

WOMEN

a socialist feminist bulletin

spring/summer 1987

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CAYENNE

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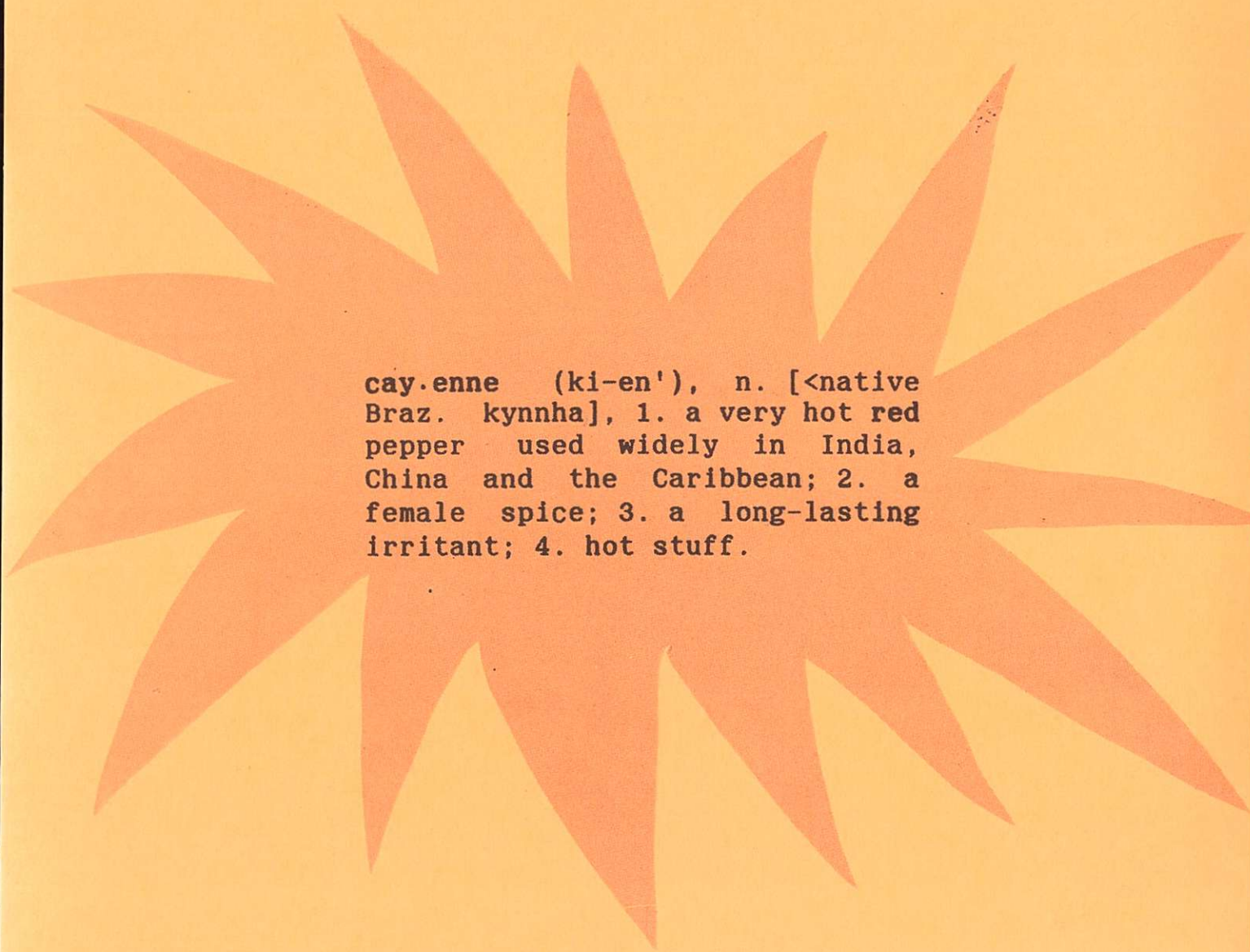
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CAYENNE

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

You have in your hands another double issue of Cayenne, partly because we were able to bring together a group of thought-provoking articles, and partly because of delays and difficulties in production.

Our centrespread article is one of two from Nancy Pollak on the struggles of Native people in British Columbia to regain control of their lives after decades of enforced dependency on colonial governments.

The concerns of Native women are to extricate their rights and opportunities from subordination to those of men, and to ensure the well-being of their children. Indian women in Canada have so far fought their battles largely in isolation from non-native feminists, despite the familiarity to feminists of these dimensions of their struggle. This is not a division which we can redress simply, for we are profoundly separated by culture and privilege. A small beginning step we can take is to listen and pay attention to the voices which Nancy is helping us to hear.

Nancy's second article is a primer on the dispiriting process of Native land claims negotiations in B.C.

A second major focus in the issue is daycare. The federal government has proposed to increase funding of for-profit daycare in the name of fairness and "choice." Their spokespeople present the idea as a step to improve daycare services and facilities for all parents. But given the scarcity of daycare spaces available, what "choice" do

parents really have? The same spokespeople claim that parental input and responsibility are vital for a healthy daycare system. But by shifting the balance of funding to private daycare, the potential for a strong parental role or for community control is seriously undermined.

Increased government funding of commercial daycare fits in well with the 1980s agenda of privatizing social services. The major way in which a private daycare can make a profit is by paying their employees little, since salaries are their greatest expense. (At present, staff in commercial daycare centres earn 30% less than employees in non-profit centres.) Funding for commercial daycare centres means a further entrenchment of the low wage status of daycare workers--thus daycare will continue to be a ghetto for low paid women's work.

The stakes are high. Will the ideology of "choice" be successfully manipulated to justify another move toward expansion and domination of childcare services by businessmen? Is free trade in children going to become a reality? Why do some daycare activists feel daycare is not an issue for the women's movement?

What constitutes a socialist feminist strategy for daycare? This question is at the heart of the daycare articles in this issue. The funding of private daycare in Alberta, and the state of the daycare movement in Toronto both pose a challenge for socialist feminists. Let's not ignore it.

Strategies for Daycare

Anne Fourt
Toronto

With the recent release of the report of the federal government's Special Committee on Childcare, daycare has apparently just had its "five minutes of fame" as a headline issue. Though Committee members listened to parents and community organizations across the country, they seem to have ignored the clear consensus that emerged, in favour of their own political agenda. (A little known fact is that the Committee's chief researcher resigned because government interference distorted the results of his work.) Thus, the report has emerged as an important statement of government ideology.

Even the title of the report, "Sharing the Responsibility", is indicative of the government's definition of its role: to help parents make (largely fictional) "choices" about childcare-- and not to move toward a federally financed daycare system with genuine choices for parents at all income levels.

This 'family support' role is further developed in

the major recommendation, a system of tax credits to parents, to maximize their individual choice-making potential. It does nothing to increase the limited number of quality daycare spaces available, or to reduce the cost of these spaces. Direct grants, which are crucial for increasing spaces, are only a small part of the monies being made available, and these grants would be available for commercial, profit-making facilities as well as non-profit centres.

While nominally the Special Committee report encourages non-profit, it leaves the decision on profit to the provinces.

The situation is quite different from province to province. Manitoba encourages development of non-profit daycare only. Alberta offers grants to commercial daycare (see Cayenne, this issue). In Ontario, the Liberals clearly intend to push the federal government for enhanced funding which would not be restricted to non-profit centres. The federal proposal to leave the question of profit/non-profit

centres to the provinces in fact promotes commercial daycare because it does nothing to discourage it. Enhanced government funding of private daycare is a threat to the future of daycare, and a step backwards, away from the goal of a universally accessible non-profit daycare system that has been a demand of the women's movement for more than a decade.

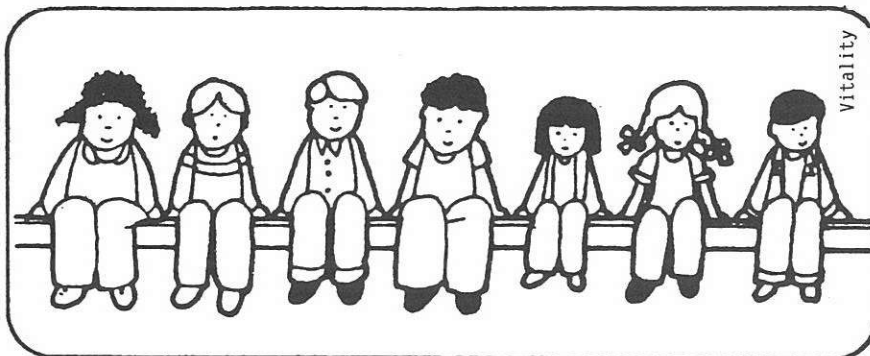
★

Politicians seem to have discovered daycare again. Brian Mulroney is promising better daycare, but the Special Committee on Child Care Report is hardly a step in that direction.

Luckily, the daycare movement is not a newcomer to the political scene. It is a broad-based national movement. Here in Ontario it is engaged in a critical battle concerning the government's plan to increase funding to for-profit childcare centres.

While other articles in this issue deal with the nitty gritty of the current struggle, this article is a strategic look at the daycare movement in Ontario in general, and particularly in Toronto. Although I certainly recognize the strong points of the daycare movement and the progress it has made over the years, I think some aspects of its strategy need a critical reexamination.

I am the mother of a five-year-old daycare consumer. As a parent, I have experienced the difficul-



daycare

ties our present childcare system poses: supervised homecare, babysitters, two different daycare centres. As a political activist, I have also been involved in the struggle for free-standing abortion clinics. Thus, my comments are shaped both by my personal experience as a daycare parent, and by perspectives on strategy derived from the struggle waged by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) over the last few years.

A HISTORICAL DETOUR TO BEGIN

The present daycare movement began as an alternative service run on a shoestring in the 1960s. The daycare centres then, like the alternative universities, popular health clinics etc., were part of a movement that expressed dissatisfaction with the system by setting up alternative institutions.

Now, daycare is a licensed community service caring for over 84,000 Ontario children under age six. The movement has grown, not only because more and more women with young children are working, but also because of a long-term strategy developed and implemented by activists.

1979 was an important turning point for the Ontario daycare movement. Up to this point the strategy had been mainly defensive in nature, fighting to keep daycare centres open one by one. At a conference held that year, the decision was made to move onto the political offensive and adopt the slogan of universal daycare in order to

transcend band-aid solutions.

The target of the daycare movement was the provincial government, which controlled an important part of the funding, set the standards for daycares and laid down the rules for administering subsidies and federal monies. This expanded the struggle from one fought on a strictly local level, into an issue of public policy.

Next, broadening the base of the daycare movement beyond the parents and staff who were the mainstays of the movement, was identified as a priority. Gaining support from political parties, trade unions, educators, and people within the social services, was now seen as essential.

Finally, an important element in this new strategy was to mobilize and organize the unorganized. Unionization would give a voice to daycare workers who, through low wages and poor working conditions, were subsidizing the childcare system. Strong unions would not only be able to fight for better salaries, but also could be strong advocates for improvements in the daycare system itself.

Important successes have been achieved through this strategy. The daycare movement developed a platform which was adopted first by the NDP and then by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) in 1981. Subsequently, the OFL launched a public campaign on the issue. This led to the formation of a broad-based coalition in which the OFL, teachers' unions, and social service



The Daycare Book, Marcia Salo Rizzi

representatives joined with daycare activists to demand universally accessible non-profit daycare. Thus the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare was formed.

The recognition that non-profit daycare was in the best interests of children resulted in a split in the daycare movement: private daycare owners left.

Subsequently, in 1982, a conference in Winnipeg led to the development of a national organization, the Canadian Daycare Advocacy Association.

Over the years, the daycare movement has broadened its base considerably, built a national organization, and successfully framed the terms of the debate around childcare. Through systematic research, skillful use of the media and thoughtful participation in government commissions, the facts concerning female participation in the labour force, the intolerably high costs of childcare, and the shortage of daycare services

daycare

are now impossible for politicians to deny. The ideological battle for universally accessible daycare has advanced considerably. Public opinion has moved, and the federal and provincial governments have both been forced to deal with this demand. Today, the questions of how much funding by government, when, and to whom--profit or non-profit--are on the table precisely because of the pressures brought to bear by the daycare movement.

In Toronto, the daycare movement has become adept at working within the political process with sympathetic municipal politicians. Precedent-setting grants to increase daycare staff salaries in the city's non-profit centres have been won. This is important, not only for the workers and centres concerned, but also because it acts as an upward pressure on all daycare workers' salaries. It stabilizes daycare centres by increasing staff wages without raising fees.

Participation across the country on the Katie Cooke Task Force on Childcare permitted activists across the country to articulate their experiences and demands, and the resulting recommendations gave increased credibility to the urgency of the problems.

The gains have been impressive. However, I feel that certain problems have arisen which must be addressed.

BROADENING THE BASE: WHERE ARE THE PARENTS?

My experience, albeit limited to only two daycare centres and information gleaned from informal conversations with parents at other daycare centres, indicates that parents currently using daycare facilities are not being given sufficient information regarding the daycare movement.

Because daycare is a service used by individuals for a lengthy but limited time span, the turnover is high. People move in and

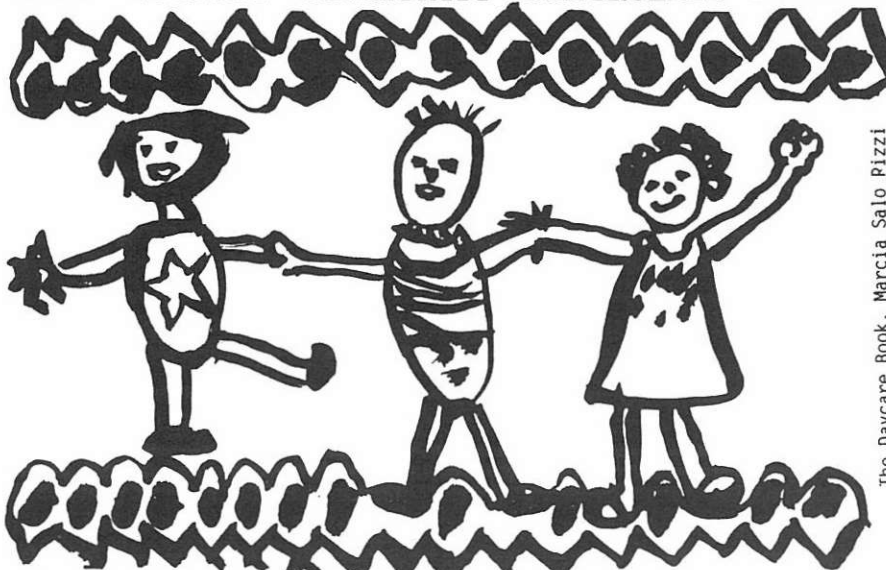
out of the formal daycare system depending on work, finances, family situation, childrens' ages, etc. Parents entering daycare facilities with toddlers today probably have no idea of the history of the daycare movement. Often their understanding of the issue is limited to personal experiences and is not situated in a broader analysis. More parents would and could become active supporters of the daycare movement if sufficient outreach and education were done on an ongoing basis.

DAYCARE: NOT A HOT ISSUE IN THE WOMENS' MOVEMENT?

In Toronto, a second problem is the relative marginalization of the daycare issue among socialist feminists. Daycare has not developed a high profile within the women's movement here. Its low profile has meant that daycare has been more of an afterthought than an important focus; an example is the International Women's Day activities in Toronto in the past few years.

Perhaps many socialist feminists find it easier to fight against compulsory motherhood than to elaborate an empowering vision of childrearing for women and men. For a vast number of women faced with raising children for many years of their lives however, these issues are important. If socialist feminists could speak to these issues in a meaningful way, both the daycare movement and the women's movement could be greatly strengthened.

