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breaking the SILENCE

a feminist quarterly

**WOMEN SPEAK UP
FROM OUTSIDE THE MOVEMENT**



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about *Breaking the Silence*

For too long women's voices—our struggles, and joy—have been silenced. Living in a patriarchal world, we have been separated from one another and from the mainstream of society.

The *Breaking the Silence* collective is committed to giving women a voice. In particular, we provide a forum for discussion on the social welfare needs of women—needs such as support services for survivors of violence, affordable housing, sufficient and good daycare, adequate pensions and employment.

We are committed to moving toward a world absent of oppression: be it sexism, racism, classism, homophobia or ageism. We are committed to helping to build a peaceful and humane world where women's ideas, experiences and activities are heard and made visible.

from the collective

In this issue we invited women who see themselves as part of groups outside of the women's movement to write about feminism. We were inspired to do this by our own realization that generally, we as feminists, are seen as a closed shop. We are viewed as a homogenous group with little knowledge or interest in the many ways women are choosing to live. In fact feminists do work with lots of different women and on many diverse topics. Further, we feel that the women's movement should be excited by the diversity of ideas and lifestyles that are possible to increase choices for women. Why is there a discrepancy between what we do within the women's movement and how we are perceived?

In this issue of *BTS* there are an unprecedented number of contributors whose writing has never before appeared in a feminist magazine. These women are by turns, elderly, from countries other than Canada, mothers at home with small children, or well acquainted with the grind of poverty. What is striking is the commonality of the themes that run through many of the articles they submitted. We are given some insight into these women's fears, criticisms and concerns about feminism. Sadly, to these women, we present a threatening picture.

Dorothy O'Connell, in her article on poor women, points out that our journals are written primarily by and for academically-trained women. In Marie O'Shea's article, clerical workers paint us as bra-burners who would just as soon live in a world without men. Sheila Scotchmer, writing about mothers working in the home, discusses the distress some mothers feel about feminists who advocate abortion on demand. An undercurrent of resentment runs throughout the articles. Who do we think we are, claiming to struggle for the liberation of women, when it is obvious we are not representative of all women?

This difficult question is followed by others, some stated overtly in the articles, others clear by implication. Are we feminists a club? If so, what kind of barriers have we created that keep out other women? Do we create barriers? Or has the powerful male-dominated mainstream media created an image of feminists that is false and intimidating?

One of the most worrisome perceptions that women outside the movement have is that we feminists are career minded, upwardly mobile young women who are willing to step on other women, and men, to get ahead in the male corporate world. Clearly the members of *Breaking the Silence* do not see ourselves this way, nor do the feminists we know. It is true that some feminists do aspire to high places in the corporate world. But we are a diverse group, representing many different beliefs, backgrounds and political ideologies. Many of us have placed our commitment to women above all other things and this has cost us much, financially, professionally and personally.

While at first the message in the following articles is a little startling and definitely unsettling, on reflection it offers feminists a positive challenge. For without doubt our challenge is to find common threads among all women and to illuminate the threads that are still invisible to many. It is also time for us to recognize more directly the different realities women live. Oppression in a patriarchal culture takes form in a myriad of ways, and therefore must be fought against in a myriad of ways.

To those women who have contributed for the first time to *BTS*, we extend a heart felt thanks. As a community of women, with disparate views, we can only learn from these women's words, ultimately uniting under a more encompassing vision of feminism.

bts

taking some time out...

You are probably wondering why the Spring and Summer issues are combined this year. There are two important reasons. The first is that we have decided to make this issue more comprehensive than usual, given the unique nature of its theme. As a result we have exerted even more effort than usual to collect the material included here. This has severely restricted our time to produce two separate issues.

The second reason is directly related to the level of our collective energy. This issue marks the fourth anniversary of *BTS*'s arrival on the Ottawa scene. Some of us have been intimately involved with the publica-

tion since its inception; others have been connected for only a year or two. All of us though share something very important – we do all of our work for *BTS* in addition to our paid work. To put it simply, we are tired.

By producing a combined issue, we are allowing ourselves some time to revitalize and plan for the magazine's future. *BTS* started in 1982 as an eight page newsletter which cost about \$200. an issue to produce. Now it costs over \$2,000. to put out an issue. In order to continue, we are using this time to look into more efficient production techniques and possible sources of sustaining funding.

Which leads to our next point ... You may have noticed that the cost of *BTS* has risen from the ridiculously low \$1. per issue to \$2.; a sum we feel that is still reasonable. For you who are subscribers, please remember that your annual cheques provide our base of support. They also enable us to make the magazine available at no cost to women who live on low incomes. You are in fact our valuable supporters. As usual, donations above and beyond the cost of subscriptions are always welcome.

Happy spring/summer reading!
Look for us next in September.

L . E . T . T . E . R . S

Breaking the Silence would like to encourage women to write—to make this a forum for your ideas, engage in dialogue on the issues that affect you, or respond to the articles published in BTS. We welcome your input!

Dear *Breaking the Silence*,

I need to respond to one major point in the important and challenging interview with Esmeralda Thornhill by Deborah Gordon in your fall issue. That point is the question of which "takes precedence" – racial or sexual imperialism.

We get nowhere by trying to come up with absolute either-or answers to such general questions about such profound and complex aspects of reality. Worse than nowhere: for in the attempt, we create unnecessary divisions among ourselves, on top of the divisions that are already there – and this disturbs me profoundly.

Thornhill asserts categorically that "a Black Woman's feminist perspective is a priori based on the premise that racial imperialism takes precedence over sexual imperialism." She goes on to speak of a "hierarchy of discriminations" in which "race and colour head the list. Clearly, these are more serious forms of discrimination than, for example, social conditioning," she says.

What Thornhill seems to be implying here is that white women's feminism is concerned with relatively minor issues when compared with the problems that Blacks face because of their race. If I am interpreting this passage correctly, she has gravely misconstrued the concerns of white feminists and the seriousness and urgency of our struggles. Rape, battering and compulsory motherhood are no more trivial than police brutality, segregation and forced sterilization are. The statistical probability of poverty is a common denominator in the struggles of both women and Blacks. And the term "social conditioning" itself applies not only to gender but is in fact practically a synonym for the "rampant psycho-social reality of institutionalized racism" (and sexism) to which Thornhill refers and from which so many outrageous injustices arise.

In searching for concepts that draw us together rather than divide us, for theoretical frameworks that respect the validity of each woman's

experience of oppression, whatever her race or background, I find Andrea Dworkin's concept of "primary emergency" to be key. She points out that "not all women are in a state of primary emergency as women. As a Jew in Nazi Germany, I would be oppressed as a woman, but hunted, slaughtered, as a Jew. That first identity – the one which brings with it as part of its definition, death – is the identity of primary emergency." Thus the Black women that Esmeralda Thornhill speaks for live a state of primary emergency as Blacks, while a battered wife or a rape victim, whether she be Black or white, rich or poor, experiences a state of primary emergency as a woman.

In the light of this concept, the potentially divisive and "irreconcilable" question of which imperialism is paramount loses its divisive power. It becomes, in fact, nothing more than the sort of academic either-or mind game that men tend to like to play. Surely we as women can see beyond that kind of simplistic pseudo-intellectual competitive trap to recognize and embrace the realities of our sisters' lives and our own in all their complexity.

In sisterhood and struggle,
Helen Forsey
Enterprise, Ontario

more letters on page 33

an interview with

Charlotte Bunch:

In it for the long haul

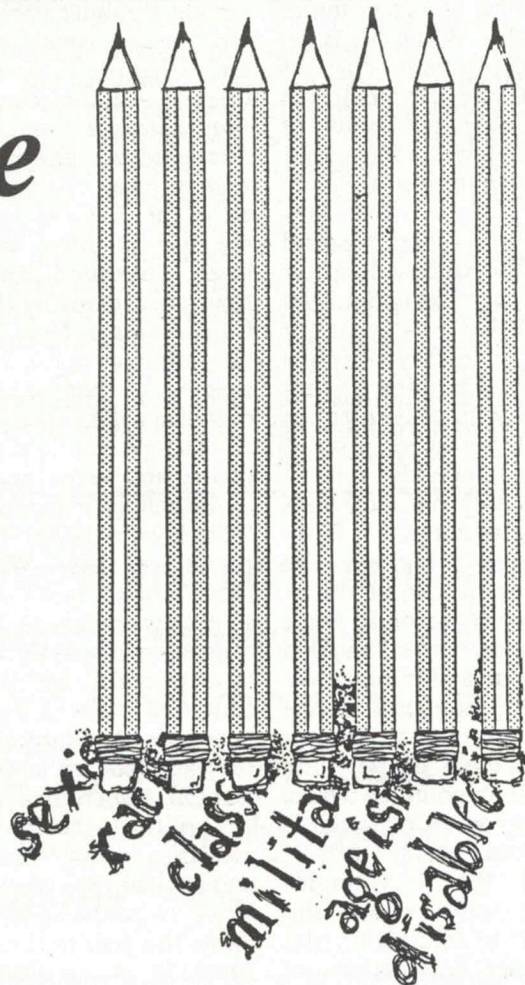


Illustration: Tracy Clark

by Sherralee Galey


Feminists are part of a world struggle over the direction the future will take. But while feminist activity and thought are happening all over the world, there is much diversity among us and no agreed-upon body or doctrine or central organization. Yet there is a similarity in our approaches and in our fundamental questioning of society.

On the one hand, our diversity is our strength, but it can divide us if we do not take seriously the variations of female oppression suffered by women.

The world has been torn apart by male divisions and conflicts for thousands of years. We should not assume that women can overcome and

solve in a short time what patriarchy has so intricately conceived. While new approaches are essential and possible, they are not simple. We cannot afford to be naive about the task we face. The oppressions, resentments, fears and patterns of behaviour that have developed due to racism, classism, nationalism, as with sexism, are very deep. We cannot just wish them away with our desire for women to transcend differences. Above all we do not overcome differences by denying them or downplaying their effects on us — especially when the ones denying are in positions of privilege.

Charlotte Bunch



After almost twenty years of feminist activity, Charlotte Bunch has not succumbed to burn-out or disillusionment. She is clearly one woman who is in this movement for the long haul – and who has found ways to stay hopeful. While she is too realistic to expect drastic changes overnight, she continues to be driven by the revolutionary possibility of feminism. Not content to see minor reforms as ends in themselves, Bunch works for them only as necessary steps on the way to major social transformation. The kind of feminist movement that Bunch has committed her life to is one that will settle for nothing less than the end of all forms of domination, subordination and injustice. In her view, improvement in the condition of the vast majority of the world's women depends on it.

Bunch's name may not ring bells the way Gloria Steinem's or Betty Friedan's does. That's because she eschews media notoriety in favour of the hard, slogging, background work of organizing. Lately what inspires her most are the types of feminist action undertaken by women's groups in developing countries. Bunch believes they can help us see new dimensions to our ongoing struggles in the West. She is convinced that it is the emergence of the women of colour and Third World women's movements that will restore the "radical potential" to feminism; "the longer-term, deeper implications of feminism are being brought back by Third World feminism."

Charlotte Bunch began her career as an activist in the American civil rights movement and became a convert to feminism in the early days of "women's liberation" and consciousness-raising groups. Her new-found lesbian-feminist identity would come to have a profound influence on all aspects of her life and

her work. She was one of the founders of *The Furies* and *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*; two classics among feminist periodicals. She has written extensively and edited seven anthologies on feminist themes – among them, *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education* and *International Feminism: Networking Against Female Sexual Slavery* (reviewed in the Fall 1984 issue of *Breaking the Silence*). Most recently, she has been involved in international feminist organizing through Interfem Consultants in New York. In Nairobi this summer for the world's largest meeting of women, Bunch helped to organize the film program, and workshops on lesbianism, feminist theory and sexual slavery.

Bunch is a compelling writer, a thought-provoking theorist and a riveting speaker. What I appreciate most about her work is that it somehow manages to combine the originality of a visionary, the analysis of a strategist, and the old-fashioned common sense of an organizer. She possesses that rare ability to present radical ideas in a simple and lucid fashion. Bunch makes a massive shift in political, social and economic priorities sound eminently sensible and logical. She makes you wonder how we could do otherwise. In her view, the goal of theory, writing and speaking is to illuminate practice, mobilize people and help feminists to make the best possible political choices in the struggle for change.

For a good example of this, take a look at the series of pamphlets Bunch publishes under the title *Feminism in the Eighties*. The most recent one, *Bringing the Global Home*, should be read by any woman willing to develop a global perspective on women's issues and challenge her own ethnocentric biases. In essence, she argues that "the strength of

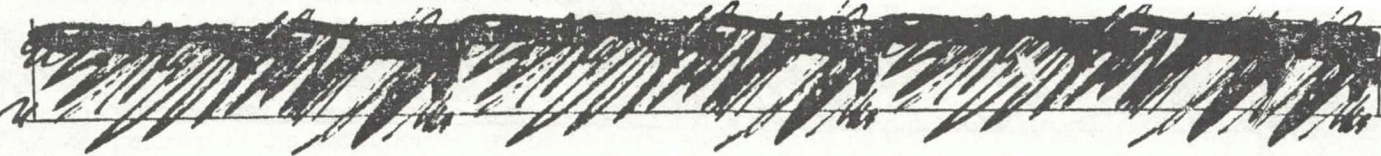
feminism is in its grassroots nature, but for that strength to be most effective, local and national actions must be based on a world view that incorporates the global context of our lives."

I had the good fortune to talk with Charlotte Bunch when she was in Toronto to open a conference on *International Violence Against Women*. Even though she had gotten off the plane only moments before we were to begin the interview, and she had to eat lunch as we spoke, so that she could meet all her commitments that afternoon, Bunch was gracious and warm, giving her full attention to my questions and careful thought to her answers.

In keeping with the theme of this issue, I particularly wanted to draw on her insights about the women's movement. To my mind, she has commented wisely on the subject. I had been particularly struck by her perspective on internal conflicts within the women's movement, what she sometimes calls "the women's movement wars." She tells us to "remember that the reason we have a movement in the first place is not just to advance the careers of a few individuals or create pure and correct lives among the hard core but to create political change in the world."

