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# International Women's Day Committee newsletter

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## EDITORIAL : Eaton Strike Not Over

Geri Sheeay, a RWDSU organizer addressed the NAC conference in Ottawa on Sunday May 13. Rumours of an end to the Eaton's strike had been spreading all weekend and we were both eager and apprehensive about hearing the details.

She delivered a solemn message to us from the strikers and the union:

No matter what happened in the next week, the strike would not be over; the fight would not be over

A day or so later we heard that the bargaining committee had signed fourteen separate contracts for the striking Eaton's employees without taking them back for ratification to the membership. Faced with the deadline for legal dissolution of the bargaining unit and more non-strikers than strikers, they felt that this was the only way to save the union that took over forty years to organize.

Many of the strikers and their supporters were disappointed with the terms of the settlement. Conditions of employment with the T. Eaton Company are not much different with the contracts than they were without. But there is one big difference. Now there is a union (or union locals) in Eaton's that can fight for better contracts in the future.

The fight for fair and decent working conditions at Eatons has only begun. The efforts that the RWDSU, strikers labour movement and women's movement put into signing up the employees and the five and a half month strike for a first contract will have to be maintained, if not redoubled, if the strike is to be won.

The current business offensive against unions, and Eaton's special attitude towards them, mean that almost no union can make gains in isolation. Good contracts are not won at the bargaining table. They are won by the strength of the local or national unions between contracts that can brought to

bear against the company during negotiations.

The union locals at Eatons will need the continued support of all RWDSU's resources, the labour movement and the women's movement to have that strength.

The importance of a union victory at Eaton's has not changed. It remains an important symbol for the Canadian women's and labour movements - organizing unorganized women - organizing the retail sector - defeating a Canadian institution built on the maltreatment of workers, especially women... Gains at these Eaton's are necessary to encourage employees in the rest of the Eaton's empire and the whole retail sector to go ahead.



The fight hasn't let up for even one day, for the Eaton family or their striking employees. It's a safe bet that the company does not plan to go meekly into the next set of negotiations. It shouldn't be a surprise to anyone if they organize a decertification vote later this year.

Meanwhile the ex-strikers have faced harassment from management and scabs on their return to work. They are not sure of their rights or job security. The organizing and support they had on the picket line isn't out on the store floor.

A lot of the needed support has to come from the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). We understand that they

have their organizing staff by one half. Given the difficulty of organizing in this sector, the fact the Eaton's drive probably needs more rather than less resources and the crucial nature of their success or failure, we wish this wasn't the case.

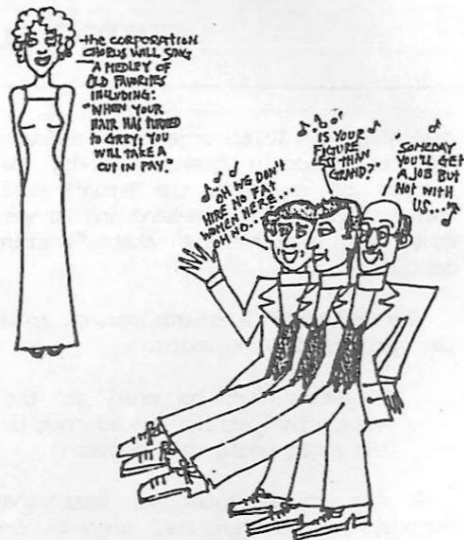
If they have to withdraw this central union support, experience has shown that if strength is to be maintained or increased, it has to be replaced with local union organization and leadership. Strength at the local level is fostered by some degree of autonomy, education in procedures, tactics and strategy for the local activists, clear and open lines of communication between central and local levels of the union membership participation through committee work that has some tangible outcome, and resources from the central union for all of these developments.

The women's movement and labour movement will have to maintain active support as well.

The Women's Strike Support Committee played an invaluable role during the strike. They made the necessary links between the various sectors involved. They broadened support for the strike and initiated necessary and successful mobilizations.

If the IWDC and other organizations involved in that committee maintain an active commitment and involvement, it can make a huge difference in the outcome of the next set of negotiations. We can maintain the links between the women's movement and the labour movement, including the RWDSU. We can strengthen the connections between activists in the women's movement and the Eaton's strikers. We can help put women on strike now (eg. the Visa Centre employees) in touch with others who have been in that situation to share information and support.

The Eaton's strike is not over. We've been fighting it for over 40 years and it didn't end in May. That was only another battle. We all have to keep up our active support.



## Documenting Eaton's

By Marusia Bociurkiw

In late September, a video documentary called "Making Change: The Story of the Eaton's Strike" will premiere in Toronto. Produced by Emma Productions, (a feminist media production company) and partially funded by seven different unions, the tape documents the entire six month strike from a feminist perspective. Footage from solidarity pickets, the IWD storming of Eaton's, meetings of the Women's Strike Support Coalition, and the IWDC Eaton's Benefit will be combined with interviews with women from the four struck Metro stores.

The tape will let the women strikers speak for themselves in a way that the news media was reluctant to do. Several interviews reveal the growing awareness among the strikers that their issues were connected to a larger women's movement; in particular, interviews days after IWD indicated a significant change in the way they identified themselves and their struggle. As one of the Bramalea women put

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## Talking Together

IWDC initiated a series of three discussions by and for socialist-feminists inviting women outside the group to participate. The idea for the sessions flowed from our internal discussions, a recognition of the need to talk with others, as well as the urgings of women who also wanted the opportunity for dialogue. The discussions were not intended to be large, "public meetings", but were designed to be small enough to allow for real interchange. We weren't interested in experts putting forward a line. We wanted to provide a space to allow socialist-feminists to explore areas of concern to all of us in an informal manner. The meetings were designed to touch any grand conclusions. We did hope that they might spark an interest in some type of ongoing network or informal discussion process.

The first session dealt with sexual politics and reproductive rights. Mariana Valverde and Linda Gardner laid out their current thinking to the group in order to provide a starting point for the discussion. Mariana spoke of how the women's movement has allowed the pornography debate to overshadow all other issues of sexuality. She felt that we as a movement must put more energy into sex-related concerns and the development of a sexual ethic. Linda spoke of reproductive rights in their broadest sense: their relation to the state; what we demand, and what can be won under capitalism. Both were very thought provoking explorations which led to good discussion.

The second session was chaired by Gladys Klestorny of the Latin American Women's Collective, and began with remarks by Sue Genge of CUPE and the OFL Women's Committee. She spoke of her nine years' experience in the trade union movement, the changes that have taken place within it, and its relationship to the women's movement. Cindy Wright outlined why she felt white feminists must actively support and take up anti-racist work. (Her comments are

included in this issue of the newsletter.) The Black Feminist Collective was originally to have made a presentation to the group, but on further reflection decided it wanted to have more discussions internally and with other Black women before it presented publicly.

The women participating thought that the discussion that developed was excellent. It dealt with the structural and personal manifestations of racism. The question was asked, Why doesn't the women's movement concretely support anti-racist campaigns such as the recent Wei Fu demonstration? Women felt that it was a problem of political analysis, as well as a lack of sensitivity to the differences among us, and how we participate in each others' oppression. We also spoke of class struggles such as the Eaton's strike, and why the feminist community, aside from specific individuals and groups, didn't respond more strongly. There were ideas put forward on how we could build this type of support and better integrate our different struggles.

Because of this discussion, the format of the third session was somewhat different. Instead of asking a few women to prepare remarks on specific areas, we approached a range of women asking them to respond to the following questions: How do we bring our socialist-feminist politics into our practice? How can we be more supportive of each other? How do we work together?,



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## Give Strikers Credit

As more than a hundred of their fellow strikers streamed across the lawn bearing coffee, doughnuts, and strike signs, the VISA Centre sit-downers emerged hungry but exhilarated after their 21-hour occupation of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce's VISA operation in Toronto.

