

# Rebel Girls' Rag

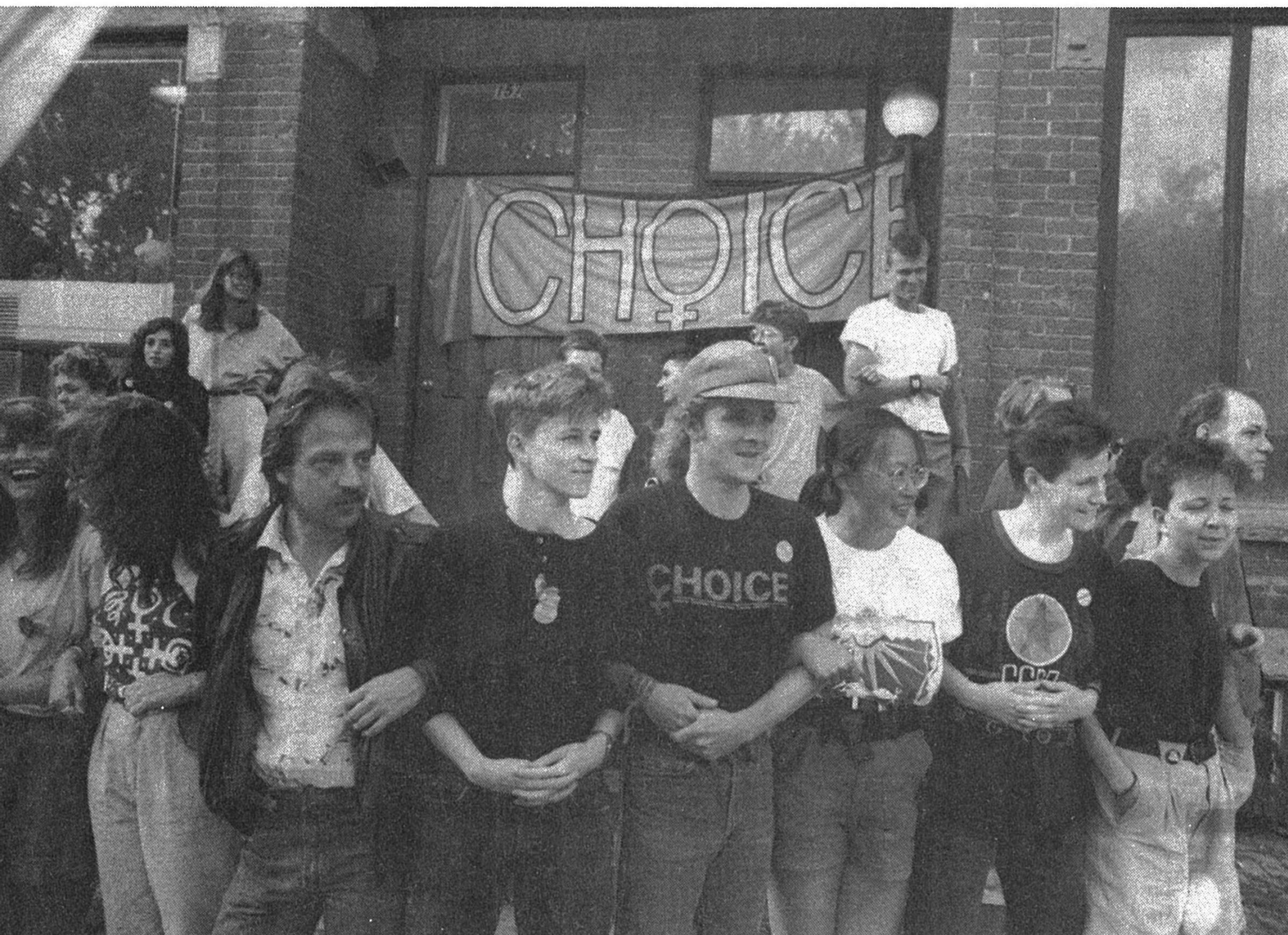
A FORUM OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

Vol. 4, No. 2

75¢

February, 1990

News & Views from Toronto Socialist Feminist Action



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# Rebel Girls' Rag

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## Revolutionary Potential in Eastern Europe?

by Carolyn Egan

As socialist-feminists we support the movements for democratic reforms that are sweeping Eastern Europe. Millions of women and men - workers, students and intellectuals - are demanding basic democratic rights: the right to vote, the right to freedom of speech and assembly, for an end to state repression, for the right to strike, and for independent trade unions. Hopefully, this political upsurge will spark the beginning of a genuine socialist transformation with real democracy, workers self-government and an end to class exploitation and oppression based on gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality.

These events are being portrayed in the media as the "failure of communism", but what we are actually witnessing is the death knell of the Stalinist parties of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria and Romania. Stalinism is the negation of socialism and all that we, as revolutionary socialists, are struggling for. Unfortunately, these parties claimed the title of socialism and subjugated people in its name. To understand how this came to be, we have to trace the roots of Stalinism to the betrayal of the Bolshevik revolution.

