

PRIORITIES

the feminist  voice in a socialist movement

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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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Chair's Report

Following is the Mission Statement and goals adopted by the WRC Steering Committee at our October meeting. The development and implementation of these goals means a great deal to the WRC.

With the direction we will gain

from them, we can truly be a proactive committee. When you are re-active, you're always operating on someone else's agenda. Well, we've set our own agenda now. Our Mission Statement tells us and others who we are and what we're

doing here. Now the task ahead for us is to develop our agenda in the form of objectives for the coming year.

*In Sisterhood,
Maggie Larocque*

Mission Statement for Women's Committee of the B.C. New Democratic Party

The mission of the Women's Committee of the B.C. New Democratic Party is to address systemic discrimination, to advance sisterhood through continuing education in the theoretical basis of feminism and to provide and promote such action as will improve, correct, enlarge, enhance and equalize the position of women, both within the Party and in our society as a whole.

This includes (but should not be considered to be limited to) the following goals:

1. Develop leadership and participation of young women in the Party.
2. Ensure equal participation of women on committees and executives within the Party.
3. Ensure that at least one-half of nominated candidates in provincial campaigns are women.

4. Elect women to at least one-half of the available delegate positions for all conventions held by the Provincial Party.

5. Ensure that the available resources meet the requirements of accessibility, quality, effectiveness and accountability for women in all areas of the province.

6. Compare present systems of power, leadership and organizational structures with those consistent with feminist principles.

7. Work to maintain a positive relationship with all Party members as a means to facilitate the achievement of the committee's aims.

8. Continue to educate members of the Party regarding feminist principles and feminist goals.



Agnes Macphail: a woman of vision and principle

1990 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Canada's first woman Member of Parliament: Agnes Macphail. She sat as a member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the parent party of the NDP. She was an intelligent, skilled orator, who fought on behalf of women, youth, the disabled, and

the poor. She was a peace activist, was strong in her opposition to capital punishment, and was responsible for extensive prison reform including the banning of the use of torture instruments in Canadian prisons. She belonged to a farm family, and throughout her 19 years in office (1921-1940) was an

by Dawn Black, MP. From Women's Report, September 1990

outspoken advocate for rural people and agrarian reform.

Agnes Macphail's very first speech in the House of Commons was about women's rights. She said, "...what women really want today is perfect equality with men..." She fought for equal pay for women, divorce law reform, and pension legislation.

In her day, a husband could secure a divorce from his wife on the grounds of adultery. However, a woman trying to get a divorce had to *prove* that her husband had engaged in incestuous adultery, bigamy with adultery, rape, sodomy, or bestiality. Some members of the House of Commons supported this law, and spoke against changing it. Agnes provided a strong voice for women.

She said, "When you read the laws... and read history, you will find they are everywhere the handiwork of men, describing their own actions and forgetting that after all they are only half of the great human family."

She was constantly reminded of her sex. She once said: "...being the only woman in the House of

Commons was sometimes almost more than I could bear. Had I known how bad it was going to be I wouldn't have gone through with it. But once in, I wouldn't give up." Agnes was committed to increasing the numbers of women in the House of Commons.

Agnes herself was elected in the first federal election after women were given the right to vote, and was seriously and openly discouraged from running for office because of her sex.

A British Labour Member of Parliament in 1929 commented about Agnes' first experiences in the House of Commons: "...opposition to her was extreme; criticism of her unjust and continuous. The men resented deeply the fact that another sanctity had been invaded."

Always an excellent Member of Parliament, she earned the respect and admiration of her colleagues in the face of incredible prejudice against her.

She won 5 federal elections, but, known as an advocate of demilitarization and peace, lost her seat near the beginning of the war (1940). She subsequently ran provin-

cially in Ontario and won. She had turned down both federal cabinet posts in the Mackenzie King Liberal government, and an offer of a Senate seat, refusing to compromise her socialist feminist principles. She died in 1954.

On March 24, 1990, on the 100th anniversary of her birth, the New Democratic Party caucus in the House of Commons, led by Audrey McLaughlin, commemorated Agnes Macphail by reintroducing in the House several of her motions which have still not been implemented, on equality, international peace and disarmament, support for agriculture and social reform. Audrey unveiled a plaque in Agnes' honour to mark Agnes Macphail's former office on Parliament Hill. NDP MPs and staff also arranged the screening of a National Film Board video on Agnes' life, and a display of memorabilia usually stored at the National Archives.

Note: Quotations and anecdotes taken from Doris Pennington, *Agnes Macphail: Reformer* (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1989).



Royal Commission on the Status of Women



Summary of a report by Dawn Black, MP, NDP status of women critic, September 1990

Enclosed is a copy of an assessment of the implementation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommendations. The Royal Commission report and its 167 recommendations were issued on September 28, 1970.

Although the information bulletin produced by Status of Women Minister Mary Collins' department also lists September 28 as the 20th anniversary of the Royal Commis-

sion, the minister said she prefers to honour it on December 7, the anniversary of the report's being tabled in the House of Commons. December 7 is also the anniversary of Pearl Harbour, which fits in with the minister's other portfolio, as Associate Minister of National Defence. The House of Commons will probably not be sitting then, and so the government will be able to avoid uncomfortable questions about why some of the Royal Commission's recommendations were never implemented.

When the report was released, there was only one woman Member of Parliament: Grace MacInnes (NDP-Vancouver-Kingsway). The

report noted that poverty was especially prevalent among sole-support mothers and aboriginal women. In 1990, there are 40 women Members of Parliament, yet many of the situations described in the report are still significant problems today.

