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Vol 5:3

# breaking the SILENCE

a feminist quarterly



## PUTTING FEMINISM INTO PRACTICE

Inclusive or Exclusive Feminism?  
Racism in the Women's Movement  
Young women  
Language

At Home  
Housework in feminist households  
Action on Daycare

Survival  
Food banks  
Lessons from around the world

Institutional Change  
Women's studies  
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## *about Breaking the Silence*

For too long women's voice - our  
struggles, and joys - 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,  
activities are heard and made visible.

# *from the collective*



The greatest distinction between feminism and other social movements has been the serious attempt women have made at integrating our theoretical concerns into day-to-day reality. It is significant that feminists popularized a slogan such as "the Personal is Political." Every aspect of our lives, from raising our children and cleaning the house to who and how we love and what we say has turned into an exploration of creating equal and non-oppressive relationships.

The struggle of living as feminists has created the greatest hardships and joys. By taking so much personal responsibility for our lives we often find the job to be overwhelming.

One feminist goal is for each woman to live her life based on her own choices. "Choices" is a useless concept without control over resources to make them real, and without the power to go beyond the limited parameters of choice set by a patriarchal society. At the same time, another goal must be to learn new models of interacting with others, and to bear our share of the responsibility for the effect our life decisions have on others.

This issue documents the wide range of methods women use to put feminist principles into practice. Miriam Edelson, in her article, "Feminist Process and Union Democracy," offers a concrete strategy for incorporating "the Personal is Political" into a bureaucratic structure. At the other extreme is an article by Caridwen Irvine on feminist youth which illustrates the wide potential available to an unorganized group of young women. Interestingly enough, her article at the same time reminds older feminists of some practical aspects of organizing.

Incorporating feminist ideals into everyday living is illustrated in Joan Holmes' article on housework and Janine Robinson's article on language.

This issue also documents the incredible injustices done to women through government policies and the diligent work that women have initiated to combat those policies. Susan Lott's article, "I Know What It's Like to be Hungry," offers a vivid picture of the many women who have become increasingly reliant on food banks in order to feed their families. In "An Uncertain Present, An Uncertain Future," Jane Beauchamp illustrates the negative affect Ontario government policy is having on some older women living in public housing.

Probably the most painful articles to read were those that reminded us of how the definition of feminism has become exclusive. Both Kelly Boville's letter and Maxine McKenzie's article examine why class and race have become tools to divide women. Maxine McKenzie's article, "You Mean I Still Ain't?" especially challenges the concept of an inclusive feminism and offers suggestions as to how we can use differences in women to be a strengthening force in feminism.

This issue only scratches the surface in its attempt to illustrate the many ways women live feminism. It is clear that if each woman begins to live, acting on her own integrity and needs, while simultaneously being responsive to and accommodating of a collective feminist consciousness, we have succeeded in putting feminism into practice in its most fundamental and powerful way. Each woman's positive, women-loving individual action culminates in an inclusive feminist vision. An easy act to begin with today is to listen to the voices of the many women in this issue and incorporate their thoughts into your everyday reality.

bts



# 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*,

Thank you for forwarding the Fall 1985 issue of *Breaking the Silence*, - "Critical Questions for Feminists." I very much liked the range of issues covered, and also thought the layout and graphics were nicely done. As for the "Dancing" article ("Mothers need to dance, too" by Joan Holmes), you have used a lovely image in the title. I still have trouble with the term "child-free," though it does reflect aspects of miserable reality, while "childless" certainly contributes to the concept of hierarchy you rightly argue against. Ever the need to create our own language.

Laura Weintraub  
Toronto

Dear *Breaking the Silence*,

I have been reading feminist periodicals for years and have never come across one which I like as much as *BTS*. My favourite issue so far was the one titled, "Women Missing from the Women's Movement" (Spring/Summer 1986). I think it is extremely important that feminists listen to and take seriously what non-feminists are saying. Until we are open to the concerns of all women, we will never be able to change anything, and those who dismiss us as women on the fringes will not be entirely wrong. I realize that this is a radical (maybe even heretical!) thing to say but it is an issue which I feel very strongly about.

You asked in your last issue where I think *BTS* fits into the women's movement. I don't think that at present *BTS* is the voice of all women's experience, or that it could be, but *BTS* can certainly give voice to feminists and non-feminists (as opposed to anti-feminists) alike. I believe that this should be a goal to strive for, and I think that you should continue to discuss issues that affect all women, rather than just issues which feminists happen to be working on at any particular time. It seems to me that you are already doing this to a great extent. Please keep up the high quality.

Sharon Stone

Dear *Collective Members*,

I've just read Ellen Adelberg's piece, "Danger to Women: Free Trade Ahead" (Fall 1986) which she based on notes from my talk (as she says). It is really very good. I certainly wasn't so eloquent and I'm grateful for her ability to make the whole issue clear and readable.

Marjorie Cohen  
O.I.S.E.  
Toronto

Dear *Breaking the Silence*,

I thought the review of Bronwen Wallace's *Common Magic* (Fall 1986) was very nicely done -- she is great, isn't she? Also *Breaking the Silence* has turned into a very good magazine, with a nice blend of viewpoints and tones.

Pat Smart  
Carleton University  
Ottawa

Letter to *Breaking the Silence* and all sisters,  
**Feminism-phobia**

I am a woman. I was raised by a single parent mother who was my role model. She taught me to be strong. She showed me how to be a "good girl." How to respect my elders, be polite and do the things "nice girls" did. I went through high school only because I had to, it had nothing to do with my ambition in life. I wanted to be a success. To be married, have children and live happily ever after, being a good wife and mother.

I got married at 18, had two children by 21, so far so good. But happily ever after didn't seem to be in the picture. Having to go on welfare because my husband lost his job showed me who had to take charge. I watched the kids, took care of the house and bills and continued to be a good wife. Not happy with surviving on a small income, I got a job. I became a secretary. Thus started my involvement with feminism.

I read feminist magazines and decided I was not a feminist. These magazines dealt with lesbianism, third world poverty, middle-income problems. They had nothing to do with me. I was a low-income married woman with children, working only to make extra money, not for a career. I liked being a mother, wife and lady.

From what I read, feminists were well-educated, middle-income women and were usually lesbian. In what I read they were telling me that my lifestyle was oppressive and I should be unhappy. They didn't seem to give a damn about a low-income heterosexual woman's problems, like paying rent, buying food to feed her family and having adequate clothing for cold Ottawa winters. They had nothing to do with me, therefore I was not a feminist.

I started to express my feelings at work one day after reading my first copy of *Breaking the Silence*. I was telling a friend that I was not a feminist because I was poor and heterosexual and hardly understood what the words meant. She explained to me that she was also low-income heterosexual and had children but was a feminist. She told me that a feminist was a woman who wanted equality for all people and wanted women to be recognized as equals in all aspects of life. She said that a feminist was someone who cared about the future of man - and womankind.

After I talked to her I decided that I was a feminist without even knowing it. I cared about the future of man- and womankind as a whole and as an equal.

But if feminists are trying to create equality maybe we should start by making women equal to women. Not classing us by income or sexual preference. Not making me feel inadequate because I can't do the things middle-class women can do because of lack of funds, education or a babysitter. Make me feel good because I am a woman and maybe with you and me together we can change things. Explain to me what these big words mean so they don't scare me.

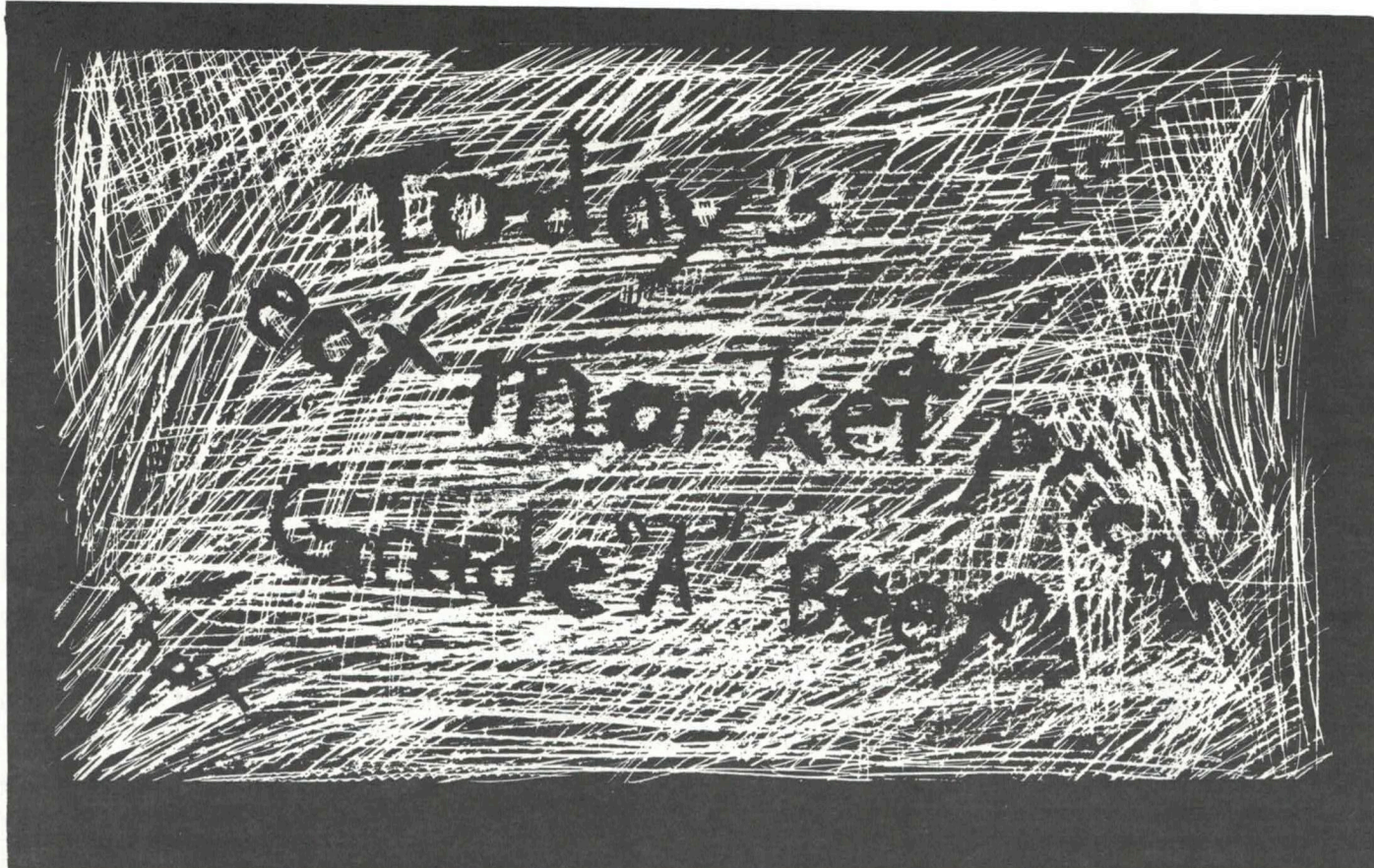
Just don't tell me that I am wrong for the way I feel and think. Educate me. I may not understand or accept it immediately but give me time....

Kelly Boville  
Ottawa



# FEMINIST YOUTH

Illustration: Caridwen O.B. Irvine



By Caridwen O.B. Irvine

I wake up at six or seven and arm myself for my daily trip to the Meat Market. Deckerd out in combat boots, baggy mismatched clothes and a coat which proclaims, "My body is my own", I grit my teeth and plunge into the "real world."

Ah, high school! The sexist teachers. The homophobic little boys, the majority of whose lives are centered around losing "it." The girls who, for some strange reason, want to go out with the them to gain respect from peers but not a reputation. You can close your eyes and try to ignore the situation, but it won't go away.

Fortunately, there are also a few small groups of radicals and subversives who believe that there is more to life than one's gonads and going across the river to get pissed. The problem with finding them (the feminist youth) is that they are few and

far between, and "wymyn's rights" are dirty words. This isolation, however, will often cause people who can think for themselves to become slightly erratic and therefore easier to spot after a few months.

After I found someone who shared some of my views, we both felt more confident about asserting ourselves; for example, "My name is Caridwen, not sweetheart, dear or darling," or "So maybe I am a lesbian . . . are you supposed to be my alternative?"

My last years' teachers still remember who I am, and none of them call me dear anymore. That was sufficient for last year. This year, some of my friends and I are trying to start a young feminists' consciousness raising / bitch session / possible self-defence group. All of these are needed at a high school level, organized by us and for us.

The first thing that has to be done is to find out who's interested. If you're not too shy, the easiest way to do this is simply walk down the halls and ask every wymyn you see. I was surprised at how many were willing to become involved in some way or another -- although I did get some hostile reactions, like "you wymyns' libbers are just going too far . . ." This tactic was well worth it. One really important thing to remember though, is to make a phone list with full names and nicknames the first time you talk to these people so that you only have to make a fool of yourself once. (Does this sound like the voice of experience?)

After names have been established, try to find out who is interested in spending a lot of time working and who can make it to the first meeting. If

*continued on page 35*



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## RESPONSIVE OR REDUNDANT?

A

By Joan Riggs

C

Over the past year there has been a growing battle between REAL Women and NAC, initiated by R W and promoted by the media. It has caused many of us in the women's movement to censor ourselves, to avoid raising concerns we have and displaying our vulnerabilities and weaknesses too blatantly. Our weaknesses are a legitimate part of a growing, vibrant movement and must be examined to insure our moving forward. It is in this context that this article is written. Not to criticize but to promote thought on some very difficult issues that most women's groups must address at some time in their ongoing evolution.

How do you feel when you hear that the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) has made a statement on behalf of "feminists" in this country? Do you feel that they represent your interests? Do you know the process they go through to be able to make a statement that represents over three million women and approximately 450 member groups?

Over the past three years I have put half a foot into the door of NAC, the largest women's organization in Canada, by: attending the Annual General Meetings as a media person, co-facilitating a workshop, and sitting on a committee of NAC. Yet, NAC has never received my full-fledged support. Recently, I have begun to ask myself why. Is it that I have problems with a national lobby for women as a tool for feminist change? Or is that I support the principle of a national lobby but do not support the present operating structure of NAC?

The written mandate of NAC is to "unite women and women's groups from across the country in the struggle for equality." NAC does that by providing media visibility to women's issues, conducting public meetings and forums and producing publications. But NAC's greatest visible action is their Annual General Meeting. Representatives from member groups meet in Ottawa to report on the past year's work and make plans for the next year. The culmination of the weekend's work is always a lobby with the three political parties on Parliament Hill.

But is NAC inclusive and does it facilitate women's participation in decision making? Opinions differ widely on this issue.

I asked member groups why they joined and all of them stated the political importance of supporting the only national women's lobby group. It was a principled stance. Women should also be joining NAC for other reasons.

NAC originally was a women's lobby group out of Ottawa, Toronto and

Montreal with a strong middle-class, professional focus and direction. It has clearly maintained its historical link.

However, if the AGM is any example, some improvements have been made. Slowly there is a growing presence of women of colour. Where three years ago I remember only two or three present, in 1986 there were at least 15 women from diverse cultures including women of Caribbean, Hindu, aboriginal and Muslim descent. Where three years ago the word lesbian was never mentioned, there is today a lesbian committee of NAC. Where once the number of grassroots organizations could be counted on one hand and large national lobby groups were the norm, there is increasing evidence of smaller groups joining, thus adding a balance of views and styles of working.

Yet NAC is victim to the problems inherent in any national organization attempting to represent a large constituency. There are gaps in overall representation of their constituency. Neither of the two national groups for aboriginal women belong to NAC, few organizations for women of colour and/or distinct cultural groups are members, and there is a general lack of lesbian and poverty-based organizations. Looking at regional representation within NAC we see an overwhelming majority of the women



# TABLE A WHO BELONGS TO NAC (as of April, 1986)

PROVINCE	Member Groups	Delegates	alternates	observer	Total
NATIONAL	64	(Of those only 9 have their head offices outside of Ontario)			
Alberta	28	5	0		5
British Colombia	60	22	4	2	28
Manitoba	6	2	1	3	6
New Brunswick	5	3	-	2	5
Newfoundland	21	9	3	1	13
Nova Scotia	20	9	1	2	12
N.W.T. *	2	0	0	0	0
Ontario	196	(70 or 43% of those are based in Toronto)			
South Ont.		94	28	129	251
North Ont.		6	3	3	12
PE.I.	4	2	-	-	2
Saskatchewan	13	4	2	-	6
Yukon *	3	2	1	0	3
Quebec **	40	28	6	27	61
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>404</b>

\* no aboriginal women's group

\*\* 29 of the organizatins are based in Montreal, 19 are English

coming from central Canada, and more specifically Southern Ontario, as shown in Table A.

In Ottawa alone there are approximately 192 women's groups and associations. Of those, only 13 belong to NAC: three are based in academia; three are for business women; one is politically aligned with a federal party; two are for lawyers; one is a peace group; and four are service-oriented groups.

The number of members in NAC have grown but not necessarily to include an accurate cross-section of feminist perspectives and lifestyles. It has been suggested that this lack of diversity is reflected in an exclusive structure and operating procedure.

