

CAVENE

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*a
socialist
feminist bulletin*

CAYENNE

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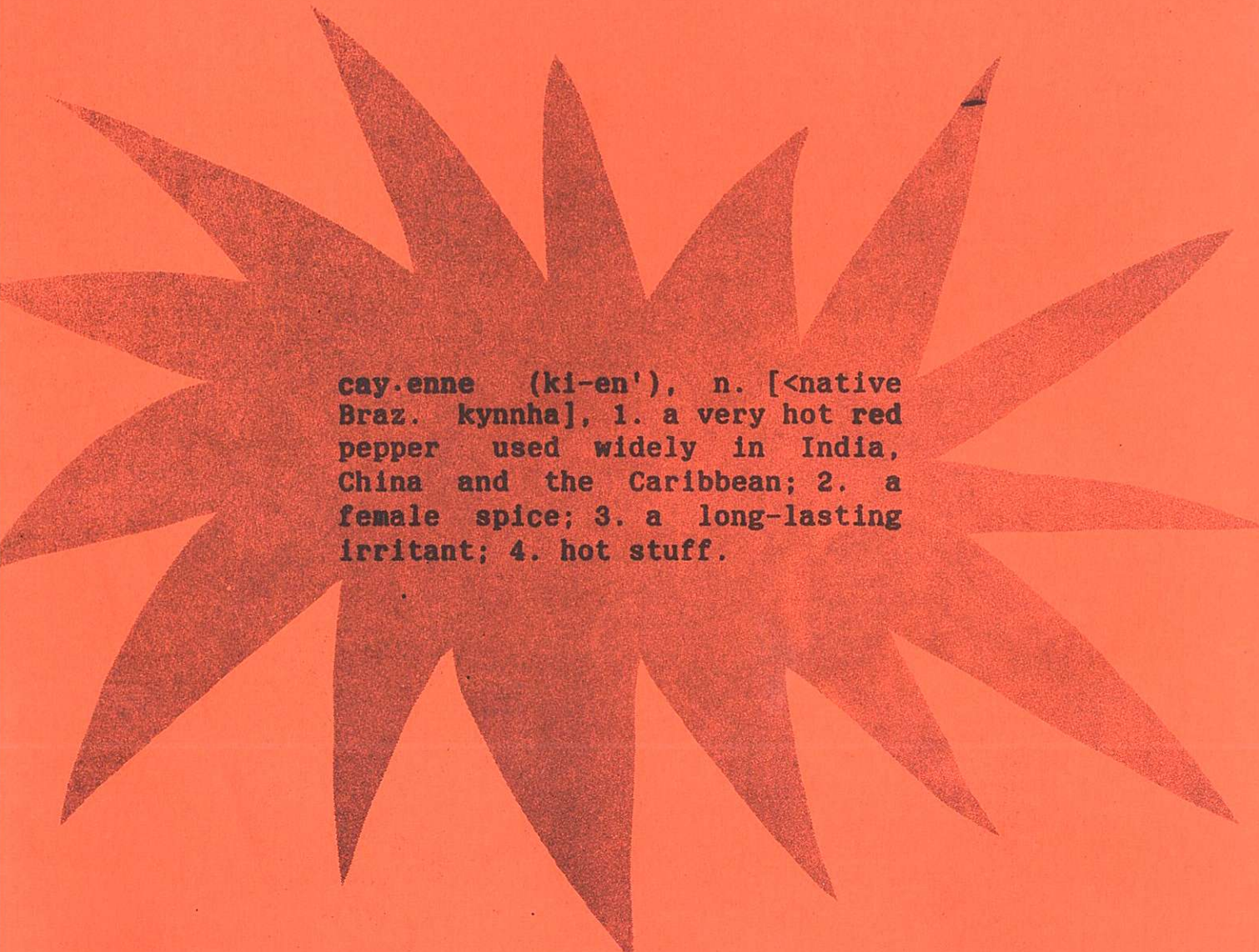
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CAYENNE

a socialist feminist bulletin



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

CAYENNE

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EDITORIAL

With this issue Cayenne goes quarterly, and we're nudging up our subscription price to \$12, a step towards acknowledging our limitations as a small collective and our rising costs. We think you'll still consider Cayenne a great deal.

We're very excited about our special section on Nicaragua, which includes an interview about women agricultural workers and an analysis of the recent debate on abortion. Feminists in the women's movement in Canada have long been inspired by the struggle of Nicaraguan women. But it is still too rare that we consider the practices and analyses coming from movements in countries like Nicaragua in our own struggles.

We've had a mixed response to last issue's special section on the debates about racism that emerged during IWD in Toronto. Many readers appreciated our taking up the debate, and adding our voice to the growing concern about racism in the women's movement, as well as in the wider world.

We have also received critical reaction to our positions, which is of course what we want and expect. We are pleased to be publishing in this issue a letter of strong disagreement with Marie Lorenzo's article, and disappointed that there are no other exploratory, in-depth letters to go along side it.

The difficult question of criticism within the women's liberation movement was raised very strongly for us, not only by the contents of the last issue, but by our receipt of a letter attacking Marie personally, and declining to engage in open political debate. Such a letter does nothing to advance the cause of an anti-racist women's movement, and in fact is destructive of the possibilities for free discussion on any serious and highly charged subject, of which there are many facing our movement.

Over the course of the last few months, the Cayenne collective has been talking a lot about criticism, and how we deal with it. As a movement, our record is not that great. As a collective, we have tried to ensure that we are open and responsive to criticism which is constructive and aimed at furthering debates. In this issue we are including no less than three critical evaluations of recent political activities and writings of socialist feminists.

Criticism means risks. But how else are we going to grow as a movement, and move forward?

The Cayenne Collective

P.S. By the way, what do you think of our new format?

letters



—Gail Cefner

Dear Cayenne Collective:

I've just finished reading the June/July 1986 issue of Cayenne, and I want to congratulate you on an outstanding publication. I was delighted by the breadth of selection of your articles, the pleasing presentation, and, most importantly, the tone of the articles, which were informative and provocative without being polemical.

The discussion of the difficulties besetting this year's IWD was especially illuminating for those of us who care, but are not involved in organizing. I was impressed by the way in which you were able to inform the reader about all facets of the controversy, while maintaining so much warmth and integrity. I applaud you for being so open about the process you went through in deciding to discuss so potentially divisive an issue.

The interview with Peggy Smith also warrants a mention. Without being told too much, I was immediately into the guts of her experience, and rather than anger, I felt the love, the fatigue and the despair of the relentless pace of her life.

Thanks to you all for making us pay attention. Your commitment to sharing even the most sensitive issues, and allowing us to feel their nuances is a feat which you certainly have accomplished.

Congratulations!

Marion Levi, Toronto

Dear Cayenne,

We're writing in response to Marie Lorenzo's article "Women and Racism in Toronto: Some Anger and Some Hope" in your last issue. We disagree with several of Marie's points.

For lack of a better term we've used "women of colour" to include black, native and Asian women. We feel uncomfortable with this because it does not differentiate one group from another. We are also not addressing the experience of immigrants who are subjected to a form of racism based on language and culture, rather than "colour."

To situate ourselves: we are two white women who were not involved in the International Women's Day coalition, though we participated in the rally and march on the day itself and attended several of the events during the week. We realize that we can't deepen the debate for those who worked in the coalition, but still feel the need to answer Marie.

Our impression of the day was that there were in fact more women of colour participating than in previous years and the rally was impressive for the way it

addressed the diverse ways that racism manifests itself both within individuals and institutions. It felt like the beginning of a positive process. A process that is by its nature a difficult and painful one.

When people with a history of oppression begin to articulate their experience and demand a voice and concrete changes, it is often not "convenient," it doesn't fit with the existing order of things, it is not neat. There is no "appropriate" way to do it. Our major disagreement with Marie is that she does not seem to acknowledge the importance and necessity of this process and instead insists that the way things unfolded in the coalition was based on "a misperception of who the real propagators of racism are," that "anger directed inside the women's movement is only appropriate within certain contexts," and that IWD should be used instead to "raise consciousness and politicize unorganized women, and to make demands on society in the name of all working women."

Marie's argument brings back vivid memories of the 70s when as feminists we tried endlessly to convince left groups of the validity of our oppression as women and the impossibility of putting our concerns and struggle "on hold" in order to forge a stronger unity with men to fight the "real" oppressors. While of course sexism and racism do not operate identically there is still a lot to learn from the parallel. Often the people we felt oppressed by were our male friends, com-

rades and workmates. Sexism was (and is) an integral part of our day-to-day lives and yet when we brought it up we were accused of being divisive, disruptive, overly-sensitive, of being "bourgeois feminists," of wanting to focus exclusively on issues that were "secondary." We argued that a unity that does not acknowledge differences in power and privilege is a false unity that only serves to perpetuate and reinforce those differences. Women of colour can make a similar argument.

Marie's article is reminiscent of a doctrinaire Marxism that mechanistically separates the state and economic system from people's attitudes and daily lives, and so devalues the importance of confronting attitudes and daily practices that embody racism (or sexism, or classism...). Racism is not simply "outside in the state and economic structures"; as white people we gain in a daily way from the existence of racism and we are not going to easily give this up.

Marie does acknowledge the necessity of us confronting our own racism, but her examples of racism--believing white women are "superior in dealing with sexism" and women of colour more "dependent on men"--trivialize the work that has to go in to white women confronting the very deep internalized racism we all live. They also trivialize the experience of being a woman of colour in this society.

