

# cayenne

June/July 1986  
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a  
socialist  
feminist bulletin

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# cayenne

## a socialist feminist bulletin

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cay.enne (ki-en'), n. [<native Braz. kynnha], 1. a very hot red pepper used widely in India, China and the Caribbean; 2. a female spice; 3. a long-lasting irritant; 4. hot stuff.

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CAYENNE BANNER: dian marino

## EDITORIAL

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We apologize to all our readers for the long delay you've experienced before getting this issue of *Cayenne*. As we were approaching press time about 2 months ago, too much controversy had emerged from International Women's Day to be dealt with in one article. Charges of racism were in the air, and we decided to examine the context in which they were raised, their impact and their implications for feminists all over Canada. The results are in a special section, pages 25 to 44. The combination of this special section and the delay meant that this turned into a



In this issue the *Cayenne* collective is departing somewhat from tradition by turning page one over to me to say goodbye to our readers. I'm moving to Ottawa June 1 so this will be the last issue in which I'll participate as a member of the collective. I will, of course, still write for *Cayenne* from Ottawa--a continual spur to our goal of being less Toronto-centric. (I know, Ontario-centric is just as bad--we're working on that too!)

I'm going to miss the ongoing work of the collective: the building of each issue from vague ideas for stories ("We might be able to get someone to write about that, if she's not too busy or too burned out..."), the giddy camaraderie of an all night layout session, the relief of finally sending

double issue. We hope you think its been worth the wait.

For those of you who started subscribing to *Cayenne* with either issue #2, 3, or 4, then this is your last issue. Please renew.

This issue we say goodbye to Chris Mills. (See her goodbye to you below!) We're sorry to lose Cris from the collective, but we know she'll makeup for our loss through her reporting from Ottawa. Good luck, Chris!

it to the printers, the excitement of opening the boxes to the wonderful smell of paper and ink, the horror of finding that now obvious typo the instant we open the first copy ("it completely changes what I meant to say; how could we have missed it..."). And I'll even miss the difficult, often undisciplined, occasionally hilarious, sometimes even painful collective discussions about that politics of what we are trying to do, the whys and hows of continually expanding our concepts of what is socialist and what is feminist.

I will particularly miss one of my pet projects within *Cayenne*, the development of our international coverage. It has been an education in itself to read women's publications from all over the world and gradually

build a sense of the immensity of the tasks women have taken on and the human and political resources we bring to them.

I have learned how narrow my idea of "the women's movement" was, simply because the major part of the writing and thinking I had been exposed to came so overwhelmingly from white North American (and to some extent, British Commonwealth) theorists. It has been exciting to find out what women in other countries are thinking and doing about their own oppression, and to see how much we have to learn from them. And it is not just from their practice that the lessons come; Third World women and women of colour are on the cutting edge of feminist theory, as was so clearly demonstrated at the NGO Forum in Nairobi last year.

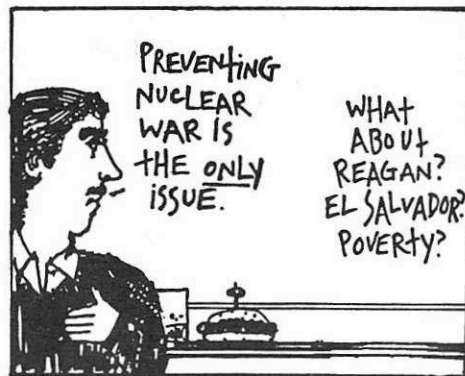
The enthusiastic response from many of our readers about our international coverage tells me that, contrary to what some may think, Canadian women are not so complacent, but are eager to learn from our sisters everywhere.

Intimately associated with this in my mind is some work I have

undertaken with Makeda Silvera of Toronto (Fireweed) and Cy-Thea Sand of Vancouver (Kinesis) around improving access to publishing for women who fall outside the self-defined "mainstream" (white, middle-class) of feminism--women of colour, working-class, rural, differently-abled women, and others. This year for the first time there were workshops at the Feminist Periodicals conference specifically on the issue of accessibility (and by implication, just who our constituencies are). We attempted, at the very least, to put the question of accessibility on the agenda for Canadian feminist periodicals and to get other publications thinking and working on ways to confront the problems of racism and classism in feminist publishing and in the women's movement.

I hate drawnout goodbyes, but I can't leave without expressing my thanks to the collective which has given me so much personally and politically, to the writers who have made every issue an adventure, and most of all to our readers who have been so supportive and constructive in their criticism. I'll keep in touch!

Christina Mills



# APPEAL!

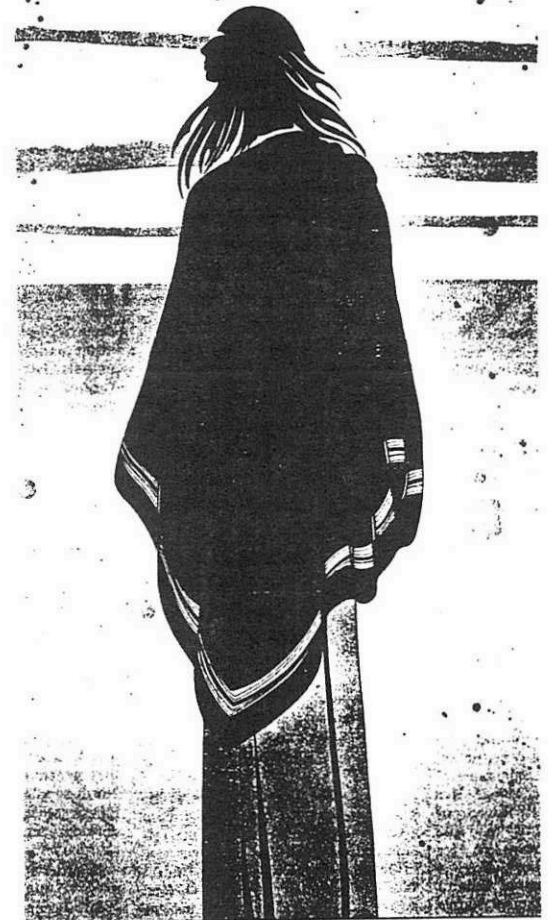
May 5, 1986

To Friends of Saskatchewan Native Women's Association:

This August, the Saskatchewan Trade Union Movement has generously agreed to send one of our Board Members on the Trade Union Tour to Nicaragua. This is a chance of a lifetime for some of our representatives to experience first-hand a people's movement that has successfully reconstructed a better way of life. We are now in the process of raising funds to send another woman on this tour. If you or anyone you know could help us we would be most grateful and it would mean a lot less bingos for us. Please distribute this letter anywhere you can and be sure to send names and full addresses of people who donate. On our return from Nicaragua, in repayment for your generosity, we would be willing to do some public relations for any group or individuals who donated. Public relations meaning a talk, a slideshow, etc. Thank you for considering and lending support to S.N.W.A.

Priscilla Settee  
President

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## The G.L.C. Relegated to History

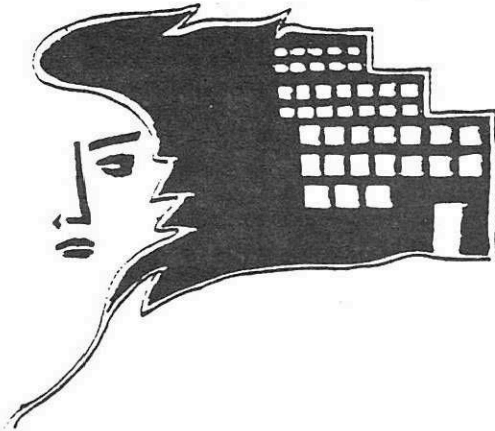
*Editors' note: The last issue of Cayenne included an article by Sheila Rowbotham on the threatened demise of the politically progressive Greater London Council. The Toronto Star later surprised us by running a sympathetic story on the GLC's last days, excerpted below. We hope to have a more analytical account, focusing on women's losses and responses, in a future issue.*

On Tuesday [April 1, 1986], London will become the first major metropolitan authority to go backward in history. After an unsuccessful battle with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government, the GLC will disappear.

The GLC was created in 1965 to centralize basic services to Metropolitan London's seven million inhabitants.

["Red Ken"] Livingstone, elected leader of the militant-left majority on the 92-seat county council in 1981, shrewdly used the council's limited powers to challenge the free-enterprise puritanism of the new Tory administration.

A stone's throw across the Thames from horrified Thatcherites in Parliament, the "revolutionaries" at



county hall fought for cheaper transportation fares, job creation programmes and multi-ethnic services [as well as services for women].

The GLC, with 24,000 employees and a spending budget of nearly \$2 billion, imposed its own practical brand of socialism on the city, forcing the wealthier boroughs to subsidize services for the poorer ones. As such, it could claim to be the genuine voice for all London.

"The GLC will be seen as a landmark, like the administration of Vienna between the wars," Livingston has said. "We were the first to learn the lessons about the postwar welfare state and reject its authoritarianism."

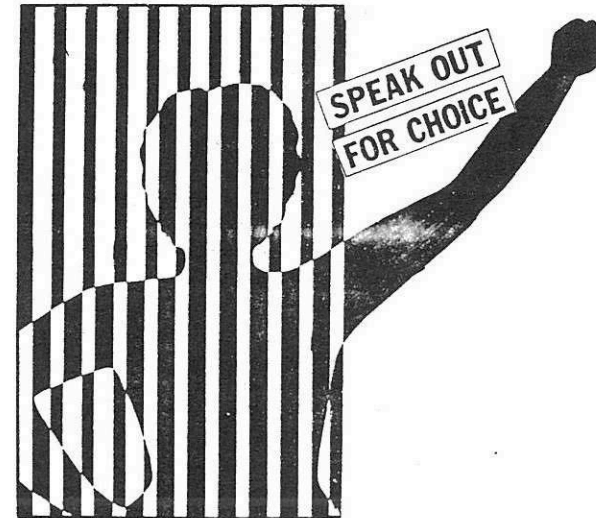
[The council] was killed by government fiat. A piqued Thatcher introduced the abolition of the GLC as a last-minute addition to her campaign platform in 1983, and an abolition bill was introduced in 1984, under the British government's authority to establish municipal reform.

The work of chopping London back into pint-sized pieces has already begun. About 3,000 workers will lose their jobs as a result of the change.

Many agencies will simply vanish. The GLC's Women's Committee, the first such municipal committee in Europe, is on the way out. Funded with a \$26 million annual GLC grant, it provided day care centres, counselling for sex discrimination and abuse, as well as giving women a major role in local affairs.

Livingstone himself is not about to fade from view. He is already a candidate for a safe Labour seat from the London constituency of Brent.

\* Original article: March 30, 1986, by Stephen Handelman, excerpted by Judi Stevenson.



## ABORTION LAW ON TRIAL

Donna Scagliotti  
Toronto

On March 1, 1986, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) held the Ontario Choice Tribunals. With the aid/help of a mock jury, the Canadian Abortion Law was put on trial. Woman after woman gave testimony of their experience. The accumulation of stories was a moving indictment of a law that was rightly found guilty of denying women their fundamental rights and thus causing physical, psychological and emotional damage. Not surprisingly, the Tribunals brought out the very deep personal responses women have to abortion. I was not spared.

When I had my abortion I was emotionally numb. All I could think about was that under no circumstances could I have a child and I would do whatever was necessary in order not to have one.

My only thought was getting rid of the pregnancy. Luckily my family doctor was able to arrange for an abortion without putting me through moral scrutiny. My family was aware of my pregnancy and my decision to terminate it. Never once did they suggest or even think that I had done or was doing something wrong. I realize now I was lucky not to have to deal with a guilt trip from them. But the idea that an abortion automatically comes with guilt was very much alive.

I remember one night feeling that there must be something wrong with me because of the anguish, pain, and guilt I was not feeling. On looking back I see how sick it was that I thought I should feel anguish and guilt.

To my amazement, pain and anger were what I felt strongly throughout the Tribunals. All the pain and anger that I thought I should have felt years ago was finally out--I was over the numbness.

I have been a choice activist for more than two and a half years. You can't be involved in this issue without being angry at the total lack of respect this law, and the system that supports it, has for women. It does so consistently, from the raid of the Morgentaler clinic, the arrests of the doctors, the ruling that this law is constitutional, to the everyday harassment that women go through while trying to get an abortion from either Ontario hospitals or the Morgentaler clinic. Yet I had never had such a personal and emotional response to abortion as that evoked by the experience of the Tribunals. In this sense, they were a powerful tool.

The Tribunals unmistakably brought home the law's disregard for women and women's anger about it. Stronger than ever, I felt that anger against the system that causes so many women to needlessly suffer physically,

mentally, and emotionally. But I was also in awe of the women who so courageously shared their experiences. Maureen Adams, a battered women's shelter worker, once said that there is nothing more powerful than women telling their experiences to their peers. She could just as easily have been talking about the abortion law Tribunals.

It was also a remarkable event in terms of the women who organized it. One of the weaknesses of our [choice] movement is its dependency on the 'old guard', but this event was almost entirely organized by the newer, younger activists of OCAC.

Something I thought was unfortunate was that, just as so many other things, the event was held downtown and was attended primarily by the downtown feminist community. The outcome of the Tribunals, i.e. the sentencing of the abortion law, was as expected. It was after all 'our' audience. I wonder how effective it would have been if it had happened outside of downtown Toronto--perhaps in Etobicoke or Scarborough. We may have not had such good attendance but it



could have been a wonderful opportunity to attract new women because it primarily spoke to women's emotions. You did not have to have a feminist analysis to get angry at the law and to want it changed, all you had to do was listen. There was no jargon; one would not have felt intimidated by either the language, political perspective, or analysis one might find at an OCAC meeting.

Tribunals can be a great organizing tool if we deliberately use them to reach new people. The difficulty is, of course, chronic lack of time and energy, but hopefully many of us have been energized sufficiently through the experience of these Tribunals to move us successfully beyond our circle.

In spite of those limitations, though, the Tribunals showed the power and courage of women and that the fight is not over. We are clearly revitalizing and becoming stronger. Whether they will have any affect in changing the law, or whether they will pull more new women into the movement, remains to be seen.

\*\*\*

Cayenne welcomes the appearance of Pandora, a new publication intended to provide women in Nova Scotia with an alternative to the mainstream media. The issues we have seen cover a broad range of topics from violence against women to fabric art as an expression of women's experience. Subscriptions are \$5 yearly (four issues), with a sliding scale. Write: Pandora Publishing Assoc., 5533 Black Street, Halifax, N.S. B3K 1P7; tel: (902) 455-1287.

## Growing Pains

Kate Boyle  
Toronto

*Editors' note: This letter appeared in the newsletter of the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare. We are reprinting an excerpted version due to space constraints. Mini Skool is a private, for-profit Alabama-based chain of daycare centres. Workers in three Mini Skool centres in Metro Toronto and one in Hamilton unionized and went out on strike during the winter of '81-82 for better wages, benefits, working conditions, and quality of care issues. The strikers offered alternate care to parents and this led to the permanent establishment of a nonprofit community based daycare centre called Paradise Corner Children's Centre in Hamilton. Kate Boyle is both a parent and a worker at the Centre.*



It has been over three years since our school opened and many times since then I have tried to package my thoughts and feelings about the strike. The best I could come up with was a dry chronology of the events. When I was hired by Mini Skool in September 1977 I was making \$2.95 an hour, just short of what I had been earning at my previous summer job. When I left Mini Skool in October 1982, I was earning \$4.44. After moving from an assistant's position during my first year (with my B.Ed. degree I was assistant to another teacher, a college graduate who had a year of experience) to a room supervisor and after five years, the pay was still awfully poor. I am now earning just over \$7.00 an hour since October 1985.

Yes the pay is better. But it's more than that. At Mini Skool we were just vehicles by which the corporate heads could get rich. At Paradise Corner, there is no "profit". The parents pay fees to cover staff wages, supplies, food, building expenses and rent. This is the basic difference. We're still not making great money but we know that when the fees go up we get a raise and that, even more important, in order to get a raise, we have to raise fees. This produces much less resentment and frustration. And we were resentful and frustrated at being cogs in some nameless, faceless wheel. We didn't have control. And this is where it starts to get complicated. Now we do have control, and the decision-making, oil bills, rent cheques and the responsibility and fear that this brings. If I were a better writer I'd love to write a book about us and call it "Growing Pains" and it wouldn't be about the little darlings we care for each day.

All this began with a hush-hush meeting at a staff member's apartment where we were recruited by OPSEU. No

one dreamed of where this would eventually take us. After certification came our first contract. When time came to renegotiate, a settlement could not be reached and we went out on strike--for 4 1/2 months--during which time we cared for the children in our homes. We scouted around for a new location and opened the Paradise Corner Children's Centre in February, 1983.

