

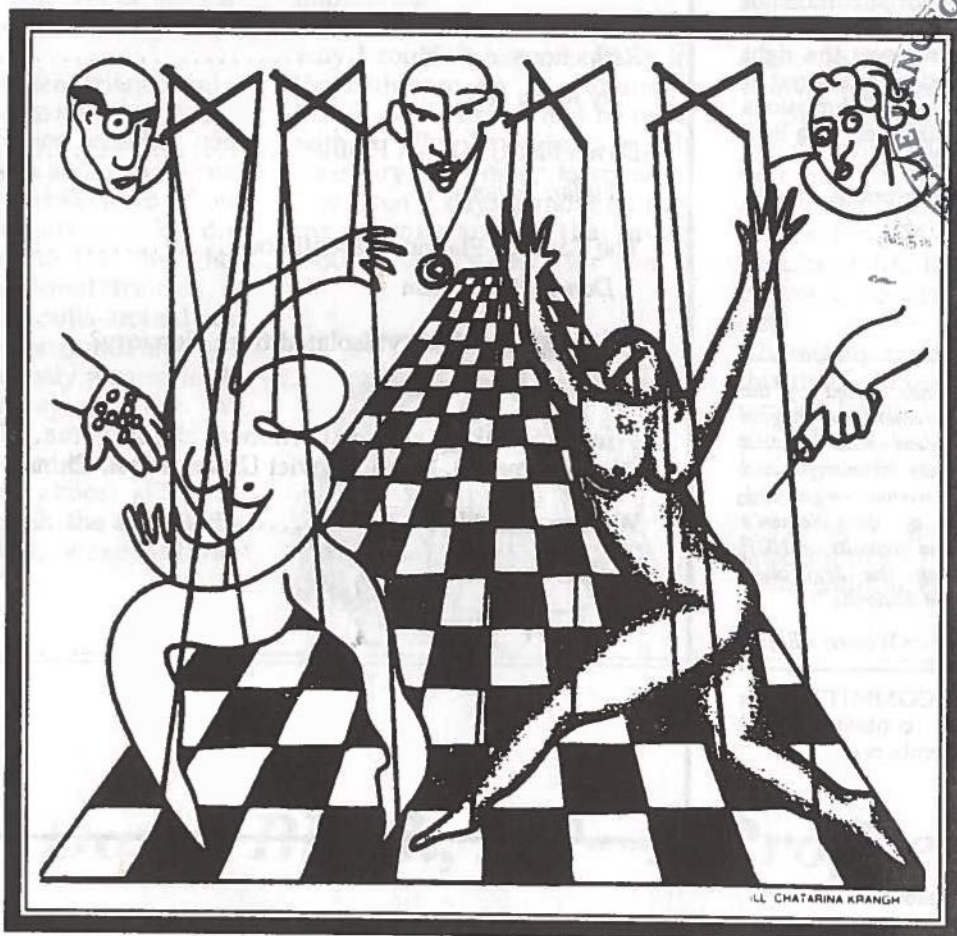
PRIORITIES

the feminist **+** voice in a socialist movement

VOL. XVIII NO. 2

PRICE: \$1.50

SUMMER 1990



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In this issue . . .

. . . birth control, abortion, AIDS

Also, a profile of Dawn Black, MP

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

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

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

ISSN 0700-6543

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

Submissions and subscriptions should be mailed to:

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

"The issues and demands raised by the Women's Liberation Movement are integral to the development of a democratic socialist society. The NDP actively encourages and provides support for women organizing around the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement and commits an NDP government to creating the legislation necessary to realize these demands."

—NDP Policy on Women's Rights

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Design and production:

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Printed in a union shop:

College Printers
Vancouver, B.C.

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Reflections

by Kathy Hill

If ever there was a political subject, it is menstruation. I know that some of you will be snickering to yourselves already. Read on...

A dear woman friend and I began a discussion that ended with some rather amazing conclusions. It was about menstruation and our recollections of our earliest feelings about it. We discussed the whens and the whos and the emotional trauma of having all the adults around you smiling and congratulating you when all you really wanted to do was crawl away and die. We remember the smug looks on their faces, we remember how the embarrassment almost killed us. We, even though the rest of the world crowded, were not impressed.

And we admitted that time has not softened us. Menstruation is still something that, while the embarrassment is gone, does not impress us.

I can remember wondering why I couldn't just go and sit in the bathroom for 15 minutes a month while I bled, and be done with it. Why, I pondered was it necessary for women to spend 4, 5 or even 7 days a month wearing a contraption that even modern science can't (or won't)



make comfortable?

While reminiscing about my feelings I suddenly began to wonder... if a young woman starts menstruating at 10 or 12 and continues at a rate of 5 days a month until she is 50, that woman has bled 60 days a year or, over 40 years, 2400 days! If you convert 2400 days into years, you are confronted with the reality that the average woman bleeds for SIX AND A HALF YEARS of her life (6.57 years to be exact, not counting pregnancies).

Now, my friend and I are, by this time, almost consumed by a morbid hysterical laughter, until she takes a breath, turns to me and says with a perfectly serious demeanor:

"I think we should be compensated for this."

Not political, eh?

Dawn Black, MP—A Profile

by Jan Taylor

I first met Dawn Black at a luncheon for Constituency Assistants in 1979. Ten years later, sitting at my kitchen table talking to Dawn Black, MP, I am struck by how much she has grown and how little she's changed. Dawn was elected member of parliament for New Westminster-Burnaby on November 21, 1988. She was appointed New Democratic Critic on Women's Issues in January 1989. Ten years earlier she would have scoffed at the suggestion that her life would

develop this way. Dawn Black epitomises both the traditional role women have played in the party and the new one.

Dawn joined the NDP in 1975 while working as a canvasser for Dave Barrett. She volunteered because her son's illness had convinced her of the need for quality health care and she was concerned an NDP defeat would mean a return to the bad old days under Social Credit.