The business meeting of the Annual General Meeting follows Robert's Rules of Order, a rather foreign

questionable process to many of us who work within grassroots organizations. As Debbie Hughes, former member of the executive of NAC points out, "I have real questions about the way we seem to get bogged down in procedures while not really dealing with the issues. I am concerned with the terms used at NAC, NAC's way of doing things and NAC's professionalism." After all, how many of us really understand what it means to make a friendly amendment to the original motion?

It was clear at the last AGM that NAC is aware of its structural problems. The most contentious resolution at the AGM related to NAC's proposed examination of its structure. It was stated many times from the floor that there was an urgent need to ensure member groups' full participation in the discussion and yet there appeared to be

a strong insistence on the part of the executive to keep the evaluation closed, internal and, dare I say, selective.

In that discussion some real concerns were raised relating to how representative NAC is of women throughout the country and how increasingly inaccessible the AGM, the committee structure and general structure of NAC becoming to the majority of women in the country.

Megan Ellis from Vancouver pointed out that because of the reduced travel vouchers there were at least ten women from B.C. who normally attend the AGM but who were absent, thus affecting the selection of the regional representative and other decisions. It was also pointed out travel costs are not provided for committee members, and most committee meetings are in Toronto, thus reinforcing the central Canada focus.

*continued on page 33*



**RACISM:** The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance manifested or implied."

Audre Lourde  
(From "The Uses Of Anger,  
Women Responding To Racism")

**you  
still**

Before any discussion of racism takes place there are some truths which must be spoken. North America is a sexist, racist and classist society. The Feminist Movement was an ideological reaction to one of these oppressions. The motivating stimulus behind the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s was to end the oppression of women by men. Although the radical women who were the pioneers of the movement had a history and a familiarity with the civil rights movement, they did not see a necessity to incorporate either their knowledge or experience of race oppression into their rhetoric. What feminism purports to change is the unequal balance of power between men and women. Knowing that their doctrine was incubated in a racist environment, feminists chose to address only the issue of sex oppression, the implied decision being that other oppressions were irrelevant to a discussion of the oppression of women. Feminism and its theories are by definition racist.

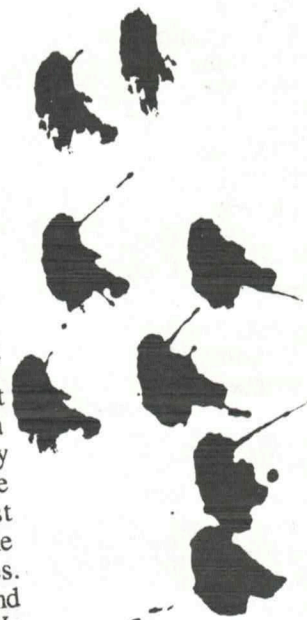
Even within the safety of the sisterhood, women of colour were being ignored and discriminated against. There existed, even among women, an unequal balance of power. Betty Frieden, in that bible of feminism, *The Feminine Mystique*, blatantly ignored the reality of non-white and working-class women.

In the late 1970s radical feminist theorists did begin to pay lip service to the existence of race privilege within the movement. It was then admitted that all women do not share a common lot, that all women do not experience oppression in the way that the privileged white theorists did. Granted, this society does favour men over women. It also favours white over black, brown and yellow, middle and upper classes over the working class. White middle-class feminists, who developed original feminist discourse, started to say out loud that racism existed... out there, that they were privileged because they

were white. They were, needless to say, very reluctant to say that they as white women were racist. Yet, if the theorists of the movement did not make eradicating their own prejudices a priority, then they were themselves being the oppressors of women.

Unlike the patriarchal culture from which it sprang, feminism attempted to analyze the differences among women. In eager pursuit of a unified feminism, theorists incorporated theories about racism and privilege into the rhetoric of the movement. Yet there is, on the part of these same women, either a reluctance or an inability to find a way to use this analysis to help bridge the gaps between the races. Feminist analysis of the issue of race has become instead the foundation of battle lines. There is now a feminism of women and a feminism of Women of Colour. We are not women struggling against oppression together. I see no rationale in delving into the nature of differences unless it is to be of some benefit to the common cause. Feminism has fallen into the trap of using difference to divide. There has been no attempt to synthesize the knowledge of the sexual oppression of all women and the racial oppression of women of Colour into a true analysis of the oppression of women. What should have resulted from all this debate was a new feminist definition of womanhood, a definition that included the realities of all women. Instead, white feminists continue to see their reality as the norm and everything else as a deviation. As a result, feminists encourage the emerging pattern of separatism within the movement.

I still recall with extreme discomfort a recent encounter with a group of white feminists representing a local organization. The discussion centred around a criticism by women of the community who felt that a poster





# mean, I ain't?

by Maxine McKenzie

Design: Gabrielle Nawratil

chosen to represent the organization perpetuated racist and classist stereotypes. Throughout the meeting I had the distinct impression that the Women of Colour attending the discussion were actually there to prove that the criticisms were not just the hysterical ravings of emotional women. Nevertheless our objections were duly noted. I began to feel optimistic. My optimism was, however, short lived. Toward the end of the meeting one of the white women explained that though she recognized that the poster did reinforce racist stereotypes of Women of Colour, she was still reluctant to remove the offensive poster from circulation. Why? Because this poster was the only way the organization could get its message to women. My question here is, what message? And to which women? By implication the pain and discomfort of Women of Colour who are being oppressed by their sisters should not be a deterrent to the real goal of reaching real women (read white women). Also implied by this blatant insult is that it is white women for whom they will be supplying their services.

This is racism. As well, it is an effective way to prevent women from working together. If in every utterance of the word "woman" you do not envision a kaleidoscope of colours and take into account the gamut of realities and lifestyles that are the true lives of women than you do not speak of or for women.

In defining this world as feminists, we must redefine our uses of differences. Differences should not divide. We must unlearn this habit. The fear of difference, the perception of difference as deviation and therefore as undesirable is the baggage of the patriarchy. Feminism runs a lesser risk of perpetuating oppressive behaviour if the knowledge of race difference is

used as a measuring stick. What keeps the feminist movement from embracing Women of Colour is still fear that differences are incompatible. Each woman who defines herself as feminist must accept that, in fact, the working definition of womanhood is incomplete. Differences of realities and experience due to differences of race and class make for a different definition of woman, not for many different types of womanhood.

Combating racism requires that you have more than a merely superficial comprehension of race, colour and history of and the culture of Women of Colour. Without a personal investment in acquiring as much knowledge of Women of Colour as Women of Colour have of white women, white feminists cannot address issues of concern to all women. This is the unifying potential of an analysis of racism. Sometime soon, we as feminists may truly address the oppression of all women.

Because of the rebellious nature of feminism it potentially nurtures other rebellious ideologies. Although feminists carry with them all the racism of the patriarchal culture, they also carry the benefit of a commitment to change. Some of the work is done. There is much feminist theory by white women. There is an equal amount of theory by feminists of Colour. We have more than adequately recorded our differences. I need to know that these differences will not always keep us from practising common ideals. If privileged feminists commit to overcoming their learned ignorance of other women by teaching themselves about the reality of the lives of other women, I believe that they will overcome their fear of difference. If we overcome the fear, we are one step closer to becoming non-oppressive women. Then perhaps tomorrow we can change that other world. As a woman who has made a personal and political commitment to ending the oppression of women, are you not a hypocrite by not ending your own oppression of other women?

bt

Maxine McKenzie is an Ottawa Activist who is involved in the International Women's Week Committee and the Sexual Assault Support Centre.



# MAN WORKS FROM SUN TO SUN BUT WOMEN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE!

## FEMINISTS TACKLE HOUSEWORK

by Joan Holmes

*Seven Ottawa feminists spent a morning discussing feminism at home, a discussion that they reduced to two basic issues: housework and children. This article, the first of two parts, focuses on housework.*



Illustration: Virginia Howard

For many of us, the greatest challenge of being a feminist is putting our feminism into practice at home. Whether we share our homes with friends or lovers, women or men, children or adults, our attempts to organize our households in a feminist, fair and egalitarian manner are often frustrated. We still tend to play the role of household manager and carry a disproportionate responsibility for the smooth running of the home.

Meg Luxton's recent study on the changing domestic roles of men and women in Flin Flon, Manitoba ("Two Hands for the Clock" p. 26) showed that full-time housewives spent, on average, 63 hours a week on domestic labour. Women who worked full time for pay spent an average of 35.7 hours per week on domestic labour; their husbands, 19.1 hours. On average, the men in the study had increased the time they spent doing housework by 8.3 hours a week between 1979 and 1981; women, however, had only decreased their burden by an average of 4.3 hours a week.

"John's away a lot. There are three women in the house. They decide what he should do and give him special projects."

As feminists, we can easily explain household inequalities by gender. The ideology of housework as women's work is both an expression of, and a primary source of, oppression of women by men.

It is easy to understand why men cling to the idea that housework is women's work. They are protecting their privilege when they refuse to accept more domestic responsibility or wage guerilla warfare by ruining clothes in the wash. This has nothing to do with nature or even of skills; it's all about power. Men who live alone or with other men are not always slob and incompetent housekeepers. They seem to be able to function perfectly well as housekeepers when there is no woman onto whom they can dump the responsibility.

As women, we have internalized the myths that women are responsible for housework. Our early training continues to have an effect on us even when we choose to live with other women and there is no "oppressor" in the house. In our discussion, we talked about overcoming our sexist training and the complications that differences of class and personality add to the frustration of achieving our idealized feminist household.

We talked about the realization that there is an aspect of control and power in managing the household. This is the sphere of power, control and influence that is traditionally considered respectable for women. And therein lies its insidiousness. It tends to lock women into the role of housewife, a job that is accompanied by no pay and little recognition and is difficult to stop or even alter without quitting the entire family.

Lesley: "I'm home all day and that's my world. If I'm taking on the role of being a full-time housewife, I want the authority, the control and power. It's a very dangerous position to get yourself into because once you take on that authority you try to protect it."

Anne: "I also find myself in that situation because my husband works shifts. For six months I'm used to him being home at dinner time and the other half of the year he's home at breakfast. When he changes shift, he's suddenly in my space. I'm used to having that time to do things my way, I'm used to having complete



control. He's taking the responsibility for doing something in the house and I realize that I'm mad because I've lost control. If I want him to take responsibility, I have to give up some control."

Because women have been trained to do housework and brought up to take pride in a well-kept home, we can easily be manipulated into assuming responsibility for running the household. So often it is easier to do a job yourself than to give step-by-step instructions to a reluctant housemate. Before we know it, we are carrying the bulk of the burden.

Phyllis: "I was living with a man and his daughter. I would come home from work, go to school and come back home again and the place would be messy. We finally had one of those family meetings. We sat down and I said, 'I'm really pissed off with everybody; the house is a mess.' They looked around and said, 'the house is not a mess.' So I decided to teach them a lesson by doing no housework. I did nothing for about a week and a half. They had gotten used to me doing everything and so they did nothing. The place looked like a pig sty. I remember Jack observing, 'I don't think I've ever seen this place look so disgusting.' And I smugly smiled at him and said, 'and that's what happens when you just wait for the housework to happen.' I had already trained them to be accustomed to the house being clean, whether or not they did

and organization. Adjusting to someone else's standards is even more difficult if your cultural or class backgrounds are different. The issue of class differences is clearer between two women than between a woman and a man, where gender expectations complicate the conflict.

Phyllis: "My lover said to me, your standards are different than mine because I'm working class and our standards aren't up to yours. I started seeing that if you are coming from different kinds of backgrounds, you have to mould your standards to each other so you can share a home. Now we have some separate space as well. She can mess up certain rooms and I can fanatically clean certain rooms."

Several of the women have discovered that it isn't easy to fight off their compulsion to take control and

have things done properly, according to the standards they had been taught, but anything, so it became my responsibility. We never did resolve that."

Even when our housemates are

## FOR HIRE



Illustration: VirginiaHoward

"I hate to admit this. He hired somebody to come in and clean, top to bottom every 2 weeks, because we had such vast differences in standards."

cooperative, it is often difficult to accept someone else's standards of cleanliness that it is important for them to consciously restrict the role they play or they end up with all the responsibility on their plates.

Inez shares the household chores with her husband and their four children, aged 8 to 15. She has learned to let go of the traditional expectations and to choose to do extra housework only for her own satisfaction:

"If there is a piece of housework and I can't stand to live with it, I do it because I choose to do it, because I enjoy it in a certain way. I don't do it

in order that they thank me for keeping a neat home and the same must apply to them. The example in our household is that if you get up and your clothes are all dirty you don't yell at Mom. We all have responsibility for our own."

Christina is trying to teach the little girl she co-parents to share house chores. Although it would be less hassle to do it herself, Christina believes it's important that she learn to be responsible:

"At home, she doesn't have to do any housework or chores and at eight years I think she should. When she's with me, she has to clean her room. She resents doing it, but I told her if she was going to come and stay at my place she had to have standards."

Most of us had at some time bought appliances or paid for cleaning services as a buffer between the amount of housework we want to do or have enough energy for and the overwhelming amount of housework that needs to be done. Appliances and services cost money and are viable options only for women who are economically secure. Low-income women do not have these alternatives. They must rely much more heavily on the cooperation of housemates, lower their standards of housework or go crazy trying to do everything themselves.

Hiring women to do housework is a sensitive and complex issue. Are we simply passing responsibilities that we have denounced onto another woman or are we providing legitimate paid work?

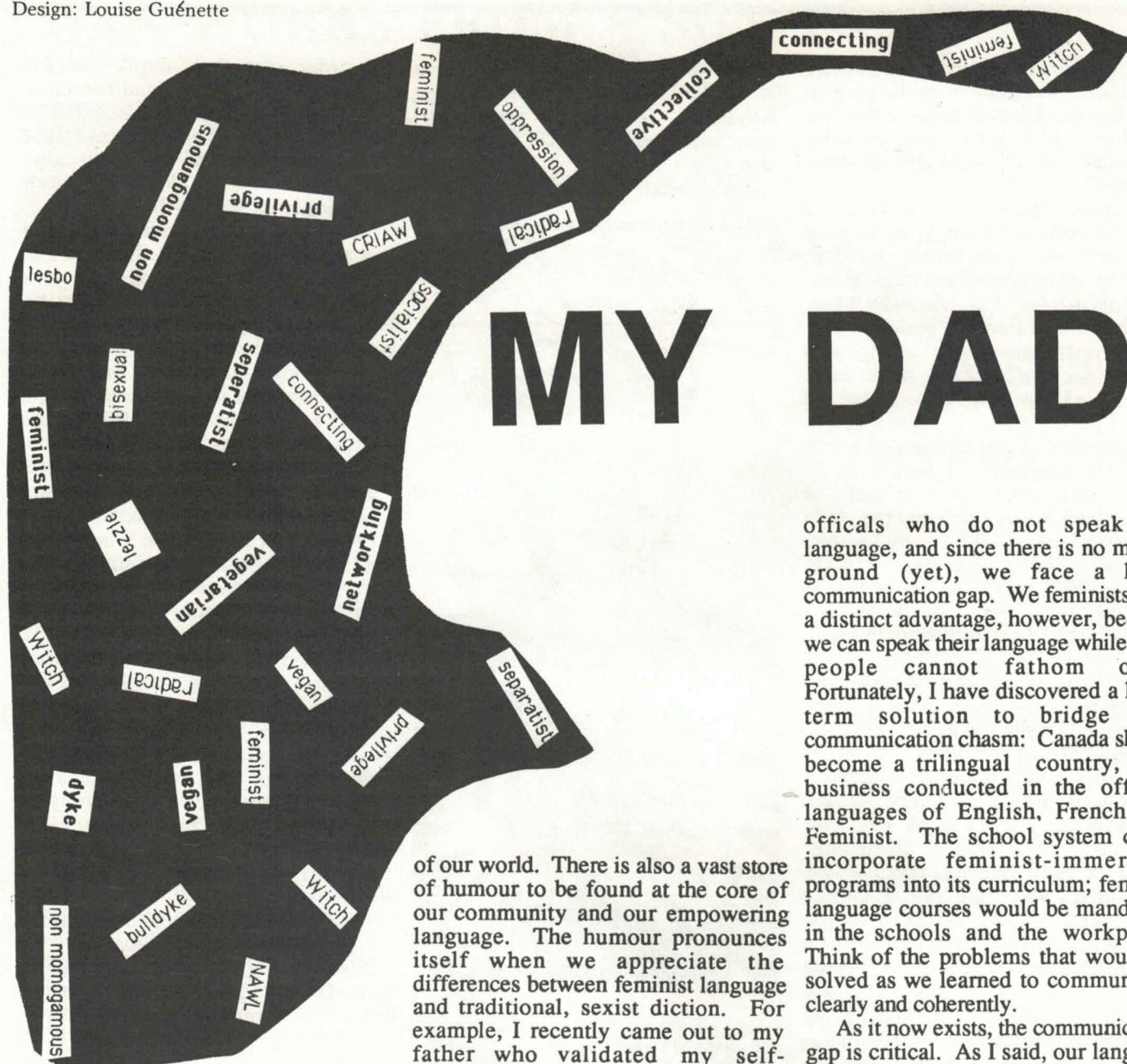
Lesley: "I have always been surprised that it's the feminist who says, 'Lesley, go and hire someone.'"

