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# PRIORITIES

the feminist ♀ voice in a socialist movement

VOL. XVII NO. 2

PRICE: \$1.50

SUMMER 1989

LANGFORD ROWELL  
99

## *Strengthening the Web: Women and Social Change*



RECEIVED JUL 18 1989

### *In this issue:*

- *“Free” Transit*
- *DAWN—Disabled Women’s Network*
- *Women in the Trades*
- *The Japanese Women’s Movement*
- *Women in China*



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

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**

Individual: \$10.00 per year  
Institution: \$15.00 per year

ISSN 0700-6543

PRIORITIES welcomes letters and articles from its readers. All submissions must be signed, although publication of names may be withheld on request. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to edit all copy received in the interest of brevity, clarity and taste. Submissions should be typed, 35 characters to a line, triple-spaced if possible.

Submissions and subscriptions should be mailed to:

PRIORITIES  
250-3665 Kingsway  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V5R 5W2

*"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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Baseline Type and Graphics Cooperative  
Vancouver, B.C.

**Printed in a union shop:**

College Printers  
Vancouver, B.C.

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Cover graphic: "Woman Spinning Thread," a woodcut by He Baitao, from *Lu Xun shoucang Zhongguo xiandai muke xuanji*, 1931-36 [A Selection from Lu Xun's Collection of Modern Chinese Woodcuts, 1931-36] (Beijing, 1963). Reprinted from *One Day in China*, translated and edited by S. Cochran and A.C.K. Hsieh.



# Chair's Report

By Ann Frost

## Regional conferences

Two conferences down, and five to go! The Island and Kootenay regional conferences were, in my opinion, great successes. Excellent turnouts at both of them, and a real feeling of (dare I use the "g" word?) grass-roots social democracy. Lot's of time for networking and socializing, and lots of focus on really significant issues in both the plenaries and the workshops.

The WRC has been represented by members of table officers, by a member of the Nomination Support Committee, and by our Women's Organizer at both conferences. Most of our women MLAs have also attended.

The "White Paper" on Women's Issues has been the major focus at the Women's breakfasts. The women at the Island conference asked particularly that the paper include a summary of current party policy for each of the issue areas. That addition was made before the Kootenay conference.

Comments and suggestions from the Kootenay conference and from the upcoming Vancouver Richmond conference will be incorporated before the paper is taken to Smithers for the Northern Conference in September.

## Nomination Support Committee

The Nomination Support Committee continues to meet regularly. At the second last meeting, members of the committee took responsibility for direct contact with potential women candidates in all of the swing ridings currently held by the Socreds. That process is working very well. The women who have been contacted have told us how

much they appreciate our calling them, and how important it is to know that other women in the party are supporting them.

Jay Taylor, past chair of the WRC, has been working on a handbook for women called "Winning Nominations," and her drafts have been reviewed by members of the Nomination Support Committee. It's a truly wonderful document. It addresses, in great detail, everything from the personal and political considerations involved in making the decision to run and then setting up a campaign team, to personal skill development and building a base of support in your constituency. No potential candidate or campaign

manager should be without one. They'll be available by the end of June from Provincial Office at a cost of \$10.00 (to cover costs). Order yours from Vicki Robinson.

## Motions

In my last report I referred to the motion going to Provincial Council in February about gender parity. After some spirited comment, the motion passed as we presented it.

There shall be gender parity in all executive positions. Gender parity means that women shall hold a minimum of 50% of all elected positions, excluding the candidate.

Now that this is council policy,

## WINNING NOMINATIONS A HANDBOOK FOR NEW DEMOCRAT WOMEN NOW AVAILABLE

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each of us needs to take the responsibility to have it incorporated in our constituency by-laws. It will be required by the Executive should a constituency submit any other by-law revisions, but I'd like to see constituencies be more proactive around this issue.

Federal Council early this spring passed the following motion:

Be it resolved that the same standards of Caucus solidarity and discipline, which are routinely applied to policy matters, be applied to the policy on abortion.

When the Borowski decision was announced by the Supreme Court, subsequent to the Federal Council meeting, one of our MPs publicly voiced his opposition to women's right to choice. The WRC directed me to convey our concern about this action to our federal leader, and ask him to ensure that he would enforce caucus solidarity on this issue in future, as he does in all other policy areas.

### Roe vs Wade

Many of you will have seen film clips of the pro-choice march in Washington, D.C., around the Roe vs Wade issue. Just before the march, I was reading the excellent set of articles in the April Ms.

Magazine, "The Gathering Storm", and at the end of those articles, the magazine urged women everywhere to contact President Bush, Attorney General Thornburgh, and the Supreme Court justices, urging that Roe vs Wade be upheld. I wired on behalf of New Democrat women in B.C., and passed the word along to the women's committees of the B.C. Federation of Labour, the BCTF and the College Institute Educators' Association as well as to B.C. member groups of the National Action Committee.

### Special gatherings

In early March, the WRC hosted a reception for Audrey McLoughlin at the Blue Horizons Hotel in Vancouver. Audrey was en route from Edmonton to Whitehorse (yes, via Vancouver is the shortest route!) and stopped over for a day.

