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FOCUS

- TWO WEEKS IN SEPTEMBER

Frances Wasserlein relates some of her experiences at the UN and NGO conferences on Women in China and has some thoughts on where we go from here.

- BC BENEFITS?

Gillian MacDonald on the changes to our social services.

- HEALTH

Regionalizing healthcare - Melanie Watts looks at it from a northern perspective.

Do we have a healthcare system or a sickcare system asks Irja-Liisa Lantela.

- FEDERAL CONVENTION

Maya Russell's moving and celebratory tribute to Audrey.

Participation of Women have had their number of representatives to Federal Council cut in half. Hilda Thomas writes on what this means for women, and her sense of deja vu.



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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

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ONE WOMAN'S TRIP TO CHINA TWO WEEKS IN SEPTEMBER

by Frances Wasserlein

Every time I begin to write or talk about this summer's trip to the NGO Forum and UN 4th World Conference on Women in China I feel like I have to tell all of the story, minute by minute. That would take at least a month. By now, though, I recognize the impulse two or three paragraphs into a draft document, send them into electronic oblivion and begin again. The problem is I had such an amazing time, and the experience offered me both challenges and satisfactions which I had not anticipated, I want everyone to be able to have a little of the same experience. Well, that's just not possible. So instead, I'm going to give you a little information about what happened at both gatherings, and some suggestions about what we, here in Canada, in British Columbia, might do with the outcomes of the conferences.

Most of the coverage available in British Columbia, print and electronic, seems to have been focused on how hard it was for reporters/journalists to cover the conferences and not on what was actually happening there. I think that happened because it is difficult for reporters/journalists to see how it is that women's movements operate, and in particular it is difficult for them to see how women(1) could accomplish anything under nearly impossible circumstances. They forget we(2) do that all the time. So it was really no surprise to me that I could find almost no mention of the real work done at either conference.

The NGO (Non-governmental organizations) conference, **Look at the World Through Women's Eyes**, was held at Huairou, a small tourist-

focused city northwest of Beijing, near the Great Wall. There was much fuss in the spring of 1995 about this meeting having been moved from Beijing because of claims there were structural problems with the Workers' Stadium originally selected.(3)

The site was difficult for several reasons. Women with disabilities found it necessary, once again, to spend a great deal of their time demanding changes which would make it possible for them to participate. They had been promised real access, being able to attend the meeting without hinderance, by the UN organizing committee.

The weather was unseasonable as well, with days of rain in a usually hot and dry season. The mud was quite something! And another drawback to the

¹The majority of the 30,000 persons present at the NGO meeting were women. There were, however, many men as well.

² I acknowledge that this "we" doesn't begin to include the variety of women's experiences across class, "race"/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, education, geographical location, etc. Without becoming lost in the so-called post-modernist debates about inclusive and exclusive language, suffice it to say here that I am using the word "we" to include you/reader with me/writer in this text, nothing more, nothing less.

³ This meant 90 minute bus rides for those of us staying in Beijing, who were not the majority of the 30,000+ delegates to the NGO meeting.

site was there was no place where everyone could be at once. The hall where the plenary sessions met held only 1,500 people. And the sessions weren't plenaries, as such - rather they were presentations(4) on specific subjects by panels with a representative from each of the five regions(5).

The 5,000 workshops were scheduled in tents, hotel meeting rooms and a variety of school buildings. There was one outdoor space with seating for 10,000, but it rained. Part of what this meant is that there was no opportunity for women to meet together to have political discussions or to pass a resolution, outside of the scheduled events. Now, this actually had much more to do with the politics of the UN than it did with the site, or the fact that the conference was held in China. UN politics are not dissimilar from those of say, the Canadian state. You can talk about doing almost anything, you just can't do it. Mass meetings of delegates didn't happen.

What did happen though was the remarkable opportunity to talk with and learn from women from all over the world. Such meetings would not be possible without the UN(6), and for all its problems, we still need this kind of chance to meet together.

This story will tell you, I think, about what such meetings can produce. I had a conversation with a woman who is a health worker in Beijing. She and I walked together to the Railroad Workers Cultural Palace to attend the **Lesbian Organizing: Regional Perspectives** workshop.

I was a little lost and asked for directions because I heard English being spoken. I asked whether she knew where the building was, she asked "Are you going to the lesbian workshop?" "Yes", I said.

As we walked she looked at me and sighed, and said, "You know, I wonder sometimes how hard it must be to live as a lesbian." And I thought to myself, ok, Frances, another coming out at hand and said, "Well, I am a lesbian, and it hasn't been too hard so far." She looked a little startled for a moment. And then she asked if she could put some questions to me. The rest of our walk, and the time we sat waiting for the workshop to begin was filled with her questions, all arising out of the stereotypes people all over the world have been taught about lesbians.

She wanted to know if I was promiscuous. Was I healthy. Did I have a long term relationship. Did I live with my partner. Were we happy. Was there violence in the relationship.

I answered all her questions. I told her I was just beginning a new relationship with someone who lived 2400 miles from me. That I was happy. That lesbians were concerned about HIV infection and safer sex. I said that homophobia was, for me, the hardest part about being identified as a lesbian, and that I wished everyone would just get used to it. We are here, we have always been here, and we're not going away. She said that this would be very difficult for people in China. I said that it seemed to me that in the 50 years since the revolution, Chinese people had taken up many new ideas in the struggle to move out of feudalism, and that perhaps accepting differences among people in sexuality could also be one of those new ideas. She smiled, and said she'd never thought about it in that way. The workshop began. She left just before the end, and I didn't see her again. But I won't forget her.

