

PRIORITIES

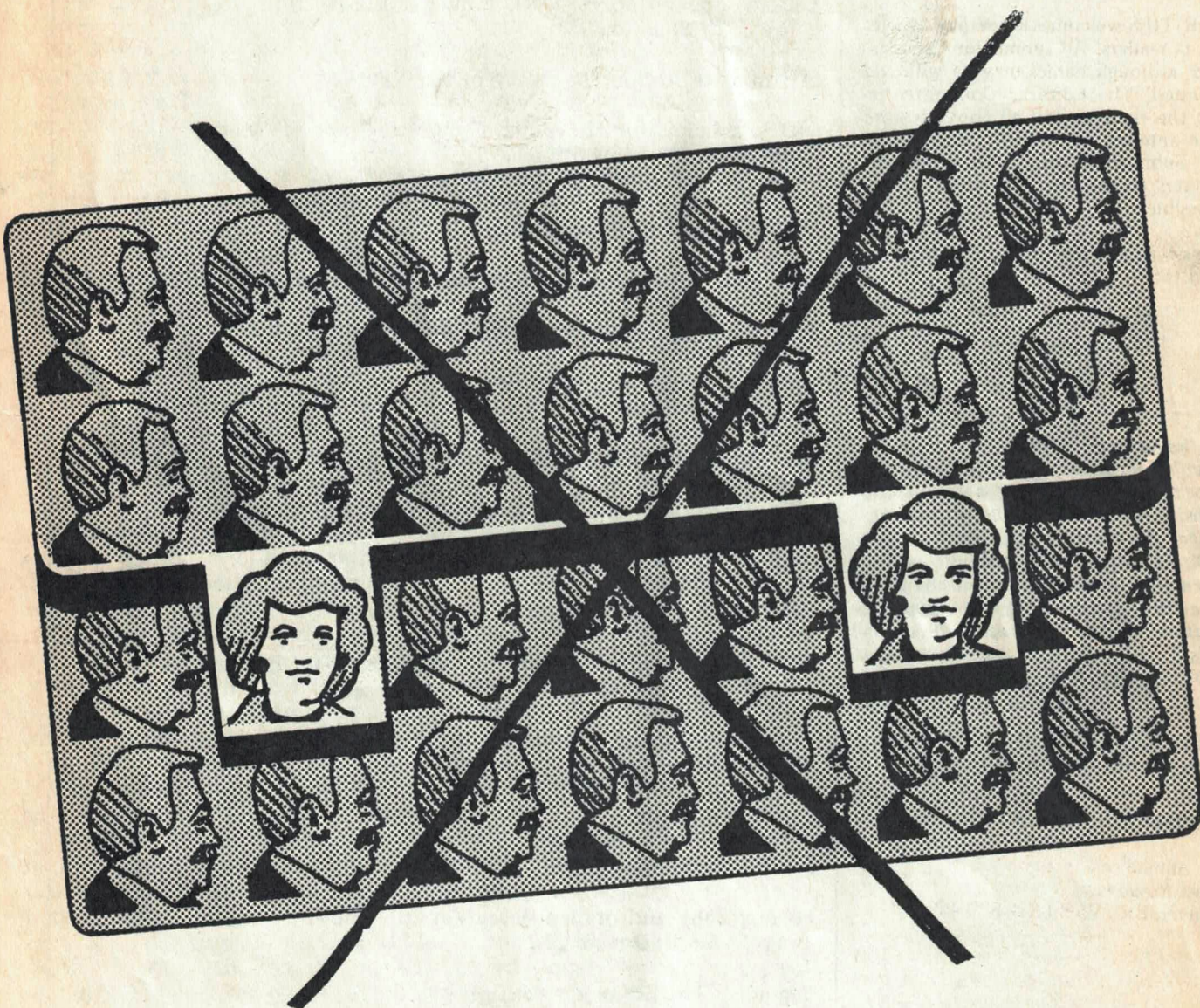


A
FEMINIST
SOCIALIST
PERSPECTIVE

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**Convention '83:
Action for 50%
women/men leadership**

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"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

THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE is responsible for the content of all unsigned articles.

PRIORITIES CO-ORDINATOR:

Sharon Shniad
 517 East Broadway
 Vancouver, B.C. V5T 1X4 879-4601

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

Outreach program to continue

Apologies to our readers for the lateness of what was to have been the May issue of *Priorities*. The cause of the delay, of course, has been the provincial election campaign. With the dispersion of members of the *Priorities* editorial collective into their respective ridings where they served as candidate, Election Planning Committee members, campaign and canvass organizers, and canvassers, and with the cancellation of the scheduled public meeting/panel discussion on prostitution which was to have been the central feature of the May issue, publication during the election became an impossibility.

In this "catch-up" issue we focus on several areas of current concern for the Women's Rights Committee and for the party as a whole. First, we report on the analysis of the election defeat undertaken by women from all regions of the province at a Women's Rights Committee meeting June 5th. The conclusions reached through this process of analysis and discussion have confirmed for many members of the WRC the validity of the new directions taken by the committee last fall. Resolutions passed by the Women's Caucus at the November, 1982 convention proposed that we reach outside the party to educate the community on feminist and socialist issues. This we have begun through a series of film nights and public meetings on pornography and prostitution. In the works are a series of public meetings around the province to be organized by the Technological Change subcommittee of the WRC which will serve to focus public attention on NDP policy.

The WRC also discussed, last fall, the need to address ourselves to party structure and democracy. This we are now doing as we deal with the question of what role the committee should play in the upcoming leadership contest. Resolutions on this subject follow Sharon Hazelwood's report of the June 5th post-election meeting in this issue.

We wish to encourage readers to participate in this process of analysis of the recent electoral defeat and of future directions for the provincial party by writing *Priorities* with your views.

Secondly, with a federal convention scheduled for late June, early July in Regina, this issue of *Priorities* addresses topics relating to federal legislation and to the federal party. These include affirmative action within the federal party, reproductive rights, pornography, the federal task force on older women. As well, Hilda Thomas, Participation of Women (POW) representative to the Socialist International Women's Congress held in Albufeira, Portugal in April, brings to our attention issues arising from that meeting.

The previously scheduled public meeting featuring a panel discussion on prostitution will be rescheduled for the fall and we hope to devote an issue of *Priorities* to that topic. The WRC has developed policies on prostitution this spring and presented these policies to several public forums in the city of Vancouver where the issue has been creating headlines in recent months. Proposed changes in the criminal code dealing with prostitution, which are opposed by the Women's Rights Committee, will not likely be introduced into the House of Commons until the fall. Therefore, it will be appropriate that we return our attention to prostitution at that time.

Finally, we are pleased to report that the March issue of *Priorities*, which dealt with pornography, generated a good deal of interest both inside and outside the party. Requests for copies have been constant. ♀



by
Joan Smallwood

WRC evaluates election

One of the strengths of the Women's Rights Committee has always been its commitment to an ongoing evaluation of its work and achievements.

It is difficult and perhaps unpleasant to embark on such an open evaluation at this time; however, it is as New Democrats that we acknowledge that growth comes through open democratic discussion.

The WRC has done its work. We feel that this was revealed in the polling results prior to the election. For the first time, women were looking to our party for answers to their social and economic problems. We were encouraged when our party's leader asked for assistance in addressing these concerns. We were encouraged when our representatives on the Election Planning Committee and the Policy Review Committee were given consistent verbal assurances that women were a target group and, therefore, women's issues would be an integral part of the campaign and platform.

Despite these assurances, we are disappointed in the lack of recognition of women's economic realities in our central campaign.

While we have been speaking of the immediate past, the WRC strongly believes that we, as a party, did not face an organizational defeat but instead failed to present, on a consistent basis, a viable socialist alternative. This cannot be done in a twenty-nine day campaign.

The WRC, at the fall convention last year, adopted a direction for the coming year. Once more, we bring this to your attention because, not only do we feel that it is relevant today, but we also hope that we might enter into such a strategy with the party as a whole.

The direction adopted is simple:

1. Organize public educationals dealing with current issues from a feminist, socialist perspective.

2. Publicize our position on topical and other questions in the community.

3. Use our publications to reflect these activities. **Continued on page 8**

3/31: will this change?