We were personally tested beyond our expectations of ourselves. First, the decision to join a labour union--we were a bunch of wide-eyed college grads and housewives--extremely naive about labour unions, women's rights or our own potential. Then, the decision to strike--none of us had the least idea



Off Our Backs/USA

of what it was all about. We were a group more concerned about diaper changing than political change, about playground quarrels than labour disputes and about "lining up" than "picket lines". It was an overwhelming vote--over 80% in favour. Further, caring for the kids in our homes, in the winter, isolated from each other, with little in the way of equipment. I wonder how many of us would have done it if we'd known what we know now--long days (some from 7:00 a.m. 'til 6:00 p.m.), no breaks and no clear end in sight. And then the preparations at the new school. As I was at the time the mom of a very tiny baby (a preemie actually), I was only

peripherally involved. But I know, even after putting in the long days with the children, there was exhausting painting, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, etc., to be done by the staff and anyone else we could recruit. My husband, incidentally, designed the logo and had our letterhead printed. Looking back from a position of reasonable security, I'm amazed that not only do we have a terrific school but that we survived!

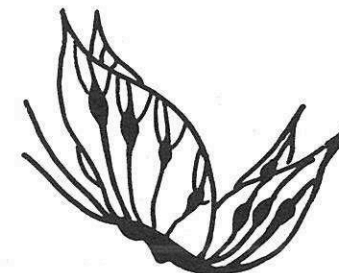
Onto the present. The control we have gained has been a double-edged sword. It is psychologically important to employees to feel that they count, that they make a difference. We have that now as we didn't at Mini Skool. But there is another side. The

resolve, determination, strength which were so necessary to get through all the aforementioned stages has been hard to lose. It's like a beast unleashed. Before the strike all our energy was adversarial, "us and them", but not consequential, sort of like punching a pillow. During the strike our sense of "us and them" continued and deepened and we had to be in "fighting spirit" to go on with our tiny campaign. But that fighting spirit has led to some mighty big battles in the running of our school. I don't know if a single person there would agree with my observations. I don't have a good grasp of how this experience has changed me, I only know that it has. I

have mixed feelings about this as well. On the one hand, I don't ever want to be the mouse I was before all this; yet on the other, I don't like the hard-nosed person I've become either. I guess the pendulum-swing was pretty extreme and the ideal is somewhere in the middle. I don't think we've reached it yet. Frankly, being so busy caring for kids, looking after my own family (now two children) and learning how to run a school (I'm a former board member) leaves little time for personal reflection.

Is it better now? Yes it's better, but it ain't easier. I never look back. It was something we had to do. I'm proud of the guts we showed, I'm proud of the care I gave the kids

at Mini Skool, during the strike and the ones I presently look after. But I do miss the nice new building we had (built in 1977 when I was hired), I miss the nameless faceless adversary we had, easy to blame for all our troubles, and I miss the simplicity (innocence) we lost. Happy? Well, no regrets anyway.



## Feds Study Daycare Yet Again!

Sue Colley  
Toronto

The most stunning event of International Women's Day 1986 for those of us who have been organizing the fight for universal daycare since 1970 was the front page headline in the *Toronto Star* that shouted "Give Everyone Free Daycare Ottawa Urged". For the first time since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (also an event of 1970), a government task force had come out in full support of the need for free universal daycare in Canada!

Unfortunately, the task force in question--known for its chairperson as the Katie Cooke Task Force--has no official status as a policy-making body, and no power to effect the exciting recommendations it has made. It was set up by the previous Liberal

government, and became something of a lame duck when the Liberals were thrown out of power. Its deliberations were not actually cancelled but its report has been effectively shelved, and indeed it has been superseded by the Tories' own Parliamentary Special Committee on Daycare, a body which is conservative in every sense of the word. Its clear intent is to go to extreme lengths to pull out "real" women to its hearings, to reinforce its pre-existing policy stand against universal daycare and in favour of keeping women in the home.

The Katie Cooke Task Force lived but a short life in the mainstream media, and it is now up to us to resurrect it and fight for its recommendations at every opportunity. Some of its conclusions and recommendations will be familiar to *Cayenne* readers, but as a total



statement it is extremely useful. Its highlights are as follows.

(1) Childcare is the issue of the 1980s. Childcare in Canada is in a state of crisis and requires federal intervention and leadership for resolution.

(2) Over the past two decades families have undergone a significant transformation. In 1961, over two-thirds of Canadian families consisted of breadwinner-husband and homemaker-wife. In 1981, only 16% of families fit this pattern. There are more single parent families (11% in 1981 and only 6% in 1961), and most of these are headed by women who are poor. More mothers are now in the paid labour force (59% in 1984 compared with 20% in 1970), which creates greater demands for childcare services.

(3) Parental leave which enables both mothers and fathers of very young children to combine work and family responsibilities is a very important part of childcare policy. However, current provisions for parental leave in Canada prevent men and women from fully meeting their work and family responsibilities.

(4) In a study of the parental leave policies of 12 countries, the Task Force found that most countries offer a period of extended parental leave following the initial period of maternity leave. Except for the UK and the USA, all countries studied provide leave enabling mothers and fathers to care for sick children, and several countries provide additional leave benefits to allow parents to care for their children.

(5) Licensed childcare provides for only 9% of children requiring care in Canada. The remaining 91% are cared for in unlicensed situations of unknown quality, or else they care for themselves. It is estimated that between

40-50% of school-aged children look after themselves.

(6) Childcare should not be a babysitting or remedial service but should be a service that responds to the development needs of children. As all families need access to some form of childcare, a universal system of quality daycare should be available to all. Canada's lack of a quality, universal daycare system creates problems for everyone, but some groups are particularly poorly served: infants, rural children, handicapped and disabled children, native children, children of seasonal, part-time and shift workers, and children of the unemployed.

(7) Parents usually prefer licensed care, but few parents are receiving the type of care they prefer for their children.

(8) Providers of childcare are generally caring and dedicated people. However, in relation to the service they provide, they are paid and respected very little.

(9) All provinces (and the Yukon) have licensing standards and procedures. These standards could form the basis of a system of quality care.



(10) An inadequate system of care is costly: [a] to children in terms of damaged lives and unrealized potential; [b] to parents in terms of stress related illnesses, lost employment opportunities and consequently, poverty in old age; [c] to employers in terms of absenteeism, work interruption, high employee turnover and low productivity; and [d] to society in terms of necessary remedial services in the medical, educational and social service and justice systems.

(11) The financing of childcare in Canada places good quality licensed services beyond the means of most parents unless their incomes are so low that they qualify for subsidy (and can find subsidized places), or their incomes are high enough to pay the full cost.

(12) According to a survey done for the Task Force, childcare fees for children under age 6 range between \$3000 and \$4000 annually. For the 6 to 12 year-olds, the cost is between \$2200 and \$2500. The highest fees are in Ontario, British Columbia and Saskatchewan. The lowest are in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Fees in the unlicensed market are not significantly different from those in

the licensed market.

(13) In the 1984-5 fiscal year, government spending on childcare in Canada amounted to \$542 million, or just \$116 for each Canadian child under 13.

(14) Childcare subsidies cost-shared by federal and provincial governments are available to less than 20% of low-income families. Eligibility requirements for subsidized care vary from province to province. In addition, there are long waiting lists for subsidized spaces in many areas, and in some areas there is no subsidized care at all.

(15) The Income Tax Act provides for a childcare expense deduction of \$2000 per child, up to a maximum of \$8000. For a number of reasons, this deduction is being used by fewer than half of the parents eligible to claim it.

(16) In studying the childcare policies and practices in 11 other countries, the Task Force found that in every country but the USA, a greater proportion of the cost of childcare is borne by government than it is in Canada. One notable feature of most European systems is that state-sponsored and -financed kindergarten commences at age 2 or 3.

(17) A competent, comprehensive, accessible system of quality licensed care offered on a non-profit basis is needed to solve the current childcare crisis. The system should be multi-faceted, offering a range of services and catering to a variety of needs of children and families. It should be developed with the collaboration of both levels of government, childcare providers and users of the service.

(18) A system of parental leave is needed to eliminate the present inequities, enrich the current system of paid leave, and extend benefits to fathers as well as mothers.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

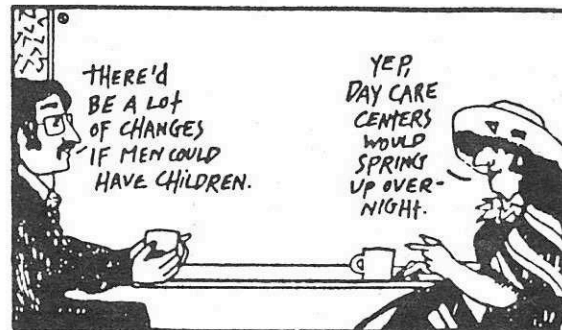
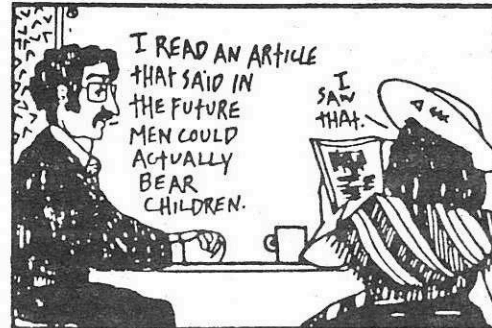
1. A system of complementary childcare and parental leave which is as comprehensive, accessible, and competent as the health care and education systems should be developed.
2. The goal of the childcare system should be to provide services that are accessible to all children needing them, without regard to parental income or work status.
3. The federal government should take the lead role by implementing short- and medium-term fiscal measures which would stabilize the current licensed care system, increase the availability of spaces and improve the affordability of licensed childcare.
4. In the long term, the Task Force perceives the need for a system of licensed childcare which is fully funded out of public revenues. This should be done following a study of the impact of short and medium-term measures.

Related recommendations are:

- i) appointment of a Minister for Children;
- ii) expanded research and academic initiatives;
- iii) increased training for childcare staff through a "National Training Program";
- iv) expansion of the role of the National Daycare Information Centre at the Department of Health and Welfare.

*Editor's Note: The next issue of Cayenne will include an assessment of the directions being taken by the Tory Commons Sub-Committee on daycare, and a strategy discussion on how to prevent its policy directions from taking over the mainstream of debate and planning.*

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## Contraception and Control

Eleanor J. Bader

Reprinted from *The Guardian Supplement*, Spring 1986.

If having children is an act of faith, a hopeful assertion that there will be a future not only for oneself, but for one's children, then South Africa is a place of optimism. The government and influential Dutch Reformed Church, however, fear the consequences of the high birth rate among blacks and officially sanction and reward the white population's effort to breed.

South Africa's population is 30 million. The Republic's 22.7 million blacks comprise 70% of the population. There are 4.7 million whites, 2.7 million so-called coloureds and 870,000 Indian people. Many in the government and church feel that increasing the number of whites while reducing the number of blacks, is a way to quell racial unrest and maintain white supremacy.

According to a South African nurse who spoke at Forum '85 in Nairobi, "Wherever there are Africans, be it in urban or rural areas, you find an abundance of family planning clinics. But you don't find similar clinics in the white-only areas since whites are encouraged in every way to have more children." She also cited cash bonuses given to white parents-to-be.

Likewise, Jeanette Mthobi of the African National Congress's (ANC) women's section says, "If one thing is free for black women in South Africa, it is family planning. Every other thing you have to pay for." The major form of birth control, she says, is depo-provera, an injectable



contraceptive that prevents ovulation and makes the uterine lining unsuitable for implantation. A shot of depo, good for three months, is easy to administer. No pelvic exam is required, nor must a medical doctor be present. Unlike other contraceptives, there is no way to withdraw the drug should the woman begin to feel any of its numerous side effects.

Banned in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration (except for the treatment of inoperable, recurrent cancer of the uterus or kidney or where informed consent is obtained) because studies have linked its use to cancer in animals, depo-provera is used in more than 80 countries around the world and is approved by the World Health Organization, the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

It is manufactured by the Upjohn Company, whose spokespeople call depo "close to the ideal contraceptive."

Easy, cheap and profitable to administer, maybe. But ideal? Among depo-provera's documented side effects are irregular, often excessively heavy bleeding; increased risk of cervical cancer; long-term infertility; weight gain, hair loss and acne; increased risk of malignant breast tumours, and increased risk of fetal malformation.

"Illiteracy in South Africa is very high," said Mothobi. "Most of the women who take depo shots don't know what is available. Family planners come with beautiful slides and tell the women the advantages of using contraception and of lowering the birth rate. People get to see slides of well-fed, healthy children. Our people go for such services. They don't always want children, or may want to space children. The disastrous implications of taking depo are unknown to them."

The pill is not widely distributed, explained another South African woman at Nairobi. African women, "branded 'stupid' might skip taking the pill. Depo-provera is publicized and available to them without prior medical examination."

TV advertisements, she says, juxtapose two couples. "The first have the look of success: smart, healthy, with flashy car and good job and two healthy children. The second are poor, shabbily dressed with many haggard-looking undernourished children." Similar messages appear on radio and billboards. Depo-provera (understand--not class struggle) is the way out of poverty, ignorance and squalor.

Family planning is the only health service offered free to black people. In South Africa health services, like most everything else,

are segregated. While there is approximately one doctor for every 330 whites, there is one for every 12,000 Africans. Is it any wonder, then, that infant mortality is officially 80 per 1000 blacks born and 14 per 1000 for whites, that life expectancy is 58.9 for blacks, 72.3 for whites, or that the death rate for infants under the age of one year is 100 per 1000 blacks and 20 per 1000 whites?

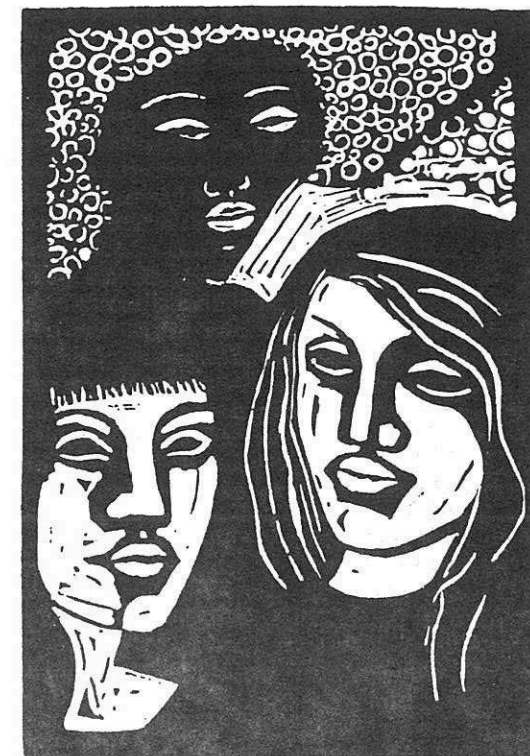
Given these facts, it is no surprise that women of childbearing age continually try to control their fertility, hoping against hope that they will be able to raise healthy and strong children. The apartheid regime, however, has other plans. In 1981, Dr. J. de Beer, then director of the Department of Health and Welfare, predicted a government program of forced population control. "If strong voluntary measures are not introduced and accepted now," he warned, "circumstances will deteriorate to such an extent that a lowering of fertility



would in any case have to follow, whether by compulsory measures from the state, or by a rise in mortality and misery."

Since then, black women throughout South Africa have lined up for "the shot." In some areas, family planning teams visit factories and white-owned farms and administer depo to black female employees. In these areas, said the nurse, "a family planning card is an essential component of the documents a woman presents to her prospective employers when seeking a job in factories or as a domestic worker." The card, she said, is supposed to guarantee the woman will not become pregnant, thus inconveniencing her employer.

The ANC is vehemently opposed not only to the use of depo-provera, but to the wholly racist way family planning is done in South Africa. "The use of contraceptives," says ANC's Mothobi, "should be understood in the context of the apartheid program of abusing the black population of South Africa. We say the women's struggle, whether over the right to reproductive control, or employment, or health care is part of the liberation struggle, the full dismantling of apartheid."



Lucia Venerelli

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Cayenne receives many women's newsletters and magazines from around the world. The international items in each issue have generally been Christina Mills's excerpts (and sometimes translations) of articles thought to be of particular interest to our readers. After the May issue, however, Chris left us to move to Ottawa. If any of our readers would be interested in helping with some of the sifting and selection of international materials, please contact us as soon as possible. It is a fascinating way to keep informed about what women are doing around the world, and would be a great help to this dedicated but tiny collective!

## Midwifery is Catching

by Eleanor Barrington

Judi Stevenson

I have never had a baby, but not very long ago I was present when one was born. From the first pains of labour to the last gasp of birth, I was there. Two things became clear to me that night: birth is one human achievement which truly deserves the adjective "awesome," and no woman should give birth without a midwife by her side.

Eleanor Barrington's book, *Midwifery is Catching* (NC Press, 1985) is dedicated to both these propositions.

Drawn to the fascinating story of the resurgence of midwifery beginning in the sixties, Barrington was single and childless when she began her research, pregnant when she wrote the book, and a mother shortly after the book was offloaded to the publisher. Only after her son was born did she realize that she had written the book "because I was really going to need my midwives. And so would Liam, to have the kind of birth he deserved." Her labour was 24 gruelling hours long, and she had the research evidence to know that she would not likely have been allowed by hospital obstetrics to proceed without surgical intervention to a completely natural birth.

Her perspective on the subject is occasionally mystical, and her tone can be annoyingly reverent, but underneath the hymn to midwifery and birth there is a practical and politically interesting book. It is first of all a guide to choosing a midwife and understanding the role she can play in preparing a woman for birth, supporting

her through the heaven-and-hell experience itself, and backing her up strongly in the difficult post-partum period.