The IWD coalition did organize a series of events which addressed the broad

issue of racism and reached out to the larger community. Women of colour engaged in face-to-face struggle with white women both to organize these events and to educate white women within the coalition. But just as we have told men that we cannot be wholly responsible for educating them about sexism, we have to be committed to working alone as white women, to examining our practice, and to fighting to change the structures of society that entrench racism.

Marie says our greatest incentive to confront our racism is our "shared exploitation as paid and unpaid workers in this society." We feel that our struggle with racism will not be motivated by what we "share" with women of colour, but by our willingness to accept the challenge to examine differences and to confront the ways that as white women we experience privilege. We believe this challenge is urgent and we must answer it if we are really working towards "power through unity."

Of course this is easier to say than to do.

In Sisterhood,

Rachel Epstein
and Jenny Horsman

Dear Collective:

Congratulations on the Vol.2, No.2/3 issue of Cayenne. It gets better each time, and is a treat to read.

I did admire your courage to outline the struggles of IWD '86. We have so much to learn, and your example is a stimulus to us all.

Thank you so much for your work.

B. Hall, Toronto

Sisters,

Thanks for reminding me [to renew my sub]. I enjoy Cayenne but money has been tight so I put off sending you any--(you need it as much as I do.) Magazines like Cayenne right now are a necessity for me, not a luxury and must be budgeted accordingly. Keep up the good work.

In solidarity,

Alison Nutt



EXPO: THE VIEW FROM THE LAUNDROMATS

WELCOME, VANCOUVER!

It is with great pleasure that Cayenne welcomes Nancy Pollak to the pages of this issue. In our on-going struggle to make our bulletin a truly national forum for debate and exchange, we have succeeded in enticing her to make regular contributions from Vancouver. This first one reminds us how different the struggles are in different parts of the country, and confirms us in our desire to explore them further with the women involved.

Nancy is a graphic designer and printer who sometimes toes the chorus line in Acting Up, Vancouver's most hilarious feminist theatre ensemble.

Nancy Pollak
Vancouver

If the whirl of washers and dryers is any measure of economic health, British Columbia is in the pink. In laundromats and basements across the province, legions of women perform load after load as relative after guest after relative scatters a trail of dirty sheets and tablecloths, the detritus of Expo fever. Alas, the work is unpaid. And the cost--in aggravation and boredom--is just another invisible figure on the bill of goods the Socreds have sold British Columbians.

In the polarized world of B.C. politics, one of the few things people agree upon is that Expo spells Socred spells Expo. It is in the choice of synonyms that the ways part. For the establishment, this fair is the bait to lure tourists and foreign capital to a province abounding in supernatural vistas and super-unemployed masses. Expo will put B.C. "on the map", a map whose contours are decidedly pro-business.

Socreds are serious about creating a Silicon

Valley North, they are serious about Philippine-style free-trade zones, and their policies on labour, unemployment, and social assistance are calculated to ensure an unorganized, hungry swell of workers. In the meantime, Expo means thousands of 5-month-long jobs at \$4/hr. and one helluva party. Spiritually, Socreds worship at the Dale Carnegie Church of Positive Thinking, and there's nothing like a big bash with fireworks and the Royals to prime the P.T. pumps. It is almost refreshing to be up against such naked visionaries.

For those of us destined to solder the circuit boards, Expo is the wrong party thrown by the wrong party for the wrong reasons. We would rather whoop it up with decent schools, well-maintained hospitals, reinstated social programs--but unfortunately that version of fun is itself part of the problem. Progressive people in B.C. have been in a reactive "give-back-what-you-took-away" posture for so long it is difficult to envision, let alone pursue, the transformed (not merely restored) society we want.

Nonetheless, our political movements are alive and, given the sustained clobbering we've received, doing

quite well, thank you.

And what a clobbering it's been. B.C.ers have lived to see the day when that which the state has given, the state--province, to be exact--can take away. The list of losses threatens to be endless (no one can accuse us of being listless):

* Labour

Unemployment is chronically high and the minimum wage (\$3.65/hr.) is Canada's lowest. Women continue to be excluded from the relatively well-paying jobs in resource industries. Socreds laugh at the concept of equal pay for work of equal value. Domestic and farm workers, many of whom are non-English-speaking women immigrants, remain inadequately covered by the B.C. Employment Standards Act.

Collective bargaining and the integrity of union rights are under attack. The Compensation Stabilization Act & Program of 1982 triggers an automatic rollback of public sector wage



settlements deemed too high (in B.C., unions are daring when they go for a 2% hike). Government employees and health workers, mainly women, have been consistently thwarted by the CSP, and 1986 promises to be a long, hot year. Amendments and rulings relating to the Labour Code and the Labour Relations Board are patently pro-employer, and organizing is correspondingly difficult. (For example, the garment industry has increased threefold in as many years, yet the ILGWU is facing a daunting task when it tries to represent these new workers' interests, given recent LRB rulings on what constitutes an unfair labour practice prior to certification.)

20% cut in benefits and no wage increase (this, after a 56-month contract). Reduced personnel has resulted in both a deterioration in health care and a marked increase in work-related injuries among hospital workers.

Abortion facilities are as scanty and endangered here as elsewhere. This spring, our Health Minister pontificated that there was no need to improve "family planning" programs since women already knew full-well how to prevent pregnancies.

* Education

Socreds have a long tradition of diverting federal education funds into general provincial revenues. Still, their savaging of education

and English-as-a-Second-Language courses have been slashed, and there exist few programs to assist women or native peoples. The B.C. Teachers Federation is a militant union facing yet another round of negotiations with an employer who is offering no wage increase. Meanwhile, private schools, many of a religious bent, flourish.

* Social Services/Social Justice

Socreds, of course, believe that poverty is a symptom of laziness, that the dole prolongs--nay, encourages--the disease, and that recovery lies in the healing power of the free enterprise market (remember Expo?). For those other ills (you know, life's nasty little happenstances), please turn to your family and church. It is as though Ronald Reagan had died and gone to B.C.

Since the notorious 1983 budget, what have we lost? Homemaker services to the elderly and disabled; the Child Abuse Team; rent control; the Human Rights Commission; funding to Women's Centres and Family Places; hundreds of social worker jobs. Legal aid is less accessible; funding for transition houses and rape assault centres is inadequate. Daycare is in bad shape; it is estimated that eight out of nine children go without the care they need. And daycare funding is perverse: a single mom with one child loses her subsidy when she earns over \$1300/month; fees for care are an average of \$370/month.

A · CONTEMPORARY · EQUATION ·

E = X P = O

In which E=Extravagant, and P=Promises, the product of which is Nothing

Nothing To Be Thankful For — Plenty To Resist

* Health Care

Funding cutbacks have meant the loss of 2000 staff positions in six years, while direct costs in the form of user fees and premiums have steadily risen. The Hospital Employees Union has massive support for a strike this summer, and no wonder: their employer is offering a

in the mid-eighties has been totally awesome. In raw figures, \$330 million has been lopped from the budgets since 1982. Every dimension of education has suffered. Student aid is the poorest in Canada, workloads and classroom sizes have burgeoned, programs have vanished. Adult basic educ-

* Aboriginal Land Claims

Native women and men are dealing with a government that is, in mentality and action, a direct descendent of the government of 1866. At that time, it was decided that since Indians had no legal title to their lands there was no reason to negotiate treaties. Consequently, the Socreds have steadfastly refused to recognize even the concept of native land claims, let alone engage in discussions with the Indians and the federal government.



So much for the depressing list, partial though it may be. Happily, another list is available, one that displays some of our achievements, as organizers and activists:

* A new coalition of womens' groups called the Womens' Economic Agenda is holding forums and dispensing information with an eye to making women's and children's issues a priority in the next election.

* The Womens' Strike Support Coalition meets regularly in Vancouver to exchange reports on labour disputes and devise support strategies.

* Vancouver's new Lesbian Centre is bustling with political, social, and cultural activities.

* The Defend Education Services Coalition, comprised of students, teachers, and support staff, is also gearing up for the election with various community events and candidates workshops.

* The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) continues to maintain a high profile as advocates of prostitutes' rights.

And native people are persevering in their goal of self-government with a degree of clarity and directness that is inspiring. On their lands, among themselves, and in the courts, they are asserting the very basic idea that what is theirs is theirs and cannot be taken away by some arrogant, insensitive power.

Which brings us back to Expo. The money and attention siphoned into this colossal merry-go-round was taken from British Columbians: \$1.037 billion in direct costs and a projected loss of \$550 million. Money from hospitals and schools, from children and workers, from every facet of women's lives.

Mary Louise Williams is of the Lil'wat Nation and is active in the Indian Peoples Liberation Movement. As she says, "My response to Expo is no. We simply



didn't want to have anything to do with what Bennett did. There are those who think it was an economic opportunity for us, but I ask--did it have to be at this price?"¹

Or, as the women in the laundromats and basements might say, it just doesn't wash.

Thanks to Kinesis and the Womens' Economic Agenda for information and statistics.

1. The Expo Story, E. Wachtel and R. Anderson eds., 1986: Harbour Publishing.



PAY EQUITY:

**MISGUIDED STRATEGY
FOR DAYCARE?**

Susan Prentice
Toronto

Daycare is a very complicated issue. Once supporters move past the demand for "free universal childcare," the politics of this service-oriented issue get quickly confused and confusing. For the most part, women in the daycare movement are greatly informed by feminism, while the women's movement is relatively untouched by the daycare movement. Daycare is mostly the object of benign neglect by socialist-feminists in Canada--an interesting contradiction, and one which I'm interested in exploring another time.