More than 75 people turned out to hear Audrey speak, and to ask questions. Some of the table officers of the WRC were able to meet with her before the reception and query her on her position on a number of issues. Since then, of course, she has declared herself as a candidate for leadership of the party. At our last Steering Committee we reported on our meeting with Audrey, and

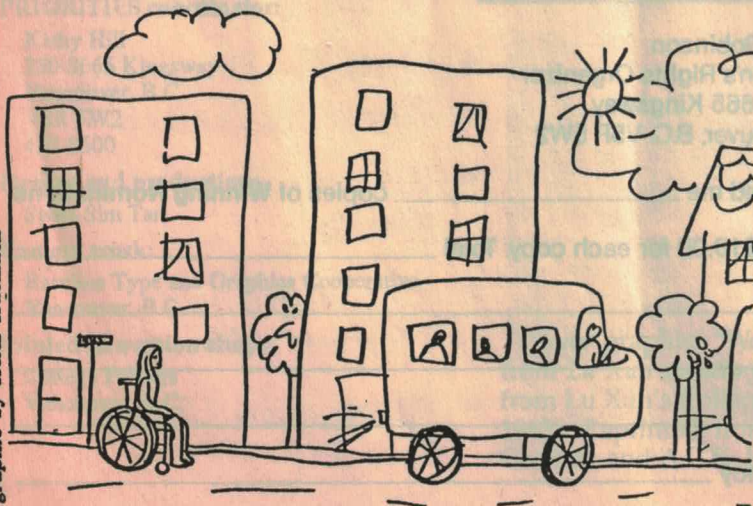
decided that we wanted to put similar questions to all of the leadership candidates. The candidates' "roadshow" will be in Vancouver early in September, and we are looking at a way to gather that kind of information at that time.

In April, Vicki and I attended a meeting of Lower Island New Democrat women. The meeting was intended to develop new interest and energy in a Lower Island Women's Rights Committee. More than 40 women turned out to the meeting. Joanne Fox was elected as chair of the committee, and I'd say they are off to a flying start.

### New faces

Women move, priorities change, and workloads increase. As a result, there have been some changes in the membership of the Women's Rights Committee. Warm welcomes to Norah Hutchison who has moved from Member-at-large on the WRC to the role of Vice Chair, to Dee Whalen, new Regional Rep for Vancouver Richmond, to Lillian Arndt, new Regional Rep for the North, and to Pat Bartlett, a new Member-at-large replacing Nadine McDonnell who has wended her way to New Zealand to work on her Master's degree in Law. ♀

graphic by Heidi Hueniken



## DAWN BC: The Disabled Women's Network

# Family Life Conference 1989

Funded by the Office of the Secretary of State

By Eunice Brooks

Women with disabilities met at the Lion's Easter Seal Camp Squamish, March 16-19, to bring to a close the year focusing on *Violence Against Disabled Women*, and to begin the year of *Family Life*. The goal of women in DAWN BC is to identify various



means of improving family life, and to pass the information on, in radio programs and workshops, each within her own community.

Each year the women select a focus, while still gathering information on previous interests. The concern of the network is information gathering and education. We rarely lobby.

DAWN BC is not a self-help group, nor a doctor, nor a social club. The network serves for information sharing. Members are dedicated to educating themselves and others about services available, ways of improving wellbeing, and how to end the solitude disability brings.

DAWN BC deals in solutions. For instance, after our third conference on *Violence Against Disabled Women* in 1988, we ran a series of free-to-members anger workshops. The focus was on finding methods for dealing with our disabilities and our harsh realities as well as possible pasts. Some found personal anger was a barrier to accessing the available world. Some found they needed professional help to deal with memories that emerged. Some found they were being tranquillized into silence by doctors who, for some reason, could not deal with women's anger. What became clear was that the culture of disabled women is different from that of able-bodied women.

The Plenary consisted of three family life stories. Tannis Doe, a deaf professor from the University of Alberta and single parent, told how she adopted her daughter Ann Marie, who is also deaf. Ann Marie is from Jamaica. Tannis and Ann Marie fell in love when Tannis spent a year on the island teaching. Ann Marie was an abandoned child of three. It took two years of eating red tape to get the child here, but we have her now. She ran with the pack of DAWN kids while at camp Squamish, and it's obvious that she's happy.

Barbara Smith, an anthropologist who lives in Victoria with four sons, told us how it feels to be a blind mother. Barbara has had her struggles with a system that would rather

remove children from a family and place them in foster homes than give the family respite care. Because the sons are able-bodied, the Ministry of Social Services and Housing will not allow the family to have a homemaker. Son Jesse, who was also at the conference, is a special needs child. He is unable to be accommodated in the provincial school system. He's seven now. His sunny disposition is no indication of the problems he presents to a mother who wants the best for Jesse and her other boys. From the look of it, there are tougher times coming.

I was the third story teller. It was a last minute decision to tell the assembly what I did. I told how the death by traffic accident of an incredibly lovable kitten named Mobius drew together a functional family with me as the granny, Al and his son Brad as the core, and Crista, a youngster he is fostering, as the tie up. Only Al and Brad are related by blood. All of us are related by abiding love. We functioned as a unit, taking the kitten to the vet, saying goodbye to him when the X-rays showed no hope of life, and watching the door close on the room where only people come out alive. We buried him in a layer of pink rose petals, and the kids made a marker with their names and his picture.

My disability is hidden in this story, just as it is on the street, or in a meeting. I know that people take me for able-bodied, and expect things of me that I am unable to perform. Even disabled women who know I have a disability sometimes make value judgements. They think that because I don't use a wheelchair I am free to go anywhere. That isn't true. One of the things we try in DAWN BC is to stop rating disabilities. None of us is a "perfect ten." All of us have value, each in her own way.

We are in the think tank business. Each new member has ideas, plans, needs for support in projects under way, and solutions. Everyone is not only free to speak but is encouraged to spill her thoughts onto the table.

I joined the ad hoc committee that planned and carried out the found-

ing conference in 1985. I'm the only member still on the board of that founding group, but most of the others hover nearby like guardian angels. Good motherly role models are only a phone call away. The thought is comforting when policy is being talked over. We like the image of the network, safety net, equal knots, with strong ties. DAWN is a community of friends.

The time of arrivals is almost too exciting to bear, as travelled children and mothers greet friends they have likely not seen for a year. Bonding of newcomers takes place as if by magic. There never seem to be loners at a DAWN BC conference. We offer accessibility.

