

PRAIRIE WOMAN

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A NEWSLETTER OF SASKATOON WOMEN'S LIBERATION



Editorial.....

R.

The theme of this issue of Prairie Woman was originally meant to be "Women in the Unions." There should have been a graphic on the front page depicting militant women leading the working class in its struggle against patriarchal capitalism.

Pretend there is.

The collective presently consists of only 3 women, and our lack of numbers is symbolic of the state of the women's movement in Saskatoon, perhaps there is no need for a group like ours to exist?

Just as we ask you to imagine the graphic on the front page, we ask you to imagine the demise of Saskatoon Women's Liberation.

Of course, militant will exist to continue the struggle of women toward socialism, but as individuals we are virtually helpless to effect any measure of change for all women.

We recognise the malaise of the newsletter to be only a symptom of the decreasing activity and participation of women in Saskatchewan, but its dependant on all of you who read this newsletter and are dedicated to the women's movement, to take up the struggle in an organized way.

WE no longer ask in a polite way for help, we can only replace the responsibility of the newsletter and the women's movement back into your hands, you the women of the Prairies.

Newsletter Collective
or remnants thereof

S.O.R.W.U.C.^{3.}

by Lynette
Polson

I'm sure most of you have heard the rumours which have been flying thick and fast about SORWUC recently. I'm their full time worker in Sask. so I'll fill you in on the facts regarding the situation.

First, some information about women employees in the banks. The only recent in-depth study of women in the banks was done in 1971 by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. The particular study was entitled "Manpower Utility in Canadian Chartered Banks" by Marianne Bossen, done in cooperation with eight of the Canadian chartered banks and the Canadian Bankers' Association. Here are some excerpts from that report:

- 64% of all bank employees are women
- 89% of all women earn less than \$5000.
- 72.3% of all men earn more than \$5000.
- 20% of all men working in banks (5,483) earn over \$10,000.
- 17% of women working in banks earn over \$10,000.

In the Senior Executive Group (above position of bank manager) there is 1 woman and 326 men.

3% of all women work in management or staff specialist operations,
44% of all men work in management or staff specialist operations.

Total estimated male management trainees in all banks - 2,000
Total estimated female management trainees in all banks - 128.

Since the banks are under federal jurisdiction, they only have to pay federal minimum wage which amounts to \$3.05 per hour. Saskatchewan's provincial minimum wage is \$3.25 per hour, so that means many bank employees are living below the Sask. poverty line.

The above statistics are certainly disgusting enough, but they are especially so when you look at the particular employer. According to all analysts of Canadian economic affairs, the banking industry is the most powerful group in the country. The "Financial Post", in its annual report on the 300 largest corporations in Canada (The Financial Post 300, Summer, 1977), put the five largest chartered banks at the head of the list of the top 35 financial institutions. They also published their profit figures and their growth in profits since 1971:

	Profit 1976	Average yearly growth in profits
The Royal Bank	\$157,389,000	17.3%
Bank of Commerce	\$145,898,000	19.1%
Bank of Montreal	\$ 95,934,000	15.1%
B. of Nova Scotia	\$116,853,000	20.9%
Toronto-Dominion	\$ 92,185,000	22.2%

SORWUC grew out of the Working Women's Association in Vancouver, which in 1971 began doing support actions for working women's struggles. The decision was

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made to form a union, and in October, 1972, the founding convention of the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada was held. In July, 1973, SORWUC was certified for its first bargaining unit, a small legal office. During the summer of 1976, SORWUC was approached by bank employees who wanted to unionize. In September, 1976, it was decided to charter a separate local for bank workers called United Bank Workers. After SORWUC had submitted applications for 21 branches, the Canadian Labour Relations Board held hearings to determine what would constitute an appropriate unit for collective bargaining. In June, 1977, the CLRB decided that a bank branch was an appropriate unit. Shortly thereafter, SORWUC received an inquiry from some interested bank employees in Melfort, Saskatchewan. In November, 1977, the Royal Bank in Melfort was certified and the Toronto Dominion (Main Branch) in Regina followed in December. In March, 1978, I was hired to assist in negotiating for both the Saskatchewan branches. I had been working for a bank in Vancouver. In June, 1978, we were chartered as the Saskatchewan Section of the United Bank Workers. Negotiations began in both provinces, but in July SORWUC in B.C. announced their decision to stop negotiating for their 24 certified branches. It was a difficult and painful decision to make. Basically, the reasons for the decision were a lack of funds, and an active anti-SORWUC campaign by the CLC. SORWUC had decided that the only way to get a good contract would be to strike at least one of their branches and organize a province-wide boycott based on that strike. Financial support from other unions was absolutely essential for this. At that point, the CLC began advising their affiliates not to support SORWUC financially. The dispute with the CLC arose over the question of SORWUC's affiliation. SORWUC was willing to join the CLC as a national union with their own constitution and with jurisdiction to organize the unorganized in all