Neglect--and therefore misunderstanding--of the highly complex politics of daycare produces strange results for strategy. Right now there is a strong equal pay movement which is strenuously arguing that daycare workers can experience redress through the equity legislation. Underpaid daycare workers are keeping their fingers crossed, but I wonder if their hopes are well founded. As a daycare advocate, I worry about our movement being sidetracked into a pay equity fight which, by itself, cannot possibly be the cure we need. To me, the struggle for direct grant funding must remain the integral and

vital heart of equity strategies for daycare.

PAY EQUITY

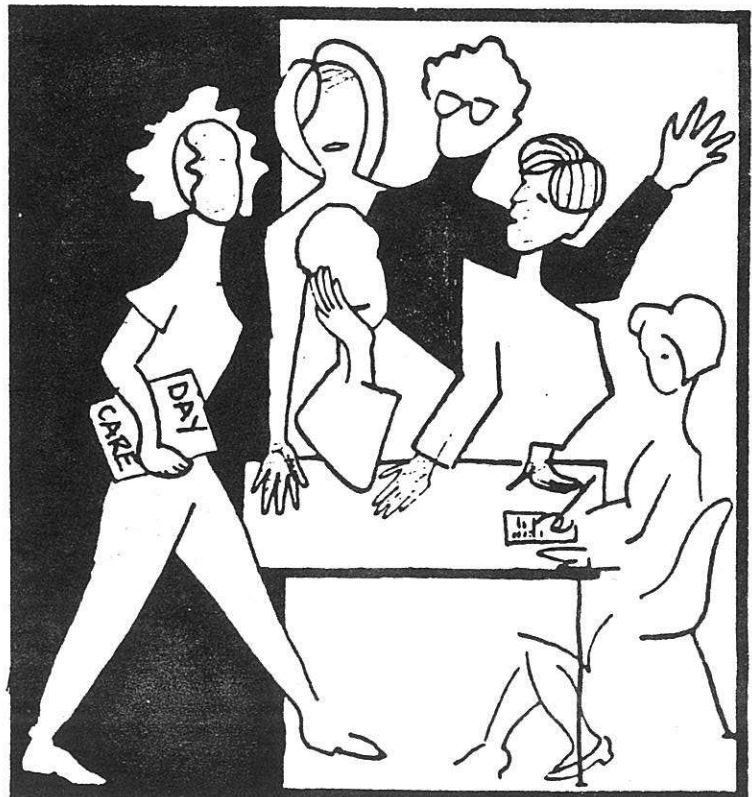
Can pay equity make a critical difference to Ontario's 10,000 daycare workers, whose annual salaries hover down around \$12,000? Supporters say yes, but I say, probably not; paradoxically because daycare is a female job ghetto.

Cynicism aside, pay equity legislation contains the germ of a progressive idea: the recognition that women are underpaid and can no longer be expected to subsidize the system through low wages. Current pay equity proposals are a complicated legal prescription for change, but the principle underlying them is simple: compare women and men workers in the "same establishment" and use that comparison to raise women's wages.

But pay equity alone can't transform the situation for daycare, because neither the practice nor the funding of the crisis-ridden daycare system are amenable to "reform through equal pay legislation." Here's why.

SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE

Daycare workers and parents seesaw back and forth in a catch-22 over money. If wages are to go up, then parents' fees must rise too. If fees rise, then enrollment will fall as parents who cannot afford more money are forced to withdraw their children. When enrollment goes down, workers must be laid off. In the financial mess that constitutes the "funding system" some parents qualify for daycare subsidies but most do not. Most centres try to operate with a mix of full-fee paying and subsidized children



to stabilize enrollment and therefore income.

Around kitchen tables, in community meeting spaces, in cramped offices across Ontario, daycare parents and teachers struggle with the contradictions of the user-fee daycare system. Irresistible force meets immovable object when the militant demands of organized daycare workers for increased wages come up against the desperate inability of daycare parents to pay more. What is to be done?

FUNDING FOR DAYCARE

Daycare activists have called for reorganized funding, a universally accessible, publicly-funded childcare system that breaks the circle of wages and fees. But this simple solution to the childcare crisis is politically unacceptable right now, due to its enormous cost. Cautious estimates of the most minimal system of nation-wide, universal daycare suggest \$11 billion annually--an incredible expenditure.

As a short term measure (while advocates work to establish popular support for universal childcare), calls for a direct grant system have been made. A daily grant for every child enrolled in a licensed non-profit daycare space would be an injection of fresh funding into the vicious circle. It could lower parent fees, raise worker wages, and/or supplement an inadequate toys and equipment budget. Only such an infusion of public dollars can break the user-fee sys-

tem that now traps workers and parents.

The direct grant approach is working in Toronto. In 1983, after a massive campaign by the Metro Daycare Coalition, the City government established a Direct Grant Fund on the principle that it would help to stabilize parent fees, and assist workers in non-profit daycare centres reach wage parity with better paid daycare workers in municipally-operated centres. In the first of the three years \$1,000,000 was allocated. In 1986, the grant fund totals \$3,000,000, to be given to non-profit centres as wage supplements.

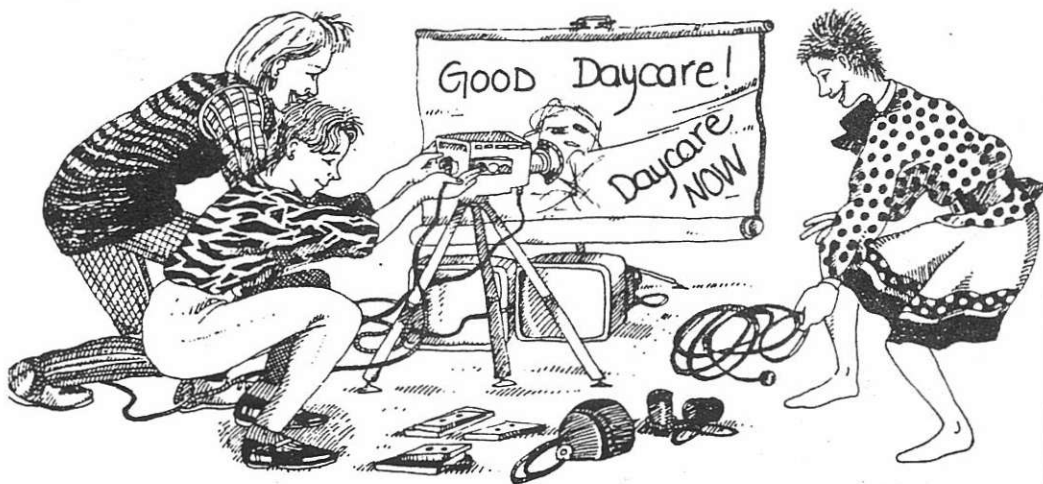
So what about pay equity?

Without much controversy, the daycare community has decided to do the nearly impossible: to use pay equity to raise worker wages. Despite serious questions about its efficacy, daycare advocates are developing arguments which attempt to squeeze daycare into the framework of pay equity.

THE LOOPHOLES

According to the green paper on pay equity, poorly-paid women workers must prove that their wages are low in comparison to male workers in the "same establishment" in order to qualify for redress. Since there are no male jobs to use in the daycare system, creative alternatives to the notion of "establishment" must be posed.

One of the most popular ideas is that the "establishment" used for comparison purposes could be the municipal government. In large municipalities which have centres operated by the government on behalf of the parents, the situation is clear. Daycare workers in municipally-run centres are local government employees, nearly always unionized, and can look to predominantly male preserves in municipal government for job comparison. In fact, relatively speaking, employees in municipally-operated programs are the most privileged in the daycare community.



daycare

Starting salaries for trained Early Childhood Education graduates in Metro Toronto centres are \$17,800-42% higher than the average wage.

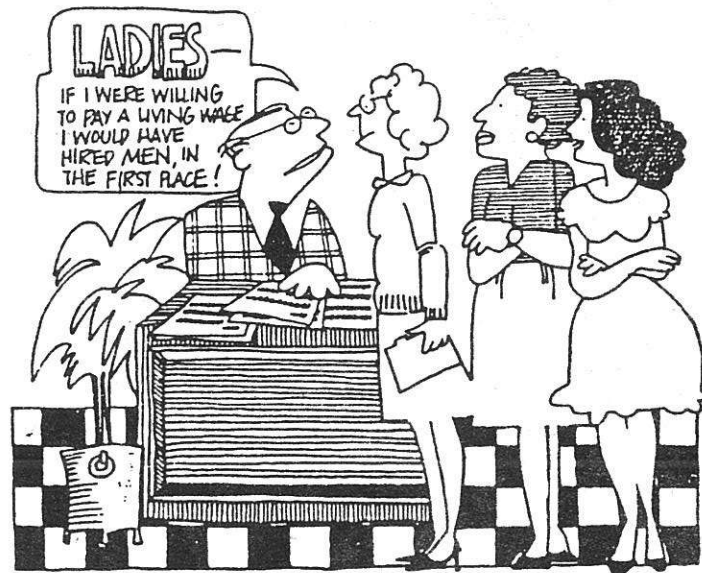
These workers are also the most likely to benefit from the pay equity legislation, since they are in the strongest position to argue that in their establishment, male job preserves are better paid than female ones.

Most daycare workers would be pleased to have their wages rise as high as municipal workers' wages are at present.

