

CAVENE

a socialist feminist bulletin

winter 1987



CAYENNE

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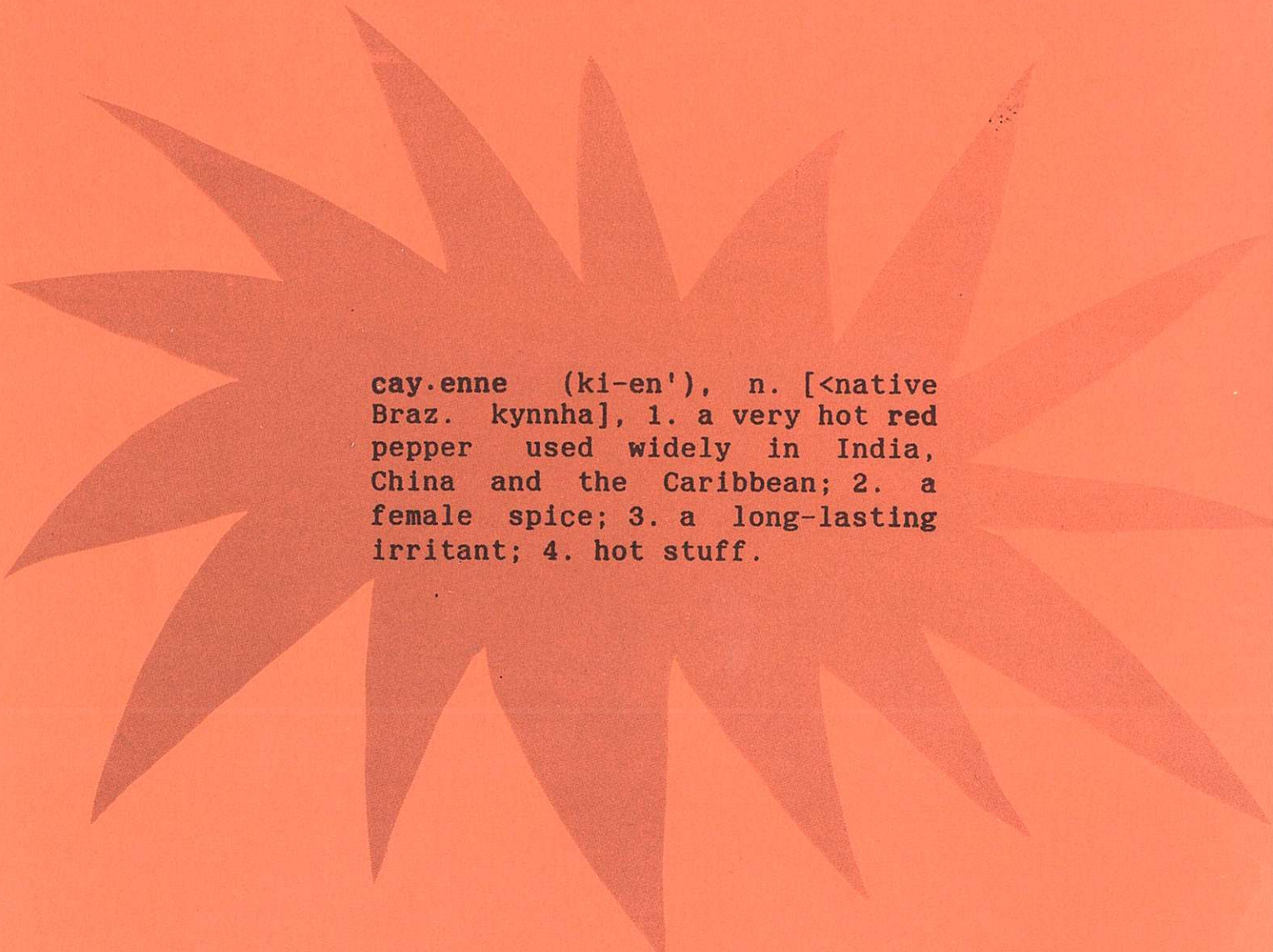
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a socialist feminist bulletin



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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Celebrate International Women's Day with your sisters in Nicaragua

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Nicaraguan women in the villages--women
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this very important project.
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those who cannot send anything.



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Dear Cayenne

First I would like to congratulate Cayenne for a very interesting and informative publication for socialist feminists in Canada. Keep up the good work!

With regard to Susan Prentice's article, "Pay Equity: Misguided Strategy for Daycare?", I would like to take issue with several points that Susan makes. Basically, I do not share Susan's fear that somehow the daycare movement is going to get swallowed up by the pay equity movement. There is no evidence that daycare activists have been putting more energy into the pay equity struggle than the daycare struggle; if anything we have not paid enough attention to the issue of pay equity.

Pay equity legislation could make a beneficial difference to the daycare struggle. We have long identified one of the key daycare issues to be the low pay of workers; we have also identified how the present user-pay system makes it impossible for many parents to afford the cost of daycare. Without government funding, this cycle cannot be broken and Susan articulates this complex cycle well.

But in order for the government to act, it has to be pressured from all sides: on the pay equity issue; on social assistance issues; on the commercialization issue; on employment equity issues; and on the daycare issue *per se*.

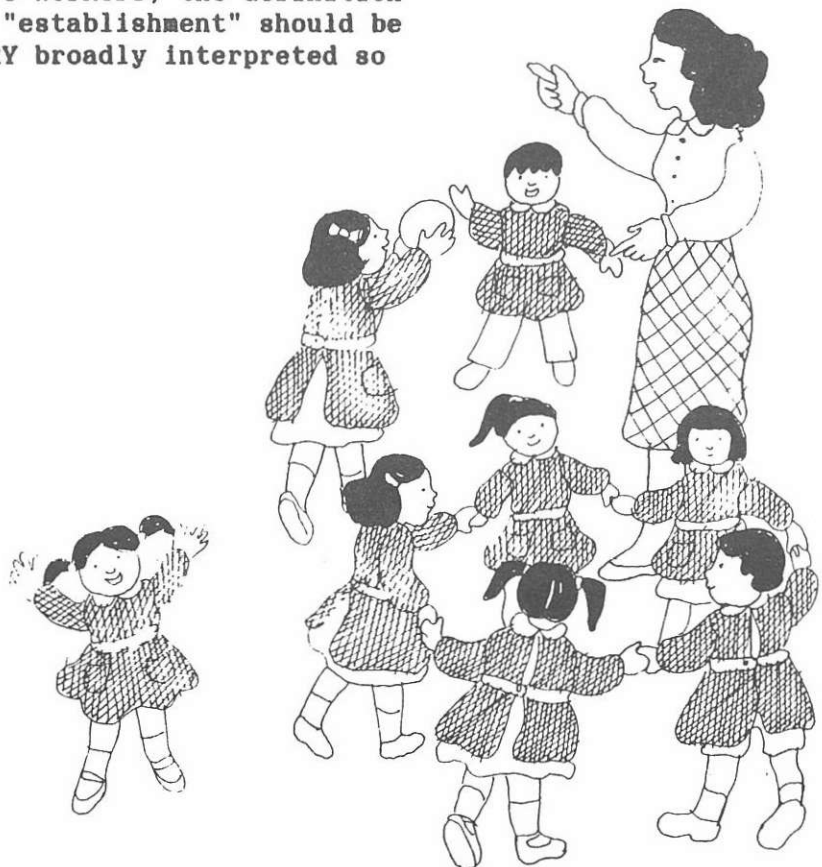
Pay equity legislation contains more than "a germ

of a progressive idea." Fully one-third of daycare workers employed in Ontario are employed in municipal daycare centres; a further 10 per cent are employed in community centres and other centres where women can compare their rates of pay to those of male workers. While it is true that the majority of daycare workers are employed in independent daycare centres or private homes which are typical female job ghettos, a significant proportion of daycare workers *could* take advantage of pay equity legislation.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care has argued before the Ontario government's Pay Equity Commission that for the legislation to affect daycare workers, the definition of "establishment" should be VERY broadly interpreted so

that workers in daycare centres may compare their rates of pay to other workers doing jobs with similar skill, responsibility, education and experience. We are not likely to win that one, but it keeps the pressure on and begins to create the notion that something "special" will have to be done for women in these circumstances. In that way, it puts the government on the defensive, where we want them, and opens up the possibility of winning change through another route, such as child care legislation itself.

Furthermore, there is always the trickle-down theory. The mere fact that wages for daycare staff are raised in municipalities,



community colleges, hospitals, etc. improves the bench mark for daycare workers—a bench mark that needs to be constantly raised. Because of the shortage of trained Early Childhood Educators, combined with the legislative requirement to hire trained staff, daycare centres have no choice but to pay higher wages.

This not only causes wages to rise, but fees also, forcing more parents into the affordability crunch. It could be argued that this is unfair to middle income parents, but equally unfair has been the treatment of daycare workers who have been subsidizing the daycare system through their low wages for far too long. The view that daycare is a political issue, and not just a service that you purchase in the marketplace if you can afford it, is on the rise. Politicians are increasingly aware that their constituents are concerned about daycare and want government intervention in some form. More pressure

on parents can only increase the pressure on the politicians.

Finally, support for equal pay is also support for women's equality. Day-care workers and their low wages are part of a much larger scheme of things which systematically discriminates against women—in their homes, in the workplace, and in relation to their bodies. It may seem a little bit rhetorical to say it, but the fight for one

issue is still part of the fight for all and it's about time we all realized that we

FIRST CONTRACT

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by CAROLE CONDE & KARL BEVERIDGE

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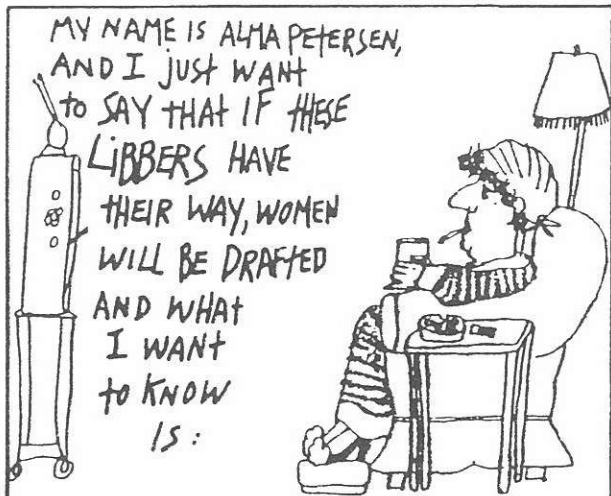
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DAYCARE: COMBINING STRATEGIES

Sue Colley
Toronto

It is no accident that media coverage of daycare issues has increased five-fold in the past five years; that child care was cited as one of the four key issues to watch at the Liberal convention; or that the Ontario government has increased its spending on daycare by 379 per cent in the last seven years.