She says that conflicts must be viewed less personally and more for what they can teach us about our differences and how we can direct those lessons toward more effective and inclusive action.

I began by asking her about the place of women's studies within the movement and moved on to explore strategies to educate feminists about other forms of injustice and to broaden the base of the women's movement.



Breaking the Silence: *Is women's studies the academic arm of the women's movement? Can it be, should it be? What are your feelings on the relationship of women's studies to the women's movement?*

Charlotte Bunch: It's funny, when you said the academic arm what a strange vision that conjures up. The women's movement is such a decentralized and dispersed phenomenon that in some ways it's hard to talk about any particular group as the arm or the leg or particular piece. It's not a body to begin with.

I think that women's studies is in fact (whether you think they're doing what they should be or not) a part of the women's movement in the broadest sense of the term. I mean more than the movement that calls itself feminist. I mean the movement of women seeking to define new terms of being a woman, seeking to understand what that means, seeking to add it into society.

In the broad sense there is no way that you can see women's studies as anything but a phenomenon created by the women's movement. The problem is the kind of a relationship you have between the two. The relationship has always been, in my experience, a very touchy one. The expectations from both sides are usually pretty unrealistic.

I would hope that people would continue to see the importance of keeping the relationship alive. I'm not an academic but from their point of view I understand that they feel under siege, that they're barely staying alive, that their programs are marginal to the institution. They feel that the women from the women's movement don't understand that and that they are viewed as the rich and the elite.

From both sides there needs to be a lot more conversation about how to help each other instead of constantly seeing the other as better off or somehow ripping you off. There are occasions where I think that women's studies has ripped the women's movement off, particularly certain groups, and I get very angry by it.

My major complaint with the women's studies end is that I think in their search for academic acceptance they don't acknowledge enough of the roots and the sources of their own ideas in the women's movement. They don't use enough women's movement writings in their courses. They wait until it has been sort of sanitized into an academic version.

Most of the academic articles, not all, started with ideas that came out of some portion of the radical movement. And I get very angry on that point. To me, that, and the researching of groups and not feeding that research back to groups — those are the kinds of issues where I feel that people in the academic world need to be more responsive.

“ There are very few women in the feminist movement or anywhere who are not also affected by race or class or heterosexism or by ageism or by disabledism. ”

I don't think that we should have some censor bureau or some kind of grand women's movement council that should tell academics what to work on but I think there should be more attempt to talk about what work can be useful to the movement and to acknowledge what work has come from the movement.

Probably it will always be uneasy, but the relationship between academics and activists is always uneasy. They are two different pieces of the task.

BTS: *Having been to Nairobi, I have a strong sense that feminism can be, and is being seen increasingly as, in your words, "a transformational politics," a politics that can take into account a*

broad vision of a better kind of society. Do you share that sense based on what you saw and heard at Nairobi?

CB: Yes. I think it's happening more and more. I think it's happening by necessity from Latin America and Asia where the thought of separating changes for women from a major social transformation is really almost impossible to conceive of, because the demands of the social change in society are so tremendous.

I think women may work on other issues but the sense that you have to work on it as a whole is born into those movements. And in fact it was born into the women's movement in the beginning. In the early sixties in the women's movement in the U.S., there was a sense of connection to a

transformational vision. I feel that what a lot of us are calling for is a return to the radical roots rather than really a brand new thing. In the United States anyway, I have felt that Nairobi had a very big impact in furthering this process. More and more women are doing work on broad issues of social change and seeing that as feminist.

Certainly the women of colour movement within the U.S. has reinforced this idea. I felt that in Nairobi it was almost like a sigh of relief. It seemed to me that we were starting to be the majority. I may be overly optimistic but I certainly point to Nairobi as a moment when that

continued on page 31

On Being Older and Wiser

Women touch, embrace, communicate. They share food, feeling, thoughts, and ideas. They praise each other's accomplishments. They support each other in trouble. They provide sympathy for hurts, advice for problems, many kinds of mutual education. They laugh or cry together, love or quarrel, lend things, give gifts, do favors.
The Crone: Woman of Age,
Wisdom and Power
by Barbara Walker

by Jane Taylor

Back in '79, fully aware of the negative image our society has of older women, three women decided that a space or group was needed where older women could begin to counteract that message and define themselves from their own experience. So the "Positive Ageing Group" began.

For the first few years we met on the first Monday evening of every month at a restaurant just to enjoy being with other older like-minded women. We tried many places and finally settled on a Chinese restaurant, because it was the only one that had round tables – a non-hierarchical seating arrangement. There were only a few of us at first, usually four or five. But after a while word got around and we began to grow. As our numbers increased we began to experience difficulty when

everyone wanted to talk and to hear. We experimented with various forms of structure, hoping to contain our vibrant enthusiasm within a manageable form, but none of them lasted very long.

In the end the Crones had to clone. By this time we were calling ourselves The Crones – with thanks to Mary Daly for her positive redefinition of the word. When we could no longer squeeze another woman around the biggest table in the restaurant, we split into two or three smaller groups. The option was left open for anyone to attend the once-a-month restaurant dinners, which continue to this day.

Who are we then, we Crones? "Fiesty, feminist women over fifty." A slightly facetious description, but it holds a kernel of truth. In our gab-group, we have settled down to a

minimum of three and a maximum of eight members. Most of us are battle-scarred veterans of the institution of marriage. Some of us are divorced, one of us has never married and some are still married. But all of us recognize the oppression of women and the desperate need to do something about it. We were all young girls in the thirties and forties, one of those recurring periods in history when awareness of feminism was at a very low ebb.

When we were teen-agers, soldiers of war were held up to us as heroes. The war ended, and we were led to believe that if we married a hero, raised a large family and did everything a proper wife was supposed to do, we would live happily ever after. We were all taught that proper ladies were nice. Oh, how we struggle with niceness! Now we have learnt to be quite nasty when necessary, especially when women are maligned, ignored or attacked.

At the beginning of our lives feminists were not audible. In mid-life we experienced an exhilarating explosion: the resurgence of a new, clear feminist voice. We have experienced life before and since feminism. The group gives us space to struggle; to struggle without criticism because we all acknowledge the common pressures we were subjected to as young women. We understand only too well the wear and tear on the psyche that comes from scrutinizing our lives, past and present, in the light of a feminist perspective.

Our support group offers safe space – a space to be ourselves, where we can talk and be heard. A space where we can be as we truly are – mature, wise, funny, loving and courageous women. Which doesn't mean that at times we are not outrageous, stubborn, noisy and even impossible.

It is a space where we can still learn – from books, from each other and from new experiences. It is a truly delightful and necessary space. One where we sometimes sing at the top of our lungs. You would have had to have been born when we were, to be able to withstand the shock of a bunch of older feminists belting out, word for word, all those corny love songs of the forties.

We have done many things together. We have spent a weekend in the country where one of us was introduced to skinny-dipping. We have protested outside the courtroom on Nicholas Street, demonstrating our outrage at a legal system that condones, covertly and overtly, violence against women.

We have marched in International Women's Day parades. At last year's march we were asked to lead the parade and carry the banners. A choice made, I think, because we seemed such a distinctive group wearing our sashes of purple (the traditional colour of protest for women). Growing older, historical continuity becomes more important and we wanted to commemorate the suffragettes, who also wore sashes on marches.

We have gone as a group to a conference on women and ageing. We shared a day of companionship, discussion, good food and relaxing exercises. Leah Cohen, as featured speaker, spoke to us about what happens to older women in this society. From her carefully documented book, *Small Expectations: Society's Betrayal of Older Women*, emerges a picture so dreadful that no one in their right mind would want to be an older woman.

Some of us have facilitated workshops on older women and groups and intend to do so again.

Most of all though, we talk. And talk and talk and talk. We talk about all those things not considered suitable subjects for polite conversation. We talk a lot about death and dying. How we would wish to die, when we would wish to die, the abysmal situation of those who are now dying, what we can or would do to change things so that control of our last moments is returned to us.

As women our position in society is minimal at best; as older women we are well-nigh invisible. So we spend some of our time affirming ourselves as we are. We recently celebrated the 65th birthday of two of us. It was a great celebration with lots of good food, laughter and affection. Each of us brought a significant piece of literature to be read aloud. These ranged from poetry to articles to excerpts from books. One of the group is interested in collecting articles

from newspapers that are of concern to women. She has, in effect, become our personal clipping service. She had prepared a magnificent display of articles and photographs of women well into their seventies and eighties. The impact of page after page of vibrant, energetic and enthusiastic women, even older than ourselves, was salutary and encouraging.

We even discuss such ordinary things as knitting. But most of the time we spend trying to unravel the knots of life, the knots that kept us woven into a design that neither enhanced nor liberated us. With a good deal of laughter and not a little agony we recount how each of us coped with the discrepancy between what was expected of us and what we really wanted to do and be. We are still trying to deal with the same discrepancy but we are better armed now with a feminist awareness of the origins of the pressures that shape us.

Contrary to popular myth, we very seldom talk about our ailments or recipes. Rather, we talk about the ailments of the world and the recipes needed to produce a better one. But mainly, we meet together to reaffirm ourselves as older women who have a feminist perspective on life.

From the outside we older women are not much more visible in the women's movement than we are in society at large. I also think we are under-utilized within the movement.

Although our energy is less than it was and we can't attend meetings 6 nights a week, nor be on as many committees as we once could, we want to have a place in the women's movement. We have a role to play as arbitrators, mediators, speakers and facilitators. By using our life experiences we can add more detail and a richer hue to the feminist vision of women's abilities and destinies. *bts*

Jane Taylor is 58 years old. Part of her time is spent in Ottawa; the rest of her time is spent building her own home on 100 acres of land near Perth, Ontario. According to Jane, "I discovered the Women's Movement in 1972, and life has never been the same since." She dedicates this article to her sister Crones, "without whose input, encouragement and nudging, nay, even pushing, this article would never have been written."

IMMIGRANT WOMEN:

Illustration: Ginette Potvin



Who are immigrant women? Where do they fit into the social/economic structure of Canadian society? Although immigrants from many class backgrounds come to this country, immigrant women often find themselves in a very disadvantaged economic position once they are in Canada. Immigrants tend to cluster at the top and the bottom of the Canadian labour market; immigrant women, however, are mostly in the lower-paying jobs.

Immigrant women who do not speak English, are from racial minorities, or working class or rural backgrounds, often end up working long hours at "low-skill", insecure, and underpaid jobs, in hazardous and unorganized workplaces. Many are employed in service industries (as cleaners or cooks), in the needle trade and small manufacturing, and as temporary farm labourers. Despite their

expectations of making a better life for themselves and their families, they often find they remain trapped in these jobs for many years, frequently working a double day because they also look after their families.

Middle class and educated women who come to this country expecting to use their skills often find that their education and professional qualifications are not recognized. Many of these immigrant women are also forced into the lower strata of the labour market.

Many immigrant women in Canada feel that the women's movement neither includes nor represents them. Women who identify themselves as "the women's movement" have also begun to consider whether they exclude immigrant women. In the following interview, Roxanne Kalimootoo addresses the

by Alma Estable

question of immigrant women's alienation from the women's movement. Roxanne is a counsellor at Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO). She emigrated from Guyana 20 years ago. A social democrat, she is also very interested in women's issues, and has been on the fringes of the women's movement for about ten years. She believes that cultural, class and racial differences often act as barriers between immigrant women and the "mainstream" women's movement. (In this interview, the term "mainstream" is used to refer to individuals who are Canadian-born members of the dominant ethnic group).

Alma Estable: *What kinds of barriers prevent immigrant women from getting involved in the women's movement?*

Roxanne Kalimootoo: In your own country, you meet friends, you go out

from the outside looking in

and talk to them. Here, it's harder to do. You don't know these people. You don't socialize with them. How are you supposed to know what's expected of you in a social situation, in a group meeting?

Mainstream women, in the women's movement and out, aren't very aware of immigrant women around them. They don't know, in their daily lives, how many immigrant women they come in contact with, on the street, shopping in the supermarkets, etc. An immigrant woman may come and drop her child off at the daycare – who makes an effort to go and talk to her?"

Alma: *Some immigrant women say that the issues taken on by the women's movement are not that important to immigrant women. How do you feel about this?*

Roxanne: Women who have grown up in another country do not always see the significance of certain issues in a Canadian context. Sometimes, the things that immigrant women have taken for granted in their own countries, Canadian women are only just fighting for. For example, a Guyanese woman might not understand why women in Canada complain about exclusion from politics, since women in her own country are very active in political life.

Alma: *Do you feel that the issues which concern mainstream women affect immigrant women as well? Aren't violence, unequal wages, lack of childcare, all important issues for immigrant women?*

Roxanne: Yes, they certainly are. But as well, immigrant women have other areas of responsibility, and other concerns not shared by mainstream Canadian women – for example, the preservation and transmission of a culture and a language. We see things in a more global perspective, not within a western Canadian perspective. And so we want to change things more, to change more things, and more deep-

ly, than mainstream women.

Alma: *Immigrant women in Canada have begun to organize and define their own issues, as women and as immigrants. What effect does this have on the women's movement?*

Roxanne: The things that immigrant women are fighting for are of little consequence to a women's movement that is *middle class*. Immigrant women in Canada do not have to debate whether or not to stay home with our children. For most, there is no choice: we have to go out and work.

Alma: *What essential issues has the mainstream movement not addressed?*

Roxanne: Things like ESL training in the workplace, changes to the immigration laws, social assistance to refugees, the recertification of professional women's qualifications, and fighting racism in the schools are critical areas for political action for many immigrant women. Yet I feel that these items are not on the agenda of the mainstream women's movement. When gains in these areas are achieved, it isn't usually because the women's movement has done anything about it. These are not areas that women's movement has worked for.