It is also an historical look at the fall and rise of midwifery in Canada, informed by a feminist awareness. Barrington knows that birth is a political event in our culture--an event located in the power struggle between a professionalized medical fraternity and the rest of us for control of our bodies.

That struggle affects men, women, and children--witness the current battle over extra-billing in Ontario. But it affects women most of all, perhaps because the male domination of the profession has dramatically distorted the medical model of the healthy female body: the model of good health is the male body. As Gena Corea wrote in *The Hidden Malpractice* (Harper-Colophon, 1985), after extensive historical research into the effect of the male monopoly of medicine:



Everywoman's Almanac

I found that doctors had changed childbirth from a natural event into a doctor-centered operation ...Gynecologists [I learned] could control women through medical theories that were assumed to be scientific but which were in fact permeated with stereotypes about woman's nature and role. Consider what gynecology books written by men taught about woman: that her hormonal system makes her utterly unlike men in her ambitions and abilities; that menstrual pains often merely reflect her hormonal shortcomings; that she becomes repulsive at menopause; that her sex drive is inferior to man's and relatively unimportant.... Doctors began to sound like warriors to me, and women's bodies like conquered lands. (pp. 15-17)

Starting from this kind of "sympathy" for female biology (undoubtedly less grotesque now, but the foundation in male normalcy remains), it is no wonder that the male-dominated obstetrical profession tends towards a crisis intervention perspective on birth, creates rules and timetables to ensure its orderly occurrence, and offers drugs and surgery in every sincere belief that any sane woman would want the fastest possible end to the messy and painful process of doing something they can't do: give birth.

Erica Jong has written about the zipless fuck, but many obstetricians give every indication that they would like to invent the zippered birth, a procedure for removing babies through a zipper in every woman's abdomen. In fact they have invented it. It's called the caesarian section.

As Barrington writes, midwives in Canada have been practising in a legal



vacuum. Their recognition is a provincial matter, and so far only Newfoundland has had any provision for licensing practitioners. Midwives become an adjunct to the system that is no longer a threat but a necessity, when distant outposts need obstetrical care that city doctors are unwilling to provide.

Ontario has recently announced a task force to draw up a code of appropriate practice and educational requirements for licensing, but it is not at all clear that their provisions will encompass the wide range of services now offered by self-taught and self-regulated midwives.

It is also not clear that the task force will grant them an independent

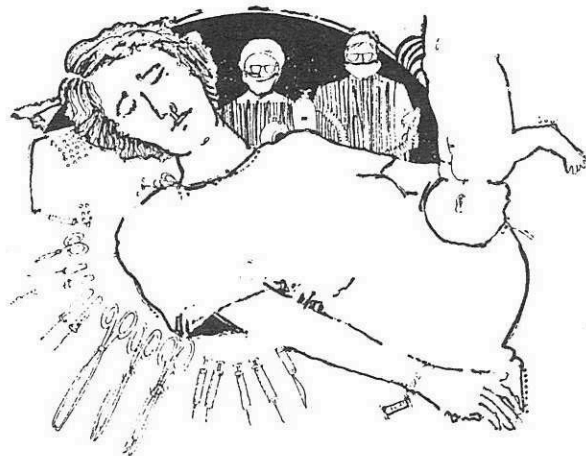
College of Midwifery, as opposed to inserting them in some sort of adjunct status into the College of Nurses. This would be an enormous loss to the women of Ontario, for midwives--unlike nurses--tend to be committed to self-control of the body (within safe medical limits), to non-institutionalized birth, to information as a source of confidence and competence in parents, and to non-intrusive supports for the birth process wherever safety permits.

Midwifery is also a woman-dominated profession, and I think we need it.

Towards the end of her book, Barrington points to the uneasy alliance between feminists and midwifery advocates so far. She points out that the feminism of the early 1970s was intent on "freeing women from the shackles of childbirth and mothering." At that time many feminists were uneasy with the counterculture ideology of most midwives, while many midwives could not embrace a feminism which appeared to reject motherhood.

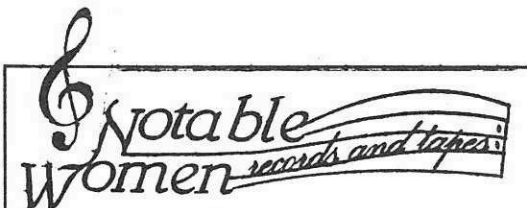
Today that self-hating tendency in the women's movement has been transformed into a more open notion of "choice" about childbearing and childbirth, and in some formulations, a position that women's capacity to procreate the species is a unique part of our power. I believe the latter, as does Barrington.

But Barrington's book, despite occasional lapses into the neo-mystical, is informative and interesting no matter your position on birth. She writes easily, like having a talk over tea, and the book is laced with you-are-there descriptions of births and the ministrations of midwives from all over Canada.



And if you are pregnant in Toronto, do yourself a favour. Call the Midwives' Collective of Toronto (531-3377) to find yourself a friend, an ally and above all, an invaluable medical resource.

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Cayenne readers will be interested to know that a company has been formed to distribute independent recordings by Canadian women. To request a catalogue or suggest artists for inclusion, write: **Notable Women**, 64 Alice Street, Guelph, Ontario, N1E 2Z8. Tel: (519)821-2623.

## LABOUR

### Keeping Canada Clean

Judi Stevenson

According to 1981 statistics, 97,000 Canadian women are employed as cleaners. All over the country, as the wool-suited set herds into the "down" elevators, heading for home and a hot television set, the polyester-smocked set enters the "up" elevators, ready for a long dark night of cleaning up after them.

Many are not unionized, and many of those who are face the constant possibility that building owners will fire or "discipline" them by not renewing the contract of the maintenance company employing them. (When a maintenance company loses a contract, the low bidder replacing it is usually non-union.)

Cadillac Fairview tossed the 300 cleaners of CUPE Local 2295 into a limbo of threats earlier this year. The tactic was precisely to put up for tender the work long done by Modern Building Cleaning, under a collective agreement with CUPE. Union organizer John Susa was forced to suggest a one year pay freeze to "keep the employer competitive".

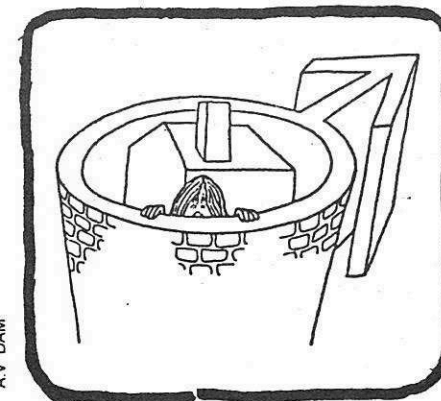
Last year, after the O'Keefe Centre changed maintenance contractors, the cleaning staff readied themselves to take to the streets. But in a surprise happy ending, the new contractor agreed to a three-year labour agreement with the Service Employees International, allowing the long-time employees to keep their jobs after all.

In 1984, there was a bitter hotel workers strike in Toronto, to bring up the wages of women like Olive Beckford, who was raising her family on a weekly take-home wage of \$155.00. Meanwhile the Westin Hotel was charging \$122.00 nightly for a single room.

That same year the mostly Portuguese cleaning staff of First

Canadian Place and other office towers in the portfolio of Federated Building Maintenance Co. went on strike for a small wage increment and sick leave concessions--and won. This March the same workers were given a choice: give up the gains they had won, losing their collective agreement and effectively breaking their union--or lose their jobs. Again it was part of the ploy which involves a change in cleaning contractors.

Premier Peterson intervened in this one, but the loophole in workers' protection still exists: the Ontario Labour Relations Act does not protect collective agreements when there is a change in contractors.



A.V. DAM

Peggy Smith has been a cleaner at the University of Toronto for fifteen years. She is a tall, slim, erect woman, 58 years old, a cleaner for most of the last 28 years, and the mother of seven. Although her job as a member of the unionized cleaning staff at the University of Toronto is not in immediate jeopardy, her working conditions are much like those facing other women (and men) in this low wage sector. The invisibility of the labour, and the particular double-bind situation of women in the workplace, facing gender oppression at home and on the job, are made painfully real in the following interview.

## PEGGY SMITH SPEAKS

Based on an interview by David Rayside of University College, University of Toronto, on International Women's Day, 1985.

I came from England in '46. I married a Canadian. He was in the army over there and returned in '45 when he was demobilized. I came the following year, and within a year I had one child. I stayed home until '58--I had four boys by then.

The doctor said I should get out of the house. There were some things I wanted around the house too, so I figured I would earn some money rather than just spending it--work for one year, and then stay home again. My husband was against it right from the first. He's still one of those who thinks that a woman's place is in the home.

I didn't argue--I just went out and got a job. And cleaning was the only thing available at that time in the evenings, especially part-time. Now there's so much going on, but it's too late to change.

My first job was at Eaton's; I worked there for three years. I had a child in 1961--was laid off at the time. Then I went back to Eaton's in 1964 and stayed 'till 1970. Then they hired outside workers on contract. There are so many companies now which have contracted out. We could have stayed. But we were making \$2.17 an hour at the time, and would have dropped to \$1.10 if we stayed. And until that time we were working five hours a night--that's enough, with families and all. They wanted us to work nine and a half hours a night, six nights a week. No one stayed at all.

So I started with the University in 1970--March--just fifteen years ago.

My first job was at 240 Bloor Street W. When I started we did about the same as now, except for a while I did damp mopping.

It was difficult with a family of seven boys--very difficult, just trying to get everything done. When you have seven boys, about fifty shirts a week and a pair of jeans every day to wash. Lots of ironing--not wash and wear like now. Each day, get up at quarter to seven or seven, put one load of laundry in, get the kids up--two at a time so they could shower. By that time, one lot of laundry would be done. Throw that in the dryer and another load in the washer. Get breakfast, take the kids to school--the younger ones. Do a little shopping on the way back. Then finish off the laundry. Beds, cleaning. Bedrooms cleaned every second day, although with the kids' rooms you'd think it had been a year. And then I would clean outside every day. I'd work up to the last minute, as much as I could. Veranda, kitchen floor, bathroom floor every day. Then I'd get lunch. After that it was almost time to start dinner.

Then I'd go to work, around five. I'd finish work at the University around eleven. Then I'd go home and iron. There was always something that needed doing. I'd get to bed at three or four o'clock. I'd get home tired, but it had to be done. Next day, start all over again.

I got involved in the union in '71. I was nominated as a steward. And I thought, "Nothing to lose, I'll give it a try." I did it for seven or eight years. But then it was taking up too much time. Sometimes it was like knocking your head against a stone wall. One time I filled in a grievance but no one would sign, because of fear I guess. A grievance goes in three stages. When it goes up to the top, staff relations, the person who's

grieving has to be there. Whether it's fear of that, or fear of reprisal, I'm not sure. They won't admit fear. Even the people I work with, they'll say: "I'm not scared of nobody." But when anyone comes to ask about problems with the work there's not one word spoken.

I'm a lead-hand here in the College now. I'm supposed to check on everyone's cleaning, and there's a foreman who's supposed to check over me. I have a full load, though, and don't have time to check. I do the main floor alone, except the offices where I have help. There's lots of vacuuming and sweeping.



The men say that the women have it easier. I think the work the women do is more difficult. We have to check every room every night, and we have a certain fixed amount to do. The men do more general areas. They're supposed to have a certain amount to do, but it doesn't always get done. When you have to cover a certain number of offices, you can't get away with not doing it. They can tell by the waste paper basket, that it hasn't been touched.

It seems women are put upon sometimes. "Oh, let the women do it--the women don't do nothing." There are more job postings now that women can apply for--the parking division (for example). But there are no women caretakers. It's just as though you were dirt.

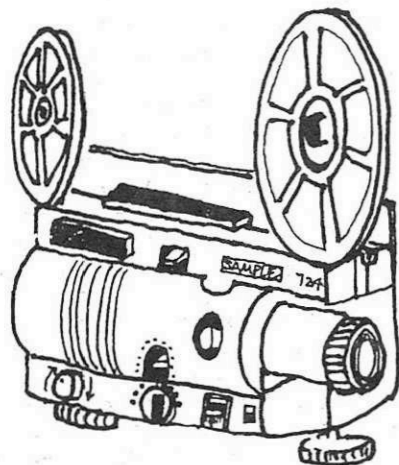
None of the foremen or supervisors are women. There was one lady a few years ago. Since that time, the size of the cleaning staff has declined, and there have only been two supervisory jobs posted. Whether any woman applied for them, I don't know, but there were two men who got them.

Some of the foremen would kid and say, "Oh, you're just a woman." I've found that with the union, too. If you're a woman they don't always want you to speak up. When I was a steward I was the only woman, with maybe ten men. They didn't want to listen to a woman. At negotiations, that was different--you could speak. But at stewards' meetings, you shut right up. You didn't have the support of another woman, so you shut up. I wouldn't do it today, but in those days I did.

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Quel Numero?

What Number?



or The Electronic Sweatshop

A film by Sophie Bissonnette  
16mm or video, colour, 81 minutes,  
Quebec (Canada) 1985.  
Available from DEC Films, 229 College  
Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R4,  
(416)597-0524.

Linda Briskin

A word processing operator is working the night shift in a hospital, isolated in a basement room with walls reflecting sharp white light. After telling us her story, she turns thoughtfully to the camera and says, "I now realize what this job is [really] worth. I'm ready for a change. I am going to double my efforts to get a new job."

Four supermarket cashiers spend a Sunday afternoon writing a song for Bissonnette's film about the tyranny of the new cash registers. They sing it together at work while the camera rolls and the customers look on in amusement and puzzlement. Their singing is charged with a power and a challenge and we wonder why management has allowed it.

Bell telephone operators develop skits about a hellish day at work dealing with rude customers and the merciless monitoring of their work. They laugh uproariously.

A postal worker turns her anger toward the camera and describes the broken promises of the new technology.

These vignettes are part of a new film, "Quel Numero What Number?" by Sophie Bissonnette (co-director of "A Wives' Tale") which reveals the "other side of the computer revolution as told by the women who do not control the new



BARBARA SANFORD

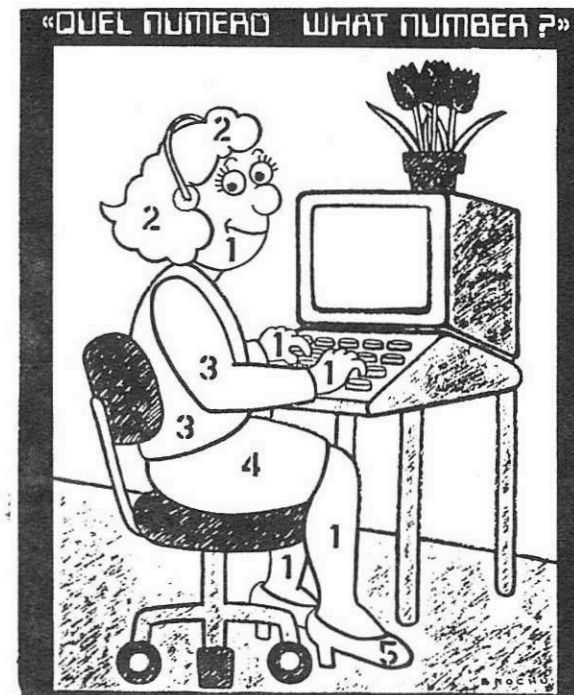
machines." One of the remarkable strengths of this film is the way in which the women themselves participate in creating the film, as they contribute their skits and songs and stories to it. We see the collective process of making the film have a politicizing effect on them. This active participation of the women stands in sharp contrast to their descriptions of powerlessness at work with the new technology.

We see each workplace: the supermarket, the office, the post office, the bell operator's cubicle; we see the letters coming down to be processed--1800 an hour; the calls coming through, as many as 1300 a day. We are confronted with and overwhelmed by the tedium, the loss of control, the dehumanizing overvaluation of the technology (one woman says that her machine is treated better than she is; "It can have a bad day but I can't!"), the speed up and piecework mentality reminiscent of the industrial revolution, the increasing isolation, the fear for their jobs, the electronic monitoring, and the impact that all of these have on their home and family.

One woman sadly acknowledges her inability to shut the door on the workplace after eight hours. She describes her frustrations at taking out her strain on her family and wryly tells us that when she was on strike her family was glad; "I stopped yelling at them."

Many speak of the broken promises of the new technology: more interesting work, not being tied to the typewriter, the possibilities of promotion and less stress, none of which have come to pass.

Despite its strengths in revealing women's experience of the new technology, the film is not unproblematic. Two themes are largely absent: the liberating potential of



technology and the power of collective action to reshape the work experience.

Although the point is made that the technology has "possibilities," this is easy to forget as we are faced with the litany of grim tales of technological battering. These women appear to face the introduction of new technology as isolated individuals, up against the mammoth.

Although many of them are in unions, surprisingly there is no mention of the role of their unions in developing strategies around the introduction and use of new technology. Yet many of their unions have waged fierce battles around these issues (the postal workers and communication workers, in particular).

In fact, collective resistance is not discussed. As a result, our sense of solutions becomes the skits and songs, the camaraderie, the anger, the looking for a new job. Although the women have courage and humour, we are left with an intensely depressing view of the new technology.

