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# priorities

THE FEMINIST VOICE IN A SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

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## focus

### WOMEN AND COMMUNITY

#### ◆ Saying good-bye

Diane Dupuis resigns as editor of priorities and shares her experiences of being a feminist editor.

#### ◆ Thoughts on despair

From Bosnia to Bernardo, Marcy Toms looks at the evil in our midst and sees a solution in the community.

#### ◆ Taxi Driver

Melanie Watts finds community in Dawson Creek, thanks to her children's demands for playmates other than mom.

#### ◆ Looking back

A look back at the early years of the WRC and priorities found community through activism, involvement and just plain talking.



Communit $\blacklozenge$ y, n. Joint ownership, as ~ of goods; identity of character; fellowship (~ of interest etc.; also attrib. as ~ singing, in which all present join); organized, political, municipal or social body; body of people living in same locality (~centre, place providing social & other facilities for a neighbourhood); body...having religion, profession, etc., in common, as the mercantile the Jewish ~; the ~, the public; monastic; socialistic, or other body practising ~ of goods.

◆ the Concise Oxford Dictionary



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*"The issues and demands raised by the women's liberation movement are integral to the development of a democratic socialist movement. 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*

The editor is responsible for the content of all unsigned material.

**Editor:**

Nancy Weaver

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# priorities

THE FEMINIST VOICE IN A SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

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Volume 23, Number 3, Fall 1995  
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**FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:  
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# SAYING GOOD-BYE

Dear Sisters,

As editor of *priorities* I preferred not to publish unsigned editorials. Rather I felt it was more important to allow as many women as possible the opportunity to have their signed work published. An editorial then is a departure for these pages but since I resigned as editor, prior to convention in March, the new editor thought I should share my experiences.

I remember the fears I had when I took on the challenge of editing *priorities*. I knew a fair amount about the editorial process since I had done this kind of work before. I also knew about the potential problems of women being late with articles. But there was something missing that did not fully prepare me for every potential and real disaster. And I soon realized the feminist editor must possess nerves of steel and a sense of humour to survive the pitfalls. I also discovered that being *priorities* editor also meant taking on a mothering/nagging role and I will not miss chasing women down for late articles and missed deadlines.

Feminist publishing is a challenging and precarious undertaking in the current social climate and *priorities* weathered many storms over its 23 year herstory. At one point in the mid-1970's it almost folded due to lack of funding. A creative production strategy prevented this and eventually the party began to fund it. It now has a relatively secure funding base. During my time as editor several feminist periodicals, including *Healthsharing*, *Pandora* and the *Canadian Women's Periodical Index* folded due primarily to a lack of resources both financial and human. This concerns me. Every feminist periodical that closes means one less opportunity for women's voices to be heard, for our issues to be raised, for our information to be shared. For there is rarely, if ever, a new feminist periodical to take the place of the one that has fallen. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to support feminist periodicals. While I recognize that a subscription to every one is not financially possible, we can and should demand our local public libraries purchase subscriptions.

Another issue I want to raise is the upcoming provincial election. All of us have to work to ensure our government is re-elected. Women in our communities (both party members and non-party members) have to be reminded that since our government was elected in 1991 the number of child care spaces has increased, all women centres and transition houses now receive core funding and there is now core funding for abortion clinics. This funding is only secure as long as we have an NDP government in Victoria. A change in government will also mean an end to the ministry of women's equality. Women, particularly non-party members, have to be told that the Liberals cannot be trusted to protect women's interests.

The decision to resign as editor of *priorities* was not an easy one to make. However, after four years I felt the magazine needed a new perspective. I will miss working with the wonderful women I was fortunate enough to meet and work with on the women's rights committee. Women from all regions of the province who taught me that there is life beyond the Lower Mainland. And that there are fabulous communities of women in every region of the province. In the process I also learned a lot about myself and was able to work on eliminating some preconceived notions I held about other areas of the province.

These are the memories and experiences that will remain with me regardless of what new challenges I face and hopefully overcome.

In Sisterhood,





# TAXING TIMES FOR WOMEN

by CLAIRE YOUNG

**D**eath and taxes, they say, are the two certainties in life. For some women there is a third – they fare less well under our tax system than men. Poor women, single mothers and elderly women are just some of the groups discriminated against by our tax system.

In order to see the nature of the discrimination one has to understand that our tax system is about more than just raising revenue. It is, in fact, the most powerful social and economic tool. Tax deductions are just another method by which the government delivers a subsidy for a “preferred” activity or to a “chosen” sector of society. The government acknowledges this by publishing “tax expenditure accounts” which detail the cost of every tax-delivered subsidy. Did you know, for example, that in 1989 (latest figures available) the government spent over 10 billion dollars subsidizing private pension plans?

There is a second issue to consider when thinking about the impact of tax provisions. A tax deduction is worth more in terms of tax dollars saved to those who pay taxes at higher rates. If my wealthier neighbour pays tax at a rate of 50 per cent, and we both incur a deductible expense of \$5,000 for child care, he is subsidized in the amount of \$2,500 while I only receive

a subsidy of \$1,250. It is this feature of our tax system that results in many women being treated unfairly by our tax system.

