

# PRIORITIES

A  
FEMINIST  
SOCIALIST  
PERSPECTIVE

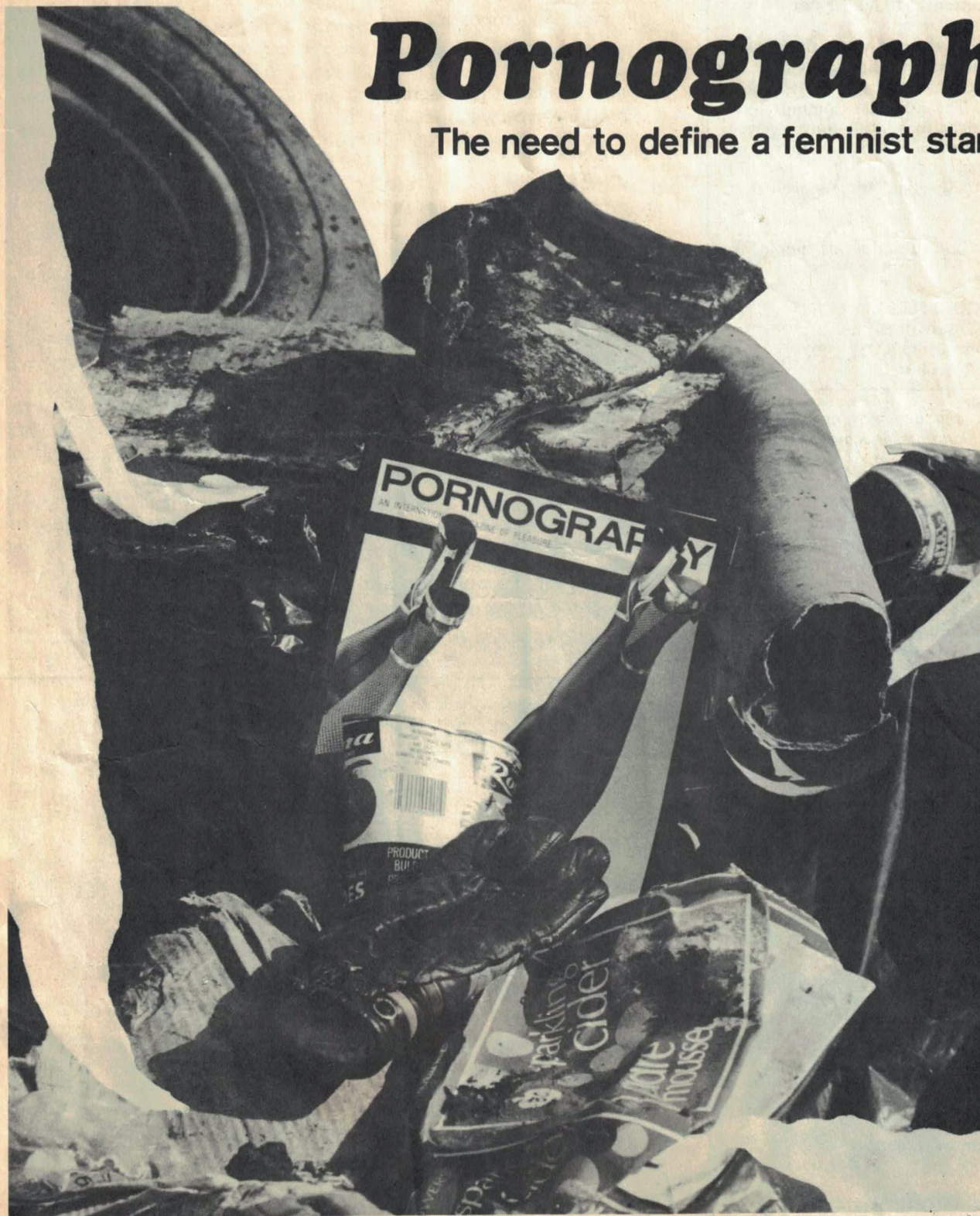
VOL. XI No. 1

PRICE: 50¢

MARCH 1983

## *Pornography*

The need to define a feminist standard



PRIORITIES is published six times a year by the Standing Committee on Women's Rights of the British Columbia New Democratic Party.

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**

Individual: \$ 5.00 per year  
Institution: \$10.00 per year

PRIORITIES welcomes letters and articles from its readers. All submissions must be signed, although names may be withheld on request. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to edit all copy received in the interest of brevity, clarity, and taste. Submissions should be typed, 39 characters to the line, triple-spaced if at all possible.

Submissions and subscriptions should be mailed to:

**PRIORITIES**  
517 East Broadway  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V5T 1X4

*"The issues and demands raised by the Women's Liberation Movement are integral to the development of a democratic socialist society. The NDP actively encourages and provides support for women organizing around the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement and commits an NDP government to creating the legislation necessary to realize these demands."*

— *NDP Policy on Women's Rights*

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ALFASET TYPESETTING  
1307 East 20th Street  
North Vancouver, B.C.



Printing by  
THE NORTH SHORE TIMES  
1422 Pemberton Avenue  
North Vancouver, B.C.



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*Thanks to all the workers who have made the production and distribution of this magazine possible.*

# The issue of pornography

Despite its sudden currency in the media, the fight against pornography is not a new one for feminists. Within the past year the NDP Women's Rights Committee has addressed this issue in a variety of forums including *Priorities*. The Provincial NDP convention in November saw passage of a strongly-worded resolution on pornography moved by Hilda Thomas on behalf of the Women's Rights Committee. Throughout the year, NDP women around the province have used the anti-pornography film *Not a Love Story* as an educational tool in their ridings.

But it has been the technological revolution in the communications industry which has raised the issue to crisis proportions in the minds of ordinary women across the country. Pay TV and relatively inexpensive video equipment have resulted in an explosive proliferation of pornography, bringing it to every neighbourhood shopping centre and household. The dictum that women are the prime victims of technological change takes on a grimly literal meaning in light of this pornography explosion.

Suddenly, women can no longer ignore pornography as something peripheral to mainstream society, something to be relegated to an underclass of sick men. Its cheerful availability to the teenaged boys next door makes women face what they have always known in their guts. . . that humiliation, degradation, and domination of and violence against women is part of the common warp and woof of our society.

Women across the country have responded to this realization with outrage. Yet, they have had some difficulty translating their anger into clear and unequivocal stands which could provide a platform for action. Their attack on pornography has been parried by the media attempt to pit feminists against civil libertarians in debates on censorship. They have been deflected by those for whom the promise of the sexual revolution of the 1960's still holds currency. (Ironically, it is pornography which most graphically demonstrates that this promise of freedom from the oppressive sexual proscriptions of traditional society has proven a cruel hoax on women). They have been offered the simplistic platitude that attitudes towards women reflected in pornography are the product of a capitalist society and would wither away in a socialist state. In the face of these arguments, women's anger is in danger of becoming despair.

To help socialist feminists clarify their positions, find the words with which to fight, and map out strategies for action, the Women's Rights Committee cosponsored panel discussion entitled *Pornography: Defining a Feminist Standard*. The speeches of the three panelists are reprinted in this issue of *Priorities*, along with a summary and analysis by Hilda Thomas. Pornography is the subject of various other articles and reviews in this issue.

## NEW GUIDELINES FOR 'PRIORITIES'

With this issue of *Priorities* we inaugurate the policy passed in our caucus at convention that the content of the magazine directly reflect the activities of the Women's Rights Committee itself. This issue is also the product of a reconstituted *Priorities* sub-committee. As a result of good response to our recent plea for participation by a larger number of women, we have been able to form a collective with rotating editorial responsibilities.



by  
Joan Smallwood

## 1983: WRC off and running

At convention in November, 1982, the Women's Caucus set the direction of the Women's Rights Committee for 1983. In accordance with resolutions passed in Caucus, the Women's Rights Committee organized a number of educational events open to anyone.

The first of these, on February 11, combined a showing of the Judy Chicago film *Right Out of History* with a pub night. Proceeds went to the Margaret Livingstone Memorial Fund. Thanks to the efforts of a few hardworking women this evening was a great success, with over 200 people in attendance.

The second event, on February 16, was a panel discussion on pornography. A planning workshop for the technological change forums followed on February 26.

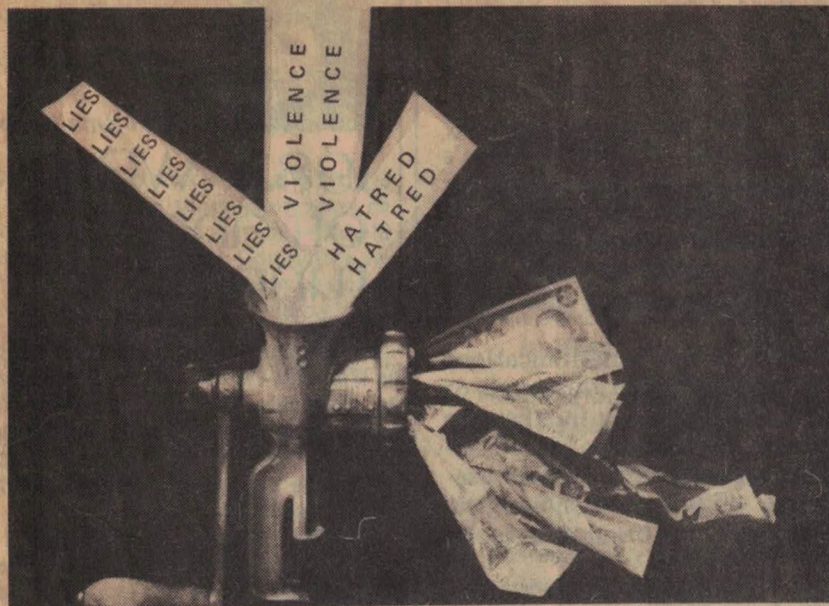
Committee members have been active in the community as well. At demonstrations at Red Hot Video outlets protesting the distribution of pornographic tapes, copies of NDP policy on pornography were distributed to other protesters, media representatives, and passers-by. Currently the committee is helping to circulate a petition demanding action by the CRTC to curb the transmission of pornographic material.

