective is to participate in building a mass movement of women which shares an anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, class perspective and includes the broad participation and leadership of disabled women, working class women, Black, Asian, Native and other Women of Colour.



Reproductive Technologies

Part 2 of 2 Part Series

by Gillian Morton, Bob Lee & Vicki Van Wagner

This is the second part of an edited transcript of the speech given at the TSFA forum held January 24.

In Vitro Fertilization

IVF is probably one of the most high tech and high profile of the NRTs. Such high tech practices are very prestigious and profitable for doctors to engage in. Profit research has been carried out at universities, with doctors becoming part owners of companies and attempting to patent both procedures and equipment (as in the case of surrogate embryo transfer). Such patenting would restrict the research which would allow us to better evaluate the technology.

The motives of the pharmaceutical and medical institutions aside, the key point to make about IVF is how few women have access to it, and for how few women it works. The procedure itself can help only a small percentage of infertile women (mostly women with blocked fallopian tubes, although it may also be used when men with low sperm counts reject AID).

A few facts: as of this time last year Canada has 12 IVF clinics with three more scheduled to open. Applicants must be able to foot a bill of approximately 1500 dollars for each attempt. This high cost is only one factor restricting access. Applicants are carefully screened; mostly younger, married or commonlaw couples "deemed stable" are accepted. That is, those who can afford it, who conform to the heterosexual monogamous family ideal, and who have the greatest chance of success (and the least chance of screwing up statistics) are the applicants accepted for IVF.

The success rate of IVF is low. As of last year in Canada 365 babies had been born with three thousand five hundred women attempting to conceive. Keep in mind that more than 240,000 couples in Canada suffer from infertility. The cost of these programmes is incredibly high: Ontario has invested at least 7 million dollars as of December '88. To put this in context about 2.5 million dollars go annually to Ontario women's health centres. Costs are estimated at ap-

proximately 34,000 dollars per baby. So unequal access, high costs, and a low success rate are factors which must frame our discussion of IVF and women's experiences in the clinics.

Little information is given to women in IVF clinics; without getting into technical details, the procedures involved are very intrusive and risky (for a good discussion of this, see Healthsharing, Fall 1985). Whether women are making informed decisions remains a question. Also, IVF pregnancies are highly regulated. Often women cannot continue to work while they attend a clinic, and therefore the focus of their lives becomes successful conception and carrying to term. Because they are given so little information about success rates and little supportive counselling, they experience the failure to conceive as a personal failure.

The possible complications are numerous: IVF produces four times the number of stillbirths that regular births do; multiple births are common; studies in Australia record two times the number of congenital malformations, 25% are miscarriages, 5% are tubal pregnancies, and 43% are caesarean section deliveries (C sections are thought to better the chances of a healthy birth).

Beyond the hardships for women, it is important to note that the IVF technology reflects an emphasis on genetic ties, ie. the importance of having a biologically related child, and the experience of pregnancy. The notion of a "natural bond" seems somewhat ironic here, given the amount of technological intervention required in the supposedly "natural" process of conception and birth. Socialist feminists need to unpack this insistent desire to reproduce the biologically related nuclear family.

Surrogate Mothers

Surrogate motherhood is important for socialist feminists because of the questions it raises about motherhood and the family. Answering these questions is difficult, perhaps because again the important underlying issues are obscured. Although surrogacy is the most widely publicized of the 'new reproductive technologies', it is neither new nor technological. It is a social arrangement which highlights and challenges many of the assumptions of our society (if surrogacy is a reproductive technology, as it is defined by the Ontario Law Reform Commission and

most "experts", then should it not receive the same provincial funding and OHIP coverage that other NRTs such as IVF receive?). Surrogacy is defined as the practice of having a child for someone else, with or without financial support. Although this is not new, and in some cultures is not uncommon, what is new is the possibility of a 'surrogate industry'.

The dramatic potential of a surrogate industry to oppress women has been highlighted by many feminist writers. And yet the practice of surrogacy is not inherently oppressive. In fact, like most of the practices and technologies being discussed, if defined by women, surrogacy could help women.

It is important for socialist feminists to participate in the debate about surrogacy for two reasons: (1) fundamental questions about the social relations of reproduction are being raised, and (2) the feminist position in the debate to date has been characterized by essentialist assumptions which reinforce the idea of the natural and sacred mother child bond.