My husband doesn't clean house. I'm looking after three small kids, and it just doesn't get done. We had a Molly Maid come in and clean the house for a while. She was a single mom with two babies. She's in a worse situation than I am and she's cleaning my house and her house, because I am married to the man with the income that can afford that. Is that feminist?"

Inez: "What we must do as feminists is lobby for decent wages and benefits for women. You are paying this woman to come in and do work that is paid work. It's valuable

*continued on page 34*





# MY DAD

officials who do not speak our language, and since there is no middle ground (yet), we face a huge communication gap. We feminists have a distinct advantage, however, because we can speak their language while most people cannot fathom ours. Fortunately, I have discovered a long-term solution to bridge the communication chasm: Canada should become a trilingual country, with business conducted in the official languages of English, French and Feminist. The school system could incorporate feminist-immersion programs into its curriculum; feminist language courses would be mandatory in the schools and the workplace. Think of the problems that would be solved as we learned to communicate clearly and coherently.

As it now exists, the communication gap is critical. As I said, our language is an empowering one, lending strength and validity to the lives we lead as women in this culture. While the majority of the population regards networking as CBC programming, we have adapted the word. For me, networking evokes strong images of vegetarian potlucks and engaging and enraging feminist discussion among women wearing buttons that read "RHETORIC SPOKEN HERE." Those who do not empower their activities through language would label this mere socializing. Such labelling, we feminists realize, creates a negative impression of what women do when we are together, reducing our activities to mere gossiping and recipe-swapping.

of our world. There is also a vast store of humour to be found at the core of our community and our empowering language. The humour pronounces itself when we appreciate the differences between feminist language and traditional, sexist diction. For example, I recently came out to my father who validated my self-identification as a Lesbian by saying: "It's O.K., your high school gym teacher is a lezzie too and she's doing quite well for herself."

The dichotomy between my self-definition as a capital 'I' Lesbian and my patriarch's definition of small 'i' (as in locker room) lezzie is crystal clear. Under most circumstances, such a comment would be infuriating, but I was stuck listening because I must deal with my father on an ongoing basis. So, instead I found humour in the words that mirrored this traditional, heterosexual male's perception of my life.

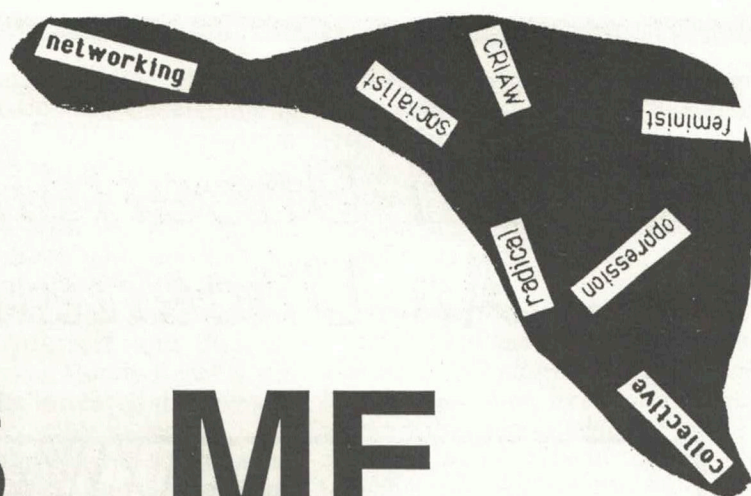
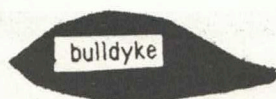
Since most political progress is channelled through (male) government

By Janine Robinson

As a Lesbian feminist, language has been integral to my self-definition in the larger, predominantly heterosexual world. I have felt the power of the spoken word throughout my evolution into a political being, which has led me to this conclusion: the noun "feminist" means not only a woman, but is also a language. We speak in a tongue that is barely decipherable to the community at large.

Our words reflect our politics and our women's culture, revealing that there is a wealth of power at the centre





# CALLS ME

Everyone knows that feminists are much too serious to waste time with idle banter. No, we network.

We work especially hard at networking within our community groups, the names of which we have abbreviated to make our language less superfluous. We speak of NAC, NAWL, OCLISS, IWW, etc. For us, acronyms are convenient, breath-saving devices: for most people, they are codes for subversive acts. Imagine being overheard on a bus: "I was down at NAC networking for IWW and we reached consensus that we should recruit NAWL to help with outreach, PR and community org. so we can collectively lobby the PCs to support Bill 7." You might receive strange looks from people wondering where you're from. They might think you're a Communist; they might think you're a lesbian. In any case, you are labelled as some sort of social oddity.

We become enraged when people automatically label feminists as man-haters, bitches or lesbians. The feminist language, however, has created a huge assortment of labels for descriptive self-definition. Any feminist, no matter what her beliefs, can find an appropriate handle. How many feminists do you know who are "white, working-class, vegetarian, radical, lesbian, separatist, non-monogamous, politically-correct, socialist feminists"? Such strings of prefixes have become a method of quick political identification, and they reinforce our allegiance to "the cause." They are still labels and I find them

humorous necessities like acronyms and other feminist tools.

All language is in constant flux when new words or phrases are incorporated with changing traditions. Feminist vocabulary reflects this vibrancy as it addresses an evolutionary aspect of this society. As we learn to love ourselves as individual women, and as we perceive that energy in a collective sense, we develop terms like women-positive to embody the new ideology. We also modify traditional definitions to use words with pride where they have previously been used to evoke shame and humiliation for being women in a misogynist world. The words feminist, lesbian, dyke and witch are four great examples of the way we have turned language on its head.

It is the uniqueness of our language, the sense of vibrancy, the feeling that our language is alive which makes it powerful and empowering. By the same token, it is this uniqueness that is inherently humorous. Until feminism becomes more accepted, its language is destined to remain foreign to the majority of people. When this country is finally indoctrinated in our ideas, we will all, with any luck, speak the same tongue.

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*Janine Robinson is a recent welcome addition to the Ottawa Lesbian Community from Sudbury. She is now working with Breaking the Silence and International Women's Week.*

A  
LENZIE



# An Uncertain Present, An Uncertain Future



By Jane Beauchamp

Illustration: Wendy Irvine

I did this research with the staff of the Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services (OCLISS) because we wanted to break the silence of women trying to live with current housing and social assistance policies.

Many social action researchers use statistics to convince politicians and social policy makers that change is in order. Certainly, statistics can help paint powerful pictures of women's poverty. In 1981, for example, 35 per cent of the 14,450 single parent families headed by women in Ottawa-Carleton had annual incomes below \$10,000. In 1986, a single woman on welfare received \$4,436 per year; the poverty line is over \$9,000.

It is only when we hear, however, what these women have to say about their own experiences that we can see

the serious and often painful consequences of current social policies -- policies developed by people who have never been poor, nor do they ever expect to be.

## "The whole thing stinks."

*Cora is the mother of three children. She lives in public housing and receives Family Benefits. She has been active in her public tenants' council and has lobbied for changes in social policies that affect low-income people.*

I'm in that bracket next year (i.e., her youngest child will turn 18, and the family will no longer be considered a family-. ed.) I'm scared.

If my girl was not at school and not at work I would have to kick her out.

I'm not over 55 and therefore I'm not eligible for public housing. Single people are not eligible for OHC.

There's no place else for me to go. In 1974, I had my own home. I have 11-years of not working--working but not getting paid. If I make an application, I have an 11 year gap and I have to do a lot of talking...How do you explain in a convincing way these 11 years out of my life? It's sickening. I'm looking at next year. In that time I could be evicted. I have no family to run to. I won't live with my friends because after a while two people in a kitchen doesn't work. I really don't know that to do.

The whole thing stinks. They don't want kids loitering, drinking or using drugs and yet they kick them out of their home.



### An uncertain future

*Barbara is the mother of three teenagers, the youngest of whom is 15, and is separated from her husband. She receives Family Benefits and lives in public housing.*

It's hard to solve your problems with these rules. For example, when you live in public housing, if your children quit school, you'll have to get out and you won't get Family Benefits. So it makes it very hard to solve the problem because you're worried about this.

You don't know where you stand. It makes your future uncertain. My son doesn't realize the problems he's giving us as a family. I don't share this with him because it is a tool he could use against me.

My son feels he's been gyped. He's stuck with me. Losing FBA won't improve the situation. No one

can get through to him. He needs some compassion and understanding too. He's just a child. Kicking him out won't help him survive.

The way they operate the system makes it very difficult. As a woman you raise children and you don't get rewarded for it. Even with FBA there's the attitude that you should be supporting yourself and that it's charity. To go on Family Benefits you are seen as the lowest of the low and it's almost impossible to get out.

I've lived my life with so little time for myself. For the first time in years, I have time to sit and think. It's like you've been in the army for life and you finally get a breather. Now they're expecting you to go out and work again.

It's like they're recycling the housing. You're not worth anything. They made it really clear to me that if I wasn't 50 when my children left home I wouldn't be eligible for housing. It's really nice to be told that. Family doesn't stop because a child reaches 21. Sometimes I feel like they just wish I'd disappear.

If society respected what mothers do it would be better. I'd like some respect for what I've contributed. Not being treated like garbage. My husband has put away enough money to retire at 50 while I struggle to buy milk for my kids.

### "I keep everything inside."

*Claire has lost her Family Benefits and receives Welfare. She is in poor health and has been declared temporarily unemployable by Welfare. She has been turned down for GAINS-D (disability pension).*

My son is 22 years old and he lives with me. He doesn't want to be on welfare. I get \$263 a month from welfare and I have to feed him and me. I have lost 30 pounds in the last few months. I would rather see him here than in the street where he could get into trouble.

I can't stand arguments anymore. I hardly smile. I never cry. I keep everything inside. You're the only person I ever talk to. I usually never tell anyone that I'm on welfare or what I get.

*continued on page 33*

## OTTAWA COUNCIL FOR LOW INCOME SUPPORT SERVICES - Press Release

### The Social Policies

The Family Benefits Act (FBA) of Ontario provides income support for single parents and their children. When the youngest child reaches 16 years and is no longer in school or reaches 18 years, the family is considered to be no longer a family for the purposes of the Act. Family Benefits are withdrawn and the family may apply for General Assistance.

Under General Welfare Assistance (GWA) the single parent, usually the mother, is considered to be an employable person. Her older children may be eligible for assistance if they are dependent but not in their own right. The income provided is much lower than Family Benefits which already falls significantly below the poverty line.

Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) sets the rules for Ottawa-Carleton Regional Housing Authority (OCRHA) and the subsidized units

available in City Living. When the youngest child in a family reaches 18 years and is no longer in school or reaches 21 years, the family is no longer considered to be a family and faces eviction.

### The Consequences

The consequences of these policies for women who have raised their children on their own, have received Family Benefits and have lived in public housing are serious and painful.

Women who have raised their children on Family Benefits have lived in poverty during that time. Having to support their still dependent children on GWA deepens their poverty. There is insufficient money for food after rents and utilities are paid. The years of deprivation and stress that are part of living in poverty leave many of these women with severe health problems. Women on welfare are expected to find jobs, but the jobs these women could get are often too arduous given their health problems. Further, the years spent raising children, the lack of training programmes, and the lack of appropriate clothing means that getting a

job is extremely difficult for these women.

The Medical Advisory Board does not consider these women disabled since social factors are not a primary concern and disability means being in a wheelchair or close to it.

Women and children lose their housing and the lack of affordable housing in Ottawa means they may end up living in two rooms in a boardinghouse. Three hundred families in OCRHA could be given eviction notices tomorrow if the board decided to enforce OHGC policy. Women are currently being evicted from City Living which does enforce the policy. Housing is so expensive, a woman's whole GWA cheque may not be enough to cover it. Children are not able to get work because of the employment situation. Families are forced to break up because of these policies. Women who are forced to choose between housing and families may end up more isolated than they have been.

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# Sortir le féminisme du placard universitaire :

par Eve Gaboury

Entrez dans cette petite maison d'allure sage et conservatrice (1) et vous croirez sans doute que le Programme d'Études des femmes de l'Université d'Ottawa est à l'abri de toute contestation. Mais là comme ailleurs, les apparences sont trompeuses. En effet, durant l'année académique 1985-1986, un groupe d'étudiantes, de professeures et d'administratrices ont eu à traverser (de bon ou de mauvais gré) un des épisodes les plus tumultueux de l'existence du Programme. C'est pour m'être trouvée au beau milieu de cet orage qu'on m'a demandé de relater ici les péripéties de quelques féministes impatientes au coeur de l'Université d'Ottawa.

L'histoire commence en octobre 1985, au moment où la Collective des étudiantes en Études des femmes (2) s'est réunie autour d'une tasse de café (les plus politiquement correctes buvaient évidemment de la tisane). Les vapeurs nocives de la caféine aidant, nous avons entrepris de réfléchir sur les grandeurs et misères de notre Programme. Après quelques séances de discussion intensives, nous avons décidé de dresser la liste de nos doléances et de la publier dans le bulletin d'information, créé quelques semaines plus tôt par certaines d'entre nous. Cette décision allait catapulte notre inoffensif journal *Digression* aux rangs des publications infâmes et abhorrées de l'Université.

## Les griefs des étudiantes

Nos griefs se concentraient autour de trois points : d'abord, nous voulions

que le Programme adopte une perspective féministe (ce que ne faisaient pas toutes nos profs); ensuite, nous constatons trop souvent qu'il semblait n'y avoir aucun lien entre l'enseignement universitaire et le mouvement féministe; enfin, nous souhaitons que soient intégrés et validés le vécu et l'expérience de toutes les femmes, y compris l'action militante et la perspective lesbienne.

Pour atteindre cet «idéal», il nous semblait primordial d'avoir notre mot à dire dans le contenu des cours et d'obtenir la représentation paritaire avec les professeures, au sein du Comité de programme. (Ce comité, chargé de travailler sur les questions d'ordre académique, était à l'époque composé de quatre professeures; bien que la question de la participation étudiante ne posait pas de problème particulier, celle de la parité était cependant contentieuse.)

Ajoutée à la parution antérieure de quelques autres articles pouvant porter à controverse, notre «audace» eut l'effet d'une bombe. Les réactions furent très vives. On nous reprocha de vouloir laver notre linge sale devant tout le monde (c'est-à-dire la communauté universitaire et surtout les administrateurs), de menacer l'existence du Programme, de nous attaquer à d'autres femmes alors que les vrais responsables se trouvaient ailleurs. En fait, nous avions osé court-circuiter les rapports entre professeures et étudiantes et remuer quelques peurs et insécurités profondes.

En y réfléchissant aujourd'hui, il me semble que deux facteurs ont créés cette

impasse : premièrement, il n'y avait jamais eu jusque-là de définition précise concernant l'orientation politique des Études des femmes; deuxièmement, le Programme n'était pas alors (et n'est pas encore) entièrement autonome en raison de son caractère multidisciplinaire.

## Le manque d'orientation politique précise

Pour comprendre le premier point, l'absence d'orientation politique, il faut situer le débat dans un contexte historique. À partir de 1977, quelques profs et membres du personnel se réunirent pour examiner la possibilité de créer un Programme d'études sur les femmes. Étant donné les maigres ressources de l'époque et l'ampleur de la tâche à accomplir, les fondatrices adoptèrent des objectifs de travail plutôt flous. Il aurait été difficile de spécifier davantage l'approche à cause de la différence entre l'enseignement d'un cours avec une approche féministe et l'enseignement d'un cours *sur* les femmes. Avec l'approche féministe, on place les femmes au centre de l'enseignement et de la recherche, non seulement comme objet mais aussi comme sujet d'études. On met en question les normes soi-disant universelles contre lesquelles on évalue la situation des femmes. On considère ces normes comme masculines et, à leur place, on situe les femmes au centre de ce qu'on étudie.