The committee has also addressed itself to the issue of prostitution. Members felt that clarification was needed on the effects of implementing NDP policy in this area. After initial meetings among committee members, they met with Mayor Mike Harcourt on the subject.

Through its chairwoman, the committee replied to an editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* on violence against women. The letter, which was published by the *Sun*, corrected the omission in the editorial of the part played by Margaret Mitchell, Rosemary Brown, and POW chairperson Hilda Thomas. A letter was also sent to Monique Begin protesting the proposed cuts in funding to Planned Parenthood.

Continued on page 16

# Pornography



- is any material that advocates, encourages, or condones the linkages between sexuality and violence, coercion and exploitation
- targets women
- equates the pain and humiliation of women with sexual pleasure
- is a massive industry: \$550 million in Canada and \$4 billion in the U.S. annually

Source: The Women's Research Centre, Battered Women's Support Services, and the Vancouver Status of Women.

## What is porn?

by the Women's Research Centre, Battered Women's Support Services, and the Vancouver Status of Women

The feminist definition of pornography differs fundamentally from the two other major definitions: the moralist approach and the civil libertarian approach. Both of those are based on the idea that the defining feature of pornography is that it is about sex.

The moralist position says that because pornography is about sex, and because sex outside traditional roles is wrong and bad and corrupting, therefore pornography must be controlled.

The civil libertarian position says because pornography is about sex, and because people have the right to any form of sexual expression they choose, therefore pornography must not be controlled.

The moralist and the civil libertarian positions are merely reverse sides of the same coin: both focus on sexuality, not violence.

But for feminists, pornography deals not with sex, but violence against women.

## The fight against pornography

by Sharon Shniad

In an action co-ordinated by the B.C. Federation of Women, women's groups around the province erected picket lines on December 11, 1982 in front of Red Hot Video outlets. Their aim was not only to demand legal prosecution of the video tape retailers by the Attorney General, but also to raise public awareness and to enlist women in the fight against pornography.

*Priorities* asked women in several communities around the province to report on the fight against pornography in their area. Susan Parks of Prince George writes that women and men from a number of groups demonstrated in front of Red Hot Video on December 11, handing out leaflets signed by the Mayor, the Salvation Army, the Women's Equal Rights Association, Pro-Life, Prince George Rape Assault, and the Phoenix Transition House. As the *Prince George Citizen* noted, the group included representatives of organizations usually found on opposite sides of issues.

This local newspaper's December 13 story on the demonstration included the following quote from one of the protesters: "Although the owners of Red Hot Video outlets claim they control the age of the people obtaining their adult

movies, they also distribute a catalogue which includes a form on which anyone of any age can order films, and the local outlet has placed an advertisement in the *Globe and Mail* inviting readers to write to their George Street address for a copy of the catalogue."

According to Susan Parks, three of the Prince George women pickets laid charges against three video tapes but were informed that when the RCMP went to the Red Hot outlet, one of the tapes had been removed from the shelf. The charges against it were therefore dropped. The police are proceeding with the charges against the other tapes, but the women are not very confident that much will come of it, particularly since the Prince George store was not raided by the police when the other stores in the province were hit. The women have not received a satisfactory answer from the police as to why the Prince George store was omitted. They are continuing to circulate a petition and are holding panel discussions for groups in the community. (For a further report on action against Red Hot Video, see Jean Lake's article on the North Shore Women's Centre elsewhere in this issue).

## THE FIGHT AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY

Anne McIlwee Moore of the Okanagan Women's Coalition reports that this group took part in and helped organize a picket in Kelowna. Denise Hackett, Coordinator of the Cranbrook Women's Resource Centre, writes that the Centre plans to investigate the pornographic films available at local video outlets as well as how pornographic magazines are displayed in local stores. Action against stores displaying pornographic magazines in public areas is planned by the Prince George group as well, according to Susan Parks.

As part of a public education campaign around the issue of pornography, women's groups have organized showings of the anti-pornography film *Not a Love Story* in Cranbrook, Kelowna, Vernon, Prince George, and Salmon Arm. The Okanagan Women's Coalition, undertaking a broader examination of the media, has devoted the February issue of its newsletter *Tapestry* to the issue of Pay TV. The Coalition also showed the film *Killing Us Softly* which, although broadly covering women as seen in advertising, says Anne Moore, also shows that many ads are not only sexist but blatantly pornographic. The Cranbrook Women's Resource Centre is also addressing pornography as part of a larger topic, "Images of Women in Society."

### Vancouver Island activity

Television talk shows have provided a forum for the Okanagan Women's Coalition and for the NDP Women's Rights Committee representative in Nanaimo, Doris Lee. The dangers of pornography as a model for youth was a point she emphasized heavily when interviewed by local television, Doris reports.

Doris also told *Priorities* about a recent Pornography Censorship Workshop she attended at Camosun College in Victoria. The major speakers represented three differing views of pornography. Dr Webb King, policy analyst of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and a Political Science Professor from Lethbridge, Alberta, discussed the dilemmas of censorship through legislation. Dr. J.P. O'Connell focussed on the element of violence in pornography. The Christian moral position was represented by Dr. Ted Fallows.

In her report to *Priorities*, Denise Hackett of the Women's Resource Centre in Cranbrook notes that her organization is presently divided on the issue of censorship. "We hope to clarify our stand and feelings on pornography through education and group discussion," she writes. ♀

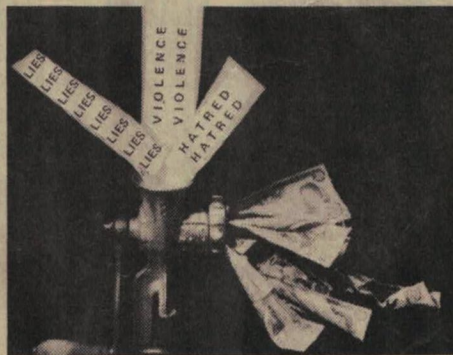
# The Red Hot Video story

by Jean Lake

Jancis Andrews of the North Shore Women's Centre became alarmed last June when she saw a headline in a local paper stating that a video store was opening on the North Shore. Having just seen *Not a Love Story* she felt that immediate action was called for.

The Women's Centre protested to North Vancouver City Council that a store distributing pornography should not be given a license, but the answer to that was that other municipalities had already granted licenses to Red Hot Video outlets. Council also felt that they did not have the right to refuse a license to a "legitimate business."

The Women's Centre then proceeded to find out more about the tapes offered in the store's catalogue. They rented and viewed some films and picked out six that clearly contravened the law. Section 159 of the Criminal Code of Canada states that it is illegal to circulate violent pornography in Canada and it is even illegal to possess it for circulation.



The Centre complained about the six films to the police who picked up five of them for viewing. One typical example was *Prisoners of Paradise*, an extremely violent film involving one male and two women who are chained and suspended upside down from the ceiling and forced to have oral sex; later they are chained to a billiard table and raped.

### Local prosecution refused

The local Crown prosecutor eventually told the Centre that he could not prosecute. When asked to give reasons he said, among other things, that the acting in the films was so mediocre that they could not be taken seriously.

The Centre insisted that they wanted a prosecution as a deterrent, but the prosecutor suggested that taking Red Hot Video to court would only give them free publicity. Another argument was that prosecution of *Playboy* magazine back in the 60's had not been successful.

Although the North Shore outlet of Red Hot Video was never prosecuted, considerable publicity was generated and many letters were sent to newspapers and politicians. The local manager agreed to remove two of the most violent tapes from his shelves. But efforts to get Attorney-General Alan Williams to do something about the situation brought no response. The local MLA even queried Williams in the legislature but received no answer.

In the meantime, women in Port Coquitlam complained about the offerings at their Red Hot outlet. One film was *Water Power*, which involved forced enemas, amongst other brutalities. The distributor withdrew that one. But the Crown prosecutor would not act against any of the films even though they featured violent rape scenes. *Young and Abused* is about a young woman raped by two men. When it was shown to the press, some got up and walked out and one man actually threw up. A Prince George women's group pointed to *Tiffany Minx*, in which four women are raped and two murdered. Wasn't that sex with violence?

As more and more women's groups and others called for some action to stop this material from circulating, the prosecutor's office continued to waffle. They said that the prints were of poor quality (presumably preventing them from seeing what was going on) and also that the guidelines were too vague. This in spite of the fact that the Criminal Code specifically prohibits pornography that shows explicit sex with violence.

### Police raids

However, once again, the Attorney-General's office was being inundated with letters and calls. The issue exploded on to the front pages when a group calling itself the Wimmin's Fire Brigade claimed responsibility for the fire-bombings of three Red Hot Video outlets in the Lower Mainland on November 22, 1982.

On January 7, police raided seven outlets around the province, including the Victoria store, where five tapes were seized and charges laid regarding three of them. A trial is now scheduled for May 9. After voicing their outrage for many months, women's groups across the province will be watching with great interest to see what comes of this case.