One of the key factors has been the strategy of the daycare movement. The concerted efforts of daycare activists have focused on combining mass action, broad support, and confrontation of politicians for five years with significant results.

An example of this kind of strategy was on display at Queen's Park on



October 27th. Four hundred people crammed into the Ontario room at Queen's Park to hold a bear pit session at which politicians were confronted with a range of questions on their legislative and budgetary plans for daycare in the province.

Although daycare activists look back on the seventies with fondness, they also say, "Things have come a long way since then. In the old days, we would rally *outside* Queen's Park and hear speeches and shout slogans, but essentially it all fell on deaf ears." Now, we are able to have our daycare demonstrations *inside* Queen's Park, with the politicians there in front of us to respond to our questions and concerns. It was a lively bear pit session. Each party was asked about the key issues and what action they would be taking inside the legislature to transform daycare from a welfare service to a public service. The NDP, as always, gave their full support and assured us that they would be raising questions in the House. The surprise this year was the Tories: They seem to have made a 180 degree policy turn in the direction of the daycare community. Support for the direct grant and expansion of the service to establish a comprehensive system rolled off their tongues as though they had been attending NDP caucus meetings for ten years. Their own policy, subsequently adopted by the new Liberal government, of removing indirect subsidies to

daycare centres around the province and threatening loss of spaces and possible closures was ferociously attacked by Larry Grossman, the Ontario Tory leader, himself. It seems like a good idea to keep them in opposition--they're much more useful there.

The Liberals were defensive. A year ago they promised the daycare community a review of child care policy resulting in far-reaching legislation to transform the current daycare system into a comprehensive system with much more direct funding.

Despite promises all year, we have yet to hear anything from them. In an attempt to offset the antagonism, John Sweeney, Minister of Community and Social Services, announced "transitional grants" to municipal daycares threatened with subsidy cutbacks. But even though this announcement went over like a lead balloon, we are expecting a provincial announcement on immediate initiatives in the next few weeks.

It will undoubtedly fall far short of our long term demands for a universally accessible system, but we are expecting that after five years of organizing we will win the direct grant--the first step on the road to a publicly-funded system. Enough to fuel the fight for another five years and enough to convince us that the strategy is worth continuing for a while longer.

LIBERATION OR LOSS?

Janet Ramsay

The Participatory Research Group recently received in the mail a report on a conference held last May at the Australian National University in Canberra, on the Impact of the New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs). PRG was kind enough to pass it on to Cayenne, and we think it is an interesting contribution to the debates on reproductive choice.

excerpted from the original
by Judi Stevenson

"Liberation or Loss?" was an event of major significance for Australian women. The conference was organized by staff at the Centre for Continuing Education, the Australian National University, Women's Studies Staff at the ANU, and members of the National Feminist Network on the New Reproductive Technologies (NFNNRET).

Marathon phone conferences hammered out and structured a set of themes and issues. They also

brought decisions on the nature of the conference: to gather and connect as wide as possible a group of Australian women. We knew this would mean deep, possibly painful divisions of opinion, and that the deepest lay between women who claimed their right to make use of in vitro fertilization (IVF) and its last hope of bearing a child, and those already convinced that the apparent benevolent effects of IVF are too small a price to pay for the violence to women and life which they mask. The conference design had to contain this passionate disagreement, if possible without destructive conflict. We also faced the question of difference of expertise about a subject based on highly technical information, and the wish for an informed consultation, reaching beyond an exchange of basic information.

Our plan (to achieve this) was generally successful. In the end, time restricted our intentions. I know that some infertile

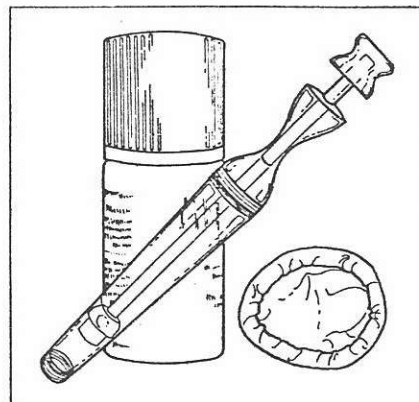
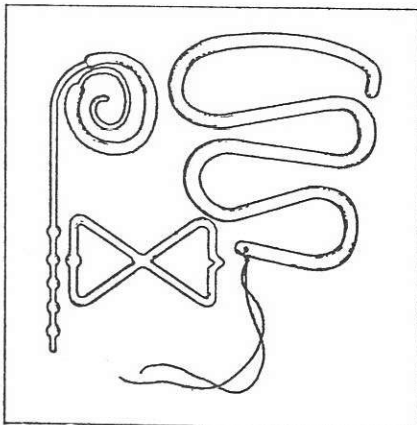
women left feeling that their personal grief and rights had been trampled on by feminist opinion, and that some critics of the technologies felt that their woman-loving concerns had not had the impact they had hoped for.

In the weeks since the conference, several women have said to me, "It was like being back in the 70s."

I think I know what they mean. This conference had that feeling of stunning new revelation, of the fear and the thrill of newly discovered feminism, which I have not felt as often in the 1980s as in the 1970s. It had, too, that once familiar flavour of risk, pain, and urgency as women faced fundamental disagreements, but struggled together to make responses to a threat which all in some way perceived.

Patriarchy has stunned us again, by a new assault of such appalling consistency that to recognize it is like becoming feminists all over again. In fact, women are becoming feminists for the first time as they recognize the implications of power and control that lie behind these technologies.

There is the benign public image: IVF offering infertile women the precious hope of a child. Rebecca Albury showed us the media image of the IVF doctor photographed between mother and father, his "team" ranged behind, a third procreator absorbed into a *New Idea* image of family coziness and normality. Barbara Burton and Patricia Brown spoke for women who are making this choice; of the devastation



of facing infertility and their right to seize the hope of IVF, despite low success rates, experimental clumsiness and manipulative counselling. Other women see their hope as part of a "softening-up process," by which the experimental manipulation of women, embryos, and the nature of human life are creeping their way to acceptability.

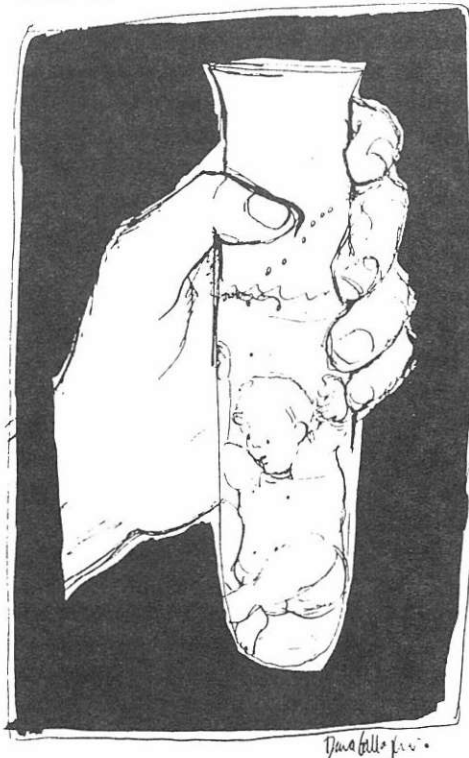
Gena Corea quoted an American IVF scientist who likened participation in this research to being part of the Manhattan Project-- which produced the hydrogen bomb, and argued that the technologies worked, like many patriarchal processes, to destroy the self-worth of women.

Janice Raymond distinguished between the anti-technologies arguments of Feminists and "Foetalists". The technologies, she stated, are a violence towards women, they "hurt women personally, publicly and with professional legitimacy." The language and practice of the new reproductive technologies act to disembody, fragment, and displace women. Motherhood becomes a "medical objective." "They also divide women from each other. The status of motherhood can't be raised until the status of women is raised. Women's bodies must have the same freedom from intervention as men's bodies, and the right not to be plundered medically."

Robyn Rowland argued that the feminist call for a "Women's Right to Choose" has been thrown into confusion by the advent of the NRTs, that by "choice femi-

nists mean control," and that it is this which is under threat as techno-docs gain greater control of procreation.

Ramona Koval spoke of the commercialization of reproductive technology, and with it the possible sale of genetic material and "surrogate" wombs. Ditta Bartels demonstrated from genetic engineering how competitive pressure in the scientific/medical community can convert a marginal health issue to a major disease problem requiring a technofix solution.



In workshops, women discussed the reinforcement of the ideology of compulsory motherhood and assessed the churches' idealization of mothering; the likeness of "surrogate" womb use to the experience of adoption, for both relinquishing mother and for the child;

the critiques of the medicalization of reproduction and its control offered by the home birth movement and the Billings ovulation method; questions of access and equity involved in the social control of IVF; the concept of property in knowledge and children as expressed by science and law; the paradox of apparent parallels between arguments for the control of these technologies and for the banning of abortion.

The task of the conference was to connect strong feelings with current theory. We brought together experience in the law, medicine, and in policy-making and the theoretical work of the past two decades, and brought them to bear on a new/old onslaught on women.

In the Women's Liberation Movement we used to say that we carry no fixed characters and programs, because we never know what we will need to know and do tomorrow. A publicly-funded medical science that experiments on human embryos, offers preselection of sex, transplants one woman's fertilized egg to another woman's womb, and is projecting to implant an egg impregnated by his own sperm in the abdomen of a transsexual male, has reminded us of that all over again.