# Quelques réflexions sur la crise du Programme d'Etudes des femmes de l'Université d'Ottawa, en 1985-1986

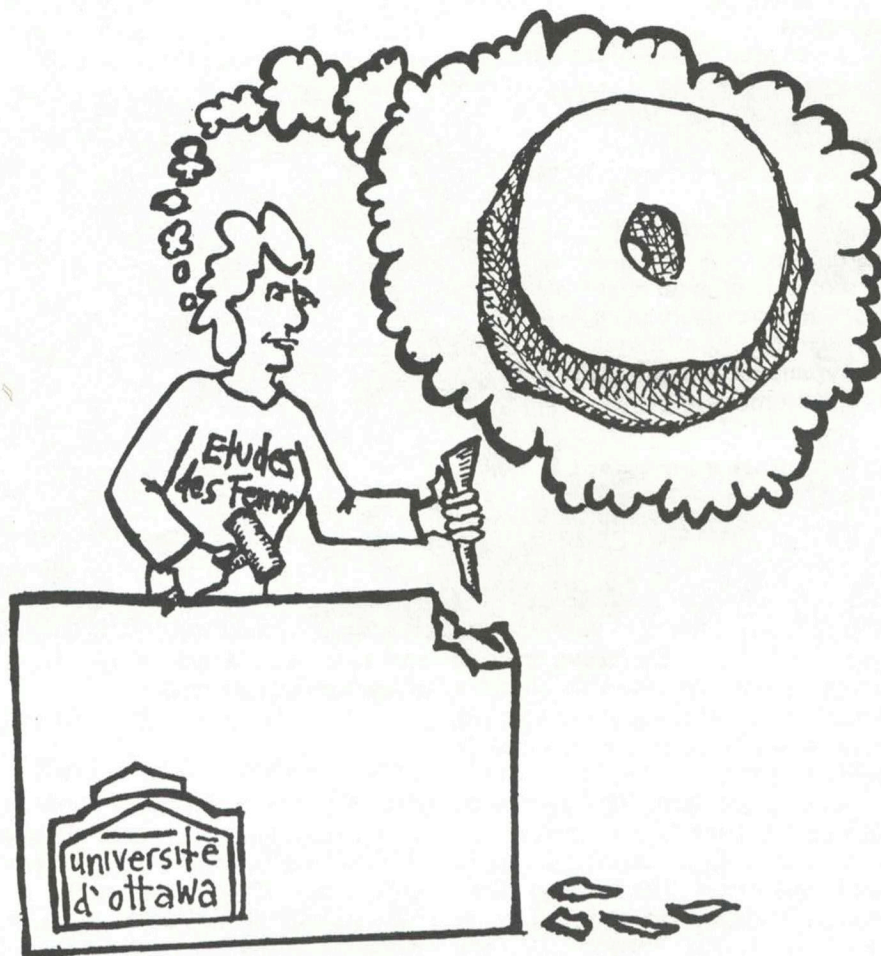


Illustration: Michelle Benjamin

## Le manque d'autonomie du Programme

En plus de cette inégalité méthodologique, le caractère multidisciplinaire du Programme, qui n'en favorise pas l'autonomie, a également contribué à l'impasse. Ainsi, les cours donnés par exemple en histoire, sociologie ou littérature, sont la responsabilité de profs qui relèvent de départements rattachés aux facultés des Arts ou des Sciences sociales. Enseigner des cours sur la culture des femmes représente donc un potentiel

certain de marginalisation par rapport à l'enseignement traditionnel qui est encore quoi qu'on en dise, principalement androcentré (c'est-à-dire centré sur la norme masculine). Dans un tel contexte, adopter une approche féministe présente pour les profs un «risque» de ghettoïsation que certaines sont moins prêtes à courir que d'autres. L'insécurité que ressentent certaines profs au niveau professionnel a donc des conséquences directes sur leur façon d'enseigner et sur le fait qu'elles adoptent ou non une approche féministe.

Il importait aux fondatrices, avant tout, d'implanter et d'étendre l'enseignement sur la condition féminine et de rendre plus visible la recherche sur les femmes, plutôt que d'insister sur leurs différentes approches personnelles. Pour mettre en place un Programme d'études des femmes, on misa sur la tradition libérale du milieu universitaire qui favorise habituellement une ouverture à de nouveaux domaines de recherche. Le pari fut remporté. L'Université accepta de regrouper les cours déjà existants sous un programme spécifique, auquel se greffèrent par la suite, et un peu au hasard, d'autres cours sur les femmes. L'objectif global, la création du Programme, avait donc été atteint mais les différences méthodologiques, elles, ne disparurent pas pour autant.

C'est ce qui explique qu'en 1985-1986, l'approche féministe ait été utilisée de façon très inégale. Certains cours étaient enseignés avec une perspective franchement féministe, d'autres pas du tout, et d'autres encore défiaient toute tentative de classification. Nous nagions parfois en plein paradoxe. Une de nos profs, qui se disait ouvertement non féministe, avait pourtant une approche féministe, et par moment même assez radicale. Une autre, qui s'affirmait féministe, refusait explicitement tout travail sur des auteures ouvertement lesbiennes, prétextant que ce n'était pas sérieux. Nous constatons même que le mot «féminisme» était tabou puisque dans certains cours, il n'était presque jamais prononcé.

## L'importance de l'approche féministe

Si l'approche féministe n'est pas appliquée dans le Programme, moins d'importance sera alors accordée aux deux autres griefs établis plus haut -- les liens entre le mouvement féministe et l'enseignement universitaire, d'une part et la validation du vécu et de l'expérience de toutes les femmes, d'autre part.

Avec l'approche féministe, l'interaction entre la théorie et la pratique devient le fondement des études des femmes. Les liens entre le milieu académique et l'activisme n'existent alors que par un engagement personnel, en faveur du changement, de la part de



chaque étudiante, professeure et militante. À l'Université comme ailleurs, le féminisme ne peut survivre s'il est coupé de la réalité et du vécu des femmes.



Ainsi, ce que nous pensons et ce que nous vivons en tant que femmes devient aussi important que ce que nos profs pensent ou ce que les auteures que nous étudions pensent. Puisque nous sommes nous aussi des femmes, il devient essentiel que notre voix soit entendue, comprise et validée. Apprendre d'une façon féministe c'est ne plus vouloir revenir en arrière : on prend goût à être crues, à être écoutées et à être respectées pour ce que nous sommes. Dans le contexte bien précis des Études des femmes, ce processus d'apprentissage devient un processus de conscientisation et de croissance personnelle. Sentir son vécu et son opinion validés dans un cours nous amène à nous demander pourquoi ils ne sont pas validés partout, à commencer par les autres cours du Programme.

C'est donc à partir d'un sentiment de frustration, né de l'inégalité des approches méthodologiques, que nous avons senti le besoin de réagir. Les étudiantes étaient les seules à avoir une vue d'ensemble sur la situation réelle, et les mieux placées pour faire une critique globale du Programme.

### Un processus de changement improvisé

Il faut comprendre cependant que cette critique n'a pas été organisée de façon toujours systématique. L'ampleur de la réaction a été créée par la publication de nos griefs, ce qui

évidemment en a fait réagir plus d'une. Or, c'est à partir de cette publication que l'administration a proposé des rencontres entre professeures et étudiantes. Les premières réunions étaient plutôt de type assemblée générale, où les griefs des étudiantes ne faisaient pas l'objet d'une attention particulière. Ce que nous souhaitions et ce que nous n'arrivions pas à obtenir, c'était de simples rencontres entre profs et étudiantes pour discuter de ce qui n'allait pas.

Ce n'est que le 24 janvier 1986, soit trois mois après le début du conflit, que ce type de réunion a finalement pu être obtenu. À cette occasion, étudiantes, professeures et administratrices se sont pour la première fois réunies pour discuter de l'orientation politique du Programme. À la suite de cette rencontre, on créa un comité de travail formé de trois étudiantes et de trois professeures féministes, chargés spécifiquement de clarifier les objectifs du Programme.

### Des Résultats qui restent à consolider

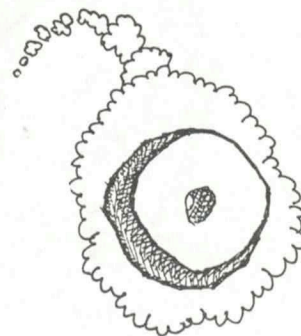
En avril 1986, à la suite de l'adoption du rapport produit par ce comité, le Programme d'études des femmes optait officiellement pour une approche féministe. De même, après de nombreuses rencontres et de chaudes discussions, les étudiantes finirent par obtenir la parité au sein du Comité de programme.

Tout ce processus de changement ne s'est pas fait sans heurts sur le plan personnel. Ainsi, certaines profs n'admettaient absolument pas d'être remises en question et ne voyaient en nous que des adolescentes contestataires. De notre côté, nous ne pouvions concevoir qu'une simple rencontre d'égaux à égaux soit impossible à obtenir.

Il est certain que cette tempête a eu des résultats bien concrets, ne serait-ce par exemple que l'adoption officielle d'une approche féministe et l'obtention de la parité étudiante. Toutefois, il reste que personne ne peut obliger les professeures à enseigner d'une certaine façon. En fait, tout ce que cette déclaration officielle a réussi à créer c'est un certain climat de sécurité pour les profs qui désirent adopter une approche féministe. L'application de cette méthodologie féministe continue

donc de dépendre de l'attitude personnelle de chaque professeure et des attentes formulées par les étudiantes. Or, comme les étudiantes se renouvellent chaque année et que l'histoire de nos luttes étudiantes ne se transmet pas intégralement d'une année à l'autre, il n'est pas certain que l'approche féministe constitue un acquis solide à l'Université d'Ottawa.

Au contraire, je crois qu'il est nécessaire et qu'il faut constamment réinventer la roue pour sortir le féminisme du placard universitaire.



(1) Le 143, rue Wilbrod.

(2) Groupe formé en janvier 85, composé à l'époque d'une dizaine d'étudiantes du Programme (auquel environ 25 étudiantes étaient officiellement inscrites).

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*Eve Gaboury fait ses études en Sciences Religieuses et au Programme d'étude des femmes de l'Université d'Ottawa. Elle se consacre à la recherche active du paradis terrestre, se considère païenne de coeur et d'esprit et s'identifie à la culture dissidente de l'état patriarcale.*

*La collective de Breaking the Silence aimerait encourager les femmes qui étudient ou enseignent dans des Programmes d'études des femmes à poursuivre cette discussion. BTS vous invite donc à envoyer des lettres ou des articles à ce sujet.*

*The Breaking the Silence collective would like to encourage women students and teachers from Women's Studies programs to continue this discussion by writing to BTS.*



# Surviving Feminism: A Time Addict's Notebook

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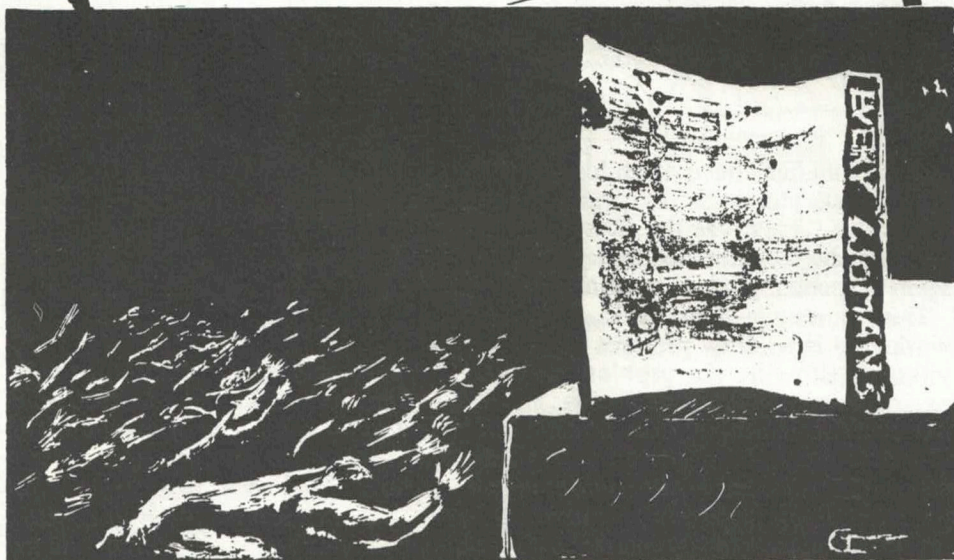


Illustration: Caridwen O.B. Irvine

By Tunde Nemeth

"Have you ever seen a feminist without her agenda book? Pathetic, isn't it?"

-- Joan Riggs (BTS, Winter 1985)

You're in a meeting and it's getting late. Time to set the next meeting and then pack it in. There's a sudden flurry of shuffling as all 15 of you in unison reach into backpack, briefcase or purse and whip out 15 identical copies of *Everywoman's Almanac*.

Well, not quite identical, perhaps. Some of us use a huge paper clip or rubber band to hold it open at the current week -- so we don't forget what week it is or, in extreme cases, what month it is. Some of us have clipped a corner out of the front or back cover, and put our names in the space revealed. Some of us have coloured in the resulting triangle -- pink, of course. Each of us seems to have her own strategy for keeping track of the right

book. Imagine the chaos if they ever got mixed up! Horrors.

Actually, I'd like to know if that's ever happened. I've certainly never seen or heard of it; everywoman seems to clutch her little book as if it contained her life savings. Indeed, perhaps it does. How many times have you heard some woman say, "oh I'd be lost without my agenda book?" Or, "I can't tell you when I can meet you for lunch, I left my agenda book at home?" Or, worse: "oh no, I've done it again! I've booked myself into two (or more) places at once!"

How on earth did we ever get so busy? How did our lives get so complicated?

I, for one, need about five books to keep myself organized. The alternative, I suppose, is to carry around one huge week-at-a-glance book, bristling with little slips of paper, as one friend finally ended up doing. But me, I'd never

have it with me anytime I really needed it, because it would be just too inconvenient to schlep around. Nope. The *Almanac*, it is, at least for portability.

Still, it doesn't solve all my problems. In fact, I'm beginning to feel a little like Anna in *The Golden Notebook*, with a different little book for each kind of organizing. I have the *Almanac* for planning, another agenda-type book for keeping track of what I've actually done (the best-laid plans of mice and women...I still don't know where the time goes), a notebook for lists of everything I have to do, plus two kinds of diary, one for stray thoughts, one for the more organized kind. I guess you might call me compulsive.

But I haven't always been like this, I swear! It's this feminism business that's done it to me. Look at men -- they don't need to do this kind of nonsense, do they? As one male of my acquaintance puts it, "I organize my life so that I can get to the point where there's nothing I have to do: that's my goal."

Well, I want to know how. I, too, used to be able to go to work in the morning, come home in the evening and put my feet up, watch the news, read the paper, and twiddle my thumbs all evening if I wanted to. I lived with my mother at the time. *She* never got to read the paper.

Now, well...no, I don't need to elaborate. It's the same story as everywoman else's. We all look guiltily at each other and think, my gawd, how does she handle it and why can't I, without ever looking realistically at our own workload until it's too late -- till we get burned out, or sick or just plain tired. There's always one more meeting to go to, one more petition to circulate, one more thing to do that's too important to say no to. And so it goes.

But there's got to be a better way.

And I'm going to find it. bts

*Tunde Nemeth is a graduate student at Carleton University, studying women's literature. She's worked with BTS for a year and a half. Like Martha, she's a compulsive editor. She's also very good at making schedules, but not nearly as good at following them.*



# PUTTING FEMINISM INTO PRACTICE:

## GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

by Alyson Huntly

*I spent six weeks this summer travelling in southern Africa. What follows are some of my reflections on that experience, as I consider the connections between my life, my attempt to put my feminism into practice, and the experiences of women who live and work in very different situations.*

Febe stood up, swinging her baby off her breast and onto her back. She spoke with a quiet firmness. This was her village, her life she was describing.

Febe lives in a tiny village in western Zambia. She and the 15 other women sharing experiences at this workshop are all members of women's groups in their own communities. They have come together for the first time ever to talk about their lives, their plans and ideas about their work. Many of them travelled for two days to get here. But, for them, this is important -- important enough to leave their fields and their children and to walk the many miles to the nearest train station. Their women's groups are the source of hope in their lives -- hope for a different future. Febe speaks for the group when she says, "We have come here to learn, so that our work will be better."

Febe and I took an instant liking to each other. What does that mean, I wonder, when the only thing we seem to have in common is our gender. I'm Canadian, live in an urban setting and identify as a feminist. She's a Zambian, lives in a rural environment, and feminism is as foreign to her as "that British language" that I speak.

When I told her I have no children, she looked at me with surprise and sympathy. This was the first formal meeting she had attended in her life. I seem to spend my life in meetings.

The women's first task at the workshop is to draw pictures of their villages, showing the problems they experience, and who benefits and suffers as a result. Because one third of the group is illiterate, drawing is the best way to communicate and give everybody an equal chance to participate.