The 1970 report stated: "...we heard of discrimination against women that still flourishes and prejudice that is very much alive. It became abundantly clear that Canada's commitment is far from being realized." This is still true. The enclosed assessment report documents the improvements as well as the stagnant areas of women's struggle for equality in the past 20 years, using the original 1970

recommendations as a point of reference.

We will not let the Royal Commission's recommendations lie

forgotten in the annals of herstory. I hope you will find the assessment useful.

20 Years Later:

The Recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women

Summary

Many of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, released on September 28, 1970, have been implemented. The recommendations that have not been implemented are major ones.

For example, the recommendation made 20 years ago for no criminalization of abortion in the first trimester is being thwarted by the Conservative government's abortion bill, currently in Senate. The bill would create criminal prohibitions for abortion *at any stage* of pregnancy, unless the woman's health or life is likely to be endangered. As well, the Royal Commission's recommendation for family planning education and services for every Canadian has never been implemented. A 1987 Gallup poll found that 46% of Canadians feel they do not have sufficient family planning information or services. Government activity in this area has steadily decreased since 1977.

The Royal Commission recommended that the federal government participate in the funding of women's organizations and centres. The Women's Program of Secretary of State, which funded such programs, has experienced multi-million dollar cuts in the last two years. The Program withdrew 100% of its operational funding contributions to women's centres across the country. After a public outcry, these funds were reinstated for one year only.

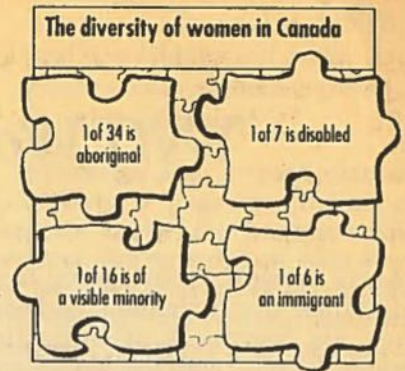
The Royal Commission recommended a national childcare program. This was promised in 1988 by the Conservative government, but after it was re-elected, it dropped this plan. The Commission recommended homemakers' pensions.

This was promised by the Conservatives in its 1984 election platform. Six years later, there is no sign of the promise ever being delivered.

The Commission recommended access to language training for immigrant women. After 20 years, discrimination still exists causing differential access to language training programs for male and female immigrants.

The Royal Commission, in its 167 recommendations, documented a wide range of situations in which women experienced unequal treatment, and in which the situation of women needed improvement. In 1970, women working in full-year, full-time jobs earned 59% of what men did. In 1989, that figure had dropped to 65% from 66% the year before. Over 20 years, there has only been an improvement of 6%. We still have a gap of 35% in the earnings of men and women.

Some of the Royal Commission's recommendations were only partly, or badly, implemented. For example, although an *Employment Equity Act* was passed, the employers that it covers are not penalized in any way for making no progress in meeting their own goals. Only enforced targets and timetables will make a difference in the hiring and promotion of women, and the reduction of the wage gap which is still so large. Another example is the recommendation to remove the discrimination in the *Indian Act*, so that a woman who married a man who was not a status Indian would not lose her status. Although this was done, the government did not foresee how many people would apply for status, and there is a backlog of years of paperwork. To complicate matters, the government did not allocate enough



funds to allow reserves to absorb the influx of people returning to them as a result of regained status. Reserves that were already short of housing, land, health care services, schools, are now even more overcrowded and financially strapped.

Many things have changed for women over the last 20 years. In 1970, some provinces had different minimum wage laws for women and men. Married women were not allowed to enlist in the Canadian Forces. There was much discrimination in law as well as in practice. The women's movement has been very active in keeping these issues in the forefront, and demanding action on the part of governments. The action taken by governments has not matched the commitment these women have shown, in staffing shelters for battered women, in initiating services, in educating the public, and working towards a society in which women and men are truly equal. The Commission did not touch on violence against women at all: this is one current priority of the women's movement.

Not all of the Royal Commission's recommendations were for the federal government. Its widespread recommendations also included suggestions for provincial and territorial governments and private business. The Commission received 468 briefs and about 1000 letters. It took over three years to conduct research, public hearings across Canada, and finalize these 167 recommendations. Dawn Black's research document reports each recommendation in its original form, and gives the current status and discussion of each recommendation. ♀

YND Women's Committee Challenge

Many women in our society face additional discrimination because they are members of minority groups. Women with disabilities are often forgotten. Immigrant women are discriminated against. Racism affects the lives of women. We challenge the YND to consider programs that will address the concerns of young women who face double discrimination.

Almost two million preschool children across Canada need childcare services because their parents work or study more than 20 hours a week. But, there are only 244,000 licensed childcare spaces to meet their needs. By 1995, the current federal government's project will only meet 25% of current need.

- *We challenge the YND to support publicly-funded, non-profit, quality childcare services that are universally available to all families who need them.*

The lack of affordable housing for women and their families is a serious problem. Some women must spend up to 80% of their disposable income on housing. Sole support mothers and elderly women on their own comprise the largest groups in need of social housing, but planners are not meeting their needs. Lack of affordable housing is a major obstacle for women with disabilities and for women trying to regain control over their lives, such as widowed and divorced women, women leaving violent home situations, and the homeless.

The facts speak for themselves. More than 50% of one-parent families headed by women are poor, compared to 9% of one-parent families headed by men. One million children under age 16 and 50% of elderly women live in poverty. Racism prevents full access to hous-

ing for native women and for women from visible minority groups.

- *Will the NDP ensure affordable, quality housing is available to all women across Canada?*

Women with full-time jobs earn about 65% of the average earnings of their male counterparts. Women's low wages contribute to the increasing feminization of poverty.

