

# PRIORITIES

the feminist ♀ voice in a socialist movement

VOL. XVII NO. 4

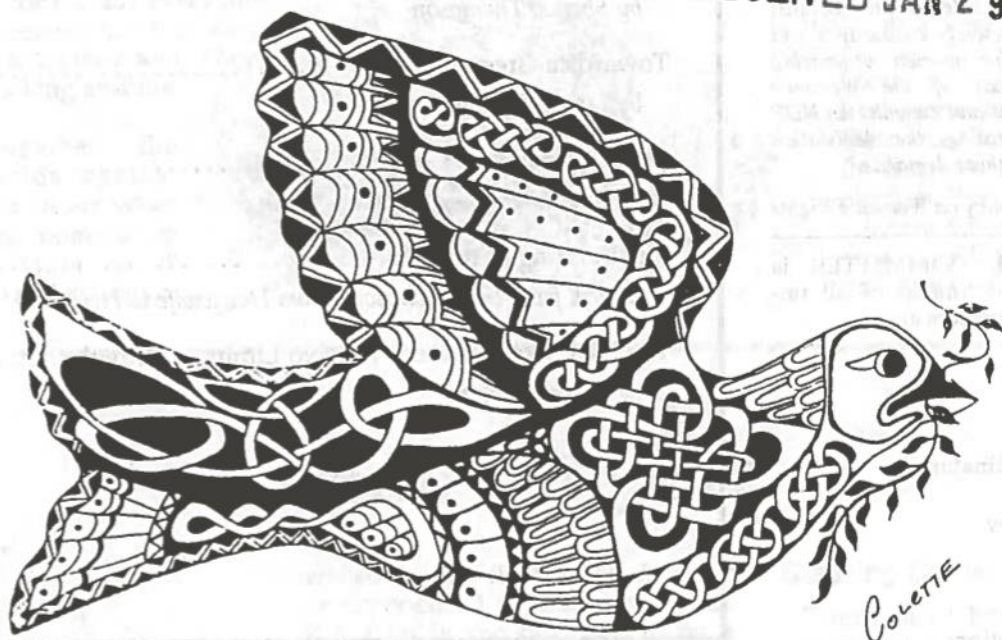
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WINTER 1989

## *Our Environment:* *Time for action*



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*Also in this issue:*

- *PMS - coming full circle?*
- *How we deny our oppression...*



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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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## Contents

A Christmas Carol .....	1
<i>by Kathy Hill</i>	
Chair's Report .....	1
<i>by Ann Frost</i>	
Pearl Myhres - Parksville Qualicum .....	4
Environmental Issues: Women's Issues .....	4
<i>by Carol Hartwig</i>	
Our Common Future .....	6
<i>by Sheilah Thompson</i>	
Towards a Greener Party .....	7
<i>by Lynn McDonald</i>	
PMS: A Review .....	9
<i>by Ray Edney</i>	
The Bursting of the File .....	11
<i>excerpt from Sonia Johnson, From Housewife to Heretic</i>	
The NDP Green Caucus Has No Limits to Growth .....	13
<i>by Donna Sanford</i>	

## A Christmas Carol

*by Kathy Hill*

The year is 2010.

Today, almost three thousand people are gathered in a city in Canada to select a new national leader for their political party. The excitement is almost palpable. There are those among the crowd who will remember the days when only men succeeded to those higher positions, when women were membership secretaries and social conveners at the constituency level.

They remember the endless debates over gender parity, dreaming ahead to the day when they would not have to "reaffirm" their support for it, for the day everyone would finally believe that they did, in fact, mean what they said. They remember speaking and not being heard.

They remember the incredible odds against them and their sisters when they contested nomination battles in "safe seat" constituencies and ridings.

They will easily, but not happily, remember the pain and disillusionment they suffered because they dared to speak. Not only because they spoke against, but because they spoke at all.

But, today, they will particularly remember that day in early December of 1989, when almost by sheer power of will, the women of this Canadian political party tore down, brick by brick, all those traditions that had for so long been oppressing the women of Canada.

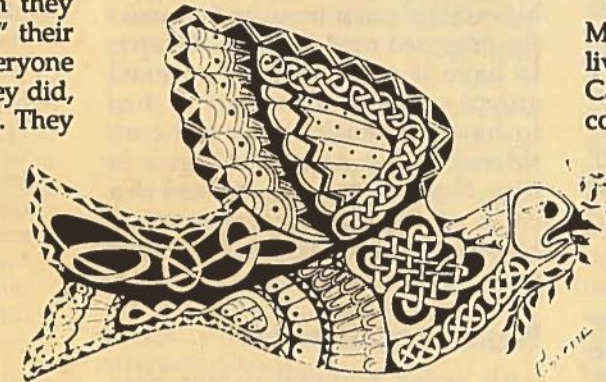
They will remember that all the women who had come before them, for more than two hundred

years, had contributed to the gift they had received that day which seems so long ago.

For on that day, a leader was elected. This new leader was facing an extremely difficult task. A country divided both geographically and politically, and a party facing critical choices about its future. But this leader had one qualification no other leader had ever had. She thought, deliberated and acted like no man had ever done. She was the first-ever woman elected to the leadership of a national political party in Canada.

They knew that electing Audrey McLaughin had changed their lives, and the lives of all women in Canada, and they knew that her courage, and the courage of the thousands of women who had gone before, had set them free. Free to speak. Free to disagree. Free to run for election. Free to elect.

Merry Christmas to all the women of Canada! God bless us every one!



## Chair's Report

*by Ann Frost*

### Federal Convention

Yes, we did make herstory! Many readers of *Priorities* were in Winnipeg at the Leadership Convention, and I'm sure most of the rest of you were glued to your television sets at home.

I was a delegate from my riding, and count myself fortunate to have been present on such a significant occasion. It certainly had elements of high drama, especially as we

waited for the final count. And it's an experience I will long remember. What an incredible time to be a socialist feminist! Rosemary Brown's spontaneous dance on national television expressed the feelings of many, many women across the country.