If I had this conversation, just imagine how many others like it there must have been in the course of the ten days at Huairou, on the buses, in the taxis, in the restaurants and meeting rooms. How many women told each other stories and shared information about their lives and the lives of the women at home? How many of us had conversations which

will change forever how we do our work? And now, all of us are telling the stories we heard. Every time I met someone I haven't seen since I went to Beijing, s/he asks me to tell what happened there - was it worth all the hassle, they ask. Yes, I say, because I remembered how it is that we are changing the world. Moment by moment, story by story, experiences shared, tears of anger and pain shed together with other women. We are telling the truths about our lives to each other, recognizing the differences and building common cause.

The UN conference - I call it the Big Girls' Conference - was a different matter altogether...

It was held in the Beijing International Convention Centre (BICC), a venue not unlike any other large convention centre you've ever been in. Escalators, broad expanses of lobbies and meeting rooms, flush toilets, comfortable chairs, and lots of men and women in suits. The point of the UN meeting is for governments to be seen to be doing something useful. But again, remember, talk is allowed, it's doing where there's a problem.

Because of the work of women at previous UN conferences, this one was much more open to NGO affiliated observers than any before. I ended up at the UN conference as a delegate for the International Gay and

Lesbian Association. I'd been asked to participate in some of the political and lobbying work being done to get sexual orientation included in the lists of prohibited grounds for discrimination in the Draft Platform for Action (PFA). I was thrilled to have been asked, and very much enjoyed the days I spent at the UN conference. The Lesbian Caucus met everyday, late in the afternoon, to assess how we were doing in identifying both the support for and the opposition to the four tiny paragraphs where sexual orientation was included. Many of us talked with delegates from various governments, including Canada, about their willingness to support lesbian rights. We organized and carried out a "Lesbian Rights are Human Rights" demonstration on Human Rights Day. In the end, the language we were hoping for was not included in the Platform for Action. The opposition

from right-wing and conservative governments was too great. However, lesbians at the conference maintain that the increased visibility, and the statements made by sixteen governments including the European Union - that they would interpret the language in specific sections of the PFA as including protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation - were indications of real progress. Again, the work of lesbians and women who support lesbian rights, one little bit at a time, is changing the world. And that is the point, isn't it.

Here's what I think you might do to be of use, both to women in this country, and in particular to women in the South(7). Write to Sheila Finestone, Minister responsible for the status of women, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa ON, no stamp necessary, and ask for a copy of the Platform for Action from the 4th UN

7 South - south of the Equator and China.



4 I understand there will be a book issued by the UN which will include texts from all the presentations they received by deadline. I'm not sure how this will be available.

5 North America, South America, Europe, Asia and the Pacific Islands, Africa.

6 The first Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975, the second in Copenhagen in 1980, and the third in Nairobi in 1985. The fifth will be held in 2005, probably in what we now call Eastern Europe.

World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September, 1995. You will receive a rather large document which includes some remarkable plans for achieving equality for women and girls by the year 2000. (Now, don't be holding your breath!) Read through the document and decide on two, just two, things you think Canada could push for to benefit us here and women elsewhere. You could just open the document randomly and choose two items, too. Then write to your MP and demand action and a response. Bug them. Write often. Call their constituency offices. These folks need to understand how important even the limited goal of equality for women and girls is to all of us.

Despite its shortcomings, particularly on economic questions, the PFA does set out very important concerns about human rights for women and girls. Reading it will tell you about some of the problems faced by women in the South, which we, relatively privileged women in the North, don't currently face. Another way we can be of use in the work of the international women's human rights movement is to study and come to understand what women in the South have been doing to survive the economic changes of the last several decades. Many sit here complacently in the North thinking that the rights we have are safe. What's abundantly clear is that this isn't true. And we are facing economic pressures about which women in the South know a great deal. It will be more necessary than ever for

I know you are all busy, involved, active women. Make demands of the New Democratic Party, and of social democrats and trade unionists everywhere that will lead to recognition of and demands for the implementation of the recommendations of the PFA. Know that women all over the world are doing the same things.

Remember that we cannot rest. All the daughters for generations to come will keep on. Remember

to keep alive the stories of what we have already done. Remember that we have been doing this for centuries. Remember how we are changing the world.

Frances Wasserlein teaches Women's Studies at Langara College and at Simon Fraser University. She works for the Vancouver International Writer's Festival and the Vancouver Folk Music Festival. She is active in civic politics in Vancouver. She's going to the 5th World Conference on Women in 2005 come hell or high water.



BC BENEFITS?

by Gillian MacDonald

November 9th, 1995 marked significant change to social assistance in BC, with the introduction of BC Benefits. This legislation has some very positive proposals, but at the same time it has some that are disturbing to Social Democrats. Some of the legislation we can all be proud of - other pieces seem to take us on the road to welfare bashing.