Alma: *When you talk about the "women's movement" in Canada, to whom are you referring?*

Roxanne: I guess I mean the high-profile people, like Status of Women Canada, the Advisory Council, the organizations that are known and respected in this society, that the government goes to, that the newspapers go to for quotes. Also the Ottawa Women's Network, the Business and Professional Women's Associations, etc. In my experience, these are often the same women who say immigrants cause unemployment, or problems in the schools, and lack any awareness or sensitivity to the situation of minority and immigrant women.

Alma: *What about the groups and organizations that are less high profile, who provide "alternative" services, who work in a more collective fashion, who see themselves more as grass roots women's groups?*

Roxanne: They haven't included us either. There may be one woman from these groups who contacts us to ask for information, but that's all. The mainstream women's groups appear to me to be fighting sexism in isolation. They're only fighting sexism, not class... Maybe this (article) can be presented as a challenge to the women's movement. If they have something more to offer immigrant women, let them tell us, because we, immigrant women, don't know. This is all we read and hear about.

Alma: *Therefore, you feel class is an important barrier?*

Roxanne: Yes. If you're an upper class immigrant woman who comes over to Canada with money, you can start a business, for example. You may feel racism, the isolation, of being an immigrant, but not the added disadvantages of poverty. But if you're from a lower class, and without education, all the difficulties are compounded.

Alma: *What about cultural differences?*

Roxanne: Class interacts with cultural background in different ways. In some countries, for example, the upper class male is more sexist, in others it is the lower class male. The North American women's movement does not see these differences. To many immigrant women who have been politically active in their own countries, it appears that the majority of Canadian women in the women's movement have not even begun to worry about a class analysis in their own context. Canadian women do not even realize that upper and lower class women have different problems in Canada, and they are much less prepared to handle the

continued on page 32

INCOME

MAKES ALL THE DIFFER- ENCE

by Dorothy O'Connell

Question: *What is a low-income woman's definition of feminism?*

Answer: *A young university-educated woman with a career.*

According to this definition, low-income women are excluded from feminism. Is the definition true? By and large, I would say it is fairly accurate. Most feminists are young university-educated women.

Low-income women do not think much about being feminists, any more than they would think about being Americans, or anything else which is theoretically possible but unlikely to happen. In this article, a few of the reasons why are explored.

In general, low-income women are not very well educated. There is a trend in the public school system to start streaming the children of the poor into dead-end occupations as early as first grade. To educators this seems entirely reasonable, since low-income parents do not have the money to send their children to university. In the system poor kids are taught not to aspire, although their lack of aspiration is usually blamed on their mothers. Unless they have exceptionally strong parents, streaming means that they will be looking for a job as soon as they leave high school, which may be as early as grade eight. The type of jobs available to people with a limited education contain little if anything to encourage original thinking. They are usually rote jobs, boring and repetitive.

Most low-income women marry either immediately after high school

or shortly thereafter. Childbearing begins almost immediately. After all, it was the primary reason for marrying. Such marriages are generally between two young people who are now, in their own eyes, grown up and therefore capable of raising a family. The young men and women are almost always from the same background, because they have not been anywhere to meet anybody who is different.

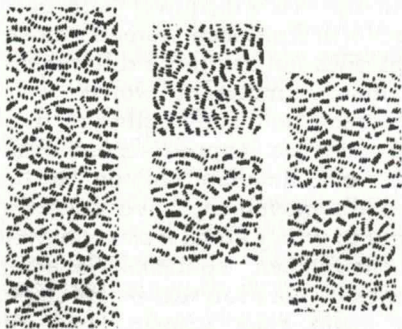
For entertainment, the married couples go to places that are cheap. They join bowling leagues or dart teams made up of other couples like themselves. They go to the Legion or to a military mess, where women are relegated to the Auxiliaries. Or they stay home and watch television, where women are usually portrayed in support roles, or as having careers which they throw up in a flash for marriage. Cagney and Lacey are the only television role models of women doing interesting work and getting respect for it.

Nobody is suggesting to young low-income women that any interesting roles but motherhood are open to them; not the schools, because such women are not considered career material; not their parents, because they were brought up in the same way and think that women's careers (as teachers, hairdressers or nurses) should only last until marriage, or be pursued only if the extra income is necessary. Parents, among others, teach low-income women that they should not take on anything which will seem more important than, or as important as, husband and family.

With this kind of conditioning, it is not surprising that low-income women feel that feminism has little to do with them. They feel more at home with their contemporaries, even if they are male, than with feminists. They are not unreachable, but they will not respond to literature sent to their homes, or to people knocking on their doors.

In order to involve low-income women in feminism, it is necessary to convince them that they will in some way benefit. Right now they are receiving messages in a number of ways which tell them that they will lose.

Certainly their husbands,



boyfriends and fathers are not encouraging them to consider feminism. The approval of males is still very important for almost all young women, but particularly so for low-income women since the culmination of their lives, they believe, is marriage. They often have the wedding planned right down to the last flower, but everything beyond that is hazy, a vague dream of motherhood for the rest of their lives.

Feminism seems to threaten the importance of women's role in the family, and it is the only role low-income women have. Jobs are just something to do until marriage, or afterwards, for extra money. Friends are okay, but there is still a lot of competitive feeling among women, so a firm basis of support does not always exist. Feminism does not seem even a safe thing to consider, and talk of equal pay for work of equal value often meets with disapproval, since the father of the family must reign supreme or the whole foundation is threatened.

When a marriage breaks down and the family is not supportive, sometimes a low-income woman will start to consider feminism. Let us consider such a young woman. She is now trying to raise a family on her own, she needs employment, she needs support. Will feminism help her to find those things?

She is liable to find that the people with whom she has the most difficulties are female. Her social worker, her child's teacher, the staff at the Housing Authority where she applies for housing, perhaps a Children's Aid worker may all be threatening. She feels that they sneer at her, they do not take her seriously, and they do not care if she and her children have adequate food and shelter.

Perhaps she is lucky and also finds teachers and social workers who want to help her get upgrading, who want to help her to find a job which pays enough to get off Family Benefits. Usually all she will find is that she cannot afford to work. If she takes a job, her rent will go up, she will not be able to get daycare and food will still be too costly. She will find herself forced back onto social assistance just when she thought that things were going to work out. Again,

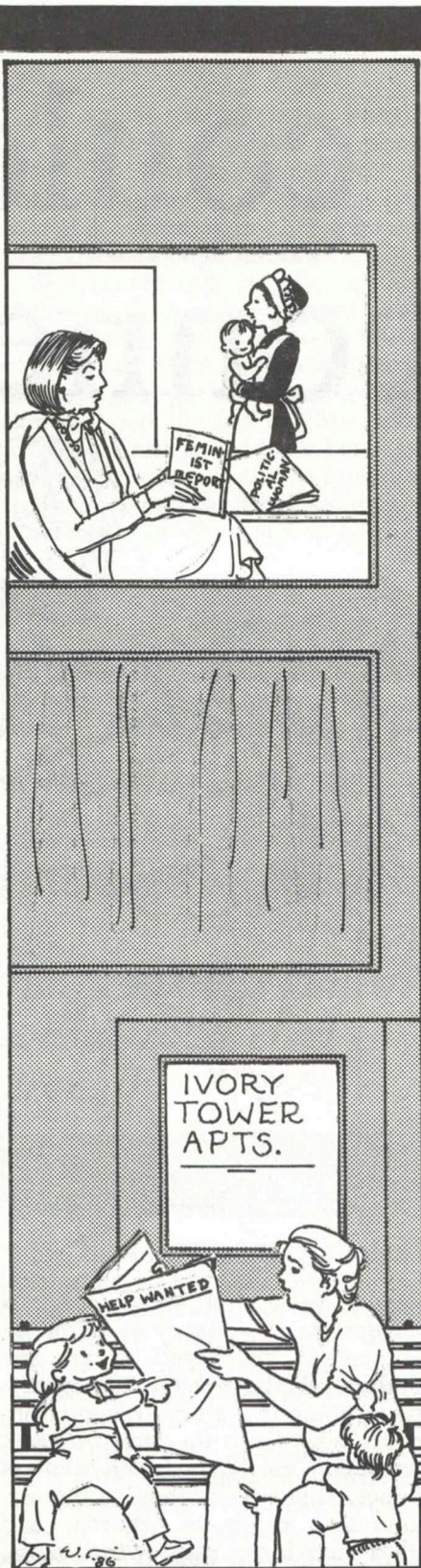


Illustration: Wendy Irvine

it appears to her that women are not being too helpful.

Suppose that at this point she picks up a feminist publication, looking for people who share her state of mind. She is finally ready to take a stand about women and equality. What does she read? Is it about women like herself, with their backs to the wall, facing poverty and discrimination? Or does she read something which, in the first place, is in such academic terms that she has trouble understanding what it's about? If she manages to get past the academic jargon and the buzz words of the *cognoscenti*, does it have anything at all to do with her? Nine times out of ten the answer is no.

Furthermore, the women she meets who are feminists are apt not to be fighting for Canadian women who live in poverty, but for women in some other part of the world — like Africa, Nicaragua, El Salvador, whichever is in this year. If she tries to talk about Canadian poverty, she may well get a lecture on real poverty, and how lucky we are that Canadians, except maybe Native people, do not have to worry about it. When she tries to say that she does not have enough food in the house and may not be able to pay next month's rent, these feminists are liable to look the other way, or tell her how poor they are too, with not a penny extra.

If they have a meeting on, say, whether or not the Child Tax Credit should be paid to women once a year or quarterly, they may infuriate her with long philosophical debates which do not, in her opinion, reflect the reality or the urgency of many women's need for money. In despair, she may decide that she was right in the first place — feminists have nothing to do with her. bts

Dorothy O'Connell is the author of two books of humorous short stories which feature low-income women on Family Benefits as the main protagonists. She has been a long-time activist on issues of concern to low income women. Dorothy works for the Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services (OCLISS). Formerly known as the Ottawa Tenants' Council, OCLISS is a self-help group dedicated to improving the lot of low-income people through political action.

If we could only connect ...



by Sheila Scotchmer

Contrary to popular opinion, it is possible to change diapers and think at the same time. The fact that our society acts as if it believes otherwise leaves mothers who have chosen to stay at home feeling victimized by glib assumptions and faulty perceptions.

Many feminists consider themselves incapable of such misunderstanding. They reject out of hand the stereotype of mothers at home as "frumpy, dumpy, chocolate-eating, curler-wearing, soap-opera addicts." (1) One wonders, however, if they are as quick to dismiss the

equally false but less conscious perception of mothers at home as women of privilege: wives and mothers who have the luxury of staying at home in a stress-free environment; who have the time to cook wonderful meals, maintain spotless homes, enjoy each other's company, volunteer in school, church, and other activities, ski, swim, skate, quilt, read, listen to music and do all the other little things most women would really like to do if only they didn't "have to work."

For the vast majority of mothers at home, nothing could be further from

the truth. That is not to say that there are not some women at home who are just that privileged; or alternatively, that it is not a privilege to be at home nurturing another unique human being. It is to say that privilege is *earned* by most mothers at home at considerable cost to themselves.

Consider for example the working conditions mothers at home have chosen to accept: non-existent wages; on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; no promotions, positive ratings or even recognition that they work; an endless supply of the same work,

which at best is never visible, and at worst is all too evident; isolation from adult company for long periods; work with people who at times are filthy, irrational, totally demanding, and utterly insensitive to their mother's feelings, needs and rights; and finally alienation and condescension from a world which often forgets that they exist.

Mothers at home accept these conditions because they feel that their role is vital in a society which has become increasingly fragmented, demoralized, and inhuman. They know their children will never pass their way again, and that they will achieve irreplaceable growth and development from the privilege of watching their loved ones make that passage.

Society undervalues this contribution of mothers at home, partly because it glibly assumes that such women have chosen the traditional path taken by their mothers and grandmothers, and that today's women have the same support systems at their disposal. However, whereas our mothers' decision to stay at home was in the popular majority, today's mother at home is in the minority. That one little fact has made all the difference.

Living on one income in a two-income world is an economic reality for mothers who choose to stay at home today. It is also a social, emotional, and psychological one as well. The feelings of isolation, of being the only adult home on the block during the day, can be overwhelming, especially for a new mother. Lifelines — such as women's groups, parenting courses, playgroups, public health information sessions, Mothers are Women and the Parent Preschool Resource Centre — do exist, but often, and especially, during the first long cold winter of her baby's life, a new mother does not know about them because she does not know anyone else in her lonely situation. She does know that our society finds it very difficult to value anything without using money. Since she has given up this standard measurement she finds her worth and her very identity in question.

She knows that at parties people first ask "Do you work?" and then "What did you do before?" as if, without employment, neither her current life situation nor her opinions could possibly be of interest.

She knows that in spite of her previous employment record, she cannot now obtain a credit card without her husband's co-signature. Nor can she get a loan from the Women's Credit Union. She also knows that she is suddenly bereft of economic power. She is completely dependent upon the largesse or fair-mindedness of her partner for her allowance.

“ Mothers at home may be in a vulnerable position in today's society, but they have chosen that weakness out of considerable strength. ”

She knows as well that the federal government values her contribution to the future tax base so little that it has recently proposed doing away with the child-tax exemption. This is a matter of relatively little significance to most two-income families but it is of great importance to her own. She suddenly discovers that her family is a poor cousin compared to everyone else in her peer group, even though her decision to be downwardly-mobile was a voluntary one, some of the unpleasant consequences hurt.

In addition, she is hurt by the fact that a cart of groceries is acceptable on a city bus, but her baby in a

stroller is not. Or by the fact that heavy smokers are made to feel more welcome than a mother and child in most public places, even those without plants, dim lights and a suitable ambience.

Even more disturbing is the fact that should she and her child choose to avoid public places altogether, in an emergency at home, there may not be anyone else around. When someone else is around, namely her partner, she finds herself making demands on him for emotional support far greater than any one person can be expected to sustain.

She certainly cannot look for emotional support to a society which claims that children are its greatest resource, but pay the lowest wages to those engaged in work similar to hers.

