

# PRIORITIES

A  
FEMINIST  
SOCIALIST  
PERSPECTIVE

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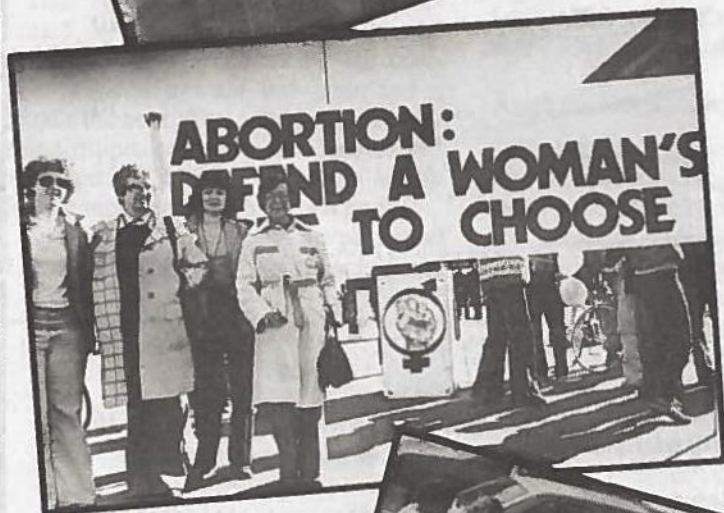


## *Reaching Back to Our Roots:*

*WRC Retrospective*

*Also in this issue:*

- *Refugee Bills*
- *Abortion Rights Struggle Continues*
- *Perspective on Pornography*
- *Update on Chile*
- *Federal NDP Presidents Speak*



Top: Walking for Peace

Bottom: Women March  
for Choice

Right: WRC Workshop  
on Family Law

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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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## Table of Contents

Chairwoman's Report <i>by Adrienne Peacock</i>	1
Equality for Women: New Democrats Lead the Way <i>by Johanna den Hertog, President, Federal NDP</i>	2
Reflections on the Presidency <i>by Marion Dewar</i>	3
Travelling with the A-Team: the Cranbrook Tour <i>by Adrienne Peacock</i>	4
Back to Our Roots <i>by Nonni Graham</i>	5
Women in Motion: 1971-1975 <i>by Marianne Gilbert</i>	6
"It's Only The Beginning" (sic) <i>by Hilda Thomas</i>	8
An Abortion Clinic for B.C. <i>by Maggie Thompson</i>	10
Rally for Choice	10
Pornography: Women Consult <i>by Ray Edney</i>	11
Perspective on Pornography <i>by Jillian Ridington</i>	11
Health Collective Update <i>by Joy Thompson</i>	14
Visit to Chile <i>by Marie Rodriguez-Jonas</i>	16
Don't Send Refugees Back <i>by Alicia Barsallo</i>	18
Letters	19
NO' XYA' (Our Footprints)	20

Cover: Photos from our past.

## Chairwoman's Report

by Adrienne Peacock

### Gender parity in our ranks—an ongoing issue

Leadership from the Women's Rights Committee at Convention resulted in Convention passing a resolution to ensure gender parity for the provincial executive. But as many women keep saying, the real block is often the difficulty in getting women elected to high profile positions in their own constituencies. Consequently, it was encouraging to see the unanimous support at Provincial Council in June, 1987 for suggestions from the Women's Rights Committee to help realize gender parity in the constituency associations. Council adopted the following recommendation:

That constituencies initiate affirmative action programmes and actively seek out women for executive positions. In particular, the position of Provincial Council Delegate is one where women are often poorly represented.

That those ridings currently represented by a male Provincial Council Delegate consider alternating the position between a male one year and a female the next. Alternation of all executive positions could also be a mechanism to encourage affirmative action where female representation has been poor.

To illustrate our concern, we presented a gender breakdown of provincial con-

stituency table officers. The figures tell the story (Table 1). Women are vastly under-represented as presidents, vice-presidents, and council delegates while women are still holding most of the secretary and membership secretary positions. Clearly this situation must change.

Although there were a few doubters about the benefits of affirmative action, Council did give unanimous support to the suggestions. Several provincial executive members spoke eloquently about the need for this action. Now it is up to us. If you have been thinking about getting involved at the constituency level, now is the time. It's also the time to reach out to women in your constituency and get them on the executive. Experience in constituency associations is critical to preparing women for leadership roles throughout our party. Let's make sure we each do our part to make it happen.

### Regional representation

On another note, the Women's Rights Committee has decided to tackle the difficult issue of regional representation on the Steering Committee. Consequently, a Task Force on Regional Representation was struck at the September Steering Committee Meeting. The Task Force is to explore how regional representation can be increased and the recommendations will be submitted to the Women's Rights Committee at our first Steering Committee meeting in 1988. The ultimate goal is to produce motions to address the issue of regional representation for consideration of the Women's Caucus at Convention in 1988. If you have concerns, suggestions, etc. mail your comments to the Task Force Chair:



Jane Evans  
R.R.#3, Noble Rd.,  
Armstrong, B.C.  
VOE 1B0  
or phone: 546-8222

Congratulations to the following women who have joined the Women's Rights Committee as Members-at-Large:

Lynda Annibal	Skeena
Sylvia Bishop	Delta
Jane Evans	Shuswap-Revelstoke
Carol Hart	Shuswap-Revelstoke
Nola Miller	North Island
Janice Vichert	Van-Little Mountain
Verna Walsoff	Kamloops
Dee Esak	South Peace

### New home for the New Democrats!

With support for the New Democrats growing every day, the headquarters is forced to grow too. We've left 517 East Broadway and moved to a new and bigger home. You'll find us at:

The B.C. New Democrats,  
#250-3665 Kingsway,  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V5R 5W2

Tel. 430-8600

	% Men	% Women
Presidents	71	29
Vice-Presidents	70	30
Secretaries	17	83
Treasurers	45	55
Council Delegates	65	35
Alternate Council Delegates	70	30
Membership Secretaries	25	75

# Equality for Women: New Democrats Lead the Way

by Johanna den Hertog, President,  
Federal NDP

It is often hard to remember that only three short years ago many in the media and political pundits were predicting the virtual elimination of New Democrats in the 1984 federal election. At about 10% in the polls, we were expected by some to be fighting for our political life.

Of course that did not happen. In fact, in contrast to the Liberals and in spite of what was a Conservative sweep, New Democrats did not suffer any major defeat. On the contrary, we steadily and very markedly picked up support.

Two and a half years later, Ed Broadbent and our caucus of 30 capable MPs have led our party to a firm second all across this country. We have developed new areas of support such as in Quebec, where New Democrats are regularly placing first. For more than a year we



NDP presidents, present and past  
Johanna den Hertog and Marion Dewar

have received the confidence of over 25% of the Canadian population and over the last six months that support has grown another quantum leap. On a national basis New Democrats are being supported by over 35% of those polled.

## NDP gains credibility by raising feminist issues

None of this has happened by accident. The opportunities we are enjoying now are due to the serious way New Democrats have placed issues that matter to average women and men on the Canadian political agenda.

One of those issues is the equality of women. We achieved great things in the forum of the 1984 campaign. In spite of lack of evidence going into the campaign that equality questions were vote-determining issues, we decided that the opportunity for women to have real equality is a political issue.

The practical issues—child care, employment equity or affirmative action, pensions and many more—*did* become part of that campaign and debated by all the parties, thanks to New Democrat leadership. The other essential ingredient, the involvement of women in the political process itself, was a measuring stick of our party's integrity and progressiveness.

Now, just one or two years away from another election, we again have the responsibility to lead on equality issues. As the newly-elected national president and as a woman I am particularly conscious of this.

## Putting our women in power

One way that we can

win greater equality is in increasing the number of New Democratic women in elected office. Marion Dewar, our past president, ensured that we made this a key party-building element up to 1984.

One challenge will be to far exceed the 65 nominated women that ran as New Democrats in 1984, and to ensure more of the women that run are elected. The three recent victorious by-elections are promising. Two of our three nominated candidates were women: Marion Dewar in Hamilton-Mountain, and Audrey McLaughlin in the Yukon; our candidate in St. John's East, Jack Harris, also faced a very strong challenge for the nomination by a women.

There are other issues regarding candidacy. Why are only 27 out of 282 MPs women? Let us examine the barriers for women candidates.

With almost no exception the women that have until now been elected have been single, or older, or with families that are long grown. Until very recently there was not a woman in the House of Commons who *also* had a family of younger children. Even when we acknowledge that political life is also hard on men, especially if they have children, a quick sociological look at who sits in the House shows that the barriers keeping women from participating are likely to be related to other issues than just lack of money, support, or experience.

## Attitudes and economics shut women out

Twenty years ago young women were still asked by family or friends, "Do you plan on getting married *or* do you intend to start a career?" A very similar choice today is implicitly demanded of women who wish to participate in politics—and this is still ruling out large numbers of women from the political process.

It is totally acceptable in 1987 for women to mix employment and children. But it seems to be unacceptable for women to mix *politics* and children.

The difficulties experienced by women trying to enter politics are exactly those which still prevent so many

women from living the kind of fulfilling lives that we want for everyone.

What do women need? The list is long. Affordable quality childcare. Fairness in employment and education, and affirmative action to correct long-standing imbalances. Legislation to permit parents to share in parenting as well as pension and employment provisions that stop the systemic discrimination that exists for so many women *because* of childrearing. Equal pay for work of equal value. Freedom of reproductive choice. Freedom from violence and sexual exploitation.

## What can New Democrats do?

We need more women New

Democrats running in potentially good seats.

We want more campaign schools, like those that have been held in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Atlantic provinces, to give women interested in candidacy or campaign management the skills and support they require.