It was trial-by-fire, canvassing for Dave Barrett in Coquitlam in 1975. But as often happens during

election campaigns, Dawn was bitten by the political bug. She went on to work as a canvasser for Norm Levi and Pauline Jewett in the 1979 joint provincial and federal campaign. It was then that Dawn began her political career as constituency assistant in the Levi/Jewett constituency office. She managed Levi's unsuccessful 1983 campaign and John Cashore's 1986 victory. In between, she managed a number of municipal campaigns, and from 1976 onwards she sat on the constituency executives provincially and federally, holding just

about every position at one time or another.

There was also work for the central party on the International Affairs Committee and the Provincial Election Planning Committee.

Dawn Black had paid her dues.

The decision to run for elected office was the next logical step. But for Dawn, the decision to seek the nomination for the New Westminster-Burnaby seat vacated by Pauline Jewett was not automatic.

It was frightening to think about all the public speaking and about being separated from her family. Even with the "unqualified support" of her sons, it was a tough decision; but Dawn had been around political life long enough to know that timing is important, and this was her best chance to win a nomination and a seat.

She went for it! In May 1988 she beat Carol Jones (a Burnaby School Trustee) and Tom Beardsley (a New Westminster School Trustee) and won the nomination. It is a mark of Dawn's character that both her former opponents now sing her praises. Says Jones, "I couldn't have lost the nomination to a finer person. Dawn maintains a professional standard in her politics. She easily translates her observation of the individual dilemma into the broader issues, and is tenacious in pursuit of those issues."

In the Fall of 1988, Dawn became one of five women elected to the NDP federal Caucus (of forty-three). She's never looked back: for one thing, she hasn't had the time.

For Dawn, there is "no such thing as an average day." She gets to her parliamentary office between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. and seldom leaves before 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. Then, of course, there is the travel back and forth to her riding, weekends spent at community functions, guest speaking engagements throughout the country, and recently, work on Audrey McLaughlin's leadership campaign.

Dawn says she had a good working relationship with Ed Broadbent and clearly she does with McLaughlin, who says, "Dawn Black

has shown what it means to be a feminist, a socialist, and a Member of Parliament. From her first day, she has been a strong advocate for women. I've been most impressed with her leadership in the fight to stop the recriminalization of abortion. Her awareness of the issues, combined with her ability to communicate effectively, make her one of our strongest caucus members."

As NDP critic on Women's Issues, Dawn has had to be strong, in the House and in the Caucus. Issues like the Meech Lake Accord and Bill C-43 (Abortion) have led to intense debate. Dawn claims her best moments have been when she has been able to sway a colleague to her point of view—a feminist point of view.

She also says that she has been able to overcome some of the initial obstacles—the public speaking gets easier (if never easy). She recently spoke in the House for 10 minutes without notes. The isolation she feared and the separation from her family are minimized by a schedule that doesn't allow time for traditional family responsibilities anyway. Asked what has been most important to her survival as an MP, Dawn credits support systems, both personal and political, and says that support is crucial in her new role. She has found the women's caucus within the federal caucus a source of support and encouragement, and also cites Gloria Levi and Pauline Jewett with convincing her to have

confidence in her own strengths and abilities.

Dawn has worked hard at building political support by developing a rapport with women's groups across the country. She says she is struck by the different levels of awareness in different regions of the country and believes that the B.C. women's movement is at the forefront. Sometimes, when speaking to women in other parts of Canada, she has to remind herself to temper remarks which she would be quite comfortable making at home.

Dawn has also worked to develop a rapport with the Women's Rights Committee, as women's organizer Vicki Robinson affirms. "Dawn is a joy to work with as federal women's critic. She understands the issues thoroughly and the politics within the issues. Her comprehensive reports to the WRC are a delight."

Dawn urges each woman considering seeking a nomination to find the route that's right for her personally. It may be party work, community work, or municipal work. Each has its assets and liabilities politically. "Find the route that interests you and go from there," she says.

Life has changed a lot for Dawn Black since May 1988 and she has grown stronger and more confident as a result. "I'm happy to be doing what I'm doing." And since she's doing a great job, that's not surprising. ♀

Women in Canada

Did you know that:

- the average life expectancy of women in Canada born in 1986 is 80 years?
- 59% of women in Canada live with a husband or common-law partner?
- women make up 44% of the Canadian work force?
- 75% of women in the labour force work full time?

from *Women in Canada: A Statistical Report*, Statistics Canada

The Case for Planned Parenthood

by Donna Henningson

An unassuming woman, relaxed in pants and sweater, greets me at the New Westminster clinic.

I follow Cathy Castles through a maze of corridors, stairways and doorways to a corner closet-of-a-room off what seems to be an examination room. We sit across from each other at a small table. Cathy directs her matter-of-fact gaze on me with few preliminaries.

She acts as an education facilitator for Planned Parenthood, speaking with both adolescent and parent groups through the Coquitlam School Board.

"I have a lesson plan called 'How Do You Tell if You're in Love?' If you ask adolescents what they consider before they have sex, ... about 80% of them say, 'I should feel that I'm in love.' Then, if you ask them how many times they've been in love: 'Oh, a number of times.' I tell them that they have to think about other things, too. I bring this up with parents, as well."

It's hard for a parent to talk to teenagers about sex. The Planned Parenthood office on West Broadway is stocked with such titles as "Perils of Puberty," "Choices & Chances," "Teen Sex? It's Okay to Say No Way," and "So You Don't Want to Be a Sex Object?"

But, it's even harder to comprehend the fact that Canada has only just celebrated its 20th anniversary of legalized birth control. The road has been long and winding.

Before 1929, family planning education in Canada was akin to spreading "obscene matter":

"Every one is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to two years' imprisonment who knowingly ... offers to sell, advertises, publishes an advertisement of, or has for sale or disposal any means of instructions or any medicine, drug or article intended or represented as a means of preventing contraception or of causing abortion or miscarriage; or ... curing venereal diseases ..."