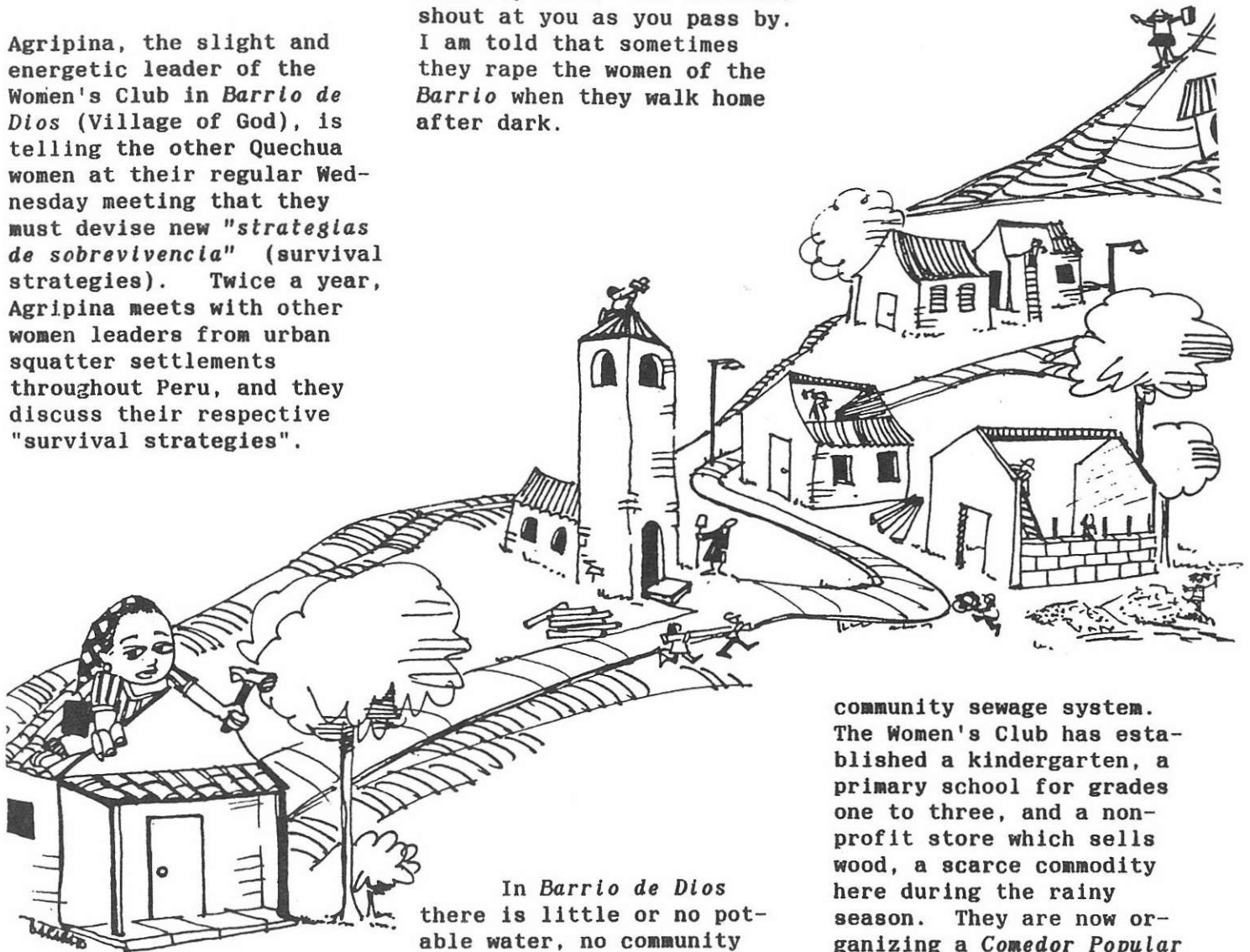
For further information on NFINNRETT, contact Laraine Fonseca, Unit 8, Kent Road, Keswick, S.A., Australia, 5035.

BARRIO WOMEN: STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

Andrea Doucet
Ottawa

Agripina, the slight and energetic leader of the Women's Club in *Barrio de Dios* (Village of God), is telling the other Quechua women at their regular Wednesday meeting that they must devise new "*strategias de sobrevivencia*" (survival strategies). Twice a year, Agripina meets with other women leaders from urban squatter settlements throughout Peru, and they discuss their respective "survival strategies".

down a gravel road, two kilometres past the city's military base. The soldiers shout at you as you pass by. I am told that sometimes they rape the women of the *Barrio* when they walk home after dark.



Barrio de Dios is one of fifty-two urban squatter settlements outside of Cuzco, Peru's tourist capital. To get there is a pleasant walk up the hill from the market behind the Cathedral Belen, and then

In *Barrio de Dios* there is little or no potable water, no community health post, no sewage facilities, no street lighting or garbage collection, no public transport. Yet since its inception 19 years ago, this overnight village of 280 Quechua Indian families has managed--with little or no help from municipal authorities--to install five public water taps and at least the beginnings of a

community sewage system. The Women's Club has established a kindergarten, a primary school for grades one to three, and a non-profit store which sells wood, a scarce commodity here during the rainy season. They are now organizing a *Comedor Popular* (open kitchen) to provide collectively prepared and nutritious meals to the village.

I worked in *Barrio de Dios*, and other squatter villages in Peru and Bolivia, for three months, and I came to some important realizations. One is that water is mainly a women's issue. Among the overwhelm-

ing majority of the rural and urban poor, women are the primary drawers, carriers and users of water. It is estimated that one-sixth to one-half of all energy expended by women in the "developing world" is expended in searching for and carrying water. In some cases, a single water-fetching trip lasts four to eight hours. It is also women, as mothers and household managers, who decide on the proper and hygienic use of water. They are vital actors in determining hygiene and ultimately the health of their children.

In Peru, there is a well-developed system of organization among the urban poor, from the community level to the national level. This organization forms a

collective lobbying group for obtaining essential services from the government as well as a central meeting place for an exchange of information and experiences. The real power in Peru, however, lies with the women's groups. It seemed clear to me, as I trekked from one community to the next in Peru and Bolivia, that the level of community development is highest in communities where there is a strong women's group.

In *Barrio de Dios*, I worked with one of the most dynamic women's groups in all Peru. Each day as I took the two kilometre walk past the Cathedral on the hill and past the military base, I always felt a bit transformed. Awe is one word which comes to mind.

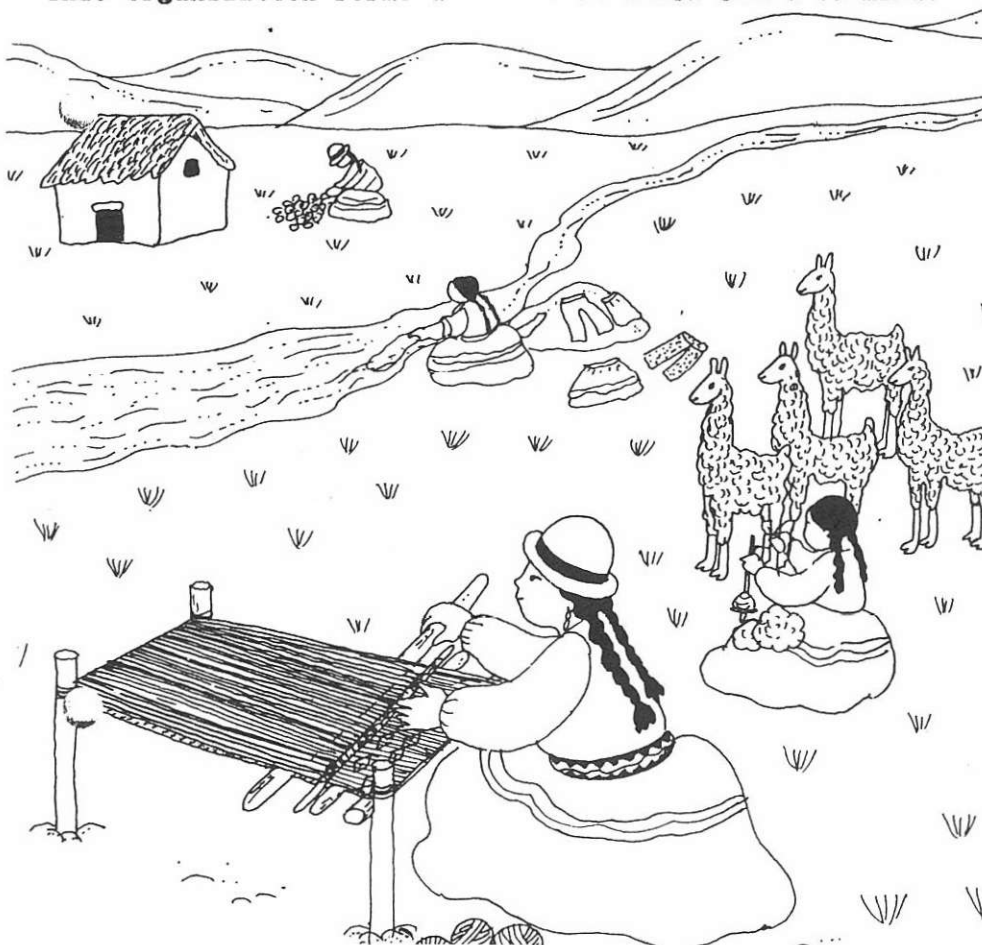
Indeed I cannot quite name the feeling these women inspired in me. I had never felt that way before.

Since the women's group began in 1978, there has also been a change in household relations in *Barrio de Dios*. The confidence and personal strength gained by the women through their participation in the women's group has led to a greater respect on the part of their husbands. The women were proud to tell me that their husbands do not beat them anymore. They were never ashamed to sit with me and tell me of their past experiences, no matter how horrible or painful.

I took the opportunity to tape the oral testimonies of the women over several days of meetings at their small community centre. They told me the story of their group's history, a story that details the slow and steady progress of a group of shy, individual women coming together to form a strong collective community force. *Asociacion Amauta*, a small non-governmental organization working in Cuzco, played a role in the growth of the women's group. I will let the women speak for themselves:

"Our Women's Club began in 1978 with a kindergarten project introduced by *Asociacion Amauta*. At first there was a lot of resistance. The women could not believe that it would be good for their children. Then we raised the money to build a school for grades one and two."

"After the kindergarten, *Asociacion Amauta*



set up literacy courses. Fifty persons registered in the course. All women. The men were too ashamed to register. The women wanted to learn. We were not afraid of being criticized. We said, please teach me to sign my name. We used to have to say to our husbands, you sign for me. This always made us feel embarrassed. A person must be able to sign their (own) name."

"Learning how to read also led us to share our experiences, our lives. It was a good meeting place."

"In 1980 a Swiss organization came to work in our *barrio*. A woman came to talk to us every Sunday. She would talk about 'capitalism'. We did not even know what that was. She did not seek out opinions. She told us we should rebel against the system and create a revolution. We found she was insincere and not in touch with our feelings and our reality. We stopped meeting for a while."

"We began meeting again and started to write stories to be broadcast on the radio. We were asked by *Asociacion Amauta* to write these stories. When we made the radio stories, we remembered the past. Many of them were similar. A frequent theme was mistreatment and abuse by both our husbands and our bosses. When things are bad, we tend to think that life is supposed to be like that. That we are meant to suffer. Some of us were abandoned by our parents. There were so many similar stories. It made us all very emotional. We



cried. Before this, there was little confidence between us. We were afraid to share ourselves. We were afraid of being criticized and laughed at. But little by little, we have learned to become close and united."

