

International Women's Day Committee newsletter

May 1984



ABOUT US . . .

IWDC is a socialist-feminist group. We operate on the principle that mass actions are our most effective instruments of change. We believe that the oppression of women touches every aspect of our lives and that the liberation of women will require fundamental changes in the structure of society.

We hold bi-weekly meetings where our policy and overall direction are determined. Smaller committees work on specific events or issues or in different constituencies.

We welcome new women. For information about meetings, call Mariana at 532-8989.

Would you like to subscribe to the IWDC Newsletter? We publish 6 issues a year, full of news, reviews, commentary, letters, and updates on topics of concern to women, from a socialist-feminist perspective.

We ask for a contribution of \$5.00 for a year's subscription--more if you are a well-paid person or institution. And of course, if you can't afford to pay, you can still get the newsletter.

To receive the newsletter, or to send us your suggestions and ideas, write to the IWDC Newsletter Committee, 386 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ont. M5S 1X4.

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The cover graphic is by Claire Kujundzic. The eight women are members of the Press Gang, a printing and publishing collective in Vancouver.

Editorial

For the past two years in May or June, IWDC has held a conference on process and direction. This year we are spreading discussions over a longer period, but we will kick off with a one-day, internal conference at the end of May.

Like all political groups, IWDC has been affected by the changing political and economic conditions which have touched all the major movements we work with-- the left, labour, lesbians, the women's and peace movements. Certainly the women's movement has changed dramatically since we began work in 1978. One recent and significant change concerns the March 8 Coalition. For the last few years, IWDC has played a central role in getting the Coalition off the ground, providing the necessary continuity from one year to another, and facilitating the flow of paperwork. This year, women from different groups challenged the old ways of organizing International Women's Day and brought some new ideas and possibilities to the Coalition. Out of this came the Women's Liberation Working Group (originally called the Follow-Up Committee of the March 8 Coalition), which has worked out a proposal for how to organize International Women's Day in 1985 (among other things). You may have read some background on this committee's work in past IWDC newsletters; in this issue we are printing an excerpt from the proposal which has been sent out to groups across the city.

Where does this leave IWDC? We believe that it is crucial that IWDC begin to look at what it is to be a socialist-feminist organization in the present political context. What can a socialist-feminist group bring to the women's movement and to the left in this city? What can we do that other groups cannot? In short, does Toronto need IWDC (or a group like it)? And, secondarily, if there is a need for such a group, what should it be doing? How should it be organized? What is its responsibility and relationship to socialist feminists outside of it?



These are difficult questions and we are not expecting easy or quick answers. It will take courage to struggle with them, because in order to do so we must first rid ourselves of the emotional baggage we carry. We must do away with the kind of vested interest that seeks to perpetuate something just because it exists, looking for work to justify its existence rather than asking whether it serves a purpose. The May conference will only scratch the surface and needs to be followed by a whole series of planned discussions. Whatever the outcome, the Newsletter Committee feels the process is a necessary and worthwhile one. We would gratefully welcome any input that you, our readers, may have.

-- The Newsletter Committee

Feminists Celebrating Mother's Day ??

At first glance, one could wonder why a feminist group is celebrating Mother's Day, a day which at the least enriches greeting card companies and, more fundamentally, reinforces the ideology of women as dependent and subservient mothers.

Recently, Mother's Day has been used by Right to Life groups to protest against abortion and promote traditional familial ideology which depicts women as wives and mothers, bearers of children and dependents in the home. Pro-choice supporters have mounted spirited counter-demonstrations, but these have tended to be, necessarily, defensive responses.

This year, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC), as a major group in the pro-choice movement, felt we should take the initiative on this day. First of all, we decided to try to block the Right to Life by booking Queen's Park, their traditional meeting place. We were successful in this, and these groups have dropped plans for an activity on Mother's Day this year.

Having secured the place, we then wanted to seize the day from the Right in political terms. Within the pro-choice movement, there is an ongoing debate about how best to fight for and win reproductive freedom for women. The tension is between a focus on abortion rights as a single issue and a wider view of reproductive rights in which abortion remains the central political organizing focus but which includes many other factors. The first helps us to concentrate our political energies while the second allows us to situate the abortion issue within the wider struggle against women's oppression. The problem is striking the right balance between the two approaches--too exclusive or narrow a focus runs the risk of becoming isolated from the wider women's movement while too general or diffuse a focus weakens us as a political force.

In this instance, OCAC decided to focus on two themes. To define Mother's Day in our ideological terms we stressed Motherhood by Choice. For motherhood to be a real choice, a range of things are

necessary: access to free, universal, quality day care; birthing options including midwifery; economic security and independence; custody rights for lesbians;



adequate housing and social support; safe effective birth control and free and equal access to safe, legal abortion. Because we feel access to abortion is central to controlling our sexuality, fertility and thus our own fate, we also stressed abortion as a woman's right.

For a feminist organization, there are obvious tensions around stressing Motherhood and Mother's Day. The view that childbearing and nurturing somehow define the essential nature of women--that mothering is the essence of femaleness--can have very constricting ideological implications. Our emphasis on motherhood by choice--and all the things necessary to guarantee it--was an attempt to provide an alternative vision of parenting.

Building wider support for our movement and reinforcing existing links with other feminist and community groups was also an important motive for OCAC. Women in health care, labour, day care, midwifery, lesbian, immigrant and other sections of the feminist community were approached for their advice and support.

The response was enthusiastic. On a more practical level, OCAC also required concrete help organizing the day and various groups were asked to take on specific tasks such as mailings to their constituencies, providing displays/information tables, postering, sharing resources, etc.

Why the picnic/rally rather than a demonstration? This event was seen as a way to appeal to a broader audience and to experiment with a new type of action, a new way to mobilize. We decided on a picnic/rally where the politics and issues would be raised and presented in a relaxed, festive atmosphere with music and other forms of entertainment.

Admittedly, it is a bit of a gamble. Come Mother's Day, May 13th, we will be better able to evaluate this event and its effectiveness. The Pro-choice movement has to develop appropriate strategies for a long term struggle. This is especially so now when the lengthy court trial has served to divert and diffuse our energies. We hope that actions such as this and the building we have been doing around it prove a useful strategy in the struggle for reproductive rights.

-- Linda Gardner



Socialist Women and the Peace Movement

A socialist forum on peace was held in March. Not many people attended. We talked about the peace movement and the labour movement and the participation of feminists in the peace movement. The presentations were orthodox, the discussion the usual socialist routines. I left with a headache resulting from multiple frustrations. Now I'm trying to sort out what was wrong. I don't think it was a problem with what any one speaker said; I don't think it was the absence of a--in this case--much needed affirmative action speakers' list. It was rather that the relation of the struggle for socialism and the peace movement was never addressed.

I think back, too, to an earlier occasion during the International Women's Day celebrations of this year, at the public forum on peace and anti-imperialism in which native women and women from the Philippines and Central America spoke. Though they spoke powerfully and movingly, they also lacked a framework to understand the relation between campaigns for nuclear disarmament and the struggles of the women of Third World countries as part of more general struggles against oppression.