At that time, there were two philosophically-opposed views to birth

control. The first was that women needed to limit the size of their families so that they might take a greater outside role in society. The second was that contraception should be made freely available in order to keep the poorer working-class population in check.

Proponents of the latter theory made early inroads in Canada. A.R. Kaufman, a Kitchener manufacturer, ran a free mail-order birth control service.

In 1937, the Supreme Court of Ontario ruled that birth control distribution was permissible if it "served the public good."

In the years to follow, Kaufman ran a clinic in Toronto. At the same time, the Family Planning Association of Winnipeg was established, and Planned Parenthood Associations began in both Toronto and B.C.

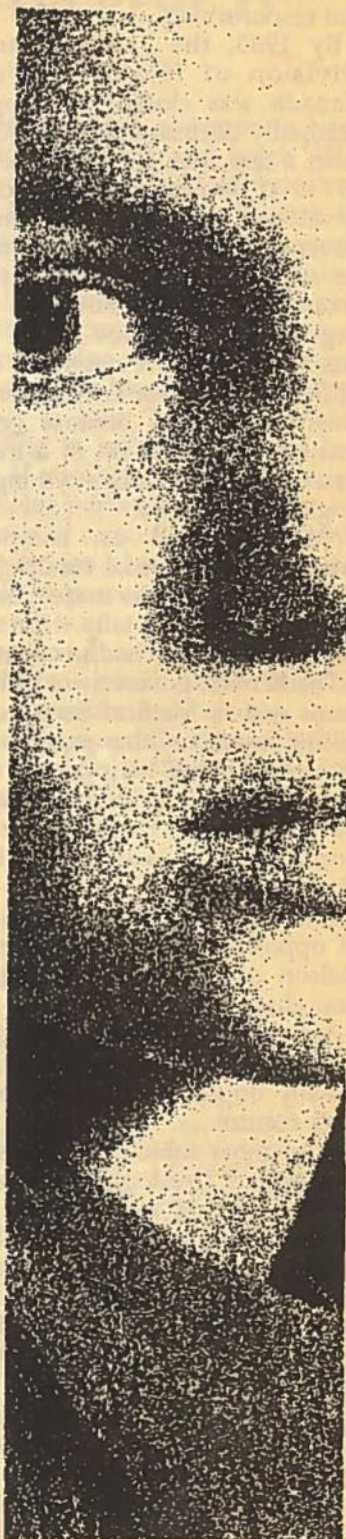
In 1966, the Standing Committee on Health & Welfare advised that family planning be legalized because it was a personal decision by a married couple. Two years later, the UN Conference on Human Rights decided that couples had the basic right to decide on the number and spacing of children. On July 1, 1969, Bill C-150 made family planning no longer an offence of the Criminal Code.

Barbara Hestrin is Education Coordinator of the Planned Parenthood Association of B.C.

"Our board of directors, a few years ago, came to a crossroads in terms of what kind of organization we'd agree to be, regarding the abortion issue, for example. Planned Parenthood in Canada has developed to promote family planning options and provide education. The first clinics worked to help families be more healthy, not with any genocidal idea of decreasing the so-called 'lower-class.'"

"We got political in the '60s and decided to make every attempt to have family planning education and promotion of birth control deleted from the criminal code."

In 1971, federal funding for the Family Planning Federation of Canada (later



Trouble and Strife

re-named Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada) began with \$100,000. The next year, it was \$885,000 and remained at around \$600,000 until seven years later when it was decided that family planning programs were a provincial responsibility.

By 1985, the Family Planning Division of Health & Welfare Canada was closed. Funding has gradually decreased to \$146,000 last year, a less than 50% increase from 1971. "Planned Parenthood had developed 'off the ground' and the government thought it was time for us to be self-sufficient, but they shouldn't totally remove the funding from agencies that can't generate their own income. It's very difficult to fund-raise. However, in a way, it's healthy, because government funding is a bit of a muzzle. You're loathe to do anything that might rock the boat.

"We received an increasing amount of provincial funding until 1983 when cutbacks under the Bennett government totally wipe us out in one swoop. We had to scramble."

The Bennett government did leave them with a Medical Services Plan billing number. Other moneys come from the United Way, private donations, individual memberships, and patient fees. Birth control is provided at a cost lower than a drugstore.

The organization has had its share of opposition. A vocal minority in Nelson picketed the opening of a new clinic.

According to Hestrin, "The people who give us the most flack are usually opposed to open access to birth control.

"The most rabid are opposed to any kind of freedom for women, to women having options with their lives. They tend to feel that a woman's place is in the home raising the children, and accuse us of being anti-family, of contributing to the high divorce rate, and promoting promiscuity."

Barbara laughs. "If you're having children continually and raising them in the home, you don't have any choices about what else you're going to do with your time. It has

an impact on women's lives."

To detractors, Planned Parenthood officials point out that they promote responsibility. The provision of pregnancy tests, for example, serves two very positive purposes: In 1989, approximately 54% proved negative. Also, the test provides an added opportunity to talk about birth control at a time when the patient is most likely to listen.

Cathy notes that teenagers don't generally look favourably on an abortion or "termination": "They don't see it as an alternative. It's so frowned upon that they wouldn't want to do it. As is giving up your child for adoption. So, that leaves keeping your baby. They don't feel they have a choice about a pregnancy.

"I think there's a decrease. But 15, 16, and 17-year-olds are still having children, which is not, traditionally, too unusual. The problem is they're not yet ready to parent.

"My focus, with adolescents, is prevention. Delay sexual activity until you can make a reasonable decision that includes contraception."

Hestrin agrees: "We are a preventative organization. Secondly, whatever the reproductive decision, the person should have access to the full range of options, and to safe, effective medical care."

The 3-Rs of Planned Parenthood are Respect and Responsible Reproduction. Especially for teenagers, the message is "It's O.K. to say no."

