

OCT. / NOV. 1980

PRAIRIE

WOMAN

A Newsletter of
Saskatoon Women's
Liberation

Hello and Welcome Back

Response to our letter asking for donations has been overwhelming. At the time of going to the press the total sum collected is \$311.00. Many thanks from all of us. We know that you are with us in spirit.

In our last issue, the Prairie Woman Collective had announced a break in production to give ourselves time for meetings and discussions throughout the summer period.

In May at the Prairie Socialist Feminist Conference in Regina Charlotte Rochon had given a thought provoking presentation with respect to lesbianism in the women's movement.

We felt that a further discussion would be worth our while. The following article is one woman's reaction to our meetings.

One of the deepest and most fundamental struggles within the women's movement is lesbianism. Lesbians face misunderstanding from the absurd to the obscene, having had to fight bitterly to gain recognition and acceptance as activists in the movement.

Straight women have to face their own contradictions of struggling for control over their bodies on one hand, and yet on the other, rejecting sexual orientation and the oppression of lesbians as legitimate causes for the movement.

From all accounts, this struggle is not over. But it would appear that at least some feminists are beginning to realize that lesbianism is a feminist issue, and when understood without fear, is at the heart of women's liberation.

Sexual self - definition is primary to the feminist movement. Sexual self - definition is power without which women and men, especially women, cannot freely negotiate their relationships.

Lesbians, by virtue of the fact that they define themselves independently of men, are able to move towards a female centered consciousness without fear of losing male support. They do not have the same personal emotional conflicts as women, whose primary loyalty is to men. Because lesbians

have actively chosen to, and must struggle against social pressures of homo phobia, many have gained the strength and wisdom that the women's movement needs in order to understand, develop, and control our own herstory. The lesbian choice of self - determination is ownership, not only of our bodies, but of our beings as well. In the practice of sexual self - definition, economic independence through equal ownership (hopefully the concept of ownership will be deleted) is inherent. In the same sense child care and reproductive freedom have a Yin and Yang relationship to sexual self - definition.

The total commitment that lesbians can make to women makes them a vanguard for the movement. Only when the power of women loving women is liberated amongst women, for women, will the movement be able to take power and negotiate true equality.

The Convent

- a short story by Marlene Swidzinski

If Barbara had a choice, she would take a train rather than a bus. She hated travelling by bus; she did so only when desperate. Barbara had not always been as adverse as she presently was to greyhounds. At no point in her life did she like them, but she had once at least tolerated them. Greyhounds were useful to take, she had found, when trying to catch up on sleep. The motion of a bus put her to sleep immediately; she could sleep for hours - for the duration of a trip. The only problem was that the seats were not quite wide enough to accommodate sleeping passengers. On numerous occasions Barbara had woken up midtrip to find herself snuggled on the shoulder of the person beside her. She had once caused an adolescent boy a great deal of anguish with such an action. If the poor boy had been able to retreat further into his corner, away from Barbara's persistent body, he would have passed through the very walls of the bus. As Barbara disentangled her arms from the boy's neck, she had apologized, giggling, for having so rudely impinged upon his personal space; his eyes remained bugged open - he stammered an inaudible response.

What had turned Barbara irrevocably against bus travel were her last few trips.

A few months previously, Barbara, who had dawdled too long at the depot's paperback rack, and was the last person to board the bus, had to settle for the last remaining seat, the choice seat -- the seat next to the toilet. She was sharing the seat, she soon realized, with a person who had definite reasons for choosing the seat he had. Having made a good guess that the ten or so beer --

in his stomach, would rest more uneasily when the bus began rolling down the highway, had sat in a place where he could quickly remedy a situation where the contents of his stomach were distressed to the point of leaving. Barbara had no opportunity to sleep during this trip. When not eyeing the drunken man for signs of yet another upheaval which if recognized, would require her to promptly pull her legs in to facilitate his reaching the john in time, or listening to his slurred recollections of how he came to be so pissed and why, found herself playing can co-ordinator. Barbara answered all inquiries about the can's occupancy, she explained to smiling old men that the door to the can was not jammed, but rather had been locked by the person presently in it, she assured frazzled fathers that their lost charges were not hiding in the can, and suggested other places they might look.