So they draw pictures. Poverty in Zambia, much like Canada, has a disproportionately female face. The women describe their drawings:

*This woman is carrying a heavy load. A single woman, with no one to help her carry it. An old woman, she is not married. Her husband has gone and taken the children. She has no one to plow for her and no oxen. She tills by hand, a tiny plot that can barely support her for a month.*

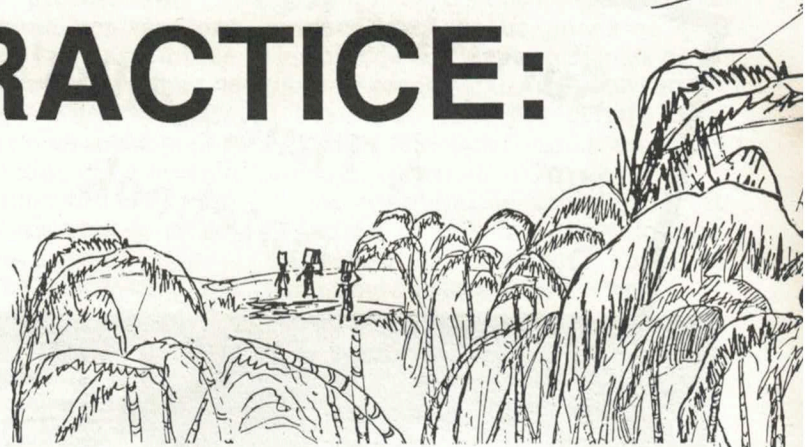
*These women are selling mangoes. They sell for a low price to the merchants, who resell for much higher prices. And the women are poorer still.*

*These women are single. They have no one to protect their crops. The birds trouble their crops and the elephants spoil the maize. The rice gets eaten by the birds because they cannot afford to pay someone to watch in the fields all day.*

*A drum of beer. The men drink beer all day, even the fish they catch they sell for beer. They aren't interested in helping the women. They aren't*

*interested in the women's projects, or the work they are doing. So the women remain suffering with their children.*

*This woman with her children, with no father, is selling scones in the market. But everyone has brought food, other kinds of food, all different varieties to sell. So she must carry her load back home. And how will she support her children?*





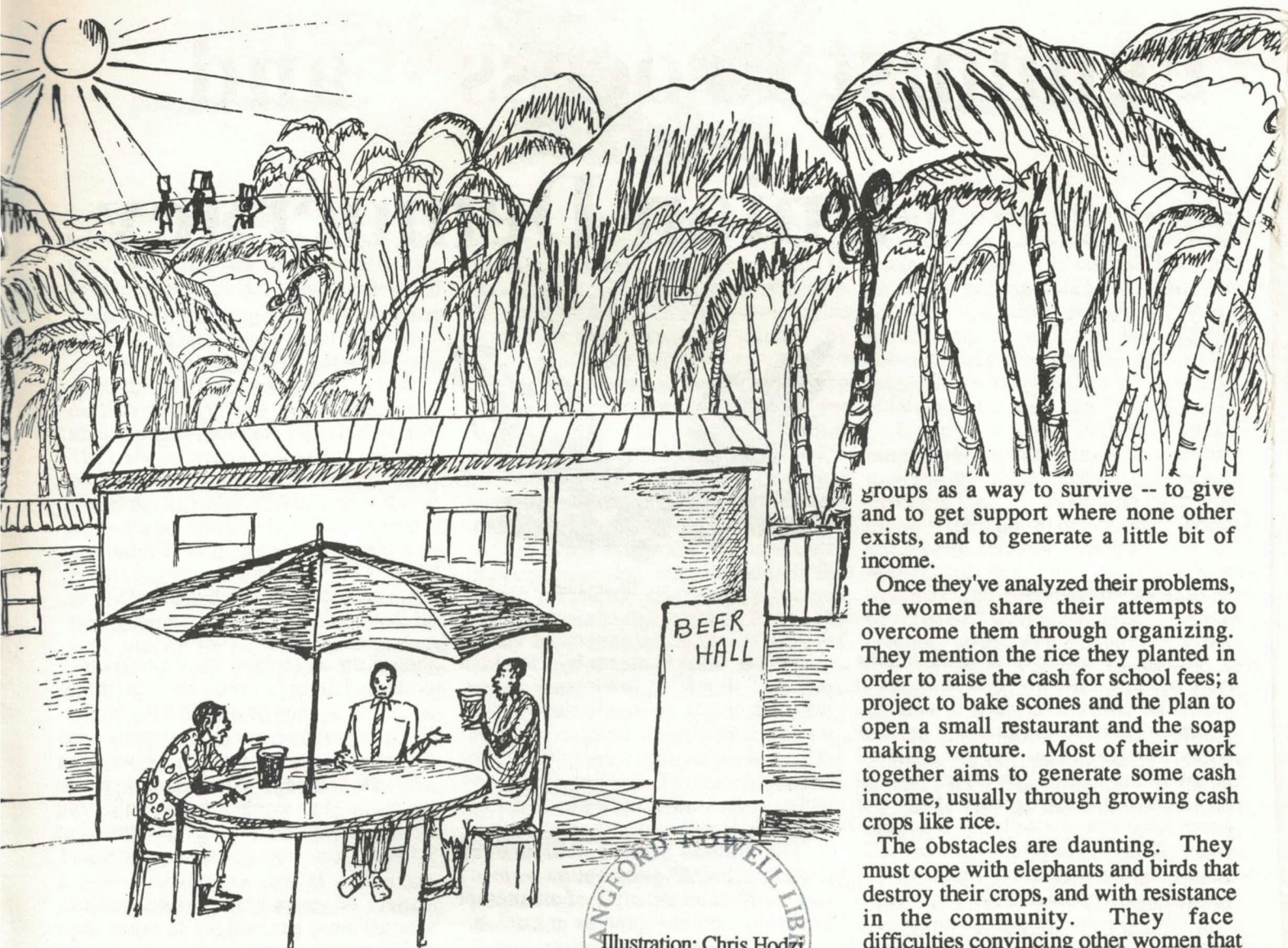


Illustration: Chris Hodzi

Single women carry the heaviest load, a burden that grows heavier still with age. About one third of the women in this group don't have men to support them.

Some men must leave to work in the city, part of a colonial legacy that pulls men from the rural, agricultural setting into the urban capitalist machine. The men may have deserted them for other women; more than one wife is permitted under Zambian customary law. Some women never married. Whatever the case, it means no one to plow the fields or to provide a source of cash income and the security that comes with it.

Even for those in the group who do have husbands, the situation may not be

much better. The women talk of alcohol abuse and violence. They discuss at some length men's feelings about women's groups.

**Judith:** "They're afraid women will develop themselves and learn things the husbands don't know. The women might not obey their husbands anymore."

**Loveness:** "They are uncivilized, ignorant and jealous."

**Delphin:** "I'm free to go to any meeting I choose because my husband says to me, 'life is a complicated affair. If I die, how will you support yourself?'"

**Regina:** "Women must respect their husbands."

Many women come together in

groups as a way to survive -- to give and to get support where none other exists, and to generate a little bit of income.

Once they've analyzed their problems, the women share their attempts to overcome them through organizing. They mention the rice they planted in order to raise the cash for school fees; a project to bake scones and the plan to open a small restaurant and the soap making venture. Most of their work together aims to generate some cash income, usually through growing cash crops like rice.

The obstacles are daunting. They must cope with elephants and birds that destroy their crops, and with resistance in the community. They face difficulties convincing other women that the project has some hope of success, finding time to meet together regularly, maintaining a strong core of members, and overcoming their own lack of skills and confidence.

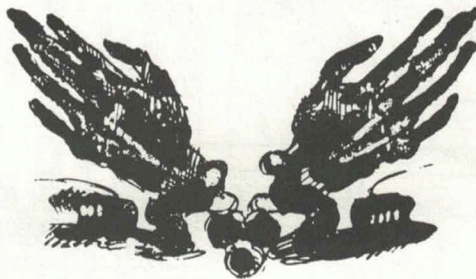
There are also the obstacles on a larger scale. One is the lack of transportation they attribute to Zambia's lack of foreign exchange which in turn is caused by the low price of copper, their main natural resource. Another is the violent economic and military control exerted by South Africa over the whole region. It is not surprising that the groups don't make much money. In fact, none of the groups represented at the workshop showed any profit at all last year. But Febe stresses, "That is not the point. In coming together we are able to support each other, and we discover that we are in fact capable of

*continued on page 35*



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# Feminist Process and Union Democracy



by Miriam Edelson

Illustration: Virginia Howard

During the last several years, unions have become more involved in issues of particular concern to women workers. From recourse against sexual harassment to equal pay for work of equal value, many such issues now sit on union bargaining agendas. But these items have not just fallen into unions laps. Rather, attention paid to such issues has been (and continues to be) the result of considerable organizing and struggle on the part of members committed to making their unions more responsive to women's particular interests.

As union women have organized, new ways of working have emerged and new questions have arisen. How, for example, will we use the power base we are developing? Do women trade unionists have a different view regarding how leadership should be exercised? Does our vision of unionism challenge the hierarchical/bureaucratic model in which we often find ourselves?

Union women have created alternative models for union work based on two tenets. First, personal and political issues are inseparable. Secondly, the ends do not always justify the means, thus the goal of political work must be prefigured in the process of working toward our objectives.

This is what is meant by "feminist process." It refers to an interest in how we work together, in addition to what we work at, and it emphasizes that personal relations, especially the distribution of power between individuals, cannot be abstracted from our goals.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada's (PSAC) program on women's issues offers an example of an attempt to develop feminist process in a union.

## PSAC's "Women at Work"

"Women at Work" was a six-day in-residence course held in 1984 for women members of PSAC. The program dealt with the sources of women's oppression in society and the workplace and addressed issues like equal pay, sexual harassment and affirmative action. It looked at the internal barriers to greater involvement in the union movement by women members, and encouraged them to develop workable political solutions to those problems.

Group interaction is one of the most important aspects of learning. Conflict between the participants often emerged as a consequence of women having chosen different lifestyles and priorities. Opinions diverged on issues such as mothering, being single, relations with

men in the workplace, appropriate dress codes, flirting, and the primacy accorded women or men in their lives.

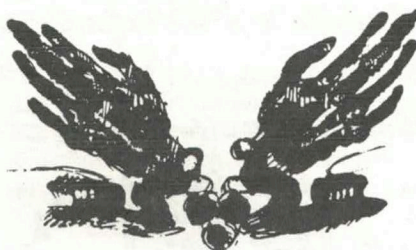
In attempting to come to grips with the oppression of women as workers and as women, participants were encouraged to express these conflicting points of view in a "safe" environment where no one was attacked on personal grounds. It was emphasized that a variety of views are possible, and the women were encouraged to voice their differences without attacking one another's choices.

This was difficult since many of the issues raised touched our personal beliefs and behaviours.

Many concerns were raised. For example, women whose families form their central daily concern sometimes felt threatened by or angry at women who were more work-oriented or who are openly critical of the men in their lives. Alternatively, single women or lesbians felt discounted and / or angry at the assumptions about women's lives made by a group which, in its orientation, accords legitimacy exclusively to heterosexual relationships and marriage.

The clashing of these personal identities forced reflection, self-examination and exchange -- all part of the process of challenging participants' attitudes.





Positive resolution of such conflicts seldom occurs spontaneously. The group facilitators encouraged the development of an environment in which such exchanges could have taken place. Two techniques stand out.

First, during the introductory session participants were asked to outline briefly one accomplishment about which they felt especially good. The only requirement was that we speak positively about ourselves. Many found the exercise difficult, as it forced us to not put ourselves down -- a trap all too familiar to many women. We were encouraged to share personal experiences and therefore take risks in a new group. As each woman took her turn, support for her was developed and expressed. As participants, we were immediately able to relate on a more intimate level, and first impressions and stereotypes were partially eroded. The result was a climate of trust.

The second technique was check-ins by participants and the facilitator at the beginning of each day's session. Members were asked to express their feelings about the course and group, and to identify problems or concerns they had at a personal or program level. While this technique is often used in our mixed courses, the debate which developed among the women was notable. Tensions which developed were dealt with quickly as members of the group were encouraged to deal directly with one another and not to rely upon the facilitator as an arbiter.

### Taking it into our workplace

This approach to dealing with conflict could be adopted by any small

group, be it union negotiating teams or women's organizations. Any group working closely together needs to develop a basis of trust to be effective. While differing political views, styles and historical rivalries cannot be ignored, at some point the group has to decide whether or not it wants to accomplish certain tasks. If the answer is yes, the group requires some method of talking out differences productively.

In the course it was acknowledged openly that how people feel conditions their behaviour and, hence, the group's ability to meet its goals. Typical union meeting procedure does not address this issue. It assumes that people participate on an exclusively rational basis. In many local settings, however, it is not simply grave ideological differences which hamper effectiveness. I believe attempts to deal with conflict by inviting, rather than discouraging, differing points of view and, simultaneously, agreeing to attack the opinion and not the individual, would foster a more productive debate of issues.

Leadership along these lines is being offered now by women at all levels of the union movement. The interest in democratizing union practices by decentralizing power to members is not, however, a goal shared by all. Just as resistance to taking women's issues to the bargaining table was (and continues to be) encountered, so too can we expect resistance to attempt to modify how we work together. My contention is that although taking new approaches to the way we work cannot solve all the problems facing trade unions, we can no longer afford not to examine the lessons and experience other movements have to offer.

At a time when fully 50 per cent of the Canadian Labour Congress' inner circle is female, it is crucial that trade unionists not be lulled into believing equality has been achieved. Role models are significant, but further concrete measures are still required to break down the barriers to women's involvement in their unions.

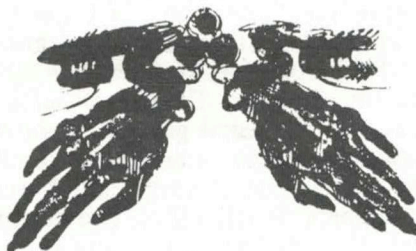
Unions and other small bureaucracies committed to effecting fundamental social change may benefit from the kind of organizing successes union sisters are experiencing. Those achievements rest, in part, on the recognition that union members have interests and preoccupations that go well beyond workplace issues. In very concrete terms, this recognition means that the realm typically considered to constitute "union" issues has been forced to expand.

The recognition of union members as more than simply "workers" reflects feminism's commitment to personal issues as part of the overall political project. As a result, paying attention to the individual's desires and ability to effect change becomes a central consideration in developing strategies for collective action. It is this message which shapes the process and models many union women are experimenting with in their work.

bts

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*Miriam Edelson is an employee of the Public Service Alliance of Canada and has been working on union and women's issues for a number of years.*





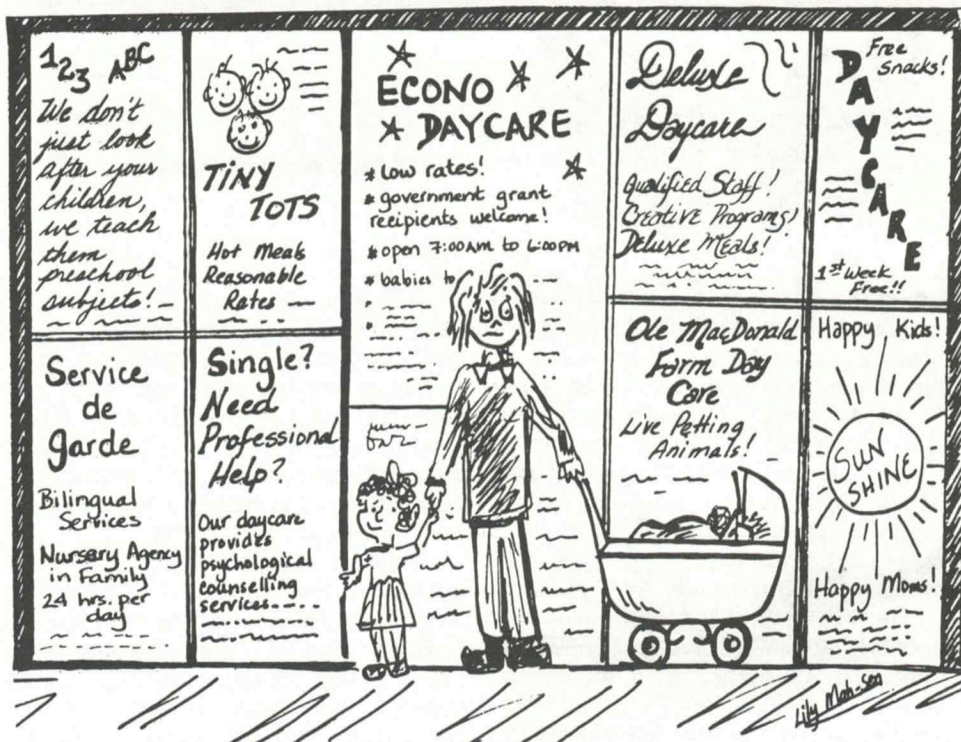


Illustration: Lily Mah-Sen

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT READY TO ACT ON CHILDCARE

by Lynne Westlake

Child care has finally risen to the top of the nation's political agenda! The prime minister has declared that he expects "new measures" to be in place by November 1987 and all three political parties have developed -- or are working on -- popular child care policies. Groups like the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (CDCAA) and the National Action Committee (NAC) have worked hard to bring this about. It now appears that of all issues affecting women, child care has been singled out for federal action. While advocates are pleased with all this unaccustomed attention, they are deeply concerned that a Conservative government will adopt measures that will actually set back the development of a universally-accessible, high-quality, non-profit child care system.

In November 1985, the federal government appointed seven federal M.P.s to the Special Committee on Child Care. Its mandate is to "examine and report on the future of child care in Canada in the context of the changing needs of the Canadian family in today's society," and is to include both parental and non-parental care. Shirley Martin, M.P. (P.C.) from Hamilton, Ontario, chairs the Committee, which includes four other Conservative backbenchers, as well as Margaret Mitchell M.P. (N.D.P.) and Lucie

Pépin, M.P. (Lib.). The committee was scheduled to report in November 1986, but has been granted an extension to March 31, 1987.

Child care advocates had mixed feelings about the creation of this committee. Royal Commissions on the Status of Women (1970), the Year of the Child (1979), and Equity in Employment (Abella, 1984) had already urged the government to act, and the federally-appointed Task Force on Child Care chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke was scheduled to report early in 1986. Clearly, child care has been studied and over-studied; action, not more research, is necessary.

This last committee was supported, however, because it was given a mandate to hold public hearings across Canada. The Special Committee on Child Care has been a political process, a necessary step to convince the federal government that there is a wide consensus and political support for child care. This it has done. In the cross-Canada hearings last spring, a wide range of individuals and groups called for universally-accessible, high-quality child care. Participants included not only the usual parents, child care programs, labour unions and women's groups, but also children, grandparents, churches, professional associations and community groups.

The process was so successful that it has come under attack by the anti-feminist group, REAL Women, as being "manipulated" by paid lobbyists.

Debate now centres not on whether the federal government should support child care, but on how it should. There are two fundamentally opposing views of how child care in Canada should develop.