Goals for the future include a 24-hour province-wide sexuality information line, and a steady reliable income to meet core needs, perhaps through a satellite business.

What role do companies play that manufacture birth control?

"They've learned that if they try to editorialize, people won't have anything to do with them. Our credibility is on the line, and if we simply went with drug company propaganda, we'd lose our audience."

Hestrin is quick to point out that Planned Parenthood is vigilant with their own individual branches as well as outside drug companies. An

elected volunteer board sets policy.

"B.C. has the most active organization in the country. We insist that branches send in statistics and documentation, and that they toe the line. For example, we shut down one clinic when the doctors refused to give initial examinations. We have to be very conservative in the way we deal with medical issues.

"Schools now have the government Family Life curriculum for grades seven through twelve, but it's not being used fully in every school. It was mandated and supported financially for the first year, but that funding has stopped. The program hasn't been monitored very well."

Cathy is in agreement: "Coquitlam has led the way. The Family Life curriculum provides way less than what we were already."

I can imagine Cathy surrounded by a circle of girls...no...young women now, their young futures so closely dependent on the mature decisions each must make regarding a body that bears babies.

"I rarely talk with teenage boys. But when I do, they're very receptive: 'We've been getting a bum rap all these years...'"

Cathy laughs. "They want to know why there's so few methods for them to use. They feel left out of contraceptive decision-making."

Cathy sees young men who want to take more responsibility for birth control.

"We have to encourage it and not just sit back and wait for them to change. But if a girl suggests a condom, it's often used."

It's hard enough for a mature woman to be so assertive. How can teenage girls be expected to do so?

"I try to change the attitude that there's something wrong with preparing for sex. I challenge the attitude that they 'shouldn't be thinking about it' or, if they are, they're not the best kind of person. I've really tried to dispell that myth."

Volunteers such as Cathy are the backbone of Planned Parenthood. PPABC recently won a United Way Award of Excellence for meeting its goal for level of participation over five consecutive years.

Another goal is to be more visible to the media, the general public and other professional organizations. In future, look for an active media watch in every branch.

Nationally, activities have included an essay contest, as well as a film to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Planned Parenthood movement in Canada. PFFC has received a special \$264,000 grant (over 3 years) for the creation of a Reproductive Health & Human Sexuality Resource Centre to provide access to educational resources, develop and market materials, and act as a clearinghouse.

Internationally, the IPPF acted quickly to help Romania, following the reversal of Ceausescu's repressive laws on contraception and abortion. The Federation quickly spearheaded a campaign, calling for emergency contraceptive supplies to be rushed into the country.

Barbara Hestrin concludes, "The bottom line regarding reproductive rights is, no matter what broader life issue you're talking about, whether it be Meech Lake or abortion, reproductive rights permeate. Entrenching equality in a constitution is useless unless there is support, on a basic level, for safe birth control options."

"Women must be pro-active in as many ways as possible. Write letters in support of Planned Parenthood. Take out a \$10 membership. Come to general membership meetings. When giving to the United Way, specifically target the money for Planned Parenthood so they know we have support. We need the vote of confidence."

Cathy Castles adds, "There's a minority of vocal people against the service we provide. But, when I talk with teenagers, I see faces of young people who are getting frank information, maybe for the first time.

"If every one of those young people, who've been helped by a person like me, would stand up and be counted, it'd make a great deal of difference and make our job much easier."

(For more information, call Planned Parenthood Association of B.C. at 731-4252)



Isolated from History! Isolated from Herstory?

by Lori Winstanley

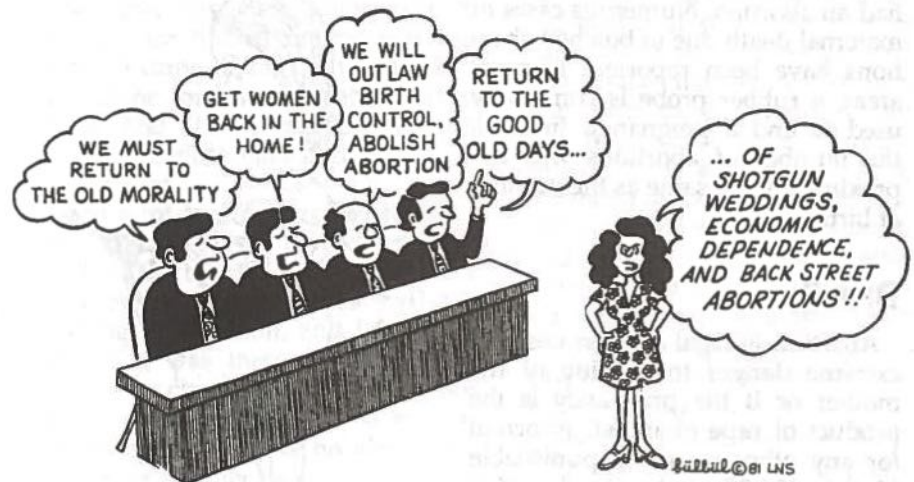
History with its myths, literature, folklore and religious teachings, has proclaimed for us "the nature of women."

Women universally are now piecing together Herstory. Books, stories and new legends are being written. From the women of power behind King Arthur to the millions of women killed for being witches, we are revealing the truth. Whether our story will become a part of our daughters' and granddaughters' reality is up for much debate. For now we still struggle daily with patriarchy and its historical assumptions of "the nature of women."

In our struggle we cherish our support systems. In our house, that often means a spontaneous gathering of women, talking, sipping wine and "ordering in." It can mean

someone to listen, someone to hug, the freedom to cry and laugh with other women. In our struggle, we read, attend workshops, belong to groups, we count on other women's experiences to carry us through. Imagine for a moment being shut out from those spontaneous gatherings. Imagine having no access to groups or workshops. Imagine not reading, no one to hug. Imagine Women struggling in isolation. Isolated because of disabilities, abilities, race, geography, poverty...