The challenging questions surrogacy raises include: What makes a person a parent? What is a mother? What is a father? What is the nature of the relationship between a genetic parent and a genetic child? How do we value genetic ties versus social ties? What is the relationship of a pregnant woman to the fetus growing in her body? What rights does she have in relation to this child once it is born? Is it OK to pay women for "reproductive labour"? What constitutes baby selling? Are we allowing human life to be commodified?

All of these questions are made more difficult by the context of our society which basically treats children as the private property of parents and considers women who give away their babies to be bad mothers. There are no easy answers to these questions; socialist feminists must continue to emphasize the importance of the social rather than the biological nature of parenting, and challenge our society to rethink the family.

The Baby M case has shown us that the surrogate industry is designed to provide fathers with genetic children. By valuing the wealthy William Stern's desire to recreate over working class Mary Beth Whitehead's urge to nurture, this case revealed classist and sexist bias in custody proceedings. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruling also strengthened the romanticization of the mother-child bond in order to rationalize its granting of visitation rights to Mary Beth Whitehead.

In the feminist critiques of the case the use of the term surrogate mother has been called into question. It is argued that Mary Beth Whitehead, for example, is a "real" mother, not a surrogate mother, because she gave birth to a child. Are women mothers because they go through the physiological process of pregnancy and labour? Because they are related genetically to the embryo? Again, attempting to define "real mothers" in this way focuses on biological ties and precludes stressing the importance of social parenting.

By seeing in surrogate motherhood only an inherently exploitative practice,

ie. the nightmare of Atwood's reproductive handmaids, or the breeders of Dworkin or Gena Corea's mother machine, feminists have neglected to critique the complexities of surrogacy as a social arrangement.

Looking at the working conditions of surrogate mothers, we find a wage which equals less \$ 1.50 per hour (based on the average fee of \$ 10,000). Basic rights to make choices about daily life and medical care are signed away in contractual arrangements which ensure women undergo prenatal diagnostic techniques to determine if the fetus is normal, forced abortion if abnormalities are detected and a C-section to ensure a baby undamaged by the process of labour. Robbing women who work as surrogate mothers of their basic rights is endorsed by the recommendations of the Ontario Law Reform which seeks to further regulate the behaviour of the surrogate and privileges the protection of the adoptive parents, all in the name of the child's best interests.

What is being sold in the surrogate arrangement? Should we argue that women should not be allowed to be paid for the 'sacred' work of pregnancy and labour? It might be more useful to argue that women must control the conditions of surrogacy, that a contract cannot force women to give up basic human rights or to give up custody rights to a child which she has carried and given birth to.



Women have always made and are still making surrogacy arrangements between themselves, in their own interests. In other cultures, the practice of one woman bearing a child for another is not unusual. It is important that our reactions to surrogate motherhood not reinforce ideas about individual ownership of children or natural motherhood or women as inevitable victims. Surrogacy can and does exist as a cooperative arrangement which gives women greater control over reproduction.

It is important to look beyond the dramatic reactions to surrogate motherhood. Michelle Stanworth points out that underneath fears about commercialization can lie the fear of a world where the mother-child bond is transient or a moral panic about the disintegration of the family. In her view the moralism of much of the debate about surrogacy is reminiscent of the prostitution debates of the early 1900s.

While we would oppose the exploitation of women working as surrogate mothers, it is very important to challenge a "knee jerk" reaction to the commercialization of surrogacy. We reject criticisms of commercialization based on the resistance to bringing the "natural" into the market place, or on the belief that women's biological capacity (considered important because it is essential to our identity as



and Social Arrangements

women and one of the few areas where we maintain some autonomy) should not be exploited. These ideas work to reinforce traditional notions of "the natural" and easily become prescriptive ideals of motherhood/womanhood and are frequently appropriated by the anti-woman right wing for their own purposes.

Our discussions did not lead to firm and specific conclusions, although we ended by deciding that surrogacy should not be outlawed or criminalized and that contracts should not be enforceable, to help ensure that women could potentially control the process for their own ends. The danger of state regulation of surrogacy in the name of protecting women would easily justify more extensive restrictions on women; whether women are able to arrange surrogacy in their own interests depends on challenging such official regulation of reproduction.

Socialist feminists argue that it is not surrogacy itself that oppresses women but the social, political, economic conditions that could create a surrogate industry where lawyers and fathers and wealthy women could benefit from exploiting poor women.