The vision of groups like CDCAA is public funding of comprehensive, community-based, non-profit child care programs, including full-time day care in centres and licensed family homes, out-of-school care and support services for parents at home, such as relief care and parent-child drop-ins. The CDCAA has proposed that the federal government, the provinces and the territories share the cost of capital and operational grants for these programs. This would provide a secure funding base which would make these programs accessible to all children without any restrictions caused by parents' circumstances or ability to pay; the same funding would allow equitable salaries for child care staff.

In the other view of child care, services would continue to be based on user fees paid by parents, with public money targeted to needy families in the form of subsidized care and tax benefits for other families to help them purchase what child care they can, as well as tax incentives to business and private enterprise to meet the need for new programs. The result would be a child care system developed in a disjointed



*From May to August 1986, I was exposed to a world I had read about only a little and experienced not at all -- the world of shelters, meal programs and grocery distribution facilities. A Master's student at the School of Social Work at Carleton University, I chose a field placement with the Regional-Municipal Social Services Department of Ottawa-Carleton. My placement was to undertake research to obtain a more accurate and broader knowledge of the growing number of users of emergency services in downtown Ottawa and area.*

*by Susan Lott*

One of the most visible and alarming signs of the crisis in our social welfare system is the growth of meal and grocery programs in this country over the last four or five years. In 1985, there were 94 food banks in Canada. The majority were in the West; nine were reported in Ontario, up from only four reported in 1984.

In Ottawa's downtown core, five facilities distribute groceries to approximately 350 people each day. In addition, approximately a dozen facilities in the downtown core and vicinity provide meals to 900 people each day, and 30 or more churches give food vouchers or groceries to people on a regular basis.

All of this adds up to a very stark fact: the social safety net in this country has broken down. The majority of people using these programs are on social assistance, mostly welfare, and are attempting to do the impossible -- trying to subsist each month on woefully inadequate welfare payments. Welfare recipients at all levels and in all categories in this province receive less than 40 to 60 per cent of the poverty line.

While others used the services, the grocery distribution facilities I visited and some of the meal programs were frequented by large numbers of women, many of them young, single parents on welfare. The revelations of these women about their daily existence logically demonstrated why the grocery and meal programs had become a regular part of the lives of a majority of people on social assistance, particularly single women with children.

I met the following women at the Foster Farm Community Centre and at a grocery distribution program in the west end. Both are located in an area that contains approximately one quarter of the subsidized housing in Ottawa.

Foster Farm Community Centre provides a lunch program three days a week throughout the year and a breakfast program for children during the school year. This program is unique in that it is run by women in the community living in subsidized

# "I KNOW

## WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE HUNGRY"

*Resident, Union Mission, Ottawa*



Illustration: Anne Warren

housing. Many of the women are on welfare and they saw a real need for such a program in the community.

Barbara is in her mid-twenties and has a 12-year-old son. She is a single parent and receives \$543 each month in Family Benefits. She lives in subsidized housing which she rents for \$135 a month. She told me she usually needs to use the Foster Farm meal program by the end of each month.

At the beginning of the month she spends \$250 on groceries to last the month (\$60/week for two people). Once every three or four months she gets food vouchers from the local church. After she pays hydro and cable at the beginning of the month, she has virtually no money left for extras. Any clothing money goes for the child, not for herself.



She says it is very difficult finding work beyond anything temporary. She feels "almost guilty about complaining because we have a place to live" but she can't help express frustration "when you wake up in the morning and can't buy any extras." After telling me her son had a vitamin B deficiency as a child due to the difficulty of affording fresh fruit and vegetables, she justified her use of the meal program, saying: "When it comes to feeding the kids, you don't have any pride, you just do it."

Jane is in her early twenties, also a single parent. She has two children under five and receives \$644/month in Family Benefits. They use the Foster Farm meal program about three times a week. She pays \$159/month to rent her subsidized apartment. Her monthly expenses include \$38/month for cable TV and \$200/month for groceries. By the third week of the month she says she usually has no money left. She gets second-hand clothing for herself from her parents but makes sure that her kids have "decent clothing". This is very important to her because she remembers her own childhood (her mother was on Family Benefits) and the humiliation of wearing second-hand clothing. She says simply, but with meaning, "it affects you."

After outlining her monthly expenses she remarked, "if you have cable and it's the only thing you have, they condemn you for having that little bit for yourself". She talked also about the difficulties of getting off welfare. In order not to lose full benefits, she must find work that pays a maximum of \$140/month. She says it is impossible to find work, full-time or part-time that pays only this amount. Even if she could find full-time work, it is unlikely (given her grade 11 education) that it would pay much more than she is receiving on Family Benefits. In addition, she admits, it is difficult to be away from her children. About the lunch program she says: "I don't like to come down too often in case someone needs it more than me."

I spent a day helping Jackie Allen, Chairperson of the West End Interfaith, with their grocery delivery program. This program represents the joint efforts of churches in the west end of Ottawa. When the program began in 1980 it was making only two or three

food deliveries a year. It is now making three to five deliveries *per day* and serves approximately 60 families a month. One hundred and fifty families are regular users of the program (they may use it four or five times a year).



Ann has two children under five. She explained that she stopped working in May as a full-time clerk at Zeller's in order to spend the summer with her children who were upset about her recent separation from their father. She applied for welfare to start in June, but was told that she couldn't receive full benefits until August and was only entitled to \$217/month for June and July. She was desperate, knowing that \$154 of that amount had to go to rent and that she would still have to pay for hydro and the telephone, not to mention food for two children and herself. Her social worker had suggested that she contact the Salvation Army. She was finally referred to the West End program through a local church. When I asked her how she was able to cope even with a full welfare cheque, she replied that there is still a need at the end of each month for the food programs. Any unforeseen event such as a sick child can make getting through the month almost impossible.

Karen is a single parent with one young child. She receives \$191 from general welfare each month (her rent is paid directly to the landlord). At the beginning of the month she spends \$50-\$70 on food and uses her baby bonus to buy meat, but she regularly needs food from the program from the middle of the month on. She said she has no money left over to buy clothing for her child.

These four women's stories represent the lives of thousands of women in similar circumstances in this and other Canadian cities. They have been forced, by the gross inadequacies of social assistance levels in this province, to scramble and scrape to find ways of supplementing welfare in order

that they and their children have enough food to eat each month. That this activity goes on day after day in Canada's capital city, unseen for the most part, makes tragic mockery of the federal government's commitment to an "adequate" standard of living for "all Canadians."

Their stories also demonstrate the inconsistencies and illogic of the welfare structure. Their difficulties in finding employment while receiving welfare suggest that the very structure of the welfare system completely mitigates against any attempt by these women to get off social assistance.

The food and meal programs these women have been forced to depend upon are themselves highly vulnerable. They are supported mostly through private donations, and the time and effort of thousands of volunteers. Their access to government funding, which in this province has been the Emergency Shelter and Assistance Program (ESAP) has been, and continues to be, described as a temporary "emergency" program, not a permanent source of funding. (It also does not fund salaries.)

Although retaining the "emergency" status is justified by some as a way of keeping the issue of the inappropriateness of the need to have such programs visible, the reality is that social assistance levels are not going to change next week or next month. In the meantime, meal and grocery programs continue because there is a critical need for them -- a need that grows daily.

These programs have been lifesavers for many women, but it is important not to lose sight of the larger issue. These programs are band-aids; they can't begin -- and it is highly immoral that our governments are leaving them to attempt -- to bridge the gaping holes in our social welfare system. The responsibility lies with government, not the voluntary sector. The human cost of allowing the present situation to continue is too high.

*bts*

*Sue Lott is pursuing a Master's degree in Social Work at Carleton University. She is currently doing research at the Social Planning Council of Ottawa on emergency services.*



# CRIAW CONFERENCE:

## TEN YEARS OF FEMINIST RESEARCH

### CELEBRATED

by Tünde Nemeth

We've had a busy ten years. At the 10th annual conference of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), held in Moncton last November, opening session speaker Marguerite Andersen called feminists "*filles studieuses*," quoting Nicole Brossard. The conference celebrated ten years of feminist research with the theme, "Feminism: Retrospect and Prospect."

Andersen recounted how she had set out to do a literature review in preparation for her talk, but had quickly realized that it would take ages just to compile a bibliography of recent Canadian feminist research, let alone read it all. Using this measure, then, feminists have indeed had an enormous impact.

#### Can't rest on our laurels

Andersen raised the question, however, of how much progress we've really made over these ten years, how much women's condition has actually changed. And, of course, the answer is: not enough!

We must be ever-vigilant, she stressed, and we can't rest on our laurels. We must, in particular, insinuate ourselves increasingly into the mainstream / male-stream, so as not to disappear in the anti-feminist backlash that is now warming up.

We're not safe, Andersen asserted, in either political or private spheres, and therefore we can't allow ourselves the luxury of ignoring our opposition. This theme resurfaced in the plenary session, when speaker Micheline de Sève said that more women must exert greater power in the public sphere, especially the political arena.

#### *The Handmaid's Tale* as chilling reality

Both Andersen and plenary session speaker Margrit Eichler invoked the spectre of Margaret Atwood's futuristic and terrifying *Handmaid's Tale*. Eichler made a persuasive case criticizing Ontario Law Reform Commission recommendations concerning reproductive technologies.

Eichler fears that, if current trends continue, women will be more exploited and divided than ever. She feels the scenario in Atwood's book is already a frightening reality in the case of in vitro fertilization and surrogate motherhood. Rich adoptive parents, Eichler pointed out, already pay poorer women to breed for them. Of the enormous sum that this costs, the biological mother only gets \$5,000 to \$15,000 while the rest goes to legal fees. This means class division among women will only get worse, she said.

Legal control can already be exerted over biological mothers. Eichler urged us to consider the ramifications of a recent case in which a woman who gave birth to a stillborn baby was charged with fetal abuse, based on her doctor's assertion that she had taken drugs during her pregnancy, despite her evidence to the contrary.

Eichler concluded that all women need to concern themselves with this issue, because it will affect us all, whether or not we as individuals reproduce or not.

#### Diversity in numbers

Over 80 speakers presented papers or conducted workshops on such diverse topics as literature, violence against women (including sexual assault, wife beating and pornography), women and work, immigration, Native issues, legal issues, politics and many others. The presentations I attended uniformly demonstrated rigorous analysis and superb scholarship. Many of the speakers were not the usual cadre of "experts" that you find at academic

conferences, and I think this is important and should be encouraged.

I came away from the conference with a tremendous sense of collective accomplishment: look at all we've done in ten short years! The conference was well-attended, things ran more or less on time, and there was a good mix of people.

I did feel, however, as did others, that the male-stream, hierarchical arrangement was a problem: most of the sessions took the form of a grouping of formal papers, with relatively few informal workshops. As a speaker, I was quite comfortable with this arrangement; as a member of the "audience" I was not.

The many speakers still had to be fit into the same amount of time as usual for these kinds of things: the better part of a weekend. I felt frustrated because we were always so very pressed for time. Because the emphasis was on the formal presentations, the time problem meant discussions were frequently cut short -- a real shame. Some of the best discussions (as I suppose is often the case) took place outside the sessions themselves.

Of course, on the other hand, it was wonderful to have so many speakers, in that it meant many women from differing backgrounds had a chance to present their views.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I left the plenary session feeling, well, the way I usually feel leaving a room filled with several hundred women. It's indescribable. But I think you know what I mean.

*bts*

*Tünde Nemeth is a graduate student at Carleton University, studying women's literature. She's worked with BTS for a year and a half. Like Martha, she's a compulsive editor. She's also very good at making schedules, but not nearly as good at following them.*



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Other Fires: Short Fiction by Latin American Women

Edited by Alberto Manguel

Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys

reviewed by Meg Masters

The sub-title of *Other Fires* is "Short Fiction by Latin American Women." As the editor, Alberto Manguel (a New York University professor and editor of *Black Water*), notes in his introduction, the sub-title is misleading in its simplicity. It is as ridiculous as a slim paperback claiming to represent the short fiction of European women, or doing a survey of English literature in summer school. What the authors of these stories have in common is sex and, in only a very general way, geography. They do not share a single vision, a shared voice or many common influences. As Manguel notes, the most striking similarity among them is their position as authors largely neglected in their own countries, as well as in the western world. And destroying this undeserved status is Manguel's mandate in presenting this collection.

This approach makes the book, on one hand, dissatisfying. Reading the collection is like being at a tremendous feast at which one is allowed only a crumb from each dish; readers become reluctant to leave one author, particularly when they realize that the next story in the series is likely to bear no resemblance to the preceding one, and is likely to be a complete change in tone and topic.

On the other hand, this kaleidoscopic diversity is also one of the book's great strengths. The tantalizing glimpses we get of the work of these authors well serves the editor's intent. Each selection leaves the reader making mental notes to hunt up English translations of the author's other work.

Moreover, there are similarities among many of the selections that give the volume a distinctive, if not unusual, flavour for North American readers.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of these women's work is the recurrent supernatural elements in the fiction, something not often found in contemporary American and Canadian short fiction. Many of the stories use visions, dream-like sequences and other-worldly images and actions. The political realism, more specifically, the violence which punctuates these tales often has this supernatural aura -- not unlike the surreal gruesomeness of Poe's stories.

There is, of course, also a shared natural bias in these stories because they are written by women, women who as Latin American citizens enjoy little equality or liberty. As Isabelle Allende notes in the foreword, the authors "tell of the multiple forms of violence they suffer and, in doing so, violate the first rule imposed upon them since birth: the rule of silence" (p. xv). It is intriguing to note that several of the stories deal with victimization of women by other women.

"The Usurper" tells the tale of a strong, mercurial woman with an obsessive appetite for sex. While she has little problem satisfying her physical needs, she hungers for the kind of love and adoration her crippled sister gets from her father and her lover through her charming, placid frailty. The healthy woman thus sets the stage for the brutal rape and murder of the invalid, posing as the wheelchair-ridden girl after the act: "I, Victoria, have discovered that a body can, sometimes, belong to another body" (p. 199). The disturbing conclusion points to the perversion of the victims themselves. In a society where women are powerless, all too often the only way to gain control of one's life is through manipulation, deceit and violence.

Surrealist poet Alejandra Pizarnik explores the other extreme: the terrifying results of absolute personal freedom, in this case, of an aristocratic woman, Countess Erzebet Bathory. This essay-tale is based on factual accounts of the life of the murderer and torturer of over six hundred young girls. At first, the horrific details and accounts seem gratuitous. Yet the orgy of violence leaves readers faced with unavoidable conclusions. They cannot deny their own reluctant fascination with the heinous, the evil. They cannot ignore the developing numbness that overtakes them as they near the end of the accounts. They cannot discount the possible product of this fascination and insensitivity: namely, the potential cruelty in each and every human being. Alejandra Pizarnik's surrealism stunningly achieves its end -- the production of fundamental, inescapable reality, a reality of the unconscious which must leave readers profoundly shaken.

While readers who attempt to devour the collection in one sitting might find *Other Fires'* great variety making them feel as if they were riding a roller coaster, the volume should not be missed because of this turbulence. Rather, *Other Fires* should be enjoyed in a leisurely way, with frequent breaks between reading the stories so that readers may savour the distinctiveness of each tale and delight in the discovery of each talented writer.

bt

Meg Masters lives in Cornwall and is a sometime member of the BTS collective.





# BOOK REVIEWS

## Ladies' Own Erotica

by The Kensington Ladies' Erotica Society

New York: Simon and Shuster, 1986 (paperback edition)

reviewed by Martha Muzychka

What is erotica? And how does it make itself known in our personal lives? These are some of the questions *Ladies' Own Erotica* tries -- and fails -- to answer through a motley collection of erotic stories. It is worth noting since women have been forced to accept men's definitions of sexuality, erotica and sensuality, *Ladies'* is a valiant effort to correct this sin of omission and to provide erotica from a women's point of view.

The book has interesting origins: a group of economically-secure women gather once a month to eat gourmet food and share erotic stories they have written, a selection of which appears in *Ladies'*. As food has an overwhelming sensual presence in this book, I suspect the women were inspired more by pate and Brie than silk and feathers. If the writers had devoted to their stories half the spice with which they spiked their recipes, the result would have been much more sizzling. (Of course, you may never look at Sheperd's Pie in the same way again.)

The truth is, I found most of these stories boring; perhaps my definition of erotica differs greatly from that held by the Kensington Ladies' Erotica Society, as the authors call themselves. There is too much attention to detail, and not enough to action. While some stories have interesting premises, the authors, sadly, do not follow them through.

Stylistically, the stories are not particularly well written, and most of them suffer from purple patch syndrome, an excess of descriptive adjectives and emotions. A strong editor should have been used to focus the rambling bits and to excise the

tedious details.

Nevertheless, I did find something to enjoy about this book. Sabina Sedgewick, the founder of the group, made it clear to her sister writers that the erotica produced would not present women as victims. Consequently, the role women play in sex is a powerful and empowering one. But it is a role, and I guess this is what they mean by sexual fantasy.

The most entertaining and illuminating piece was neither erotica nor fiction. Sedgewick's "Address to a Penis Owner," is a short essay describing, with the right combination of humour and seriousness, women's true feelings toward this part of the male anatomy:

"We are not anti-penis. (...) No, indeed. We have been brainwashed into paying more homage than is due this particular attachment of the male anatomy, and far too much has been made of its rise and fall. The fact that we admire a Greek statue no less when the penis has crumbled off should be sufficient proof that male beauty does not depend upon this unique feature."