Women earn on average about 70 per cent of what men earn. The average female headed family has an income less than half that of the average male headed family. Women are the majority of those living below the poverty line, and a staggering 60.6 per cent of single mothers live below the poverty line. For those women tax deductions are either worthless or worth less in amount than the subsidy delivered to those with higher incomes. Yet tax deductions are the method used by the government to deliver subsidies for, among other items, child care and retirement savings.

Take the private pension plans that I mentioned. The subsidy for contributions to them and the sheltering of income earned by the plan is the single largest tax expenditure each year in Canada. But it is an expenditure that many women do not benefit from. Why not? In many cases it is because they have no access to these pension plans. Women form 72 per cent of the part-time labour force, a group that does not receive benefits such as employment pension plans or indeed medical and dental plans which are also subsidized through the tax system. And of course there is no subsidy for those women who choose to stay at home and

work.

The Ontario Fair Tax Commission in its report on *Women and Taxation* said “the current system of tax assisted savings for retirement results in systemic discrimination against women as the benefits are disproportionately enjoyed by men.” This disproportionate distribution of tax savings contributes significantly to the poverty experienced by many elderly women. It is a vicious circle. Because women earn less during their time in the paid labour force, they have less to contribute to tax shelters such as RRSP’s and that lesser contribution (or inability to contribute at all) means that they do not have the pension income in retirement which means their unequal economic situation continues.

Perhaps the most pressing problem for women is the taxation of spousal and child support payments. Not only are these amounts taxed in the hands of the recipients (98 per cent of whom are women) but they are a deduction for the payers (men). The theory is that giving the payer a deduction encourages compliance with the support order, but studies show this is not borne out in practice. Consequently women who receive child or spousal support payments often face unanticipated tax bills and the value of the support payments they receive is reduced by up to 50 per cent. We know that when



the amount of these orders is set, the tax consequences are not often taken into account which means that men are receiving a subsidy for these payments while women are faced with the penalty of added taxes on the amounts they receive.

Unfortunately the future does not look encouraging. Canada is currently embarked on a course that is shifting the tax mix from income taxes to a greater reliance on flat rate consumption taxes such as the GST. Despite the promise of the Liberal government to abolish the GST, all indications are that it will be replaced with another flat rate tax which means those with lower incomes (predominantly women) will continue to pay a greater proportion of their income in taxes than those with higher incomes. The concept of taxation based on ability to pay is fast becoming meaningless in Canada. We know our tax system favours the rich but what we need now, and what the government has steadfastly refused to provide, is a gender breakdown of who benefits from tax subsidies. I fear the reason we do not see such statistics is they would reveal the true inequities of our system for women.

*Claire Young teaches in UBC's Faculty of Law. Reprinted from SPARC NEWS.*



# CANADA EXCUSES CHILD LABOUR

The federal government has caved in to corporations and right-wing academics who advised Canada to refuse to call for a "social clause" in international trade agreements.

Such a clause would help guarantee workers' rights to organize, ensure compliance with employment standards and bar goods produced by child labour. But Trade Minister Roy MacLaren insists economic growth in developing nations will automatically lead to increased pay, better working conditions and human rights. The market will take care of the workers.

This will be comforting news indeed to the estimat-

ed 200 million children working in virtual slavery in developing nations to produce clothing, textiles, toys, rugs and other goods sold to consumers in Canada and the USA.

It will be welcome news to workers like Lesley Rodriguez, one of an estimated 6,000 girls between the ages of 12 and 15 who work 12 hour days in the Honduran maquilas making clothing for companies like Liz Claiborne. The sweaters sell in Canada for \$90 – the girls are paid about .38 cents an hour. They are beaten for failing to make production quotas, are harassed and abused on the job.

Unfortunately,

MacLaren's message comes a bit late for children like Iqbal Misah, a Pakistani child who was sold to a carpet manufacturer when he was four years old. Iqbal spent six years chained to his loom, earning the equivalent of .04 cents a day. This March, just weeks after the twelve year old testified at European hearings on child slavery, he was shot dead while playing outside his home.

It's also a bit late for the 188 workers, many of them 13 years old who were burned to death in the Kadar toy factory fire in Thailand in 1993.

What the federal government refuses to acknowledge is that the competitive advantage of many developing nations is based on the exploitation of workers, especially children.

These workers are not waiting for the Canadian government to do the right thing. They're risking their safety and their lives to speak out and to organize.

After Lesley Rodriguez was fired for trying to organize a union at the Honduran clothing factory, the UAW brought her to the US for Senate hearings on child labour.

As a result of her testimony, the Liz Claiborne factory agreed to recognize the union – the first to be established in a Honduran maquila. Employment of children at that maquila has not ended, but they are restricted to no more than six hours a day, instead of

At the last WRC steering committee meeting, Sandra Boehner expressed frustration at not being able to find a shoppers guide to identify companies which violate human rights and the environment. Several women expressed an interest in helping Sandra research and compile the list. More details on this list as available.

12.