The debate about surrogacy underlines the need to continue to raise issues about the nature of the family and the need to work towards developing a community rather than an individual responsibility for children. We must acknowledge the power and complexity of many people's desire to have their "own" kids, while working to change the society that has constructed the primacy of genetic ties.

Conclusions

Where do the reproductive technologies fit within the politics of the reproductive rights movement? What would a socialist feminist analysis and politics on reproductive technology look like? One difficulty is that this issue does not fall neatly within our usual political framework: it is not at all clear where the basis and direction for mass action is; how we build alliances; and what our demands and campaigns are. Socialist feminists have prioritized organizing against the state -- but what is the clear strategic focus here? We know that state regulation of women's reproduction is pervasive and vital to the overall maintenance of gender, class and race oppression and reproductive technology is going to be tightly regulated within this context. But it has also been our experience that most facets of the regulation of women's reproduction are not visible and immediate enough to build large campaigns around. For example, the focus of abortion organizing was inadequate and inequitable access and a corresponding set of demands on the state; a campaign to wrest control of service provision from doctors would have lacked the strategic focus of the demand for abortion clinics. Similarly, who is the constituency to organize? A key difficulty here is the definition of infertility as the personal/private problems of women and the dominant cultural representation of infertile women as desperate and pitiable.

Whatever these difficulties, the issues can't be ignored. We cannot aban-

don these complex questions, letting anti-feminist medical or legal experts or liberal and radical feminists define the questions and issues. It is crucial to develop a socialist feminist analytical framework to set these issues within the context of broader reproductive rights struggles.

So how do we develop such a framework? First of all, we must not see reproductive technologies in isolation. They are not solely a result of a power mad male expert conspiracy, the 'pharmacrats'. We must keep reproductive technology in its perspective as one - but not necessarily the most important - among many forces and trends shaping the way reproduction is socially organized. Overemphasizing the significance and impact of the high tech practices -- seeing them as symptomatic of all the horrors done to women as many cultural feminists do - can deflect attention from other issues. We must include a consideration of the politics of health care in general; the legal and administrative framework for governing childrearing, sexuality and reproduction; and the varied material circumstances in which women reproduce.

Seeing reproductive technology in context also means emphasizing the inordinate expenditure on small numbers of women and babies affected by higher tech practices in contrast to the higher infant mortality among poorer women and women of colour, coerced sterilization, and women forced into 'choosing' abortion because of their intolerable social and economic circumstances. Our goal here is not to criticize the more privileged women who are seeking fertility help, but to condemn the racist, sexist capitalist system that constrains all women's choices so greatly. This type of analytical framework highlights the political nature of state expenditure on reproductive health care. We must point to the underlying basis of problems that reproductive technology is supposed to correct -- the widespread causes of infertility.

From our examination of specific techniques and social arrangements we see two basic goals of a socialist feminist politics around reproductive technology. First of all, we need to determine what techniques, implementation and organization could enhance women's control over reproduction and how we can maximize the potential benefits for the greatest number of women. At the same time, we must identify the practices that will increase medical and state control of women and minimize their adverse effects.

This problem is a complex one; how can we seize the opportunities presented by some new technologies such as the new abortion pill without allowing increased medical control? How can we use debate and organizing to make visible the real underlying concerns and issues -- eg. that the uproar around surrogacy is caused by its exposure of the fragile construction of mothering and parental love and children. How do we integrate struggle around particular facets of reproductive technology with the broader fight for reproductive rights? How do we transform the underlying social relations of reproduction?

One of the great strengths of socialist feminism is that we have inherited -- and deepened -- marxist political economy analysis allowing us to understand the balance of political forces around reproductive technology and reproductive rights in general. We start by asking who are the groups making the key decisions regarding research, funding, implementation, etc and how they function to maintain and reproduce class, race and gender oppression? Within what institutional/organizational settings is this taking place? We look to a broad constellation of interests, institutions and forces: or-



ganized medicine; the pharmaceutical industry, hospitals, universities and research institutions; lawyers and other "experts"; anti-feminists and regulation by the funding and policy-making framework of the state. A strong analysis of the state is particularly vital to understanding the potential development of reproductive technology, but we must be careful not to get simplistic or deterministic here. The state does not directly control the development of reproductive technologies or their implications for women. We must begin to unpack the interrelation of state and medical institutions and interests.