Sedgewick notes, quite rightly too, that the penis is not the focus of lovemaking for women; instead, the women, in their stories, describe the sensuous nature of lips, hands and hair.

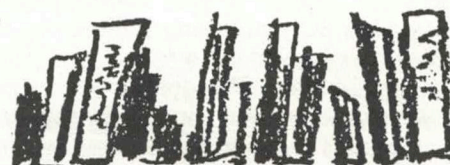
Furthermore, the stories in *Ladies'* celebrate sensuality in supposedly commonplace things. Shopping, cooking supper, breaking down on the highway and dressing for dinner all become erotic rituals, preludes to the main course, as it were. The focus is on what women find important in lovemaking; what is essential is tenderness, affection and sometime even humour.

A second piece, "Animal Lust", best represents what the Kensington Ladies tried to do with this book. It is about one woman and the mistaken perceptions the men in her life have had

about the nature of her sexuality. Like a chameleon, Frances conforms to her lover's image until finally, she rejects it, and revels in the freedom of her new-found erotic self.

The book depends upon the assumption that inside every woman is a secret erotic self, and not even the most sensitive and intimate of lovers is able to discover it unless the woman allows it to happen. While the book is imperfectly written and has several flaws (not the least of which is the lack of lesbian content) *Ladies'* is about women trying to meet their erotic selves, and acknowledging erotica's presence in their daily lives.

bts



## Good Writing is Inherently Subversive

by Martha Muzychka

I haven't had a Margaret Laurence weekend in a while. Whenever I feel disgruntled and grumpy, I curl up with well-thumbed favourites like *The Fire Dwellers* or *The Diviners* and read, a cup of tea in one hand and a cat in the other. Laurence's women are strong women, and when I feel my lowest, these women give me an important lift. I have learned much from reading these and other stories, and from talking about them with my friends.

Someone wrote that good writing is inherently subversive. I believe in a corollary to that: good reading prompts action.

This issue is about putting reminism into practice, and I want to share with



# BOOK REVIEWS

you some of the books I have read that help me do that. Naturally, these are purely personal choices, and I am sure many women have their own special "reads" to revive their spirits, to celebrate their successes and to spark new thoughts.

I like reading work by women writers because they speak keenly to my own experiences. Margaret Laurence's writing is good, satisfying and enriching. *The Diviners* is my favourite, because I can appreciate Morag's development as a writer and as an independent woman.

Fay Weldon is another writer whose work I enjoy. Her books are pointed commentaries on women's lives, but are softened with a ready wit and a taste for black humour, which I find a healthy alternative to wallowing in self-pity. "You can't keep a good woman down" is the underlying philosophy in Weldon's books; even when situations are predictable, Weldon twists them, leaving the women sometimes sadder, sometimes happier, but always wiser. Her books that I recommend are *Down Among the Women*, *Praxis*, *Female Friends*, and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*.

There are other fiction writers, such as Edna O'Brien and Jane Rule, who recreate or identify women's experiences and provide a new vision for society. At the same time, though, putting feminism into practice means being armed with information. Knowledge is power, and for women, lacking information can be detrimental to their health, well-being, and self-respect.

I need all the facts and figures I can find to back up my feminist analysis. Fortunately, women's studies is a thriving field, and the variety of books available now is extensive. For me, knowing where sexist ideas originated is important, and Rosemary Agonito's *History of Ideas on Women* is an anthology of writings about women and their role in society by the so-called "greats" in Western political and social

thought: Aristotle, John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Sigmund Freud, among others. Agonito alternates patriarchal thought with feminist analysis, creating a more balanced perspective on the development of women, politically, socially and culturally.

Having read and digested past visions of women's role in society, I find reading feminist philosopher Mary Daly inspiring and provocative. Daly challenges assumptions, and *Gyn/Ecology* is an excellent guide to re-thinking and re-vision. Daly is best known for using language in a creative manner, as she re-claims old meanings to define new perceptions of the status of women.

The power of naming our own oppression is a liberating tool and *A Feminist Dictionary* defines women's reality in concrete terms. Edited by Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, the dictionary is actually more a guide to the language and philosophy of the women's movement, in the past, the present and the future. An excellent reference to use with this unconventional dictionary is Kate Swift and Casey Miller's *Handbook for Non-Sexist Writing*. This handbook is well-written, with many excellent practical suggestions, proving thoroughly that non-sexist writing need not be awkward or clumsy. This book is strongly recommended to those for whom writing is part of everyday experience.

Acquiring practical skills and sharing them is an important part of feminism, and putting our convictions of self-respect into practice. Two books that I find helpful are *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves* and Sheila Kitzinger's *Woman's Experience of Sex*.

Women's health has long been an area of mystery, misogyny and mistaken assumptions. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* provides useful and accurate information, refuting traditional attitudes towards women's bodies. Its content is more than complete, and the writers thankfully avoid the patronizing and condescending tones that mar many health books.

*Woman's Experience of Sex* is wonderful, comforting and practical. It de-mystifies women's sexuality, for both heterosexual and lesbian readers, and responds to issues that are personal and political. I highly admire Kitzinger's approach, mostly for her frankness and her honesty. She recognizes that women have different understandings of sexuality, and that women have different expectations of sex than what has been generally accepted by male sexperts. Understanding and controlling your sexual self is empowering; accepting anything less than this right is defeating.

There are, of course, many books that belong here -- the feminist classics by Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Simone de Beauvoir, for example -- but I haven't yet finished reading all of them. Other books haven't spoken as strongly to me; others still sit on my shelf, whining accusingly, "read me, read me". And there are the books that I haven't yet discovered, or perhaps have not yet been written, but I have faith that I will find them.

In the joy of reading comes the joy of discovery, and the two together make a powerful combination.

bts



Martha Muzychka is studying composition and language theory at Calreton University this year. She is a compulsive editor and a member of the BTS collective.



# BOOK REVIEWS

**Darkness**

by bhara

Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1985

*Reviewed by Meg Masters*

For a number of years, Canada was lucky enough to have Bharati Mukherjee as one of its residents. Recently, Mukherjee, author of two novels and a travel memoir (written with husband Clair Blaise), published a volume of short stories entitled *Darkness*, a collection of touching and painful accounts of the Indian immigrant experience in North America. What may be discomfiting to Canadian readers is that Mukherjee tells us in her introduction that her "transformation as writer, and resident of the new world, occurred with the act of immigration to the United States" (p. 2)--emigration out of Canada.

Our multiculturalism is a two-edged sword, suggests Mukherjee, allowing immigrants to maintain their identity only to isolate them from the rest of society -- unlike the "melting pot" of the United States, where Mukherjee found the relative obscurity a relief and could savour her Indian heritage without confronting the almost institutionalized prejudice she perceives as existing in Canada. While many of Bharati Mukherjee's tales describe the violence of life in the old and new countries, nowhere is it as immediate and as urgent as in the Canadian stories. The chilling sequence of events in "Tamurlane" leads to the shooting death of an old, lame, landed immigrant chef who, defiant in the belief that he should not be hunted like the rest of the illegal staff, or perhaps simply exhausted by the constant hassle of being an unwanted immigrant, resists attempts by the Mounties to arrest him. Ann, the only white protagonist of the stories, is a case worker at a Human Rights Commission, and is worn away by the shrill desperation of her immigrant

clients whose brutal treatment in their new home will be filed away as "Isolated Incidents."

The racial violence Ratna deplores and fears in "The World According to Hsu" is the violence of the streets -- of the faceless public. Mukherjee demonstrates that this is no less an institutionalized violence. She links nationalism to race ("An eight-year-old Punjabi boy was struck by a car announcing on its bumper: KEEP CANADA GREEN. PAINT A PAKI," p.47.) Immigration is no longer a problem of belonging comfortably but one of survival -- the right to live and be different.

In the American stories, racial prejudice appears at first to emerge as a personal problem to be dealt with on an individual level. By its very nature, however, racial prejudice strips the target individual of his or her individuality and, as Mukherjee demonstrates in the stories, this act of depersonalization, itself a form of violence, propels the encounter into the public domain. When the "Lady from Lucknow" is discovered in her white lover's bed by his wife, she luxuriates in the headiness of being the "exotic other woman." The wife, however, dismisses her as a little threat of no consequence. Her passion mocked, "The Lady from Lucknow" internalizes the prejudice aimed at herself and sees herself as "just another involvement of white man in a pokey little outpost." (p.33)

It would be misleading to suggest that this collection is solely about the encounter of racial prejudice experienced by immigrants in North America. An underlying theme to all the stories is the more obscure dilemma of identity confronting the immigrant: that peculiar dialectic of old and new which forms the identity of the eternal foreigner. As the publisher's assistant in "Hindus" notes, "No matter what language I speak it will come out slightly foreign, no matter how perfectly I mouth it." (p. 140)

In the same vein, Mukherjee depicts the mixed marriage as a metaphor of this struggle to create a union of the old and new. Home is no longer a homogeneous place but rather a state of mind, culturally complex and multiple. Unlike their children, who are truly "travellers over shifting sands," (p.112) the newcomers find that fitting into neither order, they become a new order: a new race of foreigners. Ratna, vacationing with her Canadian husband in a small riot-ridden African country, contemplates her fate, a foreigner among other foreigners "feeling for the moment at home in that collection of Indians and Europeans babbling in English and remembered dialects. No matter where she lived, she would never feel so at home again." (p.56)

We do not have to search far in these stories to find the intense bewilderment of people whose past cultural experiences can no longer be called upon to serve them in their new homes. This is particularly true when the protagonists are confronted with sexual situations. In "Visitors", a young woman comes to the U.S., by way of an arranged marriage to a wealthy business man. During the course of her wifely duties, she is surprised and excited by the unexpected visit of a young Indian student, whose advances in India she would be compelled to instantly rebuff. She knows the formula of her Indian experience is no longer relevant but has nothing to replace it with. Inarticulate and awkward in her use of the new cultural language, Vinita creates a situation beyond her control, which is at once exhilarating and terrifying.

In this, as in other tales, Mukherjee subtly reveals the pain of immigration -- the small-scale tragedy experienced by all emigrants, the loss of cultural identity, from which eclipse comes a "Darkness." This is but one of the many "darknesses" the author asks us to contemplate in these honest and unrestrained tales of the immigrant in North America.

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Illustration: Lily Mah-Sen

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fashion. The quality of care for children would vary substantially, depending on their parents' ability to pay; most care would continue to be unregulated.

The vision of comprehensive, high-quality, universally-accessible child care has been outlined clearly by child care advocates and women's groups and was supported in the recommendations of the Cooke Task Force released last March (*Report of the Task Force on Child Care*). Conservative members of the present parliamentary committee, however, have indicated that they share no such vision, and concerns are mounting that the Committee will recommend a hodge-podge of government measures in keeping with the second view described here. It is unlikely that the report of the Committee will be explicit in its assumption that high-quality child care for all is *not* in the future for Canadian children.

Specifically, the Special Committee must now recommend whether to

channel new public dollars for child care directly to the programs, in keeping with the recommendations of those most knowledgeable in child care, or whether to increase financial assistance to parents through the tax system. It must also decide whether government should fund licensed programs or provide monies for unlicensed, unregulated, informal care. Finally, the Committee must decide whether to recommend setting a path for community-based non-profit programs or whether to look to private enterprise to provide funds for profit daycare. There are rumors of many piecemeal recommendations the Committee is considering, including incentives for work-related child care, benefits for parents through the tax system (though never enough) to buy child care services, financial support for stay-at-home parents, new incentives for informal care, direct capital and operating grants to programs, and the inclusion of commercial operations in all child care funding.

The report of the Special Committee

on Child Care should be tabled in February or March; Jake Epp has indicated that a government response will follow within 120 days; and that the federal government intends to implement some measures immediately and negotiate others with the provinces and territories. Clearly, decisions made in the next year will affect the future of child care in Canada. Child care advocates fear that in adopting a disjointed approach now, this government may entrench funding mechanisms which will preclude the development of universally-accessible, high-quality child care. Strong public reaction will be necessary if we are to keep the door open for universal daycare.

*bts*

#### Resources

For more information contact:  
CDCAA  
323 Chapel St.  
Ottawa  
K1N 7Z2  
(613) 594-3196

You can support the struggle for universally-accessible, high-quality child care by taking out a membership in the CDCAA and / or by writing to: the Prime Minister of Canada; the Minister of Health and Welfare; the Minister for the Status of Women; the Minister of Finance; or your local M.P., stating the urgent need for publically-supported non-profit day care. (Letters to the House of Commons need no postage)

See also: *Report of the Task Force on Child Care*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1986.

*Lynne Westlake has been the Co-ordinator of the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association since its inception in 1984. She is the mother of two daughters aged, 15 and 20, and has been a long-time child care consumer.*



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It's hard on the nerves because you can never sit down and relax. You never know what's going to happen to you. That's what's so hard. I'm not in public housing anymore. At least, I'm in public housing but it's an apartment for the disabled. I don't know what will happen if I go to Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Will I lose my housing? GWA isn't enough to live on. I'm barely surviving.

### Upgrading, but no jobs

*Adele receives Family Benefits and lives in public housing. She has raised nine children on her own for 24 years. Her last child will soon be 16. She upgraded her education and took a government-sponsored computer*



*training program while raising her family.*

Disability pensions keep women poor, sick and dumb. I'm damned if they'll do that to me. Women have to go to their doctor regularly to get a bus pass. Their doctor gives them uppers and downers. It's society that puts them in that place.

There are lots of women healthy enough to get jobs -- if there were jobs. A number of people upgraded with me. They should have left them

alone. They're back hanging around the public housing project where we live. They're more frustrated.

bts

### Resources

Ottawa Council for Low Income  
Support Services  
95 Beech Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1S 3J7  
(613) 232-2677

*Jane Beauchamp is a student in social policy in Social Work at Carleton University. She says: "I had the opportunity to do this research while on a field placement at OCLISS. Working with the women who are OCLISS and the women whose words appear in this article changed me. I*

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Lynne Tyler from the YWCA feels that NAC could present a more diverse viewpoint of feminism...not a water-downed version but a more inclusive approach representing many lifestyles. However, that would entail a major rethinking of how NAC represents women and a restructuring of the organization. She suggested that NAC consider using the focus of the Ottawa International Women's Week committee which tries to enable women to speak for themselves instead of trying to be the voice for women.

Maxine Stata of the Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services pointed out that NAC is naturally going to be exclusive if it only has women's groups as members since many non-white, non-middle-income women do not have the time or resources to organize within women's groups and they often involve themselves in gender-mixed issues that aren't women specific.

It is not the label "feminist" that convinces me that a person or a group is committed to making positive changes for women. It is the actions and underlying beliefs behind those actions. It is important to embrace the many aspects of women's lives into a definition of feminism, while simultaneously grappling with an

inclusive process that can establish collective feminist beliefs. I feel that some of those beliefs have already been established. They include that:

- women are intelligent human beings who can make decisions for themselves;

- the collective energy of the movement go to enabling women to attain and live their choices;

- information be continually made available to women so as to facilitate a knowledgeable choice;

- it be recognized that the existing structure of the world is constructed so as to consistently deny women the opportunity to develop their lives based on informed choices;

- there be a commitment to an inclusive membership: that all women working toward the same basic goals of feminism feel equally welcome and validated; and,

- there be a commitment to a process that enables all women to speak out and be heard.

These beliefs ideally would be reflected in every feminist action. But is it reflected in NAC?

The internal process of NAC is clearly being challenged as to its effectiveness in incorporating the multitude of voices that are struggling to live feminist lives. It is not enough to get a wide range of women joining NAC or even in one room at a NAC

Annual Meeting. The real job is in getting all women to participate in the discussion, to voice their concerns and to come to a consensus that is not based on the most powerful voices simply silencing the other quieter voices around them.

We cannot kid ourselves as to the magnitude of our job as feminists. It is no longer sufficient to make resolutions that exclude the voices of some women. We are a diverse group of women with differing views on every conceivable topic, and yet all of us choose to identify as feminists. We have to present the complexities as well as the bottom lines. The "consensus" may take a long time to arrive at but we will have a bottom line that is inclusive of as many women as possible. It is a positive step for NAC to be engaging in an organizational evaluation. Let us hope that it will enable many more of us to seriously consider putting both feet into the organization and not just giving the organization our principled support.

bts

*Joan Riggs is an Ottawa Activist committed to working towards an inclusive women's movement. Most of her energy is now spent with the International Women's Week Committee. She is a collective member of BTS.*



work, a way for her to earn a living. It's your relationship with her that counts. It's how you interact with that woman who comes to clean your toilet and wash your floors, it's how you and your husband interact with each other."

Phyllis: "I think that what we are discussing here is the value of that work. If we are going to continue thinking that housework does not have any value, I think that we are really not practising our feminism."

Anne: "I agree, I think that we have to acknowledge that housework is a necessary, productive activity. Everyone should take responsibility for doing their share or paying someone to do it for them. Paying reasonable wages is hard when it has

to come out of a woman's salary, which is probably already too low. The same goes for paying for child care. I knew a woman living with a professional man, she did all the housework and he paid her a salary. I thought it was a great arrangement, so did she."