It can be argued that a daycare centre serving a population of subsidized children is financed by the municipal government and could use that government as its "establishment," and benefit from the comparison as described above. There is a precedent. During the years of "6 and 5" wage restraint, daycare centres with over 50% subsidized children were considered public institutions, and therefore subject to wage restraint. If daycare was good enough then for wage restraint, it should be good enough now for pay equity.

In schools, the situation is different. Here the argument could be made that the comparable "establishment" is their Board of Education. After all, school-based daycares rely heavily on Board support for survival: low rent, program support, access to bulk purchasing, free maintenance, and other perks.

In workplace daycare a similar argument could be made. Those centres which



operate with the effective support of an employer through low rent, capital and start-up assistance, and so on, could try arguing that the employer should be considered the "establishment."

Rural Ontario faces particular problems in finding a suitable institution to hook its pay comparison on. The small, lone daycare centre in most rural Ontario towns is usually isolated from the workplace or school system. However, a major provincial review of daycare policy may result in the loss of an indirect subsidy which some rural centres receive, due to an accounting loophole. With the loss of indirect subsidy and the corresponding closure of many centres whose parents can't pay full fees, rural daycare will be even more disadvantaged.

Private home daycare might benefit from a recent labour board decision in which the workers at Cradle-ship Creche, a non-profit private home daycare agency in Toronto, were declared

"employees" for purposes of unionization. This decision could be the launching pad for an argument that private daycare workers be allowed to use their supervising agency as "establishment." Comparisons with the staff of the agency, who are better paid supervisors and administrators, and frequently male, could raise private home daycare worker wages.

However, the thousands of women who care for children informally--as babysitters, nannies, neighbours, friends and relatives--will continue to operate within whatever private arrangements they have made. Yet these workers are just as much in need of wage relief. Studies have shown that the reason parents choose informal care is its lower cost. The lower fee to the parent is reflected in the low wage that a babysitter earns, estimated at \$2 an hour.

DIRECT GRANTS: THE KEY

Using pay equity to raise wages sounds plausible, but

it would demand all of our energies for an uncertain outcome. The bottom line for daycare workers is better wages. Pay equity legislation might do it, raising some wages, if broad enough definitions of "establishment" can be agreed upon. But given the politics by which pay equity will probably be implemented, most daycare workers will gain nothing.

Furthermore, serious questions must be raised about how many daycare work-

ers could benefit from pay equity legislation, even at its best. The elaborate and optimistic strategies of the pay equity advocates, even if successful, would cover only a fraction of the childcare workers in Ontario--those in licensed centres, either directly operated by municipalities or with purchase of service contracts, or those which can argue their comparability to the preceding. Everyone else is likely to be out in the cold.

The daycare movement needs to be absolutely clear about the crucial importance of direct funding to move away from the user-fee dilemma which keeps daycare staff so underpaid. My fear is this: while daycare activists are trying to jump on the pay equity bandwagon, the slow laborious work of developing support for direct funding may be lost. Without a good direct grant, pay equity is just a drop in the bucket.



"Occupation?"
"Woman."

MOVES TO LIBERALIZE ABORTION IN EUROPE

Barcelona--Spanish feminists claimed this week to have carried out 10 illegal abortions recently in seven Spanish cities. At feminist meetings, they screened videotapes of the operations as part of their campaign for full legalization. A June 1985 law permits abortions for rape victims, for mothers whose lives would be endangered by childbirth, and for women with malformed fetuses.

Athens--The Greek government has legalized abortion for all women during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, liberalizing a 1984 law that permitted abortion only when the mother or the fetus had serious medical problems. The old measure also forbade married women to have abortions without their husbands' consent.

ABORTION IN NICARAGUA: THE DEBATE BEGINS

Marie Lorenzo with Lynda Yanz

During the past several months in Nicaragua, there has been a great deal of debate about the legalizing of abortion. In Canada, the debate has been in the political arena for a long time, and in many ways it may seem to us that Nicaragua's debate is a re-hash. But there are some qualitative differences about the process in Nicaragua.

Last fall a debate was sparked in local newspapers by an article that appeared in *El Nuevo Diario* (END) about illegal abortion casualties at a women's hospital in Managua. Though the debate in the press has since died down, it has continued through the constitutional *cabildos* (neighbourhood meetings organized by the state to discuss a new Nicaraguan constitution), held in June and July of this year.

AMNLAE (the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women) organized preliminary discussions among women at the community level for the *cabildos*. At the women's *cabildos* that followed, abortion was one of the issues that kept coming up. In Managua, two women spoke for the legalization of abortion to much applause at the women's *cabildo* held June 10. Similarly, at the women's *cabildo* in Leon, there was a majority of women in favour of legal-



Photo: Olivier Beaudou

izing abortion. (*Barricada*, June 11, 1986.)

However, in a recent discussion with Lynda Yanz, AMNLAE's Patricia Lindo warned against underestimating the difficulty of discussing abortion in a predominantly Catholic country where many women still know little about their bodies.

One of the most compelling factors in this debate is the enormous health problem illegal abortions currently present in the cities. No doubt the problem of women injuring themselves, sometimes fatally, was a severe one before the revolution. But developments since then have aggravated the situation.

The increased access women have to jobs means young women are less likely to want to settle down into motherhood early. This is particularly true if they

are depending on already struggling families to support them. In an article in *Barricada* recently, Darwin Juarez Juarez argues, "By no means [should] it interest the society we are building to have starving children, beggars, and mothers that have to prostitute themselves to support them, or have to frustrate their aspirations to a better standard of living, based on their effective integration into the productive activity of society." (*Barricada*, December 7, 1985.)

Current legislation permits only abortions where the mother's life is in danger. Worst of all, the law requires the request of the husband for an abortion—an ironic situation since most women seeking abortions in Nicaragua do not have husbands.

Peasant organizer Benigna Mendiola pointed out

that, "...with or without a law, women have always had abortions [in Nicaragua]. It used to be considered a crime of the lower classes...but the rich do it, too, just that they don't suffer because they have money." (*Barricada*, December 6, 1985.)

By far the majority of women seeking abortions in Nicaragua today are young women in urban centres. Mendiola continued, "In the countryside, women, when they don't want [the baby], drink a herb potion, because they don't know any other way.

"Sometimes it doesn't work, and of course they can't strangle themselves, so they have it...and, as a result, there are many semi-abandoned, dirty, uncared for little kids [in the countryside].

"I think we have to re-examine the situation and the laws, but first we have to educate and prevent...."

Proponents of both sides agree on the dire need for better preventive education, in particular, sex and birth control education, especially for young people. This had not been sufficiently emphasized in the programs of the ministries of health and of education. Doris Tijerino, National Chief of the Sandinista Police, argued in an interview last December that there is a pressing need for these organizations to go back and reassess their priorities:

"Some people accuse the police of focusing on abortion [as a crime], others ask why the police do nothing," she told

Barricada on December 9, 1985.

"As a woman I believe the law that classifies abortion as a crime should be revised, but in creating a new law, a massive educational campaign must be developed around this issue.... The law as it currently exists restricts woman's civil rights by denying her the option to freely determine her maternity....

"The plans for the Ministry of Education must be revised...[to include] sex education.... [And] the Ministry of Health should re-examine their birth control policy and make contraceptives available which would be cheaper for women than trying to find them in shops, when no culture exists for their usage."

This has since occurred and the Ministry of Health has established many birth control and sex education centres. AMNLAE feels the debate in the press opened up a space for that

kind of education to happen. Various television and radio shows now carry out sex education, and a sex education course has been developed for primary schools. AMNLAE would also like the Ministry of Health's current focus to include the education of doctors and other health professionals about the situation women face.

Though both sides agree that preventive education is key, those opposed to the legalization of abortion argue that legalization would only encourage "the crime."

"It is said that illegal abortions must be fought against, that it is a real and inevitable fact; so is theft real and inevitable and nobody says it must be legalized," says Gladys Xiomara Paguaga de Valladaris, Civil District Judge of Leon. (*La Prensa*, Managua, December 26, 1985.)

"It is obvious that, with a law forbidding it, there are many abortions.



Photo: Sonia Mayorga Salablanca

Surely legalizing it would correspondingly increase that number, and there would be an increase in participants to such a crime. The difference is that the crime would be legalized."

Dr. Carlota Moller Melendez also argued that legalizing abortion would not solve women's real problems, which are "socio-economic-judicio-moral-cultural, and [only] a law that would take all of this into account might...provide the solution.

"I believe what is necessary and pertinent is a good sexual education for our people.... This sexual education should be massive, through radio and telecommunications, and by people well taught in the laws of God and the people.... If we seek to protect women, it should be in all aspects. Legalizing abortion would entail, in the long run, the extinction of humanity." (*La Prensa*, Managua, December 20, 1985.)

Both these women's positions reflect the traditional religious beliefs that are still prevalent in Nicaragua. (The Sandinista Liberation Front of Nicaragua does not have a position on abortion, but the leadership are currently discussing their position on women in general.)

AMNLAE's own strategy is to remove abortion from the constitution altogether, not to make it illegal. "But publicly we are not in favour of abortion per se, and there are differences among our leadership. What we want is to encourage a good discussion by women so that our line on this really develops from the grass-

roots," said Patricia Lindo, "rather than taking a position that would alienate a majority of women." However, AMNLAE believes abortions for medical reasons should be readily available in hospitals.