**Violence against women increasing**

During the past year, women working

**THE RED HOT VIDEO STORY**

in transition houses and Rape Relief offices in B.C. have noticed an increase in sexual assaults that they feel are linked to violent pornography. Women report that their partners have adopted bondage or other sadistic methods in their sexual behaviour. Documentation on such information is being prepared by women working in these centres.

Latest government statistics indicate that in Canada there is a rape every 29 minutes and a sexual assault every four minutes. Also, of course, there are many more that are unreported. Sexual crime, including incest, is increasing at an alarming rate. This is true of other countries besides Canada. And a number of studies have shown that the relaxation of obscenity and pornography laws has been directly related to the increase in sexual assaults. ♀

**CATALOGUE NO 20**

NOV. 12, 1982

**Red Hot Video** <sup>TM</sup>

WESTERN CANADA'S LEADING SUPPLIER OF  
"ADULT VIDEO TAPES"

**EROTIC THEME DIRECTORY**

REF. NO.	EROTIC THEME	FILMS	COMMENT
6	INCEST	66, 68, 103, 196, 282, 307	
7	LESBIAN	15, 25, 241	Every porn film has the obligatory lesbian scene, but these three are memorable.
1	ANAL SEX	9, 23, 258, 274, 275, 356, 170	
2	BONDAGE & DISCIPLINE SADISM & MASOCHISM	19, 40, 41, 51, 58, 94, 91, 69, 88, 119, 138, 155, 201, 210, 234, 274, 284, 295, 310, 331, 338, 347, 394	A number of films have standard S&M scenes. These are either films designed exclusively for S&M/B&D buffs, or have an outstanding S&M scene in what is otherwise not a bondage flick.
10	PROSTITUTION	5, 7, 14, 29, 60, 120, 231, 233, 280, 262, 285, 398	
11	RAPE & GANG-BANG	11, 36, 58, 89, 104, 197, 215, 2	Rape and gang-bangs are pretty much standard fare in bondage films.
12	YOUNG GIRLS	8, 13, 34, 42, 60, 63, 65, 76, 159, 160, 170, 210, 214, 328, 411, 412, 413, 414	

# Pornography: the need to define a feminist standard

Panelists Sylvia Spring (Media Watch), Wendy Frost (Simon Fraser University), Debra Lewis (Women's Support Groups) and chairperson Shelley Rivkin at the February 16 public meeting organized by the Women's Rights Committee to discuss the issue of pornography. The panelists' speeches and an introductory article by Hilda Thomas are published in the following pages. Photo H. Thomas



## Coming out of silence

by Hilda L. Thomas

When Debra Lewis finished speaking, there was no applause.

The silence was more eloquent than any ovation. It was the silence of a shared witness, of an audience deeply moved by the feelings of grief and helplessness to which Lewis gave voice.

The images Lewis used to exemplify the real content of pornography—its contempt for and hatred of women—are no longer unfamiliar to feminists, and it is not surprising that the proliferation of these celebrations of cruelty and terror under the name of “adult entertainment” should engender feelings of hopelessness and despair. But it is also true that pornography is eliciting a new kind of response from women. More than any other issue, pornography unites women in an understanding of the contradiction between the mystified view of women's role in society and the lived reality of oppression, submission, and subservience. It is even possible to hope that the fight against pornography will finally lead to an understanding of the repression of the body which penetrates all the social constructs of society, resulting in what Wendy Frost calls “the

sexualization of the domination of women,” and the internalization of images of male muscle and female vulnerability, male mastery and female subjugation.

### Many-sided attack needed

One thing which emerged clearly from the panel following the discussion is the need for a many-sided attack on the problem. While Frost's caution that the state is not noted for acting in women's interests, and that censorship could be used against us, is valid, it is also true that the law is no more contradictory than other institutions in our society. How laws are interpreted and who decides when and against whom they are enforced is a separate question which needs to be addressed. But the selective application of the law against the most vulnerable groups in society should not lead feminists to reject the possibility of using existing sections of the Criminal Code, or of changing the Human Rights Codes to define pornography as hate literature.

The real question is whether the issues of censorship and freedom of ex-

pression will be resolved in the direction of license or liberation. As Sylvia Spring put it, pornography must not be posed as the price women must pay for their liberation. Rather, it must be recognized for what it is: the price we have paid for our oppression—the currency of the sexual fascism which Debra Lewis warns about. Nor can we allow pornography to be dealt with as if it were merely a question of private behaviour or personal taste. Pornography, as one member of the audience pointed out, involves the “pollution of the communal imagery.” Its effects go far beyond the private realm, shaping the public conception of what it means to be human. The internalization of violent, dehumanized attitudes towards sexuality can only have disastrous consequences not only for women, but for society as a whole.

### Whole spectrum of violence

A feminist politics of sexuality must situate pornography within the whole spectrum of violence against women—rape, wife-battering, child abuse, and prostitution—where it belongs. We need to ask why depictions of the abuse and torture of women and children which arouse horror and revulsion when they are met with in the reports of Amnesty International are advertised as entertainment by those who control the mass media. We must call on men to examine their own actions and attitudes, as was suggested by the panel, and to take the risk of standing up against the distorted idea of masculinity that links sexual prowess and sexual pleasure with violence and coercion.

What is also needed now is a language not only of words, as Sylvia Spring suggests, but of images. Images are at once the real expressions of any culture and the means whereby new forms and new visions of human relationships come into being. We need to create our own celebratory images to replace the terrorism of Red Hot Video and *Playboy*—images of genuine liberation and unrepressed sexuality such as are displayed in the organic forms and glowing colours of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*.

The silence which followed Debra Lewis's address was a mark of respect and understanding for the depth of her feeling. But in the discussion that followed, the audience and the panelists, including Lewis, showed that we are not prepared to remain silent. Out of the crucible of women's experience we will forge the words and images that will enable us to win the struggle. Out of the silence we will raise our voices together.

♀



# Pornography: bringing it home

by Sylvia Spring

I'm speaking tonight about pornography as it affects women, at a gut level, and how the pain is moving us to action. I work mostly with women, and being a woman I can best speak from that perspective. I am sure there are men here tonight who have strong feelings against the proliferation of pornography. I would like to see men against porn get together, as a group, and act out in a public way their objections. I've seen little of that so far, except by the fathers of church and morality—a group with whom I feel no kinship.

What I'll speak about, in the short time I'm given, is self-defence. About the movement to arm women with the ammunition to fight the lies of pornography and to eliminate pornography itself. Ammunition to counter the mainstream line that "porn is the price we have to pay for the freedom of expression we are allowed in this society."

I'd also like to mention that there's an excellent document by Daphne Jervis which compiles much of the feminist writing on the subject of pornography. It's called *Pornography: Feminist Perspectives* and was prepared in 1982 for Status of Women Canada. I highly recommend you read it for a summary of feminist thought on the subject.

## Bringing it home

The recent announcement by First Choice Canadian Communications Corp. that they would, for a small fee, bring pornography right into our homes, has stirred up many Canadians. Why? What's the problem? As the First Choice people were quick to point out, this material has been around for years—in magazines, movies, tapes, on calendars and in books. Nobody, except for a few fanatic feminists, gets upset any more about *Playboy* magazine. What's the big deal?

The big deal from my perspective is that pornography, its existence, its lies about women, its preached violence and hate, its degradation, humiliation and objectification of women can no longer be kept hidden in the closet or the locker room. Porn has come OUT, and with a vengeance. Women who have managed to avoid dealing with it until now cannot avoid it any more. It's hitting them where they and their children

live. Suddenly, many women who have had no history with feminism or activism are hopping mad.

The last time I can remember such massive female anger occurring was a couple of years ago when Canadian women discovered that we were about to be excluded from our new Constitutional Charter of Rights. And we were mad then! So mad we scared the boys in power into rewording, rewriting and reinstating us.

What do these two events have in common? They are both instances where women, as a group, a class, a gender, united in their rage, broke their silence and broke through their factionalism. United by fury, sharing an emotion deeper than their polite socialization, women have spoken up.

## Common language needed

What do these two events have in common? They are both instances where women, as a group, a class, a gender, united in their rage, broke their silence and broke through their factionalism. United by fury, sharing an emotion deeper than their polite socialization, women have spoken up.

But in the case of pornography, their voices—however strong—are unintelligible. That is because women do not yet have a common language, one that speaks to this very emotional issue and specifically one that speaks to the cool voices of civil libertarian "logic."

Despite the bleak realities of TV porn, government inaction and a prevailing Meat Market Misogynist mentality, I feel hopeful. I feel hopeful because I see long-range prospects of mobilizing and verbalizing women's anger. Pay TV has brought the issue home. I'm hopeful because we women are the majority of Canadians and although we feminists are continually reminding the powers-that-be that we *are* the majority, we rarely have had a visible majority consensus. Our threats have had a hollow ring to them.

But this time our voices have resonance, and however grudgingly, we are being listened to. A friend in Ottawa tells me that Francis Fox is so inundated with letters, telegrams and phone calls that his staff and their computers can't

keep up with it all. And at the CRTC the noise is even louder. Mr. Meisel and company can't ignore the issue any more. Reluctantly, and so far ineffectively, they are moving. They did nothing but give Media Watch a polite nod when we warned them at the national Pay TV hearings and the provincial ones that Pay TV would try introducing porn under their blanket label of "adult programming." We didn't sound like many then. Now we do.

The big issue for me is not the development of a feminist analysis of pornography—that's been done—but the translating of that perspective into a common language that can be communicated to everyone. People—women in particular—need words, a new language that describes and legitimizes their gut revulsion against porn. To date, most women, for a complexity of reasons, have avoided facing the ugly truth about porn. Now it has entered their homes, their refuge, threatening not only their safety but also their children's. Women must act. There's no escape; there are no more closets. But they need ammunition to defend themselves from the voices that attempt to legitimize pornography. Contrary to what men would have us believe, women have a long history of silence, of being mute, dumb, gagged. I'd like to quote here from Susan Griffin's exceptional book *Pornography and Silence*. She speaks of our heritage of silence.