The sit-down began four hours before the official strike deadline. Company letters sent to union member's homes, the threat to cut off benefits, and the bank's removal of two day's pay from workers pay slips in expectation of a strike sparked the sit-down.

The Commerce refused to allow food into the area the sit-downers were occupying. The bank also cut off the phone lines so sit-downers could not contact their families. Nevertheless, about 40 of the original 75 stayed through the night, emerging at 9 a.m. the following morning to the rousing, delighted cheers of the outside pickets.

The sit-down occurred two days after full page ads prepared by the UAW and paid for by the Canadian Labour Congress appeared in The Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail. The ads were designed to get the issues of the negotiations out to the public and to send a signal to the Commerce that the labour movement was going to be very serious about helping the Visa employees, members of the Union of Bank Employees win a decent first agreement. The CLC is also paying strikers \$300 a week strike pay, plus benefits so that the bank "won't be able to starve them out." Workers currently earn an average \$9.12 an hour for a 37.5 hour week.

The VISA Centre workers were certified last September and went into bargaining in January. More than 30 meetings were held with the company, but no progress was made. The company finally tabled an offer on May 9. The union responded on May 31 with several revisions in its own proposals in an

effort to reach an accommodation. The bank responded by tabling a second offer worse than the first. The strike started on June 12, 1985.

The UBE represents about 250 people at Visa Centre and about another 175 at four other Commerce locations in Toronto, as well as a branch in Quebec and another in B.C. The UAW is assisting with all five sets of the Toronto negotiations.



The company offer currently on the table features:

- \* a two year agreement with absolutely no wage increases. (Employees have not received a regular wage increase since 1981. Equal pay for equal work does not exist)
- \* no increase in benefits
- \* no improvements in holidays or vacation
- \* mandatory overtime

- \* management refuses to guarantee the present work week and wants the right to reduce hours of work whenever they please, meaning they can change full-time employees to part-time.
- \* management wants to be able to layoff and recall anyone they like and promote whenever they want, regardless of length of service.
- \* they want the right to discharge sick or disabled employees.
- \* before an employee can accept any other part-time job, they must get the permission of the bank.
- \* they want an archaic management right's clause, with the right to fire, classify and re-classify, promote, demote, layoff, recall, evaluate, retire, discipline or discharge any employee without the right to file a grievance.

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## CALEA Wins

By Nancy Farmer  
(with thanks to  
Peggy Nash of CALEA,

Just as we, in the women's community, were preparing to mobilize around the CALEA strike (Airline ticket agents), the strike was won. Bob White, the President of the Canadian Auto Workers sat in on negotiations and helped bring bargaining to a satisfactory conclusion, just three weeks into the strike.

As you'll remember, Air Canada management as attempting to roll back the clock on many past gains and also threatened the continuing job security of the union members. The company was clearly trying to copy-cat the upheavals in the U.S. airline industry following deregulation. The result, had Air Canada been successful, would have been the creation of yet another low-paid job ghetto, where workers would have had no choice in whether they wanted full or part-time work.

This was the first full-scale strike against Air Canada in 39 years, and the boss underestimated the union's strength. The final settlement brought a 35% cap on part-time work, no lay off of full-timers before part-timers with a seniority date before May 19th 1985, and a 4% wage increase. Other gains came in areas such as technological change, health and safety. Also, a real breakthrough was the improved rights and benefits won for the part-timers. Some of the notable items are

full seniority accrual; full lay-off, bumping and recall rights; dental and pension plan and personal leaves of absence. As more people are forced into part-time work it's important that these positions are not considered second-class, and part-timers receive the same benefits and protection as full-timers.

Also worth mentioning, in mid-June the CALEA members voted 82% in favour of joining the Canadian United Auto Workers. These members will now be able to attend the founding convention of the UAW in Canada this September. Congratulations on making a move that can only help make the auto workers stronger in this country.



## Comics, Condoms and Kotex

By Marusia Bociurkiw

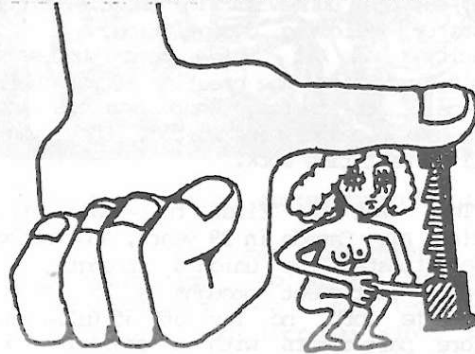
A few weeks ago, an art installation in the window of Pages Bookstore on Queen Street West was raided by the morality squad of the Metro Toronto Police. Entitled, "It's A Girl", the piece, collectively produced by a group of women ("Woomers"), was part of the feminist art show Fanfest, and was meant to depict some of the paraphernalia that are part of growing up as a girl in our culture. Objects seized included: a Barbie doll, comic books, makeup, condoms, and several Kotex pads splattered with red paint. The store was charged with displaying obscene material.

Why would a collection of trinkets and kitsch attract the attention of the police? What's so obscene about some fake menstrual blood? What next?...These were some of the questions floating around the feminist and art communities as news of the raid spread. The producers of "It's A Girl" were reproducing ideas that have been part of feminist cultural production for some time - that of trying to create an alternative feminist culture through the validating of female experience, including biological processes that have been hidden because of their "taboo" nature. One well-known proponent of such work is Judy Chicago, who ten and fifteen years ago produced such pieces as "Menstruation Bathroom", which incorporated blood, tampons, and sanitary napkins as major parts of the work, and "The Dinner Party", which used vaginal imagery as a central theme.

Artists have been dealing with taboos for centuries; but the definition of what is or isn't taboo or obscene changes historically, and often according to the needs of religious institutions or the State. (Fifty years ago it was socialist art, a month ago it was feminism.) In 1933 a labour play called "Eight Men Speak" had its first performance in Winnipeg. It was written to protest Section 98 of the Criminal Code which imprisoned the eight leaders of the Communist Party of Canada. The play was

banned, and never performed again until 1983: theatres who chose to show it were threatened by the government with having their licenses revoked. And last year, a show of videotapes by Vancouver artist Paul Wong, called "Confused: Sexual Views", which had interview subjects discuss their sexuality in explicit terms was cancelled by the Vancouver Art Gallery for fear of hostile public reaction. That was also the year that two men from the Ontario Censor Board seized tapes on lesbian and gay sexuality from A Space Gallery in Toronto. and so it goes.

My own reaction to "It's A Girl" - which I managed to see before it was raided - was less one of shock or catharsis, than of disappointment. "Hasn't this already been said?" I wondered, and felt uncomfortable about the continuing use of such imagery within feminist art. I felt that the artists had neglected to deal with the political and social contexts of sexuality, and were therefore too close for comfort to the realm of biological determinism. The raid gave a notoriety to the work it might otherwise not have received, and in some ways heroicizes the seemingly innocuous act of including references to menstruation in a piece of art. (One wonders if "menstrual art" will begin appearing in the AGO.)



It is important not to view this work, and the raid in isolation, but rather to link it with other alternative forms of sexual representation, and with the

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## Nicaragua Notebook

By Mariana Valverde

I recently spent about a month in Nicaragua, translating for a group of trade unionists from Saskatchewan and doing my own political sightseeing. Rather than attempt any overall analysis, I will here share some of what I saw, heard, and felt while I was there.