The 1995 BC NDP Convention gave unanimous support to the five principles outlined in the Canada Assistance Plan, which ensured:

1. Income support to anyone in need.
2. Income support that meets budgetary requirements.
3. No requirement for a period of residence to be eligible for assistance.
4. An appeal procedure.
5. A person cannot be forced to work to receive benefits.

The BC government's BC Benefits program either threatens or contradicts each of these principles by reducing income assistance rates further below budgetary needs, imposing a residency requirement, and forcing young people to participate in work or training programs to receive assistance.

"Employable" recipients of Income Assistance will have their benefits reduced by \$46 a month, from \$546 to \$500. This will bring the BC rate below that of the Harris government in Ontario. This cut represents a bus pass, food, clothing, etc. Surely our Cabinet Ministers can imagine what kind of existence they would have should they ever be forced to make do with \$500 a month.

This proposal imposes a three month residency requirement to receive assistance. In plain terms, this means that someone arriving from outside of the province with no money will not receive any assistance even if they have no money or shelter. This could well lead to higher crime rates as desperate people will take desperate action. Is this really what we want the NDP to stand for? The only exceptions will be for women and children that have left an abusive situation and have arrived in this province, and adults with children that are destitute. Shelter will be provided in transition houses, safe houses or other shelters.

Our Social Policy Review Committee does not support these changes. One major difference between our party and others has been that government programs in the past have been worked out within the framework

of NDP policy. BC Benefits is a major departure from this policy and the party is going to have to wrestle with the problem of whether policy developed at the grassroots and passed at convention is going to have relevance for our elected officials, or is the work of the rank and file going to be marginalized?

Savings from the decreases in assistance will go towards job training and job hunting. Youth, aged 19 to 24, on assistance will be transferred to the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, thus removing them from the rights guaranteed under the GAIN act. This means youth will only be granted benefits if they agree to participate in job search or training. Since when has job training been part of our social safety net? The Federal Conservatives and now the Federal Liberals have used Unemployment Insurance money for job training programs over the years, thereby decreasing the UI available to those out of work. As New Democrats we consistently opposed this. What is the difference between the reallocation of UI money and the reallocation of social assistance money?

Only 10% of assistance recipients remain on assistance longer than two years. What we need is more jobs. The problem is unemployment,

not welfare abuse.

People with disabilities will receive a pension type benefit, removing them from the stigma of welfare but at the same time removing them from the protection of the GAIN Act. Similarly the administration of the seniors supplement for low income people over 65 will move to the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations and out of the GAIN Act.

Those removed from the GAIN Act will be particularly vulnerable to any cuts that may come in the future.

On the positive side are increased child benefits and benefits for low income people. Starting in April 1996, vision care will be available for children under 18 in eligible families and up to \$500 in dental benefits for children 12 and under. In 1997, dental will rise to \$700 per eligible child up to the age of 18.

A family bonus of up to \$103 per child under the age of 18 will be provided to low and moderate income families. Families who qualify will be contacted by May 1996 as eligibility will be determined from income tax returns.

More funding for child care will be made available so parents with young children will be able to enter the work force or avail themselves of training programs more easily.

The new training initiatives would have some merit if the funding was from a different source. People will be helped with job search strategies and programs, career planning, and education. They will also be eligible for

workplace based training in which employers will receive a training credit of \$8,000 a year to hire and train. This may well be a two edged sword as there is no guarantee that current employees will not be displaced and there is also no assurance that there will be a job at the end of the year. A downward pressure on wages could be another result of the program.

We need the Provincial government to make the necessary changes to **BC Benefits** so that the five principles of CAP are met and are enshrined in the new GAIN Act. We need the government to formulate policies that will lead to employment with decent wages. We need the government to focus on the

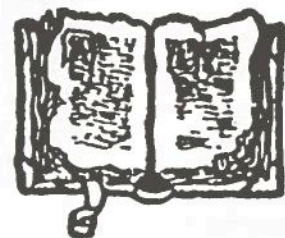
corporate side and demand more training dollars from them. Any public money used to fund on the job training should be tied to a guarantee of a job of a certain duration at the end. There needs to be a guarantee that these are new jobs and not simply a way to displace current employees. We have people in Cabinet who are very capable and with a little more work on this I am confident that the necessary changes can be made to satisfy their desire to see more training while staying within our policy.

Gillian is President of the Cariboo South Constituency Association and ran in the last federal election for the riding of Cariboo Chilcotin. She works as a florist in Williams Lake.

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM

Saint Thomas Aquinas

In her particular nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman is due to a weakness in the generative force or imperfection in the pre existing matter or even from some external influences, for example, the humid winds from the south.



IS THE NEW WAY OF DELIVERING HEALTH SERVICES WORKING?

Regionalizing Healthcare

by Melanie Watts

Patriarchy depends on a strong, centralized, controlling force in order to be effective. Throughout history, male dominated governments have been autocratic, administered from one central place and run by a group of males representing their own interests. Recent policies by the BC NDP to decentralize some of its ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, suggests that traditional ways of doing things are being phased out and that local people, namely women, will now have input on decisions that will directly affect their lives.