Pauline Jewett M.P. New Westminster-Coquitlam



Margaret Mitchell M.P. Vancouver East



Lynn McDonald M.P. Broadview-Greenwood

This 50th anniversary convention of the New Democratic Party will mark an important milestone in the progress towards equality for women. Convention will be asked to institutionalize measures to create gender parity on all party elected or appointed bodies, from the federal executive to party committees.

This long-awaited dream of women's caucuses in the NDP represents the winning of the first step in the campaign to have the women's liberation movement fairly represented in the NDP. As one federal council member happily remarked: "Now we can move to run women for office on political positions, not just because they are women."

With a federal election in the offing, the question is now sharply posed: what will the NDP do to extend the process to the electoral scene to ensure 50% representation in the House of Commons instead of the three out of thirty-one we now have? And how long will it take the provincial/territorial sections to follow suit?

Affirmative action for parity in the NDP

Last October, the Federal Council adopted the following resolution presented to it by the Participation of Women Committee:

Whereas the 1981 Federal Convention adopted an affirmative action proposal which included the following guideline regarding party structure;

When party committees, convention delegations, etc. are being formed, every effort should be made to achieve male-female parity in the membership. . .

Whereas the membership of Federal committees does not reflect the intent of the resolution, i.e. achievement of male-female parity, and

Whereas the 1981 resolution also states that:

The women's committees of the party are to monitor the success of this voluntary compliance affirmative action plan, and if there is no significant improvement in the drive toward parity, they are to consider proposals with more force;

Therefore be it resolved that the federal executive be directed to examine the barriers within the party structure which are impeding the achievement of parity in the party committees and report to the next federal council with recommendations for resolving the problem.

Affirmative Action Committee report

A special committee, chaired by Joyce Nash, was charged with preparing recommendations for the April-May meeting of the federal council and the report presented follows:

The barriers which impede the achievement of gender parity on Federal Council, Executive and committees result, to a substantial extent, on attitudes present on all levels of the party:

1. a general assumption that there is a lack of available and representative women;

2. the tendency to consider women as first choices for appointments or nominations in areas which specifically deal with "women's issues;"

3. the assumption that, as the NDP is a democratic party, all members (male and female) have equal chances for nominations or elections;

4. the assumption that, because we are committed to gender parity, somehow parity will eventually happen.

While no charges of deliberate discrimination or prejudice can be levelled at any group within the party (or constituent part), the evidence shows that systemic discrimination prevails at all levels of the party structure, just as it does in society as a whole. Systemic discrimination refers to practices or systems

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: STATISTICAL EVALUATION

which may appear to be neutral in their treatment of women and may be implemented impartially, but which operate to exclude women for reasons which are not related to the job to be done. In terms of the party, there is no conscious intention of practising discrimination; the discriminatory impact on women is either not recognized or is assumed to reflect actual inadequacies (or unavailability) of women to do the job.

From caucus to committees

This is true, for instance, of the Federal Caucus which has a disproportionately large number of male members (as does parliament and the provincial/territorial legislatures) when compared to the total population mix.

This is true for the representation on federal council from affiliate unions. In this instance, there is no female representation at all even though a significant proportion of trade union members is female.

This is true, in significant measure, in the case of provincial/territorial party representation in the makeup of federal officers, executive and council. Some progress towards parity was made in the constitutional amendment requiring POW representation on federal council. However, if the specific POW representatives are deducted from the total of this group, only 14% of members to council from the provincial/territorial sections are women.

Conventions, which are considered by many to provide the broadest representation of any party body, reveal a somewhat better picture. At the 1981 NDP Federal Convention, women made up 35% of the delegates. If the representation by constituent parts is studied, a less encouraging picture emerges. Caucus representation by women, 8% (six male MP's either did not attend or were included in some other statistical category); union affiliates representation by women, 9%; central labour bodies, 15%. Only in the case of three provinces/territories did the proportion of women to men bear any close relationship to the relevant proportions in the total population (and in the case of these three, the figures tend to be distorted because they represented only 1.7% of the total convention delegate representation).

In the view of this range of representation (or under-representation) of women at the convention, the fact that 38% of the federal councillors elected directly from the convention were women is encouraging.

"It may be argued that many women are denied full participation in party business because of other responsibilities—the traditional role of women as parent, and the types of employment in which the majority of women find themselves: service, clerical, non-unionized jobs.

Often, getting time off, even without pay, is a problem.

Many employed women do not have the flexibility enjoyed by employed males.

Gender a lesser factor

The dynamics of slate-making and intra-party election do not yet seem to attribute to gender equal weight with many other factors: regional representation, expertise, availability to serve, prominence or influence in a constituent sector of the party, success in achieving public office, a record of involvement in party affairs, etc. The development of those intangible "old girl" networks have not yet reached the stage of development and extent of influence long ago achieved by "old boy" networks. But that element, too, is not peculiar to politics.

It may be argued that many women are denied full participation in party business because of other responsibilities—the traditional role of women as parent and the types of employment in which the majority of women find themselves: service, clerical, non-unionized jobs. Often, getting time off, even without pay, is a problem. Many employed women do not have the flexibility enjoyed by employed males.

It may also be true that women, on the whole, view their work in the party as volunteer in nature, whereas men view it in terms of a secondary career which includes promotions from level to level or office to office. If this is so, it is probably a situation that has resulted because women have, for years, been consciously or unconsciously disregarded for elected or appointed positions within the party.

Solutions

The problem is not a simple one to resolve when the constituent parts of

the party are considered. There are specific areas within the federal party's jurisdiction upon which action can be taken at federal council in spring 1983 and at Convention 1983. Areas in which provinces/territories and affiliated groups have jurisdiction (some appointees to committees, council representatives elected at the provincial/territorial levels) cannot be legislated by the federal party. Therefore, the Committee recommends constitutional amendments and resolutions concerning educational/organizational approaches to affirmative action to ensure gender parity in those areas in which the federal party prevails.

The federal council adopted all the recommendations of the committee, with some minor amendments and one addition. It was resolved that:

1. Parity in male/female representation be mandatory in Nominating Committee nominees for the following positions at convention: Vice-presidents (total of 8 positions) and councillors elected at convention (total of 20 positions), and

2. In the matter of co-opts appointed to council, parity shall be observed.

3. Convention committees (not including the Convention Executive which reflects function or office), have equal female-male representation (exclusive of the chair).

4. A survey of delegates, alternates and visitors (female and male) at convention 1983 be conducted to gather information re participation (perceived and/or experienced) of women in the party.

5. The Federal Council strongly urges provincial/territorial sections of the party and affiliates to use equal representation as a guide in presenting nominees and in selection of delegates to Convention 1983.

6. The Federal Council use the provisions of Article IX Section 1 (*the election of the federal executive by the federal council—Ed.*) to ensure parity on the executive.

Constitution amendments

Constitutional amendments to be presented to convention provide for the election of a woman associate president if both the president and French-speaking associate are men,

Four of the eight vice-presidents to be elected shall be women and ten of the twenty councillors. Power will also be sought by council to appoint not more than five persons to council (co-opts) at least two of whom must be women.

Policy resolutions to go to convention are:

1. All committees of federal council, executive and convention (exclusive of the Finance Committee, Participation of Women Committee, Election Planning Committee, Nominating Committee and Convention Executive (*Federal Council does not have the power to determine the composition of these committees—Ed.*) shall have equal male/female representation, exclusive of the chair.

2. The Election Planning Committee and the Nominating Committee, by Convention 1985, achieve parity in their membership.

3. The Finance Committee, whose membership is determined by the office of Treasurer on the Federal/Provincial/Territorial levels, be excluded from the demand for parity.

4. The Executive elected at Convention 1983, at its first meeting in fall 1983, strike an Affirmative Action Committee to be responsible for monitoring affirmative action within the party, ensuring its implementation and planning for future action and educational programs.