For a woman such as Lynn Wilgenhof, with disabilities that cause her to need a wheelchair, getting to a conference at Squamish might mean leaving her Prince George home at five minutes past breakfast. She brings with her a child, Kristen, and bags of necessary clothing, swim suits, and towels. The first journey is to the airport. She wings it to Vancouver. Next she pushes through the crowds to find the ride that will carry her and Kristen up the highway of falling rocks. She is tired, and the network supports her as she falls into the rhythm of the weekend workshops and the AGM. She is DAWN.

Travel to camp was facilitated by a pair of vans with tie-downs for women who use wheelchairs for mobility, also by a luxury highway bus, with toilet, air conditioning, lights over each seat, and the nicest driver ever to tromp on the gas. He was, one could say, the opening act for the weekend's performance.

This year the swimming pool was available for those arriving after lunch Thursday. Counselling on Family Life was a feature enjoyed by some women. For many disabled women the Women's Centers of B.C. are inaccessible, geographically or philosophically. DAWN women believe an inaccessible office is a fair indication of our welcome. "If you don't make our entrance possible, obviously you don't want to help us." Camp Squamish is completely accessible.



Also this year, for the first time, there was a full agenda of children's activities, not just babysitting. Women from WAVAW assisted the children in peer counselling and role playing. Profoundly deaf six-year old, Ann Marie, bonded with Sarah, five, who has hearing. They were almost inseparable. Several of the children entertained the luncheon crowd on Saturday with a play. Each received a network award. Day care was provided on site for babies by two women recruited from the Howe Sound Women's Centre.

Workshops filled most of the time: Parenting Naturally, Free Trade, Reproductive Rights, Isolation, and Relationships. In each workshop, those attending spoke of what they knew best. Every woman has a story worth telling and hearing. The group has plans to publish some of the stories told in this *Family Life* Conference. An anthology of disabled women's writing is in the works.

In Parenting, we learned how the government makes announcements that "the family" is important, yet a blind mother of four sons cannot get homemaker service. Her worker explains that the children should be doing the laundry and floors. Nor is there money for recreational outings for families when mom is on pension. There is no respite care for worn out disabled moms who have no blood relations or available friends to call upon, and little money for a babysitter. The Ministry of Social Services and Housing appears to have as its primary mandate the protection of tax dollars from needs of disabled mothers, a not uncommon impression.

An opening panel included workers from both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Services and Housing. No rotten tomatoes were thrown at them, but the mood of the queries was angry and the facilitator was forced to cut the panel short. The panel refused an invitation to stay for lunch.

In Reproductive Rights, the twin topics of abortion and the right to carry what has been labelled a defective fetus were discussed. Women shared stories of abortions they had, and ones they almost had. The most striking story belonged to Jenny, whose son we had all met and liked. He's 12, and charming. She birthed Jeff, despite advice from three doctors to abort.

Others told of decisions made to carry till term, then put the baby up for adoption. You had to be there to realize the pain letting go brings. No one admitted to having an easy decision about abortion, nor an easy time forgetting, but neither did anyone admit to regretting abortions had.

Mojave Kaplan, who was unable to be with us, mailed in the story of the home birth of her son Luke. Her partner, Dale, and her other three children assisted. The photographs she sent told more than mere words of the functional family at its best.

About abortion: DAWN BC has a civil liberties policy in place that supports the absolute right of members to hold beliefs and to make decisions, each for herself, as an individual within the network. Put more plainly: we don't tell anyone how to think.

Through long, raking sobs, Janice Stevenson talked of the isolation of not being able to read. It was from her frustration that a policy was formed to focus on *Literacy and Communications* for our 1990 projects.

Our work is always for the needs of members. Each joiner brings a story, stories lead to projects. Everyone contributes; everyone benefits. DAWN BC works on the individual person and her quality of life and wellbeing. We welcome members who are disabled, including, but not limited to, women of color, lesbian women, parents, native women and immigrant women, without bias to racial or linguistic status, sexual preference, age, marital status, type of disability, income level or religion. We evolve with

each new member. And, the group will speak for each member until we can help her find her own voice.

We learned in a workshop designed to inform members of the ways free trade is being implemented that demands from Americans are already causing social programs to be cut. One such program was being prepared by Workers' Compensation to inform persons who work with dangerous chemicals of the dangers. We see this as taking away safety from women who work in the agriculture industry. We see lack of education about poisons as adding to the lists of already disabled women. The implementing of free trade is something we are watching.

On Saturday evening DAWN BC celebrated her fourth birthday with songs around the fire, story telling, two huge chocolate cakes and spirited dancing. Kamala Tai led us in learning some new steps.

Elected to the board for the lower mainland were 11 members. At a time convenient to this board, elections will take place for positions. First will come a time of learning about DAWN BC's mandate, policies and philosophy.

DAWN BC: The DisAbleD Women's Network was formed at an organizational conference in March 1986. Since then conferences have focused on isolation, violence, parenting, sexuality and racism, all within specific contexts. The second conference was on *Wellbeing*, the third on *Violence Against Disabled Women* Next year the illiterate will get all the education we can give.

There is only one way to access the network, and that is to join. Make a commitment. Speak up. Get a buddy, pen pal or phone pal. Mobilize women in your community to take action that will result in the education of everyone who participates in the needs of persons with disabilities.

Supporting memberships in DAWN BC are \$25.00. We welcome support. ♀



# "Free" Transit

By Elizabeth Woods

## Introduction

If you look across the water from any point in Vancouver or Victoria on a sunny day, you can see, for miles, a yellow layer of pollution hovering above the sea. It is ugly, and you know you're breathing that miasma even as you gaze upon it.

Cars and trucks contribute a major proportion of that chemical soup of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, lead and other noxious substances—part of the price we pay in our passion for road transportation in general, and the automobile in particular. We also pay in the land lost to provide freeways, roads and parking lots—a visual blight in themselves and usurpers of space that would be better used for wilderness, parks, farms, or affordable housing. Cars and trucks also take a horrendous annual toll in the deaths and injuries suffered in traffic accidents.

