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KINESIS

News About Women That's Not In The Dailies

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A film that sets its audiences on Fire

"BC Benefits" Who Pays?

Re-thinking Choice

Secret Lives of The Waltonsteins

INSIDE

KINESIS

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Kinesis welcomes volunteers to work on all aspects of the paper. Our next Story Meeting is **Tues Nov 5, 7 pm** at Kinesis. All women welcome, even if you don't have experience.

Kinesis is published ten times a year by the Vancouver Status of Women. Its objectives are to be a non-sectarian feminist voice for women and to work actively for social change, specifically combatting sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and imperialism. Views expressed in Kinesis are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect VSW policy. All unsigned material is the responsibility of the Kinesis Editorial Board.

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Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*
Photo by Dilip Mehta

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SUBMISSIONS
Women and girls are welcome to make submissions. We reserve the right to edit and submission does not guarantee publication. If possible, submissions should be typed, double spaced and must be signed and include an address, telephone number and SASE. Kinesis does not accept poetry or fiction. Editorial guidelines are available upon request.

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"Happy International Day to Eradicate Poverty...," said Reform Party leader Preston Manning as he handed out his party's pre-election platform on October 17 to a crowd of 1,000 Reformers in London, Ontario. (Okay, wake up now. Yes, you were dreaming.)

On the contrary, a quick glance at Manning's platform reveals that the Reform party will likely increase poverty in the lives of many more people in Canada—first off, he's promising to eliminate the federal government's transfer payments to the provinces for welfare programs ($3.5 billion). Then, he says his party would strip down the size and role of the federal government, drastically slashing the budgets of Canadian Heritage, Indian Affairs and CIDA (the Canadian Internationational Development Agency).

Of course, with any right-wing political party, there's always privatization involved...so out to the corporate world will go Canada Post and Via Rail, and parts of the CBC. Wait, here's something we almost missed: Manning plans to do away with *all* secretaries of state, which includes the status of women and multiculturalism. Federal affirmative action programs are also on the chopping block.

"Who is Manning trying to win votes from? Wealthier individuals and "families." (Remember the Reform Party's definition of the "family.") For them, Manning plans to save them money by flattening out the income tax rate, so that everyone pays the same (but not fair) share of taxes, no matter how much they earn. As well, he promised some lovely tax cuts—to surtaxes to higher income earners and to capital-gains tax. (It seems Manning is quite concerned about the eradication of their "poverty.")

Of yes poverty...that's were this all started. Congratulations to Canada: a recent study from the Washington-based Bread for World Institute has given Canada second prize in the sport of child poverty--that is, for having the second highest rate of child poverty in the world: 14 percent (based on 1994 statistics). Statistics Canada puts the figure even higher: 19.4 percent.

Guess which country won the top prize? The US, coming in at 22 percent. And with the recent slashing of welfare programs, Bread for World predicts a further 1.1 million children in the US will be pushed below the poverty line.

Changing subjects...what about "choice?" That's a question feminists are debating (or needing to debate) these days, particularly given the spate of court activity on the right of pregnant women to make decisions concerning their own bodies *[see page 10.]* Why is this discussion so urgent? Because, among other things, the Supreme Court of Canada has agreed to hear the appeal of the Winnipeg Child and Family Services of the decision by the Manitoba Court of Appeal to overturn a lower court ruling ordering a pregnant woman into a drug treatment program *[see* Kinesis *October 1996.]* The Supreme Court will deal with the question of whether or not a woman has the duty to protect her fetus and whether the fetus, at a particular stage of its development, gains rights as a "person."

What is at stake here is not just the right of a woman to have an abortion...it's much, much broader than that, and much, much more dangerous. If the court recognizes even some fetal rights, it could open the door to increased medical and social services interventions into the lives and decisions of pregnant women. This is a slippery slope and feminists need to re-consider our analysis and strategies around choice to see if they can address all the issues raised in this era of exploding NRTs and growing political conservatism. In future issues, we'll present some of these discussions.

As we were going to press, we received an update to one of our What's News stories from last month: "Sexist, racist *[Ed note: and homophobic]* Quebec judge." In early October, Jean Bienvenue decided to step down as a judge to circumvent his possible removal from the bench by the federal minister of justice. This move allowed him to protect his $100,000 yearly pension he would have lost otherwise.

Many of us don't have such a generous pension plan, and may never even have one. The federal government says it is still planning to drastically alter the Canada Pension Plan despite running into a snag at last month's meeting of the federal and provincial finance ministers. Several provinces balked at the feds proposals, saying they wouldn't agree to it unless some of their demands were met, which include reducing unemployment insurance premiums and increasing the ceiling on the amount of income against which CPP can be levied. Whatever the disagreements, it's clear that an overhaul of pension system will leave women worse off.

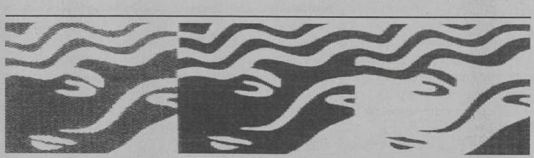
Speaking of women...the Women's Research Centre in Vancouver is getting ready to launch its latest book on child custody and access. Soon to be hot off the press, *Women and Children Last*, written by the Vancouver Custody and Access Support Group, provides insightful analysis into current custody and access issues and a scathing critique of the court and other systems. *Kinesis* will surely be reviewing this valuable resource in an upcoming issue.