However, supporters of all the candidates certainly deserve congratulations for all their hard work, as do the candidates. And now, it's onward and upward. A new leader, a new decade, new challenges, and new achievements.

### Steering Committee meetings

There have been two steering committee meetings since my last report, both with chockful agendas, as usual. At the November meeting, we were able to welcome all the new regional representatives elected at the fall regional conferences: Marg Lubbers (North), Donna Stewart (Lower Mainland), Ingrid Berg-Jensen (Fraser Valley), and Agnes Lui (Interior). We also welcomed Joanne Fox from Lower Island, who has replaced Mary Burroughs. A mailing list of all



elected WRC members is available from Provincial Office.

#### Role and functions of regional representatives

At our November meeting, we approved a statement of roles and functions for the regional representatives. The heart of their task is to develop regional networks with all the constituencies and clubs in their region. We hope eventually to see a WRC liaison member in each constituency and club in the province. And I look forward to the day when each region will have its own Women's Rights Committee.

#### Candidate endorsement

As a result of requests from a number of candidates for nomination, the WRC has developed and approved an endorsement policy. The policy was published in the December edition of the *Democrat*. Women who intend to be candidates for nomination, and who are interested in the endorsement of the WRC, should contact me, or Charley Beresford (chair of the Nominations Support Committee) for more information.

#### WRC paper/Convention 1990

The November Steering Committee had a final chance to review the position paper we have been working on since last January. The paper presented at that meeting incorporated the suggestions we have received from women's caucuses at all seven regional conferences, and established a set of priorities for a first term in government.

Members at the meeting reviewed those priorities, made some further suggestions for change, and then approved the paper as amended. It will now go forward to Convention 1990 not only as the position of the WRC, but also representing the input of New Democrat women across this province. To all the women who read each successive draft, and who contributed suggestions and ideas from their experience of their own particular region, my heartfelt thanks. Together, you've done a

magnificent job!

#### NAC reorganization

I have been representing the WRC on a Lower Mainland NAC committee which has been looking at a major reorganization of NAC. Our first priority has been to make NAC more responsive to the grassroots women's organizations across Canada, and in that process, to decentralize it. (Does this goal sound vaguely familiar?) We completed our proposal in September, and took it to the NAC Regional Meeting in Quesnel early in November.

With some modifications, it was unanimously endorsed by that meeting, and delegates agreed to take the proposal back to the member groups for endorsement. Our Steering Committee meeting in November unanimously endorsed the proposed model. The next step is to have it considered by regional groups across the country, and then to have the entire proposal considered at the AGM in Ottawa in May. If any of you is interested in a copy of the complete proposal, please phone me (922-4067) or write to me at Provincial Office.

#### Regional conferences

All seven regional conferences have taken place, and Mike Harcourt and I share the distinction of being the only party members who attended all seven! At Provincial Council at the beginning of this

month, Louise Kilby gave the wind-up report. It seems clear that the conferences were an outstanding success. My sense was that many of the delegates who attended were people who had probably never been to a provincial convention, but who cared deeply about social democracy, and about how it needed to be implemented in their communities.

I did a windup report for this month's *Democrat*, where I tried to summarize some of my feelings about these events. I'd like to quote my final comments:

And beyond even these memories, I remember my feelings, seven times over, of being part of what I can only describe as grassroots socialism. Some of those feelings came from the opportunity to participate in workshops and plenaries that focused on the special needs of the people who lived in the various regions.

Some of them came from the opportunity to meet with regional women at the by now famous (or infamous) early morning women's breakfasts, to hear their comments and concerns about the WRC's "white paper," and to discover in those discussions, not just our differences but the bonds of our commonalities.

I think we did touch base with real "grassroots socialism" at the regional conferences, and it's a contact we need to preserve. At our November meeting, the WRC agreed to ask the Party, after we form government, to consider how best to continue the input that was made possible through the regional conferences.

#### Nominations Support Committee

Charley Beresford has taken on the position of chair of this committee, and is continuing to make contact with women throughout the province who are considering standing for nomination. So far, only 29 women have indicated a willingness to run for nomination, six of

whom are incumbents. This number is less than in the last provincial election. It seems clear that we will not meet our goal of 50% women candidates, let alone 50% women MLAs.

Charley suggests in her report that we need to re-examine our strategy. The decision to establish the Nominations Support Committee was made last spring, following the federal election, when we realized that the percentage of women in the NDP caucus was smaller than that in either the Liberal or Conservative caucus. I questioned at the time whether support and "sweet reason" would be sufficient measures to ensure a fair number of women candidates in our next provincial election, and events as they have unfolded have not answered my questions in any satisfactory manner.

I have written to the Executive, at the direction of the WRC, to ask them to examine the reasons why so few women are being nominated in winnable ridings. I have asked for a reply prior to the next Provincial Council meeting.

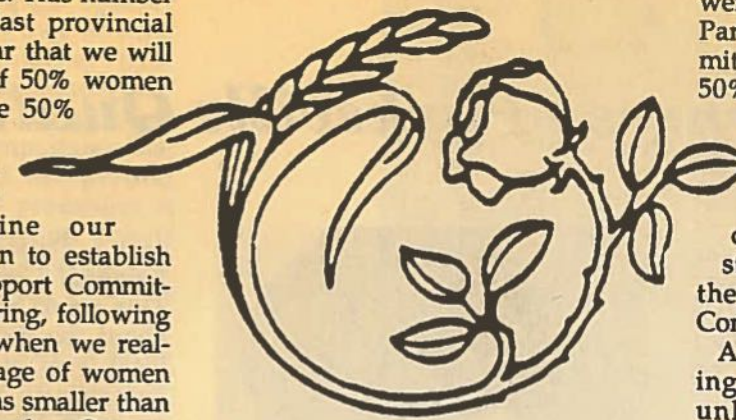
#### Convention 1990

##### Women's Issues

Convention begins March 9, the day immediately following International Women's Day, and the WRC paper on Women's Issues will be debated that evening. We will also present resolutions on prostitution, and a constitutional amendment recommending that the WRC Chair, or her permanent designate, be a member of the Provincial Executive. Up until now, the POW representative has sat on the Provincial Executive, but with the establishment at Federal Convention of Councils of Federal Ridings throughout the country, the POW representative will now sit as a member of that body.