We want more financial assistance for women candidates. The Agnes McPhail fund, launched successfully in 1984, is an attempt to recognize the additional financial burdens many women face when running for office, because of childcare costs and lower incomes.

We must ensure that equality issues continue to be placed on the federal political agenda.

Political structures themselves will have to change if we are going to have truly equal participation of women and men in politics. It will be this generation of women who will develop new models to ensure equality on the political level.

It will be an exciting two years! I invite all *Priorities* readers to help through work and money (the two essential New Democrat ingredients!) to make more of these dreams of ours happen in that next campaign, and in the Parliament thereafter. ♀

# Reflections on the Presidency

by Marion Dewar

Redesigning power, strategizing for openness, inclusion and trust. Such was my motivation as I acceded to the presidency of our federal New Democratic Party in June, 1985. What is the significance of my two years at the helm of the ship and what are the challenges facing my successor, Johanna den Hertog?

As a result of wide popular support within our party for broad-based openness as well as general support in the community, it seems we have indeed entered a period of critical transition and maturation. The Canadian political scene is shifting and in the process our federal party is challenged to develop realistic and progressive alternatives for Canada today. The current debates on free trade and tax reform are excellent examples of our party's ability to define appropriate solutions for this country.

I have striven to act as a medium for a new model which this process of growth entails. Inspired by firmly founded feminist values, I have tried to promote sharing over control and change over the status quo. How?

- By supporting the entry of more women as candidates and as elected members to positions of authority within our committee structure.
- By implementing measures to increase our capacity to function as a fully bilingual organization.

- By reaching out to our grass roots.
- By encouraging committee members to be active and to fully accept the responsibility which they have been delegated by party structure.
- By promoting the flow of information within the party and broad consultation on the development of policy and internal guidelines. It has been important to keep my colleagues on council and on the executive informed of the members' views. (This was not always done satisfactorily and avenues of communication should be developed.)

## Structure is political

Structure can be designed to be inclusive or exclusive. We can choose the vulnerability of openness and thereby give ourselves fresh infusions of stimulating ideas, or we can choose to keep control by means of an impermeable structure and survive on stagnant rhetoric. My choice was to open the party to ordinary people. This meant travelling, attending nomination meetings, annual meetings, women's workshops, peace conferences, activities



on university campuses, economic development seminars. I sat at kitchen tables and in church halls. We asked for ideas, for involvement. We encouraged people to actively participate in the democratic process. Hundreds, indeed thousands of capable New Democrats who were eager to be informed and included in the definition of policies and structures came forward.

## Thinking nationally

This approach was seen by some as "rocking the boat." My choice was to foster a strong and active federal party. As frequently occurs when growth takes place, events have somewhat preceded our internal structural maturation. The New Democratic Party has achieved strong national acceptance. Now we must ensure that our structures and modes of operation do justice to this reality.

Concretely, the funding of the federal party must be solidified with each section willingly accepting its responsibility for the financial health of the federation. No formula (several have been tried)

will work unless each member of this party makes a decision to think nationally. Already, we have begun to assess the internal management of the federal party in an effort to maximize our resources. The Policy Review Committee's Forum 2000 provided an exceptional opportunity for all members of the party to participate and have input into developing policy, while also garnering information to be used at home.

### The strength of the NDP lies in its grass roots

It is important to remind ourselves that the New Democratic Party has traditionally been anchored in openness through

its conventions and council. Over the years however we sometimes have become distracted by the gruelling daily demands of political life. Sometimes we have neglected to organize and deliver services to our own grass roots, to whom we are accountable. Those ordinary women and men who believe in peace, in justice, and in honest hard work, have been the breath and blood of our party. No one must ever use his or her position of authority within the party to claim superiority over our broad membership.

As our strength increases on the federal scene, so too does the diversity within our ranks. This is a sign of health and permanence. Throughout my

presidency, I was prompted by a belief in the need for greater links among the many organizations and communities across Canada. A framework of carefully planned strategies to facilitate this networking is critically important.

The great reward of my presidency has been meeting and sharing with ordinary Canadians. Throughout, I sought to fully share that sense of unison with the party officials and staff as well as to work hard to inform our members of our accomplishments as a federal party. Information empowers people. Together we will create a society based upon dignity, peace and love. ♀

## Travelling with the A-Team: the Cranbrook Tour

by Adrienne Peacock

Outreach is a major focus for the Women's Rights Committee this fall. On Sept 18, 1987, I travelled with the five women MLAs and our women's organizer, Vicki Robinson, to a Women's Conference in Cranbrook. Anne Edwards, MLA for Kootenay and unofficial host for the tour, is clearly very popular with Kootenay women. The Conference consisted of five workshops led by our MLAs with a plenary session following and a wrap-up. Women came from all over the Kootenays, from Fernie to Nelson, about 60 women in all.

Everyone seemed to agree that the afternoon meeting at the Women's Centre in Cranbrook was the highlight of Friday. Women travelled from Elkford, Nelson, Golden, Trail and Fernie to discuss their centres, funding problems and share strategies. Vicki made many useful links for the Women's Rights Committee.

At the Conference on Saturday the energy in the room was palpable. Women came to discuss their issues, and the crowd represented a political cross-section. The workshop topics included:

### Pay Equity

Joan Smallwood, MLA Surrey—

Guildford—Whalley, led this workshop and discussed our progress and problems in drafting a pay equity bill for B.C. We shared information about pay equity. All agreed that it's an important component of economic equality for women. One participant, Gail Simpson, was particularly eloquent on why pay equity alone is not enough. She emphasized the different opportunities between urban and rural areas and the very real need to get money to those who need it most.

### Young Women

Darlene Marzari, MLA Vancouver—Point Grey, discussed the concerns of young women in this workshop. Educa-



tion and especially access to education emerged as a focus. "When they wiped out the university (David Thompson University in Nelson), they wiped out our hope". Just the physical presence of a post-secondary institution allows young people to feel they can attend university if they want to. Moving to the Lower Mainland to go to school, particularly for the first couple of years, is a real barrier.

### Job Training

In this workshop Anita Hagen, MLA New Westminster, explored the issues and problems of job training for women. With the workshop participants, Anita attempted to find some solutions. The importance of role models was emphasized. Solutions included workshops in high schools and young women's groups, pay equity, adequate childcare and political involvement on school boards.

### Women In Small Business

Anne Edwards, MLA Kootenays, led the discussion on the role played by women in creating small businesses and the consequent employment it brings. Some of the difficulties women face were discussed, including a lack of access to capital, lack of childcare, access to

education, among others. The pros and cons of privatization elicited an fascinating exchange as some participants described their experience as consultants in some of the social services which have already been contracted out. Everyone with this experience agreed that service deteriorates, wages are inadequate yet money is wasted.

### Women and Politics

Lois Boone, MLA Prince George, shared some of her experiences in this workshop on women in politics. An increasing number of Canadian women are

getting involved in politics yet they still face many difficulties unique to women. For example, women often have more difficulty than men in raising campaign money and home responsibilities are often greater. The workshop proposed some practical tips for women considering seeking a nomination.

During the plenary, I outlined the work of the Women's Rights Committee, historically and present. I discussed the importance of gender parity in the NDP, our work on pay equity and the B.C. Coalition for Abortion Clinics. Several women, at the close of the conference, expressed their concern about the issue

of reproductive rights and support for the Coalition.

In spite of discussions on the many problem areas for women, the conference ended with a positive commitment to work to improve conditions for women. It was a very upbeat conference made possible by many able and energetic women. I came away with a much better understanding of the problems and concerns of women from the regions and even more impressed with the incredible talent and commitment of our five women MLAs. ♀

## Back to Our Roots

by Nonni Graham

I first became active in the B.C. NDP as a worker in the Margaret Birrell campaign for the provincial leadership. After that convention my interests led me in other directions until I was approached to become active in the Women's Rights Committee. At the 1985 convention I became Secretary of the Table Officers.

When I was asked to make this presentation about the years since 1985 I wrestled with it for some time, feeling that, because I had made a concentrated

effort to record the minutes of all meetings scrupulously, I rarely had a opportunity to participate fully. I felt I had little "history" with the B.C. NDP or the Women's Rights Committee. This realization awakened me to the fact that this was the very reason for the Educational. We were all there to rediscover the roots of this committee, to acquaint ourselves with the philosophy of the Kamloops Manifesto, and understand within ourselves what was necessary then, and what is necessary now. It is important for us to know why the struggle is worth continuing and how we can plan together for success in our endeavours in the coming years.

Issues are important. Their resolution determines the fabric of our society as a whole. Even so, issues of the day come, are resolved or not and change as new problems present themselves. What remains constant as the years roll on is our philosophy and commitment. This forms the basis of why we feel as we do about issues that confront us. It is the reason we set about to tackle the workload co-operatively, why when we have little energy left we find some, and when we feel discouraged by turns of events we look for the positives.

Upon reflection, we see that this committee stems from strong political idealism. This is our history and our heritage—one of which we can be proud. Its legacy to us is strength. We know—we can be a powerful influence in shaping a more just society. ♀



W R C

### RETROSPECTIVE

On Saturday, September 26, the NDP Women's Rights Committee held an education day to look back at more than 20 years of women's history in the WRC. Women reviewed the past accomplishments and experiences of those in the WRC with a view to examining future goals and directions.

Speakers included many of those who were instrumental in forming the committee as well as more recent participants. On the panel were Marianne Gilbert, the first chairwoman of the WRC; Hilda Thomas, past editor of *Priorities*; Margaret Birrell, past women's organizer; Nonni Graham, a recent WRC secretary; and Sharon Yandle, now on the executive of the provincial NDP.

The following articles are excerpts from the presentations of three of the main speakers. Sharon Yandle's examination of the Kamloops Manifesto will appear in our next issue.