I've tried to think through some of what I think we need to talk about. I believe the notions of class and class struggle must be central. When we, as socialists, look at issues of peace and imperialist oppression, we're looking at class. Not as socialist feminists have often thought about it when we've had to confront a left which has insisted on class as coming first and gender oppression a sad second. We're not looking at class as definite bunches of people--the baddies and the goodies (and which side are you on?): we're not in the business of trying to decide who's in and who's out. Class and class struggle are not like baseball games at which we can be spectators. We are in the middle of them in our daily lives and whether we take up the struggle consciously on one side or the other, we are still implicated.

I'm not talking about abstractions. I'm talking about our everyday worlds and how they are put together. I am talking

about our nightly fears: about the powerlessness to protect those we love from the nuclear holocaust or ecological disaster; the fear of losing your job; the misery and debasement of welfare and poverty; the perpetual struggles with landlords; the appropriation of the hours of the day every day and the energies of body and soul by labours to earn a wage which impoverishes; the insults and damage done to children in the educational system; and above all about powerlessness, powerlessness, powerlessness. These are the experiences which are embedded in global relations, policies and powers. This is the experience of class and of class struggle at a time when the other side has the initiative and power and depends upon ignorance, upon divisions and separation, concealment and mystification. When we talk about class in the context of capitalism, we're talking about relations which organize the exploitation of the mass of people in the interests of the self-expansion of capital. The mass of capital in the world increases as a result of exploited labour. It is controlled by forms of ownership that increase the powers of those who command capital rather than returning it to the benefit of those who create it. These relations organize our powerlessness before the threat of nuclear war, of technological unemployment, of the multiple oppressions of imperialism.

These powers are organized on a global level; they are vast corporate and banking empires. In the United States the production of armaments by the great companies is locked into the political objectives of global military and political domination.

The media prevent rather than enhance the possibilities of communication of people to people. The dominant classes insert their messages into our worlds, but we cannot speak to one another except laboriously through leaflets, door-to-door, or through demonstrations which are uncertainly represented in the press.

This is a period of the increasing centralization of capital on a global scale. We are seeing the emergence of an internationally structured working class, with a division of labour between a highly skilled and highly paid elite of workers in the First World and workers in labour intensive industries and services in both First and Third Worlds. The introduction of new technologies creates a vast surplus of labour which competes on a world-wide market. The squeeze via media and government on the working class to accept the lower wages and the paring away of health care and welfare services are a part of this process. Racism is the local effect of a global organization of imperialism which has meant for the most part white domination over non-white both in the native countries of non-white peoples and in the state-managed labour force in countries like Canada. The threat to world peace isn't just a confrontation between two superpowers. It is part of a complex of military and political initiatives on the part of the United States which seeks to defend both its own economic and political preeminence as well as the rule of capital.

The powerlessness we experience corresponds to a centralization of global capital, shifting the making of key political

and economic decisions further away from the democratic processes within our reach, raising questions about the power of nation states to control their economic affairs. The scale of the powers ranged on the side of the dominant classes is intimidating. But the global organization of capital also creates a global opposition--multiple, fragmented, but more and more visible. The emergence of a global working class has a reality in relations of competition which force wages down and contribute to unemployment in advanced capitalist countries. Its reality is as much in division as in bases of common interest, but it is beginning also to have a consciousness. The peace movement is international. So is the women's movement. There are international supports for struggles against imperialist oppression in Central America, the Philippines, and many other Third World countries. South Africa does not go about its racist business unnoticed and unchecked.

And closer to home, there is active development of the organization through which people are empowered. There is an important building of the power of women in the labour movement. There are new areas of trade union organization. There is organization among the unemployed. There is research. There are tenants' rights organizations. There are important organizations among women such as IWDC and Women Against the Budget in B.C.

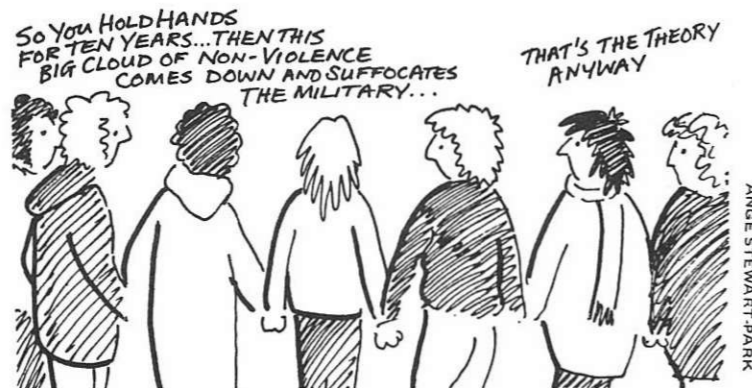
The multiple bases of struggle, though concealed, have a common ground in class. Though it is not true, as Bob Penner suggested in the socialist forum on peace, that to oppose the testing of the Cruise missile is to oppose capitalism, it is true that to organize is to empower ourselves. And feminists in particular know how to empower ourselves through organization rather than an elite leadership. The job of socialists is the conscious development of organization that empowers people; it is the conscious development of grassroots, rank-and-file, community organization, organization that begins where people are, breaks down isolation and gives us voice. The old debates between reform and revolution have no meaning in contemporary contexts. We know in the women's movement how to work for concrete objectives in ways which expand and develop the powers and capacities of women to organize and work together.



I think it is beyond our powers at this time to be clear about economic policies and objectives except perhaps in the most visionary way. But we can see the importance of building relations in which people are empowered and that means not only building locally or around special issues, but seeking ways to make alliances across divisions, of finding common interests, of building networks, of entering into coalitions. The expansion of powers requires the expansion of relations.

Of course socialist feminists are already involved in this work. But we need to take it up consciously and to do some hard thinking and talking about how to build effective and useful links which transform local struggles into the kind of expanded relations we need to link particular struggles with class struggle. Obviously we are disillusioned with, if we ever believed in, building unity through dogmatic abstractions. Rather we have to take up consciously the practical business of creating the linkages and relations through which people can talk, become conscious, plan, coordinate, and struggle with divisions. The struggle for socialism at this time must be the empowering of a working class which isn't only women and men workers, but housewives, old people and children; which consists of non-manual as well as manual workers; which is multi-racial and multi-national and is already engaged in a class struggle, whether consciously or not.

Dorothy Smith



Pornography, Power and Passion

The following is the text of a speech given by Mariana Valverde at the International Women's Day Public Forum on Pornography. A number of women suggested that we print it. We welcome your responses.

There is general agreement in the women's movement, and in large sectors of Canadian society, that pornography, and especially violent pornography, is a problem. But there is no agreement as to why it is a problem - and so there is no agreement on solutions. Personally, I am worried about censorship solutions, since they seem to rely more on the protection of women by a benevolent state than on self-determination for women. But although I have lots to say about how the state is appropriating this feminist issue and doing weird things with it, I would rather, for tonight, not discuss the state, or the right wing, or the censor board. I want to discuss the women's movement; and to try to see why we are so politically fragmented when it comes to porn and related issues. Why is it that a sector of women is calling for a clamp-down, not just on porn, but also on prostitution and even 'promiscuity' (Robin Morgan), and doing so in the name of the women's movement?