No one in Nicaragua argues that abortion should be legalized and made into a permanent institution. But health care workers in particular, are painfully aware of the dramatic toll self-induced or backstreet abortions are taking on young women's lives. In a report published in *END* on November 7, 1985, the statistics are horrifying. Of the 109 patients received at the Bertha Calderon Hospital for Women over a one year period *who confessed to self-inducing an abortion*, 10 died and three lost their uteruses; these had been their first pregnancies.

After an investigation led by Dr. Ligia Altamirano [of the Hospital], it was determined that the majority of women practising self-induced abortions are young, healthy women, suffering from no other pathology but that of an unwanted pregnancy. [They are] women between 20 and 24 years old and from all socio-economic levels....

For the act, they use probes, wires or abortifacients which complicate their health and make it necessary for them to undergo one operation after another, to remain hospitalized for up to two months in intensive care, and which often take their lives. Women generally come to the hospital after the second day with perforations of the uterus, the intestines, or with the instrument used still in the abdomen.

Besides the physical and emotional toll on these women, there is also the toll on the country's health resources to be considered. The economic costs of each case was estimated at seven times that of a normal birth. A therapeutic abortion would cost even less.

Clearly those arguing for legalization are not opposed to better sex education, the teaching of prevention, encouraging the use of contraceptives, or, most importantly, the structural, socio-economic changes necessary to truly liberate women.

As Juarez Juarez says in his article (see above), abortion has to be considered in its historical context. It is a bit like the cart before the horse:

"At this point abortion must be legalized, because, whether we want it or not, it will continue to be inevitable for some time; only as the society develops a strong material base which will allow it to assume the...support and education of children socially and allow women to integrate themselves without obstacles into social production, will the conditions exist for abortion to disappear."

WOMEN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN NICARAGUA

Clara Murguialday

Interviewed by Lynda Yanz in Managua, August, 1986.
Translated by Heather Chetwynd.

The Asociacion de los Trabajadores del Campo (ATC) represents agriculture and farm workers in Nicaragua. It is the first Nicaraguan union central to establish a women's office to address the special problems women face as agricultural workers and as union members. The team working in the women's office has developed an ambitious five-year work plan which includes research, advocacy, training, and organizing.

The following is an excerpt from a conversation between Clara Murguialday, one of the project's coordinators, and Lynda Yanz. The full interview, along with other testimony and materials from the project, will be published in a booklet being prepared jointly by the ATC and the Participatory Research Group.

LY: Maybe you could start by telling us a bit about the ATC?

CM: The ATC works with agricultural workers producing the three main export crops--cotton, tobacco, and coffee--as well as those in cattle and rice. We don't do any work with cooperatives or anything with small and medium producers of basic grains, rice, corn, and beans, who work in state farms that were taken over from the Somocistas. We only organize the people on wages, not the people that have land.

Our members aren't the people that are demanding land; they want higher wages and better work and health conditions. And they want to be working all year, not only during the harvest. These are their demands. This year the ATC has two priority worklines. One is based on the work-norms, and

the other deals with social services that companies should provide in order to guarantee a reasonable level of life for the workers. Women members and our women's project are involved in both these areas.

Seventy percent of Nicaragua's export production is in private hands, the rest is state property. So the majority of agricultural workers are working for the private landowners. These are people we call the patriotic bourgeoisie; they do not support Reagan, they're not *contras*!

Private landowners in fact get all kinds of help from the state--incentives, tools, money, etc. And some of the money they make they invest back into the land, in coffee, in pesticides, and so on. If they don't reinvest, they're affected by a reform law which was approved in 1981 that says that all landowners of more



than 500 manzanas (one manzana is approximately 1.7 acres), who don't give sufficient care to maintaining the land and the crops can be accused by the workers of de-capitalizing the farm. The workers can appeal to the Law of Agrarian Reform and ask that the land be taken away. But in fact, there's been very few expropriations.

LY: What is the situation for women agricultural workers?

CM: Women and children have always worked as agricultural labourers, and they have always worked in different conditions than the men. As seasonal workers they did most of the manual and routine labour, which was also the worst paid and most dangerous work, work that no man wanted to do.

Photo: Olivier Berthoud



For example, when tobacco plants are two months old they are covered with little worms and it was always the women who did the distasteful job of picking the little worms off the plants.

Before the Triumph, the landowner used to put his best worker, the "puntero," at the head of the rest of the people. The puntero was ideologically and politically sympathetic with the owner and so he did the best work, in terms of efficiency and productivity. His job was to establish the rhythm of work; he set the work pace for everybody and usually nobody else was able to keep up with him. Then what the puntero did was presented as the norm to get the base wage, and those that couldn't keep up didn't even get the minimum. The puntero system was the fundamental mechanism that en-

sured high levels of exploitation in cotton capitalism.

Women generally earned half the basic salary, even when they were able to do the same work as a puntero. But also, since the worker never got the basic salary, the system obliged all the members of the family to work. That's one of the reasons why for many decades women have also been agricultural workers. The minimum subsistence salary that their men earned was not enough to pay for all the needs of the family. So the phenomenon of the high presence of women in production is not new; it's not a product of the revolution.

The fact that women have always worked in agricultural production means that the feminist, pro-emancipation message in our work is very different from what it has been in capitalist and developed countries. Here the concern definitely is not "woman go out of your home and get yourself into production" because we've been incorporated into production for years. And this is true not only in the countryside where women have been the seasonal workers, but also in the cities where women have been integral to the informal sector since Spanish colonization five centuries ago.

LY: What implications does that history and analysis have for your work?

CM: It's meant that our strategy isn't centred around "getting women into production," but rather the fact that women work two

shifts. This wears us out; it screws up our lives. It's unjust that we have to be in the reproductive realm and the productive realm at the same time while the men only have responsibilities in the productive realm. This is the challenge right now, especially with the agricultural workers.

The first thing is to understand that for a woman worker what happens in the house and what happens in the field is intimately related. A woman worker doesn't think--now I'm a worker and producer, now a housewife, a wife, a mother. You can't be divided into two. But unfortunately until now the union has fostered that kind of separation; it has dealt with the production area and hasn't wanted to know anything about women's home life. Now we're turning that around and proposing to the ATC that what happens to women in the productive realm depends on her role in the reproductive realm. And we are trying to translate this into concrete terms and conditions, and not only into socialist-feminist rhetoric.

LY: Can you tell us a bit about the lives of women agricultural workers now?

CM: Women make up 35% of the workforce in export agriculture. One thing to keep in mind is that at this moment women's work as agricultural workers is changing dramatically. We calculate that 20% of the male workforce is now mobilized in the defence with the result that in these last two years women are beginning to do jobs

that used to be done exclusively by men.

The result is of course that women experience problems related to their lack of practice working with a machete and operating machinery, or their lack of physical strength necessary to do some types of work that have been organized with the assumption of a male workforce. And we also find a lot of problems that come from women's family responsibilities--continual pregnancies and childcare. There is a constant physical wearing down produced by the endless toil at home, the pregnancies, and, on top of that, all the work in the fields.

A woman agricultural worker gets up at three o'clock in the morning, she grinds the corn, she makes the coffee, she makes the tortillas, she prepares the breakfast. The man gets up a lot later, between five and five thirty. He eats his breakfast, and at six o'clock they go together to the fields. They do the same work, work the same six to seven hours, but when they get home the woman's work continues. She makes dinner, and then has to walk the half hour there and back to the river to wash the clothes. The work day of a woman ends at eight or nine at night. She rests very little. She's always overworked, overtired, worn-out. Women that are 30 years old look as if they're 60.

LY: How did the ATC begin to develop a special program of work with women?

CM: In 1984 the ATC started

work which was directed specifically to women agricultural workers. This was when the war displaced so many men to combat that it resulted in women entering even more into production and of course also into the ATC. In the many areas of the countryside, the ATC is the only organization in the community: it organizes work, the vaccinations, defence, adult education, health education--everything.

So each day there are more women in the union assemblies. In fact, sometimes you go to them and they're all women. But one thing that you can be sure of is that there will be a man up front leading the assembly. The leadership is all men, and that's true at the zonal, regional and national levels. And what happened is that women started to get very concerned that the base levels are all women and the leaders are men, with the space getting deeper between the two.

One of our first tasks has been to help put forward the demands of women at the base because we know that the demands of women and men are often different. For example, the first demand of a woman usually isn't the salary. More often it's to put a health centre close by, or a centre where she can leave the children when she goes to work, or a centre that would assure their basic food needs nearby and at a reasonable price, instead of having to travel 20 hours to the city. This is very different from the men whose first demand is always a raise in salary

because when they get more money they can drink more.

We are saying to the leadership of the union that if you have in your head the male demands as if they were the work demands of the whole working class you're only going to be responding to part of the class, the males. The female part of the working class have different demands. And we know that if the union does not respond to the women then they are not going to recognize the union as their organization.

The survival of the union itself is at stake if the base levels don't consider it as their organization. And even more serious, it endangers the development of the revolutionary model of popular participation which is fundamental to the Sandinista revolution. Popular participation cannot be formal and quiet or based on a perspective from the top which makes it more vertical and authoritarian than participatory. It's complex.

LY: Are there specific structural changes in the union you'd like to see?

CM: We would like to create within the ATC a permanent structure that deals with women, a women's secretariat with representation at all levels--a woman at the national executive directly representing the interests of the women, another woman at the regional executive level, another at the business or company level, and so on.

