

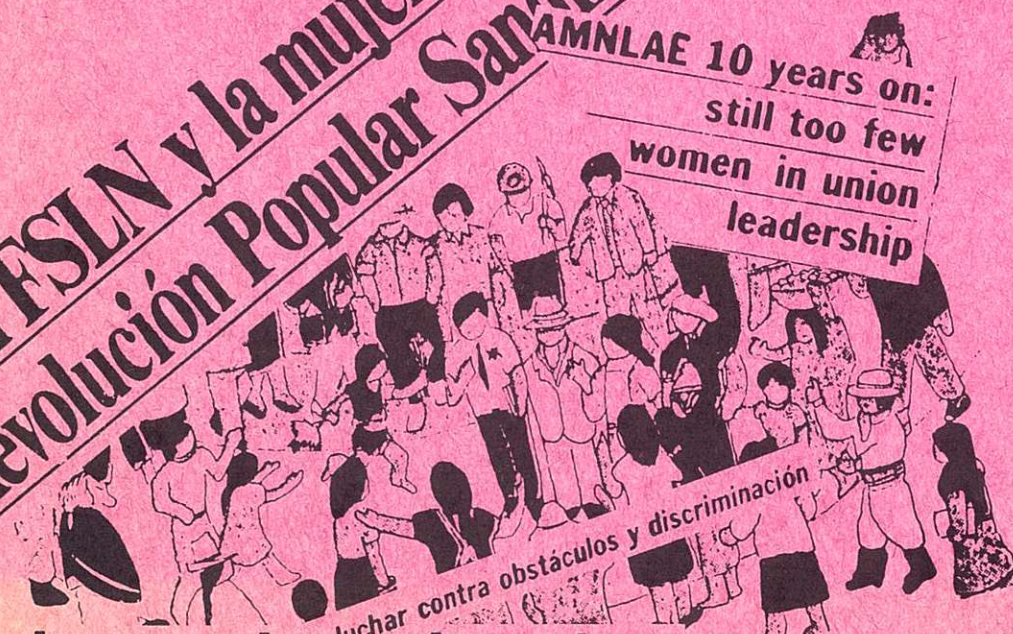
CAVENDISH

a socialist feminist bulletin

fall 1987

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El FSLN y la mujer en la Revolución Popular Sandinista



**AMNLAE 10 years on:
still too few
women in union
leadership**

**Integración de la mujer
es decisiva para vencer**

FSLN: Hombres y mujeres a luchar contra obstáculos y discriminación

CAYENNE

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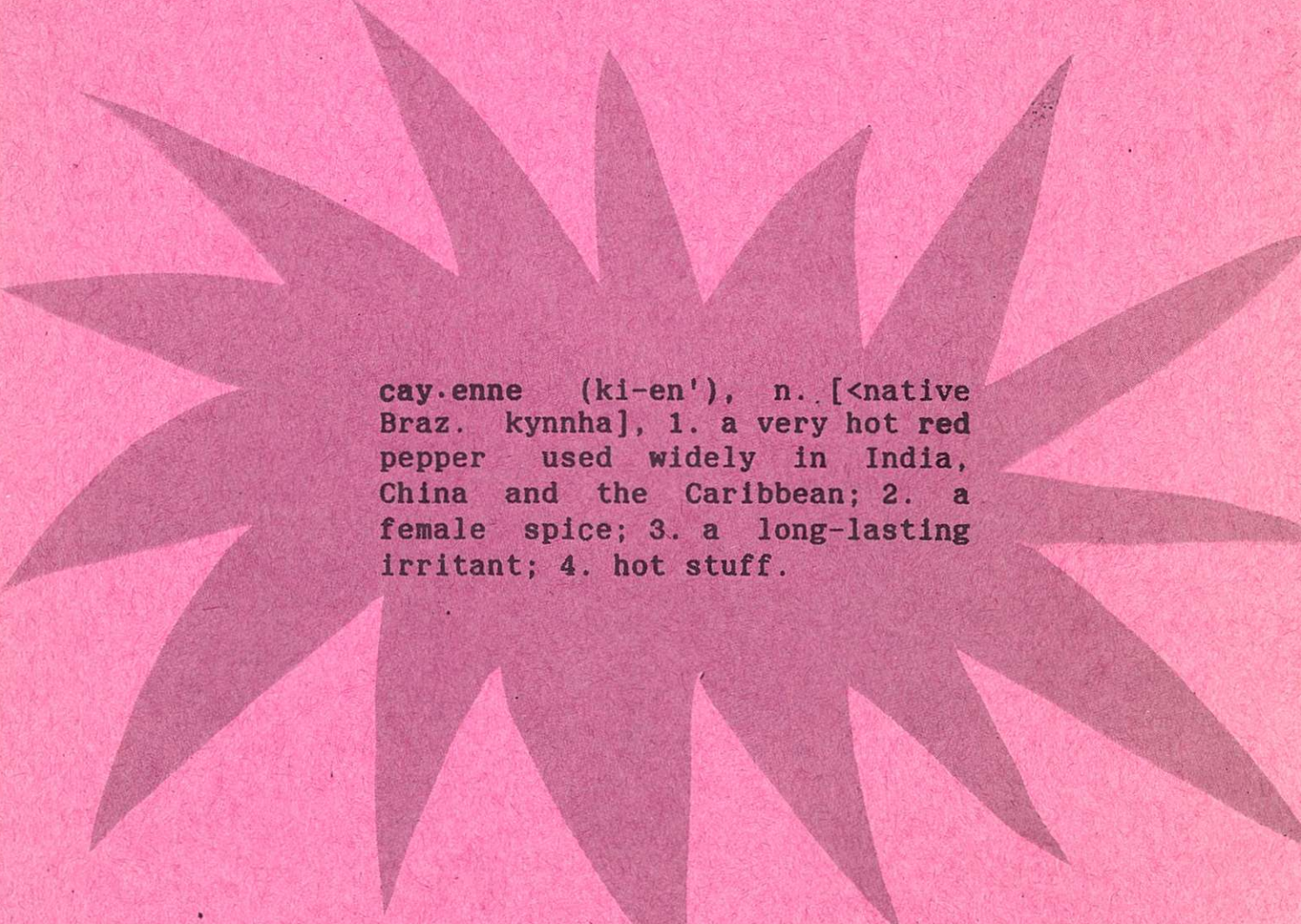
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cay.enne (ki-en'), n. [<native Braz. kynnha], 1. a very hot red pepper used widely in India, China and the Caribbean; 2. a female spice; 3. a long-lasting irritant; 4. hot stuff.

An Open Letter to our Readers

CAYENNE

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In the all too brief grace period between issues, the **Cayenne** collective paused for reflection. We wanted and needed to look back on the past (almost three!) years of our history.

The need to think about the politics of publishing **Cayenne** was made more urgent by the fact that we are feeling the stress and strain (not to mention the grind) of putting out a quarterly magazine with only a few people and even fewer dollars. This situation is serious and must be addressed if **Cayenne** is to continue.

For the most part we remain convinced that **Cayenne** is a useful and worthwhile political project, a special publication which is *beginning* to find its voice and audience. At the same time, we have serious questions about both its validity and its feasibility. We'd like to share our thoughts with you.

When **Cayenne** was founded a few years ago, we had ambitious goals. We felt that socialist feminist activists needed a journal for debate and analysis, and we hoped **Cayenne** could be a tool to stimulate discussion and critical thinking. We talked about facilitating kitchen table discussions--a to-and-fro exchange which would allow us to build on each other's experiences.

Since that time both the political context and the magazine have changed.

Politically, victories are infrequent, in spite of our efforts, which do not

compare to the retrograde legislation coming forth from the federal government and some provinces. In many sectors there seems to be a lack of energy or burnout which makes exchange difficult. The process of political fragmentation in Toronto (our admitted political and structural base) has continued.

There is no doubt that creative political organizing continues. Coalition building remains an important strategy, and one that many activists and groups attempt to integrate into their practice. All over Canada, women are trying to deal more openly and imaginatively with the racism that has limited our unity. And, in spite of the fragmentation that does exist, there are rare events, such as the Toronto *Women and the State* conference, that succeed in bringing together large numbers of women for a weekend to reflect on their experiences. But for the most part, women seem to stick to their particular issues and reference groups.

Alternative magazines, particularly feminist publications, have not had an easy time of it, *Herizons* and *La Vie En Rose* being two of the more recent casualties. We understand all too well the dilemmas involved in exercising the liberal state's "freedom of the press." It takes time to build a magazine, especially one which dreams of national contributions and a national audience. In times such as these holding on to

the terrain we have managed to stake out is in itself an accomplishment.

Actually, we are proud of Cayenne's modest political contribution to a revolutionary and feminist vision of women's and social struggles in Canada. Cayenne has had to grow in this context where survival itself is a victory. But it's not simply that.

We can name concrete accomplishments. We have some active contributors and collaborators as well as faithful readers who have supported us. We have followed up on certain issues such as daycare and choice, and facilitated an exchange of information and ideas. We argued at length in the collective about how to frame the debate around racism and IWD in Toronto in 1986, so that the articles we published could contribute positively. We have occasionally succeeded in reflecting regional perspectives and interests in our Toronto-based magazine. Further, we have frequently published articles about women and their struggles in Third World countries while focusing on issues of strategy which concern us all. Thus, we serve a role in helping people keep a vision beyond their daily ken.

However, in spite of our efforts, Cayenne has fallen short of our original goals. Cayenne has only partially served as a vehicle to foster debate. And attempts at analyzing more globally how changes in the political and economic context have affected women's lives, women's issues and women activists have been

most noticeable by their absence.

Recognizing our difficulty in promoting and sustaining debate on the pages of the magazine does not explain why this occurs. It is not entirely because discussions are not happening. They still occur regularly in bars after meetings or in conferences. Yet these discussions remain unrecorded, underdeveloped. Why?