Women of minority? I don't think so. I wonder about how we, the women of power, of privilege, the women who attend groups, facilitate, and write, how we can commit to include those isolated sisters. I wonder how we can open the doors and remove the barriers to ensure a place in Herstory for all Women.



Women Speaking about Abortion

Translated and excerpted from El Dia, Mexican periodical, as reprinted in mujer / fempress, Chilean feminist monthly, June 1989

Is abortion a crime? Or a desperate recourse for women who cannot bring another child into the world for economic, occupational, or familial reasons?

The legalization of abortion has been a central issue for the feminist movement. One of the primary causes of maternal deaths is the conditions under which abortion is practised.

We review the legislation on abortion in various countries below.

Argentina

Abortion is legal if the life of the mother is at stake, or if a pregnancy is the result of incest or rape; in all other cases, abortion is punishable by four years in prison for the woman and one to 10 years for the practitioner. In spite of this, it is estimated that one in four women has had an abortion. Numerous cases of maternal death due to botched abortions have been reported. In rural areas, a rubber probe is commonly used to end a pregnancy. In 1970, the number of abortions was approximately the same as the number of births.

Brazil

Abortion is legal only in cases of extreme danger to the life of the mother or if the pregnancy is the product of rape or incest. Abortion for any other reason is punishable (Article 124-27 of the Penal Code); the penalty for the "crime of feticide" is three years in prison for both the woman who consents to it

and the person who intervenes (the doctor, nurse, etc.).

It is estimated that there were 3,000,000 clandestine abortions in Brazil in 1983; 25% of all hospital beds in the country were occupied by women who were suffering complications from clandestine abortions. Women use diverse methods to end a pregnancy: jumping from heights, jumping rope, drinking poisonous herbs, and scalding the uterus with boiling water.

Chile

Abortion is legal only in the case of danger to the woman's life, and the doctor who performs it must have the consent of two other doctors. All other abortions are punishable by law (Articles 342-345 of the Penal Code), with three years of jail for the woman and 540 days to three years for the doctor who performed the abortion.

Article 85 of the same ordinance

establishes that "the death penalty shall not be executed when the condemned woman is found to be pregnant; instead she will be sentenced to 40 years in jail after the birth of the child."

Abortion continues to be practised in Chile despite the penalties and punishments—in unhealthful, insecure, and clandestine conditions. Thirty-eight percent of maternal deaths are due to abortions.

Colombia

Abortion is legal only in the effort to save a life; illegal abortions are punishable. Infanticide is included in the category of abortion if it is motivated by "family honor" and committed less than eight days after birth; it is a crime that is considered with indulgence (Article 369 of the Penal Code).

In 1980, 280,000 illegal abortions were performed. It is estimated that for every two births, two illegal abortions are performed; the majority of the women who abort are married, Catholic, and have more than three children. Abortions performed during the first pregnancy are very rare.

Cuba

Abortion is free, legal and safe. It is practised in state hospitals in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy.

Ecuador

Abortion is formally illegal, but is tolerated if undertaken to "safeguard the honor" (Article 444), for therapeutic reasons (Article 447), or in the case of rape or danger to the life of the woman. Illegal



Fraklin/Mujeres

abortions are very expensive and are practised in unhygienic conditions. Peasant women use traditional methods to terminate pregnancies, based on herbal lore.

El Salvador

Abortion is legal only if the woman's life is in danger, if the pregnancy is the result of rape, or if the fetus is deformed. Abortions performed for any other reason result in a one to three-year jail sentence for the woman and two to four years for the practitioner.

The woman may allege that the abortion was necessary to "safeguard her honor," in which case the penalty is less severe.

Despite its illegality, abortion is a common practice. Twenty percent of Salvadoran women have had abortions.

Guatemala

Abortion is legal if the life of the woman is in danger and three doctors have certified that fact. It is common practice in rural areas, where it is performed in unhygienic conditions.

Bolivia

From an interview with "Margarita" from Bolivia, by Linda Farthing for the "Better Health through Family Planning Conference," Nairobi, October 1987, as reprinted in The New Internationalist, British progressive monthly, No. 176, October 1987

My husband left about a year ago. He ran off with another woman. Since then I have been working part time cleaning offices downtown. I do three offices each day, for two hours each, which pays about 15 bolivianos (\$7.50) a week—just enough to buy food. Luckily I don't have to pay rent, because this old adobe house belonged to my grandmother and I've lived here all my life. I can't find a better job because I only studied three years in school, then I had to earn money by

selling newspapers on the street.

I sold newspapers until I was 17, then I married my husband. We were lucky because we had two healthy children, a girl and a boy, and neither of them died. That's unusual around here. It was the best time of my life: staying home to raise my children.

No, I have never used anything to stop myself from getting pregnant. I don't know any women who have. I don't know much about what I could do, but I do know that if I went to the doctor it would be very expensive and I just couldn't afford it. Two years ago, when I was three months pregnant, I fell over in the cemetery when I was visiting my mother's grave and I lost the baby.

I got pregnant again at the beginning of this year. My husband came by and I thought maybe there was a chance of us getting back together again. Well, we didn't get back together, but I did get pregnant. I felt angry and upset, but I didn't tell my husband in case he'd get angry and take it out on the children.

So I decided to get an abortion. I just can't afford any more children. It was hard because I am a Catholic and I think it is wrong. But I just couldn't see any other way. I went to a private doctor who I heard will get rid of pregnancy for you, but the office was so crowded I had to come back another day. It cost 80 bolivianos (\$40), which I borrowed from my aunt, who runs a little store and has some money saved. The doctor treated me politely. But when I came home I felt bad, like I had done something wrong, against God. And after about three days, I was in terrible pain and started to bleed a lot.

My aunt took me to hospital in a taxi. The cleaned up whatever was still there, but before they did the doctors told me I was evil for having an abortion, and I felt even worse. I was there for three days and they charged me 50 bolivianos (\$25) which I also had to borrow from my aunt. I have no idea how I will ever pay her back.