##### Being a delegate

Let me encourage all of you to stand for election as delegates to the 1990 convention. Many of you have taken part in regional conferences,



and have clear ideas about issues that are important to your region. This conference is the lead up to an election campaign after which, if there is any justice under the sun, we should become government. So, the policies which are approved at convention in 1990 will be the policies that will lead us into our first term of government. Be there to be sure that those policies address the needs of women and the needs of people in your region.

At our February Steering Committee meeting, our educational component will focus on being a delegate: we will look at speaking to the assembly, lobbying, and other topics which will help you be an effective delegate.

##### Gender parity/affirmative action

As a result of the Fisher Commission, all the constituencies in the province have been reorganized. One consequence of this has been that new constituencies have had to submit a constitution to the Provincial Executive for approval. At our last convention, we agreed to have equal representation of women and men on all provincial committees. Because there was no provision in that resolution for committees with odd numbers, the WRC brought forward a resolution to the February, 1989, Provincial Council to redefine representation as "a minimum of 50% women, excluding the candidate," in order to solve the problem of unequal numbers. This resolution passed almost unanimously.

Some of the constitutions which

were received by the Constitution, Party and Municipal Affairs Committee did not include the minimum 50% provision. The Constitution, Party and Municipal Affairs Committee approved these constitutions on an interim basis, but decided to ask the constituencies to bring their constitutions into line by the time they selected their delegates for Convention.

At a subsequent Executive meeting, the Executive decided that, unless constituencies met this requirement, they would not be allowed to seat their delegates at Convention. This decision created a great deal of controversy at the December Provincial Council meeting, the upshot of which was that the issue was held over to the Convention for decision.

One of the concerns was that the language approved in February would mean that all members of a constituency executive would be women. We need to make clear to concerned party members that a provision which requires "a minimum of 50% women" does not require any more than that. To elect more than a minimum of 50% women would be entirely at the discretion of the constituency members.

In his parting address to the Federal Convention, Ed Broadbent spoke movingly of the need in our party for affirmative action. He said, for the past 15 years, our party has led the political struggle for women's equality, and went on to comment that affirmative action was not a mere slogan, but rather "the practical application of our strong desire for equality."

What all of us must do, either as delegates or as lobbyists in our own constituencies, is work hard to ensure that, as we go into the 1990s, the B.C. New Democratic Party stands solidly for affirmative action, and that all of our constituencies have, in their constitutions, provision that a minimum of 50% of their executives, excluding the candidate, be women.





## Pearl Myhres - Parksville Qualicum

I am seeking the nomination for the new Parksville Qualicum Constituency because I believe that as a local resident for the past 25 years I understand the concerns of the residents of this area.

My community work with the 4H, Parent-Teachers Association, Business Association and the Vancouver Island Water Districts Association has given me an opportunity to resolve concerns in our community and work with others to find sensible solutions. For the past 10 years I have been a self-employed businesswoman and I feel there is a definite need for the government to recognize the contribution small business makes to our communities throughout B.C.

Since my election to the Regional District of Nanaimo in 1987, I have



worked very hard on several committees. As well, I have been the Regional District Appointee to the District 69 Health Planning Society

and a Trustee on the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital Board. This work has raised my concern about the difficulties faced by the local level of government and the community to communicate our needs in Victoria at the provincial level.

Whether the issue is women's rights, water quality, environment, health care services, education, equal employment opportunities or affordable housing, I believe I will be an effective New Democrat candidate who has a proven record of ability to listen, work hard and be reliable.

Women wishing to contribute to Pearl's campaign can call

757-8555 (Residence)  
757-9422 (Office)



## Environmental Issues: Women's Issues

by Carol Hartwig

Every politician, bureaucrat and businessperson these days is an environmentalist. But without legislated commitments, strong political will to enforce those commitments, and adequate staffing and budgets, the public sees continued resource development without proper environmental protection. The women's movement has at times seemed reluctant to talk of environmental issues, preferring instead to concentrate on women's relationships with other people, with their families, with social services, with government, history, political access and power. But women's relation-

ship to the planet, to their surrounding environment, to the ecosystems which sustain us is not as clearly defined.

Women are active in environmental groups. Two women have achieved national notoriety for their work to protect the forests and wilderness of British Columbia: Colleen McCrory of the Valhalla Society and Vicky Husband of the Sierra Club of Western Canada. But traditionally women's groups have chosen to keep their concerns limited to the more obvious female issues such as access to abortion, childcare, and equal pay.

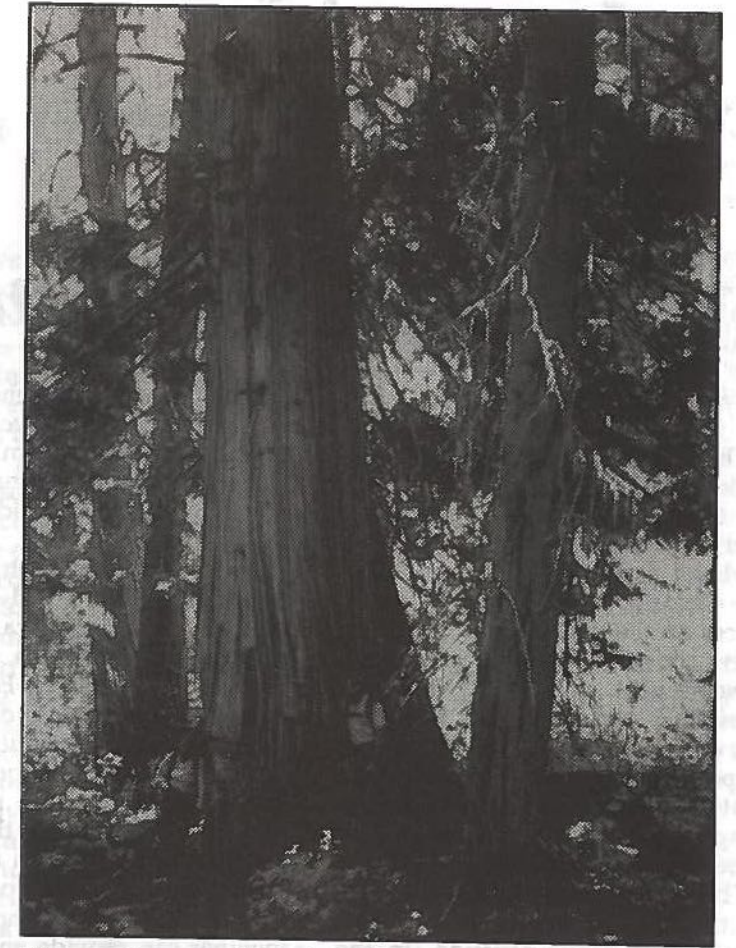
The Bruntland Commission has linked poverty and inequality with