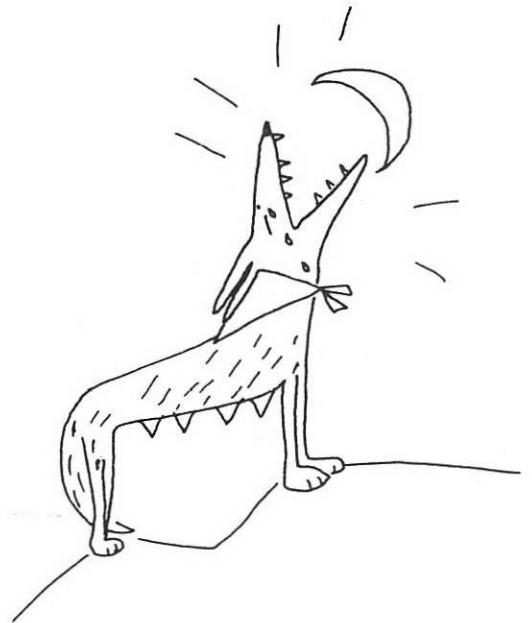
How are socialist feminist activists analyzing the current *coyuntura* (a Spanish term to name the "precise political moment")? How do we understand our specific history, say the last fifteen years? What are the current strategic priorities? Is there really a political (and organizational) base for a socialist feminist politics? Or have the analyses and dreams that seemed so sound in the early '80s been modified in light of the practice and reality of the last few years? What are the lessons of current organizing efforts?....

So many questions. So much experience. And you can be assured, many, many differences. But so little time? space? interest? in writing and reflection?

Cayenne is still committed to the political goal of fostering debate among socialist feminists. But we're wondering. Is Cayenne the best vehicle for this? Do Canadian socialist feminists (and those of you who read Cayenne in other countries) feel the need for such a magazine? And do you feel Cayenne is up to doing the job? Would our energies

be better spent by looking for other alternatives? For example, some socialist feminists in Germany have gained control of two issues a year of an established socialist journal (see article, page 17). Many people have limited time to read periodicals--is Cayenne making an important enough contribution?

Putting out a magazine is costly. At this point expanded womanpower is absolutely crucial for Cayenne. We are not going to be able to continue doing even this much, let alone develop our contributions and our readership, without new blood, new energy and new bodies. Your help as a promoter/subscriber, as a writer/contributor, as an editor/proofer, layout person, is necessary if this project is to continue and grow. Let us know what you think.



letters

Dear Sisters,

You may be aware that flight attendants at Wardair have lodged a complaint to the Human Rights Commission, alleging that Wardair uses its female flight attendants as sex objects. The complaint is based largely on discriminatory grooming regulations, eg. we must wear make-up, we must wear high heeled shoes, we must maintain company specified weight, and we must shave our legs and underarms. These regulations for females are laid out in the flight attendant manual and are strictly enforced.

We would like you to help us by writing to the company, as public pressure seems to be the thing to which Wardair responds best. If they think they may lose business, they may change their archaic and sexist policies.

We are not allowed to wear slacks, only skirts and dresses. Our job is physically demanding and requires a lot of manual work which we would feel more dignified and comfortable performing if we had the option of wearing slacks. Also, we would no longer have to show off our legs for the passengers.

Please help us by telling Wardair that you support other Canadian airlines, which do allow their female F/As to wear slacks. Wardair is the only airline we know of which does not allow slacks for women.

Senka Dukovich, who filed the complaint and spoke on it to the media, has been disciplined by the

company and suspended for two weeks without pay. We feel the company is trying to intimidate other women from speaking out and supporting the complaint when it is investigated by the Human Rights Commission.

Rest assured that the exploitation of female flight attendants by airlines has been documented and is historically sound. This exploitation continues today, as is obvious in Wardair's policies, and we are trying to right the situation step by step. Coverage of the Human Rights complaint was on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* on March 21, so Wardair should expect to hear from women's groups. The suspension has also received media coverage. We are convinced it is only the public who can change Wardair's mind.

Please send letters to Peter Bolton, Vice-President, Customer Relations, Wardair Canada Inc., 3111 Convair Drive, Mississauga, Ontario, L5P 1C2. It would be helpful if you copied us: Women's Committee - Local 4015, Airline Division of CUPE, Suite 301, 5415 Dundas Street West, Islington, Ontario, M9B 1B5.

Marilyne White
Chairperson,
Division Women's Committee
Canadian Union of Public
Employees



Dear Cayenne:

Thank you very much for the copy of Cayenne. The article on the Philippines Women's Movement was interesting. I would like to share with you the latest developments with GABRIELA.

We are currently preparing a Women's Legislative Agenda which we plan to present and lobby for when the Philippines Congress convenes this year. This is a very important campaign because, at present, several laws that discriminate against women are still very much contained in our legal codes and systems.

We hope to be able to come up with "creative" and "effective" methods of lobbying, just like the much-publicized Tapestry Campaign for Women's Rights which GABRIELA spearheaded when the Commission drafting the Philippines Constitution convened late last year.

Perhaps you can share with us some materials on how you conduct lobby work for Women's Rights there in Canada? We will appreciate it very much if you can share with us some of your successful experiences. Of course, you can still expect that GABRIELA will continue to pursue militant actions that we know from experience to be effective in asserting our rights.

In May this year, GABRIELA operationalized its plan to set up a National Service Center that provides services for grassroots women, engages in project development, organizes regional chapters of GABRIELA, develops publications work,

fundraises and promotes health and welfare programs for women.

There are two important GABRIELA activities which the National Service Center is preparing for. The first is a national seminar/consultation on women's health issues being held in September. Through this activity, we hope to start up efforts at popularizing women's health issues and orienting existing health care to meet the needs of women. We hope to follow-up this activity with appropriate programs and services to promote the health needs of women and children. We realize, too, the great need to raise women's consciousness and increase their understanding of their own bodies and reproductive rights. It is a basic step that women must take to assert greater control over their own bodies.

The second event is a national conference on Women and Development. This is actually a gathering of representatives of member-organizations which are currently undertaking income-generating and welfare programs for women, especially from the grassroots. One of the highlights of this conference is a comprehensive discussion on gender issues in development within the Philippines context. At the end, we hope to be able to come up with an integrated program for women and development, perhaps by drawing up a women's development agenda that we can pursue and advocate for in the years to come. Along with this, we intend to

develop an educational campaign on the impact of the debt crisis on women.

In August, GABRIELA will co-sponsor with CWR (Center for Women's Resources) a four-day trainers' training on the education module that CWR has just finished publishing. This is really an attempt to systematize sporadic education efforts initiated by various member organizations of GABRIELA.

Perhaps you have learned by now that the Alliance for New Politics (ANP) candidates lost in the last Philippines Congressional elections. However, I am happy to tell you of the warm reception given by the people in the places we visited during the campaign. Although we lost, we were able to promote a new kind of politics that is based on an intelligent discussion of crucial issues, including women's concerns. These were the agenda we presented before our audiences everywhere we went.

With the elections over, we continue to wage our struggle for a real resolution of the basic

problems of landlessness, U.S. domination, people's oppression and women's inequality. This we hope to achieve by continuing to empower our people and women. . . .

In sisterhood and solidarity

Nelia Sancho,
Executive Director
GABRIELA

If you have experiences and/or reflections to share with GABRIELA about lobbying efforts in Canada please write P.O. Box 4386, Manila 2800, Philippines.

For more information on the legal/constitutional situation of women in the Philippines see a recent issue of Piglas-Diwa: Issues and Trends about Women of the Philippines, the Center for Women's Resources (CWR)'s newsletter. It is available in the PRG resource center (Cayenne office) or you can subscribe by sending \$US5 plus postage to the CWR, 2nd Floor Mar Santos Building, 43 A. Roces Avenue, Quezon City, The Philippines.



PIGLAS-DIWA '87

Pay Equity in Ontario: Coalition Politics

Pat McDermott
Toronto

In her article "Pay Equity: Why No Debate?" (Cayenne Spr/Sum 87) Sue Findlay discusses what she terms the "barriers to debate" present in the pay equity workshop at the February *Women and the State Conference*. I think the major barrier can be traced back to coalition politics--specifically the politics of the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition (EPC).

As Findlay points out, the women's movement has come to depend on various specialized coalitions to lead the fight on particular issues. In this case the EPC has for over a decade kept up the pressure on the government to bring in equal-pay-for-work-of-equal-

value legislation.

In the past two years the struggle became critical with the promise of equal-value legislation in the Ontario Liberal/NDP accord. Two complex pieces of draft legislation were introduced: Bill 105 for the public service was tabled first, followed by Bill 154 to cover the broader public and the private sectors.

The EPC's position on Bill 105 was basically that it was confusing and weak legislation; however, its position on Bill 154 was generally positive--it was "a good first step." How the Coalition came to support Bill 154, despite its many weaknesses, can partly be explained by the political make-up of the Coalition, partly by the necess-

ity of constantly fighting the business opposition and to some extent by excitement, exhaustion and fear.

Needless to say the EPC is not composed solely of left-leaning women's organizations. It is made up of a broad political spectrum from the YWCA and the Business and Professional Women's Group, through to the mainstream labour movement and a minority of "left-of-the-NDP" groups (IWDC, WWIW and so on). Given this political composition, it should be no surprise that the thrust of social change that emerges is decidedly reformist and not concerned with, to quote Findlay, "revolutionary demands for the transformation of power." The politics are real-world

CATHY

by Cathy Guisewite



party politics that play themselves out with behind-the-scenes lobbying and the acknowledgement that each pressure group can't get everything it wants. It is a world of compromise--not only within the Coalition--but with a state that is openly trying to appease both women and the business community.

It must not be forgotten that the Coalition's pressure for legislation which provides for equal pay for work of equal value has been confronted by an increasingly organized employer lobby. Unlike many

women's issues, such as abortion, employment equity, or day care, equal value could place a relatively heavy financial onus on both the state and especially employers. In this sense it is a women's issue that can challenge, in a very direct way, capitalist organizations.

How did the EPC come to support Bill 154? Briefly the two major events leading up to this decision were: first the Green Paper Hearings on pay equity that toured the province, and secondly, the tabling of Bill 105--pay equity legis-

lation for public service workers. The EPC was extremely active, not only in presenting a lengthy brief to the Green Paper Panel, but also in organizing its member groups throughout Ontario to appear at the Hearings. The constant presence of women's groups at these hearings was important to counter the steady stream of business opponents and to ensure balanced media coverage.

Finally, in February 1986 Bill 105 had its first reading, in late spring it received its second reading and went into Legislative Committee over the summer. Bill 105 was to provide "pay equity" for the Ontario public service--approximately 2% of the total number of women in the paid labour force in the province. This incomprehensible, complex and poorly drafted Bill presented a sobering challenge to the Coalition. It took hundreds of hours to decipher the legislation in order to make an articulate response.