On her most recent trip, Barbara had the pleasure of sitting next to a fortyish cowboy type who confessed that he rode buses because he enjoyed watching scenery from bus height, and picking up young women travellers. He revealed to her fond memories of the time he and a young lady had at some prairie town removed their luggage from the bus, booked in at a local hotel, and postponed further travel for a week. He informed Barbara that he would let her wear his cowboy hat, and asked her periodically if she wanted to hold his hand, and/or other parts of his anatomy. Barbara looked desperately around the bus for a seat she might relocate in; there were none. Even the back seat was fully occupied, three people assembled awkwardly in it, -- sharing a bag of peanuts. Barbara

somehow survived the trip, but she afterwards swore that she would never set foot on a greyhound again.

Barbara broke her oath, dangerously, only two months later. Having decided that she should go to Saskatchewan to visit her family whom she had not seen since she'd moved to Edmonton six months ago, in dismay realized that the bus was her only viable travel arrangement. Passenger trains did not stop at towns near her parents' farm, nor did airplanes. No one she knew in the city had plans of motoring out Saskatchewan way. It was December and cold - not the best time to hitchhike. So here sat Barbara, on a bus, once again, thinking of ways she could avoid having someone sit next to her. At the rate the bus was filling up, however, a travelmate would inevitably be hers. Hopefully, the person would present herself as a hermit, who had been living in northern Alberta woods for the past ten years, and who was entering civilization now, only briefly, to attend her mother's funeral in Toronto. This person, wanting to maintain her solitude, would ignore all people around her.

No such luck for Barbara. The travelmate that soon appeared did not quite fill Barbara's order. A thin man, wearing wire framed aviator glasses, and a navy, polyester suit, toting an airforce parka and a faded, brown briefcase, plopped into the seat beside her. Barbara noted with relief that he was not wearing a cowboy hat; his hair was short, brylcreemed, or just greasy.

"I hope you don't mind my sitting here," he announced.

"Oh no," Barbara replied, convincing not herself, but possibly him.

"That's good," he said. "I'm Peter by the way...."

"And I'm Barbara."

"Nice to meet you," he said, with a smile that should have split his cheeks open.

Peter produced a book from his briefcase, adjusted himself in his seat, and began reading. A good sign, Barbara thought. But after half an hour or so,

the man started fidgeting. He turned to Barbara, finally, and posed, "It must be scary for you, a girl, to be travelling alone, eh?"

"No, it isn't scary," Barbara replied.

"Young women must be careful these days you know - there are few Christian people left." He sighed. "You don't mind my talking to you - you weren't going to go to sleep, were you?"

Barbara had just been pondering the strange fact that her body, after travelling thirty miles, had yet no inclination to sleep. "I'm not sleepy," she admitted, reluctantly.

"Good. It's nice to have someone to talk with."

Or at, Barbara thought, suspecting she was in for an earful.

Peter related that he worked for an oil company in Fort McMurray, that he had worked briefly in Edmonton as a mechanic, that he was originally from Sarnia, Ontario, where his wife and children were still living, and that the jobs had not been good there, so he had moved out west, a year ago. He assured Barbara that he sent his family money and letters, and that he missed them. "Maybe someday I'll move them all up to Alberta," he decided.

Yes, he'll just pack them up in a suitcase, and bring them out, Barbara muttered to herself.

Peter talked about how happy he was in Alberta, compared to his troubled days in Sarnia. "In Sarnia," he said, voice lowered, "I was an alcoholic." He shook his head, slowly, sadly. "I caused me, my wife, and children much suffering." He barraged her with incidents responsible for the familial pain, including the time he'd come home drunk, and smashed a hole in the colour t.v. set during the Waltons. Peter looked at Barbara, shyly, to see whether or not he'd shocked her into non association. She accepted him with a sympathetic head movement.

"Then, I straightened out," he said triumphically. "Yes, things got rough, I travelled to Edmonton - I didn't know anybody - I was lonely, I

was drinking - some good people found me, they took me to their church and introduced me to the Lord - I was, I am hooked." He paused, necessarily, having to inhale more air. Air supply replenished, he continued. "Yes, I really was down; I was a mess." He shook his head incredulously, reflecting on his former stupidity. "Then, I got religion. I now, am a changed man." Peter grinned.