Being a non-driver by both necessity and choice (if I had enough money to buy and operate a car, I'd open a charge account with a taxi company—in addition to my bus pass) has led me to propose the following transportation systems to deal with the above (and related) problems caused by the current systems.

One major premise of this proposal is that everyone benefits from public transit, whether or not they ever set foot on a bus. (Throughout this article, "bus" is frequently used generally to include streetcars, trains, and subways.) Just remember what hell it was to drive during the last transit strike, and you'll see my point: that the more people use the bus, the better it is for those who continue to use their cars.

However, a significant and permanent reduction in the number of vehicles on the road will not occur until the public transit system provides the three chief amenities of the private car: mobility, convenience and privacy.

## What is "free" transit?

The first two objectives, mobility and convenience, could be met in the following way:

The mass transit component of the public transit system (buses, streetcars, trains and subways) would be made free at the fare-box. That is, as an essential service to the community at large, public transit would be entirely funded out of municipal, provincial and federal general revenues.

No longer having to pay a fare would mean that people would be free to get on and off buses as often as they needed to as they moved about the community, generating a level of demand that would require many more buses, running two or three times as often as now, to satisfy it. Many more routes would also have to be added.

Since the most common objection to using public transit is the time wasted waiting for a bus to come along, both of these improvements (more routes and much more frequent service) must be in place before, or at the same time as, the elimination of fares. All three elements are needed if the goal of luring people out of their cars is to be realized.

As people learn how convenient public transit has become, a second wave of demand would be generated, requiring, eventually, buses running every three or four minutes on every major thoroughfare and many secondary ones, and every six or seven minutes on all

others.

The buses referred to, of course, would not be the 40-to-50-passenger ones we use now, but 12-to-15 (or even 6-to-10) passenger mini-buses, designed to run on a variety of fuels from renewable resources, such as methane from sewage and electricity from B.C. Hydro.

Each bus would be painted a different beautiful design (by many local artists) and given its own name. (People could become very fond of these colourful buses, and schedules might even be printed using their names so that phrases like "meet you on *Rosinante* at Douglas and Yates at one" might become common.)

Trains would also be used a great deal more, with existing rights-of-way brought up to standard and many one- or two-car mini-trains shuttling along them every few minutes. Like the buses, these trains would run on renewable-resource fuels and be individually painted and named.

The third amenity, privacy, would be met through the introduction of autocabs, small coin-operated cabs you'd drive yourself, picking up one where you found it, and leaving it at your destination. On-street parking would be free for autocabs, while all parking would be relatively expensive for private cars (a small stick to make a large carrot even more attractive).

Of course, autocabs would also operate on fuels from renewable resources: and each community's fleet would have its own beautiful, identifying design. The cabs could be lawfully driven anywhere within each community's transit system (for example, in Greater Victoria, from Sooke to Sidney).

The fare would be somewhere between "free" and the cost of taking a taxi (chauffeured cab). Both auto-



cabs and taxis would be cheaper over a given distance than driving one's own car. Taxis should be subsidized, if necessary, to make sure that those of us who can't, or don't wish to, drive ourselves have an alternative to the bus (other than hiring a personal chauffeur); and special services for the handicapped and elderly, such as HandyDart, would be expanded (and provided "free," of course).

The reason for not making every part of the public transit system "free" is to persuade a majority of travellers to use the mass transit sector of it most of the time. Streets clogged with autocabs carrying one person at a time wouldn't be much of an improvement over what we have now.

### Costs and benefits

But how much is all this going to cost? And, since government leadership and action are obviously required to institute such a massive change: How much is it going to cost us as taxpayers?

A lot—perhaps as much as Northeast Coal or the Site-C dam—but what we would get for our money would also be a great deal: poison-free air and a decrease in acid rain; less traffic and more beautiful vehicles; fewer throughways and parking lots; more land for affordable housing and parks. In fact, so much would we gain that the money expended would be more accurately termed an investment than a cost.

In addition, we would have all kinds of people working in all kinds of new or expanded industries

which, as well as serving local markets, would export their products, technology and services around the world.

Not only would we employ many more bus drivers and artists, but, with an initial market of several hundred thousand buses and autocabs in B.C. alone to start with, we could also begin to establish an indigenous Canadian car industry (and an indigenous Canadian car, the CanuckCar—and the Canuck-Bus and CanuckTruck—small, stylish vehicles which are sturdy, nimble, and cheap to build, maintain and operate).

The driving public is just as environment-conscious as anyone else, and, if they were given the chance to use (or buy) a vehicle which doesn't destroy the environment in either its manufacture or operation, while being a pleasure to look upon and a delight to drive, many people would go for it, both here and in other countries.

Another big chunk of investment/cost would be in the research and development necessary to find out how we can build these vehicles out of aluminum from recycled cans; plastic from recycled milk jugs and packaging; wood from B.C. logs, etc. In addition to the recycling and transportation industries this research would help establish, there are bound to be who-knows-how-many serendipitous, economic-activity-creating new ideas spawned.

The cost of painting the buses and autocabs in beautiful designs would also be an investment in artistic talent, providing a much-needed boost in the incomes of local artists;

and the buses themselves (and the fact that each one had a name) would create a popular tourist attraction. People would visit B.C. just to ride our transit systems.

A further benefit would be that adding beauty to our environment is one of the cheapest methods going for cheering us up and improving our mental health.

The investment/cost of research and development, of buying the buses and autocabs and of having them painted, of hiring and training the drivers, of servicing the autocabs, and so forth, must be balanced (in addition to the benefits already mentioned) against the savings from much lower UIC or welfare payments, from lower health care costs, and lower expenditures on building and maintaining highways and parking garages, plus the added revenue from the taxes paid by all those new businesses and all those newly-employed workers.

### Conclusion

To eliminate that deadly mist which spews from the internal combustion engine we don't have to entirely give up our cars, but we do have to improve them and we do have to make more creative use of them.