Moreover, a new mother at home soon realizes that her work is not exactly similar to that of paid caregivers. At the end of the day, a babysitter, daycare worker or nursery school teacher can hand the child back to the parents, and attribute any unacceptable behaviour patterns to the home environment. By the same token, a mother who works for pay can blame her child's evident problems on the lack of "quality child care." A mother at home provides the quality or lack thereof. She is the home environment, and therefore more than anyone else, she is responsible if anything goes wrong. Since something inevitably does go wrong, she is prone to feelings of confusion and guilt, resulting in a loss of self-esteem.

To assuage those feelings she may try to be a "Supermom." If she can afford it, she will enroll her child in every program going. If she cannot afford it, she will give her/him her undivided attention. As a result, she will feel resentful, exhausted and abused. Most of all, she will feel inferior to her "working" counterpart who seems to be able to excel in a demanding job in the "real world" and still cope with all the requirements of parenting.

Even if there are many days when the mother at home congratulates

herself on her full-time commitment and rates herself as at least an acceptable, if not a perfect parent, she still feels the guilt of knowing she wants time to herself. The one morning or afternoon off a week that her mother (having an extended family nearby) might have enjoyed, would improve the parenting skills of today's woman immensely. But for most mothers at home, the quality childcare needed as a substitute is neither affordable nor available.

Last, but definitely not least, unlike her "working" counterpart, today's mother at home constantly knows the frustration of never being able to clean and tidy the house without having it quickly messed up again by someone small. She cannot accomplish one task to her satisfaction without a little person interrupting relentlessly; nor can she get through an entire day alone or engaged in preschool activities with those same tiny people without experiencing more stress, sudden emergencies and minor crises than most air traffic controllers ever have to face.

The life of an average mother at home then, is not that of the majority of the population, but rather that of a disadvantaged minority. It is from this minority position that many mothers view a feminist movement which claims to speak for all women. Not surprisingly, the feeling of alienation, of feminists not knowing whereof they speak, increases in direct proportion to a woman's awareness of her own disadvantages in a two-income, two-partnered, physically fit, and upwardly mobile society.

Some mothers at home have husbands who travel constantly on business for example; others have been abandoned by their partners. Still others are single, legally separated or divorced, physically and emotionally battered, on welfare, living with alcoholics, or caring for handicapped children. In each case, the woman's perception of herself in particular, and of the women's movement in general, will be as individual as her life situation and experiences.

Most women, including mothers at home, have nothing but praise for feminist achievements such as the establishment of rape crisis centres, shelters for battered wives, and

hostels for homeless women and their offspring. On the other hand, a mother at home whose earning potential is far lower than her husband's might begin to change her mind about the feminist goal of affirmative action after her husband has been laid off work for six months. Another woman who worked B.C. (before children) as an office cleaner or a waitress might question whether the women's movement will ever be as interested in or at least as vocal about homemakers' pensions as it is about the problems of women who carry attaché cases.

An older woman at home might be opposed to full support maternity benefits which she feels discriminate against single people, men, childless couples, and others such as herself whose children are all past infancy. Her neighbour might share her feelings but for a different reason. This mother at home maintains that such benefits do not benefit society as a whole since they only encourage mothers to return to work as soon as possible after the benefit period has ended, in order to avoid having career or monetary prospects hampered by anything as inconvenient as the next generation.

Another mother's *raison d'être* is threatened by yet another feminist spectre. Her family has made considerable financial sacrifice so that she can take care of her own children. She does not understand why her family should pay more in taxes for universal daycare. Why, she may ask, should they subsidize all those two-income families who are working for all the little extras which her family cannot afford.

Finally, I know at least one woman at home who had to wait six years before a baby became available for adoption. Therefore she finds it difficult to accept the feminist creed of abortion on demand. For yet another mother at home filling such a demand is not seen as a valid choice for a woman but rather as a license to murder the most innocent members of our society. Her view of this issue is that the women's movement is not advancing the cause of women's or any other human's rights. Indeed, it is sounding the deathknell of civilization.

For feminists such thoughts are

anathema, yet if they listen carefully to these sisters they will find them to be as articulate, intelligent, perceptive, humane, fair-minded and aware of today's realities as those who march to a different drum. As individuals, mothers at home may or may not subscribe to each and every tenet of feminist ideology, and as a group they may have chosen to step outside the mainstream of modern life, but such a choice has given them *more*, not less, to say to other women and to the world.

On the other hand, without the difficult pioneering work of the women's movement, groups for mothers at home, such as Mothers are Women, might not exist. In addition, feminist publications like *Breaking the Silence* do give such groups the chance to make themselves understood. By itself, though, understanding is never enough.

E.M. Forrester once wrote that to bridge a chasm between two worlds, one must "only connect."⁽²⁾ However, electricity cannot flow without first plugging the cord into its power source. So, no connection can be made between the world of feminists and that of mothers at home without more audible acknowledgement from the women's movement of the fundamental role of all women, and especially of mothers at home as lifebearers, caregivers and nurturers of the next generation.

Mothers at home may be in a vulnerable position in today's society, but they have chosen that weakness out of considerable personal strength. And until the feminist movement recognizes that strength, stops calling it weakness, and instead seriously consider the needs, viewpoints and essential value of such women, I fear there can be and will be no movement from the other side.

bts

(1) Debbie Lapointe, *Homebase*, p. 3.

(2) E. M. Forrester, *Howards End*, Epigraph.

Sheila Scotchmer, a former teacher, is now a full-time mother at home learning from her two children. She writes for Profession: Parent, the newsletter of the Parent Preschool Resource Centre in Ottawa, and for Homebase: A Forum for Mothers at Home.

To Live Outside the Law

by Deb Ellis

Women will make perfect criminals, once we break out of the law, order, and convention which restrain us.

As the rich grow richer, and some women trade justice for a stock portfolio (just like the boys), it's becoming clear which occupations ring morally right, and which are havens for sell-outs looking for a sexually-equal ride on other people's oppression.

Women will make fine criminals, wonderful thieves. As an under-culture in the world of men, we have centuries of criminal-character-building behind us. From keeping back the egg money to keeping back our true thoughts, to faking interest and orgasms left, right, and centre, we are indeed finely-tuned liars.

We are used to having double lives, to say the least. Like the slave maintaining a second skin for the master, keeping her or his real skin for rare moments of privacy, we women blink at the real world through a mask of Estée Lauder and Bonne Bell. We are already not what we seem. The men who are nearest and dearest to us sometimes suspect as much, some even deeply wish it were not so. But our secret lives are too close to us, too protected. Again like the slave, we wash the master's socks and type the master's letters with loving submission on our faces and murderous fire in our hearts.

In an era of rising unemployment, especially among women of the lower strata, it's clearly time to make these "secret lives" work in our favour.

This is a call for so-inclined women to form themselves into a Women's Crime Collective, for the

purpose of Burglary with a Conscience. Most of the crimes punished by our laughable justice system are those of the poor against the poor. The Women's Crime Collective will choose its targets with care, holding fast to a vow of never hurting people who are hurting already.

The Women's Crime Collective could declare open season on the banks (but not on the bank employees), on the cars of the rich, the jewels of the well-to-do, the treasures of the corporate heads, and the playthings of the wealthy. In keeping with their overall view of society, the Women's Crime Collective could redirect a chunk of its take to the people who need it most – battered women's shelters, free food banks, and so on. (The real Robin Hood was a woman, and Maid Marian was her lesbian lover who specialized in shoplifting!)

"Crime is crime is crime," said Margaret Thatcher, and she should know. She's one of the most prominent female criminals of all time (all legal crimes, of course). Some people get away with murder.

The people who are called criminals are not the ones who are poisoning the planet, slaughtering its inhabitants, and making billions of dollars on our species' impending

demise. Oh no, those are the upstanding citizens ... the ones who make the laws which declare other people criminals.

As women, as feminists, we must seek to make crime, as currently defined by the state and society, a noble, artful profession, one in which we can take pride, and hold up its perpetrators as role models for our daughters. Many women we now praise, read, and revere – Barbara Deming, Emma Goldman, Angela Davis, Rosa Parks, Rosa Luxembourg, Ethel Rosenberg, the Pankhursts – they were criminals, all of them.

We should all strive to be unworthy in the eyes of the Law, with all the creativity, courage, and stamina we can muster. To be on the "right" side of Law is to be on the wrong side of Justice. In a world where mass murderers make the laws, run the courts and pull the strings, being a criminal in thought, word and deed is one of the most moral types a person can be.

And it's gotta be more exciting than being a secretary. bts

Deb Ellis is a Toronto activist who is involved in the peace movement. She works as a public educator on issues related to the Third World and peace.

by Ruth Scher

Asking labour women to criticize the feminist movement is as easy as pulling teeth. Protective of a movement that has touched almost every facet of their lives, labour women are more likely to be found caucusing over sexism in a union local or about an anti-choice resolution that is about to hit the convention floor.

Then why bother quibbling over seemingly less significant conflicts with the feminist movement? We are becoming increasingly willing to examine our movement from a constructive, but critical perspective. Now that we've survived and grown from our many battles, we're no longer too fragile to unearth our weaknesses. Attacks from a vengeful New Right have also compelled us not to take anything or anyone for granted, even our traditional allies.

One of those allies is the labour movement. While the links between the trade union and feminist movements may seem tenuous at best, the fact is that labour women have struggled within their unions to gain recognition, not only for themselves, but for the very principles that all feminists hold dear. Now daycare, affirmative action, sexual harassment and equal pay for work of equal value are not simply women's issues; they're clauses in collective agreements or policies passed at union conventions.

That's not to say there are no hitches in this convergence between the feminist and labour movements. The following is an edited version of a roundtable discussion with eight feminist trade unionists living in Ottawa. Sharing their observations and misgivings about some aspects of the feminist movement are: Morna Ballantyne, Donna Balkan, Deborah Bourque, Jackie Desrochers, Miriam Edelson, Sylvia Gruda, Nancy Porter, and Nancy Riche.

Why Labour First?

Ruth: *Why did you choose to work more closely with the labour movement than with the feminist movement?*

Morna: I found it a very refreshing experience to be working in a union. It's a more effective vehicle, I think, to accomplish certain objectives. In unions, you're fighting a common enemy (your employer). But, if you're in the women's movement, you're waging a huge battle; you're taking on all of society. Although women's organizations have had some real successes, the successes are easier to see in the labour movement because trade union issues are often so specific.

Deborah: That's true. But trade unions also share a built-in structure. Compared to the women's movement, the labour movement also has many more resources. Although unions often focus narrowly on the workplace, you find that changes in the workplace are reflective of changes in society. So if you are making gains in the union, generally those gains will flow into the rest of your life.

Nancy P. Unions, too, have legitimacy that is entrenched in law. Legally, an employer must eventually recognize your demands. And that legitimacy really helps people feel that they're doing something everyone can recognize.

Morna: Trade unions are also a powerful tool in our society — they can withhold labour power. Except for the one-day women's strike in Iceland, usually women are unwilling to use confrontational tactics because they are seen as "male tactics."

Donna: I think there are a lot of labour women who, because they're so involved in their unions, don't have the time to get involved in a women's organization or spend time in a women's centre. But when there's a pro-choice rally, they'll be out. Union work is very demanding. And if you combine that with, let's say, children, that's a lot of time demands. And for a lot of union activists, the union always comes first.

SPEAK UP A Lab Wome Roundt

On Structures:

Ruth: *How do you feel about consensus decision-making or other feminist organizational structures?*

Morna: Although I have a lot of criticism of trade union structures, I find that women's organizations sometimes spend too much time on how to make a decision rather than on the decision itself. Consensus decision-making is fine when you all agree, but what happens when there's a disagreement that you can't resolve. Should there be a vote? Conflicts also arise when some women's organizations work in coalitions with hierarchical organizations like unions.

Donna: At the Halifax Women's Peace Conference, there were some very clear divisions between labour women and the other women there. We got frustrated because we are

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say what you want to say, yes or no; in consensus you can't.

Morna: Some feminists say that because women haven't been taught the rules, they're kept out of the political process, so we have to get rid of the rules. This bothers me because I think that the logical conclusion may be that women are incapable of learning the rules. Also, compromise to reach consensus is not always desired. For instance, I have yet to see a feminist organization compromise on the issue of choice. There are certain issues that we won't compromise on and it's a good thing too!

Nancy P. At Organized Working Women (OWW) general meetings, I like to stick to the rules of order. Since a great deal of our mandate is to teach women how to fight for their rights in the workplace and in their unions, I think we should practice the rules and structures so that we don't get out of shape.

Jackie: It might be a drag for people who know the rules of order, but you can't forget the people who don't know them. You can't leave those women behind.

On The Issues:

Ruth: *Do you think that most feminist organizations are addressing issues that concern labour women?*

Morna: Let's talk about NAC (National Action Committee on the Status of Women) for example. I often think of NAC as the CLC (Canadian Labour Congress) of women's groups. NAC's issues regarding the workplace are very similar to those of the labour movement. For example, their work on equal pay for work of equal value, pensions, and sexual harassment. But although NAC has good positions, it's still mainly a middle class organization. Yet, it's a real credit to NAC that it's able to have good positions on workplace issues without significant trade union membership.

Sylvia: NAC can do that because most women are working women. And they did have a good student rate at the last conference.

Deborah: I don't like feminist groups

that have functions that deny access to women. Parts of the women's movement think that the women's struggle is climbing the corporate ladder.

Morna: And what about the Eaton's strike? It was a struggle to get some women's groups to accept the Eaton's strike as a woman's issue. It's not that they're not willing to listen. It's just that they don't think of it naturally.

Deborah: The struggles of the mainstream women's movement and the union movement are often the same. Maybe the women's movement puts more emphasis on rape crisis because that's where their resources are. And trade union women put more emphasis on equal pay because their strength is in collective bargaining.

Nancy R. For so many years, the women's movement was working on consciousness raising. The labour union women, if they were active and in the public sector unions, worked on getting first collective agreements. So priorities were in different places. Well, that part has been done. And now the movements have come together on economic issues.

