

WOMEN SAY NO TO RACISM

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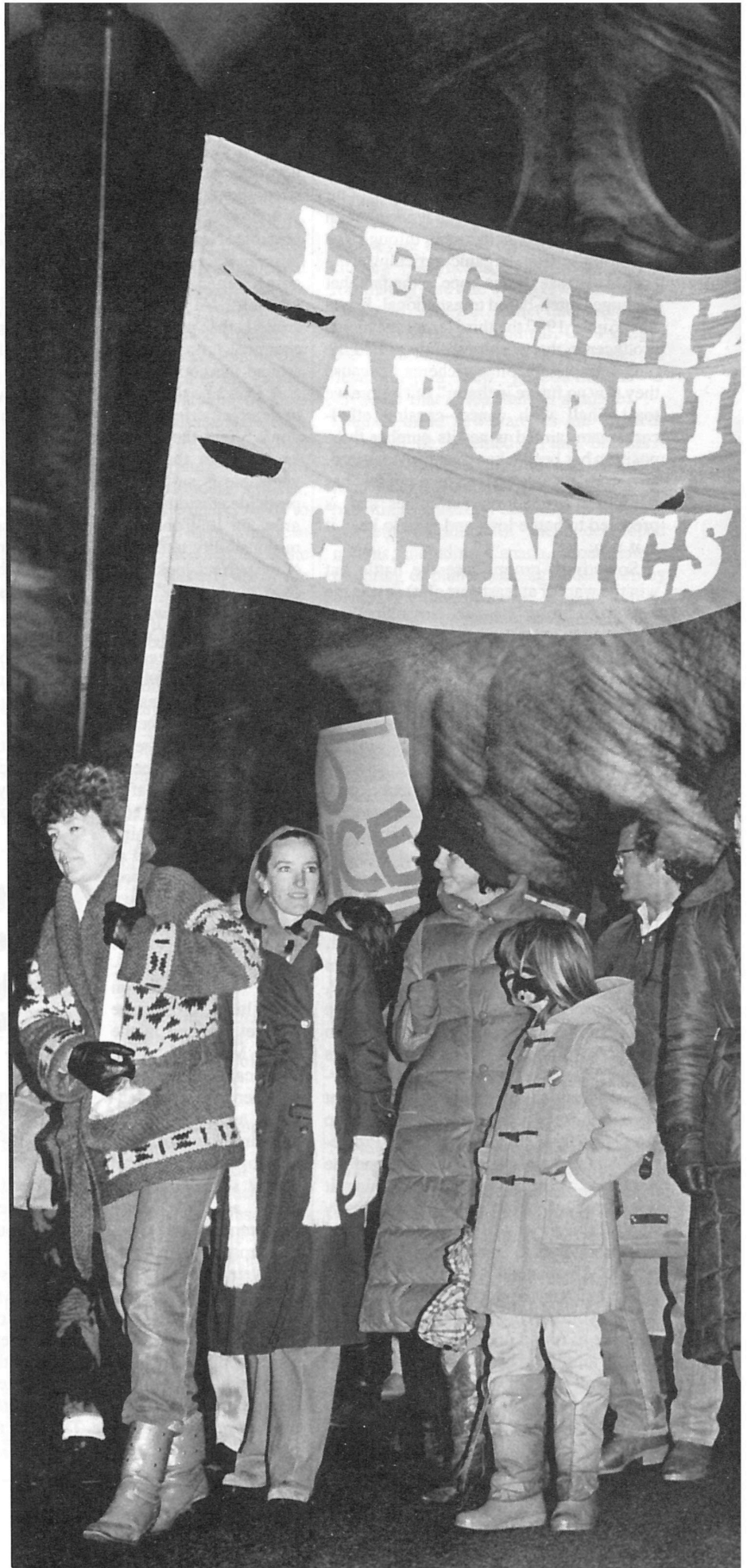


It's taken a long time but working women are making their unions strong.

The union movement has changed a lot in the last 10 years. Public sector unions, newly organized 20 years ago, have firmly taken their place in the movement's mainstream. Health and safety activism has won for us the right to know about toxic substances on the job, and the right to refuse unsafe work. And Canadian unions, once minority members in this country's House of Labour, are today majority partners. These are profound changes.