A "free" transit system, and all the other industries with which it would interact, would go a long way to restoring our air, water and land to their original pristine condition, and would also be part and parcel of developing a sustainable economy—a way, in fact, of having our automotive and economic cakes, and eating them, too. ♀





# "You Don't Belong Here..."

## HARD-HATTED WOMEN

STORIES  
OF  
STRUGGLE  
AND  
SUCCESS  
IN  
THE  
TRADES  
  
EDITED  
BY  
MOLLY  
MARTIN



These are journeylevel plumbers, electricians, steelworkers, carpenters and miners, plus a host of other trades. They are also mothers, wives, women of colour, lesbians, feminists and union activists. For all their differences, they have two things in common. They are women, and they wanted a job that paid them a decent wage. These are their stories, 26 of them.

*Hard Hatted Women* holds a special meaning for me personally, as I am a journeylevel painter. The stories told by these women are powerfully moving, their personal struggles with the men on the jobsite, the sexism, the racism. Having experienced them firsthand, their words moved me first to tears, then to laughter and back again.

They tell the stories of the struggle, yes, but there is much more here. We find inspiration in their individual struggles dealing with the day-to-day problems: no facilities for women, having to wear a man's uniform, pornography, disrespect, disbelief. It gets worse. They tell stories of deliberate attempts to injure them and sexual harassment on the job.

But any woman who has ever worked in a male-dominated trade knows that gender harassment is the hardest to take. On the jobsite, sexism is not merely a notion, it is a brutal reality that the (usually) individual woman must deal with. She is usually faced with a "pack"

of men, alone, all day, every day. Often, the man you work with side by side will be unashamedly involved in the lunch-hour baiting. It eats at your guts, it makes you hate. It also is powerfully disillusioning. Women feel that if we contribute our share, everything will turn out O.K. In the trades, sometimes it will never be O.K., and we tend to take that as personal failure.

They tell us of the "you are taking a job away from a man" attitudes and the obvious YOU DON'T BELONG HERE early warning.

These stories are not always depressing. They tell of women standing proudly admiring a difficult job well done. They tell of women networking to maintain their sanity; of cooperatives established for women to teach other women skilled trades, that they too might go on to teach others; of women struggling with the difficulties of working with an all-male crew; of surviving, and ultimately gaining the respect of their coworkers.

Their stories tell the truth about women in the trades, stories told with energy and feeling, with wit and compelling insight. Like myself, not all of these women have remained in their trade. Though I enjoyed the physical nature of my work, I decided to change careers. I could not stand the daily baiting; it sapped so much of my emotional as well as physical strength.

But those of us who have been and gone, and those who have remained, have all contributed our share to the de-domination of the trades. The women in this book help us to realize and appreciate just how difficult a task still remains. □

*Hard Hatted Women,  
Stories of Struggle and Success in  
the Trades*

Published January 1989

Canadian price \$15.50

Edited by Molly Martin

Published by Seal Press,  
Seattle, WA

Distributed in Canada by  
Raincoast Books

Review by Kathy Hill



# Strengthening the Web: 15 years of Japanese women's activism

by Inoue Reiko

Reprinted from *AMPO Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*, Vol.18 No. 2-3

(Part 1)

Above the suffering and fever generated in the long search for words to express their feelings and thoughts and to share them with other women, the first step toward a new women's liberation in Japan was marked when, in August 1971, women gathered together from all over Japan in Nagano Prefecture.

This was one year after the big NOW demonstration in the United States. Although Japanese women had received various influences from these Western women's move-

ments and had become part of the worldwide movement, the women's liberation movement in Japan also inherited the ideology and ideas that characterized the upsurge of the Japanese New Left, particularly the Zenkyoto movement (the students' revolt). This is shown, for example, in their emphasis on changing themselves and in their style of basing the movement on the active participation of each person in decision-making, uncommon in traditional Japanese movements. The women's liberation movement, however, included criticism of and independence from the New Left movement because it emerged just at the moment of the latter's decline.

## Departure from the male Left

While the traditional women's movement had aimed at achieving institutional equal rights with men in the ideological frame work of "peace and democracy" asserted mainly by the Japan Socialist Party and the Japan Communist Party, this new movement of women who had participated in the New Left departed from this markedly in their positive assertion of the nature of womanhood.

They aimed at challenging the total structure of oppression and discrimination while acknowledging the empirical position of women as the sex which has been oppressed and

discriminated against. This way of thinking is seen in their definition of themselves as the movement of "onna" (females), an expression considered to be rather vulgar and discriminatory in comparison to "fujin" (ladies), which the traditional women's movement referred to themselves as, and which is considered to be a somewhat more refined expression. The term "onna" was formerly used, for example, when a man referred to his girlfriend as "my onna." It encompasses the meaning of possession of women and the denial of their equality as human beings. When a woman calls herself "onna," however, it shows self-assertion and refusal of dependency.

The traditional women's movement was divided into movements of mothers, housewives and women workers. The women workers' movements was organized as a women's branch of men's labour unions such as Sohyo. This reflects the roles which women are forced to adopt in a male-dominated society. The new women's liberation movement, however, recognized this as a result of the situation in which women are split into several separate roles, and rejected this split in order to recover their totality as women; thus this was a women's liberation movement.

This idea had a strong impact on, and gave a feeling of liberation to, a large number of women who had been forced to deny their identity as women in a male-dominated society.

To assert your womanhood meant to question the patriarchic values that had governed your life and to





change yourself. To live fighting like a man, or to live as a "sweet girl" to be loved by a man were both seen as submissions to patriarchic values. Women began to fight against the internal oppression inside themselves as well as against social oppression. So this new liberation movement emphasized the aspect of consciousness-raising against both external and internal discrimination.