- *We challenge the YND to ensure that the equal pay for work of equal value provision in the Canadian Human Rights Act is enforced effectively in their own hiring of staff.*

Each year one million women in Canada continue to be physically and sexually abused in their own homes. Many teenage women are being beaten by their boyfriends. Many children are living in violent homes. The number of shelters is inadequate. Many women are unable to seek shelter because they are isolated by geography, language, or disability. We need to develop a coordinated campaign to prevent the crime of family violence.

- *We challenge the NDP to develop measures that will help women and children who are the victims of abuse.*

A large number of women may lose their jobs as a result of free trade. Labour intensive industries are most vulnerable to trade liberalization. Women may be forced into low-paying jobs as a result of free trade.

- *What does the NDP suggest to help women who lose their jobs as a result of free trade?*

In our society, women become pregnant and bear and raise children under conditions of inequality. Reproductive choice is an equality issue. Reproductive health services must be available to women in all parts of Canada and be fully funded by provincial health insurance plans. That includes information on birth control, family planning, sex education and abortion.

Legislation on abortion is neither necessary nor warranted. Abortion must be a medical service provided under the Canada Health Act.

- *The NDP must stand unequivocally for access to abortion services, research on contraception, more sex education in schools and increased information on birth planning.*

Politics is still dominated by men. Only 65 women have been elected at the federal level since Agnes Macphail in 1922.

- *We challenge the NDP and the YND to ensure that women's concerns are central in formulating policy and that the party put forward women in winnable ridings.*

Many older women live in poverty. Women earn lower wages than men during their years in the work force and tend to work fewer years because of family responsibilities. The current pension system does not acknowledge women's work in the home. Canada's Pension System needs to be changed to ensure adequate retirement incomes for all women, whether they work in the paid labour force or in the home.

Pension benefits should be doubled to 50% of earnings and spouses should be required to share their benefits when both reach retirement age.

- *We challenge the YND to approve policies that would ensure that women will be able to live in dignity in their retirement years.*

Feminism is and must be a transformational politics which addresses every aspect of life. It is not simply a laundry list of so-called women's issues such as childcare and equal pay. While these issues are important, feminism is not a new ghetto where women are confined to be concerned about only a select list of topics separated from the overall social and economic context of our lives. Similarly, feminism is not just an "add women and stir" into existing institutions, ideologies, or political parties as they are.

Charlotte Bunch, from Lynne Segal's, Is the Future Female?

- *The Women's Committee challenges the men of the YND to become aware of, and to try to curb their tendency to, verbally overpower women at meetings.*

Feminists usually structure their organisations in order to empower each other, not hierarchically with some women holding power over others. Women's collectives operate without an executive or executive director, and decisions are made by consensus. This way of operating allows all members to feel involved and effective and demonstrates that it is possible to organise without a hierarchy. While this method may not be practical for the YND,

- *We challenge the YND to adopt some of the principles of women's collectives: to reach as many decisions as possible by consensus of the membership, to empower the membership to become active themselves rather than imposing decisions from the top, and to rotate meeting chairs throughout all members who attend meetings.*

The major theme of pornography as a genre is male power—intrinsic to both the substance and production of pornography. It has become the hate literature of a misogynous

society, hate literature which portrays and endorses a message of violence, degradation and subordination of women, and often children. The distinction between erotica and pornography is the distinction between a sexuality which is mutually pleasurable and entered into freely, and a sexuality which is linked to violence, humiliation, and ridicule. In order to deal with pornography, it must be defined from a women's perspective. Pornography is a women's issue; the law cannot be gender neutral. Feminist criteria must be established for legislation on pornography, and include the following:

- Consider pornography a practice, not merely pictures, words, or ideas
- Target the harm women experience
- Make the law women-centred and not gender neutral
- Make the law women-initiated and women-driven
- Compensate the victims of pornography
- Advance gender equality
- Permit artistic and educational dialogue on sexuality.

- *The NDP must, as a priority, address the systemic problem of pornography and its place in the socialization process. We challenge the YND to initiate lobbying for a women-centred law on pornography.*

The *Globe and Mail* recently included an article entitled "Women student numbers rise as education funds sink: coincidence or policy?" The article stated that since more women have entered the social science areas of education, funding in those areas has dropped. However, in areas where women are still entering at a lower rate than men, i.e. engineering, physics, etc., funding has remained constant or increased. This draws a parallel with those jobs that become lower paying when they become predominantly women's jobs.

- *We challenge the NDP to research further this issue of women and*

education funding and to establish funding guidelines that would protect women's education from becoming "ghettoized."

Tax reform and, in particular, the GST have a negative impact on women. Under the proposed GST, women will be taxed on such items as tampons and sanitary napkins, and daycare and housing costs will increase. The reforms are neither fair nor progressive. Those with the lowest incomes—women—must spend most of their income on taxed necessities and will be hardest hit. The present system and proposed tax systems favour high-income earners.

- *The NDP must lead the fight against the GST and other regressive tax reforms. At the same time, the NDP must propose alternative tax schemes, which will protect women and all other low income earners.*

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R.E.A.L. Women - REALLY Dangerous

by Karen Dubinsky. Appears with permission of Canadian Dimension, Vol. 21, No. 6, October 1987

(This article was originally printed in 1987 and therefore an occasional specific reference may be dated. Ed.)

It's unlikely that you've missed hearing about that curiously titled organization, R.E.A.L. Women of Canada (RW). The Canadian Left and women's movement have been slow to react to the challenge they pose. But we must begin and fast.

To do so, we have to keep three things in mind. First, it's wrong to separate the economically right-wing (those who attack unions, or social-service spending) from the socially right-wing (those who oppose abortion or gay and lesbian rights). They are the same phenomenon and, increasingly, they are the same people.