The Ministry of Health is to be congratulated on the establishment of the Ministry Advisory Council (MAC) in September 1994. With representation from thirteen women from all regions of BC, the council's mandate is to advise the Minister of Health on women's health issues, development of health care policy and delivery of health services. As representatives of their communities these women are seen to be closely attuned to the unique needs of local women and thus ideal people to advise the Ministry. The MAC has advised the Minister of Health on such issues as midwifery regulations, breast cancer care and access

to contraception and abortion services. John Miller, the Provincial Health Officer has recently released his annual health report and the MAC will be sitting down to review the report and provide him with feedback.

In Dawson Creek, the rewards of local representation on the advisory council will soon be realized. A new teen drop-in centre will open its doors on December 14, 1995. The three month pilot project is in response to the growing need of local teens to have a place which will respond to their unique needs. Knowledge of its existence will be spread by word of mouth and identities of those teens who come to the centre will be kept anonymous. This low key approach is essential as the aim of the centre is to encourage an atmosphere where teens feel safe. It will be open one evening a week and staffed by public health nurses and doctors who are volunteering their time. Local organizations will provide funding for facilities which will include an examining table, health care information as well as an empathetic ear. Apparently contraceptives will be available by the ton!

Rita Bowry, the MAC representative for the Peace River Liard

region says that providing the Ministry of Health with valuable feedback on women's health issues is vital. Education and awareness is the first step in giving women control over their bodies.

Regionalization of health care is not just about giving communities more control over determining how their health care dollars are spent. Like everything else it is also an attempt to deliver better health care with less money - first by disbanding local hospital boards and replacing them with new more autonomous regional health boards (RHB) and second by having communities share resources. For example, a Cat Scan machine is to be placed in Dawson Creek and shared throughout the region.

Local representatives on Community Health Councils (CHC) work to define and plan the level and types of services available in their community. CHCs then take their recommendations to their RHBs for drafting of the final health plan. These CHCs are to replace the present hospital boards. In Peace River Liard there are six CHCs from different areas in the region all reporting to one RHB. The average female representation on RHBs and CHCs is 51%.

With strong representation by women it would seem at the onset that the Ministry of Health's commitment to involving women in health care decisions has panned out. However, the realization of this may never happen.

Sheila Barnes, a representative from the Dawson Creek CHC says that health plans have yet to be put into place by the CHC or RHB as they are still developing their visions, principles and ideas of how health care should be delivered. Health care guidelines put out by the Ministry of Health are documents to assist CHCs in making their health plans which then have to be submitted to the Ministry of Health for approval. To date, six health boards have submitted health plans to the Ministry. Five of these plans have been rejected. Only one of the six - plans submitted from the East Kootenays, have been accepted. One of the reasons it is so hard for the health boards to draft acceptable health plans is because the guidelines are constantly being redefined.

Initially the Ministry was sincere in its ideal notion of a regionally administered health plan. Perhaps because of the unwieldiness of such a task, communities may not have as much control as they thought. It seems that CHCs will be relegated to advisory status, leaving the new RHB with the real control. With six CHCs to listen to, the RHB of the the Peace River region has a difficult if not time consuming task. However if the Ministry

is not prepared to go that extra mile to realize its original mandate then regionalization will not benefit the people - women - it was designed for.

Sheila Barnes stresses that development of the plan is still in its early stages. Her advice to the Minister of Health is - congratulations on making a tough

decision - you are on the right track. Barnes says that community health councils are needed especially in rural areas and every attempt should be made to ensure their continued existence.

Melanie is a writer and a member at large on the WRC. She lives near Dawson Creek.



EVENTS

January 11. Gay and Lesbian Caucus Meeting. Contact 683-6659 for information on time and location.

February 14. March to remember Native women who have been murdered or gone missing in recent years. For information contact the Indian Homemakers Association at 876-0944 or the Union of BC Indian Chiefs at 684-0231.

February 16, 17 and 18. NDP Provincial Convention. BC Trade and Convention Centre / Hyatt Hotel in Vancouver. Women's caucus meetings will be held Friday early evening and early Saturday and Sunday mornings in the Balmoral Room at the Hyatt. Delegates will receive information on the women's caucus' in the mail closer to convention.

March 2. WRC Steering Committee Meeting. For information on time and location call Jessica Bowering at 876-2830 or Vicki Robinson at 430-8600.



REAL HEALTH BEGINS WITH THE WHOLE PERSON A "WHOLE"ISTIC APPROACH

by Irja-Liisa Lantela

I'd like to share with you some of my early experiences dealing with my own health. I was 21 years old and expecting my third child when I went to my doctor for help as I was experiencing fatigue and finding it difficult to cope. My doctor looked at me, somewhat bored, his head hanging over one of his shoulders. After a pregnant pause he said, "What is it that makes a young woman so tired?"



What I should have done was give him a nosebleed, but I was well controlled 40 years ago. That was the day I came to understand that I needed to reevaluate things to avoid being treated in a degrading and humiliating way by my "helpers". My self-esteem wasn't up to par in those days and that visit to my doctor didn't boost it. But it made me see clearly that I had to become more interested and knowledgeable about myself and my health and, if possible, try to manage it on my own.

Dr. Deepak Chopra, world renowned author and lecturer on mind/body medicine says that "our society has made a serious mistake in teaching that healing belongs in the

hands of professionals and so doing we have created an ineffective, cruel and very expensive medical system." In my opinion, women were the first guinea pigs and we are still strong front runners with just a little competition from a mouse in our medical science. We have been poked, cut, tortured, mutilated and killed for science and most of us think nothing of it, except we are lucky to have it. The cure is truly worse than the disease. And this is the system we are fighting to save!