Both these criticisms are related to a larger debate about how this film, and to some extent documentary film in general, is conceptualized. To what extent should the filmmaker shape the material to highlight a political strategy, or to what extent should she allow the women's experience to shape the film?

For a political strategy which emphasizes the liberating potential of technology and the need for collective resistance to be a central theme in the film, Bissonnette would have to consciously intervene into the women's experience and introduce these points. This would move her away from the recounting of the women's experience as they see it. The women do not see the new technology as liberating; they do not speak of collective resistance to technological control of their work process and environment. Which kind of film to make--a dilemma not easily resolved.

In her introductory notes to the film Bissonnette says, "Where does hope reside in this film? For me, it lies in the strength, the humour and the desire for change of the women who participate in it." My question is, "Is this enough?"

Part of my desire for an articulated political strategy and vision is related to my experience as a teacher. One of the most disheartening aspects of being a teacher is coming up against the degree to which our ability to envision alternatives and make choices has been damaged. It is part of the reason that I want the film to

present alternatives: I have lost faith that a vision of alternatives emerges easily out of the shared experience of oppression.

The ability to see and believe in alternatives and thereby to think strategically is a learned one. I want us to take every opportunity to participate in this politicizing process; otherwise reality simply reinforces our sense of powerlessness. In the case of this film, it is too easy for the audience to be overwhelmed with the power of the new technology.

My desire for political strategy is legitimate but what is not clear to me is whether it is the responsibility of a filmmaker to articulate such a strategy. Isn't her capturing women's experience in such a powerful way enough of a contribution? Am I asking her to fill a political vacuum?

Perhaps this can only be answered by assessing the effectiveness of the film with an audience. Is "Quel Numero?" experienced as depressing? Or is the revelation of experience as politicizing to the audience as perhaps it was to the women who participated in making the film? Does it encourage women to ask how to change their situation? Does it mobilize women to action? Would the presentation of some alternative view of the technology encourage women to see the possibilities of collective action?

Any views out there about what kind of films work best to politicize and mobilize ?

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## RACISM AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN TORONTO

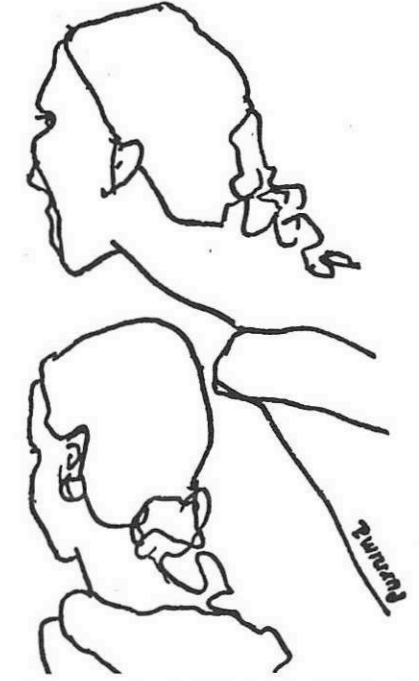
### Cayenne Takes Up the Debate

This issue of Cayenne has been considerably delayed because of the decision taken by the editorial collective to present an extended discussion of the controversy surrounding this year's International Women's Day in Toronto, and to explore its implications--challenging and scary implications--for feminists across the country.

The subject is racism in the women's movement, and it is here in our own frontyards.

This year the March 8 Coalition--a loosely knit and shifting assembly of activist women who traditionally organize the packed day of events that has come to be synonymous with Toronto's IWD--chose Women Say No to Racism from Toronto to South Africa as the theme for the day. It was a bold political move, and something of a breakthrough, for which the organizers are to be congratulated. But it did not build from idea to occasion in a happy and harmonious way. The organizing process, and the day itself, generated a startling amount of tension, conflict, and hostility.

It is of course true that the Coalition has never been trouble-free, and the politics of organizing what is arguably the central event of the women's movement each year has never been simple. (Given the complexity of the women's movement, how could it be?) Women's groups in Toronto have come together to organize International Women's Day for eight years now, and serious tensions have emerged as they struggled to articulate a "collective strategy" that would



respond to, and at the same time, move beyond any single group's special interests.

There were years when trade union groups and trade unionists challenged that their issues were not being taken seriously. We've had debates about whether and how to involve men. We've been divided on how to address lesbian issues in a way that didn't reduce them to "secondary," and on whether or not to take positions on difficult international struggles on which feminists stood on different sides. And we've fought bitterly about how the Coalition should work, and what "leadership" means within it. The list could, and no doubt will, go on.

This is not the first year IWD and the March 8 Coalition was a rather wobbly affair. But one important--and we think positive--difference is that this year's arguments have not remained



entirely behind closed doors, with the majority of Coalition participants only having access to part of the debate and having to function in the midst of all the tension and intrigue. This year there are a series of documents that with luck (and more importantly, with political commitment) could work to carry an important debate forward.

Despite the political differences, International Women's Day itself was in many ways a success, and a memorable event. But because of the political struggle that emerged in the Coalition, IWD was also the centrepiece in a confrontation between feminist women of colour and white feminists about racism in the women's movement.

The charges of racism made by women of colour against their white co-organizers have been very discomfiting to all white activist women, and many have chosen silence as a defence. Cayenne is taking up the issue with some trepidation, but also with conviction. Many friends and colleagues urged us not to enter the debate, not to extend its life by giving it more ink. But neither the issues nor the pain of them will go away by our ignoring them.

All of us share the twin fears of inadvertently revealing ourselves as unconsciously racist, and then of bearing the responsibility for the additional wedge we would be driving into the women's movement. But racism in the women's movement is a serious fact of our lives, and we have to acknowledge it in order to deal with it. If we do not deal with it, it will surely damage the movement beyond repair.

What the Cayenne collective has decided to do is try and present the debate as fully and fairly as we can with limited space, by publishing a series of excerpts from the many statements of purpose, criticism, clarification, and conviction that

accompanied the 1986 IWD organizing process, followed by an article raising some of the issues that need to be thought about and discussed further by white women and women of colour alike, over the months and years to come.

Cayenne has not attempted to "tell the whole story" of IWD 1986; nor can we claim that what follows represents all points of view. That would have been impossible. The waters are too muddied with fierce emotions, with the struggle to hear and speak what is painful, and with the simple passage of time.

But we feel that issues have emerged that are too important to be left unaddressed. They are these: (1) the internalized racism of white women in the women's movement; (2) the implications of women of colour telling white women that we must deal with our racism on our own; (3) the challenge to racism "from Toronto to South Africa" being weakened by a series of local skirmishes among women of colour and white activists about the racism in their midst.

Cayenne believes that the internalized racism of white women in the women's movement is a critical political obligation on all of us. As a result of the political upheaval around IWD, our editorial agenda now includes a more serious commitment to the development of a publishing practice of exposing racism, and to the promotion of a discussion of racism within the women's movement.

Cayenne believes that white women bear fundamental responsibility for dealing with our racism, and that women of colour will sometimes prioritize projects within their own communities. But we believe that the process of change must also include collective work with women of color. Only in our shared experience of working together will the necessary confrontations by women of colour to the deeply ingrained



assumptions of white women raised in a racist society take place. It simply won't work if we are left to do it alone.

Cayenne too believes that there is an important debate to be had around IWD and the choice between reaching out to a wider community of women, or addressing one another as activists. This year that choice got posed around racism, but it is an ongoing tension. (Marie Lorenzo takes this discussion a step further in her article at the end of this section.)

We think the following documentary excerpts and articles provide a useful basis for a debate beyond the specifics of IWD 1986 in Toronto to include other vantage points and involve other voices. We hope you agree.

We've included excerpts from:

- o the original "call" to organize the Coalition;
- o a statement to the Coalition dated February 5 by the Black Women's Collective giving their views on the problems;
- o the newspaper Our Lives produced by the Black Women's Collective to raise awareness about the problems in the way the Coalition was functioning;
- o the Coalition leaflet;
- o the Coalition speech presented at the rally on March 8;
- o two separate statements by white women responding to the accusations of racism made during the Coalition's evaluations.

We start with an impression of the International Women's Day rally by Anne Fourn.

## Impressions of IWD

Anne Fourt

I approached IWD 1986 with interest and curiosity as well as with the customary enthusiasm one of the rare "alternative" holidays always invokes. As a white socialist feminist who had participated in organizing IWD a few years ago, I was interested in seeing how IWD celebrations have continued to evolve. With memories of past political and organizational debates concerning the themes, content, and format reverberating in my head (ghosts of IWDs past), I arrived at Convocation Hall where the day's activities began.

(Before continuing, I should make it clear that at the time, writing about my impressions of the day was the furthest thing from my mind and thus I took no notes and must rely on my somewhat faulty memory.)

I felt there had been many positive changes since I had last been involved in organizing March 8th. The rally seemed more coherent and more political than I had remembered from past years. Instead of a somewhat scattered shopping list of different demands (all of which were valid and important), there was a clear focus on racism.

Links were drawn between the struggle in South Africa and the situation here in Canada. Women of colour spoke of their experiences and struggles within Canadian society and also within the women's movement here in Toronto. The Coalition spokesperson, Sherie Macdonald, emphasized the role of the ruling class in maintaining and propagating racism as well as sexism and underlined the need to struggle against a common enemy.

This IWD celebration showed vividly how women experience racism in diverse forms and how this reality shapes their lives. The class content of the day seemed more explicit than in the past. The conditions working class women of colour face were highlighted.

Some speakers were critical of the lack of interest or involvement shown by feminist activists in issues such as the Japanese Canadians' struggle for recognition and compensation for their internment during World War II, and the lack of active support for struggles involving Southeast Asian women. These criticisms were thought-provoking and challenged each person present to think about racism within our movement and how we can develop a truly anti-racist perspective.

In my mind, it is a sign of strength for our movement that IWD is becoming more than a celebratory moment where we feel our strength and voice our demands; that it is becoming also a moment for reflection where weaknesses and problems can be raised and ideas be challenged. I felt pleased and proud to participate in this day.



## Ad Hoc Committee Proposal to the March 8th Coalition

*Each year in Toronto, a small group of women representing different sectors of the women's movement come together to prepare an initial proposal suggesting the focus for the year's IWD events. In early December, individuals and representatives of different groups hold the first Coalition meeting to decide on the political focus and begin organizing.*

*This year's organizers broke with the tradition of uniting around several main themes by suggesting the time had come to rally around the single theme of NO TO RACISM. The proposal was passed at the first official Coalition meeting in January.*

...It is time for the feminist movement to recognize in a very public way that the struggle against racism is our struggle. We hope to use March 8th, 1986 to make a resounding statement about this....

Because of our consciousness of our oppression as women, we seek to understand and eradicate the roots of all oppression in our society.

- Ever since Sojourner Truth asked: "And ain't I a woman?", the double oppression of women subjected to racism has made even clearer the nature of the oppression of all women. All aspects of sexist oppression are magnified through the glass of racism....

The March 8th Coalition is composed of a broad cross-section of women's organizations and is seen by many as representative of the feminist movement as a whole. For this reason, the Coalition must lead the way in efforts to build the feminist movement on an even broader basis and to bring the issue of racism to the attention of the Coalition's component groups....



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For many years the March 8th Coalition has tried to give attention to the special oppression of Women of Colour and Immigrant Women. At first we dealt with these issues in a separate section of the leaflet and in particular forums or activities. Later, we tried to overcome "tokenism" by referring specifically to the impact on the Women of Colour and Immigrant Women whenever we discussed any feminist issue.

Nevertheless, many women have felt that issues of racism somehow tended to "get lost". The media seldom picked up on them, and people might have attended the March 8th celebrations without having to think about the connections between racist and sexist oppression.

That's why we think it's time to put the issue of racism front and centre.

We propose that the central theme for March 8th be "Women Say No to Racism from Toronto to South Africa"....

## Statement of the Black Women's Collective

*This document was presented to the Coalition February 5, 1986.*

We want to make clear our position as part of the International Women's Day Coalition, and to comment on events which have taken place and their political significance. In the beginning, some of us came to the first meeting of this year's Coalition to investigate the legitimacy of the Coalition in addressing the theme "Women say No to Racism from Toronto to South Africa." We knew the Coalition in past years to be largely white and therefore unfamiliar with the analysis which we as Black feminists would bring to discussions. That analysis is deeply rooted in our history in these Americas as slaves, captured and dragged across the middle passage and sold into bondage for three

hundred years. Our historical memory does not allow us to forget our political, economic, and social relationship with white people particularly since it is a relationship which extends to this day--the relationship of oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, privileged and underclass.

We in this room, Black and white, are the sum total of that history....

(W)e joined this year's Coalition because the issue of racism is pivotal to our lives, and we felt that our political analysis was crucial to the expression and practice of this year's theme.... We recognized that understanding and fighting racism was a complex task for white women and requires education and consciousness-raising which would lead to political



commitment. We could not commit ourselves to doing this work with white women as we need all (our) strength to devote to our day to day struggles as Black women.

But more importantly, it is only white women who can free themselves of racism or commit themselves to anti-racist feminist struggle....

Our vision of women working together is not the vision of reducing us to our similarities but to addressing our contradictions, respecting our political positions and coming to a politics which is mindful of those things....

We work in this Coalition on the principle that it is only we, Black women, who can decide upon issues which concern us, because it is only we who have lived our lives. In simple, practical terms, we are saying, where the route for example has to be chosen, we, as victims of certain institutions and their racist regulations, know these places and their relevance....

It is not our intention to stifle genuine discussion. We cannot, however, subject ourselves to procedures that negate both the theme of the march and our (leadership)

status within it: Nor can we agree to "accepted normal procedures" overriding the relevance of a change in those procedures, overriding our history....

For white women, individual awareness of the problem is the beginning of the process (of understanding racism). Verbalizing the problem is the next step, followed thereafter by collective awareness of the group. Hence our suggestions for closed workshops for white women. Knowledge of the material reality, its covert and overt forms, helps in strategies for self-liberation....

This Coalition (from) our point of view has organized (only) white women over the last ten years. In selecting this theme [anti-racism], perhaps it was not fully aware of the step that it was taking. Simply, it was seeking to organize Black women! Did the Coalition consider how it would have to change in order to do so?... The step of choosing this theme shows interest, shows concern, but it is just a first step. Deeds count, 'cause words come easy.

The Black Women's Collective wants to know what deeds you will do as white women?! Are you with us?

### Sisterhood Must Be Struggled For

*Statement by the Black Women's Collective of Toronto in their newspaper, Our Lives, (Vol.1, No.1, March 1986), which was distributed just prior to International Women's Day.*

In November 1985, some of us heard about the proposal by the ad hoc committee (of the International Women's Day Coalition) that the theme for March 8, 1986, should be "Women say No to Racism from Toronto to South Africa." We attended the first meeting of the IWD Coalition to inspect the terrain and to see if this was a genuine enough effort to come to terms with racism (for us to put our scarce resources of time and energy). Remember, we as Blacks have been called out before, only to find the commitment wanting....

(W)e saw the theme as a genuine and welcome effort on the part of our white sisters to come to terms with racism in the women's movement and to put their labour and their feet where their mouth was on sisterhood. For this we commend them on their courage, because it is not easy to fight against racism. Dealing with racism, however, because of the deep personal and political examination needed, made it extremely difficult even for the most together white feminists. Many had never sat in a room with Black women before and had stereotyped images of Black people, e.g. Blacks are violent. Therefore they were threatened by our presence and afraid to speak. Not used to being with Black women or dealing with racism with Black women present, most kept silent. For us, racism is common knowledge and we looked on the white women's ignorance with mistrust. How could they have access to so much information and the evidence in their own lives and yet overlook what is for us a daily and imperative struggle?....

As early as December we spoke with the white leadership of the Coalition suggesting to them that they, as the most advanced white feminists should set an example by putting a call out to their white sisters explaining what racism was in their lives: how it also helped to oppress white women and why it was a feminist issue. We also warned that without this analysis the ranks of white (Black?) women in the Coalition would dwindle, as would the early courage shown by participating white women. We knew that it would not be easy to deal with racism and we felt that the white leadership should shoulder that responsibility. We were willing to help if those women would take that radical step of being accountable, even compassionate, to their white sisters who had less experience. Our suggestions went unheeded.



We repeatedly suggested internal workshops for white women on racism. There was much balking and hemming and hawing but no movement. We pressed and pushed saying that this had to be a condition of organizing together not just for this day but for the future. After several discussions, the white women agreed (some reluctantly) to accept direction from us. In spite of this, we met with obstacles on issues ranging from voting to the selection of workshops....

One of the issues (of conflict) was white women wanting to vote on what were positions of principle to us. (...) (Even) where Black women (were) clearly the experts, the white feminists still felt that they should have the last word: the vote. Even though that vote would disenfranchise the Black and Native women in the room....

Time-old attitudes of directing and programming what they have never gone through, i.e., racism, made it difficult for most of them to accept fully the directorship of Native, Black or women of colour. The irony of this fact is that white women have perceived this domination quality in white men, be it in an organization, corporation, or a home, but they did not draw parallels....

Because we had been thought of as tokens and not full participants, white women wanted us to participate in their workshop on racism so they could release their guilt. The assumption here was that we would be content with the tokenism of guilt instead of a full grasp of what racist attitudes mean in real terms, even in the Coalition itself. Another assumption was that the theme on racism was a March 8th "event" rather than a mode of life for us, and so we should willingly participate in giving entertainment to lighten the day's gloom....