5. As women's participation on the federal level of the party is determined to a great extent by the provincial/territorial sections and affiliated groups, the federal party urges those constituents to work towards parity in their representatives to federal council, convention and committees. ♀

THE NDP PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN COMMITTEE

Spring meeting prepares for convention

by Hilda L. Thomas, Chairwoman

Because of the provincial election, I was unable to attend the meetings of the Participation of Women Committee in Ottawa April 27-29. This report is therefore based on the minutes of the meeting and subsequent conversations with the Director of Women's Issues, Mary Humphrey.

By all accounts, the most significant item on the Federal Council agenda was the report of the special committee on affirmative action established by the Federal Executive in response to a POW motion approved by Council in October.

The motion called for an examination

of the barriers within the party structure which act as impediments to the achievement of parity. In its report, the committee found that while there is no conscious "discrimination against women in the party, as in society as a whole, systemic discrimination prevails at all levels." The specific proposals for correcting the problem, which received the unanimous approval of council, will be covered in the council delegate's report. As Chairwoman of POW, I applaud the Federal Executive and Council for the speed with which they have acted in this matter.

Task Force on Older Women

The Interim Report on the Task Force on Older Women was presented to Council by Margaret Thompson, POW representative from the Yukon who chaired the task force sub-committee. The final report is now being edited for presentation to the convention, and omnibus resolutions arising from the findings were approved. These will be given priority at the convention. The council also approved POW resolutions on pornography, women in prisons, native women, and pensions.



POW REPORT

Reproductive choice

The issue of reproductive choice continues to be of urgent concern to POW. A letter regarding the Morgentaler clinic was drafted by the committee and sent under my signature to Premier Pawley of Manitoba (copy on this page). POW is also of the opinion that the Liberal government does not intend to mount an adequate defence in the Borowski suit which is challenging the constitutionality of the present limited abortion law. In this connection, I wish to register my profound objection to the statement on reproductive choice distributed to all candidates during the B.C. election, which not only failed to state party policy, but managed to be devious and insulting to women as well.

The POW received a substantial information package from MP Lynn McDonald on the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code respecting prostitution (soliciting). POW continues to oppose the amendments on the grounds that they attack the victim, not the problem.

A Handbook for Women Delegates is being prepared by POW for distribution at the convention. All B.C. women attending the convention are invited to participate in the Women's Caucus. ♀

From speakers' notes issued to all candidates in the recent election in British Columbia — see POW report in this column.

STATEMENT ON ABORTION

The position of the New Democratic Party on provincial abortion issues is the same as that of the Social Credit Party.

The NDP does not view abortion as a solution to socio-economic problems. It is not an acceptable form of birth control.

Along with all members of the Legislative Assembly, the NDP members have approved budgets for hospitals and the Medical Services Commission.

The NDP supports efforts to educate our young people about matters of reproduction and choice. Young people and their families need the courage and the information to make intelligent choices in sexual matters, including the right to say "no."

POW letter to Premier Pawley

The following letter has been sent to Manitoba Premier Howard Pawley by Hilda Thomas, Chairperson of the federal NDP Participation of Women Committee, dated May 2, 1983.

Dear Mr. Pawley:

Your government is currently faced with an issue which will affect women across Canada, that is, the issue of reproductive choice. As you are no doubt aware, our Federal Party has a position on reproductive choice, which states in part:

That an NDP government would... provide adequate facilities in hospitals or special clinics for sterilization and abortion procedures. (Convention 1971).

However, reproductive choice is not only a federal matter. Section 251 of the Criminal Code specifies two situations in which therapeutic abortions performed by qualified physicians are legal. Therapeutic abortions performed in accredited hospitals or *approved facilities* are legal if the requirements under the law for therapeutic abortion committees are observed. *Approval is at the sole dis-*

cretion of Provincial Ministers of Health.

The approval of non-hospital facilities for the performance of therapeutic abortions is one way in which the gross inequities of the current law can be reduced. We therefore urge you to approve the clinic proposed by Dr. Morgentaler, and any others where approval is requested by qualified medical practitioners.

New Democrats in government have the opportunity to implement party policy. Support for the right of women to reproductive choice has long been the policy of our party both federally and provincially. As a provincial government, you have the power to markedly improve the health status of Manitoba women and to show all Canadians that New Democrats in government *do* make a difference.

c/o 301 Metcalfe Street, Ottawa.



Provincial Council's pro-choice stand on clinic

The following motion was adopted by the B.C. NDP at the meeting of its Provincial Council held in Vancouver on June 11, 12, 1983. The motion adopted was an amended version of a motion originally submitted by the Vancouver-Little Mountain Constituency Association.

That the Provincial Council reaffirm the policy of the B.C. NDP supporting the right to choice on abortion and calling for the establishment of community health clinics to meet the health needs of women,

And that letters be sent to Howard Pawley, Premier of Manitoba, to Larry Desjardins, Minister of Health, and to Roland Penner, Attorney-General, urging that the Morgentaler clinic in Winnipeg be approved by the NDP government and that a stay of proceedings be

entered in the charges laid against the staff and patients at the clinic; and further that full medical coverage be extended to the patients using the clinic.

And that Provincial Council endorse and participate in the National Day of Action for Freedom of Choice on Abortion called by CARAL (Canadian Abortion Rights Action League) in Toronto and CCCA (Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion) in Vancouver, for October 1983. ♀

A major battle over the legality of abortion is under way in Canada. Three protagonists—two pro-choice, one anti-choice—have mounted an all-out attack on the Federal abortion law.

Sharing the limelight are Dr. Henry Morgentaler from Montreal, remembered for challenging the abortion law in 1973 and successfully establishing abortion clinics in Quebec, and Joseph Borowski, a former Manitoba MLA, now owner of a health-food store, and a staunch Catholic, known for flamboyant, publicity-seeking anti-abortion activities.

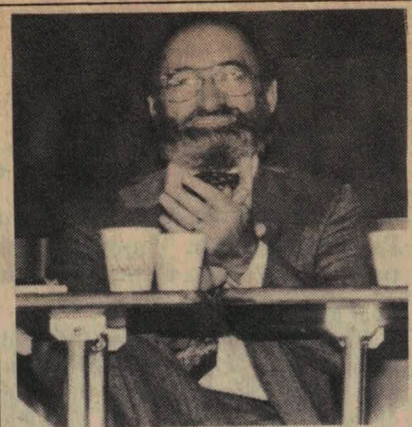
Morgentaler is openly defying the Federal law by establishing free-standing abortion clinics in Manitoba and Ontario, while Borowski is trying to prove in court that the fetus is a person and thus entitled to the "right to life" enshrined in the Constitution. A third case, initiated by Norma Scarborough, President of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, is challenging the law under the same Charter of Rights and Freedoms for denying women the right to "security of person."

Whatever the outcome of these challenges, there can be no doubt that the abortion law will be changed. The change is long overdue, as far as the pro-choice lobbyists are concerned. The restrictions outlined in the 1979 amendments allow abortions to be done only in hospitals after approval by a therapeutic abortion committee. Applications to these committees must be received in writing. A woman is not allowed to present her own case or challenge to a committee's decision. Only 20% of eligible hospitals have such a committee, and each defines "health" in a different way. As a result, Canada has the highest rate of second-trimester abortions in the world. Thousands of women must travel to the U.S. or Quebec to obtain a medical service denied them in their own communities.

Morgentaler again tests law

Morgentaler, who was acquitted by three juries when charged in 1973 for performing abortions in his clinic, has now decided to test the law again by opening clinics in Manitoba and Ontario. He believes that by offering a service far superior to that available in hospitals, he will be acquitted again when charges are laid. Backed by the strong, grass-roots-based Coalition for Reproductive Choice in Manitoba and by the Coalition for Abortion Clinics in Ontario, he is ready to try to render the law inoperable across the country.

Morgentaler's case is also indirectly supported by the challenge issued by the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, our only national pro-choice organization. Citing Section 7 of the



Dr. Henry Morgentaler

Abortion rights under attack

by Maxine Boag
who is active in the Victoria chapter of CARAL

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ("Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice"), CARAL President Norma Scarborough contends that the abortion committee system denies women security of person and involves a process which is in contravention of the principles of fundamental justice.