"I used to always be in the house. Something was missing in my life. Now with our women's group, we are very content. I have learned a lot by sharing my experiences."

"At first, the men thought that we were using the women's group as an excuse to be with other men. Some women thought that we were talking about how to dominate our husbands. We are accepted more now because of the work we have done. We have the school, the store to sell dry wood supplies during the rainy season; we have the sewing collective, and we are organizing a popular kitchen for the community. We built

five water taps and now we want to install sewage and domestic water taps."

"Some of the men in the community do not like us because we criticize their drinking. Or we want to keep better family accounts of our money. They tell us to raise our children and to be quiet. They tell us we should not be so 'proud'."

POST NAIROBI CONFERENCE: ANOTHER CONFRONTATION WITH RACISM

Liz Willick
Oxbow, Saskatchewan

Liz Willick is a farm woman and rural development educator from Oxbow, Saskatchewan. She participated in Forum '85, the end of the decade women's conference, in Nairobi last year, and attended the Post-Nairobi Conference held in Toronto on October 17-19, 1986. This article is drawn from a larger report that Liz prepared for the South Saskatchewan Committee for World Development.

Although in advance the agenda looked promising, I found myself thinking at several points during the Post Nairobi Conference [PNC] that it didn't have the supportive, high-energy feeling I usually associate with women's movement conferences. In retrospect, my discomfort came from a wide variety of factors, but primarily these three: that participants, whose common ground was having been in Nairobi in July, 1985, did *not* have a sufficient basis of unity to develop positions and resolutions; that participants did *not* consider themselves feminists (and did not share a common understanding of the meaning of that term); that it was hopeless to think we could develop "a collective statement ... on the political implications of the [original Nairobi] Forum [for] the women's movement in this country...."

The 1985 Nairobi Forum was primarily an educational and information-sharing event. It was not, of itself, adequate preparation for developing strategy for "a more internationalist framework for the work of the Canadian women's movement," as PNC organizers had hoped.

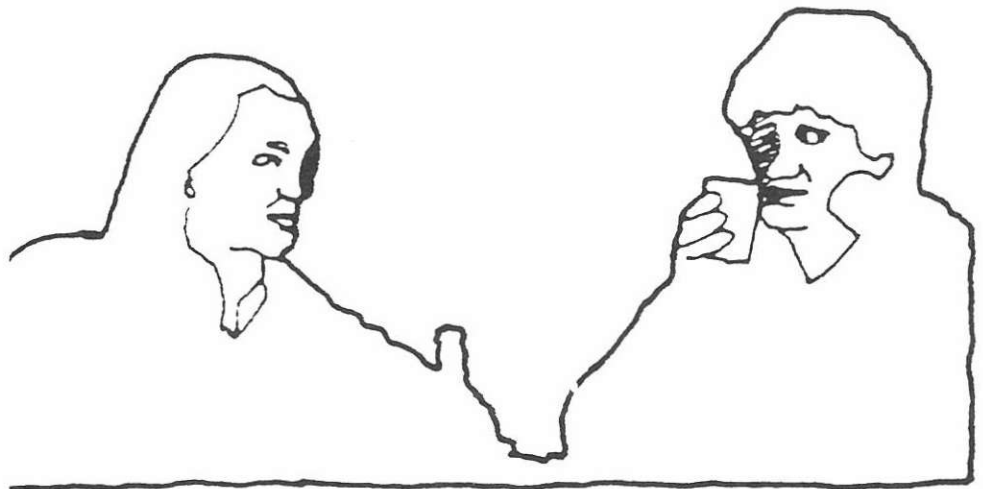
The most common theme through the PNC conference was discussion of minority group experiences. White women spoke of being in the minority in Nairobi; Black women of being part of the majority. Discrimination against Native and non-white Canadians during the United Nations Decade of Women processes was on the table from the first panel on. By the end of the conference, racism in the Canadian women's movement was being challenged explicitly.

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE AND A CONTENTIOUS RESOLUTION

By the Sunday morning plenary it was clear that the small group process intended to develop coherent, useful resolutions and statements out of cau-

ses and workshops had been less productive than planners might have hoped. Conference coordinator Punam Khosla began the session with a major statement, and a resolution from the chair's microphone.

Frustration was very evident in Punam's presentation--probably for a combination of good reasons: the difficulty with and responsibility for conference organizing (the ad hoc committee had been largely non-functional after obtaining funding and hiring staff); the lack of unity, clarity and common ground among participants and an early tendency to self-congratulation; the participants' reluctance and inability to deal with difficult internal



*Resolution Passed at Post Nairobi Conference,
Toronto, Oct. 19, 1986*

Whereas,
preparations for Nairobi '85 did not allow Forum participants from Canada to be either broadly representative or accountable to women's organizing efforts in this country;
and whereas,
current Post Nairobi work being conducted at the Federal level speaks [only*] primarily to the fact of the conference and not to the specific topics discussed there;
and whereas,
funds currently being used for generalized reporting on both Forum '85 and the Government Meeting could be put to better use by women organizing within their communities and constituencies on the specific priorities defined by their respective communities;
and whereas,
the fundamental lesson of Forum '85 has been recognition by women around the world of the need to integrate gender with both racial and class considerations;

Be it resolved that:
this conference calls for [all government bodies to stop funding generalized Post Nairobi work*] more money to be allocated to women's organizations working in their own communities to further identify their problems and meet their own needs.

Be it further resolved that:
these funds be reallocated to women working in specific constituencies to advance the position of women according to their own needs. Priority for funding should be given to non-white, Native and poor women, followed by women from other socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged groups.

Be it further resolved that:
in the spirit of Nairobi, the federal government allocate more funds to the Secretary of State Women's Program to finance organizing amongst women here that is in support of building international networks and links with women working for similar causes in other countries. Priority should be given to migrant, refugee, Native, and non-white women building links with their home countries.

Be it further resolved that:
the Status of Women Canada abandon research and documentation of the Nairobi conferences in favour of providing research and material support to women working in their own communities on the issues they have defined as priorities.

* Original wording which was not included in the final version of the resolution is in brackets above.

issues (especially racism and homophobia); and doubtless also from long personal experience as an immigrant feminist in Canada.

Punam's resolution argued that the conference was more evidence that there is no unified sense of what feminism means; that there is no understanding by government that we can't just create unified common statements; that governments' generalized funding for Post Nairobi events and publicity avoids support for the real work at the grassroots/community level--which actively hinders the community-based work.

There was a moment of dead silence as women tried to cope with the implications of the resolution.

The reading of the resolution then had to be tabled pending distribution of copies! Presentation of resolutions from small groups proceeded. Most passed with a minimum of debate. How they would get tidied up and sent to their end destinations remained something of a mystery. I don't think I was alone in feeling that Punam's statement/resolution should have had priority. I thought I supported the resolution but wanted the chance to read it to be sure. And we should have talked about the preamble and whereas's--discussion and some level of understanding there would have paved the way for dealing with the clauses in the resolution. I also had the

feeling that if we did accept Punam's analysis/proposals, it would probably contradict the illusion of unanimity created by the passage of an array of hastily drafted resolutions.



The session closed late for lunch, followed by a poorly-attended public forum. Punam's resolution did not come back to the group until after 3 p.m. Especially for long distance travellers, pack-up and plane schedules were getting to the top of the priority list.

A DIFFICULT DISCUSSION...

Debate on the resolution itself was emotional and difficult. Many of the conference participants were, I think, ill prepared to handle the implicit and explicit charges of racism that it entailed. Some I'm sure had almost no background within their own organizations/smaller cities/rural communities from which to understand the tension, and the demands of the women of colour. We forget sometimes that in such a predominantly white society it is possible for adults never to have experienced a direct personal challenge about endemic racism.

Hearing the resolution read evoked for many of the white participants, including myself, an oh-dear feeling that *our* work/organizations/priorities would suffer from prioritizing those women of colour. The conclusions expressed by the whereas clauses were not discussed; most importantly whether or not there was agreement (which I doubt) that "the fundamental lesson of Nairobi [was] recognition...of the need to integrate gender issues with both racial and class considerations."


Instead, much of the debate was on the wording of criticism levelled at government. Concerned with "not sounding negative," and ignoring the call for re-allocation of those funds, there was an eager discussion of the propriety of ever calling for a halt to funds for women. I took strong exception to this discussion; not only because it avoided more important questions, but also because of the content.

If the availability of government (or other) funding causes us to initiate programs which are not adequately rooted in women's needs and capacities to be useful; if we set agendas to get them which do not really reflect our priorities and work methods; if to get those monies, we are reduced to squabbling among ourselves as well as competing in the who-can-write-the-most-acceptable-proposal game... then surely, there must be a time when it's

better to refuse funds. And in the process make clear to agencies involved that their priorities are not in fact in the best interests of the women they claim to support.

In any case, some women at the Post-Nairobi Conference (PNC) felt the resolution threatened not only their funding, but also denied the value of their and their organizations' work. In particular I remember a gray-haired woman from the Women's Institutes (FWIC) who had tears in her voice. Her organization had always been for the good of all women, she said. It had an international component through Associated Country-women of the World which supported rural women's projects in the South. Was she expected, she asked, to tell the FWIC women that their work over many decades was all wrong?

She had the courage to speak her confusion and hurt. I suspect others who slipped away before the vote



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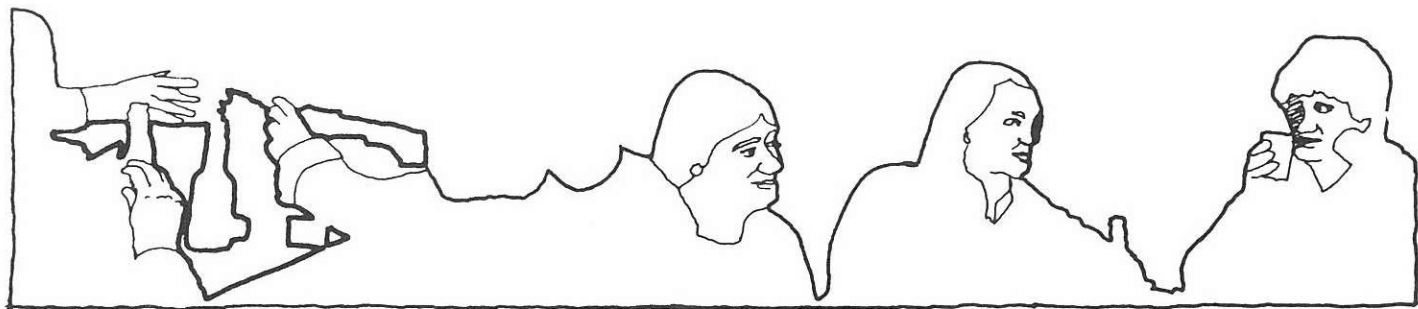
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felt similarly. Some probably left in frustration/anger/confusion with no clear understanding that they were being challenged about basic principles of development with women--because they lacked a familiarity with the debate and had never formulated an analysis of global systems and processes which have at their heart, class, race and gender biases that fundamentally disadvantage the vast majority of the world's women.

