

PRIORITIES



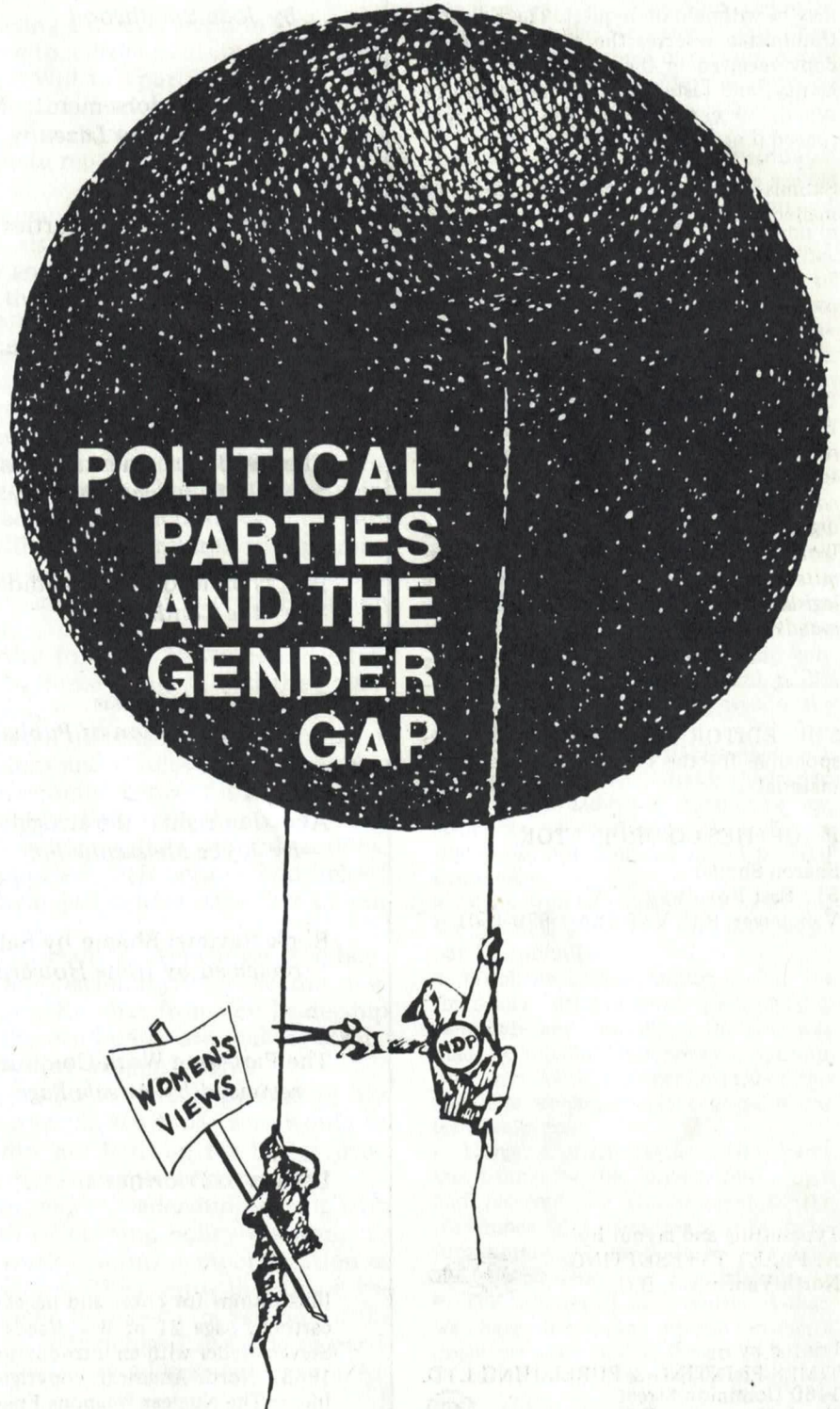
A
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PERSPECTIVE

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- WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE B.C. NDP LEADERSHIP ELECTION
- WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE FEDERAL ELECTION
- WOMEN'S RIGHTS COMMITTEE ENDORSES MARGARET BIRRELL FOR B.C. NDP LEADER
- CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ACTION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN WORKERS
- THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONS ON PENSIONS AND PART-TIME WORK
- THE ABORTION STRUGGLE CONTINUES
- TECH CHANGE COMMITTEE ON THE ROAD
- BOOK REVIEW: SHAME BY SALMAN RUSHDIE



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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

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EDITORIAL

The feminist challenge to leadership

The New Democratic Party is now facing a federal election and a provincial leadership contest. We are coming to a cross-roads in our history. Will the pattern of the past be repeated? Will this party continue to use women as grassroots organizers and election workers without having a program which addresses the needs of women, without acting on their behalf, and without allowing them adequate representation in the party's decision-making processes?

If we are to win enough seats to survive as a federal party, we must make it clear to women that the Liberals have refused to effect substantive change in the lives of women and that the Conservatives have never even pretended that this is one of their goals.

We must demonstrate that it is the NDP that works within the community and alongside its brothers and sisters in the labour movement to grapple with the thorny issues of our time: technological change, reproductive choice, the problems of older women (pensions and health care), equal pay, childcare funding, employment, pornography.

Provincially, women could provide the key to a revitalized party, the block of voters we need to become government. The last two Social Credit budgets have forced women to become politicized for their very survival. One woman, a single parent with teenage children who is training at a community college for a job she hopes will allow her to become self-sufficient, said it all: "There is not one piece of Sacred legislation that does not affect my life in some way."

The B.C. NDP now has an opportunity to speak to women. They are listening. They have been hard hit by these budgets, and they want to know what we would do to help them.

But they are not mindless victims. Women no longer accept "politician talk." They have seen countless commissions and studies come to naught. They do not believe that the promised economic recovery is right around the corner for them. In anger and desperation they took their case to the streets last summer with petitions and rallies, leaflets and job actions. And while ordinary NDP members supported their actions and helped them to organize, women could not help but notice that few of our leaders stood with them in public.

Now there are indications that political leaders, even those who have belittled women's issues in the past, are beginning to sense the new political awareness and power of women. Reports from the leadership campaign trail are that virtually all of the candidates are making strong and uncompromising statements in support of women's rights.

Women have passed the point where they will be impressed by the words of "born-again" feminists. They want to see those who would be our leaders standing beside women who are battling for better lives, joining their voices with their sisters', rather than speaking for them.

In the NDP, women members want to see the leadership fighting with them for implementation of the wealth of existing policy on women's rights. They want a leadership that will work towards democratization of the party as well as collective decision-making. They know that this is the only means by which women and others who have been locked out of the power structure of our party will become enfranchised and able to participate fully to win governments that will seriously address women's needs as a priority.

CHAIRWOMAN'S REPORT



by Joan Smallwood

As I sit down to write this report, I find it difficult to contain my excitement about the leadership campaign initiated by the Women's Rights Committee. To bring some of you up to date here's a brief history of how we took on contesting the leadership of the party.

- June Provincial Council meeting — Women's Rights Committee distributed a leaflet urging delegates to vote against the Provincial Executive recommendation to hold a leadership convention in November 1983. Our position: that party policy was an integral part of discussions around leadership, so the two aspects should be dealt with at one convention; that NDP members needed to be involved in an in-depth assessment of party strategy. The executive proposal was defeated and leadership selection put off until May.

- The WRC decided that the only suitable leadership candidate would be a woman who had demonstrated her commitment to democratic socialism and feminism.

- Early fall — the WRC sponsored the workshop "What is Leadership?" The women attending outlined their concerns and recommended opening discussion to their brothers within the party.

- November 26 — a well-attended open meeting was held on "What is the leadership?" A broad-based committee was struck to work further on outlining the issues and concerns raised by NDP members.

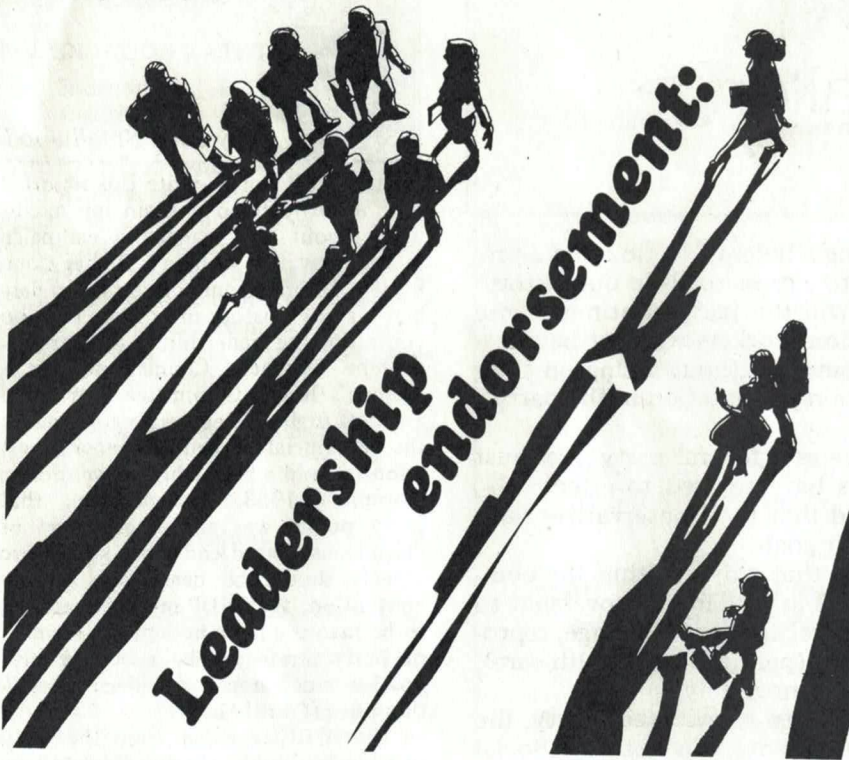
- Many women contributed to writing the political statement for the November 26 committee.

- Problems became apparent as to the financial realities of funding a leadership candidate and, initially, a decision was made to opt out. But pressure and support from WRC members overruled this and here we are, deeply engaged in the leadership race.

- Margaret Birrell was selected to carry our banner in the contest. She sought and received the endorsement of the November 26 Committee and is therefore running on its platform. To date, the response has been electrifying.

- The last item I will mention is that we have hired an interim women's organizer until May 1. We are fortunate to have Heather Morris take on this responsibility.

Margaret Birrell



by Jo Dunaway Lazenby

The B.C. NDP Women's Rights Committee endorses the candidacy of Margaret Birrell for Leader of the B.C. New Democratic Party.

The Women's Rights Committee was founded on the principle that socialism and feminism are inseparable.

Over the years we have worked tirelessly to educate and inform party members on critical women's issues and have developed a comprehensive body of policy that reflects this philosophy.

Over the years, we have promoted and supported socialist feminist women who have run for positions of leadership on the party executive.

At conventions we have brought forth innovative policy and raised issues reflective of the changes in our society that will affect women.

Consistently, we have worked for and fought for socialist feminist candidates to represent our party at the provincial and federal level.

A new way forward

As feminist socialists we are committed to a political structure that integrates philosophy and principles, encourages open participation and analysis and debate, and practises co-operative decision-making, complete accountability and concrete action.

It is our belief that if this model does

not exist within the party, we cannot convince the voters of British Columbia to join with us in building a sane and co-operative society. Our struggle, therefore, has to be within and without the party.

In choosing a new leader for our party we are not simply choosing an individual—we are deciding on the direction and the future of the NDP. The Women's Rights Committee has been a leader in articulating that position to party members. The Candidacy of Margaret Birrell, a woman who is a feminist, a socialist, a fighter and a sister in our cause, represents the first opportunity we have had to elect a leader of the provincial party who reflects our vision.

We support Margaret because the platform she is campaigning on incorporates both a philosophical analysis and a practical framework for achieving our goals as socialist feminists. Her call for the party to re-examine its origins as a socialist movement aligned with those fighting for social and economic justice is an antidote to the malaise presently felt within the party. Her understanding and presentation of the fundamentals that our party is built on make her campaign a rallying point for the sisters and brothers who have felt isolated and alienated for the past few years. Her perception of the future challenges that face this province and her development

of concrete and credible programs of response offer a positive direction.

In the forefront of struggle

We know that Margaret's platform is not just campaign rhetoric. We know where Margaret stands. She has been in the forefront of the struggle on behalf of women, the poor and minorities. She has demonstrated her conviction by her work in the community and in the party, both as the Women's Organizer and in the years before assuming that position. We know the leading role Margaret has played in the formation and adoption of our policy around women's issues; the organizing skills she has devoted to projects such as the Committee to Repeal 251, the Task Force on Older Women, and the current Task Force on Technological Change; and the time and encouragement and expertise she has given to women's groups, community groups and the Solidarity movement.

Her political acumen and her organizing abilities, coupled with her tenacious dedication have made her an invaluable asset to the Women's Rights Committee and to the party as a whole. Margaret's election as leader of the provincial party would be a significant step towards the realization of a party based on the feminist socialist ideals for which we have been fighting. ♀

Women and political parties

by Sharon Shniad

Conventional wisdom holds that women voters follow the lead of their men-folk at the ballot box. Any woman who has canvassed door-to-door for the NDP has despaired at hearing the words, "You'd better talk to my husband. He's the one who takes care of that sort of thing."

For the first time since women won the vote, however, this pattern is changing dramatically. Recent election and poll results reveal the emergence of what is being labelled a political "gender gap."