The Bolsheviks were revolutionary socialists who overturned capitalism in Czarist

Russia in 1917. Democratic rule was established through worker councils. There was collective ownership of industry. Abortion, homosexuality and divorce were legalized. The equality of women was beginning to be recognized in state policies and structures. A process was initiated that had the potential of eventually liberating all of humanity. But this dream was not realized. The civil war, political isolation, the policy of "socialism in one country", economic crisis and the defeat of other revolutionary movements all contributed. But, a major reason for the degeneration of the Russian revolution was the development of a bureaucracy interested only in its own economic security and control. This bureaucracy, motivated by self-interest rather than the struggle against exploitation internationally, won control after Lenin's death. It solidified its position gaining more and more privileges. It became a ruling class with its own interests, antagonistic to those of the working class, national minorities, and women. Strikes and independent trade unions were outlawed. Pronatalist policies were adopted by the state and homosexuality was once more illegal. There were mass purges, show trials and the execution and imprisonment of thousands. Democratic control was wrested from those who had won it, and the Soviet Union was no longer

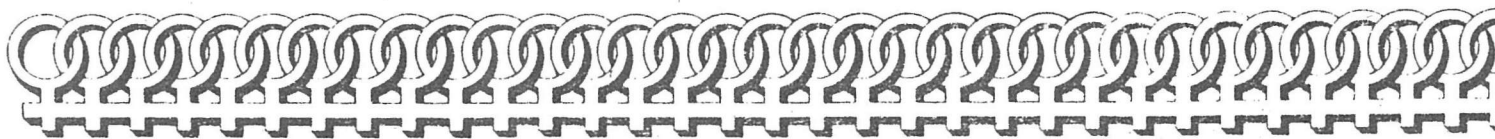
on the path of socialist transformation.

After World War Two, the governments of eastern Europe were organized on this same model under the auspices of the Soviet army. The party was divorced from the people, and the ability of the working class to involve itself in the political process was sabotaged by this Stalinist elite. There have been other attempts to oppose these regimes: 1953 in the German Democratic Republic, 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, but they were all viciously repressed by the intervention of the Soviet Union. Today, these states are facing a political crisis that is directly linked to serious economic problems. They are experiencing low productivity, declining wages and standards of living and poor economic growth. This is because the ruling elite relies on a bureaucratically dominated system of management which enables them to live off the labour of others. This economic model is not socialist. It prohibits the active involvement of the producers in the process of production. As well the model used in Eastern Europe has consciously sabotaged the participation of a politically conscious working class in the workplace or the government.

It is important to understand that perestroika and glasnost are the leadership's response to the economic crisis that it is facing. It

was hoped that by allowing greater political expression the people would support a reduction in social benefits, cutbacks, and endure greater economic hardships. The introduction of "market socialism" would maintain the privileges and control of the bureaucratic rulers and the cost of this restructuring would be borne by the workers. By using market methods, the leadership hoped to solve their economic crisis by forcing workers to produce more through competition, threat of layoff, unemployment, and harsh economic measures. There is no intention of giving workers greater democratic control in the workplace, as we have seen in the crackdown on the miners' strikes in the Soviet Union. There are to be cuts in State subsidized food, transportation and health care. They are using the promise of easing totalitarian controls to make it easier to introduce these changes, as well as to attract loans and investment from the west to maintain their economic control.

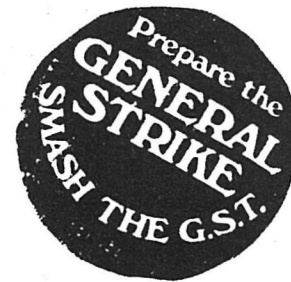
The political direction of movements for change in Eastern Europe is quite unclear at this time. They involve many groupings including adherents of a market economy and right wing reactionaries. Hopefully the movements that have been unleashed in Eastern Europe will rediscover the vision of 1917, and revolutionary organizations committed to self-emancipation and the true meaning of socialism and democracy will emerge. We will continue to report on the situation as it unfolds in future issues of Rebel Girls' Rag.





# Editorial

## Call for a general strike



### Rebel Girls' Rag

A Forum of Women's Resistance

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

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

We welcome new members. For more information, phone Debi at 588-7430.

This issue was put together by:

Laurie Bell, Debi Brock, Julia B., Sheryl Boswell, Karen Chapelle, Carolyn Egan, Nancy Farmer, Mary Gellatly, Shelly Gordon, Miriam Jones, Susan Kazarak, Gregor McNish, Gillian Morton, Cindy Ripley, Bonnie Slade, Jennifer Stephen, Cynthia Wright.

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

#### REBEL MOMS and TOTS

The Rebel Girls are please to announce yet two more additions to our 'children's auxillary' with the arrival of Red Diaper Babies:

Caleb Gaynor  
8lbs., 13 oz.

October 25, 1989

Congratulations to Leslie Gaynor and Laurie Bell.

and

Caleb (Cab) Maxwell  
8 lbs., 9 oz.

January 10, 1990

Congratulations to Jan Maxwell and Soon

The Tory government is going forward with one of the biggest rip-offs of the poor and the working class that we have seen in recent years--the GST. Almost all consumer goods and services will be subject to a 7% tax in 1991. There is little doubt that it will be raised even higher once it is in place. It is a regressive tax that will have a devastating effect on working class Canadians which includes the majority of women, Native people, people of colour, and those with disabilities. If it is not defeated, the Tory agenda will go forward unimpeded, and the gap between rich and poor will continue to increase.