On The Barriers:

Ruth: *What do you think is preventing more labour women from getting involved in the feminist movement?*

Morna: The problem with some feminist umbrella groups like Ottawa's International Women's Week Committee is that not enough effort is directed towards working-class women. For instance, the debate over an all-women's dance. Excluding men will often exclude working-class women because this is very foreign to them. Also there was a fight last year to hold the International Women's Day march on Saturday so that women who work could participate.

Ruth: *Let's get back to segregated or women-only events. Do you think that these events are a barrier to participa-*

used to something that is very goal-oriented. For example, when you're working in the labour movement, you're working on a new clause in a collective agreement, to get somebody elected or to get a resolution passed. At this Peace Conference, it was all process and nobody was really sure what the goals of the conference were.

Nancy P. In the labour movement, there is an attempt to reach consensus behind the scenes. To a great degree, there is informal background chatting and compromise.

Jackie: My experience with consensus on a smaller level is generally positive. But I'm concerned about whose voice makes the consensus. I've found that the woman with the "big mouth" often decides the consensus. I always think it's good to vote, no matter what. In a vote, you can

tion by working class women?

Nancy P. No. I see International Women's Day as a celebration of women's achievements. One day a year is not too much to be together as women. Either decision (to exclude men or not) will exclude some women. We have no idea how many working-class women are lesbians. A lot of women are uncomfortable in mixed parties.

Miriam: For me, it is a strategic question. We need them. I think the problem (of sexism) is bigger than individual men, although individual men are often part of the problem. I think that men can change and that we (women) can fight to get what is ours.

On Class and Feminist Judgementalism:

Ruth: *Are there any other reasons that may make working-class women prefer their unions to the feminist movement?*

Nancy R. Now let's really be honest. I was much more comfortable walking into a labour meeting than I was walking into a women's centre. I felt intimidated by the women who gathered in the women's centre. They were talking and they'd all read the literature. I hadn't. I didn't know anything about Betty Friedan back then. Anyway, I looked at the books on the shelf and I hadn't read any of them. So I guess I felt that I could not participate in their kinds of discussions.

These (women's centre) women were different people from me. They were wonderful after I got to know them. But it took me years, absolutely years, to get to know them as women. I don't think I understood their humour. I didn't know what was funny.

Donna: But also there were cultural things. You wouldn't be caught dead walking into the Women's Centre in 1972 wearing a skirt and makeup.

Nancy R. Let me tell you another story. Once I was on this committee with another feminist and it was decided that we would meet for lunch. Somewhere in the middle of lunch, she says to me: "Do you shave under your arms?" And I thought to myself: "Oh, my God! There's a feminist answer and I don't know what it is." Well, my way out is to be

honest. I don't know how to lie. So I said, "Yes." And she asked: "Why?" And I said: "Because I sweat!" And she accepted that. But when I got home, I got really, really angry. I thought: "Who the hell does she think she is asking me that question when I am doing the same thing she's doing. I am working for a bunch of people who have been discriminated against for a whole bunch of years."

Donna: Class differences also create communication gaps. For example, when I first heard about sexual harassment as an issue, I was supportive, but I didn't understand it. I said, "Why don't you just tell the guy to buzz off?" because that's exactly what I had done. But that's because I was brought up to be assertive, so I didn't understand women being afraid of losing their jobs or not knowing how to fight back. I've talked to a lot of women since then. And I understand it now. Maybe it is class-related. Maybe middle-class people, because of the advantages they have in society, don't have as much to lose by telling a boss to go to hell.

On Outreach:

Ruth: *How can feminists be more sensitive to labour women and encourage them to join the women's movement?*

Deborah: It's important that the women's movement become more accessible to labour women, that it realize that working women work certain hours, sometimes the night shift, and that we can't always afford childcare. There should be an effort in the labour movement to encourage labour women to participate in the women's movement. There should also be a conscious effort in the women's movement to be more aware of the labour movement.

Donna: The links are the labour activist women. For example, when OWW has a table at the Women's Information Fair during International Women's Week, that does two things. First of all, it's a way of getting labour women interested in International Women's Week. Secondly, it makes feminists more informed about labour issues.

Some conclusions:

Although it is difficult to make hard and fast conclusions based on discussions with eight labour women, there are a few common points worth noting. While most agreed that consensus works in small, homogenous groups, it appears to be a far less effective tool at a huge conference or gathering. More importantly, the divergent approaches of labour women and many feminists, which can be described as "goals versus process," only scratched the surface of a larger debate on which form is more democratic. Perhaps this is one area in which there is room for compromise.

Of greater importance are the recurrent comments about the cliquishness of certain feminist groups, particularly some urban women's centres. Whether it is the "I'm more feminist than thou" attitude or cultural barriers, expressed in exclusionary dress codes and styles of humour, we must recognize that this behaviour will intimidate women from working class or ethnic backgrounds. That's not to say that we should change our own preferences. Rather it means we must be careful not to impose them on others. It's not unusual for a social change movement to invent parallel norms, but it becomes a problem when our actions erect barriers to sectors of women.

Recruiting women from other communities can only happen when feminists cease to brush off racism or class distinctions as secondary struggles. A woman living in an impoverished area of Newfoundland is not about to rush over to the nearest women's centre for a quick chat about pornography and censorship. Nor is a black woman who is fighting racism in her workplace.

This does not imply that we have nothing to offer those women. We do. But feminism will be a luxury ideology attractive mostly to white, university-educated women until we present it in a way that makes sense to these women, in a way that brings meaning to their daily lives. bts

Ruth Scher is an Ottawa-area feminist and labour activist.

Feminist Action in the Farm Community

by Helen Forsey

Last spring I began a battle with the editor of *Farm and Country* magazine over a humour column trivializing wife abuse.

Bill Booth's column started out: "It's getting so you can't turn around without somebody ... nagging at you ... (to) stop doing things that might be harmful to your health, like smoking or wife-abusing." He continued: "Most everybody knows that wife-abusing is ill-mannered, ill-advised, and illegal. ... But the door to domestic tranquility ought to swing both ways." He then went into a standard little piece of trash about a poor hen-pecked husband getting beaten up by his wife.

When *Farm and Country's* editor, John Phillips, printed excerpts from my letter of protest, he mangled it beyond all recognition, leaving out my two main points — that "family violence" almost always means the systematic abuse of women and children, *not* men, and that such abuse is not a laughing matter. He appended an editor's note justifying the column.

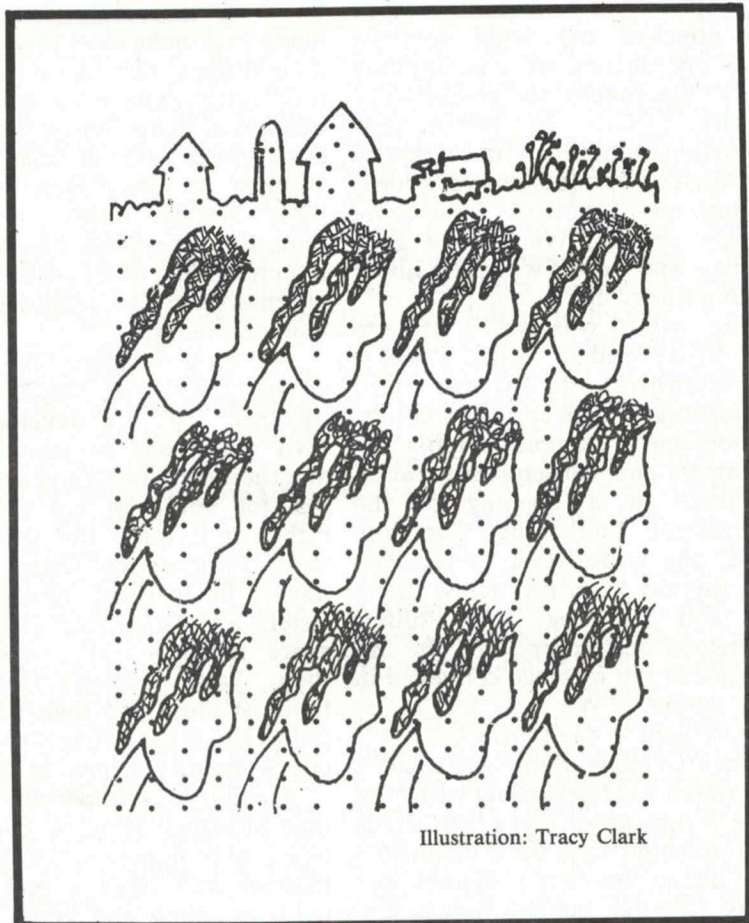
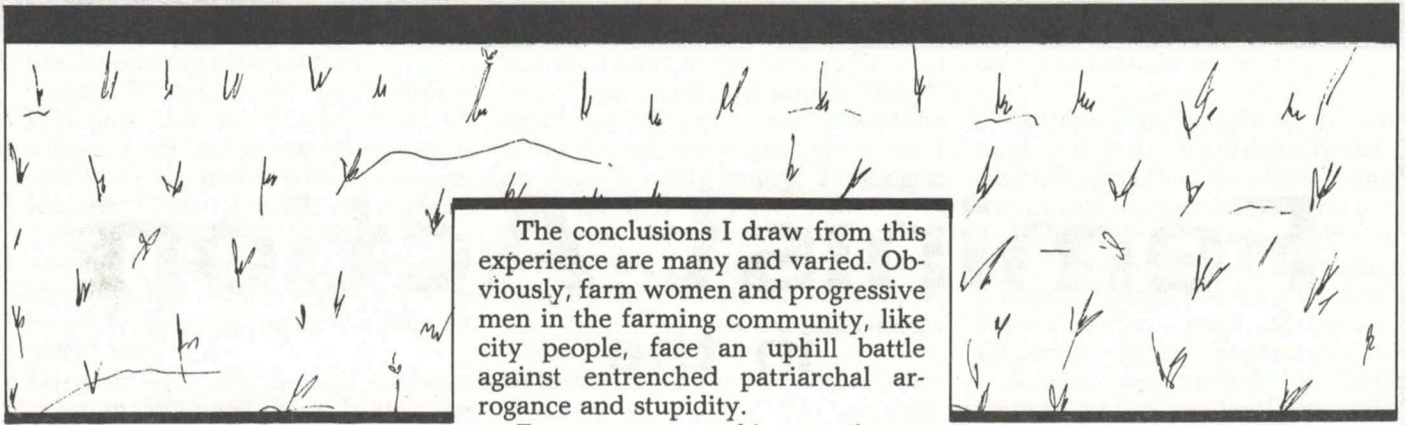


Illustration: Tracy Clark



The conclusions I draw from this experience are many and varied. Obviously, farm women and progressive men in the farming community, like city people, face an uphill battle against entrenched patriarchal arrogance and stupidity.

Farm women, working together as farmers and as women, are emerging as an articulate voice with which to be reckoned. Yet it is sad that so many farm women still feel they have little in common with feminists.

With the growing crisis in food production forcing families into debt and decimating whole communities, many farm women experience the threats to their identity and livelihood as farmers much more acutely than any sense of oppression as women. Their reality is a daily struggle for economic survival, coupled with incredibly long working hours that make most urban women's double days look like a picnic. And they struggle and work with men. The traditional roles, when they exist at all, seem to offer at least a tenuous security to many farm women in these stormy times. Urban-based feminism threatens these familiar structures, too often without offering alternatives which acknowledge farm women's realities.

As rural women find out how strong they are when they act together, they are developing their own definitions of woman power, and their own forms and agendas, not just for feminism but also for the rights of farmers and the needs of farm communities. Urban feminists have a lot to learn from their rural sisters, and a great deal to gain and to share through real solidarity with them. Farm women's fear of wild feminist ideas and their disparaging libber labels are a timely challenge to city women's concepts of sisterhood.

Finally, it is important to repeat that although strength comes with unity and numbers, individual initiatives still have a real place in political action and work for social change. It is perhaps especially important for women in rural areas,

geographically isolated and usually too busy with farm and family to attend endless meetings associated with urban organizing, to realize small personal efforts can lead to real achievements when coupled with persistence, creativity and a willingness to find information and allies. Individual actions can set examples, making it easier for other women to take action, who may not have thought it possible before. Furthermore, each woman who even thinks of taking such action is part of a network which is growing stronger, like a web, extending its threads into more and more communities across our country and around the world.

From this, we can see that alliances among women can bridge some pretty wide gaps in ideology and approach if they focus specifically on a common issue or a particular problem. Alliances between the powerful and the powerless are a bad joke; alliances which demand a compromise of principles are better left unmade.

However, there are other alliances that recognize differences yet build on commonality. If we can recognize these opportunities, listen to each other, and find ways to work together for common goals, we can tap the strength of our potential unity and build towards it.

bts

Helen Forsey lives and works in the Dandelion Community on a 50-acre farm in south eastern Ontario. Here members share values of equality, cooperation and non-violence as well as property, skills and work. For information about their visitor's program, contact: Dandelion Community, R.R. 1, Enterprise, Ontario, K0K 1Z0. (613) 358-2304.

Copies of my response to Mr. Phillips went to a number of people in politics, in the farm community, and in the women's movement. Several, including Harry Pelissero, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) which owns *Farm and Country*, never replied.

I also contacted Women for the Survival of Agriculture, who printed a note in their newsletter encouraging others to write and protest. With one exception, however, the further letters that *Farm and Country* printed on the subject were from farm women who attacked my "wild feminist ideas," my "unrural attitude," and my "scary approach to so-called ... equality." One of these correspondents summed it up by saying: "No, Ms. Forsey. You and your ideas frighten me." Another, even more tellingly, ended: "We have a good marriage and I don't want any libber messing things up."

After haying was over, I wrote to OFA Vice-President Brigid Pyke, a well-established farmer and outspoken advocate on farm matters. She sent me a supportive reply immediately, and subsequently raised the issue at a meeting of the Agricultural Publishing Company Board. She wrote back: "I received good support from my fellow directors, and feel that Mr. Phillips understood and appreciated the importance of the message conveyed in your letters. ... We will try to be more vigilant in the future. ..."

Since October, *Farm and Country* has printed a series dealing with wife abuse in rural areas, and a fifth article is still to come. One issue included a page listing transition houses and family resource centres across Ontario under the heading, "Where you can get help."