It is interesting to note that even though Bill 105 was clearly weak, and the main target of the legislation--the Ontario Public Service Employees Union--had begun to mount a serious challenge to the Bill, there were still members of the EPC that urged the Coalition to support the Bill. This seemingly strange position appeared to be one arrived at mostly out of fear that this would be all that the Liberal/NDP accord would produce and this would be the last chance to put something into place before a Liberal majority.



The suggestion is made by some women that the EPC support Bill 105 also may have been arrived at out of fatigue and frustration. Everyone became tired of EPC meetings that would end up in complex legal debates. On the other hand, those who undertook to translate the Bill into an understandable format for Coalition members without legal training, were more convinced that the Bill would be a disaster not only for the public service, but as a model for the legislation that was to follow. Thus a consensus emerged that this Bill would be opposed.

When Bill 154 was finally tabled, most Coalition members were relieved and some were even quite excited. Here at last was coverage for both the public and private sectors, and a draft bill that was easier to understand. This is not to say it is an accessible piece of legislation--it is not. But it was significantly more comprehensible than its predecessor Bill 105.

For those EPC members concerned about the role of unions, Bill 154 also appeared to have a stronger role for collective bargaining in the pay equity process.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Working in Coalitions

The EPC's decision to be highly critical of Bill 105 encouraged other groups to express similar doubts about the legislation, and in turn aided in its eventual withdrawal. It is also likely that it had the effect of



Neighbourhood Action

strengthening Bill 154 from women's perspective. The status of the EPC as a large and unified Coalition surely helped to mount pressure for the removal of Bill 105 and the tabling of a better piece of legislation. Individual groups would not likely have been able to analyze the Bill and produce a comprehensive critique in the short time available.

Another major advantage the Coalition has had in the fight for equal pay for work of equal value, besides the ongoing expertise needed to dissect and respond to complex legislation, has clearly been the consistent media coverage. Immediately after the lock-up that follows the tabling of a draft bill, the media are ready to receive the responses of lobby groups. The response must be made then, or you lose the critically important media needed to make your point on the issue.

There is no doubt it would have been a serious political blunder not to have had a clear message about the Coalition's position on Bill 154 after the lock-up. The problem with

this however, is that we basically had to decide how we would respond *before* the legislation was released. This was done by setting basic parameters about what would be acceptable and what would make the Coalition oppose the bill. This decision is critical since once a group comes out in favour of or against a particular legislative initiative, it is difficult to say later that it has changed its mind.

The EPC's discussions before the lock-up produced an overwhelming majority who supported a positive response to the legislation unless it was seriously flawed in terms of its coverage or the mandatory onus it placed on the employer. Thus as a representative of a long-term member group (Organized Working Women) of the Coalition, I personally felt bound in my workshop on Pay Equity at the Women and the State Conference, to avoid openly criticising the EPC's position that the legislation was "a good first step."

Thus in some ways the strengths of a broad-based coalition that has the political sophistication to speak in a strong and decisive voice at politically critical times, particularly to the media, can lead to what could be termed "barriers to debate." By having to have a clear and unified position--perhaps too quickly--a large Coalition tends to get locked into a position. In this sense we are, as Findlay notes, working on the State's timetable.

For EPC member groups that did not support the "good first step" position, there was of course the option of pulling out of the Coalition. Given the employer lobby against the legislation and the potentially serious consequences of harming the united push to get a pay equity bill passed, preferably before the end of the Liberal/NDP accord, this option would do much more harm than good. Individual groups, although supporting the "spirit" of the EPC's position, were certainly free to critique Bill 154 in their publications, as well as presenting briefs to the legislative committee studying the Bill.

Again, however, the reality of too many briefs could have resulted in a stalled or slow legislative committee that might still have been assessing the Bill as the accord ended, and with it the political will to implement pay equity. So again there was pressure not to be too expansive in one's criticism, for fear of extending the committee hearing for too long.

The Legalization of Women's Issues

It is quite clear that the legal nature of what has come to be known as pay equity presents a major barrier to discussions about the issue. Most people do not have legal training, and without it, it can be difficult to understand the ins and outs of how the legislation is supposed to work. As anyone knows, when it comes to legal matters you have to carefully read the fine print. Unfortunately, with Ontario's Pay Equity Act even lawyers are unsure about the intent and meaning of the fine print.

As Findlay points out, workshop participants may have felt uneasy about mastering the intricacies of pay equity, and therefore did not feel free to fully debate the wisdom of supporting this piece of legislation. Believe me, this unease will not be easily overcome. Pay equity in North America is a very legal and technical enterprise, and this fact creates serious barriers to communication. I'm not sure what can be done about this.

For one thing, it is important to do your own

personal and group studying and thinking about the issue and not leave it totally to one Coalition. It is far too much work for one group to handle. I mentioned earlier that one reason for some people wanting to accept Bill 154 was exhaustion. There have been many periods in the past two years when the EPC met two and three times a week for long, tedious meetings about legislative amendments. Given the complexity of the two Bills we were dealing with, these meetings left people, all of whom work at full time jobs, drained and often frustrated. It is easy to lose one's perspective when involved in such a process.

Now that it looks like Pay Equity is becoming a reality in Ontario, there will indeed be debates about it for years to come. Hopefully these debates will be informed, as we all learn more about what is in store for women. Perhaps the demand will become equal pay for work of equal value in a way that we can all understand--not a demand drowned in legalese and job evaluation techniques and methodology.



Nicaragua: Women Take Issue

More than 4,000 women from all over Nicaragua participated in AMNLAE's Third National Assembly on March 8, 1987. AMNLAE's leadership presented a balance of the last year's work with women, they approved a new organizational line for the Association and elected a new executive. At the same meeting the FSLN presented its manifesto on women's liberation in Nicaragua. In the months since then the discussion around women's struggle for equality in the context of the revolution has been taken up by almost every sector in the country, and is without doubt significant for feminist and socialist activists everywhere. Cayenne wants to share some of the background, discussion and issues.

Marie Lorenzo was able to interview Heliette Ehlers, secretary of the women's program of the Union of Agricultural Workers, (ATC--Asociacion de Trabajadores del Campo), who have been a major force behind some of the strategic changes in AMNLAE adopted at the March Assembly. She is now on AMNLAE's national executive.

We've included background on the recent changes in AMNLAE's political line and organization, as well as excerpts from the FSLN proclamation.

Finally, Sofia Montenegro's article will give you an idea of the way the debate is being taken up in the pages of Barricada.

Organizing Women: Rural Women Challenge AMNLAE

An Interview with Heliette Ehlers

Marie: Tell us about the debate around the role of AMNLAE that culminated in the organization's restructuring last March 8.

Heliette: The debate revolved around what the nature of a mass women's organization should be. Many say that women need our very own organization where we could discuss our own issues in order to transform our ideology. And others of us say, we do have to reflect on our issues by ourselves, but in order to act within each sector we have to have a space inside it, not be separated. We have to have an organized voice, AMNLAE, in our country. But we have to be involved where men are, too. That is where we have to do our ideological work with them, within the organization, not outside it. What good does it do for women to overcome the ideological problems of our subordination if it does not result in a change in men's attitudes?

We, [in the ATC] are often asked, what will happen to women when the war is over? How much power will we have in our society? Will we have so little power that men will be able to silence us again, or will we have such great power that we will be able to decide how we live, at our workplace and in society? Will we be sitting at the same table with men speaking for ourselves, or will we be

behind them talking through their voices?

When the war is over what will women do? Will men take over our jobs and send us home? I think this is an important consideration for our strategy to strengthen AMNLAE. I'm not sure what happened to women in Canada after the two wars, but I imagine that though thousands of women went to work, they did not organize a large women's





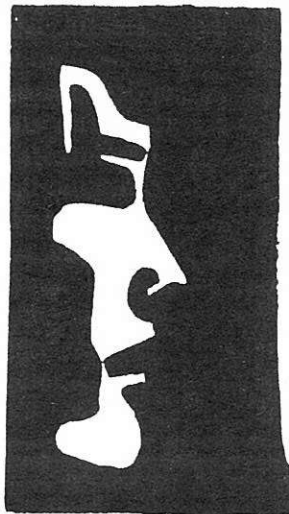
organization that could influence government politics. For us, a strong women's organization is strategically necessary. When the war is over, AMNLAE must be a force so great that it will be impossible to hold women back. But to have this power we must be united, we must all be represented and ready to defend all of our demands.

Nicaraguan women have advanced more in eight years than the USSR or Cuba in all their years. In Cuba, for example, they were content to have a very traditional women's organization, such as AMNLAE was in the beginning, in other words, outside the society. They did not involve themselves in the spheres of men, they remained separate, mobilizing women to ensure the survival of the revolution. They concentrated on getting the conditions for material progress in place, and subordinated all other interests to this goal.

We tell the Cubans, we have been able to combine

these things. In the middle of the aggression, we have been able to move the economy forward, without forgetting that there are women out there, women who need special conditions in order to work. For example, the first women activists in the Cuban revolution were in the unions. Then when the Women's Federation was created, the unions had no more use for the women. They became the responsibility of the Federation. So the women were marginalized. In the Soviet Union there is an enormous women's association. But women do not have a major influence in the running of Soviet society. We have more influence on the political, economic and social life of this country because we are organized within our sectors. It is a great temptation for women to have their own organization. But we may lose ourselves in that temptation.

When AMNLAE was originally conceived, its primary idea was that women should participate in building and defending the revolution in all its tasks.



But AMNLAE wasn't needed for that, because women participated whether AMNLAE was there or not. It's fundamental task now should be to identify the basic limitations to women's equal participation, not to solve them, but to facilitate a reflection on the problems by women themselves until they can move to resolve them for themselves. Women need to discuss among themselves: "What's the matter with me? Why am I not in the same position as my comrades? Why do I have to stay home more often than my husband? What's preventing me from working for the revolution? I have a double load and no one is helping me with that."

In the past, AMNLAE was not able to conduct this kind of reflection. It did not assume that role. It tried to encourage participation instead. But that was not what was needed. Since last March 8 I think AMNLAE is beginning this dynamic. But it has to overcome its tendency to believe women must participate without seeing that women *are* participating.

AMNLAE has made the mistake of preaching its "line" to local women. Its members had greatly developed their ability to speak, but had reduced their ability to hear. We in the ATC want to do the opposite. We are developing our ears, we want to hear what the women want to reflect on, not teach them our line. People may implement a line, but they don't know why they follow it. What must be done is let people develop a

line of their own and then they'll follow it knowingly.