We see this goal of institutionalizing a voice for women within the structure of the ATC as a short-term

goal, for the next one or two years. At the same time we do not want this structure to come out of a decree. We don't want the national executive of the ATC, which is very clear on this situation, to create a women's secretariat from the top to attend to all these problems at the bottom. We want a structure for women workers to grow from the bottom. We are working to support women workers to reflect on their reality and problems, and from there to see the need for a structure where they can channel their demands from the bottom to the top. But it must come from the women, as a fruit of their own reflection.

LY: Do you work closely with AMNLAE (the Nicaraguan women's organization)?

CM: Our work is coordinated with, but not dictated by AMNLAE. As the women's organization, AMNLAE is not a mass organization but rather a political and ideological movement promoting the emancipation of women. The way that AMNLAE works is to call women to incorporate into the mass organizations that are relevant for them, as workers, as students, as citizens, etc.

In our case, AMNLAE encourages agricultural workers to get involved in organizing the ATC. And then it is our job, within the ATC, to look at our own problems and the demands of the women. In this way we are executing the strategic line of AMNLAE. In fact, two years ago we were the first mass organization to try and put this into prac-

tice. Now the CST, which brings together urban industrial workers, has begun a similar program, and proba-

bly next year UNAG, the peasants and small producers association, will begin to work on this.

MEMORIES OF MARTA, A NICARAGUAN CAMPESINA

Sandy Stienecker
Toronto

As we go marching, marching,
unnumbered women dead
Go crying through our
singing
their call for bread.

Small art and love and
beauty
their drudging spirits knew
Yes, it is bread we fight
for
but we fight for roses, too!
-Bread and Roses

J. Oppenheim

This verse has always struck a special chord in me. Hearing it, I picture my grandmother. A woman who bore nine children and lived in poverty, in a small West Texas town. She lived in poverty, not because she didn't work hard, but because she depended upon a man who gave and gambled away all the money he earned.

After my visit to Nicaragua in July, the verse conjures up a picture of another woman alongside my grandmother. Marta Rivera is a campesina who shared her home with me while I tried to help build a school in Panali, the resettlement camp where she lived.

Like my grandfather, Marta's man fathered numerous children, is charming, and helpful to others in the community, but has left Marta and their children to live with a younger woman, a common occurrence in Panali. He dropped in occasionally while I was there, to play with the kids or eat food that Marta prepared. Like my grandmother, Marta is the glue that holds this family together. Or she was.

Marta was wounded in a contra attack on Panali on July 28th. She is in the hospital in Managua and is not expected to live. Her youngest child, a three year

FEIFFER



old, is dead from the wounds suffered in the attack. Their house, a nine-by-twelve foot structure made from dark green plastic sheets, wooden poles, and a corrugated tin roof, was destroyed. Their belongings are all gone, what there was of them:

- 1 plastic bag of beans, rice and corn,
- 2 plastic plates,
- 2 plastic cups,
- 1 spoon,
- 1 hammock,
- 3 cans used to carry water,
- some cardboard which Marta and her children slept on,
- a sleeping bag that I left for them,
- 1 machete used for every task imaginable,
- 1 schoolbook and pen.

Marta's life was not easy. Like most women in Panali, Marta's day started at 5 a.m. when she got up to grind corn and make tortillas. While Suzanna, her eight-year-old daughter, went to the river to get water, Marta fed the other children and put the food and dishes away to protect them from the flies that

started to gather as soon as the sun came up. Every day



she meticulously folded up the cardboard and swept the dirt floor. Then she went to help in the field where the women's co-operative is planting a vegetable garden. In the afternoon she or Suzanne would wash clothes on the rocks in the river. After fixing dinner on her adobe stove, Marta would sit for a while as it got dark. Bedtime was usually around 8 p.m.

Suzanna used to laugh at my unskilled attempts to clean my clothes. Neither she nor Marta could grasp the fact that I had no river at home in which to wash clothes. When I tried to explain washing machines, dishwashers, and other conveniences, they couldn't picture such things. They did however glean the essence: "It must be wonderful to be a woman in Canada."

One night as we were going to sleep, I asked Marta if the mortars were closer than usual. She said yes and explained again that we'd run into the mountains if the contras came that night. Sleeping on the floor with her children, she kept the oil lamp burning until it went out, an unusually luxurious act borne of fear. I lay with my shoes and flashlight and thought about my little boy safe at home.

Marta and her baby were murdered in an attack by cowards. An informer in the camp told the contras that the militia would be gone all night responding to another battle in the mountains. Fortunately, he was wrong. They came back unexpectedly and prevented a total massacre. Seven women

and children and a very old man were the immediate victims of this act of terrorism. Twenty-four more were wounded and many of them are expected to die. Civilians are always the primary targets of U.S.-backed contras, along with the medical centres, schools, and agricultural co-ops built to make the revolution a reality.

Marta wasn't an exceptional woman. She did no more than thousands of women. She survived each day with great effort. She supported the FSLN, but wasn't a leader in her community. She was shy and quiet, especially around men. She loved the clothes and toiletries I brought from Canada. My lavender soap was a source of real pleasure. She was worried about her kids--the baby sick with diarrhea, the youngest boy spitting up blood at night. Lying in her house, she was afraid of the contras.

Like my grandmother, Marta didn't know much, if anything, about art, love, or beauty. She did know about survival. Marta and I didn't have any intellectual discussions about socialist feminism. However, her life has challenged my assumptions and beliefs more than any book or lecture. For instance, the debates between radical feminism and socialist feminism seem esoteric now. I know that time will give me some perspective on issues like this. I just hope it doesn't also allow me to rationalize inaction.

Celebrate International Women's Day with your sisters in Nicaragua

AMNLAE, THE NICARAGUAN WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION, NEEDS HELP TO PRODUCE A
POSTER FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY,
1987.

Because of the US government's undeclared
war against the Sandinista government,
their resources are low. Perilously low.

Let's get together, through the pages of
Cayenne, to help make International
Women's Day a strong expression of
solidarity with Nicaraguan women.

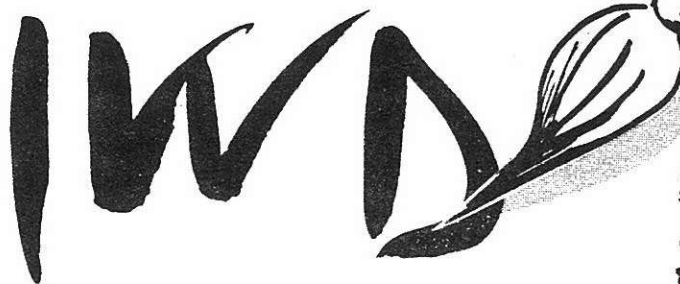
What can we do? Send money to AMNLAE.

AMNLAE needs \$2,000 for supplies and
printing costs for an IWD poster, so that
they can reach out to thousands of
Nicaraguan women in the villages--women
who could not be reached in any other way.

If every Cayenne reader sends in just \$10,
we could give AMNLAE a cheque that
would do more than cover the costs of
this very important project.

If half our readers send \$25,
their contributions would make up for
those who cannot send anything.

IWD



Scapigliato

NAC '86: WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT?

Nancy Adamson
and Anne Molgat

Nancy and Anne are currently involved with the Canadian Women's Movement Archives and have been active in the women's movement in Toronto and Ottawa.

NAC is a bundle of paradoxes. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) held this summer in Ottawa was fun, interesting, annoying and provocative. Sometimes we couldn't make up our minds whether to jump in with both feet and get involved, or to throw up our hands in despair, pack our gear and catch the first bus home.

Is NAC worth our attention or is it beyond redemption? It definitely is contradictory--it encourages the participation of francophones, yet provides virtually no workshops in French; it is open to women

of varied lifestyles and sexual preferences, yet conducts a survey to prove that the nuclear family is alive and well in NAC; it is keen to attract disabled women, then fails to make the podium wheelchair accessible; it is determined to be a national organization, and at the same time reduces travel subsidies and plans a conference where the key discussions are left until the end when many women have already left....

Representation is clearly a big issue, and a difficult one to resolve in an organization as large and diverse as NAC. Most women are involved in NAC through their participation in one of NAC's over 450 organizations. Individuals may join as "Friends of NAC" but do not have voting privileges. It seems to us that in a discussion of representation in NAC there are two questions--how NAC represents the range of its membership, and how, if at all, it represents the Canadian women's movement.



One resolution at the AGM, submitted by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, inadvertently raised both these issues. The OCAC resolution called for direct participation by "Friends of NAC" who, according to OCAC, "have no vehicle by which to participate in NAC except by joining a member group." NAC, they argued, should consider the formation of "chapters, area boards and other base units, and individual memberships."

When asked to explain the concerns behind this resolution OCAC responded by saying that they wanted NAC to be a more democratic and grassroots organization. We don't quarrel with those aims. We do, however, have serious reservations about what OCAC proposed and whether the result would mean increased democracy.

While it's true that individual women activists need places where we can discuss a range of political issues, OCAC doesn't seem to realize that in virtually every province except Ontario, women do have a forum for that type of discussion. B.C. has the Federation of Women; there are Action Committees in the Prairie provinces and Quebec, and in New Brunswick there is Reseau/Network--to name but a few.

"Women in Cuba and Nicaragua" by Margaret Randall

A transcript of Margaret Randall's speech on "Women in Cuba and Nicaragua," appears in the May, 1986 issue of *Agenda*, Ann Arbor, Michigan's Alternative Newsmagazine. To order a copy, send \$2 to: *Agenda*, P. O. Box 3624, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, U.S.A. Contact *Agenda* for special prices on multiple copies.