As *Kinesis* goes to press, Toronto women, labour activists, artists, and those who have been less politically active are coming out to protest against the Ontario government's fiscal policies. The Metro Days of Action, a week of demonstrations, has the support of a broad broad range of individuals and groups, as more people feel the devastating impact of Mike Harris' cuts. Next month, we'll bring you more on the Days of Action.

Things will not quieten down in the month of November. In BC, women are preparing to vote (or not) in the upcoming province-wide municipal elections, set for November 16. Like the federal and provincial politics, the civic political spectrum is a place women must watch to ensure right-wing agendas don't prevail. Find out what the candidates stand for and what, if anything, they'll do to advance women's equality (and not set us back even further).

Finally, as *Kinesis* goes to press, we have just heard about a group of all-Asian queer women in Vancouver who have been dialoguing about starting up a formal group for queer Asian women. The next meeting will be in late November, so anyone interested in participating should call June at 254-4545, Da at 253-5110 or Fatima at 682-0080.

That's all for this month as *Kinesis* goes to press. Have a fabulous month.



Our appreciation to the following supporters who became members, renewed their memberships or donated to Vancouver Status of Women in October:

Paula Clancy*Allison Flack*Sherrille Grace*Marion Kerr*Sandra Kerr*Monique Midgley*Chris Morrissey*Meh Najak*Cherie Nash*Catherine Racine*Jeanne St. Pierre*M. Diane Wiesner*Rita Wong

And a special thank you to our donors who give a gift every month. Monthly donations assist VSW in establishing a reliable funding base to carry out our programs, services and publish *Kinesis* throughout the year. Thanks to:

Wendy Baker*Barbara Curran* Nancy Duff*T. D. Gibson* J.K. Gordon*Erin Graham*Lorraine Kuchinka*Barbara Karmazyn*Barbara Lebrasseur*Lolani Maar*Eha Onno*Sheilah Thompson*Elizabeth Whynot

Thanks also to the following office volunteers whose regular efforts help to keep VSW running.

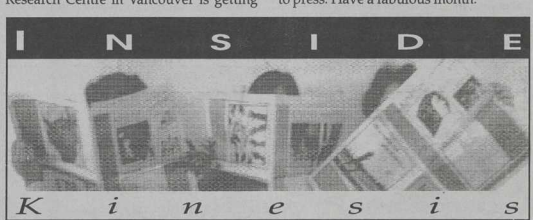
Amy Fong*Julie McDonald*Celine Rumalean*Claire Walsh

Corrections

We made a few boo-boos in the September and October issues of *Kinesis*. At the end of the story "Domestic worker fights for back wages," on page 8 of the October 1996 issue, we forgot to credit SIKLAB's September 1996 newsletter for the original story. SIKLAB is a Vancouver-based organization advocating for the rights of Filipino migrant workers.

Also in the October 1996 issue, the column As *Kinesis* Goes to Press wrongly identified Andrew Coyne as having attacked Sister Vision Press on a Toronto radio show and in an opinion piece in the *Financial Post*. The writer of the vicious attack on the Black women and women of colour press was a different right-wing commentator: Michael Coren. (Not that strange a case of mistaken identity!)

And lastly, on page 9 in the September 1996 issue, in the interview with Farida Akhter "The sun is always rising in the women's world," we forgot to credit and describe the photograph used. Indeed, the photo is of Farida Akhter while she was giving a workshop at the Tent City in Ottawa that marked the culmination of the NAC/CLC National Women's March on Poverty, and was taken by Agnes Huang.



It's cold, wet and windy in Vancouver, so we decided we would bring you an especially warm, dry and witty issue to keep you toasty during the month of November. We don't have much to report on the inside goings-on at *Kinesis*, except that as usual, it's been an eventful month and production process.

We had to say a kind-of-goodbye to Cat L'Hirondelle who, for many many years, has been doing the bookkeeping at the Vancouver Status of Women, and in particular, kept *Kinesis*' accounts in check. Cat is busier than ever running her business, L'Hirondelle Financial Services, and has had to step back from some of her commitments at VSW and *Kinesis*. Chrystal Fowler, who has been administering *Kinesis* subscriptions and VSW memberships and who works with Cat, will take on the additional bookkeeping tasks.

Cat has been working and volunteering at VSW, on and off in one way or another, almost since the very beginning of VSW's conception 25 years ago. We will miss her ever-cheerful presence in the hallowed halls of VSW/*Kinesis*, but we aren't convinced she won't be glimpsed from time to time hanging out with VSW staff and volunteers. She'll be back—she'll miss us soon enough...Besides, we did make her promise to join VSW's Finance and Fundraising Committee. Thanks for everything, Cat. A big farewell (and see you around). We'll miss you, but don't worry, we'll still keep that rhino cartoon up behind the administration computer!

New to this issue is Swee Sim Tan, who was hired on contract to design this month's issue and entertain our devoted production volunteers. Swee Sim has been the desktop publisher at *Aquelarre*, the Vancouver-based Latina women's magazine on art, culture and politics. She also freelances her design skills, and teaches computer courses at a number of different places in the city. Swee Sim was a valuable addition to the production process, persevering in calling lots of volunteers to join in on the proofing and layout work (and fun). As well, she put in the time and energy to ensuring *Kinesis* looks good!

New voices in *Kinesis* this month are: Filipina writer and activist Ninotchka Rosca, Fiona Miller (of the Feminist Alliance for Genetic and New Reproductive Technologies); Patsy Kotspoulos (of the recently discontinued BC politics and culture magazine *Pacific Current*); and Sandra Kerr, an advocate in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

This month, women new to the *Kinesis* production room, wielding blue pencil, x-acto knife and waxer are: Marlene del Hoya and Allison Campbell. Also this issue, we welcome local artist Lisa Prentice who created some incredible images for this issue *[see page 9 and centrespread]*.