The sentiment against the GST is massive but unorganized. Eighty percent of Canadians oppose it. In November, delegates to the Ontario Federation of Labour convention overwhelm-

ingly endorsed a general strike against the tax. An action of this nature, rooted in the work place would be able to draw in sectors such as senior citizens, consumer groups and women's organizations that are also opposed to the tax. Linking community based opposition with militant labour action has a real potential for giving the Tories a run for their money.

Not surprisingly the executive of the Canadian Labour Congress has rejected the direction of its rank and file. It has backed away from a general strike because of its fear of militant action, and has endorsed instead a five minute work stoppage. During these few minutes we are to vote for or against the tax in order to inform the federal government of our sentiments!

The Tories already know what we think, and they have

made it perfectly clear that they don't care! The only way this tax can be stopped is through a fight back so strong that Mulroney will be forced to withdraw it. The organized working class has the potential to do this, particularly in light of the strong community opposition. Unfortunately, the left is very weak right now, but union members, feminists, senior citizen activists and all who understand the implications of this tax should involve themselves in the campaign against the GST. We must argue for more militant action including a general strike. The CLC convention is taking place in the spring and the debate should be reopened. It is only this type of resistance across the country that can stop the sales tax and fight the entire Tory agenda including the dismantling of VIA rail, daycare and social cuts and the recriminalization of abortion.

## No Turning Back: Stop the Tory Abortion Law

by Cindy Ripley &  
Bonnie Slade

On November 3, 1989, the federal Tory government introduced new legislation which, if passed, will recriminalize abortion. This attack on abortion rights cannot be seen in isolation, but rather, as part of the larger Tory agenda to roll back the gains of women and working people. Cuts in funding to VIA rail, unemployment insurance benefits, educational programs and women's groups, as well as free trade and the proposed general sales tax clearly reveal the government's not-so hidden agenda of profits over people.

#### Background

On January 28, 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada threw

out the existing abortion law. The old law declared that abortion was illegal except when approved by a hospital committee board of three doctors who were of the opinion that continuation of the pregnancy would endanger a woman's life. Hospitals were not required to set up these committees, making access to

of Canada, such as rural areas and eastern provinces, women have had to travel large distances at great personal cost to obtain necessary medical services. Furthermore, hospitals who had set up committees were not required to perform abortions.

Due to these problems, the Supreme Court judged that the law infringed on the Charter of rights and freedoms and was therefore unconstitutional. The judgement made it clear that forcing a woman to carry a fetus to term by threat of criminal sanction was a profound interference with her bodily integrity.

#### The Same Old Story

This new legislation would make abortion an indictable offence, liable up to two years imprisonment, "unless the abortion

# NO Abortion Law

abortion privileged and uneven across Canada. In many regions

*continued on page 7*



# Talking Back: bell hooks

by Gillian Morton

bell hooks, a black feminist who recently published her third book, *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, was recently in Toronto to speak at the Euclid Theatre and at Osgoode Law School. I attended her talk at the Euclid, for which over a hundred people (who had shown up at least a half an hour early) were turned away because the theatre was filled to capacity. Her Canadian publishers, Between the Lines, promise to find a larger venue when they invite her to Toronto this spring.

bell hooks talk was informal; she spoke spontaneously, occasionally referring to her notes and directly addressing her audience. She spoke about a number of important issues, and it's difficult to do her presenta-

tion justice in a brief review. Her presentation reflected the interests developed in her forthcoming book *Yearning*, which is about questions of race, representation, and gender. bell hooks has often written about these issues in her "Sisters of the Yam" column in *Zeta Magazine*, reviewing films as disparate as Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*. hooks' work is groundbreaking. She is one of the few cultural critics writing from a feminist perspective about representations of race and racism in the media, and connecting these representations to the daily lives and political struggles of black women and men.

spoke. She is concerned about the fate of black people globally, and concerned about what she describes as the political, spiritual, economic and moral crisis of black people in their liberation struggle. hooks noted the importance of understanding the politics of location, of knowing where you're speaking from and to whom you are speaking.

bell hooks focussed much of her discussion on the mainstream media's representation of black men, and of her anger and anguish of the depictions which construct black men as "dehumanized brutes that might pounce on people at any minute". Hollywood films portray blackness as terrifying and whiteness as purity and innocence, noted hooks.

She connected her discussion of how black men are repre-

sented in the mainstream media to the question of how black men are perceived by the (white) feminist movement. Citing white feminists' excuses for not reading such authors as Ismael Reed because they are "too sexist", she showed how the sexism of white men, or white male authors such as Michel Foucault, is considered less hostile than the sexism of black men. White feminists grounding their work in the methods or theoretical frameworks developed by white men do not continually preface their work with a denunciation of sexism.

hooks asserted that a complex critical response is appropriate to writing by black men despite its sexism. She also noted that the sexism of black leaders such as Martin Luther King or Malcolm X does not necessarily diminish their prophetic message for black liberation. hooks stressed that both black and white women in the feminist movement should not overly condemn or censor black male work. Instead, hooks advocated a climate for feminist dialogue that would allow disagreement and space for diverse ideas.

hooks also reflected on how the "gender war" between black men and women is being orchestrated and exploited by the media. Looking at episodes of Oprah and Donahue featuring black women writers, she talked about how the racist white medium created a "public spectacle" which worked to disrupt the solidarity between black women and black men, gave negative images of black men and prevented a rigorous and engaged dialogue. In the racist public framework, black people are forced to react rather than to be self-defining, forced to ask "how are we as black people being perceived by whites?" rather than "how do we as black people represent ourselves to ourselves?"

hooks went on to discuss how some images of black masculinity "sell better" than others, demanding to know who is manipulating the images of blackness offered by such celebrities as Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, and Mr. T., and to what end. How do these images

impact on the lives of black people and their solidarity? Just as myths created about black masculinity must be dispelled, so must such myths about black women. For instance, we must challenge the suggestions that black women succeed at black men's expense, and insist that the abuse of black women is not acceptable no matter what pressures are exerted on black men.