This movement encompassing the self-liberation of women directly approached the problem of sex, which had been excluded from discussion as almost a taboo. The call for "liberation from toilets" put forth by this women's group signified their rejection of a situation in which women's sexuality had been allowed to exist only as an outlet for men's carnal desires, in a society where Confucian morality has some influence as a ideology of oppression and domination. This call shook the consciousness of women, who had kept their problems and desires deep inside, and succeeded in drawing out their sympathy. This consciousness of sexuality also triggered women's concern for their bodies, which had formerly been objects for men to look at, not for women to think about, and a variety of movements concerning women's bodies started up.

### Building out from inside

The initial liberation movement was supported by young and anonymous activists, most of whom had come from the New Left criticizing its male-domination and subjectivism.

The Japanese New Left, chiefly occupied with criticizing the involvement of Japan in the Vietnam war, began a struggle against Japanese immigration laws in the early 1970s. When the bill for revision of the immigration law was presented before the Diet to strengthen control over foreign residents (mainly Koreans and Chinese), the New Left groups not only opposed the bill itself but drew attention to everyday social discrimination against these people, including a certain amount of self-criticism, recognizing themselves as

oppressors. The newly born women's liberation groups also joined this movement, but asserted their own perspective on the problem:

We, Japanese, are oppressors—we can never over-emphasize this fact. But recognizing ourselves as oppressors is only an empty idea unless another point is recognized. Most people take the immigration struggle upon their shoulders, repeatedly persuading themselves that they are oppressors. They are struggling against immigration policies on the strength of others' suffering—the oppression of Koreans and Chinese—because, they say, it is a political problem! Another point is that the oppressors are themselves oppressed. We cannot suffer pain as oppressors without looking at our pain, our misery, as the oppressed.

*from Tanaka Mitsu's "Why Should the Women's Liberation Struggle Oppose Immigration Reform?"*

But this viewpoint was not shared by everyone in the immigration movement.

Thus women in the initial women's liberation movement started off from their own experience, the struggle against sexual oppression and suffering in their daily lives, and related this to the struggle for social change. They tackled and discussed everything on this level—from their relationships with their male partners to the problem of the 4th Defence Force Strengthening Plan then proposed by the Tanaka government. They tried to grasp the whole from the viewpoint of women, but their perspective was coming from their personal feelings and experience, and so although their approach roused a wide range of ordinary women, it failed to pull these voices together into a continuous movement.

When the bill for the revision of the Eugenic Protection Law (Abortion Law) was presented before the Diet in 1972, opposition to this bill became a common task, tying together various groups of women all over Japan. In 1973 the national meeting to oppose the amendment

of the Eugenic Protection Law gathered thousands of women together under the slogan "For a society where we can give birth! For a society where we want to give birth!" Asserting their sex in relation to childbirth and maternity they were aiming at changing the society which forces abortion on women. Though women rejected state control of childbirth and abortion, under which childbirth and child-raising became part of the general oppression of women, and demanded the right to abortion, they knew that abortion would also cause mental and physical suffering for women. Thus women would be forced into a dilemma unless they changed society. Above the confusion and disputes over the abortion issue, this slogan was adopted and a combined opposition of women of various circles managed to bring down the bill.

### Rejecting society and rejected by society

The provocative way of talking adopted by the initial liberation movement made it difficult for those who were still captured by the established ideology and values to understand. Though their appeal produced wide potential sympathy among women who had long been harboring these common doubts and concerns, the liberation movement succeeded only partially in capitalizing on their sympathy.

One of the main barriers which stood between the liberation movement and these common women was the mass media. The Japanese mass media made efforts to deprive the liberation movement of its ideological content, caricaturing the liberation movement as in pursuit of free sex for the purpose of currying the favor of male-dominated society. This strengthened the social pressure on, and isolation of, the women's liberation movement.

On the other hand, the women's movement itself refused to join the existing society and was not demanding institutionally guaranteed rights, but trying to build instead their own community outside



society. Thus they failed to establish a circuit which would connect them with the women suffering inside Japanese society—for example, women workers.

The initial liberation movements were mainly propelled by young women in their twenties, most of whom had babies and lived in collectives with these children. In the din and bustle of living together they tackled every problem, but this small core of activists became short of breath in spite of the impact their incisive proposals had on a large number of women. The Lib Shinjuku Center, a center for these various activities, was closed in 1977.

Japan's high economic growth rate could no longer be guaranteed after the oil crisis in 1973 and concern increased over dominance of material wealth as the supreme social value. Many women's liberation activists

also joined in movements concerned with natural food, natural childbirth, the environment and communal living. The trend of emphasizing a change in the way of life, as opposed to challenging political problems, gained popularity among people involved in many progressive movements in the latter half of the 1970s.

### New blood

In 1975, overlapping the decline of the original liberation movement, a new trend for women's liberation emerged with the beginning of the UN Decade for Women. This new trend, inheriting some of the perspectives of the initial liberation movement, tried to reassess past experiences and develop a fresh outlook.

The International Women's Year Action Group was formed in 1975, marking a turning point towards a

new trend in the Japanese women's movement. This Group, including lawyers, journalists and social critics, succeeded in utilizing the mass media and individuals of high social status and public recognition—in contrast to the initial liberation movement—and exerted wider social influence. They attempted to solve concrete problems of sexual discrimination, focusing particularly on the sexual division of labour. They protested sexual discrimination in the mass media; for example, they criticized a TV commercial for instant noodles in which an actor said "I am the one who eats," and an actress responded "I am the one who cooks," and succeeded in getting it taken off the air. ♀

*(Watch for Part 2 in the next issue of Priorities).*

## Women of China

By Janice Vichert

I have a friend in China, exactly my age, who shares with me an auspicious birth in the spring of the year of the rabbit. Although she spoke not one word of English and I spoke only enough Chinese to survive and bargain in the market, we felt a kinship which transcended such barriers. We both worked at a teacher's college in Gansu province, she as an arts teacher and I as an English teacher. I knew her as Xiao Du, but that, of course, was not her name. Du was her family name, and Xiao the affectionate diminutive given to youngest children.