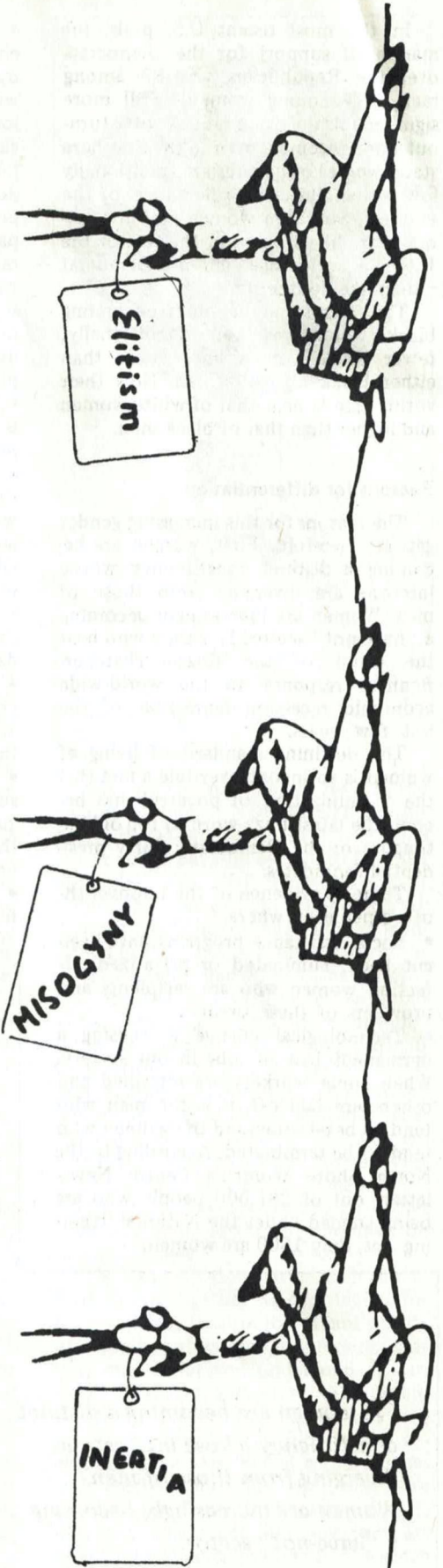
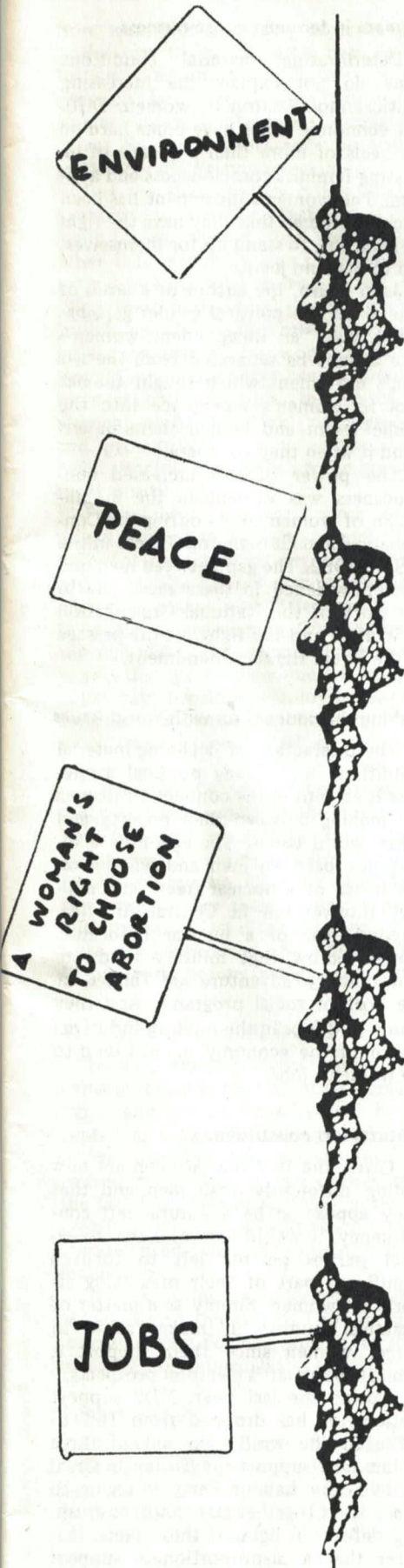
A January 1984 Gallup Poll, for example, found a wide difference between men and women in their support of Canada's federal parties. Support for the Liberals and Democrats is higher among women, while men tend to support the Conservatives.

Over the past year this trend has become more pronounced. A poll taken in January 1983 revealed that 51% of men supported the Tories, versus 46% of women. The most recent poll revealed that Tory support among men has risen to 60%, while Tory support among women has not changed. It would appear that women are not as impressed by a jutting jaw as men are!

A similar difference between men and women was revealed in a poll taken by the B.C. NDP six months before the May 1983 election. That poll showed support for the NDP had increased 25 to 30% among white collar women workers. No other identifiable group showed a comparable increase.

Not unique to Canada

This emerging independent women's vote is not unique to Canadian politics. In the 1980 U.S. presidential election, the vote for Reagan was 8% lower among women than it was among men. This gap is expected to widen in the coming 1984 election. Already there is evidence of a "divergence between men and women at every level of national policy from the invasion of Grenada to environmental protection." (*In These Times*, November 1983).



In the most recent U.S. polls, the margin of support for the Democrats over the Republicans was 8% among men, 18% among women. Still more significant is the rising rate of voter turnout among women, even in the Southern states where voting rates are traditionally lower than those in other areas of the country. Southern women are now voting more like women in the rest of the U.S.—i.e. anti-Reagan and pro-Democrat—than like Southern men.

This trend can be observed among black women as well. Traditionally, fewer black women have voted than either black or white men. Now their voting rate is near that of white women and higher than that of black men.

Reasons for differentiation

The reasons for this increasing gender gap are two-fold. First, women are becoming a distinct constituency whose interests are diverging from those of men. Women are increasingly becoming a “have-not” sector. It is they who bear the brunt of the Reagan-Thatcher-Bennett response to the world-wide economic recession/depression of the last few years.

The declining standard of living of women is so incontrovertible a fact that the “feminization of poverty” has become the latest buzz-word to roll off the tongues of the Democratic Party presidential candidates.

There is evidence of the impoverishment of women everywhere.

- Social assistance programs have been cut back, eliminated or privatized, affecting women who are recipients and providers of these services.
- Technological change is causing a permanent loss of jobs in our society. When some workers are retrained and others are laid off, it is the men who tend to be retrained and the women who tend to be terminated. According to the North Shore Women's Centre Newsletter, out of 281,000 people who are being trained under the National Training Act, only 1500 are women.

... women are becoming a distinct constituency whose interests are diverging from those of men. Women are increasingly becoming a “have-not” sector.

- Employers are cutting labour costs by changing full time jobs to part time and by contracting them out. It is primarily women who take part time or piece work jobs because they are forced to take care of home responsibilities. Part time jobs and those paid on a piece-rate basis do not normally provide the benefits, pensions and holiday pay which accompany full time employment. The base rates of pay average around minimum wage rates, forcing workers to make superhuman efforts to increase their income by reaching for impossible productivity goals set to be attained by piecework quotas.

- The unemployment rate for women is higher than it is among men, by as much as 20% (N.S.W.C. Newsletter).
- Two out of three elderly women in Canada live in poverty. 50% of all single women are poor, yet federal restraint legislation limits old age pensions, family allowances, and wages (NDP Task Force on Older Women).
- Older women frequently pay more than 25% of their incomes for accommodation.
- Divorce results in a significant increase in income for the average man and a disastrous decrease in income for the average woman.
- In the U.S., 2½ million women have sunk below the poverty line since Reagan became president, and two out of three impoverished families are now headed by women.
- The U.S. unemployment rate among female heads of households has jumped 40%.



Increase in feminist consciousness

Deteriorating material conditions alone do not explain the increasing political mobilization of women. Difficult economic times have come hard on the heels of more than a decade of increasing feminist consciousness and activism. The women's movement has been teaching women that they have the right to speak out, to stand up for themselves, and to demand justice.

Joan Walsh, the author of a series of articles on the political gender gap, has noted that “an independent women's vote cannot be separated from the women's movement which fought the barriers to women's emergence into the public realm and helped them understand it when they got there.”

The power of this increased consciousness was evident in the mobilization of women voters during the Congressional and Gubernatorial races in the U.S. in 1982. The gap between men and women widened in these races due to the work of the National Organization of Women and the fight for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Making the connection with world issues

The interaction of declining material conditions with rising political awareness is evident in the connection women are making between their poverty and other world issues. There is now a divergence between men and women on the issues of a nuclear freeze and military intervention in Central America. Beyond fear of a nuclear holocaust, women know that military hardware and military adventure are funded at the cost of social programs. And they know that jobs in the military-industrial sector of the economy do not tend to be women's jobs.

Natural left constituency

Given the fact that women are now voting differently than men and that they appear to be a natural left constituency, it would be reasonable to expect parties on the left to focus a significant part of their organizing efforts on women. Simply as a matter of practical politics, it makes sense to target women since their support is crucial to the left's electoral prospects.

During the last year, NDP support nationwide has dropped from 16% to 12%. In the west, two out of three voters now support the Tories. In Great Britain, the Labour Party is trying to piece itself together after another crushing defeat. In light of these facts, it is clear that a disproportionate support

from women is absolutely critical if the Tories are to be defeated here or in Britain. And in the U.S. there is no question but that a high turnout of women voters is absolutely crucial to defeat Reagan in November, according to Democratic Party strategists.

But are these parties doing what is necessary to win the allegiance of women? It is certain that the federal Liberals have their eye on the increasing voting potential of women. They are using their position as government to launch splashy, well-funded and well-publicized forums for women's issues. Royal Commissions have been appointed to deal with pensions, the status of women, part-time work, pornography and prostitution. Token women have been appointed to high profile government positions.

Predictably, however, these high-priced forums, studies and commissions have not been translated into concrete action by the Liberal government in a way that makes any difference in the lives of ordinary women. Consequently, the feminist agenda remains unchanged, year after year: reproductive choice, equal pay, pensions, employment, educational opportunities, childcare, freedom from violence and degradation, etc.

That women support the peace movement and are leaders in the movement both here and in Great Britain (witness Greenham Common) has also not gone unnoticed by the Liberals. More than one observer has seen Trudeau's peace initiative as a last-ditch attempt to reverse the decline in the polls of the Liberal Party before facing an election.

The Social Democratic record

In democratic socialist parties, one expects that a commitment to women's rights and gender equality will be accepted as a fundamental principle. Yet if we examine the performance of various social democratic parties over the last few years in response to the increasing activism of women and their material needs, this performance is sadly inadequate.

In this context, a letter sent by Jean McCrindle to the British Labour Party magazine *New Socialist* during the summer of 1983 sounds all too familiar.

Women ignored

"It has become almost obligatory for writers and speakers on the Left to mention the impact of the women's movement on the changes in the Trade Union and labour movements over the past decade.

"Anna Coote, in an early article in *New Socialist* questioned whether this obligatory mention had gone more than skin deep and she suggested that women's politics, if taken seriously, could not be tagged on to the end of Labour's programme. Women have been disturbing the normal definition of political priorities too deeply for such superficial grafting.

"A disproportionate support from women is absolutely critical if the Tories are to be defeated here or in Britain."

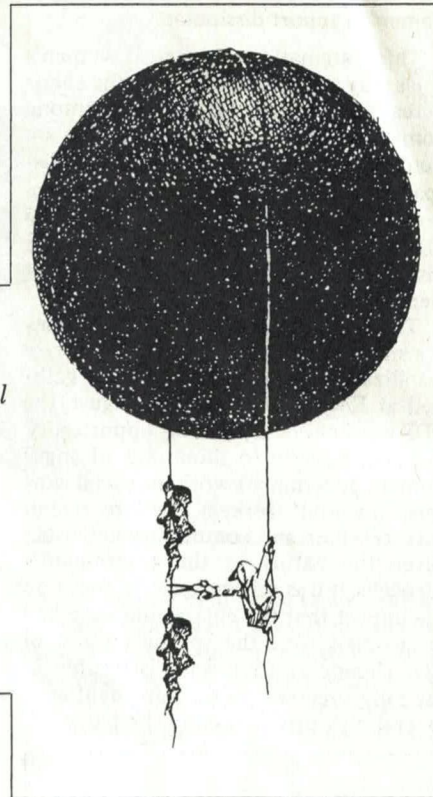
"So it was with some despair that I read to the end of Pat Seyd's article on the Labour Left in Crisis in *New Socialist* 10 and found one passing reference to 'feminism' in what was, after all, a long article on the differences between the Labour left in the 1950s and the 1980s.

I would have thought that the existence of a whole new generation of women, politicized in the 1970s by the women's movement, and now entering the Labour Party both at the constituency level and via the trade unions would have merited a couple of paragraphs at least.

"You only have to look around your local party GC to see the gap between the older women who remained loyal during the Wilson/Callaghan years and the much younger ones who wouldn't have joined the Labour Party until the Left move in the late 1970s.

"The growth in women's sections, the disputes within the Women's Conference about the strategy to employ in relation to National Conference, the Women's Action Committee of CLPD, the appointment of Joan Lester to Shadow Cabinet level on women—Greenham and all—surely these are events worth Pat Seyd's attention and thought. You yourself as editor might have suggested to him that he include a discussion of these issues.

"It really is time that male writers on the Left take up the women's cause and make it integral to their analysis. Otherwise we are going to have women writing about women and men about 'politics' and we'll be back where we started."
Jean McCrindle, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire.



Similar attitudes here

McCrindle's sentiments reflect the feelings of many NDP women in this province. Despite the fact that everyone in our party pays lip service to feminist principles, the NDP Women's Rights Committee had to fight a knock down, drag out battle just to have women mentioned in the 1983 election platform.

As former chairwoman Shelley Rivkin reported to *Priorities* in December 1982, "We were successful in our lobby for a member of the Women's Rights Committee to sit on the provincial Election Planning Committee. This success was minimized when the legislative caucus released its economic strategy entitled *Let's Get to Work*. For nowhere was there any mention of women."

The glossy central campaign leaflet later appeared. Again, no emphasis on women's issues.