industries and occupations where women are a majority. The CLC only wanted the United Bank Workers, not SORWUC's other bargaining units to affiliate, and they expected SORWUC to adopt the CLC constitution. When the CLC moved to stop financial support in B.C., SORWUC decided they were not yet strong enough to take on the banks as well as the CLC.

We offered them financial support but they felt that really large sums were needed to continue.

The decision to stop negotiating for branches does not mean that SORWUC has kicked the bucket, so to speak, by any means. In January, 1978, a special convention was held at which time it was decided to change the approach to bank organizing from a branch-to-branch basis to a province-wide basis. The decision makes sense in terms of the kind of bargaining power it gives and as a means of stopping the kind of intimidation practiced by the banks in the certified branches. Certainly such a move will take time to accomplish, but organizers in B.C. are confident that the job can be done and they are gearing their second campaign that way.

Here in Saskatchewan we are still negotiating. Financially we are in a better position than B.C. and we have not felt the same type of direct CLC pressure. Negotiating is a time consuming and frustrating process, but we feel that we will be able to get a first contract, hopefully within a few months. We still have some stalwarts in each branch who have put up with an incredible amount of pressure at work and who are prepared to stick it out.

New organizing is not a priority - mainly because many bank employees are taking an attitude of "wait and see". This is probably partly a result of the banks' anti-union campaign. In the last two years they have certainly schooled themselves well in the classic tactics. Money is no object when it comes to keeping a union out of the work place. Be that as

A Note on the Election

One acutely perceptive political analyst whom I overheard in conversation several weeks ago expressed concern that Conservative leader Dick Collver had developed a severe case of laryngitis. With Collver forced to silence, argued this observer, the Conservatives might actually stand a chance of picking up a few votes.

In spite of that person's optimism, there appears to be little doubt that the Conservatives will command a large share of the electorate's ballots; although Collver's character is a point of continuing debate, his party has engineered a strong campaign. It appears that voters have been convinced by arguments that government has become too big and is interfering in areas that should be restricted to private interests. What has the N.D.P. done to counter this attack? Very little that demonstrates any grasp of the political realities which face them. The New Democrats began their campaign by attempting to avoid any confrontation over the resource issue by referring to an obscure statement in the legislature in which a Conservative member advocated a return to medicare premiums. Naturally the Conservatives dissociated themselves from one member's musings and stated emphatically that this was not party policy. By resorting to such tactics, the N.D.P. successfully delayed the presentation of the Conservative platform until just before the election when it was guaranteed to have greater impact.

Why is the N.D.P. so averse to taking on Conservative arguments and rebutting them squarely before the voters

Should they win,

I may decide that fortune plays a larger role in the course of events than I ever imagined possible.

Conservative propaganda assures the electorate that every resident will receive a share in the Saskatchewan Potash Corporation when that party begins dismantling the existing structure. On the surface, this argument appears sound, but on closer inspection it is not difficult to predict the long-term consequences. As shareholders gradually begin the process of exchanging shares for needed cash, the ownership of our resource will gradually fall into the hands of fewer and fewer people. And what about management under this formula? The Conservatives are not saying, but more importantly, the New Democrats are not asking. The N.D.P. campaign strategy has been abysmal and seems to rest solely on the assumption that the high regard the electorate holds for Allan Blakeney coupled with the suspicion that surrounds Dick Collver will carry the party through.