But the most profound change — and some say Canadian labour hasn't seen anything like it since the growth of industrial unions in the 20s — is the establishment of women workers as a major voice in the trade union movement of the 1980s.

There are now about a million women union members in Canada, double that of a decade earlier. Most unions have active women's committees, and a number have internal affirmative action programs. With women making up nearly half the work force, traditional bread and butter bargaining is now accompanied by issues reflecting a new social conscience: workplace day care, equal pay for work of equal value, reproductive rights, parental leave,





WHAT HAVE WOMEN DONE

including fully paid extended maternity leave, and tough affirmative action designed to promote women into positions of equality with men.

In many notable examples it is quite clear that unions are interested in actively responding to these new challenges. Perhaps no better illustration exists than the Canadian Labour Congress' recently successful organizing of the Commerce bank workers in Toronto. Nevertheless, there are also many examples that show unions are still trying to adjust. Most trade union leaders — 80 per cent by some estimates — are male, as are two-thirds of the membership.

"Men can't lead women's struggles," remarked one union sister in a recent speech. "They can be supportive in every single way, but the real test of a man who supports women's rights is a man who can support women to lead."

In the interests of supporting women's struggles and to mark International Women's Day, March 8, Our Times interviewed three feminists with long histories as trade unionists who have played leading roles in the Ontario Federation of Labour's Women's Committee. Deirdre Gallagher was once the editor of the Steelworkers' national newspaper, *Steelabour*, and responsible for women's affairs in that union, as well as being an active member of the women's committee of the OFL and CLC. She is now on the staff of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Shelley Acheson was for many years the human rights director at the OFL and is today a part-time member of the Workers' Compensation Board appeals tribunal. Frances Lankin is a fulltime tribunal member, but until recently she was the Equal Opportunities Coordinator with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

All through the 1970s, women organized to demand greater equality in wages and working conditions. The women's movement of the 1960s had made many women aware of their right to

independence and control of their own lives. Women joined unions at a rate faster than men. In the middle of the decade the OFL formed its women's committee.

"We just brought activist women together in educational conferences," says Acheson. "We had no materials and were all over the place. I was in the human rights job and was supposed to coordinate, but we had kind of a blank cheque." Because under OFL rules committees must be headed by federation vice-presidents, the committee was first co-chaired by men, Bob Nickerson from the United Autoworkers and Maurice Keck from the Steelworkers, who brought the results of the committee's work back to the federation executive.

"By 1978," says Acheson, "we had a more concrete program, focusing on government legislation and on change inside the movement, too. We brought up collective bargaining issues and raised questions of democracy. More women had more jobs in unions. Deirdre was at Steel, and Frances at OPSEU. The committee met every couple of months or so, about 20 people each time, with a system of alternates. We were really training people in how to work together and it was surprisingly cohesive. In the members' reports, the stories of oppression were all quite similar. People would talk about their personal battles, talk things through. I really miss those meetings."

Lankin says it was the committee's support for actual struggles of working women like the Bell Canada strike that was crucial. "It set the tone of the committee. This was militant action, based on actual stuff." The committee's first major campaign, according to Lankin, was around daycare in the winter of 1980. "It started with a policy paper called *Sharing the Caring*, which became the focus for a province-wide conference attended by a couple of hundred people. We were able to reach outside the union movement to activists in the field, to daycare workers,

“Men can't lead women's struggles”

parents and teachers. We developed a policy paper for the OFL convention with action proposals. We learned about working in a larger movement with a whole range of people who didn't all necessarily agree with each other.”

But these successes in mobilization came up against the deep recession of the 1980s during which real wages and consequently the standard of living had generally been declining, bringing into sharp focus the connection between women's unpaid work in the home and their underpaid work in the labour force. Women's victories in getting jobs and some wage increases were put in jeopardy and with cutbacks in government services, the care of children, the elderly, the disabled and the unemployed appeared ready to fall once again on the shoulders of women, who are still generally considered responsible for this work.