environmental degradation and this news should be of importance to women. Environment is the new measuring stick against which all development and political action will be evaluated. If equality and economic security are going to prevent environmental degradation, there should be additional incentives for the public and politicians to work harder for women's issues.

Whether environmental issues can be used to the advantage of the women's movement, however, is of lesser concern than the fact that environmental degradation has reached a stage where the very lives of women, men, animals and plants

are at stake. Working for equality and economic security may be trimming for a non-existent tree. Without a healthy environment, survival itself becomes the primary issue. It is of utmost importance that women understand the pivotal place environmental protection is occupying and will occupy. This is not a transient fad in the media, it is the issue, around which all other issues will orbit.

Women who have fought social issues on the basis of the rights of people may find this adjustment difficult since it requires some appreciation for other species on an equal basis. To a certain extent one must realize that humans are after all animals whose existence is linked inexorably with and dependent on a complex ecosystem. The components of that ecosystem have an intrinsic value and do not need to be assigned worth because of their value in the eyes of humans. Through this new process of reevaluation, women and men may be able to find the key to living in harmony with their environment.

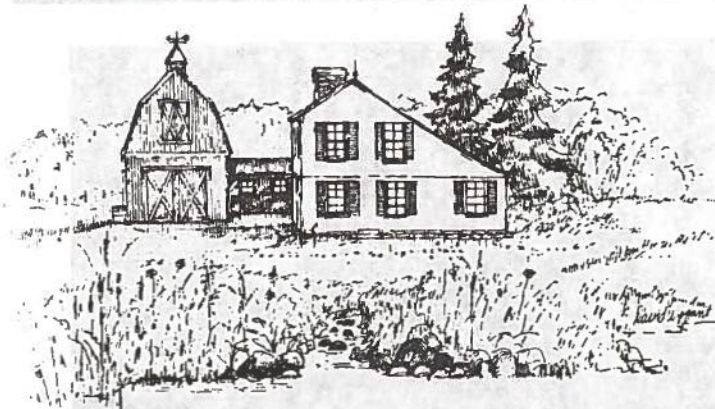


Women and men must investigate their relationship with ecosystems. Forests sustain us, not the other way around. Large cedar and hemlock trees in the interior are becoming more rare and deserve the same attention as the coastal Sitka Spruce. These beautiful examples are found in Hammil Creek in the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy.



Women and men are realizing that environmental protection is vital to their own survival. In September, environmental groups from both the East and West Kootenays met in the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy to talk over the need for protecting the surrounding areas or bufferzones around the Conservancy. Only through protection of the buffer areas can the Conservancy maintain its wildlife populations and ecosystems.





by Sheilah Thompson

## Our Common Future

The Brundtland Report was published in 1987, and its influence on the thinking of people — politicians and citizens — is steadily growing. Perhaps its greatest contribution is the linking together of the many forces on the planet that we tend to view separately: militarism, urban development, pollution, population growth, poverty, and so forth. By viewing these holistically, the Report is able to create a context that enables the ordinary reader to grapple with problems that otherwise seem overwhelming.

There are criticisms one can level at the Report, particularly at its overly optimistic attitude (in the opinion of many critics) to the idea of growth and the meaning of "sustainable development." Nevertheless, it has had a considerable influence on the thinking of many people in the "first" world, and that influence is being translated into concern for the environment in the most basic sense.

David Suzuki is becoming a prophet for this movement. Remember, prophets in the Biblical sense were people crying for justice, and condemning the lifestyles they saw around them. Suzuki is adding a dimension to that role, however. He is also foretelling the future in the manner traditionally expected of prophets, and that picture is one of doom and destruction. His special on "Amazonia: The Road to the End of the Forest" is a shocking chronicle — "the consequences of the destruction of the rain forests are serious, far-reaching and irreversible." The rate of destruction is

almost beyond comprehension, and this situation has developed with financial support from the World Bank and multinational corporations involved in building hydro-megaprojects.

How can we deal with this kind of information and avoid the depression and withdrawal that are natural responses to such overwhelming disaster? Fortunately, Suzuki's documentary does provide some positive models for resistance to the disaster, especially the experiences of some remarkable people cooperating in their opposition to the destruction of the land. Their example is empowering to each of us, showing how working together can provide an antidote to despair and inactivity. Suzuki also asks us to write to him at CBC, and he promises to send suggestions for action.

There are many ways we can all be involved in this struggle for our planet. I appreciate Suzuki's saying our involvement can be/must be local, national and global, and only this holistic approach will enable us to grapple with a problem which at first sight seems overwhelming.

What is required of us is a change in lifestyle, a change in the way we view the world and our place in it. Re-cycling has become fairly widely accepted, but that is only the first edge of the wedge. It involves some work in one's own home, but it also sensitizes each of us to our "garbage" and the problems of waste disposal. Then we become conscious of our community's problems, and the issue of development — and it goes on from there. For once, I see the average citizen, particularly

women, being ahead of the politicians in their awareness of the impact our new approach to the environment will have on nations and international relationships.

Significant economic problems confront us: for example, the apparent struggle between jobs and the environment. Suzuki puts this confrontation on another level of thinking, asking what are the concerns shared by these seeming opponents. I have a hope that women will be a significant influence in bringing about the necessary shift in our thinking, the change to looking at the globe as our home, requiring our care and nourishment and support.