Poland

Excerpted from an article by Anna Siwek, Maryla Ciecchomska, and Jolanta Plakwicz, and translated by Ela Ginalska in Spare Rib, British feminist monthly, No. 205, September, 1989

In Poland, abortion has been legal since 1956 and available under the state health service. However, health care in Poland is seriously underfunded, so many women end up paying for private abortions. Recently, the powerful anti-abortion lobby almost succeeded in steering a new bill through the Sejm (Parliament) that would have dramatically curtailed women's rights.

The bill "giving legal protection to the unborn child," containing a proposal to repeal the existing law that sets out "conditions under which an abortion may be carried out," was finally put before the Polish Parliament on February 28, 1989. This issue had been discussed much earlier, since the autumn of 1988, but it was given no publicity because the authorities still insist on treating the people of Poland as incapable of exercising any autonomy and therefore keep political matters a secret.

The bill proposes a penalty of imprisonment for up to three years for performing or consenting to abortion (that is, for the mother and the doctor). It does not permit any exceptions such as rape, the pregnancy endangering a woman's life or her health, if such treatment could harm the fetus. The bill would, in law, equate the moment of conception with the beginning of human life. It provides for a "curator" of the fetus. It also makes arrangements for alimony for the fetus, payable from the moment of conception and deducted from the presumed father's salary, but at the same time forbids medical attempts to establish the father's identity during pregnancy. This law would be administered by the state.

The bill is the result of lobbying begun in the 1960s "emphasizing the protection of unborn children and natural methods of family planning." As a result of this lobbying,

the clergy helped to set up a few pressure groups, of which the best-known is *Gaudium Vitae* (the Joy of Life). In 1981 this movement took advantage of the liberalised atmosphere in Poland to begin an anti-abortion propaganda campaign. They saw Solidarity as a monolith linked to the Catholic Church. The anti-abortion movement created propaganda which suggested a crude division in Polish society (later reinforced by martial law) into Catholic Solidarity and pro-Communist Reds. This crude division did not reflect the reality of Polish society. The propaganda campaign begun in 1981 did not receive a widespread response in Poland.

The alliance of anti-government activists with the Church began to assume alarming proportions. This state of affairs worried the authorities, who adopted a more flexible attitude to Church-State relations. One factor in this political game was the abortion issue. The Communist government began to take a softer stance on sexual issues, negotiating in secret at the expense of women. Although the strongest criticisms of the bill were voiced by the government, it does not mean that Poland's Communist rulers are champions of women's rights—such actions were simply part of their pre-election strategy. Solidarity's unfortunate silence on their scandalous bill aligned it with the bill's supporters.

Before the bill was shelved, women of all political persuasions received a crash course in feminism. As the bill was being discussed, women witnessed the way they are perceived in Poland; at the same time they spoke up about their own needs and defended their arguments. Frightened, they began to speak out. They demanded the right to choose and to control their own bodies. They protested against an instrumental view of motherhood. They said that children had to be wanted. That they shouldn't count on their menfolk. That they are poor. That they demand access to contraception.

In various towns throughout Poland, independently of each

other, women came together determined to fight the anti-abortion bill to the end. A feminist group in Warsaw suddenly increased its membership. In July 1989, fifteen women in Warsaw applied for the official registration of the Polish Feminist Association.

In the new, partially freely elected Parliament, there are many MPs and senators who have links with the Church. It is possible that after a time the abortion issue will resurface. Poland freed from totalitarian communism could find itself under the yoke of totalitarian Catholicism and right-wing reaction.

Soviet Union

From an interview with "Natasha" from the USSR, by Chris Sheppard, in The New Internationalist, British progressive monthly, No. 176, October 1987

The problem is that [birth control] pills are of very low quality and you have to pay maybe two rubles (\$3) a month. And they do not advertise contraception, so many people don't know it's available. People are very embarrassed talking about sex. There is education for pregnant women about how to have a child, but not about how not to have a child. It's a very big problem.

I have had about nine abortions, but that's exceptionally high. Maybe I was supposed to have a lot of children. Most women only have two or three abortions because they don't have much sex—perhaps just once a month. They are so overworked, you see. The men are tired too. It's not because they can't have sex, it's because they don't want to.

Abortion is very easy. You just go to the hospital for your pregnancy test and arrange a date for the abortion at the same time. It's quite normal—more serious than having your tooth pulled out, but not much more. They do the abortions in the mornings and other operations in the afternoons and you can choose what kind of anaesthetic you want.

Normally people have two



Wiser Links

children. Three is unusual. And 99% of women have jobs, even if they have children, because one salary is not enough to support the family. Even with two children life is very hard. You cease to be human. You finish your work and you want to relax, but you can't, because you have to queue for tomatoes or meat and you can't find it in this shop, or that, and you have to walk around and spend hours on shopping, then cook and clean and wash clothes and look after the children.

In theory the government wants women to have more children, but in practice they discourage it because our living conditions are so terrible. There are some privileges—families with eight or ten children get free kindergarten places—but that is nothing compared to the low salaries and high prices. A woman has the right to stop work until her child is three and gets a third of her salary for the first 18 months. Then

she leaves her child with grandparents or at kindergarten. Kindergarten's very cheap—only three or four rubles a month. The problems come if the one near you is full and you have to travel miles to one with a vacancy.

The divorce rate is very high because women are more independent than in the West. If your husband doesn't earn enough money and he doesn't help around the house, what is he for? You get more support from a boyfriend than from a husband who doesn't help you with anything.

Last week I went to a fortuneteller and she told me I would have another child even though I don't want to. She's right. I really don't want to.

China

In China, the traditional preference for sons is proving stronger than the government's one-child-per-family rule. Many rural families risk fines and other disincentives to have a second child if the first is a girl. In August, 1988, the Chinese State Birth Control Commission bowed to the force of tradition, announcing that most rural families will be allowed to have a second child if the first is a daughter. The head of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities in Beijing criticized the decision sharply, stating that the government should encourage rural families to regard the two sexes equally.