Many corporations, sensitive about their market image, have adopted "codes of conduct" for their suppliers that prohibit child labour. But it's too easy to hide sweatshop conditions behind a designer label.

Workers inside developing nations are prepared to organize workplace-by-workplace, so they can see some of the benefits of economic growth. In Canada and the US, unions and community activists can campaign against one multinational employer after another. But a ban on child labour in international trade agreements along with strong monitoring and enforcement mechanisms should also be put in place.

The Canadian government should also use every opportunity to ensure that multinationals can no longer make profits from the slave labour of children. Reprinted from *Counter Offer*.

The Lower Mainland Lesbian and Gay Benefits Society has just published a workshop facilitators' manual called *Time for Change: Recognizing the Rights of Lesbians*. The manual is for groups or individuals interested in doing workshops about homophobia in the workplace. It was produced with the help of a \$15,000 grant from the ministry of women's equality and \$3,000 from the Legal Services Society.

For more information about the manual, call 999-4609. Manuals cost either \$20 for individuals or \$30 for institutions, plus \$5 for shipping and handling.



## WHERE DO WE STAND?

# NDP HARASSMENT POLICY

by JESSICA BOWERING

Over the last few months, our government has been dealing with a case of sexual harassment by a (former) cabinet minister. This has been an extremely difficult and controversial problem at least partly because there is no pre-existing policy and grievance procedure that applies to cabinet and caucus. There is too much power and personality involved in harassment for it to be effectively dealt with, or prevented, on a case by case basis. As New Democrats we recognize this as a matter of policy but are still falling short on the implementation.

The NDP does have a harassment policy and grievance procedure which began as a convention resolution and was then passed in principle (whatever that means) at Provincial Council in June of 1993. It contains a definition of harassment, grievance procedures for convention and between conventions and a suggested procedure for local constituencies and ridings. At convention there are supposed to be two ombudspersons who take a proactive role in educating and informing delegates about harassment and who deal with complaints as they arise. It is worth noting that this policy provides for third party responsibility

which means that a complaint can come from either someone who has been harassed, or from someone who has witnessed harassment. The assumption is that everyone is responsible for maintaining a harassment-free environment.

There is supposed to be a grievance committee between conventions with jurisdiction over Provincial Council and executive and all centrally elected or appointed bodies. Again these people are to take a proactive and preventative role as well as responding to complaints. It is strongly suggested that constituency and riding associations establish similar committees and education processes.

Anyone who has recently attended a convention or been involved with other party committees will not recognize the procedure outlined above for the simple reason that it does not happen. There was no grievance committee established at this year's convention. There has never been a grievance committee established between conventions, and of the two ombudspersons who were appointed, one is no longer a member of Provincial Council. And it is a very rare constituency or riding that has a current grievance committee and harassment education plan, although many do take some action at election time.

The fact is that this policy is absolutely dependent on a consistent commitment, high profile and follow up. The structure of the party makes it impossible to enforce a policy any other way. This is a volunteer organization, so the disciplinary powers of the policy

cy, we wouldn't need the policy in the first place. This is the other reason why the grievance procedures were endorsed only in principle and also why the convention resolution that initiated the policy was designed to rely heavily on education and on internal

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*People say they are afraid the policy could be misinterpreted. What they mean is they are afraid the policy applies to their behaviour.*

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are weak and there is no short term incentive to use them since the potential result is the loss of a volunteer. And it is unclear what kinds of legal obligations and rights volunteer organizations have to their members, which is part of the reason why the policy exists only in principle.

This is also a democratic organization so the policy recommends certain actions that it can't enforce because things that make the policy strong, such as third party responsibility and what disciplinary power it does have, are immediately controversial. People say they are afraid the policy could be misinterpreted. What they mean is they are afraid the policy applies to their behavior. The problem is that if there weren't some members of the NDP who have reason to oppose a strong anti-harassment poli-

arbitration.

At the very least, education and the election of ombudspersons needs to be done on an ongoing basis because the elected bodies of the NDP have a high turnover rate. Many of the people currently on council probably don't even know that there is a harassment policy, or have any idea how to access a grievance procedure. We are still only able to respond to harassment on a case by case basis. This means that we are not living up to our responsibility to create a harassment-free environment. And it also means that we are more vulnerable to the messy and public situations that are of no benefit to the victims of harassment and that are damaging to the party.

*Jessica Bowering is chair of the WRC and a Women's Studies student at SFU.*



# YOU, TOO CAN DO PRIORITIES

by NANCY WEAVER

It is a good thing to admit how little one knows. I had to admit how little I knew about the WRC after listening to women talk about our committee's 23 year history at a women's caucus meeting during convention in March. There was so much wisdom and experience in that caucus room. I wanted to know more. I live five minutes from UBC but have avoided the campus after dropping out of university in 1979 – bracing myself for possible trauma I headed off to look at the priorities archive in Special Collections and what turned out to be days and days of reading and learning. It was great! Exhilarating. Really. We are lucky to have our history so passionately and fully documented. There is so much. What follows is an all too brief review of what I learned and read for those who know as little as I did.