Xiao Du was the youngest of six children, which, I discovered, was fairly typical of

our generation. In old China it was not uncommon for a woman to endure 15 to 20 pregnancies, with only one or two children surviving. After Liberation, health care became a top priority and many more babies survived. The policy of the government, especially during the period called "The Great Leap Forward," also encouraged large families. So Xiao Du and I were both products of a baby boom, although the Chinese population explosion has had far more serious consequences.

Lanzhou, where Xiao Du was born, and where we both worked, was on the Silk Road, one of the great caravan routes across Central Asia since prehistoric times. Xiao Du's father was a merchant-trader, possibly the richest in a town with many wealthy merchants. At the height of their prosperity her family had 60 servants and a large house with many courtyards. The servants



"Picking Leaves," a woodcut by Liqun (pseud.) made for and published in the original *One Day in China* (Shanghai, 1936), opp. p. 11, 54.



were gone by the time Xiao Du was old enough to remember, and the family has been reduced to three rooms around one small courtyard of their old house, but the memory of a gracious life remained and, until the Cultural Revolution, so did portraits of ancestors, priceless porcelain, silk embroidery, and many other treasures that a prosperous Chinese family might collect over the years.

But Xiao Du's earliest memories were not of beautiful artifacts. They were memories of hunger, of the terrible famines which swept across China in the early 1960s. She remembers one day in particular. It was a government policy to feed the workers first, so that often what food was available was distributed to work units. Xiao Du's father regularly received a steamed bun as his ration, but he never ate it, always keeping it for Xiao Du, who was so thin and frail that her family worried about her constantly. On this particular day Xiao Du's father came home empty-handed. Someone had stolen his steamed bun. Xiao Du's feeling of desolation could still bring tears to her eyes as she talked about it.

As I listened to Xiao Du talk, remembering that we were the same age, both children of the rabbit, I was frequently struck by the way fate had treated us, simply because we had been born on opposite sides of the globe. While Xiao Du was mourning her lost steamed bun, my biggest worry was whether my mother would permit me to see the Beatles, who were about to make their first visit to Toronto. That comparison, though, exaggerates the difference between us. Xiao Du came from a family accustomed to wealth, who had fallen upon hard times fairly recently as a result of political changes over which they had no control. My family's fortunes declined much earlier, as a result of the Highland Clearances, but they too were victims of history. By the time of my birth we were living in the tenement slums of Glasgow, a life in most ways as primitive and harsh as anything in China. But we were able to escape to the booming

economy of Canada in the 1960s while Xiao Du's generation in China went from disaster to disaster.

## The Cultural Revolution

People had only just started to live again after the famines and economic tribulations of "The Great Leap Forward" when, in 1966, the Cultural Revolution began. The Red Guards stormed over China, destroying reminders of the past, humiliating, exiling and killing intellectuals and the remnants of the bourgeoisie. The temples were sacked and the Buddhas pulled from their stands and tossed in the river. Anyone suspected of being a "capitalist-roader" was sent into exile to do "productive work" on the grasslands.

One night when Xiao Du was 15, 30 to 40 high school students, many of them classmates of hers, showed up at the door. Led by an older man and woman they announced "We are the Red Guards. We have come to take revolutionary action against you!"

Quickly Xiao Du and her family were herded into the smallest of rooms surrounding their courtyard. Xiao Du's father was left outside, and Xiao Du could hear the sound of him being beaten. Meanwhile, the Red Guards went through every room, taking every reminder of the old life of Xiao Du's family, smashing it and tossing it onto a pile in the courtyard. Portraits of ancestors were cut up first. Priceless silk was ripped and torn. A wonderful collection of antique porcelain was smashed, dish by dish. When the guards came into their room to see what they might be hiding, Xiao Du had the courage to remonstrate with one of them. She remembers his reply to this day: "Our Great Leader Chairman Mao taught us, 'If we do not destroy, we cannot establish.' The old culture must be destroyed to make way for the new socialist culture."

So the destruction proceeded, and when nothing more could be found, the pile in the courtyard was set ablaze. Only one object escaped, a Ming Dynasty teapot, which Xiao

Du's young nephew had been using as a plaything, so that it was covered in mud and looked irretrievably proletarian. But the teapot had, in fact been given to one of Xiao Du's ancestors, a woman who had become a great Taoist scholar, an unusual distinction for a woman in old China. It had been passed down through the generations to Xiao Du's family, and now by the luckiest of accidents, it had survived.

Xiao Du's father and older brothers and sisters were led away to do "productive labour" in the countryside, and she neither saw nor heard from them for several years. She was luckier than many, however—all her family survived.

Xiao Du and the members of her family who remained at home were soon subjected to neighbourhood interrogation meetings. They were called "struggle" meetings because, just as the preachers of 17th Century New England would struggle to exorcise the Devil, so the local cadres in China would struggle to purge "capitalist-roaders" like Xiao Du of their bourgeois and deviationist demons. The form followed a script which was the same everywhere in China. The accused was hauled before a group of neighbours and co-workers, an account of the crimes of the Kuomintang and the imperialist powers was read out, followed by a list of the specific charges against the accused. The accused was then asked to sign a full confession, detailing his or her acts of conspiracy against China and against socialism. If there was any reluctance to sign the confession or to read it out, the accused would be subjected to a barrage of abuse from the leader, and from neighbours, friends and relatives whose own welfare depended on being part of the charade.

These were not vigilante meetings, called together to settle old scores. My father-in-law, a missionary in China in the early 1950s, was subject to a struggle meeting identical in form to those of the Cultural Revolution. The common denominator in all was the demand for a confession, a self-inflicted



humiliation. There was never much emphasis on punishment, on jail terms or fines, although the jails were certainly full.

But the struggle was for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. Humiliation of all those who had been part of the intellectual and economic elite was an essential demonstration of the fundamental changes taking place in the Chinese society. Nowhere else has so much been attempted so rapidly.