For example, we cannot start by talking of the problems in the private sphere first, but rather we must start with the social sphere: in order to go to a union meeting, a women farmworker must struggle at home to convince the man to stay home with the kids. It doesn't work in the reverse; she is not going to fight with him first and then develop a desire to go to a union meeting. We have to start with the public to reach the private, because the private is harder to reach.

And I think AMNLAE has started to change. Certainly the ATC's participation on the national executive [of AMNLAE] is based on that belief. AMNLAE is beginning to facilitate a women's movement presence, a presence that women in the labouring sector, in the health sector, in the teaching sector, can all feel is their own. They need to feel that their problems won't be resolved by AMNLAE, but that they can resolve them themselves within their sector.

AMNLAE must also develop sufficient strength to confront the state and say: "This position taken by the government discriminates against women." "That law hurts women," or "We need this-and-this law." In other words, it must be the voice of women, coming from a position of power.

Marie: When and how were AMNLAE's approach and struc-

ture actually challenged, and are the changes now complete?

Heliette: For a number of years, women in the ATC have been saying that what AMNLAE must do is influence the women in the sectors. But that idea, though adopted, was not implemented. The same style of leadership continued--organizing women in separate groups to fight for their own concerns, to try to emancipate themselves outside the context of the rest of society. So the ATC argued that the women in the ATC are a chapter of AMNLAE

here inside the ATC. But AMNLAE did not recognize that what the women in the ATC were doing was AMNLAE work. So it was a separation--AMNLAE on the one hand, the ATC on the other. And there were difficulties on both sides, not just on AMNLAE's, we must be self-critical. ATC women also marginalized ourselves from AMNLAE, criticizing it as if it were unrelated to us, not our responsibility.

Then in September 1986, when we had the second assembly of women farmworkers, where AMNLAE women



participated, but only as observers, the *comandante* Victor Tirado called upon AMNLAE to make this work by women in the ATC, their work, too. He said, there's clearly something important going on here but AMNLAE has not yet realized its potential. So that's when the real discussion began about AMNLAE's work, the role of the sectors, AMNLAE's internal organization, etc.

What was interesting was that the FSLN National Directorate took on discussing this too. It was so controversial that AMNLAE organized a special conference to see what people thought. But the important thing is that we did not let happen to us what often happens in other women's movements, which is that the different tendencies split so much that they do not succeed in reaching a common

position. We argued that the women's liberation movement is like an idea, an idea that penetrates the sectors and that the sectors then take up as their own work. It should not be a group which comes along and imposes ideas which may even be contrary to the work actually being carried out in the sector. AMNLAE has to be that idea of women's liberation that finds its place among the daily tasks of women, finds the contradictions in those tasks, formulates the demands of the women and figures out how to fight for them. So that women are not only transforming themselves, but also their environment--the productive environment, the reproductive environment, the commercial environment, wherever they are. And this

is what was approved [in AMNLAE's convention] on March 8, 1987.

A national committee of AMNLAE was formed that had a representative from every organization that was working with women. The ATC is there, FETSALUD [the Healthworkers' Union], the Union of Professional Workers, the Industrial Workers' Union...there still isn't representation from *all* the sectors, but that's our intention.

Marie: How was AMNLAE previously organized?

Heliette: It was organized by regions and local chapters. There was a national executive of six or seven women, and the structure was from the top down. For example, in 1980, a task set by AMNLAE was to collect bottles for tomato sauce. There were thousands of women, out in the cooperatives, in the rural sector, that did not feel that was their most important issue.

Now AMNLAE has begun to function in this new way. UNAG [Union of Cooperative Workers] recently had a women's conference, in the ATC we held our third women's assembly in September of this year, in the health sector the women are starting to organize themselves, and all this is AMNLAE's work. The sum of all these demands are the demands of AMNLAE, the line AMNLAE must carry out.

So we have been talking about not celebrating AMNLAE's 10th anniversary this September as we usually do. The usual prac-



tice is to have a convention during which AMNLAE reviews its work over the year and the next year's line of work is determined. This year we are proposing that we wait to hold a national assembly until all the sectors are able to contribute to it. We want all the women from the base, the women that are transforming their roles at the grassroots, to contribute. And that will take some time. The ATC has been doing a lot of work on this and is way ahead, but other organizations are just beginning.

We have to wait so that at a national assembly we can discuss the essentials. Because this convention will set the national demands for the year for AMNLAE. So we need every sector to have women there to discuss, to theorize and from that to go to the practice. And we need not only women representing all the sectors, but also those women that have been breaking traditions, for example, the only woman pilot in the country must be incorporated into that assembly. Those women are doing things we never imagined that women could do, and they must meet with other women, because they are so isolated and they need replenishment. For example, the only woman pilot is in a very difficult position and she needs to--to recharge her batteries, as we say here.

Marie: How has the FSLN responded to this situation?

Heliette: Well, in the first place, we in AMNLAE

consider the FSLN to be *our* party, just as in the ATC we consider them to be our party. We support the program of the government because we believe it best represents the interests of the working class. Every party in Nicaragua has a women's group, the Socialists, the Marxist-Leninists. But the FSLN is the party that has the most women incorporated into its political activity....

So on March 8, the FSLN presented its line in support of AMNLAE, saying they supported the representation of the sectors in AMNLAE, and so on. For us the fact that the FSLN said this was a great strike against the resistance of male comrades to change. In the majority of countries where there have been revolutions, or even in advanced capitalist countries, governments have been known to say that when everything is in place then we will *give* women--very patronizingly--what they want/need. And the FSLN said very clearly, we are not going to leave the struggle for women's emancipation until the material conditions are exactly ripe, we are starting right now.

Many of our comrades would tell us that talking about women's needs and demands was selfish in this stage where we have to take up the defence of our country. But the National Directorate endorsed what we have been fighting for, that we must start working on the issue of women right now, not 100 years from now. So this is a mortal blow to all



those that did not agree. Now all FSLN militants must uphold these positions. As Milu Vargas said recently in a meeting, "Since the FSLN's pronouncement, *machismo* has gone underground in Nicaragua." They have to go underground because they know that any woman may jump on them!

So to follow the line of the FSLN now, is to forget about marginal activities for women and start taking on the ideological struggle around this society's values. We won against *somocismo*, but the ideological battle is yet to be started. We are winning against the *contras*, but the battle that has to do with ideas is so difficult! It takes a long time. We are living in a revolution but we still live within traditional frameworks. This work belongs to everyone in society, but it is to women, who are doubly exploited, doubly discriminated, doubly oppressed, that it means the most.

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The FSLN Takes a Stand

Reprinted from Barricada International, March 26, 1987

A small cross-section of Nicaraguan women gathered on March 8, in a sports arena in the capital, to celebrate International Women's Day-- and something else of great importance: the recognition that *machismo* and other forms of discrimination against women inhibit the development of the whole society. They were celebrating also the formal promise of the unions, grassroots organizations and enlightened sectors of society that they will fight to eradicate oppressive practices and promote women's participation in every sector of society.

To do this meant overcoming the temptation of setting aside certain issues (such as women's rights) until the war is over. Women had presented their demands at FSLN strategy meetings for the 1984 general elections; at the public forums about the Constitution; and in FSLN-initiated consultations with women. In the Sandinista Assembly (advisory body of the National Directorate) a special September 1986 session was devoted to compiling all the information collected at private and public meetings and union meetings (both rural and urban), and in the Constitutional forums.

The principles read by Comandante Bayardo Arce (deputy coordinator of the FSLN executive committee) were the fruit of this long

process of meetings with the bases and the leadership of the Party.

The proclamation gives an overview of the history of Nicaraguan women and enumerates the following nine principles of the FSLN.

The FSLN recognizes that:

1. Nicaraguan women have been socially subordinated over and above the discrimination to which all working people were subjected;

2. the revolutionary triumph and the establishment of popular power opened up the possibility of transcending that situation.

3. One of the goals of the FSLN is to eliminate discrimination against women and bring about their full integration into society.

4. The fundamental task of the whole population, at this time, is the defence of the Revolution. The struggle against discrimination of women cannot be separated from the question of defence.

5. The solution to the problems of women concerns the whole of society.

6. All offices and members of the FSLN, all grassroots, social and labour organizations, must make a sweeping program to include women, to work for their concerns and to combat all forms of discrimination and oppression.

7. The family is the basic unit of society, guaranteeing its biological reproduction and the constancy of its principles and values.

8. The FSLN upholds its decision to carry on the struggle to abolish

discriminatory laws and policies and the manifestations of *machismo* and repression;

9. The Luisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association (AMNLAE) is precisely the organization through which revolutionary women can contribute to the mobilization of all women. In AMNLAE, Nicaraguan women can identify the obstacles to their emancipation, express their most pressing needs, and propose solutions.

There was long, general, spontaneous applause when the need to share housework and develop solidarity within couples was mentioned. "A few years ago that would never have occurred to me," murmured one of the women attending, as Bayardo spoke of solidarity within the couple.



A New Structure and Role for AMNLAE

[Past] AMNLAE coordinator Ruth Marcenaro gave an evaluation of the organization's seven-year history. Through a process of self-criticism, AMNLAE recognized that it has isolated itself from society, and has not successfully reflected the specific concerns of women.

But everything in the balance is not negative, said Marcenaro: "We helped increase the social base of the Revolution and raise the level of political consciousness, patriotism and anti-imperialism in the Nicaraguan people."

The Assembly also approved the new organiz-

ational structure of AMNLAE. The highest authority, the three-member national executive committee, was replaced by a 9-woman committee, including Lea Guido, ex-health minister and the new AMNLAE secretary general, Patricia Lindo, formerly AMNLAE's director of public information; Ivonne Siu, of the governmental Women's Affairs Office; Martha Munguia, prominent agricultural worker from the north of the country; Silvia McEwans, of Managua; Benigna Mendiola, representative of small farmers and ranchers; Glenda Monterrey of the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST); Heliette Ehlers, of the Union of Agricultural Workers (ATC); and Iris Montenegro of the

Health Workers Federation.

AMNLAE has been trying to create the most representative committee possible, with special attention given to the areas in which women play a decisive role. The national assembly will be the governing body, and when this is in recess, the national committee will direct activities. Regional assemblies will be formed throughout the country, and their task will be to involve and incorporate women from all sectors of their region.

The idea is to go to the roots, wherever women are found, and then to search out, investigate and analyze the obstacles they come up against.