Women, she states, are discriminated against by this law, having neither the right to state their own case to a committee nor to be represented by a lawyer, nor even to appeal decisions the committee has made. CARAL's case goes to court later this year.

Borowski challenge

Joseph Borowski, in a case presently being heard in a Regina court, is using the same section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in his attempt to render the 1979 amendments "void and inoperative." His lawyer is presenting a range of "experts" including Bernard Nathanson, author of *Abortions America*; Dr. William Lilley from New Zealand, a perinatal physician credited with perfecting amniocentesis; and a geneticist from France. All contend that life begins at conception and that the fetus is a person. If Borowski is successful (his case will be completed this June) abortion will become totally illegal, as it was prior to 1969.

CARAL refused intervenor status

CARAL attempted, unsuccessfully, to get intervenor status at the opening of Borowski's case, fearing that the defendant, the Federal government, would not defend the law adequately. One reason for CARAL's fear is that Mark MacGuigan, Minister of Justice, is on record as expressing anti-abortion beliefs.

So far the trial has demonstrated that CARAL's concerns were justified. Little cross-examination of witnesses has occurred, and no mention has been made by the defendant of the degree to which the public supports abortion availability. (6,000 women had legal abortions in Canada last year and a Gallup Poll in June, 1982 showed that 72% of Canadians believe that abortions should be safe and legal.

1983 will go down on record as a critical year for abortion rights in Canada. In view of this, CARAL is sponsoring a National Day of Action for Freedom of Choice on Abortion in early October. CARAL/Victoria and the Vancouver-based Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion will be coordinating this action. Watch for more information in coming issues of *Priorities*. ♀

- DEFEND A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE
- REPEAL ALL ABORTION LAWS
- LEGALIZE FREE-STANDING ABORTION CLINICS

CANADIAN ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION LEAGUE (CARAL)
has called for

A DAY OF ACTION FOR ABORTION RIGHTS — OCTOBER 1

All organizations supporting the above demands should aim to participate in this action which is a matter of urgent necessity.

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA CONTACT:

CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR CHOICE ON ABORTION
BOX 24617, POSTAL STATION C., VANCOUVER, B.C. V5T 4E1

Sask. Pro-Choice Coalition in action



Another point of view on the Borowski challenge to abortion rights comes from the Pro-Choice Coalition of Saskatchewan which mounted several protest activities during the hearing in Regina in May. Any groups or individuals interested in participating in the Pro-Choice Coalition are asked to telephone 522-9707 or 584-7288. Financial contributions may be sent to Pro-Choice Coalition, c/o 219-1810 Smith St., Regina, Sask. A slide-tape presentation on abortion from the pro-choice perspective is available from the Coalition.

On May 9, Regina's Court of Queen's Bench was the scene for anti-abortionist Joe Borowski's long-awaited legal challenge to Canada's abortion law. The trial will net Morris Schumiatcher, Borowski's legal counsel, \$250,000 in legal fees and, if successful, prevent any and all abortions in Canada, making them tantamount to murder.

While Borowski won the legal right to represent fetuses in court, a judge disallowed any other interventions in the trial. No one represented the thousands of Canadian women who face unwanted pregnancy; in fact, no one represented women at all. The critical decision for Canada's future abortion policy lies in the hands of the judge. Joe Borowski, his lawyer, and legal representatives of the federal Department of Justice whose Minister is the avowedly 'pro-life' Mark MacGuigan.

Outside the courtroom, however, representatives of many women's, community and labour organizations, the Regina Pro-Choice Coalition, challenged Borowski's case. A press conference and public meeting took place in the week preceding the court case opening as well as activities during the trial itself.

What is at issue

The law in question, Section 251 of the Canadian Criminal Code, in place since 1969, allows for legal abortion when the 'life or health' of the woman

is endangered. Since its adoption, deaths from illegal abortion in Canada have dropped dramatically. The federal government's own task force, the Badgley Report, has already documented the regional inadequacies and restrictive nature of the existing law but Borowski's challenge would restrict abortion altogether, making it impossible for a woman in Canada to obtain a safe, legal, medical abortion.

Borowski himself has long been a militant opponent of liberalized abortion laws. In 1971 he first made headlines when he resigned as Manitoba's then NDP Minister of Highways to protest the financing of hospital abortions and earned himself the moniker of 'Holy Joe' with his frequent moral tirades. In 1973 he refused to pay federal income tax on the same grounds and was subsequently jailed several times. Most recently, he has gained notoriety with his anti-semitic outbursts and threats of physical harassment against Dr. Henry Morgentaler and his proposed free-standing abortion clinic in Winnipeg.

He is also attempting to obtain an injunction against the federal finance minister to stop the spending of public money on abortions.

Consequences of a Borowski victory

The trial has gone ahead with no input from those most directly affected. Canadian women, currently facing limi-

ted access to a basic reproductive right, the right to choose, may now face the total removal of that right. Could safe legal pregnancy termination become murder under the law? Could that IUD you've got, which prevents implantation of an already fertilized embryo, make you guilty of manslaughter? Could we return to the old days of illegal back street abortions which killed and maimed so many? It could happen. Joe Borowski's one-man crusade to over-rule what 72% of the Canadian population feel should be a matter of individual choice, the right to choose whether and when and where to bear children, could be successful.

The Pro-Choice Coalition, formed this year to defend the right to choose, includes a variety of community groups and organizations, and Judge Matherston's ruling to exclude legal interventions has necessitated an out of court room focus to the coalition's activities. In addition to a full-page newspaper advertisement the Coalition held a May 5 press conference with representatives of the women's, church, labour and medical member groups of the coalition. The evening of May 5 featured a public meeting with keynote speakers on the issue. During the trial itself several of the participating groups carried on public activities highlighting the issue. ♀

Why did we lose the B.C. election?

by Sharon Hazelwood

WOMEN
A future
of opportunities
with the
NDP

LET'S END the second-class status of women in our province's economy. Women in British Columbia constitute 40 percent of our workforce but are the most poorly paid and least secure members of our society:

- almost 20 percent of single parent women — the sole supporters of their families — are unemployed;
- the average income of a woman is...

CHAIRWOMAN'S REPORT

Continued from page 1

Our Steering Committee met early in June. It was a well-attended meeting, having representation from many regions of the province. We were also pleased to see many new faces.

This meeting was followed by another held during the Provincial Council weekend. The discussions and decisions we took are fully reported on pages 8 and 9 of this issue.

Our committees are now all functioning: we still find ourselves committed to the work before us.

If, as a party, we are seriously evaluating our program and strategies, we must first examine "democratic structures" that will promote genuine open discussion and socialist solutions based on reality. ♀

A Women's Rights Committee meeting held June 5th at Provincial Office brought together women from Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland, and the Interior of B.C. There was a remarkable similarity of experience in their reactions to the party's recent election loss.

Two themes recurred in the reports from each geographical area and in the discussion that followed. First is that twenty-nine days is not nearly long enough to educate an electorate on NDP policy, to confront the old bugaboos of "socialist hordes" and "fiscal mismanagement," and to win the support of groups who are our natural constituencies.

The short period from the election call to E-Day should properly be taken up with identifying our support and getting it out. But if we have not won those hearts and minds in advance, we cannot do it on the doorstep. Again and again women spoke of the lack of awareness of both voters and our own members on where the party stands.

We have fought long and hard to get

policies on the books that support full employment, a better deal for welfare recipients, improvements in education and health care, equity for women in all areas, reproductive choice and more.

Why then do the unemployed young, under-employed women, people trapped in poverty on welfare, and old-age pensioners not see us as their choice? The presentation of NDP policy as the human alternative must be a year-round process, and it must involve members at all levels.

Workers and decision-makers kept apart

The second major conclusion of the meeting was that there is a division between the workers and the decision-makers in the party. All constituencies represented at the meeting saw remarkable numbers of new people, especially women, come into the campaign as volunteers. There was also more money available and more trained organizers and organizing tools than ever before. But still we lost.

Various aspects of the campaign were

WRC will sponsor woman leadership candidate

then discussed in an attempt to identify the reasons for the defeat. Workers varied in their reactions to election material. Some found fact sheets to be useful; others felt they were too little, too late to present on the doorstep.