Gallagher remembers this period well. “We were in the midst of feeling incredibly positive about our achievements,” she says, “and then we came up against the reality of the recession. Women were getting laid off because they were the last hired, first fired. This happened at Stelco and in all kinds of areas we saw women losing their jobs. The labour movement was beginning to go on the defensive, and we were having fights and battles around concessions. The expectation was that the women's movement within the labour movement would go on the defensive, too, that we would have to fight just to hang on and everyone was predicting the imminent demise of this fledgling women's movement.

“We felt it just wasn't possible to shunt women out of the work force, that there had been major structural changes, that we were in the workforce and the labour movement to stay, and that we weren't just going to fight a holding battle for rights that we had won. We were going to challenge the government, the employers, and the labour movement for our full rights regardless of the times. We weren't going to allow women to be the scapegoats of the recession. The recession would not be resolved at our cost.”



This was a very difficult time for the committee. According to Acheson, “We were looking at concessions not only in collective bargaining, but internally around which issues should receive the highest priority; whether precious funds should be diverted to “fringe” issues. Once again it was suggested that a separate women's movement was “separatist,” and that in tough times we must all pull together on the key issue — unemployment.

“Hearing these arguments with our newly enlightened minds,” says Acheson, “we could translate these affable and seemingly sensible admonitions into the truth, i.e. that we would work like dogs on a male agenda for decreasing unemployment, which would not recognize the particular economic plight of women, and very likely not even mention women at all, nor attempt to involve them at the grass roots level.

Lankin says the committee decided to hold a weekend think tank. “We would talk this through,” she says. “We began to develop positions, cementing our personal ties. There was a strong sense that we had to take on this issue and fight for our interests — not to let the economic arguments put our concerns on the back burner.”

This was a very heady discussion and some people thought that the committee's desire for an affirmative action program in the middle of the recession was, as Gallagher notes, “Some kind of madness.”

The committee's program was

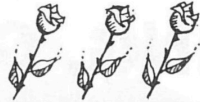
comprehensive. They developed a discussion paper, debated it at a women's conference, and revised it before bringing it to the 1983 federation convention. “We addressed three main areas,” says Gallagher, “the economy, politics and legislative change, and the labour movement. I personally had been an opponent of affirmative action and had put forward in earlier times the concept of equal pay for work of equal value as a more effective way of dealing with women's economic oppression. However, we came to understand and agree that there needed to be programs which compensated for the type of disadvantages women face.

“We did not take the very narrow management approach to affirmative action to get only a few token women into management positions. We developed a holistic approach. We not only needed affirmative action programs which had targets and timetables about getting women into places from which they had been excluded, like Stelco and CN, but we also need equal pay for work of equal value. We had to include the fight for childcare facilities, contract language which included better parental rights, protection against sexual harassment, and later on we added the importance of reproductive rights because that is also a part of the system that puts women at a disadvantage.

The committee went on to win the OFL to this action-oriented proposal. Under the banner Making Up the Difference, it included public regional forums where women came to talk about the discrimination they faced on the job and in their committees. There was legislative lobbying, with a focus on certain kinds of employers. The whole campaign is now coming to a head with Labour Minister Bill Wrye's legislative proposals for affirmative action and pay equity laws.

Within the labour movement there was another set of proposals. The most well-known was changing the OFL leadership body to allow for greater representation of women. Until this occurred the women's committee was still chaired by two men, who represented the committee on the ex-

“Yes, we need bread. And roses, too.”



ecutive. Surprisingly (perhaps), the women have only positive comments about the leadership role played by men like OFL President Cliff Pilkey. Acheson, for example, on the abortion rights issues says “It was really hard for me. I was on both sides of the fence. The turning point was how strong Cliff was. He took this on, he answered nasty letters, and took the phone calls. Then there was the Morgentaler clinic battle and the OFL played an important role in convincing the NDP to support it.”

Lankin makes similar comments regarding the daycare campaign. “OFL leaders were sensitized to that issue. Cliff and Terry (Meagher, former OFL secretary-treasurer) sat in on the forums and heard, first hand, all the horror stories. It opened up a line of communication and converted them to the cause. We now have women on the executive. Then we didn’t and it was hard to bear, but it worked.”