The Black Women's Collective and the Native Women's Resource Centre gave leadership to all aspects of this year's International Women's Day.... Our leadership marked a milestone in the history of IWD (Toronto), the significance of which we in the feminist/womanist movement and the Black Liberation movement will have to examine over the next several months/years.... We know the importance of organizing autonomously as Black women and we also know the importance of uniting with other women, creating a base of sisterhood with others who are disempowered by sexism....

We feel that the contradictions raised at this year's Coalition were/are necessary steps in building that base of sisterhood. There was no going around it, no shilly-shallying about it. It had to be lived in order to be analysed and understood. In other words, **sisterhood must be struggled for.**

*Note: The full text of the statement on March 8th by the Black Women's Collective (Toronto) can be obtained by writing to: Our Lives, P.O. Box 44, Station P, Toronto, M5S 2S6.*

# NO TO RACISM!



**International Women's Day March 8 1986**

*This is excerpted from the Coalition leaflet distributed on "the day." The leaflet and rally speech are the major public statements of the Coalition's politics, and so are always the focus of intense debates.*

The intense and ongoing struggle in South Africa has brought the fight against racism to the attention of the world. But racism begins at home. It begins here with the treatment of Native, Black, Chinese, South Asian and other peoples of colour in Canada and North America.

We do not believe that racism is merely a misunderstanding among people, a question of interpersonal relations or an unchanging part of human nature.

It is, like sexism, an integral part of the political and economic system under which we live. This system uses racism and sexism to divide us and exploit our labour for super profits.

We are shaped by racism. It gives some of us privilege and we reproduce what it teaches us. This has to be fought in our daily lives. But we cannot just educate racism away. Even legal reforms are not enough. We must take racism to its material roots and change the economic and political structures which maintain it....

## RACISM-SEXISM IN THE WORKPLACE

...Racism-sexism is played out from the moment we apply for jobs to the assignment of work categories. We get jobs which they think we are fit for by their racist-sexist standards....

Domestic workers, Black and Filipina, have long waged a struggle against the racist-sexist laws which exploit their labour yet curtail their rights and place their labour and sexuality in the control of white male employers--with white women often playing a complicit role in their exploitation....

## RACISM, REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

...We confront sexism and sexual abuse which are quite specific. Slavery, colonialism, and imperialism witness routine sexual violence to Native, Black Asian and other women of colour as those systems work to exploit, subjugate, and demoralize the people as a whole....

Historically, (we) have been forced to produce children for slavery, or alternately have been the victims of population control programs--as if fewer children among specific races is the answer to poverty, unemployment, and economic exploitation . . .

## WOMEN IN TORONTO SUPPORT THE COURAGEOUS PEOPLE FIGHTING APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA

This year, the Toronto International Women's Day Coalition takes a stand in solidarity with the people's struggle against apartheid in South Africa. We affirm our solidarity with all open and underground political and trade union organizations committed to the creation of a democratic South Africa. Recognizing Nelson Mandela as the true national leader of South Africa, we join in the call for his unconditional release, and that of all political prisoners in South Africa.

We demand that the Canadian government implement a comprehensive program of political, social, and economic sanctions against South Africa....

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## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT RACISM?

- Join the May 24 demonstration against Canada's support for apartheid.
- Boycott South African products.
- Write to the Ontario Ministry of Labour demanding mandatory affirmative action legislation.
- Do not allow your school or other organization to provide a platform for representatives of apartheid.

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*The leaflet also included statements from different groups. The following is from the Native Women's Resource Center.*

## THE NATIVE WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER: WE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM TO ENSURE OUR DAILY SURVIVAL

... Racism is not a new issue in our lives, and as awareness fades after today for those who do not experience its direct effects, our struggle will continue. That is not to say that the fight against racism is the responsibility of women of colour only. Each woman must confront her own internalized racism as well as addressing it in society. It is not enough to simply gain awareness but to take direct action against racism in all its forms....

The genocide that began with the arrival of Europeans continues to this day. Genocide in the form of exploitation and destruction of the earth by the greed of imperialist governments and multinational corporations. Today 90 per cent of all uranium mined is extracted from Indian land, affecting most directly Native women, with cancer rates two times the national average, miscarriage rates three times the national average and birth defects two times the national average.

Genocide is further evidenced by the high percentage of Native women who are sterilized without their knowledge or informed consent. Other women fight for the right to free and safe abortion; we fight for the right to bear children, healthy children....

We believe that as Native women, our lives have been invalidated, our words silenced and our struggle unrecognized. It is ironic that we--whose nations recognize women as the original creative force, the leaders, the decision makers, the teachers--are yet unheard....

We affirm (our) belief in the power of Native women and continue the struggle against the racism that would suppress this belief and practice!

## The Coalition Speech

Between 1500 and 2000 women packed Convocation Hall to attend the IWD rally which included a series of statements and cultural presentations from immigrant women and women of colour, ending with the "Coalition speech," given by Sherie Macdonald.



Thirty years ago December, a Black woman on a bus in Alabama refused to give up her seat to a white person. Her name was Rosa Parkes, and she was the spark that ignited the Civil Rights Movement--a movement that built a tradition. And International Women's Day, as we've been celebrating it here in Toronto, is a part of that tradition. It's a tradition of taking to the streets to fight for justice and our rights.

And now, thirty years later, the March 8th Coalition is calling on all women's organizations to make 1986 another herstorical year--to make it the year when women in Toronto begin to build a new women's movement--a women's movement which will integrate the fight against racism and the fight against sexism, as they are already integrated in the struggles--and in the very lives--of our sisters of colour.

We know that it won't be easy for us to build this movement. It's just like Faith (Nolan) was singing in the song: they've divided and ruled us for so long that it isn't easy to come together. It wasn't even easy for us to get here together today. But we ARE here. We're here to vow that this is only a beginning and that any problems we've had are nothing but the birthing pangs of a new anti-racist women's movement.

And, white women, we're here to say to you that the fight against racism is your fight, too. Because, whether we're talking about fighting racism or sexism, we're talking about changing the very nature of the political and economic system under which we live. And that brings us up against some strong and well-organized enemies.

Have you ever noticed, for example, that the corporations that use women as a reserve pool of labour to be hired last and fired first are the very same corporations that use all people of colour in exactly the same way?

And the corporations that profit from paying women just two-thirds of men's wages--aren't they the very same corporations that profit even more from paying women of colour only about two-thirds of that two-thirds?

And the corporations that create problems such as falling wages and unemployment--aren't they the very same corporations that profit when white workers unfairly blame those problems on women of colour and immigrant women? Saying "No to racism" means identifying our real enemies and fighting them together....

So you see, saying "No to racism" could be expensive for some people. And it's generally the very same people who consider that it's just not cost effective to say "No to sexism" either. We're talking here about our bosses and their government. The enemies of people of colour are the enemies of all women, and they are powerful and well-organized. That's why we're here to say, "White women, we shall never win our struggle against sexism unless we win it as part of a broader and stronger movement which includes not only the participation but the leadership of our sisters of colour...."



International Women's Day  
March 8  
Trevi Stapleton

## (Fairy) Tales

M. Margaret Willyums

When I was a little girl,  
I read about Sleeping Beauty,  
Goldilocks, Snow White,  
Cinderella, Alice in Wonderland,  
and many other little beauties.  
When I heard there was a book  
on a famous Black Beauty, my heart  
sparkled with delight!  
Until I found out that Black Beauty  
was a horse.

## Some White Women's Response

*In the weeks following March 8th, women on the organizing committee met to try and assess the problems and conflicts engendered by the process. Two written statements were prepared by separate groups of white women.*

...In this response we do not speak for all white women in the Coalition, and those who met have many political differences among us. What we share is the recognition that we must increase our consciousness around racism and all its manifestations....

...We feel it was historically and politically important to organize International Women's Day (1986) around the single theme of "No to Racism from

Toronto to South Africa," and that it is the responsibility of white women and the women's movement to fight racism. We accept the need to educate ourselves on racism in order to take up this fight.

We strongly endorse the anti-racist politic that was developed with the leadership of women of colour in the March 8th leaflet. We also support the general perspective that was articulated in the Coalition speech, particularly the need to build a new women's movement with the participation and leadership of South Asian, Native, Black, Chinese and other women of colour. The women's movement must be self-critical of its history in this regard.

The event was publicly a political success, and we have all learned much through this process. Mistakes have been made, and we want to commit ourselves to self-critically working on the development of a truly anti-racist feminism....

*The statement goes on to make 7 suggestions about how to build a more effective working coalition for the future, by strengthening the role of separate caucuses, and more carefully structuring the terms of participation and leadership.*



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## White Feminist Racism in the March 8th Coalition

*This statement was something of a "minority report," written by Joanne Doucette and Dawn Heiden with input from Sharon Stone, all women who were active in the IWD Coalition for 1986 from the beginning. The full text of their statement is available from 122 Galt Avenue, Toronto, M4M 2Z3. This excerpt is reprinted with permission.*

White racism is here in this Coalition. Because white women are in this Coalition. Racism is part of who we are, how we were raised, how we see the world. White women in the March 8th Coalition made mistakes. And because of who we are, those mistakes are racist....

We cannot afford to ignore or smooth over what happened within the March 8th Coalition this year.... We hope that this alternative view of what happened will be heard. We call for a readjustment of power within the March 8th Coalition and feminism as whole. We call for women to inform themselves, and to decide, because to make no decision is to endorse racism....

White women chose the theme "Say No to Racism for Toronto to South Africa" and invited women of colour to join us. This invitation required an examination of our own racism, an examination women of colour demanded we undertake--and report on....

From early on in the planning white women were in reaction to women of colour. Our anxiety about the presence of vocal and strong women of colour within the Coalition and our eagerness to escape the guilt of racism made us respond defensively as if WOMEN OF COLOUR WERE A THREAT. We escaped into fight or flight behaviour....

We did not stop to think that without a thorough acceptance by white feminists of our complicity in racism, our adoption of "Say No to Racism from Toronto to South Africa" would be seen as an attempt to ride on the wave of Third World liberation struggles, borrowing their energy, public support, media attention, and their heroes and martyrs, in what might be reasonably called co-optation....

We said, BUT WE MEANT:

They refuse to educate us about racism.

IT'S THEIR PROBLEM, NOT MINE. IT'S NOT MY PRIORITY. WE DON'T WANT TO BE BOTHERED TO DO THE WORK TO EDUCATE OURSELVES. WHAT DO THESE WOMEN WANT ANYWAY?

They took over the coalition.

MARCH 8TH BELONGS TO US. IT'S OURS. WE STARTED IT AND WE WON'T SHARE IT WITH ANYONE WHO DOESN'T BELONG TO US. AND WE JUST HAPPEN TO BE WHITE.

We don't like the way they took over the Coalition.

WE'VE ALWAYS DONE IT OUR WAY. AND OUR WAY KEEPS POWER IN OUR HANDS. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH, BUT AT LEAST IT'S OURS AND WE INTEND TO HOLD ONTO IT. WE KNOW BEST.

They got mad and walked out.

HOW DARE THEY! WE'RE DOING THIS FOR THEM AND THEY DON'T APPRECIATE US. OUR INTENTIONS WERE GOOD....

These things were said before March 8th, during March 8th and after March 8th. And these things were no doubt thought. And these feelings felt: anger, hurt, guilt, rage, jealousy, resentment and fear....

Feminism is not a white women's preserve. It belongs to all women or none at all. We have to listen to and respect women of colour--Black women, Native women in this country and all indigenous women, Asian women, South Asian women, Latin American women--the majority of women in the world.

We must recognize our differences, not just in word, but in deed. That means change, change in who has power, in who calls the shots. It means a new

structure in the March 8th Coalition. It means changes in communication, outreach and publicity, in meetings, in decision-making, in accountability, in collective responsibility. It has to happen.

We cannot ignore women of colour or invalidate them by claiming that they do not represent other women of colour, much as men invalidate feminists by calling us strident or hysterical, not real women.

It's our job to educate ourselves. Every white woman benefits from racism, even a welfare mother, even a working class woman, even a woman working in women's services, even a feminist academic. We all do. We must educate ourselves....

This issue won't go away....

## Women and Racism in Toronto: Some Anger and Some Hope

Marie Lorenzo  
with input from the collective  
(particular thanks to Judi Stevenson)

This year, for the first time in Toronto's experience of International Women's Day, women of colour and Native women joined with the usual white leadership to organize the large, annual day of events. For the first time at the big rally at Convocation Hall, many women of colour were able to speak directly about their experience of racism. Though the rally was not attended by a significant number of women of colour apart from the organizers and their immediate comrades, there was a certain justice in hundreds of white women gathering to cheer women of colour speaking out their determination to change their lives.

The choice of racism as the focus of this year's IWD was long overdue in the Toronto women's movement, and could only have happened after a long and arduous struggle waged by feminists of colour to get white women to recognize that their oppression revolves at least as much around race as it does around sex. But behind the scenes of this year's success there was the tension of an uneasy leadership, riven by real and imagined racism among the white organizers, and by the public charge by women of colour that the Canadian women's movement has refused to come to terms with its internal racism.

Leaving aside the question of the truth or falsity of the specific charges levelled at the organizers of IWD, it is important that feminists

all over Canada acknowledge the racism that has troubled the women's movement since its earliest days. We must learn to see and struggle with the racism that causes the movement to prioritize abortion rights over the right to have children denied Native women and women of colour through sterilization abuse and the lack of good, accessible health care. Most importantly, we must listen to their experiences for our lives may be so segregated from one another it would be impossible to appreciate other women's oppression on our own, from our position.

Even more difficult, we must confront racism in ourselves as individuals. This is the racism that believes white women are superior in dealing with sexism, the racism that arrogantly assumes immigrant women and women of colour are more "dependent" on men, and need assistance to "see the light."

But for charges of internal racism to have become the central issue of International Women's Day is, I think, a misperception of who the real propagators of racism are: they are not inside the women's movement, but outside in the state and economic structures that shape and limit all our lives. Anger directed inside the women's movement is only appropriate within certain contexts.

It is certainly valid to make the demand that the women's movement take up the issue of racism, for feminism has raised the hopes of many sectors of society by taking their oppression seriously. As Black activist Barbara Smith says in defence of the women's movement in the introduction to Home Girls:

...a movement committed to fighting sexual, racial, economic and heterosexist oppression, not to mention one which opposes imperialism, anti-semitism, the





oppressions visited upon the physically disabled, the old and the young, at the same time that it challenges militarism and nuclear destruction, is the very opposite of narrow.

(Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press: New York, 1983, p.xxix).

This breadth of commitment that Smith speaks of has not come about without ferocious struggles on the part of lesbian women, disabled women, working class women, immigrant, and Third World women to get their multifaceted experience of oppression recognized as a struggle for all women.

But when the understandable anger of women of colour at white women's racism threatens to create unbridgeable chasms between us, it is important that we not be guilted into political silence. The worst thing that could happen to us as socialist feminists is that our guilt about our racism should immobilize us to the extent that we fear engaging in real political discussion and debate, or fear to challenge those with whom we have serious political differences. In the long run, this would only constitute a disservice to our sisters of colour--and to ourselves.

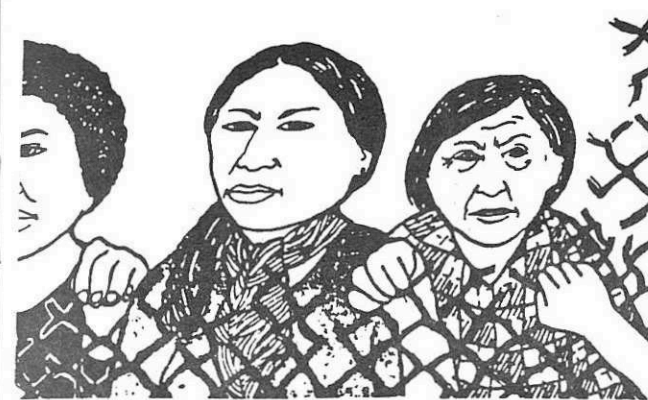
One of the problems that emerged was the relationship between the Black Women's Collective, the Native Women's Resource Centre and the women of colour caucus in the Coalition. The Black Women's Collective and the Native Women's Resource Centre assumed the leadership of the caucus and, as a result, the leadership of the entire Coalition. Other women of colour who disagreed with these two groups were isolated, particularly when, after the first meeting, the women of colour caucus never officially met again. At one of the evaluation meetings that followed IWD, some of those women were



critical of the leadership, stating that the process had alienated other women of colour, particularly those who were not Native or Black.

The fact that the joint leadership of the BWC and the NWRC claimed to speak for all women who are targets of racism created tension between women of colour in the Coalition. Unfortunately, instead of letting them decide the question of representation for themselves, some white women responded to the tensions by taking the opportunity to challenge the leadership of women of colour altogether, making it difficult for women of colour to disagree among themselves in public.

Though it is unclear how it happened, it seems that the organizing process developed into a focus on white women's individual responsibility for racism over other concerns, such as addressing a broader constituency of women of colour in Toronto, particularly working women, and building on the links between racism and exploitation. Certainly it became very important to the women from the Black Women's Collective and the Native Women's Resource Centre to make white women in the movement deal with their individual and collective racism.