(Reprinted from the Newsletter of the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights, January-March 1989.)

Delegates to an emergency meeting in Beijing heard recently that by the year 2000 there will be 120 million more Chinese than planned. Government policy in the 1960s led to a high birth rate, and those born then are now having children. The one-child policy was meant to reduce the expected increase in the birth rate in this generation, but it has not. It seemed to be working from 1981 through 1986, but since then fertility has been on the in-

crease. People have chosen to pay the penalties, when they can afford it, for having more than one child—and in fact those who cannot pay are not expected to find the money. The officials who implement the policy guidelines at the local level are not always strict in following them. People have also purposely not registered second and third births, so that no one will know about them. But in rural areas the policy has been undermined most by economic reforms. The communal farming system was replaced with individual farms, which not only created a need for children as laborers, but also eliminated the system of administration of birth control which had been implemented through the communes.

The practice of family planning is legally required in China. It is illegal to remove an IUD except for medical reasons, or if a woman has permission to start a pregnancy.

Coercion to be sterilized or have an abortion is not officially allowed, and is described as abuse. Yet every pregnancy is supposed to be planned, i.e., agreed to in advance within the guidelines.

Second children are allowed only under specific exceptions to the rule. Anyone pregnant before marriage, for example, *must* have an abortion. With the encouragement of later marriage, the likelihood of premarital pregnancy has increased.

Given that 20% of the world's population lives in China, the planning and implementation of this policy are massive problems. The government is trying to educate people to accept the policy so that it is carried out voluntarily. But they are finding that different economic and social policies can create contradictory trends, and the complexity is so far proving too much to control.

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Call for Submissions

Canadian Women and AIDS

Les Éditions Communiqu'Elles, a Montréal-based feminist publishing house, is now seeking submissions for an anthology to be entitled *Canadian Women and AIDS: Beyond the Statistics*.

We will consider scholarly articles, research papers, fiction, poetry, personal testimonies and interviews from HIV-positive women and women with AIDS, caregivers, lovers and relatives of HIV-positive women and women with AIDS, researchers, social scientists, sex workers and activists. The book will be divided into sections on research, reflection and action.

Topics can include but are not limited to:

- The politics of women and AIDS
- Differences between AIDS in women and in men
- Women, AIDS and IV drug use
- Living with AIDS
- Ethical issues involving AIDS in women
- Poverty: the economic effects of AIDS
- Safe sex for heterosexual and bisexual women and lesbians
- Caregiving
- Feminist issues
- Sex workers and the AIDS epidemic
- The epidemiology of women and AIDS in Canada and elsewhere
- Social and psychological issues
- Sex education
- Violence against women and power dimensions in relationships between the sexes in the battle against AIDS in women

• Young women and AIDS

The deadline for all submissions is September 1, 1990, but potential contributors are strongly advised to send material before that date. Contributions can be in either English or French; articles will be printed in their original language with a summary provided in the other language. Depending on funding, contributors will be paid. A national advisory committee will oversee the selection process.

The intended schedule will see the book launched on December 1, 1990, to coincide with international AIDS Day, which this year will focus on Women and AIDS.

Please forward submissions to Jacquie Manthorne, Editor, Les Éditions Communiqu'Elles, 3585 St-Urbain, Montréal, Québec, H2X 2N6, or fax them to (514) 842-1067.

For further information, write to the same address or call (514) 844-1761.

Women and AIDS Project

Suite 302-1720 Grant Street,
Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2Y7
Telephone: 255-9811
Fax: 253-3073

The Women and AIDS Project is now open to provide education about the special and unique concerns of women and HIV infection and AIDS.

We are a two-year project funded by the Health Promotion Directorate of Health and Welfare Canada and sponsored by the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.

If you would like copies of the

poster reproduced on page 11, give us a call.

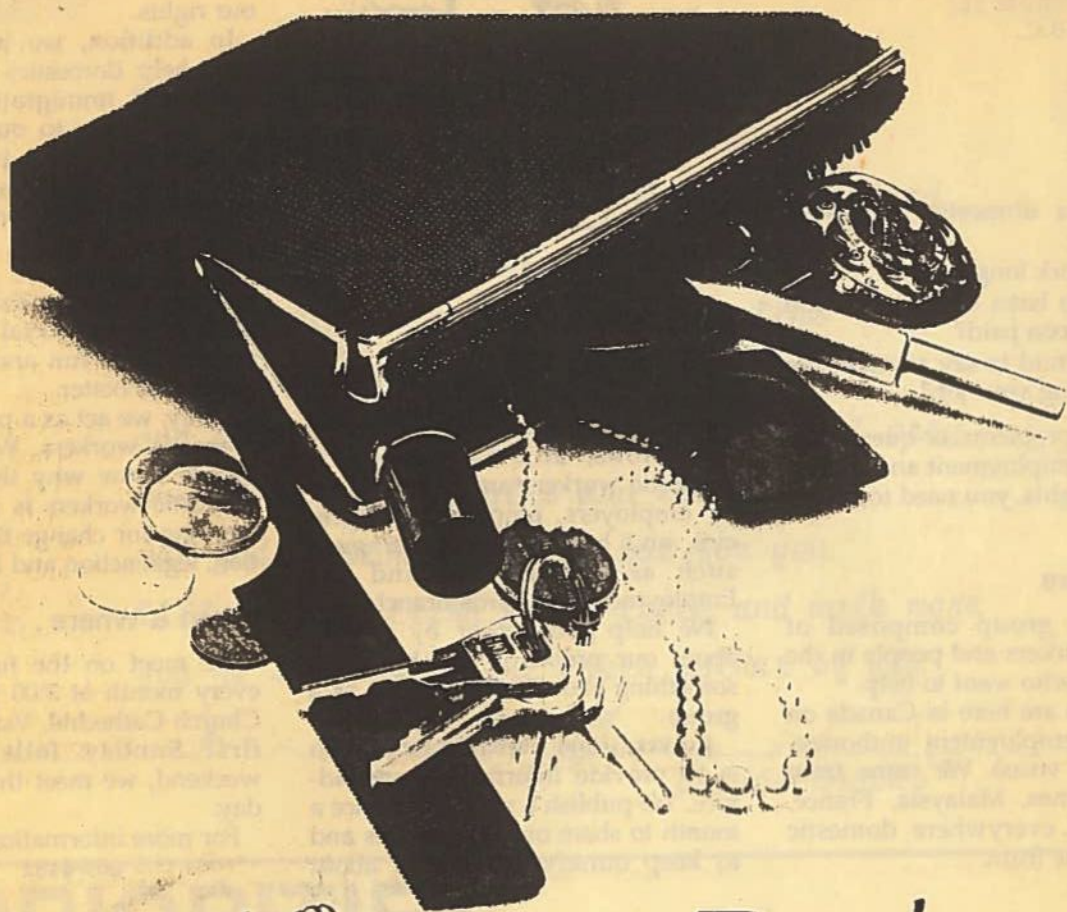
We have a supply of North American resources designed for women on topics like AIDS, how to talk with your partner, pregnancy, STDs and birth control and lesbians. Some materials are in Chinese, French and Spanish. Medical and press articles about women and AIDS are filed at the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.