Women workers are not about to back down. They are changing their place at work and in the unions. They are also a powerful force in changing unions themselves. This viewpoint is perhaps most eloquently expressed by Deirdre Gallagher:

“By this time most of us know the shopping list of issues that make up the general movement, we don’t have to be convinced. But we have to know how to fight. There are always things to learn like the effects of tech change or racism, but the common concern is how to organize, how to fight, what are the tactics, how do we plan strategies, how do we build a movement. That is what people are teaching one another.

“We have a social movement perspective on unionism compared to a narrow focus on collective bargaining in the traditional way. The achievement isn’t in better wages for women even though it is way better than it was — that’s not the only issue. We didn’t stop women from losing jobs during the recession, but we built the movement during the recession, which is really important. We broke the bonds of the 50s approach to unionism.

“The women’s movement is teaching,



or re-teaching, the labour movement a lesson. The labour movement couldn’t have been organized if it wasn’t for a social unionist perspective. The story of the UAW, the sit-down strike of the CIO organizing drives, these were part of the social movement. There is a regaining of that spirit from the 1930s and an understanding of what our movement is all about. We look at the whole person. We look at their working life and their existence as an animal on this planet. All of these things belong together. It’s not just our organizing of the OFL Women’s Committee, but the other fights in our community that have an impact on working women because women are seen fighting and we identify with them.

“Immigrant people and people of colour are beginning to organize and to express their rights. They are making us aware and conscious of how we haven’t really addressed racism sufficiently. We have to find out why people think that way. These workers generally come from highly exploited sectors of the economy. There are language barriers, cultural barriers, just even the burden of work, the exploitation, that people are so tired and don’t have any energy, no leisure, no money to go downtown to a meeting, all these combine to exclude people. We have to develop affirmative action measures to open up the labour movement to people in these positions.

“The labour movement became, even though they made tremendous gains in the

50s and 60s economically, an institution that has had tremendous boundaries and walls around it. Now, the social movement of women has influenced the labour movement. It is more open, more recognizing its common cause with different groups in the community.

“But there are still vestiges, powerful vestiges, of the old style unionism. Women who are fighting within the labour movement for change will tell you about the very difficult battles for equality. In the back rooms the men play hard ball. There is still an unwillingness to let women share power, and a fear, a real fear, of sharing power with women. In some ways it is a fear of democracy itself because the push of women within the labour movement has represented a demand for a more democratic labour movement. These people who fear democracy, fear women.

“In many ways I see the struggle of women like the struggle of industrial workers to be recognized by old style craft unions, and to help the labour movement to become more democratic and by so doing, to regain the kind of vital energy it needs. If we don’t have that energy, how can we organize? What is the motive? If you are in a bureaucracy and everyone is making \$80,000 a year, the few people who are laid off won’t bother you very much, and there is no force of energy. But if there is democracy, then the force of energy and vitality to organize and to build the movement is present.”

Or, as Shelley Acheson adds in a final note: “We need to address more fully the integration of personal and work life. How can we expect people to work like robots in a movement with the principles, values and history of the labour movement?”

Yes, we need bread. And roses, too.

This article was edited by Stuart Crombie who is a frequent contributor to Our Times magazine. It was prepared from conversations and from notes on a speech by Deirdre Gallagher to the Conference on Blue Collar Workers and Their Communities.

A DIFFICULT CHOICE

A doctor writes from Morgentaler's clinic

By *Nikki Colodny*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am writing to let you know that one more doctor has joined the staff at the Toronto Morgentaler Clinic. A few weeks ago I began working part time at the clinic, performing abortions.

My first day looked like this — I walked down the laneway where a few anti-choice protestors attempted to block my path. I walked around them silently — angry at their insults. "Why don't they demonstrate at Queen's Park," I asked myself, feeling for the women who are subjected to this harassment daily as they seek a needed medical procedure. I entered the building with no further difficulty.

The Clinic itself is like a haven. The staff members are warm, competent and imbued with a sense of common purpose. The surroundings are home-like with a restful forest-scene wall mural in the waiting room. I enjoy working there.

But why me? And why now?