Many are Called but Few are Chosen

Sofia Montenegro
Managua

Reprinted from Barricada International, August 27, 1987

Clearly, we Nicaraguans have moved ahead and achieved important victories in all areas in the last eight years. Perhaps we owe thanks to some extent to the war and the economy of survival because they have accelerated our integration and organization and permitted us to overcome obstacles which would otherwise persist for decades.

It is no accident that the most sustained progress has been in the agricultural sector where you find the greatest number of economically active people and where the Union of Agricultural Workers (ATC) has consistently worked to increase the number of women in the

work force. It was one of the first organizations to set up a women's office.

Rural Nicaragua is ahead of the cities in these matters. This is not because there are too few women workers in the city or because AMNLAE has not promoted the rights of women and women workers. It is because we are not yet a significant force in the labour movement. We women may ask what the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST) has done to emulate the ATC, but we should really ask what we can do for ourselves. There are many factors involved here, but we must be clear about two of them. In order to raise our status we must gain a certain amount of power. If we take power in the unions we will have the



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means to fight against the discriminatory attitudes and policies that make it hard for us to get training, protect our jobs and get promotions. It means having the power to create the conditions not only to increase productivity but also to make certain that the achievement of women's rights is seen as a measure of a union's competence.

As long as union leadership remains exclusively in the hands of males or--even worse--male chauvinists, or in the hands of women who lack a consciousness of themselves as women there will be little interest in our concerns. Experience has shown that our concerns are always considered "secondary," "out of place," "divergent" or whatever labels are used to block change.

Taking power and convincing men that it is in their interest to fight for our rights in the workplace are necessary steps if we are to overcome obstacles that block women's full participation in society.

This is what will make the difference when, for example, it comes to deciding whether to build a recreation centre (which only the men have time to use because the women are at home working a second or third shift of housework and childcare) or to build a childcare centre for everyone, where men could also bring their children and allow those mothers to work.

Changing the distribution of power, incorporating enlightened men and women into union leadership, this is what will ensure



that our rights are taken seriously in the workplace; this will bring us closer to emancipation.

But everything depends on the development of our "will to take power"; and this is something that women do not have. One of the characteristics of our oppression is that of servitude. This means an inculcated attitude of submission, timidity and dependence toward men. This attitude arises in the home and extends to public life, an area from which we traditionally have been excluded--excluded, that is, from positions of responsibility, not from work.

Our reaction to positions of leadership is almost primitive. Since we have not had the opportunities to develop these skills, inequality persists even when we have the chance to be leaders. Union work provides an excellent way to train union leaders. But as if things weren't hard enough already, lack of confidence in ourselves and in other women leads us to

compete with each other for men and their economic support, and makes it difficult for us to accept any woman of extraordinary capacities.

To a great extent this explains why in places where the great majority of the workers are women, the few men there are--some of whom are incorrigible chauvinists--are elected to leadership positions. Why should we be surprised, then, to find ourselves powerless and our male friends talking about "the inscrutable female psychology"?

The goal is to continually increase the number of outstanding and politically aware women holding positions of union leadership. But this requires women to make yet one more effort in time, dedication and perseverance to get the vote of their sisters (to say nothing of men).

More and more the political and ideological work of AMNLAE is necessary to make women more militant and to pull down the invisible wall of ideas--fears, myths, prejudices--which stand in our way.

The mass organizations of the FSLN ought to incorporate into their political agenda the proclamation of the National Directorate relating to women so the unions will put these ideas into practice at every level.

Every man, and particularly every politically-conscious woman, must work as a militant activist to achieve full social equality for women and support the work of AMNLAE. This way we will all win.

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In and Against the European Left: Socialist Feminists Get Organized

Reprinted from *Feminist Review*, Summer 1987.

Melissa Benn

Although it was written for English socialist feminists, Cayenne felt that this article deserved better circulation in Canada, and that the questions raised by Melissa Benn are relevant for our readers. It would be extremely interesting to see some debate in these pages, based on reflections from socialist feminists in Canada about the current state of our politics and practice. Where do we stand after 10 years of thought and action? What are the current strategic priorities? What should they be?

Melissa Benn is a journalist, and lives in London.

As part of what seems to be a renewed "Europeanization" of left politics, socialist feminists have begun meeting regularly on a European level. There was a weekend meeting in Copenhagen in 1985, and one in Hamburg last November. This new initiative is now formally called The European Forum of Socialist Feminists, and will be having a third get-together in Spain in late 1987.

The idea for the Copenhagen Forum came out of a seminar held in 1984 among women working on the German Marxist journal *Das Argument*. Nora Rathzel, who is on the editorial board of the journal told me: "our idea was first of all to break our own isolation as socialist feminists in West

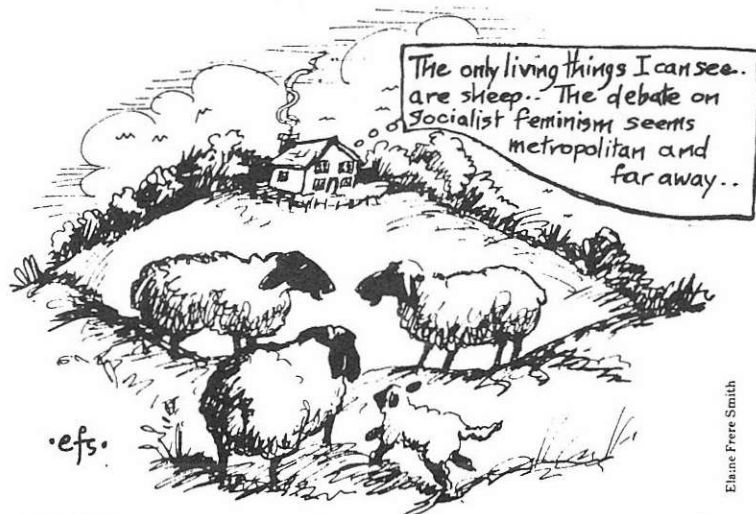
Germany. We are in a weak position here. We had contact with socialist feminists in Italy, Denmark, and England and we wanted to broaden contacts, look at new perspectives, have an opportunity to discuss our concepts."

The women on *Das Argument* seem a politically fierce and formidable group. Within their own journal they produce two issues a year autonomously as women (something not so much unthinkable as not-thought-of within British politics: why don't *New Socialist* or *Marxism Today* do the same?). They are determined that feminism should make a proper "intervention" on the left, and that one place to make that intervention is now, in Europe. Frigga Haug, also of *Das Argument*, told me: "Basically the left--by which I mean the Italian and some English men, ... have been meeting. They met in Vienna and then

Hamburg in 1984 and 1985. Ingrao, the theoretician of the Italian communists, and very influential in all this, talks of the importance of the new social movement, the importance of the grassroots. He talks of such concepts as *basis-demokratie* (roughly translated: grassroots democracy), the notion of "mutual strengthening" between different fragments. He wants to see all the new social movements joining this left, enlarging the workers' movement. Yet when all these meetings were held, the left never invited the women's movement. It was all male."

The Romance of Mutual Recognition

Whatever the strategy behind the calling of the Forum(s), women who were at Copenhagen and Hamburg talk more of the pleasure and excitement there was in just meeting.



Elaine Freer Smith

'All I'm saying is, that until rams + ewes are equal, agricultural reform is an irrelevance.'

For British socialist feminists--whose own politics is in such torpor--there was a sense of relief and an injection of new enthusiasm. Lynne Segal, a member of the *Feminist Review* collective, described Hamburg "as like an early 1970s conference, warm and friendly and exciting. Completely new women doing completely new things." Sue Lees and Mary McIntosh, who were both at Copenhagen, described "a sense of warmth, fun, trust and a shared history of feminism of the last ten to fifteen years."

But is it a very particular history? Overwhelmingly white and academic, the Forum women (as I shall call them) mostly come from the political generation of 1968 (in the symbolic if not the literal sense). The largest contingent at both Copenhagen and Hamburg was from Germany. There were a lot of English women at Hamburg, sizable groups from Denmark, Austria, Spain and Italy, and some individuals from Norway, Finland, Northern Ireland and France. Participants were to a certain extent self-selected by the fact that all the proceedings were conducted in English, and it takes some money, or backing (like

an academic institution), to pay travel costs. The problems of language and resources (or lack of them) meant there was virtually no representation from Europe's immigrant or black communities. Echoing recent debates within British feminism, the Forum saw white women talking to white women about the absence of women who weren't white, simultaneously mourning but paralysed by that fact.

So what kind of issues did the Forum(s) discuss? I wasn't at either Forum, but I have talked to many of the women who were and read all the conference papers available. I decided, from this, to pick out three questions which the Forum attempted to answer in some way or other, and which reflect the most interesting discussions. Firstly, what has happened to feminism in western Europe: is it in decline? Secondly, how should socialist feminists be approaching questions of women's work in a rapidly changing capitalist economy? And thirdly, what approach should women now be taking to the problem of political power?

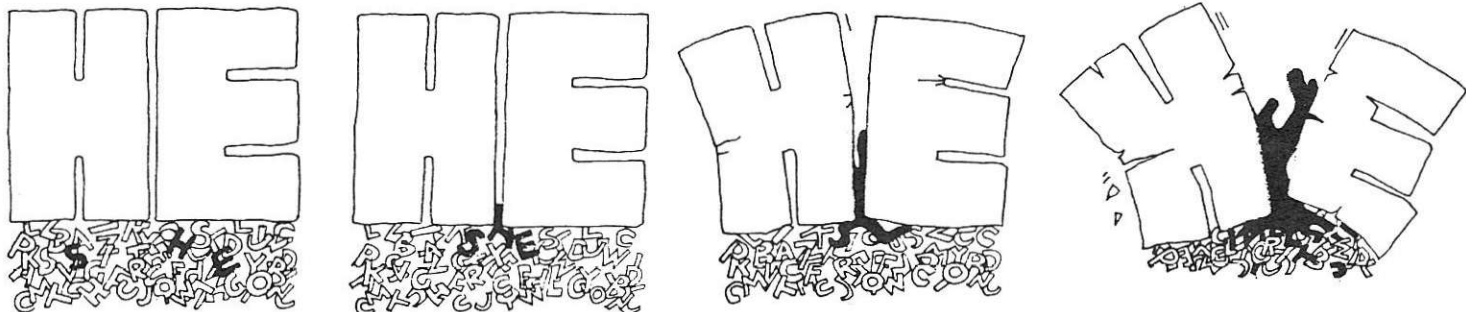
Is Feminism Dead?