I think the problem lies in taking up porn as a one-issue campaign, as though it were separate from the other issues of the women's movement, such as control of our bodies and the right to determine our sexuality. It is this separation which has made possible the 'rotten bloc' alliance of sexually conservative feminists and right-wing groups. If we kept the other feminist concerns firmly in mind while fighting porn, we would be a little clearer about who our allies are. Besides, if we concentrate on porn as a manifestation of male power, we are in danger of spending all our time criticizing what men do, and wondering why they do it, instead of wondering what women want and why we don't do it.

There are reasons why pornography has been such a popular issue. First, it unites all women in a deep and powerful anger. Secondly, porn is a collection of commodities; and in our consumer society it is easy to focus attention on the defects or virtues of products. It is not so easy to see behind the commodities and into the social relations that produce them. We cannot see patriarchal capitalism: but we can see junk food and we can see porn magazines, so we can blame the products and even get angry at them. We concentrate on things, and study the effects that things have on people.

And in the meantime, our own erotic needs - which we already know porn does not fulfill - go on being unmet and even unacknowledged. It is good that governments and universities are funding some projects that study the effects of hardcore porn on male consumers - but no one is funding women's erotic art, film, books, and magazines.

So let's talk for a few minutes about our erotic needs, as women. It is no use knowing what we do not want men to do to us if we do not have a positive concept of sexuality and of erotic imagery.

Some people think that eroticism in a feminist utopian world would be androgynous, non-violent, soft and fuzzy, and perfectly symmetrical, with both partners doing exactly the same thing for the same amount of time at precisely the same time. You know the myth: two happy significant others of no particular gender meet, like each other, talk, quietly kiss, and disappear between the sheets as the light fades. No lust; no sweat; no power; no struggle.

I think it is about time we stopped fooling ourselves with this ridiculous myth. There was an interesting debate in the lesbian community a couple of years ago, about lesbian s/m (sado-masochism). We all talked about it and hardly anyone did it, but one thing we learned as a group is that many of us do want something more than cuddly, child-like sex.

Most of us are put off by the sexist cliches of s/m as commercially developed, and we questioned the claim that lesbian s/m was somehow the royal road to liberation; but there was a reason why the debate raged so furiously, and got even the straightest feminists to sit up and take notice. The reason is that the equality we want as women is not a static thing that you can measure. It is not just dividing up the hours of housework and wages by half. That's the easy part. The difficult part is creating the kind of dynamic erotic equality that would make it possible for us to really explore our needs and wants.

One of the most deeply rooted human needs is the contradictory need for autonomy and surrender - the need to be powerful and acknowledged, on the one hand, and to give up one's power to a stronger force on the other hand. This has nothing to do with violence. It is more like the child's simultaneous desires both to assert her independence and yet meet some resistance on the part of adult authority. It is what the philosopher, Hegel, called the struggle for mutual recognition.

This struggle - which we can see in action whenever we flirt with someone - only works if both people are fully human. If one of them is a mere robot with breasts, then the erotic power vanishes. An object cannot recognize anyone; an object has no power to begin with, and thus cannot surrender it. This is, incidentally, why the male desire for domination is constantly frustrated in the pornographic world. The male, failing to get recognition in the world at large, lashes out at the powerless female and exacts recognition by force. But the violated woman has become a mere object, and cannot give the acknowledgement he craves. And if the male master continues to assert his power through violence, the female slave will become a mere corpse, lifeless, and therefore utterly unable to acknowledge his mastery. The male's victory is therefore also his defeat. The less human, the less powerful the dominated woman is, the less recognition she can give.

This vicious circle could be broken if we succeeded in freeing the erotic



struggle that we all crave from the fetters of gender stereotypes and social inequality. In the world we live in, women are automatically pushed into one pole of the dialectic - dependence, weakness, slavery. So, as we feminists struggle to gain independence, we feel we cannot afford to be seduced and overpowered, if it means losing our hard-won independence. So we don't let it happen. But we sure fantasize about it, because being superwoman and always making the first move, always being in control, is not very erotic.

So there are reasons why we fantasize about being seduced, overwhelmed, and even raped. But there are even better reasons why these sort of things are better confined to fantasies, especially for heterosexual women. When everything around you says loudly that women should defer to men and be passive, it is next to impossible



to freely surrender. As long as women are subjected to violence en masse, it would be naive to suggest that we could be more liberated if we acted out our rape fantasies. But if women were collectively the equals of men, then it would be possible to explore the interesting dynamic of surrender and submission, along with the equally interesting role of seducer or hunter.

And our fantasies would probably be quite different; they might very well be freer from violence and debasement, and more expressive of pride in our female sexuality. Power and passion are neither inherently sexist - as some sexually conservative feminists claim - nor inherently anti-sexist, as Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin have argued. Power, lust, and passion will not disappear if the sexism of our society withers away. But they will be profoundly transformed.

In my view, the feminist vision of eroticism is not some sort of egalitarian, homogenized boredom in which nobody overwhelms others and in which self-surrender is prohibited. Rather, the feminist vision tries to integrate the two poles - autonomy and dependence, power and surrender - and free them from the social inequality which presently entangles them. When the erotic is freed from the social and economic bonds which chain women to a particular role, an inevitable destiny, then we will begin to have true choice in the sexual sphere. When women are free from the fear of rape and violence, when women have confident bodies and strong minds and women's sexuality is celebrated rather than despised, then, and only then, will we be able to experience - or rather, to create - the true joy of sex.

- Mariana Valverde

...AND DON'T FORGET TO WRITE!

We hope you enjoy the variety of topics covered in this issue of the Newsletter.

But let's think for a moment about what's missing from it: Where are the articles on the Eaton organizing drive, the Conference on a Community Response to Sexual Violence, the Grange Inquiry...? Why isn't there anything on women and aging, or women and unemployment, or women's health, or women's culture, or women's sports...? And what is happening in the struggles of Native women, differently-abled women, lesbian mothers, day care workers, immigrant women, women on family benefits, women in prison...?

The list goes on and on. We would love to bring you articles about all of the above, and more, but there's a hitch:

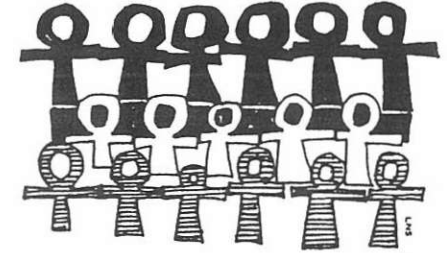
We need women to write them. That's where you come in. If you are involved in a struggle that other women could learn from; if you have some comments on an event, a book, a film, a record; if something you read here excites you or makes you mad as hell - let us know about it! We welcome (i.e., we're begging for) contributions from our readers, whether in the form of articles, letters to the editors, reviews, or announcements. So let's get those cards and letters comin'...

Que se Vaya Pinochet! Chilean Women Protest

In January of this year 8000 women gathered in Santiago, Chile to protest against the dictatorship; the following is an excerpt from a letter by a woman who was present.

As tourists, we certainly had a good reception...the government has done everything to make one feel comfortable: when one arrives at the tourist information offices, the personnel cannot do enough for you...a ton of printed info which tells one where to go, how to go, how much it will cost, etc.--very sophisticated and computerized. When we arrived we went to a small hotel in downtown Santiago, the Cervantes, nice, clean and with very friendly and helpful employees. There were no hassles at immigration, which is affectionately called INTERPOL, International Police...they want you to enjoy yourself and spend your \$\$\$ and go away saying ...Gee, it's not so bad...that show, *Missing*, was only a spy thriller after all.