The frustration and anger from some women of colour also came out clearly. I remember the tenor, if not the wording, of comments from Punam near the end. She pointed out that the resolution had *not* called for a halt to funding for any grassroots work--but for new priorities to redress past imbalances and support more of those most in need. She expressed great disappointment, but not really surprise at the debate, the reluctance to address racism as part of women and their organizations and movements, and at the possible failure of the resolution. To me, her feminist political principles came through loud and clear. Others, I suspect, given all the above, felt guilty.

Their resistance reminded me of debates within the New Left 15 or 20 years ago as women tried to get their organizations and male activists to put women's status and equality on the agenda of every step in the process of organizing for social change. For me, one of the lessons of that time was that guilt--whether male, liberal or white--is not a base on which solidarity can be built.

IN THE END

The resolution, amended, was finally passed--but was voted on by only a fraction of the participants. I don't think there were any opposition votes.

The Decade, Forum and the composition of the Toronto conference made the discussion inevitable. Its painfulness has broader and deeper roots in all of us. Whether or not it could have been built into the agenda in a more productive fashion is a question for the organizers. As it stood the agenda could have been quite productive to work with had the group held a common notion of what they were trying to do and for whom. I think the situation set us up for failure--a rather painful example of the capacity for co-option and dissension through funding

support for expensive "events" that aren't adequately rooted in the reality of intended participants.

Those of us who define ourselves as feminist activists need ways to reach out to groups which Nairobi embraced as part of the women's movement, which are women's organizations but not necessarily feminist organizations.

We need to do that on the basis of common experience and interests--as anti-racists, or health or assembly line workers, or as rural women. (I wish I could sit down now with the woman from FWIC!) We simply can't do it on the basis that we were among the 15,000 or so women who happened to end up in Nairobi in July of 1985 no matter how glad we may have been to have gotten there.

Carol Allen is a founding member of Lesbians of Colour in Toronto. She was involved in last year's International Women's Day Coalition and is part of the Planning Committee for IWD 1987. She was interviewed for Cayenne by Judi Stevenson in November.

Judi: Tell me about the establishment of Lesbians of Colour?

Carol: It got started three years ago, because I could see there was a need for women of colour who are also lesbian to get together and talk. There was really no other place available, and there still isn't, and that was the problem: where to go with our sexuality, to talk, and just be.

Judi: Tell me about your involvement last year with IWD [International Women's Day], because the issue of racism within the women's movement surfaced there in some really painful ways, and we are still dealing with the fall-out from that. Had you been involved in IWD before?

Carol: I wasn't that interested in being involved in IWD, because IWD comes attached with all these rumours and assumptions that it's racist, that it's run by white middle-class women who are very hesitant and defensive in dealing with issues of class, race and homophobia.

Judi: What did you think when you first heard that the theme was going to be "Women Say No to Racism"; did you think that a white

women's organization couldn't pull that off?

Carol: Yeah, I wasn't sure at first that I was going to do any work on it. Part of me just wanted to sit back and see how they screwed up! But then I heard that there were going to be Black women working actively on the day, and that was pretty interesting. It seemed then like it could be more of a reflection of the lives of women of colour, rather than this white middle-class group doing it for us.

At first it was my lover who was involved, and then when things started getting tense around Christmas time among the women of colour, I started getting directly involved in the [organizing] meetings. Because of the friction among the women of colour, and between Black women and white women.

Judi: What was happening, and what did you think could be done about it?

Carol: The tensions that existed between the Black women and women of colour were really serious, in terms of the anger, the mistrust that some of us had towards each other. And if there was any kind of disagreement, like if any of the women of colour disagreed with them [the Black

Women's Collective] on anything, then we were accused of being against them on everything. It was a disagreement about strategy, in how to approach organizing with white women, not about basic politics, but it created a massive division among women of colour.

Judi: Is that something you want to talk about?

Carol: I think those disagreements should be talked about, but that division is mended now, as I just found out at the Women of Colour Conference two weeks ago, where most of the Black women who had been involved in IWD came, and even though we were on opposite sides of some things then, we could work together again now. I was talking to women who I thought I would never talk to again, and that was great!



THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Judi: What were the disagreements really about? Why were they politically significant?

Carol: Well, some Black and Native women came in wanting to take over IWD, which is not a bad thing in and of itself, but the level of their demands was too high for the women who had been doing the organizing of IWD for years to accept.

The Black women and the Native women challenged the traditional decision making process of the IWD Coalition, which was to vote on the requests and demands made by the constituent groups, and they did not want that to happen because that's not the way Native people make decisions. And they were quite within their rights to demand that, but at the same time, it was something the Coalition had never dealt with before, and

it's really hard in the middle of a planning coalition to suddenly stop and sort out the decision-making process all over again. It was not the right time to have that kind of a disagreement.

And they were making a lot of other challenges that IWD had never faced before, and those are really important to stimulate discussion on the possibilities of ever working together. And we need to sit down and talk about the basis of unity within IWD that would make it possible for Native women and Black women to be more than tokens in a white women's day. But each one of those challenges was really a shock for some of the white women.

And some of [the white women] were agreeing to everything that was said by any woman of colour, and they were acting out of guilt and fear of being attacked for being racist, so they would not really resist and not really voice the kind of feelings they were having, which was too bad, because if they had, we might have sorted some stuff out. Just being quiet is not being anti-racist.

Judi: What's your sense of how we work that out, because obviously liberal guilt, and the fear of being branded a racist if you say something wrong, is a big problem for white women working in coalitions with women of colour.

Carol: And the other problem is that they don't know how to deal with the anger that women of colour have inside us after all the years of oppression, and [white women] have to be prepared for that. So if a woman of colour confronts them really angrily, they back off because they don't know how to deal with it. And that's a good way to just hide. To say, "oh I can't deal with your anger," not only negates her feelings, but it means you are just seeing the anger and not what she's saying. And individual white women get stuck there. Part of getting past it is to recognize that you're there, and talk about it, not necessarily with women of colour but with other white women.

Judi: Do you see separate caucuses as essential for white women and women of colour to work together?

Carol: Well, not necessarily as essential, but there is always the potential that women of colour will need a caucus when they are working with white women. And white women may need a group, not a caucus, because what they are working on is their privilege. And women have a really, really hard time dealing with that, because we are used to getting in touch with ourselves through our oppression, not through our privilege.

And it's not that because [white women] have privilege they are bad, that



they are oppressors as such. Just don't deny the privilege.

Judi: Do you think that the problems in last year's IWD are because it was the first time that a really serious effort was made to cross the line of race in the women's movement here, and we don't know how to do it yet, or was it because of fundamental racism in the women's movement that we haven't begun to touch?

Carol: I think it's both. I think there is fundamental racism in the women's movement in Toronto. Women of colour just don't trust feminism, because they don't see themselves reflected in it at all. So they are more inclined to work with their race, and give their sex the back seat.

Judi: How do you see that changing? Do you think women of colour have to take the initiative and demand that the white women's movement change priorities and reflect their issues? Because whether its fair or not, it seems like nothing will change without face-to-face struggle.

Carol: No, it won't. But it's really hard to say that more women of colour should get involved, because I really don't see that happening. Because there is a great need for Black women and women of colour not to have to separate themselves from the issues around race. And I just don't see the young women of colour with any desire to work within the women's movement per se.

Their alliances are with the larger Black community, which means men.

And the issues are not the same. Look at abortion, you don't see many Black faces in that struggle, because it's just not a priority issue.

And also, many women of colour have the fear of lesbians within the women's movement, which is really unfortunate. Of course other straight women have that fear too, that the women's movement is run by all these rampant dykes, and it's very threatening to them.

Judi: But there you are, working on IWD again this year. Why is it different for you?

Carol: I think because I grew up in the women's movement, I have a tie there, and because I don't want to be struggling with Black men all the time on sexism and

heterosexism. For my sexuality to be known within the Black community would be a hindrance to my work there. I would not be seen as credible. Whereas in the women's movement I can be more of who I am.

Judi: What was your final conclusion about last year's IWD, was it worth it?

Carol: Sure, I thought it was a good day. It was really positive to pull it off at all, even with all the problems. And the day has been felt all year, in terms of bringing racism to the forefront of a lot of organizations.

Judi: What do you think is the most important thing for white women in terms of addressing their racism?

Carol: One of the things is personal stuff, addressing the attitudes you grew up with, things that you don't even know you've been taught. A lot of organizations that want to address racism think that the way to do that is to try to bring women of colour into their groups, and I don't think that is the way. You don't need women of colour in your group to address racism. Anti-racism can be incorporated into the goals of the group, and that is more important. Its working on who you are. The other is tokenism, and its not going to work partly because women of colour are just not going to get involved.

Judi: How is this year's IWD taking last year's experience into account?



interview

Carol: This year there is going to be a full day of discussion (December 7), not just on the theme for IWD 1987, but on the whole coalition process. I'm on a committee preparing proposals for that and we want to institute caucuses as a teaching tool. There would be caucuses available to women on the general issues of oppression like race, class, ablism, and also groups based on the corresponding privilege to those oppressions. And the caucuses would be a means of support for those women, but also they would be able to give direction to the overall Coalition on the issues that relate to them.

Judi: They would be able to determine the direction of the Coalition on those issues?

Carol: Very much so, as long as everybody in them realizes that they have a responsibility to the Coalition too, that nobody can just go in and say "do this". Last year there was no idea how a caucus can be used, and there was no corresponding group to the so-called caucus that did exist, to teach white women why a caucus is necessary in this instance. Women have such a hard time with anything that looks like a split, anything that looks divisive! And they have to see how it can be very productive.