Meanwhile, Ted Malone has yet to display any evidence that he is politically competent. If he were to, the Liberals might successfully draw some of the anti-government vote away from the Conservatives. As it is, Malone has launched a campaign that is completely irrelevant. His argument that a series of three referendums will return democracy to Saskatchewan is totally absurd. There is nothing

serious that can be said about the Liberal showing in spite of the fact that they have more female candidates than any other party. 6.

On the subject of women's issues and the election, it can be concluded that it is a non-issue, save for the insidious pro-life campaign. The attack on medicare payments to women who seek abortions in the U.S. will no doubt have repercussions following October 18th. It will take an all out effort by women's groups to temper the mood which has been created during the campaign.



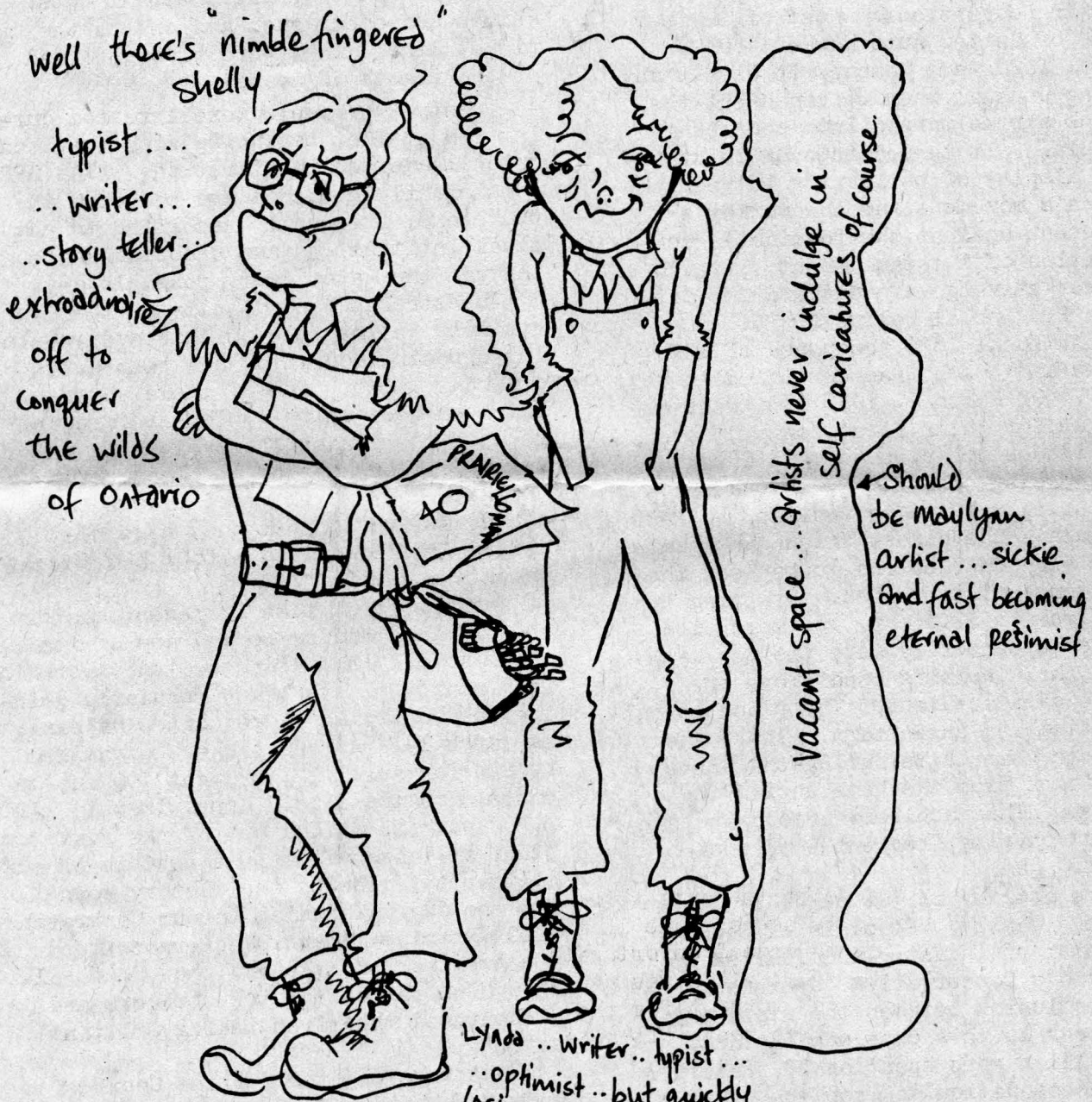
RALLY AGAINST ROLFES

Approximately twenty women and men picketed and pamphleted Herman Rolfe's nominating convention in the riding of Saskatoon East on September 13th.

The protest centered around some of the anti-women statements he has made in the past. It is indeed unfortunate that his nomination was uncontested.

The turnout for the demo was excellent. It appeared that there were as many people outside picketing as there were inside attending the meeting.

... Who are the dummies that put out this newsletter anyway?



Space filler unlimited especially in this issue.

FLECK - ^{is} it's everybody's fight

Shelly Gordon

Last March 6 workers from another small auto-parts manufacturing plant in southern Ontario went on strike for union recognition, better wages and working conditions. Most of the members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1620 were women. It wasn't anything unusual when it began but the Fleck strike turned into something special. It turned into an outstanding display of solidarity between the women's movement and the worker's movement against the formidable combination of the management, Ontario's Conservative government and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).

UAW Local 1620, composed of 125 women and 5 men, was certified in Oct. 1977. On March 6, 1978 they went on strike for their first contract over the issues of union security, wages and working conditions. Fleck Manufacturing refused to include the RAND formula - the clause which makes the shop a union shop and guarantees the existence of the union. Starting wage at Fleck is \$2.85/hr. Workers with 10 years seniority make the top wage - \$3.20/hr. Working conditions are those of a sweatshop. The place is rat-infested and unsanitary. The workers have to wear coats during the winter and faint from the heat during the summer. The machinery is old and dangerous causing frequent work accidents.