Please send copy(s) of the May issue of *Agenda* at \$2 each to:

Name

Address

Enlarging the role of individual members in NAC potentially undermines these existing provincial organizations. A friend of ours from the Alberta Status of Women Committee wondered: "We work so hard getting women to join ASWAC. What's the point if we're to be competing with NAC?" Another woman pointed out: "It's already difficult enough for the regions to be heard in this organization. There are more feminists in Ontario than people in my province--God help us if they all join!"



The way in which NAC is organized already favours Southern Ontario, and changes such as those proposed by OCAC further jeopardize NAC's position as a national organization.

The OCAC resolution presents a vision of the women's movement that we don't feel comfortable with. We feel that NAC best and most accurately represents the women's movement as a coalition of member organizations who in turn represent individual women. It seems a violation of the very principles on which the women's movement is based to suggest that the voice of an individual woman should equal that of a woman representing an organization.

OCAC may have been expressing a real need for Ontario women to have their/our own province-wide umbrella organization, but taking that to NAC is inappropriate. We in Southern Ontario need to be particularly careful not to confuse our own needs with those of NAC because of the power (and potential power) we wield in NAC. OCAC's resolution, in fact, called for the National Action Committee to fund regional meetings, when the province most in need of one is Ontario. As one woman commented: "In the regions, we're accustomed to dealing with national organizations, in Toronto you're accustomed to being them."

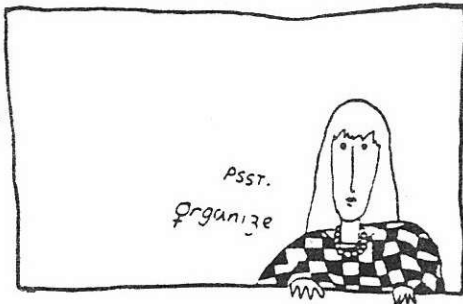
Many of us have probably dismissed the provincial "action committees" as being little liberal NACs because of their names, instead of regarding them as the activist and grassroots organizations that they are. This is Ontario regionalism masquerading as nationalism. A national organization that would accept such a focus on Southern Ontario would be neither grassroots nor democratic.

As we have said, NAC as it is presently organized favours Ontario. Consider, for example, the organization of the AGM. This year the travel subsidies were reduced and, as a result, attendance from the more distant regions was low. And even if you were somehow able to raise the funds to attend, the structure of the meeting may well have worked against you. It began on Friday with workshops in the afternoon and a speech by

the outgoing president in the evening. Saturday morning's plenary was reserved for speeches by the candidates for the NAC Board, and the discussion of emergency resolutions. In the afternoon, there were workshops, and in the evening a dinner and dance. Finally, on Sunday morning, general NAC business and policy were discussed. It was at this point that all business not arising directly out of events of the past three months was considered. Preparations for the lobby began, in theory, after lunch, though this year discussion of resolutions was carried over into the afternoon. Suppose you had to be at work on Monday morning in Edmonton or St. John's; you may well have had to miss the most salient part of the weekend, the policy discussion. In order for women from the more distant parts of the country to participate fully in NAC,

UPSTREAM, December 1978





adequate travel subsidies must be provided and the meeting organized in such a way that the chances of women missing major discussions are reduced (discussing policy on Saturday and having the workshops on Sunday, for example). We think the real way to make NAC more democratic is not to change membership policy, but to ensure that NAC more fully represents the needs and concerns of its diverse membership.

Another example: A number of Toronto women seem to have been involved in organizing a left caucus meeting. Unlike the regional caucuses, held over lunch on Saturday, it took place on Friday evening while the rest of the delegates were listening to Chaviva Hosek's parting speech. Also unlike the other caucuses, it was unadvertised. Given its timing, that's understandable. It is, however, regrettable. The turnout was remarkably good, in spite of its word of mouth advertising--about 50 women came. It was also remarkably and, in a national organization, unfortunately Torontonians. We spoke to a number of women from outside Toronto who were quite disappointed to have missed the left caucus and saw it as just another example of Toronto

women thinking that they are the women's movement. Progressive thought is not the exclusive preserve of Southern Ontario or women known to the organizers of the left caucus.

In the past most socialist feminists have regarded NAC with suspicion, seeing it as a liberal feminist lobbying organization and consequently of little interest to us. There has, however, been a shift and if the attendance at the left caucus can be seen as an indication, many socialist feminists are getting involved in NAC.

As socialist feminists we need to give more serious thought to how to relate to an organization that includes such a range of political perspectives, from the Progressive Conservative women's caucus to a self-defined socialist feminist organization like IWDC in Toronto.

Discussions and proposals for possible changes in how NAC functions are important and for that reason we were interested in OCAC's proposal. However, by its utter failure to anticipate the objections of the regions and to have a strategy to address those concerns, OCAC brought about the defeat of its own resolution, raised the hackles of feminists from outside Southern Ontario, and threw away the opportunity to engage in an important debate.

The question of how individual socialist feminists and socialist feminist organizations can best participate in NAC is open for discussion. Such a discussion is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article. We hope that socialist feminists who have experience with NAC or who have given thought to this question will continue the debate.



BEATRICE IS NO LADY

(from Listen Real Loud,
Winter/Spring 1986)

"Beatrice" is not a lady. Beatrice is a multimillion dollar industry that manufactures products in South Africa, marketed under the brand names of Hunt's, Peter Pan, Playtex, Danskin, and Tropicana orange juice. These products, which are geared primarily to women consumers, have been targeted for an anti-apartheid boycott by Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE).

For more information contact WREE at 130 E. 16th St., New York, NY 10003, (212)473-6111.

WOMEN AND THE STATE:

A CONFERENCE

DATE: February 6th to 8th, 1987

PLACE: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE),
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto

The state is powerful. Its activities reach into the lives of every Canadian woman. In our struggles for women, we confront, challenge and depend on the state. But we cannot count on its being on our side.

We are organizing a conference on women and the state. It will bring together women activists from many organizations to reflect collectively on our experience and to develop strategies for the future.

The conference will provide a place for women activists to share experiences, and to build a picture of how the state functions in relation to women's organizations and demands. Through collective reflection, we will work towards assessing and advancing feminist strategies for change.

The conference is organized around a sequence of workshops designed to take the participants through a process of thinking about the state. In order to facilitate this, registration will be limited to 200. Daycare will be provided/subsidized.

Workshops will include:

- how the state organizes women's lives;
- a map of state process in women's organizing;
- state procedures examined;
- theoretical approaches to women and the state;
- organizing a challenge to the state.

For more information, write to:
Women and the State Conference, c/o Department of Sociology, OISE, 252 Bloor Street W., Toronto, M4W 1E6

NAIROBI ONE YEAR LATER
A conference for women who attended Forum 85 in Nairobi, Kenya
The U.N. Decade For Women.....
What impact on the women's movement?



October 18th & 19th
Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Toronto, Ontario

For more information, contact: Post Nairobi Conference,
#302, 229 College St.,
Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R4
Telephone: (416) 593-5696

VAGABOND

(Director: Agnes Varda)

Judi Stevenson

The south of France in winter is drained of colour and gaiety. The thin sharp sun does not warm so much as reveal. Agnes Varda's camera shows us a landscape strewn with the detritus of our times: a rusting tractor, heaps of discarded tires, abandoned houses with smashed-in windows, rows of dying plane trees. This is the setting for the last weeks of life of Mona Belanger, the title character in Varda's newest film, *Vagabond*. It is the outward manifestation of Mona's bleak inner world.

I give away nothing to tell you that she dies. The discovery of her frozen body in a roadside ditch is the opening scene of the film. The rest of the film recounts her last days, or is it weeks.... With Mona, we cannot be sure of anything.

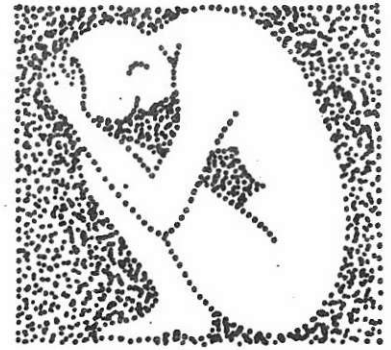
She is an unapologetic liar, beggar, and thief. Glancing off one person, then another, she remains almost untouched by any of them. Yet she is surprisingly able to touch them. Her tough young face and body, her unkempt hair and reeking clothes, reverberate

uncomfortably in their minds long after she has drifted on. Sometimes they turn directly to camera to tell us their memories, their guilt, their sense of opportunity missed.

She wants nothing but bread and cigarettes and the occasional grass high. Certainly not warmth or companionship. They want-- everything: a good story, a good lay, a character to act a part in their dreams, even love. She gives none of these except sex, and then only sometimes. And yet they remember her, follow her, try to help her, offer her bits of their lives to grab on to. Even those who are repelled are also fascinated. Why does she fascinate them so?

Perhaps it is because she represents the utter failure of their society to nurture one of their own-- and its further failure to make the evidence of social breakdown comfortably invisible, in jail or in an institution. Why is she out on the road like that, making them look at her?

For Mona has refused to toil in the niche carved out for her--as one of a million secretaries typing and filing all over the world. Yet we all know that for a young woman of no special talent or beauty, like Mona,



BARBARA SAIFORD

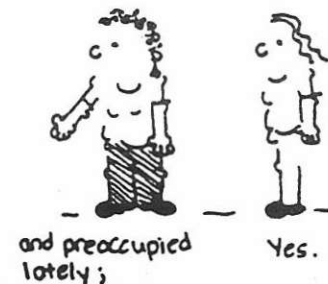
there is little else. Mona herself is the proof, for she has nothing.