Barbara decided that Peter was still in the exuberant stage of religious conversion. Overjoyed at his good fortune to become a Christian, he was eager to spread his success story. He might also be eager to lead other people into his state of happiness, Barbara realized, apprehensively. If this were so, she was in trouble. Barbara knew she was favoured prey of religious converters. They apprehended her on street corners; they appeared regularly at her apartment door Sunday mornings. Once when she was riding a bus home from work a hatted woman had sat down beside her, whipped out a pamphlet, and began reading to her specially selected scriptures. Barbara, tense after a day of keypunching, and having noticed the amused smiles of fellow passengers, began laughing hysterically. The woman, offended, got up and left.

Barbara had once theorized that it was something about her face that attracted proselytizing agents to her. Either she looked innocent, holy - easy bait, or she looked very sinful - a challenge perhaps. Barbara was not certain of what her face expressed. The only thing to do, then, in predicaments of the sort she now was in, was to adopt a blank expression; this she now attempted to do.

Peter pointed the book he had been reading towards Barbara. It was a Bible - a worn, paperback edition. "Have you read this book?" he asked her.

"Parts of it," she answered, noncommittally.

"Have you read Revelations?" Peter persisted.

Revelations was, in fact, the only chapter of the Bible Barbara had read entirely. She had liked, she recalled, the goose-pimpling descriptions of beasts with seven heads and seven horns rising out of bottomless pits, and of birds gathering at God's suppertable to eat the flesh of kings....

Peter went on to explain that conditions indicating the end of the world, prophesied in Revelations, were presently being realized. He cited nuclear power, world wars, and social insurance numbers as examples.

"Do you know exactly when the world is going to end?" Barbara asked, curiously.

"Not exactly. It could be next month, it could be five years from now. But when it comes, we had better be prepared." he advised.

Barbara regarded Peter critically. Social insurance numbers were hardly a thing a god should want to destroy a world over. She did not feel like arguing, however. What was the use? Also, she was finally getting sleepy. It was after all two o'clock in the morning. As Barbara wafted into sleep, Peter's voice faded, gradually. She faintly heard him ask her if she were prepared for doomsday, but she was out of reach now - no longer able to communicate.

Barbara woke up sharply a few hours later. Something was tugging at her hair. Turning around to investigate, she was faced with the impish grin of an insomniac child. Its mother was slumped beside it, snoring. The child giggled at Barbara and tried to grab another chunk of her hair. Barbara suggested to the toqued boy that it continue reading its Archie comics; surprisingly, it complied.

It was now six o'clock in the morning. Barbara was too restless to sleep. Peter was awake, reading his Bible. He seemed hesitant to interrupt her early morning thoughts, which suited Barbara fine. He smiled at her, quietly, each time he turned a page. Then, temptation

overcame him. He turned to Barbara and began describing his attempts to create a good Christian home. It was difficult, he admitted, his not being at the home and all, but he sent his family instructive letters, many of them. Peter was eager to get to Sarnia to see how much religious progress his family was making.

It would fix him, Barbara thought, if he should find that his wife has moved in with the man next door, and that his kids are on dope. She scolded herself for not being nice, but Peter was beginning to irritate her with his holy man act.

Peter expounded on the responsibility of the wife in achieving a Christian household. Joyce, his wife, had never been much of a Christian, he confessed. But he was convinced, now, that she was becoming a true one. She had taken a lot of abuse from him with his alcoholism, but had never turned against him. "It says in the Bible", Peter

instructed Barbara, "that a wife stands by her husband, that she be subject to him.

Barbara frowned. She could not see herself as subject to this man, to any man. Suddenly, Barbara wanted to grab Peter, and throttle the smugness out of him. She refrained herself. She pitied the poor woman and children who would soon be descended upon by this tyrant. Perhaps she should send a telegram from the next town, warning them of the danger. Better to escape than to be forced to get up every morning at five o'clock, to read scripture. Who knew what this navy suited fellow had planned for them!