Nonni Graham: WRC meeting

# Women in Motion: 1971-1975

by Marianne Gilbert

Marianne Gilbert was the first chairwoman of the NDP Standing Committee on Women's Rights. The following article was given as a speech by Marianne at the WRC's Education Day.

There were many women active in the Party prior to the '70s, women who accepted and supported those of us who came on the scene out of the anti-war, civil rights, student and left movements of the '60s. What sparked our involvement was the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. That report was released on September 28, 1970, after about two and a half years of hearings. The Commission heard 468 briefs in 14 cities in 10 provinces. There were 167 recommendations: 107 federal and 35 provincial.

Grace McInnis, M.P. for Vancouver Kingsway, was one of the first to commend the commission and urge the government to implement the recommendations. On March 28, 1971, largely due to the initiative of Eileen Dailley, NDP women were invited to a meeting to "...help Grace in her work." The letter asked us, "What can we do in the New Democratic Party to ensure that our own women participate equally and meaningfully at all levels of the party? Should we be doing anything to educate more women in the community about their

Photo by Hilda Thomas



Grace McInnis, active then and now.

At a 1980 conference to repeal Section 251 of the criminal Code.

rights, their importance and their potential in the political process?"

Not only did we meet, but we started working our butts off. On April 3, 1971, the NDP Standing Committee on Women's Rights was formed. By May 1971 we had a Women's Rights Manual full of resolutions which we fought to have endorsed at the Provincial Convention at Totem Park, U.B.C. Many of those resolutions had also been passed at the constituency level. Women in motion—it's a visual image that best describes the work of NDP women in those early years.

## We "revolutionize" party policy

Our manual covered resolutions in Agriculture, Cultural Affairs and Human Rights, Education, Environment and Pollution, Health, Youth, and twenty resolutions each in Labour and Welfare. Party policy would never be the same! You have to understand that this took incredible effort on the part of the dozen and a half or so women (and two men) who were the official committee at the time, but we continued to pick up support through those summer months. It was an exciting time in the Party—the Left was very active with the Vancouver Area Council organizing and running candidates at the civic level and with the Waffle doing its thing. There was good left representation on some of the policy committees and, more importantly, in leadership roles within the Party. To use an old cliché—a movement was growing.

## The personal is political

There were not a lot of women's groups in 1971; there was the NDP Women's Rights Committee, the (primarily Liberal) Status of Women and the Women's Caucus. The Women's Caucus had been active during the late '60s and raised a lot of issues that the NDP Women's committee adopted, e.g. abortion.

Socialist feminists dominated the NDP committee—the opening line of our 1971 manual read:

Those of us in the New Democratic Party believe that the

solution to the malaise afflicting Canada is SOCIALISM...

Women came into the NDP through the Women's Rights Committee, because they were feminists and were committed to changing the Party. Early on we adopted the slogan The Personal is Political. Many friendships that were formed at that time have remained. We were women striving to live our politics. Other aging feminists who reminisce about that time all say the same thing: WE HAD FUN!

I can't talk about the Women's Committee in the early days without mentioning the excitement the Burrard women felt when we persuaded Rosemary Brown to run for the NDP. She had been Ombudswoman at the Status of Women; we teamed her up with Pat Dodge and they ran against Norm Levi and Ray Parkinson. Brown and Levi won the nomination.

## Priorities is born

In August 1972 the NDP was elected in B.C. and formed the government for the first time. At the November provincial convention, three important resolutions were passed. The first called for the establishment of a Ministry of Women's Rights to be headed by a woman selected in consultation with the NDP Women's Right Committee. The second would ensure provision of funds that would help the committee produce a newsletter for women members of the party. The third would establish editorial control of one page of the *Democrat*.

We began publishing *Priorities* in January 1973 and it has been published continuously ever since. We funded it ourselves for the first 6 years; the Party started contributing in 1979.

There are wonderful stories around those early days of publishing the monthly magazine—long hours of standing at the gestetner with ripped (please will it make 50 more copies) stencils, Melodie threatening the readership every other issue with "Well, this is your last issue of *Priorities* unless you send xxxxx bucks to us immediately," daughters learning feminist teachings as we worked late into the night.

We had great arguments too: this past

week I found a note in one of my old copies of *Priorities* that read "we need a rational approach to the internal party power structure." The flip side of the note reads: "go to Steel...2000 white and it's set aside for us." We were always scrounging paper...

## The NDP In power: Women's Ministry fails to materialize.

Needless to say, the NDP government did not establish the Women's Ministry and much of our effort was devoted to forcing a change in the Barrett government's decision. We saw the problem facing women as a structural one; the fact that we live in a corporate, capitalist society that oppresses us. We therefore advanced the argument that the solution must be structural as well. To fully understand the debate, you should read the little red book published in July 1973, entitled, *The Case for a Ministry of Women's Rights*. (Watch for an article in our next issue.)

Here are a couple of excerpts from the book:

...establishing a Women's Ministry is a political statement that the problems facing women are not accidental flaws in the social fabric but are part and parcel of the whole political and social system. It is a political recognition that there is a thing called sexism—the constant subordination of women in all fields because of their sex—just as there is a thing called racism, and that this discrimina-

tion is so widespread it must be tackled with the same amount of energy and resources that other areas require. Also, a Ministry would have power. Its Minister would be a cabinet minister and have the same access to money, resources and information that other cabinet ministers have."

No commission, ombudswoman or coordinator of women's programs would have the same kind of power or influence. Some said, and say today, that it would ghettoize women—but can you ghettoize half the population? Or as one woman recently said, "At least we'd be together!"

Anyway, it's interesting that the Women's Ministry is not on the political agenda of the Women's Committee of today and was barely mentioned in the B.C. Women's Rights Committee Policy Handbook of May 1985.

## What did we get from the Barrett government?

We got lots of public hearings on what women really want, and we wasted a year trying to get a government committee to meet with us for the purpose of implementing NDP women's rights policy. We participated for a few short months in the Caucus Liaison Committee, meeting for the first time in February 1974 and withdrawing in protest on May 30, 4 months later!

We issued a press release which read:

It is our belief that in its dealing

with this committee, as in its dealing with the NDP Women's Committee and the women's movement as a whole, the government has acted in bad faith. In its actions and legislation over the past four sessions, the government has produced little of consequence affecting women and we have received no indication that it has any intention of doing so in the future.

## The Kamloops Manifesto

On February 21, 1974, Rosemary Brown introduced into the House a Private Member's Bill on Affirmative Action. It was party policy from the November '73 convention! The NDP government was not the least embarrassed—they clearly, at every turn, refused to implement women's rights policy. As they refused, stalled or attempted to pacify us with appointments of women to jobs they created, we grew madder and more determined.

As June 1974 rolled around we met at Capilano College for an NDP Women's Convention Strategy Conference. It was there that we planned to ask all NDP women's groups and individual women to submit only one resolution on women's rights to the upcoming convention. That resolution was to "...be a statement of women's liberation, including all previous resolutions passed since 1970 with the demand that the government implement party policy on women's rights."



Elaine Bernard, Women's Committee activist in the '70s.



Hilda Thomas at the microphone.



Rosemary Brown, an early picture

The headline in the *Vancouver Sun*, dated September 3, 1974, read: Female Fists Hail Convention Victory.

Kamloops: a blizzard of signs appeared on the floor of the NDP convention here Sunday and a small forest of triumphant feminine fists shot into the air. The signs read: "This is just the beginning." The signs and fists erupted seconds after convention chairman Frank Murphy announced that a nine-page resolution on women's rights had been approved by delegates. That resolution became the Kamloops Manifesto.

### Rosemary for Leader

In July 1975, Rosemary ran for federal leader. The whole organization around her campaign is a story in itself. The election went to *four* ballots and Ed Broadbent won 948 votes to Ms. Brown's 658! That was the year Joyce Nash was declared national president, the first woman ever to hold the position of national party president. But even at that time there were people who said that if Joyce Nash had not been elected president, more delegates would have voted for Rosemary Brown. We still had a long way to go... ♀

## "It's Only The Beginning" (sic)

by Hilda Thomas

The adoption of the "Kamloops Manifesto" by a solid two-thirds vote at the 1974 provincial was indeed a moral victory for the Women's Rights Committee, and it gave us a much-needed boost in spirits. That same year the first national NDP women's conference was held in Winnipeg, in fulfillment of a resolution put forward at the 1973 federal convention. The conference

agreed to look for a woman candidate to run for the leadership of the federal party—not a "feminist candidate," as the B.C. delegates proposed, but a candidate who "supported women's rights."

### Openness and accountability: the hallmark of Rosemary Brown's campaign

Rosemary Brown's campaign occupied the attention of many of the

Women's Committee members in the first months of 1975, and it was indeed, in spite of the earlier caution, a feminist campaign. Feminist and socialist principles were emphasized in the campaign literature and in Rosemary's speeches, and this had a considerable impact in making the language and the goals of feminism familiar and acceptable across the country. Rosemary's leadership speech, with its opening "Sisters and Brothers," was one of the high points of the convention, and she received a stunning 40% of the vote on the final ballot.

But perhaps even more important than the platform put forward was the insistence of the Brown campaign on openness and accountability—on a new model of political action. The Brown caucus at the convention was open to all comers, a fact which caused puzzlement in the press and paranoia in the establishment.

### 1975: a downward turn

The last few months of 1975 were not just an anti-climax; they were a disaster. Bill 146 sent striking workers back in direct contravention of party policy. The dark, icy winter streets made canvassing a nightmare that turned into a reality with the defeat of the NDP government. The WRC had been frustrated by the slowness of the Barrett government to implement women's rights policy; the Bennett government fulfilled our worst

fears in record time. Women found themselves fighting to hold on to the slim gains they had made, and watching as the Community Resources Boards were abolished and the Women's Office in Victoria dismantled.

