

cayenne

August/September

No. 4



a socialist feminist bulletin

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Send to: CAYENNE, 229 College St. W., Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R4.

H E L P !

MIDWIVES DEFENCE FUND NEEDS YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

The parents and midwives whom
the state recently victimized
in an inquest-inquiry designed
to slow the movement for birth
alternatives face legal bills
of over \$80,000.

FOUR PEOPLE SHOULD NOT PAY THE BILL FOR ALL BIRTHING WOMEN!

Send your cheques to:
The Midwifery Task Force
Box 489, Postal Station T
Toronto, Ontario, M6B 5C2

(Your contribution will also give you membership in M.T.F.)

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cay·enne (kī-en'), n. [<native Braz. kynnha], 1. a very hot red pepper used widely in India, China and Caribbean; 2. a female spice; 3. a long-lasting irritant; 4. hot stuff.

Cover picture courtesy of the Medu Art Ensemble, Botswana.

Cayenne banner by dian marino

SMALL, BROKE, BUT GROWING!

It's hard to believe that we're getting close to the end of our first subscription year, but here's our fourth CAYENNE ready to hit the streets. We still have a long way to go, but we feel CAYENNE is consistently moving toward being a real resource for socialist feminists.

Jan Langford's article in this issue is a step toward overcoming "Torontocentricity". We hope this will be only the first of a regular series of articles from Jan on what women are doing in the Yukon. We encourage women in other areas to send us "updates" from your city or province. What's happening that is of interest to socialist feminists? What issues should we be talking about? If the idea of an "article" makes you uncomfortable, how about a letter?

Peggy McDonough's response to "Toward a Broader Strategy for Choice" in the last issue reinforces our goal of providing a forum for debate in the women's movement; Peggy's article and one by Judi Stevenson on the midwifery trial combine to provide much food for thought on the complex issue of reproductive choice--we look forward to further discussion from our readers.

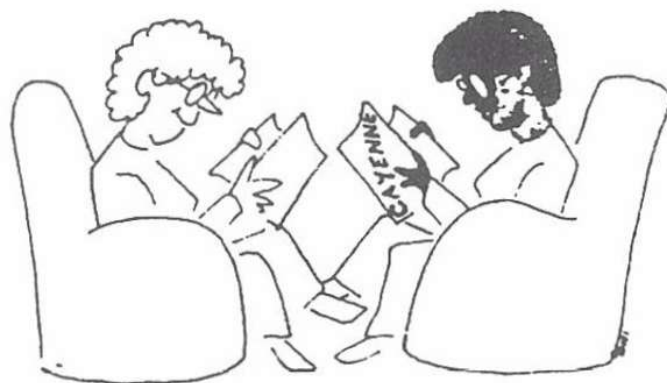
And CAYENNE is branching out--we are excited to welcome Linda Briskin and Judi Stevenson, whose creativity, enthusiasm and skills are important contributions to CAYENNE's continued growth.

Chris Mills represented CAYENNE at the Feminist Periodicals Conference near Montreal last June. We are part of a followup committee to study how to increase the involvement of working class and visible minority women in feminist

publishing, an important objective for us from the beginning.

We plan to start serious distribution by joining the Canadian Periodicals Publishers' Association, which means you'll be able to get CAYENNE in bookstores outside of Toronto. Ask your local bookstore to sign up. But it is your support in subscriptions that we are really dependent on.

Your response to our campaign for 600 subscriptions in 1985 has been tremendous. Many of you went out and sold subs, and many more sent in names for us to contact. But we're still not home free. If CAYENNE is going to survive financially we need a much more solid base of subscribers and sustainers. We're sure there are enough socialist feminists out there to support this kind of publication--please help us reach them and convince them that it is worth their while to do so.



Who We Are

We are socialist feminists who are committed to producing a bulletin of socialist feminist news, analysis and debate. We encourage CAYENNE readers and supporters to contribute to this process.

Lynda Yanz, Christina Mills, and
Marie Lorenzo
The CAYENNE Collective

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
SOCIALIST FEMINIST POLITICS
OCTOBER 11-13, COPENHAGEN**

Organizers hope the conference will provide an opportunity for socialist feminists to: exchange information, learn from one another's experience in politics and generalize the most successful experiences, discuss a necessary network for mutual support, and perhaps found such a network.

"The leading question, of course, is how can we organize effectively in Europe and in the world? What do you expect from a European/internationalization of socialist feminists?"

If you would like more information write:

Susan Steiner or Dorte Marie
Wiciefstr. 30 Sondergaard
1000 Berlin 21 Magevej 22, 1,th
1000 Berlin 21 2400 NV Copen-
hagen.



More Choice Comments

Over the past two and a half years I have read the many articles appearing on the abortion question with mixed emotions, ranging from elation to downright anger and indignation. The recent article in CAYENNE, "Towards a Broader Strategy for Choice" by Nancy Adamson and Susan Prentice has finally moved me to add my comments to the ever-growing debate. As a former member of Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics not been active in the group for well over a year), I admit to certain biases. However, in the rush to present criticism of priorities, politics and strategies of the pro-choice movement, I feel we have neglected to consider its accomplishments in a struggle against considerable odds.

The groups in the pro-choice movement represent a wide variety of political thinking which is reflected in a diversity of actions and strategies--from \$50-a-plate dinners, to lobbying MLAs, to guerrilla theatre and street demonstrations. Mistakes have been made, but the pro-choice movement has had an impact both on progressive groups and on society in general.

Back in November 1982 when the pro-choice movement was working very hard to gain friends, the Ontario Federation of Labour convention adopted a resolution supporting a



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woman's right to choose and the legalization of free-standing abortion clinics. For a powerful male-dominated labour federation to support a non-economic (in the strictest sense) women's issue, was a major victory for women. Delegates had been highly influenced by trade union women who were working closely with OCAC activists. More recently, cultural workers have been organizing and performing in benefits for the movement. This has served to transmit the goals of the movement and to broaden its base of support beyond its traditional sympathizers. Membership in OCAC continues to grow with many people active in the day-to-day functioning of the group while large numbers of women are involved as escorts. This growth is in sharp contrast to the relative decline in membership and in activity of the left and certain sectors of the women's movement.

The clinic itself has remained open for some time now. This demonstrates that we have gained ground despite attempts by the state to defeat us. It has remained open because the pro-choice movement has had a profound impact on Canadian opinion. The breadth of public support that has been mobilized to keep the clinic open has greatly affected the course of action the state has taken, visible in its reticence to close the facility. Although the appeal of the Morgentaler acquittal is holding us at bay, the state could have taken steps to close the clinic.

The recent defeat of former solicitor-general John Williams is also a sign of pro-choice support. The press attributed his defeat to public reaction against his virulent anti-choice stand. That the pro-choice movement has greatly influenced political and social



thinking on abortion does not mean, however, that discussion and criticism should not emerge.

This brings me to the article "Towards a Broader Strategy for Choice." Adamson and Prentice criticize the pro-choice movement for its "singular focus on abortion" which they say prevents it from making links with other women's health activists. They question the "near-total reliance on doctors . . . and the medical model," a model "that negates our personal experience." And finally, they urge us to consider the meaning of mass action strategy, a strategy we have always identified as uniquely socialist feminist.

I agree with the authors that building links is indeed important. However, I believe that this has been part of OCAC's strategy. For example, OCAC has consistently placed the campaign for abortion rights in the broader context of reproductive freedoms. It has done so because of its ideological commitment to the political perspective which recognizes that the right to safe and

effective birth control, to determine our sexuality, to birthing alternatives, to abortion and the necessity to end forced sterilization are all part of the same struggle.

Within the women's health movement, I believe that the midwifery struggle provides an excellent context for further unity between the two groups. Both are fighting to provide health care to women outside the legal context (although midwifery is neither legal nor illegal) with pressure bearing down on them from the medical establishment and the state. A major difference has been the pro-choice movement's use of doctors to provide procedures while midwives are fighting for professional recognition.

An alliance would be politically and strategically beneficial to both groups, but the situation is complex. Because of the obvious difference between giving birth and having an abortion, some supporters of midwives and even certain midwives themselves have expressed reluctance to link the two issues. There are of course, those within the midwives' organization who have come out publicly in support of the pro-choice movement. The Toronto Midwives Collective has worked very closely with OCAC. I would hope that this liaison would continue to develop, to become a broader, more deliberate alliance.

Equally important is to develop our outreach to immigrant and minority women. While organizations such as Women Working with Immigrant Women have endorsed OCAC and have spoken in support at its rallies, they have their own perspective on abortion.

Many native women, for example, with a legacy of several hundred years of racial genocide see very little similarity between their

situation and the relatively privileged notion of "choice." A native woman with little money who is coerced into having an abortion either by sheer economic necessity or by some health care "professional," has not exercised real choice. To attract these women's support, the pro-choice movement must develop a comprehensive understanding of abortion which would address racism and general economic issues. This we have not done adequately.



Let us now consider another reflection in the Adamson/Prentice article: the movement's reliance on the medical model. Contrary to what the authors declare, the pro-choice movement made a conscious strategic choice not to challenge the medical model at this point in time. Rather OCAC considers the clinic as a test case for the law. We used the clinic strategy to set a precedent in order to win greater access as it did in Quebec. We felt at the time that the clinic model was the best way to build public support to legalize clinics and to repeal the abortion law.

For its use of doctors and its attempt to legalize clinics, the pro-choice movement has often been

labelled "reformist" in comparison to the more "radical" midwifery movement. I believe that this comparison is somewhat unjustified if we consider the different nature of the two movements. Giving birth is much more socially acceptable than having an abortion. Consequently I believe that the public is generally more sympathetic to midwifery. In fact, midwifery traditions exist in most other western countries as well as in the Third World. By using lay abortionists, would we not have risked being labelled as "back street butchers?" Would we have gained as much public support?

Perhaps some would say that the risk would have been worth it, that we should have been struggling for the right of non-doctors to perform abortions. It is difficult to guess how things would have developed if we had gone that route. I personally believe that we would not have mobilized as much public support as we presently enjoy.

Although the Morgentaler Clinic is not ideal, its supportive staff and woman-centered atmosphere provides a real alternative to existing facilities. While some people would argue that the clinic benefits only those women who can afford it, I'm told that no one is turned away for economic reasons. However, a privately-run clinic controlled by doctors has never been the vision of many pro-choice activists, particularly in OCAC. The group has always seen as its ultimate goal, publicly funded, comprehensive women's health centers, which would provide a wide variety of free services including birthing support, abortion, counselling and birth control provision. In such centers, the question of medical and non-medical care-giving would obviously need to be addressed.



Gina Miller

Finally, the questions Adamson/Prentice raise about the meaning of "mass action strategy" for socialist feminists are intriguing. I too believe that the term is bandied about very loosely. We assume that by its very label "mass action" is inherently progressive, yet we see the Right consistently mobilizing large numbers of people.

Mass action strategy for socialist feminists is still developing. It takes form as we act, as we forge links with other groups to fight for what we believe to be our fundamental rights. Our actions are irrevocably influenced by the time and place in which we live. We act in response to particular conditions as we pursue our goals. These actions provide us with experience to articulate and build our notions of mass action strategy. As our history emerges, we understand our strategy more clearly. This comes from our past experience and determines the future. The socialist feminist component of the pro-choice movement is currently undergoing just such a struggle. The historical moment in time with its attendant conditions is unique. In our desire to develop an understanding of what this means for socialist feminists, let's not forget to congratulate the pro-choice movement, now and again.