HELP SUPPORT COMMUNITY CONTROLLED DAYCARE



daycare

Daycare movement activists have not devoted sufficient time and energy to sharing their strategic vision with other women activists. I have heard some women argue that since only a minority of women need daycare at any given time the issue has limited appeal in the women's movement. To me, this sounds more like an admission of failure by daycare activists than an objective explanation. Pushed to its extreme, this argument seems to imply that women, or people in general, will only struggle for their immediate and short-term interests.

The same type of argument could be made concerning abortion. Though a great number of women become pregnant, a much smaller number seek abortions each year, and an even smaller number receive an abortion at one of Toronto's free-standing clinics. Yet one of the strengths of OCAC, in my view, has been its ability to situate the struggle for abortion rights politically, to show how this issue affects all women and to reach out and share our perspective in the women's movement.

I recognize that the time and energy of daycare activists is limited but there is also a question of political choice. Daycare activists have not seen education around strategy aimed at women activists and the women's movement as a political priority, and hence an organizational necessity. If people do not come forward during the period when the [Toronto]

March 8th Coalition is being formed, to explain their demands, the specific context, and strategic implications, then it may be regrettable but it is certainly not surprising that daycare will be relegated to the back burner.

This is important to do, and not only for the sake of the daycare movement itself. Through these exchanges, different sectors and activists concerned with different issues exchange viewpoints and perspectives and learn from each other, strengthening the whole. The multiplier effect that being part of a broader movement brings to the struggle, and the wider political vision that comes from that larger women's movement, are strengthening forces.

This weakness is all the more striking when one considers the impressive educational work and outreach the daycare activists have done to build a broad-based daycare coalition.

UNIONIZATION

Unionization as a long-term strategy for the daycare movement is vitally important for several reasons.

Unionized daycare workers are better able to fight for improved wages and working conditions. This is crucial since the system will continue to experience high turnover in staff as long as daycare workers are subsidizing the daycare system through their low salaries.

Secondly, a strong union of daycare workers could become a prime mover in the struggle for universal daycare. By educating and mobilizing its members, the union could make systematic efforts to reach out to parents and draw them into the movement. This would be an important complement to parents' boards, which have limited time and resources.

Thirdly, a strong union of daycare workers



daycare

could play an important role in ensuring that improved state funding does not lead to a loss of community/worker control over daycare centres. The question of how to ensure state funding, state regulation of minimal standards in terms of teacher education, safety standards, and hygiene, while ensuring grass-roots control, remains unanswered.

In spite of the importance the daycare movement has attached to it, the success of unionization has been limited. The high turnover in young and often inexperienced staff, the small numbers of people in bargaining units, the high cost of servicing many small units, the ferocious opposition of private daycare owners (remember the Mini-skool strike a few years ago?) and problems within the unions themselves, may all be factors which weaken the push for unionization.

The high percentage of daycare costs which go into salaries and the limited ability of parents to pay the resulting increases in fees may cause an adversarial relationship to develop between parents unable to pay higher fees and daycare workers unable to live on present salaries. Given this dilemma, it is crucial to develop specific appropriate bargaining tactics which identify government underfunding as the source of the problem. The trade union movement's potential for leadership in the daycare movement is enormous. Successful unionization can only help both the trade union movement and



the daycare struggle. The strong role the OFL played in promoting daycare through a public campaign in 1982 illustrates the strategic importance of unionization in this sector. It remains to be seen if public sector unions have the political will, the money, and the energy to devote to the effort for unionization in this sector, and if they are flexible enough to adapt the particular tactics necessary to be effective.

TACTICS IN THE STRUGGLE

The daycare movement, as we have seen, has been very effective in using lobbying techniques, and conducting public education campaigns in order to further their cause. A combination of traditional lobbying tactics and "creative" mass actions were used in order to maximize the impact on government policy. I am concerned that these successes may lead the movement to underestimate or neglect other, more confrontational tactics such as demonstrations, and public rallies. The follow-

ing example illustrates my point: October 27, 1986 was Lobby Day for Daycare at Queens Park. This was billed as an indoor demonstration. Four hundred people crammed inside a room where politicians from all three parties came to respond to questions from the coalition in a bear-pit session.

The Coalition for Better Daycare newsletter (January, 1987) analyses this event in the following manner:

"Things have come a long way since the Seventies. Now we are able to have our daycare demonstrations INSIDE Queen's Park with the politicians in front of us responding to our questions and concerns. In the old days, we would rally OUTSIDE Queens Park, hear speeches and shout slogans, but essentially it all fell on deaf ears. This is perhaps the key indicator of how far we've come in a few years."

Since when do rallies outside Queen's Park fall on deaf ears? Perhaps politicians choose to ignore our

daycare

women's demands by giving the appearance of meeting our demands while containing elements inimical to them. In this way the government is hoping to diffuse our movement. For activists, the prospects of direct grant funding to for-profit daycare centres is problematic. Apparently, the politicians perceive there is an important group of votes wanting increased daycare funding but remain sceptical that people are committed to a program of universal *non-profit* daycare funded by the state.

To withstand these attempts to co-opt our issues, education and mobilization of daycare supporters is crucial. A one-sided strategy relying too heavily on lobbying could leave the movement vulnerable. Particularly, when years of struggle are on the point of paying off, let us not underestimate the power of public rallies, demonstrations, and other mass action tactics.



Maria Salo Rizzi

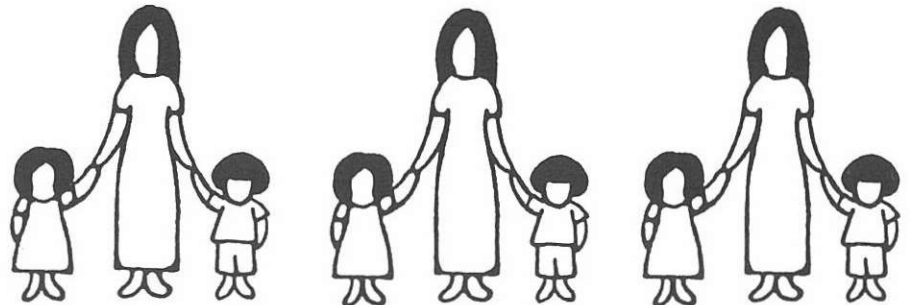
Furthermore, if the daycare movement is to continue to advance towards its objectives, socialist feminists must struggle for a clear analysis of the state. Flexibility and creativity in tactical terms is necessary, even essential, but they are valid only as long as the strategic analysis of whom we are dealing with and how we will ultimately win, is clear.

demands, but demonstrations are not only aimed at politicians; they are events which educate the public and help build the movement. As such they are not *passee*, out-moded or ineffective.

Participation in government inquiries and commissions, and effective lobbying is hard work. These tactics help to legitimize one's viewpoint in the public, gain access to media coverage, and can influence politicians. This is an area in which daycare activists have excelled. It is also a tactic which is often ignored or underestimated by socialist feminists.

But as socialist feminists we know, and should attempt to make clear in the movement, that success in lobbying is a function of perceived or demonstrated political clout. It is not, above all, the reasonableness of our words but the strength of our movement which will ensure gains against the state.

The Liberal government in Ontario seems to be dealing with several hard-fought



For-Profit Daycare: Alberta

A recent Alberta study examined the impact of the strong private daycare sector on the quality of care available in that province. The Ontario government is also considering measures which will encourage private for-profit daycare, and other provinces may also be moving in this direction. This article is an edited version of the summary of the study by Dr. Christopher Bagley, Chair of Child Welfare at the University of Calgary. The original summary first appeared in the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare Newsletter in January 1987.

Although, on a per capita basis, the Alberta government provides more generous funding for childcare than most provinces, its encouragement of privately-run daycare centres has created serious problems. Staff training is inadequate and standards relating to maximum group size and quality of care go virtually unenforced. Inspection by licensing officers is negligible, and no effort is made to have private operators account for the millions of dollars they receive in subsidies.

The goal in daycare is a quality system which is accessible to and serves the interests of all children. But what does quality care involve?

There are three key conditions for quality care: (1) a high ratio of workers to children; (2) small group sizes; and (3) profession-



Speak, South Africa

ally trained and accredited staff.

Untrained staff with good levels of experience and motivation can achieve quality care, provided they work under a trained supervisor and as long as the other two conditions are met. A trained worker, on the other hand, cannot operate effectively when she has to care for a large number of children at the same time.

In the past, and still today to a large extent, daycare has been seen as a special service for a small number of families who are poor, or have a handicapped child, or who have other problems requiring social assistance. This attitude is reflected in both provincial and federal policies.

There are, however, compelling arguments that daycare should be *universally* available to all parents of young children-- that it should take the form of a universal social service, on the same basis as

education and medicare.

PROFIT OR NON-PROFIT

The role of profit-making daycare centres is a controversial one. Alberta has taken the lead in encouraging private daycare development, as part of the government's general philosophy of encouraging private enterprise in the delivery of social services. The province has provided generous funding for the operating expenses of daycares run for profit, a condition of these grants supposedly being that the provincial standards be met. This has led, almost by default, to the provision of more daycare spaces for children below the age of six than in any other province.

As a result, Alberta's daycare expenditure is nearly two-and-a-half times greater than the average for other provinces. Also, because of the availability of operating grant subsidies for every child regardless

daycare

of parental income or type of daycare attended, the average monthly fee for a child attending daycare in Alberta is some \$80.00 less than for a child in Ontario.

But the pattern of service delivery in Alberta is unsatisfactory, with 70 per cent of daycare spaces being provided by private enterprise--by far the highest proportion of any province. Alberta's requirements on square metres of indoor space are among Canada's lowest, and its standards for staff training are the country's worst.

The Alberta government trusts for-profit daycares to fulfill operating subsidy conditions largely on an honour basis. The government has acceded to the argument of the independent operators that raising standards must be supported by appropriate funding increases. This is a classic "free enterprise" position: to seek *maximum* government subsidies and *minimum* government control of day-to-day operations.

LICENSING AND CONTROL

Alberta employs only 21

licensing officers, most of them in the Edmonton and Calgary areas. This works out to one inspector for every 37 centres. Licensing officers more frequently learn of abuses through daycare workers or parents than through visits to daycares. Unfortunately, licensing officers rarely act decisively in these matters. They complain of overwork and also of the reluctance of higher government officials to revoke the license of a centre, even when it is blatantly violating regulations.

During 1984 and 1985, the province's Social Care Review Committee identified thirteen daycare centres of exceptionally poor quality, which showed no improvement between inspections. But the Committee simply hired a consultant in child development, who worked with these delinquent operators to try to improve their care of children. None of their licenses was ever suspended.

LACK OF TRAINING

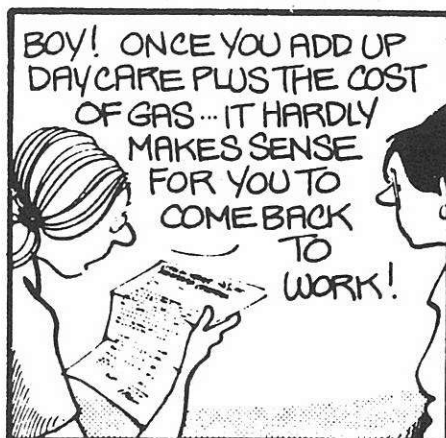
The issue of education and workers' training is a crucial one, and a point on

which advocates of non-profit care disagree with the profit centres. It is claimed that the independent operators don't want to employ trained workers because of the increased payroll costs and correspondingly decreased profits. The independent operators counter that they would be delighted to employ more trained workers if the government would subsidize the additional costs, in the same way it subsidizes the staff/child ratio.

Several organizations that represent the interests of daycare workers and operators--including the Day Care Society of Alberta and the Early Childhood Professional Association of Alberta--have been active in calling for training standards for daycare workers. But the government has steadfastly refused to incorporate even minimum training requirements in its regulations.

POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

A survey of Alberta community college early childhood development and education graduates found a high de-



gree of dissatisfaction with pay and working conditions. In 1983 the median salary of diploma graduates (including those with several years of previous daycare experience) was \$6.75 an hour for those in private daycares, and \$8.00 an hour for those working in non-profit centres. The average hourly rates of pay for untrained commercial daycare workers was less than \$6.00 an hour.

Graduates of diploma programs who enter daycare employment face a number of frustrations. First of all, they face a gruelling eight-hour day during which their attention must not wander from the young children in their care. They have short vacation periods, and they are subject to unpaid layoffs when enrolments in the daycare decline. In some centres, if three or more children do not attend on any particular day, a worker may be laid off immediately without pay. In the present system, in Alberta as in most other provinces, some-

one loses in daycare. The pressure to keep costs down --in both profit and non-profit centres--discourages efforts to improve the general levels of daycare training and the recruitment of trained workers.

CONCLUSIONS

The operation of daycare in Alberta leads to three important conclusions.

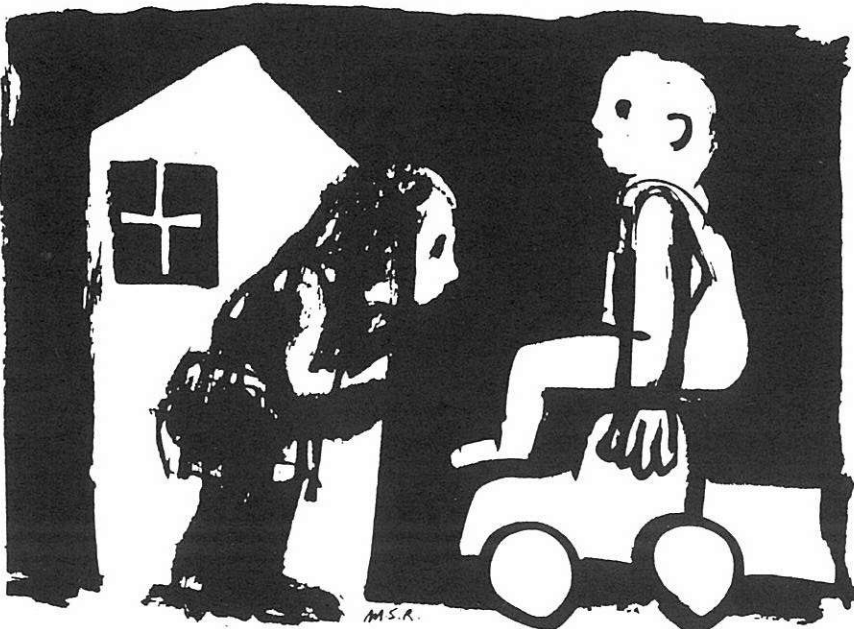
1) The Alberta government has been generous in giving subsidies to daycare operators, including those operating on a for-profit basis. But the government has made no effort to call to account the millions of dollars given in daycare subsidies. This practice extends to many other areas in Alberta and is a significant weakness in the government's social policies. In our view, for-profit daycares should be prohibited.

2) The central weakness of the Alberta daycare system--apart from its failure to specify staff train-

ing levels--is the failure to insist that important aspects of its regulations, such as those on maximum group size, be properly enforced. The possibility that the operating subsidies could be used as a means to ensure compliance with the standards has been ignored.

3) The alleged need for cutbacks in social service budgeting has provided an excuse for failing to increase the numbers of licensing officers and daycare consultants as well as an excuse not to implement earlier recommendations on staff training requirements. However, we would argue that improving the quality of services for young children should be the primary goal of social policy. To the extent that such expenditures reduce the need for expensive social service intervention in later years, they may be cost-saving in the long run.

Alberta has many good daycare centres, but at least 10 per cent of them offer services of frighteningly poor quality which must inevitably harm the children in their care. The extraordinary tolerance which the government has extended to these for-profit centres can only be explained by an overriding commitment to the use of "private enterprise" in social service delivery--a philosophy that transcends any belief that the welfare of the children should be paramount. When the interests of children and the interests of business conflict, it seems that in Alberta's daycare system, profit always prevails.



