

Cayenne

A SOCIALIST FEMINIST BULLETIN

394 Euclid Avenue
Suite 308
Toronto, Ontario
M6G 2S9

July 1989

Dear Friends:

It is with sadness and regret that we announce our decision to cease publishing Cayenne. This has been a difficult decision to make. Both the magazine and the experience of working together on it have been so important to us that we avoided for as long as we could the hard fact that it is no longer feasible to continue.

This news will perhaps come as no surprise. In our editorials over the past year we have written of the need for more participants and for a revised and more critical approach. We announced a publishing hiatus last fall, during which we would attempt to recruit new members and reflect on the project of producing a socialist-feminist journal. We have done this, and although the outcome for Cayenne is sad, we feel satisfied with the process. It brought us closer together as thinkers and friends, and served to recommit most of us to the work of developing socialist feminist analysis.

While we recognize that any explanation of Cayenne's demise can only ever be partial, we nonetheless want to describe to you, our readers, some of the situations, reasons, and understandings behind our decision to cease publication.

The process of coming to realize that we can no longer produce Cayenne involved prolonged political and personal reflections. We discussed—at length and in depth—the current state of the women's movement, the political and economic climate, and what a socialist feminist publication could and should do. The irony is twofold: only by ceasing publication could we find the time for the kind of discussion necessary to sustain and direct a project like Cayenne; and, as a result of these discussions, we are convinced now more than ever that up-to-the minute, responsive, analytic writing has an important place in the ongoing development of socialist feminism.

We still have a lot of questions. Why was it so difficult to stimulate vivid debates in the pages of Cayenne? Why do activists in movements find it so difficult to find the time to sit down and write to share their experiences and analyses? Is Cayenne's failure part and parcel of the crisis the left as a whole faces in developing a coherent overall strategy? Or was the problem more specifically linked to mistakes and limitations on our part?

The women's movement is far from dead. On the contrary, it has gone in different directions into all the issues and nooks and crannies of daily life. As the movement has broadened and developed many women have shifted to working on different issues, be they peace, anti-poverty organizing, abortion rights, daycare, employment equity, anti-racism, etc. However, with this diversity there seems to be less time and space for overall political strategizing debates. While encouraging debate is almost a motherhood issue, it doesn't seem to be a priority in practice. We have moments of anger that our energy was not always matched by the many who agreed with our goals.

On a personal level, we each examined the stresses and demands of our lives, truthfully declaring what kind of commitment we could realistically make over the next year. As important as we consider the project, we can't go on with it in this form. We considered dropping back to two issues a year, and even that seemed overly optimistic.

A problem that has persisted throughout the life of Cayenne is the problem of womanpower. We have at most times operated with an editorial collective of three or four women. Somehow it always happened that the new members who joined us were offset by old members moving away or going on to different projects. Our current editorial collective consists of six women, two of whom joined during our recent attempt to recruit new members. Why is this not enough? Well, one of us is leaving the province, and four of us have worked on Cayenne for three, four, even five years, managing to share the tasks comfortably, and to forgive ourselves and each other for our haphazard publication schedule and the compromises we were forced to make in political and editorial standards. We managed for five years, but now we are tired.

And while we have grown tired, the world in which we live and move has become tougher on us. The escalating cost of living requires us to spend more of our time earning money. This is a problem facing activists all over Canada, particularly as we grow older and have children and parents to support. We cannot manage the same scale of volunteer political activism as before. There are also the demands of our jobs. Two of us have jobs that require extensive travel; our periodic absences do not mesh compatibly with the publishing schedule of a quarterly journal.

One solution to this problem would be to obtain funding to pay someone full or even part-time as Cayenne editorial staff. We have looked into this, and have discovered it to be impossible. There is no government money available these days for a publication calling itself "socialist-feminist."

But as we came to the decision to end Cayenne, and met one last time to make the decision final and to organize this letter and other details of business, the strength of our commitment to reflection and writing, and the strength of our bond as a group surfaced in the realization that we didn't want to disband. We sat around the dinner table, six women, two babies, and one daughter, and talked about what it had meant to us to work together on Cayenne, how we had valued the discussions, the debates, and the friendship. We felt, in the warm glow of the candles and the wine, that we had managed to put socialist feminism into practice in a way that touches the vital core at the centre of all we are fighting for: critical analysis and uncritical personal support. We decided, in the same breath as we decided to end Cayenne, to continue meeting as a discussion group. But this is not just a turn inward. It is our aim that various writing projects will grow out of these discussions as, freed from the demands of a quarterly publication, we develop a structure of work that better fits the realities of our lives, allowing us to concentrate our efforts not on meeting deadlines and drumming up copy, but on reading, discussing, analyzing, and writing.

We are proud of Cayenne. For an alternative publication we had a good circulation rate across Canada and unusual reach internationally. Responses to our survey indicated that most readers were supportive of, even enthusiastic about, our general direction. We are pleased with our stand on racism in the women's liberation movement, and our willingness to challenge rigid thinking at the point of contact of socialism and feminism. We have of course always been interested in discovering what we should do better or differently; much discussion during our retreat focussed on possible restructurings, and although we eventually came to the decision to fold, our ideas for the improvement of Cayenne will necessarily enter into our conception of future writing projects.

We realize that in giving up the burdens of Cayenne we also give up the pleasures of its challenge and achievement. We close this chapter of our work together with regret for what Cayenne could have been--because we continue to believe in the need for a regular socialist-feminist publication, and our closing coincides with the demise of too many other progressive publications. We will miss the experience of working with a

variety of interesting and inspiring activist-writers, and we even regret some facets of the lifting of the burdens: deadlines, however onerous, are sometimes the only guarantee that important work will get done.

It was always our aim that Cayenne should be a forum for debate and a vehicle for exchange. The extent to which that goal has been approached is the extent to which our readers and writers have engaged with the project, and to you we say thank you for the encouragement of your support and the guidance of your criticisms.

A shifting composition of people has produced Cayenne over the years; the following people--past collective members and friends--have all in various ways made significant contributions:

Alison Bechdel, Ruth Beck, Sigrid Blohm, Linda Briskin, Mary Chapman, Sue Chapman, Ginny Dickie, Cynthia Flood, Amy Gottlieb, Jan Langford, Dian Marino, Janet Mawhinney, Jenny McIntyre, Christina Mills, Carol Anne O'Brien, Nancy Pollock, Susan Prentice, David Rayside, Ann Rowan, David Smith, and Dorothy Smith. Thank you all.

In solidarity,

Anne Fourt
Nancy Jackson
Marie Lorenzo
Liza McCoy
Judi Stevenson
Lynda Yanz