The Brundtland Report says in its introduction:

We live in an era in the history of nations when there is greater need than ever for coordinated political action and responsibility.... Responsibly meeting humanity's goals and aspirations will require the active support of us all.

And the overview to the Commission Report says:

From space we see a small and fragile ball dominated not by human activity and edifice but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery, and soils. Humanity's inability to fit its doings into that pattern is changing planetary systems, fundamentally. Many such changes are accompanied by life-threatening hazards. This new reality, from which there is no escape, must be recognized, and managed.

Are we able to become such managers?

♀

## Towards a Greener Party

by Lynn McDonald

All citizens of planet Earth have to re-think their most basic commitments in the light of the environmental crisis. Women in the NDP, no less, must examine their priorities, whether or not we believe that we, as women, have some special insight into what is good for Mother Earth. A growing literature says that we do. As the prime nurturers of life, women are more tuned into ecology — or perhaps fewer women than men own mining companies, run clear-cut logging operations and manage nuclear reactors. I'd rather not debate that, but get on with considering what we all need to do differently at home, at work, in our local communities, provinces/territories, in the federal government and up to the United Nations and World Bank.

How can we run a resource-based economy on the basis of sustainable development, that is, as originally conceived in the Brundtland Report to mean living off the earth's resources without depleting them for the next generation.

How do we make "reduce, re-use and re-cycle" a reality from a slogan? What incentives and what prohibitions do we need?

Some things we need to do are relatively easy and obvious; we know what the problem is and solutions for it are available at modest cost. All that is required is political will and citizen gumption. Significant re-cycling is an example, meaning reducing municipal waste by, say 80%. Yet, while citizens are keen and municipalities desperate, the necessary infrastructure has yet to be put in place: separation of garbage at pick-up and depots for sorting, tax incentives and regulations to promote the use of re-cycled materials over newly manufactured. To move from the token re-cycling now done to a real onslaught on the mounds of garbage will require no less than a national strategy, with suitable provincial/territorial and local components.

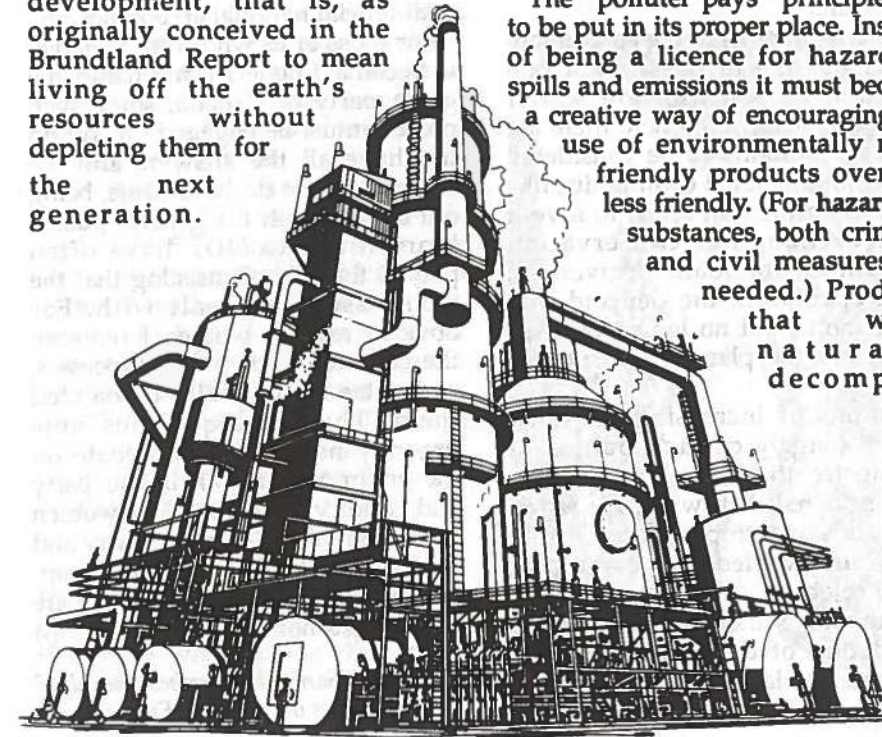
The "polluter pays" principle has to be put in its proper place. Instead of being a licence for hazardous spills and emissions it must become a creative way of encouraging the use of environmentally more friendly products over the less friendly. (For hazardous substances, both criminal and civil measures are needed.) Products that won't naturally decompose

take up storage space as permanent garbage and their cost should reflect the rental of this space. Products made of non-renewable resources deplete a resource for which substitutes will have to be found in the future, and their cost should reflect this additional (if impossible to compute accurately) expense. Consumers are willing to pay more for environmentally dubious products, like guilty smokers who want to quit and actually welcome tax increases on cigarettes.

The greenhouse effect is a much more difficult issue, especially for the gas-guzzling, fuel-wasting society we are, and the one next door to which we export. We know that we use twice the energy per person that comparable industrial European countries use... without being twice as happy or prosperous. We know we must sharply reduce our consumption of fossil fuels, preferably by switching to renewable sources and using energy more efficiently. Yet our own party routinely opposes price increases for fossil fuels and continues to support the subsidization of fossil fuel "development."

A new environmentally benign energy policy for Canada must include the phase-out of nuclear energy along with a shift to renewable sources and energy efficiency. We must not allow the nuclear industry to pose the alternatives as dirty coal with acid rain and greenhouse effect or clean, safe nuclear. We must cease exports of nuclear technology to countries no more able than we are to dispose of radioactive wastes, quite apart from any risks of Candu plutonium going into nuclear weapons.