A Makibaka Militant in the Philippines

Three of us from Toronto were in the Philippines recently to participate in an international meeting on the impact of micro-chip technology on women's work and labour struggles. While there, we had an opportunity to see and learn something about the women's movement.

There seems little doubt that the women's movement in the Philippines is currently one of the strongest and most dynamic national movements for women's liberation, combining as it does the struggle for national liberation with the struggle for women's emancipation. There are many differences between Canada and the Philippines, yet it is clear that socialist and Marxist feminists here have much to learn from activists in the Philippines as they work to mobilize women and build a mass women's movement based on a class, gender, and nationalist analysis.

The national women's coalition, GABRIELA, is probably the best-known women's organization in the Philippines, representing over 100 different groups. Less well-known, but very important in terms of both the history and the present reality of the women's movement in the Philippines, is the women's underground organization, Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA), which was founded in 1971 "to liberate women not only from the feudal stranglehold of our patriarchal culture, but also from our neo-colonial system of society, to expose cultural imperialism, and to liberate Filipino women from social discrimination and exploitation."

With the declaration of martial law in 1972, MAKIBAKA became an "illegal" organization; however it continues to exist and is a member of the National Democratic Front (NDF)

While in the Philippines I had a chance to interview a woman who's worked with MAKIBAKA since it began. For obvious reasons, she cannot be identified.

Lynda Yanz

★

Can you begin by talking a bit about going underground?

The time just before martial law--the early seventies--were the best years of our lives, in the sense that it was a time when we were so politically conscious that the students were able to establish different types of organizations which were very relevant to the political moment. It was in this period that we set up MAKIBAKA.

Of course all the male

comrades looked at us with suspicion. But we were able to get the other women within the different organizations convinced of the need to set up a women's organization. Eventually, one way or another, the men were able to understand.

Then when martial law was declared [in 1972] all the open mass organizations that had formed between 1968 to 1972 went underground. All of the students went underground and--because all of us knew one another--we



Womenews, Philippines

started seeing each other in the countryside. That was funny. I was already a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army (NPA), so I went underground right away.

Martial law marked a total change in our lives. We knew that when we went to the countryside it was not just for rallies anymore. Most of us had not been fully involved in the struggle beyond organizing and mobilizing the students for rallies and all that. And, you know, you are still a romantic, you like that *ambiance* of being a militant. You don't mind being shot at by tear gas at a rally or harassed by the military. But the countryside is a totally different thing.

When we went to the countryside and shifted from working with students to direct mass organizing among the peasantry, it was really a step towards the revolution we had been talking about. It wasn't long be-



fore the arms which we carried were a part of our lives. We were so young then--I was 22--and yet you know that you are burning bridges behind you and that there is no turning back.

What was it like to make that kind of change in your life?

Actually, it seemed like a natural thing. I didn't have great battles with myself like some of the comrades about whether to take this step or not. We were under the terrorist rule of Marcos and didn't have a real choice. It was just something we had to do and soon it became our life.

Of course some comrades did have a hard time

and dropped out. But that was really understandable. Those were the hard times. Those were the times when you are the only NPA in the entire province and you have to begin organizing a guerrilla base out of nothing. You start organizing the people out of nowhere. Often you can't even relate to them...like me, I come from a petty bourgeois family. And there were the peasants with a completely different life, culture and language.

But what happens is that at some point you just don't think of those things anymore. You just live with them, sleep with them on the floor or earth or wherever. And the difference is that you're not just experiencing it for two or three days, it is a very deep part of your life. Like if they don't eat, you don't eat. And of course you don't have any money of your own, even for transportation. Like if I had to go to another village I had to ask a peasant to give me money, only the exact amount for going to that village. And to come back I'd ask in that village for the exact amount for coming back. But soon that was normal, and you didn't worry. And once in a while they even gave you cigarettes.

You are so dependent on them, for your life. They could turn you in at any time and you'd get shot. Or if the military is there and they don't warn you, you are dead.

And how did it feel to be the only woman?

You know, you sort of feel a sense of liberation because all these peasants are listening to you, trying to understand what you're talking about. And you know that their feudal values mean that they look at women very differently. So for them to agree it means they



understand what I was trying to say, from the standpoint of the politics, and not because of any authority I had. Although I remember once, I was listening to some of the peasants. They were wondering why a girl would do what I was doing, "this crazy girl coming here, and talking to us when she is so young she could be our daughter. Maybe what she talks is the truth." So in that case, my being a woman probably gave them a

interview

little inspiration.

Did your work in the countryside include setting up separate women's units?

Organizing peasant women started in 1968 as part of the general organizing of and recruiting for the NPA. The urgency of the situation at the time was to set up an army and establish a guerilla base. As part of that, we organized the women and set up separate women's organizing committees. The problem, and it's still a problem, is that since the overall thrust of organizing women, and peasant women in particular, was in relation to the overall political context, the first priority was to uplift their general political consciousness. The result was that many of the women's committees did not have a specific under-

standing of their own problems as women.

And this is still very prominent. You know we have millions of peasant women who are organized, who are part of the New People's Army, who have been trained, who have participated all this time, but in many ways they still participate as an adjunct and supportive unit to the overall struggle.

But you have to go step by step because for peasant women, even for those more politically advanced, it is hard when you start addressing their specific problems--it goes so deep into the social fabric.

So this is the very serious area which we are addressing now and which we feel needs to be addressed with even more urgency. We don't have to go to the level of organizing --they are already organized--it's

just a question of education and orientation and the proper skills and leadership training. It is a big problem in the sense that we have millions of peasants organized already in the armed struggle. They understand the armed struggle, they know why they have to fight this. Their political understanding is high; their support for the revolutionary struggle is unquestionable. But they need to address their problems as women and that is the urgency of the agenda.

Is that MAKIBAKA's priority right now?

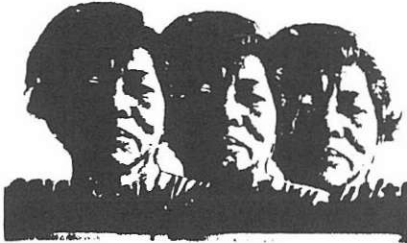
Yes, it's our immediate priority, especially in the countryside. Of course it has the same stress in the city, but it is a lot harder in the countryside because you really have to battle a lot of feudal relations and cultures.

When did work with women become a priority again?

It became a priority in 1983. A lot of women comrades within the revolutionary movement had always pushed for more work with women. But the thing that really developed the women's movement was that women themselves felt the urgency and the need. Women's groups started flowering all over the country. And what was extraordinary was that most of these women already had a high level of political consciousness and accepted the need for the national democratic revolution. What this means is that the question of setting



up women's organizations and building the women's movement has been in the context of the revolution from the beginning.



Task Force Detainees
Metro Manila

In a relatively short period of time we have been able to put the agenda of women in all facets of political life. But let me tell you it was not an easy thing to do, and we still have so much work to do. There are still some comrades we have to convince about the need for a women's liberation movement in the Philippines. Some of our current problems exist because there is still a lack of understanding about this.

And this is also the case within the revolutionary movement. You see, internally within political organizations you have to wage a struggle about the importance of a revolutionary women's mass movement. Because otherwise we are just talking to ourselves. We have to wage an ideological battle within the organizations, within the parties, in the underground, explaining why it is necessary to build a revolutionary women's mass movement and why it is a part and parcel of the overall women's movement in the Philippines.

What are the current priorities of the women's movement in the Philippines?

There are two: setting up women's organizations and waging campaigns. You just can't organize without mobilization, and campaigns are the best vehicles for mobilization. At present the women's movement and its organizations have a tremendous capacity to mobilize women around a whole range of issues.

It is important that everyone sees that women can address any political question. And of course we address these problems from a women's standpoint. Just as it is different when you address the problems comprehensively, from their political essence, it is also different when you relate every struggle to the oppression of women. Class and gender relations are critical.

What is MAKIBAKA's relation to the women's movement?

We lead it. We lead it in the sense of being an under-

ground organization with a comprehensive orientation, with comprehensive political work and a principled stress on organizing women.

What are the most important women's organizations in the country?

GABRIELA is the most important. GABRIELA provides comprehensive political leadership in the women's movement in the sense that GABRIELA addresses the major national issues and stresses women's issues. And then, all the organizations that relate to GABRIELA represent that thrust in their particular sectors.

GABRIELA has gone through various stages organizationally but its success has always been in its ability to relate to the majority of women in the Philippines. There have been a number of small groupings that were set up after GABRIELA, but these were not able to sustain the mass movement of women. To maintain the momentum of the movement you have to sustain the involvement of women through your program and through your campaigns. You





Center for Women's Resources, Philippines

have to have long-term objectives with a plan that includes building from rally to rally, campaign to campaign. And GABRIELA has done that remarkably. It plans its strategy months ahead. They plan for campaigns for March 8, for May 1 in solidarity with the women workers, and then in October they work in solidarity with peasant women. And in between they carry out ongoing educational work. It's been tremendous what's been achieved in this short time.

What about the women's political party that was formed last October? In Canada there is a lot of skepticism about the political limitations of a "women's party."

The women's political party is a major development in the women's movement. In terms of electoral politics, women have always struggled against the fact that we have not made political policy, even in liberal parties. And as we have understood it from the beginning, one of the major problems of women's liberation is . . . we are always

treated secondarily. We are treated as if we haven't brains enough to talk about policy. Women are told they shouldn't be in politics at all but should be in the home, etc., etc. That has been a major stumbling block.

A lot of women internalize that politics. And especially here in the Philippines--you know Cory was a housewife until her husband died, and she'd still be a housewife. In any society, whether it's communist, socialist or capitalist, a basic fundamental question of the liberation of women is how to participate in political life.

I think the formation of a women's political party in the Philippines is a major breakthrough. There is a sense of liberation with this new party. Why? Because the traditional political parties that exist here in the Philippines are basically male-dominated. Except for a handful of women--you can count them on your fingers--the rest of the women are on the finance committee or the ham-and-egg

sandwich committee. They are not participants in the discussion of the agenda of political parties; they do the dirty work. They do the finance work, they run machinery, they run the polling places. They participate in everything except the leadership. And here in the new party they are having the experience of being the leadership.

The women's party is one more vehicle for developing women. It could be an issue organization or a community organization. I don't think that the fact that it is a party is a major contradiction. We have to be able to address bourgeois politics. We have to learn to be very skilled at united front work, and this is what the women's party is about. It would be a totally different situation if the revolutionary movement were in power. But at this point in time we have to adapt to a situation where we have to deal with and operate within the bourgeois political reality, and at the same time to challenge that politics.



Guatemala-NACLA



Womenews, Philippines

Are there many within the revolutionary movement who would support progressive bourgeois parties, like the Partido ng Bayan (People's Party), but don't support the formation of a women's party?

Yes, and I think we have to fight that fight. Because it's always a fight. Anything that you set up that is all-women is always a fight. It's a problem of patriarchy. Something like the women's party is basically a question of strategy.

You can tackle imperialism in many different ways, and given that part of our a-

genda is to reach out to women, the decision was taken to create a women's party.

It is nationalist, anti-imperialist, anti-fuedal and anti-fascist. So what's the problem? And it has been able to reach out to the revolutionary middle class, which is very important and which many others haven't been able to do.

It's the same struggle that we have within the revolutionary movement. It's often talked about as an issue of unity. We can all unite in this and unite in that. Of course we are united. You wouldn't be-

lieve how united we are. We're united at all levels, except when it comes to the women's question. And that's something we just have to struggle out.

Has women's leadership role in revolutionary organizations also increased with the development of a strong women's movement?

Well it has, but not drastically. It's been very slow. One step is that women mass leaders are now recognized as *women* mass leaders. Before they would say "urban poor," "worker," and "peasant" and all that. But now they say that there is a *woman* mass leader from the urban poor or a *woman* mass leader from the women's movement. The recognition of that alone is a major step towards recognition and making their leadership essential.

But internally, within the revolutionary organizations within the Party, for example, there are still improvements to be made for the development of the women leaders. But even within the Party there are women leaders who are really good but when they start having children, and all that, then they get back to the kitchen, taking care of the kids.

Why is it important that an underground women's organization like MAKIBAKA continue to exist?

Because of the political circumstances in our country. Since the February revolution when Marcos was driven out of the country, there has been no funda-

mental change in the social base in the Philippines. The people still live in the same conditions. We now have a bourgeois government, or I would even say, a reactionary government with liberal tendencies and policies. Remember, the same army that implemented martial law is still intact, and the vestiges of the Marcos regime are still intact. And Cory... it's very unclear how long her centrist position can last. Even now there is still a major militarization going on in the countryside.

So under these circumstances it is still necessary for a women's organization with a revolutionary perspective to exist, and to remain underground. The counter-insurgency wanted all the illegal organizations to surface, but we were not about to enter the trap. They talked about democracy, about freedom, but there is no genuine freedom in the Philippines. This is still going to be a long revolutionary struggle. To be honest with you, we are just about to face a more decisive stage and that is going to come within the next three or four years.

Why can't MAKIBAKA operate legally?

Basically, we could not operate in the open because we carry, we embody, even within the organization, the organizing of women directly for the armed struggle. That makes all the difference. MAKIBAKA's main orientation is to organize the women in order to take up the revolutionary call.



Is MAKIBAKA organized on the basis of democratic centralism?

Yes, but with a flexibility that respects and encourages diverse views and opinions. I don't think that it is necessary, especially on our theoretical stand on certain issues, that we always be united. We want to encourage women in MAKIBAKA to always make their views known, regardless of what other members or leaders of MAKIBAKA think.

Of course if views become too divergent, that can become counter-productive.

Is there an elected leadership?

Not yet. Right now leadership and coordination for MAKIBAKA comes from a national organizing committee. Full elections will have to wait for our Congress, which we plan to have by next year. We had planned it this year, but we really don't think we can make it.

interview

Are there local chapters?

There are many chapters, in different regions, cells in some areas where we cannot yet form a chapter since each chapter is expected to have between 12 and 15 women. Chapters are often formed within other organizations.

How have the kinds of changes in your analysis of women's oppression and role in the revolutionary struggle been incorporated into the line of the organization, given that you haven't been able to hold a Congress?

The line of the organization has developed, but we feel that there has not been enough. Not enough in the sense that we have been growing in our understanding of the women's orientation and of women's problems. But despite some of the theoretical papers we have done, we still feel that we need a much deeper under-

standing of the women's question and women's struggle in the particular conditions of the Philippines. So we feel that MAKIBAKA needs to strengthen its theoretical work.

How do you develop theoretical papers?

We read a lot of books (and oftentimes we don't get a chance to finish all of them) and try to apply what we learn to the Filipino context. We have a lot of collective discussions within different chapters and then sometimes we write documents which, after discussing and discussing--and being turned upside down--become part of the line of the organization.

We try to encourage a lot of discussion by all the members. What happens is that the leading organ makes the first paper, and it goes down for discussion. And sometimes when it gets back to us half of it is sliced. Then there's more work to do.



Will holding the Congress be significant for the women's movement in general?

It will be very significant in the sense that it will really be formalizing MAKIBAKA. A lot of women have been waiting for the Congress. And not only the women; also the other underground mass organizations. Because it will represent the rebirth of MAKIBAKA and of the revolutionary women's movement. It will be very important that MAKIBAKA hold its own Congress, attended by all its members, and come out with its own constitution, program, and set of officers. It's very important that women from all different parts of the country gather and discuss the perspective of MAKIBAKA, say for the next three years. The major thing will be to establish the thrust and direction for the unity of the revolutionary democratic struggle and the struggle for women's liberation, and to determine what that means in practice.

Most Third World women have this common goal, because they are struggling for their national liberation and at the same time for their own equality and emancipation as women.