"Our silence. The silence and the silencing of women. The creation of authority in the image of the male. Rape. The burning of witches. Wife-beating. Laws against women speaking in public places. Against women preaching. The imprisonment of suffragists. Force feeding. Harassment on the public streets. Scorn for the woman who dares to 'act like a man.' A woman's love for another woman, unspoken, hidden. The manuscripts of Sappho burned, the writing of women never published, lives of geniuses spent obscurely, or in domestic labour and child-rearing; the life of the mother, of the housekeeper, unimagined and unrecognized. Woman's word pronounced full of guile. A woman's testimony held suspect in court."



## PORNOGRAPHY: BRINGING IT HOME

"These several centuries of the silencing of women are a palpable presence in our lives—the silence we have inherited has become part of us. It covers the space in which we live; it is a blank screen and onto this screen a fantasy which does not belong to women is projected: The silence of women is the very surface on which pornography is played. We become other than ourselves."

### Silence a complex issue

This issue of women's silence is complex. Diana Russell suggests some more reasons in the American anthology, *Take Back the Night—Women on Pornography*. She states that otherwise outspoken women have avoided the issue for seven reasons. "First, there is generally the fear of any alignment with conservatism. Second, we have often bought the male liberal and radical line that being against any aspect of the 1960's 'sexual revolution' is mere prudery. Third, it is less painful for women to ignore pornography than to really look at it. Fourth, the 'experts' have told us that porn is completely harmless, if not beneficial. Fifth, the women's movement has been tied for practical reasons to a piecemeal approach to problems, focussing separately on rape, battery, incest and so on. Sixth, we are confused by the involvement of women in the porn industry, and the fact that some women economically benefit. Seventh, there is what could be termed the 'censorship hangup'—so fearful are we of censorship as a solution, we fail even to confront the problem itself."

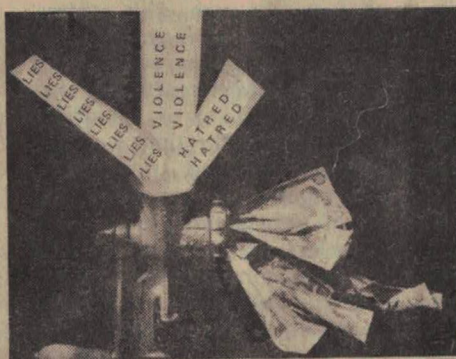
### CRTC Task Force and Media Watch

I have been dealing both personally and politically with the issues of language and image as they relate to women. I was a representative on the CRTC Task Force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Media, which did its work over three years. I am also one of the founding members of Media Watch, a subcommittee of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

My work on the Task Force convinced me that unless we had a very vocal and articulate mass movement, our concerns about the imaging of women would be given only token attention. Media Watch created a complaint form for people to use whenever they felt offended by how the mass media were portraying them. This form has been

extremely popular with all kinds of women. It provides them with an easy vehicle for their anger. Many who would never call themselves feminists (let alone become part of an activist group) attack fiercely, from the safety of their home, the lies that invade that space.

First, they tackled the advertisements, the 30-second interruptions that blast stereotypes at us over and over again. The worst of these were intolerable and easy to attack. That was step one. Step two was the realization that the women depicted in most programs were also a lie. Action breeds more action, and the complaint process has escalated. But what became clear to us in Media Watch was that many women lacked the language and analysis to really state their objections effectively. We realized that we had to provide them with more. We started trying to raise money in order to develop an information kit and a community outreach program regionally and nationally—to help women find their voices. We were dealing mostly with sexist content then, although we saw all the signs and connections to the inevitable invasion of pornography.



### Pay TV hits

Then it happened. Pay TV hit, and suddenly the demand for words, tactics, actions became acute. Vancouver Status of Women, Women Against Violence Against Women, Media Watch and many other visible feminist organizations became inundated with calls from angry women demanding that "they" do something (as if they had not been dealing with the issue to that point). They asked us how to fight back; wanted to know what the laws were, whom to write, where to march. So we called a meeting for anyone who was working on the issue, or who wanted to. And lots of women showed up. What became very clear to me after everyone had spoken was that although the silence was being dramatically broken, we still did not feel secure in our methods.

We formed work groups, and the largest one was the "educational group."

Over and over again women expressed their frustration at not knowing how to counter some of the mainstream arguments about "freedom of choice," "discretionary service," distinctions between eroticism and pornography—and the biggy, *Censorship*. They also needed strategies, to understand the laws as they exist, the mandate of the CRTC, the role of various government agencies. But first they wanted to arm themselves with words. Words that would cut through the rhetoric of liberal logic, words that would distinguish human rights from morality, words that would make the links between sexism and pornography, words that would cut through bureaucratic double talk. Words as ammunition. The silence is being irrevocably broken.

### The analogy of racism

A recent article by Kathy Tait in the Lifestyle section of *The Vancouver Province*—that bastion of malestream power—states the case against porn on TV in a language that is clear, heartfelt and familiar. She recounts how times have changed and how yesteryear's racial slurs against blacks, Chinese or native Indians would never be tolerated now. "But," she says, "when it comes to slurring and stereotyping women, it seems that the only people who are upset are women. I find it surprising and shocking how many decent and intelligent men will defend to the death their perceived right to see portrayals of women in a manner that offends what women see as 'their' human rights." She ends her very convincing argument with this statement, which reiterates my point that the issue and the movement are becoming large. "It's clear more women like myself—ordinary, non-strident women who are not members of any so-called 'women's group,' need to define the matter as we see it, an issue of human rights."

I didn't come here tonight with all the answers or all the definitions to the pornography problem. There are lots of women who've done very good work on the subject. We use their analysis and research as part of the ammunition we're stockpiling. At Media Watch we're in the process of translating all the words we've gathered into a common language, packaging it so that it's easily accessible, and disseminating it around the country. We want every woman whose gut hurts and who wants to act to be effectively armed. And this first and most important step is being taken: that of recognition and naming *en masse*. Where all these words will take us in our campaign against pornography is not clear yet. There are a number of possible routes and women, in our diversity, will probably use them all. ♀



## Pornography and sexual fascism

by Debra Lewis

The content of what I have to say this evening has changed substantially since I first accepted the invitation. I had imagined that I would give some version of a calm, rational analysis with an argument for why some forms of pornography should be legally controlled thrown in. I seem to be doing a lot of speaking like this lately, and I'm sure that those issues will be raised. But when I came down to actually deciding on the words to use, I realized that it wasn't what I want to talk to you about at all. What I want to tell you is why pornography, more than any other issue, has almost immobilized me as a woman and as a feminist. I want to speak about why it is so fundamentally important to confront the pornographers head on.

For the last ten years, I've worked on some pretty horrifying issues—rape, wife assault, sexual abuse. But it was working on pornography that brought the whole package together; brought the real, horrifying truth home. As feminists, we've known for a long time that we live in a culture that is fundamentally sexist or patriarchal. What I've come to realize is that it is violence against women in all its forms that holds the system together.

The extension of this is that before things get better, they may well get worse. Or should I say, they are getting worse. The increase in the quantity and violence quality of pornography is one very important characteristic of that process.

Now I'm sure that most of us here will agree that when a capitalist or class system can no longer sustain itself through the liberal democratic process, one possible course of events is the institution of fascism. We certainly have the examples of Chile and other Latin American countries to know that this is so. What I am now convinced of is that we are rapidly entering a phase of sexual fascism in north America—a political system which is more insidious, more difficult to analyze, but in a similar fashion as violently destructive to wo-

men and children as more conventional fascist systems are to the people they oppress.

### Pornography affects all of us

It is from this state of affairs that the immobilization comes. When I've worked on rape, or battering, we are still looking at events that affect women individually, even if all of us experience the shock waves of being potential victims. That means there is something we can do in the short term—through crisis centres, support services. But pornography does not pick us off one by one, even if some of us are more directly affected than others. It affects all of us, all of the time. And most of the time we don't even know it's happening.

So as feminists who are working on the issue of pornography, we have to teach ourselves about what is really being shown. This in itself is the second part of the immobilization—forcing ourselves to watch the contempt for and hatred of women graphically demonstrated. For those of you who think that pornography consists primarily of air-brushed centrefolds, I want to give you some examples from myself and from other women who have forced ourselves to look.

First, from a video distributed by Red Hot Video:

... four young women are forcibly detained in a men's club run by "the Master." The women are hung in chains from the ceiling, flogged and sexually assaulted in this position. As they are beaten and raped in a process called "the Taming of the Shrews," they are taught that "independence in a woman is not a virtue" and "disobedience will not be tolerated." One young woman is chained naked, splayed out on a table with a studded collar around her throat. She is sexually attacked by "the master." . . . The tape ends with everyone becoming turned on watching one of the women being beaten with a leather

belt and screaming.

Another example, this time from Project P, an Ontario Provincial Police collection of confiscated pornography that *lost* in court:

A 'photo roman' of a very blonde, very buxom, very scantily clad young woman driving a huge chrome boat which breaks down and leaves her stranded at the side of the road. Along comes an older farm pick-up, driven by the handsome, dark-haired, white-skinned lifeguard type who offers her a ride to the phone. No more is she in the pick-up than she is fondling him, and he drives her instead to his farmhouse. Sexual acrobatics of all kinds, until he can finally take no more and races in desperation from the house and the insatiable female inside. She, of course, amuses herself by trying to fuck the door-knob. He returns, bringing an enormous pink boar with black blotches on its side. She sexually conquers even the boar. The final scene shows her performing oral sex on the hog.