Peggy McDonough

CHOICE

Midwives on Trial

Women's struggle for reproductive freedom opened up a new front here in Toronto in July of this year. Midwives and their supporters took the stand in a coroner's court to defend their view of the birth process and to argue the case for legalized midwifery services in Ontario.

The issue of legalized midwifery drew me--despite the fact that I have never given birth myself--first because of the intolerably marginal status forced upon the women who practise midwifery (which is outside the law, but not against the law in Ontario), and second because we seem to be at a time when birth is being redefined in our society. "Mystical motherhood" is making something of a comeback as women are squeezed into unemployment, but also our generation of feminists is discovering motherhood, often in a very experiential, apolitical way. It seems to me important to give birth a political interpretation, both for ourselves as socialist feminists, and also as an organizing tool for the many, many unpoliticized women giving birth--women whose birth experiences might provide the context for a new understanding of the ways women suffer from unequal power relations in our society.

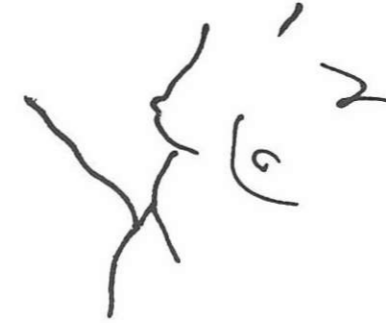
Having said all this, I was still unprepared for my anger on listening to midwives describe the indignities and outright dangers still routinely inflicted on women giving birth in hospitals. The more I thought about women being forced to give up control of their bodies to a medical profession infamous for its history of mistreatment of women's health, simply in order to be able to give birth, an act which we are uniquely capable of doing on our own,

the more outrageous it seemed. The more midwives I met, the more impressed I was with their courage and good sense, as well as their commitment to building a service that women want and need. So I decided to make a film about it all, and began the process by following two midwives and their organization to court.

The context was heavily loaded against them by the circumstances that led to the courtroom: a baby's death. The details of his birth and death ought to have been matters for the private grief and memory of his parents and the two midwives who delivered him. Instead, the Toronto Regional Coroner's Office decided not only to call an inquest, but to use that inquest as a forum for examining the wider issues of midwifery practise and home birth. The deck was stacked against dispassionate policy-making by the spectre of a dying infant.

The inquest was organized in two stages to accomplish two official goals: the first, to establish the "facts" of the baby's death, and the second, to work toward general recommendations on the future of midwifery care and home birth in Ontario. A jury of two men and two women heard three weeks of testimony, then took 48 hours to come to their conclusions. What they heard were two entirely opposed interpretations of birth and death, one based in interventionist obstetrical assumptions about the female body and the birth process, and one rooted in the midwifery tradition of non-interventionist support and holistic diagnosis.

The moment by moment unfolding of the case was fascinating. But beneath the surface we can also see the outline of the State's response to what is becoming a serious



Sonia Quiñones

challenge: the medical professions' attempts at control and cooption, and the first indications of forthcoming public support for midwifery.

The essential conflict was around assessments of what is normal in pregnancy and delivery, and what constitutes an emergency. To the obstetricians, normalcy did not include a first birth at 31, a nine pound four ounce baby, an eleven day extension of the pregnancy past its due date, a labour time of fourteen hours, a haemoglobin count of less than eleven, or a transport time to hospital of about 30 minutes. The midwives disagreed, down the line.

Notice that each of the factors in dispute contains a numerical score--no accident. The heart of the dispute often came down to this: the medical model of birth has developed a reliance on rules of normalcy which provide the basis for making a host of interventions, from rupturing the birth sac to using forceps, which midwives say ignores the wide variety in women's responses and physiology. They use a more elastic and intuitive standard of judgement, a standard of judgement that grows from their extensive experience of natural births (something which few obstetricians have), and from their commitment to each birthing woman as an individual.

The inquest was billed in advance as an open and unbiased forum

for the exploration of broad social policy issues around birth care. Not so. In essence, if not in appearance, this first stage ("the facts") was an attack on alternative birth practices, and more--an attack on the competence of women to develop models of care for their own bodies. The coroner tried to prevent both the midwives and the mother of the baby from stating their objections to routine obstetrical practices on the grounds that they were unable to judge them. He ridiculed the defence lawyers, both women, for asking questions about obstetrical practices, denying their competence to frame relevant or intelligent issues for the jury's consideration. His foremost expert witness argued that midwives must be held to a rigid and restrictive set of guidelines, denying their capacity for independent clinical judgement. And ominously, the court took a negative view of "anecdotal evidence," meaning the direct experience of other women of their pregnancies and deliveries.

The great god "science" was in each instance touted as the superior means of diagnosis. The question of science is much beyond the scope of this article, but what must be said is that its use as the basis of a boys club around birth is to be absolutely rejected.

If the first stage of the inquest was a well-orchestrated attack on the competence of the midwives involved, the second stage was something else again. The defence brought forward a series of witnesses to help make the case for midwifery. A doctor from the World Health Organization in Copenhagen testified for most of the day, putting the weight of his organization, his medical training (and of course, his gender) firmly on the side of the midwives. He told

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the jury that 75% of births in Europe are supervised by midwives, and that Canada is looked on by the rest of the world as strange indeed for having forced them from the field of maternal care. It is official policy of W.H.O. to promote them, not as a third world substitute for doctors, but as the best caregivers for normal pregnancy and birth.



Chris King

When the crown attorney and the coroner gave their closing addresses, the inquest began to look like a conspiracy. Sensing that the overall case against midwifery had been lost, both of them pitched the argument that midwifery in Canada should be considered in light of the death of this one baby. "If you cannot affirm the judgements made by these midwives about this baby," they said to the jury, "you cannot take a position that promotes midwifery in Canada." No mention of the babies who die everyday in hospital, with no inquests called.

To the disappointment of midwifery supporters, the jury did find that the death was preventable. But it resisted the Crown's and the coroner's encouragement to muddle the general with the particular, and made far-reaching recommendations in favour of a midwifery service which may become both independent and strong. It recommended the inclusion of midwifery under OHIP, and even

went so far as to advise admitting privileges to hospital for midwives, a cheeky idea which will no doubt have the medical monopoly up in arms, and perhaps even more resolutely mobilized against midwifery than before.

But the recommendation which will bring most satisfaction to many feminists is the one recognizing free choice in relation to home birth, which is a victory for choice in general.

The slow re-emergence of midwives in Canada during the last fifteen years, after 100 years of decline and virtual disappearance, poses a deep and significant challenge to obstetricians' domination of pregnancy and birth. From the College of Physicians and Surgeons on down, they have issued edicts against home birth, and refused on an individual basis to cooperate with midwives. I expected their position in court to be more convincing, but what I observed was their fear of losing clients and income and simple monopoly. It's a power struggle that goes well beyond the inter-professional competition that doctors have engaged in with other practitioners (naturopaths, chiropractors). This power struggle also involves the essential gender conflict over the definition and control of reproduction itself.

The jury recommendations in the McLaughlin-Harris inquest represent a victory for midwifery, but a costly one, purchased at the expense of four individuals who never should have been "on trial" as a means of designing public policy. It was purchased at their expense in the direct sense too, for they are now responsible for legal bills totalling over \$80,000, despite the forbearance of feminist lawyers. They fought this case for us, for the women of

Ontario, and I urge all CAYENNE readers to send a cheque to their defence fund:

Midwifery Task Force
Box 489, Postal Station T
Toronto, M6B 5C2

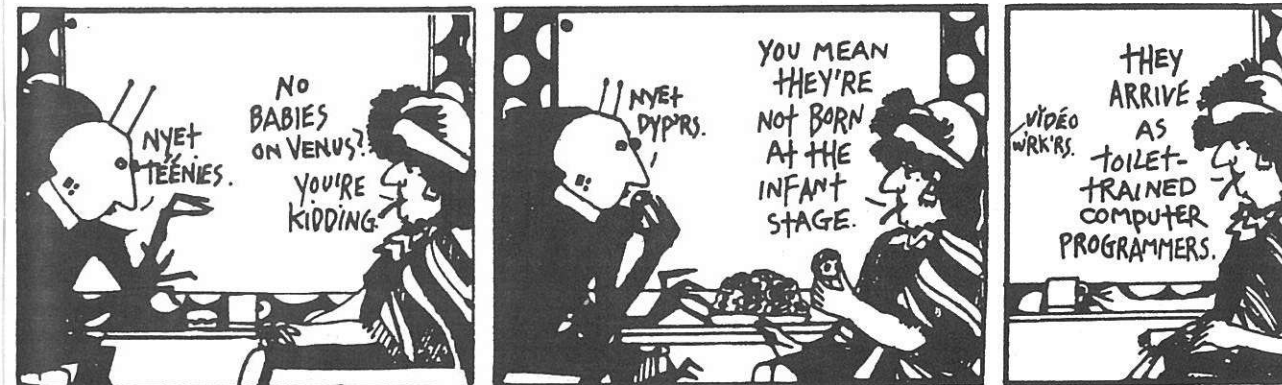
The struggle must now go forward, for the jury suggested a five-year period of administration by the College of Nurses. The opportunity of winning independence for midwifery through this channel is fraught with the dangers of territorial rivalry. A truly alternative (feminist) service must be kept independent of nursing.

Midwifery needs to be a more widely embraced issue for feminists. It is part of the essential struggle for control of our bodies, and it must be won. As Peggy McDonough points out elsewhere in this issue, it has the potential for widespread public support because birth (as opposed to abortion) is socially acceptable—and precisely because of that basic acceptability I think it could be a powerful tool for the advancement of the women's movement into the everyday lives of more women.

Some feminists are no doubt suspicious of the birth issue because of its trappings of domestic servility. And it is true that the support movement that exists at present has currents which are more concerned with an old-fashioned notion of "the family" than with a reversal of power politics around reproduction. This tension within the midwifery movement is bound to surface more directly in the future, and I hope an alliance between socialist feminists and groups like the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) and the politically astute Toronto Midwives Collective can be built to play a leadership role. It would be useful if CAYENNE could initiate debate on how that alliance might take shape.

The mythology of birth in Canadian society floats on a sea of women's rage about our personal humiliations and losses. Our mothers' generation was silent about it. It is time to break the silence around birth.

Judi Stevenson



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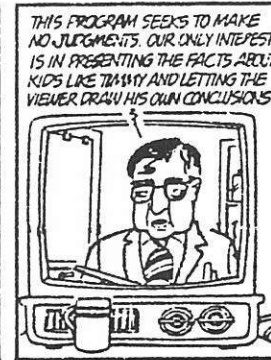
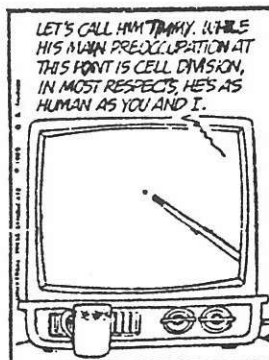
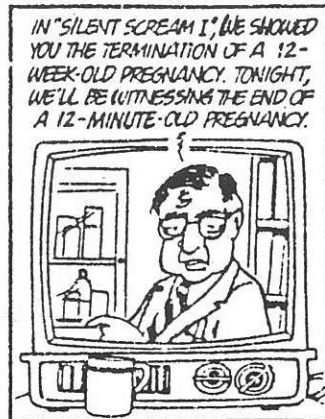
Silent Scream: Loud Lies

Throughout North America supporters of reproductive choice have been incensed by a propaganda film used by right-to-lifers to "counsel" women with unwanted pregnancies, and to persuade the media and the general public of their position.

