

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE 1992

## REGIONAL STRENGTHENING

At last year's AGM, the NAC Executive was instructed to have a number of discussions concerning regionalization of NAC. Since 1981 NAC members have agreed that strengthening the regional presence of NAC is a priority for the organization. It has been clear for years that it is not possible for one regional representative to be responsible for all NAC organizing in her region. Last year we proposed moving to campaign organizing with the hope that it would improve the situation. And it has - particularly through the Future of Women's Work Campaign and its regional organizing. National campaign meetings have also improved regional and grass roots input into NAC's decisions. The President's Stipend has enabled the President to spend more time in the regions which has in turn improved some member groups sense of connection with the organization. Nevertheless the goals of increasing NAC's ability to organize national campaigns at the regional level and to improving our regional presence have proven elusive.

One goal adopted at the 1991 AGM was to hire a regional organizer as the first step towards a goal of five regional organizers. We are hoping to be able to achieve this in the coming year if our finances permit. However, one additional staff person for the entire country will not significantly improve the situation.

The plan to develop a special relationship with provincial women's organizations has also not materialized. Each province is very different and many provincial organizations are so busy with their own provincial priorities that it seems unrealistic to expect them to play a major role in relation to NAC.

After several discussions on how to regionalize NAC, the Executive has arrived at the proposal for Friends of NAC Groups. These would be groups of individuals in a particular location who agree with the *Women's Charter* and are interested in working with NAC on federal issues and NAC campaigns in their locality in conjunction with other NAC member groups. The groups would have the same constitutional status as other member groups but would be able to assist the regional reps in carrying out NAC work in the region. Each group could decide their own priorities in the framework of NAC's national priorities and could focus on one or more campaign, fund-raising, organizing regional conferences or other activities. The regional rep would remain the NAC spokesperson in the region and would work closely with the Friends of NAC group(s).

One Friends of NAC group has already formed in Calgary. Another is forming in Moncton. To experiment further, we hired a part-time field worker in Vancouver this spring to assist with the formation of a Friends of NAC group there. The experience of these three groups should help us to have a concrete discussion at the AGM about how to continue the organizing.

NAC's experience with organizing country-wide actions and campaigns has shown us two things about our strengths and weaknesses. Many of our member groups are mobilized around actions specifically related to their own strengths and region, many do not specifically work on federal issues, and many are not able to spare energy for country-wide coordinated actions. At the same time, many women who do not belong to member groups have time and energy to work on federal issues or country-wide coordinated actions. It seems to make sense to find a way to mobilize their energies.

We believe that Friends of NAC groups will help to correct our weakness at the regional level without taking anything away for the power of our member groups. In fact, we think by having a group of women working with the regional representative, that we will be more able to keep member groups informed and involved in NAC campaigns. So far the feedback from member groups has been very positive.

We want to discuss the following questions about Friends of NAC groups at the AGM:

1. Do you think Friends of NAC groups are a useful step in further regionalizing NAC? Do you have concerns about this idea?
2. Do you think a Friends of NAC group would work in your community?
3. Should agreement with Women's Agenda be the basis of joining a Friends of NAC group?
4. What should the relationship be between the Friends of NAC group and other member groups in the region?
5. What role might paid staff play in supporting the organizing of these groups?
6. How can we assure that Friends of NAC groups reflect the diversity of the women's movement?