Our normal body functions and natural life changes have become treatable diseases. Drugs are pushed as the answer. I came to learn that my body is on my side and to see the connection of the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. You, my sister, are the highest authority in your life and the only one that can heal you.

Dr. Chopra says that "ignorance is the most circular of all circular traps. If you are ignorant about Einstein's theory of relativity, it doesn't change the theory one jot. But if you are ignorant about yourself, you will shrink to the level of your understanding

and knowledge", and dare I add wisdom.

There is an urgent need for us as women, caretakers, mothers, grandmothers, wives, lovers, friends, co-workers, bosses to come to understand our impact on the health of our families with what we are and teach. We are the ones who take our children and courage our partners to go to the doctor. We also need to help them build trust in their own knowledge and understanding of themselves, and not just trust in blind faith.

One of the greatest obstacles to this understanding is the media and the different research groups that make it their business to irresponsibly spread fear, perhaps out of ignorance. Just a few months ago there was a news item on the morning, noon and evening news hour on a type of breast tissue that is most likely to turn cancerous and "the only way to find out if a woman has it is to have a mammograph." It sounded like an advertisement for mammography to me as it is losing its reputation for being helpful to us and in fact may be harmful.

The direction I believe we need to take is to educate ourselves and then we in turn are able to educate

our children and others that may seek our help. I am not saying don't go your doctor. But when and if you do, you need to be able to fully participate in your healing. This is YOUR life and YOUR body - respect it!

We need to come to terms with the fact that we don't have a healthcare system, we have a sickcare system which is focused on treating symptoms, which bring on more symptoms, getting us deeper and deeper into negativity, despair and loss of identity. One way to begin thinking about this is by reading - besides books by Dr. Chopra, I would recommend The Medical Mafia by Guylaine Lanctot, MD and Barbara Brennan's books Light Emerging and Hands of Light. Knowledge is power. Mary may choose to have a little lamb, but she doesn't have to be one!

Irja-Liisa works as a Registered Massage Therapist and Metaphysical Healer. She is a member at large on the WRC.



BRIGHTEN UP YOUR JANUARY WOMEN IN VIEW

The eighth annual Women in View Festival runs from January 25-28, 1996, showcasing 34 events in 9 venues over 4 action-packed days. This year Women in View moves the core of the festival to Commercial Drive with the focus of activities and performances at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, WISE Hall, the Maritime Labour Centre, Dr. Vigari's and Harry's off Commercial. Other festival events take place across Vancouver at the Western Front, The Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver, the Freddy Wood at UBC and Vancouver's Public Library.

The festival's opening production is a modern retelling of *Lear*, starring Joy Coghill in the role of the irascible monarch and family head driven to madness by betrayal of her daughters. Other highlights include *Lily*, by Byrna Weiss from Buffalo, New York. A co-presentation with the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver, *Lily* is an acclaimed one-woman portrayal of one woman's life from her experience as a young girl separated from her parents during the Nazi persecution of the Jews to her present day reality living in Israel during the Gulf War scud missile attacks. Calgary's Trickster Theatre Company presents *The Cave*, a spiritual journey about a woman's experience with cancer. *Bearded Circus Ladies* by local writer and comedian Jan Derbyshire will debut at the festival. And Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan, responsible for *We're Talking Vulva* this time present *Arborite Housewife* and *The Thin Skin of Normal*.

Musically a strong line up of artists includes Juno-award nominees the *Elektra Women's Choir*. On the dance front, Montreal's Dulcinee Langfelder returns with a new work, *The Lady Next Door* - a humorous portrayal of approaching mid-life, alone, in a universe composed of cartoons, sit-coms and musicals.

And there is so much more! Comedy cabarets - readings - networking sessions - as Kate Weiss, artistic director of the festival says, "there are so many reasons to come to the festival - so many amazing ways to brighten up your January."

Festival programs will be available at the beginning of January. Tickets are available from January 2 from the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (254-9578). Prices range from \$5 to \$14. Women in View can be reached at 685-6684.

AUDREY, THANKS!

by Maya Russell

[This is the text of a tribute Maya gave to Audrey at the federal convention in October.]

There is a generation of young people in the NDP - and particularly young women - who joined the party after Audrey was elected. It wasn't an organized recruitment, but for many of us her leadership does mark the beginning of our political involvement.

It was a time when we were realizing some changes. It was around the time when we realized that *Seventeen* and *Young Miss* are really insulting magazines; when we realized that we could ditch the stupid boyfriends; when we began to think that our teachers weren't supposed to be that sexist or this racist; when we looked around our communities and saw that young women like us were being hurt, were working too hard for too little pay, and were starving themselves.

We were seeing a world that was horrifying and confusing, but we were also seeing our strength.

And we saw this woman from the NDP on TV and we began to watch the news more.

Audrey changed something for us. Her arrival on the political scene was like a blurry TV screen that became clear: all of a sudden politics was a

different channel that we didn't flip past. The black and white boy photos from *Socials 11* were replaced by a real person - a woman - someone who seemed to understand who we were and what our lives were like.