Downtown Santiago is very modern with several shopping malls with shops which seem as if they were located in some posh area of a European city...a lot of luxury stores. We actually experienced culture shock after Bolivia's cities which are small and the poverty is in evidence everywhere. The reason for all these shops and industry, mostly foreign and multinational, has been the economic policy followed by the Pinochet government which opened Chile's doors to uncontrolled imports...the result has been the bankruptcy of national industries, an unemployment rate of over 35%...and this is visible in beautiful downtown Santiago by the number of people trying to eke out a living by selling on the street ANYTHING ...Great to be able to buy Gucci shoes, but there is a large number of people who cannot provide enough to eat for their families. One doesn't see tanks patrolling the streets but there is a fair number of police (*carabineros*) who patrol, often with German shepherds on leashes.



Anyway, we Bolivian tourists walked around with gaping mouths trying to figure all of this out. Fortunately, we were able to make contact with some friends of friends who turned out to be key to our enjoyment and understanding of Chile. They were able to orient us in a number of ways...in terms of the present political situation to where to go to the beach.

One of the phenomena of the present conjuncture is that the people are no longer afraid...they are willing to protest in many different ways against the dictatorship. We were fortunate enough to be able to participate in one of these. A friend, Carmen, invited us to a "cultural" activity organized by different women's groups in an arena. When we got there we couldn't believe our eyes and ears...there were over 8000 women gathering to protest against the dictatorship...all united with the same song or slogan on their lips: ¡Que se vaya Pinochet! (Pinochet out) and the beauty of joining hands with 8000 other women and moving as one big wave ready to wash away the last ten terrible years... it was very moving! After three hours of speeches, songs, and chanting, we poured out into the night right into the presence of the police. The women, as if they were oblivious to them, continued their slogans ...Out with Pinochet! Murderer!! We got onto a bus and as we turned a corner, the trucks with hoses had arrived to put a damper on the crowd...they managed to wet a number of people, but they could not extinguish the growing flame of dissent which grows stronger every day...1984 will be a year of change they say in Chile, after ten years of dictatorship.

February 12, 1984
Cochabamba, Bolivia



Mrs. K. works in an electronics factory in the Penang Free Trade Zone. Her husband is a labourer at a dockyard. Mrs. K has opted for permanent night work because she can take care of her family (two of her three children go to school) in the day time. She also makes some extra money by washing and ironing clothes for some neighbours and as a result has been getting only two to three hours sleep in the afternoon for the past 8 months. "She is only 27 but looks like a 40-year old woman." An ILO report notes that "there are many such married women who are under pressure doing shift work because they have to cope with both their housework and fulfill their role as workers." The report notes that many women choose night work because they feel that their families need them less at that time and because they "have carried out their responsibilities earlier during the day. This means that they regularly lose their sleep."

-- quoted in Labor Communication,
March 1984.

. GERMANY

The parliamentary committee of the West German Green Party marked the first anniversary of its existence by replacing its leadership with a group consisting entirely of women. The ecologist-pacifist party, which holds 26 seats in the Bundstag, replaced its 3-member parliamentary executive committee with a group proposed by its women's sub-caucus, and elected women to the positions of whip and assistant whip.

To avoid possible intra-party feuding the election of leaders was replaced with a consensus approach and they began to discuss which prospective speakers would work together. The women's sub-caucus proposal for an all-woman slate was passed despite a greater than 2 to 1 preponderance of men in the caucus.

Stepping down after the shuffle are two of the caucus' most prominent men, as well as the most famous Green woman, Petra Kelly. *The Guardian*.

This poem was written by a woman who participated in a programme for training health promoters in Santiago, Chile. She has the lowest level of formal education of anyone in her group (about equivalent to grade three) but has been a mainstay of the group almost since its inception, and despite being barely literate has discovered a talent for expressing herself in poetry.

Now We Are Together ...

One day with a lot of fear
We began to learn
Thinking that if we learned
It was to teach
We will work until the end
To share with our people
Their struggle for their well-being
Now we are together
And have decided to move forward
We, as women
Toiling for our lives
Share the work with hope and smiles
We live very afflicted
By our poverty
But this won't detain us
Not now
Not ever again
And we will continue working
Without concern for our problems
That we will solve
As rapidly as they appear
Because we have the strength
The fortitude and the patience
To think that this life
Would be better if we struggle
Leaving behind the impotence
That didn't allow us to give our opinions
Today we will raise our voices
To shout the truth.

A nursery and day care centre are operating. There is a basic health clinic staffed by a nurse with periodic visits by medical students as part of their training. The children are taught in a one-room school house.

Since 1979 there have also been additions like new latrines which may seem mundane but have had a dramatic impact on the quality of life for residents of Hugo Paiz. There is now electricity in all the houses and there are many new buildings and some new showers.

In addition to our work in the fields, brigade members worked on two other projects. One was moving the health clinic to a newer building with plumbing, renovating it and stocking it with medical supplies brought from Canada. The other was digging four dry wells to help alleviate problems of sanitation and disease caused by pooling of water underneath the taps.



FEMINISTS IN SOLIDARITY

A small group of us have met twice to discuss forming a committee in support of women in Central America. We're looking to find ways of linking and strengthening our work in the women's and solidarity movements. We've talked about lots of possible activities for such a committee--a women's media campaign against intervention, support for women's projects in the region, organizing women's tours to and from Central America, producing educational materials, organizing educational, and linking with other groups in Canada and the US working on this issue. If you are interested in working with us call Lynda 961-8638 or Chris 532-8584.

The experience of living and working alongside Nicaraguan workers and peasants meant something different to each of us. I felt very lucky to observe the revolution in progress, a process which is sometimes uneven and necessarily slow. Young people participate at all levels of this changing society and contribute a tremendous amount of energy and creativity to it. The vitality of the society is evident and the Nicaraguans are determined to defend the gains they have struggled to achieve. Lastly, I came to understand in the most concrete way the importance of international solidarity. Nicaragua is a poor country whose limited resources are being strained by the need to defend its borders. Despite this, social programmes have high priority. The Nicaraguans will defend their right to determine their way of life in Nicaragua--we must help them defend it in Canada, in the United States, in Europe.

Right now, the strongest threat to Nicaragua is the American-led attack on its borders. The Nicaraguans will do their part in the struggle to stop this attempt to destabilize the region. In Canada, we must do our part to ensure that the reality and achievements of Nicaragua are well understood. We must counter the propaganda coming from American-based media. We can do this by building links between our organizations, women's groups, trade unions, church and community groups, and the solidarity movement. In this way we can work together to build a better, more equitable society in Canada while defending that same kind of society in Nicaragua.

-- Fern Valin

The IWDC Newsletter Committee consists of Marie Lorenzo, Liza McCoy, Chris Mills, and Lynda Yanz. The views expressed in editorials are those of the committee and should not be taken to be positions of the International Women's Day Committee. The views expressed in signed articles are those of their authors alone.

Reflections of a Brigadista

At 6:30 am February 8, 1984, 35 bleary-eyed women and men gathered at the airport in Toronto. We were about to depart for what would prove to be a unique and moving experience as the first Canadian work brigade in free Nicaragua, our small part in a large international brigade movement showing solidarity with the Nicaraguan Revolution.