One of the many meetings that my group had was with the national leadership of AMNLAE, the women's organization (with about 85,000 members). A very young and clever woman who was a member of the executive told us that they had been recently visited by Betty Friedan, who promptly told AMNLAE that they should not support the Sandinista government because women in Nicaragua were just not liberated at all. The AMNLAE leader said to us: "I could see that she was thinking that we were not liberated because we hadn't read her book, so I said to her, *Companera*, how can you expect Nicaraguan women to have read your book; it was only after the Revolution that most of us learned how to read." The irony was apparently lost on Friedan, but our own group learned a lot from her words.



'We're not trying to overthrow them—we're only trying to change their structure.'

Another woman active in AMNLAE invited me to attend the annual national meeting of the organization, saying that they were going to present a new approach to their work: their self-criticism was that in the past couple of years they had acted too much like a conduit for Sandinista campaigns, and now they wanted to open up the organization's agenda to the needs expressed by women members. She said, animatedly waving her rum glass in the air, "if women want to talk about the abortion situation, we'll take up abortion as an issue" (abortion remains illegal). Then she explained that AMNLAE was organizing gatherings for women who were active in their unions or mass organizations, to allow them to share their experiences and discuss their demands as women. She said: "For instance, the teachers' union is mostly women, but it's only now that we are getting them together just as women, not to do work". I sipped my rum quietly, wondering if they knew what they were getting into. I asked: "But won't you have some trouble from the FSLN?" She answered, "Well, let them give us trouble. They know they can't carry on with the revolution without AMNLAE's support."

I was eager to attend the convention, but on the other hand, I had just finished two weeks of sixteen-hour-a-day translating, and my plans were made to go to the beach town of San Juan del Sur for the weekend. I decided I wouldn't absorb anything even if I attended the convention, so I went to the beach. While I was there I looked for a copy of the FSLN paper, *Barricada* (the largest circulation daily in the country). Sure enough, there was a report of the AMNLAE convention: but the report said nothing about what the women said. It only summarized a speech given to the women by Bayardo Arce, one of the nine (male) commanders of the FSLN. The speech acknowledged AMNLAE's crucial role in carrying out the revolution, but it contained dire warnings about the dangers of "only" dealing with women's issues. I could just imagine my feminist friend's

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## Third World Lesbians Protest

TO INSURE THE FULL AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION OF THIRD WORLD LESBIANS AND GAY MEN IN THE INTERNATIONAL GAY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCES

### WHEREAS:

the International Gay Association intends to be representative of the international lesbian and gay community;  
the oppression of Third World Lesbian and Gay men cannot be separated from the struggles of our people against U.S. and European imperialism and racist oppression of our brothers and sisters in South Africa;

all the resolutions in support of Central American and South African liberation struggles were voted down at the IGA plenaries;

the IGA plenary refused to allot funds for the establishment of a Latin American support group;

caucuses for Third World Lesbian and Gay men were scheduled either in conflict with IGA plenaries or after all plenary sessions were over;

Third World Lesbians and Gays, especially lesbians, are grossly underrepresented in this conference (i.e. there was only one Third World lesbian delegate present);

### WE DEMAND THAT:

1) each IGA conference organizing committee establish and support a Third World Caucus as part of the organizing committee to insure that Third World needs and Third World issues are addressed throughout the conference;

2) the IGA continue to encourage and support spaces for Third World people only, Third World workshops and Third World people's caucus at future IGA conferences;

3) at the end of each IGA conference, the Third World Caucus be invited to prepare and distribute an evaluated report from Third World people regarding the IGA conference. This evaluation will be passed on to the organizers of the following conference;

4) a Third World Secretariat be created in which lesbians and gay men are equally represented;

5) priority in the distribution of travel funds to bring delegates to IGA conferences be given to Third World lesbians and gay men;

**We who believe in  
freedom cannot rest  
until it comes.**



From Long Open House - March 14, 1984

6) the IGA support the struggles for liberation being waged by our sisters brothers in Central America and South Africa.

RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE THIRD WORLD LESBIAN CAUCUS 7-6-85

## How Accessible Are We?

"Not the Church, not the State, women must control their fate." By Joanne Duxette

Really? What if the woman is "different"? What if she uses a wheelchair or crutches? Or is blind or hearing impaired? Or is an epileptic? Or is developmentally or learning disabled? Or is a survivor of patriarchy's psychiatric system? Do the state, medicine, the church, or the family not have the right to decide her fate? At what point does a person become a non-person?

Jobs, housing, children, recreation, culture, social services and basic human relationships are denied to disabled women every day—not by our disabilities. No, we are barred from freedom more by the attitudes of those who define the human in their own image. An image that is white, middle class, emotionally inert, able-bodied and male. Women are, by definition, not men and our tenuous claim to humanness depends on our usefulness to the powerful.

Women and all disabled are all seen as inherently defective, disposable things.

Doctors, governments, social service agencies and institutions assume without question their right to control even the most intimate and mundane aspects of the lives of disabled women. I have talked to women who've been beaten for being incontinent, who've been electroshocked, tranquilized into stupor, experimented on (without consent) surgically and chemically, sterilized (without consent), raped,



tortured and deprived of the most basic human rights and dignities.

Sexism defines "woman" in such a way that the further we depart from the "beautiful" or the "nice", the more "inconvenient" we become and the more we are oppressed. Feminism must address the totality of women's experience. In practice, this means the women's movement has to make itself accessible to disabled women starting with ramps, TTYs, sign language interpreters, information on Braille and type, but also through consciousness raising and attitude. Are disabled women welcome? Do you publicize your events in disabled community papers or on information lines?

Disabled women were proud to take part in an accessible IWD Fair 1985. (Too bad the march didn't have a van capable of carrying wheelchair users who could not go the whole route). Disabled women have been meeting across the country, at disabled consumer conferences, in caucuses, and at forums and special events.

We share a common oppression as women. Women who are not now disabled will probably be so at least once in their lives. Our present is your future. We have something to fight for together.

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\* they want to exclude many part-time workers from the collective agreement.

Last year the Commerce made \$399 million in pre-tax profits, \$282 million after taxes. The six months ending April 30 of this year produced profits of \$167 million, 25% higher than last year. The Commerce also has \$74 billion in assets.

-Excerpted from UAW Newsletter, June 14, 1985

To support the VISA Strikers you can call the authorization numbers. This will tie up the lines and make it more difficult for stores to get through for authorization of purchases using a Commerce Visa. Remember that you will be talking to people who have crossed the picket line.

Call: 862-2221  
785-3222

## Choice Goes Bi-National

by Deborah Gardner

On May 5, 1985, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (O.C.A.C.) hosted a bi-national strategy meeting for activists in the Choice movement. The meeting concluded the week-end of the annual general meeting of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (C.A.R.A.L.).

Activists from all parts of English Canada and Quebec attended. It was exciting and encouraging to have so many activists present to discuss strategy. Many shared their unique experiences and brought to the meeting a broader, and consequently better, understanding of the situation bi-nationally.

Linda Gardner, from O.C.A.C., presented an outline for the clinic strategy which was adopted by the coalition in the opening of the Morgentaler Clinic on Harbord Street. The rationale for the strategy was:

1. to address the lack of access.
2. to directly challenge the law.
3. to provide a focal point for mobilization.

Linda addressed some of the problems with this strategy with input from the activists in attendance. She then concluded with the idea that when clinics are to be opened the question of where and when needs maximum coordination/consultation within the movement to determine preconditions. The need to keep a bi-national perspective on the effect each clinic opening will have on the movement was emphasized.