The Coalition of Family Values, for example, recently organized in opposition to Bill 7 which extended human rights protection to gays and lesbians in Ontario. This group brought together fundamentalist churches, anti-abortion, and anti-feminist groups, as well as the National Citizens Coalition.

Feminists, gay and lesbian activists and the Left may at times feel isolated from one another, but to our enemies we are indistinguishable.

Second, we have to understand anti-feminist women as political actors in their own right. There's a tendency in the women's movement to see RW as "dupes of patriarchy" or "men in skirts." That's wrong. It's insulting to those involved and it denies them any responsibility for their actions. These people are not stupid.

Third, we have to allow ourselves—the women's movement—to

be self-critical. What is it about our feminism that some women are so threatened by?

Self-Declared War on the Women's Movement

The formation of RW was announced February 1, 1984, at a press conference in Toronto. Audaciously, they announced their membership at 10,000—no mean feat for an organization which has scarcely published its first newsletter.

RW has constantly evaded questions about membership lists and procedures, as well as sources of funding. Working backward from their 1986 membership income (\$28,000), their membership is more like 2,800, a far cry from the 45,000 they currently claim.

Two other recurring themes were announced at their public unveiling. Grace Petrasek, their first president, announced RW's opposition to most feminist positions—on abortion, easier divorce, universal daycare, equal pay and affirmative action—and to feminism itself. She vowed the organization would "fight back on every single issue the radical feminists make with which we do not agree."

Petrasek also unveiled one of their most stirring anthems—their

defence of the family. RW's major premise was and is that the family is the "corner-stone of Canadian Society." As she exclaimed, "The prime responsibility of a woman is her family!"

Through the rest of 1984, RW recruited, wrote position papers, and submitted briefs to government. Perhaps their best-remembered action of 1984 was the attempt to cancel, then disrupt, the televised debate on women's issues by the three party leaders during the federal election—on the by now familiar grounds that the National Action Committee panelists were "unrepresentative" of most Canadian women.

RW celebrated its first anniversary by holding its first convention. Two hundred delegates focused on an overt attack on feminism. Participants were told, for example, that NAC was a "danger to this free country" because it "breaks up marriages and destroys family life."

Invigorated, perhaps, by their convention, RW took bolder steps in their self-declared war on the women's movement. In Ottawa, organizers of International Women's Week (IWW) 1985 were faced with the dilemma of RW's request to celebrate this internationally recognized day of feminist solidarity with an anti-abortion work-shop. (We said no, and were ridiculed by the press). Later in the year the group made its second well-publicized request for funds from the federal Secretary of State.

It has been in the last 12 to 16 months, however, that the organization has begun to receive the kind of legitimacy they have been seeking. They lobbied federal MPs twice last year—one event was attended by 40 Tories and 9 Liberals. Their "gift" of home-made muffins with pink icing earned national headlines, and no



doubt endeared them to not a few politicians. Their support in the House extends from the lunatic fringe of the Tory back bench to some in the Cabinet—notably, Health and Welfare Minister Jake Epp.

Five of the seven women who initiated RW have university or professional degrees. Their first provincial representatives included a pharmacist, two business people, a social worker, and a teacher. Lynne Scime, their new president, is also a social worker.

Most are married to professionals and live comfortable, middle-class lives. Most of these women quit their jobs to raise their children, yet virtually all are also veteran political and community activists—primarily in the anti-abortion movement. In light of what RW has to say about “selfish and upwardly-mobile feminists,” it is indeed ironic to see such an active and accomplished group of women at the helm.

What Do R.E.A.L. Women Stand For?

RW are getting much smarter. They are far more careful in their public statements than they were in the beginning. A woman’s “prime responsibility” has been replaced in a recent brief with more flexible choices, such as, “To support homemaking as an option is not to say that we believe every woman should be in the home. Neither motherhood or a Master’s degree is for everyone.”

Last spring Toronto feminist Susan Cole squared off against RW founder Gwen Landolt (who has since fallen out of favour with the new RW executive) in a series of spirited debates held on university campuses. Sensing, perhaps, that she was in hostile territory, Landolt sang a surprising tune.

She stressed, for example, that men have made “the business world” in their image, and women should demand entry on “our terms”—better maternity leave, benefits for part-time workers, etc. Cole literally had to force Landolt to

reveal the groups’ real policies—their opposition to daycare, affirmative action, and equal pay.

This outburst of liberalism doesn’t amount to a major ideological shift. It’s a rather skilful bit of public relations. To see this, we have to start where they start, with the notion that the family is the cornerstone of society, and women’s place is within it. Their opposition to most feminist positions springs from this beginning.

They oppose universal daycare, for example, because they believe children should be raised by their mothers. They confidently cite the work of psychologists published in the 1950s to argue that “without an early foundation of love and trust, the victims of maternal deprivation might be gravely damaged for life, pathologically suspicious and detached.”



They oppose easier access to divorce as “trendy legislation” which lets couples off the hook too simply. “There is nothing new about unhappy marriages,” they argue. “What is new is the unwillingness of a married couple to work through the problems which are inevitable.”

Some don’t even see male violence to be sufficient cause for marital break-up. In one of their more horrifying statements, one of their leaders has insisted, “Too often a woman is sexually attracted to a man and rushes into marriage within six months. If she had waited a couple of years, she would have realized that he was the type to beat her up.”

As a solution, they’ve put forward

a program of tax-deductible marriage and pre-marriage counselling. This will, supposedly, prevent unhappy marriages and bolster shaky ones.