"Silent Scream" is a slick, expensive and very effective piece of PR. It is also sensationalist, unscientific, and above all dishonest. The producers use technology to falsify supposed "information"; for example, they change the speeds at which ultrasound images are displayed in order to suggest that a twelve-week fetus suffers during an abortion and purposefully moves away from the instruments in a "pathetic attempt to escape." The narrator, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, holds up a plastic model which is almost the size of a near term fetus while showing the ultrasound "movie" of a twelve-week abortion and suggests that the model is the actual size of the fetus in the ultrasound. In fact, a twelve-week fetus is only about two inches long.

The very title of the film is misleading: in order to be able to scream there would have to be synapses, or nerve cell pathways, in the cortex of the brain. These do not develop until at least 24 weeks. To support his contention that the fetus screams he points to an area on the ultrasound which he describes as a screaming mouth, and which in fact is the space between the head and the chest of the curled-up fetus.

I could not begin to enumerate all the distortions and outright falsehoods in the film. What is more insidious is the way in which the script uses language to manipulate the emotions of the viewer.



Nathanson speaks of the "child" in its "sanctuary" being "agitated" as it "senses mortal danger," and assures us in his most professional and sombre voice that the twelve-week fetus is "indistinguishable in every respect from you and me." He even tries to suggest that abortion clinics are an industry run by organized crime!

Planned Parenthood in Seattle has made a film in response. The rebuttal film clearly suffers from hasty production and a small budget (in bitter contrast to the apparently unlimited resources available to the anti-choice forces). It also has serious ideological problems, chief among them being the assumption that all women are heterosexual and either married or yearning to be. It does, however, refute the most significant falsehoods, and is therefore a useful and necessary weapon in fighting the unscrupulous tactics of the anti-choice movement.

There is also printed information available which refutes the film. You can get a transcript of a panel of physicians who discuss it from a purely scientific point of view from CBS Audience Services, Transcript Requests, 51 W. 52 Street, New York 10019, NY. The Planned

Parenthood Federation of America also publishes a pamphlet entitled, The Facts Speak Louder: Planned Parenthood's Critique of "The Silent Scream", available for 75 cents from Planned Parenthood's Publications Department, 810 7th Avenue, New York 10019, NY. (see Ms., August 1985)

In the meantime, keep eyes and ears open for screenings of either or both films by pro-choice organizations.

Doctors for Choice will also be holding a forum on the issue of free-standing abortion clinics and improved access to hospital abortions later in the fall.

For more information about Doctors for Choice write P.O. Box 753 Station P, Toronto, M5S 2Z1.

Christina Mills

OCAC NEEDS ESCORTS FOR WOMEN USING THE CLINIC. If you can help, call 532-8193 and leave your name and telephone number; someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

PSAC: Militants on the Rise

The Public Service Alliance of Canada, representing 180,000 federal government workers, held its national triennial convention in Ottawa June 17-21, 1985. It may well have been one of the most significant--and tumultuous--in PSAC's brief history.

For those rank and file members left of center, and for many who are not, the basic union principles of collective bargaining with the right to strike, and of internal union democracy were at stake.

It all began when members woke up April 11 to learn that Daryl Bean, vice-president in charge of collective bargaining, had single-handedly and secretly negotiated with the treasury board a master agreement covering most of the 39 bargaining units in the union. He had also signed letters of agreement covering pensions and a dental plan.

Union activists, leadership and staff alike have been pushing for a master agreement for some time. As well, since most of our members are now without a contract--for as long as two years--collective bargaining is viewed with some urgency!

However, the details of this agreement were far from palatable. They included a two-tier system whereby we would retain the right to strike only on monetary issues; all other demands--tech change, job security, health and safety, sexual harassment, to name a few--would go to something called "binding conciliation." In other words, no strike.

The whole deal was to be signed without rank and file ratification. When activists realized that the union leadership was prepared to give away the right to strike--and without any regard for democracy in order to

arrive at a contract, we mobilized overnight.



Gail Geltner

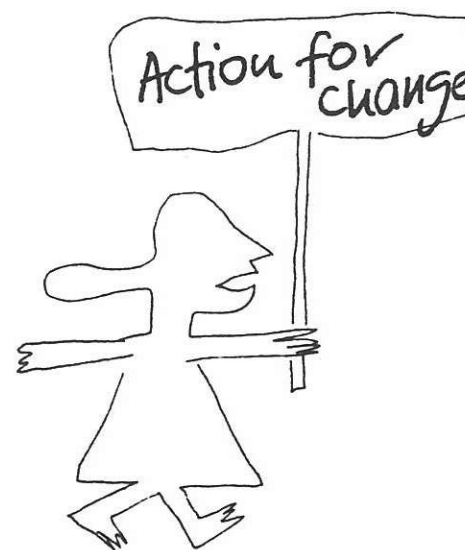
The Ottawa union office was deluged with telegrams, letters and phone calls; meetings condemning the deal were held in Ontario and Quebec. Delegations were sent to Ottawa. In a short time, we were successful in getting the agreement on pensions and the dental plan tabled. And, at an emergency board meeting, with the support of a handful of the progressive leadership, it was decided to bring the question of member ratification to the convention.

For those of us who had been organizing around women's resolutions, strategy after April 11 became more complex. It was immediately clear that as well as lobbying support and developing floor fights for affirmative action, daycare, changes to the constitution on sexual harassment and sexual orientation, we would have to devote enormous energy to protecting the

right to strike, and to changing the leadership--otherwise the organizing of women in our union would have little meaning. We were concerned, though, that our supportive brothers might lose sight of the need to continue to mobilize around women's issues in the face of the internal struggle.

Prior to and during convention, the interrelationship of women's issues, the right to strike, strong collective bargaining and democracy was stressed at meetings of the progressive caucus. Those "of us" running for leadership positions highlighted the role and demands of women in our literature and speeches. In part, I believe it was our consistency in making connections between issues that made it possible for the progressive rank and file to emerge from convention, not with a clear victory, but with a new strength and unity.

The convention got off to an uproarious start on Monday when an



emergency resolution rejecting the deal was introduced. We managed to get it on the floor as an emergency resolution, but lost the vote. By this time, the lines between the right and the left, between those fighting for a democratic, militant union and those attached to the concept of consultation, rather than confrontation, with the employer, were palpably drawn. As progressive resolution after progressive resolution was defeated, the right became more gleeful, the left dispirited.

Somewhere around Wednesday, women's resolutions started hitting the floor. The first proposed increasing the executive management committee to six positions and allocating two of these to women. The debate was hot, the opposition almost menacing. We lost. Then a resolution entrenching freedom from discrimination--including gender and sexual orientation--came up. A brother who stood up to amend the resolution to exclude "sexual orientation" was unable to find a seconder and was roundly booed. The resolution passed with a large majority. After that, a crucial resolution to include sexual and personal harassment in the discipline section of the union constitution was put on the floor, and passed unanimously. Not one delegate spoke against it, even though there were some who would have if they could have gotten away with it. Another resolution supporting Bonnie Robichaud, a member who has been fighting a case of sexual harassment in the courts for over six years [see article in this issue], and who has recently been suspended from her job, was also passed unanimously. On Friday, we passed another resolution, not only supporting regional and national women's conferences, but also providing the necessary funds.



Wisconsin Patriot/LNS

I think the winning of some "women's" resolutions was the turning point for progressive delegates. Sisters who had voted with the old

boys' club around the deal, now, somewhat courageously, broke rank with the block voting of their union caucuses; or managed to get their caucuses to vote with us. But mostly, it was the momentum we gained from realizing we could win something that gave a push to organizing for Friday when we achieved some important victories.

Although Daryl Bean (he of the infamous deal) was elected President, we elected Susan Giampietri, a feminist and strong supporter of membership involvement and basic union principles, as second vice-president. Her election was a breakthrough for rank and file control of the union.

On Friday, progressive delegates introduced and passed an emergency resolution calling for a master contract on all items (no two-tier system) and with the right to strike. This meant that Bean and the Executive had to go back to treasury board and demand different terms of reference for collective bargaining than those arrived at in camera around the deal. The passing of this resolution represented a strong rebuke to the leadership.

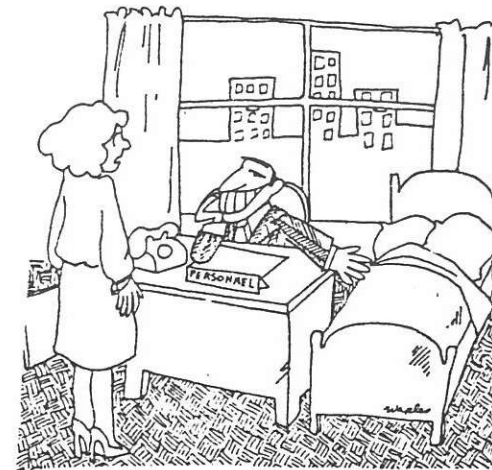
The employer is quite likely to remain recalcitrant around a master contract. In the end we may have to strike illegally. But at least PSAC members were able to leave this convention knowing we had prevented our union leadership from giving away the most basic weapon available to the union movement--the strike. Knowing that PSAC had not gone down to disgrace within the labour movement, progressive members left Ottawa determined to organize over the next three years. There's lots of changing required in our union--but the militants are on the rise!

Penni Richmond

Bonnie Robichaud: Still Fighting

Bonnie Robichaud is an example of the new woman in the labour force. A victim of sexual harassment, she has fought a five-year battle to retain her dignity as a woman, a worker and a trade unionist. It's been an ordeal which would have caused most people to snap. But Robichaud won't, and that seems to make the old boys' club all the more determined to make an example of her.

When she started work with the department of national defence in 1979, the North Bay mother of five beat out fourteen male applicants to become the first woman lead hand of a cleaning crew at the nearby Canadian Forces Base. She was elated, but four months into her probation her supervisor, Dennis Brennan, a burly ex-policeman, utilized his position to sexually assault her.



Robichaud kept silent during her probation, then went to her union local to grieve Brennan's behavior. When it failed to support her, she took the case to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

It wasn't until July 1982 that a one-man tribunal comprised of Carleton law professor Richard Abbot, in an unbelievable decision, dismissed Robichaud's claim--despite what he called a "severe credibility problem," with Brennan's testimony.

In February 1983 a review tribunal overturned Abbot's decision and found both Brennan and the defence department guilty. This made Robichaud's case unique on two counts. It was the first time a victim had remained on the job under the supervision of the person who assaulted her; legally, it was a landmark because it held a federal department liable for damage.

But it was a short-lived victory. The justice department instructed the treasury board to appeal on the defence ministry's behalf. In December 1984 a Supreme Court panel upheld Brennan's guilt but exonerated the defence department.

Brennan has never been disciplined. Robichaud, however, was suspended from her job without pay or reason on May 30 of this year. Her base commander has said she must submit to a psychiatric examination and receive a clearance from health and welfare before she can return to work.

Robichaud is rightly incensed, but stoically chalks it up to another shot in the department's intimidation campaign. What does concern her is that other victims of sexual harassment are being coerced into silence by the treatment she's received.

LABOUR

Robichaud has harsh words for the Human Rights Commission. "They haven't given me any moral support, or followed up on my situation at work," even though she has made them aware of the continued harassment. "Left up to them, I would have lost long ago."

Robichaud's case points up the futility of relying on human rights legislation as a cure-all for workplace discrimination. Woefully understaffed and underfunded, officials point to their formidable backlog of cases. A simple investigation can take up to a year, and if there are court appeals the commission is often reluctant to incur the expense.