Why me is a hard one to answer. I feel very privileged to have a skill which allows me, a woman, to be helpful to other women in such a tangible way. I have been a general practitioner in Toronto. In part the answer to "Why me?" began with my experience with patients who wanted abortions. Getting my patients through the hospital committee system in a reasonable amount of time has been unacceptably difficult. All my training taught me the importance of minimizing such delays, and yet I have to practice medicine under a federal law which forces me to deliver substandard medical care to women. The psychological and physical costs of delay are well-documented in medical literature and well-known by any woman who has had to wait for an abortion. The average national delay between the first appointment and the abortion is nine weeks. That gives Canada the second highest middle trimester abortion rate among industrialized nations. This is appalling. This is appalling!

Then there were other patients who called me in desperation because they had

spent days on the phone trying to get an appointment at one of the hospital clinics. One downtown hospital gets 75 calls a day. Out of those 75 calls, six women get appointments. What kind of medical system is it that allows a lottery system like this to operate?

Abortion is not illegal in this country — but it is unavailable unless you are lucky with the lotteries of income, geography, race, age and being in-the-know to get one.

Can you imagine having to play this kind of roulette for a hernia repair or any other medical procedure? I can't.

In order for women to achieve full equality, the fight for women's control of our reproductive and sexual lives must go hand and hand with other struggles like equal pay for work of equal value, universal daycare and other economic rights.

So that's why I'm working at the Morgentaler Clinic. It is clear that the federal abortion law must be challenged and appealed. The rational solution to this medical crisis is the legalization of free-standing clinics providing medically insured abortions. Why now?

I have been an activist in the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) during the past year. We marked the acquittal of Doctors Morgentaler, Smoling and Scott with a celebratory demonstration down Yonge Street. In February 1985 when Cardinal Carter called for anti-choice demonstrations at the clinic, 7,000 pro-choice demonstrators came to show their support for the clinic and for a woman's right to choose abortion. We were getting many calls at the OCAC office asking where Queen's Park was because many who came that day had never been to a demonstration before. We marched to the clinic itself and filled Harbord St. for two blocks. It was glorious to see people's outrage and commitment. They were outraged that a small anti-choice minority would try to impose its views on the majority and they were committed to defending what the pro-

choice struggle has so far won.

In October 1985 the judgement from the first appeal was announced. Not surprisingly this was an anti-woman judgement. The judges declared that Canadian tradition allows a woman to marry and have children, but not to have abortions. Whose traditions are they talking about? — not ours, not women's. Even under illegal and consequently dangerous circumstances, abortion has always been part of women's traditions — as have contraception and midwifery.

Now the state has us tied up in the courts as we wait one year or more to be heard by the Supreme Court. If we lose there, which seems possible at this time, it will mean a re-trial for the doctors. How many jury acquittals will it take before the government acts responsibly?

Tying movements up in the courts is an effort to demobilize them. Well, the pro-choice movement is not about to be demobilized. This year the movement began holding public tribunals from Vancouver to Halifax. Women will put the abortion law on trial. On January 25, the first tribunal was held in Vancouver. B.C. Federation of Labour President Art Kube, BCFL Women's Coordinator Astrid Davidson, and Grace McGuinness were part of the jury which heard powerful testimonies from the west coast. The jury and the capacity crowd rendered a resounding verdict against the law. Other communities will be joining the tribunal campaign over the next few months with the series culminating in a public tribunal in Ottawa this June.

The Toronto Morgentaler Clinic has been open for over a year now. Its staying open depends on the very broad support it receives from the women's movement, trade union movement, church groups, students and the general population. Now, more than ever, your support for the clinic and for the pro-choice movement is crucial.

In Solidarity,
Nikki Colodny, M.D.

Women's Day 86

Unity Against Racism

Toronto's March 8 Coalition, formed to celebrate International Women's Day, is sponsoring a week of activities this month under the banner, "Women Say No to Racism: From Toronto to South Africa." The series of forums, films, workshops, and rallies will focus on women of colour.

"There is a growing consciousness in the women's movement that we need to add to our work a focus not only on global racism, as particularly illustrated by apartheid, but also the racism that still exists here in Toronto," says March 8 spokesperson Laurie Bell. "We want to examine the racism within the women's movement itself, and see how women of colour and white women can work together to build a stronger movement."