Besides understanding the forces opposed to women's reproductive autonomy, we must figure out who our allies are. These must be other feminists, brought together around issues of control and empowerment and other reproductive rights struggles, fighting for woman-centred/controlled reproductive care. We share the goal of preventive, community-based care.

With NRTs, we can identify long-term implications, but not so easily see the common basis or focus for immediate mobilization -- picture us trying to build a demonstration around prenatal testing, let alone around gamete intrafallopian transfer.

So we should identify the potential bases of common understanding and struggle. What are the bridging/unifying themes, demands and slogans that can pull together different groups and campaigns within the reproductive rights movements and different currents of feminism?

One very obvious unifying theme is the feminist notion of *choice*: both the informed choice over all care fought for by midwives and the radical health movement and the broader reproductive rights goals of not just individual

choices, but all the material conditions needed for every woman to really be able to make choices freely about her reproduction.

A second point of unity can be the question of equal access. Whatever our analysis of the dangers/benefits of reproductive technology and how women are to control its use to their own ends, how can we ensure that whatever benefits won are available to all women? This question of equal access has not really been heard in many feminist critiques to date. Cultural feminists tend to cast all women as victims, without paying enough attention

to the differences between women on the basis of race and class.

What would be needed to ensure full and equal access to reproductive technology? All care would have to be free and publicly funded, with no privatization of facilities and treatment. Care would have to be decentralized beyond the teaching hospitals in the major cities. There must be a full range of counselling and support services and would have to be available in all the diverse languages women need.

Demands on the state for adequate funding of whatever reproductive health care women need can provide a mobilizing focus and can link reproductive technology issues to other struggles within the reproductive rights movement.

The theme of *control/empowerment* is another unifying goal, not just to challenge male/medical/state control of reproduction, but to win the conditions and social changes necessary to ensure reproductive self-determination for individual women.

Such themes contrast sharply to the goals and interests now shaping the development of reproductive technology such as professional prestige and rivalry to the devaluation of women's experience and judgement. More importantly, it allows us to develop a sense of how these technologies, within what social and institutional arrangements, could be progressive.

As a final word, we must remember to see struggles around the politics and implementation of reproductive technology as part of the movement towards the sexual and reproductive freedom for all women. This implies not just a restructuring of health care and the social relations of reproduction, but a revolutionary transformation of society as a whole.

Ten Years & More:

Women & the Labour Movement in Ontario

by Sue Genge

It is now over ten years since women began organizing directly around women's issues in the labour movement in Ontario. A core organizing vehicle for much of this activity was and is the Ontario Federation of Labour Women's Committee, although women unionists have organized in their individual unions as well.

Women have organized on three fronts over this period -- although there wasn't a clear strategic plan to organize this way. All of the efforts are inter-related, but can be broken down into policy development, bargaining issues, and leadership.

Policy

Historically, the labour movement has a mixed record on women's issues. On the one hand, there have been policies in support of equal pay for equal work, and equal pay for work of equal value since the late 1900's -- the Toronto Labour Council for example. Such progressive stands have been accompanied by rather less progressive policies in relation to women -- support for the family wage or for family allowances, so that women could stay home (where "they belong"), and look after the children. There have also been policies opposing immigration, and citizenship rights for Chinese railway workers -- to cite only a couple of examples.

The fight in the late 70's and early 80's was to clarify and make consistent the labour movement's support for progressive economic and social policies which concerned women, and to codify a clear policy in support of women's right to work. Policies were

adopted by many unions and by the labour centrals in support of equal pay for work of equal value, equal job opportunities, and affirmative action. More strictly "feminist" issues were also debated and positive stands adopted. For example, childcare as a social right, protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and freedom of choice on abortion.

I want to focus briefly on two of these issues to illustrate the nature of the battles which have been waged and the problems which have existed and which in some cases continue to exist. The issues are choice and affirmative action.