Robichaud is luckier than most complainants. Her union's national office, The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), has been footing her legal bills, in the hundreds of thousands. Even so, she has personally paid out \$2000 to fight the case. Other victims have been left in considerable debt when forced to rely on their own resources. The maximum award a tribunal can make is



"Mr. Baker, I've just divorced one of 'God's gifts to women.' And for the time being, I'm returning further packages unopened."

\$5000, although additional compensation can be won for lost wages. Even when fines are levied some argue they serve as a licence for employers to continue discriminating, since for many it would be preferable to pay a small fine than to enforce the law.

The newly elected head of PSAC, Daryl Bean, has called for strengthened legislation against harassment to be included in employment standards acts. This would place the onus on the employer to prove compliance with regulations.

Ultimately it is the employer who has prime responsibility for safety in the workplace, and it's the government's job to enforce it. The Ontario Federation of Labour has called for sexual harassment to be compensable under the Workers Compensation Act.

The WCB turned down a request from Robichaud for lost wages due to stress-related illness. She has circulated a petition asking the board to reconsider, and feels a recent Quebec board award to an harassment victim will strengthen her appeal.

Meanwhile Robichaud plugs along, speaking to labour and women's groups, sending off letters to politicians and the media. She feels that even if the department wins this round some valuable lessons will have been learned about boss-worker, male-female power relations.

For the labour movement Robichaud's case unmask a sensitive area, pointing to the need for better education on human rights issues. No union member should ever have to battle this kind of grievance alone. No worker should suffer such humiliation in order to keep a job.

Kerry McCuaig

Australian Women Fight For Steel Jobs

For the past five years, 34 predominantly migrant and poor women from one of the most impoverished towns in Australia have waged an historic fight for the right to work in steel mills in Wollongong, New South Wales.

The women claim the steel company unlawfully discriminated against them between 1977--when anti-discrimination legislation came into effect--and 1980, when it hired some women after formal complaints had been lodged with the then Counsellor for Equal Opportunity.

As a result of the unlawful delay in hiring, some of the women were among the first to be dismissed under the "last-hired, first-fired" principle when retrenchments began in early 1983.

If the women win and survive any appeal to the courts they will claim damages of about \$13 million, which will likely have a dramatic effect on the wider business community. Either companies will be forced to take anti-discrimination laws seriously, or the decision will galvanize them into a fight against Federal affirmative action laws.

If blue-collar women can force open the gates of heavy industry, then all employers may have to take their heads out of the sand and address the question of integrating their workforce.

Laws barring women from lifting certain weights would no longer be able to be used as a blanket excuse



not to hire women; instead, companies would have to revise their work practices. A win for the women could provide impetus to change the weight laws to protect men, too.

The Wollongong Jobs for Women campaign, whatever its outcome, has had a profound effect on the lives of the women involved. Women who could speak little or no English have learned during the campaign to organize, agitate, conduct meetings, write letters and leaflets, and to take control.

Reprinted from Women and Work (Canberra, Vol. 7, #1, May 1985).

IMMIGRATION HARASSMENT

Sharon Hayles is a young, black Jamaican woman who was detained by immigration authorities and placed at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Toronto in December 1984. While in custody at the hotel, pending a hearing regarding her status as an immigrant in Canada, Sharon charges that she was sexually harassed and subjected to verbal and physical assault.

When Sharon protested invasions of her privacy by male guards she was branded a troublemaker and told in racially abusive terms to return to her own country.

Because Sharon suffers from allergies, she avoided going to the recreation room, which is frequented by smokers: she was accused of isolating herself and having a problem socializing with the rest of the detainees.

While in custody at the Waldorf Astoria, she became ill and requested a doctor through her immigration counsellor. The attending physician prescribed medication that apparently created additional health problems. Her subsequent requests for medical attention were ignored; instead of being allowed to see a doctor, she was accused of being "a problem" and taken to the Metro West Detention Centre.

Sharon's immigration counsellor managed to have her returned to the Waldorf Astoria, but her persistent requests for medical attention continued to be ignored. When guards came without warning, saying they were taking her to the doctor, Sharon resisted being handcuffed (not having been handcuffed before); she was grabbed and punched, then handcuffed and again taken to the Metro West

Detention Centre, where she is still being held.

Since her return to the jail, Sharon's health has deteriorated. She is very depressed and it appears that she is not receiving adequate medical attention.

Sharon has since taken legal action against the guards involved and, as a result, counter charges of assault have been laid against her.

The Sharon Hayles Defence Committee has written to the minister of employment and immigration and several federal and provincial government agencies protesting the treatment of Sharon Hayles and requesting an investigation.

Lend your support by sending letters of protest to the minister of employment and immigration, the minister responsible for women's issues, ministry of correctional services, ministry of health and other government agencies that you think should be concerned with this case. Being an illegal immigrant or a refugee seeking status in Canada does not justify the violation of basic human rights.

It is invariably a costly process to defend one's rights, and the case of Sharon Hayles is no exception. We therefore welcome any contributions that you can make toward her defence. Cheques or money orders payable to the Hayles Defence Fund should be sent to: Sharon Hayles Defence Committee, 184 Vaughan Road, Toronto, Ontario M6C 2M3.

The Sharon Hayles Defence Committee was convened by the Congress of Black Women to bring together a broad base of support for Sharon's case.

NATIVE

Mohawk Women Resist Pollution

Women in Akwesasne, referred to on New York state maps as the St. Regis reservation, are leading the community's fight against the growing threat of toxic wastes. A General Motors foundry there has been issued the highest fine ever by the Environmental Protection Agency, but has refused to pay up or clean up. Dumping of PCB's continued at least until 1981, nine years after the highly toxic compound was banned.

In 1979, the Women's Dance Health Project was organized at Akwesasne and other sister communities. It translates traditional concepts into practical tools for organizing women around community health action and developing a health model based on cultural revitalization.



Central to the project's philosophy is a revival of midwifery and breastfeeding, which help women experience more control over their lives in a way that is grounded in their culture. Yet because of PCB pollution, women are worried about whether to breastfeed their babies. They need information to guide their choices.

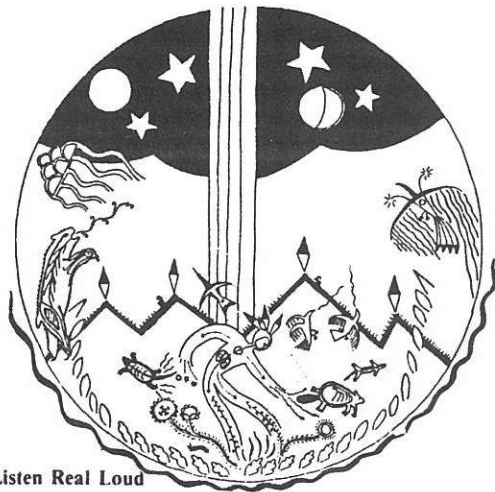
As the demanding negotiations over clean-up and compensation go on, Women's Dance is working to set up a breast milk monitoring project, involving a broad range of women in the educational and organizing process.

The emphasis on women's active involvement encourages people to revive their skills of observation and judgement, making hard choices as they decipher a chemically complex world. As the community's working knowledge about environmental health expands, strategies develop for preserving the land and the community. The project functions not only to gather information, but to gather strength.

Katsi Cook and Lin Nelson

Women (native and non-native) and community groups who are developing similar community health projects are urged to contact the Akwesasne women through Katsi Cook, 301 S. Clinton St., Apt. 1E, Ithaca, NY 14850, U.S.A. Telephone: (607) 273-4843.

Reprinted from AFSC Women's Newsletter *Listen Real Loud* (Volume 6, #3, Summer 1985).



Listen Real Loud

Frances Young Free on Probation

After pleading guilty to a reduced charge of reckless homicide, Frances Young was sentenced to five years of probation on condition that she leave Kentucky and enter counselling. A Native American, Young had been charged with first degree murder in the shooting death of her common-law husband, a white alcoholic who had frequently abused and beaten her and her teenaged son.

Young decided to plead guilty to the reduced charge after a survey showed that only one person in 12 in Louisville would accept the incident as self-defence. National and local support had a tremendous impact on the case, believed to be the first in Kentucky where someone pleading guilty in a killing was sentenced only to probation.

From the AFSC's Women's Newsletter (Volume 6, #1, Winter 1985.)

NORTHERN NOTES:

On May 1 the Whitehorse Women's Centre heard that our grant for the 1985-86 fiscal year (which began April 1) had been approved by secretary of state minister Walter McLean. This was a small victory because in mid-April we had heard rumours that the Women's Centre, along with two Native groups who were also awaiting funding from secretary of state, were on Eric Nielsen's "hit-list." Apparently our conservative MP down there in Ottawa had recommended that we not receive full funding. Nielsen denied these allegations of course.

But in April we were also in the midst of a territorial election campaign. The Yukon conservative incumbents argued that a conservative government in both the Yukon and Ottawa would provide many goodies, economic recovery and general blissfulness. (Voters didn't fall for these sugar-coated bullets.) I believe that one of the key factors in our continued funding was that the funding question was made an election issue.

The federal conservatives woke up to the fact that there was an election campaign going on in the Yukon and that it wouldn't make for good PR to cut funding for three community groups that have a lot of support from Whitehorse residents.

Political pressure is effective during an election when votes might be at stake. But what about next year?

Although we got our funding this year, all indications from the BC/Yukon Women's Centers Conference recently held in Vancouver is that cuts are coming in 1986. Out of the conference we set up a BC/Yukon Women's Centers Coordinating

Tories to Cut Women's Centre Funding

Committee to lobby secretary of state for continued funding and to act as a central communications relay for women's centers in the region.

In the meantime the Whitehorse Women's Centre is looking at ways we can prepare for what seems an inevitable cut in funding. In many of the rural BC towns, the women's center is the only women's group and serves as a transition home, rape crisis centre, counselling service

the political uproar won't be as big as in the urban centers.

It is important for urban feminists to support the struggles of rural women as we often feel politically isolated from the hub of activity. Hopefully this article will promote understanding of the issues facing women in the rural west and north.

Jan Langford



P.S: Yes, we now have a minority NDP government in the Yukon but their ability to put some of their policies and promises into practice has yet to be seen.

Graphics this issue from:

Hot Wire, Network of Saskatchewan Women, Breaking the Silence, Hysteria, Tapestry, Broadside (New York), Women's Education des Femmes, Tellus, Canadian Women's Studies, Women and Environments, Listen Real Loud, Isis: Women and Media.

Thanks to Linda Briskin and Judi Stevenson for help in producing this issues of CAYENNE, and to PRG for continued support.

and so on. Cutbacks in funding for these centers will mean the loss of many services. The Whitehorse Women's Centre provides all these services and more on a paltry \$33,000 grant from the government. I call that a cheap way to get a lot of valuable services. Yet because most of the women's centers in our region are in a rural setting I am afraid that the federal government might try to cut back in this area, hoping that

NAIROBI: A Decade in the Balance

Worlds in Collision?

Well, its over. The world's largest ever gathering of women and the women's movement. Most significant, over a third were from the third world, a dramatic increase from either Mexico or Copenhagen. Within Kenya, many women walked thirty, forty and fifty miles to get to Nairobi.

Over two-thirds were there to attend the non-governmental organizations (NGO) Forum, and the rest were also there as formal delegates to the U.N. Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the U.N. Decade for Women.

One of the highlights of Nairobi was getting a glimpse of the changing relation of third world feminism to the women's movement.