An NDP women's committee existed in the 1960's but lapsed into relative inactivity after 1968. A committee formed again in 1971 to respond to the federal task force report on the Status of Women, worked to organize the first NDP women's conference held in Vancouver in September of 1971 and prepare for the 1972 convention.

There were two women's caucus meetings at the provincial convention in 1972. A report of the cau-

causes in the first edition of priorities said there was much "discussion of the need for a ministry of women's equality and how to get the resolution to the floor". There were "many doubts and hesitations...but after talking about personal experiences of discrimination faced by many" and "as the meeting progressed, feelings of solidarity grew stronger and by the time we had adjourned there was solid agreement on the need for the ministry and strong determination to fight for its passage."

The resolution calling for the creation of a women's ministry passed with a two-thirds majority. However, not all women delegates and not even all women MLA's voted for the resolution – some felt the creation of a women's ministry would ghettoize women's issues, that such a ministry would be divisive. A letter to priorities from a delegate who did not vote for the resolution blasted the WRC for its "negative, critical attitude" which served only to "turn off" many women and men. "Are you not aware" the letter writer continued, "that we are no longer fighting the Social Credit government and that we do indeed have an NDP government in BC?" Another letter said that a women's ministry would segregate women and "be like giving women a crying towel, and we don't want that!"

But the resolution had

passed and at the second women's caucus meeting organizers decided on a two step plan – to have conferences to discuss and plan for the ministry – and begin publishing a magazine. One title considered was the Godmother (this was the seventies, remember) but, echoing a comment made by then Premier Dave Barrett that the creation of a ministry of women's rights was a low-priority, priorities was chosen.

Volume one, number one was published in January of 1973. This first issue captures the energy and fervour of a growing movement. In the 1970's an issue of priorities cost 25 cents, ran to 40

ly liked the company of women. It always ranged somewhere between competitive and boring. As I sought common ground for growth with other women, bonds became stronger and trust grew. What a tickle!"

Volume one was produced by an enviable editorial board. Gillian Campbell, Melodie Corrigan, Cynthia Flood, Marianne Gilbert, Bev Turner and Sharon Yandle were joined by Hilda Thomas, Margaret Birrell, Elaine Bernard and many others. In the mid-1970's chapters of the women's committees which had formed all over BC took turns producing priorities – an article titled "You,

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pages and was published monthly. On average, 15 pages were devoted to letters which came in from Terrace, to Toronto, to Tehran. Women had found a place to talk about their personal and political lives – articles and letters focused on health, work, media, humour, sexuality and the unexpected joys of sisterhood. Ronni Holtby wrote "I, like so many other women, had never previous-

too can do priorities" outlined what was necessary, including a typewriter in good working condition with carbon ribbon, black construction paper, blue pencils for proof reading and lots of correction fluid.

The pages of these early copies of priorities reflect a growing activism. Women's committee chapters were forming all over BC – groups from Victoria,

*continued on page 12*



# SOME THOUGHTS ON DESPAIR

by MARCY TOMS

In the course of learning about and teaching history, I have been confronted by many, many horrifying images. In my head are lodged bulldozers moving heaps of bodies at Auschwitz, children in Vietnam running from Napalm bombs, the skeletal leftovers of civil war in Biafra, a bespectacled Heinrich Himmler, nervously wiping a splat of brain from his forehead as he witnessed a mass murder. My objective in showing these and other images to my students was both to document and to provoke in them the will to act thoughtfully for the general good. One day in March of 1988, a group of student representatives from my History 12 class came to request that I not include the disturbing World War II concentration camp segments of the British World at War series in my upcoming lessons. These were students I knew very well, most had been in my Social Studies classes for four years and they were uniformly bright, inquiring and socially conscientious. The reasons for their request were interesting. They said they remembered the scenes from grade nine, had found them disturbing but necessary and insisted that they had learned both my lessons. They knew, clearly and without doubt, what was right and wrong, how

to make judgments, the kind of world they wanted. Evil, they recognized, did exist. I agreed with them and instead we watched the White Rose, a German film about adolescent anti-Nazis in 1942 Munich. It, too is disturbing – there is violence, the dissidents, including Sophie and Hans Scholl, are executed – but it is also optimistic and ultimately uplifting about the human spirit. The documentary

streets of East Vancouver, sleeping in a basement suite – each holds its own danger. Even though fears about rising crime are not verified by statistics (violent crime is not increasing on a *per capita* basis), Canadian women have witnessed what appears to be an escalation of violence against them. The media – television in particular – has intensified our fears by the very methods of

of us are left with deeply troubling questions about how much we should view or read, whether of the trial of Paul Bernardo or the search for Lynn Duggan's remains or the spontaneous roadside shrines for recently murdered women. Perhaps, as did my History students, we think we know enough about evil and, like them, are prepared to resist it. Or, perhaps we fear that by viewing, we condone or participate in that same evil. Perhaps we are, above all, afraid.