And, lest you think that such images are only available in the sleazier outlets, some scenes from magazines at your corner store:

From *Hustler* magazine, the cover announces a feature article, "Twelve Pages of Rape"—the pictures are exactly that. From the cover of a *Penthouse* magazine — a woman spreadeagled on the ground with a jackhammer pointed at her crotch. A photo spread about people "having sex" while renovating their houses—the woman with her legs open with a screwdriver pointed at her vagina.

And consider the way these images appear in the media in general—sometimes more subtly perhaps—but there all the same:

Ads for a record album—"I'm black and blue from the Rolling Stones—and I love it." The woman in the ad is bound and bruised.

A fashion layout depicting a woman

being viciously slapped by a man.

### Concrete examples

I give these examples because I am not willing to discuss pornography in the abstract. Some pornography is less graphic, less extreme. But the examples I have given are not the worst of what is available. We are looking at and living in a culture that encourages violence against, and coercion and exploitation of, women. It is a culture that will not stop the destruction of women as long as we are embroiled in academic debates over what we are *not* going to do about it.

The question of whether pornography is part of this destruction, this sexual fascism, is not an academic one either. We can quibble about whether there is enough so-called "objective proof" of the harm that pornography causes. But those of us who work with women, those of us who talk to other women, know that pornography has its effects—directly when it is used against us, and indirectly in our everyday experience.

The direct effects? Ten percent of a random sample of almost a thousand women reported that their husbands or lovers had directly used pornography against them—trying to "convince" them to imitate the pictures, using violence against them, sexually assaulting them. Some examples of their accounts:

"He forced me to go down on him. He said he'd been going to porno movies. He'd seen this and wanted me to do it. He also wanted to pour champagne on my vagina. I got beat up because I didn't want to do it. He pulled my hair and slapped me around. After that I went ahead and did it, but there was no feeling in it."

"This guy had seen a movie where a woman was being made love to by dogs. He suggested that some of his friends had a dog and we should have a party and set the dog loose on the women. He wanted me to put a muzzle on the dog and put some stuff on my vagina so that the dog would lick there."

"It was physical slapping and hitting. It wasn't a turn on; it was more a feeling of being used as an object. What was the most upsetting was that he thought it would be a turn on."

I give these accounts because I want you to hear the words of women, and I want you to believe them. It is essential that one believes in the stories of sexual terrorism that women tell—otherwise a discussion of pornography's role in that terrorism becomes meaningless. I have been involved in many debates with

those who simply do not want to believe that it is as bad, as horrifying, as it is. And those debates become one more part of the immobilization.

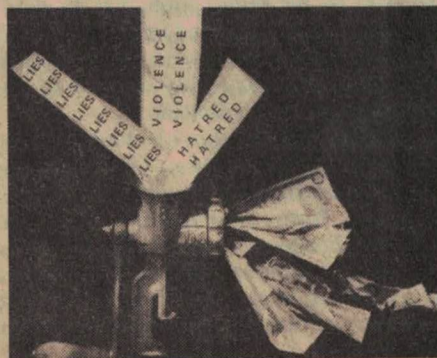
### Other direct victims

There are other direct victims as well—some of the women who work in the industry are beginning to tell their stories. Juvenile women, some of them little girls, are used in the industry—almost half of pornography's subjects, according to one estimate.

But ultimately pornography affects all women because it sustains the society we live in, because it teaches sexual fascism.

I want to read one more account, from an article that helped me understand why I sometimes feel immobilized, sometimes almost insane. It is from a speech given by Andrea Dworkin in 1978, describing her own reactions to working on the issue of pornography. She says that seeing pornography in bits and pieces can bring women to a "useful rage," but looking at the quantity and depth of what the industry has to offer brings grief, mourning, hopelessness. These are her words, but also those of myself and many other women who work against violence:

"For myself, pornography has defeated me in a way that, at least so far, life has not. Whatever struggles and difficulties I have had in my life, I have always wanted to find a way to go on even if I did not know how, to live through one more day, to learn one more thing, to take one more walk, to read one more book, to write one more paragraph, to see one more friend, to love one more time. When I read or see pornography, I want everything to stop. Why, I ask, why are they so damned cruel and so damned proud of it? Sometimes, a detail drives me mad. There is a series of photographs: a woman slicing her breasts with a knife, smearing her own blood on her own body, sticking a sword up her vagina. *And she is smiling.* And it is the smile that drives me mad. There is a record album



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plastered all over a huge display window. The picture on the album is a profile view of a woman's thighs. Her crotch is suggested because we know it is there; it is not shown. The title of the album is *Plug Me to Death*. And it is the use of the first person that drives me mad. "Plug Me to Death." The arrogance. The cold-blooded arrogance. And how can it go on like this, senseless, entirely brutal, inane, day after day and year after year, these images and ideas and values pouring out, packaged, bought and sold, promoted, enduring on and on, and no one stops it, and our darling boy intellectuals defend it, and elegant radical lawyers argue for it, and men of every sort cannot or will not live without it. And life, which means everything to me, becomes meaningless, because these celebrations of cruelty destroy my very capacity to feel and to care and to hope. I hate the pornographers most of all for depriving me of hope."

### Women's actions heartening

So I spend a good deal of time trying to sustain what little hope I have left and maybe gaining back a little more. The events of the past few months, the actions of women against the industry, have been heartening. But it's not nearly enough. I hope the discussion this evening can be focussed on what we are going to do from here. I, for one, am prepared to use whatever avenues are available to stop sexual terrorism. Yes,

Continued on page 16

# Censorship: closing more options for women

by Wendy Frost

I want to try to open up some discussion around censorship as a strategy for fighting pornography, to look at some of the questions such a strategy poses for the women's movement, and to explore how any formulation of strategy must hinge on formulating a clear feminist analysis of what pornography is and how it operates.

There's been a great deal of debate in the women's movement around the demand for state censorship of pornography. Debate thus far has already brought forward some by now familiar objections to this line of action.

Demanding censorship through legislation has many potential pitfalls. For one thing, it's questionable how much effect censorship could have on the multi-billion-dollar industry porn has become—rather than stopping it, legal enforcement could simply drive it underground, which could result in raised prices, increased profits, and even less control over its production and distribution than now exists. The analogy with Prohibition is a useful warning here.

## Censorship used against us

Even more seriously, we have no guarantee that any censorship laws would not be used against us. We have the examples of the obscenity trials of *The Body Politic*, and the banning of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*. Could we ensure that censorship laws would not be used to repress any explicit depictions of sexuality, would not be used against already vulnerable gay and lesbian publications?

True, we can lobby to have feminist definitions of pornography enshrined in law, but legislation and enforcement can be two different things. We would have no control over how and in what terms such legislation would be enforced.

Analysing the problem of porn is a necessary precondition to formulating strategies to fight the problem. While there are useful cautions against pur-

suing a potentially counter-productive strategy, I think there are deeper problems with focussing feminist response to pornography on censorship. The issue of porn has the potential to open up a much-needed area of debate in the women's movement; it presents us with the challenge of formulating a feminist politics of sexuality. If we proceed by fixing on demands for state censorship as our primary response to porn, we will be sidestepping this challenge.

## Framework of sexism

We need both to situate porn within a broad analysis of sexist practices and institutions in this society, and to isolate how pornography differs from other congruent practices: how it, in particular, is harmful.

Pornography can be located within a broader category of social control of women. Porn is part of a wide spectrum of mainstream cultural representations of women which present us with false pictures of ourselves. Like TV, movies, advertising, popular music, literature, the high and popular arts, pornography lies about women. All these representations contribute to reinforcing male supremacy and misogyny. They define women primarily in relation to men, in our roles as wives and mothers, or as sexual objects. The madonna or the whore: these are the images of women that the dominant culture imposes on us. Women have been allowed no hand in creating these images; our role is to appear, to be acted upon, not to act. Hated or revered, reviled or worshipped, we have no choice or voice; these images both prescribe our reality and rob us of the power of self-definition.

Porn is part of this ideological construction of the female. The messages about women in porn are not very different from the messages in other cultural images of women. So why do we see porn as most dangerous? Because it's defining us in the area in which we are most vulnerable—our sexuality.



## Power over women

Porn says women enjoy being degraded, humiliated, dominated, raped—that that is what our sexuality is about, that that is what we want. And it says to men that *their* sexuality is about is having power over women. Men learn to get sexual pleasure from dominating women. A sexual woman, in pornographic terms, is one who does not define herself sexually, who exists to be sexually defined by men. Men learn both what it means to be male, in sexual terms, and what turns them on, from pornography. It's very tied up for them with both sexual pleasure and self-definition.

Pornography is one of the ways in which our sexuality is socially constructed. We don't have control over our sexuality in this society, we don't have the freedom to express ourselves sexually in any equal and autonomous way. The ways in which we can be sexual are severely limited and proscribed by a range of social institutions such as the law, medicine, education, religion. Pornography is another such institution.

To deconstruct the way in which porn operates as social control, we need to look carefully at what needs porn fills for men, what effects it has on women, and who and what is benefitting from this delimitation of our sexuality.

## The construction of sexuality

While both male and female sexuality are constructed, our experiences of this process are not symmetrical; men have very real power over women and the way in which our sexuality is played out reflects this. Both men and women internalize the prescriptive messages in pornography; these messages reinforce in our sexual behaviour and expectations the power imbalance between men and women that pervades this society.