If you want to get involved in our last issue of the year (that's next month's issue)...just give us a call at 255-5499.

That's it for this month: until the next, stay warm...and/or start a fire with *Kinesis* (one way or another)!

Access to abortion services in BC:

Bubbly for bubble zones

by Agnes Huang

Pro-choice advocates are hailing a recent BC Supreme Court decision uholding the Access to Abortion Services Act as a major victory for women. Last month, Judge Mary Saunders held that the Act, also known as the "bubble zone" legislation, was a constitutionally valid means of ensuring women's access to health care services.

"The Court recognized that women are entitled to the same respect accorded to others who require access to health care services," says Dr. Penny Ballem of BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre.

BC Women's was one of the five women's groups that intervened in the case as a coalition to forward women's equality rights arguments. The other members of the coalition were the Everywomen's Health Centre, the BC Coalition for Abortion Clinics (BCCAC), the Elizabeth Bagshaw Society and West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF).

The case stems from an earlier acquittal in provincial court of an anti-choice protester Maurice Lewis. Lewis was charged with violating the Act by infringing the access zone around the Everywoman's Health Centre, a free standing abortion clinic in Vancouver. Lewis was the first person ever charged with breaking the bubble zone law, enacted last year to protect women seeking abortions as well as abortion service providers from harassment and intimidation by anti-choice protesters.

In acquitting Lewis, the trial judge struck down two sections of the Act prohibiting "sidewalk interference" and "protest" within an access zone, saying they violated Lewis' freedom of expression rights because they restricted "peaceful" protests *[see* Kinesis *March 1996.]*

Judge Saunders overturned the lower court decision, convicted Lewis of violating the Act and ordered that he be returned to trial court for sentencing.

In her judgment, Saunders concluded that while the Act violated Lewis' freedom of religion and conscience and freedom of expression (points that the Crown attorney had conceded), the law was a reasonable limit on those freedoms and could be "demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society."

Jennifer Whiteside of the BCCAC says she was ecstatic when she heard about the outcome, and became even more so when she read the judgment and discovered that Saunders had incorporated most of the Coalition's arguments and analyses into her judgment.

"We intervened before the court to achieve this result," adds Jennifer Conkie, chair of West Coast LEAF's legal committee. "Our equality arguments were clearly heard by the court, as was the evidence of women about the negative effects of protest activity on their privacy and dignity interests."

Saunders ruled that the objective of the Act—to provide equal access to abortion services, enhanced privacy and dignity for women seeking those services and improved the climate and security for service providers—are both pressing and substantial.

In reversing the provincial court judge's decision, Saunders said that given the history of anti-abortion protests, she had difficulty accepting the portrayal of their tactics as "peaceful." "Although much of the protest activity has been described as peaceful, in my view that is a mischaracterization...At its most benign the protest activity could be described as non-violent."

Further, she said that the information communicated to women by anti-choice protesters contain some exaggeration and misrepresentation and was often offensive in tone and content. "As such, they cause real harm to women by generating more distress immediately before the [abortion]," Saunders wrote.

A coalition of anti-choicers, called the CARE Coalition, also formed to intervene in the case to make their arguments heard. The coalition included groups such as the Archdiocese of Vancouver, Campaign Life Coalition of BC, and Feminists for Life.

Saunders rejected basically every positions advanced by the CARE Coalition, including the argument that the access zone interfered with their ability to identify and target, specifically, women who are seeking abortion services—which was their objective. On the contrary, Saunders concluded that, in fact, the Act was passed to limit this element of "captivity" anti-choice protesters were aiming for, and that "it is this identification, targeting and captivity that creates the most harm [to women]."

In determining whether or not the Act was justifiable, Saunders examined the alternatives to enacting a bubble zone to determine if the means of attaining the objectives of the law amounted to the least infringement on other constitutional rights.

In particular, Saunders looked at injunctions and concluded that the access zones were among the least intrusive legislative responses to achieve the objectives.

Saunders commented that injunctions do not accomplish a key component of the Act's objectives: to safeguard the privacy, dignity and security concerns of women seeking abortion services. "...the injunctions in place at the two clinics, while curtailing activity which was in the nature of criminal conduct, actions of trespass and intereference with property rights, did not successfully protect the women using the clinics from the burden of negative, angry and harassing communications delivered on the very threshold of the health care facility."

Jennifer Whiteside says that while the decision marks a significant victory for women, it is Saunder's comments and rulings concerning the admissibility of evidence that will have the greatest impact on women's equality rights.

Saunders accepted many of the witness statements that were considered hearsay by the provincial court judge, and as such set a precedent for what is to be considered admissible. The trial judge had ruled that statements made by clients to abortion clinic workers about their feelings and experiences when encountering the anti-choice activity near the clinic were not admissible.

However, Saunders recognized the incredible difficulty of getting women who have sought abortion services to come to court and give their own accounts of the effects of anti-choice protests on them. She wrote that obtaining direct evidence on the effect of the protest on women seeking an abortion clinic's services was next to impossible "without serious intrusion into the privacy and personal security interests" of the women. She accepted second hand accounts (hearsay) as valid evidence.

Marcia Gilbert, executive director of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL) says she is thrilled about the decision from a national perspective.