In most NGO workshops I attended, I came away most impressed by the strength and insight of the analyses coming from third world activists. Kamla Basin from India talking about the relation (and contradiction) between activists and theorists as part of a panel on "feminist theory"; Jing Porte from the Philippines talking about building a movement of women workers as an integral part of the workers movement; the third world participants in the lesbian caucus describing the tensions between lesbian, feminist and left organizing; the women from Central America, the Middle East, the Philippines, South Africa describing the organizing of women within national liberation struggles . . . and the list went on.

It's not the analyses that represent a change: most of us have been sufficiently humbled by the insight of women who daily battle against a level of oppression we cannot even imagine. Still I don't think I expected to hear discussions

that spoke so directly to issues that we grapple with (and often avoid grappling with) here.

I'm not sure we've fully grasped how much the experiences of Third

World feminism have to offer, especially in helping us to think through some of the roadblocks we're facing. Too often we read "international news" as simply that,

Statement of the Convenor: NGO Forum

The climate in Nairobi is quite different from Copenhagen. In 1980 the international political climate was much less reactionary and confrontational than it is today.

Mexico City was the beginning; Copenhagen was to be a major consolidation exercise. And it was.

Much is made of what didn't happen at Copenhagen. Much regret has been expressed at the lack of unity, the absence of "consensus". But consensus around what?

There were over 8000 women in Copenhagen, every one of them individual registrants, even if some were members of coalitions, workshop participants, celebrities or resource persons.

In Copenhagen we saw a wide variety: the first lady of just-liberated Zimbabwe, young women in chadors explaining their own and their country's position, a band of youthful musicians from Iraq; roaming, indefatigable video crews; single mothers with babes in arms; the Gray Panthers; the Coyotes; one-woman religious organizations; researchers and analysts from Western academia, from Asia, Africa and Latin America; craftswomen from cooperatives in Togo and Benin, working-class women and peasants from the mines and the highlands of South America; emerging politicians from the new nations of the South Pacific with names still unfamiliar to most of the world . . . Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu . . . and nations of the

Caribbean. There they crossed paths with leaders of Western feminism, Sandinistas and Polisario activists, social workers and village leaders from rural America and rural India and rural Africa.

Eight thousand and thirty-three women . . . every woman looking for an audience . . . every woman a part of another audience. Here in Nairobi there are 10,000 plus, with the same goals. And of course there were men at Copenhagen, as there are today. Never before and not since have so many women and so many agenda items met in a free forum to cross purposes and find common ground. Five years later, some of the same and many new women are here to test the safety of that common ground, in Nairobi . . . in a Third World country, an African country.

For the women who venture to Nairobi, the challenge will be to assess, accurately, the power within the world community of women and to devise ways of harnessing that power to re-energize the movement . . . forward. There can be no one strategy, no single alternative, because although there are common roots of women's oppression and equality, one woman's liberating truth can be another woman's destruction. That is why consensus is not possible. Understanding can be.

Nita Barrow, Convenor, NGO Forum
Opening Session, July 10, 1985



what's going on somewhere else, and not as the experience of women who are struggling with many of the same problems, and potential.

Not so long ago it seemed that socialist feminists were alone in trying to build bridges between Third World (particularly Latin American) women and activists in North America. We felt caught between two critiques. Third world women were skeptical about the women's movement in North America: from all media reports, and some first hand contact, our movement looked middle class, privileged, and self-seeking. While in North America many feminists held the view that if women weren't fighting "like us" and on the same issues, they weren't really feminists.

That uneasy relationship has been shifting, in large part as a result of the growing involvement (and demands) of Third World and women of colour within the women's movement, and of feminists in the solidarity movement. There is now a much wider recognition that, for example, struggles for national liberation cannot be seen as separate from feminist issues and demands as we know them. And perhaps more importantly, we've learned it is not our prerogative to decide what is and isn't feminist.

The July editorial in *Rites* (a Canadian lesbian and gay newspaper), talked about the importance of organizing internationally. Speaking to lesbian women and gay men, they said, "We have the possibility to

develop a more global movement--one that moves beyond the boundaries of nation-states to open up space in which to explore the diversity of our lives. It could be the beginning of a movement which not only recognizes the concerns of lesbians and gays in the Third World and lesbians and gays of colour, but one which is integrally defined by these experiences."

There is no doubt that the women's movement is at a different point in terms of being an international movement, but I think the counsel is equally valid for us. After a lot of prodding by Third World women, as well as by immigrant, native and women of colour within our own communities, we have made headway in learning to respect and actively support the struggles of women in the Third World. But now there's another step to take.

Women's movements in Third World countries have grown tremendously in the last ten years. Third world women have taken the feminist ideas and thinking that's come from our movements, had years of experience of fighting battles in very different contexts, and now are ready to reflect on and share how they see feminism and feminist issues. In so doing they are providing a new basis for the development of feminist and socialist feminist theory and practice. I hope we are prepared to listen. It's essential if we are going to build a truly international movement. It also may prove important for getting over hurdles here.

Lynda Yanz



Ann S. Miller, Director, International Women's Tribune Centre

The NGO Forum: Beyond Appearances

Somewhere between 12 and 15,000 women from around the world came to Nairobi in July to talk politics (god-forbid). The range of politics was wider than anything I could have imagined; and it made for many surprises. I still cringe remembering how I felt when I realized that the nice, patient woman who I managed to find workshop space for was in fact the Phyllis Schafley of the Australian right to life movement. I felt sick and oh so liberal.

Pre-conference materials warned would-be participants not to expect a conference. The Forum was there for all 12,000 of us to use in whatever ways we could. Not surprisingly the result was a jamboree that seemed to be happening totally out of control of everyone.

The main program consisted of over 1000 workshops. Then there was the "peace tent" that included displays, discussions and cultural activities, a continuous cultural program, a "tech and tool" fair including workshops and displays of "appropriate technology" from around the world, a film festival organized by NFB's Studio D, and two markets where Kenyan women sold crafts. Something for every woman. Unfortunately nobody had arranged display space for the miles and miles of materials, posters, art, crafts, and exhibitions that women brought. In typical make-do fashion groups began spreading their wares on the lawn of the university courtyard.

When I got back from Nairobi I was amazed at how little friends here had heard about what went on. It seems that in the eyes of our media Nairobi warranted neither serious reporting or analysis. First, most press discredited both events (and by implication the women's movement) because of the high level of chaos. ("Can't you women be professional?")

Secondly, and much more dangerously, the media has been using what happened in Nairobi to promote the reactionary view that the women's movement (and all "good" feminists) is being threatened by what Linda Hurst in the Toronto Star called "a small but increasingly vocal minority" that want to talk politics instead of women's issues.



I get angry when I read those reports. The Forum a mad-house: how could it have been anything else? Twelve thousand plus women in a Third World city the government of which would have preferred we had never come.

Given their unofficial status, Forums are constantly at the whim of

decisions made elsewhere--by the U.N., by host governments, etc. The organizing committee has no say in the dates (which the U.N. changed twice in the last year) or location. Although the fact that the Forum took place in Africa was politically very important for the women's movement, the Kenyan government's lack of support exacerbated the disorganization. Throughout the planning and the Forum the steering committee (and in particular Nita Barrow) had to negotiate its way through endless bureaucratic hassles and roadblocks: censorship regulations, limitations on evening activities, and most problematic--space to meet, space for workshops, space for displays, accomodation.

Funding was another major hassle. Until very recently it was unclear whether there were sufficient funds to carry the event off. Sixteen months ago Nita started knocking on funders' doors with a grand total of \$1,200 in the bank. No funds are forthcoming from the UN for these "alternative events" even though they're recognized as more dynamic and certainly as important as the "official conference."

The lack of funds plagued the planning throughout. For one thing, it meant that most of the work for the conference was done on a volunteer basis. Think of it: organizing and coordinating an event for 12,000 women with one or two paid staff and different organizing committees working in Nairobi, Geneva and New York.

The point is not to justify the disorganization. Many participants were rightfully angry at the chaos and disorganization. Limited translation services meant that only English-speaking women got a chance to participate fully. We all lost out as a result. Organizational

problems are never simply that, whether or not it's intended, they inevitably have political implications, which serve the interests of the larger, more institutional groups who have access to simple things like paid organizers, long distance telephone calls, telexes, good mail services, etc. It is those political implications that we need to understand, not have the media use "disorganization" as a means of dismissing the whole event.

But it is the reporting of a "division" between politics and feminism that is most menacing. If indeed we can make any overall statements about what Nairobi, we must state loud and clear that Nairobi represented an overwhelmingly loud rejection of the view that women's struggles are separate from other political struggles, that they can ever be separate from the realities of class struggle, racism and national liberation.

Charlotte Bunch opened a panel discussion on "What is Feminism?" by recalling an incident at the Copenhagen Forum in 1980. "The Forum newspaper chose as the quote for the day 'to talk feminism to a woman who has no water, no home and no food is to talk nonsense.' That became a mobilizing point.

"We saw it as a challenge to feminists around the world to change the concept of feminism from being a luxury item for the elite, rather than as a mass movement.

"Feminism cannot be separated from politics. Every issue is a woman's issue." I don't think you'd find many disagreements from the vast majority of women in Nairobi.

It's hard to believe that any woman came away from Nairobi really believing that the problems had to do with mixing politics and feminism.

Surely we're clearer that "problems" are the result of serious political disagreements, and an inevitable part of social movements as diverse as ours.

The privilege of being in Nairobi was having the opportunity first hand of hearing women talk about their lives, their oppression, their struggles and their dreams. There is nothing more powerful than hearing women weave together the reality of their personal lives and political struggles. Some of this happened in the workshops; The more important connecting, for me in any event, took place more informally as women struggled to learn from each other. That may sound hopelessly romantic but I really believe that most women went to Nairobi with a thirst to learn about the lives of women in other places, to connect with them. That seems one important and political outcome.



The questions that keep coming up now are: was it worth it? Should we do it again? It will take a long time before we can answer that. First we need the assessments from the different groups and constituencies who will evaluate the Forum from the reference point of their priorities. Solidarity groups. International networks. The peace movement. What was accomplished? What wasn't? Why?

My sense was that those groups who went to Nairobi with a clear sense of what they wanted to accomplish got most out of it. Needless to say socialist feminists were not an organized force. Of course, many of the best organizers and tacticians there were socialists. But there were only two sessions that actually focused on socialist feminism, one organized by the third world women's network DAWN, the other

DAWN

North American and European feminists were definitely the bystanders in a series of workshops organized by "the DAWN group." Each session was packed with 400 to 500 women, and gave voice to the experiences, perspectives, and differences among women organizing in the Third World. Most importantly, it provided an opportunity for Third World women to connect with each other.

DAWN stands for Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. The network of activists, researchers and policy makers are committed to developing alternative analyses and methods to "attain economic and social justice, peace and development free from all forms

by the Norway Women's Front. (Hopefully we'll have those stories next issue?..)

It's absolutely essential that as a movement we begin to draw up a balance sheet on an event that cost so much: in terms of time, energy and money. We can assume that funding agencies are going to be on the retreat, feeling they can rest on the laurels of their contribution to "Nairobi".

And how does Nairobi, the Conference and Forum, figure in the realm of world politics? What was being acted out there? Who won?

The question is where we go from here. We've had a chance to come together as an international movement: it's a growing reality. How do we use it to move forward the struggle for peace, development and equality?

Lynda Yanz

of oppression by gender, class, race and nation."

DAWN began as a Third World feminist initiative at a meeting in Bangalore, India in August 1984. The meeting brought together a group of women from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific, Europe and the US to share a similar critical perspective on development issues.