Ellen Kruger gave the meeting an update on the current situation with the Winnipeg Clinic. Ellen's presentation was followed by Dr. Morgentaler speaking about his recent tour across Canada. He also spoke about his continued belief in the public support for the issue and that it will be translated into the acquittal of doctors when brought into the courts.

Activists reported on what was happening in their particular area, and how they felt it reflected their role in the movement. Women from Quebec spoke emotionally about their past and present struggles. The building of links and the sharing of information became more and more apparent as a necessary process in the establishment of a truly bi-national movement. The links were being forged as each woman spoke.

Judy Rebick, of O.C.A.C., presented a proposal for bi-national tribunals to take place in the fall of 1985. The problem of access would be documented through the presentations of women who had had abortions and the conditions that were prevalent at the time. The tribunal will be divided into three time periods; pre-1969, post 1969 and current.

The tribunal will have reports from women from the east to the west coast. It will put a focus on the women's movement and the powerful position of the Choice movement by those women whose lives were affected by the lack of access to safe and medically insured abortions.



Spare Rib/England

A strong and extensive media coverage will be necessary to create a bi-national momentum. It is hoped that the momentum will not be unlike that set by Steve Fonyo's run for cancer research.

O.C.A.C. has prepared a "tribunal kit" for women or groups who are interested in participating in this historic documentation

of women's struggle to control their own bodies. If you are interested in contributing in any way please contact O.C.A.C. at (416) 532-8193 for further information.

It will take the efforts of many women to make the bi-national tribunals a success. The energy that was evident at the strategy meeting in May certainly gave indications that the necessary support is there. We also need to ensure that the necessary women power is. It is crucial that women's experiences are documented and presented to show that it is not only a woman's choice to have an abortion, but that it is also a woman's right to make the choice.

## Midwives Demand Inquiry

By Linda Gardner

The call for public inquiry into the issues surrounding midwifery arose during a coroner's inquest which began on June 24, 1985. The inquest, scheduled to continue for three weeks, is investigating the death of a baby born in October 1984. The baby was born at home after a normal labour attended by two midwives and then transported to Sick Children's Hospital where he died two days later.

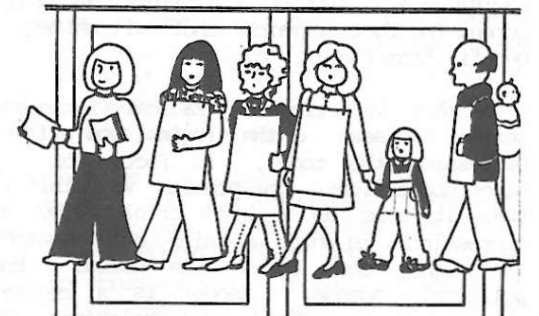
Although the inquest was viewed as an opportunity to raise publicly the issues involving home birth and midwifery, it has become clear that it is not a fair or unbiased forum. The hostile environment in the courtroom towards midwifery, the attempts by the crown attorney to discredit the abilities of the midwives involved and thus the profession as a whole, and the fact that the coroner himself is a physician do not allow for all the evidence to be heard on this subject.

A public inquiry would permit an indepth examination into the present status of midwifery, the right to choose the care of a midwife either in hospital or at home, the right to choose a home birth, the safety



of home births, and the integration of midwifery into the health care system. Midwifery is an important element of the wide spectrum of reproductive rights and the fight for women-defined and -controlled health care. This struggle, just like the current struggle for abortion rights, is a key focus of the conflict between women's demand for reproductive freedom and state and medical control of our bodies.

At the time of writing (early July), the Association of Ontario Midwives was asking supporters to call the Chief Coroner, the Attorney-General and the Minister of Health to demand a public inquiry into midwifery care. Many supporters have been attending the inquest (15 Grosvenor Ave. Toronto) and money is still needed to cover the legal costs (make cheques payable to Marcia Matsui in Trust and send to: Marcia Matsui, 11 Prince Arthur Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5R 1B2). To volunteer your time and energy, please contact: Leslie Schear at 534-9847. For further information, contact: the Association of Ontario Midwives, P.O. Box 85, Station 'C', Toronto M6J 3M7.



## Fighting Racism is a Feminist Issue

Note: This article is the written and somewhat revised version of a talk which I gave at the IWDC forum on "Women Organizing", Sue Genge of the Canadian Union of Public Employees also spoke that evening on women and the trade union movement.

As a starting point for my own talk, I want to begin with some ideas which were put forward by Barbara Smith in a talk she gave called "Racism and Women's Studies", published in the Black feminist anthology; But Some of Us Are Brave. In her talk, Smith gives two reasons why racism is a feminist issue, and these two answers will form the basis for my own comments.

Racism is an issue for all feminists, she argues, because of the very definition of feminism. Feminism is about the liberation of all women, and anything less than this vision cannot be described as feminist. Secondly, Smith argues that the practice of racism distorts the lives of white women in some very fundamental ways.

Certainly, Barbara Smith is correct on both accounts. At the same time, we need to get at the reverse side of both her arguments. In the first place, we need to figure out why a systematic analysis of racism has not been incorporated into feminist theory, just as socialist-feminist theory has had to work with the fact that traditional Marxism has no fully adequate theory of women's oppression. Second, while racism does distort the lives of white women, the fact remains that all whites do benefit from racism.

In many varieties of radical feminism, sexism is seen as the original and primary oppression—the model, in fact, for all other oppressions. One problem with this is that it sets up a kind of hierarchy of oppressions, in which anything not regarded as primary ends up at the bottom of the political agenda. Gender is a central category in analysing social relations, but it certainly is not the only one.

Some writers, such as Adrienne Rich, have tried to incorporate an analysis of racism into a radical feminist perspective. I'm thinking of her essay "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism and Gynophobia" (1978), published in On Lies, Secrets; and Silences. However, it seems to me that the way she sets up her argument has some problems.

She tends to understand white women's racism as a form of false consciousness. For Rich, racism is fundamentally a patriarchal practice which divides women from each other, and which is engaged in by white women who have a false loyalty to white male "civilization". In some ways, this reminds me of certain orthodox leftist arguments which analyse sexism as a tool of monopoly capitalism to divide men and women



workers so that they can't see "the main enemy".

Of course, the capitalist system benefits tremendously from racism and sexism, but the point is that racism and sexism have powerful, material weight in history and society. They are practices, not "illusions" or examples of "false consciousness", and the ideological and material benefits which come with them are very real.

I do agree with Rich about the patriarchal dimension of racism. There never has been a white supremacist organization that did not also advocate, and enforce, strictly male-dominated family forms and certainly this is one reason why it is in the interests of white women to fight racism.

Socialist-feminist theory does not have all the answers, either. Historically, socialist-feminist work has developed as a critique of Marxism, by trying to show the ways in which Marx's theory does not adequately understand, and theorize, women's oppression. The oppression of women has nearly always been subordinated to other, more "primary" questions within socialist theory and practice. At the same time, though, socialist-feminism has no adequate overall analysis of racism; other than that which it has inherited through the socialist tradition. Consequently, socialist-feminist suffers from the "tacking on" problem when it comes to addressing the lives and conditions of women of colour.

Barbara Smith argues that racism distorts and lessens the lives of white women, and that it very definitely does. But whites also benefit materially from racism and this fact is certainly among the biggest obstacles to unity among women.

I definitely do not have any fresh and original approaches to understanding our prospects for working together on the points

which we have in common, but there are three very general points which I'd like to end on:

1. In order to understand how white women and Black women/women of colour can work together, we need an understanding of each other's material reality within the Canadian context. We desperately need more of the kind of work on Black women's lives which Dionne Brand has published in Fireweed (see issue #19).