An example of the extent to which RW seeks to preserve the “family unit” is their scheme to end male violence. RW proposes a “buddy system,” in which an older and presumably wiser couple is paired with a troubled family. The idea is that when a fight starts, the buddy couple is called in to cool things down, thereby sparing the family the tragedy of separation or divorce. As Susan Cole asks, “Is she supposed to say as he grabs her by the neck and shoves her against the wall, ‘Uh, excuse me, but I have a phone call to make?’”

They are stridently opposed to human-rights protection for gays and lesbians. Their own literature is hysterical, calling upon all the elements of an old-fashioned moral panic—death, disease, and child-snatching. Gay-rights legislation gives “special privileges” to a group which has chosen an “offensive lifestyle.” Groups of gamblers or Hell’s Angels might claim similar protection.

“The homosexual,” they claim, “seeks sex in the young age group. As he ages, when he begins to lose his attractiveness, he resorts to buying sex from young boys.... Homosexuality involves acts such as oral sex, and intercourse, sado-masochism, bestiality and other perversions.” RW believes “Homosexuality is one of the gravest threats to society.”

You might presume that a so-called “pro-family” group would be concerned about incest and other forms of child abuse. Not so—or at least, not always. Lynne Scime argues that further child-abuse legislation is “detrimental to families” since “everyone knows children don’t necessarily tell the truth.” One wonders, is homosexual “seduction” of the young bad, but garden-variety heterosexual child abuse by family members (by far the most prevalent) okay?

The Funding Controversy

As soon as it became clear in 1985 that RW's application for funding from the Secretary of State was opposed by the women's movement and by some members of government, they went on the attack. Their newsletter began to read like scandal sheets.

The women's program of the Secretary of State was "riddled with radical feminist extremists." Certain recipients of federal funds were targeted, such as *Horizons* and *Kinesis* ("lesbian papers," to their intrepid investigators) and the NFB's Studio D (another hotbed of "radical feminism").

Federal politicians were attacked, including such notorious subversives as Judy Erola and Flora McDonald. RW supporters were urged to complain that federal funds are being used to "promote lesbianism in Canada."

Clearly, lesbian-baiting is a favourite trick. Most recently, funding for IWW from the Secretary of State was threatened thanks to RW's complaint that approximately five of over 200 events had a lesbian focus.

It seems quite clear that RW applied for funds precisely because they were as interested in damaging the women's movement and engaging in a lesbian witch-hunt as they were in actually getting some money.

The House of Commons committee created to study the Secretary of State's women's program recommended recently that feminist criteria should govern the distribution of grants in the future. It remains to be seen how RW will respond to their set-back; it's doubtful that the funding story is over.

How RW's Anti-Feminism is Used

The positions promoted by RW have found their way into government and press. RW has supporters in the Cabinet. It's common to see RW comment included in press reports with a focus on women. CBC's *Morningside*, for example,

began an RW panel to "balance" their regular feminist panel.

These are troublesome and annoying developments, but they hardly indicate an avalanche of anti-feminist sentiment. More important, and more insidious, is the way groups like RW have been used by the state either actively to oppose progressive demands, or to justify inaction.

Last year Ottawa's right-wing city council, which clearly had no desire to assist the women's movement, used RW as a "cover" to justify their reduction of funds to the local women's centre. Don't be surprised if this happens elsewhere.

Using an overplayed opposition as an excuse for inaction has long been a favourite delaying tactic of government. The federal government has refused for years to change restrictive abortion laws, for example, because of a so-called "polarized political climate," despite polls consistently reporting a huge pro-choice majority. RW claimed a great victory recently when the federal government opted for a tax-credit system for childcare—a policy RW had been pressing—rather than direct funding for childcare centres.

We should also be concerned about the impact of a potential anti-feminist cold war within government bureaucracies—especially those concerned with the status of women. Most feminists never believed that the state would fund or organize our revolution for us, yet we must recognize the importance of feminist research and policy analysis in government agencies. Press reports quote several unnamed feminists in government complaining that more and more of their time is taken up justifying actions or decisions RW might get angry about.

Why RW's Vision Appeals

One thing which makes the New Right so "new" is that they have discovered what feminists have been arguing for decades—issues related to the family, sexuality, and reproduction are political at their root. Defence of the family involves

the re-establishment of the family—not the state—as the provider of social welfare. It also involves the re-entry of women into the home as subordinate, reproductive beings.

Why do some women so enthusiastically support this vision? I don't believe women "consent" to patriarchy solely because they are terrorized by male violence. The popularity of patriarchal ideas lies in their ideological appeal; they are presumed-natural, common-sense ideas which simply "fit," or make sense of the world, for lots of people. When the world changes, and the structure begins to shake, the identified culprit is feminism—not the changed world. In this sense, the New Right is a response to feminism, and a measure of our success.

But our success is only partial. Feminism, in combination with changes in the economic and social structure in recent decades, has freed women from some traditional roles, but such freedom has often proven illusory.

For many it's meant entry into the low-paid, monotonous world of the female wage ghetto. It's meant an increase in poor, female, single-parent families.

As Andrea Dworkin and others have pointed out, sexual freedom can also be rather bogus. "Sexual liberation" as it unfolds in a still-patriarchal and capitalist society, can have the effect of "freeing" women from one of the few sources of security we have—a stable and responsible male breadwinner. As Rosalind Petchesky has observed, "Anti-feminism has attained a mass following and a measure of political power because it is in fact a response to real material conditions and deep-lying fears—a response that is utterly reactionary but nevertheless true."