Judi: How can the caucus process be different, more successful, this year?

Carol: There was no sense of responsibility to the Coalition

last year, and that's because there was no real plan. The term "caucus" kept being used, but it wasn't really a caucus, it was the Black women and the Native women, and other women of colour were not involved in it. But it kept getting referred to as "the caucus decision" and "the caucus position", which was an abuse of what it can be, what it can bring about.

It was the issue of prostitution which divided the women of colour, and that division among us came out in the general meeting. All the white women found out there was a division among us, which should never happen with a caucus, because that can be manipulated and used. So that was a mistake.

But another mistake was the structure of the so-called "caucus" meeting itself, and who felt that they could express their opinions and that their opinions would be heard. The caucus was being dominated by some women, and others were just following along, and not thinking about the issues. And that was wrong too.

Judi: What else needs to be different this year, given last year?

Carol: More participation in the beginning decision making by a wider group of women. More of a feeling of being able to participate in establishing what the Coalition believes, what the Coalition endorses. More of an understanding of how a coalition actually works, so more give and take.

Judi: How is that accomplished?

Carol: Well, an open day like December 7 is really important. And even though there may not be a big turnout, we can say to women as time goes on, and new women are yelling and pissed off about what's already been decided, we had this day, and everyone was invited, and if you have a problem, then next year you be there! Because it is also their responsibility to be there. And you couldn't say that last year, because it was too closed.

Judi: So you really believe in coalition politics for the women's movement right now?

Carol: I don't see any way for us to accomplish any real long term goals for women without it, because we just don't pack the punch working on our own.

Judi: And do you regard the day itself as a celebration, or as a tool for reaching out to more and more women?

Carol: It should be both. Media wise, it is a tool, it reaches more women than any of our other events throughout the year. And at the same time it should be a celebration, it should be a good time. It should show that we can work together, that we really can do things. Its a time that we can be militant together, instead of each doing our own little thing. We can be militant around being women, and that is a real energizing thing.

★

NICARAGUA: REFLECTIONS ON AMNLAE

September 1986 marked the ninth anniversary of AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan Women's Association. This anniversary was the catalyst for a day-long discussion of AMNLAE in the Assembly of the FSLN (the Sandinista National Liberation Front), and a special feature on "Women in the Revolution" in *Barricada International*, the FSLN's newspaper. Included in the feature were three self-critical articles on AMNLAE's progress. *Cayenne* is publishing excerpts from these articles below.



A Self-Critical View

by Milu Vargas

AMNLAE took on the challenge of transforming the traditional role of women in a society suffering from a U.S. war of aggression. This is no easy task. We had to avoid making the mistake of thinking the struggle for women's rights was our sole objective, or that the Revolution should only be concerned with the defence and military development of society.

After the triumph of the Revolution, we had grassroots support in municipalities throughout the country. But AMNLAE's tasks were never clearly defined, and as a result each region carried them out in its own particular and spontaneous fashion. We also became absorbed in organizing women who were working with the FSLN, and we threw ourselves into the overall work of the party. Thus, we neglected our main concern: to bring together and represent the large number of women who were beginning to take the first steps toward participating in the Revolution; women who were, in practice, transcending their traditional roles.

For this reason, although the organization developed well at first,

later it became stagnant in several parts of the country. It became apparent that we would have to re-think our *raison d'etre*, so that women would identify with us as an organization that raised issues and worked to promote their rights. At the same time, we had to have a flexible structure in order to become an influential organization for broadening the participation of women in the revolutionary process.

We spent three years reflecting on these issues, and there have been times when we felt we were making headway. We began with discussions and analysis, gathering experiences about the participation of women in the first six years of the Revolution. We held about 600 meetings across the country, in which 40,000 women from every social class took part.

We found that women had participated extensively in the many political, social, economic, and military tasks of the Revolution. However, the integration of women in the Revolutions has not eliminated the need to struggle for equal opportunities and treatment.

At the town meetings and in AMNLAE's National Assembly women made observations, recommendations, and suggestions. With clarity

and precision we expressed our demands for free choice in bearing children, respect for our physical and psychological well-being, access to positions of leadership based solely on merit and not sex, access to land and to land titles, and rights to full employment, the protection of maternity, and equality within the couple.

With all this information the leaders of AMNLAE could have drawn up a plan of action; but it has not been done. We have not been able to meet regularly, nor to be orderly, coherent, and consistent in our work.

In short, I am saying there was no justification for our passivity. It is a revolutionary obligation to be critical and self-critical. Now that we have recognized our errors, we must correct them and carry on with our work until our organization expresses the aspirations and interest of Nicaraguan women in the Revolution.

Milu Vargas is a lawyer who heads the legal advisory team to the National Assembly, and is a member of AMNLAE's executive board.

Wresting With Real Problems

by Gioconda Belli

Revolution is a dynamic process, charged with energy and change. In a revolutionary situation, all society's structures are affected. Consequently, revolution is the ideal catalyst for the process of women's liberation. Now the struggle can take place in the context of the liberation of an entire society rather than in isolation.

These past seven years have shown that, just as Lenin said, the taking of power and the destruction of the old state are only the beginning of revolution. Observing the development of AMNLAE, we feel that there is still much to be done.

As women begin to become involved in the Revolution they have to confront a complex social and family situation. Women find themselves alone in resolving these problems; society has only concerned itself with women's integration, failing to deal with the ideological work that must be done with both men and women.

AMNLAE came up against this very problem. The organization had to wrestle with women's real problems if it wanted to represent them; it had to provide answers which would transcend the mere integration of women into the work force; it had to provide answers to the problems arising from the very process of integration it was defending.

AMNLAE didn't have the answers, nor the belief that a women's organization must

play a persuasive role so that society develops concern for women's problems and considers them problems affecting all members of society.

AMNLAE actively took on the role of organizer, but was unable to complement it by bringing women's problems to the forefront in society. What was missing was the ideological orientation required for an undertaking of this scope, which involves changing both patterns of thought and action, rather than only seeking material gains. This vision was lacking not only in AMNLAE, but also in the Revolution as a whole, and the FSLN.

The most positive way to treat this question, which arouses so many different opinions, is with a strong women's organization: a renewed AMNLAE developing

new ideas and new directions. To carry out this task it is imperative to combine mass action with a solid organizational structure. The organization must have sufficient authority to coordinate tasks within the fields of education, law, health, material conditions, etc.; this requires the full participation of women.

This is the AMNLAE we need. Nicaragua has the chance to become the Latin American vanguard for a new integral solution to women's liberation. We have the opportunity to give a revolutionary, Sandinista content to feminism.

Gioconda Belli is a prize-winning poet whose work has been published throughout Latin America and has been translated into several languages.

Breaking Old Patterns

by Vilma Castillo

Material conditions shape ideology, and ideology serves to maintain and reinforce this oppression, by convincing people to accept rather than to question the system. Thus purely social phenomena are attributed to "nature" or God's will.

In social and individual development, ideology is internalized and becomes psychology, and institutions such as the church, school, and, above all, the family constantly reproduce these norms and values.

So even when people succeed in changing the material conditions of their society, changes in ideology



do not necessarily follow automatically. In fact, the old ideology may act as a force that constantly pulls backwards.

It is to AMNLAE's credit that it has promoted

laws that encourage change in the social relations of the family, and that it has organized the mothers of those who are fighting or have fallen in battle. It is also to their credit that the Women's Legal Office has focused public attention on such issues as the abuse of women, and men's responsibility as fathers. Not only do these projects make AMNLAE's work valuable, but a dynamism is also achieved when men and women from the grassroots are involved in this work.

We still have a long way to go. Thousands of women are not in the party or in unions, and have had no contact with AMNLAE. Thousands of women are being worn down every day by problems that require not a change in material conditions, but a change of ideology. Thousands of women who work outside the home are mistreated because they don't have dinner ready when their husbands arrive. Many women have jealous husbands who will not allow them even to work outside the home, much less join a coffee-picking brigade.

To think that this only happens to older women is to ignore the fact that marriage is still considered the only way to safeguard a young woman's morality; that female sexuality is still a motive for jealousy, mistreatment, and even murder, because it is bound to male honour; that female fertility is still used by both sexes to bolster the male ego; and that although women have no say over sterilization or abortion, any children born are their exclusive responsibility.



If in reviewing AMNLAE's work of the past seven years, we find that the political element could have been integrated into our work to a greater degree, or that we have not taken full advantage of the revolutionary potential of women who want change, we

may conclude that we have lacked a strategy and an analysis of practice and theory. None of this, however, invalidates in any way the essence of our organization.

*Dr. Vilma Castillo is a psychologist. ***

Women in Nicaragua face a double struggle — for equality and for the survival of their country. 'Resistiremos con dignidad/We will resist with dignity' is a slogan of AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan Women's Association. This year, the *Tools for Peace* women's project will bring support to Nicaraguan women in their fight for equality and peace.



Survival with Dignity

Tools for Peace, in conjunction with AMNLAE (the Nicaraguan Women's Association) has targeted sanitary supplies as a priority for the 1986 campaign.

Canadian women rarely imagine life without sanitary supplies. If we do, it is easy to understand why the women's association considers these a priority item. Providing sanitary napkins for Nicaraguan women will help them to survive the war with a little more dignity and independence. That is why, as part of this year's Tools for Peace campaign, we are asking you to donate these basic supplies for women. What is requested are standard, adhesive-backed sanitary napkins in boxes of 10 or 12 (no tampons, please). Cash donations can also be made. The money collected will be used to make bulk purchases at the end of the campaign.

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WOMEN CHALLENGE THE CHILEAN LEFT



Viviana Erazo

Excerpted from Mujer/Ilet, February, 1986. Translated by Gini Dickie.

The "New Chile Institute" was created in 1978 in Rotterdam as a way for Chileans in exile to meet and reflect on political issues. As it has done in past years, the Institute organized the fifth Summer School in Mendoza, the Argentinian city closest to Santiago.

From January 8 - 16, 1986 six hundred Chileans mainly from inside Chile met in courses, workshops and creative and recreational activities. Thirty-five per cent were women and there was an important youth contingent.

A round table discussion on "women, politics and parties" took place, with the participation of women from various political parties as well as the Feminist

Movement, the Shantytown Women's Movement (MOMUPO) and the Women for Socialism Movement. It focussed on a crucial issue: the need for a common platform developed by the broad women's movement to be included in the programs of the political parties.