2. Second, objective differences are crucial, but they do not carry with them automatic and fixed conclusions about the possibilities for shared political work. Such differences can be the focus of positive historical and political struggle. If the women's movement is to grow, we have to be able to start with these differences in our conditions as women and figure out what strategic positions can be pulled from them.

3. This raises the question of coalition work. In the Home Girls anthology, Barbara Smith refers often to the political importance of coalitions — difficult though many of them are. Probably the most significant coalition for her was the one which was organized in Boston after 12 Black women were murdered in that city in a space of six months in 1979. Many of us have worked in a lot of coalitions, but we don't always sit back and think systematically about what coalitions work and why, and around what issues. For instance, undoubtedly the Boston coalition worked because it was led by Black women around an issue that concerned Black women at the most basic level.

The lives of women of colour and white women are socially organized in different ways. It's clear that we have conflicts, and that building unity among us will have to be struggled for. In the discussion, I hope that we can expand on some of these points and deepen our analysis.



## Sexism at the Border

Women Working with Immigrant Women made a submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights. It dealt with sex discrimination in both the Immigration Act and its regulations, and with English as a Second Language (ESL) and other training programs. It made the following recommendations.

- 1) About a third of immigrant women enter Canada under the "sponsored" class. Therefore, we urge the Honourable Flora MacDonald, the Minister responsible for Employment and Immigration, to review the Immigration Act and implement changes, in areas such as the point system, that will remove the systemic discrimination towards immigrant women. This review should be carried out in consultation with the community immigrant women groups.
- 2) The Immigration Act and Citizenship Act should be reviewed and amended to ensure that all citizens have equal access to services. The periods of citizenship and sponsorship should be made to coincide. One must have access to all services upon becoming a citizen. (This recommendation was first made in March 20-22, 1981 at the "Immigrant Women in Canada" Conference.)
- 3) Language training is a right of all newcomers. Therefore, language training with an income, transportation and childcare allowance should be available to all immigrants who wish it, regardless of their labour market intentions and immigrant classification at the time of entry into Canada.
- 4) Language and training allowances should reflect the cost of living.
- 5) Immigrant women should have full access to pre-employment training, skill training and on-the-job language training (for both English and occupation - specific English terminology.)

- 6) Educational requirements for training programs should be re-evaluated to ensure that they are not unreasonably high and are relevant. Determination of eligibility for training programs should be based on aptitude for the particular skill rather than on educational qualifications.
- 7) There should be more generic training; that is, training in skills common to a number of occupations (i.e. core and basic training), so that there is an opportunity to develop portable skills. (Recommendations #6 and #7 are cited from the Abella Report "Equality in Employment".)
- 8) Finally, a single department should co-ordinate all ESL programs to ensure they are relevant, effective and accessible. This department should also ensure that all ESL and training programs are effectively publicized.



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it, "I guess we're part of the women's movement now!...Women for the cause...who would've thought?..." In a group interview conducted after the strike had ended, the former strikers and some women trade unionists discuss their feelings about an inadequate contract, and strategize for the future. They also talk about the enormous impact the strike had on their lives, and their hunger for continued involvement with the women's movement.

"Making Change" will be distributed to trade unions and community groups across Canada, to be used as an educational and organizing tool, and as a document of an historic strike.

Check your local lamp post, hydro pole or weekly tabloid for information about the September screening.

## Colonialism Lives On!

By Carolyn Egan

IWDC was one of a number of groups which sponsored a meeting with Susanna Ounei, a founder of the Group of Kanak and Exploited Women in Struggle, one of the ten organizations that joined together in September 1984 to form the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front in New Caledonia. The Kanaks today make up half of the islands population, and are under French colonial rule. New Caledonia is situated 750 miles east of Australia, and 12,000 miles from France. The struggle of the Kanak people has not been given a high profile in the North American media, and Ounei's tour was the first opportunity many of us had to learn about it.

Susanna Ounei has been active in the liberation struggle since 1969, and she spoke of the racism and exploitation her people suffer, as well as the particular situation of women.

In school we learned that our ancestors were Gauls, with blond hair and blue eyes...we saw that our parents were treated with scorn by the white bosses when they tried to find work. Today there is massive unemployment within the Kanak people.

Ounei decided in 1974 to work on the involvement of women in the anti-colonial struggle. She was imprisoned for eight months after a court room occupation demanding the release of political prisoners, and it was during this period that she and other women discussed both the role of women in the struggle and their role in the future society. When they were

released they started to question women's participation in the movement. "Why was it that the women swept the hall after every meeting?" Why was it customary that women never said anything in the meetings? Raising questions such as these caused problems at first, because the men did not want to deal with the concrete point of the

status of Kanak women. They said there were more important questions to deal with. The men felt that we were engaging in feminism, and trying to copy the women's liberation movement in France. "The questions I was raising came from my own experience in practice." The women's organization has continued to raise these questions within the movement and Susanna Ounei has become a respected leader of the struggle. The fact that she was chosen to represent on this tour speaks to the role she plays.

Today the women's group also includes non-Kanak women who are interested in a revolutionary movement, and fight against the problems of rape, wife battery and lack of birth control, particularly for younger women who are denied contraception, get pregnant, leave school and often have to seek work as housekeepers, raising their children alone.

We are glad to have the opportunity to hear Ounei outline the situation in New Caledonia. The liberation movement of the Kanak people is a sign of the renewed struggle of the indigenous people of the Pacific. "For us", Ounei stated, "international solidarity is very important because exploitation has no single colour, nor do the oppressed. Even though New Caledonia is a very small place, we hope to make the situation there as well known as possible around the world".



## Support for Choice in B.C.

by Janet Vesterhack

About 200 people crowded into the room to hear and cheer for Dr. Henry Morgentaler on Friday, April 12th at a wine and cheese reception at the Trout Lake Community Centre. This event was co-sponsored by the B.C. NDP Women's Rights Committee and Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion (CCCA).

The enthusiastic crowd expressed its heartfelt thanks to Dr. Morgentaler for his uncompromising stand on the question of choice by giving him more than simply applause: donations totalled well over \$1600, money greatly needed if mounting legal costs are to be met.

### NDP Spokeswoman

NDP speakers reaffirmed the party's support for freedom of choice on abortion. Margaret Mitchell cited the 1983 convention resolution to remove sections 251 and 252 from the criminal code and to pardon practitioners who have been prosecuted under these archaic laws. She noted that the party has policy to support free-standing clinics for abortion and sterilization procedures.

There were many criticisms of the Manitoba NDP government which is acting in contradiction to party policy by failing to accredit Dr. Morgentaler's Winnipeg clinic, thereby leaving him and his associates open to prosecution.

Perhaps the most direct criticism was delivered by former MP Grace MacInnis, who asserted that politicians are too afraid to take a firm stand on the issue.

Pointing to the need for a visible and vocal pro-choice movement, she declared that politicians will only move if they are more afraid of the majority than they are of the minority.

### CCCA Rally

The next evening the CCCA held a large public meeting at John Oliver High School. Again, the hall was packed despite attempts by anti-choice demonstrators to block access to the hall.

Both Dr. Morgentaler and Carolyn Egan of the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics were greeted with thunderous applause and donations exceeded \$4500. The standing ovation for Henry Morgentaler lasted several minutes as people expressed their deep respect for his personal sacrifice on the front lines of the fight for free access to abortions.

Carolyn Egan gave a very strong speech emphasizing the historical nature of the struggle for abortion rights, comparing it in importance with the fight for the right to assembly, to unionize, and to vote. Reproductive freedom is as fundamental to the liberation of women.