Clerical and Secretarial Workers: Why some women remain outside the women's movement

by Marie O'Shea

Editor's Note: During the preparation of this article, the author interviewed a group of eight women from the Ottawa region who work in secretarial and clerical jobs in the Public Service.

As of 1980, one third of all women in Canada with paid employment performed clerical work. It has been well established that sex segregation and unequal wages go hand in hand.(1) According to the *Citizen*, women with college degrees earn less than men with a grade eight education.(2) They have fewer opportunities for promotion or other benefits than their male counterparts. This is true even though the overwhelming majority of women have at least graduated from high school and on average have more formal education than their male counterparts.

Feminists have been the strongest critics of economic inequality in the workplace. Therefore, one would expect women in clerical or secretarial

positions to be strongly attracted to feminism. But more often than not, this is not the case. Many of the women in secretarial or clerical positions with whom I spoke acknowledged the improvements brought about by feminist action. Yet few saw themselves as "feminists" or as part of a collective feminist movement. This article addresses the reasons why this may be so.

If, as has often been argued, work is primary, it follows that work has a profound effect on women's views of themselves. It should therefore be the starting point for explaining the state of women's consciousness. The nature of clerical and secretarial work may also explain, at least in part, why women in these groups do not identify themselves more strongly with the women's movement.

Paid work is often an important source of enhanced self-esteem because it provides greater economic independence compared to work in the home. As well, work outside the home usually involves contact with other adults and positive feedback based on performance.

However, the parallels between paid work and that done in the home

should not be overlooked. In clerical work as in housework, women often perform tasks that are repetitious or exhausting and require little skill. In both fields, there are few training or promotion opportunities. In the labour force as in the home, women's status often depends more on the men for whom they work than on their own job performance.

Work that rewards women who respond to the needs and demands of others cannot encourage the development of people who are assertive, adventurous, self-confident and cooperative.(3) Since these are the exact characteristics that the feminist movement is promoting it is not surprising to discover that women who perform clerical work, and are therefore subject to its values, tend to be uncomfortable with feminism. One secretary commented, "They (supervisors) treat you like you were stupid." For a male boss in an office, "his girls" are expected to behave. The supervisor's patronizing manner often reinforces a feeling of inferiority on the part of "the girls." Although some women are permitted to express their concerns, there is no guarantee that they will be consulted

or heard.

For most women, office changes happen without consultation even though it is those women who actually do the work, and will have to do so under the new conditions. In the view of the male power structure, they are merely an extension of the boss. If they feel free to take an independent position, the male attitude often is that the boss fails to keep them in line properly.⁽⁴⁾

Most of the secretaries and clerical workers with whom I spoke described themselves and their co-workers as having an apathetic attitude, with little sense of control over their situation. They felt there was a general unwillingness to challenge the system or engage in unconventional behavior. "I would feel uncomfortable actively pushing for some of the things feminists stand for." Although it was mentioned less frequently, it was also obvious that for many, male friendships and approval were very important. Women are unwilling to be too visible in their support of feminist ideology for fear that this would threaten their relationships with fathers, brothers, friends and lovers.

To suggest that women's work is related to women's ideas is not to deny the importance of early learning. In fact, research done by psychologists Fagot and Patterson in 1969 indicates that children have a clear idea of their own gender identity by the age of three or four. Although this conceptualization is altered and adjusted as a result of later experiences, research suggests that sex-specific behaviour develops through imitation, sanctions and self-socialization. Unfortunately, little consideration is given to the origins of the sex roles that are transmitted to children or how they are maintained in later life.

Attitudes and ideas are not accidental products of a culture. They are directly related to the organization of our patriarchal society. In our society, male psychiatrists and

“ Unlike the work professional women do, the nature of clerical work is more likely to reinforce non-assertive behaviour patterns. ”

psychologists suggest that healthy women differ from healthy men by being more submissive, less independent, less adventurous, more easily influenced, less assertive, less competitive and more excitable in minor crises. Without either subscribing to the view attributed to clinicians of what is "healthy" or denying the clinician's bias, it can be argued that many women do fit this description. Once again, the real issue is why they do so. It is obvious that the apathy or unwillingness to actively support feminist goals which is often seen in clerical or secretarial workers is rooted in our broader patriarchal culture.

Unlike the work professional women do, the nature of clerical work is more likely to reinforce non-assertive behaviour patterns. The "divide and conquer" approach of patriarchal thinking explains much. There is a tendency for some women to be distracted by feminist agenda items which they feel threaten them. One woman stated, "She enjoys raising kids, which I'd like to do, and she even expects to be paid for it." Several women commented to me that they were against abortion or were against exhibitionist tactics such as bra burning and therefore did not see themselves as feminists. It is obvious that simplistic, misleading media images have had a strong influence.

There is also a tendency for identifiable groups of women to compete or to resent each other instead of joining together to support common goals. One example, explored at some length in this issue of *Breaking the Silence*, is the misunderstanding

which often exists between women working in the home and women in the paid work force. Another example is the schism between Pro-Choice and Pro-Life women.

In addition, a lack of a sense of self-worth causes horizontal hostility, and helps to explain women's consent to oppression. As already noted, the tendency of our society to undervalue or make invisible clerical and secretarial functions, which are categorized as "women's work," plays a major role in undercutting self-esteem. It is ironic that while the contradictions and conflicts created by the system have necessitated the growth of the women's movement, liberal reform which have been introduced may undermine efforts to raise women's consciousnesses.

Will clerical and secretarial workers eventually give greater support to the women's movement? So long as the reality of inequality continues to deny the myth of equal opportunity, more and more of these women will come to see feminist values as relevant to their own situation. Much will depend, however, on whether the feminist movement itself can overcome its image as a club for professional women only. bts

(1) Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, "What Women Must Do for Pay," in *A Working Majority* (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1983).

(2) *Citizen* (Ottawa), 31 December 1985, p. D17.

(3) Robin Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1970), p. 159.

(4) Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978).

Marie O'Shea has been a member of the BTS collective for two years. She was prompted to write this article after listening to the problems encountered by many women in the paid workforce, and their questions about the relevance of feminism to their situation.

BOOK REVIEWS

Inland Passage

by Jane Rule

Naiad Press, 1985

reviewed by
Martha Muzychka

Reading a book of short stories is almost like buying a box of Cracker Jacks and trying to guess the prize. Sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you don't. With *Inland Passage*, Jane Rule's tenth book, the reader is definitely rewarded by a wide variety of stories filled with intriguing characters and situations.

What is most interesting about Rule, well known as a lesbian author, is that she addresses both straight and lesbian realities. Her understanding of human nature illustrates a fascination with everyday dilemmas as mirrors for much larger problems. The reader can identify with the questions confronting Rule's characters, whether it is a married lesbian hiding behind the respectable facade of married life or a middle-aged man faced with the moral quandary of where to put his mother and her friend.

Although *Inland Passage* is an uneven collection of stories, Rule's tender approach makes the book a joy to read. The opening story, "Dulce," rambles with little focus through the life of a modern-day muse, but suddenly resolves into acceptance: "My real companions ... are women very like myself, who holds the shell of a poem to her ear and hears the mighty sea at a safe and sorrowing distance." Rule shows that living the life of a solitary person need

not mean a life devoid of significance and interest.

In contrast, "One Can of Soup at a Time" is short, succinct and almost painfully sweet in its resolution of a question with far-reaching effects for two people. By focussing on a can of soup and who will get it, Rule shows how the petty details of everyday life mask the larger questions involving women's self-worth and their roles in the institution of marriage.

The struggle to erase dominant and submissive roles is common enough in today's relationships, but whether or not these conform to the "traditional" male-female couple is irrelevant, as Rule shows in "The Real World," the touching lesbian love story of Tess and Annie. Yet Rule's subtle manner also shows us that Tess and Annie's love goes beyond them to encompass Tess' mother and grandmother, in an unending circle. Tess' mother is understanding of her daughter but allows herself confusion and hesitation in explaining to her own mother the "new generation".

Probably the most entertaining and provoking series of stories are those about Harry and Anna and their two children, Sally and Joey. While fitting into the nuclear family stereotype on the surface, Rule's deft characterization reveals real people with everyday concerns. "A Chair for George" tells of the children's search for grandparents, and Rule gives us a subtle but telling moral lesson on the need to have friends no matter how old or how young, and the need for old people to be wanted.

The need for human contact is clearly delineated in "Inland Passage," the best story of the collection. The reader is introduced to two lonely women, Troy, a Vancouver widow

laden with elegance and chic, and Fido, an unconventional Toronto film editor. Both women are mourning, for different reasons, their loved ones, and have chosen to ride a ferry into the B.C. interior to escape civilization, and to examine their own souls.

Troy and Fido become friends in spite of apparent differences, but by the end they find they have much more in common than they expected. Fido is a lesbian who has lost her lover to cancer while Troy is the mother of a gay man who was not accepted by his father before his death. The two understand the unfinished nature of their lives, and find a quiet resolution when they become lovers. The wonder of new experience and the understanding of their trip through the inland passage as a new beginning for each show Troy and Fido in a very human light.

In *Inland Passage*, Rule's philosophy comes through clearly, without rhetoric or bombast. What we see in her stories is reflected in our own worlds, except that we are sometimes too blind to notice. Rule's descriptions of relationships between lesbians are not much different from her views of heterosexual relationships; she senses that all relationships share common problems. The mystique surrounding sexuality is taken away whether it be straight or gay.

It's the kind of book you'd want to give your mother before coming out to her.

bts

Martha Muzychka is a journalist who writes for BTS as a refreshing change from her work as President of Canadian University Press, a national cooperative of student newspapers.



BOOK REVIEWS

Company of Adventurers

by Peter C. Newman

Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1985

reviewed by
Joan Holmes

Peter C. Newman's historical account of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in North America is an irresponsible popular history that perpetuates sexist and racist attitudes. Newman's approach to writing history is sadly traditional. It glorifies the adventures and contributions of individual white men and the HBC to Canada's development, without acknowledging or giving due respect to the role of aboriginal women and men.

Newman informs his readers that Indians are the "ghosts of Canadian history," and then proceeds to ignore their role as trading partners of the HBC. Indians, most dramatically Indian women, are invisible in his novel, except when they are used to add sensational tidbits or unsavoury "spice."

The editorial director of Penguin books defended this bias by stating that "the early fur traders ... were themselves racist and sexist" (*Globe and Mail*, 23 October 1985, p. A8). The personal diaries and official journals of the fur trade clearly illustrate this point, and I do not dispute the attitude of superiority of the traders. However, I do criticize Newman's use of this material because he chose to publish some of the most offensive

passages from diaries and journals, without modifying their credulity or balancing them with more accurate current knowledge.

Newman's most extensive depiction of Indian cultures consists of grisly accounts of cannibalism, treachery, inhumane behaviour or misinformation. Take, for example, HBC trader and explorer Samuel Hearne's claim that the Cree (men presumably) "cohabit occasionally with their own mothers, and frequently espouse sisters and daughters." In fact, this was not the normal practice of any of the cultural groups in the north. One must conclude that this brief was the result of Hearne's ignorance or misunderstanding; and yet Newman quotes this passage without adding any qualifying information.

In the same vein, the novel abounds in examples of how Indian men mistreated their women or held them in low regard, ignoring evidence of the high status and independence which Indian women enjoyed in many tribal groups. Newman chose to use the most titillating and sensational references to the fur traders' relationships with Indian women, none of which merit repeating. He did not make use of the numerous writings by traders that indicate the deep and affectionate familial ties many of them formed with their Indian wives and children.

When Newman is not directly insulting and belittling Indian women, he leaves them out altogether. For example, his book includes long descriptions of the clothing and gear the traders wore and used. He neglects to explain, however, that it was Indian women who provided

them with these necessary goods.

Indian women, in fact, performed a whole range of services for the early fur traders. Through marriage and diplomatic services, Indian women cemented trade relationships between traders and their tribes, and acted as interpreters, guides, paddlers, bearers and peace makers. They manufactured clothing, snowshoes and mocassins; they cleaned forts; they trapped small game, fished, and supplied traders with berries and other wild foods. They were also sexual partners and companions, and raised generations of Native (mixed-blood) children, many of whom grew up to serve the company as employees, wives and mothers.

While Indian women undoubtedly suffered abuse from the traders, they were not merely passive victims or senseless seductresses. They were strong willed and sometimes powerful women capable of independent and collective action. The Indian women attached to Fort Chipewyan, for example, went on to strike, refusing to clean the fort to back their demands that the HBC, rather than their husbands, pay for their support. Their withdrawal of services won concessions from the HBC that their men had been unable to achieve.

It is probably little consolation to Native women that Newman's references to white women are equally trivializing and insulting. He found it necessary, for example, to write a lengthy footnote which describes the various attributes of Charles II's mistresses.

There are exactly two positive references to Indians in Newman's book. One is to Matonabee and his

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wives who guided the HBC adventurer, Samuel Hearne, on his "discovery" of the Coppermine. It is interesting to note that Matonabee explained the absence of women on previous trips as being the prime cause of Hearne's earlier failures. Newman entirely neglected to include this observation.

The other positive reference is to Thanadethur, a Chippewyan woman, who acted as interpreter, peace maker and trade intermediary. Her story is more completely documented by Sylvia Van Kirk in *Many Tender Ties*.

For a more balanced history of the period, I would recommend *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* by Sylvia Van Kirk, and *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* by Jennifer Brown, or any of the numerous articles by these historians (see *Resources for Feminist Research* for a comprehensive listing).

Newman's bibliography lists works by both these women, but it is obvious from reading this novel that he was not interested in reflecting the depth and vividness that their work brings to our understanding of the relationship between Indian women and fur traders. He gives a fleeting summary of Van Kirk's thesis but fails to integrate it into the rest of his book, or to learn from her the importance of recognizing and overcoming ethnocentric and androcentric bias.