In other provinces, criminal injunctions are the only methods abortion clinics have to stem anti-choice harassment. Gilbert says that after Lewis acquittal, anti-choice protesters in Alberta challenged the consitutionality of private injunctions held by individual clinics and their staff. While in the end, the courts upheld the injunction, the clinics and service providers endured a tremendous cost interms of legal fees , time and energy.

Gilbert says she hopes other governments will look at Saunder's judgment and see that similar legislation in their provinces is valid and needed.

Whiteside says that since the decision, anti-choice protesters have stayed outside of the access zone around the Everywoman's Health Centre. "We're hoping that now that they've seen the tactic of intentionally breaching the zone won't work through the courts, they'll respect the process that has been established."

However, she says she is concerned that the protesters will follow the lead of some US anti-abortionists and resort to more direct and violent tactics.

Whiteside says no one in the Coalition knows whether or not Lewis will file a motion to appeal Saunders' decision. He has until November 2 to do so.

Vancouver Status of Women is . . .

25 and Alive!

A Gala Birthday Party and Book Launch

Saturday, November 2

Featuring Sawagi Taiko,
VSWers from yesterday and today
and
Judy Rebick and Kiké Roach
launching their new book
Politically Speaking
(Douglas & McIntyre)

Schmoozing from 6:30 pm
Main event at 8:00 pm sharp

Refreshments
Door Prizes

Wheelchair accessible

Vancouver Public Library
350 W. Georgia
(Multipurpose Room)

Tix: $10 - $2,500 (employed), $5 - $25 (un- & underemployed)
This event will sell out, so buy now! Tickets available at VSW, Women in Print, Little Sister's, Harry's, and People's Co-op Bookstore. (Call 255-5511 for info.)

Organizing against California's Proposition 209:

Affirming equality

by E. Centime Zeleke

On November 5th, the day Americans go to the polls to vote for the country's next president, Californians will also be casting their ballots for or against Proposition 209.

Proposition 209 is officially called "The California Civil Rights Initiative," but it is nowhere near being a progressive civil rights initiative. In actuality, it will outlaw affirmative action programs in public employment, public education and public contracting. In addition, the initative will gut all laws protecting women from sex discrimination.

Noellia Canales of the Feminist Majority, a US national feminist organisation, has been working on the "Stop Proposition 209" Campaign. She says Proposition 209 comes on the heels of the many anti-welfare, anti-immigrant, anti-lesbian and gay bills that have been introduced at the federal and state level in the US over the past year. She adds that the initative is linked to an increasing right-wing climate that scapegoats women, people of colour and poor people, and covers up the fact that chief executive officers (CEOs) of major corporations are reporting 400 percent increases in their incomes. Meanwhile, most people in the US are experiencing great economic uncertainty.

Proposition 209 was authored by two academics with the California Association of Scholars: Tom Wood and Glen Custred. The initiative also has the backing of California Governor Pete Wilson and the Republican Party. Wilson has been a leader against affirmative action. In fact, through an executive order in June 1995, Wilson unilaterally cut half of California's affirmative action programs, making it the first state to roll back such programs.

At present, there are 14 other states with initiatives similar to Proposition 209 before their state legislatures. In addition, Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole has co-written a similar bill at the federal level. Canales says Proposition 209 is not just a local state issue; it has very significant implications nationally because many state governments are waiting to see what happens in California before pushing their own anti-affirmative action bills.

Audrey Johnson of the Vancouver Status of Women believes that women in Canada should be paying very close attention to what is happening to their sisters in the US. "In Canada, we are already seeing the attack on programs that promote the equality rights of women, people of colour, and Aboriginal people." She adds the US often sets precedents for many of the political decisions made here in Canada.

An example of the attacks on equality rights in Canada is the recent uproar over the employment equity policy of the University of British Columbia (UBC). The university was the target of a spate of right-wing attacks for a job posting which encouraged "women and visible minorities" to apply. A number of anti-affirmative action individuals and groups, including the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, have been putting pressure on the university to reword—and essentially scrap—its employment equity policy. UBC's Board of Governors says it will consider it.

In California, the leader of the "Yes to Prop 209" campaign is Ward Connerly, a University of California regent. Connerly, who is Black, was a key supporter in the University of California's cancellation of all of its affirmative action programs at all its campuses last year.

The opponents of Proposition 209 say that Connerly has been recruited by Governor Wilson and other 209 initiators in order to make voters believe they're not playing the "race card." However, Canales believes that the strategy of pitting people of colour against each other, as well as men of colour against women, has not been affective in attracting people of colour over to the "Yes" side. She says the strategy which has been effective in doing this is the co-optation of progressive civil rights language in the wording of Proposition 209.

"209 uses language we are all familiar with as civil liberty fighters to push an anti-woman and anti-people of colour agenda," says Canales. "The language of 209 is confusing voters. This is why 209 is so frightening." The National Lawyers Guild of the National Organization for Women (NOW) says "the initiative is disguised as a civil rights initiative because the civil rights movement ranks as the most popular movement in the US."

Clause "A" of Proposition 209 is taken in large part from the California Civil Rights Act, enacted in 1964. Presently, the Act bans discrimination on the basis of race, sex, colour, ethnicity and national origin. The proposed California "civil rights" initiative adds a new twist. Proposition 209 would prohibit "the state, local governments... from discriminating against or giving preferential treatment to any individual or group..."

Canales says "preferential treatment" is legal jargon that has not been defined in any court in the US. "It is basically a very open-ended term that would include the removal of any and all programs that exist under affirmative action which are based upon giving equal opportunity to women and all people of colour," she says.