She spoke of the many positive features of the fight so far. In Toronto, 150 women have volunteered to escort women needing abortions from safe houses in the vicinity to Dr. Morgentaler's clinic. They do this on a regular basis in order to counteract the intimidation of the anti-choice faction. This is a good example of women helping women in true solidarity.



Carolyn stressed our long-term goal: to win a breakthrough with the clinics that will render the law unenforceable, and result in its removal from the criminal code. To achieve this goal we need two things:

1. A doctor, or doctors, willing to open clinics in spite of the criminal code, and
2. A broad-based alliance of unions, community and political groups led by the women's movement.

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## NAC and the Grassroots

By Carolyn Egan

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women held its annual meeting on the weekend of May 11th and 12th at Carlton University in Ottawa. NAC is made up of over three hundred women's groups across Canada and Quebec (the vast majority Anglophone), and is often viewed by the media and the government as speaking on behalf of the women of Canada. Historically it has taken a lobbying role, monitoring legislation and government actions as they affect women. Its leadership would generally be seen to be a part of the liberal feminist current. In the last few years it has experienced a significant increase in membership, and a number of strong policy resolutions have been debated and passed at annual meetings. In the recent past it has begun to take public stands on issues such as the Eaton's and CALEA strikes, and has actively involved itself in strike support work. This speaks to some of the changes that have been taking place within the membership, and is strategically significant because it is an action oriented approach which goes beyond the passing of support resolutions.

An elected executive functions as the decision making body between the annual meetings. It is made up of regional representatives and members at large. There are also standing committees on health, pornography, economic issues, peace and survival etc. which meet throughout the year.

IWDC has been a member for a number of years, has attended annual meetings, but has not been active in the organization. In the fall of 1984 we attended a NAC meeting held in Montreal, which was an attempt to develop links between women activists in Quebec and English Canada. It was to be an information and strategy sharing session. There were speakers from the Solidarity Coalition in B.C., the abortion campaign in Ontario, Action Travail des Femmes, La Vie En Rose, the CSN Women's Committee (a Quebec trade

union), and the Coalition of Visible Minority Women in Montreal. This type of meeting was a departure for NAC, and although it had no policy making authority, it was a fruitful sharing of perspectives and strategies, something that is badly needed in the women's movement.

Because of our experience in Montreal, and the discussions and educational we have had on liberal feminism and the mainstream women's movement, IWDC decided to make participation in NAC more of a priority. We recognized the importance of working in the wider women's movement, and seven of us participated in the AGM. Two were delegates from IWDC, three from other member groups, and two went as observers. We decided to contact a number of other women who would be participating, and initiated a meeting at the start of the conference. This was a very informal caucus at which we went over resolutions and workshop topics. (Two of us facilitated workshops.) Throughout the weekend we worked with women from the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Women Working with Immigrant Women, Rexdale MicroSkills, the NDP, the Ontario Federation of Labour Women's Committee, the Ontario NDP Women's Committee, CARAL and others. We strategized together on resolutions, and took a role in the debate in the plenary on issues such as Nicaragua, pornography, abortion rights, lesbian sexuality, daycare, and work place issues.



It seemed that this year there was much greater participation from grass roots women's groups, which indicates the desire for more networking, joint activities, and the sharing of strategies. NAC asked activists to facilitate workshops ranging from the Charter of Rights, pornography, reproductive rights, immigrant and minority women, economic issues etc. This was important particularly for strategic discussions. They took place prior to the plenary and gave women the opportunity to talk issues and politics in a smaller setting. There were also regional caucuses, and for the first time a lesbian caucus!

This was quite significant and is an indication of the changes that are beginning to take place. Many women felt that if NAC was the organization that was seen to be speaking for them, then they should be involved in it, and that we should make sure that its policies and activities actually represent the feminist movement. For example, there had been very limited lesbian visibility at past meetings and NAC had not been known to speak publicly on lesbian issues or concerns. The caucus was a step to overcome this. St. John's (Newfoundland) Status of Women submitted a resolution asking that NAC make a priority of the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Charter of Rights. After three presentations from members of the lesbian

caucus, the resolution passed easily in the plenary. The Globe and Mail picked up on the question of heterosexism, and how it affects all women, probably a first! After the easy passage, homophobia later raised its head in a group on the Charter. Some women felt that the issue should be downplayed because it would jeopardize other issues more relevant to "all" women, give REAL women a reason to discredit NAC, etc. But this was defeated in a vote after discussion. The caucus is going to continue to function during the year.

NAC does not have a history of being an activist organization, and its leadership has been criticized for being removed from the day to day struggles of women, and therefore slow to respond. It has not always put issues forward in the strongest fashion. There has been limited participation from quebequois, working class, immigrant women, and women of colour. But more and more women are becoming involved, and it provides a vehicle to link with each other bi-nationally. The executive has begun to take stronger public stands in response to the membership, and this has been very important in specific struggles. We feel that it is important and worthwhile for women to participate. IWDC certainly profited from our participation in the annual meeting, and will continue our involvement.

## NDP Strikes Out

By Lynn Lathrop

There were major victories for the left during the recent federal NDP convention. They included a reaffirmation of the NDP's out-of-NATO policy and the rejection of a key economic policy resolution for its failure to mention public ownership. This resolution was ultimately passed after it was amended to include a recognition of the important role of social ownership throughout the economy.

In contrast to these and other victories, the convention's response to the reproductive rights issue was extremely disappointing. Efforts by rank and file

women to highlight the struggle in Manitoba failed. Attempts to bring forward resolutions condemning Manitoba were vigorously opposed by the Participation of Women (POW) committee and party hierarchy.

Some of the arguments put forward against us were very powerful and helped to persuade other delegates not to give priority to any facet of the abortion struggle: A few Manitoba women argued that any public debate around the issue would make their job much more difficult, and that since they were the ones most directly involved they should set the agenda on how to deal with problems in Winnipeg. A POW representative charged that our attempts to raise this issue at the

convention were divisive and counter-productive. Furthermore, she maintained that the convention would vote down any abortion resolutions and this would be a tremendous setback for the choice issue.

Many of us tried to counter these arguments stressing our appreciation of the work done by the Manitoba women at the same time as pointing out that the attacks on the clinic in Winnipeg and its subsequent handling were of national importance. Since there were repercussions for all of us, we were therefore all, entitled to have some say in this issue.

Furthermore, we tried to point out that when internal pressure fails to do the job, outside pressure is often a logical next step.

Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in all of our attempts. In fact, I realized that we would be defeated when I stood to speak to the women's caucus at the Saturday meeting. The meeting was packed with women MP's, MPP's, federal council women, etc., most of whom had not been present for the debate the day before but who were clearly there to defeat any move to condemn Pawley publicly or to make abortion an issue at this convention.

In the end we were left with an internal petition, signed by about 400 delegates, that called on Pawley to follow the party's position on choice. Some of us met with him briefly on Monday to underscore our concern about what was happening in Manitoba.

Given the very well-organized opposition to bringing the abortion issue forward at this convention, it is clear that we will have to be much better prepared for the next one if we are to make any headway in this tremendously important area.



## Talking Sex

Side by side, a non-profit, feminist resource group is in the process of organizing "Coming Together: A Women's Sexuality Conference" to be held in Toronto on October 4th, 5th and 6th, 1985. The general aims of the conference are to provide an occasion for women to affirm and strengthen our sexuality in a feminist context, to allow women to explore the communalities and better understand the differences in our sexual affectional preferences, and to provide an educational experience that may help us shape our thinking and actions in the sexual sphere in a way that is consistent with our feminism. It should be an informative, exciting and challenging event!