The "brigadistas" came from diverse backgrounds and political experiences. We were construction workers, students, teachers, solidarity activists, journalists, artists--with the common goal of experiencing life in Nicaragua first-hand and learning about the reality of a poor, revolutionary society. Once in Nicaragua we joined a group of British Columbians to form the Hugo Paíz Brigade. As we travelled from Managua to the Hugo Paíz State Farm to begin work as cotton pickers, our sense of uncertainty was only overshadowed by our excitement.

The state farm from which we took our name is itself named in honour of a student killed during the final days of the insurrection and whose father lived and worked on the farm. Prior to liberation in 1979, this farm--owned by a paternalistic American, John Spencer--had few hygienic facilities and no electricity. It did have a private security force to keep the campesinos "safe". The farm is located about 45 kilometers northeast of León and has 5,250 acres of cotton, rice, corn and sorghum under cultivation.

When we arrived at the farm our apprehension was shared by the local people. We eyed each other shyly and with curiosity and made our first attempts to communicate. These tentative efforts quickly developed into close bonds with the children and soon after with the campesinos with whom we lived and worked.

Home for the next 3 weeks was 2 rooms in a large, well-ventilated wooden building. We shared this building with some of the campesino families and a huge rooster, with an even larger set of lungs, that did not understand it was only supposed to crow at day break!

None of us had ever "cut" cotton before and rumors of the hazards of this work abounded--thorns, back-breaking and bone-wearying work, skin problems, heat and the dreaded "pica-pica" plant. Of course, not all were true and those that were, we endured.

Our day began before dawn about 5:00 a.m. After a breakfast of a hot drink, rice, beans and a corn tortilla (the first of 3 identical daily meals) we were at work in the cotton fields. We worked together until 10:30 when the heat became unbearable; we had the next 5 hours off and were back in the fields by 3:30 pm and worked until sunset. We managed to average 30 pounds per day while the Nicaraguans working all day could pick over 150 pounds.

During the mid-day break our time was our own and we used it in a variety of ways. One of the most popular was cooling off at a small irrigation reservoir. This time was also used to talk to some of the local people, think, read, learn Spanish, and even have a siesta.

After the evening meal there were informational meetings on different aspects of the farm and Nicaragua itself. We also used this time to better get to know each other and the local people as well as to quench our almost insatiable thirst with superb Nicaraguan rum.

One hundred families live permanently at Hugo Paíz. Their lives are shaped by traditional roles: the women work in the home with responsibility for the children while the men (joined by the children when they are not in school) work in the fields. All the farm workers are members of the agricultural workers union, the A.T.C.

The roles of women and men on the farm are slowly beginning to change. Some women are now receiving technical training in agriculture so that they can take a more active role in running the farm. In addition, since the revolution, a support structure is being developed to ease some of the burden the women have to shoulder.

International Notes

Starting this issue we will feature a regular column from some of the many newsletters we receive from around the world. Some of the items will horrify us, some will inspire. We hope all will enlighten us and strengthen our sense of the international character of the struggle in which we are engaged.

. . . . SRI LANKA

1300 women at the Polytex Garment factory in Colombo, Sri Lanka, have been on strike since February 17 following the dismissal of seven workers who failed to meet management's demand for production above targets previously agreed on in a recent strike settlement. They are calling for reinstatement of the seven workers, back pay owing to them since July 1983, and other demands dating back to previous settlements, but never implemented by management.

The union is appealing to people around the world to send cables of support to the following addresses:

1. His Excellency, the President of the Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, Janadhipathi Manderaya, Colombo, 01.
2. The Minister of Labour, Labour Secretariat, Colombo 05.
3. Mr. Sohly Captain, Managing Director, Polytex Garments Ltd. Hemas Building, 3rd Floor, Colombo 01.
4. The Director General, Greater Colombo Economic Commission - 14 Fir Baron Jayatileke Mawatha, Colombo 01.

--Asian Women Workers Newsletter,
March 1984

. . . THE PHILIPPINES

To provide militant leadership to the cause of women workers was the focus of discussion by an assembly of women labor leaders and organizers from various federations, alliances and local unions held last January 23. The discussion culminated in the creation of the KMK, Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan.

"Women represent half of the entire Philippines labour force; hence, the dire need to raise their consciousness regarding their problems and role in social transformation," cites the KMK manifesto.

The KMK chairperson announces a weekly forum on the problems of women workers, to begin a consciousness-deepening program in their ranks.

The need for concerned and nationalist women to make a common stand regarding the May 84 elections generated a warm response and the creation of an organization with a perfect acronym of WOMB--Women for the Ouster of Marcos and Boycott.

In its launching and first general assembly on February 13, WOMB joined hands with other political groups demanding full and unconditional realization of six democratic demands to the Marcos government.

WOMB considers the May 84 elections as another exercise in futility, unless these demands are granted. With the expiration of the Feb. 14 ultimatum, WOMB has decided to exercise its full choice of boycotting the meaningless elections, expose its fraudulence and pursue its concerns for upholding the democratic rights of the people.

Chosen by the assembly of women as convenors are Ms Mita Pardo de Tavera, Sr. Christine Tan and Dr. Alicia de la Paz.

Daluyan, March 1984

Women in Labour: CEIU Women's Conference

Although posters and buttons were distributed in celebration of International Women's Day this year, the Public Service Alliance of Canada has been slow in mobilizing around women's issues. In part, this may be explained by the fact that the PSAC had had a hard time mobilizing generally since the shock of the state's Bill C124--the legislation which imposed the infamous 6 & 5 wage constraints and temporarily wiped out collective bargaining.

But the inaction of the PSAC on those women's issues around which other sectors of the labour movement have begun to organize has been disappointing. The Alliance is one of the largest unions in the country; over 56% of its members are women and 80% of clerical and administrative support jobs are held by women. The militant potential of women in the union was evident in 1981 when thousands took to the picket lines during the clerical strike. But without any organized focus, it has been difficult to tap that potential.

However, recent events suggest that PSAC women are more than ready to stand up together on women's issues, both inside the union and in community coalitions. Last week we heard that there will be a National PSAC Women's Conference early next spring--just prior to the National Convention. While this is partially the result of the hard work of national staff and elected officials, the pressure exerted on the national board of directors by local and regional component initiatives cannot be underestimated. (The PSAC is made up of 17 "component" unions, of which CEIU is one.)

One such initiative was the First Women's Conference of the Canada Employment and Immigration Union (CEIU) held in Toronto March 23-25. Organized by the CEIU Women's Committee, itself less than a year old, the conference brought together over 100 women, and a few men, from across the province.

Some women who attended were activists in both the women's and the union movement. Some were activists in one or the other.

emerging feminism. Many had not previously gone out to union functions because they felt that their concerns would not be raised or heard.

From the opening address on Friday night to the singing of the final verse of "Solidarity Forever" ("We are the women of the union; we have just begun to fight ..."), it was clear that the opportunity to debate and plan together would be seized with energy and commitment. And there was celebration in the air.

There were three keynote speakers during the convention and each woman was provocative and stimulating. It was extremely exciting for the organizers to have the support of union officials in inviting Madeleine Parent to speak. As someone who had been there, she gave an inspiring, class conscious overview of the role of women inside (and outside) the union movement since the 1930's. Many sisters commented that listening to her gave them a vibrant sense of their history for the first time.