The Women's Committee then scrambled to put together its own leaflet for the campaign. Despite the valiant efforts of a number of women, the fact remains that this leaflet was underfunded, hurriedly produced, and poorly distributed.

During the election candidates and campaigns focussed on jobs to the exclusion of all else. Social welfare issues and costly items like childcare were avoided for fear of alienating voters, despite the fact that these programs are vitally important to thousands of women in B.C.

Women's support dissipated

This systematic avoidance of women's issues may explain the fact that the sharp increase in support for the NDP among women white collar workers in the six months preceding the election had dissipated by the time of the election. Women who had earlier felt that the NDP would deal with the economic crisis in a manner which would benefit them were now not so sure.

The Party dealt with women's issues in a similar manner during the *Solidarity* mobilization. When 40,000 people gathered at Empire Stadium last August, the NDP was handed a priceless opportunity to speak directly to thousands of angry women: government workers, social workers, hospital workers, welfare recipients, teachers and community activists. Given the nature of the government's cutbacks, it was difficult not to focus on the impact that the cuts would have had on women. But the special edition of *The Democrat* that was distributed at the rally focussed on the personalities of several high-profile men in the party.



When it was announced that a revised version of this special issue would be prepared for distribution at further rallies and public forums, the Women's Rights Committee welcomed the opportunity to improve the original issue. We went to no small effort to obtain information that had been compiled by *Women Against the Budget* on how women were being hit by Bennett's legislative program. We presented this to the *Democrat*, but the information was never used.

Anti-feminist positions of office-holders

Not only has the party failed to appeal to women, but NDP office-holders actually take anti-feminist positions on prostitution and abortion (note especially the Manitoba NDP government's prosecution of Dr. Morgentaler) and duck issues like childcare.

The special edition of The Democrat that was distributed at Solidarity's PNE rally focussed on the personalities of several high-profile men in the party.

The party's feminists are left with what one veteran activist calls the humiliating task of having to demand over and over that the federal and provincial parties support their party's own principles and policies on women's issues.

This failure of social democratic parties to address women's agenda appears to be universal, judging by the words of Irmtraut Leirer, Secretary-General of *Socialist International Women*. In an intervention at the S.I. Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean in Rio de Janeiro, August 22 1983, Leirer said:

"... the members of the S.I. have to adhere to a common platform: *The Declaration of Principles*. In this Declaration ... the member parties pledge themselves to fight against inequalities, discrimination and oppression stemming from class, race or sex.

As to the class aspect, all of our member parties struggle for more equality in society in the economic, the educational, the social and cultural fields.

As to race... there exist subtle and not so subtle mechanisms which prevent the political leadership — even of our parties — from representing the ethnic and racial composition of the population.

As to sex, this is a long and deep-rooted neglected area in the socialist movement.



Irmtraut Leirer
Secretary-General
Socialist International Women

Photo
Hilda L. Thomas

It was Karl Marx himself who, at the second congress of the First International, had the vision of the necessity of organizing women in the labour movement. Although living privately the life of a bourgeois patriarch, he put all his authority against the British trade unionists, the French Proudhonists, and others in order to get the clause in the statutes to form women's organizations within the labour movement.

And it was up till the thirties of our century that some of our member parties were opposed to giving women the vote with the argument that women would vote only conservative.

The record of history

History has proved them wrong. The first left government in France was elected in 1935 after women got the vote. The first Labour government in Britain was elected after women got the vote. Just two examples. If a socialist party has a programme, actions, and representation of women, women vote for them.

Unfortunately, the problems of oppression and discrimination of women are considered to be of a light nature—a luxury problem, fit for the democracies of the industrialized countries. Unfortunately, it is not like that. Let me take just three areas: food, work, sexual torture."

Leirer then proceeds to describe how the inferior status of women leads to undernourishment and ill health in many parts of the world. She notes how women are used, because of their need to take up any work for survival, to undermine the advances made by the labour movement. And she observes that the sexual torture of female political prisoners is met by a wall of silence whenever repression or torture is discussed by political bodies.

She concludes, "Today we have no Karl Marx with his authority and vision to tell you men of the SI about the necessity of organizing women. We have to remind you ourselves."

The future?

The future of our party is now in the hands of its members. To paraphrase Irmtraut Leirer, if we become the party that has programs that meet women's needs, the party that takes action on their behalf, and the party that works to ensure their representation, women will vote for us. Whether this will indeed happen depends in large measure on the leadership choices we make at the provincial convention in May. ♀

WRC Technological change committee on the road

by Frances D. Moffatt



In the October issue of *Priorities*, we set out a schedule for community visits (constituency presentations, public educationals, and community forums). This has been amended due to the tremendous response for constituency and public presentations: we will not be able to move immediately into the community forums as planned.

More research and input will be required prior to a final report and suggestions for party policy in this area. Our report to the May convention, therefore, will be in the form of an interim report, with a resolution to seek a further mandate.

Lanny Siegel of Pacific Studies Centre has been commissioned to make a 45-minute presentation on technological change to the convention.

13 presentations per month

Members of the committee have given approximately 13 presentations per month since October and we note the increasing awareness and concern of NDP members and others with the direction of technological change and with its control. Concern is also growing about the potential for widespread, centralized abuse of information stored in thousands of computer data banks. In 1984 (Orwell's year), government and big business will continue to collect, store and distribute details about the private lives of citizens on the world's network of computers.

There are few effective controls on how that information is used. Only in Quebec has any provincial government introduced public sector data protection.

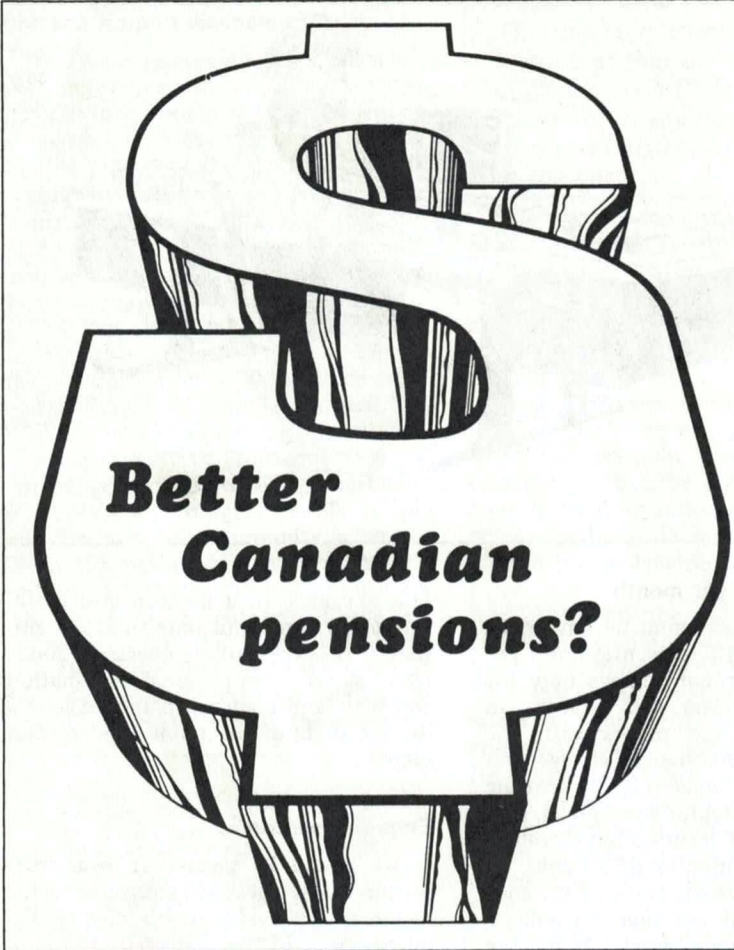
The existence of a modern grid of information banks not only threatens privacy, it raises disturbing questions about who has access to personal information and why, and about who should govern its use in both the public and private sectors.

Enquiries welcomed

We would be pleased to hear from people with suggestions and/or concerns in the area of technological change. Enquiries should be directed to Judy Shipper or Fran Moffatt (co-chairing the Tech. Change Committee), or to Heather Morris, Women's Organizer, at the NDP Provincial Office, 517 East Broadway, Vancouver, B.C. V5T 1X4; telephone 879-4601. ♀



The 1983 Parliamentary Task Force on Pensions



Better Canadian pensions?

by
Jo
Dunaway
Lazenby

Women and low income and unsalaried workers (there is a lot of overlap in these categories) have always known that the pension system in Canada was not designed with them in mind. Lord knows we haven't been quiet about it. Over the past decade, women's groups, along with senior citizen groups and anti-poverty groups, have lobbied, discussed, briefed, argued, proposed and recommended reforms to the pension system.

In 1982, the federal government issued a set of proposals for reform in a Green Paper entitled *Better Pensions for Canadians*. In 1983, a Parliamentary Task Force was appointed to "examine and report upon the proposals for reform of the Canadian retirement income system" in the Green Paper. One of the areas the Task Force was directed to make particular reference to was "the proposals to overcome the special problems facing women, including homemakers, under the current pension system."

The Task Force, composed of five Liberals, three Progressive Conservatives and one New Democrat (Ted Miller,

Nanaimo-Alberni), visited 13 cities to hear testimony from interest groups and regional representatives. They also received many written submissions from groups and individuals. The report of the Task Force was submitted to the government in December, 1983.

NDP minority report

And upon reading the report, the first reaction is: "No! No! No! You still aren't listening!" Scores of recommendations from women, labour, senior citizen and anti-poverty groups that the public pension benefits (primarily the Canada/Quebec Pensions Plans) be expanded — all rejected.

So far does the Report of the Task Force fall short of ensuring universal access to adequate and equitable pensions and of addressing the problems of our poorest elderly, most of whom are women, that the lone NDP member dissociated himself and issued a minority report.

Miller's minority report zeros in on the pivotal question: "Are the elderly going to participate fully in Canada's

prosperity?" and outlines proposals that were debated and rejected by the majority of the task force. For those of us who tend to glaze over at the mention of "actuarial tables" and "vesting," Miller's report and the accompanying background notes issued by the federal NDP office are a helpful explanation of what's out there now, what reforms the majority of the task force have recommended and what they will mean, and the proposed reforms that were rejected and what they would have meant. It is valuable reading material.

Because of space restrictions (and the limits of what anyone can take of this stuff) this report on Miller's minority report will concentrate on the items that are specifically directed to women, although, of course, all aspects of pension reform will affect some women. It is also intended only as an overview of the report and not a detailed discussion of it.

Before comparing the recommendations of the two reports, a brief outline of the current situation is probably in order.



What happens now?

There are three layers in Canada's retirement income system:

1. Public pensions provided by the government: Old Age Security (OAS) which can be supplemented by Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) based on income and the Canada/Quebec Pension Plans (C/QPP) which are mandatory earnings-related public pension plans and provide retirement, disability and survivor benefits based on covered employment earnings.

2. Private plans such as Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSP) and occupational pension plans which take many forms and may cover either public or private sector employees.

OAS/GIS and C/QPP

Almost everyone in the country is covered by the OAS/GIS system. Virtually everyone in the paid work force is covered by C/QPP. For many of the now elderly and future elderly, these will be the only source of pension income.

OAS, a single person without other income must rely on GIS after age 65. Most submissions to the Task Force proposed 70 to 75% of pre-retirement earnings as a necessity.

Majority Report vs Minority Report

The major difference in the recommendations of the report of the majority of the Task Force and the dissenting opinion released by Ted Miller is how to close the gap between the income available through OAS and C/QPP and the 75% "replacement income" level. The majority report would like to see the gap filled by occupational and individual pension plans under new governing regulations. Miller's report proposes that the gap be closed through expansion of the protection offered by the C/QPP and OAS programs. Almost every women's group and labour organization listed expansion of the C/QPP as the first priority for long term pension reform.

Miller points out that more than two-thirds of women between the ages of

25 and 44 are employed in the paid work force and approximately 80% of these women have full-time jobs. He recommends, in agreement with the proposals of women's groups, that the C/QPP benefits be doubled to provide up to 50% of the AIW.

Occupational pension plans

More than two-thirds of the women in the work force do not have access to pension plans sponsored by employers. Therefore, reform measures to improve portability, provide indexing, ensure the use of non-discriminatory mortality tables, etc. have little meaning for most women.

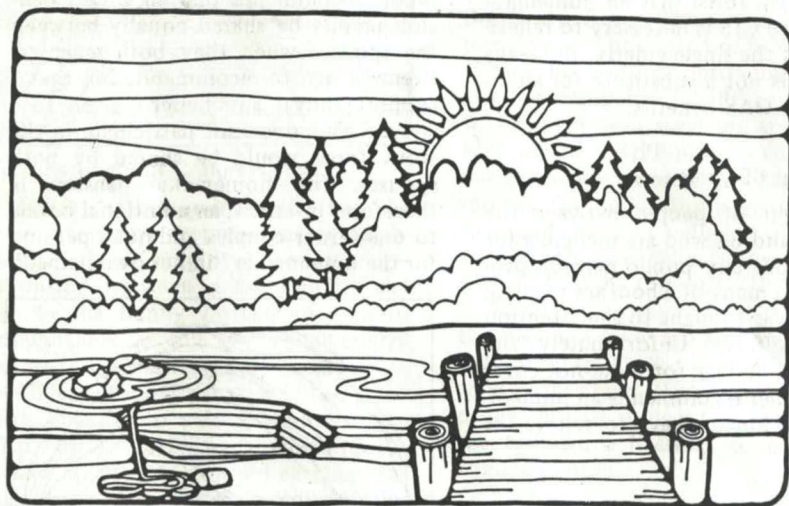
Most women will have to rely on public pensions for their income after retirement. If the C/QPP is not expanded, a woman worker with a full-time job (whose earnings average about three-quarters of the AIW) will receive a replacement income of less than 44% of her pre-retirement earnings.