Some of the specific programs Proposition 209 would eliminate are math and science programs for girls magnet schools designed to desegregate school districts, outreach programs for women and minorities in government jobs, and outreach programs for youth at risk designed to help them into colleges and/or into the work place. In addition, courts would be prohibited from ordering affirmative action remedies, even in cases where race and sex discrimination is proven.

Beverly Hills 90211: the zipcode of the "Stop Proposition 209" campaign. This campaign is fighting for the opposite of what Beverly Hills 90210—the TV series about upper-middle class, white college students—represents. *photo by Agnes Huang*

Affirmative action programs that have quotas specifying recruitment numbers for different groups of people are already illegal in the US. NOW says that "the use of preferential treatment and affirmative action as interchangeable terms does a vast disservice to affirmative action—and is fraudulent and deceitful."

Canales also says that while clause "A" forms the body of Proposition 209, it is clause "C" which will impact women's lives most significantly. Clause "C" would repeal California's equal rights amendment.

Californian women enjoy the highest legal standard of scrutiny when it comes to sex discrimination: "strict scrutiny." However, with clause "C", this standard would be lowered from "strict scrutiny" to allow sex discrimination that is "reasonably necessary." In California, sex discrimination is currently permitted on the basis of "bonafide occupational qualifications." An example of this would be that a woman could be refused a job at a men's prison because hiring her would be in violation of the male prisoners' privacy interests. Proposition 209 would remove the term "occupational."

The removal of the term and the rewriting of the current anti-sex discrimination legislation would mean women in California would have very little or no legal recourse for addressing sex discrimination. In fact, women's groups in California are saying that clause "C" of proposition 209 actually legalizes sex discrimination.

An example of what may be considered "reasonably necessary" sex discrimination is when young women are told they are not hired for jobs because they are more likely to get pregnant and therefore more likely to leave their job, says Canales. Another example would be if a fire department refuses to hire women because all the uniforms they have are fitted for men and they cannot afford to buy uniforms for women.

Women's groups, lesbian and gay organizations, Latina, African American and Asian American groups have all come together in a coalition to stop Proposition 209. Strategies to combat 209 have focused on educating voters on the initiative, registering voters, and recruiting volunteers to encourage voters to vote "No". A number of volunteers from various communities have also conducted voter registration workshops specific to their communities.

The Stop 209 campaign organized a "Save the Dream" bus tour across California that included various civil rights leaders, such as Patricia Ireland, president of NOW; Jesse Jackson from the Rainbow Coalition; Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority; and Delores Huerta, cofounder of the United Farm Workers of America. The bus tour focused on making visible the issues behind Proposition 209 and the diversity of people who are opposed to Proposition 209.

For more information on the Stop Proposition 209 campaign, contact them at 8840 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA 90211. Tel: (310) 358-3210; fax: (310) 358-3272.

E. Centime Zeleke is an Ethiopian-Canadian feminist activist who is alarmed by the globally growing right wing agenda. The original research for this article was done for OBAA, a show produced by, for and about women of colour on Vancouver's Co-op Radio, 102.7FM. Special thanks to Kagendo Murungi for background information.

BC's three month residency requirement:

Out one day, back the next

by Wei Yuen Fong

Just as quickly as the courts struck it down, the BC government brought it back to life. "It" is the three-month residency requirement—the length of time individuals have to live in BC before they can become eligible for social assistance.

On October 3rd, the BC Supreme Court struck down the residency requirement on the grounds that the government did not have the authority to impose the requirement under the existing welfare legislation—the GAIN (Guaranteed Available Income for Need) Act. But five days later, the NDP re-introduced the requirement and a new Act, which it believes can stand up against any further court challenges.

The three month residency requirement was among the many "reforms" introduced by the government as part of its regressive welfare package, called BC Benefits . The package was tabled in the legislature last June and had passed through the various stages of readings. However, it had yet to be proclaimed into law. This meant that the legislation which was in force during the court case was the GAIN Act and its regulations.

The Court challenge was brought by the Federated Anti-Poverty Groups of BC (FAPG) and three individuals denied welfare. They urged the court to strike down the legislation on the grounds that it goes beyond the powers given to the government under the GAIN Act, violates the BC Human Rights Act, and is contrary to the constitutional protections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In his decision, Judge John Spencer accepted the argument that the government had overstepped its administrative boundaries accorded it by the GAIN Act.

Spencer ruled the residency requirement was inconsistent with the purpose of the Act: "the relief of poverty, neglect and suffering." As well, he ruled that while the provincial government could draw distinctions on who is eligible for income assistance, it could only do so within the confines of the reasons listed in the Act.

The GAIN Act sets out reasons for which the government may refuse welfare to individuals, such as not meeting the financial eligibility requirement (that is, having too high an income). Length of time living in the province is not one of those grounds. Essentially, Spencer ruled that the government has the power to refuse social assistance to certain people, but that the scope of its discrimination is limited.

Spencer, however, did reject FAPG's argument that the residency requirement violated the provincial human rights legislation, and he also declined to rule on whether or not the requirement violated the Charter, namely the guarantee of mobility rights, security of the person and equality rights. He passed determination of those questions into the hands of a higher court.

Katherine Hardie, a lawyer with the BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre (BC PIAC), says she is confident that the Charter arguments can be successful in court. "A person being forced to live on the streets with no money for food or clothing, is arguably one of the worst violations of the security of the person."