For New Democrats, it has been too easy to blame big corporations or capitalism for our environmental woes. Unhappy examples of





plunder for profit indeed abound, but where are the better, socialist, alternatives? Certainly the experience of the Soviet bloc countries has been dismal. Soviet environmentalists explain that "fulfilling the plan" overrides protection of the environment as much as the drive for a better bottom line does here. In industries where pollutants can be trapped, re-processed and sold, there is no financial incentive to do so in the Soviet systems. Hazardous emissions go on, escaping through the cracks between different ministries. In the nuclear industry, safety standards are routinely sacrificed for lower costs. At Chernobyl there was not only operator failure but poor design and the violation of siting requirements to avoid contamination of major waterways. And, though some plans for reactors have been cancelled, the government's pro-nuclear program goes ahead.

Pro-environment demonstrations are still brutally broken up by the police in the Soviet Union and ecologists thrown in jail. Soviet ecologists call for "ecoglasnost," but still see prison more than perestroika.

Should these blatant abuses be corrected — and let's hope they will be — there yet remains a theoretical barrier to better environmental practices in any society using Marxist economics. Ironically, this occurs because Marx was not enough of a materialist! In his development of the labour theory of value, only social, human labour added value: what came with creation, the natural resources themselves, was literally without value. One result of this is that no cost is attributed to clean water in the Soviet Union, for no social labour went into producing it. Declining supplies of (relatively) clean water are accordingly wasted and Soviet lakes are as polluted as Lake Erie.

The social democratic approach, of course, has been different, but also not without its problems. The successful social democracies of western Europe have been as committed to economic growth as any

capitalist could wish. As the redistribution of income and wealth ceased to be a goal of socialist parties, growth became the only means to better the lot of a country's poorest members. Social democratic governments have presided over the pillaging of the environmental capital of future generations as selfishly as liberal and conservative governments. The current struggles over sustainable development within the B.C. New Democratic Party show just how difficult an issue this is for all of us.

Some social democratic parties have learned the errors of their ways, changed their policies, and even gained support as a result. Sweden, the country with the longest-lasting socialist government in the world, reversed its pro-nuclear policy after concerted pressure from environmentalists, desertions to a smaller, greener, party and a national referendum. Sweden is now phasing out its nuclear reactors — relatively safe ones at that — and doing the research needed for safe alternatives, like tidal power. Even more boldly, perhaps, Sweden has banned factory farming, giving farm animals rights, as it were, to occupational health and safety, if not a longer life.

Experts differ as to the consequences of the loss of the tropical rain forest: some scenarios are scarier than others. Yet, even here there are creative solutions to be considered by the international community, like purchasing the rain forest to save it and exchanging conservation guarantees for loan forgiveness, quite apart from the demand that international aid no longer be used to destroy the planet's life support systems.

Options of increasing our own forests (largely cut and burned in the nineteenth century) have also to be considered. Yet, while we wring our hands over tropical forest depletion, our own federal government has rejected the Brundtland Commission's more modest recommendation of designating 12% of our national lands for conservation

or wilderness protection. Preposterously, the Minister of the Environment has argued that Canada is too large a country to make this commitment: evidently smaller countries with denser populations have more land to spare.

On the really difficult issues of economic and population growth, our rights relative to those of other animals and habitats, I would not presume to know the answers. At least we can admit that these questions must be confronted, both within the party and society at large. One typically Canadian way of proceeding would be to establish a royal commission on the environment and lifestyle changes. Its mandate would not be to delay regulatory changes, clean-up or any other initiative, but to launch a public debate on the next steps needed for planetary survival. Hearings across the country would become forums for local discussions. In preparing briefs for presentation, voluntary and professional organizations, churches and unions, parents, industry leaders and experts would have to think through their own positions. Undoubtedly some good new ideas would emerge, and local actions need not wait official national acceptance.

For those of us who want the NDP to become, in effect if not name, the green party of Canada, some such process must be engaged on. We do not have all the answers and we risk, where we do have some, being out of step with the general public. Women in the NDP have often played the role of insisting that the basic issues be dealt with. For obvious reasons women have seen the need for open public processes, and often successfully demanded them. These are qualities now urgently needed in the debate on the environment both in the party and country at large. Many women are already there — in the party and environmental groups in the community. Those not yet involved are encouraged not to delay. □

(Donna Sanford describes the NDP Green Caucus on page 13. Ed.)

## PMS: A Review

by Ray Edney

A few years ago I attended a lecture on Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) given by an eminent doctor (of the female variety) from a Vancouver hospital. At this lecture I listened to young women saying such things as: "When I go off my PMS medication my boyfriend really notices that I get angry a lot." And "When I have PMS I'm just a bitch and I can't seem to control my emotions." I have a lot of trouble with these kind of self-blaming statements, and I hear the old adages about women not expressing anger or strong emotions echoing behind them.

As a counsellor who works primarily with women, and as a feminist activist, I know there are a lot of things for women to be angry about. I also know how hard we work at being "in control" and not being "bitchy," even when the situation warrants it. Needless to say, I left the lecture feeling that PMS is just another method of rationalizing away the existence of real emotions, and of blaming women for their feelings. In other words, it is something else that women have "wrong" with them.

It's interesting that we seem to have come a full circle with the advent of PMS. Twenty years ago, we were asserting that menstruation does not render us incapable of carrying out jobs and leading a normal life. Indeed, I personally fought to get questions about dysmenorrhoea (painful periods) taken off an application form for teachers, and won. By that time people were beginning to recognize that women are not governed by their menstrual cycles, and to assume that it may affect their ability to perform was unfair. What I now fear is happening is that PMS will become the "problem" that menstruation once was,

and the catch-all for every little mishap or failing.

That said, I do not claim that PMS does not exist, or that it does not have some pretty extreme effects on some women. But I think it is important that a suspicion of PMS be very carefully analyzed, and that it not be used as an excuse to avoid dealing with other issues and concerns. Further it is most important that PMS not be used to keep women out of the fire department or from becoming pilots, for example.

The journal *In Control* is designed to reach and support women who are suffering from PMS and to spread the word about this syndrome. It offers critical literature reviews and suggestions for self-help remedies. It also tends, like any other recent discovery, to offer generalized and superficial diagnostic devices which allow us all to believe that we have PMS. To quote from the newsletter:

*In Control* is a support newsletter



written for all women, especially those living with premenstrual syndrome (PMS)... the physical, emotional and behavioral changes that occur several days to weeks before a woman's menstrual period that escalate to a level of severity that disrupts daily life. Common symptoms include fatigue, depression, mood swings, abdominal bloating, headaches, anxiety, decreased concentration, clumsiness, breast swelling and tenderness, crying spells, hostility, irritability, and increased appetite.