The 1976 convention saw the first steps towards a formal alliance between the Women's Caucus and the organized left in the party—the Open Caucus. This move resulted in a sharp division between those women who "put feminism ahead of socialism" and those who, in the words of the *Kamloops Manifesto*, believed in the "inseparable link between women's liberation and socialism."

In an attempt to deal with this painful and destructive conflict, the Steering Committee drafted a set of guidelines for the 1978 convention. These guidelines, which stressed the importance of democratic decision-making and accountability, served as touchstones in the election of the Steering Committee for the next five years.

### Turning words into action

In spite of the serious internal conflict which plagued the Women's Committee during this period, the process of drafting policy and getting it through conventions had continued. By 1978 the party had policy on almost every issue affecting women. Nevertheless, there was a strong feeling that the passing of resolutions had become merely an empty

ritual. It was unpolitic to vote against women's rights, but neither did anyone in power have to pay more than lip service to the goals of the women's movement. The problem was how to turn words into action.

A conference held in Kamloops in January 1978 did much to heal the divisions within the committee, and to involve women from around the province in developing both strategy and policy. A paper entitled "A Strategy for the Achievement of Sexual Equality" was prepared for the 1978 convention. It contained papers on education, affirmative action, northern and rural women, family and children's law, child care, and sexual harassment.

One immediate result was the establishment of a Task Force on Older Women which, under the direction of the women's organizer, Margaret Birrell, travelled around the province holding hearings and workshops. This task force, which brought in its interim report at the 1979 convention, provided the model for other policy areas in the '80s and did much to consolidate the growing reputation of the Women's Rights Committee as one of the hardest working and most creative groups in the party.

### Was it worth it?

This bare recital conveys no sense of what it was like to be a part of the committee during that joyous and painful decade in which it grew from a half-

formed idea into a full-fledged organization. We laughed a lot. We sat in hotel rooms and cried, exhausted by fruitless struggles and pointless slanders aimed at our best-intentioned efforts. We wrote, edited, typed, printed, and peddled *Priorities*. We worked in elections and spent endless hours in committee meetings. Was it worth it? That question can only be answered by the women who are now carrying on the work of the committee.

Some of the names of the original members need to be recorded: Joyce, Margaret, Marianne, Shelley, Mercia, Cynthia (and Hilda: *ed. note*) and many, many others. The struggle against unequal and sometimes unscrupulous opposition should not be forgotten, for there are lessons to be learned from it. But most important of all, the ideals we fought for, and the bright shape they make against the darkness of a cruel and ugly and violent system—the shape of something loving and human, in spite of all our mistakes—needs to be preserved. Words like "open" and "accountable" and "democratic" are part of it. Collective action is part of it. In the end, though, it means the refusal to be content with anything less than fundamental change: an end to sexism and all the other kinds of oppression and inequality that distort and diminish human lives. ♀

Past Women's Rights Committee members actively defending women.

Photo by Elaine Bernard



Action against Section 251: Dixie Pigeon mailing repeal cards



Mercia Stickney leading a discussion on affirmative action WRC conference 1981



Mercia Stickney and Margaret Birrell: at a hearing of the Task Force on Older Women



Joan Smallwood with Birrell Campaign supporter NDP leadership convention

## An Abortion Clinic for B.C.

by Maggie Thompson

A free-standing abortion clinic is in the making in Vancouver. Since January the B.C. Coalition for Abortion Clinics has been building community support, consulting with groups and individuals and generally laying the groundwork necessary to put a clinic into place.

The groundswell of community support for building a clinic has come from accumulated frustration with the limits on access to abortion under the current legal system. Women are fed up with the delays, the waste, the travel and the patronizing treatment they have to endure to get an abortion in B.C. Women in Vancouver have organized, and together are working towards building a clinic that is sensitive to their needs while being responsive to the community at large.

The Coalition of numerous organizations and individuals is bound by its founding principle: "That the Coalition seek the establishment of women's reproductive health clinics throughout the province, that include abortion services, and that are funded by MSP and that in the interim we establish and support the on-going operation of an abortion clinic in Vancouver and that we

Photo by Janice Ainsworth



At the rally: Jessica Ainsworth

demand this service be funded by MSP."

Women's experience in Ontario and Quebec, as well as in numerous countries around the world, has shown us that abortions done in free-standing clinics are more cost effective, efficient and more sensitive to women's needs than abortions done in and within the hospital system.

On Sunday October 18, the B.C. Coalition for Abortion Clinics (BCCAC) held a march and rally in conjunction with similar actions across Canada. Women joined together in solidarity to demand an end to the harassment of doctors and staff in existing clinics, the repeal of the federal law on abortion, and the immediate establishment of free-standing clinics to ensure safe access to

abortion for all women.

While free-standing clinics have many advantages over hospital based abortion services, governments have consistently refused to include clinic expenses under provincial medical plans. The BCCAC is determined to continue its fight until medically insured, clinic based abortion services are available throughout the province. Why not join us?

For further information, contact

The BCCAC  
Box 66171 Stn. F  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V5N 5L4  
Phone # 873-5455

## Rally for Choice

On October 18, women and men across Canada and Quebec demonstrated for full reproductive rights for women. October 18 marks the day in 1985 when the clinic in St. Therese, Quebec, ceased to perform abortions. This is a reminder that nowhere in Canada are abortion rights secure. From Vancouver to St. Johns, Newfoundland, pro-choice supporters demanded the repeal of the federal law on abortion, an end to harassment of doctors and staff in existing abortion clinics, and the establishment of fully insured free standing abortion clinics to provide access to abortion for all women.

Here in Vancouver, an enthusiastic crowd of about 400 people marched to and rallied at the First United Church at Hastings and Gore. It was standing room only in the crowded auditorium and people warmly cheered the speakers and singers.

Speakers on the program included:

- Robin LeDrew, B.C. Regional Representative from Vernon of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women
- Dr. Ingrid Pacey, spokesperson for Physicians for Choice
- Jackie Ainsworth, BCCAC spokesperson

- Margaret Mitchell, NDP MP for Vancouver East
- Astrid Davidson, B.C. Federation of Labour's Director of Women's Programs
- Linda Ervin, minister of the United Church
- Val Cary, pro-choice activist from Kamloops

Hilda Thomas made a rousing pitch for funds and raised over \$1,300. While the collection was going on, Hilda taught us the song "The Friends of the Fetus." Also appearing on the program were the Top Twins from New Zealand, a real bonus for the rally. This indomitable duo delighted the audience by singing politically sensitive and funny feminist songs. They even yodelled for choice!

Lastly, two members of the Euphoniously Feminist Quintet led participants in the singing of "Fight Back," a well-known Holly Near song.

This action was timely and inspiring for all of us who made it out to reaffirm our strong commitment to reproductive choice for women. ♀

## Pornography: Women Consult

by Ray Edney

At the invitation of the Vancouver Coalition Against Pornography a number of feminist women's groups met together on May 30 to discuss pornography and what to do about it. About 20 women attended representing groups including: the Coalition for the Right to View, Women in Focus, WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women), the B.C. Periodical Review Board, the BCTF Status of Women Committee, the Liberal Party, the Progressive Conservatives, and myself from the NDP Women's Rights Committee.

The focus and purpose of the day was to identify areas of agreement and to hopefully develop a common front in dealing with pornography. It was very encouraging and gratifying to hear the optimism and positive views voiced in the standard round of introductions.

The day started with some examples of sexually explicit material which we attempted to rate in terms of its potential harm to people. As could be expected, we had trouble making personal decisions about the material, let alone coming to any kind of consensus in small groups. We also saw some examples of material which has been, or could be, stopped by Canada Customs under the code. Every one of us agreed

that this material is not at all harmful but rather is positive and educational in nature.

In the afternoon we got down to the nitty-gritty of attempting to define pornography and the issues around it. This discussion needs more than the hour or so that we had. We frequently disagreed, but we also found some common

ground.

One of the areas we felt that we could work on constructively as a group was Bill C-54, "An Act to Amend the Criminal Code on the regulation of pornography."

The following is an analysis of the legislation by Jillian Riddington.



Are we closer to a solution?

Shelley Rivkin chairing pornography panel, 1983.

## Perspective on Pornography

by Jillian Riddington

This article is adapted with permission from the *Legal Services Bulletin, Legal Services Society, 1987.*

The control of pornography is one of the most difficult issues for Canadians to agree upon. It makes us uncomfortable by forcing us to address our attitudes towards sex, violence and inequality. If restrictions are deemed advisable, different forms of regulation must be considered. Only government bodies, with the power of law to back them up, can truly censor material. Other forms of

regulation, including "self-regulation" by makers, distributors, or citizens' advisory boards, can also be employed.

### History of the debate

At one time, concerns about "obscenity" focussed on explicit literature, like *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. Most Canadians now would oppose any attempt to restrict such erotic literature. Yet pornography remains a controversial social issue. Over the last decade, concern about the increased availability of violent pornography has led to demands for stronger legislation and restricted ac-

cess, to boycotts, and even to bombings.