On the first question--is feminism in decline?--the

answer seemed to be: feminism is Everywhere and Nowhere. It is Everywhere in its diverse and manifold projects, in the sometimes tricky way it has taken root in public and even conservative consciousness, in the areas of social and public action now influenced by it, and so on. But it is also Nowhere in the sense of its no longer being a publicly coherent and identifiable "movement" as it might be said to have been a decade ago in so many western European countries.

Some of the German women identified this political "nowhereness" as a sort of defeatism which itself has to be defeated. For instance, Frigga Haug told me: "Everyone talks of feminism as dead. When a woman stands up at a women's meeting in Germany and says that, everyone claps. It's a kind of political masochism."

It was generally agreed that the tension between radical and socialist feminism has subsided into separate development: there has been a flowering of "cultural" feminism, linked to an uncovering and celebration of a specifically feminine identity. Feminists now talk much more of the womanly virtues (nurturing, peacefulness,



creativity) than they did a decade ago. Some socialist feminists see this as a backward step, a psychologizing of women's nature which neglects how much material factors shape femininity. And the German women at the Forum were constantly pointing out how vulnerable this has made feminism to a clever new right. Frigga Haug wrote about this in a recent *New Left Review* article. In Germany "the [right wing] Christian Democrats have proceeded to draw up a new policy on the family and women. Ingratiatingly worded in feminist language, it was greeted by parts of the women's movement as 'exceptionally progressive.' It [the policy] talks of a feminization of society--about feminine strength and virtues, about revaluing housework and reinstating the ethos of family life."

The political forms which give expression to the new feminisms are various. Roberta Tattfiore, a journalist on the left/feminist Italian magazine *Noi Donne*, told me: "The great visibility of the movement

has died...there has been a split in a lot of women's centres...into cultural politics, and a lot of women are doing women's studies, but not institutionally... It's what would you call... self-help, I suppose." In France, the cultural, creative and psychoanalytic work of Cixous and Irigaray is vastly influential. In England, cultural feminism is evident at Greenham, in all the writing, reading, publishing and craft projects that women have entered. In the German-speaking countries (Austria, Switzerland, Germany) there has been a big revival of an intellectual feminism. Nora Rathzel told me: "In about ten cities in West Germany, Austria and Switzerland, women are trying to build up research groups in which they combine the exploration of their theory with their experience, combine Marxism with women's liberation." While cultural feminism flourishes, too, in Southern European and Catholic countries, this co-exists with campaigns for more basic rights, like the right to a legal abortion. In Spain and Ireland abortion rights are still a major focus of the women's movement. At Hamburg, women were told of how women still die in Spain from illegal and backstreet abortions or fly out in planeloads to England (23,000 Spanish women came to London in 1983 alone). In Ireland, 10,000 women a year leave the country for abortions. And in Spain there are a whole host of ideologies and practices, in areas like



family law, sexuality and prostitution, which have been carried over from the Franco era.

A Question of Time

"Women and the Restructuring of Labour" was the main theme of the Hamburg Forum. Part of this restructuring process, it is now generally acknowledged, is that while women have become wage dependent in the European economies, the form their work takes is increasingly part-time and "flexible": thus, they teeter, ever more unsafe, unskilled and underpaid, at the edge of the labour market. How can this change?

Carla Ravaioli, a member of the Italian Communist Party, set out the problems in an interesting way in her paper "Women and Time." She pointed out how greedily the labour market swallows up "human time," how the eight-hour day in fact disguises a much longer day, a day of possibly fifteen hours, when meals, transportation, and so on are taken into account. But this "productive" time, if



Jean Mayer

it is to be efficient, needs "reproductive time" behind it; that is, the emotional and physical labour that sends a worker out into the market. Women are almost solely responsible for "reproductive time," which is of course why their own relationship to the labour market is so weak. Firstly, women simply have less time to offer to the labour market. Secondly, they come to the market skilled in "reproductive" rather than productive functions, a fact which is then replicated in the kinds of jobs they do. Thirdly, they are the first to come off the market when "reproductive" skills (looking after children, tending parents and so on) are required. In addition, women have a subjective resistance to the world of work. Ravaioli says: "This idea of finding one's exclusive realization through work, according to the logic of male society, that is according to the concept of the absolute prevalence of production values, is something women do refuse...throughout history, they have learned the importance and the richness of the values of relationships that are part of the reproductive process and of daily life." The answer, according to Ravaioli, is a "drastic" reduction of work time (to six hours a day) for all workers, male and female, and "the impartial distribution of non-automatized work among all adult citizens." This will then allow a genuine division of domestic labour between men and women, and the chance for

both men and women to find satisfying work.

Ravaioli was very critical, as were most of the women at Hamburg, of the pattern of "flexible" working increasingly undertaken by women. While on the surface appearing to be a solution to women's double time problems, flexible working in reality makes women subject to increased employer exploitation: the individualization of working time undermines collectivity; new technology can be used to maximum advantage by having two part-time workers working one machine, and short hours means women escape the protection of rights legislation and benefit entitlement.

In a paper on "Women, Training, Jobs and Men," Cynthia Cockburn talked about new ways of looking at the rationale of women's choices concerning work and time in the context of the new Youth Training (YTS) scheme currently operating in Britain. A third of a million young people are on YTS schemes, and almost 80 per cent of young women on YTS are on office, sales, service or caring placements: traditional women's work. Why? "Because women aren't stupid. They are choosing in the light of a wide range of factors, not just work. These are gendered choices. Women (and men) pay a high social price for entering a gender contrary job." And women are recognizing their different relationship to time early on. They know "they are unlikely to meet men with time for looking

after [kids, or the ill...]" We should define the problem as being not simply "getting women non-traditional skills" but enabling young women to have *everything* they want--good jobs and training *and* relationships, children and so on.

The Politics of "In and Against"

The third thing the Forum talked a lot about was politics and power. There was general agreement that part of the socialist feminist project is to weld some kind of a relationship between "direct" forms of democracy (that is, the way feminism does its politics) with "representative" democracy (the institutions of state and power in society). But as Cynthia Cockburn told me: "Women who come to the Forum are by definition either in a party of the left or out of it. We all have some relation to organized politics. Those who are in parties may be socialist or communist. Of those within parties, some are more oppositional than others. In the Forum there is always a tendency for the difference to flare up into recrimination. But in Hamburg it was possible to come to an agreement early on in the meeting that we meet across that difference and don't harp on it."

Socialist feminist strategies seem to vary dramatically, according to the historical and political factors that have shaped each country and left politics within it. In Italy, women in the PCI (Italian Communist Party)

have fused what might be seen as the radical feminist emphasis on feminine identity and "difference" with their socialism via the politics of autonomy. Maria Luisa Boccia, a feminist activist within the PCI, told me: "In the early 1970s all women were talking about was the concept of "oppression" and rectifying that, but now we have to do more. We have to bring a feminine identity into society, challenge the assertion of the masculine identity...And we can only do that through autonomy. Women in the Communist Party are now demanding a separate policy, organization and commissions...We have just produced a document, a discussion document which we want to circulate to all Italian women and then draw up a manifesto..."

Do they have links with other European feminists or community women?

"We have no links with women in the PCF (French Communist Party), for instance, but we have more links with French philosophical and analytical feminists like Irigaray, and German women in the SPD. We are interested in talking to women in all parties--and not necessarily just socialist parties."

In France, socialist women are now also making links across the parties after their failure to set up an autonomous "current" within the French Socialist Party. "Courant G"--as the feminist grouping was called--was set up in 1979. They had their own paper *Mignonnes, allons voir sous*

la rose--"Little ones, let's look under the rose" (the rose is the French Socialist Party's symbol). But demands for an autonomous structure within the party were squashed by the Socialist Party leadership, and in April 1984 both the magazine and the "Courant" were terminated. Socialist women have now started the Feminist Association for an Alternative Policy (AFPA), which is independent of all parties and includes socialist, communist and radical left women. Luce Sirkis, involved with this new cross-party initiative, says: "Our position is a very uncomfortable one, because the whole group is living the contradiction of co-operating with political institutions and working within the women's movement at the same time."

In Finland, a split in the Communist Party (which mirrors the split in the British Communist Party between "Stalinists" and "Euros") has resulted in a new phenomenon called "communist feminism." Leena Alanen, herself in the CP, told me: "During the last three or four years, something like an autonomous women's movement has made an appearance within the Communist Party. When a split was threatened, women from different factions came spontaneously together to discuss the situation and found that on a grassroots level we could act for common aims . . . Although in the end the split was not avoided, something else was gained: a new consciousness and culture for communist women. We even at one point attacked, altogether, a



meeting of the central committee of the Finnish Communist Party."

Two specific political initiatives were discussed at the Forum(s): the establishment of women's "quotas" in elective politics, and the phenomenon of *Weiberrate*, or "women's councils." Quotas have been most successful in the social democratic states of Schandinavia, where feminists have been campaigning for them for many years. Beatrice Halsaa from Norway told the Hamburg Forum that quotas have been established in the Liberal Party and the Socialist Left Party since 1973-74. And in 1984 even the Labour Party gave in. "The results," she said, "were a clear feminization of Parliament after the 1985 General Election, with women now occupying 27 per cent of seats . . . Unthinkable a decade ago." Norway has a woman Prime Minister and eight women cabinet ministers. It will be interesting to see the long-term effects of this feminization.

Forum women witnessed for themselves the effect of quotas during the Hamburg weekend: an all-women Greens list were fighting in the local elections. The women got a respectable 10.4 per cent of the vote. Jeanne Gregory from Britain said: "There was an exciting political atmosphere . . . to be there and see it happen." And Lynne Segal said: "It made you realize just how dull English politics are and how that's something to do with PR. It made you think again about PR."

The nearest equivalent we would have to *Weiberrate* would be those local authority women's committees which co-opt women from outside the Labour Party, except that *Weiberrate* by definition operate outside the local state. The *Weiberrate*--there are now three or four in the German-speaking countries--represent an attempt to get all currents of feminism (radical/revolutionary/socialist feminism) working together but *directed* at centres of political power. The West Berlin *Weiberrat*, for example, has become involved in diverse campaigns, some with a distinct troubleshooting edge to them. For instance, they were involved in the struggle to get women within the Green/Alternative party nominated as candidates. They were part of the framing of a separate women's list for local elections in Berlin, and they have been involved in setting up a Commission for the Equality of Women, a grassroots campaigning body.