The women's leaflet was well-received in many constituencies but came too few and too late. In other constituencies it came not at all. Its very existence was due to last-minute slogging on the part of several WRC members when the official literature contained practically nothing on women's issues, despite the efforts of Shelley Rivkin on the Election Planning Committee for months.

Some women reported that their riding Election Planning Committee had concluded that they had organized well and won, but that the rest of the province just had not worked hard enough.

There was a reluctance to discuss the election loss as a political defeat.

Low profile strategy criticized

In other constituencies it was agreed that organizing had been well done and that therefore other reasons must be sought for the loss. Members in many ridings are questioning the wisdom of the "Lie-Down-Don't-Discuss-Issues-Let-the-Socreds-Hang-Themselves" strategy.

The meeting expressed concern that the energy and enthusiasm of these members not be dissipated in a leadership circus, that they not be demoralized into depression and lack of involvement, and that they not be browbeaten by those of greater experience until they doubt their allegiance to democratic socialism.

We have at least four years to prepare for another election, to create and present policies that meet the needs of ordinary people, and try to bring into focus the structure and function of a democratic socialist party which adequately reflects in its own organization and handling of internal power how we hope to spread decision-making power among citizens.

For a democratic, political leadership

This election post-mortem then concluded with the passage of a resolution directing a small committee to draft a leaflet to be distributed to all provincial

council delegates at the June 11 Council meeting. This leaflet urged delegates to vote against a special leadership convention in December, as recommended by the party's executive, and to support a May 1984 convention as planned prior to the election.

This would ensure that a leadership contest would not take place in the absence of a policy discussion and that the party would have an opportunity to engage in a full debate about existing policy and future platform.

Plan for a feminist/socialist candidate

A second, special Women's Rights Committee meeting, open to all women

members of the party, was held after the provincial council meeting.

The discussion focussed on the role the WRC should play in the upcoming leadership contest.

This meeting resolved that the WRC would initiate a campaign, seeking support and participation throughout the party, for a woman candidate for the leadership who has demonstrated that she is a democrat, a feminist, and a socialist.

A sub-committee was struck to draw up guidelines for such a campaign to be brought to the next steering committee meeting. ♀



Women's Rights Committee

WRC call for May leadership convention

Under the constitution of the B.C. NDP every convention is a leadership convention. But the task we are now facing—the election of a leader—is a matter of particular importance.

For, in a leadership contest, we are not simply choosing an individual; we are deciding on the direction of the party. Such a decision should be the occasion for stimulating policy discussion in every constituency throughout the province.

As a party we believe in grassroots participation. We believe that our leaders must be accountable to the membership.

A special convention which separates the choosing of a new leader from a discussion of policy and program is contrary to the democratic principles we stand for.

In addition, the holding of a leadership convention in Decem-

ber and a separate policy convention in May will impose an extra financial burden on the membership, and in mid-winter, travel difficulties may further restrict attendance from some areas.

The Women's Rights Committee believes that we as a party should use this opportunity to take the time for a careful re-evaluation of our policy and direction.

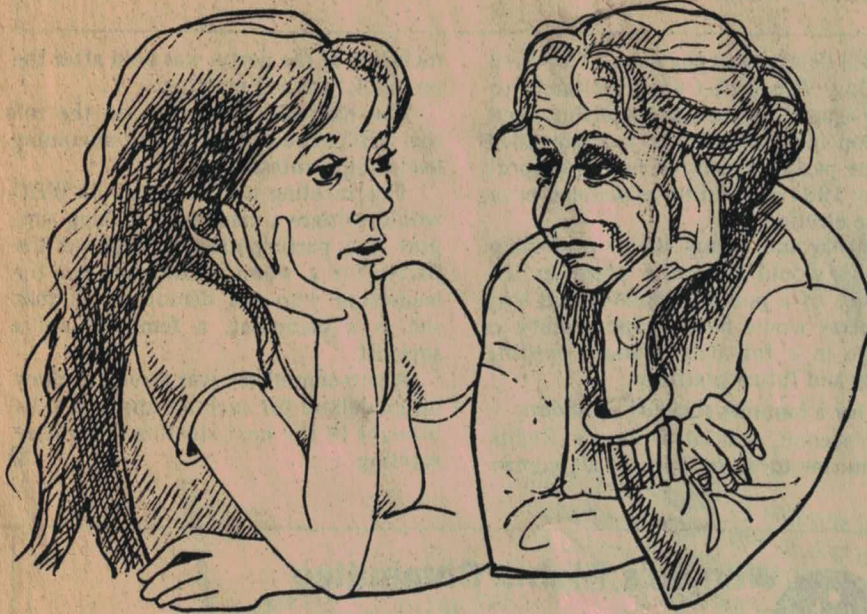
We urge council delegates to vote in favour of combining the important task of selecting a new leader with a full examination of policy and program at the regular annual convention scheduled for May, 1984.

The executive proposal to hold the leadership convention in December was defeated. The motion failed to receive the 2/3 majority needed.

Task Force on Older Women in Canada

Report ready for Convention '83

by Margaret Mitchell M.P.



The report of the Task Force on Older Women conducted by the NDP makes recommendations for:

- Employment for women in their middle years
- Adequate incomes for older women
- Affordable housing for older women
- Community services for older women
- Health care for older women
- Native women
- Government planning for an aging population

"My only hope," laments a 56 year old single mother of three from Manitoba, "is to die young so I won't be a burden on society in later years." She has worked outside her home for 30 years, but in offices with no company pension plans. Because she received wages well below those of her male counterparts, her Canada Pension Plan benefits will also be correspondingly lower. "I get angry," she says, "at how hard I've worked for employers and still have so little to show for it."

The financial plight of Canada's older women is grim. Older women are unlikely to complain, but their financial problems are greater than those faced by any other group. All too many elderly women are condemned to spend the last years of their lives in poverty as inflation eats into their already inadequate incomes.

This is no fringe group. In 1979, 608,000 senior citizens lived below the poverty line as defined by Statistics Canada. Seventy per cent of them were women.

These are women who have contributed to society by raising children, working in the home, or working outside the home. They are our mothers, our grandmothers, our sisters. If, after raising her family, an older woman seeks

work outside the home, she will be lucky in today's employment market to find any job, even at minimum pay. If she is working outside the home, she will often be the first laid off or she may be pressured into early retirement.

Financial problems magnify the many other difficulties the older woman faces. The infirmities of age can make getting about such a terrible struggle. In rural areas lack of a car can further isolate her. Health workers' attitudes towards older women, advertising stereotypes, indeed the views of society at large, add insult to injury.

Women live longer, have fewer benefits

Canadian women can expect to live to age 77—seven years longer than the average Canadian man. There are already more than one million women in Canada over 65. In 20 years, there will be two million—half of them over 75—and women over 75 will outnumber men in the same age group by a startling ratio of two-to-one.

Yet Canada's retirement income system has been set up so that fewer women than men are eligible to collect benefits, while those women who do collect usually receive less than men. Three out five unattached women over 65 in Canada in 1980 lived in poverty.

But statistics alone can't tell the story. That's why the New Democratic Party initiated its *Task Force on Older Women*. Since June 1982, the Task Force has held public hearings and workshops across Canada. Many organizations concerned with the plight of older women and women in their middle years presented briefs to the hearing panels. Individual women also spoke about their own experiences and problems—surviving on an inadequate income; dealing with grief; taking on the role of caregiver for elderly parents, disabled spouses and handicapped children; coming to terms with society's bias against aging; dealing with the physical process of aging; wanting to remain useful, contributing members of society.

Task Force report now ready

Women, from both urban and rural settings discussed the isolation they feel, often caused by poverty. This was best expressed by a deaconess in the Yukon Anglican Church who related her experience in mission work in Vancouver... "elderly people living in pokey, drab little rooms.. There was a church with beautiful stained glass windows and they would come and sit in the church for hours. It was the only place where they could find beauty and dignity in

Congress of Socialist International Women



by Hilda L. Thomas

NDP delegate to the Congress Resolutions Chairperson Joyce Gould (Great Britain) and SIW President Lydie Schmit

Algarve Province in Southern Portugal is among the poorer areas of Europe. Formerly a region of fishing and farming people, it is fast becoming a haven for English and northern European sun worshippers, the centre for expensive summer homes and luxury hotels in which the local population is employed in waiting on the tourists.