Joan Kuyek, a community activist from Sudbury who was involved in the Wives Supporting the Strike Committee, was particularly challenging. She raised issues not often brought to union conferences, saying that if unions don't immediately begin to address seriously those barriers which have traditionally operated to keep women from active participation, women may simply pack up and leave. She said that it's high time meetings, for example, are re-organized so that they aren't



boring, so that all may participate, so that they are educational. Let's take what we have learned from the women's movement and incorporate it into union structures, she suggested.

In many ways, Linda Briskin complemented what Joan had said, but she focussed on practical ways of organizing ourselves within our union and stressed the importance of unions working in coalitions with women's and community organizations. In talking of her own experience in OPSEU, she struck a chord with many of us when she cautioned us to organize thoroughly around realizable goals, rather than expecting to make the revolution overnight!

On Saturday, delegates participated in one of seven workshops, each of which met for 2 two-hour periods during the day. Topics included sexual harassment, affirmative action, technological change, child care and parental rights, unions and social change, health and safety, and the double day. Each workshop was asked to report and bring resolutions to the plenary on Sunday morning.

While feedback to the organizers has been that these workshops were relevant and worthwhile, it was generally felt that not enough time had been allowed for discussion. This criticism is important because each of the workshop topics raised issues of some urgency for women in CEIU and the PSAC in general. Technological change, for example, is being introduced almost overnight throughout all federal departments: women are facing potential lay-offs, de-classification, and greatly altered conditions of work. Another example is sexual harassment, which is an issue presently being hotly debated within our union, and one which the union has been reluctant to address. Essentially, it was important that women have the time to learn more about the issues, and to talk about them more thoroughly before leaving the conference.

However, despite the time constraints, each workshop brought progressive resolutions to the plenary. These included demands for child care at all union functions, collective bargaining demands for employer-funded child care near or at the workplace, equitable representation of women and men on the CEIU board of directors, other extremely thorough affirmative

action measures, and more. These resolutions were debated and passed at the plenary. (Not that the plenary was all easy going--a resolution on nuclear disarmament brought forward from the floor created outspoken debate and ended up being tabled. Next time.)

Overall, the conference was quite successful, particularly in encouraging us all to make links between issues and movements, and in providing a basis for beginning to organize. One sister has written in our union newsletter, "Over the weekend (my) enthusiasm and excitement was constructively channelled and the resulting experience...was one of joy in the realization that by working together, progress will be made for a better tomorrow."

Since the conference, the momentum has been sustained. Because the resolutions passed at our conference had no legal status within the union, it was necessary for us to go back to our locals, debate the resolutions, and have them passed for submission to our national (CEIU) convention in July. Our deadline was April 2. Every single resolution passed and will be debated nationally. We'll be ready.

As well, women came out to the CEIU Ontario conference April 26-29, participated actively, caucused effectively, and developed a 1984-85 women's programme, with a substantial budget, which will include skills workshops and a campaign around sexual harassment. This will be the responsibility of the Women's Committee to coordinate.

Everyone realizes our work within CEIU and PSAC is just beginning. We must continue to debate issues within our locals. We must be prepared to participate actively in our regional and national conventions. We must stay in touch with one another and extend our network to activists in other unions and the women's movement. We have made a good start.

-- Penni Richmond
CEIU Ontario Women's
Committee

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-- Penni Richmond
CEIU Ontario Women's
Committee

Proposal for a Women's Movement Coalition

Do you think that the women's movement in Toronto needs better, more effective discussions? Are you tired of the way our movement is represented in the media? Have you often lamented the fact we don't have better ways of involving new women? Do you have ideas about how to use March 8 for better education and outreach? Have you ever thought of being part of an on-going women's liberation movement structure (such as a coalition or council) to accomplish our goals?

A group of us have been meeting to develop a proposal for a women's movement coalition to tackle some of the above. We think that as a movement, we have reached a point where we could unite around a statement of feminist principles and a plan of work to enable us to work together more effectively.

Our committee was established by this past year's March 8 Coalition to follow-up on ideas presented in a proposal by Action Day Care. We have continued to meet these past months and are excited about the process that has been set in motion. As individuals we are active in a variety of women's and other political groups.

What we are proposing

Our proposal has changed substantially from that presented in the March issue of Broadside. In short, we are proposing to test the viability of an activist and on-going coalition of groups and individuals in Toronto working for women's liberation, united around a basis of unity which would include:

- A general Statement of Principles
- An action plan which would include organizing March 8, 1985; developing a higher profile feminist and women's movement media presence; developing mechanisms for involving and educating new women about the women's movement in order to facilitate their becoming movement activists; and organizing debates and educations around critical issues for the women's movement.

Quite a tall order! But we are convinced it's worth trying. By focussing on the concrete tasks listed above for the next year, the coalition will be providing specific services to other groups and will be developing the collective skills, visibility, infrastructure and identification of common goals necessary for united and effective political action.

We have mailed out our full proposal and a draft statement of principles to all the women's groups we have addresses for. We are asking groups to discuss the proposal and to get back to us with ideas that will enable us to strengthen the proposal. We also hope that interested individuals will get involved in discussions about the coalition. We have scheduled a public discussion meeting for Sunday June 3, where we will have a chance to collectively respond to the idea of an on-going coalition.

At this point, our proposal does not include specific suggestions for a structure of the coalition. We feel that the actual working structure must respond to the needs of those who become involved, so we decided to wait to get ideas from those of you who want to be active in any coalition before developing a draft proposal.

We are, however, committed to developing a coalition that would allow for the participation of a broad range of constituencies--native, women's services; peace, trade union, lesbian, solidarity, immigrant, etc.--as well as those of us more traditionally seen as 'the women's movement.' What do you think?

Related to the above, we also need to think about who are going to be the actual members of a coalition. If we are establishing a coalition with its base in groups, what about the many individuals that will be important to such an organization? How can a coalition make an active place for individuals? And, what groups will be involved? Many groups active in the women's movement are not

"women's groups" *per se*. So how can we involve the different constituencies and groups active in working for women's liberation and still very clearly be a women's movement coalition?

We are anxious for your input. So please, if you haven't already received a copy of the proposal, call a member of our committee to mail you a copy. Once you've had a chance to read it, contact us if you'd like to discuss it further. If you are part of a group or union local that might be interested in participating take it to your next meeting. And make sure to mark the June 3rd meeting on your calendar.

After June 3, if there is sufficient energy and commitment we will plan another meeting, later in June, to begin the work of the coalition in earnest.

In sisterhood,

Nancy Adamson	Lyna Lepage
Linda Briskin	Pat Leslie
Naomi Brooks	Marie Lorenzo
Jan Champagne	Liza McCoy
Sue Colley	Susan Prentice
Jaynie Cowl	Joan Parker
Maureen Fitzgerald	Sandy Steinecker
Connie Guberman	Lynda Yanz
Wiesia Kolasinska	

For information call Susan or Wiesia at 977-6698. Or write the Women's Liberation Working Group, c/o Action Day Care, 345 Adelaide Street West, #600, Toronto.