By dismantling such myths, hooks argued, a "redemptive and subversive sweet solidarity in struggle" between black women and black men and against white capitalist patriarchy would be possible.

This attempt at summarizing bell hooks talk was originally developed for *Frameline*, CKLN's weekly review of film and video, focussing on the issues of representation raised by hooks. Her talk ranged over a number of issues, however, from the role of humour in political struggle, to the pleasure of critical thinking, to the contradictions of material desires. The wide range of topics touched on by hooks provided a demonstration of the kind of feminist theory that she calls for in *Talking Back*. Hooks suggests that we need theory which moves beyond naming personal pain, theory which emerges from a context in which there is an integration of critical thinking and concrete experience, a recognition of how critical ideas impact on everyday life experience.



A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE STRUGGLE



characteristic but as an expression of power relations which are historically constituted. In addition, while I would agree that violence is one important vehicle by which race and gender power relations are played out in the current context, I would argue that violence is only one way -- and not necessarily the primary way -- in which gender and race relations are expressed.

Socialist-feminists have not adequately specified how we conceive power relations in society. The key task for theorizing and strategizing around sexist and racist violence is the understanding of sexist and racist power relations and the violent forms these can take.

There are, nonetheless, a number of important issues that socialist feminists argue should be raised concerning violence against women and how we respond to the Montreal massacre. First, we need to examine how particular forms of violence are produced and, more fundamentally, how such acts of violence are embedded in sexist and racist power relations which are legitimated and reproduced in our racist, sexist and capitalist system. This means we have to examine how the state (i.e., judicial and police institutions) allows violence against women, black, native, and other people of colour and lesbians and gays to take place with relative impunity. For example, we are all too familiar with stories of the abusive husband who gets off with a mere slap on the wrist or cases such as the Vancouver judge who accused an abused 3 year old of being 'sexually aggressive'. It is not simply the states' legitimation of certain forms of violence, but the ways in which the state takes up and perpetuates racist and sexist violence through its own prac-

tices that we must critically examine. It means disclosing practices such as the justice delayed to Helen Betty Osborn, a native woman in Manitoba whose murderers went free for years because of racist police cover-ups. It means understanding how racism has resulted in the police shootings and deaths of native people like JJ Harper, and black people like Anthony Griffin, Lester Donaldson, Michael Wade Lawson and the recent shooting of Sophia Cook. In addition, it is not just police shootings of black people with relative impunity but also the day-to-day police harassment and racist violence that people of colour face.

The contradictory practices of the state with respect to violence against women also needs to be explored. For example, on the one hand the state constructs women as 'the victim' in its attempts to legislate pornography and prostitution in order to regulate sexuality. While on the other hand, the state has cut back funding to rape crisis centres, battered women

shelters and transition houses. It also means examining the material conditions women face such as low wages, job ghettoization, lack of affordable housing, lack of English language training and other social support services which prevent women from leaving violent relationships at home.

It is important to place violence against women fully in the context of race, gender and class relations in the current context. Rising unemployment, plant closures, cutbacks in social programmes etc, all produce a context of despair and alienating conditions in which violence, as legitimated by state and cultural representations, become perceived as one of the solutions for the individual. We need to examine how the state and capital, in defence of the capitalist system, attempts to counter the struggles and demands of the working class, women, gays and lesbians and people of colour by perpetuating divisions among us.

In terms of organizing, it does not always appear evident to socialist feminists how to mobilize around violence against women. The Montreal massacre galvanized a lot of people, bringing women and men on to the streets. I believe that many women have come out to the International Women's Day organizational meetings in response to the killings and "no to violence against women" has

become one of the four political demands of the day for Toronto.

It appears difficult to formulate specific demands around violence against women. The question becomes one of how to formulate demands which will fundamentally challenge and transform those racist, sexist and capitalist relations that are at the root of violence against women.

First, we must link violence against women with racist and homophobic violence as being products of the same racist, sexist, heterosexist capitalist system. Second, we must challenge those cultural representations and structures that legitimate violence as an expression of power relations. Third, we must support the various services for women who are abused and demand the material conditions that will allow women to leave abusive situations. It is only through building a broad based movement and overturning of the racist, sexist capitalist system that we will no longer have to fear the violence and backlash represented in the massacre of Quebecoise students.