I remember a speech Audrey gave during the federal election, at the University of British Columbia. Audrey talked about jobs, social programs and education, and she did so with passion and energy. There was excitement in the room, but I realized that I was waiting for something - I was waiting for Audrey to name our issues, to talk about the violence in women's lives, about choice on abortion. And when she did, I looked around and the young women from my famously apathetic generation were hooting and cheering. It was the relevance that thrilled us, that gave us a feeling of connection.

As we have watched Audrey on the news over these years, we looked into the mirror of the TV screen and what we saw was something unusual - I think we might have seen our own faces.

I have been extremely lucky to work with Audrey as a vice-president of the party for two years. I'll admit to you that I was a little overwhelmed in Ottawa and found the meetings intimidating. But being in the same

room with Audrey and other strong women always made it worth it - Audrey brought with her a spirit of respect and fairness that made the party more open. I think I learned from Audrey that a leader doesn't just talk to the media and speak in the House of Commons. Our leaders carry with them our hopes and our fears. Those who are the most vulnerable right now have the highest hopes for us. In these last few years the words "political correctness" have been easier to say than "patriarchy". In that climate it could be easier to tone down our commitment to disempowered groups than to speak up. And the one thing that strikes me about Audrey is how clear she was in standing with women, young people, the labour movement, people of colour, gay men and lesbians, people with disabilities and low-income people everywhere, and the pride with which she carried our hopes for change.

Audrey's leadership has been all about pride, and integrity, honesty, and the hopes that we carry together. I think I speak for others like me when I say in return we are, and will remain, fiercely proud of her work.

Audrey, thanks.

Maya Russell is a student and is active in the YND

THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN COMMITTEE HAS BEEN REDUCED BY HALF

TAKING THE POWER OUT OF POW

by Hilda L. Thomas

[This is an opinion piece. We welcome anyone who does not agree with the opinions expressed to write in.]

The 1995 Federal Convention in Ottawa, October 12-15, left me, like many other delegates, with very mixed feelings about the new configuration of the federal executive and council, and about the role of the Participation of Women Committee of the party.

On the plus side, we now have as our new leader a woman of unquestionable integrity and conviction who is also a feminist. Alexa McDonough's record of support for women's issues was attested by the number of leading women's rights advocates from across the country who supported her campaign.

On the minus side, however, is the way in which Alexa's victory was won. On the first ballot, she received fewer than one third of the ballots cast. Nevertheless, she did come second, after Svend Robinson. This somewhat unexpected result was achieved not because a great number of Nystrom delegates went over to Alexa, but rather because a significant block of delegates was persuaded to abstain from voting altogether.

According to my notes, there were 1819 registered voters prior to the first ballot. The actual number of ballots cast was 1735 - a difference of 84.

In recognition of the fact that his defeat had been assured by this "Anyone but Svend" engineering, Svend Robinson conceded to Alexa before the second vote could be taken. In doing so, he deprived the convention delegates of their right to cast a deciding vote. This made a mockery of the 50% +1 rule which the party has always followed. It also denied Alexa the legitimacy of a clear ballot victory. Whether this will indeed strengthen her position as leader and prevent "divisiveness" has yet to be seen.

Another battle on the convention floor concerned the Participation of Women's representation on the party's executive and Council. At the Council meeting in June, POW joined with the NDYC (New Democratic Youth of Canada) to fight the proposed cutting of both groups' representation from 12 to 6, and for an increase in regional representatives from 10 to 12. They lost this fight, partly for strategic reasons.

At convention, the youth section

was successful in overturning the Council decision. POW was not so fortunate. Their resolution calling for their representation to be restored to 12 (one for each province and territory) and the right to elect their own chair, was defeated by a vote of 485 to 440.

This defeat was assured by the opposition of the labour caucus. It was very disheartening to hear trade union women arguing that there was no need for a strong POW committee because they, as feminists, could play the role of advocates for women's issues, and to hear from other women that because the party has affirmative action (a policy initiated, fought for, and won as a result of POW leadership in the 70's and 80's), POW is no longer important.

The consequence of this defeat is that women now have 5 regional members on council to represent the whole country, plus a chair, elected by the women's caucus in convention, who will sit on the executive.

The women's caucus meeting at the convention was also problematic. It was very well attended (dare one say it was packed?), and in the election of

the chair, Sybil Frei, a PEI woman who had worked extremely hard for the POW in the last two years, was defeated by Susan Murray, who later acknowledged that she had voted against the POW resolution that morning.

To give her the benefit of the doubt, Susan's experience on Audrey McLaughlin's staff has no doubt given her a firm grasp of feminist principles and of the way the party works. She has already organized three committees (candidate search, newsletter and policy, each to be coordinated by a different region) and she has made a firm commitment to devote her energy to women's issues.

At the caucus meeting, a motion was put forward by Margaret Mitchell that in order to counter the loss of 6 representatives on federal council, each provincial and territorial women's rights committee should elect someone to act as a liaison with the designated POW representative. Jon Leah Hopkins was elected by the BC caucus at convention to represent the region of BC and the Yukon.

With the new federal structure, we have lost our federal council position on the provincial executive. A strong effort should be made to get the provincial party to give that position to the POW liaison person. This would mean putting forward a constitutional amendment, which would require a 2/3 majority, at the BC convention in February.