Since PMS changes are normal, *In Control* favours the term stressful premenstrual changes.

Having included all women in its definition, this publication does allow that not all of these symptoms mean that we have PMS. Through an all-consuming charting process (there is even a "handy purse-size pull-out chart to easily keep track of your entire cycle"), we can determine if certain symptoms (which range from increased oil in your hair or skin, to anxiety and depression) occur only premenstrually or if they are generalized. The trouble is, if the premenstrual period can be weeks long, it's difficult to determine what is not premenstrual.

To be fair, the charting procedure is designed to separate premenstrual syndrome from problems and issues that need to be dealt with in other ways. Also, the author allows that anger and emotional venting that is expressed premenstrually should not be dismissed and may well have roots in unsatisfying situations in women's lives.

The other major section of this newsletter dealt with self-help strategies, designed to help us "take control" of our bodies and PMS. Why was I not surprised that this section focussed on diet and fitness? Somehow, whenever women need to take control of their lives, it



involves dieting and self-abnegation. Depending on the type of PMS you have, the suggested "women's diet" disallows caffeine, dairy products and eggs, chocolate, sugar, alcohol, beef, pork and lamb, and salt or high sodium foods. Good luck having any fun that way!

Once again, I should say that I'm sure healthy eating habits contribute to general health. But the problem with dieting is that it focusses the responsibility for the illness and the cure on the individual, so that when we fail and our problems are not solved we only have ourselves to blame. There is no doubt that the kind of food that is easily available and heavily advertized in the mass media is not as healthy as the natural diets we ate on the farm or in the caves. But let's not blame ourselves for that. Let's put at least as much effort into pressuring food producers to develop and promote healthier food as we do on ourselves to exercise perfect self-control in an uncontrollable situation.

Likewise with fitness and exercise. The editor of this newsletter

describes how she used to run every day at 7:00 a.m. while her husband fed the baby before he went to work. As the baby got older her husband put the baby in a baby seat and bicycled alongside her as she jogged. I guess if you have a husband who is perfect this plan may work. I have been a faithful exerciser for seven years now. But I know I have only been able to keep up this schedule because I have no children and my work schedule is flexible. For many women, time to exercise is a luxury that simply does not fit into their schedule. Again, I do believe that exercise is a good idea. What I object to is the self-blame that occurs when we cannot find the time for it. The next issue of *In Control* promises to focus on vitamins. If you can afford them, this may be a less demanding way to help deal with PMS.

*In Control* takes issue with the "patronizing and useless" advice that doctors have given women with PMS for so long. The philosophy is that premenstrual changes are natural and should be

accepted and dealt with accordingly:

By providing women with the latest information from journal searches, the pros and cons of existing treatments, what is proven or not, *In Control* can help women make informed decisions.

I believe that this goal is a valid one, and that any time women cooperate to take control away from male-dominated and patronizing medical establishments, the outcome can only favour us. My concern is that in so doing we do not individualize or privatize the problem to such an extent that women are left feeling ineffective and responsible for their own demise when they fail to maintain control.

Further, while I know that PMS is a serious issue, I am concerned that it not become the latest fad catch-all that excuses ineffectiveness and double-standards for women. While this newsletter is important, I cannot help but feel that it should have a limited circulation if it is only to go to those of us who have PMS or may work with women who do.



## The Bursting of the File

Excerpt from Sonia Johnson's,  
From Housewife to Heretic

All day and all night, as long as we are sentient beings, each of us is bombarded constantly by stimuli, countless bits of information that register upon us though we deal consciously with only a few. In fact, we have to be very selective about which and how many we actually acknowledge or we would soon be overwhelmed. So we select from this immense smorgasbord of continually accumulating data only those bits we need to appear sane and reasonable to our friends, and we file the other bits away for future reference or for oblivion. But though we consciously deal with only a minute portion of the incoming data, the experts tell us that we never lose any of it. So what we have, in effect, each of us, is miles and miles of underground corridors full of filing cabinets in which we busily file away mountains of data every day.

Somewhere in these endless subterranean storage cabinets, women have a unique file entitled "What it means to be female in a male world," and from the moment we are born female and a voice says "It's a girl," we begin dropping pieces of data into it. For some women, this file is readily accessible; they can look into it whenever they wish, and it often offers its contents to them spontaneously. For still others, this file opens only infrequently and is so threatening that it is quickly closed, though the owner knows and remembers what she has glimpsed there. There are all degrees of awareness and willingness to cope with this file until at the other end of the continuum are women like the woman I was, traditional women, deeply male-oriented and patriarchal in our view of the world and ourselves. Our file is



From *Housewife to Heretic*  
By Sonia Johnson  
Published by Wildfire Books

buried deep, deep under all the others, and our defenses against its content intruding themselves upon us of a sudden are inordinately powerful. We, more than other women, fear the knowledge that file contains, so much so that even when we are forced to look, we deny what we have seen, we distort the data to make it fit the myth patriarchy teaches women to live, and we thrust the file deeper, down into the bottom corridor and underneath stacks of files we never open. No matter. This subterfuge does not fool our unconscious sorter. Data about being female under male rule still drops at an alarming rate into that file, and the file grows fuller and fuller — there is so much data! — until the seams begin to crack. We reinforce them frantically.



Finally, however, no matter how strong that file — and patriarchal women have almost bionic files — there comes along the one piece of data that breaks it wide open.

Not everyone responds identically to the bursting of the file. Women who have no faith in themselves, who are totally dependent upon the approval of both patriarchal men and women — as is classically the case in fundamentalist church settings — and those whose feelings of self worth have been almost totally crushed, these women must still deny what their now open file tells them is the truth, they must distort reality so much that they become ill: emotionally, physically, and morally. Not facing their file data is a way to self-destruction, which women choose more or less deliberately rather than face the implications. Depressed women, women with psychogenic illnesses — backaches, headaches, chronic fatigue — these women are still acceptable to their institutions. Even insane women are more acceptable than free women.