While Spencer ruled against the NDP, he left the door open for the government to restore the residency requirement by changing the welfare legislation. The government was quick to jump on this opportunity. On October 8, the NDP government repealed the GAIN Act and proclaimed the BC Benefits Act into law by Order-in-Council—that is, without a vote by members of the legislative assembly. The new Act includes new regulations, including a three-month residency requirement.

The new Act also essentially takes away the discretion of financial aid workers (FAWs) to make decisions on an individual case basis, and the right of people to appeal decisions which refuse them assistance.

"We are shocked that the provincial government has chosen this course of action in the face of the Supreme Court's decision," says Gisele Guay, president of FAPG. "The three month residency hurts people. Because of this law, we will have people living in BC without food and shelter. This is not how a government should be treating its most vulnerable residents."

Provincial Human Resources Minister Dennis Streifel has justified the residency requirement as being critical to protecting the social safety net for those most in need. However, Guay says it appears the NDP is playing political ping pong with the federal government. FAPG says the province was sent a letter from the federal government eight months ago outlining financial incentives of about $32 million if the province rescinded the residency requirement. (The federal government is already withholding $47 million in transfer payments until BC drops this requirement. That case is still before the courts.)

Streifel has responded that the deal does not address BC's main concern which is that some provinces receive higher rates of welfare subsidies from the federal government than wealthier provinces like BC. Unfortunately though, governments are fighting this political battle on the backs of the most vulnerable.

During the court proceedings, FAPG brought forward the cases of two "new arrivals" to BC to highlight the qualitative outcomes of the residency requirement: a woman who was seven months pregnant, and a man who had relocated to BC for a job, but who was unable to work after he became seriously ill and was hospitalized. Both were denied social assistance.

Guay says anti-poverty advocates hear these types of stories all the time. She adds that a lot of people come to BC because they have a confirmed job, but sometimes things change that situation.

According to Guay, the government is playing into the vicious cycle of poverty and making things worse by denying people welfare. "If people are refused assistance and they end up on the streets, then they can't prove their residency, then they can't get assistance."

However, Guay says the scariest part of the new Act is that it allows the provincial govenment to make changes by Order-in-Council. "That means, if we are able to successfully challenge a regulation in court, the government can just introduce the regulation again in a different way," says Guay.

FAPG has filed a petition to challenge the new residency requirement in the BC Supreme Court. Their lawyers say they intend to request the case be expedited because of the serious adverse impact the requirement is having on so many people.

FAPG filed its petition on October 17, which Guay says was done for a very specific reason. "We chose to launch our challenge to coincide with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty to illustrate the hypocrisy of the provincial government."

Women from the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre at the candlelight vigil in Vancouver *photo by J.C. Starr*

International Day to Eradicate Poverty:

Stop the rain...of cuts

"Rain, rain, go away..." may have been the chant, but not even a torrential storm could stop 120 women and men from coming outside for candlelight vigil in downtown Vancouver. The vigil on October 17, organized by End Legislated Poverty (ELP), marked the United Nations-declared International Day of Action to Eradicate Poverty. Similar actions were held across the country.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien, who was in Vancouver that evening, not surprisingly, was not to be found at the vigil. Over the past several years, Chretien's Liberal government has ensured that cuts to social programs and public sector jobs rain down on women, people of colour, poor people, immigrants, people with disabilities...and not to be outdone, provincial governments across Canada have brought in their own share of women-undermining, poor-bashing, immigrant-blaming legislation. All this, of course, has only ensured the enhancement of poverty, not its eradication.

It's clear from their actions that governments in Canada pay very little heed to UN declarations, says Michelle Des Lauriers, an organizer with ELP. "They're legislating the neo-conservative agenda that makes people poorer, shreds Canada's social safety net, and blames [poor people] for the economic conditions over which they have no control," she says.

At the vigil, ELP's Linda Marcotte read from the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC), which Canada signed in 1976 (after the United Nations recommended to Canada the incorporation into human rights legislation of more explicit reference to social, economic and cultural rights.) She pointed out that Canada had failed to recognize and advance the rights outlined in the ECOSOC Convenant, including: the right to work freely chosen; the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for her/himself and her/his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing; and the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

A number of people also spoke about how poverty has affected their lives and the lives of people around them.

Marion Dumont, an advocate at the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, spoke about the need for governments to ensure adequate resources to eradicate poverty, particularly in the areas with high numbers of poor people. "I want to see some changes happen now, in the Downtown Eastside where we need it. There are good systems, good programs. They need money and support, but they're not getting it," Dumont said.

Downtown Eastside anti-poverty organizer Irene Schmidt, an advocate at the Carnegie Community Centre, says it is critical that everyone advocates on behalf of young people. "The youth are really getting a rotten deal. They're feeling like they don't have a future, and we have to start doing something about it right now," says Schmidt.

The day before the vigil, ELP released its progress report on the BC provincial government on its efforts to end poverty and suffering caused by unemployment and its own policies. Needless to say, the NDP failed.

WHAT'S NEWS

Inquiry into the Vernon murders:

Police failings revealed

by Prem Gill and Fatima Jaffer

A coroner's inquest into the killings of nine members of the Ghakal family in Vernon, BC by Rajwar Ghakal's estranged husband concluded last month, producing 29 recommendations on improving police procedures, firearms regulations, and government policies on spousal abuse.