 * PUBLIC MEETING *
 * to discuss proposal for a *
 * Women's Movement Coalition *
 * 1 pm Sunday, June 3, 1983 *
 * St. Paul's-Trinity Centre *
 * 427 Bloor St. West *



Socialist Feminists Speaking About the Women's Movement

What follows is the first of a two-part interview with Sandy Steinecker. Sandy has been a long-time activist in the women's movement in Toronto and is currently involved in the organizing for a women's movement coalition. She was interviewed by Lynda Vanz.

We hope to develop "Discussions With Socialist Feminists" as a regular feature of the IWDC Newsletter.

Do you remember the experience of being a new woman in the women's movement?

Clearly. A friend of mine moved to Toronto from the States--I think it was about 1971. She came to visit me and we heard that Germaine Greer was in town. My friend and I walked up to the school where she was speaking and were told that it was full and that we couldn't get in. And my friend--she's a real bitch, in the wonderful sense of that word--said, "What do you mean we can't get in? We need to hear her. We are really isolated. We need this!" And she managed to get us in. We went inside and there were thousands of women in the auditorium to hear her. It hadn't been advertised in the paper; it was passed on totally by word of mouth.

I was totally inspired by Greer's talk. It was wonderful. And I was inspired by the number of women in that room. I remember thinking, this is it. There are tons of tons of women who want to change things. And I went running around looking for things to sign up. I wanted somewhere to put my name and phone number. I wanted to be a part of this. And really was very desperate about it. I had time. I had lots of time and I really wanted to be a part of what I saw. But there was nothing. I remember saying to my friend--this is nuts; nobody has a list, nobody is taking these women's names, nobody is organizing this.

It seemed a long time after that, but maybe it wasn't--I managed to make contact with the Toronto Women's Caucus and finally started to feel like Toronto was going to be home. From there, another woman and myself decided to start a women's centre, precisely because we had both suffered a similar kind of pain in finding the women's movement. We were convinced that there needed to be something that would provide women with an entry point into the women's movement that wasn't totally alienating. We believed women needed to know where to go. Building on my experience with Germaine Greer and feeling like if I had had a phone number or a place to go, some visible sign, that I would have been able to get involved so much more quickly, painlessly and effectively.

Months passed . . . and we did it. We developed a collective of women and set up a A Woman's Place, right on Dupont Street, in 1973. It seems unbelievable now, but for a long time we totally funded ourselves on donations. I remember Eve Zarembo was wonderful. We were going to just get a little room, an office somewhere, and Eve said, "That's what women always do. If what you want to do is start a women's centre, rent a house." And so that's what we did. We rented this huge house that we couldn't afford. And she said, "Now, send out a slick letter and tell women you want them to be a part of this going concern." So we sent out a letter asking women to be a part of this, said it was dynamic and here we are and here's our address. I can't remember but it seems to me there were something like \$900 a month in donations. It was fantastic, it was a wonderful experience working with a collective of women.

It's really important to understand the context in which we started Woman's Place. It was the first women's centre in Canada, and here in Toronto even, there wasn't anything else. We started the women's bookstore, the first classes on automechanics. We had classes on everything. We even had one on socialist feminism.

Women's Place lasted about four years. I left and took a job at the Y as a community worker, a few women who had been active went off and started Interval House. The Y ended up picking up the classes. The bookstore became a bookstore by itself. Many of the things we were doing began to be done by others. And even though these different things were starting up, there still weren't the places to filter women that we had hoped for. We had wanted Woman's Place to be a gateway to all these other organizations, but unfortunately there weren't a whole lot of other organizations. You'd look in the phone book under women and there wasn't anything. Now there's a list ten miles long, which is why I think the follow-up committee (now the Women's Liberation Working Group) is so important.



Organizing for International Women's Day was another attempt to create a visible presence for the women's movement. How did that develop?

Well, it started earlier than the first large IWD demonstration in 1978 that most of us know about. In 1975--I think it was the Communist Party, although they didn't present themselves as that, called me and said, what should we do for International Women's Day? They suggested I go to an organizing meeting. I went, thinking we were going to have a serious discussion about what we might do, but in fact the agenda was already set. Another woman and I proposed we try for a huge demonstration but got creamed in the vote. Anyway, not unlike the follow-up committee, we got ourselves on a committee for a follow-up event, which turned out to be the "May 10 March."

Our committee was so well organized. On International Women's Day we were there with a table, buttons and leaflets for the May 10 march. It was International Women's Year so we organized around the fact that the government had set up IWY to sell us out. They were saying, here are a few projects, go home. And that what women wanted was . . . and we started with our extremely rudimentary list of demands. If you compare that list with our demands today you'll see how much we have developed. We couldn't have said two words past universal day care. Abortion had more depth because there had been a campaign around it. Many of the ideas were really undeveloped, but what we were really clear about was that the federal government was not the women's movement and we were trying to reclaim that.

It was a huge demonstration, the largest in the women's movement in Toronto. Ever. Well, maybe in WWII there were larger demos around day care, but not in our recent past. One thousand to 1,500 women showed up.

And then it was a couple of years after that that women from the RWL approached a few of us about organizing a demo on International Women's Day 1978. That's where the letter came from that circulated before the first meeting to plan IWD. I don't think it was so much a coalition we had in mind. Rather, again we felt that women needed a chance to identify with the women's movement in a public way--which is not too far away from what we are saying in the follow-up committee. There were lots of women who believed that what we had to do was to show over and over again that there was a women's movement, that it wasn't the government, that it was us and our issues, and that women needed to be able to have a way to say I belong to this; I'm at this march because I believe in these issues and I'm a part of this movement. The decision to start that first IWD demonstration had a lot to do with that, with promoting a visible event that allowed women to feel a sense of involvement, visibility and strength.

You've pulled back from active involvement in the women's movement these past couple of years. Why did you decide to get involved in the follow-up committee?

It would be a lie to say that the people weren't a large part of it for me. The fact that you were there, Nancy Adamson, Maureen Fitzgerald, Linda Briskin, Sue Colley. Women that I had worked with in the past and whom I felt I had a bond with, a bond that had been severed. The political differences and my leaving IWDC cut me off. And then the demands--for a year of that time--of being a single mother and still having a very demanding job. I had tried a couple of times to do political work and ended up telling people I would do something and then not being able to carry through. So what happened finally was that I just totally divorced myself, missing it a whole lot and at the same time feeling guilty that I couldn't deliver. It was horrible. And the isolation just ate away at my confidence. My own neurosis came out--and I suspect a lot of women have this--by my not being able to ask people for help. I walked around with a superwoman complex, at the same time that I was teaching a family class about the lack of supports for women. Intellectually I knew what was happening, but I couldn't seem to break out of it. It was insane.



And so by the time things had changed somewhat in my life and I could get involved again, I was really scared. I didn't know where I wanted to be involved. I didn't know where I would be welcomed. I didn't know what my role could or should be. And it's only since January --the follow-up committee is the first thing that I've made a solid commitment to.

It was so funny. Sue Colley called and said they were presenting an alternative proposal to the March 8 Coalition meeting and that I should come. Linda Briskin and I went out to dinner before the meeting and said, "We're not committing ourselves to this, right?" And both of us said, "If I start talking, you stop me, o.k.?" "O.k. Yeah, me too." And then both of us, the first chance we got . . . hands up. She was great. And then as soon as the debate was over she turned to me and said, "We have to organize a committee." And we were off like a shot. Involved. It felt wonderful.