As necessary as that may be, this approach moved IWD away from attempts made over the last couple of years by the March 8 Coalition to reach out to working women outside of the women's movement and try to speak to their issues. Although working women's struggles were highlighted by the selection of speakers at this year's rally, the time spent on internal accountability during the planning process did not allow for sufficient outreach to draw in more working women and women of colour as participants.

Which brings me to the question, what do we want International Women's Day to be for? I think International Women's Day can be a great opportunity to raise consciousness and politicize unorganized women, and to make demands on society in the name of all working women. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to do our internal coming to terms in other forums, sometimes together and sometimes apart? Finally, there is the question of separation.

At the final evaluation meeting on May 7, the Native Women's Resource Centre sent a tape explaining their absence, in which they stated that they would not be the source of white women's education about racism, since this would deprive their own community

of their time and energy. There is real accumulated anger here, and it is valid. But a change of attitudes does not happen in a vacuum. It is relational. Without engaging in face-to-face struggles with women of colour, white women will find it almost impossible to change--just as men have found it almost impossible to change except in the crucible of ongoing confrontations with women.

Clean up your act, said women of colour, and that's a fair demand. But racism is a fact of a class-divided society, and as such, it is well beyond the control of any individual. Changing attitudes is not enough. We all know there is a power structure to change. But white women, attempting to fight on all the fronts listed above by Barbara Smith, need to hear that we are not the enemy.

For as women, our greatest source of unity--and therefore of power--is our shared exploitation as paid and unpaid workers in this society. An awareness of that shared oppression, and our potential for power through that unity, is also probably our greatest incentive to confront our racism and work things out.

Of course, I am talking about coalition politics here, politics which are predicated on autonomous organizations of women of colour, Native women, Black women, immigrant women, and all other sectors of the women's movement.

But coalitions are serious political business. As Bernice Johnson Reagon (of Sweet Honey in the Rock) once said, "You don't go into a coalition because you like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you figure you can stay alive." (*Home Girls*, op. cit. p.356-7).

## I-Ain't-No-Racist Blues

Iris JohnsonBrown

Say hey there  
good white sista  
come on sit here on my lap.  
Let me tell you little story,  
let me run it down in rap.  
See I heard you got quite angry,  
heard you got some real bad news,  
heard you went and got all indignant,  
got them I-ain't-no-racist blues.

Hear you said that color don't matter  
that we wimmin all the same,  
that we got to fight oppression  
that tries to bind and keep us tame.  
That we got to fight for jobs  
where we can earn our decent pay  
and stop listening to the boys  
tell us with whom we ought to lay.  
Heard you even got do-down  
and said there'll be no more  
of tryin to separate us into the  
rich, the fair, the poor.  
Now I ain't sayin that you weren't right  
for gettin the right to choose,  
but I think that you still sufferin  
with them I-ain't-no-racist blues.

See I went to one of your meetins  
it was just the other day,  
said yawl wanted the lesbians  
to come and say what they had to say.  
And I was checkin out the audience  
'bout 15 to 20 more,  
and I noticed I'm the only Sista  
to have passed through the door.  
Now I ain't really upset  
I've gotten used to the fact  
that where yawl usually do somethin  
there's but 3 to 4 who's Black.



We would like to encourage responses and exchanges around the issues raised in this section, so for contributions to this debate, our copy deadline will be August 1. If you are interested in responding but need more time, please leave us a message at 416-977-8118, or write us at 229 College St., Ste. 309, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R4.

## REVIEW

### South African Women on the Move

Jane Barret et al. (the Vukani Makhosikazi Collective), *Between the Lines*: Toronto, 1985

Linzi Manicom  
Toronto

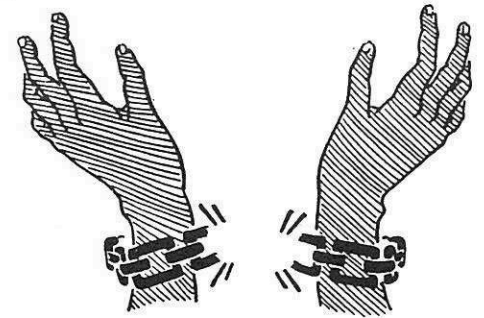
It is one thing to know "the facts" about the oppression of black women in South Africa. All African women have to carry passes and face batteries of restrictions on their movement and residence. Women living in the bantustans are not legally permitted to seek work in the urban areas. The migrant labour system effects and enforces the physical separation of women and men in relationships, and of parents and children. We could go on and on listing the general and specific constraints and regulations that circumscribe and make bitter the lives of black women. But these "facts" have so much more impact, becomes so much more real and powerful, when we see them lived and illustrated in the actual life stories of South African women.

The particular value of *South African Women on the Move* lies in the way it moves us beyond the usual static and sometimes cliched depictions of "women under apartheid." We are able to see how the legal and administrative coordinates of the apartheid system disrupt and distort the everyday lives of black women. We also get a vivid sense of the daily stresses, strivings and struggles that black women confront, and the grit and determination with which they do so.

The book achieves this in two ways. Women in a range of situations

share their perceptions and their stories through extensively quoted interviews. The effect of these accounts is augmented by the strong photographic images that fill the book. The book is not all photos and quotes however. It contains much clearly written information on the contemporary situation of African women in South Africa--on work, health, education, etc. Unfortunately the book is not particularly well-edited, especially for a non-South African readership. Some of the local references remain unclear.

*South African Women on the Move* focuses exclusively on the experience of African women, specifically working class women, as "the most abused by the process of apartheid and capitalism, the women who are at the centre of the struggle for meaningful change," according to the authors. A few of the women who speak in its pages are high profile leaders, but the majority are ordinary working women. Their stories are representative of thousands like them.



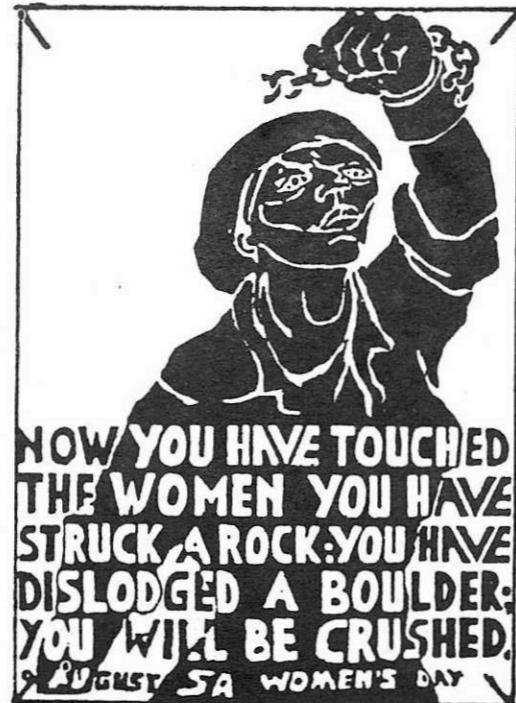
There is comprehensive coverage of the contexts in which black women are living and struggling. We read of women who work under appalling conditions on private factory farms; women who strain to cultivate arid plots in the bantustans; women who face demolition of their precarious squatter settlements; women who lead lonely lives as live-in domestic workers; women who risk their health in unprotected factory work. The daily oppressions that are revealed in their stories may be less dramatic than the brutal repression of township protestors that have filled our TV screens in recent months. But such things as the embargo on women's right to live and work in the cities alongside husbands and lovers, the sexual exploitation of women workers, and the frequent deaths of undernourished children, are as invidious, and insidiously violent.

A major theme in the book is that of women's collective forms of resistance and organization. It does not paint a triumphant, simplistic picture of women's organizations, but one that shares with us the rationalizations of women about the need for organization, and the sobering difficulties that beset their attempts to organize.

Women who become involved in trade unions, in community and women's organizations, face not only persecution and repression at the hands of state forces, vindictiveness and victimization at the hands of employers, but also suspicion, discouragement and violence at the hands of male partners. The women interviewed felt that within the unions and community organizations, their voices tended not to be heard. Women were not represented at the leadership level, and their immediate problems were not adequately attended to. One

of the major views expressed was that women's organizations should set up self-help schemes to ease the practical burdens of women and to reach more women who would not otherwise be attracted to "political" organizations.

There is much material in the sections on organization and on daily family life that is reminiscent of the kinds of debates that have taken place in political movements all over the world and through many years of history. What are the terms of women's involvement in political struggles? What are the appropriate forms of struggle and organization that allow, and indeed, promote, women's active involvement? To what extent are gender issues incorporated in the prevailing characterizations of "the political struggle?"



from HECATE

The authors do not draw out the various views expressed into an explicitly political or theoretical discussion about gender and political organization at this phase in the South African liberation struggle. Nor, I think, do they answer one of the questions which they themselves pose in the introduction, namely, "why do these problems [those faced by women] exist and where did they come from?" Although it is disappointing that there is no explicit treatment of the construction of gender, race and class in the lives of the women who form the subject of the book, it can fairly be argued that to take up these issues more directly would not have been congruent with the stated objective of producing an accessible book, one that "brings out the issues as women experience them".

The authors do emphasize in the preface the importance of developing women's organizations in order to address the specific problems faced by women. While this position is not contentious at a general level, the lesson from other national liberation struggles has been that the existence of women's organizations does not necessarily ensure the more equal participation of women in the struggle, nor that the full range of issues of concern to women will be perceived and addressed as political problems. It is too easy to ghettoize issues constructed as "women's problems." The struggle around such issues comes to be seen as the work of women and their organizations, and as marginal to the male-directed "political" struggle.

On the other hand, as the authors and some of those interviewed point out, women's organizations provide a context in which women can gain experience and confidence in organizing and in which women can strategize



Photo: Workers' Unity

collectively about raising their issues in the general organizations of the liberation movement. It seems that women in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, have experienced the forms of organization of the political opposition to apartheid as sometimes prohibiting their participation. Clearly, only through women's organized strength will those existing (patriarchal) forms of organization be transformed and become truly democratic--that is, in terms of gender too. As some of the women in the book declared, only if women get together to assert their positions, will they be able to make sure that they "don't get left behind in the struggle."

According to the accounts in South African Women on the Move, far from being marginalized, the major contemporary women's organizations have been quite centrally involved in some of the very successful resistance campaigns, such as consumer boycotts and stay-aways. In these, women have

collaborated with labour, community and youth organizations. Women's organizations have also led some of the protest actions against increases in food prices and rents--issues which tend to affect women most immediately but are also of concern to the working class as a whole. But the impression is also given that there are certain issues which are definitely perceived as gender-specific, for women to bear and resolve on their own. Childcare and domestic labour are the most obvious of these. Childcare projects appeared on the agendas of all the women's organizations. Women's sole responsibility for domestic labour on the other hand, though much grumbled about, seemed to be an issue that women dealt with individually, rather than collectively. The reality is that many women in the urban townships do not live with male partners, but "sole-support" their families. Their double burden is not one easily negotiated in the home, but is one that could be considerably ameliorated by better pay and work conditions.

\* \* \*

That this book about black women was written by white women might be seen as contentious by readers here in Canada, particularly in the light of some of the struggles and positions asserted around the anti-racism theme of International Women's Day in Toronto this year. It is important, I would argue, not to project the context and experiences of the Canadian women's movement onto the situation in South Africa which has been quite differently constructed in terms of race, gender and class, historically and culturally. Nor is it correct or useful to invalidate the attempts of authors to "document the experience of women in



Rachel Burger/GPF

South Africa" just because they are white. But it is important for socialist feminists to consider and assess how relations of race, as much as of gender and class, are treated in such widely circulating and important publications as South African Women on the Move.

The "white" authorship of so much of the writing on South African women reflects the consequences of racial capitalism. (I am myself a white South African woman whose writing and academic work has focused on women under the racial and patriarchal capitalist system that is apartheid). White women there, in general, have very privileged access to the means of intellectual production. In this instance (and I would argue in all instances), the issue is not drawn merely in black and white but very clearly involves class questions too. For they are intellectual women, writing about working class women. And the question of the validity--political and "scientific"--of any "outsider" writing about or representing the experience of oppressed women is one that is of critical concern to all socialist feminist researcher/writers.

While the discussion around the development of a feminist and anti-racist research methodology is relatively young, it can be said that certain practices have become widely accepted amongst feminist writers as complying with those objectives. It might be useful to consider South African Women on the Move in terms of these.

"Letting the women speak" through the use of quoted speech from interviews is perhaps the most common form of capturing women's experience. This was the main approach of the authors of South African Women on the Move who add in the introduction that the women they interviewed were only too happy to tell their stories. Angela McRobbie, in her provocative assessment of feminist research strategies ("Between Talk, Text and Action", Feminist Review 12), has pointed to some of the problems with this method. She argues that quoted speech should not be fetishized as necessarily more "pure" than interpretive text, pointing out that all speech is processed and transformed in the course of research and publication. It is also easy to pull out the quotes that affirm our own positions in an uncontradictory way, however unconsciously we may do this.

Another accepted practice, but one that is difficult to implement, is the referring of the writer's account back to the women themselves whose lives are represented, for their approval and validation. It seems that this step was not taken with the manuscript of South African Women on the Move, though the authors expressed a concern that the book accurately reflect the lives of women portrayed in it. A third criterion of validity is one that acknowledges the commitment of feminist and socialist research, and sees writing as more legitimate, where it

arises out of the context and questions of the relevant liberation struggle itself. The Vukani Makhosikazi Collective is, from within a broad socialist feminist perspective, clearly committed to social transformation in South Africa. They wrote the book to "enlighten other South Africans about [women's] problems and their potential as a force within the struggle for real change in South Africa."

The insertion of this lively and readable book about women into the mushrooming body of writing about the South African liberation struggle will, one hopes, militate against the perpetuation of the pervasive gender-blindness of this literature. South African Women on the Move is an essential resource for anyone interested in the liberation struggle in South Africa or in the struggle of women internationally.

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IN CONCERT

JANE SAPP

Singer/piano player  
from Augusta, Georgia



Also appearing, The Mary Ann Shadd Singers

The DEC Bookroom  
Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press  
Participatory Research Group

Saturday, July 26, 1986

8:00 p.m.

Trinity-St. Paul's Centre

427 Bloor Street West

## INTERVIEW

### Maria Jose Alvarez, Nicaragua's Foremost Woman Filmmaker

Marie Lorenzo

*Maria Jose Alvarez was in Toronto last November for a screening of her film Bread and Dignity. She is Nicaragua's foremost woman filmmaker. The following are excerpts from an interview I did with her during her visit, translated from the Spanish.*

ML: When did you become interested in filmmaking?

MJA: Actually, I've always been attracted to film, going to movies, and other graphic arts, but what I'm really academically trained in is photography. I studied photography seriously for about five years. Part of that time I studied in Boston at the Museum School of Fine Arts. They had everything there: filmmaking, drawing, and many other crazy things, you know. And while I was there I did a little experimenting with a video machine. But that's when the insurrection in Nicaragua started and so I asked the school if I could do my independent studies in Nicaragua. And that way I started going to Nicaragua in the summers.

ML: What period would this have been?

MJA: Well, that started in 1977. At first I wasn't very involved. My family was quite bourgeois and removed from reality, and so was I. Then, as a photographer, I became more connected. For instance by going out to the coffee plantations or the cottonfields I started seeing different things. And I got involved with people doing political work and with the Frente



(FSLN--Sandinista National Liberation Front). I went back to Boston then, and decided to take a course in film editing and to study a bit more video.

But in 1978 I returned to Nicaragua for good. And there the creation of what is now the Nicaraguan Film Institute was being organized in response to a need to have a historical memory of our revolution. It was created by many international comrades, including some from Puerto Rico, Colombia, the United States, and then us "Nicas," who didn't know a thing about film, except that it interested us. So we started filming and doing interviews, without really having a sense of how we would use the material.

Then after the triumph, the leadership asked us to make films about the war. That was the first time that we had any notion of how to edit film. We had a lot of help from some young Cubans who were interested in teaching

us. We did some work in Nicaragua and also went to Cuba to learn, to study with them.

The first thing I committed myself to doing was around the literacy campaign. It was decided that I would produce a short. That was what you would call my first screenplay, although really it was just a skeleton structure. (Laughter) I went to Cuba again to study editing and there I met a comrade, Santiago Alvarez. I learned enormously from him, because I was right in his editing room watching him create screenplays. He taught me how to produce screenplays. I'm not saying I learned how to produce them, but he taught me what a screenplay was, visual methodology, and so on, and that's how I started.

I did various shorts, maybe seven, and then I did this documentary, Bread and Dignity (Pan y Dignidad), which is 28 minutes and another short on workers. But then for various reasons I decided to go work on the Atlantic Coast.

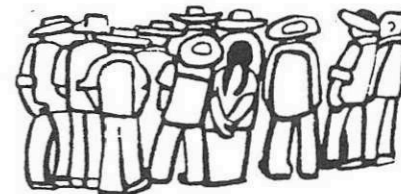
My project there is to develop the means of communication in the region. We are building a local bilingual television station and newspaper.

ML: Tell me about that--it's in Bluefields, isn't it?