In many ways, the rise of RW is intimately connected with the rise of liberal feminism. Barbara Ehrenreich has argued that what she calls "lifestyle feminism" has led fewer and fewer women to identify with the women's movement. "Outside the middle classes, lifestyle feminism can be actively repellent. If

feminism is for women who are slender, intelligent, and upwardly mobile, and you are over 40, perhaps overweight, and locked into a dead-end job or marriage, then you are more likely to see feminism as a put-down, rather than a sisterly call to arms."

"Feminism as career strategy" is clearly the image of feminism RW uses. They have a particular vision of feminists as young, white, upwardly-mobile, career-oriented women who simply don't give a damn about men or children. They pitch their message to older women, women with large families, women who don't work outside the home, or women with less than "professional" jobs. They tell these women that it's the fault of feminists—not

the state, business, or even men in general, that their work and lives are not properly valued.

This is the vision which the women's movement must counter in our struggle against anti-feminism.

What to Do?

Feminists often respond to RW by angrily reminding them that feminism has long championed the cause of women in the home and older women. The point is: why don't the women attracted to RW know this?

Anti-feminism forces us to ask some difficult questions about ourselves. I used to think that liberal feminism could be "tolerated." Now

I wonder if it does more harm than good. I used to find "feminist culture"—young, educated, urban women who spend most of their time in long and intensely personal political meetings—sustaining. Now I find it isolating.

I wonder how the women's movement can claim to work for the liberation of all women if it means ignoring or wishing away very real divisions among women based on class, race, age and politics.

Paying attention to RW is depressing, and clearly induces pessimism. But unless we challenge the perception of feminism which they are exploiting, we run the risk of losing the little ground we have gained.

And that's *really* depressing. ♀

Custody and Access Support

Munroe House provides support through a custody and access drop-in group. The counsellors will meet with potential group members and give one to one attention, and assess suitability for the group. Pre-screening assures confidentiality for members of the group. Women can call Munroe House and have telephone counselling.

This group is not suitable for women who have had their children apprehended by the Ministry.

Many women who have separated from physically and mentally-abusive husbands find that court decisions make it possible for the abuse to continue. Some of the ways this happens are:

- custody given to a husband who has not been involved in parenting and who wants the custody to punish his wife
- sexual abuse of the child that the court ignores or dismisses

as hysteria and manipulation

- forced visits with an abusive father that upset children
- allowing visits with a father who uses the visits to pressure the child for information about the mother's life-style, address, etc.
- physical and verbal assaults when the children are exchanged

- using visits inappropriately to verbally devalue the mother in the eyes of the children
- the growing use of mediation which is focused on getting an agreement, not on looking at the safety of wife and children, or the unequal power of the parents
- the belief that abusive fathers have a right to visit their children, that is based on research that children need to be involved with their fathers. This research does not consider abusive families and the need of the mother and children for safety.

The groups will meet at Munroe House from 1-2:30 every Wednesday EXCEPT the second Wednesday of the month when it will be in the evening from 7-9. Childcare may be available on request.

Phone number at Munroe House is 734-5722. ♀



Fathers, Imams and Ataturk

Women of Turkey

This article was written for *Connexions* in February 1986 by Sedef Ozturk and Fusun Yaras, two members of *Kadin Cevresi* [Women's Circle], a women's group based in Istanbul, Turkey.

When Aisha was born, her father barely hid his disappointment. Having a female child is like having no child at all. She grew up serving her family, especially her brothers, who had as much right over her as her father. She was 14 when her father started looking around for acceptable suitors. The man who had the means to raise enough money to buy her chastity would get her. When a prospective bridegroom was found, Aisha was seen and approved by him. She, however, was allowed only one glimpse of him.

The imam (religious officer) married them and that night she lost her well-protected virginity. Bedsheets stained with drops of blood were sent to the groom's parents the next day. Had she not been a virgin a fight may have ensued. She left her family and entered her father-in-law's household. She bore seven children in 12 years. Her husband would say he had three children because only boys were worthy of that title.

Aisha and her husband toiled hard to keep the family alive. The work aged them quickly. And then came the day when her husband brought home a younger woman, a second wife. Aisha gave her consent, resentfully perhaps, but she gave it. (Hadn't the prophet allowed for four wives to each man?) She lived as her mother had done and saw to it, in her turn, that her daughters kept their virginity intact for their husbands. And when Zeynep, her eldest daughter, was 14...

A typical story, one might say, of a rural culture where Islam and many feudal structures have a stronghold. How far have the rules governing marriage and women's position vis-à-vis the constitution changed? Or

have they changed? We would like to attempt a very short description of wedlock in Turkey, emphasising certain changes that came into being with the advent of the "nuclear family," but also tracking the traditional practices that continue.

The Islamic *sheria* (religious law) outlines the rules of conjugal life. These include the absolute dominance of the man over family members and property and his right to divorce a woman with the simple utterance of the words *bos ol* which means "you are divorced," the isolation of the woman in the household, her subordination to the man's will legally and socially, and the restriction of her functions to that of childbearer and servant. The *sheria* was first questioned during the 19th century under Ottoman rule by those who favoured "westernization."

The 1800s saw the beginning of the transformation of many feudal

structures which reached its peak with the founding of the nation-state of Turkey in 1923. With its integration into the world capitalist system, the economic base of Turkish society shifted. Rural migration to the cities increased dramatically, creating slum areas and causing major transitions in the traditional family structure.

Under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk [the founder of the Republic of Turkey], women were granted certain rights, such as the right to vote, the right to primary education and the shedding of *carsaf* (Moslem women's outdoor garment that covers a woman's entire body except for her eyes). Along with the legal transformations which aimed to bring Turkish women's standard of living to that of western women, came the break up of the traditional large family. Large numbers of women began moving to the cities to work, leaving behind their parents, grandparents and cousins in the villages. This also meant that men could no longer afford more than one wife and household.