I find it very discouraging that an author of some stature should continue to write grossly biased accounts of history, even after being exposed to more accurate portrayals. I shudder to speculate on how Indian women and white women will be

misrepresented in Newman's next volume, which will cover the period of time when the Hudson's Bay Company merged with its most powerful rival, the Northwest Company. *bts*

Joan Holmes makes her living as an independent consultant, researching women and Native people. She lives in Ottawa with her husband and young son, and has been a collective member of Breaking the Silence for three years.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985

reviewed by
Martha Muzychka

According to author Margaret Atwood, there isn't anything in *The Handmaid's Tale* that hasn't already happened in one form or another. Her chilling picture of a society in the not-too-distant future is a feminist 1984, and a timely warning to be heeded before it is too late.

Atwood tells the story of Offred, a woman in the service of a commander of the Gileadean regime, a modern-day Puritan government. Society as we know it has disappeared; women have become the possessions of men, their worth

measured by their reproductive capacity. The handmaids are surrogate mothers, their only function to copulate with the husbands of childless women. Nothing is said of men's role or their ability to fertilize; failure to conceive belongs wholly to women.

Individuality is not permitted – the women are classified by colour into a rigid hierarchy. The Wives wear blue; the Handmaids wear red ("the colour of blood"); the Marthas (servants) wear green; and the Econo-wives – the lowest class of all – wear stripes. The handmaids lose their real names; instead they are known by their commander's first name – Offred is "of Fred." The women are permitted nothing which would mark them as humans with needs, thoughts or concerns. They are not allowed to read and their conversations are limited to weather, food or the latest birthing.

This frightening and insidious story permeates the reader's vision. Learning how women are cut off from their bank accounts because of sex-identifying "F" recalls endless forms where we must identify our sex, or the new debit cards which bankers hope will eliminate cash. The increasing number of surrogate mothers today makes it easier to envision the handmaid's role as a future profession for women.

The unkindest cut of all is the co-opting of the feminist movement. In the training centre for handmaids the Aunts, or female guards, brief the women on the evils of feminism. While admitting that the eradication of rape and pornography was an admirable goal, the Aunts decry feminist philosophy, and point to the

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regime's success in eliminating these same evils, yet do not acknowledge the loss of women's freedom and individuality. The most scathing attack comes against reproductive freedom; women who had abortions are seen as denying their femininity or God's gift. Needless to say, under the new puritanical regime, abortions are outlawed, and inducing one results in extreme punishment.

The reality shows us a group of frustrated women, devoid of personality or independent thought. The state's propaganda is summed up in slogans, repeated by the women in carefully structured conversations. Atwood's tight, spare prose is an excellent foil for the terrifying scenes she depicts. In stream-of-consciousness writing, Atwood represents a reference, then builds upon it, weaving together Offred's past with her deadly present.

In one particular scene, Atwood describes with blank sterility the ceremony in which Offred must meet with the commander once a month. Together with the Wife, all three participate in a formal sexual act, designed to fertilize Offred's egg:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he is doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose.

The reader is unsure what the ceremony entails as Offred begins by describing the room from her

perspective, that of being flat on her back. The detachment and lack of emotion signify Offred's acquiescence with her activity. Despite her assertion of choice, she eventually reveals that she did not have any.

In an ironic contrast to her role as a propagator of the species, the handmaid lives an isolated, barren life. Offred lives in a white, sterile room, devoid of human warmth. She is not allowed to associate with the other women in the house, only with other handmaids. Yet in spite of the restrictions, the women find a way to establish a network, and while it in no way resembles the sisterhood of women as we know it, the common experience of being surrogates unites the women, albeit superficially.

Offred often relives her past life before the regime's coup, and describes her relationships with her husband, child and mother. Intimacy is forbidden in Gilead; and Offred hungers for "the act of touch."

It is not surprising then that Offred fosters an illicit relationship with her Commander; having a real conversation, reading forbidden books, and just sitting with someone (outside of the Ceremony) is thrilling to a woman who has been denied such once common pleasures. But the contact changes the nature of their roles, leaving them open to discovery by the Eyes, the regime's secret service. As Offred fails to conceive, the Wife, driven by desperation and the loss of status, convinces Offred to have sex with the chauffeur. Offred goes beyond the agreement, and has a full-scale affair with the young man, not caring about the consequences because she is drunk on the sexual intimacy.

The denial of women's natures, and the attempt to force them to con-

form, make the handmaids do things they would never have considered doing before. At a mass salvaging (a public execution) the women are whipped into a frenzy to butcher a rapist who killed a woman with child. The women's recklessness is their undoing; whether they incur the wrath of the regime or the onset of insanity, they find some freedom in action, however limited.

The tenuous "mayday" network and the limited sisterhood it provided may have saved Offred; the reader never knows for sure. Survival of the fittest is the mainstay of these women; to believe in nothing less means an endless, empty existence as an object. Atwood has given us a moral lesson; for the puritanical tendencies of the new regime have the seeds in the new Right of today with its emphasis on the traditional role of women as wife and mother. *The Handmaid's Tale* speaks to all women, and her story has a far-reaching impact on us all. We would do well to listen, and remember. *bts*

Criminal Women

by Pat Carlen, Jenny Hicks, Josie O'Dwyer, Diana Christina, and Chris Tchaikovsky
U.K., Polity Press, 1985

reviewed by
Ellen Adelberg

This powerful book is an example of feminist praxis at its best. Jenny Hicks, Josie O'Dwyer, Diana

BOOK REVIEWS

Christina and Chris Tchaikovsky are four women survivors of the U.K. prison system. In *Criminal Women*, Pat Carlen, a feminist criminologist at the University of Keele, acts as their editor, providing them with the opportunity to tell us the individual stories of their involvement in crime, and their experiences in English prisons.

All of the women are articulate, insightful and highly intelligent. They provide the reader with intense, gripping accounts of their lives. One is left to marvel at the creative and gutsy, albeit self-destructive, way that each involved herself in crime. The story of Josie O'Dwyer focuses on her prison years and as it unfolds the reader is moved to detest and despise the inhumaneness of the prison system in a way that could only be inspired by a first person narrative such as this.

But the book does more than provide space for four female offenders to share their experiences with the world. In the introduction and conclusion, and intertwined in the narratives, are comments by Pat Carlen and the women themselves which reveal the close links between their involvement in crime, their treatment in prison and the misogynistic and capitalistic culture in which it all occurs. As well, Pat Carlen's introduction provides a brief, yet highly critical review of traditional criminological theories about women.

The conclusion, by Pat Carlen and Chris Tchaikovsky, publicizes the existence of Women in Prison, a campaigning group (Canadian translation: lobbying group) run for and by women who are ex-offenders. Chris Tchaikovsky is the founder of Women in Prison and Jenny Hicks

and Josie O'Dwyer are active members. As an appendix to the book, the group's Manifesto is included. Theory and a call to action form the foundation of this document. The theory ... that women suffer the same "deprivations, indignities and violations of civil rights as male prisoners" as well as additional sexist and racist discriminatory practices. The action ... a total of 20 concrete calls for reform of the prison system which, if undertaken, would not eliminate prisons, but might result in their transformation into supportive, constructive places in which to spend time.

One of the strongest messages in *Criminal Women* is that progressive change for women offenders is inextricably linked to feminism. The accounts of the four women's lives reveal that for all of them, the women's movement has been an important source of growth and development either directly, through their own involvement, or indirectly, through contact and support from feminist women. It appears that for all of these women it is socialist feminism, along with the love and support of family, close friends and correctional workers which has provided them with the strength to go "clean", by providing them with a way of making sense of a seemingly inexplicable, yet hostile world. For those who work with women offenders, it appears to me that this is an important point to consider.

While I wholeheartedly recommend this book, a few words of caution are in order. It would be a mistake to assume that the stories of the four women in the book replicate exactly the stories of all women who go to prison. For example, Chris, Jenny and Diana were all products of

middle class upbringings, yet the vast majority of English offenders (women and men) who go to prison are from working class or poorer backgrounds. The same is generally thought to be true in Canada. Chris and Jenny both "mastered", as it were, the art of "white collar crime". They became highly successful con artists, reaping the consequent rewards of money, status and power – until they got caught. However, most women in prison in Canada are there as a result of sentences for petty offences such as shoplifting, fraud and selling drugs. If one were to attempt to draw a composite woman offender, she would be perhaps as gutsy as Chris or Jenny, but not nearly as successful at crime, nor as independent of men as both of these women were.

For Canadian readers, there is also the question of the degree to which the English experience can be assumed to mirror the Canadian experience. The harrowing accounts of prison life in *Criminal Women* in particular force one to consider whether women's imprisonment in Canada is as barbaric as it is in the U.K. Analysis of the regimes in the British women's prisons led the authors to conclude that the motto of those running them could be summarized by the slogan "Discipline, Infantilize, Feminize, Medicalize and Domesticize." While the same motto may well be applied to women's prisons in Canada, the level of violence and abuse by correctional officers (prison guards) may not be as great. The scant level of research in this country about conditions of prison life for women provides us with no definite answers.

These words of caution stated, read *Criminal Women*. It will raise your consciousness about the need

BOOK REVIEWS

for feminism to address the issues concerning women who commit criminal offences, and it will cause you to wonder with incredulity why these issues weren't written about earlier, and in Canada. bts

Ellen Adelberg is a writer and researcher who has been involved with BTS for three years. She and another woman are currently editing an anthology of Canadian feminist writing on women in conflict with the law.

The Subversive Stitch Embroidery and the making of the feminine by Roziska Parker

London: The Women's Press, 1984

*reviewed by
Martha Muzychka*

Having failed miserably at knitting, I was pushed into embroidery at 12; my mother still has the rooster I painstakingly stitched for her Christmas present. Although I still embroider, finding some satisfaction

in cross-stitching the occasional bookmark, I rarely admit it.

But lately embroidery is becoming fashionable again, and not in the suburban circles of crewel-stitched landscapes, but in the feminist art circles inspired by Judy Chicago and her *Dinner Party*. Women are reclaiming the crafts of needlework, fancy stitchery and quilting, elevating them to art forms and refuting their earlier socialization of well-trained little girls.

In her scholarly but readable book *The Subversive Stitch*, author Roziska Parker says "to know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women." Needlework has been so long associated with womanhood and feminine traits, it is hard to believe it was once a joint craft of men and women in the Middle Ages. Parker shows us the transitions as a mirror for the corresponding changes in women's roles from helpmate to servant to status symbol of the leisure class.

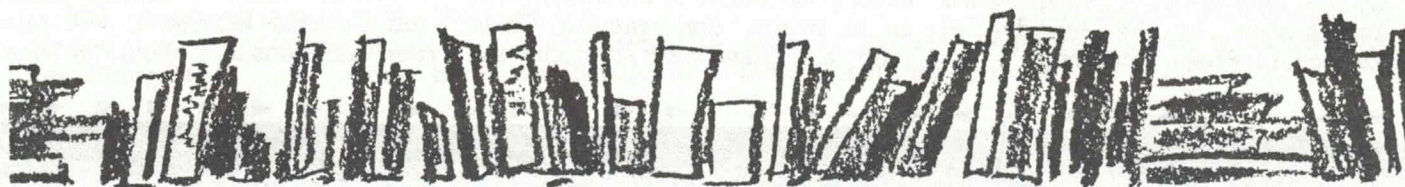
Parker argues that femininity with its characteristics of passivity, acquiescence and unobtrusive productivity is so linked with needlework as to become the symbol and instrument of women's subservient role in society. Embroidery was a skill used for the decoration of sacred vestments or royal clothing in the medieval period, and it was a worthwhile occupation for women in which to channel their religious fervour. By the eighteenth century, embroidery had become identified with the upper classes in general. The ability to wield a needle with some artistry was such a valuable skill that a young girl's

education was not complete without it.

In the nineteenth century, the ability to produce fine needlework was equated with being a gentlewoman. But the image of the cultured Victorian lady engaged in the leisurely pursuit of fine stitchery contrasted sharply with the plight of working-class piece-workers who often ruined their health and eyesight before being forced into prostitution to make their living.

Parker shows other dichotomies, whereby the Victorian suffragists stitched their own protest banners, not to downplay their womanhood but to show their infinite potential. Today embroidery continues to be used as a form of protest at Greenham Common, where the women have made banners to decorate the fence separating them from the army base. In the Ukraine, women prisoners of conscience embroider in defiance – to assert their womanhood and to preserve their culture.

The Subversive Stitch is a remarkable and thought-provoking study of femininity and the evolution of embroidery as a feminine skill. Parker recognizes the artistry of needlework, whether it is in altar cloths, tapestries, cushions or slippers, and above all, she reveals the handiwork of women, known and unknown. Her book is a major contribution to women's history, as the successful combination of scholarly research and feminist philosophy illuminates what we once were and what we have now become. bts



broader transformational possibility of feminism was really given full voice. Both from women talking of feminism as a transformational politics and also from having feminists in the Third World and I think especially women in Latin America and Asia affirming feminism as a mode of operation and ideology. So many women from the West heard that in Nairobi for the first time.

BTS: *In Nairobi women from poor countries, women of colour and others were vocal in their demands that feminism must be a movement that is anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-heterosexist, etc., that we have to understand the effects and work against other forms of oppression besides gender. I see that too as the challenge of the next fifteen years for our own movement – to integrate this understanding in all of our feminist work. Do you have any strategies to encourage women who are already feminists or for women's equality to move in that direction?*

CB: The main way I see moving in that direction is to make connections for people that are already present in their lives. There are very few women in the feminist movement or anywhere who are not also affected by race or class or heterosexism or by ageism or by disabledism.

There are so many different forms that domination takes. My feeling is that you approach it from the idea that all of this builds on a whole rather than as separate pieces. Part of the problem has been the notion that all of these are all separate movements and separate issues. My approach instead is to say that racism is not separate from sexism – they're both extensions of an idea of domination. You have to look at how the two interact in any person's life. An individual woman is not oppressed by these things separately and they are not boxes that you add up to see what your life is like – they affect each other. In trying to talk to people about why I think that's important my approach is to try to get someone to see how her own life is an interaction of different forms of domination.

Take age for example. It isn't just that you're also oppressed as an old person. The form of your oppression as a woman changes as you age

because it changes in relation to the age factor and age discrimination.