During the second stage of the Symposium, political leaders organized a workshop called "The Society We Want" and, in spite of the strong presence of women in the Symposium, women's invisibility as participants repeated itself. Neither women nor youth were invited.... When the political leaders project the Chilean society of the future, do they envision it without women?

In the sign announcing the workshop, women wrote under the title "The Society We Want" will be without youth and without women."

This of course was not surprising given the histor-

ical precedents, but it motivated the women to demand that the political leaders participate in a workshop organized by them which was called "Women and the Society We Want". The political leaders were asked to answer three questions:

1. What does your party think of women's social movements?
2. How are women incorporated into your party's political platform?
3. In the future democracy, what are the concrete steps proposed by your party for the incorporation of women into the society?

There were those who answered these questions describing the "full" participation of their parties' women militants; others who called feminism an "export product"; some who argued that the priority and fundamental task is to overthrow the dictatorship; and also those who recognized their lack of knowledge of the women's question as well as the situation of women militants in their own parties.

Finally, as a result of the discussion, the political leaders recognized the need for the political parties to find ways of relating to the social movements and that there can be no democracy without the incorporation of women and women's specific demands into the parties' programs.

THE LIBERATION OF ERITREAN WOMEN

Lorna Hillman
Toronto

(This article is based on the publications of the Eritrean Relief Association. They are located at 229 College St., Toronto, M5T 1R4.)

Eritrea is a colonial and feudal-capitalist country. Currently under rule by Ethiopia, previous colonizers were the British (1942-52), the Italians (1890-1941), the Egyptians (1867), and the Ottoman Turks (1557).

Under Ethiopian colonialism, Eritreans are subjected to extreme exploitation and oppression. Working people are stripped of their right to form trade unions. They are abused in their work places, the majority of which are owned by foreign investors or the Ethiopian state. There is massive unemployment and poverty, which has forced thousands to migrate to the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

The peasants in Eritrea, who constitute more than 60% of the population, live in a state of semi-starvation. The pastoral nomads have to rent land for grazing and cultivation from landlords or the Ethiopian regime, who also burden them with heavy taxes.

Eritreans are forced to learn and speak the language of the colonizers and are forbidden to practice and maintain their own culture.

GENERAL FACTS ABOUT ERITREA

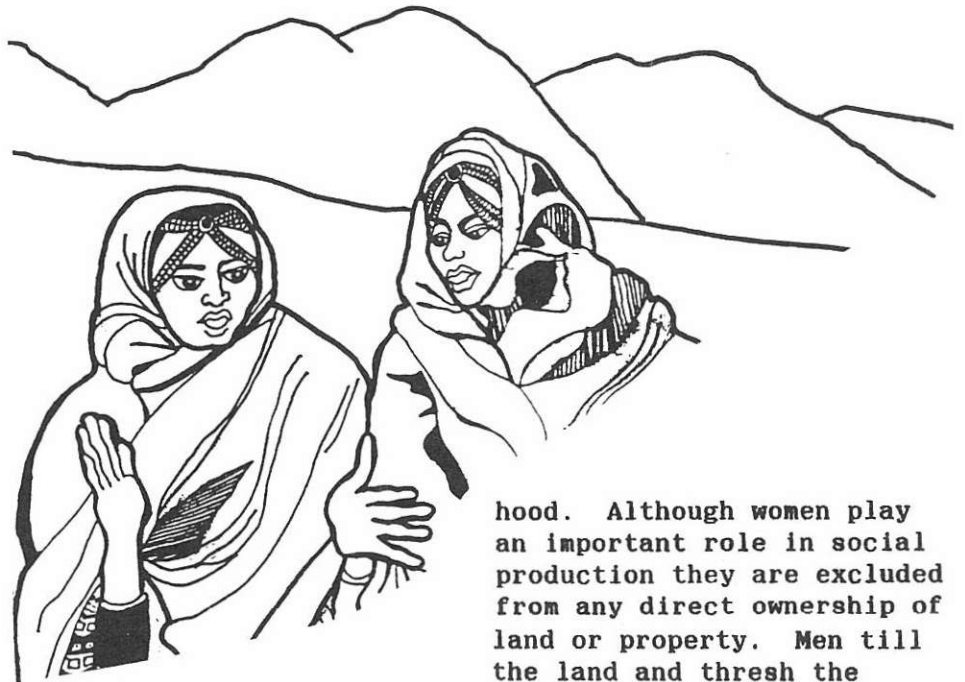
Location: Horn of Africa, Sudan to the West, Ethiopia and Djibouti to the South, the Red Sea to the East

Population: 3.5 million

Religions: 50% Christian, 50% Moslem

Languages: There are nine cultures and languages

Eritrea has been engaged in armed struggle against Ethiopian colonialism for the last 25 years.



The situation of Eritrean women must be discussed in light of this reality.

Eritrean women constitute an indispensable component of the work force in both rural and urban areas. They suffer the same class exploitation and oppression as men, but in addition, Eritrean women suffer the added exploitation of gender.

In the countryside, agriculture and nomadism are the main means of liveli-

hood. Although women play an important role in social production they are excluded from any direct ownership of land or property. Men till the land and thresh the grain. Women weed the farm, participate in the harvest and do most of the chores. A typical day in the life of a peasant woman in highland Eritrea would include getting up before dawn to grind grain, prepare breakfast and lunch, then she joins her husband in the fields. After a full day's work, a woman returns home ahead of her husband to gather firewood, cook dinner, and do all the household chores. She is

not allowed out of the house and in some lowland areas a woman cannot share food with her husband.

The condition of Eritrean women workers is no better than that of their peasant sisters. Generally, they are paid less than their male counterparts for the same job. They are laid off for reasons of maternity or illness with no compensation. On foreign-owned plantations and farms women agricultural workers are mainly seasonal, and work more than 12 hours a day at very low wages. A large number of women are employed as domestic workers, working 15 to 18 hours a day and receiving wages as low as \$7 a month. Employers have total power over employees, firing and cutting wages as they please.

Although the Eritrean people as a whole are subjected to political, social, and cultural oppression, the patriarchal system further denies Eritrean women even the limited role that men play in the political life of society. A few decisions regarding the affairs of the village, the family, and the children are made by men. Female members of the family are discriminated against, and privileges, such as schooling, training, choice of spouse, and divorce are reserved for men.

Today in the liberated areas, under the direction of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), the situation has changed dramatically.

The armed struggle began in 1961. At that time, despite the strong patriotic

sentiments of Eritrean women, only a few actually joined the Front. Most women participated by providing food, shelter, and information about enemy movements. Women working in the cities organized to raise funds for the Front.

Since 1974 however, advances have been made in the mobilization of women. They have now set up their own mass organization, the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEWmn). NUEWmn gives a high priority to raising the political consciousness of Eritrean women so they can grasp the source of their oppression and what's required to change it. Ninety-five per cent of Eritrean women are illiterate, which hampers their political development.

The NUEWmn has carried out a number of literacy projects and this year they hope to involve 15,000 women in a campaign which is getting assistance from a Canadian non-government agency.

The NUEWmn also recruits for the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Army, and women from among the organization's most conscious members are chosen for the peoples' militia. At present, 33% of the fighting forces are women.

In the liberated areas, women are engaged in agricultural production and cottage industries. Others are trained and working in machine and electrical shops, weapons repair departments, and the salt mines, side by side with men. Women are also



performing outstanding services in medicine, education and information, culture, and social welfare. They participate fully in the Peoples' Assemblies, administration, and other mass organizations like the National Union of Eritrean Workers, Students, and Peasants.

In the areas where land reform has been successfully carried out, women now receive an equal share of the land. The traditional marriage laws, which include child marriage and dowry, have been outlawed and more progressive marriage laws are in place, giving women equal rights in choice of spouse, property, protection rights for children, and equal rights in divorce.

Other objectives of the NUEWmn are:

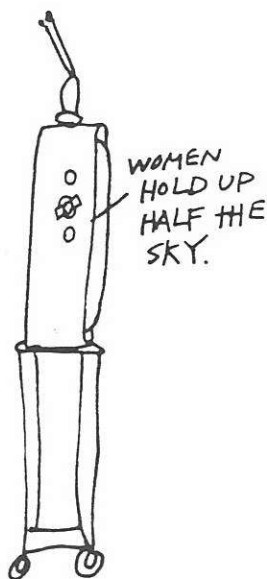
- an end to class exploitation ensuring full equality between the sexes in all cultural and political life;
- equal pay for equal work;
- right to one month's

paid leave before and after giving birth;

- establishing schools for children and special homes for women recuperating from childbirth;
- ensuring women are not forced to do work that is dangerous to their health;
- eradicating prostitution and all other forms of reactionary culture that strip women of their dignity;
- improving women's capacity to participate in politics, culture, and handicrafts in order to abolish the absence of women from social affairs which restrict them to a domestic role;
- giving women maximum educational opportunities-- the EPLF currently has a policy of giving women priority in enrollment in their cadre training.

The consciousness raising of Eritrean women was and still is a long process. Yet incredible

strides have been made in a relatively short period of time. A woman fighter was asked how these changes are occurring so rapidly. Her reply was, "The oppression of women has been so tremendous that the idea of liberation was already on their minds. The organization of the struggle for independence and social change served as the catalyst."



HEARTBURN

Directed by Mike Nichols

MEN

Directed by Doris Dorrie

Mary Chapman
Toronto

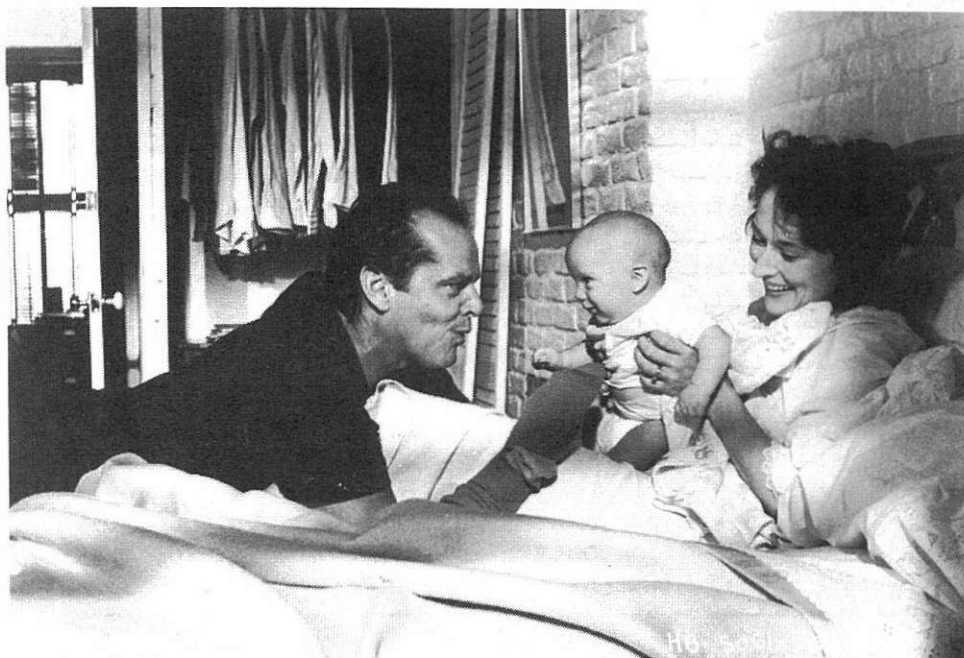
"Men have to snore to protect their women from wild animals."