The woman who faces the contents of her file chooses the way to health, inner strength, and peace. This woman — and she is multiplying until one day she will fill the earth — is a threat to patriarchy because she has faced and accepted the great secret whose discovery is taboo: *women are oppressed and have been since the dawn of recorded history.* This is the knowledge women hide from themselves in that file, and would often rather die, or at least live miserable half-lives, than know. Because to know is to be in danger of having to do something about it, of having to *be*, and patriarchy trains women to believe that they cannot *be* except through men and male institutions; only through patriarchy. That is the great deception, which keeps women enthralled.

### Why We Oppose Votes For Men

» one

Because a man's place is in the army.

» two

Because no really manly man wants to settle any question otherwise than by fighting about it.

» three

Because if men should adopt peaceable methods women will no longer look up to them.

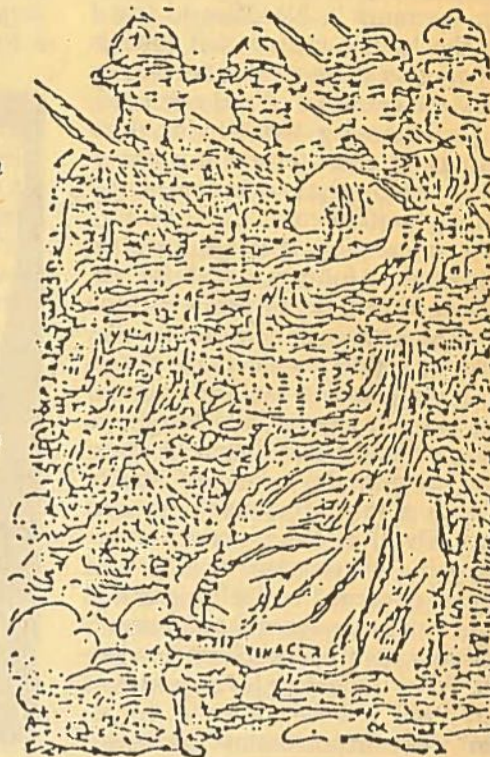
» four

Because men will lose their charm if they step out of their natural sphere and interest themselves in other matters than feats of arms, uniforms and drums.

» five

Because men are too emotional to vote. Their conduct at baseball games and political conventions shows this, while their innate tendency to appeal to force renders them particularly unfit for the task of government.

- Alice Duer Miller, 1913





## AQUELARRE Magazine

AQUELARRE Publications  
(Vancouver, B.C.)  
\$5.00/issue  
\$18.00/4 issues  
40 pages

AQUELARRE Publications is pleased to announce the release of its quarterly magazine. The first of its kind in format and scope, AQUELARRE offers unique insight into the social, political and cultural life of the Latin American women's community in Canada and abroad, while providing a stimulating vehicle of intercultural exchange and discussion around themes that are of particular concern to all women.

AQUELARRE covers a broad spectrum of issues and interests, with interviews, literature, testimonies, essays, humour, reviews and visual art. Its first issue includes: an exclusive interview with novelist Isabel Allende; poetry by Lake Sagaris, a Canadian writer residing in Chile; testimonies by Latin American women residing in Canada; a look with visual artist Claire Kujundzic at her journey through Nicaragua; and much more. The second issue focusses on human rights and the rights of women.

Born out of a desire to examine the elements that shape individual and cultural identities, AQUELARRE has given itself the task of heightening awareness of the many cultures of the Americas. Published in a fully bilingual, Spanish-English edition, it promises to become a vital link between communities at this crucial time of change in North American society.

Please contact the address below for more information or to obtain a review copy.

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A Magazine for Latin American Women

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### 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!)

Please contact Kathy Hill at 584-7346

## The NDP Green Caucus Has No Limits to Growth

by Donna Sanford, Vancouver Point Grey

Donna is a member of the Lower Mainland Green Caucus. She expresses some of her views in this article.

In the spring of 1989, a group of people within the NDP came together to discuss serious concerns about the Party's environmental policy — specifically the collective failure of the NDP to address the fundamental causes and consequences of the collapse of the global environment. It seemed urgent that a forum be created for people in the NDP who see themselves as both socialists and environmentalists, and who believe that the NDP must face the challenge of ecological survival and the economic restructuring that survival demands.

The result of these discussions was the formation of the NDP Green Caucus. The Green Caucus sees itself as a community within the Party — a support and communication network for those who are committed to equity and survival. The Green Caucus differs fundamentally

from other green political movements in B.C. — it brings an explicit socialist perspective to the task of addressing the roots of our current environmental crisis.

The goal of the Green Caucus is to provide a vehicle within the NDP for organizing for survival. Its main objectives are to educate the Party membership about the scope of the environmental problems we face, and to help the Party advance environmental and economic policies that will form the basis of democratic socialism for the next few critical decades.

Interest in the Green Caucus expanded significantly in November at an all-day conference entitled "Socialism and Environmentalism in the 90s." Over 70 New Democrats attended this forum to discuss such fundamental questions as: What is ecological sustainability? Are there ecological limits to growth?

Conference participants favoured strengthening and expanding the Green Caucus. Though initially based in the Lower Mainland, two other regional Caucuses have

formed: the Northwest NDP Green Caucus in Smithers and the South Island Green Caucus in Victoria.

Recent meetings have addressed the overall organization and coordination of the Caucus. Our goal is to see active green caucuses in each constituency. Each local caucus should organize and act autonomously, with links among the caucuses for exchanging ideas and information. Membership in the Green Caucus is a simple matter of general agreement with the statement of principles; you are a member if you wish to be a member.

Two committees with a specific environmental focus have been created as formal bodies of the NDP: the Sustainable Development Working Group, and the Environment Standing Committee. Though Green Caucus members participate on both these committees, there is agreement within the Caucus that we must continue to organize around environmental issues as an independent body in the Party whose primary concern is ecological survival.

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