The company is 50% owned by James Fleck's family. Fleck is ex-Deputy Minister of Industry and Tourism in Ontario's Conservative government. The collusion between the state and the boss in this case was blatant. \$3 million were spent on OPP salaries and accomodation to keep the plant open and the workers "under control" during this five month strike. Three days before the walk-out OPP officers

attended a general meeting of the workers to acquaint the women with the "do's and dont's" of picketing. They were told not to bring baseball bats, knives and other such weapons to the picket line. They were also informed of the rights of scabs.

Twenty-two people were arrested during the strike, beginning with the Local union leader on the first day. The OPP consistently harassed and badgered the picketers, frequently resorting to physical intimidation and escorted scabs through the gates every possible day.

The strength and dignity of the strikers in the face of this over-whelming opposing coalition has been extraordinary. Very few of these women had ever been union members before and none of them had been involved in a strike. They have been able to keep up their courage in great part because of the active support they have received from organized labour and the women's movement.

For the first time in recent history the UAW is standing behind one of its small locals in a dispute. Auto-workers from nearby plants began regularly joining the Centralia picket lines as early as March 14. A mass picket, organized by UAW for April 12, brought 500 supporters to the line. Approximately 1,700 workers walked out of the Ford plant at Talbotville in a gesture of solidarity, closing the factory down for the day. Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Dennis McDermott kept a convention promise and showed up, although he patronized the strikers and discouraged them from taking militant action.

That same day the Supreme Court of Ontario handed down injunctions barring mass pickets and outlawing picketing at the Ford plants in Talbotville,

Oakville, Windsor, Niagra Falls and Brampton.

Ontario Federation of Labour President Cliff Pilkey joined the strikers several times and appealed to the Ont. Division of CUPE for solidarity with the Fleck women.

The women's movement in Ontario gave unprecedented support to the strikers. Ontario Working Women (OWW) called for Women's Solidarity Day for May 19.