Battered Women: Argentina

Ana Maria Amado

Excerpted from Mujer/Ilet, December, 1986. Translated from the Spanish by Gini Dickle.

"Ordeals" were a trial system used in the Middle Ages, in which the severity of the punishment endured proved the guilt of the accused. This perverse mechanism reminds us, in a way, of what happens psychologically to women who are beaten by their husbands; they are silent about it because they feel shame and guilt.

Little by little, however, they get the courage to speak and thus they begin to break through the thick cloak of impunity that still seems to cover the exercise of domestic violence.

During the last three years of democracy in Argentina, this topic has been gaining ground - inch by inch: whether it be declarations from various sectors of the population against this brutal injustice (which is also a violation of human rights), or the acceptance by some institutional structures which are beginning to show a commitment to the problem at different levels.

In each country, the solutions to this question are diverse, depending on national characteristics, and, above all, the human and economic resource capacity of the country. But beneath these differences, there is a common problem. Bureaucratic structures are usually unwilling to accept changes or new ideas in the



same way as the people who generate them. There is, therefore, a need to get rid of prejudice so that institutional bodies can give the help that is required.

Regarding institutional help to battered women, Fempress spoke with psychologist Cristina Vila de Gerlic, who has carried out one of the most systematic studies of battered women for several years in Argentina. In addition, she is the current coordinator of an ambitious research project at the University of Buenos Aires School of Public Health sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization. In this project there is an assistance team and a teaching team.

Ana: To what established structures do battered women have access for help?

Cristina: Battered women need the attention of sensitive professionals, that is lawyers, doctors, social workers, police, etc., who are trained and aware of this problem.

Ana: What does "aware" mean in this case?

Cristina: Able to overcome the most common myths and beliefs. For example, hospital personnel frequently believe that if a woman doesn't find a way out, it is because she likes living that way... and we already know that there is no way

out if there is no help, which is why a woman always stays imprisoned. The other dilemma is whether to get involved or not in an issue that is still considered a private one. And then there is the possibility that if one intervenes and reports the case, the treatment could get worse if the police do not carry out some kind of surveillance.

Ana: Can police surveillance really offer some way out? Are you training police personnel?

Cristina: We have not yet worked with the police, but we have worked with their social workers. Regarding police intervention, we are starting to implement--and we don't know the results yet--a system of requesting a "protection order" when a report is made to the police. This would require police to carry out some kind of external surveillance of the house in question: it is expected that a patrol car would pass by several times a day, which creates a restriction for the man who has been charged with physical aggression against his wife.

Ana: What do you think of the Women's Police Stations in Brazil which are separate and have women police personnel to look after cases of rapes and abuse?

Cristina: The problem with these police stations is that they can establish only a few because of the shortage of personnel. In addition, the result could be increased reports of beat-

ings. And then what? How do they get important structures such as the judicial system to intervene? That is why we are insisting here that the problem must be the responsibility of the entire police system. This is the only way to guarantee that they will deal with it throughout the country, even in the most remote areas. Now that the issue has spread, we can see that there are different ways to approach it. There is the case of San Luis province: the Office of Women's Affairs announced in the media that they were taking direct responsibility for battered women. In small towns women came to report that their husbands had always beaten them and to reassure themselves that, indeed, someone was taking responsibility for their situations.

The husbands were later informed in their homes, and there were apparently no more beatings. In small communities, when the "authorities" prohibit such actions, the social pressure is so strong that the men react as if they were being pressured by the provincial governor himself.

Ana: What other measures are being implemented at the government level?

Cristina: The Women's Program of the Secretary of Human Development and Family is planning a contract to train the agents of PAN (National Food Plan). These young people bring food hampers to poor communities where they relate well with the people and help them

with their problems, such as child health, drug addiction, and now wife beating. (The women brought up this issue last.) In many areas, this will be an invaluable connection for giving support to the victims of this situation.

Ana: Are these community workers now participating in the courses you give? Do people register spontaneously?

Cristina: In the last year and a half, we have developed five courses with about forty participants each time who, after their training, lead the support for battered women in their own organizations and regions. In these courses, participants analyze the causes of domestic violence, the myths about battered women, the profile of the batterer, the problem with the children and finally, the difficulties of prevention and assistance. There are more and more interested people, which shows that there is already an awareness of the specific aspects of this problem. The people who come are social workers, psychologists, teachers, people who do political work and think that they should bring this issue to their groups, employees of judicial bodies who want to deal with it better and many lawyers, especially young women lawyers.

Ana: Why are lawyers so interested? Is it because of the possibility of more divorce cases?

Cristina: No. In fact, the

majority are working free through the Legal Aid system, in various organizations. The Argentinian Association of Women in Law Careers, however, sent a number of women lawyers for training, who are committed to working with women who cannot pay for legal support.

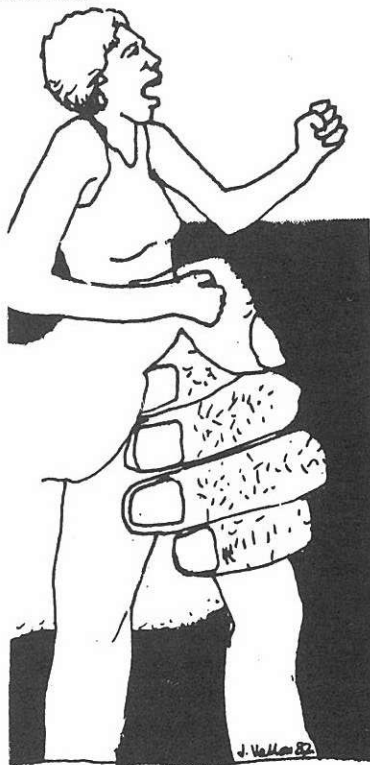
Ana: We haven't yet mentioned the word "shelter", a common resource to help battered women and their children in many countries. Why do similar places not exist here [in Argentina]?

Cristina: For obvious economic reasons, we do not have places dedicated specifically to this problem. For now, we use the premises of other organizations such as Caritas, which has let us use some places that already had beds to shelter women who, having reported their situation, cannot return home. Now a contract with the Secretary of Human Development and Family will allow us to use, in the same way, the premises of various institutions with this capacity.

Ana: How does the extended family react when a woman tells them that she has been beaten at home?

Cristina: On this point I believe the reaction differs with what probably happens in the United States or in Europe. In a significant percentage of cases, in both the middle and lower classes, the woman's immediate family supports her, takes her back, protects her and doesn't

"forget" what happened. In industrialized countries, this does not happen and women basically count on shelters...although I would like to make it clear that we are not giving up hope of also having shelters, because they represent a fundamental reality, both symbolically and concretely. These structures show, at the same time, the acceptance and the support that the society gives to the problem.



Off Our Backs

Ana: Isn't it remarkable how this issue, until recently denied and ridiculed, has begun to reach different levels of society?

Cristina: It is precisely on that point that an unexpected awareness has emerged: the supportive response from the school system. When a battered woman moves to the home of her mother, sister, or another family member, her children must

change schools from one day to the next, and as we know today, there are no vacancies anywhere. But when mothers present an explanatory letter from the Support Project, there is an extraordinary response from the teachers. Not only do they accept the children, but they also ensure special attention from the school psychologists. These professionals open files, make contact with the mothers as well as with us, and in the end they notably broaden and extend the development of this work.

Ana: In periods of economic crisis and unemployment such as now, does domestic violence increase?

Cristina: The stories we have gathered do not indicate that "now that my husband is not working, he beats me". A relationship is violent from the beginning. In every case they say, "Now that my husband has not been working for awhile, it's worse but he has always beaten me..."

Ana: Is it common to find batterers in the middle classes of society? Or are they exceptions?

Cristina: Not at all. In the School of Public Health located in the middle of Barrio Norte, a privileged area accessible to the middle class, we treat many wives of military officers, businessmen, and professionals.

Human Rights Bill Passes

Jan Langford
Whitehorse

Amid cheers and applause from supporters sitting in the legislative gallery, the new Yukon Human Rights Bill was passed on February 12.

Passage of the bill marked the end of a long 18-month debate throughout the territory on the principles of the bill.

The new act gives protection from discrimination in the areas of employment, accommodation and services, on the grounds of ancestry, national origin; ethnic or linguistic background, religion or creed, age after a person's 19th birthday, sex including pregnancy, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, criminal charges or record, political belief, association or activity, marital or family status, and actual or presumed association with individuals who are members of any of the above groups.

The bill also provides for equal pay for work of equal value in the public sector and mandates the Human Rights Commission to conduct research into pay equity in the private sector. Since the act comes into effect July 1, 1987, the government will soon be setting up the Human Rights Commission and hiring a Director. The Commission will oversee the implementation of the act and promote human rights through public education.

The public debate

surrounding the bill centred on a few issues. The most contentious items were the prohibited grounds of sexual orientation and criminal record or charges, the provisions for equal pay for work of equal value, and the powers of the Commission.

The debate on these issues was marred by emotionalism, moralism and misinformation. Many of the views expressed in opposition to the bill were philosophical in nature and/or based on incorrect information.

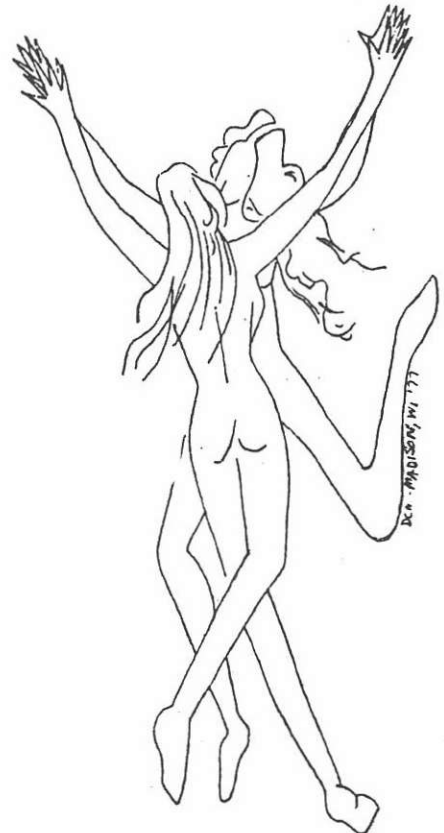
Thus we heard the erroneous view that human rights give "special rights" to certain groups. Religious leaders stated that it was moral to discriminate against individuals such as homosexuals. Some people blatantly said that employers and landlords should have the right to discriminate against whomever they choose. Still others said that government should not legislate morality where "God's law" and human compassion should govern.

Supporters of the bill countered misinformation with facts on human rights and presented historical and material arguments to counter the religious moralism. Supporters lobbied the government and carried out a successful letter-writing campaign. Local media was utilized to counter some of the sensationalist statements made by Opposition MLAs.

The role of the official Opposition in the debate was less than honourable.

Instead of presenting cohesive well-researched arguments to oppose some items in the bill, they chose to make sensational statements and filibustered debate in the legislature. This approach alienated them from Yukoners, including some fellow PC Party members. It also served to fan the flames of fear and misunderstanding amongst Yukoners.

The government stuck to NDP principles and passed the bill without too many detrimental amendments. However, it seems the government was quite willing to let Justice Minister Kimmerley shoulder the brunt of the controversy. Many NDP MLAs, particularly those in rural ridings, did little work in their constituencies to promote the principles of



human rights.

Individuals (in particular, homosexuals) were exposed and hurt by the hateful statements made during the human rights debate. The misinformation coupled with emotionalism was hard to counter.

Yet when all is said and done, much educational work was done in the course of 18 months. The average Yukoner now knows more about such things as pay equity, discrimination and homosex-

uality. We must also remember that controversy is healthy. In all historical periods controversy or conflict has been a pivotal point for change.

So now Yukoners can go about living our lives as the basically good people we have always been. We've learned a few things and now we have a law which protects ourselves and our neighbours from discrimination. Sounds like the kind of place I'd like to continue to live in!



"I think I'm in love with the third baseman from Telewoman"

Highlights from the Bill

What Was Passed:

a) The Positive:

i) Section 6 of the Human Rights Act is one of the most progressive lists of prohibited grounds in the country. This is the list of reasons that are not valid for refusing someone employment, accommodation or services. Along with the usual list are two that are significant for women: pregnancy and family status. Sexual orientation, criminal charges or record, and political belief are also included.

ii) Section 13 is a specific harassment clause which refers to sexual harassment and harassment on all of the grounds of discrimination.

iii) Section 14 makes us the fifth jurisdiction in Canada to implement pay equity in the public sector. This clause applies chiefly to the Yukon Territorial Government (YTG), and to the municipalities.

As well, the Act recognizes both the need for affirmative action programs and the rights of aboriginal people under the constitution. It also sets up a Human Rights Commission independent of government to investigate complaints. The Act comes into force on July 1, 1987.

b) The Negative:

i) Section 10(3) exempts religious, charitable (etc.) organizations from complying

with the Act in terms of employment. This amendment changes the original intent of 10(1) which was to allow these organizations to discriminate in favour of their members but not to violate the protections offered under the 'prohibited grounds'. Section 10 also exempts employers of people in their private homes, and renters of rooms to boarders from compliance.

ii) Section 19 (1) is the weakest complaint section in the country. Not only does the Commission have no authority to initiate its own complaints, it cannot accept any third party complaints. This means that complaints can only be filed by the individual who is discriminated against, or an agent filing a complaint on his or her behalf. The restriction will limit the extent to which systematic discrimination can be addressed through this legislation.

iii) Section 23 (on remedies) does not allow the Board of Adjudication to order an affirmative action program, making the Yukon the only place in Canada where this is not an option.

iv) Section 24 was amended to say that both the person who complained and the Commission could be ordered to pay costs and damages to the respondent's (employer, landlord) reputation if the complaint is dismissed as false. This is the first section of its kind in Canada. It could be used by respondents to intimidate people who have filed or are planning to file a complaint with the Commission.

Native Women Fighting Genocide



From Akwesasne Notes

Nancy Pollak
Vancouver

Genocide may seem too strong a word to describe what Native people are fighting in Canada, but it is exactly the word which the Indian Homemakers Association of British Columbia uses to denounce the child welfare system in this province. Aboriginal women are intensely concerned about the threat of disappearance of their nations, and they have many fronts to cover: from legal abductions of their children to government policies of assimilation to life-destroying poverty.

Aboriginal women have durable traditions of leadership and activism in British Columbia, but they are a "women's movement" that non-native feminists know little about. Researching this article was the beginning of my education, and like any beginner,

what I offer here is the first stage of my understanding.

BILL C-31: WHO IS AN INDIAN?

"The government has always tried to reduce the number of Indians, to box us and make the box smaller and smaller."

Sharalene Frank,
of the United Native Nations
[UNN]

In 1985, the federal Indian Act was finally amended to eliminate Section 12 (1)(b), which discriminated against Native women by depriving them and their offspring of legal status as Indians upon their marriage to non-native men. (Native men and their children suffered no such consequence as a result of marrying non-native women.) The amendment is known as Bill C-31.

While considered a

step in the right direction by many native people-- though by no means all--C-31 perpetuates a Euro-Canadian tradition of legally defining "Indianness." In both its practical application and political significance, it is fraught with difficulties.

The bill does eliminate some sexual discrimination against native women by preventing their loss of status as an Indian through marriage. It also reinstates Indian women who lost status through past marriages, and extends that status to their children. The children of unmarried Native women by non-native fathers will also gain Indian status.

But the troubling ingredient of C-31 is that now, for the first time, Indian bands are able to set their own band membership rules (pending DIAND's [Department of Indian and Northern Affairs] approval of course). Status and band membership have suddenly become two separate entitlements. It is possible that Indian women with newly acquired or restored status can nevertheless be ruled ineligible for band membership. And not all bands are eager to welcome their prodigal daughters.