Those who do not follow the issue closely may see evidence of a new puritanism. Certainly, sexually explicit material is not new; "dirty postcards" and erotic literature have been available for eons. The Canadian public generally has a "live and let live" attitude towards erotic material; they may not like it, but they are perfectly willing to let their neighbours have it. But when people see material which combines sex with violence or coercion, their opinion often changes. Those active in the debate refer to such material as "pornography," and

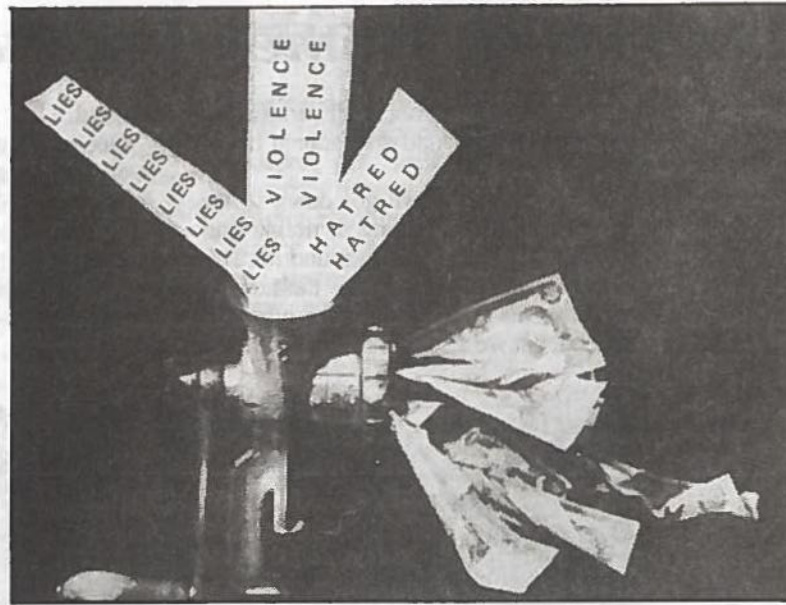
distinguish it from "erotica."

### Pornography becoming more violent

Public concerns have increased because the material has become more explicit and more violent, and available in a far wider variety of forms. When *Playboy*, the first of the modern "adult sophisticate" magazines, came on the market in 1953, it did not show overt sexual behaviour, and it did not contain violent images or language. But *Playboy's* success and high profits brought about a flood of imitators whose content became more graphic and aggressive as competition increased.

New "hard-core" magazines pushed the limits of acceptable community standards. With the increase in competition, the traditional "soft-core" market suffered. In an effort to regain sales, the publishers have hardened their content. *Playboy* featured a pictorial with a subtle bondage theme in its October, 1986, issue—the first time in more than 30 years of publication that it has shown such images.

Pornography is available in media which did not exist in 1959, when the current Criminal Code provisions were legislated. New technologies—video cassette recorders, satellite television, computers with modems, phone message services, and video games—can carry sexually explicit and often dehumanizing images or words. These technologies are more profitable than movies and magazines, and much harder to control. Satellite television comes across the border without going through Customs. Regulating access to satellite TV would require an international agreement; this is unlikely in today's political climate. British Columbia now classifies all "adult" films and videotapes which are publicly shown or rented, but it remains easy to smuggle videotapes across the border, and to copy them for exchange or sale.



### Should we be concerned?

Proponents of regulation point out that the reported rates of child sexual abuse, wife battering and rape have increased dramatically over the period that pornography has proliferated. There are many reasons for this. An increase in police response and support services affects rates of reporting; high unemployment and economic recession increase wife battering and child abuse.

But the easy availability of violent pornography may also be a factor. Numerous studies indicate that the viewing of material linking sex with aggression can create dangerous behaviour and attitudes. Many of these studies have been done in laboratory settings, with only university students as subjects, but the body of research is voluminous, and the conclusions consistent. Further, the research bears out evidence given by victims of the violence perpetrated by users of pornography.

### Is the state capable of a 'sensible' approach?

Civil libertarians believe that only pornography whose manufacture involves children, or causes actual harm to the participants, should be restricted. They fear that any further regulation may lead to suppression of books, plays and works of art. Members of the gay community point out that any restriction on freedom of expression has always impacted most heavily on material aimed at a gay

audience. Artists are strongly opposed to any limitations on their right to explore sexual themes. Actors share their views, but are also concerned that members of their profession may be coerced into participating in acts which exploit their sexuality.

Some recent case law seems to demonstrate that the current Criminal Code provision could limit violent pornography if it were carefully enforced and sensible interpreted. These decisions recognized that the majority of Canadians today are willing to allow the expression of a variety of sexual be-

haviours—so long as no element of cruelty or violence is present. However, judgements are inconsistent. In the past year, a magazine judged "obscene" in Ontario has been found not to violate community standards in Manitoba. Clearly, clarification is needed.

### Bill C-54: rigid and confusing

On May 4, 1987, Justice Minister Raymond Hnatyshyn tabled Bill C-54, an Act to amend the Criminal Code and other Acts in consequence thereof. Critics have found Bill C-54 to be more clearly drafted than Bill C-114 (the bill presented by John Crosbie in 1986, which died on the order paper when Parliament prorogued later that year), but still problematic. Bill C-54 is very specific, and presumably would eliminate the current "community standards" test for judging "undue exploitation." Current case law could become obsolete, and judges and juries would be bound by the law's rigid wording. C-54 attempts to distinguish between "erotica" and "pornography," but limited the definition of "erotica" to displays of nude sex organs "in a sexual context or for the purpose of sexual stimulation." Consensual non-violent sexual activities involving adults are listed under "pornography," and visual depictions would be forbidden. This would decrease the restrictions currently impacting on "gay" magazines, by allowing textual descriptions of anal sex, but would distinguish

between "erotica" and other non-violent, sexually explicit material. This contravenes the findings of the Fraser Committee, and does not reflect the views of most Canadians.

Depictions of sexual conduct involving persons under 18 or involving actual or attempted bodily harm, sexually violent conduct, and material showing degrading acts (bondage, defecation and the like), bestiality, or necrophilia are also defined as "pornography," and "any matter or commercial communication that incites, promotes, encourages or advocates" such conduct would be illegal. Here, the bill loses rigidity, but becomes confusing. No interpretation of "any matter or commercial communication that incites, promotes, encourages or advocates" is given. These words will have to be interpreted by the courts, a process which may take several years.

### Literature could fall victim to Bill C-54

The wording may have been intended to create distinctions between pornography and literature which includes sexual themes, but that might not prove to be its effect. It is possible that detailed descriptions of child sexual abuse in a "sophisticate" magazine could be legal, if followed by a statement of remorse, while memoirs of adolescent explorations would be "pornographic." Many works of art could also offend. Bill C-54 states that a court may find an accused "not guilty" if "artistic merit" or "educational, scientific or medical purpose" is established. However, these defenses are not available to charges involving "kiddy porn" or material involving actual or attempted bodily harm. No means of determining the merit of artistic works is suggested, and the onus of proof is on the artist. It is possible that established artists and writers could prove their innocence, but art students and unknown writers could not.

As proposed, Bill C-54 and Bill C-114 would both add "sex" to the characteristics of identifiable groups covered by hate literature legislation. However, the requirement for the consent of the Attorney General, and the word "wilfully" would not be removed. The Crown would have to prove that the accused intended to promote hatred—not an easy task.

### How can we judge what is pornography?

As Chair of the B.C. Periodical Review Board, I conduct regular, detailed examinations of "sophisticate" magazines. I am convinced that context, and acknowledgement of the maker's intent, are of primary importance in judging whether or not material is pornographic. In my view, the law should specify that intent and context should be considered in all cases, prior to the laying of charges, and during litigation. Case law currently distinguishes between "sophisticate" magazines and novels; the latter are viewed on a page-by-page basis, while books are considered as complete works. Such distinctions should be specified in legislation, to prevent the possibility that erotic literature could be banned. I am in favour of regulating abusive pornog-



raphy—but I oppose restrictions on other sexually oriented material. I hope that Bill C-54 will be amended to provide an effective means of dealing with pornography in all forms of the media, while allowing artists freedom to express sexual themes, book dealers the right to possess and distribute erotic literature, and adults who wish to use explicit erotic material the right to do so. ♀

## Vancouver Lesbian Connection

Vancouver Lesbian Centre  
876 Commercial Drive

### Legal clinic

Ruth Lea Taylor is holding a legal advice clinic on the last Saturday of each month between 9 a.m. and noon. Any woman needing legal advice is welcome. This is a free service.

### Young lesbians

A Young Lesbian Support and Social Group is meeting every second and third Friday of the month, 7:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Drop in fee is \$2. For more information, phone 254-8458.

### Workshops

The VLC is sponsoring six workshops on Lesbians and the Law starting October 19 and running the 3rd Monday of every month (except December), 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Issues being addressed will include: child custody, wills, human rights. Free.

### Fundraiser

The VLC Coffeehouse is holding a dance and auction at Talk of the Town, 23 W. Cordova, November 28, 8 p.m. Cost \$4-\$6.



# Health Collective Update

by Joy Thompson

For an organization that faced a major setback when we lost our core funding in 1983, we at the Vancouver Women's Health Collective feel we have flown in the face of that attempt by the provincial government to marginalize our services.

This is why.

As of May 1987 we have 13 paid workers. They are all hired on short term contracts, an unfortunate reality of no core funding; very few of the positions last for more than six months. We also have a core of highly committed unpaid workers who are involved in every aspect of the Collective, from working on grant projects to working shifts helping to keep our information centre open.

As for the last 15 years, we continue to provide free health information and counselling services to women. Furthermore we have expanded. More and more we are responding to women's health concerns as they arise. We have become involved in coordinated political actions that address major health problems women have experienced through the inadequacies of law makers, pharmaceutical companies, government policies and, at times, medical proce-

dures or lack of them.

We are active with both D.E.S. Action Canada, Dalkon Shield Action Canada and the Canadian Coalition on Depo Provera. The Vancouver chapters of these lobby, pressure and educational organizations operate out of the Health Collective.