I think the fight for labour support for a pro-choice position has been the major struggle, and the strongest victory for women. The arguments on this issue have raised all the major questions relating to women's role and proper place in society. The pro-choice movement raises the question of women's right to control our own bodies, which relates to women's right to work, and workers' right to adequate social programmes, childcare, housing, and an end to racist policies. All of which are necessary in order that working women can make the decision to have children in the knowledge that they will be able to provide them with a decent life. The anti-choice arguments, apart from the "immorality" charges have raised a different conception of the role of the union movement: charges that the issue is divisive and not a union issue are based on an understanding that the role of unions is strictly economic. The pro-choice forces have based their political arguments on a social unionism footing. Although women unionists are not

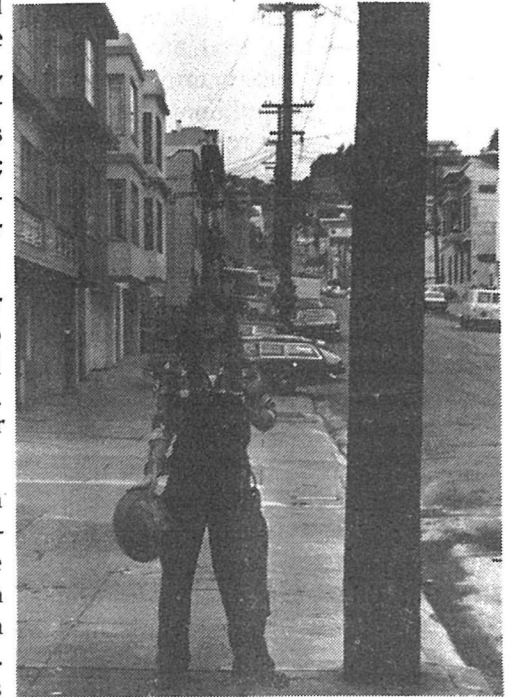
alone in furthering a social role for the union movement, it has been women's issues by and large which have pushed the union movement to organize more directly for social change. For example, in my memory, the first move to working with other community groups was around the daycare issue in the late 70's; now it is standard for the labour movement to organize campaigns with other social forces.

So, the choice debate in the labour movement raised questions relating to women's role in society generally and to the role of the union movement itself. In both cases, the response of the labour movement was extremely positive.

The debates within the union movement on the question of affirmative action have been more problematic. On the one hand, women took up the fight for affirmative action during the recession of the early 80's. The focus of the campaign was women's right to work and access to jobs. The campaign took on the old notion that men were the bread-winners, and women were a reserve army of labour, working for pin money and able to be shunted in and out of the labour force to make room for male workers. It was an important campaign because women compelled the labour movement to take an aggressive position vis-a-vis the recession. Not only was the labour movement saying "no concessions" and no going backwards, the affirmative action campaign was a positive demand for improvement. In my reading of labour history and labour response to recessionary times, this response was extremely unusual and positive.

On the other hand, there was a

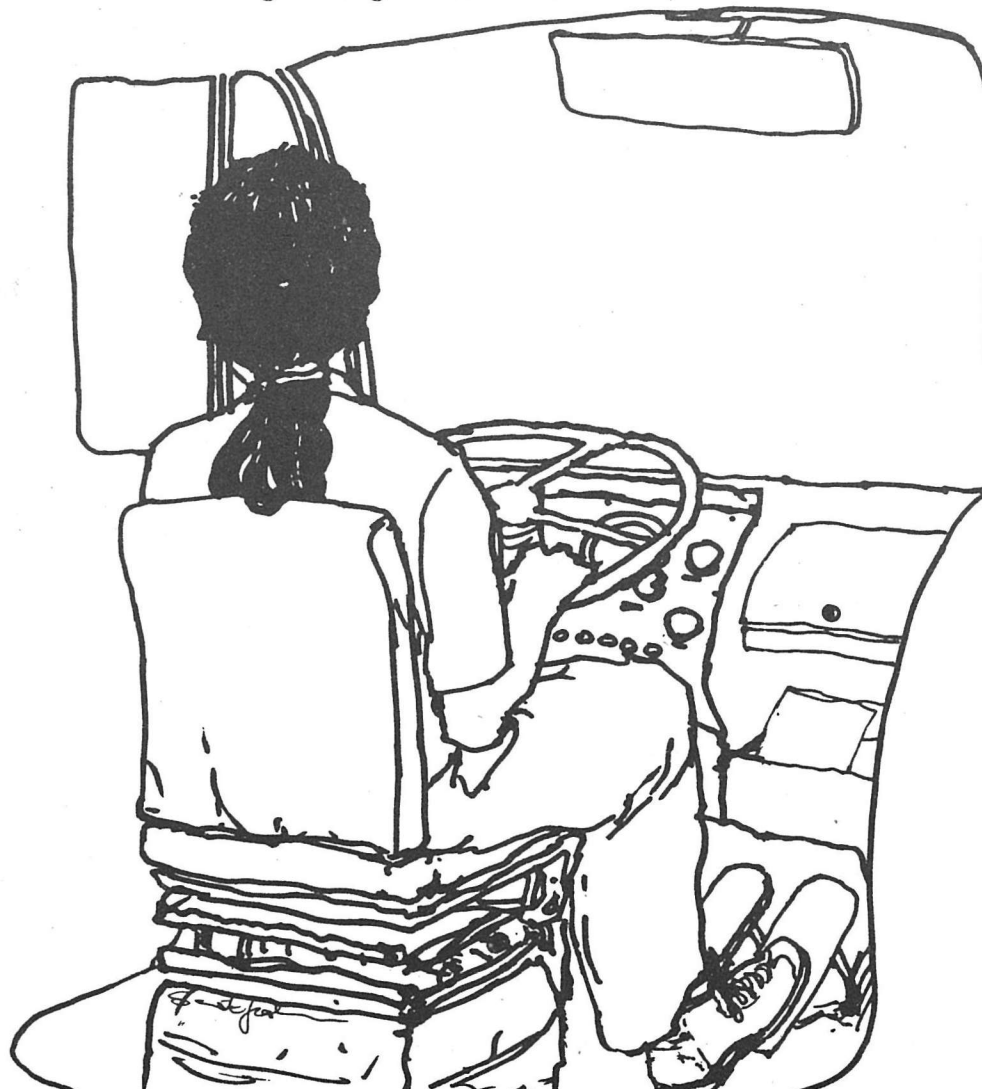
Photos by Kathleen Higuera/Jewels Graphics