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*Today, when cruelty, ridicule and misogyny are major sources of entertainment, when politically-motivated torture is on the rise, when Bernardo and Bosnia share the front page, we need to recognize not only evil persons but also the less tangible, socially-condoned evil that nurtures individual pathologies.*

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The interconnection among gender, violence and victimization appears clear, unmuddied and almost simple when the faces viewers associate with it are those of Carpenter, French, Mahaffey, Cameron, Duggan. The images of these young women fuel anxiety because of their very conformity. Women

– and men – easily identify with the smiling faces of the now-dead, women we can imagine knowing, women we think might have been our own friends or neighbours and, thus, through this imagined connection, our own vulnerability is exposed. These were ordinary women, playing by the rules, not troublemakers, boat rockers or flaunters of conventional morality. Yet these qualities did not protect them from apparently random evil. What, then, as we recognize this appalling truth, are we – women and

version of the Holocaust did not seem to offer my young students this – in it, the concentration on detail and fact, however imperative, was depressingly ominous about the future of the human condition. During the past couple of years particularly, I have been aware – as have thousands, likely millions, of Canadians – more than ever before of the extraordinary terrors which wait for women in the very ordinary course of daily life. Walking to school, working alone in a suburban shop or on the

reportage. Coverage of recent murders of young women is extended by a new focus on familiarity with victims and the agonies of their families and friends through the unforgiving lens of the camera and the voice of the microphone. Evil exists. Often now this coverage slips into voyeurism, especially when it finds itself in the midst of unbearable grief. Debates rage about the moral propriety and journalistic necessity of reporting and printing everything given as evidence in court rooms. Many

– and men – easily identify with the smiling faces of the now-dead, women we can imagine knowing, women we think might have been our own friends or neighbours and, thus, through this imagined connection, our own vulnerability is exposed. These were ordinary women, playing by the rules, not troublemakers, boat rockers or flaunters of conventional morality. Yet these qualities did not protect them from apparently random evil. What, then, as we recognize this appalling truth, are we – women and



men – to do? And, remember, the women in whom we see ourselves are not alone. They are joined by many, many more from society's margins, without power or personal resources, who also die violently – left in alleys, tricks gone bad, poisoned and then stabbed in Vancouver's east side beer parlours. Lots of women are murdered every year whose names are never publicly known, whose faces never become features of the daily news. They are sex trade workers, First Nations women, the very poor, women who are ill and broken. Their deaths are seldom eulogized in the media – rarely, if ever, do these victims become symbolic of victimization. Sometimes, those of us whose sense of safety is never disturbed breathe silent sighs of relief, of self-righteousness, when the dead are prostitutes, junkies, thieves. It is true that even empathy with victims is circumscribed by class and racism.

After World War II, historian Hannah Arendt analyzed the social psychology of the Third Reich in a study titled *The Banality of Evil*. To digress briefly, an intriguing aspect of European folk and fairy tales is the monstrous and foreign character of those who do harm. Often physically repugnant, too large or too small, with crooked faces, the "others" neither look nor behave as do human beings. They are quite apart from us. Not so the perpetrators of the Final Solution, not so those who,

fully aware of the virulent anti-Semitism of the party voted for the Nazis or later, welcomed them as occupiers. These Himmlers, Heydrics and Eichmanns, these dutiful, ordinary electors and collaborators, were exceptionally commonplace. Unexceptional. Banal. They went about their ordinary business as the ovens burned overtime. Their actions were deliberate and methodical. Nothing on the outside identified them as monsters. Historian M.R.D. Foot points out that, as common standards of decency were reversed by Nazism, atrocious conduct readily passed as normal. Today, when cruelty, ridicule and misogyny are major sources of entertainment, when politically-motivated torture is on the rise, when Bernardo and Bosnia share the front page, we need to recognize not only evil persons but also the less tangible, socially-condoned evil that nurtures individual pathologies.

Earlier I noted that for women, many of the unremarkable tasks, chores and actions of daily life are, or seem to be, fraught with hazards. Television and tabloids simultaneously sentimentalize victims and sow seeds of fear. I am not usually susceptible to the debilitating effects of pessimism or despair, but I confess that as I read and watch the news this summer my sense of being in an intact, secure, confident world has eroded. Certainly others feel similarly and resolve to buy pepper spray, enroll in self

defense courses, bar their windows, stay home at night, seek protection.

Despite my inclination to weep easily as I read that the ashes of a murdered Coquitlam woman will be returned to her family home in Poland, I realize that none of these strategies contains a real solution, either to fear or to danger. None addresses the existence of evil. Ultimately, of course, there are neither individual nor simple solutions. The option of withdrawing from the world does not really exist and trying to ameliorate murder through capital punishment merely replicates the original murder. What *will* begin to make a difference is moral courage and a commitment to an ever broader and more complicated moral community that transcends the role-based communities of tradition and establishes itself on the foundation of relationships. By trying to work out the practicalities of such a morality, its creators will confront the real difficulties of merging the personal and the political and of developing a social conception of the self. For surely it is only by recognizing the "other" in ourselves, by *learning* to empathize, that the fragile web of human society can survive. And, with survival and an increasingly global moral concern perhaps will come – from both women and men – the moral strength and the political will to confront evil in all its forms.