Although Barbara longed to tell Peter off, she could not bring herself to. She mused that she maybe felt obligated to be nice to religious people, which was silly, or that she maybe was intimidated by them.

Peter continued his tirade. He observed that many women were not realizing their christian role. He singled out women who had abortions. "These women are really mixed up," he explained, "because what happens when a woman gets pregnant is that her body chemistry changes, and she cannot think rationally. She can no longer distinguish between what is right and wrong ..."

"I do not think that is true," Barbara countered, "It doesn't make sense..."

Peter went on, as if he had not heard her. "Yes, its a frightful thing when women kill their own babies."

Barbara spoke again, "Being pregnant does not affect a woman's intelligence."

"Oh it does," Peter assured her. "Its medical fact. And women do tend more to the emotional than to the intellectual, anyways."

"They do not."

"They do," he said impatiently.

"And where did you read this?"

Barbara challenged.

"Everywhere. In the Bible .."

"How silly of me to ask," Barbara said sarcastically.

"But its true!" Peter insisted.

Their voices were increasing in volume. Babies stirred in their sleep. Anger tingled Barbara's flesh. She had not in her 20 years encountered a man who infuriated her quite this way. Did

he think he could say these things about women to her, without her getting upset? Did he expect her to agree with him? She, who was a woman?

"Listen here," Barbara yelled.

"What you are saying is a bunch of horseshit. You don't know what you are talking about. Women are just as intelligent as men. Often more." she added.

Peter protested with a long glare. He said finally, provokingly, "I do not think you are a good Christian girl".

"In this at least, you are correct. I, am a Druid," she declared, the name flashing to her from a historical romance she was reading. She grabbed Peter's bible, and flung it to the floor in heathenish delight. "Druids," she provided, "worship trees, and goddesses... Druidism, is making a real comeback. There are probably many Druids right here on this bus." She waved her hand around the seats.

Peter had seemingly lost his power to react. He possibly was stunned. He neither spoke, nor moved to pick up his Bible.

Barbara picked it up for him. She said, in a calm voice, "I've been meaning to tell you now for hundreds of miles that I disagree with everything you say because it makes little sense. I do not wish to listen to you any longer, I am leaving."

Barbara got up, and looked for another seat. People eyed her, curiously. There was only one person sitting in the back seat - Barbara moved towards it and claimed a space. She sat back, and surveyed her new travel-mate. He was a boy of about fifteen; his hair was blonde and he wore brown framed glasses, and a blue, decaled T-shirt. A robust group of pimples had colonized his chin. If this boy did not object to strange women sleeping on his shoulder and if people had not over excited their bladders with too much coffee at the last cafeteria, Barbara might get some sleep - she might survive the trip.

The End

PRESS RELEASE

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Members of the Canadian Library Association considered the many aspects of power at their 35th Annual Convention June 1980. The following resolution, sponsored by CLA's Gay Interest Group and approved at the Annual General Meeting and by the Association's Council, addressed one specific area in which lack of information has resulted in powerlessness;

Be it resolved that the Canadian Library Association, recognizing the need for information pertinent to the understanding of human sexuality, urge that libraries provide materials which promote this understanding, including more information which will improve the understanding of homosexuality, and that the Association publicly support the need for such information..

Patrons exert your power. Access to information is your basic human right. Insist on it!!!

WEN-DO

Women's self defence - a course taught by women for women. Wen-Do offers alternative ways of dealing with sexual harrassment on streets, at parties, and to physical, sexual assaults. The oral aspects of the course are just as important as the physical. There will be an intensive two-day course November 15 - 16 at the YWCA. For registration and information call Sandy 244-6031 (after 5:30 weekdays).

RAPE: Blaming the Victim

- by Lynn Finnie

A great deal has been written about the trauma of rape/sexual assault - the trauma of the assault situation itself, as well as the ensuing devastation of dealing with the experience. Whether the victim chooses to report to police and others or to tell no one, the process of dealing with the experience of rape is made much more difficult than it might be by the prevalent phenomenon of blaming the victim for her/his own victimization. The tendency to blame victims is seen in a variety of situations; for example, the victims of poverty are commonly held to be lazy and lacking in ambition, and so deserving of poverty. But in no other situation is victim blame so finely developed and frequently applied as in the area of rape and sexual assault.