So what has come out of these Forum meetings? The idea of the *Das Argument* women was to "organize" European socialist feminist women: they wanted distinct structures and a manifesto to emerge from the Forum get-togethers, neither of which has yet happened. Other Forum women are more relaxed about what is happening. Cynthia Cockburn says: "I'm a bit unclear (and lazy too) about how we "organize" in Europe. It's great when people have that vision. But I don't think if it's not happening then



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it's not worth meeting. In this world it is men who do the travelling. They are so much more mobile, have so many more forums than women do--military, financial, they even have spy rings! Whereas it's rare for women to have any kind of international forum, organized by and for us."

For the moment, then, it seems that the Forum will remain principally an information and idea-sharing exercise. Women there pointed out to me how useful it was to recognize that feminism in every western European country experiences the same contradiction: that which exists between needing to develop a separate women's politics while simultaneously making an intervention in organized politics, in order to change the world, rather than simply to survive within it.

It would be great for British socialist feminists if at least some of the energy generated at the Forum, some of the contacts made, some of the ideas swapped, could start to enliven socialist feminist politics over here. It really needs it.

★

Irish Women Denied Right to Information

Linda Briskin
Toronto

In Ireland the struggle for fertility control has been a long and difficult one. Abortion is illegal. Contraception only became legal in 1979, after a long-drawn-out struggle by the Irish women's movement. Access to choice in contraceptive method is limited for many rural and working-class women, and many Catholic doctors and pharmacists refuse to provide artificial birth control. In 1983 an anti-abortion constitutional amendment was passed by 66% of those who voted, which strengthened the already existing abortion laws and made prohibition on abortion absolute. Even the two situations in which abortion is allowed by the Catholic Church, ectopic pregnancy and uterine cancer, are technically illegal, although hospitals continue to perform these procedures.

The 1,200 women at the Third International Inter-disciplinary Congress on Women held in Dublin in July 1987, including a group of seventy Canadian women of which I was part, were called upon to demonstrate to "Defend the Women's Clinics." Their closure was a result of a High Court Ruling in response to a challenge by an extreme right-wing Catholic organization, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, to the pregnancy counselling service of two Dublin women's clinics.

Irish Women Fight for Access, Information, Choice.



photo by Derel Spiers

Since July 1983, one of these clinics, Open Line Counselling, has helped more than 2,000 women with the problem of unwanted pregnancy. As a result of their closure, Irish women who wish to have an abortion cannot receive counselling in Ireland, but often must go alone to Britain. Ireland is the only country in Europe where women are denied *information* on abortion.

In the estimation of Irish feminists, the ruling marks a watershed in the attacks on women's rights. It states that abortion is "evil and wrong in every sense" and that the right-to-life of the fetus must be given statutory protection from the moment of conception.

Because of the emphasis in the ruling on the rights of the fetus over women's rights, charges against women who have abortions become a real possibility. Under the Offences

Against the Persons Act (1861) a woman attempting to abort herself faces life imprisonment, and anyone helping her to procure an abortion faces a sentence of five years. The High Court Ruling reaffirms this Act and represents one of the strongest anti-abortion laws to be found anywhere in the world.

On Thursday July 10, I set out to find the Department of Justice at 22 St. Stephen's Green, the location of the demonstration to support the women's clinics. I was a few minutes late winding my way through unfamiliar Dublin streets, but when I arrived I was dismayed to find a small gathering of six people attempting to staple some rather large signs to posts with a wholly inadequate stapler. The idea that such an attack on women would mobilize only a few women from the more than a thousand conference delegates to the Congress horrified me. But grad-

ually a small group gathered, perhaps a 100, lazily watched by two policemen.

The Irish organizers distributed large signs each with a letter spelling out "DEFEND THE CLINICS" and we lined up in front of the massive faceless modern gray building. Women were invited to speak about the situation of reproductive rights in their countries. Few came forward and those that did spoke mostly of attack and restrictions. It dawned on me as I stood there that Canadian women, despite inequality of access and attacks by the religious right, had made some gains over the years. I spoke to the group about the Toronto Abortion Clinic open for four years despite the legal challenges, of the Marion Powell report, which despite its limitations affirms the right of women to equal services, and of the struggle in Quebec which netted Morgenthaler three acquittals and the women of Quebec a network of women's clinics which provide a range of services including abortions. In some ways that international context and the serious attack faced by Irish women allowed me to see our gains in a new light.

Eventually our small band began the trek back to Trinity College. Although unplanned and illegal, we took to the street, much to the surprise of two on-looking policemen. We marched down Grafton Street, the main shopping promenade in Dublin, still crowded for the lunch hour. When we reached the entrance of

Trinity College which faces a major traffic circle, an inspired suggestion led to us sitting down on the road and stopping the traffic coming at us from a startling number of directions.

Later the Irish organizers of the demonstration told me it was the most spirited reproductive rights demonstration they had ever seen in Dublin, and perhaps one of the largest! They hope that the Irish women's movement, together with international feminist pressure, and pressure from the European Economic Community (EEC) which operates on the UN principle of freedom of

information of all citizens regardless of national frontiers (in the UN Convention of Human Rights), will lead to the Ruling being overturned.

Sources :

Ruth Riddick. *Non-directive Pregnancy Counselling and the Law in the Republic of Ireland*. Dublin: "Defend the Women's Clinics," Leaflet, nd.

More information from, and letters of support to, Defend the Clinics Campaign, 6 Crowe St., Dublin 2, Ireland.

*



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10-YEARS

Housebroken

Leona Gom, NeWest Press: Edmonton, 1986

Cynthia Flood
Vancouver

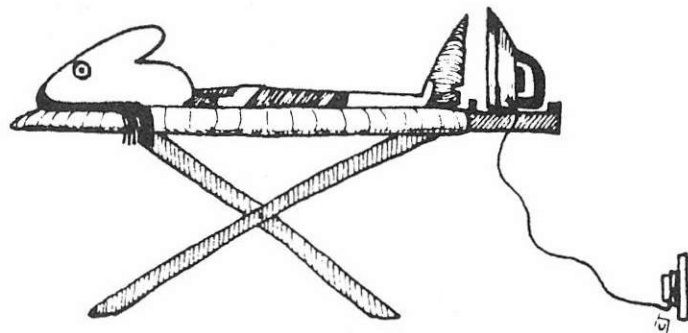
Leona Gom's poetry (*Land of the Peace*, *NorthBound*) is already well-known for its precisely expressed emotion, humour, and evocation of landscape, and many readers have been looking forward to the publication of her first novel. *Housebroken* has all the attributes of Gom's poetry. In addition, the commodious framework of the novel enables her to explore, through the sad lives of her characters, many interrelated issues of interest to feminists. It is an absorbing and thoughtful book.

Set in Chilliwack, B.C. (a Fraser Valley town whose ugliness Gom describes exactly), *Housebroken* is told by once-divorced and once-widowed Ellen, who is now in her early forties, trying to define herself and her life's purpose. In the course of her relationships with her neighbours, Susan and Whitman, Ellen analyses their lives and hers, both past and present. She asks how people become what they are, and especially, how friendship between women is nurtured or blighted; why women depend on men and why men desire that dependence; how people deceive themselves and others about their history, needs and beliefs; what meanings sexual connections do and don't have; what people feel about the locations and physical structures of the lives they live.

That the novel does not sink beneath the weight of these issues indicates Gom's skill in characterization. Ellen in particular, is fully developed. Readers learn her essential qualities by seeing how they express themselves in her connections with Susan and Whitman, and we can also see previously un-lived aspects of this woman come into being. Her politics, in the broadest sense, and her feelings about her body, are very well presented, as is her transitional stage of life; Ellen is in one of those dreadful periods of flux which turn out to have been full of design, invisible till seen in retrospect. Whose design? and how made? are yet other questions posed by *Housebroken*. They directly concern agoraphobic Susan; although we have multiple sources of information about her, she is not as alive as Ellen, fictionally speaking. She is more like a puzzle the reader wants to solve. Her husband, Whitman, arouses other desires--to shake, to

give a swift kick. But he is wildly and ridiculously alive, and along with Susan and Ellen produces a three-way connection whose tangles and depths and internal contradictions is also alive.

The techniques Gom has employed to tell her story lie comfortably within the traditions of mainstream realism, and she uses them well. Ellen as first-person narrator looks back over a critical period of her life, which has culminated in her



Cath Jackson

friend Susan's death. Gom gives access to the individual and joint aspects of the principle characters by means of the flashbacks and by incorporating Susan's journals, letters, radio play, poems and stories. Present-time scenes in the period following Susan's death flesh out our perceptions of Whitman and Ellen, and bring the plot to its conclusion, which offers at last a breath of hope for the narrator's future. Throughout, extensive and effective dialogue and interior monologue take the fiction forward. It's a pleasure to read a novel so well-constructed.

The only point at which the design is less than satisfactory is at the

end. There, reversals and revelations pile up with too much speed. A more measured pace would make Ellen's assessment of her experiences feel more solid.

For me, two aspects of *Housebroken* are of special interest. The first is its exploration of the links between the individual woman and her setting. There is a horrible correspondence between Susan's shapeless, confused existence, with its attendant terrors, and the dingy grimness of the town where she lives. She has no relation with the industrial and commercial *raison d'être* of that town, except as a female consumer.

Ellen, exiled from Vancouver, has few ways of

connecting socially in her new 'home', for as a middle aged wife and widow, the town is not designed for her. She must struggle to find ways of being in it, and of maintaining even thin ties with city friends like Brenda. With Brenda she journeys north briefly, and I can't think it is coincidence that Gom establishes the Peace River country as a source of truth about Susan's history and as the source of much of that history's pain.

The second particularly noteworthy aspect of this novel is political. There is now, in English anyway, a body of modern fiction in which feminist characters are dominant and feminist values explicit. Gom has taken a different route, and created a central character whose politics are liberal, while her own perspective is considerably more radical. The result for the reader is a binocular vision. We see what Ellen sees, but also we see far more. Such a two-layered perspective takes skill of a high order to produce. It also challenges readers whose political persuasions are left-wing and feminist, because Ellen and Susan show us both the far-reaching influence of our movement and their sad limitation. Our analyses are not compelling for Ellen; and Susan rides always so close to the pit of despair that she scarcely has eyes or energy for the larger world. *Housebroken* shows us that, although we may have begun to break down the house, we are a long way from building anew. *



The Witches of Eastwick

Directed by George Miller.