The mass picket was organized and endorsed by OWW, UAW, the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto, the Ont. NDP Women's Committee and the International Women's Day Coalition. Buses left Toronto at 3:30 a.m. May 19 in order

to deliver the 300 support picketers to the plant gates to keep the scabs out for the twelfth day in a row. Demonstrators included 2 NDP MPP's, people from Women's Press, the Law Union of Ontario, student groups, CUPE, Ont. Public Service Employee's Union, RWL and Women Against Violence Against Women.

In the same month the Women's Rights Committee of the B.C.F.L. passed a resolution in support of the Fleck workers. They sent telegrams of support to the strikers and telegrams protesting the use of the OPP to the Ont. government.

Women in Ottawa raised \$2,000 in a benefit for the Fleck women in August. CLC President Dennis McDermott, UAW organizer Alex Seymour, CUPW President Jean Claude Parrott and Chairperson of the Fleck Bargaining Committee Sheila Charlton addressed the crowd. Charlton told them, "I think the men would have given up by now. There isn't one man on the picket line ... Hopefully we'll win someday. We'll strike for as long as it takes."

It didn't take long after that. The contract was signed in August leaving wages at a low level but including the RAND formula. UAW Local 1620 will still be in existence to fight for better wages next time.

There are several things we could say about the Fleck strike. We could show how it exemplifies the more generalized attacks being made on the very existence of unions during this prolonged economic crisis. We could point to it as illustrative of the special position that women occupy in the labour force - of how we are ghettoized in menial, monotonous, low-paid jobs and taken advantage of in every way to increase profits. We could talk about it as part of the slowly increasing unionization of women workers. What we're going to do instead is talk about the lessons that can be drawn from it.

The labour solidarity shown during the Fleck strike was admirable. Big unions rarely give active support to their small locals in their struggles - especially if the local is composed primarily of women. Union bureaucrats rarely condescend to join real picket lines or marches. Support pickets and threats of "hot-cargoing" at other union plants are few and far between.

But it didn't go far enough. UAW was the only union which ACTIVELY supported the Fleck workers. Other unions passed resolutions and sent telegrams which boosted the morale of the strikers but did very little to intimidate the bosses or the OPP or to keep the scabs out. Union bureaucrats gave pleasant speeches but offered no leadership to these militant women. UAW Local 1620 was a small union fighting a relatively small battle (Although against a large foe). As the attacks on unions become more concentrated and vehement (see Ted Malone's election platform)



the beginnings of solidarity such as we witnessed around Fleck will not be good enough. The potential of the working class does not lie in its words but in its united action.

The co-operation among groups within the women's movement and between the women's movement and the unions during the Fleck Strike was exemplary. It points the way forward for us. Women's groups must not ignore their political differences but we must join forces around specific issues and campaigns whenever it is possible, channeling our agreements and disagreements into constructive action and dialogue. We must work with other oppressed groups - workers, lesbians, gays, natives, third-world people, etc. - whenever possible for we understand that it is only through joint struggle that any of us can attain our goals. We put this socialist-feminist analysis into practice through our involvement with labour (Fleck, SORWUC, Parkland nurses in Edmonton), by joining anti-nuclear coalitions, by participating in events like the Chilean hunger-strike and by initiating or co-sponsoring other political affairs.

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But a lot of us have felt uncomfortable in these coalitions in the past. We've felt as though we had to subordinate our own struggle and politics in order to support other groups. Labour unions are almost invariably male-dominated and sexist (especially the controlling bureaucracy). Many gay men are sexist. Native organizations rarely take up the concerns of even their own women. Why were we dissipating any of our precious energy in non-feminist activities and organizations? The answer is that we shouldn't be. Whatever joint actions we go into we must go first as women, as socialist-feminists. We must be able to directly forward our own goals as well as those of the other group(s). Ontario women did this during the Fleck strike and that is why it is such a good model for us. Other oppressed groups must know that we are willing to take up their struggles but that we expect to be able to present our own politics and we want their co-operation in return.

The collective's apologies to Donna for putting the second paragraph of her book review in the last issue above the first paragraph.





MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETINGS OF
SASKATOON WOMEN'S LIBERATION :
Sept. 11, Sept. 24, Oct. 10.

(Did you miss them all????)

We're now holding our general meetings at Onion Books at 7:30 p.m. every second Monday.