The blame of rape victims in our minds begins long before we encounter a particular victim (self or other). We grow up exposed to beliefs about rape which slander the victim, including: "Women secretly long to be raped"; "Rape victims 'ask for it'"; "It is impossible to rape a woman without her cooperation." The entertainment media have popularized the image of the woman who flaunts her sexuality and is attacked; she gives token resistance, but soon submits to and enjoys being raped.

Victim blame in the event of a specific case takes on a variety of manifestations. A rape victim, having subscribed to the myths about rape, may apply them to her own experience and conclude that she is to blame for the rape. Among the most potent victim

problems seen by rape crisis centres are guilt, self-blame, and tear of blame by others. This combination of emotions may make the victim choose not to report the rape to police. If she does choose to tell others, she may face disbelief and rejection. She may



be discouraged from talking further about the assault, or from telling any one else. If she reports to police, she may be humiliated by questions which imply that she invited and enjoyed the attack. Many rape victims are faulted for not fighting back in a rape situation. On the other hand, victims who did struggle and were badly beaten by the rapist report being asked "Don't you think that if you had been absolutely passive, maybe nothing would have happened?" (Russell, 1975, p. 228). The legal system's stress on lack of consent in a rape case frequently leads to an examination of the victim's actions preceding and during the incident which amounts to asking what she did to cause the rape.

Spartakos Workers Organize

by Ingrid Larson
and Nancy McRitchie

"I think they (the employees) just had it too good, I think maybe that's how it all got started," says Carol Nagel, co-owner of Spartakos Restaurant in Saskatoon. She said employees get free drinks and meals at half price, and "things were quite loose."

This statement was made in response to the current labour dispute between the restaurant management and its employees, who applied this month for certification with the Hotel, Motel, Restaurant and Bartenders Union.

The workers, who now make \$3.65 and \$4.00 per hour, are asking for better wages and better working conditions.

The union is charging that men are getting better jobs over women, seniority is not being recognized, and that there have been violations of the Labour Standards Act such as refusal to pay transportation home after 12:30 a.m. and deductions from paycheques for meal breaks that were never taken.

Barbara Makeechak, union representative said the employers are not recognizing the union, and there have been economic reprisals such as reduced hours, against the employees who are trying to organize.

One employee, Deb Hopkins, stated, "They pulled me off nights and put me on days so that I can't attend my university classes." She also said that other employees are getting their hours cut.

As a result, Makeechak said, the union organized information picket lines on Friday and Saturday evenings to inform the public of the situation and request that they not patronize the restaurant until the workers are treated fairly.

"We're not out to break their business," Hopkins said. "We just want them to obey the law and stop harassing the workers to get them to quit. We want union recognition."

Management denied many of the union's claims. They stated that they were not harassing the employees for union activities, and denied the charges of sexual discrimination, saying, "there's no such thing as promotions at this restaurant." They also stated that many employees were hired on

the understanding that their hours could be changed. Nagel said the union's claim of an "overwhelming majority" of support is false. "Employees were forced into signing these cards. They were pressured, telephoned and continually being talked at."

People are quitting because of the union," said Nagel. "Five employees who have signed cards have quit, and three others may."

Bev Bell, an employee who started work just three days before the union drive, and who described herself as "sort of neutral" said she experienced no harassment from the organizers. "They asked me to sign and I said sure. I didn't know what it was about, but I knew the girls were angered about something. I didn't want to be affected by whatever that something was."

Bell also said that as far as she knew, "people are quitting to go back to school. It has nothing to do with the union."

"We're not anti-woman, we're not anti-union," Nagel said. She explained that "unions have their place, but not here."

"Financially we cannot support an organized place. This is a small operation, most staff are part-time and staff turnover is high. They want guaranteed hours and we cannot do that. If it is a slow night we have to be able to send staff home."

She also said the wages are not low if tips are considered. She mentioned a waiter who made \$50.00 in tips one night on a six hour shift.