Ardyth Cooper of the Professional Native Women's Association (PNWA) is concerned that the regulations that separate "status" from band membership will create two classes of Indians: those with both, and those with only the former.

The Indian Homemakers state the problem more strongly: "BC bands have

shown less discrimination towards women than elsewhere. But the reality is that sexism is at least as prevalent (here) as in the rest of Canada. We know that band councils are being very ambivalent about taking back these women members. This is not only because bands believe they will be a drain on resources but also because they fear these women will be too aggressive. In their struggle to make a life for themselves outside their communities, some have obtained skills and knowledge that Reserve women do not have access to, and they may thus be perceived to be a threat to established power structures.... We know of cases already where such women are being denied their rights as full band members. One reinstated woman has been denied a disbursement of band monies. Another woman has been offered a large sum of money by her band chief to sign away her rights and those of her descendants as band members."

The PNWA advocates that reinstated women be allowed to play a substantial role in developing band membership codes in order to offset any continued discrimination against them.

By October of 1986, at least 60,000 applications for status were on file in Ottawa. It may take up to seven years to process them all, leaving thousands of women and their living and future children in limbo. One out of six applications is being rejected. Over half of those accepted now find that they cannot pass their status on to their

children after all. As Sharalene Frank said, reducing the number of Indians....

Besides failing to provide adequate staff or clear appeal procedures for the registration system, the federal government has reneged on promised funding for education programs to explain C-31. Even more distressing is the failure of the government to deal with the central issue of expanding the resource base of existing bands, and creating new bands and Reserve territories, in consideration of the tens of thousands of women and children who will be gaining status.

Expanding the resource base was a central concern of Native leaders when negotiating Indian Act alterations, and the government's silence amounts to sabotage. As Rose Charlie and Kathleen Jamieson of the Indian Homemakers say, "...women and their families would be more welcome in bands where resources are scarce if information on the additional resources needed [to enable them to return] was made available, for example, housing subsidies. At present there is fear and suspicion."

The machinations of Ottawa and the amended Indian Act continue to irritate differences among Indians, difference between status and non-status Indians, wealthy and poor bands, with Native women and their children left in a fragile position. In the spring of 1986, six Indians from the wealthy Sawridge band in Alberta started a

court action to have the reinstatement and membership sections of C-31 overturned, and the Indian Act returned to its 1982 version. The same band has already enacted a complex, restrictive band code, which the Department of Indian Affairs saw fit to accept. The Native Council of Canada has elected to fight this action: "All Aboriginal people (should be) equal in terms of status and band membership rights. Aboriginal ancestry is a birthright which cannot be given or taken away except by the Creator."

Or as the PNWA states it, "One clear principle remains: Indian women are still Indian people, and as such are worthy of inclusion ... as Indian citizens."

CHILD WELFARE

"Our native children are the innocent prisoners of this system. Our Native children are Canada's political prisoners."

Rose Charlie and Kathleen Jamieson of the Indian Homemakers Association of BC.



Earlier this century, the accused system would have been the federal network of residential schools imposed on Native children, since it was then their role to administer the lessons of assimilation. Young Native children were taken from their communities and boarded in Christian schools where they were prohibited from speaking their languages and deprived of the education they would have received from their families and band elders.

Today, the accused system is the family and child welfare programs of the provincial government. In the words of Sharon Verne, a lawyer and Cree Indian, "If people at the band level do not take control of their [children], in seven generations there will not be any Indians left."

By any standards, the rate of apprehension of Aboriginal children in BC is a scandal. For 1984-85, the Indian Homemakers estimate that, while Native kids represented about 4% of B.C.'s young, they accounted for over 46% of all children "in care." Once apprehended, their families and communities have no control over their future, which often entails being bounced from one foster home to another with scant chance of ever being returned to their own or another Native home.

The price paid is high. Native people have made a connection between a stolen childhood and heritage, and the high rates of suicide and addiction among both rural and urban Indians. As the Homemakers say, "These are the children

who grow up to fill penitentiaries and skid rows, and to die violent deaths."

Native leaders are convinced that most children are taken into care for no reason other than that a social worker doesn't understand--and doesn't like -- what s/he sees. On the one hand, the family structure and childrearing practices of Aboriginal people are different from those of Euro-Canadians, and given the prevailing racist attitudes towards Indians, those differences are readily translated into charges of neglect.

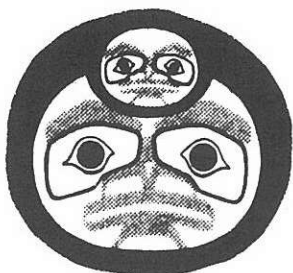
Also, poverty is a discriminating factor for any family dealing with the Ministry of Social Services (MSS), and Native poverty is rampant. The PNWA states that half of Aboriginal families are headed by women who are usually the sole wage earners. As the Indian

Homemakers say, "Obviously we do not choose to be poor and live in substandard housing and to have poor health, but we do choose to have children when non-natives do not, and we value them very highly. We do not wait until we have two cars, two bathrooms and a piano before we have children and we are discriminated against because of this."

Native people are also very angry about the government's failure to provide preventative services for families, and about the lack of co-operation between the provincial and federal governments around child welfare matters. As things presently stand, the province has no economic incentive to end this devastation of Native communities. The monies it receives from the federal government flow only after a child has been apprehended; there is no cash

Margaret Joe, Whitehorse





for counselling or prevention. While the province receives millions annually for apprehended Native children, the resources devoted to social and legal services in B.C. have dwindled at an appalling rate. Social workers have overwhelming case loads, and are virtually incapable of a compassionate approach to their jobs. Once apprehensions have occurred, cutbacks in family legal aid have prompted the Homemakers to observe that "the quality of mercy available to Native families caught in the web of the legal system is very strained indeed."

One of the obvious consequences of this state of affairs is that poor Native families live in fear of losing their children to MSS. This fear works to the detriment of Native women and children as a whole: violence and sexual assault against women and children occur in contemporary Native communities as much as anywhere, yet women are reluctant to turn to authorities whose reflex response to household conflict is to take their children permanently away.

The Native philosophy of child welfare rests on the principle that Native children belong in Native communities and that their own extended family and band

can best provide for their education and well-being.

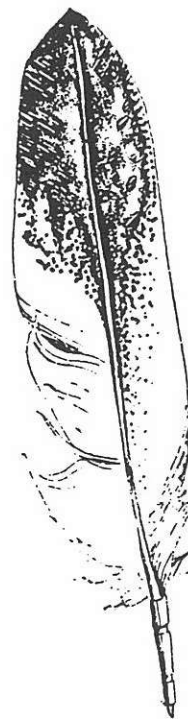
Several models of native control exist. The Spallumcheen band has enacted a by-law which empowers the band with exclusive jurisdiction over Indian child custody affairs. The by-law deals with the issue of where a child should be placed by emphasizing the child's wishes and the rights of the extended family, and enables the band as a whole to vote on her/his placement based on that principle. Although there is no clear legal basis within the Indian Act for this by-law, the Spallumcheen band has, through political pressure, secured recognition of its jurisdiction from the federal and provincial governments.

The approach advocated by the Indian Homemakers is the immediate enactment of a federal Indian Child Welfare Act based on the United States model. The US law of 1978 grants control over child welfare to Indian agencies which operate in accordance with Indian tribal customs. The Homemakers laud the U.S. system, which also provides for the training of Indian social workers and for preventative programs that recognize Indian cultural and spiritual values. "We do not think [an Indian Child Welfare Act] can wait for Indian self-government as the Assembly of First Nations suggests. Nor should it be allowed to become a political football in the way that [Indian women's rights] were for so long."

The Homemakers have

been active for years around this issue, and they have no intention of letting up. Last December they used the occasion of their 22nd annual assembly to travel to the parliament buildings in Victoria and stage a protest rally under the banner "Fighting Against Genocide."

In a recent letter to Premier Vander Zalm, they informed him that "there is a multi-million dollar traffic in Indian children in this province. This industry may create thousands of jobs for lawyers, judges, courtworkers, social workers, psychiatrists, and prison guards, but it also creates a vicious cycle of despair.... We ask you ... to take immediate action to stop this industry."



Native Women and Political Action

"Aboriginal women carry a great responsibility in the maintenance of their families and their communities and their nations.... Politically they appear obscure, but they are the ones who push for change.... They organize."

Aboriginal
Women of BC Provincial Survey,
1985

Aboriginal women of the Pacific northwest were traditionally the decision-makers in their communities: as leaders, or through their leaders, their judgement on matters political, economic and social was always sought. Women's overt political status deteriorated during the colonializing process, and the diminishment of women's power was a significant stage in the diminishment of Indian government itself. In the words of Rosalee Tizya of the United Native Nations, "Women and hereditary chiefs were the most powerful people in Indian society, and they were the ones most often enfranchised* [divested of Indian status]."

Today, Tizya describes women's role in the Indian self-government movement as "the backbone, the last line of defence." Those would also be appropriate words to describe Native women in their communities. Their activism around child welfare, health, legal and education issues is readily apparent. Around Aboriginal rights and land claims, their voices are rarely heard in the mainstream



media but as Rosalee Tizya says, "when Indian leaders speak, they are saying what their people have told them to say."

The way the accents fall on Native women's issues differs greatly from those of the non-native feminist movement. While non-native women fight for reproductive freedom, universal daycare and equal pay for work of equal value, Native women are struggling just to keep their children, and to have any waged work at all. While feminists rightly peg the patriarchal Canadian family as a major site of women's oppression, Native women are aiming to restore their extended family tradition, the well-spring of their culture.

And when Native women see the sexism that has entered their communities and political structures via Euro-Canadian society, as a part of being Indian, they resist it.

The author wishes to thank Gloria Nicolson, Sharalene Frank, Rosalee Tizya and Kathleen Jamieson for their generosity.

** EDITORS NOTE: Historically, when Indian people were enfranchised in terms of the dominant (white) Canadian political system, they lost their status as Indians under the Indian Act, and so the term 'enfranchisement' carries a negative connotation in this context.*

Aboriginal Rights: The View From B.C.

Nancy Pollak
Vancouver

Whenever Native leaders sit down with federal and provincial politicians to negotiate aboriginal title and self-government, the faces around the table are male. Yet among Native people, there is no 'gender gap' in relation to these issues. High profile Native leaders are male *because* that is who Canadian society has invested with legitimacy. Behind these grand scenes--at conferences, strategy meetings and community education programs--Native women are speaking loudly and clearly about their claim to self-determination, for themselves and their children.

"They each have a little spot they are in the habit of calling their own."

Indian Reserve Commissioner O'Reilly, speaking of the Nishga, 1887.

"Every tree and flower is part of our bonanza, The stars at night, the morning light.... Every plain and ridge is our heritage."

Theme song from the television series, *Bonanza*

It's 1987, and while the Cartwrights have been dispatched to refrigerated vaults, the mere concept of aboriginal rights still evokes a *Bonanza*-style response in the provincial government of British Colum-



Sacred Tree Teachers' Guide

bia. Recent high-profile conflicts between native people and the logging industry on the Queen Charlotte and Meares Islands have alerted Euro-Canadians to the fact that all is not well on the west coast. The issue appears to be land claims, and it is and it isn't. The issue is aboriginal self-determination, and to understand the B.C. situation requires that we examine some history.

Some History

Since the beginning of white colonization, North American Indians have been alienated from their lands and livelihoods by various means: disease, military conquest, government decree and formal negotiations. In B.C., the method chosen was a studied refusal by Europeans to abide by their own law.

The law in question

was the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which basically stated that, until such time as native peoples chose to cede or sell their territories (i.e. enter into treaties), they would be able to enjoy the undisturbed possession of their lands. The Proclamation came as the result of England's winning of the Seven Years War, and the help she had received from the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. It acknowledged that native peoples were indeed nations within the colonies, and had legitimate claims to their hunting, gathering and fishing territories.

East of the Rockies, the policy of the colonial government was to negotiate with natives for the purchase of their lands--often at ridiculously low sums--prior to white settlement. Reserve lands were set aside, and the treaties

signaled the extinguishment of aboriginal title over the purchased area. West of the Rockies, the matter of native rights to the land was simply ignored.

British Columbia's entry into Confederation in 1871 inaugurated a conflict with Ottawa that continues to the present day. The province's anti-native stance was plainly at odds with the Crown's stated aim of writing treaties prior to white settlement. In 1875, the Dominion quashed a provincial Land Act that made no provision for the creation of reserves.

The province had other tricks up its sleeve: when Ottawa suggested that each native family be granted 80 acres of land, Victoria continued its policy of reserving 10. (In contrast, a Land Ordinance regulation granted 160 free acres to new settlers.) This thwarting of both the letter and the spirit of the Royal Proclamation through provincial land use legislation is the basis of the contemporary government's assertion that Indian land ownership has been extinguished by "acts of Parliament".

At the heart of B.C.'s failure to deal with Indian title was a desire for unfettered access to natural resources, aided by a racist disregard for the people being displaced.

As for the aboriginal peoples of B.C., their experience of Europeans can most pointedly be expressed with a statistic: by the 1880s, imported diseases had reduced their population of approximately 200,000 to a

scant 25,000.

Time and time again, they attempted to talk face to face with the government. Between the 1870s and 1927, the Nishga in particular appealed repeatedly for a process whereby their existence as a nation with territorial rights could be acknowledged. Their efforts took them to Victoria, then to Ottawa, and then to the Privy Council in London.

Native agitation for justice so provoked the Canadian government that, in 1927, the Indian Act gained two new clauses: one rendering illegal any fund-raising activity in pursuit of a land or money claim, the second and more notorious forbidding the potlatch. For the peoples of the Pacific Northwest, the banning of potlatches meant the banning of their government.

The 1970s

Contemporary Indian leaders have observed that their peoples have three routes to follow in their pursuit of justice: litigation, negotiation and confrontation. It was through litigation that significant progress was first made, and it was again the Nishga who pushed the issue. Reviving their age-old claim to aboriginal title, the Nishga went before the Supreme Court of Canada in 1973 and drew a historic ruling. All six Justices agreed that the Nass Valley had been owned by the Nishga prior to colonization. They did not agree about whether aboriginal claim had been extinguished by subsequent legislation.

Prior to this ruling, the Trudeau government, like those before it, had advocated an assimilation policy. Their White Paper of 1969 had called for an end to the Indian Act, an approach that was strongly opposed by most natives who preferred the safety of the imperfect treaty and reserve system to a system with no protection for them at all. The ruling was taken as a warning that future court decisions might uphold aboriginal title, and the federal government hastened to set up bureaucratic mechanisms to settle new and outstanding claims.

The government's early approach was characterized by two goals: the inclusion of "finality clauses" in new agreements (the extinguishment of aboriginal rights), and the exchange of land for money (the real estate transaction mentality, which the James Bay Cree and Inuit succumbed to in 1976). Aboriginal peoples since



that time have made it clear that those are not *their* goals. The B.C. government, with no real motivation to change its tune, continues to sound the same note: there is nothing to discuss.