So it is the people. But also, I believe that the women's movement has got to find a way to cope with the direction we have been moving in around single issue organizing. I think that the organizing that has been done, a lot of it has been terrific and we have developed our understanding of lots of those issues and how they relate to our liberation, but organizationally, in terms of building a movement to deal with those issues, we have to find a way to coalesce. I don't know how. So what excites me is to be able to work with women whose assessment of the situation is reasonable in that same place, who are saying, yes, it seems like we have to move in that direction based on that assessment. So let's struggle with it.

In the next issue Sandy talks about what she sees as the need for a socialist feminist organization and reflects on her experience in IWDC and why she chose to leave the group.

Silkwood vs. Silkwood

When I went to see Silkwood, I was only generally informed about the story. My response to the film was anger and disbelief--not just about the issues depicted but more about the presentation by the filmmakers of the characters and issues. I then read the book Who Killed Karen Silkwood? by Howard Kohn, a Rolling Stone reporter who investigated Karen Silkwood's past, her family, friends, job, death and the ensuing court case, over a six-month period. The information in this book often contradicts the film and my tendency is to applaud the book, although to some extent I question the author's editorial and interpretive privileges as well. My criticisms of the film are founded on the information in the book.

Silkwood is a film based on the life of Karen Silkwood during her two years of employment at the Kerr-McGee Nuclear plant in Oklahoma. She worked there from August 1972 until November 1974 when she "died in a mysterious car accident." During the six months prior to her death she became very involved in health and safety issues and union work at the plant. She was 28 years old.

The film's bias is to be non-controversial. This is to be expected given that it was produced for popular, commercial entertainment. My objection to the film is that the character of Karen Silkwood is developed superficially and inaccurately, without regard for certain abilities as well as complexities of her personality, or for the complexities of the Silkwood court case.

For example, as a worker Karen is consistently portrayed as sloppy and careless, forgetting to monitor herself as she enters restricted areas. This seems an odd response from someone who became critically aware of the lack of safety standards at the plant. As a representative to the union officials in Washington, it is unfair that we are only shown a blushing, giggling, nervous woman, meekly requesting better shower facilities for the staff change rooms. Though, in reality, she may well have been nervous and self-conscious, Karen Silkwood also presented a precisely organized list, stating 39 incidents of unacceptable

conditions which she collected herself. It was divided into three categories: lack of training, failure to minimize contaminations, and poor monitoring.

As an example of Hollywood's priorities at this point in the film, we see more of an alleged romantic fling with a union official than we do of her contribution to the meeting. I also found the preoccupation with Karen's relationship with her boyfriend Drew gave me less information about this woman than it did about Hollywood's interpretations of her personal life.

It is not surprising that Hollywood neatly forgot to introduce us to Silkwood the Auto-Cross driver and Ladies Fast Gymkhana trophy winner. Auto-Cross is fast slalom on four wheels. Karen was an expert driver. Many investigations subsequent to the "accident" indicate that Karen was alert and in control of her car, and did not fall asleep or drift off the road. Yet she smashed head-on into a concrete wall. Immediately after initial investigations the section of highway where she was killed was repaved and so all evidence disappeared.

This is a film which alleges to be about real people in a small town in Oklahoma. (There is no real disclaimer in the film itself.) The film version of Karen's roommate is Dolly, a lesbian who is in love with Karen, and later on gets involved with a cosmetician for a funeral home. Aside from the incredible choice of an occupation for Dolly's short-term lover, the film treats the issue of lesbianism in a positive light, which is commendable. However, in reality, after Karen's death many rumours were circulated to discredit her personally, among them that she smoked and took drugs, and that she was a lesbian. In later interviews, her boyfriend describes her weekend disappearances with other women which he believed she used during the rough times in their relationship to make him jealous. Yet in the film Karen is not at all interested in women. And what about Karen's real roommate, who has managed not to reveal her life to the public; how does she feel about the film character? Shouldn't there at least be some sort of explanation in

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First, we ask for money when we have exhausted our own ability to finance our work. We hold meetings every two weeks, and at those meetings we take up a collection from everybody present. The money collected pays for the meeting space and childcare costs for women who must pay someone to mind their children in order to attend the meeting. Whatever is left over goes into the bank to finance our work. As well, we all contribute hours of thought and labour.

Beyond our housekeeping expenses, we need money for printing flyers, for organizing events, and for contributing to events and campaigns being organized by other groups or coalitions we may work with. When we endorse or participate in a campaign, we usually contribute a small amount of money as well as labour, or take responsibility for financing our share of the activity. Your contributions to IWDC give us the means to do the kind of coalition building and mass actions that are fundamental to our practice. We are a little bit like a socialist-feminist United Way: the more money we get from you, the more we can pass on to help actions and campaigns that we, as socialist-feminists, consider timely and important.

Our aim with the newsletter is that it should be entirely supported by subscription money. However, we are not at that stage yet, and still must tap into IWDC money at times. So you see that it is important for people to take out subscriptions as well as make a contribution to the group--\$5.00 newsletter subscriptions don't support the group financially

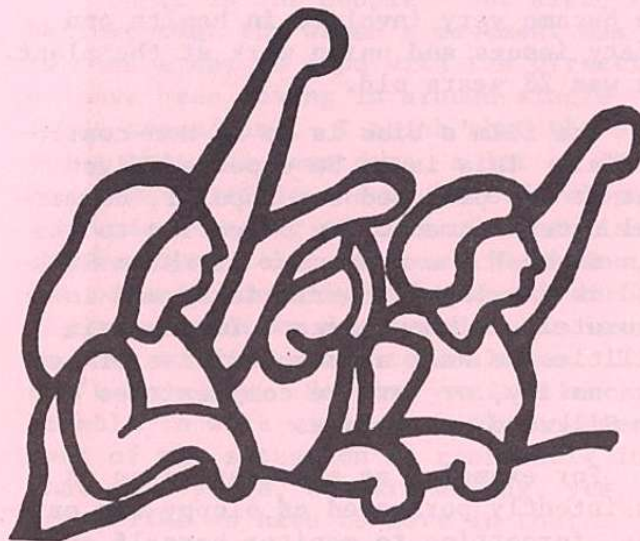
Silkwood, continued

the film about the liberties taken with the characters? But more importantly, why is it done at all in the first place?

This film also gives us a fairly in-depth portrait of a woman taking on an enormous and frightening responsibility in almost complete isolation. However, I remain suspicious of the choices which were made to develop the characters and the pertinent information about Karen Silkwood.

I would highly recommend reading one of the accounts of the Silkwood case, one of which I cited in the beginning, for anyone who is interested in finding out more about the politics of the case. It was quite fascinating to see what enormous ripples throughout the powers-that-be of the United States a small-town working woman created when she began to take on one of the most powerful industries emerging in the U.S. at that time: the nuclear power/arms industry.

-- Ellea Wright



(although the encouragement we feel goes a long way).

The pitch at the beginning of this article is serious--we need money now, urgently. If you can send something, make cheques out to International Women's Day Committee, and mail to IWDC, P.O. Box 70, Station F, Toronto M4Y 2L4. And while you're doing that, why not slip a note into the envelope to tell us what you think about the newsletter, about IWDC, what we should be doing, etc.