MJA: Yes. Bluefields is one of the main cities in the Atlantic Coast. Many ethnic groups live there, mestizos, the Miskito, creoles, and the languages spoken are English and Spanish, about 50-50. Until recently, there were no means of communication at all in the community, no newspapers, no phones. The only thing there was was a very poor quality radio. So the first thing I did when I went there was to write up a proposal for a newspaper,

and with the help of the FSLN got the money.

So I started organizing people: I went to the schools--there weren't any young people already trained or interested in writing or photography. It's too new for them. So I went to the schools and got three or four guys that I would train. I started teaching them photography and we brought in a man who was chief editor of a Nicaraguan newspaper to give us a



course. And so we started a newspaper and started with a run of 700. Now our monthly circulation is 9,000.

ML: Just in the Atlantic Coast?

MJA: Mostly in the Atlantic Coast--although some are sold in Managua because there are many people from the Atlantic Coast that are now living in Managua. And also many foreigners buy it, because the Atlantic Coast is such a controversial issue. We sell it in hotels, in bookstores, kiosks, and so on.

The newspaper has slowly grown and so has the team of people involved in it. It's interesting because it has attracted people that don't want to study, people that are a bit anarchistic, but who have what it takes, you know? They have the potential. Very young people, actually, I'm the oldest person there.

Every two or three months we have a course. If I feel that I can't teach them beyond a certain point, I invite somebody from the Pacific or from outside of the country with more experience. Not long ago we invited a comrade from New York, a professional photographer. And it's incredible how people learn--people who haven't even completed high school, and who are now excellent photographers.

And the incredible thing is that we have always tried not to be an official newspaper. We've lived under a dictatorship for so long that people are afraid of talking about their problems, of criticizing. And so, since at bottom I am an anarchist (laughter)... we decided that the basic line the paper takes is to criticize the things that are not working well. Certainly we do political education and have the ability to see the good that's happening.... But always when something bad happens it affects people more than when something good happens. When something good happens people see it as normal, but when something bad happens, everybody complains.

So we pinch those people in the state who have fallen asleep, whether it be problems with the distribution of food, in education or in transportation. Generally our paper tends to be an organ for the voice of the people. What we want is for it to become the means of popular expression, the voice of the people. Practically speaking, that is the newspaper's objective.

ML: So, what is the objective of the television station you mentioned earlier?

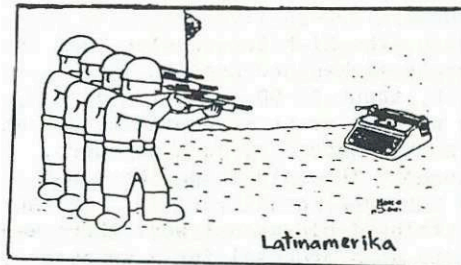
MJA: Then there is the television channel. You see in the beginning, before the triumph, people on the Atlantic Coast did not watch Nicaraguan television. Only television from Costa Rica and Honduras was available, which was quite ideologically damaging, since both of those governments are completely opposed to Nicaragua's development. Like their ideology, their TV programming is quite anti-Sandinista and pro-imperialist, the worst.

ML: Is Costa Rica as bad?

MJA: Yes, Costa Rica is incredible. They have round tables against Nicaragua; they produce propaganda directed at their youth against Nicaragua. For instance, they will say at least their country does not have a National Guard, whereas in Nicaragua we oblige our youth to do military service, All designed to divert us.

So right after the triumph the first thing that was done was to install a microwave receptor on the Atlantic Coast so that they could receive the TV signal from Managua and so they could get telephones.

Having access to national television and being able to call anyone in the country was a big advance. But even so there were problems because we have a very antiquated system of transmission. And thousands of times the program would be



cut off. And the programming that came from Managua wasn't always interesting to the people in the region--first because they speak English, and then secondly, because their reality is totally different: they have other interests. So I wrote up a proposal in order to obtain a local TV station. Since we had a transmitter and a repeater, all we had to do was put in a cassette of our own, and we could have local programming!

Of course we also needed production equipment. So one day when a Cuban delegation was down for a visit we organized ourselves to give them a persuasive pitch. We got them to agree to donate production equipment and then the government agreed to give us editing equipment.

We do local programming and seek out filming that we know will be interesting to people here. Our local programming includes a news broadcast and around three hours a week of local documentary programming. In addition, we look [for material] everywhere: we steal, we copy from other people (even from Costa Rica, because sometimes Costa Rica has some good things...), we editorialize. Many people have beta-max in Managua, and we copy a lot.

ML: And is it the same people you've trained for the newspaper who produce these documentaries

MJA: Exactly. Between the newspaper and the television we are a team of 12 people. And the result has been some real talent, really. There is one guy that I would like to see go and study to be a director; he has a lot of potential. I taught him what I knew, and he is already super-producing.

ML: Are there many women involved in the project?

MJA: In the beginning there was only myself, but now there are three more women involved. At first I encountered thousands of problems: they made war because I was the leader of the team. They hid my shoes, my purse, and they just refused to pay any attention to me, because here I was "bossing" them around. That was the word they used. But then the work itself started commanding respect, and they filed a lot of their rough edges.

And it's because in all of Nicaragua men haven't had a lot of time to think. Right after the triumph, even before, during the insurrection you had women involved in everything, in the range of fire, at the leadership levels, everywhere. And now after the triumph, women's participation was inevitable. So laws are passed against using women's bodies in advertising, legalizing so-called "illegitimate" children, giving women control over their children, the laws of equal nurture.... And women now form a



majority in Nicaragua. Well, all this came down on men like a bomb. And not only on men, but on many women. But as time goes on and women participate things are changing, and there is much ongoing discussion, study groups, seminars, self-criticism sessions, and so on.

And yet some of us are still critical of the fact that the government does not speak from an entirely feminist perspective. We believe that at the leadership level there should be much more discussion than there is, since we even have men at the leadership levels that are macho, and who believe they are correct. But at times the criticism, the discussion is a bit out of its time, because look at us: we're in a war, in an economic war, a political war, an ideological war. In a way there is not enough time to take on all those issues. So feminism in Nicaragua now is to participate in everything and to have an opinion on everything. And that practice gives you strength, you know.

ML: Coming from a bourgeois family as you mentioned, how did you come to be politicized?

MJA: It was an extraordinary thing; you know the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie is quite Christian and in my early teens I was attending a very upper-class private school, but somehow Father Fernando Cardenal came to our school to give us religion classes. He is the most subversive man I've ever met. He taught us much more about Nicaraguan history than religion. He taught us the economic history of the country, why there were rich people and poor people, what it meant to be a nation of producers of cotton and coffee, what

the significance of banks was. He explained about class struggle and who the bourgeoisie was. He told us that we were the bourgeoisie.

Up to then all I'd heard about Sandino was that he was a bandit, I imagined someone with a Mexican sombrero and kerchief. I remember my grandfather telling me about him. And the "official" school version was that after the bandit was killed, that was it, nothing happened, end of story. But Cardenal explained that there was a Sandinista movement in the country, that there were people who lived underground and were organizing.

For me the real shock came when I read the economic history of Nicaragua written by Jaime Wheelock, which even



went so far as to include the names of my grandfathers, my father, my uncles. It made me ask myself, what side was I going to be on? That's when I started having problems with my parents; I was fourteen and so they sent me abroad to finish my studies.

When I came back two years later I became close to Luis Carrion, who is now one of our highest leaders. He was the son of one of my dad's best friends and I studied with him often. One day he disappeared and the rumours started circulating that he had joined the Frente.

When I saw that someone close to me had joined the FSLN, it really made me start to believe, because I believed in him so much. To me he was a super-intelligent, good man. So I started thinking that the Sandinistas can't be bad people and I started to get involved. But I was very afraid of going underground; I was sincerely afraid I would be killed. So I did different kinds of tasks, most of them involving graphic work. That was when I was coming home from Boston in the summers.

ML: Did you ever end up going underground?

MJA: Later yes, but at first I was the perfect kind of person to take advantage of in the sense of the natural disguise my class provided. No one would suspect me of doing clandestine work for the Frente--I had a reputation for being a bit of a princess--and so I was able to carry messages, run errands, and make contacts without suspicion. But around 1978 I had to go underground because several people close to me fell.

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The Latin American Women's Collective is now publishing a bilingual bulletin, Mujeres, covering many issues in the women's and anti-imperialist movements. Write: Latin American Women's Collective 23 Anthony Rd., Apt. 9, Downsview, Ont., M3K 1B1.

# REVIEW

## 28 Up

Directed by Michael Apted

Judi Stevenson

Once-upon-a-time, when I was a child sociology student, I happened upon a chatty book by Peter Berger called "Invitation to Sociology". In it, Berger announced (to my great delight), that one of the prerequisites for becoming a good sociologist was an infinite gossipy interest in other human beings. "Nobility and degradation, power and obscurity, intelligence and folly--these are equally interesting to [the sociologist]...", wrote Berger, and "nothing men [sic] do can be altogether tedious..."

To my regret, I didn't find many sociologists answering to this description, but eventually I did find the kind of infinite interest in human beings Berger was describing, somewhere quite different--in documentary film-makers. And the proof is Michael Apted's wonderful new film, "28 Up".

"28 Up" is something unique in the annals of film. It was begun 21 years ago, when the BBC decided to test out Wordsworth's contention that "the child is father to the man", or, in less sexist terms, that we all show the seeds of our adult selves at a very early age. In 1964, they sent a film crew out into the cities and towns and dales of England to interview seven-year-old children about their lives, their hopes, their expectations for the future, and their beliefs about what would make them happy. They went back to the same children at 14, again at 21, and most recently, when they were 28.

It was imaginative of the producers--and courageous of the subjects--to keep on revealing themselves so openly. Imagine testing your own childhood ideas and ideals against the hard rocks of compromise and disappointment and encroaching adulthood, and then revealing the mismatch to a million judging eyes.

The 14 portraits yielded up to Apted are simply gripping. I cannot imagine being more moved by Celie in

"The Colour Purple" (before Spielberg got hold of her), or by the Baroness von Blixen at her (and my) most romantic, or even by Norma Alejandro--coming to an agonized political consciousness in "The Official Story". Apted has given us the gift of real people's lives, delivered in gigantic close-ups that present their puny/magnificent struggles for us to hold in our hands like the fragile things they are.

The film left me torn between anger and sadness for the dreams laid waste by the racist, sexist, class-divided world which struck all Apted's children between 7 and 28: the pixie child who wanted to be a jockey, now driving a London cab and remembering with glowing eyes the day he raced alongside "the man," Lester Pigott--never mind that he came last and never raced again, he was there; the young black boy from a children's home, now intense father to a tight-knit brood of five and stuck in a packer's job at Wall's, probably never to leave; the earnest upper-class lad who at 7 wanted to bring civilization to "less fortunate" people, today teaching high school in the tough East end of London and living in a council flat light years away from the class privileges of his childhood; the tongue-tied 14-year-old girl who would not look at the camera, hard-eyed and chain-smoking and directionless at 21, smoothed and patted into upper class matronhood by 28; the disturbed and disturbing social misfit, too tender for the world he is forced to endure, defiant and optimistic in a squatter's dump in London at 21, now shorn like a concentration camp survivor and living in a trailer in the North of Scotland, close to Land's End metaphorically as well as in reality.

I laughed and I cried and I loved them, even the ones I didn't like very much. There were certainly some of

those, for it is a determinedly class-conscious film as perhaps could only be made in Britain. The producer chose to include children from elite private schools, who scandalized me and my companions in the audience with their assumptions--and achievements--of privilege.

I have heard the film called sexist. It is not, and I want to vigorously disagree with those who think it is. Granted, the stories told by the men are mostly about their work lives rather than their relationships or emotional lives, and with the women it is the reverse. But this classic imbalance is not the fault of the film-makers but of the real world which still produces men like that and women like that, despite our decades of trying to change it. We move toward a more equal society very, very slowly. In forgetting that, we delude ourselves and become angry with the message-bearer for presenting a message we do not like.

Films can always be remade in the armchair into something "more" than they are on the screen, and it is often the obsession of the critic to point out how it could have been done. I usually find that an insult to the filmmaker, a failure to enter into the project that was in his/her mind. In this case I so much want to congratulate the makers for their project that I am moved to reprint the words of the ads for the film:

"Absolutely enthralling. Better than therapy and much cheaper."

"Hilarious, tragic, revealing, always fascinating, and at times tremendously moving."

"One of the ten best films of 1985."

There is only one problem with what Apted has done. He has made me much too eager for "35 Up"!

### DOONESBURY

by Garry Trudeau



Doonesbury Copyright, 1973, G B Trudeau



## Women's Studies in High School: Going Where?

Catherine Ross  
Toronto

*Editor's note: Catherine Ross teaches "Canadian Woman", a full-credit women's studies course at Toronto's Central High School of Commerce. Approximately 90 students--of varying ethnic backgrounds, mainly the daughters of working-class immigrants--have taken the course for each of its 10 years. Cayenne asked Ross how she approached the teaching of a feminist perspective and how successful she felt she could be.*

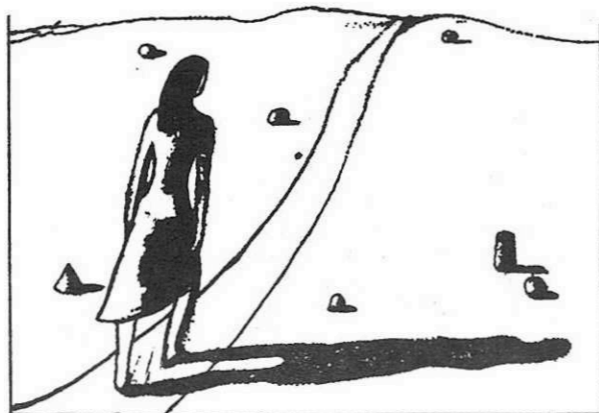
"Does being a feminist mean you have to support abortion?" "But I read Glamour Magazine; I'm not very interested in Ms." "Oh, Miss...we already know what you think of Ronald Reagan." "Well, what was that woman [who was raped] doing dancing in that bar, anyway?"

Such comments from my Grade 12 Women's Studies students aren't actually designed to prove just how difficult it may be "to get the Women's Movement moving again" (Betty Friedan), but on a grey Friday afternoon in February, enthusiasm wanes and I start to wonder, what Movement? going where?

In fact, such comments and questions are the mortar and pestle into which my feminist ideals must be deposited in order to emerge freshly ground and spiced, with the power to activate the tongues and minds of my students. Such ideals, I have discovered, are as subject to petrification as any other. If those of us raised on Germaine Greer and Kate Millett wish feminism to move into the next generation, "the old marching

tunes" to use Friedan's militaristic image from a recent TV interview, may have to be hushed, if not silenced altogether. My students cannot hear them.

This is not to say there is nothing of value young women can learn from the many years of struggle undergone by their predecessors. There is inspiration in the lives of early heroines such as Marguerite Bourgeois, Nellie McClung, Mary Shadd, and many others. I have seen respect and amazement in the eyes of students as they hear their stories. The long lineage unfolds, reaching behind their lives here and now, a broken and beautiful course of courage and vision. Likewise, some are touched by the buried lives of Prairie women: immigrants at the hands of the CPR; les filles du Roi: early habitantes in Quebec; or Native women: quickly married, used and rejected by the first white furtraders. Even more than the individuals, the lives of these groups reveal a pattern of power abused and power denied, which challenges assumptions and beliefs about Canadian society held by most students.



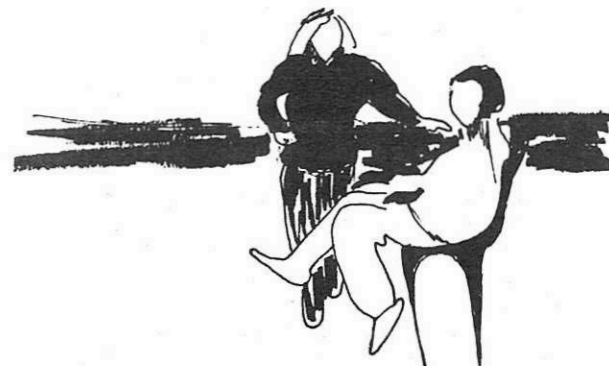
As the lives of women then are examined within a framework which questions assumptions related to power, class, justice and individualism, the lives of women now emerge against a transformed background. As questions are raised about a reality which has previously been thought to be absolute truth, lived experience ceases to be a set of fixed conditions and becomes fluid, vital, diverse. The realities of my female students are exposed and vulnerable to questioning. Such questions almost cannot be left unasked, so glaring are the contradictions, the omissions, the injustices.

"Why do my parents allow my brothers more freedom than me?" "My sister's wedding cost \$18,000. My family saved for years. Is it worth it for one day in your life?" "Why does my aunt always ask me when I am going to get a boyfriend?" "What does the Pope know about having babies, anyway?" "Where I work, the stock boys earn more than the floor clerks. Is that fair?" "My mother has been in this country for 10 years and she can't speak English. Is it her fault?"

After struggling for several years with course content, I am beginning to understand that what I teach is less important than the questions my students ask. The analytical framework becomes a window, coloured and ground by the suffering and struggles of their foremothers, through which 18 year-olds living in downtown Toronto view their histories and their futures from a new vantage point.