Three well-known feminists will deliver keynote addresses; writer Susan Cole will open the conference on Friday evening; and Jo Ann Loulan, author of "Lesbian Sex" and Connie Clement, feminist health activist, will be speaking on Saturday. There will also be approximately 30 workshops on topics such as "body image", "heterosexism", "power dynamics in relationships", "sex and culture", "bisexuality", "breaking-up". The workshops are, as of this writing, still in the planning stages, but will include topics of interest to women of differing sexual preferences, races, ages, classes and physical abilities.

The cost for the conference, which will also include a dance/cultural event, has not yet been fixed. The organizers are attempting to raise funds to offset expenses and lower ticket prices. There will, however, be a sliding scale, and work exchanges will be available.

For more information, or to be put on the mailing list, please write "Side by Side", Box 85, 275 King St. East Toronto M5A 1K2.

## Support Sister Vision

By Linda Gardner

Congratulations to Sister Vision and Andri Zhina Mandiela! On June 7, 1985, Sister Vision, Canada's first press for Black women and women of colour launched its premiere publication, Speshal Rikwes, a book of poetry by Andri Zhina Mandiela. It was an enjoyable evening for the many friends and supporters who attended the celebration. Mandiela entertained with a selection of her poetry. She is a dynamic and exciting performer who skillfully gets the audience to join in a chant along with her. Speshal Rikwes is written using Jamaican vocabulary and expressions and acquaints the reader with the rhythm and sounds of the dub tradition. By chanting with Mandiela, one learns how effective this style is in highlighting the ideas and emotions expressed in her work.

Sister Vision was formed in 1984 so that more of the works of Black women and women of colour could be published and read. While Sister Vision makes a conscious political effort to distinguish the particular historical experience of Black women, that of slavery and its aftermath, from the experiences of women of colour; it is nonetheless, committed to recognizing commonalities and to sharing the writings of Native women, Asian women and others who define themselves as women of colour. There are four areas of focus: women's oral history, creative writing, books for children and young people, and theory and research.



Sister Vision wants to "reforge the links between women of colour in Canada and in the Caribbean and Third World women the world over" and to develop "a Global feminism, an interconnecting and weaving of our histories". Mandiela's book is a good beginning towards this goal.

To find out more about this new press and to send donations, manuscripts, ideas, contact Sister Vision, Black Women and Women of Colour Press, P.O. Box 217, Station "E", Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E2. (416)-532-9868.

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### History of Morgentaler's Struggle

In reviewing the history of his own involvement in the struggle, Dr. Morgentaler described the earlier abortion law which could have sent a person to jail for life for procuring or providing an abortion. Weekly, there were notices in the newspapers of the deaths of women who had died of botched abortions. He felt he had an obligation, as a doctor, to help these women. He firmly believed that a jury would never convict a doctor for providing necessary, safe medical services to women.

To date, juries have acquitted Dr. Morgentaler four times.

Under the present Parti Quebecois government in Quebec, community health centres in Quebec provide counselling, preventive medicine and health care for new mothers and infants. Many provide abortions for women who ask for them. Women from all over Canada go to Quebec for abortions. These clinics are financed and operated by the government of Quebec but so far, says Dr. Morgentaler, it has not been prosecuted for doing so. "Only I am being prosecuted all the time."

Unfortunately, this close to ideal situation for women in Quebec could be turned around after the next provincial election if the Liberals under Bourassa are elected and he applies the federal law, as he has threatened to do. This is another reason why repeal of the law is imperative.

### New Charges in Ontario

In Toronto, despite the acquittals, new charges have been laid. Meanwhile, in Winnipeg, there are four fronts to fight, according to Dr. Morgentaler.

#### 1. The NDP government in Manitoba.

It has failed its membership by refusing to adhere to party policy. The attorney-general is pressing charges and the weak excuse he uses is that he is obliged to do so under the law. We believe the government has an alternative. It can simply accredit the Morgentaler clinic.

2. The Winnipeg police. Not only are they laying charges, but they raid the clinic every time it opens, seizing expensive equipment which must be replaced.

## Anti-racist Protest

Wei Fu is a security guard with the Ontario government. Two years ago, he filed a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) after he was subjected to racist harassment by his supervisor. His claim was backed by the evidence of fifteen of his fellow officers, but the OHRC dismissed the case. According to the newsletter of the Cross-Cultural Communications Centre (CCCC), the Commission tried "to force Wei Fu to accept 'conciliation' on terms set by management at Ontario Government Protective Services, where Wei Fu works".

Wei Fu refused this and a public campaign around his case forced the OHRC to set up a



#### 3. The Manitoba College of Physicians.

This body's mandate is to protect health care in the province. By suspending Dr. Morgentaler's licence to practise medicine, it denies women this protection.

#### 4. The anti-abortionists.

This fundamentalist sect harasses and intimidates women trying to enter the clinic. There have been threats against Dr. Morgentaler's life.

#### Close to a Breakthrough

But Henry Morgentaler is undaunted. He is convinced that a breakthrough is close and that now, more than ever before, is the time to be actively involved.

Credit: Priorities (May 1985), p.21.

Board of Inquiry into the complaint. This spring, the Board ruled that while the supervisor's racist conduct was "morally wrong", it was legally acceptable. In short, as the CCCC newsletter phrases it, "It's all right for supervisors to make racial slurs and post racist notices as long as they're not to the face of the person concerned."

The decision was a major disappointment to many, and several hundred people in Toronto rallied on April 28th to voice their anger. The demonstration was sponsored by the Ad Hoc Committee for Wei Fu's Complaint, an organization with 40 community and labour endorsements.

Wei Fu's battle for justice is not over. He is appealing to the Divisional Court, and the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union is footing the legal bills. The Ad Hoc Committee continues its support of Wei Fu, and possible future actions could include: (1) a forum on the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Wei Fu's case has once again revealed the frustration and anger of those whose claims have been dismissed by the OHRC "on dubious grounds and after considerable delay"; (2) a lobby of the new provincial government; and (3) a campaign to demand a review of the OHRC and its effectiveness.

Wei Fu's case has important implications for all those concerned about racial and sexual harassment in the workplace, and it deserves everyone's support. To find out how you can do so, call Jane at 530-4117.

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reaction to the Commander's speech! And I surmised, from the oneness of the article in Barricada, that the FSLN leadership was getting nervous about 'the rising of the women'.

A page from my diary: "It is so amazing to see the profound unity, the camaraderie, that exists here. The feminists are getting pissed off with the old-guard Leninist elements in the FSLN: but the bunch of them are clearly on very friendly terms. We could see that in the going-away party we had for the Saskatchewan group and Nicaraguans that we had met with: the old guy from the CST [union federation] was joking about his wife bossing him around on the pretext of feminism, while on the other side of me Santis [my feminist friend] goes on about the need for women to talk about their own demands, including the political hot potato of abortion. If this was Canada, the old man and the young women would probably not be at the same party, and certainly not at the same table—or if they were, he would try to pull rank on her. But he isn't doing that (although he is sexist, sure enough). He couldn't even think of doing it. Everyone is a companero or companera to everyone else. And she will not try to manipulate him through her charm or scheme behind the scenes: no, she says exactly what she thinks no matter who is listening."

The cost of living was outrageously high; it had more than doubled since my last visit last July. While the bank was exchanging dollars at the fictional rate of 1 for 28 cordobas, people in the markets were offering tourists 650 cordobas for a U.S. dollar. When we arrived the gasoline crisis was more or less over—prior to this, people had not been able to get gas for their cars for a week or two, which is a real crisis in a city like Managua, with horrendously bad public transportation. But the only plentiful things were rice and fruits; other things (beef, even chicken and fish) were expensive and hard to get. And anything that has to be imported—from pencils to nails to spare parts for motors—is subject to speculation and hoarding.