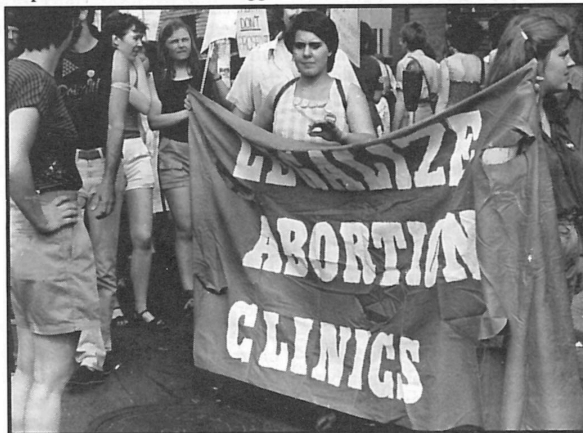
In past years, women of colour have been politically active, but not necessarily in the women's movement, according to a March 8 organizer, Mariana Valverde. "I think now there's definitely a broader definition of what is seen as a women's issue," she says. "Immigrant women have been much more active in the past few years, and though they weren't directly part of the women's movement, they knew they were feminists. Now, though, the major focus is no longer just daycare and abortion, it also incorporates issues like the struggle

against apartheid."

The March 8 Coalition also hopes to change the media's perception of the women's movement. "The media sees the women's movement as essentially white and middle class, so other women don't see it as *their* movement," says Valverde. "It's a problem we're working on, but if we recognize it only on an internal level, we're still left with the problem of image, so we must do more outreach not only to change the public image but also the reality."

Exact times and dates had not been set as we went to press, but the following are planned: March 1, a Choice Tribunal sponsored by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics; March 2, a forum on Racism in the Ontario Government Workplace; March 3, a cultural night with Women Working With Immigrant Women; March 4, an Anti-Racism Work Forum; March 5, a women's discussion on AIDS; March 6, an anti-apartheid rally; March 8, a massive march from Convocation Hall to Jorgenson Hall and a subsequent all-day fair at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute; March 9, an anti-racism event sponsored by Black Women's Collective; and March 10, a feminist cabaret. For more information, call (416) 598-9838.

Matthew Behrens



DAVID SMILEY

Banking Breakthrough Visa Workers Win

Bank workers, whose seven-month strike against the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce's Toronto VISA centre ended in January, achieved a breakthrough in a contract imposed by the Canada Labour Relations Board. The one-year agreement, which also covers about 60 workers in the central mail room, gives 350 employees increased seniority rights, a grievance procedure and an automatic five per cent wage increase for everyone earning the minimum rate in all job classifications. The agreement prohibits reprisals for strike-related activities.

Surprisingly, the bank is also satisfied with the agreement and will be dropping all its court

challenges against the labour board. The board's reasoning for the settlement will be published in a report in mid-March.

But Buzz Hargrove, of the UAW-Canada which assisted the union during months of fruitless negotiations, already told reporters: "The bank took on a fight and they lost it and they have to recognize that unions are here to stay in the banking industry."

Until this strike, the Commerce had union agreements in only four branches, covering 22 employees. The bank workers' union is now negotiating for workers in the central stationery department and two recently-organized branches in downtown Toronto.

Development Education DEC Moves, Expands

The world has moved and so have we. Remember 1971? Watergate was just an apartment complex. Quebec was in shock from the War Measures Act. Somoza ruled Nicaragua, Smith, Rhodesia, and Franco Spain. Development education was a new idea, an act of faith in an uncertain future. 1971 was the year the Development Education Centre opened.

1986. Development is a popular issue. But the questions remain. Tears are not enough, but

what is? How can Nicaragua — or any other people make it in the shadow of a giant? The UN Decade of Women is history, now what? And —

1986. DEC is 15 years old, and new. In our former location, demand for our resources had us climbing the walls. So we decided to move and start knocking them down instead. We're now located at 229 College Street in Toronto. You can phone us at (416) 597-0328.

The new DEC bookstore has