*Marcy Toms is a Vancouver teacher and feminist-activist.*

THE INTER-  
CONNECTION  
AMONG  
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AND  
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TION APPEARS  
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THOSE OF  
CARPENTER,  
FRENCH,  
MAHAFFEY,  
CAMERON,  
DUGGAN



# PERSONALLY SCREAMING

A column called *Personally Screaming* has appeared intermittently in priorities since the beginning. The column was called variously *Politically Screaming*, *Nostalgically Screaming*, *Personally Speaking* — well, you get the point. Women wrote about the death of a partner; a high-school reunion; a child custody trial — anything that affected them. Need a place to vent? This space has your name written all over it. — ed.

## OH NO, NOT ANOTHER WOMAN!

by JESSICA BOWERING

When Audrey announced her resignation, one of the first things I heard was a prominent New Democrat, who shall remain nameless, saying that we had tried a woman leader now, it hadn't worked, and it was time to try something else. I wonder what "something" he had in mind. It couldn't have been a male leader, since we have clearly tried that before.

When men lose elections, nobody is ever tempted to say that we should stop nominating and electing men (well, almost nobody). We tried a male premier in Ontario, and it didn't work. Guess we'd better try something else.

The argument seems to be that having just had a woman as leader, it's only fair for our next leader to be a man. All of a sudden gender parity seems pretty important to people who thought it was discriminatory before. If we really wanted gender parity, we'd have women as leaders for a lot of years to come.

Maybe I'm hopelessly naive, but I'm disappointed. Every member of this party should know better than to judge leadership qualities by gender. So every time I hear "not another woman", it makes me want to scream.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZER POSITION MAY BE "REASSIGNED"

by LOLA MILLER

It has recently been proposed that the position of women's organizer on staff at provincial NDP headquarters be reassigned, making the person in that position just another organizer with some "additional duties".

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*it is an appalling idea that while we on the WRC fund raise and educate about the necessity of equalizing our female representation in government, there is now the proposal to undermine that very necessary visible presence on staff*

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Those "additional" duties, to be drafted by the Women's Rights Committee, supposedly are to be those pertaining to the organization of women within the party and those duties related to the functioning of the Women's Rights Committee. While this may sound progressive, it is in fact a distinctly regressive move in a party that has always, publicly at least, championed the rights of women to be politically active and to be politically active in a manner equal to that of men.

The creation of the posi-

tion of women's rights organizer was a convention decision and there is a solid history of the work that has been done by that person, on behalf of the party's women candidates, activists and members. The position has a visible presence to the women and men of the party and has an active

responsibility to the Women's Rights Committee in their work on behalf of the women of not just the party, but the women of the entire province. The position also affords a continuity in ongoing projects as well as a knowledgeable resource to all aspects of that work being done by, for and about women in our party and province.

With the above in mind, it is therefore an appalling idea that while we on the WRC fund raise and educate about the necessity of equalizing our female representation in government,

there is now the proposal to undermine that very necessary visible presence on staff. Being a politically active woman, even in this theoretically egalitarian party still has major drawbacks and challenges unknown to most men. To have a staff person with the reams of experience, background and connections that the women's organizers have had is an essential support to those women in our party that are already politically active and is absolutely vital to those that are becoming more so.

The WRC has voiced their concern about this issue in a letter to the Provincial Executive. To date, there has been no response.

*Lola Miller is editor of the WRC's page in the Democrat.*

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you are concerned about the loss of the women's rights organizer position, contact Patrice Pratt, Brian Gardiner and Ann Frost at Provincial Office (3110 Boundary Road, Burnaby, V5M 4A2).



# TAXI DRIVER

by MELANIE WATTS

I have a new job. I acquired the job by default since I work at home and am more likely to be in a position to fulfill the duties required of a taxi driver. Living on the edge of a hay field, forty kilometers from town – town being Dawson Creek, population 13,000 – it became necessary to expand my job description of wife, mother, gardener, writer and neighbour to also include taxi driver.

As the children grew older their desire for playmates, other than me, became a growing concern. The day my son expressed a desire that we should have

more children, especially boys so that in his words he would have someone to play with – his sister being only six months old at the time – gave us pause for thought.

Since having more children was not in the master plan, we had to come up with a creative substitute. School was a distant future endeavor, hockey and soccer out of the question. Thus, preschool presented itself to be the only realistic place to enroll my “desperately seeking playmates” son. At this point, I think back to the moment of that seemingly innocent decision and think what my life would be like now if I had instead given up dreams of a Walden inspired existence and moved to town.

Easier perhaps, but certainly less richer. By moving to town I would have shut many doors on the human experience by searching out only those people who also share my idiosyncratic sometimes egocentric view of the world. Instead, by force of circumstance, I'm now happy to share my life with everyone, no matter what view of the world they purport. There is always something you can agree on and this fact can become the bridge that joins you together in the web of human contact that stretches around the world.

Eleanore Leacock, who has a Ph.D. in Anthropology, believes that

sociality, curiosity and playfulness and not assertive competitiveness and aggressiveness have made it possible for a fairly defenseless creature such as ourselves to evolve into human beings. Her premise of sociality is that we desire to seek out others of the same species. Thus, through continual contact and shared experiences, cooperation was paramount in the lives of our forebears. Cooperation formed the basis for the “group life” that made possible our evolution into successful human beings. Humanity could not then have evolved from an innately aggressive and competitive being as postulated by Thomas Hobbes.