There are few indications that relying on the public sector to "make up the gap" is a realistic expectation. The regulatory reforms proposed by the majority of the task force do little or nothing to increase the number of Canadians covered by occupational pension plans. The percentage of persons in the paid work force covered under occupational pension plans has not changed appreciably in the past 20 years, and those changes that have occurred have been mainly in the area of public sector employees.

C/QPP

On the other hand, members of the paid work force are already covered by the C/QPP, which has many advantages not provided by occupational pension plans, even if operated under the proposed regulations: vesting is immediate, and the C/QPP is fully portable throughout Canada. Benefits are calculated according to the AIW near retirement and are fully indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). An increase, proposed by the Task Force, would enhance the drop-out provision for accommodating periods outside the paid labour force without a reduction in benefits.

The major drawback of the C/QPP is that it replaces only 25% of pre-retirement earnings. But given the central role of the C/QPP, steps could be taken immediately to expand it towards the replacement target proposed in Miller's report.



The OAS pension for 1984 is approximately 14% of the Average Industrial Wage which is reckoned at \$20,000 per year (for a pension of \$270 per month).

The maximum pension available under C/QPP is equal to 25% of the AIW.

So for people with average wages and salaries prior to retirement, OAS and C/QPP provide 39% (for singles) or 53% (for couples) of pre-retirement earnings.

It is obvious that these levels are not sufficient to allow moderate and low income people to maintain their standards of living after retirement. Even with the maximum C/QPP benefits and

The regulatory reforms proposed by the majority of the task force do little or nothing to increase the number of Canadians covered by occupational pension plans.

The majority of the task force rejects an increase in C/QPP benefits and would like to see occupational plans improve their coverage. They recommend yet another review by yet another parliamentary committee in three years time.

OAS: They've earned it—but where is it?

“Old Age Security, like the Canada and Quebec pensions, is an earned entitlement, bought and paid for by the elderly of this country who have amassed the public assets and developed the economy that now generate an unprecedented level of wealth for Canadians.” (Miller, Dissenting Opinion, page 11).

Yet the participation of elderly Canadians in the prosperity of their country has been steadily eroded. In 1964, OAS benefits represented 20% of the AIW. In 1984, they represent about 14% of the AIW.

Miller's minority report recommends that OAS benefits be increased immediately by 25% (which would still bring them to only 17.5% of the AIW) and that they be fully indexed to wages.



The majority report favours increasing the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) instead of increasing the universal OAS. The task force chose \$102 a month as a figure which would bring the basic income guarantee for the single elderly, most of whom are women, from 26.2% to 31.1% of the AIW.

There are problems with the GIS—aside from the obvious ones of being a “supplement” rather than an earned entitlement. The GIS benefit is reduced by

50¢ for each \$ received from a source other than OAS—sources such as C/QPP, occupational pension plans or any private savings arrangements. Under the proposed top-up, each \$ of other income would reduce GIS benefits by a full \$. An interesting variation of the shell game.

If pensions were adequate, there would be no need for the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

The GIS demonstrates the failure of our current pension system, says Miller. He quotes from a representative from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce: “In most countries it is considered that if the people on welfare benefits are more than 15% or 20% of the total old population, there must be something wrong with your basic program.” From the same source: “In Canada, over 50% of those over 65 receive income-tested benefits through full or partial GIS benefits. If pensions were adequate, there would be no need for the GIS.” (p. 12)

Miller's report agrees with the majority of the task force that an immediate top-up to the GIS is necessary to relieve the plight of the single elderly. But, says Miller, this is not a substitute for an increase in the OAS benefits.

People under 65 years

The plight of people between the ages of 55 and 64 who are ineligible for benefits under any public pension program—a great many of whom are women, of course—was brought to the attention of the task force. Unfortunately, the mandate of the task force did not cover this area. Miller recommends an immediate examination of ways to relieve the situation.

Pensions for home-makers

This brings us to one of the most controversial items in the task force's recommendations—the so-called homemaker's pension. Up to this point, I had been following Miller trustingly as he slashed a path for me through the jargon and data. But in this particular section he becomes wordy and even a little fluffy. I think I have sorted out the gist of what the majority report proposes and what Miller has to say about it. So, here goes:

First, everyone on the task force, Miller included, is in favour of credit-splitting all pension benefits of the marriage partnership when the younger

spouse reaches 65 or upon marriage breakdown.

The majority of the task force felt that this did not provide “benefits directly linked to homemaking as work that is acknowledged as valuable by those who benefit from it.”

And those who benefit from it are the families, of course, who would themselves finance the pension through a new family rate in the C/QPP contribution structure.

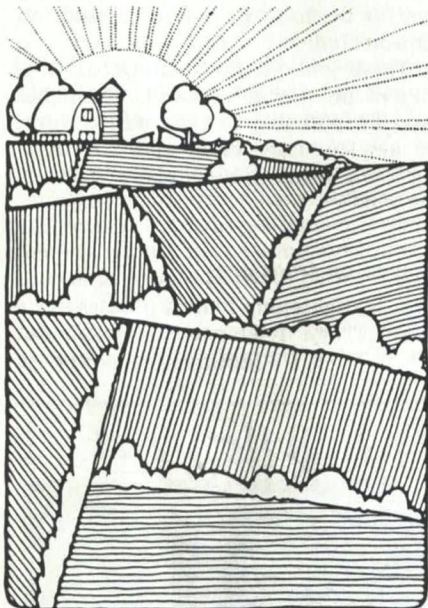
The pension would be delivered in the form of a C/QPP benefit top-up for all homemakers who earn less than one-half the yearly maximum pensionable earnings.

Miller says: “What the majority report refers to as a ‘homemaker's pension’ is in fact nothing of the sort. It is a supplementary benefit primarily for couples with only one earner. Since the majority report recommends that all C/QPP pension credits be shared equally between the spouses when they both reach retirement age (a recommendation that I support fully), any benefit given to a spouse who does not participate in the work force would be shared by both spouses. The ‘homemaker pension’ is therefore, in effect, an additional bonus to one-earner couples and not a pension for the homemaker “in her own name.”



As Miller points out, the proposed pension makes no recognition of the homemaking services of women in the paid work force. The majority report says that "the fact that these homemakers have two jobs is already publicly acknowledged through the tax deduction for child care expenses."

This doesn't impress Miller and I suspect it won't impress many of the women who are now recipients of this so generous public acknowledgement.



Canadian Labour Congress view

Miller further points out that the majority report proposal has an implication of an employee/employer relationship between a homemaker and her or his family instead of treating homemakers as full and equal contributors to the marriage partnership.

Miller proposes that increasing the OAS benefits to a level equivalent to 17.5% of the AIW and expanding the C/QPP to 50% of covered earnings and combining this with credit-splitting would provide a full-time homemaker with a pension in her or his own name without making distinctions between full-time homemakers and others who provide homemaking services.

The Canadian Labour Congress Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Women Workers Committee sounded a warning in their submission to the task force:

"It would be pitiful if a homemaker proposal was adopted and then used as an excuse for not increasing C/QPP benefits. As a way of dealing with the pension problems of women this would amount to designing a program for the future based on a caricature of women's status in the past."

And, Miller points out, this is exactly what the majority report proposal has done.

Having said this much, I wish Miller had gone on to state that the 'homemaker pension' would provide an additional payment to families who can afford to have one member stay at home, at the expense of taxpaying lower income families. And such a pension also reinforces the notion that a woman's primary function is that of homemaker.

But I am left with a problem concerning Miller's recommendations as well. I cannot see where there is a provision for a single parent who has stayed at home with her family.

I would like to see Miller clarify his position on this section of pension reform, or at least re-explain it.

Survivor benefits — or are survivors the lucky ones?

Having proposed the homemaker pension, the majority of the task force then presents the argument that benefits to survivors over the age of 65 need not be increased to the extent proposed in the Green Paper. The Green Paper proposed a survivor benefit of 60% over and above the pension entitlement arising after splitting the C/QPP credits. This would provide a surviving spouse with 80% of the C/QPP income coming into the household prior to the death of the spouse. The majority report of the task force recommends reducing this benefit to 30% to provide a surviving spouse with 65% of the former C/QPP income.

Miller's minority report claims that this does not take into consideration the reduction in OAS benefits when one spouse dies and that insufficient evidence on this subject was taken during the task force hearings to make a recommendation.

No more excuses

And finally, Miller provides some ammo for countering the scare tactics that say we simply can't afford to provide adequately for the elderly now and certainly not in the future.

The C/QPP, says Miller, is financially sound: "If benefit rates were to double, as I have proposed, and if the most pessimistic projections about birth rates were to materialize, the plan would remain financially sound, and contributions would remain at levels comparable to those currently being paid to support public pension systems in other industrialized countries."

One of the reasons often stated for not wanting to increase C/QPP benefits is that this increases "non-wage labour costs." But it is a meaningless argument, says Miller, because the advocated expansion in occupational pension plans would have the same effect. The cost of pensions is taken into consideration when wages and salaries are determined and ultimately the burden of pension financing is borne primarily by employees.

"There is a direct relationship between the quality and cost of a pension system," says Miller. "If we are to meet our goals of adequacy and equity, we must be prepared to allocate sufficient private and public resources. As a greater proportion of our population reaches retirement age, retirees will be entitled to a greater share of national income. The proposals I have set out are affordable under current economy conditions; and, as the Economic Council of Canada indicated to the Task Force, they will not compromise our future prosperity."

The Next Step

I recommend that every woman who is older, growing older, or planning on growing older in Canada, should get a copy of both the Report of the Parliamentary Task Force on Pension Reform (the majority report) and Ted Miller's Dissenting (along with the Background Notes produced by the NDP Federal Office).

It is pretty heavy reading but we cannot afford to accept the government's explanation that benefits will rise "when resources permit." Our country has adequate resources and the elderly are being denied their share of those resources. It is unrealistic to believe this situation will change unless we force it to change.

We owe it to ourselves and our sisters to ensure security and protection for the last decades of our lives; we owe it to our daughters as a legacy; and we owe it to our mothers and grandmothers as a tribute to their part in building the resources we are determined to share. ♀

The Report of the Parliamentary Task Force on Pension Reform can be obtained from your MP, c/o House of Commons, Ottawa.

The Dissenting Opinion (and Background Notes) can be obtained from Ted Miller MP (Nanaimo-Alberni, House of Commons, Ottawa).

Do it now! You don't have to stamp the letter as long as the House is in session. ♀

Leadership candidates answer:

1. What women's issues do you consider to be of major concern?

Margaret Birrell



1. Of all the issues that concern women, I think there are two in particular that we must join battle with now, immediately! Women stand squarely on the firing line in the technological revolution and in the rising wave of commercialized pornography. The two issues are not unrelated—they are part of a total picture that we cannot afford to ignore.

The impact of the technical revolution will be felt first and hardest by women. All areas of women's work are undergoing radical change. We fought long and hard for our gains in the work world: maternity leave, affirmative action, equal pay, sexual harassment protection. But the office of the future is here—it is the office of today. Jobs are

literally disappearing. And the women who work in these offices and in the service industries, and who are seeing their means of livelihood evaporating are, for the most part, unorganized and unprotected.

These jobs are not coming back and they're not being replaced. There has been no planning for alternative work, no new industry developed. "Retraining" is a meaningless phrase—retraining for what?

Women on front lines

It is frightening to hear phrases like a recent Tory reference to "computer

Continued on next page

1. (i) Technological change which is resulting in a narrowing of employment options for women as technological advancement eliminates much of the occupational work traditionally done by women. The party's task force on technological change can be a vehicle for proposing realistic action to meet this problem.

(ii) There is a lack of opportunity for advancement of women in most fields of employment. Programs to meet this need, both in traditional and non-traditional fields of occupation for women, must be a priority of government.

(iii) There is a lack of adequate support systems for women. Women, whether

they are employed or unemployed, need more educational opportunities, retraining opportunities, adequate child-care facilities, financial support to continue education or employment training. The problems of single mothers deserve special attention in this regard.

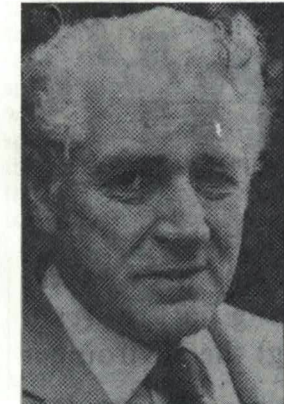
(iv) Equal pay for work of equal value.

Update women's rights policy

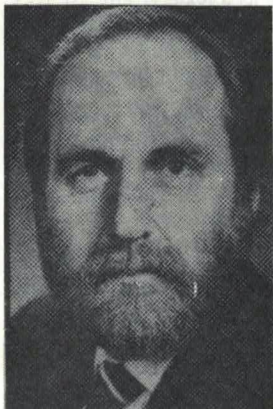
If I earn the leadership of our party I would be committed to the implementation of party policy in every area, whether in opposition or in government.

Continued on next page

Bill King



Graham Lea



1. a) Access to education (in particular post-secondary) and retraining.

b) Legal Aid.

c) Access to health care including family planning and abortion, teenage pregnancy, the special health problems of elderly women.

d) Equal pay for work of equal value—access to a decent income level either through employment, guaranteed annual income, pensions.

e) Protection under the Human Rights Act.

f) The issue of pornography and the violence towards women it perpetrates.

2. Education would be a priority of mine and certainly of the next NDP government. I am aware that the current cutbacks at the post-secondary level

have affected women students more than any other group. Women's Access programs would be reinstated. More access will also be needed for retraining for those women whose jobs are being eliminated by technological change. The education subsidy which gave thousands of B.C. women, mostly single parents on income assistance, access to upgrading, would also be reinstated. The user-pay, cost-recovery philosophy of the current government would be discarded. The recent move to eliminate college programming in communities of less than 10,000 population would be reversed and consultation with democratically elected community college boards would take place to facilitate access. I am aware

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two questions on women's rights

2. What steps would you take as leader of the NDP to implement NDP policy on women's rights?

1 If the NDP is to survive as a relevant political force in this province it cannot remain silent on the critical issues facing women. Two of the most fundamental of these are the reality of economic and social inequalities in our society and the lack of involvement of women in the exercise of political power. If we, as a party, are to convince women that the NDP can be an effective political expression of the women's movement, we must have policies that address the fundamental issue of equality and a record of opening positions of power to women, both in public life and within the party.