serious negative aspect to the affirmative action campaign of the early 80's which continues to be felt today. The affirmative action campaign focused exclusively on "women" -- which has to be read "white women". I wish I could say that this focus was an oversight -- but it wasn't, it was a conscious decision to refer only to women as a 'target group' (this term wasn't used at the time). A reason for the focus, was the political context at the time within the labour movement. Women's issues were not yet wholly integrated into the policies of the movement -- accusations were still regularly levelled that women's issues were divisive and counter-productive. Another line of the argument which women unionists often faced was that women's issues were like any other "human rights" issue and should not be specifically addressed. This was an attempt to undermine the fight against gender oppression. While the need to integrate issues makes sense now, at the time it was, and was seen as, an attempt to bury women's issues in the old and fairly moribund "human rights" committees.

Be this as it may, I would argue now that we made a serious mistake which continues to be a problem in organizing among women in the labour movement. We didn't specifically address the other constituencies which also required affirmative action. Politically, a separation has developed between "women's" issues and "minority workers" issues which is problematic since a great many women workers are minorities and a great many minority workers are women. This problem can be seen at the level of the OFL for example. So while the OFL adopted major policy papers against racism in 1984 and 1986, and a major policy paper on women in 1988 -- the issues have not been completely integrated. The women's paper at the last OFL convention, did integrate the concerns of minority women into the major planks for the paper -- choice, childcare, and

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pay equity. However, the major concern of women of colour -- employment equity -- was not, as it should have been, the fourth major plank in the policy paper. I will return to this question a bit later when I talk about current organizing.

Bargaining

While policy debates have been a major focus and have resulted in major successes for women, it is more difficult to document the changes which have occurred at the collective bargaining level. We know that issues such as paid maternity leave, language prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, race, ethnic and national origin, parental leave, childcare at the workplace or childcare stipends, and equal pay have all been on the bargaining table and have been negotiated in some places. But, we also know that we have not been as successful as we

would have liked on this level of organizing. A major impetus for the unions to fight for pay equity legislation in Ontario and for legislated, mandatory employment equity has been the failure of unions to bargain and win these issues at the table. The reasons for the failure are not solely the unions' responsibility of course. The main problem has been employer intransigence -- I am reminded of the equal pay strike by school board workers in 1986, when 200 men went out to support 20 women and still did not completely close the gap. More often, unfortunately, equal pay or employment equity issues are among the first to be dropped during bargaining. This brings us to the question of leadership.