Women generally make less in tips than men, according to Hopkins, because the men server the food while the women are asked to serve the drinks. "There are better tips in food service, and cocktail service means more work and less money."

The union claims that tipping is not an issue in this dispute. "Workers should not have to depend on customers to supplement their wages," Makeechak stated. "There is no job security in tips. You don't get them when you're sick, and you can't claim them when you apply for unemployment insurance."

Ironically, the seeds of victim blame are evident in methods suggested to women to avoid rape victimization. In essence, these techniques advise women to keep themselves out of the way of men, potential rapists; thus the onus of responsibility is placed on the potential victim to prevent the crime.

Feminist theory regarding rape suggests that it is essentially a political act: women are victimized by rape in order to keep them in their oppressed place, and then they are blamed for their own victimization to keep them quiet about it. Victim blame is a very effective weapon against women. Self-blame serves to isolate the rape victim from others at a time when she most needs support. It extinguishes the legitimate reactions of anger, personal violation and desire for revenge, replacing them with the socially acceptable emotions of silent guilt and shame (Smith and Woolacott, 1977). Blaming the victim absolves the rapist of guilt, therefore protecting men's image. The perception of rape victims as responsible also serves the purposes of camouflaging the fact that all women are potential victims, and obscuring the urgent need for anti-rape

Rape victim blame is given an aura of respectability by the increasingly popular field of victimology, the study of victims. Victimology assumes some degree of complicity by the victim; the victim must be a contributing factor because without a victim there would be no rape. Patterns in Forcible Rape by Menachem Amir (1971) one of the earliest and until recently, most frequently cited books on rape, is a good example of a discussion of rape as victim - precipitated, along the principles of victimology.

That the myths about rape and the phenomenon of victim blame exist at all is bad enough. What is immeasurably worse is that women as well as men believe in them and perpetrate them. In fact, it is often observed that women are harder on a female victim of rape than men are. This is common enough that defense lawyers tend to prefer female jurors in rape cases; while the women in the jury are blaming the victim, they are not blaming the accused rapist. When women blame a female rape victim for the rape, they are saying "You must have done something to cause the rape. I am different from you. I would do nothing to cause a rape. I am safe." So for the individual woman, rape victim blame is very adaptive; it denies that all women (including myself) are vulnerable to rape regardless of their actions. But this is self-deceptive and dangerous for women as a group. Fighting rape, and the element of rape trauma which comes from the reactions of others, is one of the many situations requiring consistent solidarity of women supporting women.

... References ...

- Amir, M. Patterns in Forcible Rape. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Russell, D. E. The Politics of Rape. New York: Stein & Day, 1975.
- Smith, D., and Woolacott, V. Breaking the Hold. Vancouver Rape Relief, 1977.



Calendar...

OCTOBER

- 31 -- Human Rights Under Attack in the 80's -- conference sponsored by the Saskatchewan Association on Human Rights at the Cosmo Civic Centre. More information at 244-1933.

Hallowe'en Dance, Gay Community Centre.

NOVEMBER

- 1 -- Regina Women's Centre Dance at University of Regina, Student Union Building; music by a Winnipeg all-women rock band.
- 5 -- Saskatoon Women's Liberation meeting, Community Aid Centre, 7:30 p.m.
Free law class on Women's Rights, J.S. Wood Library, 7:30 p.m.
- 6 -- Free law class on Violence and Women, Carlyle King Library, 7:30 p.m.
- 11 -- Free law class on Child Care Law, Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
- 12 -- Saskatchewan Working Women local meeting, Women's Issues in Chile, Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
- 15 -- Daycare Demonstration in Regina, organized by Action Child care; more information at 373-9918.
- 19 -- Saskatoon Women's Liberation meeting, Community Aid Centre, 7:30 p.m.
- 21 -- Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission open meetings, Sheraton Cavalier, 9:30 a.m. More information at 664-5952.
- 22 -- Status of Women benefit dance, A.C.T. Hall in Sutherland; music by Crooked Creek of Big River.

Every Tuesday -- Women's Directorate meeting, Mib tunnel, University of Saskatchewan, 4:30 p.m.