Our economic system places women at a disadvantage in many ways. Women

continue to earn less than 60¢ for every \$1 earned by their male counterparts and the gap is widening. As well, 65% of all working women are unorganized and thus do not receive union negotiated benefits. As a result they often find themselves forced into sub-standard working conditions.

Much of the important work that women do, including child care and domestic work, is only indirectly tied to industrial production, and is therefore undervalued or not compensated at all.

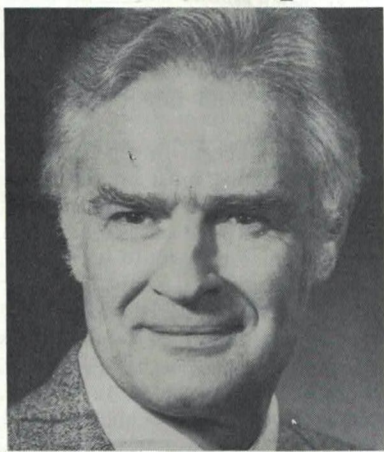
Several approaches needed

Several approaches are necessary. As
Continued on page 15

Robert Skelly



Dave Stupich



1. The most crucial single issue, in my opinion, is that of 'affirmative action.' Although there has been a great deal of talk about equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work, we still have a very long way to go.

I believe it is up to the provincial government to show leadership. B.C. people include representatives from all races, creeds and both sexes. There should be a concise effort by the government to set an example for the rest of the community by achieving some balance within the public sector for a reasonable number of employees, representative of all groups in our community.

For Ministry of Women's Rights

Our party policy calls for the appointment of a Minister who would be responsible for implementing NDP policy on women's rights. That would be the first step.

Such a minister would then have the responsibility of deciding priorities in the implementation of this particular policy and bringing recommendations to cabinet meetings where decisions on timing would eventually be made. ♀

1. There are a number of issues which women in our province are struggling with.

One of these is *unrelenting poverty*. The largest number of people on income assistance and the largest number of people working outside of the protection of trade unions are women. Women earn 65 cents of every \$1.00 earned by a man and a large proportion of women are not covered by the Canada Pension Plan or any other pension plan. Statistics Canada reveals that the poorest people in Canada are elderly women living alone, followed by single women heads of families.

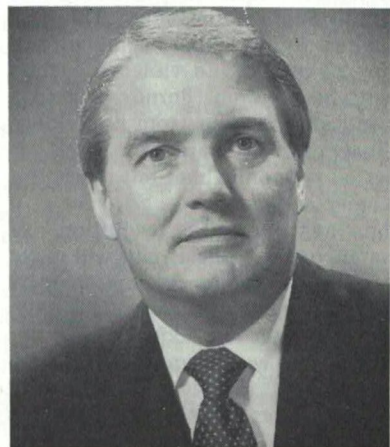
Another concern is the *escalating violence* toward women, both in the family and in society as the effort to en-

shrine pornography as part of an easily accessible culture escalates. Legal, as well as other community resources designed to protect women from violent abuse are being eroded and starved for funding by governments at all levels. The safety, security, independence, and survival of women is being increasingly threatened.

The third issue of concern is government's rush to use the present economic climate to perpetuate women's *lack of opportunity* in education, job training and employment—thus ensuring their continued poverty. Equal pay for work of equal value must be a priority. The lack of access to affordable legal services and affordable housing as well as

Continued on page 15

David Vickers



MARGARET BIRRELL

cottage industry." The reality for women of a "computer in every kitchen" is social isolation, no job security, no possibility of organizing for collective protection.

The technical revolution is going to have an enormous impact on everyone. As with most "women's issues" it is not just women who are affected but it is women who are on the front lines and take the direct hit. We have all been betrayed by the technical revolution dream. It is not the liberating revolution that frees workers from drudgery and allows them to enjoy the fruits of their labour that we as socialists have waited for. Instead it will enslave us at a subsistence level with even less control over our work lives.

We must demand answers to essential questions that will shape our future and are already shaping our present. What are the social and economic and physical costs of this new technology? How is it being put into place? Who will control it and who will profit from it?

We must get answers to these questions. We must have a carefully planned economic structure that takes control of the profits so that they can be invested into improving the creative and social aspects of our society. We must invest in repairing the damage already done to the environment. We must harness technology to work in harmony with society and the environment.

Callous disdain for human rights

We cannot permit a society geared totally towards technology and production at the expense of women and children. We are already seeing the callous disdain for human rights and the protection of vulnerable members of society that is a basis of the philosophy of the radical right. The recent Sacred throne speech stated that human rights is an individual responsibility. This, at a time when we are experiencing an outpouring of hatred and violence against women and children. Pornography is a mass industry ranging from pop videos and magazines to hard core porn. It crosses all economic lines but its victims are women and children.

The "new industrial revolution" in the hands of the radical right will make us, the workers, the most vulnerable and exploited segment of society. This philosophy of disdain and exploitation, this view of people as commodities, and dispensable ones at that, is reflected in and promoted by pornography where women and children are viewed as objects to be

used for titillation and gratification or for venting frustrations and hostility. The frightening attitudes of the present are a preview of the future. We cannot afford to ignore these signs. We must begin now, together, to build a sane, co-operative society.

Government for an educated populace

2. We cannot implement our policy on women's rights until we form the government. But we *can* begin right now to reach out to people with our policy. We can start the process of building an educated populace that understands what New Democrats stand for and what we intend to accomplish as a government.

Women's issues are a part of every issue—tenants' rights, environment, jobs, the economy, health, education, every social and economic issue—so they must be an integral part of the platform we take to the people of British Columbia.

We have excellent and well-developed policy on issues that concern women, and we will need new policies to deal with the new issues of the technical revolution. What we do not have is education on our policy and what it means when translated into practical working terms. We have been terribly remiss in bringing our message to the people of this province, in building an understanding of the type of co-operative society we could build together.

This education process must begin now—long before an election is called. We must go to an educated and aware electorate if we are to be elected with a mandate to implement our policy.

As a party we cannot be neutral on issues such as women's rights. We must run openly and strongly on the policies that have developed out of the beliefs and ideals that are the reasons that we are working together as New Democrats. We must articulate and share our vision of the sane co-operative society we are asking people to join us in building. ♀

BILL KING

However, I feel that our method of developing party policy over the years has not encouraged the fullest involvement at the grassroots level of the party, and I think that the party should undertake to update our policy, including our policy on women's rights, to reflect the concerns of the 1980's.

To this end, I am in favour of regional policy conferences, encouraging full dis-

GRAHAM LEA

that the majority of students attending college programs in smaller communities are part-time women students upgrading in Adult Basic Education and Employment Preparation programs. Adequate daycare must be developed to allow single parents, in particular, access to education and training opportunities.

Access to family planning and safe abortions

Preventative health care would be a major thrust of the next NDP government under my leadership. Access to good quality health care for women and access to family planning and safe abortions would be a priority. Funding would be reinstated to groups like Planned Parenthood. Health delivery systems like community health clinics, abortion clinics and a democratization of hospital boards need to be implemented. Prevention would include provisions for adequate income levels to provide adequate nutrition, housing and recreation. A move to pilot a Guaranteed Annual Income program similar to that initiated in Manitoba would be a priority. The predicament of the pregnant teenager and young mother and the special needs of both mother and infant will need special attention.

The issue of access to legal aid for women in particular must be addressed with adequate levels of funding assuring such access. Transition houses for women and children in crisis would be funded and family counselling and support services reinstated to decrease the need for crisis management of family breakdown.

The next NDP government must begin to examine the issue of a guaranteed annual income to replace an out-moded, unsatisfactory welfare system. A redefinition of work and compensation

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cussion and understanding of resolutions before they are passed at convention. As leader I would undertake to obtain public understanding and support for our policies, as I am firmly convinced that we must win the next election before it is called. With public support we can win the necessary mandate to carry out the progressive and humane policy reforms which I believe party members desire. ♀

ROBERT SKELLY

a party, the NDP must be more active in the fight for wage equality and lend assistance in organizing the unorganized. As a government, the NDP must implement a guaranteed annual income system. Such a system where citizens receive a basic income as a matter of right is the only effective way of addressing the poverty with which women, and especially older women, are afflicted in our society. As a government we must also put in place programs which guarantee that the full range of employment services are open to women and guarantee that necessary services such as child-care are available in order that women can pursue those options. Temporary exit from and re-entry into the work force must be facilitated.

Mandatory affirmative action must be legislated in order to eliminate the traditional bias against women at all levels. As a government we must not only entrench affirmative action in law for the public service, but also require affirmative action programs from those who receive government contracts. I support affirmative action for all hiring and appointive positions within the NDP and voted for those provisions at the Federal Convention in Regina.

In the case of elections within the party, we must ensure that women are equally represented among those from whom selections will be made. In the

DAVID VICKERS

the erosion of resources which address women's needs for childcare, advocacy and health care add to the continuing oppression of women and place almost insurmountable barriers in their struggle for equality.

Government's and society's rush to embrace *technological change* in the workplace while disregarding the skills-upgrading opportunities and concerns of health and working conditions for women, manifest the historical and continuing exploitation of women as cheap, dispensable labour.

The final issue which goes beyond women's concern surrounding her own poverty, violence, and loss of freedom over reproductive choice, is her alarm and concern at the continuing and growing attacks on *world peace*. Women have led the opposition to the testing of the Cruise missile in Canada and are also part of the movement to convince our

case of nominating conventions, I have proposed that the NDP require the empanelling of a number of candidates, at least half of whom are women, in every constituency before a nominating meeting is held. (I do not support proposals to substitute quotas for the elective principle and voted against such a proposal at the Regina Convention).

When programs requiring equality for women are entrenched in law, we can begin to measure our progress in terms of whether the law has been observed instead of looking at how close we have come to achieving voluntary goals.

2. As leader I would establish a formal line of communication with the Women's Rights Committee. Only a formal link can ensure the regular and ongoing communication necessary to effective action. Secondly, a program for implementation of women's rights programs should be developed within the party. This implementation program should specify the joint actions required by the leader, provincial council, executive and constituency organizations. A renewed emphasis on internal democracy within the party will redouble the importance of a women's organizer in promoting increasing participation of women at all levels of the party and in recruitment of candidates for public office. Only when women become as visible and as powerful as their male counterparts can we truthfully say we are fulfilling our party's ideal of democracy in a free society. ♀

leaders to practise peace as well as promote it.

2. I am committed to the struggle of women for equality of rights and responsibilities. I believe that our policies go a long way towards giving women the mechanism as well as the tools and the opportunities to get on with the job.

If elected leader I would:

1. Immediately open a dialogue with all women in the party to establish their priorities for policy implementation and to design a timetable, as well as the mechanism, for the implementing of our existing policy.

2. Establish a liaison between the caucus and all women in the party to ensure that the implementation process is monitored continually.

3. Suggest to Provincial Council that the development and upgrading of Women's Rights policy be a priority area for the 1985 provincial convention.

GRAHAM LEA

for such legitimate work as raising children and volunteer work in the community must be examined within the context of a guaranteed annual income. Women must be given equal opportunity to secure employment and in some cases an affirmative action program might be one way of addressing long-standing imbalances, and of course we must address the issue of *equal pay for work of equal value*.

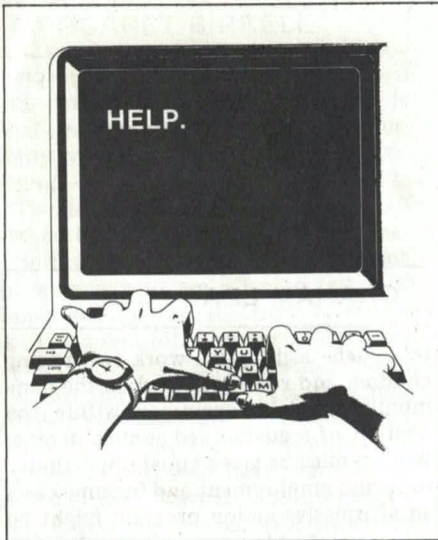
The Human Rights Act needs to be strengthened and should include the issue of sexual harassment. We would reinstate the Human Rights Commission and give it a stronger mandate.

Pornography and the issue of violence toward women in present day B.C. society is something we should all be very concerned about. A government led by myself would address this problem and move to work with other levels of government to propose solutions to this issue. ♀

4. Make a commitment to work closely with all policy committees of the party—all of whom have policy affecting women.

5. Make a commitment to work closely with the Women's Organizer of the party to ensure that at all times the women of the party and the caucus are of one voice and one effort in achieving our goals.

As leader, my commitment is to bring new directions, new energy and fresh ideas to our political process. My first responsibility will be to work with active New Democrats in each community to seek new supporters, to encourage new candidates, especially women, and to develop innovative policies for a new government which will strengthen confidence, create opportunities for equal access to the benefits of our new technological age and create social justice for all. ♀



CUPE women: survival in the crisis

The convention of the Canadian Union of Public Employees held in Toronto, October 1983, adopted this report. It was presented by the National Executive Board of the Union.

Impact of the economic crisis on women

Women are being hardest hit by the economic crisis for three reasons. First, women's participation in the labour force has increased dramatically. Today, the majority of women of working age are in the labour force. Unlike in the past, they are staying in the labour force right through to retirement.

Yet women are still streamed into traditional training and are confined to the lowest paying jobs in a handful of occupational areas: clerical, service, sales, health, education, and manufacturing and assembly. Ironically, the low paying jobs women hold are, on the whole, the jobs which produce the greatest social value, such as those found in the health and education fields.