From Bangalore the group decided to produce a paper (which grew into a small book) to synthesize the experience of women with development, highlight the impact of the global political, economic and cultural crisis on women and propose alternative visions and strategies.

DAWN was one of the most visible networks operating at the Forum. Their sessions included panels on: the effects of growth-oriented development; the global political, economic and cultural crisis; alternative visions; feminist publishing and women in publishing, writing as a subversive activity; the politics of funding; and socialist feminism.

You can write Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, c/o the Institute of Social Studies Trust, S.M.M. Theatre Crafts Building, 5 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg., New Delhi 110 002, India.



Ooman Gittup

ooman gittup
an stap bruk yuh back
awfta yuh nuh cow

dem call yuh laydy
seh fih ack genkle and sweet
but jus fih show

cause dem cum ome
an dem waan dih food
all cook an reddy
den pan top ah dat
dem waan yuh mek
pickney stan stedly

yuh wuk like a auss
day in
an day out
den dem waan yuh luv dem
evvy nite
tiad out

ooman gittup
owtah dih bed
an from ovah dih stove
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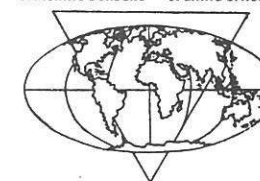
Ahdri Zhina Mandiela

This poem is from Ahdri Zhina's first book, *Speshal Rikwes*, published by SISTER VISION, Black Women & Women of Colour Press. It is from a section described as "an immediate crash course" in the language and rhythmic style of dub poetry. Ahdri Zhina suggests in her introduction, "Don't just read [it]; play it with your own voice and hear the music!!!"

The I.G.A. in Toronto

The International Gay Association's 1985 conference was held in Toronto this July 1-6. At the solidarity workshop a motion that was put forward to express support of liberation struggles, failed. The motion consisted of four parts, the first of which was a call to support all liberation struggles, the second and third mentioning Nicaragua and El Salvador specifically, and the fourth calling for letters of condemnation to be sent to respective governments. Only the first part was actually passed, but that with an amendment that made it conditional on the liberation struggles's support of gay rights. The Third World Lesbian Caucus of the IGA met after the official conference was over and passed the resolution reprinted below. It will have to be taken up by the IGA next year.

SMASHING BORDERS — OPENING SPACES



RESOLUTION OF THE THIRD WORLD LESBIAN CAUCUS

Whereas:

- the IGA intends to be representative of the international lesbian and gay community;
- the oppression of Third World lesbians and gay men cannot be separated from the struggles of our people against U.S. and European imperialism and racist oppression of our brothers and sisters in South Africa;
- all the resolutions in support of Central America and South African liberation struggles were voted down at the IGA plenaries;
- caucuses for Third World lesbians and gay men were scheduled either in conflict with IGA plenaries or after all plenary sessions were over;
- Third World lesbians and gays, especially lesbians, are grossly underrepresented in this conference (i.e., there was only one Third World lesbian delegate present;)

We demand that:

- 1) each IGA conference organizing committee establish and support a Third World caucus as part of the organizing committee to insure that Third World needs and Third World issues are addressed throughout the conference;
- 2) the IGA continue to encourage and support spaces for Third World people only, Third World workshops and Third World people's caucuses at future IGA conferences;
- 3) at the end of each IGA conference, the Third World caucus be invited to prepare and distribute an evaluative report from Third World people regarding the IGA conference. This evaluation will be passed on to the organizers of the following conference;
- 4) a Third World Secretariat be created in which lesbians and gay men are equally represented;
- 5) priority in the distribution of travel funds to bring delegates to IGA conferences be given to Third World lesbians and gay men;
- 6) the IGA support the struggles for liberation being waged by our sisters and brothers in Central America and South Africa.

INTERVIEW: "A Question of Survival"

Nelly Jitsuya, a lesbian active in Peru, was the one Third World lesbian delegate sponsored by the International Gay Association to attend the annual conference held July 1985 in Toronto. She is part of the Grupo de Auto-Conciencia Lesbiana Feminista (Group for Lesbian Feminist Self-Awareness) in Lima. Marie Lorenzo spoke to her about her life in Peru.

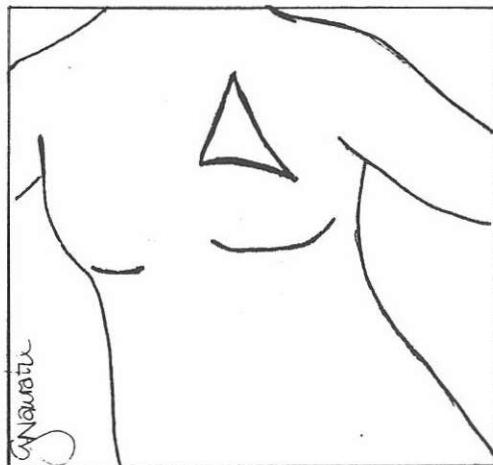
Q: What is the current political and economic situation in Peru?

NJ: Well, we have a tremendous foreign debt, which is in large part attributable to the economic repression that still goes on. Also, they have stepped up repression in the universities. Repression is carried out by the military with the sanction of the government. Many people disappear, and we know they are being held prisoner. In these cases, the victims are usually not permitted phone calls; even when they are they are not told where they are so their contact has to search all the jails for them. Many women are automatically raped in jail. Anyone can be arrested at any time to verify if they are a terrorist or not; and you are assumed guilty until proven innocent.

Since 1980, we have had a supposedly democratic government. We just had elections in April, and the party that won power is centrist, though the government as a whole is right-wing.

Q: What opposition is there to the government?

NJ: There is a recognized legal opposition, which is called the



United Left. And then there is the unrecognized opposition which is largely made up of extremist groups. This opposition is more... violent, if you like.

Q: What are the conditions for working class and poor women in Peru?

NJ: Many women in these classes are very independent. Usually there is no family in the sense of father, mother, and child. Very often women are sole supporters of large families. This is very common.

And take the question of reproduction. Most families are quite large because women in Peru don't have access to contraception. Abortion is illegal. It costs a lot of money, so for most women abortion is inaccessible... unless, of course, you get a home abortion, which is also very common. If you are a woman of middle or upper strata, it is naturally easy to get an abortion. One of the current debates around abortion is that it is a right for middle-class women only, while it is poor women who desperately need the access.

From another perspective altogether, the Manuela Ramos Movement recently undertook a large campaign to disseminate contraceptive information to women. Lack of information is the main problem in Peru. From their study it turns out 80% of the women who had taken the information did not want to go on any form of birth control. They wanted to be able to avoid sex. The conclusion reached by the Manuela Ramos Movement was that it was a way for women to say no to sexual relations they did not enjoy--most of these women had never had an orgasm.

Marriage is not that popular in the poor classes. It is very common in Peru to live communally, and it was a tradition in ancient Peru. It is common to set up what are seen as transient arrangements. There are many more single mothers in these classes, and there are many cases of fathers abandoning their children. And whether a couple is legally married or not, it takes a long time to go through the red tape to get child support; the courts are clogged up.

Q: What is the women's movement like in Peru?

NJ: The feminist movement is about 12 years old now. You can't really call it a movement in the sense that it does not contain masses of women. But there are many women's organizations, and, furthermore, all of us get together. It used to be once a month, and now we're resuming that again. We meet as a feminist movement.

Also, there are many women who do what amounts to feminist work, but who do not call themselves feminists. For example, women working in the barrios who organize themselves as women, organize daycares, etc.

Q: How is this feminist movement organized?

NJ: In Peru it's not like here [in Canada] where there are many groups that organize around specific issues. For example, we have the Peruvian Women's Centre Flora Tristan that organizes actions in various areas. There is the Manuela Ramos Movement, which is a larger group; they also organize actions in many areas. But at the level of the feminist movement, there have been various commissions struck which contain women representing different groups. For example, there is the political commission, and it works within the political context during elections, and so on. Then there is the reproductive rights commission, the commission on violence, and others...

And this breaks down barriers, because you end up working with women from the different groups and there is more communication.



Q: What is the relationship between the feminist movement and the left-wing in Peru?

NJ: I actually don't have a lot of information about the left, but I would say that in general the feminist movement works with the left around specific issues.

Many of the women now involved in the feminist movement are ex-militants of left groups. This is precisely a point which often causes conflicts, you know, this question of the double activist, i.e. being a militant in the feminist movement and in a political party or group. In other words, it is the problem of where to put your priorities. And many of these women have left these groups because they did not see the groups clearly take up the problem of women. And of course, these groups' internal organization is very sexist . . . the women would end up being the secretaries and making the coffee for the meetings... that kind of thing.

Q: How did lesbians begin organizing in Peru?

NJ: It's been very recent; we have heard that there have been other attempts in the past, but it has been very difficult for us to uncover our history. The only thing we know, and we've found this out through talking with older women, is that there was a group organized about three years ago, made up of anywhere between 20 and 50 women, depending on whom you talk to. It was intended to provide financial support to lesbians who were experiencing economic difficulties, there were a lot of single mothers, and so on. I think that group lasted, at the most, eight months.



So, now there is the group to which I currently belong, which is the Grupo de Auto-Conciencia de Lesbianas Feministas, or GALF. Many of us had previously been part of feminist groups. And what we found was that people did not want to deal with the fact that we existed as lesbians. And others would protest when we tried to bring up lesbian issues.

For example, I was part of a women's coffee house and I wanted to do a workshop on lesbianism. But we couldn't reach a consensus, because some women were opposed to the idea. And this in spite of the fact that there was a lot of interest in the topic at the time.

So, when we saw that the issue was not being raised in any of the existing groups, we began to get together. Our first aim was to be a consciousness-raising group, because we simply had no information at all. So, partly it was designed to exchange personal experiences, partly for information-sharing. For about eight months we concentrated on our

small group (which fluctuated between eight and fourteen people). We just met by ourselves and didn't participate in any external activities.

Then something happened within the group, and we had to shut down the coffee house. We became a bit disheartened. Not with the group itself, but with other things, like the coffee house, and some personal conflicts. We've started meeting regularly again; we needed to.

This time we have decided to take on different kinds of work in addition to consciousness-raising. The first thing we decided to do was put out a newsletter, because we wanted to reach more people, and it was something we could do easily ourselves. Through the newsletter we have attracted more interest. Now there is increased interest among feminist groups in discussing the existence of lesbians and lesbianism. So we are trying to organize a workshop with heterosexual feminists. On the other hand, we have also been meeting with a group of about 50 women who play soccer. We've been meeting with them and talking about organizing a workshop.

Q: What is your experience with the "straight" feminist movement?

NJ: Well, there are many aspects to that question. Many feminists are homophobic. But, we are feminists, too. We are not disassociated from the feminist movement. And we work together on specific issues. For example, I am on the Reproductive Rights Commission. And I think it is important that there be a lesbian present on all these commissions.

We have received material support from the feminist movement; for example, putting out this newsletter was made possible by

women's groups. They provided ink and stencils and mimeo'd it for us-- though at our insistence.

I think there has been an opening, but I would call it an intellectual opening. In practice it is often contradicted. For instance, there is very little coverage of issues of concern to lesbians in feminist periodicals. And on the other hand, there is still a great fear of the word "lesbian"; even feminists fear it because they still fear being labelled a bunch of lesbians.

Q: Your organization is underground; can you tell us why?