Our project will be developing a presentation/program for women which will include work on decision-making and assertiveness skills as well as strategies for

making sex safer. The program will begin this summer. Once the program is established we will develop a training package so that techniques for AIDS education for women can be adapted to suit the needs of community organizations and agencies.

Please contact us if you are interested in any of our materials, to discuss possible program implementation or if you want to help our project.

Office hours are 8:30-5:00 weekdays. If we are not available, you can leave a message. Project staff are Robin Barnett and Mylo Riley.



Condom

Condom

AIDS isn't something that
only happens to other people...
it can happen to you.

AIDS *A Woman Has
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West Coast Domestic Workers Association

309-119 W Pender St.
Vancouver, B.C.
V6B 1S5
669-4482

You

- Are you a domestic worker or nanny?
- Do you work long hours?
- Have there been times when you have not been paid?
- Are you afraid to say anything for fear of losing your job?

If you have problems, or questions about your employment and immigration rights, you need to know about us.

Who We Are

We are a group composed of domestic workers and people in the community who want to help.

Most of us are here in Canada on temporary employment authorizations (work visas). We come from the Philippines, Malaysia, France, Germany . . . everywhere domestic workers come from.



What We Do

We stand up for domestic workers' rights.

We work to improve our working conditions, and to make sure domestic workers are treated fairly by employers, employment agencies, and branches of government such as Immigration and the Employment Standards Branch.

We help each other by talking about our problems and by doing something about the problems as a group.

An important part of what we do is to provide information and advice. We publish a newsletter once a month to share our experiences and to keep ourselves informed about

our rights.

In addition, we have members who help domestics with employment and immigration problems. You can come to our meetings or telephone us for advice and help with any problems you have, whether related to your job or not. This service is free.

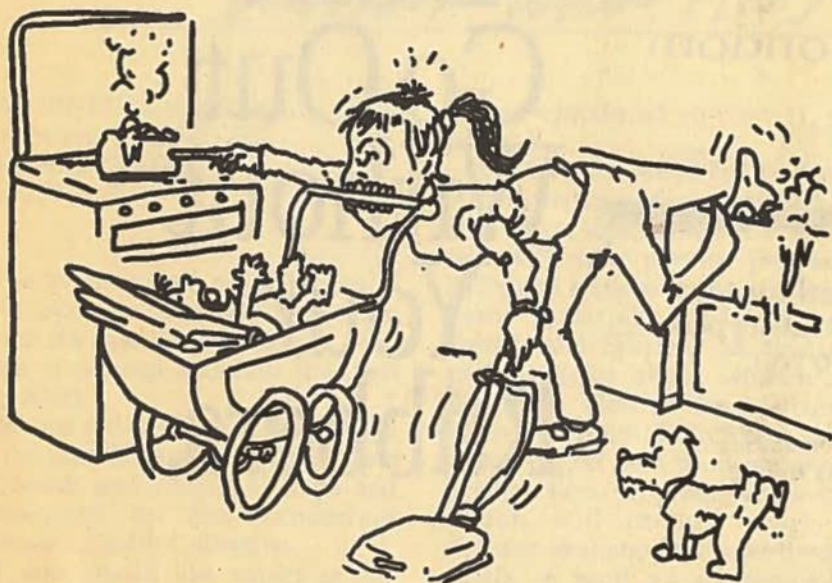
Another thing we do is provide support and friendship. Every so often we have social events where we can have fun and get to know each other better.

Lastly, we act as a public voice for domestic workers. We want to let people know why the situation of domestic workers is unfair. We are working for change through education, legal action and lobbying.

When & Where . . .

We meet on the first Sunday of every month at 3:00 p.m. at Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver. If the first Sunday falls on a long weekend, we meet the second Sunday.

For more information call:
669-4482



Editor, *Priorities*

While I have enjoyed your paper for many years, your Spring issue, dealing with feminists in the Interior, was superb.

It seems that sometimes we need to take a step back and walk "a mile in another's moccasins" before we appreciate the diversity of our movement.

Congratulations on your efforts, and best wishes on advancing the cause of socialist women throughout the province.

In Solidarity
Ian Aikenhead
President, BCNDP

Notification of Intent

forgive me Mother for I've lived
in iniquity forgive my willful waste
of the source I've absorbed more than need
forgive me the use of paper towels
and plastic wrap forgive me gasoline
as my lungs fill with you Mother
and as my bare soles touch your skin I prey
on wet marshes jungles and the sea
man gods demand hosannas but for you
I'll recycle trash plant trees and walk more
you're the source the maker mother of all

Eunice Brooks

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