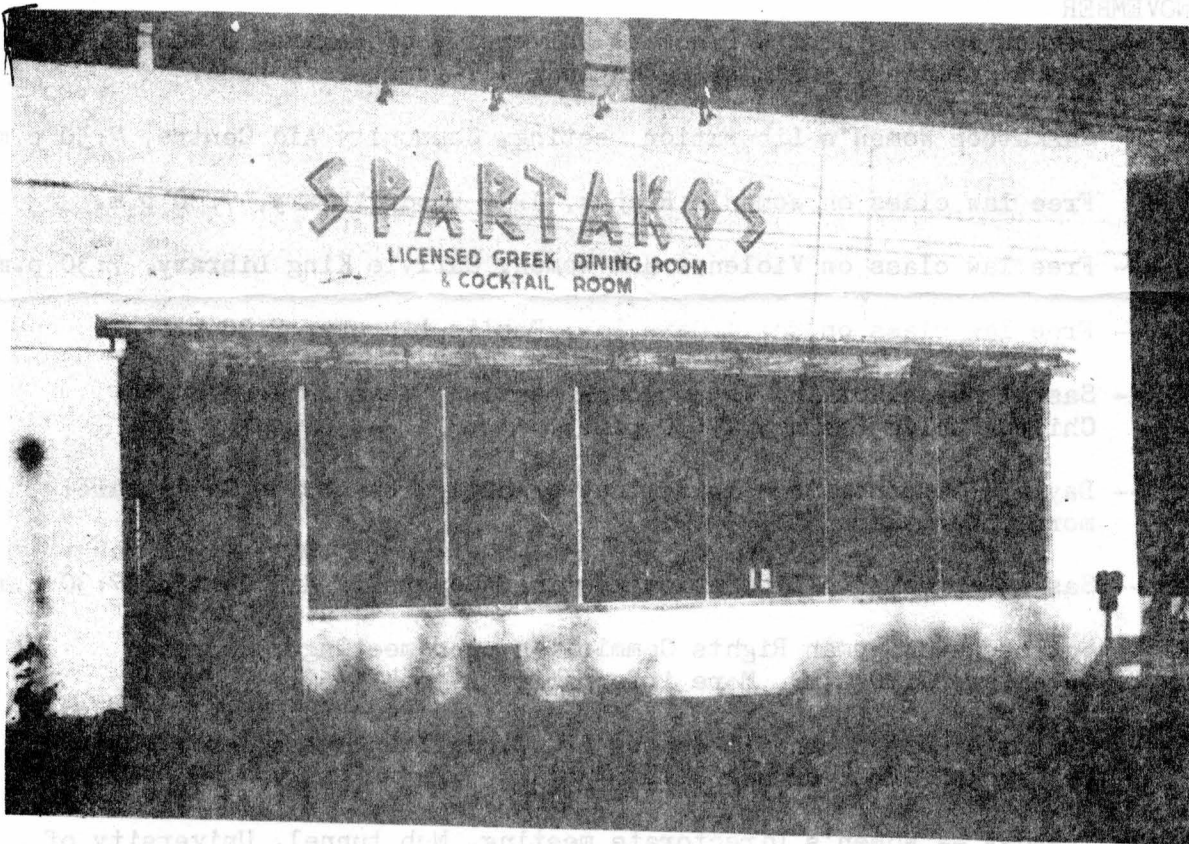
Every Friday and Saturday -- dances at Gay Community Centre.



Nagel hopes that the dispute will go before the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board soon because she is confident that the employees will not be certified.

In the meantime, the union will continue information picketing. "We've been quite effective, we've turned away more customers than went in," says Makeechak.

Employees said that to counter-act this, Jim Papadakis, the other co-owner of the restaurant, had an open house and was giving away free food and drinks. "He'd do anything to keep the union out, even give free food away. And he says he's broke."



UPDATE

In the meantime, management has attempted to further restrain employees from picketing the restaurant.

Application was made by the restaurant for an injunction banning picketing by employees totally. On an injunction application pending the outcome of a suit for damages against certain employees an interim injunction given in Chamber had ordered that picketing be limited to a maximum of three individuals.