An open discussion on past activities and an evaluation of SWL were begun at the first meeting but have not been continued for lack of participation.

We have decided to officially endorse and support the Opération Liberté teach-in on October 21 & 22.

We protested at Herman Rolfes nominating convention in Saskatoon East on Sept. 13th.

\$577.00 was raised to aid SORWUC at the benefit held Sept. 23. \$55.00 from the proceeds was sent to support the Muk-a-muk strike (native waitresses) in B.C.

Support, billets, labour shifts and assistance in organizing the demonstration for Metamorphosis were offered.

There has been an international call put out for an abortion campaign next spring. You'll find out more details as we do.

Election strategy was discussed. Initially it was suggested that SWL co-sponsor an all candidate's meeting. Several groups and organizations were willing to co-sponsor and support a meeting but few people had the time and energy at this point to aid in the necessary organization. Alternate suggestions included holding a press conference and/or preparing a press release and sending it to the media. Four women have volunteered to take on the responsibility for this.

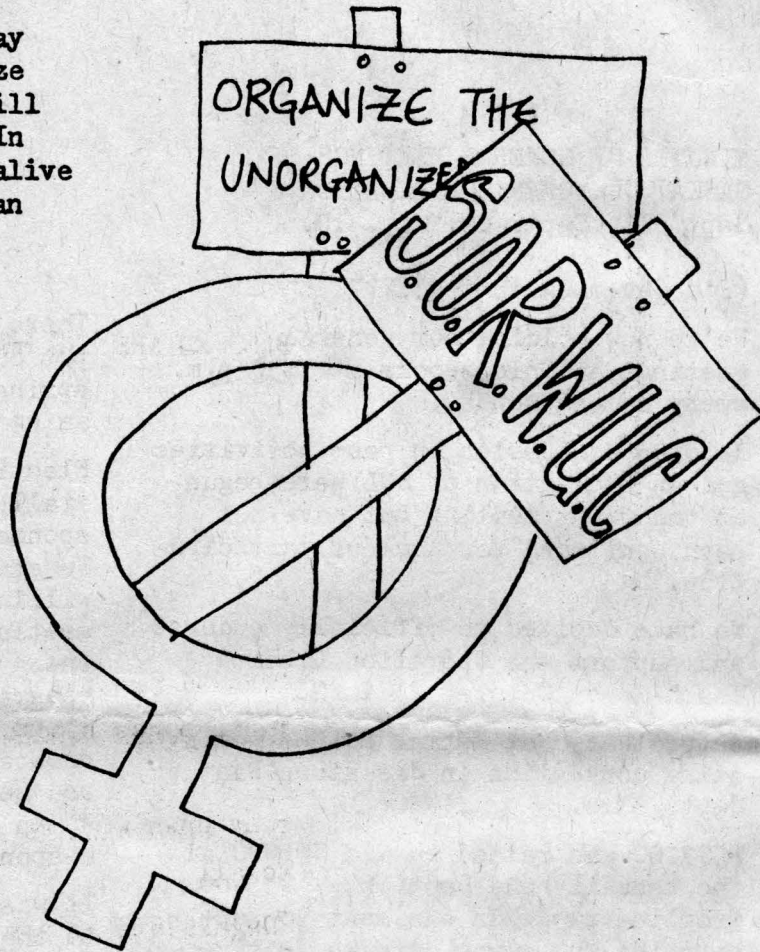
It was also decided to contribute \$50.00 to the Working Women's Association of Saskatchewan.

Shelly Gordon resigned from the Steering Committee. Lynda Shepherdson and Maylynn Woo were elected to fill some of the vacancies.

SORWUC cont.

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it may, we intend to keep on keepin' on. I expect that when we sign a contract it will be an impetus to new organizing. And while some day we may be in a position to organize provincially, for the moment we will continue to apply for branches. In conclusion, let me say SORWUC is alive and well and living in Saskatchewan and British Columbia.



You probably won't get this before the election but we put out our election issue last spring. We fell for it just like everyone else.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Blessed are the meek

Their bones become fine
white china.

They open wide to give
to all.

They become an egg
with the insides sucked out.