NJ: Well, there are many reasons, and different reasons for different people, not one of the least being our relationships to our families. In Peru, and in many parts of Latin America, the family continues to be a major source of emotional support, and in many cases our principal economic support. Then there is the question of our other political affiliations. Many women fear losing their membership in their political organization. Other cases have to do with work. As it is, in Peru it is difficult for a woman to find a job; if you're a lesbian, it's completely unacceptable.



It's a question of survival. Given these enormous obstacles, we just couldn't come out and survive. It would be suicide. And in large part this is due to the fact that we do not yet have a large movement, a base, whether it be feminist or gay or lesbian, that could support us... supposing we were fired from work, for example. So, we feel that this is not the right time.



Gail Geltner

Q: And that applies to the group as a whole?

NJ: Yes. For instance, this last lesbian and gay pride day, we had a big debate about whether we should participate publicly as a group or not, given that there was a chance the mass media would be there and it would be broadcast to all of Lima.

There are women in the group that are prepared to come out to the mass media, but since others were not, we decided not to come out as a group.

Of course, we are out to other feminist groups and to gay men's organizations, and it is in this milieu and in the bars that we primarily distribute our newsletter. There are various gay bars, and one has a women's night on Friday nights, so we try and do outreach that way.

Q: Do lesbian mothers bear any additional risks in Peru? For instance, are they ever in danger of losing their children?

NJ: Not really. As I mentioned before it is very common for women to be primarily responsible for their children, and when parents split up the fathers would never fight for their children! On the contrary. And institutions are so full that they do not pose a threat. It is not the same as in Western countries.

But there is a great stigma attached to being a public lesbian, of course, and the stigma is carried down to the children. For instance, there was a 50-year-old lesbian we met who had an 18-year-old daughter. We wanted to interview her but even though we assured her we would not publish her name, she was afraid for her daughter. Not for herself, but very afraid for her daughter. The daughter was just applying to university and she was afraid to endanger her chances in any way.

I don't know many other lesbian mothers besides myself, and we certainly haven't begun to organize ourselves around that aspect of our lives. Lesbian organizing is still too new, and we still have much to do just dealing with the broader issues.

Q: What are GALF's goals for the future?

NJ: Well, I think the most important thing for us now is to create a base for ourselves, to raise people's consciousness about the reality of homosexual oppression, and to identify the source of that oppression. It will take an enormous amount of skill and energy to achieve this; and it must be done before we can actually take on any action directed at this heterosexist society. We may take on other things, but this is our priority.

(translated by Marie Lorenzo)

TAKE BACK ★
THE NIGHT ★

(Toronto)

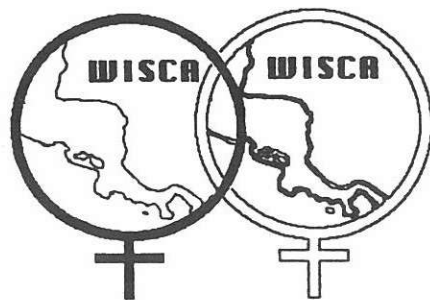
The March: Friday, September 13 at 7:00 p.m., Queen's Park; childcare from 6:00 p.m. to midnight at 519 Church St.; coffee house at 519 after the march.

The Dance: Saturday, September 14 at The Party Centre, 167 Church St.; \$6 at the door, or pay what you can; \$5 in advance from the Women's Bookstore, SCM Bookroom (pay what you can), or Glad Day Books. For info and childcare call 964-7477.

you can dress her up



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After about a year and a half of work WISCA is in the process of evaluating our mandate and discussing how we can best use our limited womanpower in the service of women in Central America and the solidarity movement. Because all of us are involved in political work with other groups, we have some of the disadvantages of a coalition without one of the important benefits: a large pool of people to draw on when work has to be done.

At this point it is clear that we will have to make some choices about priorities in our work, but the discussion about those choices is still in process. One element which will continue to characterize WISCA, whatever the concrete tasks we undertake, is our conviction that the struggle is all one.

To underline that conviction, in this issue we go beyond our usual "turf" to Chile, with a salute to the Committee of Democratic Women.

This September 11 marks the twelfth anniversary of the military coup in Chile. During the past five years CODEM, the Committee of Democratic Women, has been a pivotal organization in the resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship. In homage to the Chilean people's twelve years of struggle and to CODEM's five years as the organized voice of women in it, we are printing the following, from the anniversary issue of CODEM'S newsletter, VAMOS MUJER (Let's Go, Woman).

CODEM: Five Years of Resistance

This September 11 marks the twelfth anniversary of the military coup in Chile. During the past five years CODEM, the Committee of Democratic Women, has been a pivotal organization in the resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship. In homage to the Chilean people's twelve years of struggle and to CODEM's five years as the organized voice of women in it, we are printing the following, from the anniversary issue of CODEM'S newsletter, VAMOS MUJER (Let's Go, Woman)

CODEM was born five years ago. It is a women's organization mainly composed of pobladoras. Our purpose in organizing was to motivate women in shantytowns, the most marginalized women, to organize and become conscious of the social problems in the country at that time. Women from several areas met in a church--the majority were Christians and their commitment was part of their idea of religious faith; some were nuns.

We began by publishing the Newsletter--it came out by the end of the first month...the first run was 800 copies, because it was for March 8--International Women's Day.

Our earliest work was in the area of health; we organized a huge campaign against the privatization of the health care system, with letters to the Ministry of Health and actions in hospitals and polyclinics. We got up at six a.m. to go to the clinics and hand out pamphlets. This work



culminated in a petition to the Minister of Health asking for a meeting with him. We got four thousand names, but he never answered and we never got our meeting.

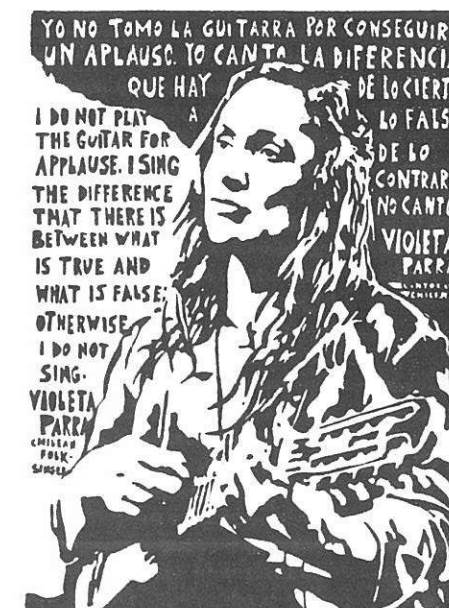
The first International Women's Day we celebrated as CODEM we were going to go to a union local along with other organizations, but when we got there the cops had closed the factory. We went elsewhere and set out on a march. The repression was horrible and many were arrested.

In 1981 there was the January 14 occupation. There we talked about the aspirations of the organization, its concerns for the problem of women as a social sector in our country. There were a lot of difficulties, but we encouraged women to join and understand the importance of organizing, since that was how to educate about the rights and struggles of women and of the people in general.

These have been five hard years, with many ups and downs, but they have given us a rich experience which has allowed us to grow as an organization and as women. Together we have learned what it means to create a women's organization under a savage dictatorship such as has never before been seen in our country.

We have had to fight discrimination against women in times when we are all, both men and women, denied the most fundamental rights, including the right to our own lives. This has strengthened us, because it is easy for everyone to understand our call to struggle against the dictatorship, but there are people who do not understand that when we call for the rights of women we are not dividing but adding to the struggle.

Because when we struggle to free women from the domestic slavery imposed on us by this patriarchal society, when we struggle to be able



to organize along with other women who share our problems and hardships, we are fighting so that half the people, the silent half until now limited to the role of companion, can become a protagonist in the struggle for our rights.

In these five years we have seen that specifically women's problems exist, that poor women are aware of them, and that in unity women learn to identify and struggle to resolve our problems. Equality with men, the participation of men in childrearing and domestic labour, adequate sex education, are as important to women as the rights to work, health, and education.

All this we have expressed in our platform of struggle. All this has contributed to our growth and consolidation. We women have been in the forefront in the task of creating unity in the anti-dictatorial forces. We have forged a coordinating body for women's organizations, a powerful



weapon in the struggle for democracy. Our celebration of International Women's Day, March 8, demonstrates to the dictatorship that the Chilean people is on the march and that we women are determined to win a place in the front ranks of the struggle to put an end to repression and death and build a new democracy in which we ourselves elect the government. . .

Five years ago, in 1980, we had already had six years of dictatorship, that is, of repression, suffering, fear, and also of struggle, because we Chileans never accepted what the military and the bourgeoisie imposed on us; from the day of the coup there were those who stood up to the oppressors, many, too many, at the cost of their lives...

Exile, torture, disappearances, these were characteristic of those years. Since in those days politics was largely carried on by men, the majority of the dead and imprisoned were men, and so mothers, wives, daughters, many of whom had until then lived only for their homes, determined to demand justice for their dead or imprisoned relatives, and to demand truth about the disappeared.

At the same time, the economic model imposed by the Chicago Boys

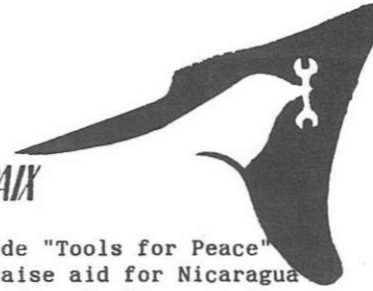
brought unemployment and poverty to the homes of workers. There, too, women put their shoulders to the wheel. With the support of the Church, workshops, communities, committees of relatives of the disappeared arose, all organizations in which women took on roles previously reserved for men.

By 1977 the popular movement was already beginning to undergo a reactivation, and the first great struggle was the relatives of the disappeared's campaign demanding to know what had happened to the disappeared. The organization which was the major protagonist at this point in the struggle, the Families of Disappeared Prisoners, was lead by women.

That reactivation continued, and the popular organizations began to recover their autonomy. The birth of CODEM was an expression of this process.



TOOLS FOR PEACE OUTILS DE PAIX



The Canada-wide "Tools for Peace" campaign to raise aid for Nicaragua is growing, and so is Nicaragua's need. This campaign began in 1981 when a group of B.C. trade unionists collected over \$25,000 worth of fishing equipment to send to Nicaragua. Since then the campaign has grown to national proportions. The 1983 effort resulted in a million dollars worth of aid, and in 1984 it was 1.5 million.

The 1985 campaign is getting started earlier than usual because of Nicaragua's increasing need of both material aid and international solidarity. Already endorsers are being sought and a preliminary fundraising letter is being mailed out. As in the past, the campaign will run through the fall. Around mid-December, after a few days of high-spirited and somewhat frenzied packing and crating, the goods collected here will be shipped to Vancouver and from there go by boat to Nicaragua.

Once again we will be sending a wide variety of goods. Everything, including typewriters, sewing machines, agricultural implements, toys, paper, office supplies, and medical equipment and supplies, will be sent. But in addition to these, this year's campaign will focus on a number of specific Canada-wide projects aimed at educating the Canadian public about the critical situation in Nicaragua, while trying to meet some of the country's most pressing needs.

The first project involves raising money to buy consumer goods in short supply as a result of the

U.S. trade embargo. Items like toilet paper, toothpaste, soap, and light bulbs are virtually unavailable in Nicaragua right now. The second project is to collect emergency supplies for the victims of the contra aggression, and the final one is to gather basic educational supplies to aid Nicaragua's unswerving advance in education. Our hope is that individuals and groups will be able to plug into one of these three projects.