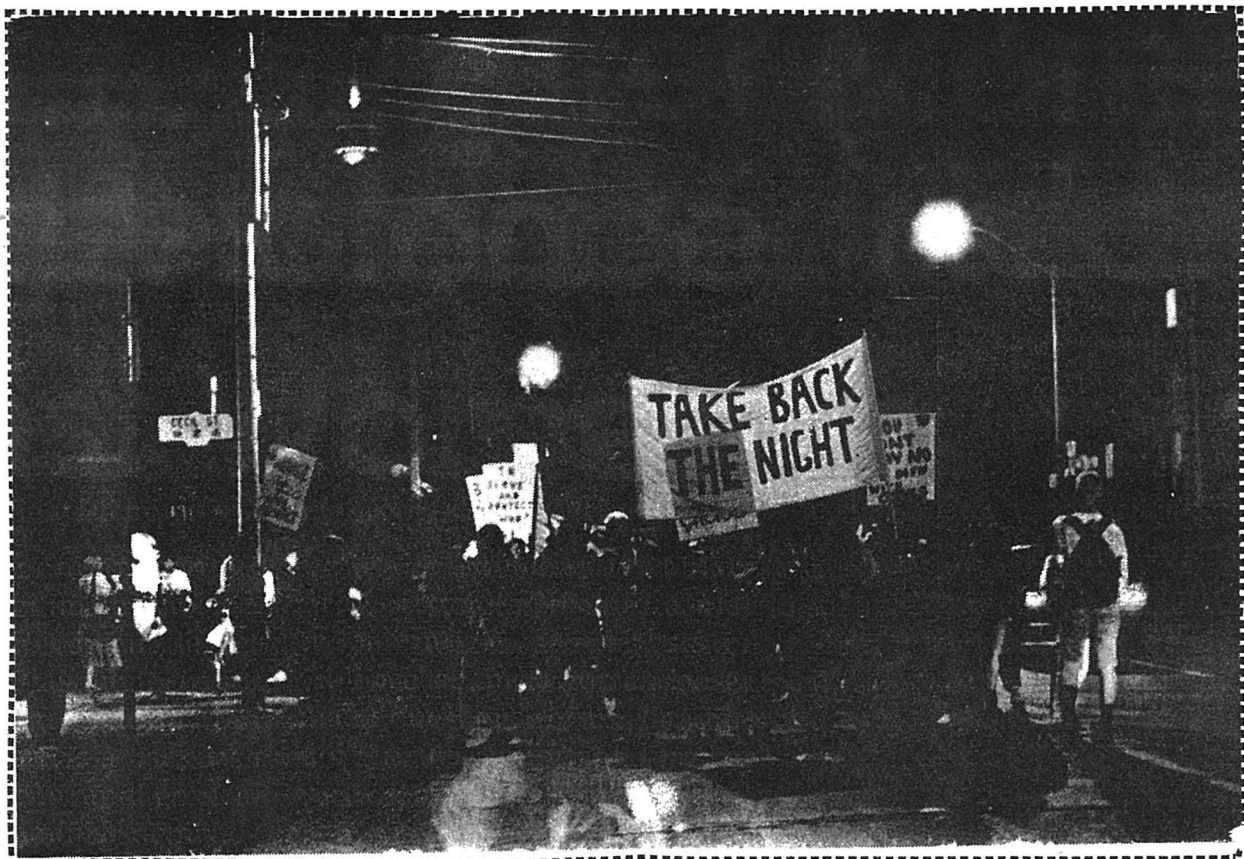


Photo: Ka Yin

### An Evening of Lesbian Herstory: Slide Show & Discussion

by Joan Nestle

Author of *A Restricted Country* & Co-founder of  
Lesbian Herstory Archives

7:30 at the Euclid  
Thursday March 1, 1990

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# After Montreal: Addressing Violence Against Women

by Mary Gellatly

## Introduction

The impact of Marc Lepine's slaying of fourteen women in Montreal extends well beyond our grief for the students killed. The event touched our own experience of violence in society. For socialist-feminists, the Montreal massacre also raises the issue of how we understand and organize around racist and sexist violence. While radical feminists have long worked in the area of violence against women, socialist-feminists generally have not. Thus, the following article, based on a presentation given on January 12 at a Socialist Challenge forum, provides a first step in TSFA's attempts to work through the issue. The article reflects some of the contradictions and gaps in socialist feminist theorizing of violence, and, hopefully, raises questions for further discussion. TSFA will continue to discuss violence against women in future *Rebel Girls' Rag* and in a public forum to be held this spring.

## The Montreal Massacre

The Montreal massacre crystallized many of the current tensions in society around the feminist movement and its demands for fundamental change. In the days following the killings, we witnessed the media's and the state's concerted effort to represent Lepine as a

'psychopath' and his 'individual' act as random and inexplicable. We were inundated with long tracts by "experts" of the psychology of "mass murderers" and long speeches by politicians on the 'solution' of gun control. Many of us saw Barbara Frum on the *Journal* badgering her guests' and denying their argument that the killings reflected violence against women in society. Feminists have been attacked for their analysis of the event and criticized for supposedly turning the killings into a forum for a feminist agenda. Not surprisingly, the *Toronto Sun* editorial condemned the "small clique of bogus intellectuals and professional man-haters .. for attempt[ing] to turn the ... massacre of 14 young women into an issue of men vs. women." The very public nature of Lepine's attack and his specification of feminism shattered the thin facade of women's equality built by the mainstream media and the state. Clearly, the attempts to represent the killings as the act of a deranged individual have an importance to the state in defending the racist and sexist institutions in society.

Most feminists would, I believe, agree that the reasons the Montreal massacre took place are not found in Lepine's individual 'psychological state'

but in our gender-divided society that legitimates violence against women. Lepine's targeting of feminists as the focus for all the 'wrongs' committed against him reflects a back-lash against feminism and general resistance to feminist demands for social, political, economic, and ideological change. Beyond these key points of agreement, however, I would argue that some fundamental differences arise in the way feminists would analyze the Montreal massacre, in particular, and violence against women in general.