The marriage age was raised. Girls could be promised to prospective grooms in childhood, but the new civil law passed in 1926 set the age of adulthood at 18. Women began participating in political activities and even became members of parliament. From this period until now, the family and the matrimonial institution may be analyzed with categories generally applied to the capitalist family structure. Hence, the situation of the Turkish woman is similar to that of her sisters all over the world where the capitalist mode of production exists.

However, despite these legal and economic changes, the cult of virginity is still as evident as it was in the past, and a man's honour is still



Photo by Fusun Yaras

measured by the chastity of his women—his mother, his wife and his daughters. Sexual and social violence aimed at women, in the family and in society, continues as before. Even though contraception has been adopted as state policy, women are still regarded primarily as childbearers and it is only recently that abortion, to a limited extent, has been legalised.

Although schools have been opened in all towns and most villages, families, especially in rural areas, send only their boys or limit the girls' schooling to primary education. It is interesting and rather terrifying to observe that even in big cities like Istanbul, where women have entered the labour force in great numbers, girls are trained to become obedient and hard-working housewives.

Marriage customs such as *goruculuk* where the man, after having seen a girl, decides if she is fit to be his wife, are still prevalent. To be fit is determined by her family's position, her knowledge of household management and her beauty. Although working women tend to choose their husbands rather than be forced to accept their fathers' wishes, women's passive position has not changed very much.

The changes that have come into being within the framework of the Republic, such as granting women certain rights, have held an important place in the government's rhetoric of democracy. Women who have gained their economic independence and have participated in political activities have begun to question the dominant male ideol-

ogy, the existing family structure and the extent to which these granted rights can be exercised.

Women are forming groups, such as ours called the Women's Circle (*Kadin Cevresi*), in which women of different backgrounds with different notions of how to gain liberation have come together. We publish books, have a reader's club and organise weekly meetings and seminars.

Contact:

Kadin Cevresi Yayinlari, Klod Farer Cad. 45/36, Servet Han, Cagaloglu, Istanbul, Turkey.

Further Reading:

Sex Roles, Family and Community in Turkey, edited by Cizdem Kazitcibaci, Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1982.



Women in the Media

by Donna Henningson

"If you're inclined to piss in the corner of your office, then you know it's time to get out."

The comment by Helen Slinger, CBC-TV drama development executive, brought laughter from 200 women (from such mainstream newsrooms as the CBC, BCTV, CKVU, the *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Province*, as well as the general public) who attended a one-day forum on women in the media Saturday, September 29, at SFU Harbour Centre.

Slinger was one of 11 successful media women who took part in the two panel discussions sponsored by the Canadian Association of Journalists: "Women & Power," and "Women, Words & Images."

The organization, according to local CAJ director Frances Bula (education reporter for the *Vancouver Sun*), acts as a public voice for journalism issues, and promotes

investigative journalism.

Slinger's remark touched on a main theme: the newsroom is still very much a male domain. Women have another view of what is newsworthy, and that alternate view is not easy to sell to male colleagues.

Dauphne Gray-Grant, chief features editor at the *Vancouver Sun*, described the imbalance. "Media are not very good at covering changes that happen slowly. We fail to cover the things that happen in silence that change the rest of our lives."

Keynote speaker Shirley Sharzer was a deputy managing editor of the *Globe and Mail*. Sharzer is coordinator of training and development for the Southam Newspaper Group, which has the highest circulation of any Canadian publishing group. She was one of 18 members of a 1988 Southam task force report, "Opportunities for, and Barriers to Women at Southam News." The report examines the degree to which women within Southam are taking on posi-

tions of responsibility and power. The figures are not encouraging.

Of 126 senior managers, six are women. In 1989, there were 31 senior management appointments. None were women. Ten recommendations came out of the Southam task force. One of the most controversial suggested a manager's annual performance assessment include how successfully he or she actively promoted women. A poor assessment would result in a loss in pay.

Bonnie Irving, editor of *B.C. Business* magazine, noted that, "Power shifts away from a position once a woman acquires it."

Gillian Shaw, business editor for the *Vancouver Sun*, said, "The granting of power to women is a sham." She called such efforts more "public relations than policy" because, for women, positions of power and responsibility force them to make sacrifices men don't have to face regarding their families.

Helen Slinger told women in media to "choose a goal, go for the goal, then get out of the position, and regroup... Centre on the product." Power will follow.

Patricia Graham, editorial pages editor for the *Province*, advised women to "never compromise yourself fundamentally." She spoke about the tendency for both men and women to bond together along gender lines. "No club, whether it be boys or girls, is worth the compromise."


Gillian Steward, former managing

editor of the *Calgary Herald*, urged women to explore alternate media besides traditional print and broadcast, such as cable, video, community newspapers and special interest publications. "Don't restrict yourselves. Get into the vehicle where you can move up quickly. Share and give power."

Suzanne Strutt, executive director of MediaWatch, an organization that monitors media for sexist material, described how CRTC guidelines regarding gender stereotyping are not widely understood. Lucie

McNeill, CBC radio host of *Almanac*, added that non-sexist guidelines at the CBC are left to individuals to enforce.

Rosie Siney, author of "Land Use Controversies: How'd We Get Into This Mess?", stressed the need for men in power to "accept female values."

Patricia Gruben, independent feature filmmaker, noted that men will let women take on positions of responsibility if women show ability and can "be trusted." 