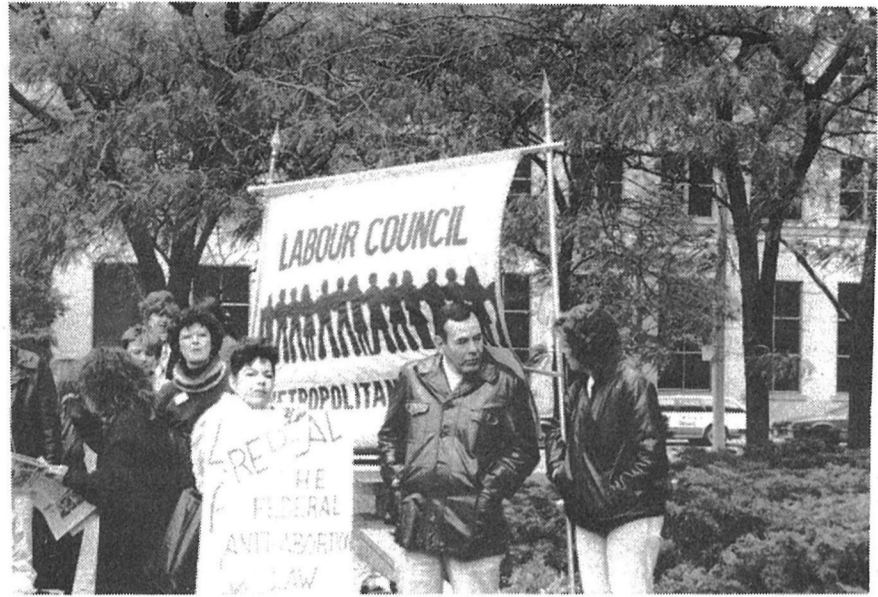
Leadership

Getting more women into leadership positions has been the third focus

of women's organizing. The prominent changes at the level of the CLC and OFL are well known. Both have established a certain number of affirmative action positions -- the OFL also has affirmative action positions for visible minorities and "the left". However, there is a danger that these targets may become ceilings -- there are no more women than there were five years ago. And while the CLC has its first woman president and the OFL its first woman Secretary-Treasurer -- both important changes -- no major union in Canada currently has a woman president.

At the local level, as is the case with collective bargaining developments, the changes are more difficult to document. Data from CUPE indicates that more women are assuming leadership positions on executives, bargaining committees and regional committees. Certainly, women's participation at internal union schools, conferences and courses is on the increase, as is the number of women at union policy conventions. At my first union conventions about fifteen years ago, only about 5% of the delegates were women and only two or three women would speak during the course of convention. At the 1988 OFL convention by contrast, about 40% of the delegates were women and they spoke on all the issues debated. This is a major change. In the last few years, women who did speak would speak on women's issues and the men spoke on everything else. So, this convention would indicate that women are more integrated into all the major campaigns of the labour movement; the other positive development is to see the number of men and male leaders speaking in support of women's issues.

An overall assessment of the gains for women unionists and women workers generally would have to be positive. There is of course, much more to be done...but, that's life in an



capitalist world.

Current Challenges

The Canadian labour movement has spent the last year and a half in pitched battle against the Conservative's free trade deal with the United States. Women unionists played key roles in this fight both in the general campaign and in specific organizing among women workers. The major political event of the last year was the loss of this battle. Generally, like all progressive sectors in the labour movement, women activists are in a state of frustration, demoralization and confusion resulting from the failure of the free trade campaign.

While it is not clear that the labour movement has yet developed a full response to life after free trade, it is clear that the beginnings of a response are in the works. The preliminary steps were taken at the OFL convention last fall -- the basis of the response is "the struggle continues". While this is obviously not a detailed strategy to fighting back, it does lay the basis for the development of fight-back campaigns.

As well, the response of the women's movement within the unions and beyond is not very precise. What is clear is that we are not prepared to adopt a defensive strategy. Rather, in all the major campaigns, positive and progressive demands continue to be raised. The public face of these campaigns has been positive and assertive: no new abortion law, extend Ontario's pay equity legislation to cover the one million women excluded by the current legislation, implement mandatory employment equity programmes.

Still, much more discussion and organizing needs to be done within the labour women's movement and within the women's movement generally to prepare an adequate fight-back strategy.