During vigils, memorials, media interviews and many discussions with women following the killings, the dominant feminist analysis of the massacre reflected a radical feminist framework. First, many feminists talked about the massacre as being symbolic of systemic misogyny. Second, a universal victimization was evoked which posits that women's very condition in society is one of the victim, living in fear of violence. It is of no surprise that radical feminist analysis has dominated the response because the radical feminist current of the women's movement has directly been involved, both in terms of theory and praxis, in struggles around violence against women for the last ten to fifteen years.

While socialist feminists draw from radical feminist theorizing, their analysis of violence against women poses many questions for us. In addition to the important services radical feminists provide to abused women, they have made a significant theoretical separation between violence and the sexual. However, their theory is rooted in an ahistorical analysis of women's oppression based on an essentialist notion of inherent male violence and sexuality. In doing so, radical feminists fail to provide us with a strategy to deal with violence because according to this perspective men are, by their very nature, violent.

While Levine's actions did mobilize women because of our own experiences of violence, it is problematic to respond to this experience with an analysis of the universal victimization of women due to male violence. The notion of a universal victimization of women neglects and obscures the agency of individual women and the power of broad based, mass action movements for change. I would argue that it is precisely because of the gains we have made -- the striking down of the old abortion law and the massive mobilizations on the streets across Canada and Quebec following the Chantal Daigle decision preventing her from having an abortion, for example -- it is the strength of our movement that has been key to the back-lash that we are currently experiencing and represented in the extreme in Montreal.

For socialist feminists, I think it is important to conceive of violence not as an inherent male

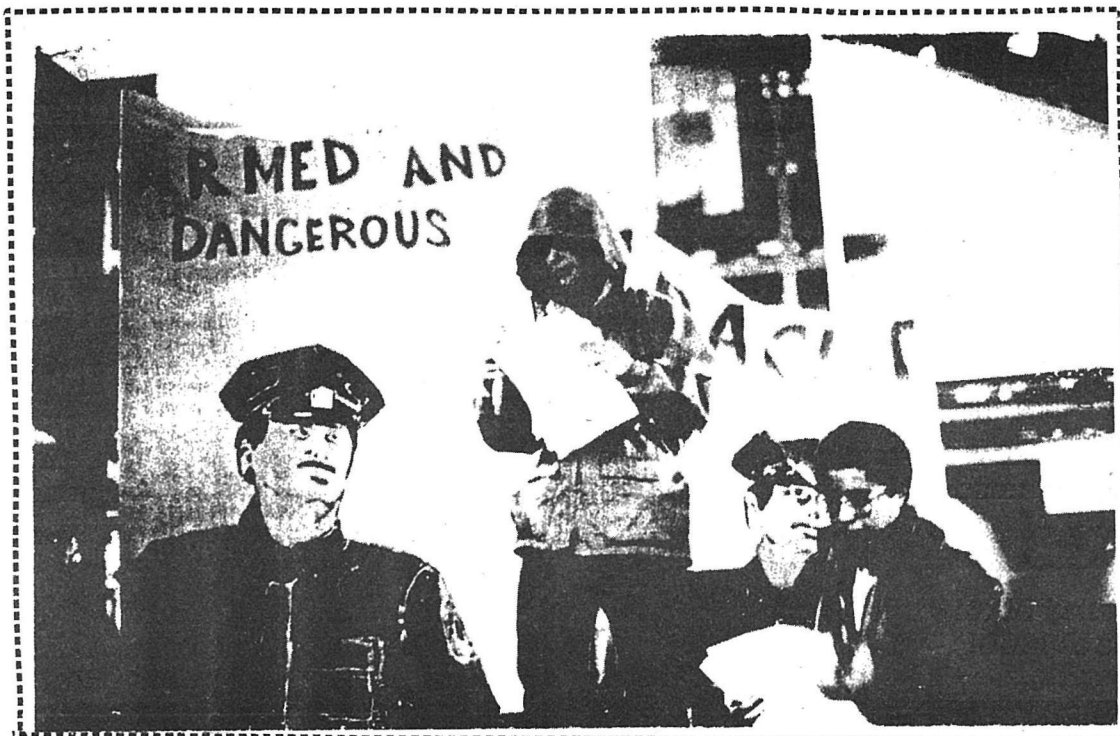


Photo: Ka Yin





# Racism in the Arts

MARLENE NOURBESE PHILIP

WINNER OF THE 1988 CASA DE LAS AMERICAS PRIZE

## HARRIET'S DAUGHTER



by Gillian Merton

Recently the mainstream media is full of "news" about racism in the arts, giving lots of coverage to the changes at the Women's Press, to Vision 21's protest at the P.E.N congress, and to native Canadians' objections to the appropriation of native stories and histories by white artists. Both the press and the responses of the criticized organizations and individuals have become predictable and, more importantly, obscure the issue, ie. systemic racism in the arts funding system, cultural representation, and every discipline of the arts.