The campaign began with fishermen raising goods to help their Nicaraguan counterparts, and in that spirit it continues to encourage sectoral links. Last year, for instance, a farmers' brigade from Alberta raised goods for Nicaraguan farmers, and this year in Toronto Tools for Peace is facilitating the transportation of electrical materials for a brigade of Canadian electrical workers who will be working in a project in Nicaragua next year. The medical equipment and supplies raised here by groups such as Medical Aid to Nicaragua (MATN) go to help hospitals and clinics in one of the strongest sectoral links developed within Tools for Peace.

Finally, and most importantly, we encourage financial donations (which are tax receiptable). We anticipate that even more money and goods will be raised this year as Canadians respond to the latest of U.S. attempts (the economic embargo and aid to the contras) to undo the gains of the Revolution.

If you would like more information, or if you are interested in being contacted when volunteers are needed, please phone Valerie Endicott at 536-7722 (until the end of August). After that call Oxfam (961-3935) or LAWG (533-4221) for our new office number.

Valerie Endicott

The Committee for the Detained-Disappeared in Guatemala (CDGUA) is a Toronto group which supports the efforts of the Mutual Support Group, which is comprised mainly of the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of the disappeared detainees in Guatemala. CDGUA publishes a bulletin of information about the situation of political prisoners and disappeared persons in Guatemala, and about current campaigns on their behalf. Right now they are urgently asking for solidarity with the Mutual Support Group in repudiating the Tripartite Commission's insulting report on the disappeared which covered up the real situation. CDGUA is raising money to pay for open letters in the Guatemalan press. Both individuals and groups are urged to sign the letters of solidarity. To contribute, or to find out more about CDGUA, write: Committee for the Detained-Disappeared in Guatemala, P.O. Box 421, Station F, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2L8.



WISCA is pleased to announce the release of WE ARE AMNLAE, an interview with Patricia Lindo of the Nicaraguan Women's Association. The booklet, a co-publication of WISCA and the Participatory Research Group, contains more than a dozen photographs and covers such topics as grassroots participation in the legislative process, women and military service, the re-evaluation of domestic labour, and Nicaragua's new paternity and nurturance laws. It is available from PRG and DEC, both at 229 College Street. \$3.50.

If you'd like to know more about Women in Solidarity with Central America, write us at 229 College St., 3rd fl., Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R4



REVIEWS

A Question of Silence

Written and Directed by Marleen Gorris, 1981

"A Question of Silence" is a Dutch film about a very uncommon theme in the visual arts or literature: women's rage against men. It tells an intricate story of four women who at the outset of the film have never met. By the end of the film each has risked her future, and three have gambled their very lives on the strength of what connects them to one another as women.

Starting with the opening scene we are faced with a yawning chasm between male and female characters. Two people are lying on a sofa. He is the lawyer, reading a tome with the familiar intensity of a man who lives to work. She is the psychiatrist, restlessly inattentive to her book, snuggling closer to him for the relief of loving contact. He pushes her away. Symbolically, the lines of incomprehension between the genders are drawn.

The psychiatrist, Ms. Van den Bos, is called to give her expert opinion on the sanity of the accused in a bizarre murder. Three women have beaten a boutique owner to death. "Its an open and shut case," says the lawyer on their way to the jail, "they don't deny a thing. Of course they're insane--you can spot women like them a hundred miles away."

Ms. Van den Bos is irritated by his assumptions. "The boutique owner," she probes, "was it a man or a woman?" "A man." She pauses to grasp it, and then with a flash of intuition she asks the key question of the film: "Could it have been a woman?" He doesn't understand: "That's an irrelevant question--it wasn't a woman." Gender irrelevant,

when three ordinary women kill a man they didn't know, leaving his genitals unrecognizable? Hardly.

The three perpetrators are achingly familiar types: Christine, the isolated suburban housewife, whose furious husband demands of Van den Bos, "How could she do this to me (sic)? She had nothing to do all day except keep the kids quiet." Janine, the sexy executive secretary, quietly running the business for a self-absorbed boss, who can't figure out his appointment schedule once she is gone. Ann, the loud-mouthed laughing waitress in a run-down cafe, slinging hash for the boys, and ducking their jibes about her manless state.

When Van den Bos arrives to do her psychiatric assessment, Janine is hostile and cynically rejecting of this representative of the male justice system. Ann is voluble with the excitement of so much attention. Christine has taken refuge in complete silence. Bit by bit the murder scene unfolds in flashback. Christine defiantly shoplifting. The boutique owner's righteous confrontation. The shock of Christine's refusal to apologize and slink away like the good girl she "really" is. The wave of excited rebellion touched off in Janine and Ann. They push him. His face is transfigured with fear. He falls. Blow by deliberate blow they kill him.

The murder scene is uncompromisingly brutal, letting no one mistake the aroused bloodlust. The violence by men against women is a commonplace of the silver screen, but these reverse images have resulted in great agitation among viewers. Those unable to accept the scene are neatly corralled with the uncomprehending observers inside the film: of course the women are insane. Or in film crit terms: these women have no

REVIEWS



motivation for this crime. No direct motivation, perhaps. But their lives are motivation aplenty, if only the idea of inchoate female rage were not so unthinkable.

A book by historian Ann Jones called Women Who Kill documents the same cultural blindness: women who act out against men can only be understood as insane. In the cases she quotes of rape, abandonment, dishonour and brutality by men, the women who take their revenge in blood are often judged by the courts to be out of their minds. Their motives and their anger are thus made safe by social denial.

In the case of Christine, Janine and Ann, the entire justice system awaits Ms. Van den Bos' assumed finding of insanity. Her husband pressures her not to step out of line. Her clients expect nothing of her. Some of the women in the courtroom witnessed the crime and are part of the conspiracy of silence. They see no point in explaining and sit ready to hear the crime dismissed as madness. Then she says it: "I find that the defendants are of completely sound mind." Pandemonium in the courtroom, and the female spectators release their silence into waves of cathartic laughter at the public acknowledgement by Van den Bos of their bond of anger against men. The question is now a guantlet thrown

down for everyone to answer: why would three women of completely normal circumstances brutally kill an "innocent" man, even in a film fantasy? Why indeed!

Judi Stevenson

Post-script: Gorris has since made a new film called "Broken Mirrors" which is evidently a reversal of the situation in "A Question of Silence." To me, the story of a male maniac woman-killer sounds dangerously close to the stuff of everyday newspaper headlines, but we have reason to hope that Gorris' treatment will be enlightening, given her obvious dedication to the theme of women and their relation to violence.

The women's program of the American Friends Service Committee publishes an excellent quarterly newsletter: Listen Real Loud: News of Women's Liberation Worldwide. CAYENNE excerpts it gratefully, and we highly recommend it. You can subscribe by writing the AFSC Nationwide Women's Program, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. A US\$5 to \$10 donation is suggested.

Ladies Against Women

I went to see Ladies Against Women with great anticipation, primed by a hilarious interview with this feminist and intensely anti-Reagan comedy troupe from San Francisco (Socialist Review, #68, 1983).

During the "consciousness-lowering session" we were introduced to the Ladies Against Women (LAW) Ladyfesto by Edith Banks, Mrs. Chester Cholesterol and Candy Cotton from the Moral Sorority.

The audience was encouraged to defend the rights of the unconceived, to save the sperm and end menstruation, masturbation and other forms of mass murder. Fred Shrapnel, a member of the men's auxiliary urged us to support the legalization of hand grenades for personal use. We participated in an exercise program to help us "look and feel as helpless as we are." Part of the LAW program recommends replacing the environment with outdoor carpeting which is more attractive and easier to maintain. "Really," they pointed out, "sport vacuuming could be at least as dynamic as golf!" They demonstrated cooking with cholesterol, revealed the secret for making twinkles from scratch and shared with us their favorite recipe--sweet and sour fruit loops.

We were treated to a slide show of Ladies Against Women's visit to the republican convention where they held a bake sale for the Pentagon outside of Reagan's prayer breakfast. The "ladies" looked terrific marching in their pink suits and pill box hats, holding signs which read "Warfare, not Welfare," "Ban the Poor," "Misterhood is Powerful," "Sperms are People Too."

At the end, Ladies Against Women sold the audience buttons with slogans such as "Tupperware Preserves

the Family," "Born to Clean," "Close Your Eyes and Do Your Duty." We were entreated to take a membership card home to our husbands without whose signature we would not be able to join.

No doubt this sounds very funny (it did when I read about it in Socialist Review) but the truth is that I did not laugh very much. The reason lies somewhere in the contradiction between humour and political satire. A key element of political satire is exposing through ridicule and exaggeration. But the image of the moral majority presented by Ladies Against Women felt too close to the truth to be funny. It didn't seem exaggerated, just plain terrifying. I had a flash that the moral majority might take Ladies Against Women at face value and even steal some of their finely-tuned slogans.

Perhaps it didn't work for me because I was the wrong audience. (Or maybe I'm just a humourless person, a thought which passed through my mind as others in the audience roared with laughter.) The question of the audience however does seem a crucial one. Who is this kind of theatre directed at? The demoralized left in the United States who need to laugh? Or the political center who apparently don't see the frightening implications of the moral majority's politics?

After the performance I asked this question to Cotton Candy aka Jain Angeles. She made a clear distinction between theatre audiences, those at political rallies and meetings, and street audiences. In terms of their goal to educate, she suggested that the theatre audience was the least successful because it is a politically self-selected group. At rallies and meetings, Jain saw that Ladies

Against Women educated by bringing together a "cluster of issues," some of which the audience would be unfamiliar with or possibly unsympathetic to. For example, at a union meeting, they might raise feminist issues; at an environmental meeting, the concerns of workers. But she found street theatre the most provocative. "There is an edge you walk that I love because you are clearly not dealing with the converted. On the street they challenge you."

I too find the idea of street theatre appealing politically because it is a way to make direct contact. In so many political arenas, we reach out to people only in a very mediated way, and often avoid having to speak to anyone directly. I would have loved to see the "ladies" in action on the street.

Whatever criticism I might have about the effectiveness of Ladies Against Women in the theatre setting, I appreciate their politics and their wonderful manipulation of the language, especially the intertwining of the language and slogans of the right and the left, and I laud their attempt to develop progressive political humour.

After I completed this review, I read a provocative letter to the editor in Broadside (July 1985). Lorelea Michaelis, who admits to not having seen the performance but only to reading the highly positive review of Ladies Against Women in Broadside (June 1985), identified a profound misogyny in both the review and production itself.

"The explicit intent of Ladies Against Women is to poke fun at the New Right and its vocal and threatening reaction against feminism. But it is almost solely the women in the Right who are the objects of ridicule... We are asked to regard them as our enemy... Ladies

Against Women breaks down no barriers: it challenges nothing. In making these women the object of derision, it merely reinforces the (male) leftist tendency to single out women to represent the decadence of a privileged class... Implicitly they [women of the Right] acknowledge women's tenuous security within marriage. They are not "other" to us: as women, many of us have experienced the same fear and rage at the thought and reality of our ex-husbands stopping the child support payments. In such women I recognize my mother . . . In Ladies Against Women I find no thoughtful and probing feminist analysis, but a deep-rooted hatred and fear of ourselves and ultimately of our mothers."

Although it would be possible to dismiss Michaelis' position as mystifying and romanticizing connections between women, I think there is an important grain of strategic truth in her critique. In my experience feminist activists have difficulty approaching the majority of women directly. We tend to use strategies that keep us at distance: leaflets, demonstrations and mass meetings. This distancing makes our politics, actions and theory less accessible. This is a strategic error that we must address.

Linda Briskin