Cooperation needs a shared experience or fact to serve as a basis for communication. So, because I didn't want to feel like I was going around in circles, one trip to town in a day is a trek, two trips to town or – blanch – three trips becomes a marathon. I had to come up with yet another creative solution to my dilemma. Obviously by offering to drive some of my children's friends, who were also participating in swimming, brownies, soccer, etc., I could reasonably expect that the friend's parents would reciprocate at a later date, thus relieving me somewhat of my taxi driving duties.

To say it worked would be the understatement of the



year. Since the distance between home and the event my child was attending were a long way from each other, dropping the children off was not an option. So, through our children's common interests and my developing skills as a taxi driver the avenues, so to speak, were open for communication. The people I have met as a result have contributed much to the richly embroidered tapestry of my life. Our children have become the common footing for the bridge that has joined us together.

Surprisingly, even though our political viewpoints are at opposite ends of the spectrum our similarities are much greater than one would initially expect. It seems that people all want the same thing – the desire to feel happy and secure in the knowledge that one is part of a network of interested friends.

Whilst taxi driving does cut into my free time it is not the drag that it could be but rather an interesting, enjoyable experience due in part to the happy, slightly dotty persona I have been forced to adopt in order to prevent myself from biting my nails.

*Melanie Watts is a northern regional representative on the WRC, a free-lance writer and a northern correspondent for CBC radio's Almanac show.*

## women's

## rights

## committee

### steering committee meetings, 1995

◆ Saturday, Sept. 30  
9:00 am to 4:00 pm  
location: tba

◆ Saturday, Nov. 25  
9:00 am to 4:00 pm  
location: tba

for information call:  
Vicki Robinson at

430-8600

or

Jessica Bowering at  
876-2830



# PRIORITIES

*cont'd from page seven*

Langley, Nelson, Courtenay, Prince George, Richmond, Fraser Valley West and Kamloops reported on their activities regularly. Conferences were held to raise awareness. In February of 1973 for example the Lower Mainland regional conference on the ministry of women's rights attracted 100 women ages 18 — 70 — "students, homemakers, women on welfare, professionals, trade unionists, MLA's."

A definite highlight of the early years was Rosemary Brown's campaign for leadership of the federal NDP in 1975. This was the first time a woman had gone so far and come so close — Hilda Thomas wrote "we were all amateurs when we started the campaign in February. Just look at us now."

In June of 1973, Hilda Thomas attended a conference in Toronto called Women for Political Action. In her article

for priorities titled "Diary of a Mad Delegate" she describes the conference and workshops on writing briefs and public speaking — Rosemary Brown's warm and rousing keynote speech — meeting and talking with women activists from all over Canada and all political parties. An MPP from Ontario tells the most frequently asked questions she is asked by the press — "How do you manage with all those children? What is your favorite recipe? Does your husband approve?" On her way home, musing on the conference and looking out the airplane window Thomas beautifully articulates the hopes and challenges faced by a beginning movement — "On the 747, chasing the sun to Vancouver, I try to spy out little bits of solid ground through the cloud masses. Once in a while the comforting squares of farmland show, and a river unwinds its silvery scroll. But mostly there are only clouds. We land in near-darkness. It is all over. It has hardly begun".

*Nancy Weaver is priorities editor, this issue marks her debut.*

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## INTRODUCING **ALEXA**

ALEXA McDONOUGH, the only woman running for the leadership of the federal NDP brought her campaign to Vancouver on June 7th. The announcement of her decision to run was made a week earlier -- she made the decision to run a week before that. Her decision surprised many as she had resigned as leader of the NDP in Nova Scotia in November of 1994 (a position she held for 15 years) and seemed to be winding down and getting ready to take a break.

But, as she told the 100 or so who gathered at the Blue Button Cafe to hear her speak it was Paul Martin's budget and the Liberal move to the right that made it impossible for her not to run.

Alexa was trained as a social worker. When elected leader of the Nova Scotia NDP in 1980, she became the first woman in Canada to lead a major political party. From 1981 to 1984, she sat as the lone woman and sole New Democrat in the House of Assembly, a position she gladly relinquished when two additional New Democrats were elected and the NDP regained recognized party status in Nova Scotia. She retained her seat in subsequent elections and is MLA for the constituency of Halifax-Fairview.

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# BOOK REVIEW

by SUSAN FONSECA

## *Shooting the Hippo: Debt and deficit and other Canadian myths*

— Linda McQuaig

In her latest best-seller *Shooting the Hippo*, Linda McQuaig takes aim at the hysteria surrounding Canada's national deficit. McQuaig agrees that Canada's debt is a problem but she rejects the currently orthodox theory that Canada faces a debt crisis and has no alternative but to slash social programs. She makes the case that high interest rates— not our social welfare system — are responsible for the deficit problem.