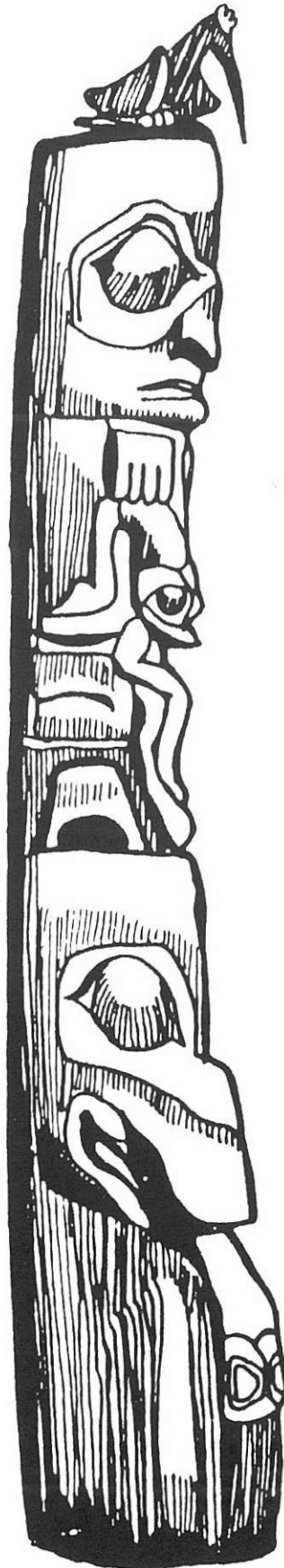
Today

"For these people [the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en], aboriginal title can be defined in part as the many individual and collective rights and responsibilities they have exercised in their relationships with each other, the land and its resources."

Neil Sterrit,
President of the Gitksan and
Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council.

When native people talk about aboriginal title, they are not referring to land ownership. They are talking about the manner in which they have traditionally governed themselves and been guardians of their resources. Self-government is considered an essential aboriginal right, and self-government is impossible without the economic self-sufficiency that stems from having a secure resource base: the right to harvest and conserve the wealth of the land, rivers and sea. Self-government is also intrinsically linked to spiritual and cultural life, hence the passionate resistance of Indians to the desecration of sacred lands.

The federal government is learning to use the expression "self-government", but there remains a big gulf between native aspirations and those of the politicians. Indians and the



provinces share a common fear that what Ottawa really wants to do is merely shed its fiscal and ethical responsibilities for the well-being of native people. Already, a version of self-government that confers municipal-style powers on a band is being touted and accepted by the Sechelt Band. While acknowledging the Sechelt peoples' right to do what they want, most native organizations are opposed to this approach.

The provincial government's contribution to the issue, beyond their refusal to deal, has been shameful rhetoric. A former Attorney General described the willingness to negotiate land claims as being the "Neville Chamberlain route"-i.e. a cowardly capitulation to an evil force! Lawyers for the province, arguing against the right of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en to establish an inland fishery, cautioned that allowing the natives to call their rivers their own would create a territorial situation akin to that in South Africa or Northern Ireland.

In March, the First Ministers' Conference (F.M.C.) made one final attempt to grapple with the meaning of the troublesome phrase in Section 35 (1) of the Constitution Act, "existing aboriginal rights". It was never likely, given the intransigence of all levels of government, that Indian leaders would achieve their threefold objectives: 1) the entrenchment of aboriginal title as an unqualified right; 2) the protection of that right by a consent clause requiring

native approval of any changes; and 3) the practical meaning of aboriginal rights to be left to each tribal group to define. Their overall political goal was that native self-government become a third level of power, on an equal footing with the federal and provincial administrations.

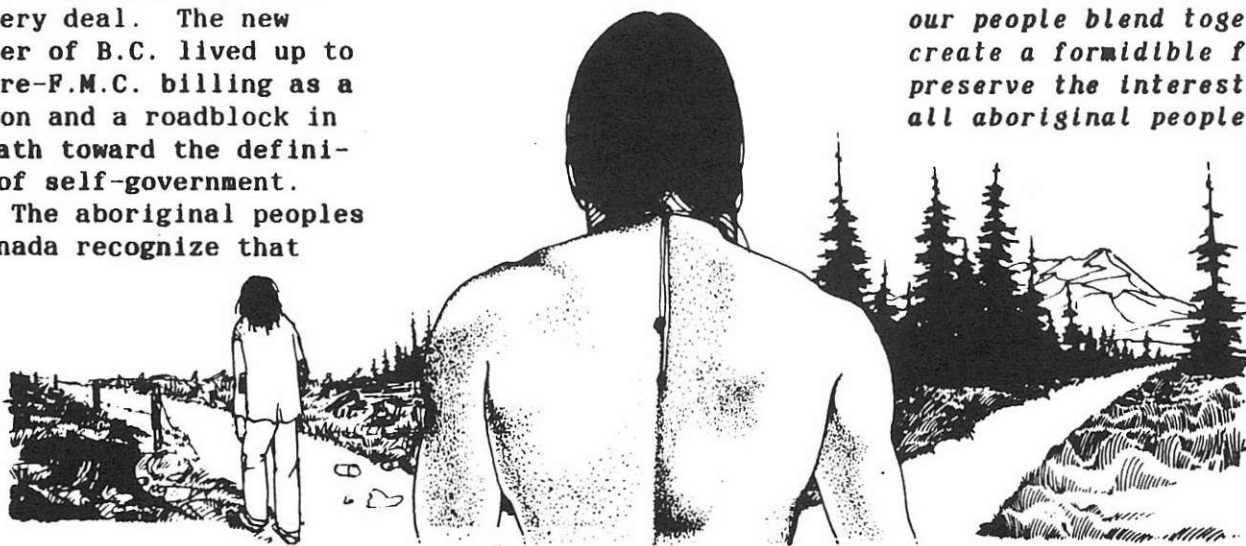
Those provinces with the most to lose (or to gain, depending on your point of view)--B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan (egged on by an uncomprehending Newfoundland)--said 'no deal' to every deal. The new premier of B.C. lived up to his pre-F.M.C. billing as a buffoon and a roadblock in the path toward the definition of self-government.

The aboriginal peoples of Canada recognize that

they are in for a long haul. Some say their only recourse is the courts, others that the political process is not yet exhausted. Victories and defeats in the legal and political spheres, while significant, cannot overshadow the importance of nurturing a sense of nationhood amongst the people. To quote the Lillooet Tribal Council:

"If Indian people are to survive in the long term, alternative means must be found for resolving conflict besides seeking relief

through prolonged and heated litigation that enriches attorneys while polarizing the public. The most promising way we now have to protect our interests is to strengthen our Indian government.... As the salmon travel in schools for protection and companionship, so can our people undertake a common journey against strong political currents to preserve the rights of generations yet unborn. As tributary streams join together to form a mighty river, so can the efforts of our people blend together to create a formidable force to preserve the interests of all aboriginal people."



Sacred Tree Teachers' Guide

Definitions

The Indian Act: The Indian Act of 1876 is an administrative act by which the federal government exercises control over Indian lives and lands, based on its authority under the British North America Act. The Act defines who is an Indian, and legislates how band governments and territories are to be run.

Status: To be a status Indian is to be registered as an Indian under the Indian Act, and to be eligible for certain benefits. These include free post-secondary education, free dental and health care, and language and cultural programs.

Band Membership: Band membership entitles a person to participate in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the band: for example, to live on reserve lands and/or own property there; to run for band council and vote in band elections; and to share in land claims settlements and resource development.

Women and the State

Kerry McCuaig
Toronto

"Ten years ago we were saying 'smash the state,' now we're saying 'give us the money.'" Of the many insightful comments made during a three-day assessment of the women's movement's changing relationship to the state, this one probably best sums up the strides and conflicts women activists have experienced.

It was an historic event. For the first time a conference was held on Women and the State in Toronto. "A moment in time," said Linda Briskin in her introductory remarks, for activists to take time out from hectic schedules and study the problems that arise from their dealings with the state. The 450 participants were beyond the organizers' expectations when the conference was initiated only a year earlier by Barbara Cameron and Kari Dehli of the Marxist Institute.

It's been almost twenty years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and only fifteen years since the Women's Program was established by the Secretary of State. During that period millions of dollars have been handed out to women's organizations, leaving many activists to question whether state dollars have coopted militancy.

Ironically the state has played a major role in the development of the



Women & Work, Summer 1986.

women's movement. It was the vast expansion of the state sector which drew women into the workforce, and it was again the state, operating to ensure corporate profits, which forced working-class women to stay in the labour force to keep their families out of poverty.

It was out of the contradictions between production and reproduction that the new women's movement was established. In order to work women need childcare, in order to pay for childcare, women need equal pay.

As the movement developed, it has built alliances with working-class

movements, particularly organized labour, and has come to increasingly identify the corporations and the state as the main enemy.

In studying "the state" the women's movement is taking another step. Every activist has had contact with "government"-- PMs, MPs, party hacks and policy-makers. Government is the "face" of capitalism; we lobby it, petition it, demonstrate in front of the legislature.

"The state, however, is a larger, more powerful and complex force that intervenes into our lives every day," explained Briskin. "The power of the

state includes agencies such as child welfare, immigration and housing. It includes coercive forces like the police. It's more difficult to identify, understand and attack the state."

There are fewer established mechanisms to deal with the state. It is more difficult to approach the faceless bureaucracy, with its regulations and administrative functions.

"It constantly frustrates us," said Briskin. "Think of what happens when a woman tries to apply for a child-care subsidy, the steps she has to go through, she is then interacting with the processes of the state.

"We need to name the state for what it is and see the powers that it has. We need to widen the focus of our attention, from the government to include the state. Because there are vast numbers of issues that cannot be dealt with through the electoral process."

How far this concept permeates the women's movement will be a determining factor in the period ahead. Of equal importance will be how closely the movement identifies the state as a class institution.

"There are differences in how activists view and analyse the state," commented Barbara Cameron, one of the organizers. "Some deny that the state is by its very nature a class institution. The bias of the state toward the dominant economic class is identified with the particular political party forming the government. A change in the party elected to government is thought to be sufficient to bring about fundamental social change.

"Marxists maintain that a change in the elected personnel of the state does not change its essential

class nature. It is our position that the bourgeois state structures must be transformed through democratization. This requires the existence of two conditions, the election of a government committed to such a transformation, and the existence of a mobilized and united extra-parliamentary opposition, led by the working class, as the real base of power for that government in its fight against the bases of power of the bourgeoisie in the economy and within the state."

Failing to recognize the class nature of the state can result in considerable frustration for activists, as the conference revealed.

Legislative gains made by women are circumvented by state application, as any experience with human rights legislation will reveal. The state can respond to demands advanced by the women's movement in such a way as to extract more cost than gain--the Ontario



Liberal government's equal pay legislation is an example. (See following article on equal pay.)

There are some groups of women who more readily experience the class nature of the state and its coercive powers than others. Native women, women of colour, working-class women; even Third World women can feel the oppressive arm of the Canadian state through aid development agencies.

As expected the conference raised more questions than it was able to answer. It testified to the need for more theoretical work to be done in this area in order to meet the demands of a growing and maturing women's movement.



Equal Pay: Why No Debate?

Sue Findlay
Toronto

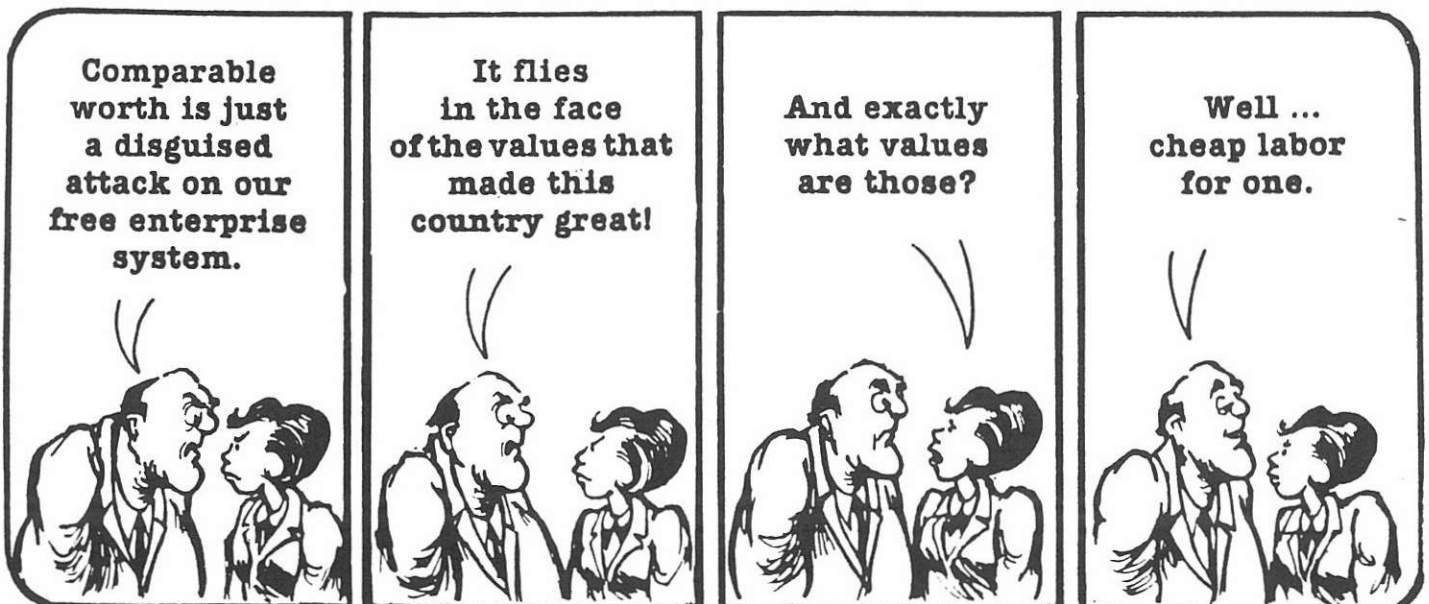
On Saturday February 6, 1987, approximately 35 concerned and active feminists spent four hours listening to an analysis of the proposals tabled by the Ontario government to legislate equal pay for work of equal value (Bill 154), and strategizing about the response we should make to this bill. We were participating in one of the workshops at the "Women and the State" conference recently held in Toronto. While many of the participants found the workshop fascinating, for me it raised questions about the limits of our demands for reform and our responses to state initiatives, and about the difficulties that we have as a movement in addressing these limits.

There was a distinct note of urgency to the discussion. Public hearings on Bill 154 were to begin on February 23, and feminist

representation at these hearings was thought to be crucial. Business interests have become increasingly vocal in their opposition to the proposed legislation and were expected to use the hearings as a platform to harness public support against passage of the Bill.

The Equal Pay Coalition has been extremely active in presenting its positions on the legislation required to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value to the provincial government. But it was felt that amendments to the Bill and perhaps the passage of the Bill depended to some degree on a demonstration of broader support from women at the public hearings. Pat McDermott, a long-time member of the Coalition, concluded her persuasive analysis of Bill 154 with a strong plea to those attending the workshop to have their various organizations prepare briefs for the public hearings.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. Urgent as the situation appeared to be, the discussion of strategies had not been the objective of this particular workshop. The two-day conference had been painstakingly designed to provide participants with a "guided tour" through feminist experience with the state over the last two decades, with a chance to reflect on and analyse those experiences that our daily routine seldom allows. The Saturday workshops, such as the one on Equal Pay, were intended to "map" our struggles with the state and specify how state structures and practices redefine our issues and limit our demands. With this perspective on the state in hand, Sunday workshops were then to focus on strategies for the women's movement. So, according to the "plan", the Equal Pay workshop had "jumped the gun"--bypassing the mapping process, including an as-



Carol A. Simpson
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essment of the role played by the Equal Pay Coalition, and leaping straight into a discussion of possible responses to the immediate situation--Bill 154.

Personally, I was disappointed. For one thing, I was part of the organizing committee that had worked out the steps of what we had considered a necessary process in understanding the state, our relation to it and its affect on our lives. But more fundamentally, I was disappointed because my experience as a state bureaucrat participating in the response of the federal state to feminist demands convinced me of the need to develop strategies based on a clearer understanding of how the state actually works. I believe that our experience with the state--as activists in the women's movement and/or as feminists working inside the state--provides the basis for this task.