As feminists, we want all of the washing, cooking, cleaning, organizing and managing that we call housework to be recognized as demanding and skilled work and treated accordingly when rights and responsibilities are divided up in the household. Out of respect for those we live with, we may have to compromise on some of our standards and ways of doing things, but we can't compromise on the principle that we are all responsible.


Housework is everyone's work.

bts

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*Joan Holmes has had some success in building a feminist household with her husband and young son. Progress is slow but she's a patient woman. Joan makes her living researching and writing about women and Native issues.*



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possible, establish a general direction for the group; this will save a lot of energy. If you can, do this through a collective format. The reason for having a collective is that we are all treated as second-class citizens who are only good for ordering around because of our age and sex. If you let yourself form a hierarchy out of habit, not only will quite a few noses get out of joint, but the meetings will become less and less enjoyable. Unless everybody can have fun and feel empowered in the process the dreaded twin plagues of burn-out and apathy will strike with insidious speed.

Next you have to try to find a place to meet in. This is just about the easiest part. Living rooms, parks, cafés, the school basement, or, if there is one in your city, a wymyn's centre will usually be more than happy to provide you with space if you give them enough warning. In fact, the wymyn at the centre will probably be overly enthusiastic. While their absolute astonishment at your ability to talk, much less your taking the initiative and starting a group, is just as insulting as the usual authoritarian cold shoulder, bear with it. You've got to admit, a frightening number of people our age have all the outward signs of being brain dead. A word of warning, don't let anybody tell you that you're too young to do anything or be of any help.

Now that you have a group, work on the dynamics a bit. You can have a go-around, with each person saying why she is there, what she hopes to achieve, or whatever comes to mind. It would probably be a good idea to have a temporary facilitator to keep the momentum and energy level up. Get to know each other any way you want. If you can see a situation that looks like it could turn out to be volatile under pressure (e.g., working on a demonstration), get it out in the open as soon as possible in an unoffensive and non-confrontational way.

Now comes the fun part . . . deciding what to do. It could be anything you want: an underground paper, a self-defence group, a place to let off steam, a resource group for

young wymyn, or peer counselling. Be creative, form a vigilante group to rehabilitate and educate sexist teachers, make a movie, form a poetry collective. The possibilities are endless.

Above all, remember, do what you feel is right and appropriate. There's nothing wrong with making a mistake if it doesn't hurt anybody. There is no right or wrong way to form a group or plan an action. Don't let other people think for you; you are more than capable. **PROTEST, RESIST, AND HAVE A NICE DAY.**

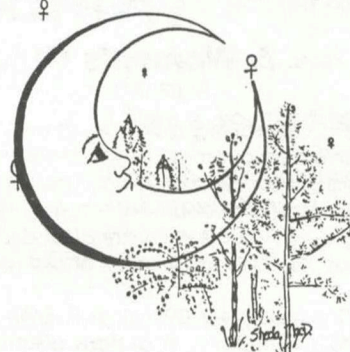
### Resources

Interested in joining the feminist youth group? Leave a message for Caridwen at 233-2691. The *Catalyst*, an underground paper connecting Ottawa high school students, needs workers and ideas. Contact Caridwen if you want to help.

bts

*Caridwen Irvine is a 14-year-old who is trying to improve the Ottawa high school which she attends. She is interested in politics, music and science, and in making changes in any way she can.*

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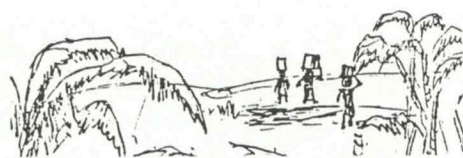


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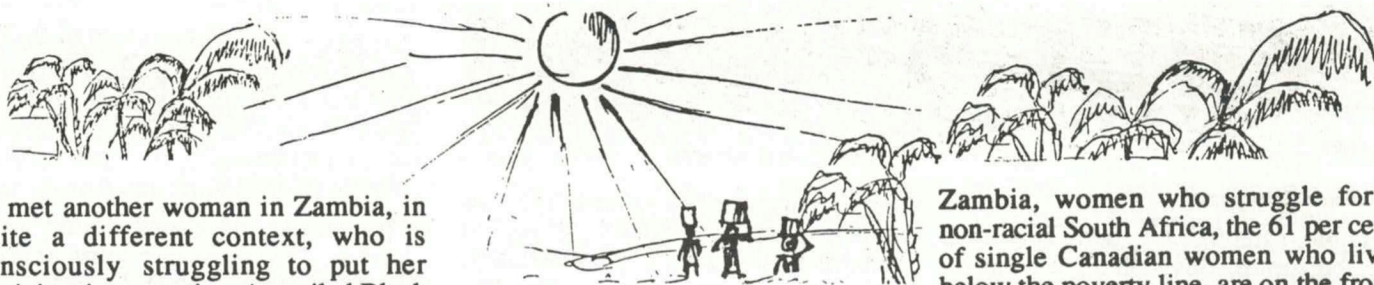
doing things to change our own situation. That gives us a sense of hope and of power. That is what is important." This is something that even an urban Canadian feminist can comprehend.

None of the women in this group would describe themselves as feminist. I doubt that any of them had even encountered that word before. But as women coming together to share experiences and support each other, they are putting into practice principles intrinsic to feminism.

In fact, this very gathering was made possible by the feminist critique of development strategies over the last decade -- a critique which asks the question, "what about the women, where are they and why are they being excluded from the development process?" Such questions have resulted in a willingness on the part of some international aid agencies to make work with women a priority, and to fund such things as this gathering of rural women's groups.

I didn't meet many women during my time in the southern part of Africa who did consider themselves to be feminists, nor many who see feminism as particularly relevant to the situation of women in their part of the world. My perception is not unusual. In fact, this observation is often used against us as we attempt to make global connections, that feminism is not relevant outside to the so-called "developed world" where women have the "luxury" of being able to address such issues. When I considered this, I realized that it has proven very difficult for us as Canadian feminists to pick up Charlotte Bunch's call, even in our own context, to "change the concept of feminism from being a luxury item for the elite to becoming a mass movement." How many of the million or so Canadian women who live below the poverty line perceive feminism to be a relevant and liberating force in their lives? With even that connection so tenuous, it is harder still for us to understand the international connections -- the threads that weave our lives together with those of women living in, say, rural Zambia.





I met another woman in Zambia, in quite a different context, who is consciously struggling to put her feminism into practice. An exiled Black South African, working with the African National Congress (ANC) Women's Section, she sees her primary goal as working for national liberation. "We see our oppression as three-fold," she told me. "We are discriminated against as women, for our class, and as Blacks. It is the third that affects us the most, but we must work at all these levels. That is why we have organized now, as women, instead of waiting until after liberation. But the priority now is the liberation of South Africa."

As we talked together, we made more connections between our lives. Indeed the issues affecting us are intertwined. Our liberation is bound up in each other's. She needs and receives solidarity support from the women's movement around the world, including Canada. Her struggle against international racism is vital to ours as Canadian feminists. For, as she points out, the South African regime does not exist in isolation. Its maintenance depends on Western governments, including our own -- on their willingness to tolerate or promote racism for economic gain. And for this same economic gain they will also tolerate or promote racism, or the marginalization and exploitation of women here in Canada.

These are not easy connections to make. I met a woman in neighbouring Zimbabwe who helped me to pull some of the pieces together and to deepen my understanding.

Sithembiso Nyoni has devoted her life to work with women in cooperatives in Zimbabwe. In her I found a sister who shares a common language, the international language of feminism. That allowed us to talk for hours, exploring each other's perceptions of the relationships between women's issues, militarism, class and racism, delighting in a shared analytic framework for the discussion.

"There are no cultural barriers between us," Sithembiso assured me, "because we are both women and women's culture is international." With

typical insight she continued, "there are also no class barriers between us. Now, if I was poor or rural there would be more of a barrier."

I nodded, recalling our struggles in Canada to bridge the same gaps between women. Part of the barrier, I realized as we talked, comes from an all too prevalent belief that middle-class feminists have something to offer poor or rural women, rather than the other way around. Sithembiso's work with rural women does not stem from a charity imperative, but from a profound understanding that her liberation cannot be separated from theirs.

In a very real way, it was, and continues to be. Zimbabwe's war of liberation was fought in the rural areas. Its success was dependent on the rural poor. Women were critical to that struggle. Sithembiso sees herself as repaying a debt, aligning herself with those who fight on the front lines, in another sense, in the ongoing struggle to create a free, just, socialist Zimbabwe.

*Women in Zimbabwe, women in rural*

Zambia, women who struggle for a non-racial South Africa, the 61 per cent of single Canadian women who live below the poverty line, are on the front lines of the same struggle. This is the reality of Sithembiso's experience, and the insight that she shared -- that these issues cannot be fragmented and compartmentalized. Those of us who work with the Canadian feminist movement work with these women. Putting feminism into practice means understanding that our liberation is bound up by theirs. If they fail, we all fail. If we let issues become compartmentalized, if we fail to see the connections between their situation and our own, if we fail to give and receive support, then we cannot succeed.

This is a debt we owe to third world feminists. Their analysis, the starkness of misogyny under new-colonial capitalism, enables us to see the related forces at play in our own lives. Their recognition of a global interconnectedness is the key to our liberation.

*bts*

*Alyson Huntly works at CUSO in the Development Education Department. She is a member of the BTS collective.*

## POWERFUL IMAGES

### A Women's Guide to Audiovisual Media

Groundbreaking guide to one of the most important international trends in the women's movement today. Includes articles on using videos, slideshows and other audiovisuals with women's groups • practical tips on equipment and production • illustrated accounts of the experiences of Third World women in making and using audiovisuals • an annotated catalog of more than 600 women's audiovisuals in all media • addresses of distributors, women's groups, and film/videomakers.

220 pages, 21 x 30 cm, in English. US\$12 individuals, US\$20 institutions. Bookstore discount available. Add US\$7 for airmail outside Europe.

Isis International, Via Santa Maria dell'Anima 30,  
00186 Rome, Italy.





# POETRYPOETRYPOETRYPOETRYPOETRY

## Dancing Class

We begin by lifting  
Stiff shoulders  
Lungs  
Shoulders drop and exhalation  
Legs wide apart

Birth of the dancing class  
Our first deep breath  
Alone

The teacher counts  
In  
Then out  
In then  
Out  
In  
Then  
Out

II In her hospital bed  
She seems diminished  
Once an adult  
Twice a child, she says

I believe her  
Her skin  
More smooth, softened of its wrinkles  
Except in the pain  
The vee of her brows

Take deep breaths  
I remind her  
In then out  
Grandmother

How long it takes us  
To learn  
To feel  
Our bodies' limits

To go beyond

The day we learned to fall  
Lord! How long  
The waiting  
How short the distance

From fear  
To curiosity  
To the body's faith  
In its own knowledge we drop

In our own time  
In our own grace

III Is it possible  
The bone cracked  
Before she fell  
The zing of glass in hot water

With partners we improvise  
Watching the movement  
Circling  
One to another

When she gives  
Too much deaf to herself  
When she takes  
Too little blind to me  
My balance scatters  
Our gestures cramp and flail

O! Woman  
How long it takes us  
To believe  
The dancing inside us

IV Morphine moves her hand  
Grasping for something  
We don't see

She needs it  
They say  
The doctors, the fathers  
For pain

When they inject it  
She and I turn our heads

V I need quiet to mend  
She says  
Listen to your bodies

One day one moment  
In her own time  
She says  
How long it takes  
To dance  
In our own grace

*Beth Follett*

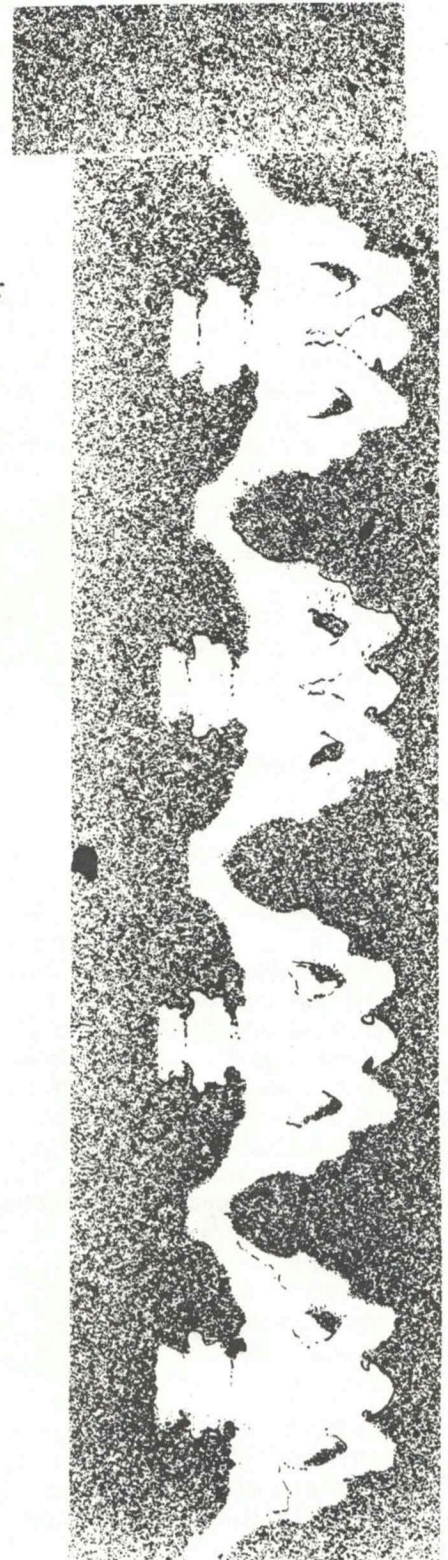


Illustration: Virginia Howard



# RESOURCES

**A Lesbian Anthology of Stories about Lesbians Who Tried to Go Straight.** We want to hear from Lesbians who, after identifying themselves as Lesbians, have tried to "go straight" and then, later, reclaimed their Lesbianism. We define going straight as:

- living celibate outside the Lesbian community (in isolation)
- living celibate, passing for straight
- living as a heterosexual with heterosexual relationships
- other.

Deadline is April 1, 1987.

Send submissions to:

*Options Research*  
c/o Box 2761  
Station "D"  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1P 5W8

**The Little Lavender Book: How to Organize an Event.** The International Women's Week Committee of Ottawa-Carleton has recently produced a booklet to assist groups in organizing an event. Chapters include: publicity, recruiting volunteers, how to avoid burnout, logistics, planning an event, problem solving and evaluating your event.

The booklet is available for the cost of printing and mailing. Make cheques payable for \$5 payable to the Ottawa International Women's Week Committee at:

*P.O. Box 76, Station B*  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1P 6C3

**A Lucky Few: A Report on the Housing Needs of the Psychiatrically Disabled in Ottawa-Carleton,** was released by the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa-Carleton branch, in September 1986. It documents the current housing situation for ex-psychiatric patients in Ottawa-Carleton, and the results of a survey of users and

social workers. One of the appendices contains an annotated guide to supportive housing in the region. Available from:

*CMHA, Ottawa-Carleton Branch*  
44 Eccles Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1R 6S4  
(613) 238-7266

**Did you know** that before the Canada Council began funding the arts in Canada, women poets and fiction writers were far more successful in having books published than they are now? Or that the National Gallery, in a recent year spent less than one per cent of its acquisition budget on buying art by Canadian women. Anne Innis Dagg in her recent book, *The 50% Solution: Why Should Women Pay for Men's Culture?*, examines how poorly women artists are treated in every cultural avenue in Canada. It also recommends ways to work toward greater equality for women and men artists. To order your copy write:

*Otter Press*  
Box 747  
Waterloo, Ontario  
N2J 4C2

Enclose \$8.00 plus 50 cents for postage.

**"A Web of Crones"** newsletter for Far Out Older Lesbians and Courageous Crones. News, poetry, resources, articles, feminist issues, spirituality. Send your life stories, etc. Four issues for \$6.00 a year or an individual copy for \$1.50 plus 51 cents handling. All correspondence to:

*Courageous Crones*  
P.O. Box 6  
Hornby Island  
British Columbia  
V0R 1Z0

**Call for submissions:** Nearly all women suffer from acts of physical, sexual, emotional and/or mental abuse sometime during our lives. For those who undertake the healing process, few ever get beyond the point of grieving to the wellspring of anger. **Our Eyes Have Found You: Angry Words Honest Women** will help to create a language that reflects our experience and provide a way to hold perpetrators of violence responsible.

Please send poems, short stories, plays, journal entries, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

*Celine-Marie Pascale*  
P.O. Box 2959  
Santa Cruz, C.A. 95063

Deadline: September 1987. All pieces will be published in the language in which they are written.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### FOR AN ANTHOLOGY ABOUT LESBIANS IN CANADA

Scholarly papers are invited for a book intended to document the diversity of lesbian experience, the extent of discrimination, and the survival strategies of lesbians in Canada. In particular, articles are sought which discuss old lesbians, visible minority lesbians, disabled lesbians, francophone lesbians, lesbians living in small towns, and lesbians who came out after marriage and children. Send abstract and/or completed paper by MAY 1, 1987 to:

**Sharon Stone**  
**Dept. of Sociology**  
**York University**  
**4700 Keele St.**  
**Downsview, Ontario**  
**M3J 1P3**