There are several positive developments within the labour movement which are leading the way towards this strategy. The first and most significant is the development of a campaign by visible minority women. There have been several recent successes: for the first time the CUPE National Women's Conference focused on issues raised by

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"Choice" Actions

The pro-choice movement will be organizing cross country rallies, demonstrations and public meetings in the fall to protest the introduction of a new abortion law. The Canadian Abortion Rights Action League has put out the call, and activist organizations from British Columbia, the prairies, Ontario, Québec and the Maritimes will be organizing actions in their local areas. The labour movement and the broader women's movement through organizations, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, are being asked to actively support this initiative, and make clear to the federal and provincial governments that they must provide full access to free abortion in every community across this country.

On April 9th, 100 Canadians joined over 600,000 Americans in Washington D.C., demanding that the U.S. Supreme Court uphold the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision, which legalized abortion in the United States. If the court rules in favour of a Missouri law, in Webster vs. Reproductive Services, it would allow each individual state to determine

whether abortion would be allowable, and this would have a devastating effect on American women's right to abortion. The demonstration was one of the largest mobilizations ever to take place in Washington, and has provided a real momentum to the women's movement. This momentum must be built on, and the mobilization broadened. In both the U.S. and Canada we must continue the fight to ensure that working class women, young women, and women of colour have both the legal right to abortion, and full and free access in our own languages and our own communities.

In Toronto join the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics on Saturday, May 27th at the Morgentaler Clinic at 85 Harbord Street for a rally and a march to Campaign Life Headquarters. There will be speakers from labour, the anti-racist movement, the anti-poverty movement and Aids Action Now, demanding *No New Abortion Law*, *Stop Operation Rescue* and *Full Funding for Abortion Clinics*. Contact OCAC at 969-8463.

DON'T LOSE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Saturday May 27, 1989 at 12 Noon
Rally at the Morgentaler Clinic
85 Harbord St., Toronto
March to Campaign Life

We say:

- No New Abortion Law
- Stop Operation Rescue
- Full Funding for Abortion Clinics

Phone OCAC for info: 969-8463

visible minority women, disabled women and lesbians. Feedback from the conference was extremely positive and it looks like -- through the establishment of networks among visible minority women on the national and provincial levels -- CUPE will be feeling the impact of this conference for some time to come. Issues of concern to visible minority women will be raised at policy conventions in Ontario and nationally to clarify the union's stand on employment equity and equal opportunity within the union itself.

At the level of the OFL, the fight for mandatory employment equity programmes has become a priority. The OFL Human Rights Committee is leading the campaign with full support from the Women's Committee. The campaign includes educational work within the ranks of the labour movement, lobbying government and working in community coalitions.

Other important and related initiatives are the literacy campaigns run by the OFL and the Metro Labour Council. These campaigns for trade unionists in the workplace -- which involve both literacy and English as a second language training -- promise to open the doors to allow more workers to be

engaged in political action through the labour movement.

I think that our single biggest challenge -- which is being met by the campaigns of visible minority workers and the literacy campaigns -- is to get more people involved in political action, through the social action oriented coalitions and through the labour movement itself. In this context, the organizing by visible minority women and the participation of all women in the feminist campaigns coming on the heels of the free trade debate are extremely positive developments. Even though we lost the election, the free trade debate was significant in that it engaged people across the country in a free-wheeling debate about what kind of country we want to live in. And in spite of the Conservative's electoral majority, a broad consensus has developed in support of maintaining and even expanding Canada's social programmes. The challenge facing us now is to translate that broad consensus into positive action. How we can do so is the question we all need to address.

This article is based on a talk I gave to a forum sponsored by Toronto Socialist Feminist Action in March. Because I am not currently involved directly in the labour movement, this overview is individualistic and in terms of present activities somewhat impressionistic.

COURSE ON SOCIALIST- FEMINISM

Toronto Socialist Feminist Action (TSFA) is giving a course on socialist-feminism through the Marxist Institute (M.I.). Anyone interested in attending should contact either the M.I. or TSFA. It will be held on Thursday evenings at 8 p.m. at the Lord Lansdowne School at 33 Robert St., Toronto.

May 25th -- Introduction to Socialist-Feminism

June 1st -- Integrating an Anti-racist analysis into our Analysis and Practice

June 8th -- Why We Support Anti-imperialist Struggles

June 15th -- Reproductive Rights

June 22nd -- Women and the Working Class: Why We Support Workers' Struggles

June 29th -- The Future of Socialist-feminism and the Struggle for a Transformed Society

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