Until recently, women made 58 cents for every dollar a man earned. If part-time workers' wages are included in the figure, women earned only 48 cents for each male-earned dollar. Today, full-time women workers make 60 cents for each male-earned dollar. Although this seems like an improvement, it probably results from the fact that men's real wage levels declined last year. It is important to note that in 1931, at the height of the last Great Depression, women's wages were at the same level: 60 per cent of men's wages.

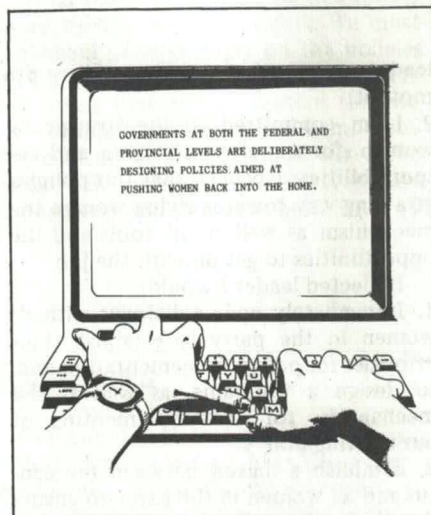
The equal pay question

The persistent wage gap between men and women exists partly because most jurisdictions only have laws requiring that men and women be paid equally for doing the same work. The areas in which most women work are seriously undervalued. However, even where men and women are doing identical work, wage inequality, particularly in private sector jobs, persists in defiance of the law.

In the public sector, employers have also managed to evade equal pay by assigning separate job titles or varying the work slightly for men and women. CUPE's successful struggle to equalize the wages of registered nursing assistants and orderlies is one example of where this problem was overcome. Nonetheless, the wage gap still persists in many job categories.

Thus wage controls hurt women more than men because women earn less. The same percentage limit applied to women gives them substantially less in dollars and cents than it does their male co-workers in higher paid categories.

Moreover, the high concentration of women in the public sector makes them especially vulnerable to the job loss and depressed wages and benefits resulting from the contracting out of their jobs to private, non-union contractors. This practice has become so widespread that it is hitting not just occupations like clerical work, food services, cleaning and laundry services, but even such job areas as nursing.



Double burden of housework

The second reason the economic crisis is having a more severe impact on women is that women are also burdened with the bulk of the unpaid work in the

home. When social services such as health care and childcare are cut back, or fees for these services rise, women are hit with a double whammy.

Governments at both the federal and provincial levels are deliberately designing policies aimed at pushing women back into the home. This is one part of their overall strategy to hide the real and rising levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty in our society.

Because of women's low wages, a cut-back in, for example, government childcare subsidies makes it impossible for some women to stay in the labour force because their net wages often end up being lower than welfare payments, and they simply cannot make ends meet. On welfare, a woman supporting a family would be entitled to housing and childcare subsidies as well as free provincial health care plus medication, etc. As a member of the working poor, she would be entitled to few, if any, such supports. Also, an Unemployment Insurance regulation almost exclusively applied to women specifies that a parent who does not have childcare during her normal working hours is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because it is assumed she is not available for work. Moreover, since the majority of workers in social services are women, cutbacks in social service funding affect them not only in terms of cost for services, but also have a differential impact on them in terms of job loss.

Automation of job ghettos

Finally, the economic crisis is affecting women more severely because the job ghettos women are in are now being rapidly automated. A noted Canadian researcher, Heather Menzies, estimates that, under the best possible conditions, at least 200,000 female clerical workers will be jobless and that, under the least favourable conditions, there will be 750,000 jobless female clerical workers by 1990. Other experts feel the real levels of unemployment among clerical workers will shoot much higher.

While both men and women are suffer-



ing from high levels of unemployment, many traditionally male-held jobs will be recovered when the depression eases. Most of the jobs lost by women, however, will be permanently lost due to technological change.

Obviously, this comparison is a relative one—many jobs in the traditional male work areas are also being permanently lost. However, the differential impact on women arises from the fact that while men have access to all job areas in society, women have access to substantially fewer. Cutbacks in these areas therefore hit a larger number of women.

Those women who retain their jobs in the traditional women's work ghettos also face a bleak future: serious downgrading of their skill levels, increased monotony, stress, health hazards and decreased control over their work flow as a result of technological change.

In addition, the new technology makes it possible for women to work from home, and this makes it difficult to protect their rights and benefits. It will be harder for them to take collective action to improve their working conditions. Moreover, employers may well attempt to use them to break strikes.

Thus women are now in a particularly vulnerable position due to their low wages, technological change and the double burden of work inside and outside the home.

While CUPE has always been concerned with the economic problems of women and has developed many excellent policies on the status of women over the years, progress in these areas has been slow.

Given the seriousness of the current economic crisis and its devastating effects on women workers, a plan of action that can be immediately carried out is a must.

Action plan

The following program focuses on immediate actions CUPE should carry

out to combat the threats to women's jobs posed by the economic crisis and technological change. The recommendations fall into three categories: general measures needed to combat the crisis, affirmative action as a specific response to threats posed by technological change, and changes needed within the union to ensure better levels of protection for female CUPE members.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Shorter Work Week

The most immediate priority is the shorter work week or work year without loss of pay to spread work among the available supply of workers. This involves action at all levels:

- The National Union should urge the CLC to breathe life into the campaign for a shorter work week, and in all its lobbying efforts, press the federal government to define full-time work as 30 hours a week.

- The National Union and CUPE Divisions should be encouraged to wage campaigns to involve the federations of labour and other workers' groups in the fight for change in provincial and federal labour laws.

- Local unions should also be encouraged to bargain the shorter work week and work year and to give this demand high priority. Locals should also be encouraged to resist the conversion of full-time into part-time jobs. Local unions should be encouraged to negotiate voluntary overtime provisions into their contracts.

- Local unions should also be encouraged to monitor and resist any employer efforts to convert daytime clerical jobs into shift positions or to introduce job-sharing, piece work schemes or any form of work decentralization.

- Individual members should be encouraged to resist consistent overtime demands from their employers, especially in areas where CUPE members are on layoff or jobs are being eliminated.

2) Re-training

- The National Union should press the federal government to levy an employment training tax on all private and public sector employers to create a permanent fund to pay for retraining and income protection for workers displaced by the economic crisis and by technological change.

- The National Union and CUPE Divisions should lobby the federal and provincial governments to develop, in consultation with the trade union movement, programs for training and re-training women for non-traditional jobs and to overcome the gaps in their skills.

- CUPE Divisions should urge provincial governments to revamp the formal education system to encourage women into job areas with better future prospects and/or where women are traditionally under-represented.

- Local unions should be encouraged to upgrade the retraining provisions in their collective agreements to ensure that longer periods of retraining with pay during regular working hours are covered. The retraining schemes their women members have access to must not be limited to the acquisition or upgrading of skills related to the jobs they are now doing.

3) Part-time work

- Local unions should closely monitor and resist the conversion of full-time to part-time positions.

- The National Union should accelerate its campaign to unionize all part-time workers in CUPE's jurisdiction and, through the CLC, encourage other unions to do the same.

- Locals should place a high priority on negotiating wages and benefits for part-time workers equal to those of full-time workers.

Affirmative Action for CUPE women

Affirmative action programs designed to upgrade the wage and benefit levels of CUPE women and to smooth their transfer into less-threatened job areas are vital to a successful fight back strategy.

CUPE does not believe that gains for women workers must be made at the expense of men workers. Rather, we stand committed to the principal of overall and continuous improvements for all workers with special measures aimed at women to remove job-related effects of previous discrimination against them.

To ensure that real rather than window-dressing affirmative action plans are put into place and to ensure the fullest possible participation by all members of CUPE, the following should be done:

- The National Union should lobby for legislation making it mandatory for private and public sector employers to undertake affirmative action programs with the full and equal participation of the union.

- The CUPE Education Department should develop affirmative action courses for local leaders.

- The CUPE National Task Force on Women, in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities Officer and the CUPE Education Department, should hold a series of affirmative action conferences on the national and regional levels of the Union. These conferences should focus

on imparting practical skills relating to affirmative action to as many members as possible.

- The National Task Force on Women should study ways to increase the protection of our seniority systems to ensure the best possible protection for all CUPE members. As soon as the study is completed, it should be made available to the CUPE membership at the Union's conferences, Division conferences and through publications of the National Union.

- Local unions should continue to make equalization of base rates for men and women workers a priority issue in collective bargaining as a means of raising the total worth of clerical and service sector jobs.

CUPE believes that women cannot afford to wait for the return of better economic times to continue the fight for the economic and workplace justice that is theirs by right.

Equality within the Union

Both to set an example to our employers and to increase the union's sensitivity to the needs of its female members, the following measures should be implemented:

- All levels of the Union should be encouraged to implement previous CUPE policies relating to the creation of women's committees. These committees should have representation from the local, national or division executives. In addition to their other work, they should be responsible for (i) creating a network of women's committees and (ii) attempting to increase the representation of women on all union committees and at all elected levels.

- To ensure the highest possible level of service to the membership, the CUPE Education Department, in conjunction with the National Task Force on Women and the Equal Opportunities Officer, should develop a comprehensive and in-depth staff training program on affirmative action. This program should be carried out in each region prior to the National Task Force's regional affirmative action conferences.

- The National Executive Board, in conjunction with the National Task Force on Women, along with the unions representing CUPE employees, should study ways to increase the number of female CUPE staff members in non-traditional jobs such as those of the national representatives and national

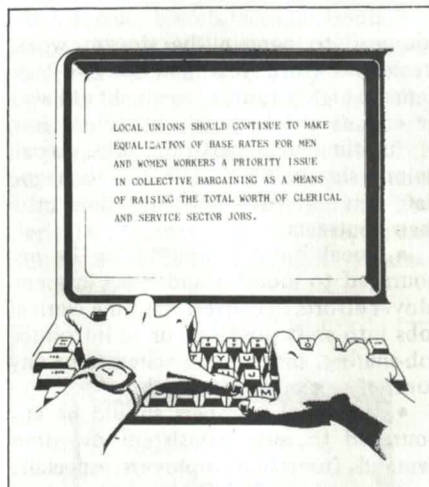
office administrative and technical staffs and to humanize staff jobs so that the double burden of work does not result in high female staff turnover rates. The National Executive Board should report its findings to the 1985 National Convention.

- The National Union Task Force, in conjunction with the Division women's committees, should provide information to members on employment opportunities within CUPE.

- CUPE staff representatives and CUPE local unions should encourage the participation of women in CUPE and CLC education courses, particularly those relating to women's equality.

- CUPE local unions should be encouraged to negotiate clauses in their collective agreements which allow the union to hold meetings during working hours so that more members with family responsibilities can attend.

- The National Task Force on Women should study the question of better pension and benefit protection for CUPE women and report to the CUPE membership at Division conventions, through Division women's committees or Division executives.



By endorsing this plan of action, the Union renews its commitment to the ongoing struggle for women's equality—a struggle which assumes increasing urgency as the economic depression and technological change exact a heavier and heavier toll on women workers.

CUPE believes that women cannot afford to wait for the return of better economic times to continue the fight for the economic and workplace justice that is theirs by right.

This action plan reinforces our belief that if ever there was a time to push for programs that guarantee women's equality it is now, when improvements to women's economic status are desperately needed. ♀

Heather Morris:

B.C. NDP Women's Organizer



HEATHER MORRIS has been hired as the B.C. NDP's Women's Organizer. She replaces Margaret Birrell who is running as a candidate for the leadership of the B.C. NDP.

Heather has been appointed on an interim basis to May 1 of this year. She has a strong background in the party and on women's issues. She has worked as a clerk-typist in Victoria, as a community services worker in Nelson, and as a Hansard transcriber in various legislatures. Her most recent job has been as a support staff worker for the NDP, doing convention and election organizing. A party member since 1975, she has worked in many election efforts as a zone captain, foot and phone canvasser. She was a member of Victoria's women's caucus, has written for *Priorities*, and has done organizing work for an International Women's Day event and for a women's centre at Queens University. ♀

While the trials of Dr. Henry Morgentaler and his colleagues wend their way through the courts, several developments reflect the relentless pressure being exerted by the pro-choice movement.

- This month, an Ontario court rejected a husband's application to prevent his wife from having a therapeutic abortion. The ruling was based on a previous court finding that a fetus is not a person. The woman concerned has since had the desired abortion.

- The Manitoba prosecution has withdrawn the conspiracy charges originally laid against Dr. Morgentaler, Dr. Robert Scott and head nurse Lynn Crocker.

- A Gallup poll conducted in B.C. in October 1983 found 83.2% responding "yes" to the question: "Do you think it should be a woman's right to decide whether or not to have an abortion?" This represents a 9% increase over the results of a similar poll conducted in 1982.

- Don Johnston, one of the Liberal Party leadership hopefuls, has declared his support for "abortion on demand" as a reflection of existing 'social realities.'

If we add the failure of the Borowski challenge, we can see that the actions of the pro-choice movement can and do affect public opinion and the actions of state institutions.

Manitoba scene

In Manitoba, the Coalition for Reproductive Choice persists in its efforts for the withdrawal of charges remaining against the Morgentaler clinic staff; for the legalization of free-standing clinics and for repeal of Section 251 of the Criminal Code.

The Coalition considers the three acquittals of Dr. Morgentaler in Quebec and the existence of eight government-run free-standing clinics there as sufficient precedent for the dropping of the charges.

The Coalition also calls on the NDP government to "actively lobby the federal government to repeal Section 251 on the grounds that it restricts an essential health service to women."