The book's title comes from a 1993 episode of W5, CTV's popular current affairs program in which shooting the baby hippo in the New Zealand zoo was seen as the only "reasonable" solution because the debt-ridden government had no money to expand the hippo pen. Death was seen as the ultimate and only deficit solution. While the program focused on New Zealand's presumed debt crisis, it was widely interpreted as a cautionary tale of Canada's own looming debt crisis.

According to McQuaig, the show was "a fine exam-



ple of what could perhaps be termed 'deficit pornography' - material designed to arouse our fears through the use of provocative imagery...of Canada poised precariously at the edge of a cliff, or about to slam into a concrete wall." Rejecting the episode's graphic message and the theatrical method of communicating a complex subject, McQuaig explains how New Zealand actually faced a brief currency crisis - not a debt crisis.

McQuaig argues that "a prevailing ideology has taken hold in our culture with a ferocity that has all but eliminated any meaningful debate." While most Canadians are reluctant to give up the security of our social programs, it appears that many have succumbed to the sense of inevitability and helplessness imposed upon us by the steady bombardment of the deficit slashers.

With McQuaig's latest book becoming an instant best-seller, she has not doubt alarmed the financial and business elite who label her a "heretic." But readers will find *Shooting the Hippo* a compelling and illuminating read. She argues that we have failed to take into consideration the role played by the Bank of Canada's zero-inflation policy. The Bank's policy has kept interest rates high, which has thrown us into recession and brought us unemployment, which McQuaig argues is the real crisis.

Ambitious in scope, this book is a must read for those of us who are still not convinced that the program slashers and hackers have our collective economic best interests at heart. *Shooting the Hippo* is a masterful, well researched, informative and entertaining book by one of Canada's best-selling investigative authors. In these days of pack journalism and right-wing "think tanks", it's refreshing to find an author who sleuths out the hidden story and thinks for herself. Canada could use a few more "heretics" of McQuaig's calibre.

*Linda McQuaig is also the author of Behind Closed Doors, The Quick and the Dead and The Wealthy Barber's Wife.*

*Susan Fonseca is a member-at-large on the WRC executive.*





# Dear Priorities

*In our last issue we ran an article criticizing federal caucus opposition to the Liberal government's gun registration bill C-68. The article generated some response — something we at priorities like. Both letters are reprinted in their entirety. — ed.*

Thank you as always for my issue of priorities. I usually read it from cover to cover each time it arrives. I would like to comment on two articles in the spring issue.

"Neighbourhoods, Prostitution and Feminism," by Marcy Toms was just an excellent article. During the summer I reviewed a book for the B. C. School Librarians' Association, entitled *Women and the Canadian Justice System*. I was surprised to learn in that book that the majority of prostitutes in Canada work without a pimp and are as likely to come from non-abusive backgrounds as the general population. Marcy pointed out in her article that "...the closer to the downtown east core, the more likely prostitutes are to be drug-dependent, most of the women are controlled by pimps, many are First Nations women, some are single mothers who prostitute themselves to stretch their welfare cheques." This would be consistent with the statistics in this book. The way Marcy writes highlights the shocking fact that many of these women are killed in their work. In addition, prostitutes themselves receive a disproportionate number of criminal convictions related to the trade which skews the overall percentage of women in trouble with the law. I agree that we should be promoting safe and fair working conditions for women in this line of work and compliment Ms MacPhail's ministry for their efforts in this area.

The second article I very much appreciated was Carol Kershaw's "New Democrats and gun control." Our federal riding association has drafted a letter that reads much like the article expressing our dismay at the caucus members not supporting and endorsing this legislation. It is everything we have always asked for.

Again, thank you for keeping us informed and for your unequivocal statements.

— Kathleen MacKinnon  
Victoria

## McLAUGHLIN RESPONDS

There is no question that this issue (gun control) has

been a divisive one for our party. There are many points of view on this particular legislation and it is not surprising that we find differing views in our party.

I am not in favour of weaker weapons legislation, nor do I oppose gun control. The majority of the NDP caucus including myself supported the legislation in 1992. We have discussed this legislation and have found that it will do nothing to make women safer in their homes or on the streets. The legislation may be in violation of several land claims settlements including the Yukon land claims and the agreement with the James Bay Cree. We did not take our position lightly or without thought.

At present, the party does not have a policy on crime and firearms control that has been adopted by convention and therefore we have no formal party policy. I have therefore asked the president that a committee be formed to bring forth a broad policy on these issues for convention in October.

Many of your readers have fought tirelessly for measures to address violence against women. In this last budget the Liberals have once again cut funding to women's programs. Yet again, there is no core funding for women's centres, rape counselling centres, transition homes, those services that assist those most at risk.

Finding funds for suicide prevention programs and treatment is a never ending circle of despair. We must continue to work for programs we know will reduce violence.

At this time, Bill C-76 is being debated. A bill which will result in the end of a national health care program. We must work together to fight the Liberal agenda.

I am convinced that the Liberals have deliberately created an emotionally divisive issue which has detracted all attention from Bill C-76, their abandonment of a national child care program and their own conservative economic policies.

I hope we can continue to work together on all those issues.

— Audrey McLaughlin, leader  
New Democratic Party of Canada



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