"If you want monogamy, marry a swan."

These are the "comforting" words men say to women in two recent films about the complexities of modern relationships, and about love, false and true. The subject is infidelity, and the films are *Heartburn*, by American director Mike Nichols, and *Men*, by German director Doris Dorrie.

Heartburn is based on New York food columnist Nora Ephron's autobiographical novel of mourning and vengeance for her broken marriage to journalist Carl Bernstein (of Watergate fame). The Ephron character, Rachel (played by Meryl Streep), becomes so absorbed by the roles of wife and mother that she does not notice husband Mark (Jack Nicholson) drifting away. Domesticity becomes such an obsession that she spends a morning recording her child's first words on tape. Mark, by this time, has left the house on another "sock-buying" mission.

In *Men*, the feminist sensibilities of Doris Dorrie yield up the more novel scenario of a successful advertising executive, Julius (Heiner Lautenback), who discovers his bored wife



Paula (Ulrike Kriener) having an affair with a young graphic designer, Stefan (Uwe Ochsenknecht). Dramatically (and bravely), he leaves his old life behind, conceals his identity, and moves into a spare bedroom in Stefan's flat in an attempt to understand his wife's new relationship.

The two films are sheer contrast. *Men* is as light and sensitive and original as *Heartburn* is heavy, clumsy and cliched, giving this reviewer emotional indigestion. Their visions of marriage and cooperation between the sexes are, if not worlds apart, certainly hemispheres apart.

In *Heartburn*, the trauma Rachel feels because of Mark's infidelity is nothing more profound than social embarrassment. She is the "last to know" in the gossipy press community of Washington. When she finally learns of her husband's affair, her aim is not understanding or reconciliation, but retaliation, a

feat she accomplishes by pitching a cream pie right in his face, in front of all their friends. Satisfying perhaps, but hardly illuminating.

Men is much more enlightened, both for the territory explored and the realizations made by its characters. Paula's affair begins a process of self-reflection in her husband Julius. By discarding all that defines him--his job, his three-piece suit, his name, his past--Julius uncovers the angry artist that Paula fell in love with when they first met.

Stefan also undergoes a transformation. Encouraged by the new suit, haircut, and hard work that Julius forces on him, he learns not to use "scorn of success" as an excuse for his failure.

Heartburn's Rachel reaches no such self-knowledge. Even as her marriage is dissolving, she clings to the labels which have kept her whole. In a

game she plays at a restaurant with other couples, they all write down the five words which describe them. Rachel starts her list with "pregnant" and "married", believing that these terms are enough to define her.

Julius makes an attempt to understand the reasons for Paula's infidelity, and wins a happy ending because of it. But Rachel only runs away, hides in therapy, and flies home to Dad.

Men is a brave and gentle film, one which both

men and women will probably agree is fair comment. It doesn't offer a prescription for happiness in relationships, but at least it questions how men and women must relate, now that roles have changed so much. "What do we need women for?" Stefan asks as he and Julius are doing laundry together. "In this age, we can do our own laundry, we can cook, clean.... Who needs them?"

The immediate answer is laughter, because Julius has put his brand new blue jeans in with Stefan's un-

derwear. But the real answer is the one you think about as you leave the cinema. If marriage is the union presented in *Heartburn*--a panacea for instability, insecurity and lack of identity, then partners have little to offer one another except more of the same. But if it is the place Julius discovers, where two strong and self-defined individuals can meet, there is much to be exchanged.

BETSEY BROWN

Ntozake Shange
St. Martin's Press,
New York, 1985, 207 pp.

Marie Lorenzo

Betsey Brown is about a Black middle-class family--mother, father, grandmother, and five children--which moves from the relative security of a segregated town in the deep-South to St. Louis, Missouri. It is 1959, the year school integration is to be enforced.

Greer, thirteen-year-old Betsey's father, is a doctor, who spends all of his time trying to catch up on the overwhelming number of Black people needing care in his world. He is a passionate integrationist, while impressing his people's ancestry and culture on his children with equal passion.

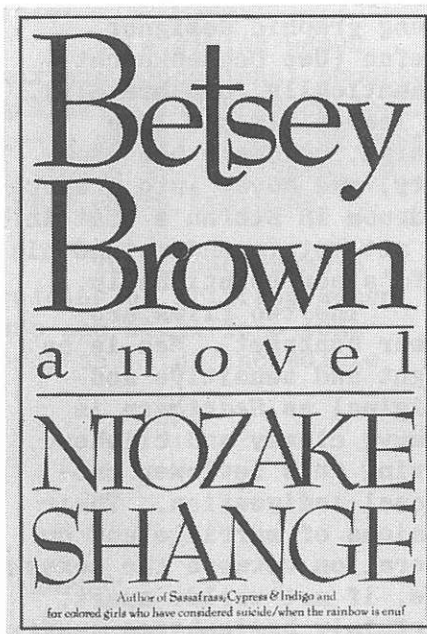
Betsey's grandmother, Vida, responds to the racism surrounding her in an almost opposite way: she is dis-

people's values. Describing her dead husband, she says:

He was such a gentle man and couldn't nobody tell he was a Negro, not even when he opened his mouth.... Not on the order of the modern men of color she'd come across in her daughter's life.

Betsey's mother Jane, a hospital worker in a "Negro" mental hospital, treads a fine line between her husband and her mother. She rails at her husband's desire to be out there saving and fighting for other Black people's lives, leaving her alone to deal with their problems at home. Her anguish at his insistence that they put their children on the front line, almost as sacrificial lambs, is heartwrenching.

Jane is a vivid illustration of the position that women often find themselves in: She wants to protect



tinctly uncomfortable with integration and would rather not mix with "them white folks." Her approach stems from a very real fear of physical harm, and also from a resistance to the psychological degradation of being around whites. Yet she disapproves of looking "too African" and encourages her family to assume white

her children and her home from outside political struggles. This also means bringing them up so that they are as acceptable as possible to liberal, middle-class white society. Yet, in her own way, Jane is just as committed to fighting for freedom for her family and herself.

The tension builds toward the day when the children are part of one of the first groups to be bused into a previously all-white school. Everyone's nerves are so taut that we are surprised and relieved when only one of the children is beaten up. And then, like the family, we feel our indignation rise with those of the family as we realize the bitter irony of our relief. But the real pain inflicted on the children is not so visible--the erosion of a sense of belonging, the isolation and, finally, the ensuing rebellion.

Betsey realizes how deeply she has come to dislike her new school and how much it has changed her life. One defiant day, she secretly scribbles large, anti-white graffiti on a street in her upright, middle-class, "integrated" neighborhood, and then graciously offers to hose it away when the culprit cannot be "found."

At this point, Betsey is also discovering her growing sexuality and womanhood. She needs to be taken more seriously as a person with her own opinions about being Black. Finally, Betsey develops so much anger at her lack of identity in her own home that she runs away. It's then that Betsey begins to appre-



ciate class differences and her own privileged position. She begs her family's hairdresser to take her in as an apprentice only to discover that the beauty salon by day is a brothel by night. She runs up against the incredulity and anger of Mrs. Maureen, who cannot believe Betsey's failure to appreciate the privilege of being brought up in a "good home." She meets one of her old babysitters, Regina, who is pregnant and working in the brothel.

With some dismay, Betsey comes to the realization that none of the people she likes being with are as secure as her; the only people who have at least as much as her are white.

Shortly after Betsey's return home, the tension climaxes when Greer decides to take the kids to a demonstration in support of school integration. Jane is sure that there will be a

situation between them explodes, causing nearly irreparable damage.

Betsey Brown is a uniquely written novel: it is a brief, incredibly brief, story. But you spend what seems like days living in it. Shange has a special ability to create a time, an atmosphere, and tension. Yet each chapter is only loosely joined to the last--the events unfold erratically, in leaps. Sometimes this is disconcerting, but the writing itself has such intensity you quickly become engrossed in it once more.

Woven throughout the book is the relationship between Jane, her mother, Vida, and her daughter Betsey. As in her earlier work, *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo*, Shange demonstrates an uncanny ability to capture the experiences of Black women, from different generations, and at different points in their lives.

Dykes to Watch Out For

Old
TURKEY

THIS YEAR, IN OPPOSITION TO MY WASP HERITAGE, I'M REFUSING TO TAKE PART IN OPPRESSIVE HOLIDAYS.

THANKSGIVING IS JUST A HYPOCRITICAL WHITEWASHING OF THE GENOCIDE OF AMERICAN INDIANS.

©1986 BY ALISON BECHDEL

AND THE NEXT DAY, YOU WERE OUT CHRISTMAS SHOPPING WITH A VENGEANCE!

WELL, SO... OLD HABITS DIE HARD. BUT THIS YEAR, I REALLY MEAN IT.

NO CRANBERRY SAUCE? NO. OR PUMPKIN PIE, EITHER.

CHRISTMAS IS A CAPITALIST CONSPIRACY OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION,...

...CRAMMED DOWN OUR COLLECTIVE THROAT, REGARDLESS OF OUR INDIVIDUAL RELIGIONS!

YOU SAID ALL THIS LAST YEAR, JULIA! BUT WHERE WERE YOU ON THANKS GIVING? OVEREATING IN FRONT OF A TELEVISION SET!

NO GIFTS? NO STOCKINGS? NO COLORED LIGHTS?

NO CARDS, NO CAROLS, NO CANDY!

NO TREE?

WE-ELL,... ISN'T THE TREE KIND OF A PAGAN SOLSTICE HOLDOVER?

JULIA... I THINK A SMALL TREE WOULD BE OKAY... WITH MAYBE JUST A HINT OF TINSEL...

ALL Lies...