One such hotel, the Montechoro, was the site of the Congress of the Socialist

International Women, March 30-31, and of the Socialist International April 7-10. The irony of addressing such themes as world employment, an end to poverty, and justice and equality for women in this setting went unremarked.

A world in crisis

Delegates from 26 countries attended the 12th Congress of the SIW, the overall theme of which was "The World in Crisis—Socialist Women's Response." In welcoming the Congress to Portugal, Rui Mateus, Socialist Party of Portugal, suggested that because of their experience of subordination and marginalization, women are very much aware of the problems of poverty, discrimination, and oppression, which are increasing dramatically with the world economic recession. Speakers from Venezuela, France, and Italy stressed the need for alternative models, and for a rethinking of socialist strategy and solutions in the face of new technologies and a right-wing resurgence. The need to find a 'language of socialism' to overcome misunderstanding and division between European and Third World women was also stressed. As Lydie Schmidt, President of SIW, expressed it, women are "at the hinge" between cultures, and must act together to resolve problems.

Disarmament for development

The first of four sub-themes on the agenda of the Congress, Disarmament for Development, was introduced by

Beatrice Rangel Mantilla of Venezuela. She warned that unless the question of disarmament is met, the world will become "a lifeless place dominated by desperation and terror." Rangel Mantilla expressed the fear that NATO is becoming an offensive alliance. The aggressive role of the U.S., and the very real fear expressed by Julietta Otero of El Salvador called attention to the fact that disarmament without social justice is not a solution for countries which are in the throes of revolution. As Carmen Mestre, delegate from Spain, expressed it, there is a need to distinguish between arms used for oppression and arms used in liberation struggles.

A world employment plan

In introducing the second theme, for a world employment plan, Caroline Diop of Senegal called for a new economic order based on dialogue between producing and consuming countries. She referred to the "sclerosis of traditional structures" which makes women the slaves of development. The same point—that women bear the burden of poverty in developing countries—was raised by Nava Arad of Israel in her introduction to the theme, an end to poverty. She called for a shift in emphasis to equality, and for a redefinition of poverty.

Status of women

The resolution on equality for women was presented by Anita Gradin of Sweden, who painted a glowing picture of

Task Force on Older Women in Canada

their lives."

A 63 year old Nova Scotia widow remembered that when her husband died, she lost over two-thirds of her income. "Canadian law," she complained, "should make it mandatory for a dependent survivor, such as myself who never worked outside the home, to receive at least a portion of these pensions (company pensions, etc.) after a spouse's death."

The final report of the Task Force based on the hearings, workshops and a questionnaire, will be released this fall. The NDP will use it as ammunition to demand legislation and changes in policy that will improve the situation of older Canadian women. ♀

Socialist International WOMEN



the status of women in Sweden relative to their position in other countries. However, she noted that even in Sweden, there is a segregated labour market, with the women's job market comprising about 30 occupations compared to 300 for men. She called for desegregation of the labour market and for expansion of child care, parental leave, training, and job opportunities.

Ivanka Corti of the Social Democratic Party of Italy expressed her envy of the situation of Swedish women. She pointed out that women in many countries are at a "pre-historic stage" in comparison, suffering not only from economic inequality, but also from social and cultural oppression.

International solidarity

In addition to the major themes, separate resolutions on a number of specific issues were adopted by the Congress. Among these issues were the plight of the "disappeared" in Argentina, the expulsion of foreign workers from Nigeria, and the assassination of Marianela Garcia Villas, president of the Human Rights Committee of El Salvador.

The Action Program adopted at the close of the Congress demands economic recognition and autonomy for women. Future meetings and seminars of SIW will attempt a deeper analysis of the problems raised in Portugal with particular attention to the need of women to play a role in North-South dialogue, and for co-operation and collaboration between SIW and the Latin American Regional Committee.

Prospects for a feminist perspective

The experience of participating as a delegate in both the SI and the SIW was very illuminating. While both bodies operate as a rule by consensus, the SIW is much more open in its deliberations than the SI. There are very few set speeches, amendments to resolutions are made from the floor, and differences are dealt with in open discussion. This is partly because the SIW is a much smaller body. It is also a reflection of the relative powerlessness of the SIW which, in my view, is not taken very seriously. At the SI, ten minutes was allotted for the report of SIW president Schmit of the two-day Women's Congress, and the absence of a feminist perspective on most issues was distressing.

The SI women, nevertheless, are firmly committed to a feminist perspective, with the possible exception of the Latin American and Caribbean delegates. Much time was devoted on the first day of the SIW Congress to an angry intervention by this group, which accused the SIW of promoting "feminism alone" and of neglecting socialist goals. Their statement declared that "we live with indiscriminate and daily massacres which have no sex barriers. Massacres are carried out against women, men and children. There is absolutely no sex discrimination in such deeds, just as there is no 'feminization of poverty.' Around here. . . both sexes die in equal misery." This potentially divisive conflict was dealt with openly and positively by the SIW, in a way which leaves the door open for understanding and co-operation in the future.

Socialist perspectives

The socialism of SI women does embrace a fairly wide spectrum, but there is

general agreement that all socialists must recognize the claim of women to economic, social and political equality in every part of the world. In the words of the Action Program adopted by the Congress, "principles of universal nature cannot acknowledge any political, cultural or religious boundaries which, calling for differentiated engagements, would be unacceptably paternalistic or racist, contradicting international socialism."

SIW is making a genuine effort to overcome the problem of Eurocentrism complained about by the Third World. The problem for women in the NDP is that we are neither first nor third world, and the enormous cost of airfare prohibits our participation in the regular bureau meetings and seminars organized by the SIW between Congress meetings, and thus prevents our achieving either recognition or influence on the international scene.

While Canada does have a vice-president, Ed Broadbent, on the SI, an invitation to nominate a vice-president to the SIW Executive was refused by the NDP for financial reasons. POW was not consulted until the decision had been made. Budgetary problems are undoubtedly real, but so is the need for NDP women to meet and exchange ideas with their socialist counterparts abroad, as men routinely do.

It was an honour to represent the women of the New Democratic Party in my capacity as chairwoman of the Participation of Women Committee. I intend to do all I can to ensure our representation at future meetings of the SIW. ♀



First Conference, Stuttgart 1907

SIW BULLETIN

Socialist International WOMEN

International Solidarity



Links with Japan

To Hilda Thomas
POW delegate to conference of Socialist
International Women

From Sachiko Taguchi
International Secretary
The Japan Democratic Socialist Party

Dear Comrade Thomas:

I hope you returned home safely though we had such tragic violence at the end of our Congress (referring to the assassination of a Palestinian delegate to the Congress—Ed.).

We have just started to translate all our documents including the "Albufeira Manifesto" into Japanese language. Since I attended the Congress and met many comrades from all over the world, I have realized the necessity of more exchange views and information with our fraternal parties regularly. If you will agree with me, please send us information of your Party, and I also do it.

Herewith, I am enclosing photos from our Congress.

With socialist greetings,
Sincerely yours,
Sachiko Taguchi

April 1983



Sachiko Taguchi and Hilda Thomas

At the 12th Congress of Socialist International Women in Portugal, March 30-31, 1983, Ana Margarita Gasteazoro was one of those elected Vice-president of the organization. A resolution on El Salvador at the Congress demanded the immediate release of Gasteazoro and other political prisoners detained by the government of El Salvador. The following is reprinted from the 1981-82 Secretary's Report of Socialist International Women.

International solidarity does not stop at the level of nations. It has to reach out to support and help individual cases. In the period since the Madrid Conference, two women especially have been at the centre of our concern. Ana Margarita Gasteazoro, who was one of the main speakers at the Socialist International Women's Conference in Madrid, was arrested on May 15, 1981. Since that time, she has been in prison in El Salvador. Ana Margarita Gasteazoro has been accused of being a member of the Frente Farabundo Marti Para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN), the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation.