A wonderful shift occurs in the tone of the classroom when the subject shifts from textbook or teacher to the lives of the young women within that room. The chalky barrier between my desk and the front row dissolves. Private musings and fantasies, once a

needed escape route, can be actually contributed to the discussion at hand. I have experienced the rewards of such engagement in my classroom as I cease to be just "the teacher" and enter into dialogue with the other women present.



It is at this point in the process of teaching and learning that terminology is needed. Words are powerful when they allow a young woman to articulate experiences of anger, fear, uncertainty, humiliation, isolation, desire. Concepts such as sexism, racism, oppression, socialization, vested interest, patriarchy and misogyny are charged with vitality when used for the first time in context. A woman whose academic self-esteem is generally low, speaks with pride as she realizes the expert on the topic of single parent families is herself! And when newly acquired concepts help her speak with greater confidence of what she has known intimately for years, her interest in learning may blossom, at least for awhile.

I don't want to sound overly exuberant. The ironies of teaching women's studies within a traditional classroom abound: grades must be assigned, permission to leave granted and teacher/student roles maintained.

Such contradictions cut sharply into the possibilities. I struggle constantly with my inability to listen. And my seemingly incessant need to teach.

As an adult woman, having undergone some of the painful experiences common to most of us and having experienced the release and power born of understanding these experiences in the light of feminist analysis rather than personal failure, I long to show "my" students the pathway. In the face of rationalization for and reentrenchment of systemic abuses of women, the demand for an organized female outcry is vital. I want my students to be part of it.

But the naive susceptibility of younger women frightens me. The extent to which they are vulnerable, these working-class daughters, to powerful media images, widespread social mythologies and the seemingly impenetrable complexities of an economic system designed to exploit them, appalls me. Most of these women will not go to university. Most of them will be married by the time they are 21. Many of them will begin their lives as workers in jobs which may soon be unnecessary. And they all have dreams, dreams created for them by some Dreamer, external to their lives but interested in the perpetuation of sweet fantasy.

I long to shake them, show them, strip from them their false dreams. The more I see of their complacency, the harder I want to rub their noses in the evils they ignore. The more passive they are, the more stridently I speak of the work there is to do, the shocks that lie ahead. The approach becomes so ugly to behold in myself, the very incarnation of the values I preach against.

My intentions are noble, like so many paternalistic overseers before me. But such methods belie what Women's Studies, at this level, should be: an opportunity for young women to name their own experience, thereby gaining a power not easily shaken; an opportunity to take more control over what they learn and how they learn it; a safe environment to formulate opinions, using new concepts and vocabulary; an opening to the diversity of experience among women, those within the four walls of the classroom as well as those beyond it.

As a teacher of Women's Studies, I have learned to struggle, not only with content, but with the process of providing these opportunities. I struggle with how to generate questions, and how to resist rushing in at the wrong time with answers. I search for ways to demonstrate that as a feminist I do make judgements based on commitments to particular ideals. But most importantly, I struggle to not lose sight of the ground from which these ideals grow: the pattern of relationships integral to social life.

Feminism, if it is to provide a strong alternative to other analyses, needs to reflect that living is profoundly relational. Fixed ideals do not expose life as a dynamic system. My own way of relating within my classroom must reflect my commitment to this non-stable vision. If not, what has changed? And I may well ask myself, what Movement? going where?



Jewels Graphics

## Women After Marcos

Christina Mills

*Prepared from information in articles in GABRIELA Women's Update, Vol. 2:1, January-March 1986.*

I wish I had been there.

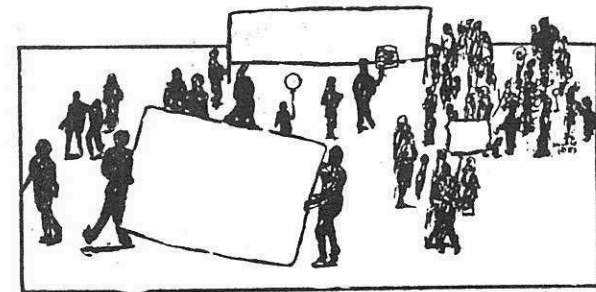
Just imagine the atmosphere when 2000 women rallied in Manila to celebrate their first International Women's Day in twenty years out from under the shadow of the Marcos dictatorship. No tanks, no anti-riot police, no tear gas--just rank upon rank of women dancing, singing, celebrating the people's recent achievement and taking strength from each other for the struggles still to come.

Despite the generalized jubilation following Marcos' flight and Cory Aquino's installation as the first woman president of the Philippines, women were not lulled into thinking all the battles were now won. The dynamic following Aquino's ascent to the presidency has been one of continued work and cautious optimism.

A two-week-long conference, the Women's International Solidarity Affair in the Philippines (WISAP) went ahead despite the upheaval of the four-day "snap revolution" just as delegates were arriving from more than a dozen countries. They gathered to discuss the basic issues facing Filipino women today as well as feminism and issues of concern to women all over the globe. The conference, sponsored by the GABRIELA Women's Coalition, evolved from the experiences and lessons gathered by GABRIELA in its Second Congress last year and in its participation in the NGO Forum in Nairobi.

WISAP was an important step in GABRIELA's work of global networking and systematizing efforts to generate support for the struggle of Filipino women through the various organizations in the women's sector. It was also a chance for Filipino women to learn from the experiences and struggles of women from other countries and express their solidarity with them. Major topics discussed were the women's movement worldwide, women and health, sexual slavery, and the situation of women workers in both the Philippines and internationally.

The highlight and culmination of WISAP was the all-women rally on March 8. Taking as its theme: "A Human Chain for Solidarity of Women Worldwide," the gathering included



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women workers, urban poor, religious activists, and students from all over the country, linking arms with their sisters from other countries to symbolize solidarity with women's struggles worldwide. Members of MARTYR (Mothers and Relatives against Tyranny) acknowledged Corazon Aquino's efforts at political reform and the release of political prisoners, but urged the new government to take action to bring to justice those responsible for the deaths and disappearances under the Marcos regime. Ex-political prisoners

delivered messages of solidarity to the women at the rally but sounded a warning note that not all political prisoners had been released yet.

With WISAP and the events of International Women's Day barely past, the women of GABRIELA then began their Third National Congress, called to define the organization's role under the new Aquino government, chart its general plan of action and reaffirm its basis of unity for the coming year. Judy Taguiwalo, a former political prisoner, spoke in her keynote speech of the importance of the women's mass movement and emphasized that it should be a distinct movement centering on the fight for women's political, economic and social equality. Under the new government, she stressed, GABRIELA



GABRIELA

should rally women's power for full participation in order to achieve full national sovereignty, strengthen democratic processes and promote women's liberation and empowerment, especially at the grassroots level.

The Congress drafted resolutions and other documents to be finalized three months later and approved by the newly elected National Council. The following are some of the highlights:

- Recognition of the leadership of Corazon Aquino and support for her efforts to destroy the vestiges of the dictatorship and her call to strengthen people's organizations at the base.

- The need for a progressive centre for women's mass organizations and the women's movement, emphasizing education, organization and mobilization of women towards a democratic society. The major tasks outlined were consciousness-raising and continuing research and study of the conditions of women.

- A call for an end to economic subjugation and discrimination against women. True economic recovery must be based on correcting the structural defects of a backward economy.

- A call for a stop to political repression and discrimination against women. To generate a significant degree of political freedom, especially for women, the fascist machinery must be fully dismantled and the people's basic freedoms restored. A second condition is the abolition of all forms of foreign intervention, particularly by the U.S. Finally, the elimination of the patriarchal system which has been institutionalized in law and practice.

- A call for a stop to the perpetuation of sexual violence and abuse against women, institutionalized by political repression, the severe economic crisis and patriarchal relations.

- A call for an end to the cultural bondage and alienation of women, stressing that women must continue to challenge and change the structures and institutions which reinforce and condone sexist attitudes and practices to free women from cultural bondage and alienation.

The Congress was an appropriate way to wrap up the activities around International Women's Day because it defined GABRIELA's role under the new

political conditions while underlining the Coalition's intent to continue to promote women's concerns and demands while participating in the general struggle for a thorough democratization of Filipino society. Marcos is gone; there is an elected president, a woman "of good will," but the people of the Philippines still have much to do. And the women of GABRIELA are rolling up their sleeves.

## FILIPINA POET FREED

Christina Mills

One of the political prisoners freed under the new government of Cory Aquino in the Philippines is Mila Aguilar, a 35-year-old poet, teacher, and journalist. Repeated protests by Amnesty International, the Inter-national Commission of Jurists, the European Parliament, and other organizations had been fruitless under the Marcos regime.

Aguilar was arrested in August 1984 and charged with being the chair of the National Democratic Front (a banned united front coalition), and with being a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines. She was ordered released on bail shortly after her arrest, but was then detained under a decree empowering Marcos to hold prisoners for a year without charges. The military ignored a supreme court order in November to file civil charges within thirty days.



Maria Aguilar has published a book of poems called *A Comrade is as Precious as a Rice Seedling, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press: New York, 1984.*

# WESTERNERS! PRAIRIE WOMEN! QUEBECOISES! MARITIMERS!

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We're getting great reviews (Kinesis, CBC's Day Shift)!  
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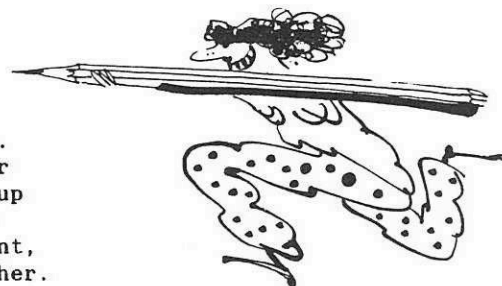


But we're failing at one crucial thing--our talent scouts haven't found you. We want women from all over Canada to be heard on the pages of *Cayenne*. We want you to write for us, think out loud for us, share your thoughts with us.

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The pay is lousy (in fact, there's no pay at all), but it'll make you feel so good inside!

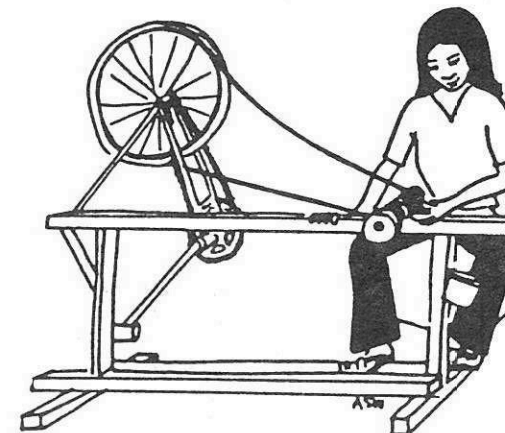
## Vietnamese Women: Their Struggles Continue

*Excerpted from an interview by Karen Gellen in the New York Guardian, March 12, 1986, by Christina Mills.*

"The Women's Union [of Vietnam] has had several different names at various stages of the struggle, but its goal has always been the same: to work for unity and solidarity among women, and to mobilize them to gain their rights."

The speaker is Le Thu, education director of the nine million-member union. In a recent interview with Karen Gellen, Le spoke of the changes in women's position and goals in the decade since the end of the Vietnam

made it necessary to have men in such posts. Many women were anxious to have children and were pleased to be relieved of their civic responsibilities. The number of women in leadership positions in villages, work teams, or cooperatives was lower after the war, but at the same time the number of women achieving more education, especially in scientific or technological fields, was higher. Fifty-four percent of secondary school graduates and 32% of college graduates are women. Women currently make up 46% of the public sector work force and more than 60% of agricultural workers. Sixty-four per cent of light industry



war. Two issues which top the list of priorities for her organization are affirmative action and a nation-wide family planning campaign.

Despite the active involvement of women both militarily and politically during the war, when it was over there was a strong feeling that the physical demands of jobs such as village chairman [sic] and cooperative head

and twenty-nine per cent of heavy industry workers are female.

In response to the lack of representation by women in the Communist Party (only four of the 110 members of the Central Committee are women), a 1984 directive was issued in order to "increase female leadership in managing the state, to continue to fight the idea that men are better than

women and to pressure party officials who are reluctant to train women for leading jobs." The directive stipulates that every unit in the party must have a specific plan for increasing women in leadership.

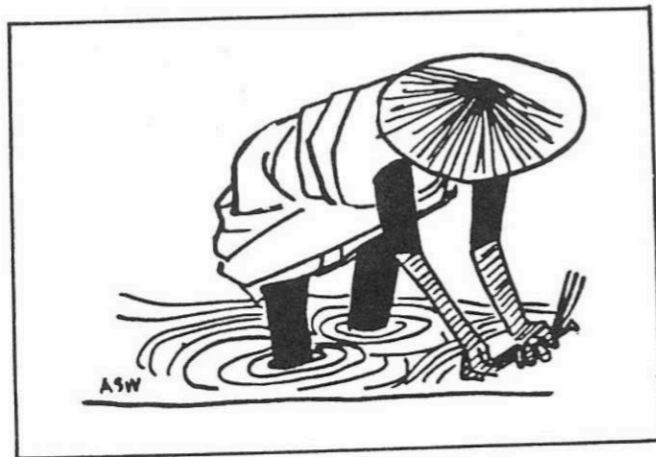
The other top priority for the Women's Union is the campaign to limit the nation's population. Despite the popular postwar desire for a baby boom, the plan has had some limited success in controlling the birth rate: down from 3.2% in 1976 to 2.1% in 1984, but short of the official goal of 1.7%. A major obstacle is the still-prevalent preference for male children, and the feeling that people need children, particularly male children, to care for them in their old age.

Although a mushrooming population is seen as a severe threat to the country's precarious economic development, the campaign relies solely on persuasion and education. Local networks of women are the grassroots activists who discuss the issues with

their neighbours, explaining, for example, how a population explosion is as dangerous as a war for a poor, developing country.

The most common birth control methods are IUDs and condoms, with some use of traditional herbal medicines. Abortion is legal, widely accepted (except by the Catholic Church), and easily available at clinics supported by international aid agencies. In contrast to the practice in the Soviet Union and China however, it is recommended only as a last resort.

\* \* \*



## Permanent Resident Status

Dark tobacco house, western Cuba, a woman stands in her eighty years.  
Retired, she works, giving what's left to a change she's lived from the inside out.  
A maid her lifetime of winters, poor, black, granddaughter of slaves.  
Her dreams produce clean words in the pages of a book.

I want to tell you my story, Dominga says, to leave it for the young so they'll know.  
And she brings her memory down from the needle trade, bouffant recitals, Don Pedro, a photo of her two babies, dead from hunger.  
The Woman Who Picked Up the Flag  
Ponce Massacre, 1938.  
What did she do before? Who was she later?  
Only her book, her only book, explains.

Xuan takes my cold hand, tells me how it was at night, the barracks, telling the soldiers --they were our brothers, you see, they were our lovers, our sons--explaining: no need to fire on your own people.  
Night after night the army moved. Village after village and no death.  
Quang Tri, just south of the 17th parallel, Vietnam, 1974.  
I have told the story of Xuan.  
Now these stories are under attack.

Doris gives us her mother, her streets, prison, struggle, persistent hope.  
Silence by silence. Word by word.  
Nora tells the real story of that March 8th, a day that made a difference for women.  
Dora Maria explains how she trembled at the birth of a child, took a city fearlessly.  
Gives us a freedom that doesn't require survival to call it home.

I bring you these women. Leave the door open.  
They haven't stopped speaking, will not be silenced again.  
They want us to listen but they too are denied adjustment of status in the land of the free. In the home of the brave.

# Dykes to Watch Out For

**DANCIN' FOOL!**

©1986 BY ALISON BECHDEL

SHE MIGHT LOOK NORMAL, BUT STELLA LIVES WITH A HIDDEN DISABILITY. SHE'S AFRAID TO DANCE. HER GIRLFRIEND HAS FINALLY PERSUADED HER TO COME OUT TO THE CLUB LAVENDER, JUST THIS ONCE.

MAYBE I'LL DANCE, MAYBE I WON'T. I'M NOT MAKING ANY PROMISES. I HAVE TO BE IN THE RIGHT MOOD.

RIGHT.

AWRIGHT, AWRIGHT!

I ALWAYS HAVE A ROTTEN TIME HERE.

MAYBE IT'S THE SMOKE.

OR THE LOUD MUSIC AND THE STROBE LIGHTS...

LOOK AT THEM, GYRATING LIKE WILD THINGS...

THEY LOOK LIKE THEY'RE HAVING FUN.

I KNOW IF I TRIED IT, I'D JUST FREEZE UP.

I MUST ADMIT, I DO LIKE THE THRILL OF FIRST ENTERING THE BAR; OF BEING ENVELOPED IN MY CULTURAL HERITAGE; OF BEING A DYKE AMONG DYKES.

UH HUH.

BUT THEN WHAT? THEN YOU DANCE. LOOK, DON'T PRESSURE ME, OK?

HEY, EVE! MAXINE! WELL, LOOK WHO'S HERE! YOU GONNA DANCE TONIGHT, STELLA?

YOU GUYS GO AHEAD. I'LL SIT HERE.

MAYBE IF I JUST TRY MOVING MY BODY TO THE RHYTHM A LITTLE WHILE I SIT HERE...

STELLA! DO YOU FEEL OK, HON? YOU'RE SHAKING!

I WILL NEVER DANCE. EVER.

ALL Lies...