For men, pornography acts to sexualize domination of women. It perpetuates misogynist notions both of what women want sexually and how it is permissible

to act towards them sexually. To be an effective man in this society is to have power over women, which includes sexual power. The man that women can't get enough of, that women will do anything for, the super-stud—this is the image of ideal masculinity that pornography peddles. These are the accepted terms of male sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Porn thus both prescribes male sexual behaviour and offers a release from male sexual fears. Men who do not in reality have this kind of sexual power over women can experience that power in fantasy through the use of pornography. The fantasy also operates as a temporary relief to fear—fear of not measuring up to social expectations of masculinity, fear of women, their sexuality and their power, fear of emotional intimacy. For men who are socialized to divorce their sexual needs from their emotions, porn offers a safe, unthreatening way to experience sexual pleasure—while simultaneously reinforcing the cultural stereotypes of masculinity which make such release desirable and necessary. It also reinforces their belief in their right to define female sexuality in their terms, and their anger at women when we reclaim this act of definition for ourselves. The woman-hatred which pervades pornography both exploits this anger and legitimates the use of women as scapegoats.

### Effect on women

So what is the effect on women of these depictions of our sexuality, designed to cater to male fears and needs? I think women internalize the prescriptive messages in pornography, with the result that we are forced to experience our sexuality in ways that are destructive to us. We either try to live up to the image of the pornographic woman in order to be valued sexually, or we feel like sexual failures because we don't measure up. The swinger, the playboy centrefold, the porno queen, the sexually liberated woman with no inhibitions who will do anything—and loves it: these are the images against which we are forced to measure our value as sexual commodities. We also internalize the mythology about female sexual passivity and masochism in pornography; passivity becomes sexualized for us, just as domination is sexualized for men.

Again, these experiences are not symmetrical. This reinforcement of our passivity acts to keep us powerless in relation to men, to make us accept our subordinate position. Women have been allowed to experience sexual satisfaction only by defining our sexuality in terms of male needs and male power; the feminist critique of this situation has exposed institutionalized heterosexuality but we have yet to develop a comprehensive politics of sexuality which will

has been governed by the misogynist assumptions in pornography, as well as developing our demands around what a healthy, non-oppressive sexuality would consist of.

### Expect strong resistance

We must also realize that there will be strong resistance to such demands, not only from men, but from all of the anti-feminist forces in our society. The recent increase in violent porn is one indication of this. In common with other backlashes against women, the increased marketing of violent pornography is an attempt to rob women of the gains we have made and push us back into our prescribed roles. In a time of growing social and economic crisis, women's hard-won rights are being eroded; the forces of the right want to push us back into the home, deny us access to abortion, deny us equal pay, deny us our right to any real social power. And the powerlessness men feel as the crisis heightens gets acted out against women; rape and domestic violence are on the increase and there is a growing market for violent pornography.

Clearly, we must take action against this heightened resistance to and repression of female self-assertion. Which brings us back to the question of censorship. In fighting the pernicious effects of pornography, we must be very clear about what we want.

We don't just want to get rid of these images; we want to promote understanding of how they function, how they affect us, how they serve to keep us locked into the status quo. We need to make links between porn and other cultural depictions of women, between porn and other ways in which our sexuality is socially constructed. We need to demand more and better sex education for children and adults. We need to promote discussion of all these questions for a fuller understanding of how our sexuality is exploited, and how we can develop a more human, egalitarian sexuality. We need to demand that men examine their own sexuality and the way in which it is entwined with the domination of women. We need to be clearly both anti-sexism and pro-sex.

*We don't just want to get rid of these images; we want to promote understanding of how they function, how they affect us, how they serve to keep us locked into the status quo.*



*Part of the audience at the meeting on pornography* H. Thomas photo

In a capitalist society in which most people lack any real power over their lives, men get bought off with the power they exercise over women. By linking this power to sexual pleasure, pornography effectively acts to keep men resistant to women claiming our own power. For men to feel powerful, women must be kept powerless; for men to obtain sexual satisfaction, women must be kept in their place. The two go hand-in-hand.

give us a collective base from which to struggle against these definitions of our sexuality in heterosexual relationships.

The act of self-definition, of reclaiming our power, is central to the feminist enterprise. We need to demand, not only the end to false depictions of our sexuality which reinforce our powerlessness, but the right to develop our own sexuality, on our own terms. Such a project must involve examining the very real ways in which our sexual behaviour

### Weigh strategies against needs

So we must weigh our strategies carefully against these needs. If we see the most immediate danger in the increase in violent pornography, how do we fight the spreading of these images while making the link with other forms of pornography and other media depictions of women and still give ourselves the space to put forward our own

# The Dinner Party

Film review  
by Angela Page

The NDP Women's Rights Committee recently held a pub and film night in aid of the Margaret Livingstone Memorial Fund, showing the film *Right Out of History*, about the making of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. The exhibit, recently in Calgary, may one day be on permanent display in Los Angeles or San Francisco.

I have been lucky enough to see both the film and the exhibition in Calgary and I recommend each experience wholeheartedly to anyone concerned with women's place in history.

*The Dinner Party* is a strong feminist statement to the world, showing some of the women whose achievements and ideals rose above the limitations imposed on them, and bringing them out of obscurity to our view. Never before have so many women been commemorated, and never through arts like china-painting and embroidery which are traditionally labelled crafts because they are feminine

## ALTERNATIVES TO CENSORSHIP

alternatives? Will demanding state censorship accomplish this, or will it backfire on us? The state is not noted for acting in our interests; our approach to demands for censorship should be a cautious one, and should not blind us to other courses of action.

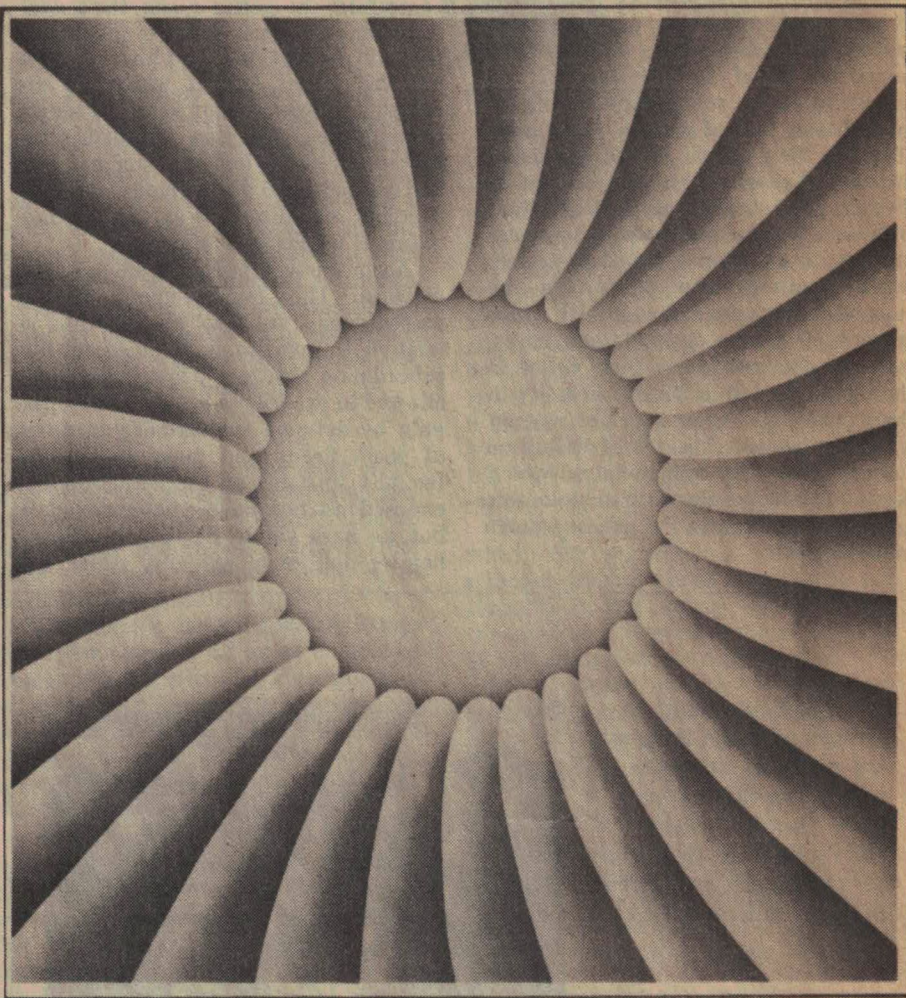
### Street activism

The women's movement has a history of street activism, mass protest; we've mobilized against degrading images of women before. The proliferation of violent images of women in advertising, especially in the fashion and recording industries that was prominent a few years ago, was met by the women's movement with mobilizing mass protest which proved an effective strategy. Such strategies against pornography would have the advantage of leaving the power to define the struggle in our own hands, not the state's. We must be wary of giving up even more power around this issue than we've already lost. For the power to assert our own right to define our own sexuality in our terms is what the fight against pornography is all about. ♀

and domestic.

Judy Chicago had to overcome her own resistance to china-painting and embroidery as arts, but she felt that they were appropriate to what she was trying to do. She began work on the project in 1971, then gradually opened her studio to others in order to bring the work to completion. In the film, we get some idea of the conflict and cooperation among these very different people. We

stands in a pool of light on a shining porcelain floor with nine hundred and ninety-nine names written in gold upon it. The table has thirty-nine elaborate place settings, thirteen to a side. Thirteen was the number of Jesus and the disciples; it is also the number of witches in a coven. The crowd moves slowly round, speaking in hushed whispers, restrained from touching by a low railing. The exquisite, vivid colours of the embroidered



see them at their regular Thursday night pot-luck supper; we share their frustration as yet another carefully moulded plate emerges from the kiln in several pieces. It took five years of hard work to complete *The Dinner Party* and over 400 people were involved in it.