The women's caucus in Ottawa also voted to submit an emergency resolution to convention to be drafted by Susan Murray and me. It read as follows -

WHEREAS the constitutional amendment passed at this convention reduces the POW representation on Federal Council from 12 sectional to 5 regional representatives, and

WHEREAS the declared objectives of the renewal process - accountability, grassroots participation, and democracy - depend on the ability of elected representatives to maintain communication with the NDP women in their regions, and

WHEREAS the vastly increased size of the newly adopted regions poses serious problems for those POW representatives to fulfil this difficult mandate;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Federal Party be urged to provide funding to enable the restructured POW committee and its elected representatives to cover travel expenses, conference calls, a newsletter, mailing costs and a possible women's conference.

After a certain amount of opposition, this was accepted as an emergency resolution by the Resolutions committee. It was the very last motion put forward before the convention adjourned. In fact, because of strong pressure from the floor, the Chair agreed to "stop the clock" so that the vote could be taken. The resolution passed handily - a small but very real triumph on which to end a very difficult experience.

Twenty years ago I began my report of the 1975 federal convention with the words, "Two steps forward, one step back".* That was International Women's Year. It was also the year Rosemary Brown got 40.6% of the final ballot in a tremendously exciting leadership campaign. Rosemary was defeated by Ed Broadbent in the end, but to the people who supported her socialist/feminist campaign, it seemed more like a victory.

Nineteen seventy-five was also the year the party establishment tried to abolish the POW committee by writing it out of the constitution. **Plus ca Change!** The motion was narrowly defeated.

Well, sisters, it appears that at the 1995 convention it was one step forward, two steps back. Over the last twenty-five years, the BC WRC has played a powerful role in leading the NDP to recognize feminist values and to adopt feminist policies. But the renewal exercise which occupied so much of the party's time and attention through 1994 and 1995 looks, in retrospect, more like a reducing exercise for women. That just means that it's time to redouble our efforts so that our achievements will not be forgotten and will not be lost. The women's struggle, like women's work, is never done.

* Anyone in need of a little inspiration should look up this issue of **priorities**. It contains the complete text of Rosemary's leadership speech, and the pictures alone are enough to raise one's spirits.

Personally Screaming

...about gender screening

by Jean Swanson

At the NDP Provincial Council meeting on Sunday, November 19, MLA Jan Pullinger said that the BC Benefits plan had "gone through careful gender screening." She then explained that it included \$13.7 million for childcare and that women could then move into full-time jobs. She didn't specify which ones.

Although I agree that the provision of dental and eye care benefits for children of the working poor are good, I believe they shouldn't be paid for by taking money away from women and men who are poorer.

Here is my quick "gender screening" of the BC Benefits programs.

For women on welfare

- single "employable" women lose \$46 a month, making them the poorest of the poor in BC.

- women in childless couples lose because the couple rate will go from \$903 to \$811 per month.

- single women and women on welfare lose the flat rate earnings exemption that allow them to keep the first \$100 (for singles) or \$200 (for families) that they earn. This is replaced with a flat 25%

earnings exemption for a year. It means that a mother who may have been earning and keeping \$200 to legally supplement welfare would now have to earn \$800 to keep the same amount.

- single parents will have to look for work or training when their youngest child is 7 years old - at present the age is 12 years. This means finding before and after school child care, an additional expense and especially difficult for a single parent.

For women who leave welfare for work

- By providing a "family bonus" of up to \$103 per month per child, the government says a single parent working at minimum wage could receive \$1460 per month instead of \$1417 on welfare. In other words, the women who work at minimum wage would receive about \$43 more. Although this sounds good, it does not take into consideration the fact that it takes time to be poor. Forty-three dollars a month won't compensate for time spent saving money by cooking from scratch, shopping at rummage sales, etc. Money must be found for a bus pass to get to work, for buying

suitable work clothes, for transportation for young children from childcare to school and home again.

There is another cost for women and especially for single parents - extreme tiredness. Often there is no extended family member to help in getting young children to childcare and off to school. This is especially true for women who must use public transport for themselves and their children. This can make your work day so long that you're exhausted when you get home and you haven't even begun your work (unpaid) at home. Physical exhaustion and emotional stress take their toll on the health of both parents and children.

The big danger of this policy comes when it is combined with the requirement for single parents to seek work or training when their youngest child is 7. Will government (NDP, Liberal or Reform) force single parents into minimum wage jobs, saying that the family bonus makes it worth their time?

in memorium



Genevieve Bergeron

Helene Colgan

Nathalie Croteau

Barbara Daigneault

Anne-Marie Edward

Maud Haviernick

Barbara Marie Klueznick

Maryse LeClair

Maryse Legainiere

Anne-Marie Lemay

Sonia Pelletier

Michele Richard

Annie St. Arneault

Annie Turcotte

It has been six years since the massacre in Montreal. Suzette Edward, the mother of Ann-Marie Edward is concerned that while the murders name is always mentioned, the women are referred to as "the fourteen". In an attempt to help people remember the names and who the women were, she presented a slide show on December 6 in Montreal to celebrate their lives.