A summary of the existing situation in Manitoba, published by the Coalition, includes the following:

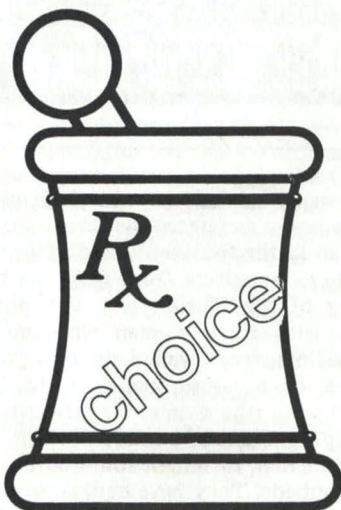
Too little, too late

Dropping the conspiracy charges was only a minor victory in the opinion of women's rights activists. Why? The NDP has a clear pro-choice policy. Of the 14 years that Section 251 has been in place, 10 of those years have been under an NDP administration. The law has caused

Abortion rights: the struggle continues

by Joyce Meissenheimer

Acknowledgements: Material from publications of the Manitoba Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion, and 'Socialist Voice.'



extreme hardship for Manitoba women. The lack of facilities in our province forced thousands of women to seek abortions outside the province or to continue unwanted pregnancies.

The Morgentaler initiative, with an offer to the government to take over the clinic was an opportunity to provide abortion services at relatively low cost. Instead, the government stood by and watched the staff and patients humiliated by anti-choice pickets, police raids and conspiracy charges. The dropping of the conspiracy charges was a victory but only a minor one—thousands of dollars have been spent to date on legal costs. Thousands more will have to be raised—and even more if the charges of "procuring" are proceeded with. If the constitutional challenge currently under way in Ontario rules the law unconstitutional, the Manitoba government would appear arbitrary and vindictive if they did not

drop the charges here against Morgentaler, Scott and Crocker.

But the facilities at Health Sciences Centre have been expanded

Yes. But this is not enough. The Minister of Health, Larry Desjardins, has announced an expansion of existing services, including funding for an increased 900 therapeutic abortions and for a complete pregnancy counselling service at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg; negotiations with the Brandon and Thomson hospital boards to have them provide some therapeutic abortions. These are definite improvements but the system is still inadequate.

The case for free-standing clinics

Recently, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba acknowledged the safety of abortions performed outside hospitals. As of November 1983, the college no longer requires abortions to be performed in hospitals.

Specialized clinics improve access because of high public profile. Whether or not there is a therapeutic abortion committee, women can contact a clinic directly.

Performing abortions in clinics frees up costly hospital operating rooms and anesthetists for more complicated medical procedures.

The staff of free-standing clinics are trained and selected to serve abortion patients. As well, there could be counselling services, including contraceptive counselling. Counsellors would be more attuned to the needs of these specific patients and could make referrals to other needed services.

In free-standing clinics, medical staff are trained in the use of local anesthetic, a safer approach than general anesthetic often used in hospitals. Consequently, patients experience fewer complications during and after procedure.

A woman's right to choose

Health care is a major social issue, and for women of child-bearing age, reproductive health care is one of the most important elements. The right to reproductive choice is the fundamental issue underlying the right of women to equality of opportunity.

While our government implements such programs as improved day care facilities, job training for women, services for abused women and children, care of the elderly, improved welfare for single mothers, we must extend our political courage to provide safe, publicly funded abortions as part of a comprehensive health care policy.

CCCA Membership drive

In Vancouver, Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion is seeking members to build the fight for a woman's right to choose, repeal of all anti-abortion laws, and legalization of free-standing clinics.

CCCA points out that "the trials of Dr. Henry Morgentaler, Dr. Robert Scott, Dr. Leslie Smoling, and nurse Lynn Crocker... will continue well into 1984.

"As part of his defence, Dr. Morgentaler challenged the constitutionality of the present abortion law.

"Should this challenge lose, Morgentaler and his co-defendants will go to trial and face possible life imprisonment. And the women of Canada will lose what rights we have to abortion. Should it win, Canada will be at the stage reached in the U.S. in 1973, when the Supreme Court ruled that choice on abortion is a constitutional right. Then the charges against the clinics' defendants will be dropped."

In order to continue its work, CCCA urges supporters to become members. Fees are: \$10 (individual), \$5 (or what can be afforded, for unemployed, seniors and students), \$25 (sustaining member) or \$100 (sponsor). Membership confers voting rights at CCCA's bi-weekly meetings and a subscription to its newsletter.

Send your fee to CCCA, Box 24617, Station C, Vancouver, B.C. V5T 4E1.

CARAL organizes protest

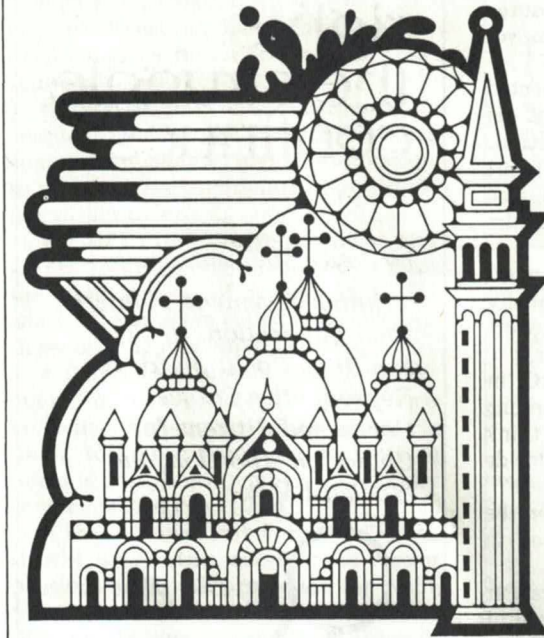
In Ontario, the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL) is appealing to pro-choice supporters to send letters of protest to Canadian Gallup Poll, 45 Charles Street East, Toronto M4Y 1S2. Gallup has refused a commission from CARAL to poll the public on the questions: "Do you agree or disagree that 1) the abortion decision should rest with the woman concerned in consultation with her physician, and 2) since fewer than 25% of general public hospitals in Canada perform abortions, do you support the establishment of specialized clinics where early abortions would be provided."

Gallup is only prepared to field a more complicated question "acceptable to both sides — anti- and pro-choice." Readers are urged to demand that Gallup do what CARAL would be paying them to do—reveal the truth about majority public sentiment for pro-choice. ♀

Shame

by Salman Rushdie
(London: Jonathan Cape,
1983. 287 pp, hardback)

Reviewed by
Irene Howard



Salman Rushdie's new novel, *Shame*, takes place in a country that is not-quite Pakistan in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, measuring from 622, the beginning of the Muslim era. The novel begins with three women who, once-upon-a-time, were walled up in a great fortress of a house, confined to the zenana wing (the women's apartments), and kept ignorant of books and ideas, of the whole rich, turbulent soul-nourishing world outside. They have had, according to their strict Muslim father, an honourable upbringing: they have been brought up in *purdah*. And yes, they are beautiful, but not in a delicate, languishing way, for they are "strong-chinned, powerfully built, purposefully striding women of an almost oppressive charismatic force." What volcanic emotions will erupt when women like these are denied the freedom to live? Well, we know what turmoil engulfed Nora and Hedda and other strong-willed Ibsen women.

Not a feminist novel

Now although *purdah* is one of Rushdie's controlling metaphors, let me say right off that this is not a feminist novel, any more than the plays of Ibsen can be labelled feminist. But, like Ibsen, Rushdie finds that one way to write about a repressive society is to write about its women.

In one of his story-teller digressions, he says that he thought he was writing a "saga of sexual rivalry, ambition,

power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge." But the women characters insisted on being heard.

"They marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me... to see my 'male' plot refracted... through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side."

He concludes, "A society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well."

Violence rooted in "shame"

When you put this novel down, images of those women stay with you: of one swaddled in the concealing *burqa* (robe with veil), wandering through the rooms of her house, driven mad by a ruthless, ambitious husband; of another, hanging by the neck, suicide note fastened to her swollen abdomen by a safety pin, driven to this extremity by a husband whose desire for children is insatiable; of yet another, chained and drugged in an attic, bursting through a brick wall and leaving her shape outlined in it. There are no earth mothers in this novel: the reader must abandon the comfortable clichés of the modern novel and reflect with Salman Rushdie on "the roots of violence"... in shame.

Shame? Not a word that accurately translates the nuances of *sharam*, which carries, says the author, in its compendium of meaning "embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts."

Humiliation creates wildness

Among Muslims, *sharam* assumes life-and-death importance. And it is *sharam* that compels Muslim women to peep at the world through slits in a venetian blind. But, Rushdie reflects, "humiliate people for long enough and a wildness bursts out of them."

So, to return to the story, when the father dies, the three sisters react violently to the ignominy of their upbringing, and, well, the upshot is that one of them gets pregnant, by an Englishman at that. But which one is the mother? They never say, but conduct a triune pregnancy and delivery, and nurse their infant son at six breasts. They name him Omar Khayyam after the Persian poet whose *Rubaiyat* celebrates the epicurean life and does violence to Muslim and Christian puritanism. Then they name their great house *Nishapur* (after the Persian village where the poet was born) and forbid their son to feel shame. Having revenged themselves upon their father, they shut themselves up for half a century until the time comes for their final act of revenge. Epicureanism versus puritanism, says the author, with a nod towards playwright Georg Buchner, is the true dialectic of history.

So this story turns on this axis of the shamed and the shameless. It ends with a confrontation between Omar Khayyam and his young wife, Sufiya, the innocent moron, born blushing for the world, experiencing the shame that should be felt by others. Inhabited by the "beast of shame" which sporadically bursts out of her, she is finally overcome, the wildness takes over.

"Well, wife, so here you are at last," says Omar, and then he looks into the "deadly yellow fire of her eyes." I shall not reveal the astonishing ending of this fairy tale.

Avenging Furies

It is not, however, of the Brothers Grimm variety, for the three sisters and the young wife-turned-beast are not witches but rather the avenging Furies of Greek myth. We are required to see them as "a principle, the embodiment of

violence," and, from another angle, as emblems of the oppressed people of all countries. For this is a political fairy tale which serves as an anatomy of violence.

Running parallel to the gradual transformation of Sufiya, "clean (*pak*) in a dirty world," is the growing disruption of constitutional democracy in fictionalized Pakistan and the eventual return of military rule. The two main political protagonists in the story, roughly recognizable as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Zia, are composites summing up the ephemeral political careers of any number of men who have imposed their will in Chile, Grenada, Nigeria, or anywhere in the world where shameful tyranny governs.

Again, the women characters provide the commentary. One example will suffice. The wife of the Prime Minister, after the military coup, spends the days of her house arrest embroidering shawls. Eventually she has eighteen of them, each documenting the "Shamelessness of Iskander the Great," he who claimed to be "the incarnation of the people's love" who, after his execution, had become legend, like Alexander the Great. I can think of no other denunciation of cruelty and corruption in literature which has such cumulative power as that in which Rani describes her eighteen shawls.

"... Shame is everywhere: in the Sind Club of Karachi a sign is still posted that reads 'Women and Dogs Not Allowed Beyond This Point' . . ."



Pakistan's political history

The complexities of Pakistan's political history might well have intruded on the story. But Rushdie's narrative gifts are impressive. The storyteller gathers

you into a circle of listeners, charms you into giving yourself to the extravagant events and characters of his tale, then pauses from time to time to reflect on matters historical, philosophical, political in connection with his story. "Suppose this were a realistic novel," he muses, and then recites a shocking catalogue. Shame is everywhere: in the Sind Club of Karachi a sign is still posted that reads "Women and Dogs Not Allowed Beyond This Point;" in the National Assembly where the Deputy Speaker was killed, long ago, by members throwing furniture at him; in the movie theatres, which must show crudely censored films; in the schools, where students are required to learn by rote and are penalized for independent thinking.

What happened to Pakistan that the 1947 miracle wrought by the Muslim League should go so wrong? Pakistan, you'll recall, was established as an independent state, separate from India, in 1947. It was made up of West Pakistan, a polyglot province of Punjabis, Afghans, Kashmiris, Sindis, and Baluchistanis, and, a thousand miles away, East Pakistan, largely comprising British Bengal. At the time of partition, millions of Muslim emigrants left India to settle in Pakistan. They brought a language and culture alien to a land rooted in centuries of Indian history. "Perhaps," reflects Rushdie, "the place was just *insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements, midriff-baring immigrant saris versus indigenous Sindi shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then: a miracle that went wrong."

He renders with admirable economy an impression of this complex political event in a few pages of serio-comic narrative. Here again he presents a startling image of a Muslim woman, this one fleeing a bomb blast, clutching the charred remains of her *dupatta* (shawl) to her naked body.

Most accomplished writer

The author now lives in England, but he and his family were among the Muslims emigrating to Pakistan in those troubled times. He writes about Pakistan as an immigrant observer, as a political satirist, and as a passionate human being anguished by the irrational violence of the contemporary political scene. He has developed his own kind of surrealist fantasy which takes off comically into orbit, then comes back to earth through the gravitational pull of political realities. It is no exaggeration to say that Salman Rushdie is one of the most accomplished writers of the past half century. ♀

The Commission of Enquiry into Part-time Work headed by Joan Wallace issued its report last year. It tells you much more than you want to know about the entire part-time work phenomenon in Canada, but it is absorbing reading for anyone concerned with the implications.

Readers of *Priorities* should be concerned: already part-time work has increased from 3.8% of those employed in 1953 to 13.5% of those employed in 1981. More than 2.4 million Canadians held part-time jobs at some time during that year. An increase to 15-19% of those employed is likely by the end of the century; it may even be as much as 50%.

International phenomenon

Like it or not, part-time work is here to stay, not only in Canada but throughout the world. It was on the agenda of the International Labour Organization as early as 1946, and an international study of part-time work in fifty countries was done in 1953. More recently, the European parliament has been campaigning for non-discrimination and proportional rights for part-time workers.

In Canada there has been interest since the 1960's, and in 1970 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended that the "federal government undertake a study of the feasibility of making greater use of part-time workers in the Canadian economy." In 1979, the Canadian government policy paper *Towards Equality for Women*, as part of Canada's contribution to the United Nations World Plan of Action on Women's Issues promised "special efforts with employers and unions to promote equal compensation and opportunities for part-time workers. . ." This report is a first step towards fulfilling that promise; its implementation would be a second.