Among key recommendations is that police should fully investigate all complaints of abuse or threats involving women in relationships as quickly as possible, regardless of the wishes of the woman. It also recommends broadening the Attorney General's Policy on Violence against Women in Relationships to include threats against extended family members, that police should consult current or ex-spouses and partners of people who apply for gun permits before issuing them, and that there be better updating and consistent design of police computer data bases and better cross-referencing of files on the same suspect in different police jurisdictions.

The coroner's inquest was appointed by Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh in June, following calls for a full independent inquiry into why the RCMP did not adhere to its own policies and other police procedures to prevent the murders. The inquiry was made as a partial concession to demands by the Coalition of South Asian Women Against Violence, made up of Vancouver women's groups and individuals. The Coalition was particularly active in getting the mainstream media, police and government ministries to reframe the Vernon massacre as an act of violence against women, and *not* a result of South Asian cultural influences, arranged marriage, and other racist justifications for violence against South Asian women.

The inquest was carried out by a coroner's jury of five people, who called numerous witnesses and retraced the events of the three years leading up to the Vernon massacre. The massacre took place on April 5, when Mark Chahal walked into his former spouse's family home with legally obtained guns and shot dead his estranged wife Rajwar, her father, mother, four sisters, younger brother and brother-in-law. He also shot two other family members, who survived. The family had all supported Rajwar's decision to leave Chahal after an eight-month marriage in 1994 during which he physically and emotionally abused her.

The inquest heard from such witnesses as Rajwar's former counsellor, her lawyer, and the policepersons who took Rajwar and Rajwar's sister Jasbir Saran's complaints about numerous threats Chahal had made against Rajwar and her family. Witnesses testified that Chahal had threatened to kill Rajwar if she told anyone about the abuse Chahal had subjected her to during their marriage. Rajwar filed for divorce in early 1995, citing grounds of physical and mental cruelty. Her family had attended a "reconciliation" meeting with Chahal's family, where they accused Chahal of abusing Rajwar.

Rajwar filed three separate reports of Chahal's abuse and threats with the Vernon police, and one with the Abbotsford police. Extensive documentation she provided the police was ignored, including an eight-page report she handed the RCMP in Vernon detailing Chahal's harrassment, threats and her fears that he would kill her and/or her family. The jury heard from police that the report was placed unread in Rajwar's closed spousal assault file. Investigators never discovered who made the mistake, which was discovered the day of the massacre.

"The most important thing to come from the recommendations is that the jury stayed clear of cultural issues," says Sunera Thobani, former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. "Violence is about power inequalities, not about culture."

Before handing down the recommendations, the coroner announced that inquests are held to find ways to prevent similar deaths, not to lay blame. As well, juries may make recommendations to government ministries which are required to adopt the findings but not bound to act on them.

However, Dosanjh says his ministry had already introduced some of the recommended changes in June, in response to the outcry from women following the massacre. These included ones that were already on the books, in the AG's Policy on Violence Against Women in Relationships, but that had not been acted on yet.

Dosanjh says his ministry will take action on the bulk of the jury's 29 recommendations following the release of a second inquiry report, this time commissioned by the RCMP, to look at police handling of the investigations of two cases—the Ghakal and the Velisek cases.

The Velisek case involves the shooting of a Vernon woman, Sharon Velisek, by her former boyfriend, Larry Scott. Velisek had reported numerous times to the police that Scott was stalking and terrorizing her with late-night phone calls, visits to her workplace and vandalism to her car. Scott eventually shot Velisek twice, then killed himself. Velisek made a formal complaint to the RCMP about the handling of her case. Reports of the investigations into both cases are due November 16.

Prem Gill and Fatima Jaffer are members of the Coalition of South Asian Women Against Violence

SINGLE MOTHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

More than 60% of single parent households headed by women live in poverty.

That's why VANCOUVER STATUS OF WOMEN published the SINGLE MOTHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE in 1991 to help single mothers become economically and socially self-sufficient.

Since then over 30 000 copies have been distributed FREE to single mothers in the Lower Mainland.

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Vancouver Status of Women needs your help to produce the next issue of the Single Mother's Resource Guide.

The Guide is an information tool that informs and empowers women about their rights and the resources available to them and their children. Single moms, lawyers, counsellors, social workers all agree that it is an invaluable tool.

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What's News

compiled by Andrea Imada and Lisa Valencia-Svensson

Women in Thailand face layoffs

Women working in factories owned by the Eden Group in Bangkok, Thailand, are fighting for fair play in yet another round of layoffs by the multinational garment corporation.

Eden Group manufactures clothes for export to Europe and the US, retailing their products under the following brand names: Bugs Bunny Americanwear, Loonie Tunes Americanwear, Mickey Mouse Americanwear, MTV's Beavis and Butthead, Power Rangers, Casper, Aladdin, and more.

The company has orchestrated about 4000 layoffs of staff—predominantly women—since it began subcontracting work to home-based operations. Subcontracting began shortly after the formation of a union in 1991. Today, the original count of 4500 factory workers has been reduced to only 300, after the most recent layoff of 345 more workers in September.

This year alone, Eden Group has stayed its course of union-busting activities with terrible labour practices, disregard for health and safety conditions in the factory, and attempts to lay off workers without compensation.

A statement from the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation declared, "Workers at Eden Group have been treated appallingly. Used and abused in past years, they are now dumped by the company as it searches out even more exploitable labour. On its own, this is unacceptable. When accompanied by a total disregard of the law regarding notice of dismissal and compensation, it is reprehensible."