This injunction was appealed by the employer, but last week Judge Kenneth Halverson of Queens Court amended this decision so that a maximum of five people rather than three might picket. A small but significant gain.



Book Review

The Life and Death of Anna Mae Aquash

by Johanna Brand, James Lorimer S. Co., Publishers,
Toronto, 1978

Instead of proceeding in a purely chronological order, as is customary with most biographical accounts, Johanna Brand starts her The Life and Death of Anna Mae Aquash with the discovery of Anna Mae Aquash's corpse, February 24th, 1976 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The title of the first chapter "Just Another Dead Indian" hints at the interest of authorities, first and foremost, of the FBI to create myths around the murder of Anna Mae Aquash, an activist in the American Indian Movement (AIM), a close friend of Leonard Peltier and Dennis Banks, a veteran of the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation and other AIM activities.

Anna Mae Pictou was born in 1945 in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. In her childhood she had encountered the harsh economic conditions of life on the reserve; poverty, lack of medicare, bad clothing, and non-nutritional food supplies, which in her later life served as a starting point for community work and her work with women on the Pine Ridge reservation.

A former school "drop-out", she knew that successful learning could only be possible in a non-racist atmosphere and teaching at an Indian Learning and Cultural Centre in Maine, she tried to motivate her students to do thorough research and challenge the "historical role" attributed to Indians

in textbooks. Likewise she thought that an organization such as AIM should continue educational work with the rank and file to avoid an extreme dependency on leadership.

In 1972 she participated in the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington and AIM's Trail of Broken Treaties, in which a 20 point proposal was submitted to the government with demands for better housing, educational and legal reforms, etc.. These demands were virtually ignored by the government.

With her companion Nogeeshik Aquash she took part in the Wounded Knee occupation, where they were married in a traditional Sioux ceremony.

Wounded Knee has become emblematic of the United States government's continued policies of genocide and repression by virtue of its having witnessed over a century, two massacres of Indian disidents: the first was the murder of Sitting Bull and 300 to 350 Indians in 1890, carried out under the pretext of halting the "insurrectionist" practice of the Ghost Dance.

In the early seventies AIM had staged several demonstrations on the Pine Ridge Reservation against the corrupt regime of tribal chairperson Richard Wilson, a particularly sordid example of the old colonial system of indirect rule.

In February 1973 one of these had resulted in an occupation of the territory in an attempt to bypass the Bureau of Indian Affairs puppets (Wilson included) posing as representatives of the Indian Nation. This occupation was answered by the State with a blockade and a disguised military invasion.

Despite careful media management Wounded Knee became a symbol of a renewed Indian resistance and thus a thorn in the eyes of the FBI. The FBI had launched several infiltration campaigns against Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Panther Party, the Socialist Worker's Party and had implanted Douglas Durham as an "agent provocateur" in AIM.

As an aftermath of Wounded Knee, a series of arrests and trials had been conducted against AIM members (only 15 members out of 185 indictments resulted in convictions. These trials however, blocked AIM's activities, and resources and energies were spent in huge legal defense campaigns.

Durham, a former pimp, won the trust of the AIM leadership in a rescue mission for Dennis Banks from the FBI. For a while he held an uncontested position of control over AIM's security clearance

in trials and over communications. His presence in AIM proved to be quite divisive.

After he had been detected, paranoia concerning agents, provocateurs, overtook the organization. For some time Anna Mae was suspected to have been an informer.

Set up shootouts and continual police harassments forced many AIM leaders to go underground including Anna Mae Aquash, after an arrest in November, 1975.

The FBI hoped to find her and through her Dennis Banks and Leonard Peltier.

She continued to work for AIM and was active in its West Coast operation in California. From there she made her last contacts with friends in the Midwest.

The news about her murder resulted in a lukewarm response in Canada and external officers were mouthpiecing FBI press releases. Johanna Brand hints at RCMP activities in Canada parallel to the FBI practice of a "surveillance of subversive organizations", yet appeals to an independent "Canadian Way" in dealing with the Aquash murder case. This seeming naivete may simply be an oversubtle way of suggesting that there is no "real democracy" in Canada. At any rate, the author does bring this incongruity to the fore.





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

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