Reliable sources, however, indicate that she was not involved in any armed activities. She has also been charged with supporting guerrilla activities and having used a false name when she appeared at our conference in Madrid. Under the decree Law 507, January 1981, she was accused of having attacked the government at international meetings. This apparently refers to the address she delivered to the Tenth Socialist International Women's Conference that was held in Vancouver in October 1978, and the Eleventh Socialist International Women's Conference in Madrid, November 1980. Several attempts have been made by member organizations to gain the release of Ana Margarita, but so far, in vain.

The other woman, Ida Nudel, was



Ana Margarita Gasteazoro

held by the Soviet authorities and not allowed to emigrate to Israel to be united with her only surviving relative—her sister. Since her release from Siberia, Ida has been homeless for many months and wandering in the streets and sleeping in railway stations. Only after a long struggle, has she been granted permission to live in Moldavskaya.

Our call for Ana Margarita Gasteazoro and Ida Nudel symbolises our struggle to help all women who are political prisoners and are also suffering because of human rights violations in other parts of the world. ♀

Pornography and obscenity legislation

by Lynn McDonald

Pornography — information kit from Lynn McDonald, M.P.

Dear Friends:

Pornography has increasingly become a problem in Canada, in all its forms: print, T.V., pay-T.V. and video cassettes. While pornography has always meant degradation, largely of women, it now increasingly entails also explicit violence against women, and child abuse. Community groups, women's organizations, churches and parents' associations are organizing to seek better control of pornography.

This package of informational materials has been developed to contribute to the public debate on the issue. The package includes:

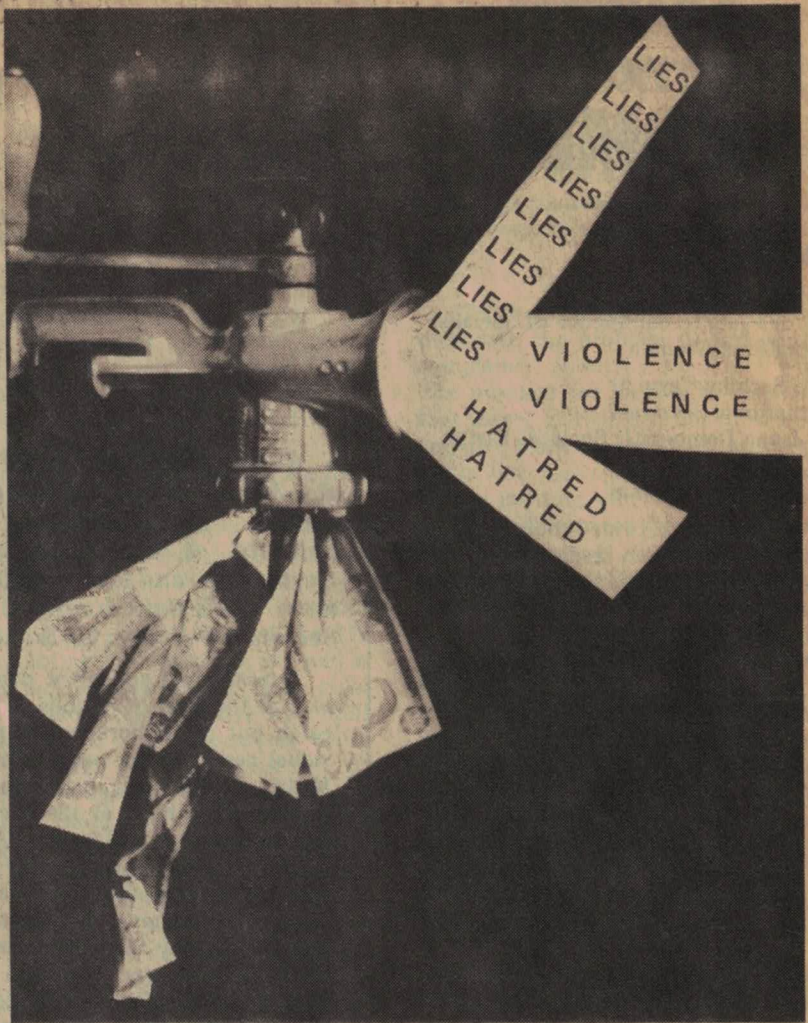
- A bibliography of research articles and books notably documenting the relationship between violence in pornography and actual violence;
- Copies of major newspaper accounts on pornography;
- My Private Member's Bill to amend the Broadcasting Act;
- A petition of support for the Bill — please sign, circulate and return to me.
- An analysis of what's wrong with our present obscenity laws;
- A summary statement of what needs to be done, and who is responsible for what.

I hope you find the information helpful, and invite you, if you have not already, to speak out actively on this important issue.

Please note, a French version of this package is available on request from my office.

Lynn McDonald, M.P.
House of Commons
Ottawa

May, 1983



The Criminal Code defines obscenity — “pornography” is never mentioned — as “the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty and violence,” Section 159(8). Crime comics are illegal [Section 159(1)(b)], as is the public exhibition of a “disgusting object or an indecent show” [Section 159(2)(b)] and advertising drugs or articles for restoring sexual virility and curing venereal diseases or diseases of the generative organs [Section 159(2)(d)].

Case law further stresses explicitness of sex as the offending criterion, so that violence done to someone, no matter how terrible, is acceptable if the person is clothed. Thus putting a woman into a meat grinder, as long as she is not nude, is all right! Serving the public greed is a defence on an obscenity charge [Section 159 (3) and (4)]. The penalties on convictions are modest, usually a small fine. Given the enormous profits made in

pornography, these are scarcely a deterrent.

Child pornography

Since obscenity is seen as sexual explicitness, the portrayal of children in nude, suggestive poses is legal. Currently the police are not prosecuting this growing field of pornography. A bill before the Justice Committee last year, C-53, dealt with child pornography, with other forms of child abuse, but was not brought back to the House of Commons. Since the Badgley Committee is including child pornography in its study of child abuse, the government does not want to proceed with Bill C-53. The Badgley Committee is scheduled to report early in 1984. It should also be noted that many objections were raised as to the wording on child pornography in C-53.

Violence and degradation at issue

To many people the current obscenity

French bill fights media sexism



Bust out of the ordinary. With an promotion.

Expose yourself around town at an incredible low price. Find out about the fastest growing development in mass communication from one of Canada's most experienced producers.

In reprinting this story from the 'Vancouver Sun,' March 10 1983, we are republishing along with it a letter to 'Priorities,' June 1976.

I came across the enclosed ad promotion in a recent issue of "Marketing" and thought it might interest you. Although it is one of the most glaring examples of the ad business' attitude towards women, it is by no means untypical.

If you believe, as I do, that sexism in advertising is an unnecessary and insulting phenomenon, might I recommend two trade journals which give an insight into the thinking of the industry. They are "Marketing," a Canadian publication, and "Advertising Age," an American publication. A random perusal of either of those publications will point out the lack of progress in convincing ad people of the changing role of women in society.

*— From Robin Sears
Acting Federal Secretary
of the NDP*

PARIS (Reuter) — The French government (March 10th) examined a new bill, the first of its kind in Europe, altering the country's century-old law on freedom of the press so as to fight sexism throughout the media.

The Bill will go before the National Assembly in the spring.

Under the new law, anyone presenting images deemed to be degrading to women through incitement to discrimination, hatred, violence, insult or defamation could face a prison term of up to one year and/or fines of up to \$44,000.

The measure would cover newspapers, magazines, television, radio, textbooks, public speeches, and advertising.

Presenting the bill at the weekly cabinet meeting, Women's Rights Minister Yvette Roudy said it was modelled on France's anti-racism law passed in 1972.

A spokesman (sic) from her ministry said: "Ideally, the law would not have to be applied but, after a few test cases, its very existence would have a dissuasive and preventive value."

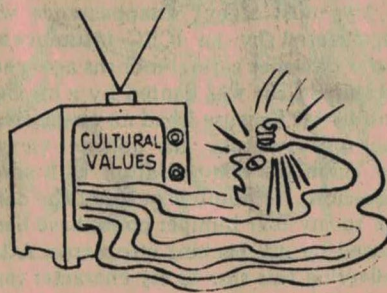
He said the aim was to help women "fight stereotypes that are still widely used by the media."