But why be rigid about a conference framework? As logical as a process might seem in the planning stages, the success of a conference ultimately depends on the participants and the capacity of those in charge to make the process relevant to their experience and needs. Most participants in the Equal Pay workshop expressed fascination both with McDermott's analysis of the Bill and with the discussion of strategies for amending it. Attempts by a few of us to resurrect the agenda or to question the very idea of support for the legislation, amended or not, were largely unsuccessful. Perhaps the

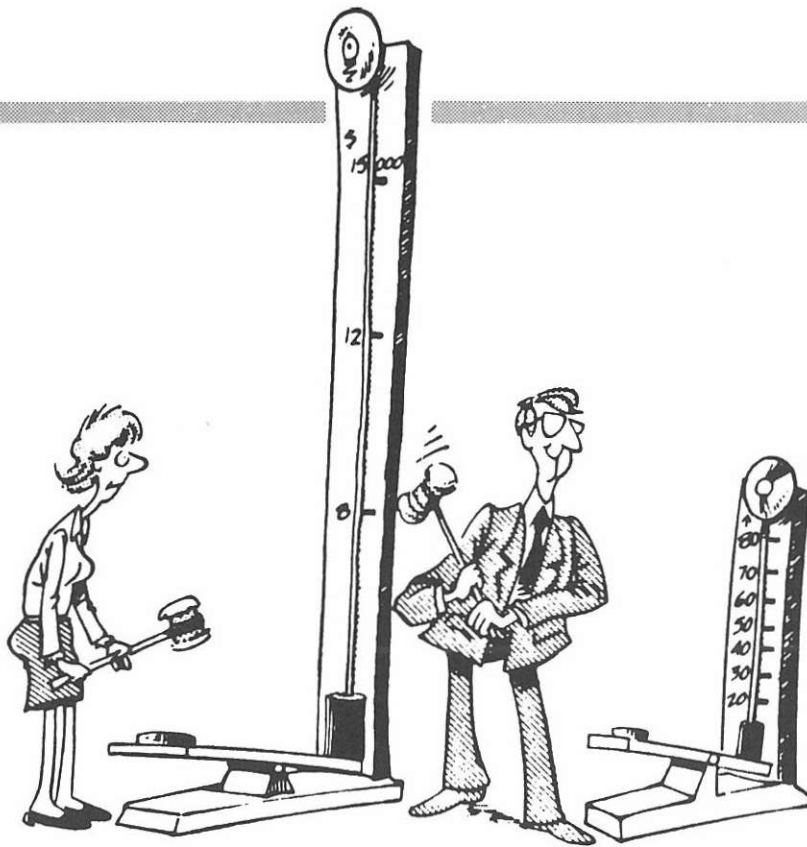
process as originally defined was simply not appropriate for the issue of equal pay--not necessary because we were on the verge of "success" and not timely because of the urgency of the need to organize the presentation of briefs.

Afterwards however, I couldn't give up on the validity of the original objectives for the workshop, nor dismiss what I heard as rather significant concerns about the dangers of legislative reform in general and Bill 154 in particular. And in retrospect, I concluded that if we had begun with our experience, our discussion would have been substantially different and could have established the basis on which to assess, and challenge if necessary, the framework and timetable imposed upon us by the state

in Bill 154.

Consider first our preoccupation with the urgency to respond and our fear that we would lose the political commitment to equal pay. A review of our experience of the struggle for equal pay in Canada (and in other western democratic countries) over the past two decades would highlight feminist success in making equal pay a public issue and forcing politicians to put it on their political agendas. Some radicals might argue that social control is the underlying motivation for reforms such as equal pay. But there is no doubt that the challenge to the state by feminist documentation of persistent and extensive wage inequalities has led the state to introduce legislation that will potentially cost both the





The Facts

public and the private sector billions of dollars. Although some of the urgency at the workshop was expressed in terms of the need to seize the opportunity to pass legislation while the Ontario Liberal/NDP accord lasts, I cannot believe that any government in the near future will renounce the commitment to equal pay legislation. It is simply too well established as a women's right. Much of the urgency accompanying the introduction of legislative proposals relates to the timetable established by the state for the review and approval process--a timetable that is intended to control debate and limit amendments as well as guarantee "swift passage" of needed legislation.

A more serious question for us to consider is the problem of the implementation of legislation. If one is convinced that legislative reform is *necessary*--or as some say "a good first

step"--the difficulties we have experienced with federal legislation on equal pay (and legislative reform on other issues such as rape and family property law) illustrates that it is not *sufficient*. Political commitments and legislative reform are not enough in a political system in which commitments to equality co-exist with structures and practices which limit the effective implementation of these commitments. The state is not a monolith, nor is power exercised simply by politicians who promise reform. State reforms emerge from a complex struggle within and between all levels of the state, a struggle in which the interests of both the dominant and dominated groups in society must be represented. Our strategies cannot rely simply on confrontation with elected representatives to extract political commitments. They must also address the policy-making

processes of the state bureaucracy, where commitments are defined and incorporated into the ongoing business of the state. Reflections on our struggles with the state over the past twenty years can show us when and how we can influence these processes to produce more substantive reforms.

Thus, while the legislation itself--including amendments on coverage and the techniques of evaluating equal value--deserves careful scrutiny, so do the proposals for the implementation of the legislation. But what does our experience tell us about legislative reform in addition to the limits that appear during the implementation stage? Do we now have good reason--as was suggested by one participant in the workshop--to reconsider our demands for equal pay legislation? To reject Bill 154? What we know is that legislative reform is the preferred response of the state, that the economic and social dimensions of our issues are often displaced in the policy-making processes of the state in favour of legislative solutions. Although we have been taught that we can and should take advantage of the opportunities inherent in liberal democracies to establish our rights in law, we know that the legal system is not a neutral and impartial instrument, and that the decision-making processes in the courts are flawed by the same biases as other institutions in society. Judicial discretion in a system dominated by sexism, racism and class interests cannot offer us the

protection that we might once have assumed possible.

But the fact that legislative reform does not provide any guarantee of our rights may not be the key



reason to question our support of legislative proposals such as Bill 154. Pursuit of legislative reform has also had the effect of disorganizing the women's movement. The state can redefine both our issues and the way in which we organize around them--by diverting us from revolutionary demands for the transformation of the relations of power and the systems that maintain them and drawing us into reliance on the existing state to provide us with equal opportunities, and by shifting the site of struggle from the political and economic sphere into the legal sphere, where the representation of our interests is professionalized and the influence of collective action is almost totally eliminated.

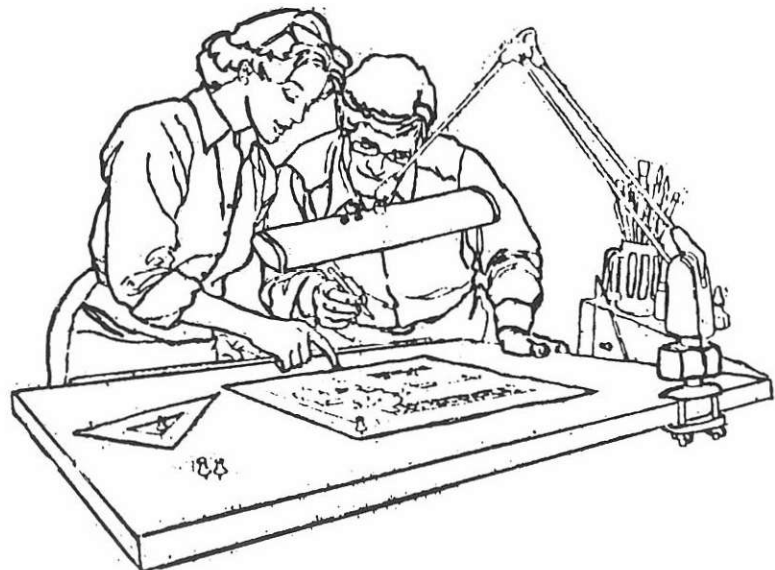
In the workshop, we learned from McDermott's analysis that Bill 154 will supercede collective bargaining agreements--weaken-

ing the influence of unions on this issue, and potentially on other issues affecting women and men in the labour force. The implications are serious--even if feminists' negative experiences with unions have suggested to some that struggles with the state are preferable to attempts to combat the chauvinism of male unionists. Our experience with the state illustrates both the dangers of relying on it to represent our interests and the importance of establishing an oppositional standpoint. While union practice still leaves much to be desired, the "theory" is right. And, if the state is allowed to curb the unions' role in negotiating equal pay, will it not be even easier for the state to disregard feminist attempts to influence state policy in the future?

I believe these perspectives on how the state responds to our demands and limits the potential of reforms are examples of what

could have emerged from a discussion of our struggle for equal pay and subsequently informed the debate about our response to Bill 154. Why didn't they? Did we simply lose sight of our experience in the urgency of the moment? Has the reformist potential of the Liberal/NDP accord obscured the real limits and dangers of Bill 154? There were enough questions about the disadvantages of the legislative proposals to convince me that the almost exclusive focus on strategies to support them could not be accounted for in terms of urgency or the seductive qualities of Bill 154 alone. If not, then what other barriers to debate were present in the workshop? Could it be that the very structure of the women's movement presents some barriers as well?

The Equal Pay Coalition has led the battle for equal pay in Ontario since 197--, and there was a clearly articulated expecta-



tion from many of the participants that they were depending on the Coalition to construct the response of the women's movement to Bill 154. There was an understandable deference to the views of those representing the Coalition--after all, they are the experts on the issue. The response to McDermott's analysis of the proposals and her request for support for the legislation was very positive. From this perspective, it was not surprising that the suggestion in the workshop that we oppose the Bill was quite decisively resisted. Given the real disadvantages of Bill 154 that had begun to emerge in the discussion and our experience of the limits of legislative reform however, the resistance was surprising.

Arguments against opposing the Bill were not well-developed--relying on the assertion that the legislation represented a "good first step" and categorizing opposition as rather theoretical or utopian. I had the distinct feeling that debate was stifled--not by

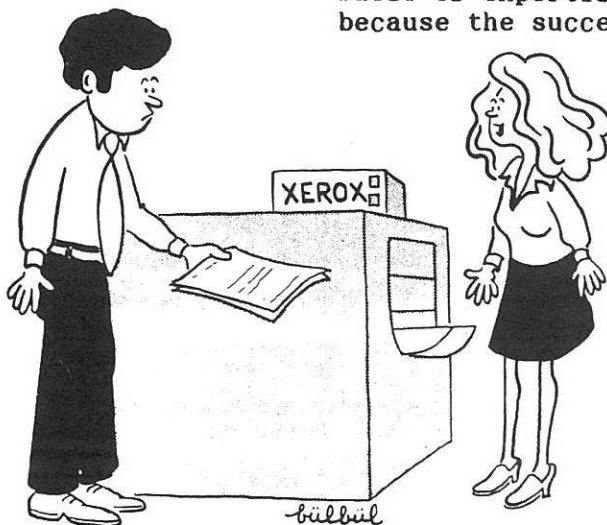
the members of the Coalition, who tentatively admitted to some dissension within their ranks about the appropriate response to the Bill, but by many of the participants who may have felt uneasy about rejecting the expertise of the Coalition and perhaps even more uneasy about attempting themselves to master the intricacies of the struggle at this late date.

This raised questions for me about the consequences of organizing the women's movement around single issues. Has the "division of labour" within the movement made the assessment of strategies more difficult? Does the expertise acquired by those concentrating on a single issue discourage constructive criticism? Do the politics of movement- or community-based coalitions organized to lobby the state on issues like equal pay, daycare, and abortion tend to discourage criticism or debate--from outside or inside?

Not only does this form of organizing tend to divide the movement on the basis of expertise; but, because the success of coal-

itions usually depends on the mediation of a wide range of political perspectives, it tends to limit our political strategies to those which are acceptable to the majority. Given the dominance of liberal and increasingly conservative perspective on the question of political reform, radical alternatives are unlikely to be debated in or emerge from coalitions unless they are formed on the basis of a common commitment to a radical perspective--a difficult task indeed given the confusing array of assumptions among feminists about the potential of reform by the state. I am not of course suggesting that we can all become experts on every issue or that coalition politics must be abandoned, but that we need to take our own practices into account as well as those of the state.

Because my analysis is based on the absence of debate--on silence rather than on actual words--it can be easily disputed. Other interpretations may be offered in contradiction. Whether the "mapping" of the issue and an analysis of the mechanisms would have broken some of the silences and encouraged debate on how the state limits reform is an empirical question. Whether the debate would have presented alternatives to the support of Bill 154 is yet another. But surely it is time we seriously considered how our own structures and practices might prevent this debate from happening and how, in turn, this absence of debate limits our demands for and responses to state reform.



"This is an Equal Opportunity machine. It will also work when MEN push the copy button."

Room to Move Suzanne Falkiner, editor

Slash Jeannette Armstrong

The Self-Completing Tree Dorothy Livesay

Cynthia Flood
Vancouver

Three diverse works to bring to your attention: a collection of stories by Australian women writers, *Room To Move*, from Unwin Paperbacks in Sydney (1985); a first novel by Jeannette Armstrong, *Slash* (Theytus Books, 1985); and, the selection of poems that she would like to be remembered by, Dorothy Livesay's *The Self-Completing Tree* (Press Porcepic, 1986).

Room To Move, edited by Suzanne Falkiner, includes 32 greatly varied stories, some vignettes, others substantial pieces, of which these brief excerpts suggest the range:

My mother read me verses that scanned. She taught me not to split infinitives. When other children learned catechisms, I recited after her "Different from, opposite to, contrasted with." Thanks to her, I twitch every time someone says "between you and I." This is my dowry, in that other sense of natural endowment. She taught me my mother tongue. (Penelope Nelson, "The Dowry")

The first stage of love is love. It lasts for hours or months or any time at all but not long. The second stage of love is nostalgia for the first stage. It is called love. It recreates love in the search for the love that was. Do you agree? (Inez Baranay, "The Saddest Pleasure")

sarah sherer reads the label as the little tablet lies on her tongue. dissolving quietly. she knows she shouldn't but she



Carta Trimestral

can't help herself. she eats them like lollies. like they're going out of fashion. the breath on her face and down her breasts in to her legs. she swells and stretches on her bed. turning her eyes suddenly languid and soft as jelly. this licorice of pleasure teeth and tongue turning black but she can't help herself. (Bronwyn Sweeney, "Licorice Lozenges")

The stories also exhibit a pleasing variety of vintage in their authors; stories from long established Australian women writers appear alongside many first publications, and a rich texture results. In many of the stories there's a strong sense of place

The Decline of the American Empire

(Director: Denys Arcand)

"The Decline of the American Empire," directed by Quebec filmmaker Denys Arcand, is probably the most talked-about Canadian film of the decade. Arcand is a long-time member of the left intelligentsia in Quebec, with a long list of politically astute films to his credit, so *Decline* was bound to be interesting.

In talking casually about the film, Cayenne collective members discovered that we had wildly mixed reactions to it, ranging from enthusiasm through mild criticism to outright hostility. Four of us--Anne Fournier, Marie-Louise, Carol-Anne O'Brien, and Judi Stevenson--decided to review the film in the form of a collective debate. Just in case you haven't seen it yet, *Decline* is structured as an ongoing conversation about life and sex among eight women and men. Most of them are long-time friends and colleagues from a Quebec university history department. In the first half of the film, the women are seen working out at a trendy gym while they discuss the men (and men in general). Meanwhile back at Lake Memphremagog, the men are in the kitchen, preparing a gourmet dinner for them all, while discussing the women (and women in general).

In the second half of the film, women and men merge (in a particularly beautiful scene), and gradu-



ally enter into another battle in the war between the sexes.

Cayenne's discussion focussed on a few key moments in this complex film: (1) the revelation by Dominique (the chairperson of the history department, whose recently published book is a discussion of the decline of the American empire) that she has secretly been lovers with two of the men present, one of whom is in a very traditional marriage to Louise; (2) the lengthy bantering exchange between the men about women's sexuality; (3) the interruption of the oh-so-civilized dinner party by the arrival of Diane's macho working class lover; and (4) the portrayal of the gay male character in the film.