Speaking of her own daughter, she related that the day of the funeral 18 of Anne-Marie's close friends came to her house to tell stories and remember their friend. They sat on the floor and reminisced. It was then that Suzette learned her daughter had a nickname. Her friends called her Spunky and spunky she was - from her choice of career, to her sports (she was on the university ski team, was a rock climber and a kayaker). Determined to learn German, she went as an exchange student to Germany when she was a teenager. Spunky spoke four languages. She volunteered with mentally handicapped kids. Her life was full and people loved her.

Many women die violently every year, and we never know their names. Many lived in Vancouver. Many lived on the Downtown Eastside. Many of the women were Native. Some died under "suspicious circumstances". Some have disappeared without a trace. It is difficult if not impossible to get statistics. Here are some of their names, in memory and in grief.

Pauline Flett
Annie Cedar Jr.
Barbara Larocque
Barbara Paul
Bernadine Standingready
Bobbie Lincoln
Brenda George
Carol Davie
Carrie Ann Starr
Chantal Venne
Cheryl Ann Joe
Christine Billy
Cindy Williams
Darlinda Ritchey
Dawn Ritchie
Debbie McMath
Debbie Neeslose
Diane Lancaster
Donna Rose Kiss

Dora Joseph Patrick
E. Nelson (Linda)
Elsie Tomma
Gertrude Copegog
Gloria Duneult (Sam)
Holly Cochrane
Janet Basil
Janice Saul
Jennifer Pete
Jenny Lea Waters
Jerry Ferguson
Julie Mai Smith
Karen Ann Baker
Debbie Kennedy
Laverna Avivgan
Lisa Leo
Lois Mackie
Loran Carpenter
Lorna George

Lorna Jones
Lorrain Arrance
Luanne Stolarchuk
Margaret Vedan
Maria Ferguson
Marjorie Susan Prionen
Marth Garvin
Mary James
Mary Johns
Maureen Riding-at-the-Door
Maxine Paul
Monika Lillmeier
Nancy Jane Bob
Nya Robalard
Patricia Andrew
Laurie Schlotz
Patricia Ann Wadhams (Trish)
Patricia Thomas

Pauline Johnson
Peggy Snow
Ray Arrance
Rose Merasty
Rose Peters
Ruby Williams
Sadie Chartran
Sally Jackson
Sandra Flamond
Sharon Arrance
Sheila Hune
Shirley Nix
Stony
Tanys Wallace
Terry Lynn
Tracy Lyn Hope
Verna Lyons
Veronica Harry
Wendy Poole

IN REMEMBRANCE OF DECEMBER 6

SELF DEFENSE WORKSHOPS

This year, the WRC sponsored two Wenlido workshops. The workshops are a positive, proactive way for women to feel and be safer in the world.

The workshops were held in Dawson Creek and Port Alberni. Despite terrible weather conditions both were well attended. Reports from the organizers say participants found the workshops very worthwhile.

Melanie Watts organized the Dawson Creek workshop, held from 10 am to 4 pm on December 10th at Northern Lights College. Nine women came and learned techniques for warding off blows and fighting techniques from instructor Ellen Pond. After easily breaking 1x10 boards with their fists they learned that the strength exerted to break the board was the force required to break a collarbone.

Patty Surrette organized the workshop in Port Alberni. Despite terribly icy roads, 16 women attended, 4 of them teenagers. The Alberni NDP constituency club donated money for lunch and the Friendship Centre donated use of the gym, so there was no charge for registration, enabling some women to come who couldn't have attended otherwise. Some of the participants had been

assaulted in their lives and instructor Gay Ferguson spent time with them to help with their particular concerns.

Both Melanie and Patty advertised the workshops extensively, using cable TV, community events radio spots, posters, and even the internet! The success of the workshops is down to them and Gillian MacDonald, who was the overall coordinator.

WRC UPDATE

...or, what happens at those weekend meetings, anyway?

The Steering Committee of the Women's Rights Committee meets four times per year. All women who are members of the NDP are welcome to attend, and have a voice and a vote. The WRC executive meets monthly.

relationship with government

Penny Priddy spends part of the day with us, reporting on the work the Ministry of Women's Equality is doing.

preparing for the provincial election

The WRC administers the Dorothy Gretchen Steeves Fund, the party's fund for women candidates. Over the last several months we have been calling activists to follow up on a letter and brochure on the fund, to raise money. To date we have raised over \$5,000. In 1991 we were able to give the women who applied to the fund nearly \$1,000 each and we would like to be able to at least match that in the next election.

1996 Steering Committee Meetings

Saturday, MARCH 2

Saturday, JUNE 1

Saturday, SEPTEMBER 28

Saturday, NOVEMBER 30

For information on location and times, call Jessica Bowering at 876-2830 or Vicki Robinson at 430-8600.

We're thinking of ideas for a celebration of International Women's Day in March which might also serve as a fundraiser for the DGS Fund.

The WRC is planning a skills building workshop for new women candidates for the end of March. This will be a fairly intense weekend, with lots of workshops and the opportunity

for current and past women MLA's to share their skills and experience with new candidates.

Jessica Bowering is updating the Handbook on Winning Nominations.

The WRC has a Campaign to Women Voters committee, to try to ensure that concerns of women are reflected in the election campaign.

workshops and guests

Frances Wasserlein spoke to the committee about her experiences at the UN and NGO conferences on women at the September Steering meeting.

We had a mini workshop on feminist ethics at the November meeting, facilitated by Devon Sierra and Marcy Toms.

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