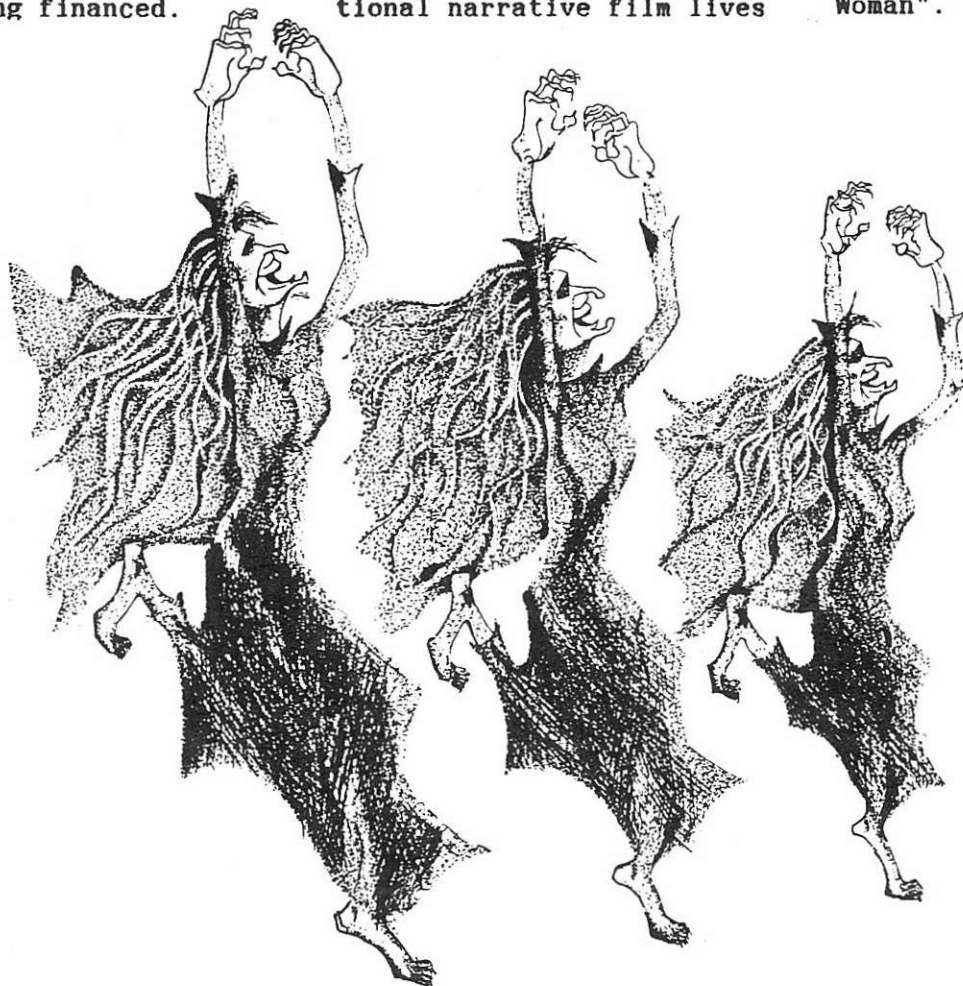
Sue Chapman
Toronto

The Faustus myth switches gender in the recent film, *The Witches of Eastwick*. A witty and lustful devil (Jack Nicholson) sets out to lure the souls of Cher, Susan Sarandon and Michelle Pfeiffer to hell masquerading as sexual heaven. It's a film which ought to be sent to the inferno set aside for all condescending, patriarchal Hollywood narratives about women. It is stunning to think that films such as *The Witches of Eastwick* with its blatantly anti-feminist slant are still being financed.

Although granted sexual identity, the film's three leading women are denied personal identity. They forfeit control of their daily lives, and ultimately of their bodies, to the supposed "magnetism" of Nicholson's devilish character. They are transformed from small-town American women with simple lives to Sunset Boulevard *femmes fatales*. And just at the moment when you think their characters may subvert the traditional Hollywood imagery with a show of their strength, they collapse and serve only to perpetuate the myth of woman as breeder and homemaker. Alas, the traditional narrative film lives

on.

Eastwick's ideology first rears its ugly head in the seduction scene between Nicholson and Cher. After lunching with Nicholson, Cher decides that this once-appealing male is the most boring, self-centred and obnoxious man she has ever associated with, and moves decisively to return home to fix dinner. Nicholson slowly circles around a paralyzed Cher, and begins to point out and ultimately convince the woman of the futility of her existence. He lectures her on obligations and generalizes condescendingly about the habits of "The Frustrated Woman". "The pills, the



reviews

booze", two intricate problems of modern women's lives, are used by Nicholson merely as case points to conquer Cher's vagina.

The film plays heavily on the notion that no woman's life is complete without maximum heterosexual fulfillment. It stresses sexual liberation, yet this liberation is ultimately repressive. It is controlled by Nicholson's whims and his occult power. The wealthy Beelzebub desperately reaches out one night for a sexual encounter with one of his three victims. Rejected by all of them, he casts an evil spell over them, causing pain and almost death to his playmates. The scene deteriorates into an up-market version of S & M.

Felicia is the hysterical, undersexed, over-religious woman who warns and prophesies in vain of the "evil on the hill", as she refers to the involvement of the three "witches" with "that man". Her character occupies perhaps the most contentious position in the film. She is portrayed as the caricature of a repressed Puritan, and set up to milk the audience for mocking laughs. Ultimately, her fate is death.

By killing off this

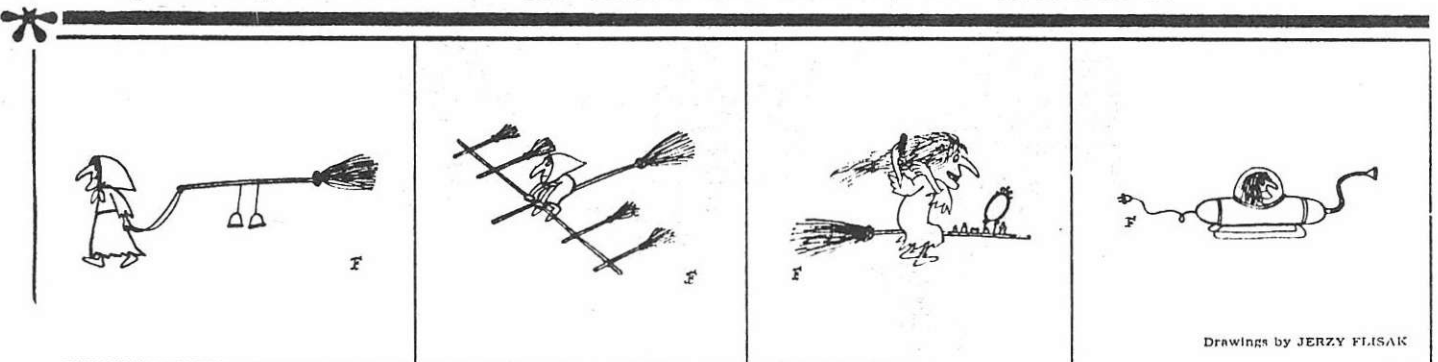
supposedly right-wing, puritanical voice, does the film manage to establish itself as progressive? Certainly not: it clings to traditional masculine and feminine roles, and the distorted notion of sexual liberation for women typical of Hollywood films. Felicity's voice is the most serious--and therefore marginalized--in Eastwick. It is because of her soothing ability that she must die, and her death is nothing but the silencing of anti-establishment values.

The *Witches of Eastwick* ends on the most patriarchal note I've seen on celluloid in a long time. The three women have given up their separate houses and lives, and have come together under one roof: his roof. Their master has left for another life, so the women share the upkeep of his memory--not only by living in his sanctuary, but also by rearing the children he has graciously conceived with each. The camera, in wide shot, reveals a seemingly matriarchal domestic bliss scene, until Michelle Pfeiffer pines, "Don't you just wish he'd come back--even for a day?" Cher, having apparently come to her senses, quips, "no". The camera then tilts up to

a multi-television-monitored wall, on which Nicholson's face appears. The women are mesmerized and drawn to it. After a brief discussion with him, they reach for the remote control button and switch him off!

For a split second I had a feeling of elation. The women did something positive, decisive. They controlled *him*, this may be a more positive film than I think. My illusions are shattered as the camera pulls back to reveal the three mothers happily surrounded by their (so far) angelic young sons. Although Nicholson himself may have disappeared from their lives, his influence will always exist through the presence of his offspring.

The women's lives move full circle in *The Witches of Eastwick*. They begin bored by their lives caring for children, and end up tied to even more (and more menacing) children. The entire plot of the film can be considered a man's game, in which the women only *think* they have won. Instead however, they have fallen prey to the ultimate in male oppression. They have been denied power and knowledge, and are rewarded with the same old token: motherhood.



Our Choice and Challenge

On May 11,
we stand by those who will fight for
emancipation and liberation . . . For those who
have struggled for the emancipation of women and the
liberation of our people. We will commit our vote to women
and men who are uncompromising in their fight to defend the
welfare of women and the welfare of the nation.

Ours is a vote for PEACE . . .
for protection from all forms of intervention and threats of violence.
For us, this means: Remove all U.S. bases. Ban all nuclear weapons.
Stop militarization and the increasing violation of human rights.
Promote equality of the sexes. Stop and penalize all abuse, exploitation
and violence on our women.

Ours is a vote for SURVIVAL . . .
for food and jobs and education and shelter. For us, this means:
Free land to the tillers. Nationalization of strategic industries.
Selective debt repudiation. Mass housing program. Free education. Price
control of basic commodities. Equal pay for equal work. Daycare
centers and support services for working women.

Ours is a vote for DIGNITY . . .
for respect for individuals as free citizens and for the country
as an independent sovereign nation. For us, this means: Stop U.S.
intervention. Grant self-determination to national minorities.
Abrogate all unequal treaties. Repeal discriminatory laws
against women. Stop sex tourism, the trafficking
of women and the prostitution of citizens.

Our stand is clear.

So are our choices....

Nelia Sancho
Romeo Capulong
Crispin Beltran

GABRIELA

Jaime Tadaeo
Bernabe Buscayno
Horacio Morales
Jose Burgos Jr.