Judi: When I saw the film, I was so angry about the hatred displayed by the men for the women, and about the complete dishonesty that ruled all of the relationships--even the relationships among the women--that all my memories of the film were completely obliterated by my rage. I was so angry that I forgot why I was angry, and in fact, I agreed to see it again, on what can only be described as a "first date". Now this is not a good film to go to on a first date! The two of us were completely unable to talk to one another after we came out of the theatre--he just wanted to leave in one direction, and I just wanted to leave in the other! And when we did talk about it much later, it turned out that I had again been feeling speechless with rage

against all men, including him, and he had been feeling speechless with shame for *being a man*. So the male characters had the strongest impact on both of us.

Carol-Anne: I was really angry too, because I felt I was forced to sit through misogyny. I hated the male characters, and the portrayal of the women showed a lack of feminist consciousness on the part of the filmmaker. There was no solidarity in the relationships between the women. There's nothing but lies between them. And the women are nothing but stereotypes--Dominique the bitter, single "career" women, and Louise, the devoted, gullible, spoiled housewife. And I found the climax of the film--when Dominique hurts Louise by flaunting her affair with Louise's husband--to be another stereotype, where women are shown being bitchy.

Judi: My reaction to that moment was, thank god someone is prepared to break through this tissue of lies, and confront the fact that *all* of these relationships are founded on deceit, power games, possession, cheap sex, and yawning gaps between social responsibility and sexual irresponsibility.

Marie: Yes, for me that moment was what the whole film was about, it was the climax for me. I felt the film was talking about how people blind themselves in different ways to what is really going on. I related to it a lot. I saw familiar characters everywhere, and

that's why I found it really intense. What was most intense was how much I related Louise to my mother. I realise I might have a very distorted reaction because of that, but I felt Louise deserved the shock she got. Her whole life was built on an incredible self-deception about her "happy family". I thought it was cruel the way Dominique destroyed her illusions, but it was about time somebody did it. And I know how hard it must have been for her to hear, but I do think people have a responsibility at some point to stop deceiving themselves. I can't just say it's capitalist hegemony, and it's not their fault that they don't see the truth about anything. To me the whole film was about that, how all these people are really kidding themselves. Oh they're so hip and trendy but those men are sexist as all hell, and yet they go and pretend to

be pseudo-left-type profs, right?

Carol-Anne: That's interesting, I didn't identify them as leftist.

Marie: I thought the film was very realistic, that's why I liked it so much. I thought it had a lot to say about left atmosphere in that kind of upper middle class, intellectual part of Quebec. But I thought the way the women talked about the men was realistic too. I know there wasn't a lot of solidarity between them, but there was the incredible disrespect they had for men, no respect for them at all. And in a way I feel like that, too. That's why I didn't feel angry at the men, I just don't expect them to be any different.

Anne: When I came out of the theatre, I was tremendously upset. Because on the surface you have this great





role reversal: the men at home fooling around in the kitchen--even though it was the gay man who was doing most of it--and the women working out at the gym. But there was such a hostility to the women deep down. It just sent shivers down my spine when they were talking about, how can you stick your penis into *that*, meaning a wet vagina. And for me that was the strongest, most horrible, moment of the film.

Judi: That particular speech made me almost hysterical with anger, and I guess I was that angry because I believe that lots of men do think that--that women are disgusting or evil or frightening black holes. And the first time I saw the film was in a packed theatre, and the men in the audience laughed uproariously at every one of those speeches which mocked the women, especially their

bodies and their sexual desire. No women laughed.

Anne: I didn't really feel that Louise being told about her husband's affairs was a great moment, that finally people were being honest. Dominique did it to get back at those men who wouldn't give her credit for her book. And it was partially done too, I guess because Louise was being very smug and pretentious about her husband and her middle class life. But that was all she had to make her feel good. All the other women had "careers" of some sort and academic qualifications or aspirations. I just didn't see it as a moment of truth in those relationships.

Carol-Anne: I didn't think it was important as a moment of truth either. To me, Louise was less self-deceiving than she was deceived over the years by her husband and her friends. As

for the women not respecting the men, the way I feel about conversations like the one the women were having in the gym, is that I abhor them! They represent a certain image of liberated sexuality in which women treat men as much like sex objects as men treat women.

Marie: But why are you assuming that this film is about what it *should* be like? I don't think that it's about liberated sexuality at all!

Carol-Anne: Yes, but it reduces women's liberation to women having lots of sexual adventures with *men*. Because although the women joke about men, they don't seriously challenge the power of men, and their lives continue to revolve around men.

Judi: This is a very interesting point--what *is* the purpose of this film from the point of view of the filmmaker? I don't think the film is about liberated sexuality either. I think Arcand [the director] is saying that these are *horrible* relationships, but they are the logical extension of the kind of obsessions that we've created in upper middle-class society around the consumption of food, and the parallel consumption of sex.

And I think this kind of consumerism goes with a loss of hope around change in the external world, like any kind of politics. I read into the film that these are people with some kind of political past, or

some kind of vague political aspirations that they've given up, in a way that I think is very typical of people of their generation.

And maybe the filmmaker is trying to push to an absurd and ridiculous extreme what can happen to people who choose to be cut off from serious political activity. In their shallowness they have reduced their relationships to these highly consumerist, beautiful, materialistic *shams*, in which sex is part of the material being exchanged. And this is an expression of the utter decadence of that class. And the critique goes beyond male-female relationships in that sense. All the relationships are equally disgusting and horrible and objectified.

Anne: As I understand it, the film is supposed to be a social commentary about people who were inheritors of the Quiet Revolution. They're the intellectual elite which rose to prominence with the Parti Quebecois, but never pushed any further. And as the political projects of the PQ and the left, never went anywhere, this elite turned increasingly inward towards self-satisfaction and self-gratification.

But I thought the whole role of the younger man who came in, Diane's lover, was loaded with symbolism. To me he seemed to represent another aspect of Quebec society, the more traditional and macho working class guy. He was the "heavy", and he combined all these stereotypes--

Judi: Chains and leather--

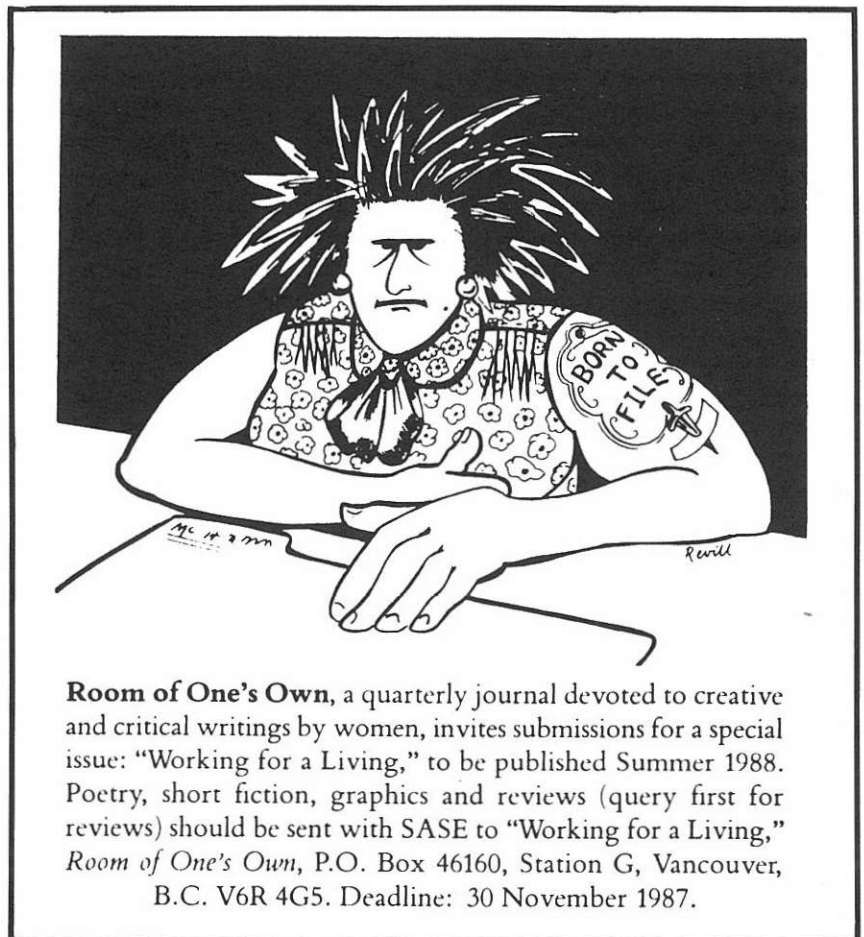
Anne: And his very physical presence--

Judi: --and drinking the beer instead of the wine, right, that was a whole cultural statement, right there in one little metaphor--

Anne: But it was such a cliché, such a stereotype, the working class, all they want is a... "*cinquante*" and they probably don't eat fish. And then to associate him with a sexual relationship with Diane that is very violent, I found that disturbing also.

Judi: I think he was there to show up the rest of them as effete. Maybe he was drawn with an incredibly heavy hand, just so we'd all get the point. But the point was, look at this effete bunch of nincompoops, right, that *talk* about sex instead of doing it. But then what does that make of the sado-masochistic relationship between him and Diane? I wasn't interested in it from his point-of-view, I was interested in it from Diane's point-of-view. What is that relationship supposed to be saying about women's sexuality?

Carol-Anne: Diane talks about the incredible power of the victim.



Room of One's Own, a quarterly journal devoted to creative and critical writings by women, invites submissions for a special issue: "Working for a Living," to be published Summer 1988. Poetry, short fiction, graphics and reviews (query first for reviews) should be sent with SASE to "Working for a Living," *Room of One's Own*, P.O. Box 46160, Station G, Vancouver, B.C. V6R 4G5. Deadline: 30 November 1987.

Marie: Which she's *conscious of*, unlike Louise. Which means you don't actually relate to Diane as a victim, right? You can imagine her reflecting on it, thinking seriously about it.

But one of my criticisms of the film is that they didn't portray the gay man accurately at all. This guy, with an implied political consciousness, was just sitting around and never *once* saying, what about me. There were a number of times when the men made comments that were heterosexist, and he just accepted that. And he only talked about how he really loved to cruise.

Judi: But why did he have to be better than they were, just because he was gay? There are lots of gay men who aren't liberated, and we don't want to romanticize people just because they are gay.

Carol-Anne: But I felt it was a really negative stereotype that the only gay person in the film was someone who was ill, and who got his thrill out of danger.

Judi: It was a stereotype, but that's not all that was true of him. I saw him as trapped in a heterosexual world, and we saw the part of him that had to survive in the university. Probably having spent many years in the closet, maybe still being in the closet to students, and partly out with only this small group of people. Well, they were so dishonest with one another, would you be honest with them as a gay person and tell them the truth? It was

only Diane that he could talk to about being ill for example, because their 'liberated sexuality' was all a trick, a veneer.

Marie: I don't think that necessarily, but I think he could very easily have challenged some of the stuff they were saying. But I also thought it was interesting that the whole film revolved around sex.

Carol-Anne: I think *Decline* is about sex because sex sells movies. Audiences seem to be titillated by the explicit discussions of sex, and many men in the audience identify with the misogyny of the male characters. That raises a whole other issue for me. I know some people were really shocked by the sexism of the men in *Decline*, and were very disappointed in the portrayal of the women, but felt that the filmmaker was critical of these things. And I don't believe that. I don't think we can assume that by showing a certain situation, you are automatically critical of it. Perhaps *Decline* is ambiguous because the director is critical of decadence, but his critique is not informed by feminism.

Marie: I think *Decline* is critical. I'm not saying this is the best film about sexism within this class, but if you compare it to *The Big Chill*--to me that film was gross and disgusting, and lots of people loved it, but to me it was saying, hey listen, it's ok to be young and idealistic, but then there's nothing wrong when you settle down to be happy

and make lots of money. And this film was exactly the opposite. It made it disgusting and decadent to be this way.

Anne: I think that was part of the controversy *Decline* stirred in Quebec: is this film a critique of a certain part of a certain class in Quebec? And is this a valid critique? Those were the questions the debate turned around. Some people who didn't think it was a critique felt it was basically an excuse for misogyny. Other people who disagreed were saying, this is a critique; you don't have to paint everything with a heavy hand in order for a critique to be made. And still other people were arguing, this is a distortion, it doesn't reflect our lives nor those of other intellectuals. They claimed the filmmaker has his own agenda and the film doesn't really reflect anything but his personal



Dykes to Watch Out For

IT'S CLARICE & TONI!
AND THEY'RE...

GETTING RESPECTABLE

©1987 BY ALISON BECHDEL

ON THE PHONE WITH MO ONE MORNING...

...BLAH, BLAH...WHINE...
NO GIRLFRIEND... NO SEX...
WHINE... BLAH, BLAH...

I KNOW, MO. BUT IT'S
SPRING! THINGS WILL
START HAPPENING AGAIN!

BYE,
DARLING!

I GUESS SO...
SO HOW ARE
YOU AND TONI?

JUST GREAT! YOU
KNOW, I DON'T THINK
I'VE EVER BEEN
SO HAPPY! IN FACT,

THAT'S NICE. WELL, I
HAVE TO GO READ THE
PERSONALS NOW. THANKS
FOR LISTENING, CLARICE!

ON CAMPUS THAT DAY...

IT'S GREAT TO SEE YOU,
CLARICE! IT'S BEEN
MONTHS! SO, ARE YOU &
TONI STILL TOGETHER?

UH. LAST
I HEARD,
WE WERE.

LATER IN THE AFTERNOON...

...MY OTHER GIRLFRIEND ANGELA IS
KIND OF UPTIGHT ABOUT ME SEEING
NAOMI. ANGELA'S A REAL LINEAR
THINKER. SHE CAN'T SEEM TO TRAN-
SCEND THE MONOGAMOUS MINDSET

GEE, LO.
THAT'S
ROUGH.

FINALLY, BACK AT THE RANCH...

JUNE! I'M NO-ONE!
IN HERE,
WARD!

TONI, AM I
STILL YOUR ONE
AND ONLY?

I THINK
SO. WHY?

I WAS AFRAID MAYBE SINCE THIS MORN-
ING YOU DECIDED THAT MONOGAMY WAS TOO
LINEAR, AND SO YOU TRANSCENDED IT.

WELL... IT IS KIND OF
UNCOOL... BUT I LIKE
IT ANYWAY.

WHY IS IT SO UNCOOL? WE DON'T GET ANY
CREDIT, TONI! WHEN I RUN INTO SOMEONE
I HAVEN'T SEEN IN A WHILE, IT'S ALWAYS
"SO, ARE YOU TWO STILL TOGETHER?" LIKE
THEY EXPECT US TO BREAK UP!

AND NO ONE WANTS
TO HEAR ABOUT HOW
HAPPY I AM WITH
YOU. THEY'RE ONLY
INTERESTED IN
ROMANTIC STRIFE!

SO, NOW WE NEED A SUPPORT
GROUP FOR HAPPY COUPLES?

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN! I
DON'T EXPECT ANYTHING FROM THE
STRAIGHT WORLD, BUT YOU'D THINK
AT LEAST OTHER DYKES WOULD
RESPECT OUR RELATIONSHIP!

WELL... STRAIGHT COUPLES GET
RESPECT WHEN THEY MARRY.
MAYBE WE NEED TO MAKE SOME
KIND OF SYMBOLIC AFFIRMATION
OF OUR COMMITMENT TO
ONE ANOTHER!

YOU MEAN...

YES! LET'S OPEN
A JOINT
CHECKING ACCOUNT!

OH, DARLING! BUT
THIS IS SO SUDDEN!