The government is doing its best to control what it politely calls the "informal" sector—the small hoarders and corner vendors—, but no amount of political genius could possibly overcome the incredible structural economic problems. When your foreign debt is staggering, and in addition to the costs of servicing it you have to spend 40% of the GNP to fight the contras, there are not many dollars left to import consumer goods. Petroleum and machinery have to be imported regardless of cost: but pencils, shampoo, automobile parts, clothes, paper, hardware goods, electrical cable—all these things and hundreds more products just do not rate high enough to be put on the government list of priority import products. So they do not get imported through official channels, or bought with dollars at the official rate: they are bought clandestinely in Miami or Costa Rica by small businessmen who in turn have to buy their dollars in the black market at the rate of 650 to the dollar. What this does to the market price of commodities is outstanding: a pair of jeans can cost more than the minimum monthly wage.

People can live on ideals and revolutionary enthusiasm only for so long. After a while, they want more than an unfurnished brand-new brick schoolroom: they also want toys for their kids, clothes for themselves, a fridge and a stove. And this the Revolution cannot at present provide. Everyone knows that this is due to American economic pressure and military intervention, and there is absolutely no support among the working-class or even much of the middle class for an "American solution". But the wear and tear sometimes gets too much. Relationships break up; men drink too much; women activists are seriously burned out.

When you talk to people, you can feel imperialism as a crushing weight forcing them to walk slowly and crooked, when they could be marching with dignity as the first free people of continental Latin America.

I left Nicaragua sadder than on other visits; but also much angrier.

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continuing battle that artists (especially lesbian/gay/feminist artists) face with censorship. This raid came very soon after "Six Days Of Resistance", a province-wide screening of videotapes and films that have never been submitted to the Ontario Censor Board. The week-long event occurred without a single raid due, no doubt, to its high public profile, widespread support, and a pre-election government loathe to alienate itself. The raid on Pages was a low-key and convenient way of slapping the hands of a rebellious and organized art community. It also allowed the police, and therefore the State, to insinuate itself ever more forcefully into the arena of sexual representation of women, and to continue to tell us how we can and cannot represent ourselves. As inadequate as "It's A Girl" may have been in analyzing the position of women and girls in society, it is nonetheless part of a feminist art movement which is trying to deal with, or provide alternatives to, images which threaten or exclude us. It is the allowing, and not the restricting, of such production, which will give us the variety and the choices we need to develop a truly affirmative language of sexual representation.

The seizing of the objects in this piece contributes to an ongoing suppression of cultural expression in Canada, through economic as well as legal means. That this suppression is now extending itself to rather less explicit work than before, and is no longer restricted to film and video, is disturbing. It is another example of how state censorship can affect and limit all areas of cultural production, including those we thought were progressive, pro-woman, or simply innocuous.

A less obvious, but equally damaging side-effect of this sort of suppression, is self-censorship: a fear of adverse reaction that prevents us from saying what we want, or need, to say. This was made clear to me a few months ago, when, in curating a show of Canadian feminist videotapes for March 8th, I was hard-pressed to find work that dealt with issues of sexuality in a positive manner, including work that contained explicit lesbian content. While there exist

many useful tapes that deal with violence, or struggles for reproductive choice, there was little or nothing that talked about the pleasurable, erotic, or even humorous aspects of sexuality. Perhaps we have internalized some old notions of obscenity and taboo. Maybe we're afraid we'll get raided, or de-funded, or banned; clearly there is a need for such work, for developing a discourse, for our own enjoyment, and for resisting dominant notions of sexuality.

POSTSCRIPT: The management of Pages Books is fighting their criminal charge. Legal costs are estimated at \$5,000 \$10,000. Donations to the Pages Defense Fund can be sent to: Pages, 256 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ont. M5V 1Z8.

MS. JONES, PLEASE TRY TO UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE NOT BEING FIRED BECAUSE YOU'RE A HARD WORKING, MOTIVATED INDIVIDUAL AND HAVE SAVED OUR CORPORATION THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS. YOU'RE SIMPLY BEING RELEASED BECAUSE YOU'RE A LESBIAN



Enclosed in this edition of the IMDC Newsletter is a FREE GIFT for the politically correct. Use the Union of Bank Employees stickers whenever you write a cheque.

and what alliances can we make? How do we/ can we integrate each others' struggles into our areas of work? Women responded in concrete ways talking about class and race issues, the problems we are confronted with, and how we try to deal with them as socialist-feminists. Women spoke of experiences in their communities and work places, and how important analysis is in carrying out our political work. A black feminist spoke of the difficulty she has working as a feminist in her own community, and the lack of support she feels from the women's movement as a whole. Others also spoke of how isolated we are from one another, and the need for not only greater support, but also political dialogue and the shared development of analysis among activists. It was felt that as socialist-feminists it is important that we be clear to others about what we stand for and why, but not in an elitist manner. As a woman speaking in Spanish said, "we and our politics will be judged by our actions". Our practice must reflect our analysis if it is to have impact. There was a lot of honest sharing that evening, and we were very energized by the opportunity to talk with one another. Women felt clearly that there was a need to continue this type of discussion.

Although there are many socialist-feminists who did not take part, a broad range of women did participate. These included women active in the South Asian Women's Group, trade unionists, women from the NDP, the Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship, Canadian Action for Nicaragua, the Black Feminist Collective, the Ontario Immigrant Women's Network, the Latin American Women's Collective, the peace movement, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, the Coalition for March 8th and others. The feedback was very positive with many suggestions for future sessions. Women have volunteered to work on a committee to plan further discussions, and we hope that they will provide a mechanism for socialist-feminists to have ongoing interaction and dialogue with one another.

## Pink Turf

The Pink Turf Soccer League for women is well into its first season. We have four teams that started playing in May. We play every Saturday, and from a mixture of experienced and inexperienced players we are developing into disciplined, skilled players.

As a sport which traditionally excluded women, we are breaking new ground and enjoying the sisterhood, skill development and confidence building that this sports activity brings to us. And the lesbian flavour of the league is an added attraction for most of us (though we are not exclusive).

Due to the success and interest shown by women in our league, we are considering organizing an indoor league beginning in September. If you are interested in playing, phone 463-3528.

If you'd like to see our league in action, we play every Saturday at Withrow Park at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.—we'd appreciate the encouragement.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sat. Aug. 3, SPIRIT OF TURTLE ISLAND, Native Women's Festival, 8pm, 427 Bloor St. W., Tickets \$5 in adv., \$7 at door For childcare and info call: 925-6568.

Fri. Sept. 13, TAKE BACK THE NIGHT MARCH. Call Toronto Rape Crisis Centre 964-7477 for more details.

### LESBIANS IN VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS

Are you now, or have you ever been, hit, beaten, physically restrained, or threatened with weapons by your lover?

A NEW SUPPORT GROUP IS STARTING FOR LESBIANS WHO HAVE BEEN BATTERED. CONFIDENTIALITY GUARANTEED.

Call Education Wife Assault

963-3422

and leave a message for Persephone. This is a contact number only.

The harassment by anti-choice picketers has increased around the Clinic. It is important that O.C.A.C is able to provide an escort service for women who are going into the Clinic.

If you are interested in being an escort please contact O.C.A.C at 532-8193 and leave your name and a telephone number where you can be reached. Someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

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 members. For information call Mariana at 532-8989.



The word processing of this newsletter was done by the women at Rexdale Community MicroSkills Development Centre. Rexdale MicroSkills is an on-the-job training program for immigrant women in microfilm and automated office procedures. If you would like further information please call Shelly Gordon at 749-0640.