## D.E.S. Action Canada

D.E.S. Action Canada held its nationally coordinated Awareness week in April. We participated by drawing attention to the issue through the media and showing the film "D.E.S. An Uncertain Legacy." The response from the public was overwhelming. Women who were prescribed the drug during their pregnancies and women who were exposed before birth held up our phone lines for days, reconfirming our sense that more information is desperately needed. We are now focusing on maintaining public awareness, assisting women with self help tools to identify whether they were exposed and establishing ongoing support groups. These groups will provide women with the support they need to cope with health issues they will live with for the rest of their lives; issues

such as infertility, repeated miscarriage, the uncertainty of related health problems arising in later life and the increased risks of developing a rare form of cancer.

## Dalkon Shield Action Canada

To literally add insult to injury, Canadian women who were fitted with the Dalkon Shield, an intrauterine device, have to face a double jeopardy. A.H. Robins, the manufacturer of this faulty device, has received a special kind of bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Act. This protection allows the company to keep making money but prevents creditors (including hundreds of thousands of Dalkon Shield claimants) from getting a cent of compensation until Robins and the court come to an agreement on how the settlements will be paid. The wheels of justice turn slowly, and now over a year since having to file claims for compensation, Canadian women still have many questions.

Some of the kinds of questions we are asked are:

- How do I know if I have used a Dalkon Shield?
- How do I get my medical records?
- Do I need a Lawyer?
- I have suffered with chronic Pelvic Inflammatory Disease for 8 years. Could this be related to the Dalkon Shield I wore for two years 10 years ago?

We give women the information they need to file a claim and health information regarding the disastrous effects this I.U.D. has had on their bodies.

The Health Collective along with the Winnipeg Women's Health Clinic has filed independent legal action in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, requesting the court to extend the deadline for filing a claim against Robins.

We will not accept any ruling that denies these women the compensation they are due.

## Canadian Coalition on Depo Provera

This cross country Coalition is doing all it can to prevent Depo Provera, a long

acting, injectable, synthetic hormone from being given approval as a birth control method in Canada. Health and Welfare have been considering its approval for some time, despite the fact that Upjohn, the manufacturer, has been denied approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration three times. Depo Provera is an extremely controversial drug and if approved will certainly put Canadian women at increased risk for many long-term health problems.

## Workshops

We continue to run self help workshops for women in the Lower Mainland and other communities in B.C. The topics we presently offer are: Menopause, Birth Control and P.M.S. We are also developing a workshop and resources on a topic many women struggle with in these difficult times, stress.

## Publications

The publications we offer are sold by mail order and over the counter. More potent and often more useful than the usual "remedies" sold women over the counter for profit. Many of these publications we have researched and written ourselves. One we are particularly please with, "A Feminist Approach to Pap Tests," is one of the only health books solely dedicated to pap smears and cervical cancer. It gives in depth details on issues such as alternative treatment, what to ask your doctor and facing the fears about an abnormal test result. We have sold this book to women's groups and individuals as far afield as India and Britain.

We are committed to participating in B.C.'s progressive health movement. We are very involved in the B.C. Coalition for Abortion Clinics which is currently working towards establishing free standing, fully insured reproductive health service for women in the province. The B.C. Health Coalition also provides us with an opportunity to work in partnership with other concerned organizations and individuals. Some of the broader health issues we are concerned about are the lack of universal access to medical care created by user fees, the extra expense of pharmacy costs that seniors now face, and opposing Bill C.1.22.

## Canadian Women's Health Network

The Health Collective is one of a number of women's health groups across the country that are working hard to establish a Canadian Women's Health Network. Many women's health care activists agree that Canadian women need to develop a coordinated cross country response to the critical health issues facing us. The Dalkon Shield, D.E.S. and Depo Provera are obvious current examples.

The Network's primary goal has been identified as the effective sharing of information about:

- particular women's health issues
- programmes and services
- resources being produced and already available
- funding sources
- media relations
- public education campaigns.

The Network's first planning meeting was held in Toronto in February of this year, a follow-up meeting is to be held this June. Women representing groups from every region in the country and from a wide range of interest groups attended. The *Federation de Quebec pour le planning des naissaries*, the Disabled Women's Network, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada and the Indian and Inuit Nurses of Canada were some of the twenty-two groups present.

## Women's Reproductive Health Project

The most recent long term project we have begun is a Reproductive Health project focusing on four topics: miscarriage, infertility, fertility awareness and control, and menstrual problems. This project is exciting and different in two ways. Firstly we are reaching women we have not been able to reach recently, low income women and native women. Secondly, the women who are experiencing these health problems in their lives are an integral part of the project. We are in the process of visiting 6 communities in western Canada to ask women what their experiences are and what they need. We will be returning to these communities in the spring of next year to present a series of workshops. We will also run a training course so that women can facilitate their own

workshops and ongoing support groups after our funding is depleted.

We will be sending drafts of our resources for women to read and return to us with their ideas and concerns to be incorporated. Self help workshops and resources, written and researched by the eventual users, most certainly turns the traditional approach to women's health, that of consumers of a product, on its head.

## Immigrant Women's Health Project

The Health Collective is aware of the lack of resources available for immigrant women in the area of health care. Along with the lack of direct services offered to immigrant women, frequently they do not speak English, and/or come from countries where medical information is scarce and unreliable.

In the fall of 1986, we obtained funding from the Secretary of State Women's Program and the Department of Immigration to begin a health education program for immigrant women. The program has two main objectives: to form an Immigrant Women's Health Committee and to write five short medical fact sheets that are to be translated into Chinese, Spanish and basic English.

The Vancouver Immigrant Women's Health Committee was formed in the first month of the project. The women on it are mostly Chinese and Spanish speaking as their input is particularly needed to ensure that the papers are culturally sensitive. The committee has assisted in selecting topics for the medical fact sheets and has met with community members to assess the papers that are being written by the Health Collective.

The Health Collective workers (who are also immigrants) met with many immigrant groups to find out what health issues they would like to see addressed and the final choices were: birth control, stress, correct use of medication, Pap smears and sexually transmitted diseases.

This project is a very minor step in making health information available to immigrant women. Much remains to be done both in education and in direct service. The Immigrant Women's Health Committee, in consultation with the immigrant groups has decided that follow-up educational work is required in the



Women of Vancouver Women's Health Collective at work.

form of workshops in the five topic areas selected. Members of the Health Collective are committed to developing workshops with immigrant women who will then present them in their communities. Such work will include more groups than the Latin American and Chinese communities that are presently involved.

With the Health Collective's expansion we face the challenging task of maintaining a non-hierarchical service and creating a truly supportive and equal

environment for all women who come into contact with us. The way we work together, and who we are as individual women, women united by our common health concerns, reflects on the quality and style of us as an employer and service provider. A health service where the users and providers are not separate but united. Hence a Women's Health Collective which is not marginal but community based, responsive, active and effective. ♀

## Visit to Chile

by Marie Rodriguez-Jonas

Marie Rodriguez-Jonas is General Secretary of Socialist International and a Member of Socialist International Women

*Mujeres por la Vida*, (Women for Life) is a multi-party organization including independent women and feminist organizations, which invited Socialist International Women, through Radical Women, to be represented in Santiago on International Women's Day, March 8. The SIW Executive decided that Marie Rodriguez-Jonas should attend. While in Chile, she was able to move about the country and talk to people about the conditions of their lives.

### Chilean squatters brutally repressed

We travelled to the *toma* Pincoya. *Toma* means the taking of land by homeless people who then try to build housing for themselves. This is the last existing *toma*. On January 8, two hundred families attempted to settle there. After raids by special police units, 42 families remained and are still living there. "Houses" consisting of a single room are built with plywood and each accommodates a large number of people (10 adults and 8 children in one case). Water must be brought from taps in the nearby *población* (poor district) and there is no sanitation.

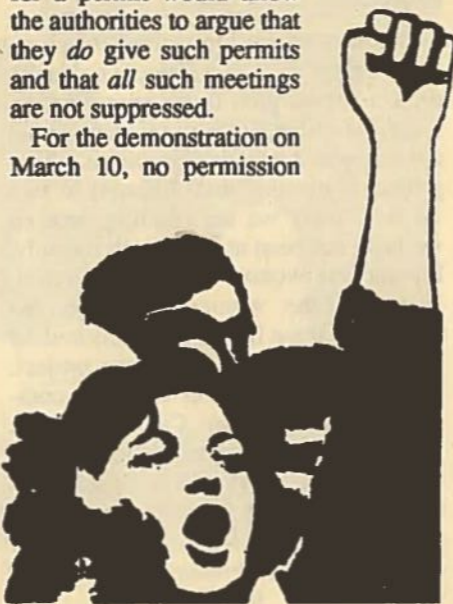
In the adjoining *población*, we were invited to a meeting where we watched a video of three women giving testimonies of their husbands' experience of torture

and suffering as political prisoners. An exhibition of photos of political prisoners was shown in the rooms surrounding a courtyard. This meeting was organized by young people from 16 upwards.

### Public gatherings must be registered

People from the surrounding neighbourhoods came, in spite of fears that the police could intervene on the pretext that it was an unregistered public meeting. Whether or not such meetings should be registered with the authorities was the subject of much discussion by the women. There was a feeling that a cultural gathering should not be subject to a special permit and also that application for a permit would allow the authorities to argue that they *do* give such permits and that *all* such meetings are not suppressed.

For the demonstration on March 10, no permission



was sought, since in all the years only once was such a public gathering permitted.

In the evening, we went to a *peña* (folk venue) and listened to singers and a woman poet. I was introduced and the chanting of anti-Pinochet slogans was so loud that the owner of the *peña* asked those present to refrain from such a noisy expression of their feelings. The particular rhythm of hand-clapping is known to the police patrolling the streets and there could have been a violent reaction, endangering the event planned for the 10th.