Announcements

Opération Liberté, a vast campaign involving information, public awareness, popular mobilization and collective counter-action of the rise of repression in Quebec and in Canada, and especially against the operations of the secret police which claim to act in the name of so called "national security", will be holding a teach-in co-sponsored by SWL, on Oct. 21 and 22. For further information contact Doug Wilson at the Human Rights Association.

Farewell women's party for Shelly Gordon the evening of Saturday, Oct. 21 at 735-6th Ave. N. Bring food and booze.

General meeting of Saskatoon Women's Liberation on Oct. 23rd at 7:30 p.m. at Onion Books, all interested women welcome.

Women's Dance on Friday Oct. 20th from 9:00 til 2:00 a.m. at the Gay Community Center.

Saskatoon Lesbian Society meeting on Sunday Oct. 15th at 3:30 p.m. in the Gay Center. All interested women welcome.



-reprinted from PARTICULARS

BOOK¹⁵ REVIEW

donna

With the release of the anthology Sisterhood is Powerful: its editor, Robin Morgan, became a public figure of the Feminist movement. Her recent book Going Too Far - the Personal Chronicle of a Feminist, brings together the author's writings on the oppression of women, her personal struggles as a woman and writer, and reports of key developments in the Women's Movement. This collection spans 15 years of experience, and Robin Morgan has included selections that trace a changing consciousness in herself and the women's movement as a whole. Some pieces seem naive, in retrospect, other analyses weak, but she acknowledges them as part of the process of development, letting them stand as pieces to be learned from.

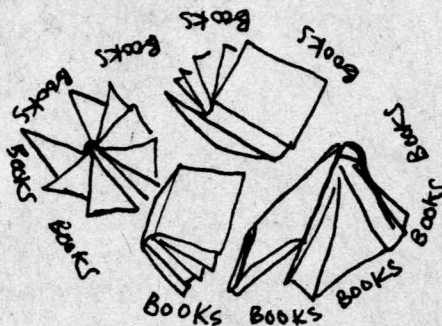
Initially a new left militant, she evolved toward a radical feminist position. The article "Good-bye to All That" expresses the sentiments and experiences of the late sixties that led many activist women to put their energies into women's liberation, rather than the traditional left. The integration of the personal and political holds true for feminists today.

She explores the male/female power relations in society, using this as a basis for analysis of sado-masochist fantasies in women. She also discusses paranoia in women, its societal roots and psychological protections.

The book culminates with Morgan's creation of the concept of metaphysical feminism. In a philosophical way, she attempts to name the qualities and visions of feminism. The work of seventeenth century poets are cited as parallel inspirations for

present day feminists. It is this piece that seems most self-indulgent. Morgan's own affinity for the poet Donne has clouded her analytical ability and does not do justice to feminist aspirations. The goals and feelings of women involved in change can better be described by them, and this particular piece denies us that voice. This treatise is further weakened by a brief attempt to use the Hegelian dialectic as a point for women viewing their own movement. She does not discuss societal forces within the process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, and as a result this tool of analysis is not transferred to the reader. We are left to rely on previous exposure to this concept rather than having it clarified for us. Feminism does embody a philosophical world view, but Morgan has cluttered these insights to the point of confusion.

Going Too Far is not a prophetic book. It is a documentary of changes and struggle. It demarcates stages in the development of the women's movement and deserves a place in our ongoing herstory. This book is available at the Saskatoon Public Library.



PRAIRIE WOMAN is a newsletter of Saskatoon Women's Liberation. Contributions in the form of articles, news items, poetry, graphics, cartoons, and photographs are welcomed from women. Interested men are invited to contribute letters or funds. Because the newsletter is put out by voluntary labour, financial donations are encouraged.

PRAIRIE WOMAN is run as a collective. Writers have had their efforts acknowledged with their articles. Others working on the paper are:

Anna Leuk ..

Donna Creed .. Marilyn Woo .. Lynda Shepherdson ...

and Betty Gordon

PRAIRIE WOMAN is published monthly. The deadline for all material is the 20th of each month. Submissions are welcome, but are subject to editing.

If undelivered, return to:
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