Oppressed: Only 6 years ago husbands lost the "right" to "force sex on their wives"

Unheard: Every 17 minutes a woman in Canada is raped

Terrorized: One in 4 women in Canada is raped in her lifetime

Raped: One in 8 girls in Canada is raped before the age of 18

Assaulted: One in 10 women in Canada is assaulted by her husband

Ghetto-ized: Women still earn only 60% of that earned by men

Endangered: One in 5 murder victims in Canada is a woman murdered in the home

Dead: 14 women students murdered at the Université de Montréal on December 6, 1989

Letters

Dear friends,

Some comments on your summer issue....

I loved Eunice Brooks' "Notification of Intent" and think it should be put on a poster so that we can hang it up somewhere prominent and be constantly reminded of its message. "Women Speaking About Abortion" was also good but as a person of Mexican heritage I would have liked to have seen a write-up on Mexico (the article did come from a Mexican periodical). I did feel that there was an important element missing in this story and that was the appalling number of women who die each year due to illegal abortions. I believe the number in Mexico is over 100,000 women. I will try and find out the exact number if you are interested.

I especially liked the article "Isolated from History" as an introduction to the problem presented. I would like to see you ask that question of your readers: How do we remove the barriers to ensure a place in Herstory for all women (and not just white, educated women). To me the women's movement needs to find issues that will cut across race and class lines. We need to increase solidarity with, awareness and support of the poor and powerless women in the Third world and here at home. I could go on and on but.... Thank you again

for sending me *Priorities*.

Sincerely,
Carmen Kuczma

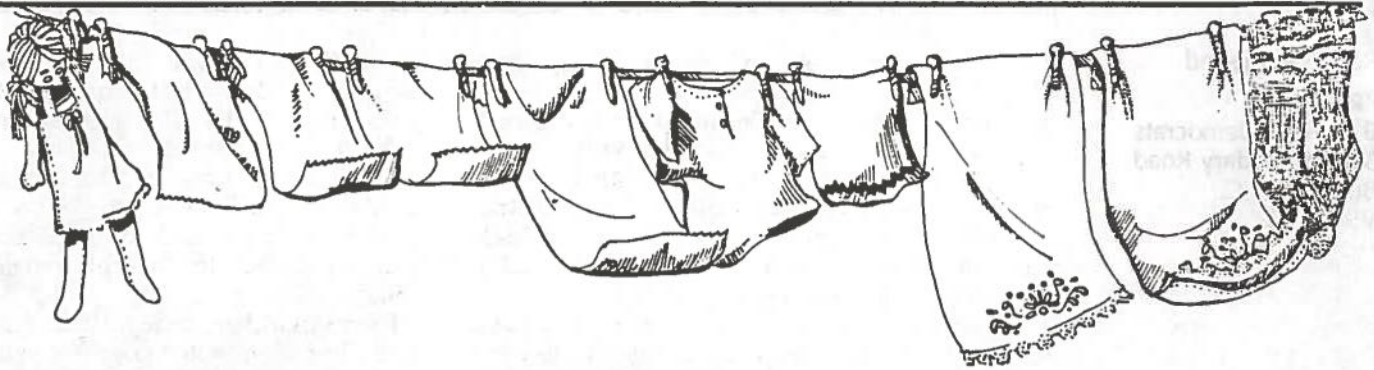
An open letter to Jack Munroe,
President of the IWA

Dear Brother Munroe,

I have been guilty of ignoring the terrible pain that the IWA collective has been going through for the last twenty years. The move from men and women workers to machines in the forest industry has brought the proud, powerful union, the IWA to its knees. The history of the IWA is one of real class struggle and determination in the face of the most powerful monied group in the province of B.C.—the forest companies.

But I think, Brother Munroe, that there is a silver lining on the more recent clouds that have beset your union in the form of demands for environmental consideration. Sustainable, sensible forest harvest is *labour intensive*. A shift to the type of forest management that environmentalists are demanding will mean a mighty step forward for forest workers. The ranks of your union will swell—and the bosses know it.

Sincerely,
Liz Thor-Larsen
NDP member Vancouver-Kingsway
and the WRC (Women's Rights
Committee)



Dear Editor,

Your plea for responses to your topic "Do you feel that the NDP has responded in an appropriate/adequate way to establish gender parity in the number of elected candidates for the next provincial election?" has moved me to write to you.

My answer is *no*, and there are several reasons why I feel this way. When I look at the list of nominees in the last *Democrat*, I see 20 women and 50 men, with five yet to be nominated. The main reason there are not more women nominated is that all the male incumbents want to keep their jobs as long as possible, so it is only when one dies or resigns that there are actually openings for women. I believe the Party should be pressing for *limits* on

terms in office (perhaps two)—and on *spending* on elections. I read in the paper that the Party spent \$3 million in the 1986 general election, and \$416,010 on the six by-elections, and plans to spend \$4.2 million in the coming general election. Such amounts of money for elections are disgusting, with the problems of just *existing* for many women and children. If there were more turnover in the MLA seats, and less expense, it would encourage more women to run. I think it would really be a good thing if *more* people sat in the legislature for *shorter* periods of time.

Also, I think the exorbitant pensions that are being paid after only six years in office are equally disgusting. The job of MLA should not be a life-long sinecure, as in the

Senate.

Another change that I have been advocating for some time (without much luck) is that the Party should lead the way to reform the election process to a system of proportional representation. Only that way would the legislature be truly democratic. And on the lists for the Party, there should be mandatory 50% women. Most of Europe runs on the PR system, but we continue to slavishly follow the British parliamentary tradition, which has always produced a male-dominated and wealthy club. The U.S. system is also a patriarchal oligarchy.

Well, any responses?

Sincerely yours,
Milnor Alexander

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...and plans to spend \$1.2 million in the coming general election. Such amounts of money for the party are **disgusting with the problems of just existing for many women and** ...

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