### Education in Chile

On March 8, I met two feminists who work for the Casa Morada. They train women to become trainers, and so on—a snowball system. Their courses were aimed at:

- women in ghettos
- students and housewives
- trade unionists and domestic employees.

The courses include the history of the women's movement, women's rights, contraception and other women's issues. They also give legal advice. The two women emphasized the importance of their work with students, as these are the first generation educated under military rule. There is learning through discussion on issues of democracy. Access to radio stations provides the possibility of going public with their work. Feminists identify themselves with the opposition. They are truly political and are perceived as part of the fight for democratization.

Talks with teachers who had been fired showed the plight of those known to oppose the regime. Those teachers able to get work receive extremely low pay (43,000 pesos per month, as compared with 80,000 pesos received by municipal clerks). The regime argues that numbers of children are decreasing and therefore fewer teachers are needed. This is not true. The reality is that great numbers of children have to support their unemployed parents with small jobs like street-vending and therefore are not attending school. Even so, there is an average of 45 children per class and the dictatorship has no interest in raising standards of education by employing more teachers.

### A visit to a poor ghetto

I visited the *población* of La Victoria, a model for its good organization. It is headed by a woman, Blanca, of the *Comando de Mujeres*. They had made many preparations for Women's Day, including the painting of wall slogans and pictures, a march, rallies and exhibitions about political prisoners and delinquency (a consequence of unemployment).

Blanca's husband is a political prisoner and has served 5 years of a 21 year sentence. Political prisoners can be visited twice a week for three hours by a limited number of family members. Time for security checks on entering and leaving is taken out of the three hours allowed.

There are frequent police raids on the *población*. Arrests are made and houses and furniture destroyed. People, unarmed and peaceful, have been shot on their doorsteps and in their houses. When a 19-year old boy who was shot in such circumstances, his fiancée starved herself to death over the following eight months.

#### Women in Focus

205-456 W. Broadway, Vancouver

Women Art and the Periphery/Mujer Arte y Periferia, an exhibition of multimedia work by 13 Chilean artists, opens at the Floating Curatorial Gallery at Women in Focus November 11 at 8 p.m. through December 19. Chilean artists-curators Diamela Eltit, Nelly Richard and Lotty Rosenfeld will come from Chile to co-curate the show.

These 13 artists will be exhibiting together for the first time in Canada. The artists include internationally known painters plus photographic, video and literary artists. This work blends European cultural discourse with the realities of daily life in Chile under the often brutal military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

For further information, contact:

Donna Clark  
Curatorial Assistant  
872-2250

La Victoria has 36,000 inhabitants. 75% are unemployed. A state system of work for heads of families provides menial work for wages of 260 pesos per month (US\$15). Men are loaded onto lorries like cattle and sent to work cleaning toilets, gardening, doing housework for the rich, etc. The soup kitchen feeds 350 daily at a cost of US\$20.

Here too, we learned about the "bone-circle." A former political prisoner who now has a butcher's shop gives bones for the soup kitchen. After being used for stock, the bones are cleaned and sent to political prisoners who carve tiny doves for pendants and earrings which are sold. The money goes back to the soup kitchen.

Blanca summed up their work, "We are fighting for life."

### Chilean exiles and political prisoners

On March 9, we visited the Vicaría de Solidaridad. Several activists told us that the list of 300 exiles not allowed to return to Chile may be reduced.

#### Other events:

November 26, 8 p.m.  
Women Writing in Chile  
\$3 under employed & members, \$4 employed

December 10, 8 p.m.  
Walking Tour of Works with curators

#### At the Video In

1160 Hamilton, Vancouver  
688-4336

November 21 and 22, 9 p.m.  
Video Screenings: Recent Video Art by Chilean Women  
\$3 under employed & members, \$4 employed

December 5, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Workshop: Women and Art in Chile  
\$5 under employed & members, \$6 employed

#### At La Quena Coffeehouse

1111 Commercial Drive

December 3, 7:30 p.m.  
Feminism and Politics in Chile  
\$3 under employed & members, \$4 employed

However, many of these have by now taken the citizenship of their countries of exile and their names will simply be transferred to the list of "undesirable foreigners." The Vicaría estimates that there are 200,000 political refugees from Chile (40-45,000 heads of households, the average household being 5 persons) and a further 1 million "economic refugees" who left their country because they saw no future.

In 1984, 1,000 exiles returned, 537 in 1985 and 540 in 1986. The returned exiles face discrimination. They must pay very heavy duties on belongings bought abroad, their qualifications are not recognized, and they have great difficulty finding any work. They run a personal security risk. They were described as still being "exiles in their own country."

The present number of political prisoners is 500, of whom 30 are women. The regime does not admit to the existence of any political prisoners. 14 have been executed, 2 of them women. Political prisoners are not given fair trials. Often their lawyers are not informed of their trials.

All are tortured. On March 9, 12 prisoners had been on hunger strike for 12 days. Most of them had been incommunicado for the last 34 days. I had the impression that suicide starvation was the only weapon they had.

### Women build new headquarters

We visited the new house of MEMCH 83 (The Movement of the Emancipation of Chilean Women) which was to be officially opened. Women painters will paint frescoes on the walls. About 16 organizations will have their offices there. It is planned to have a library/reading room, a kindergarten, a data bank, two rooms for training. Financing comes from Chilean women in exile and one training course is supported by the European Economic Community. The building will also house a pharmacy, a surgery for a gynaecologist and a psychologist. Other groups working from the house will include the *Por Retorno* organization and an organization for the disappeared. Paulina Weber described it as a place where all women can go to work and learn together, the "expression of a dream."

## Chilean women: militant and unified

Later, Radical Women gathered for a farewell dinner, where women responsible for different areas explained their work. There is a principle that Radical Women should work actively both in the party and in a social organization, trade union, feminist organization or similar group ("double militancy").

Since I had to leave for the airport early in the demonstration, my participation was limited. Also foreign delegates were asked to refrain from any actions and to withdraw when requested by the

Chilean women entrusted with the protection of each one of us.

We could see that people were already suffering the effects of tear gas. We saw water cannons, a massive police presence, and arrest lorries. The police strategy was to make any gathering of women quite impossible. I saw that members of the public were supportive of the demonstrators. The presence of diplomats' cars (in which we rode) is also understood as a positive sign of observation and interest in the events.

Women of all political parties and from other organizations can and do

cooperate in opposing the regime and working for democracy. This unity is sincere and real.

The courage shown by the women was moving and heartening. They expressed gratitude to women from abroad for their risk and sacrifice in joining Chilean women on International Women's Day. I could only stress that it was they who were courageous and daily making sacrifices in their struggle for survival under a menacing dictatorship in a brutal police state. ♀

## Don't Send Refugees Back

by Alicia Barsallo

The proposed bills C-55 and C-84 are a frontal attack on refugees, because they practically ensure the rejection of 80% of all applications for refuge in Canada. Bill C-55 places the fate of all refugee claimants in the hands of two appointed government officials who would have the power to turn back any applicants they deemed to be illegitimate, with no right to a full hearing or to appeal. And Bill C-84 orders the detention of refugees who do not have proper identification documents and sets fines and prison sentences for those helping refugees to enter Canada if the government judges that they do not have the proper documents.

But these bills are not only an attack

on refugees. They are also an attack on all of us. The government that whipped up the racist hysteria around the arrival of the Sikh refugees on a boat is the same government which recently used violent strike-breakers during the letter carriers' strike; it is the same government which has turned a blind eye to the death of a worker as a result of police violence in Quebec, and the same government some of whose members are now talking about taxing food with no regard for the growing numbers of poverty-stricken people in this country.

It is no accident either that the Vander Zalm government supports the bills. This support only reaffirms the direction this government wanted to take when, in the wake of last July's province-wide

general strike, it called for an injunction on the grounds that *any opposition to the government's laws is seditious*.

The tactics of the powerful in this country are clearly *divide and rule*. If bills C-55 and C-84 pass, refugees will continue to enter Canada because they have no other choice. However, they will be here illegally and working for starvation wages. Immigrants will continue to be blamed for unemployment and will be increasingly intimidated into being silent about controversial political issues. Finally, society's tolerance of the violation of the human rights of refugees and immigrants will make it much easier for the government to attack anyone who does not agree with it.

The Coalition for Justice for Refugees and Immigrants was formed to go against the tide and to fight back. Two successful actions have been held: a rally on September 5 and a public debate on October 24. The Coalition needs your support to continue organizing for just legislation. Join us! ♀

For further information, phone:

The Vancouver Society on Immigrant Women  
731-9108

The Committee for Racial Justice  
738-7711

Alicia Barsallo  
879-3246

### Oppose These Bills

**Bill C-55** takes away the right of refugees to have their claims heard and denies refugees access to a fair hearing.

**Bill C-55** gives two government officials the power to arbitrarily turn refugees away at the port of entry.

**Bill C-55** automatically rejects refugees who are returnable to a so-called "safe country"—no country is safe for everyone.

**Bill C-55** does not allow for an appeal based on merit.

**Bill C-55** does not provide for an independent body responsible for refugee claims.

**Bill C-84** violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by instituting the right of the government to impose a 28-day detention of refugees without review by the court.

**Bill C-84** fines and imprisons persons helping refugees come into Canada.

## Letters

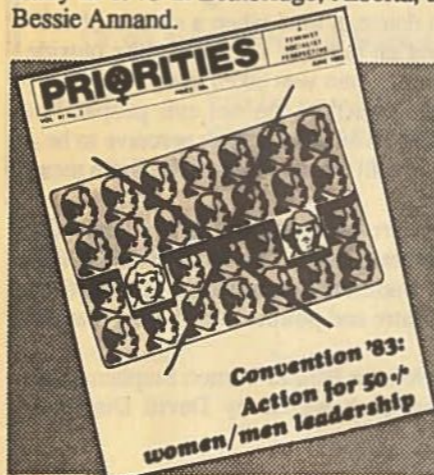
### Priorities,

Greetings, dear friends and supporters of women's struggles!