Strategically, if you're talking about getting people to work together on issues, I think that I often take a numbers approach. Obviously you're going to be stronger if you make coalitions with people who are working on something else that is also an injustice in the world – even if you don't yet see how that issue affects your life – and I think every issue affects everybody's life. Even if you don't yet see it in your own life, you can begin by saying that our movement will be stronger if we can relate to women who are fighting the oppression they experience around race. Maybe in the course of that struggle you begin to see how you've been affected by race even if you're in a racially privileged group.

I often try to convince people from the point of view of strategy. How are we going to succeed if we don't make coalitions? So which approach you take depends on whether you're working in a educational mode or a more immediate action mode.

BTS: *I think there are several related things we have to do in the movement. One we just talked about – encouraging women who already understand their domination as women to see all the other forms and how they're related. Then, we also need to relate to women who have a more immediate understanding of how they're oppressed by, say, race for example, and who may not want much to do with the women's movement. Two issues ago, BTS printed an interview with a Black woman who felt very strongly that we patronize Black women when we ask them to join the White women's movement because it is still White women who are defining the issues (from our perspective). She said we don't listen to the fact that race is the most important issue in their lives. How do you respond to this?*

CB: There's no way that anybody will succeed in moving forward by arguing with somebody about the most important oppression in her life. I have two different approaches. One is that if somebody feels that race is the most important thing and they don't want to work on anything else, then all I can do is be supportive of their struggle around the race issue. If that means going to a demonstration about South Africa or some local

racial issue then that's how I can be supportive.

In terms of making an outreach to women my goal is not so much to try to find token women to bring into the women's movement, but to make the women's movement address issues that are relevant to their lives. And to address them from a feminist perspective.

If we are successfully addressing their issues, if we are really understanding, we will probably be joined by women of many different colours who also care about the same issue. For example, if you look at housing problems in New York city and at sex and race and how they interact, you bring your analysis of the problems of women into that. In the course of that work, other women will get a stronger perspective of the women's perspective. They may have already seen that but not identified it as feminist because they hadn't heard feminists talking about it.

I think progress is made more in working on something specific that you bring a feminist analysis to than in trying to argue with somebody on general theoretical terms. I don't think there's any basis in arguing generally or theoretically about the most important oppression.

What is most important is what somebody feels. You may be able to argue in an intellectual, academic setting about forces in society. But if you're talking about organizing (and there's a difference in how you approach these things as an organizer and as a theorist trying to understand the forces of society) you have to start with where people feel the issues and then broaden it from there. You don't have to agree to start there. I can work with people if we share some common concerns even if we don't have a total agreement on the whole analysis.

BTS: *You have written that feminists have to find ways to value cultural diversity without supporting customs and traditions that are oppressive to women. I find that really interesting and something I think about a lot as a feminist involved in international development. Can you elaborate a bit more about that?*

CB: I think it's one of the hardest things to do. It seems very clear what we have to do but doing it is another

matter. I feel that in many cases we really don't know.

Until women from each culture have spent time struggling with each issue we aren't going to know. But the really important part is that we don't think that in order to build a feminist movement or to build a new position for women we have to throw out everything that anyone has ever identified with.

I think in many ways in the early years of the women's movement many of us were discovering ourselves as new people and kind of imagining the creation of the new woman. In doing that, we, like many people from the sixties, were both naive and unrealistic about the roots that people have in their own cultural identity.

I think those roots are stronger if you come from an oppressed people. It's easier to imagine throwing out your roots if you think of your roots as white, middle-class American society which doesn't seem to be such an interesting cultural definition.

Once you travel internationally, you begin to recognize that it is a distinct culture. It is not just the way life is. Then you have to make some decisions, as I think I've faced, of some aspects of that culture that I actually like. It's been very hard to get to the point of saying that there were certain pieces of it that I did like because there's so much of it that I don't like. Only when you go through that process yourself (even if you're coming from a white middle-class culture which in many ways is pretty hard to like at all) then you can

recognize that it's a process for everyone. That is figuring out what about the way you were raised really is important to you, what about it is central to being dominated as a woman, and what is not.

So many of the things we assume are signs of domination may or may not be. So much of our lives is focussed on the superficial that we can get very involved in debating whether somebody else should wear a veil or not wear a veil. The real issue is how the women of that society struggle with the role of the veil in their culture. Is it something that they're going to try to find a way to be positive about? How do they authentically go through that struggle without us immediately judging the symbol? That symbol is particularly powerful because it is a difficult symbol reaffirm in a positive way. It may not be one that can be reaffirmed ... I don't know.

But I think that is indicative of the kind of struggle that has to be gone through that we can't short circuit. In similar ways we are going through a lot of questions about culture and family. We're still critiquing the family as an institution of domination of women, but now we have to struggle on a deeper level with determining the forms of family that feminists need or want. What is inherently oppressive and what isn't? What can be changed and what can't?

For the most oppressed groups, the culture and family have been the places they went to keep away from the society. So it is even more clear to them that they're not ready to throw

that out without at least thinking about it. But once you get past the defensive point, most women I've worked with who are feminists understand very well the role of domination of cultural and family factors – they just don't know yet what to keep, what to throw out and how to get there.

BTS: *How would you sum up your perceptions of the women's movement these days? How are we doing?*

CB: The thing I feel so much clearer about these days is that we are a movement that has had tremendous impact. We often underestimate this because we see how far we haven't come. But if you look at it historically, to have had this much impact in fifteen years is not something to be discouraged about. If we take it as a lifetime, we have had a good fifteen years and now we have to plan for another fifteen and another fifteen.

None of these changes are going to come as quickly as we thought they would initially. The more we look at how things change over history, the more you realize that it takes a lot of waves forward and people absorbing that and moving back and moving forward. So that's why I try to keep optimistic about what we've done even in the face of so much yet to be done.

bts

Sherralee Galey (also known as Sherry) has been with Breaking the Silence for four wonderful years and currently works at MATCH International Centre in Ottawa.

continued from page 11

differences among immigrant women. It really irritates me that all immigrant women, all women, should be lumped into one category. We don't all have the same problems, and there should be a recognition of that.

Alma: *Is class position a more significant consideration for forming alliances among women than immigrant status?*

Roxanne: Yes, BUT. A very big but. That is what it boils down to, but in between there are subtleties, as well as smokescreens that keep us from recognizing it. Especially in the case of colour. Women of colour, no mat-

ter what class, will tend to identify with other women of colour. When I say identify, I don't mean *understand*.

Alma: *You yourself are an articulate, educated, middle-class professional woman. Why are you not more active in the mainstream women's movement? Do you feel alienated from the women's movement yourself?*

Roxanne: This is a hard question to answer. I myself am not sure why I'm not involved in mainstream women's movement organizations. I feel more of a kinship to immigrant women, who have all, in some way, experienced what I have experienced. I can identify easily with minority

women who are not immigrant. But majority ethnic group mainstream women – in other words, middle class anglosaxon women, I don't know. The problem is with English Canadians. It is a question of acceptance level, perhaps. Because minority women have for some reason, somewhere, experienced some type of isolation or discrimination, and is we have in common, that English Canadian women don't.

Alma: *Are there any other factors that keep immigrant women from getting involved in women's movement activities?*

Roxanne: Maybe immigrant women don't enjoy the kind of meetings held

by mainstream women's groups. In the immigrant and minority groups I'm involved in, we're used to having many conversations going on at the same time, to calling out to someone across the room. You carry on the meeting in a different way, you interrupt each other, you go around things, you talk about things that aren't on the agenda. You talk about things that are totally unrelated to the meeting. You can be more loud and exuberant. In mainstream meetings, you hold down your voice, you're more careful, you think first about what you're saying... But also, the mainstream women's movement does not have enough fun for many of us to be really involved. There's no music, no food. In an immigrant group, you get food. In a mainstream meeting, you get coffee!

As well, a lot of immigrant women work more in a collective rather than individual atmosphere, and mainstream women are very competitive, they focus on individual achievement. This is true of mainstream women both inside and

outside the women's movement. This is not necessarily wrong, it's just a different approach from what many immigrant women feel comfortable with.

Alma: You wanted this interview to serve as a challenge to mainstream women's groups, to see how they could become attuned to immigrant women. What specific suggestions would you make?

Roxanne: One factor for mainstream groups to consider, if they want more immigrant women to get involved, is the way that their activities are organized. They often hold meetings in the evenings. When you talk with immigrant women, they're not all accustomed to going out to meetings. If you grow up in a society where you do this, go out to meetings and formally talk about things, it's easier. But it's difficult for women who have perhaps done their best organizing around a kitchen table in their own country to get into it. So methods of organization and mobilization may be different.

Alma: What about language? How do

multilingual women's groups handle differences in language?

Roxanne: Language is more of a barrier with mainstream women. Among immigrant women, even if we don't understand the language of another woman, we somehow manage to communicate with each other. We try very hard. It takes the extra time and patience to do it.

Alma: Where should the women's movement begin in attempting to include immigrant women?

Roxanne: Have the women in the women's movement, in those groups, ever asked themselves the question, can they, should they reach out to us? At this point, it's up to them. bts

Alma Estable is a feminist, mother and social democrat. She came to Canada from Uruguay 18 years ago, and has been active in the women's movement for thirteen of those years. Alma is especially interested in exploring the possibilities and contradictions involved in "global" feminism, and currently earns her living doing research and writing on social and women's issues.

LETTERS continued

Dear *Breaking the Silence*,

I read Joan Holmes' article, "Mothers Need to Dance, Too," on the eve of an out-of-town trip to visit my extended family. My sister, undergoing surgery, needs me to look after the kids and our elderly mother, to handle the household chores and generally to be of support. Being childless, in fairly good health, and currently unemployed, I'm free to help, and glad to.

In conversation with several friends, who, like myself, have no children, I learned that each is the member of the extended family "on call" for emergencies, because she is assumed to have extra time and money. One of us jokingly remarked that she feels like the "Victorian maiden aunt," whose existence was subsumed in the needs of her sister's or sister-in-law's family.

When we who have "no family responsibilities" fall ill or in need, who comes to our aid? It varies. In my case, my husband does. The

friends who have helped are childless; the mothers I know are "too busy."

I disagree with Joan's picture of the privileged, selfish, childfree feminist who won't babysit for a mother who "needs to dance." I gather, from the end of her article, that her feelings have been hurt by individuals implying "female separatism is the ultimate feminist ideal, and the most politically correct behaviour," and that any other choice indicates a "lesser commitment." Over the years my lifestyle has been criticized too, but mostly by mothers in the women's movement who don't like me to be married and childfree.

I have no trouble with Joan's vision of a women's movement encompassing a variety of lifestyles. But when I refuse to babysit, please don't assume I haven't paid my dues. Sincerely,

Ruth Olson
Ottawa, Ontario

R E S O U R C E S

The Feminist Movement since 1970 is the name of an interdisciplinary women's studies seminar (6 credits) to be conducted at the University of Ottawa from September 1986 to April 1987. The professor is interested in talking with everyone who would like to take this seminar next year. Its focus will be on feminist theory. Therefore, she wants the class "to be a truly feminist experience which reflects feminist ideals about method and community."

"The themes we will study will include sexuality, racism, cultural feminism, radical feminism, spirituality, and creativity. Throughout the course, we should use women's art as a resource for inspiration and reflection. In addition, I hope we can find ways to move outside the traditional university setting

in both the research we do and in the findings we present."

Contact:

Naomi Goldenberg,
Department of Religious Studies
University of Ottawa,
Ottawa, K1N 6N5
office: (613) 564-2467
messages: (613) 564-2300

Mothers are Women

Homebase: A Forum For Mothers

At Home is a newsletter issued by the non-profit group, Mothers are Women. Homebase provides a forum for mothers at home without being critical of other childcare choices. The objectives of the publications are to "raise the consciousness of a society which tends to undervalue our contributions and to bolster the self-

esteem of homebased women who do not work for pay and should not feel pressured to consider themselves 'supermoms.'"

Homebase is published four times a year.

Homebase
12 Farm Gate Crescent
Nepean, Ontario
K2E 7N7

Canadian Women's Periodicals -

Title Word Index is now available from CRIAW. It lists articles from table of contents pages of feminist periodicals as well as items published about women in other academic and public journals. Published 3 times yearly. Subscriptions: \$20./CRIAW members, \$35. non-members. (plus \$3. postage)

CRIAW
suite 408
151 Slater St.,
Ottawa K1P 5H3

C O N F E R E N C E S

The Canadian Congress of Learning Opportunities for Women is holding their annual general meeting June 20, 1986 in Toronto, Ontario. For more information please contact:

Canadian Congress on Learning
Opportunities for Women
47 Main St.,
Toronto, Ontario
(416) 699-1909

The Canadian Women's Studies Association, as part of the Learned Societies Meetings, will be having its meeting June 5-7, 1986 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The topic of discussion is to be "Feminist Vision and the Human Condition: Love, Work and Commitment" as an exploration of feminist ideology and the kind of utopia it envisions. For more information please contact:

Vanaja Dhruvarajan
Vice-President and coordinator, CWSA
Department of Sociology
University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 2E9
(204) 786-9360
(204) 474-8196

The 10th CRIAW Conference will be held at the University of Moncton, November 7-9, 1986. The main theme of the conference is "Feminist Research: Retrospect and Prospect"; sessions will examine the women's movement, women and development, and reproduction and the new technologies.

Canadian Research Institute
for the Advancement of Women
Suite 408, 151 Slater
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women is hosting its general meeting in Ottawa, Ontario at Carleton University May 30-June 1, 1986. For more information contact:

National Action Committee on the
Status of Women
244 Bloor St., W.,
Suite 505,
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1W9
(416) 922-3246

The Women and Therapy Conference will be hosted May 20-23 at the University of Toronto, Victoria College by The Professional Development Association. Subjects of inquiry range from suicide, non-heterosexual therapy, prostitution and the Family Law Act. For more information contact:

Professional Development Associates
3 Cameron Crescent
Toronto, Ontario
M4G 1Z7

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