Commission's mandate

The two main reasons for setting up the Commission were first the rapid growth in numbers of part-time workers and secondly their unfair treatment: low pay, lack of fringe benefits and pensions, job ghettos with little chance of training or pensions. The Commission's mandate was not to promote part-time work or to see it as a solution to unemployment; rather to "enquire into improving the employment position of part-time workers."

Part-time work, according to the Report, is likely to be "a work option on entry to and exit from the work force

The Part-time Work Commission

Reviewed by
Angela Page



for both men and women, and during the prime working age for women." In other words, most part-time workers are either the young, parents with family commitments (usually women), and the old, either approaching or after retirement. 72% of part-time workers are women, only 28% are men; in full-time work 35% are women and 65% men.

On average, part-time wages are only 79% of the wage full-time jobs pay when hourly wage rates are averaged across all part-time and full-time jobs.

At least 40% of part-time workers are employed less than 15 hours per average week and so are ineligible for UIC benefits. They work within a restricted range of occupations: three quarters of part-time workers are in wholesale or retail trades and community business and personal service.

Unionized part-time workers do better financially than the non-unionized, but most part-time workers are in the least unionized occupations.

Myth of 'pin money' earners

No evidence was found to support the myth that women part-time workers do so for 'pin money' or luxuries. Evidence supports the argument that young part-time workers contribute to family income. Women of prime working age who worked part-time at some stage of the year contributed approximately one quarter of their household's paid employment income. Another myth, that many part-time workers hold other jobs, is largely untrue.

The Commission's main concern was with the lack of pension and benefit coverage for part-time workers. It recommended that "the federal government should amend the Canada Labour Code, Part III (Labour Standards) to introduce a new labour standard which would ensure that part-time workers are included in all fringe benefit and pension plans (on a pro-rated basis) where an employer provides these benefits for full-time workers doing similar work."

It also recommended: "In view of the lack of pension coverage in industries where most part-time workers are found, the above recommendations cannot be guaranteed to provide all part-time workers with adequate retirement income. Therefore the federal government should work towards expanding the public, earnings-related pensions system (Canada/Quebec Pension Plan) to replace a higher percentage of pre-retirement earnings, preferably 40% to 50% of the Average Industrial Wage. At the same time a method should be developed to offset the higher contribution rates for low-income workers, many of whom are part-time workers."

Revise UIC conditions

A third major recommendation relates to the provision of UIC benefits for those who work less than fifteen hours a week:

"Legislation should be introduced to eliminate the 15-hour minimum work week requirement for participation in the Unemployment Insurance Plan and replace it with a revised system under which all employed workers working over 8 hours a week would pay a straight percentage of their salary, up to a set level of maximum insurable earnings. These workers should then be covered for UI benefits on a basis prorated according to the average number of hours they worked a month."

The Commission received letters and submissions from individual workers, unions, women's organizations, older workers, employers' organizations and governments.

Individuals were mainly concerned with benefits and pension coverage, job security and seniority, lack of understanding of child care needs, inadequate career promotion and upgrading opportunities. Job sharing was also a concern for them.

Union attitudes

Union attitudes to part-time work were ambivalent and in a stage of transition. Many took the viewpoint that part-time work is here to stay and that rather than opposing it they should be working towards better salaries and benefits for part-time workers. They were willing to support the concept of part-time work on three conditions: that part-time work should not be expanded at the expense of full-time work; that it should be voluntary, i.e. not unpaid but wanted by the worker; and that part-time workers should have equal pay and have access to prorated fringe benefits and pension plans.

Women's organizations brought forward many of the same issues, but some were opposed to any expansion of part-time work until the job inequities associated with it have been corrected.

Older workers were interested in part-time work as an option which could replace mandatory retirement and allow them to phase gradually into not working. The Commission recommended that the Human Rights Act should be amend-

ed to abolish mandatory retirement; it also suggested that there should be a more flexible system, as in Sweden, allowing workers to draw a pension from the public system to replace earnings lost as a result of changing from full-time to part-time employment.

Bosses enthusiastic

Employer associations were quite enthusiastic about part-time workers; their productivity was rated highly and they have less absenteeism and sick leave than full-time workers. But employers were strongly opposed to any legislation which would make the payment of fringe benefits to part-time workers mandatory, though a survey revealed that over 76% of employers would not change their hiring practices if they were forced to pay these benefits.

Among employers in Canada, the federal government—the largest employer of all—has the smallest percentage of part-time workers of any industry which presented briefs to the Commission. Only 1.1% of its employees were part-time in contrast to 13.5% in the work force as a whole.

The Commission predicts that part-time work will continue to increase; that conditions will improve because of the demand for this; and that because people are beginning to ask for more flexibility, e.g. when they have young children, many more of them will want to work shorter hours at some stage in their lives.

Margaret Mitchell presses for measures

The report ends on a positive note; it was submitted in April 1983. In November 1983 Margaret Mitchell MP (Vancouver East) asked for a commitment from the government that at least some of the Commission's recommendations should be carried out.

On December 19, 1983 Margaret Mitchell asked the Minister of Employment and Immigration when the Unemployment Insurance Plan would be amended to include those who worked less than fifteen hours a week. The Minister replied that, in assessing the report, it was found that there had been some misunderstanding of facts; therefore he was not proposing to present any substantial revisions.

On the same day, Margaret Mitchell asked the Minister of Labour when the Labour Code would be amended to improve fringe benefits and pensions for part-time workers, 72% of whom are women. The Minister replied that amendments to the Canada Labour Code would be tabled early next year (1984)

and the Hon. Member could see the amendments of interest to her then.

So we have it: a report with basically good intentions commissioned by a government with little or no intention of carrying them out.

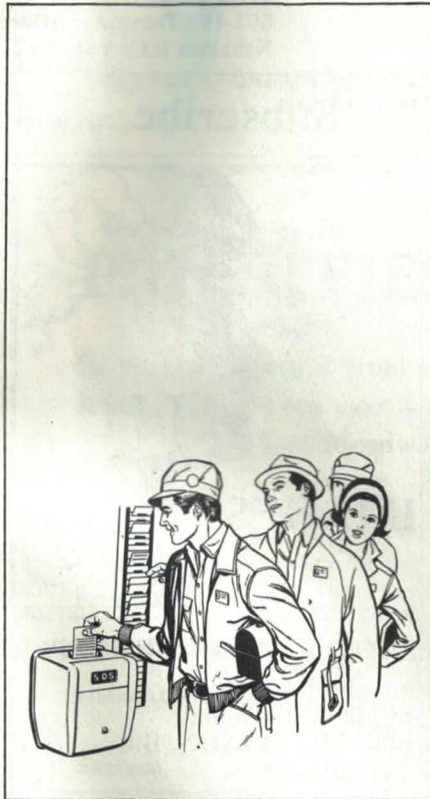
Deficiencies of the report

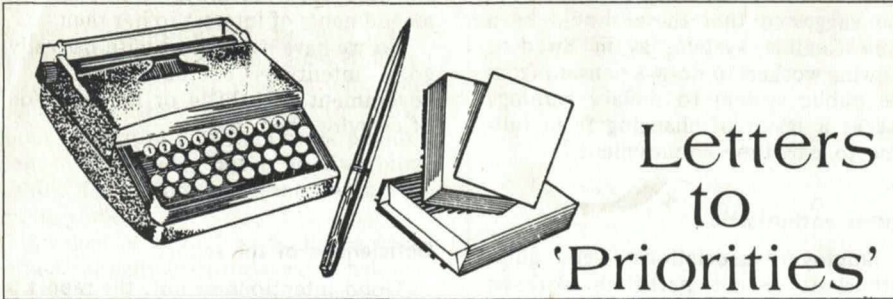
Good intentions or not, the report is not perfect. For instance, there is no mention of the effects of technological change upon employment. It seems likely that we will eventually have a shorter work week and a complete restructuring of the industrial system. Does this mean that those now working full-time where there is technological change will work part-time hours? Will part-timers be phased out, or will their hours be reduced? The report does not attempt to tell us.

Although the report goes into detail about different categories of part-time work—retailing, tourism, hotel and food services, health care, banking and insurance, etc.—it does not mention work done at home at piecework rates. This form of employment is notoriously underpaid and exploitative; it is often performed by immigrant women who speak little English, cannot obtain childcare and receive no benefits. It certainly appears to belong in the category of part-time work.

One reason for the increase of part-time work among women is the shortage and expense of child care. This was pointed out by several women's groups who presented briefs across the country. They recommended that federal and provincial governments co-operate to institute a Canada Child Care Act to ensure funding of a system of non-profit, affordable, high quality child care facilities across Canada; that employers provide child care facilities on the job site and that child care centres be expanded to serve the needs of part-time workers and shift workers. However, the report's only recommendation in this area is that Canada Employment and Immigration should provide programs that "help re-entry women by providing flexible hours of training which coincide with children's school hours."

As a part-time worker myself—which means I work at home the rest of the week—I am broadly in sympathy with the report and would like to see many of its recommendations carried out. However, it is painfully obvious that it was intended merely as an exercise and that the present government will leave it at that. At least, it makes a useful reference book for the next time around. ♀





Salute to pro-choice doctors and health professionals

Upon reflection of International Women's Day 1984, our organization would like to commend those pro-choice doctors and health professionals who have been supportive of women's health.

Alberta NDP Women's Section

Further commendation of doctors and health workers

We the undersigned are writing in support of those doctors and health professionals who demonstrate through their actions that they support women's right to decide whether or not to bear children.

Anti-choice activists and groups have become so vocal recently that it must be difficult to realize that there are many who support a woman's freedom of choice. We feel that the right to make the choice must be a personal decision, based on an individual's life situation and beliefs.

We would therefore like to be helpful in whatever way possible in support of both a woman's right of choice as well as a doctor's right to exercise his/her clinical judgement in consultation with the client. We realize that such decisions are serious ones.

We are requesting that this letter of support be published in order to endorse those doctors and health professionals who support the freedom of choice position.

For their endeavours and integrity in this area we commend them.

Alberta NDP Women's Section

Praise for Women's Caucus at Regina federal convention

It was kind of you, indeed, to send me back issues of *Priorities* and to enter my name on the mailing list for the coming year. Thank you very much.

You say that I praised the actions of the women's caucus at the national NDP convention in Regina last summer in my letter to "Mary Humphrey" — but I did not write to Mary Humphrey. It was a

real thrill to me, however, to observe the women organize for action on the floor of the convention and I said so in a very personal letter to Georgie Taylor who is currently doing Ph.D. work in history at the University of Ottawa.

I now remember that Georgie asked my permission to quote part of my letter to her and send it to Mary Humphrey. Regardless of how it happened, I was glad to hear from you and hope to keep in touch with you. It is encouraging to learn that you have such an active Women's Rights Committee in B.C.

I shall soon have my 84th birthday and was an honored guest at the national convention last summer, having been active in the formation of the CCF in 1933 and in the movements that led to it in the years before. As an "honored guest" I had to sit in the gallery where the acoustics were even worse than on the floor. I enjoyed endless courtesies, except the one I would have appreciated the most, namely to be where I could hear. It would have been pretty awful if I, or one of the other "honored guests" should happen to want to say something when not an elected delegate. So our area on high was roped off. As a compensation, I sneaked out into the women's caucus in the noon hour and they did not put me out.

In my younger days the women had two major concerns: (1) Disarmament and the peace movement and (2) Amending the criminal code so as to make it legal to disseminate birth control information. I wonder if the need has changed much. I am not downplaying women's bread and butter issues like equal pay for work of equal value, etc. but it won't make much difference if we all get fried in a nuclear holocaust; and what woman is "free" until abortion is taken out of the criminal code and she finally has control of her body?

I am sure I shall find much good reference material in *Priorities* and, again, thank you.

Most sincerely,
Sophia Dixon
Saskatoon, Sask.

Film on CCF history

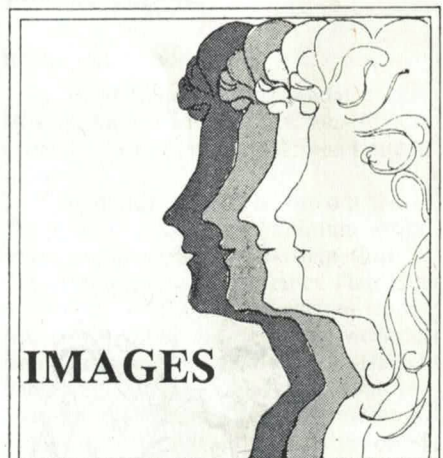
We are a group of independent filmmakers currently preparing a documentary film on the history of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. The documentary, *Heaven on Earth — A History of the CCF*, is intended as an educational tool to acquaint the public with this unique chapter in our Canadian history.

Fortunately, assistance from the National Film Board of Canada has enabled us to film interviews with a number of CCFers in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. The NFB's contribution, however, was for a partial film shoot only and although they will continue to support the project in terms of facilities and equipment, we still require an additional \$60,000 to cover the film costs, processing, travel and accommodation, salaries and post-production expenses.

We respectfully request any financial assistance which you might be prepared to offer. It would also be greatly appreciated if you could discuss this project with your friends and colleagues, particularly those individuals affiliated with organizations which might consider assisting us financially. The Nanaimo Commonwealth Holding Society has generously agreed to allow us to channel financial contributions through their organization for the tax benefit of contributors.

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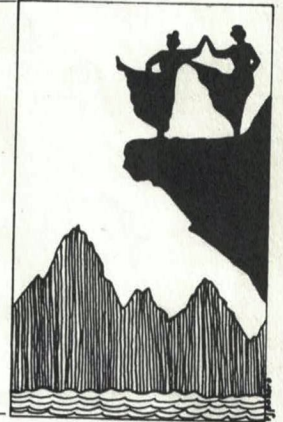
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