I urge you, as a supporter of women's rights, to take action immediately on the following suggestions in order to ensure gender parity in our party. First, and I think critically important, formulate two resolutions, one to change your provincial NDP constitution and the other to change our federal NDP constitution so that they require that one-half of the "winnable" seats, both provincial and federal, in your province have female NDP candidates, and one-half of the "unwinnable" seats have male NDP candidates. Then pledge yourself to work untiringly for the NDP candidate in your riding, regardless of whether the candidate is female or male.

I am convinced that women will always be "stonewalled" out of positions of power, that is, out of elected positions in the provincial legislatures and the federal parliament unless we take positive steps right now to change the situation by changing our NDP constitutions.

The stonewalling happens in two ways: first, in most provinces there has been, up to now, very little chance of NDP candidates being elected; hence women there have had no trouble winning the NDP nomination in practically any riding. "Just get in there and slug it out, lady... You didn't win? Too bad you weren't in Saskatchewan." Sound familiar? That's what was said to me when I ran federally in 1974 and provincially in 1975 in Lethbridge, Alberta, as Bessie Annand.



Gender parity: an ongoing issue

Second, in a province like Saskatchewan, where the NDP will likely form the government after the next provincial election, it is EXTREMELY difficult for a woman to win against males running for the nomination in those seats where it is practically impossible for the NDP to lose. I, and a number of other very well-qualified women who have tried to get such nominations, can attest to the truth of the above statement.

Hence, women are stonewalled out of positions of power. This situation exists I believe because of the thoughtless prejudices of many men who think that only men are fit to hold positions of responsibility, and by women who agree with these men. "Women should be kept in their place, you know!" Our place happens to be as MLAs and MPs!

The same thing is true federally. Now that New Democrats are stronger federally, women will be stonewalled out of being candidates in winnable federal seats if New Democrats do not make constitutional provisions to ensure that women are candidates in at least one-half of the winnable ridings.

Women must be assured of these nominations. Once the assurance is there, many well-qualified women who are committed to social democratic principles will come forward to hotly contest the nominations in the female-designated constituencies. May the best woman win!

Just look at our federal NDP executive! Aren't you proud? I am. And haven't we prospered beyond our

wildest dreams with a woman as our president? And furthermore, won't we continue to prosper? I think so.

I believe that in Quebec, NDP women have an "understanding" that there, half the candidates in winnable seats will be women. Would Quebec people who receive this letter please tell me if that is correct and send me the details of your "arrangement," which I understand is an informal arrangement. If you have not already done so, I urge you to formalize this arrangement by having constitutional provisions for it.

In Iceland, I understand, the women got so frustrated waiting to be given equal access to elected positions by the "old" parties that they formed their own "Women's Party"; we don't really want that to happen in Canada, but it is an alternative.

Remember, we did not have one male and one female councillor from each NDP provincial riding association, nor gender parity on the NDP federal council, until NDP constitutions required it. We must move on elected equality for women!

"From little acorns (of ideas) do mighty oaks (of fellowship) grow."

Yours sincerely,  
Bessie Ellis,  
Regina West delegate  
NDP Federal Convention, 1987

Contact Bessie Ellis at:  
10 - 9 Shaw Street,  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
S4R 3M5

### Dear Sisters:

Well, I have had every intention of communicating with you regularly and have even had a couple of letters drafted up and ready to be sent out. However, with everything that has been happening here in the Yukon the letters always seem to be out of date before they get sent off.

The major news here, of course, is the election of Audrey McLaughlin as the Yukon's first New Democrat member of Parliament. This is something that everyone up here is still very thrilled

about. Audrey managed to win over what had been, in the past, a very strong Tory machine and the Liberal mayor of Whitehorse, a "holistic" doctor with sizable followings in the outlying communities. That she won was a tribute both to her hard work and to the fact that we were the only party that really talked about policies. And Ed's visit didn't hurt either.

Audrey's victory was especially sweet for women in the Territory as she had originally been tagged as the "feminist" candidate who was beholden to women's

groups for her victory in the nomination race. It was predicted that these "special interest" groups would be a liability in the actual campaign. Certainly, it was true that Audrey's nomination campaign was spearheaded by women.

They organized fund raising, publicity, speechwriting, etc. And after Audrey won the nomination, these women were willing to use their skills in the actual election campaign. However, Audrey was also able to draw on her background as a community activist to show that the interests of "minorities" such as women, native people, environmentalists, the handicapped, are really interests that all of us share.

From the start we tried to make sure that our campaign team had gender parity and although this is difficult in a region in which men outnumber women, we did a very good job of it. As well as our candidate, the campaign manager, official agent, co-chair and E-day coordinator were all women. We also made a real effort to include members of the native community on our team and their input was invaluable. Although the makeup of our campaign team was not the norm, it worked well. And how can you argue with success?

Our women's committee has basically been in abeyance during the election but we hope to really get going in the near future. We have a major problem in the Yukon in that it is the same women who make up most of the various women's groups. You see the same faces at the Status of Women meetings as you see at CLOW, CRIAW, the Women's Centre and so on. So many women who are involved in the Yukon N.D.P. are plain old burned out and the thought of more meetings to go to is a real turn-off. To get around this, we've started having "no-pressure" meetings in which there isn't an organized agenda or assigned tasks. Instead, we are having primarily social evenings at which we can discuss the way we wish to see the party developing. We try to plan the evening around a central theme though, so that there is some focus to the evening. We hope to show the N.F.B. film *A Love Affair With Politics: a Portrait of Marion Dewar* at such an evening in the near future.

*Yours in Sisterhood,  
Lesley McCullough*

Headlines Theatre Co.

## NO' XYA' (Our Footprints)

Always on top of the news, Headlines Theatre responds quickly to community issues, changing with the times to put its plays in the public eye at just the right moment.



**NO' XYA'**  
**(OUR FOOTPRINTS)**  
A PLAY ABOUT ANCESTRAL LAND

NO'XYA' (Our Footprints), Headlines' co-production with the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council, is in tune with Canadians' growing concern about Aboriginal issues and the increasing relevance of Native land claims to all of our lives.

NO'XYA' (Our Footprints) opened in Kispiox, B.C. on September 9 at the Kispiox Community Hall. This performance was quite a celebration, a very special event in Canadian theatre history.

Fifty-four Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs are suing the provincial and federal governments in the B.C. Supreme Court for recognition of their people's right to ownership of their ancestral lands. The first six weeks of trial took place in Smithers, in Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en territory, during May and June. Chief Justice Allan McEachern, presiding over the

case, in his good judgement decided afterwards that his comfort and the convenience of the Court were more important than the right of tribal elders to witness the trial within their own territory, and declared that the case would reconvene in Vancouver rather than Smithers.

Another blow came from the federal government, which mysteriously withheld from the Tribal Council over a million dollars of funding that was promised to help with the enormous costs the hereditary chiefs are facing in their battle. (A million dollars is not a lot compared to the billions of dollars' worth of resources that have left the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en territory since settlers first arrived.)

At their request the hereditary chiefs, through the Tribal Council, have received a further postponement of the case. This will hopefully provide enough time to raise the necessary money to continue the costly battle.

The Chief Justice wasn't there, but Headlines was. *Our Footprints* began in the land of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en.

NO'XYA' (Our Footprints) explores, in dance, a time when a system of self-government existed in the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en territory unhindered by outside forces; a system of giving back to the Earth more than was taken away.

When the European settlers appear we see that they are not evil people, but rather, full of hope and ready to build their new lives in what they perceive to be a "vast and empty land." But what does their very different vision of the Earth mean to the people into whose home they have come?

NO'XYA' (Our Footprints) is a rich mixture of traditional Native dance (by Hal B. Blackwater, Gitksan dancer and singer), music (by local resident Ray Courmoyer), mask work (masks, robes and traditional instruments produced by Master Carver Art Wilson) and the kind of theatre and political cartooning that has become Headlines' trademark.

Set pieces were designed and produced by Master Painter Vernon Stephens. The script was created in Hazelton over a nine-week period by David Diamond, Headlines' Artistic Director.

### Priorities,

Here's a little follow-up to Pat Brighthouse's piece in the summer.

On September 16, the Vernon Hospital Society held its AGM at which three trustees were elected for terms of three years. As was expected, abortion was the burning issue and each candidate was expected to state his or her position. I was one of the pro-choice candidates.

The newly formed Pro-Choice Association had tried over the summer to present our position to the public and to gain the support of as many Society members as possible. For some reason,

unsatisfactorily explained at a special meeting in the summer, members were required to pay the \$5 fee twice. Many objected and of course many could not afford this so were disenfranchised.

About 1500 voters were present at the meeting. When we arrived, priests and nuns were giving out buttons reading "I Love Life." Anti-abortion forces were clustered at the centre of the hall. They vibrated angrily from time to time when a pro-choice speaker was at the microphone and applauded wildly when one of their own spoke. Their interest was limited strictly to abortion. When a

trustee rose to question the financial report on the grounds that a payment had been made to the chair, contrary to the constitution, and the payment buried in travel costs, there were loud cries from the centre of the room and applause when the speaking trustee was insulted by the financial secretary.

The two incumbent anti-abortion trustees were re-elected; the third candidate, also anti-abortion, had been nominated by the Society's nominating committee. This woman demonstrated in her speech her complete unawareness of the social and political implications of the whole business, and spoke ominously of educating the community on the evils of abortion.

*In sisterhood,  
Jane Evans.*

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