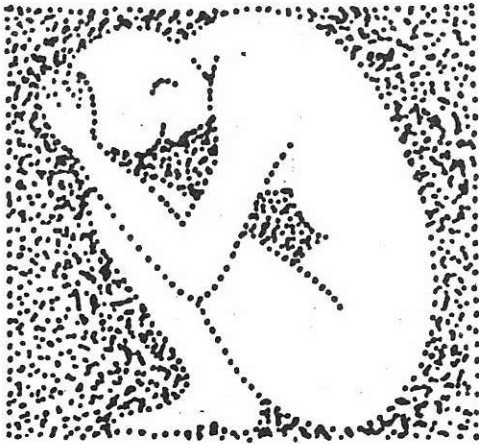
And the moral seems to be: you too may die in a ditch if you aren't obedient and pliant and good--and employed. Yet Mona regrets nothing, and the world shivers on its middle-class foundations.

Perhaps the Mona-watchers are stung with guilt because she is not safe, and they do not know how or if they are responsible. Who is responsible for Mona? The state, the community, you and me? Herself? Or no one? What is our responsibility to the stranger?

Or perhaps it is just that face which fascinates. Is it an empty face, wasted of all humanity, or merely a shuttered face, protecting a clutch of secrets?

It is very disturbing to watch the face of a woman who does not smile. We women





BARRARA SANFORD



BARRARA SANFORD

are taught to smile for everyone--for men and mothers and shopkeepers and anyone with power and status. But Mona rarely smiles, and when she does, it is never a smile of compromise or deference.

In this, as in everything, she is the *enigma*--not for nothing named Mona, recalling another French woman of mystery--with no past and no future and *no needs*. In our world, everyone has needs, insatiable needs. The entire edifice of economy and polity depends on that insatiability. And so this vagabond frightens the comfortable with her disinterest in every "civilized" value or experience.

But is she free? The crowd of characters in Varda's film debate this point. To a young girl

stuck at home with protective parents, she is. To the drop-out philosophy graduate, herding goats in the bony hills with woman and child, she is not. To him, she is dead before her death, for she has no feelings.

I agree with the goat-herd. Perhaps in some technical sense the vagabond Mona is free--free of obligation and convention and law. But it is the freedom of the void, a freedom that exposes the shallowness of the iconic term "freedom" itself. For even if Sartre is right, that hell is other people (as Mona seems to believe), the opposite is also true. Joy, if there is

any, is other people.

This world, rot and all, is the only thing Mona ever had. That's why we're still working on it.

NEWSFLASH!

Margaret Randall has been ordered to leave the US by December 1, 1986, by an Immigration Judge, who ruled that her writings, such as *Cuban Women Now*, "advocate the economic, international and governmental doctrines of world communism." Randall will appeal the decision.



So I figured that something must be wrong.



You're right.



And those are hard feelings to deal with by yourself...



I'm going crazy.



So I'm glad we got a chance to talk about it.



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SEX, POWER AND PLEASURE

Mariana Valverde
 Toronto: Women's Press,
 1986

Dorothy Kidd
 Sioux Lookout, Ontario

At the first mention of a book called Sex, Power and Pleasure, I started fantasizing, and that's just what Mariana Valverde expected. In her introduction she calls for an erotic connection with her readers, "an egalitarian and open-ended match in which there is both struggle and identification. Both partners have to be self-conscious about the fantasies and projections imposed on the text and each other...".

Towards just such a relationship, let me tell you my expectations, as I think they affect how I and other readers respond to the book. I wanted a lot: more of the intellectual toughness and wry humour of Valverde's shorter articles to help me understand this very difficult subject in a feminist and historical context. And frankly, I wanted sexual excitement and a sense of intimacy with the author.

Instead I ended up feeling that our "relationship" was simply one more encounter burdened with naively high expectations. It was not--like the reckoning the day after your latest crush has turned into one more friendship--a book that changed my life, but a good experience nonetheless. I identified with Valverde, as she invited me to, but I ended up feeling that the



—Victoria Hammond

relationship floundered because of a difference in our wider visions of who belongs in the women's movement.

My disappointment was not due to the book's lack of heat. It includes many controversial and taboo topics, introduced in enticing chapters such as "Text Lust," "Heterosexuality: Contested Ground," "Lesbianism: A Country with No Language," and "Pornography: Not For Men Only." S/M is discussed too, in a chapter called "Imagining Desire." The only major issue I looked for and couldn't find was prostitution and other sex work, and I'll talk about that later.

Neither was my disappointment because Valverde shied away from struggle. She takes on both wings of the pornography debate with a lot of gusto and caring. Speaking to the "sexual pessimists" identified with

Andrea Dworkin, she talks about violence against women and the overwhelming fear this leaves in women everywhere.

She goes on to speak against censorship, calling for a return to the wider, feminist analysis of porn which recognizes the humiliation of women and the eroticization of women's subjugation wherever it is present, whether in glossy magazines and videos, or in women's formula romances and other supposedly tame representations. She argues that a narrower interpretation of pornography--as explicit violence--leads to an unhealthy alliance with the state in its attempts to repress sexuality. Her warning of the consequences of siding with state censorship rings all too clearly this summer after the announcement of the Crosbie pornography bill.

reviews

Valverde comes closest to meeting my expectations when she speaks to the concerns of the other wing, the "sexual libertarians" represented by Gayle Rubin and the contributors to the book Pleasure and Danger, (ed. Carol Vance, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.) Valverde takes risks by revealing, with wit and charm, her own personal experiences. Stripping bare some of the traditional male definitions of sexuality, she writes of the impossibility of removing all power in relations between women and men, or between women. More provocatively, she argues that power is at the base of many of our erotic sensibilities, whether we practice S/M or not.

Valverde suggests that the attempt by some feminists to equalize power in sexual relationships has led to a preoccupation with sameness and with the quantitative monitoring of each partner's pleasure. More dangerously, it has led to a denial of the variety of sexual experience among women, and thus contributed to the angry response of the sexual libertarians and others who have felt not only left out but damned. It was at this point I felt a great sigh of sympathy with Valverde as she spoke out against this latest wave of feminist moralism!

And then it was back into the debate! Valverde sees the 'live and let live' philosophy of the sexual libertarians as mirroring the individualism of a consumer society. She believes that our sexuality is not a thing we own individually, but a process where

our desires are shaped and created by relations with others and society at large. She insists that there is a need for a feminist ethic which recognizes diversity, but also provides guidelines which are broadly agreed to by all members of the community.

It was this discussion of "community" that finally made it possible for me to put my disappointment into words.

I come from a background very similar to Valverde's, but most women do not live in the feminist community and for them, really for all of us, the problems of a freer sex life are not just in our heads. There is a whole long list of concrete problems. Think of how a woman's sex life is effected by inadequate birth control, the fear of being found out to be a lesbian, of having sex in crowded conditions with your children and relatives within hearing distance, or lack of security from violence--to name a few. Somehow Val-

verde left out these realities of women's existence.

In terms of our relations with the wider society, sex for many women is work and Valverde gives little space to the way that this fact shapes our experience, or how women are organizing to change it. She gives almost no credit to the ideas and contributions of prostitutes and other sex workers, yet it has been this group of workers that has taken on not only the state, but often feminist groups and the right wing.

I was left feeling that while our experiences may be superficially similar, our visions were not. Thankful for Valverde's pioneering effort, I now want a more popular guide to women's experience of sex in a much wider context. I want to see ideas about sex in easily understandable language and format, and with a reader's guide to the literature. I want more documentation of how women everywhere are trying to struggle against the ideas and structures of patriarchy and capitalism for greater sex, power, and pleasure.



Dykes To Watch Out For

OH NO! IT'S...
**INTERNALIZED
 HOMO-
 PHOBIA!**
 ©1986 BY ALISON BECHDEL

IT'S SAD BUT TRUE! NO MATTER HOW WELL-ADJUSTED YOU ARE, EVERY NOW AND THEN THAT **NAGGING LITTLE VOICE** POPS UP!



OF COURSE, YOUR **LESBIAN IDENTITY** ALWAYS **WINS**,... BUT WHAT A **WASTE OF ENERGY!**



ONE METHOD OF QUIETING THE HOMOPHOBIC VOICE IS BY **DIRECT CONFRONTATION**.



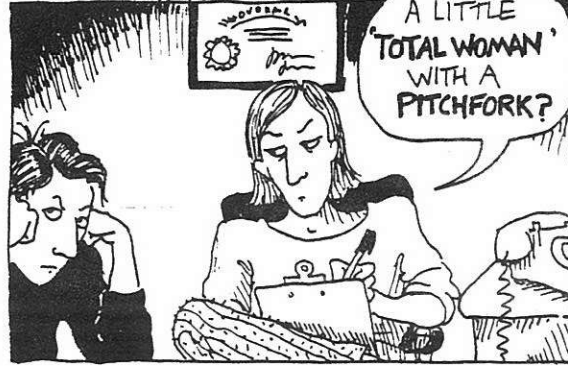
TO SILENCE IT PERMANENTLY REQUIRES **CONSTANT VIGILANCE**,...



... STEADFASTNESS AGAINST **TEMPTATION**,...



... AND MAYBE **THERAPY**.



FANTASIES

WOMEN WILL SHAKE OFF
THE INFLUENCE OF GODLESS
COMMUNISM AND RETURN
TO THEIR FIRST DUTY
AS WIVES AND
MOTHERS EARLY
NEXT YEAR.