The pervasiveness of this racism is the focus of protests by artists and activists of colour, who point to their exclusion from the process of creating a particular work or event which claims to represent them. The racism in both the images produced and the process of producing them would probably get no attention were it not for these protests. Often the criticisms they make are submerged by the press' attention to the reaction of the white artists, who are characterized as hurt and even betrayed-- the protesters do not understand and appreciate their good intentions (no mention is made of the profit and prestige which ac-

crues to the artists through their appropriation). The press juxtaposes the hurt, baffled white producers with a depiction of the protesters as aggressive (they "attack", "level charges", "accuse", "blast", "accost" etc.) and as overly emotional, encouraging the dismissal of any criticism that they have made.

The organizers of the P.E.N. Congress provide an example of an organization supposedly wronged by "attacks". A group called Vision 21: Canadian Culture in the 21st Century, of which I am a member, distributed a leaflet at the opening P.E.N. gala. This flyer made a number of points, among them that the dominant culture in Canada is white, middle-class, and Anglo-Saxon, and that P.E.N. perpetuated this dominance by inviting only seven participants who are Asian, African, and Native Canadian, out of a total of 51 Canadian participants. Our flyer stated "The Canadian composition of this 54th congress is a telling example of the silencing of the writer of colour... [and] makes a mockery of any commitment to eradicate racism or classism in this society...we urge you [congress participants] to raise these issues whenever you can at your panels and readings".

The response of incoming P.E.N. president June Callwood

was to tell first individuals in Vision 21 and then the group as a whole to "fuck off", which probably accounts for the amount of press the protest received. Her response, and her refusal to apologise, are indicative to us of contempt and lack of concern for the issues we raised.

Vision 21: Canadian Culture in the 21st Century is a small group of artists, writers, and activists, predominantly people of colour, who have come together to fight racism in the arts. The group is mainly concerned with the barriers faced by artists of colour to funding, skills, and other resources necessary for the production of art. Although many in the arts community acknowledge that there is racism in the arts, when individual examples are pointed out it is denied or somehow evaded, either by validating the "good intentions" of the artist in question, or referring to the use of "consultants" to make sure that the producers 'did the right thing'. Substitute discussions-- the freedom of the imagination, censorship, or simply counter-accusations, displace a discussion of what is racist about a work.

A dialogue about racism and about what to do about it loses out to the defense of a particular individual, event, film, book or whatever. The pervasiveness of racism in the arts and specific examples of it, as well as possible strategies for fighting it, are never the focus, and remain largely unaddressed.

There a number of artists of colour and organizations who are working on the issues of access and self-representation. For

instance, in the areas of film and video two organizations have recently formed, the Black Film and Video Network and the Full Screen Coalition. These groups share skills and information, and discuss how to effect change for artists of colour in their particular discipline.

Organizing across disciplines (dance, theatre, film, video, performance art, visual art, writing, etc.) will be difficult, especially as artists often work in isolation. Artists of colour face arts councils, publishers, galleries, festivals, schools and libraries which share a language of aesthetics and definitions of "good" art based in a white, eurocentric tradition. The arts councils, with their "arms length" relation to various levels of government, do not feel obligated to talk about anti-racism, preferring to speak of "multiculturalism" if they refer to the needs or work of artists of colour at all.

How do we go about fighting for access to resources and changing dominant definitions of art? Vision 21 thinks that one strategy is to get acknowledgement of the pervasive and systemic nature of racism in the arts through a public inquiry; we think that the results of such an inquiry will prevent the dismissal or displacement of the issue of racism, and should lead to recommendations for structural change. Vision 21 is a small group and is trying to broaden its base; a larger alliance could build momentum for a public inquiry, or generate new strategies, or do both.

For more information about Vision 21, write to Vision 21, 208 Robert St., Toronto, M5S 2K8.



Black Mother, Black Daughter



is induced under the direction of a medical practitioner who is of the opinion that, if the abortion were not induced, the health or life of the female person would be likely to be threatened." This bill replaces the old therapeutic abortion committee of three doctors with a committee of one.

Like the old law, Bill C-43 denies women control over their reproductive and sexual lives. It puts abortion back into the criminal code, where it does not belong. Abortion is a health issue not a matter for criminal regulation.

Once again, the threat to health or life is the basis of entitlement. This means that a woman who is physically and mentally healthy has not right to an abortion. Those women who want an abortion for social or economic reason would also be forced to lie because those would not be legitimate reasons under this bill.

Bill C-43 does nothing to prevent third party intervention in abortion cases. For instance, a potential father or anti-choice fanatic may try to prove a woman is having an abortion for

reasons other than health and attempt to have criminal charges pressed. Threats of criminal sanction many deter doctors from performing abortions, thus compounding the problem of inequality of access.

As this proposed law does not address inequality of access to abortion, it will do nothing for those women who already have the greatest difficulty obtaining needed services-young women, women from rural and other underserved areas, poor women, Black women, Native women and women of colour, women whose first language is neither English or French, and disabled women. In order to ensure that different regions provide access, the federal government should use the Canada Health Act. We demand full access to free abortion in all our communities and the establishment of a regional network of publicly funded community health clinics providing abortions and a range of reproductive health services.

It is hypocritical of the government to propose restricting access to abortion when it has cut back funding for vital

preventive measures such as birth control services, sex education and research into safe and effective contraception. If the government was truly concerned with women's health, they would scrap Bill C-43 and begin working on creating conditions in which women would be able to have real reproductive choices. This would mean, among other things, free, safe and accessible contraceptives, enhanced prenatal education, publicly funded universal daycare, community midwifery, affordable housing and economic equality for women.