### 'Last Supper' of the cooks

Judy Chicago wanted to celebrate women's achievements by creating a "reinterpretation of the Last Supper from the point of view of those who had done the cooking throughout history." There is indeed a feeling of sacrament about it; one is approaching a High Altar. The enormous triangular table

table runners, the decorated plates, the porcelain goblets and tableware intensify the feeling of being in a sacred place.

The thirty-nine women were chosen with three criteria in mind: their contribution to society; their attempts to improve conditions for women, and their illumination of women's experience or their actions as a role model. They go back to primordial goddesses, representing symbols of birth and life and power and forward to our own time and the only living woman represented on the table, the American painter Georgia O'Keefe.



## Women and men fight porn on the job

by Joyce Meissenheimer

One aspect of the fight against pornography has not claimed the attention it merits in the justified outrage against Red Hot Video and First Choice Pay TV. That is the battle that is being fought on an increasing scale by women at work, particularly in unionized operations.

The stand taken by the B.C. Federation of Labour against sexual harassment on the job has led to a good deal of discussion in unions and on the job. Consciousness has been raised among both women and men and they, and their unions, are taking action against the presence of pornographic pin-ups which is the most common manifestation of sexual harassment through the use of pornography.

### Women in non-traditional jobs

The efforts made by women to get into non-traditional job areas has highlighted this. One of the first things they

### THE DINNER PARTY — Books about 'The Dinner Party' and an International Quilting Bee

The women whose names were chosen for the floor represent a wide range of nationalities, experiences and contributions. They are arranged in groups related to the individual women remembered in each place setting and, for me, reading the names was like meeting old friends and discovering many new ones.

From each point in the triangle (an ancient symbol of the feminine) one can see the backs of table runners on opposite sides. They are hard to see at the distance, and this symbolizes the difficulty we have in seeing women clearly because of their obscurity in history.

It becomes increasingly clear that to have influence in one's own time, or to be remembered, women were usually high-born or wealthy. Then, perhaps, their exceptional gifts might be recognized and not punished. The role of the Christian church in oppressing and punishing women is very evident, especially when one considers the thousands, perhaps millions, of women who were tortured and burned on suspicion of witchcraft in Europe and North America.

Connections can be helpful: until recently, the only women who became painters or sculptors were related to or married to artists. Otherwise they had no access to a studio. Caroline Herschel, sister of the astronomer William Herschel, discovered eight comets and actually received a small pension from Charles II; but she could not join the Royal Society because she was a woman.

*The Dinner Party* is a celebration of the female, and the plates are based on a butterfly/vagina image which has out-

raged some critics. We do not even notice phallic imagery (like the cover of the last issue of *Priorities*), but these plates have been called "grotesque, vulgar and kitsch" by Hilton Kramer, the *New York Times* art critic. I prefer Vancouver feminist art critic Avis Lang Rosenberg's comments:

"You can't think in terms of those women on the table seeing themselves portrayed that way. Judy has used contemporary permissiveness to create a contemporary work of art. And since so much victimization of women happens exactly through that aperture, to call it one's own, once and for all, to celebrate it rather than to view it as a curse is to begin at a place of ownership of one's own life.

"It is not to be reduced to our sexuality but to begin at what we indeed all have in common structurally and what we know from inside. Then it can reverberate in a symbolic and metaphoric way. And the very fact of the manifold formal manipulations is proof of how various we can be."

I found *The Dinner Party* gave me an incredible feeling of affirmation, of connection with these women throughout history, of happiness. It is one woman's vision of woman's history, carried out by many people. I wanted to make my own list of names, one Canadian, one European. Then it came to me: in living up to what these women have done, against such incredible odds, we can create our own versions of *The Dinner Party*.

If you would like to know more about Judy Chicago's work, and about the making of *The Dinner Party*, there are three books, all available through *Through the Flower Corporation*, P.O. Box 842, Benicia, California 94510. (*Through the Flower* was begun in 1977; its goals include the creation and distribution of art furthering understanding and appreciation of women's experience.) *The Dinner Party: a symbol of our heritage*: Judy Chicago, 1980, Anchor Books, New York, \$19.95. Origins of the work, background on the women represented.

*Embroidering Our Heritage*: Judy Chicago, 1980, Anchor Books, N.Y. Colour illustrations of the plates, runners and banners and details of the embroidery. Both together: \$36.00; your bookstore can order them. Or try the library.

*Through the Flower*: Judy Chicago's autobiography; \$11.75

### International Quilting Bee

A way of becoming involved with *The Dinner Party* is through the International Quilting Bee. People are invited to participate in commemorating the woman of their choice by making triangular quilts and donating them so that they can become part of the ongoing exhibition of *The Dinner Party*. Everywhere *The Dinner Party* travels, more quilts arrive, adding yet more links to the growing chain of connections between women from all parts of the globe. Directions and information can be obtained from *Through the Flower Corp.* ♀

## WOMEN CAN WIN FIGHT AGAINST PORN AT WORK

discover is the general locker-room atmosphere pervading such work. Gross swearing, sexism (including the presence of porn) and general machoism have been found to be practised to a degree that few of these men would ever dream of introducing into their own homes.

The way women react to this varies. Enquiries seem to indicate that feminist opposition is expressed by only a minority of women finding themselves in such situations. This should come as no surprise—feminists are not a majority in the world of women in general.

Other women try to ignore what goes on while there are some who take the view that if women want to work in non-traditional jobs they must recognize that they are invading a "man's world" which they must accept. Some of them even adapt to this by competing with male workers in the use of extremely offensive language, for example.

However, where even lone feminists have taken up the issue, significant positions against porn in the workplace have been established, especially when unions have been involved.

### Some examples

The examples which follow are only a small sample of the many cases in which action has been, and is being, taken.

In a Lower Mainland plant employing both women and men, a feminist worker walked in one day to find a porn pin-up on the bulletin board. Her first instinct was to tear it down but she decided to consult her women co-workers first. One of them immediately took it down. The person who had put it up was extremely angry—this is a standard reaction—and loudly defended "his right" to put up such material.

The women then went to talk to their union about this. The union's plant leadership took a firm position and made it clear that if any more such material went up, they would take it down.

Another instance concerns a very large, traditionally male work force where a handful of women had managed to find employment. Generally, they work in complete isolation from one another and only see each other in union meetings. In this case, the company provided a small shack for coffee and lunch breaks to be used by workers working far from the main cafeteria. This shack was literally wall-papered with pin-ups. The crew using it included one woman who, quite naturally, found this intolerable.

## NDP WOMEN'S RIGHTS COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING Prostitution: a feminist approach

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THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 1983 7:00 P.M.

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*Information: 879-4601*

She demanded that the company provide her with transportation so that she could go to the cafeteria for her breaks. Some of her women co-workers found out about this and supported her. Together they raised the matter in the union. A good deal of very educational discussion took place in the union — it was clear that the degrading nature of such pin-ups was brought to some men's attention for the first time.

The company responded by clearing the offensive pin-ups out of the shack and cleaning it up.

### Sexual harassment contract clauses

Since some unions have negotiated contracts including clauses against sexual harassment, women are using this to protest porn in the workplace. At least one union, to our knowledge, has appointed a special committee to handle a specific complaint from one of its members and to prepare a clause to be negotiated in the next set of contracts.

Such a clause needs to be very simple: e.g. "No union member shall be subjected to any type of harassment in the workplace." Women should know, also, that action can be demanded from the Human Rights Commission. Employers are legally obliged to provide for the protection of their workers' health, both mental and physical, and complaints about porn affecting one's mental well-being on the job can be made.

Astrid Davidson, Director of Women's Programs for the B.C. Federation of Labour, told *Priorities* that she is constantly being consulted by unions and individuals about this problem. It is also clear that there are male workers and union officials who are prepared to fight against porn on the job. Women working in such situations have found that they can often get a very good hearing and

support from male co-workers by explaining their objections to pornography to them

### Affirmative action demands

Feminists have been demanding affirmative action to get women into non-traditional jobs as an absolutely essential component of the struggle for equality. It is clear that such action must include freedom from sexual harassment on the job. It is also clear that hiring quotas should be set and implemented so that many women get hired and not just a small token number who find themselves isolated in all-male crews. And, because of the "last hired, first fired" principle that works so well to keep down the number of women in non-traditional occupations, the unions will have to address the issue of affirmative seniority provisions to preserve such jobs for women. The Ontario Federation of Labour is leading the way in recognizing and campaigning for affirmative action including affirmative quotas and seniority arrangements. The addition of freedom from sexual harassment as an affirmative action demand will open the door to, among other things, a successful campaign to eliminate porn from the workplace.

Whenever women and their unions win such battles through protest and the education of male workmates, an important contribution is made to the elimination of pornography from society in general. It is through this kind of action that healthy images of women are created.

Women should therefore never hesitate to take up this issue if it arises, and they should enlist the help of their unions, feminist organizations, the B.C. Federation of Labour, the NDP Women's Rights Committee, not only to fight back but to spread the word that they are doing so. ♀



# Pornography and silence

When pay-TV channel First Choice announced its Playboy-produced soft-porn movies, there was an immediate cry of protest across the country. Yet the B.C. Civil Liberties Union in the name of democracy and free speech would protect pornography from censorship. Not, however, Rosemary Brown, one of their honorary directors. She declared pornography to be "an expression of hate to women" and resigned.