Presentation of the bill coincided with a week of government activities around the theme of women, including an exhibition entitled, "Advertising, you've got the wrong love story."

Opening the exhibit of recent French advertisements using images of women to help sell products, Roudy stopped before a poster showing a reclining woman wearing only a bra and panties with a man's hand placed suggestively on her thigh.

"I might have bought that thing, but I have no desire to buy the fantasy," the minister said, referring to the undergarment promoted by the poster. "I make my own fantasies."

Other posters in the exhibit show women in various degrees of nudity promoting products ranging from cars to jewelry to detergents. ♀



PORNOGRAPHY AND THE CRIMINAL CODE

laws are objectionable for prohibiting the portrayal of sexual behaviour even when it's consensual, and between adults. Women's organizations especially have stressed that it is *violent* sex and exploitation of children to which they object. This is one area where groups seeking stronger controls over pornography disagree. There is otherwise broad agreement as to the need to limit excessive violence, degradation, coercive sex, the sexual exploitation of children and bestiality.

Much European legislation is better than ours, especially on the protection of children. Some states also use terminology of "degradation of the human person" in their obscenity laws. Others are more explicit in referring to defecation, urination, and so on. Britain has specific laws to reduce the nuisance element of offensive literature, for ex-

ample, of magazines that can only be sold in special places so that ordinary people going to the corner store to buy milk are not offended or worried about exposing their children to such material.

The Minister of Justice has stated he will introduce new obscenity legislation shortly. Let us hope that it is framed in terms of the worst problems: excessive violence, degradation of persons, coercive sex, sexual exploitation of children, and bestiality. The penalties must be realistic, in line with the enormous profit made in the pornography industry.

Finally, while one would not want to quibble unduly about terms, it's probably time to retire "obscenity." The word currently used is "pornography." Carefully defined (such as proposed immediately above) the law could then be an effective means for combatting this serious problem. ♀

Dream of a free country

A Message from Nicaraguan Women

NFB film reviewed by Sharon Batt:

reprinted from *Communiqu'elles*,

3585 St. Urbain, Montreal, Que. H2X 2N6

There is seldom a word about Nicaragua's women in the recent front-page stories describing invasions of that country by anti-government forces, yet each news item I read evokes women's faces and voices. They are the indelible memories of the women in *Dream of a Free Country: A Message from Nicaraguan Women*. This Studio D National Film Board feature was previewed as a work-in-progress, March 11, as part of the Concordia University Women's Student Collective's celebrations for International Women's Day.

The film shows how Nicaraguan women fought alongside Nicaraguan men and children to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship that ruled the country's people for over 50 years. As supporters of Somoza now try to regain control of the small central American country, Nicaraguan women stand to suffer a double-edged defeat. Since the victory of the Sandinistas on July 19, 1979, they have been struggling to gain sexual equality in civilian life. The women of Nicaragua are waging war on machismo with the same determination they fought to liberate their country.

Women's experiences in battle

Dream of a Free Country introduces a dozen or more Nicaraguan women, all of whom talk about politics. A radiant young student named Maria tells us she became an activist at age 12. Another woman explains how she learned to read and write so she could be a coordinator of AMPRONAC, the women's organization within the revolutionary forces. In a small community, where the local economy was based on the manufacture of firecrackers, an older woman says with some pride that the population already had the materials and know-how to produce bombs. She begins to make one before our eyes. A photographer recalls the foreign journalists who flew in, like celebrities, looking eagerly for the bloodshed. One of her "jokes," she tells us with a mischievous smile, was to lead them to the thick of the fighting and watch their bravado vanish.

The link between a military struggle and the sexual one is explained simply by Bernarda, as she scrubs dishes under a cold water tap. "We fought for Nicaragua and we are ready to fight for ourselves." Her personal life has been transformed by a miracle, she says. Her husband used to drag her out of church and hit her; now—thanks to her patient teaching and God's intervention—he

babysits. Change outside the home is evident in a new sewing cooperative, run by the women who work in it. A member of the cooperative describes some of the rules they agreed on: everyone receives the same monthly wage of \$100 and if a woman is sick or pregnant others share her workload.

The women who speak are aware that equality is a long way off. They need to learn more skills so they can get paid employment; most women still fear their husbands; machismo remains a major force.

Dream of a Free Country was made by Studio D of the National Film Board, the same unit that produced *Not a Love Story* and *If You Love This*

Planet. Like its two highly praised predecessors, the film about Nicaragua's women draws an unabashed power from its feminist grounding. We are moved as much as we are informed. One wishes the four film-makers had worked faster on this project. The footage for *Dream of a Free Country* was shot three years ago and the hope that infuses the narrative could be history before the film reaches its audience. As Reagan pours money into the right-wing guerrilla forces poised on Nicaragua's border, the film-makers rush to meet a June release date. Still, whatever the news stories out of Nicaragua, seeing *Dream of a Free Country* will radically alter the way you read them. ♀

Identity crisis:

or How ICBC let the air out of my tires

by Kathie Robertson

I disappeared again yesterday, a common enough occurrence. I'm not bragging about it, neat trick though it is. We women are always disappearing. To male-dominated bureaucracies, women are like rabbits in a hat, now they see them, now they don't.

My most recent disappearance was engineered by an ICBC insurance adjuster. We met several months ago when the family car was dented by a hit-and-run driver. Because I had no evidence to back up my story, the adjuster viewed my claim for compensation with some suspicion. He pointed out that the damage to my rear bumper could have been caused by my backing into a tree. After delivering this slur to my character (and my driving ability) he conceded that ICBC had no choice but to accept the claim—less, of course, the \$100 deductible. Under the circumstances, my chances of recovering that weren't worth talking about.

Well, he was wrong. Unknown to me, there had been a witness who reported the offender's license number to the police. When a police officer telephoned to say that a suspect had been formally charged, he asked me to pass on this information to ICBC. When I called my adjuster to give him the good news, he was at first too astonished to say more than "Is that so!" After the third "is that so" he pulled himself together but declined to take down the details, saying that he preferred to wait for confirmation from the police. I was about to apologize insincerely for taking up his time when he added that my optimism

was premature: the suspect would probably be released on a technicality.

My third contact with the adjuster occurred a month ago. Again on instructions from the police officer, I phoned to tell him that the culprit had been convicted. He received my news calmly this time, saying only that upon receipt of an official report, my file would be re-opened.

Yesterday afternoon my telephone rang. A male caller who did not identify himself asked to speak to my husband. Told that he was at work, he asked me to confirm my husband's address. When I asked why, he said, "This is ICBC—I just wanted to make sure his draft for \$100 goes to the right address."

I wanted to cry out, hey, what happened to me, Mrs. Robertson. The principal driver as well as co-owner of the car, the person who made the claim, the person who talked to you three times, the person who caused all that extra paper work, the person you gratuitously offended? Surely I didn't just disappear? But I'd lost the power of speech and he'd hung up before I recovered it.

My husband believes that this rejection of my being may have been due only to bureaucratic incompetence. I don't. As an inspector at the Motor Vehicle Branch said on another occasion when I asked why my husband's name was on the inspection form instead of my own: "It's chauvinism, ma'am."

Postscript: After the above piece was written, the draft arrived. Made out, of course, in my husband's name only. ♀

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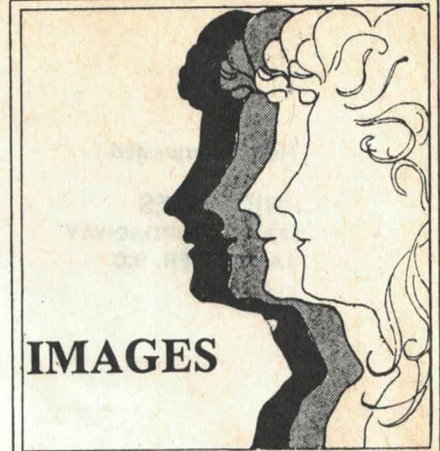
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