### A Compromise?

Under the pretense of resolving a conflict between two extremes, Bill C-43 has been put forth as a compromise. Let's examine these so-called extremes. The pro-choice movement simply seeks to ensure that every woman has the right to make her own decisions over her own body. It is the anti-choice who have organized to forcibly impose their views upon all women. These views are part of the larger new right agenda to defend and reassert a particular

form of the family which is heterosexual, male dominated, monogamous and nuclear. Operation rescue is a perfect example of their verbal and physical tactics of intimidation and harassment.

### What Can Be Done: Off the Sidewalks & Into the Street

Bill C-43 has passed second reading and will go to legislative committee hearings at the end of January. The outcome is by no means certain. We must organize and demonstrate to put pressure on the state. On February 10 there will be a number of rallies taking place across Canada to demonstrate against the new law. In Toronto, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics has organized and rally and march to begin at City Hall at 1:00 pm. Now is not the time to be a member of the silent majority. The successful defeat of this bill will strengthen all of our struggles. Women are not criminals! No new abortion law!

# Having a Blast with Joe:

## Operation Rescue Leader Comes to Toronto

by Gregor McNish

Joe Scheidler, one of the founders of Operation Rescue in the U.S., was in Toronto on November 3rd for a public lecture hosted by Campaign Life Coalition.

"Careful, honey, he's anti-choice."



Mr. Scheidler is the author of *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, a book which has been called the bible of the anti-choice movement. He is also the founder of the Pro-Life Action League. This organization was investigated "inconclusively" in relation to clinic bombings in the States. In Scheidler's view clinic bombings are strategically important to their movement because of the fear they inspire. He has worn buttons with the inscription "Have a Blast" over crossed sticks of dynamite to an anti-choice convention. He has hired a detective to track down a 12-year-old girl who was scheduled for an abortion, and then demanded of her mother to see the child alone-- through a bullhorn. In spite of all this, Mr. Scheidler encourages his supporters to be "as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves."

Taking responsibility for the closing down of over 70 clinics

and the "conversion" of over 60 people involved in providing abortion services, he began his speech feigning surprise that he had been allowed into the country because of his reputation as a terrorist. Of course, "the only people I terrorize are people who kill babies and I intend to continue terrorizing them."

His speech served to place the reaction against a woman's right to choose within a religious context, a context in which the anti-choice can feel not only comfortable, but righteous. "It's a battle between Good and Evil, and what a glorious battle to be in, and to be in on the right side. I see in the pro-life movement a new kind of genuine ecumenism, respect for our fellow man in the person of the unborn child. All over the world it's the same kind of people-- the people who care. We're not the rich people, the media people, the people in power. We have the power of

grace, of God's love; the power of commitment. This is the most altruistic movement in the history of the world because we will never be thanked. That's real charity, that's real love."

He explained the pro-choice movement and our seemingly incomprehensible resistance to the "revealed Word". "Abortionists are nasty cause they don't have God. Sex is everything to these people; their god is the god of the belly." We need abortion. "Abortion is necessary for the type of liberty that gets you pregnant." As we have turned away from God, we must replace that void in our life by becoming our own gods, and to do this we must usurp that power which is properly God's; that over life. Our talk of the right of all women to control their bodies is mere rhetoric to disguise our need to be God; which is our relationship with Satan.

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Even the "hard problems" for the anti-choice are clear to Mr. Scheidler, "Rape and incest do not negate the value of a new life. Pregnancy might be the best thing to come out of an incest. Dad can introduce people to his daughter/granddaughter; the pregnancy will bring it into the open and force him to get help." The prospect of back-alley abortions doesn't move him either. "One doctor was telling me that when he did back alley abortions he was a lot more careful than he is now. Since you could get caught, of course you didn't want any complications." Our arguments for the right to abortion are all based on fallacies -- to paraphrase the man himself; "They want abortion just for fun, just to say they've had an abortion. They want it for sex selection, for 3rd trimester abortions. One person came up to me and said that she'd get pregnant and have an abortion just to demonstrate her right to do it."

Abortion is not a difficult decision made by a woman in the

context of her own life, abortion is a religious cult, which has been going on for time immemorial.

And of course evil perpetuates itself. The anti-choice can't make us understand since "the more carnal you become the less spiritual you are; you lose the taste for beauty and truth and good-- the transcendentals." The righteous path is narrow, which explains why the majority of people are pro-choice. Scheidler was explicit on this point; being a minority doesn't matter. "God's not good with numbers -- he only wanted a few good people out of the entire cities of Sodom and Gomorrah -- He looks for the individual, for faith -- and pours grace upon him." Upon rising, Mr. Scheidler looks in his mirror and says "I'm pro-life. So's God-- that's a majority."

Scheidler explains the struggle in the terms of a holy war. Abortion is only one of the fronts upon which it is being fought. He emphasised that everything they do is educational. This, not "saving babies" is the most im-

portant thing for their movement. The only way they see to achieve their goals is through changing the consciousness of the entire society. They are engaged in psychological warfare. "The only way to lose a war is to surrender. And we will never surrender. Our God is a god of victory. He never loses."

To this end, he encourages the tactics of "conflict and and confrontation-- that's news. When you get a decision from a judge that you don't like, picket his home. Even better, picket his wife at the beauty parlour, or his kids. Always go after the wife or the kids; that will stop his activities faster than anything else. Evil must be punished."

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