I would have done the same. For, as Susan Griffin explains in *Pornography and Silence*, the freedom of the pornographer to use the mass media to sell his wares has nothing to do with liberty and everything to do with repression. We live, she argues, in a society dominated by the pornographic mind, and we have all been shaped to some degree by that mind, which distrusts and fears the body. But, startling as it is to make the connection, so does Christianity with its doctrine of fallen man whose sin is sexual knowledge. To be flesh is humiliating; to be spirit is ennobling. Out of this dualism comes a sexist division of sensibilities: the woman is associated with the life of the body and the senses, the man with the life of the spirit. He, then, is the carrier of culture. And, continues Susan Griffin, he is bidden by our culture to repress that powerful "feminine" part of himself, that eros which should be a part of his whole being.

The pornographer expresses this central conflict of our culture in sadistic fantasy. He would destroy that part of himself that would feel not only sexual delight but also joy, grief, pain, longing, tenderness, and compassion. But sadist and masochist are one being. The "woman" is simply a projection of his own mind, a fantasy whom he imagines to be an aggressor, whom he must make suffer with brutal sexual practice. There's a common misconception that such fantasies are cathartic; that, like a good laxative, they cleanse and purify. But, far from releasing and rendering harmless unexpressed sexual rage and violence, pornography acts to turn fantasy into event, to produce rape and murder, at the same time that it silences beneficent human feeling. Pornography is the censor.

### "Mass delusion" akin to racism

But pornography is dangerous even beyond its influence on individual behaviour. For this fantasy about women



## PORNOGRAPHY AND SILENCE: CULTURE'S REVENGE AGAINST NATURE

by Susan Griffin

New York: Harper & Row  
1981.  
277 pp., hardcover, \$17.95

Reviewed by Irene Howard

is shared by men throughout western society and is thus a "mass delusion" in the same way racism is. Any pornographic magazine will give ample evidence that pornography and racism are both aspects of the same mind and employ the same ugly symbols of repression. Susan Griffin analyzes in some detail the evolution of that mind in Hitler, demonstrating that for him the Jew was that "other" in himself that he despised. Hence the Final Solution which would silence what clamoured for gratification and consciousness. But the way was prepared by propaganda which would create the illusion of the Jew as enemy, of the German as master. Great

mass rallies and torchlight parades were staged with a view to making people enter into a cultural fantasy. The orations of Der Führer were theatrical events designed not to inform the listeners of government policy but to make them participants, performers in history. Thus, as in pornography, fantasy becomes real, culture becomes event.

We know that people conform to the images and expectations that others have of them. Women, like everyone else in our society, cannot help but be shaped by the images that surround them. The tragedy is that since those images don't correspond to anything in their real lives, women tend to remake themselves to correspond to the pornographic fantasy of the doll-like woman without a will.

Without the necessary corroboration of their actual experience, they lose their identity. The voice of the authentic self is silenced. Susan Griffin concludes: "We have inherited an identity of non-being from a pornographic culture, an identity which condemns us to silence."

### Disturbing connection

It is disturbing to have that connection made between the silencing of the Jews and the silencing of women. But this indictment of pornography as a crime against humanity is too well documented to be charged with over-interpretation. The accounts of the tragic lives of sex-goddess Marilyn Monroe and porn queen Linda Lovelace make painful reading, as do the passages from pornographic novels and magazines and from novelists Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, whose brutal writing about women has been given literary credibility.

Finally, the eighty pages of the book make hard reading; at least, I found them so. But the argument is endlessly, sometimes needlessly, reiterated, so that not even the most casual reader will miss the point. However, after that first closely reasoned section, the rest of the book is much more accessible, sometimes even absorbing, and enlivened by bits of revealing information such as the fact that "glamour" once described the power of witches to transform men. The book ends with the affirmation that another life is possible, one "which refuses obscenity's narrow and damaging idea of what it is to be human. And lives." ♀

## Letters to 'Priorities'

To Ms Jo Dunaway Lazenby  
*Priorities*  
Vancouver.

Dear Jo:

In reading your article in the *Priorities* reporting on the Women's Caucus, it was most disturbing to note that you made the statement: "The Women's Caucus nomination of Muriel Overgaard was later withdrawn because it was felt that she had not complied with the motion governing the seeking of nomination in regional caucuses."

I would like to advise you that it was my decision to withdraw from the nomination and not because the women's caucus felt I had not complied with the motion governing the seeking of nomination in regional caucuses. It is public knowledge within the trade union movement, the B.C. Federation Women's committee and the women as well as the general public in this area that I certainly have been and am committed to women's issues. This I also declared at the Caucus, not perhaps word perfect as some people seemed to believe necessary but nevertheless the commitment was there.

The printing of such a statement (when the person who gave the impression to the caucus was only interested in gaining the nomination in our caucus for one of the men in our region) leaves me very cold indeed.

Yours sincerely,  
Muriel A. Overgaard  
Victoria

## PORNOGRAPHY DEBATE

*Pornography:  
Sexual fascism*



Gail Hopkins and Sharon Shniad in the audience

I'll use the law when overt acts of violence are portrayed in pornography. But the use of the law is not the central issue here. When violence is as fundamental to a society as it is to ours, the law can only be a short-term tool to prevent the worst abuse.

On the other hand, a strategy focussed only on educating people is not enough either—pornography is too much a part of the sexual and economic power structure in north America for education to be an end in itself.

We need both of these tactics, of course, but we need to develop others as well. I don't think any of us who have worked on this issue have all the answers, but we are developing our tactics and strategy based on looking at pornography through women's eyes.

To close, I'll offer one final anecdote, this one from Ann Jones, author of *Women Who Kill*:

"Take the classic case of Donald Fearn, who abducted seventeen-year old Alice Porter in Pueblo, Colorado. Fearn drove Alice Porter to an abandoned church, tied her up on the altar, tortured her all night with instruments, including hot wires and an awl, mutilated her while she still lived in ways so horrible that they

have never been publicly reported, beat her to death with a hammer, and threw her broken body down a well. After his arrest he explained: "Ever since I was a young boy I have wanted to torture a beautiful young girl." Now where do you suppose he got an idea like that?" ♀

## CHAIRWOMAN'S REPORT

The Women's Rights Committee also brought the NDP's presence to the March 5 International Women's Day Rally and to the March 6 IWD Information Day at Britannia Centre.

A full day's workshop on the direction and organization of *Priorities* was held on January 15, in accordance with the directive of a Women's Caucus resolution. The editorial, mailing and records committees are now staffed and functioning.

At the Steering Committee meeting on January 16, attended by over 30 people including Island and Interior representatives, the committee decided to send a representative to the End the Arms Race Coalition. Last year the Women's Rights Committee participated in the Walk for Peace rallies, but did not seek active participation in the Coalition.

Finally, in keeping with the directive that we pursue a greater public presence for NDP policy, the Women's Rights Committee has established an External Affairs sub-committee to put together and distribute press kits, to raise and respond to women's issues in the media, and to keep other women's groups current with NDP positions.

As this report illustrates, the Women's Rights Committee is continuing the excellent work it has done in vigorously promoting NDP policies and educating the public on feminist issues. With the organizational structure now well in hand, we anticipate a full year of activities. ♀

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FRIDAY APRIL 8 AT 8 P.M.

**NOTICES OF NEW PUBLICATIONS**

*If Men Got Pregnant, Abortion would be a Sacrament!*

A collection of letters by Helen Forelle. The letters were solicited by notices in over thirty feminist magazines (including *Priorities*) on personal experiences with abortion. Mail orders from Helen Forelle, Box 326, Harrisburg, South Dakota 57032-0326. Single copies: \$6.00, 2 - 10 copies: \$5.50 each, Over 10 copies: \$5 per copy.

*Of Epic Proportions: Achieving Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value*

An Equal Pay Kit produced by the Equal Pay Information Committee (EPIC) P.O. Box 4237 Vancouver, B.C. The kit covers the position of women in the work force, the struggle for equal pay, the opposition to equal pay, and a bibliography of material on equal pay. Single copies: \$12.50 each, \$10 each for 10 or more, \$15 for each mailed copy.

*Sexual Assault: the Child victim*

A brochure published by the Coalition of B.C. Rape Centres. Available from Vancouver Rape Relief Centre (732-1613), Victoria Rape Assault Centre (383-3232, Kamloops Rape Relief Centre (374-8551), Nanaimo Rape Relief Centre (753-0022), North West Women in Crisis, Terrace (638-8388)

*Sexual Assault: the New Law*

Published by the Department of Justice, Public Affairs department, Justice Building, Ottawa K1A 0H8 (613) 995-2569. A brochure outlining the changes to the Criminal Code relating to assault and sexual offences.

*Freedom, Feminism and the State*

Edited by Wendy McElroy; published by Cato Institute, 224-2nd St. S.E., Washington D.C. 200003. Price: \$7.95. A collection of writings by diverse women writers on societal and legal restrictions fought by feminists.

*Astro Arts*, 240 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, Calif. 90012 has published *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art 1970-1980*, edited by art historian Moira Roth. Price: \$14 (surface mail), \$29 (airmail).

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WOMEN AND WORDS/ LES  
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who will be holding a country-wide conference in Vancouver in July for women working with the written form in all fields. Organized by *West Coast Women and Words Society*, Box 65563 Stn. F, Vancouver V5N 4B0 (individual memberships: \$5).

**\$1 from every woman in Canada to help sustain Canada's only women's university: Mount Saint Vincent**, 166 Bedford Hwy, Halifax B3M 2J6. Specify if you wish your donation to go to Scholarships, Bursaries or Research

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