The ongoing Chinese Revolution is nothing less than the transformation of an ancient, feudal society into a modern egalitarian society, of a kind which does not yet exist anywhere in the world. But China has the oldest functioning bureaucracy in the world, and a respect for intellectuals from which we borrow the term "Mandarin." The bureaucracy, and the intellectuals, have been instruments of oppression for the 80% of the Chinese people who remain peasants. So when Xiao Du and my father-in-law were handed a list of crimes and asked to confess, no one imagined that they were genuinely guilty of those specific crimes. But they had to suffer the humiliation of confessing to demonstrate that their power was broken.

Sitting in my study in Vancouver, I can rationalize the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. I think of the remarkable resilience of the Chinese bureaucracy, and wonder whether even more violent methods should have been used against them. But such thoughts fade in the face of a 15-year old girl, caught up in a great historical drama, watching all her possessions being destroyed and her family being led away to an uncertain future.

Xiao Du's experience was commonplace, and in fact better than most, because she had a strong mother who was able to educate her at home as, one by one, most of the schools in China closed. Xiao Du kept going as long as she could, but most of her teachers were in exile and her fellow students were having more fun as Red Guards. The school simply ceased to function.

Xiao Du was luckier than most

because she managed to acquire an education despite the breakdown of the school system. Many of her contemporaries missed out altogether; the various measures adopted to compensate students for the lost years of the Cultural Revolution were never adequate and were bitterly resented by the younger students who saw their precious university places threatened by aging former Red Guards.

But Xiao Du's greatest interest was in art, and, ironically, the Red Guards needed her to prepare "Big Character" posters and banners. She worked so diligently that she was soon considered "reformed," and in 1970 was allowed to attend art school in Shanghai. Here again, she was lucky, because her qualifications continued to be recognized after the Cultural Revolution. In one of history's unfair ironies, those students who managed, in the face of great difficulties, to acquire an education during the Cultural Revolution found afterwards that their credentials were not recognized. The old academic elite moved smoothly back into place after the Cultural Revolution and refused to accept that any valid education had taken place during the Dark Ages between 1966 and 1976.

My generation in Canada has prospered, but the same generation in China, Xiao Du's generation, has suffered one tribulation after another. No sooner did they put the Cultural Revolution behind them, for example, than they were faced with the one-child policy, which not only restricted families to a single child but also placed limits on the total number of pregnancies allowable per year in each work unit. This rule came into force in the late '70s, just as Xiao Du's generation were putting their lives back together again after the Cultural Revolution and beginning their families. Xiao Du, and everyone else I talked to, could see the wisdom of the one-child policy. But at the same time they wondered whether their generation had not been called upon to make a disproportionate number of sacrifices.

The important point to grasp

about Xiao Du's life is not the extent of her suffering, but the universality of it. She was not alone. The Cultural Revolution affected everyone. Xiao Du's husband describes coming home from school one day to find that his parents had disappeared, forced into exile without a chance to speak to their children. With his young brother, he wandered the streets of Lanzhou for days before finally finding a relative who could take them in. Everyone has a story like this.

## Women's place

Has this shared experience made a difference? What would Xiao Du's life have been like without the Cultural Revolution, without the Liberation of 1949? It is, of course, impossible to give a definitive answer. China is at the same time the oldest civilization in the world, where some things have not changed for four thousand years, and also a country undergoing dramatic and far-reaching changes. For me, it was all personified in Xiao Du. She treasured the culture of old China, but had a career of her own and a husband who shared the housework, a "model husband," to use the Chinese phrase.

Most of the women I knew in China were intellectuals, belonging to the class that was so severely punished during the Cultural Revolution. They were university teachers, scientists, medical doctors. In most professions women faced little, if any, prejudice. Although I have no actual statistics, there appear to be more women doctors than men. But old habits of thought are remarkably persistent. Where there is power, there are still very few women. At the top levels of government one still sees only men, with an occasional token woman.

And it was still usual for a woman to work as a doctor or teacher all day and be expected to cook and do the housework when she came home. Not all husbands were model husbands. For workers and peasants, of course, life was far worse. Peasant women did not even have the liberation of technology,



electric power and running water, to give just two obvious examples. The back-breaking work of old China is still very much part of peasant life.

The change which these women need is change which cannot be legislated. Old attitudes must change, attitudes that have the force of thousands of years behind them. Nearly every day, on my way to class, I passed two old women with bound feet. One rarely sees bound feet anymore, but these women reminded me that the tradition which inflicted such cruelty on women was only a lifetime away.

As important as the change in attitudes is the introduction of labour-saving devices, the technology which saves women in particular from a life of drudgery. Most women I knew still had to carry water from a standpipe located in a common area, though this was a substantial improvement over hauling water from a well. Xiao Du had a washing machine, and a few people had refrigerators. To be freed of the need to go to the market every day is one of life's great liberations.

Xiao Du and I talked about these

things, often through gestures and the expressions on our faces alone. Our lives had been worlds apart, and totally different. Yet we became friends for the same reasons we would have been friends in Canada. We shared the same attitudes, and the same sense of humour. And, to my surprise, I found that we shared the same politics. If Xiao Du had been in Canada, she would have been a New Democrat.

But there were parts of Xiao Du's life which no one outside China

could fully share. In our parting, I saw that clearly. Xiao Du came to me as we were leaving and presented me with her farewell gift, the Ming dynasty teapot from her Taoist ancestor. Shocked into speechlessness, I managed only to say, "I can't possibly take this."

She took my hand, and said, "I will be happier knowing that you have it, because it will always be cared for and always be safe. Who knows what might happen to it in China?"

## HELP WANTED

Women to join a working committee that publishes *Priorities* four times a year.

The committee will:

- ♦ plan the content of future issues
- ♦ approach women to write articles
- ♦ meet monthly (or conference call if you don't live in the lower mainland)

Please note that this does not mean that you must write (though by all means *yes* you may!)

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