In February, Eden Group attempted to transfer 52 women workers to a subcontractor's sweatshop to avoid the costs of compensation for layoffs. In the same month, they announced plans to dismiss 1400 workers with only three months compensation, a violation of Thai labour laws. A vigorous campaign resulted in workers getting voluntary resignations with 10 months compensation. However, in March, 169 women were fired without compensation.

Other abuses of workers include union organizers being reassigned to cleaning factory toilets, the company refusing to comply with health and safety standards in the factory, and women workers being abused by managers who refer to the women as "prostitutes."

The workers are calling for a voluntary resignation program with compensation of 15 months for workers over 30 and 10 months for workers under 30; social security for those who are unemployed; and the withdrawal of Eden Group's trading privileges under the Thailand Board of Investment.

[Information from Transnational Information Exchange (TIE-Asia) Update, September 1996]

Campaign for day off continues

The National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh is escalating its campaign, begun in July 1995, to get workers one day off per week. Organizers say that if employers do not meet their demands this October, workers will be urged to begin taking a day off regardless. *[As Kinesis goes to press, no information is available on whether or not the demand was met.]*

The typical work situtation for many of the 1.5 million Bangladeshi garment workers—80 percent of whom are women—is 14 to 16 hour days, seven days a week, under sweatshop conditions. The 2,500 garment factories in Bangladesh, whose practices are supported by the Bangladesh government, pull in 97 percent of the country's export income.

[Information from the International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign]

UNITE against Guess

UNITE (the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) has launched a campaign against Guess, the American jeans and clothes manufacturer. UNITE is focusing on the working conditions of thousands of women workers in Los Angeles who produce garments for Guess in factories, contracting shops and homes—and mostly in sweatshop conditions.

The majority of Guess' workers are women, almost all of whom must struggle to support families on a full-time income that is about half the poverty line. At the same time, the owners brought in one-quarter of a billion dollars for themselves over the past three years.

For the women, work hours are long, wages extremely low, overtime often not paid, and benefits nonexistent. As well, illegal contracting out to homeworkers has increased the danger of undetected child labour.

In 1990, Guess agreed to a voluntary inspection program after it was found to have violated US Department of Labor standards. Because of this, Guess was included on the Secretary of Labor's "Trend Setter List" of exemplary companies in the battle against sweatshops.

Critics denounce the voluntary program as a farce, and say conditions have not improved significantly. Workers say managers are routinely informed of imminent inspections in time to prepare the factory. The workers themselves now face increased intimidation, fearing retribution from Guess if they report illegal practices to the inspectors.

At the same time, the US federal government, playing to anti-immigrant sentiments, has increased the power of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to raid sweatshops, among others, and search out undocumented workers. The sweatshop owners are never penalized for hiring the workers whereas captured workers face deportation and high fines. The threat of the INS discourages workers from reporting labour law violations.

[Information from the Campaign for Labor Rights newsletter.]

Women able to de-link SINs

Women trying to rebuild their lives after leaving abusive male partners have won a battle with the federal government to allow them to have their new Social Insurance Numbers (SIN) de-linked from their previous numbers.

Following a letter-writing campaign and lobbying efforts spearheaded by a Vancouver woman, the federal Human Resources Department agreed to reinstate a program ensuring there would be no computer records linking old and new SINs of battered women. Many women will now be given new social insurance numbers as part of a strategy to help them avoid being tracked down and stalked by their abusive ex-partners.

Until 1992, computer records of such changes were shared with Revenue Canada and other government agencies managing the Canada Pension Plan, old age security and family allowance, so that the women would still receive benefits due to them. But because of this link, some men were able to gain access to these records and learn the new identities of women.

The government says the program will eliminate the linkage, and adds that it will look into setting up a more comprehensive program that will help battered women. However, Secretary of State for the Status of Women, Hedy Fry, cautioned that the government does not intend the option to be available to women wanting to obtain a new SIN to avoid creditors.

Women's groups say it is still not clear whether this latest step will work for women. If men can access government computers—either if they or their friends or family members work in particular government departments—they may be able to find the women.

"Determined, battering, violent spouses will stop at nothing to track [a woman] down if she's trying to disappear," says Susan McCrae Vander Voet of Toronto's Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children. "I've been told by computer security experts that if there is a wire leading to it, someone can figure out a way to get the information."

Study links breast cancer to abortion

A recently released medical study which links breast cancer to abortion has led to fierce debate between pro-choice and anti-abortion forces in the US. The study, written by four doctors at Penn State's Hershey Medical Center and Baruch College in New York, suggests that the development of breast cancer in 5,000 women each year is the result of earlier abortions performed on the women.

The study concludes that the risk of developing breast cancer increases by 30 percent for women who have had induced abortions. The study contends that a buildup of estrogen in the breasts during pregnancy results in the higher risk. The researchers say women who give birth, however, are thought to be protected by another hormone which is released in order to stimulate the production of milk.

The study's conclusions have come under attack both politically and scientifically due to the connection of Dr. Joel Brind, the report's chief author, to anti-abortion perspectives and groups. The National Abortion Rights Action League says that "anti-abortion groups are distorting scientific data and manipulating information to advance their political agenda."

In terms of the research itself, feminists critical of the study's conclusions say that a 30 percent increase in risk is in fact not very significant. In comparison, they point out that cigarette smoking increases the risk of lung cancer by 200 to 800 percent.

They also add that most of the research done on the causes of breast cancer ignores an important factor affecting the incidence rate, namely environmental factors. In particular, they note that several studies show certain xenoestrogens (artificially produced estrogens) directly affect the proliferation of cancer cells.

Afghan women told to stay home

Afghan women and girls have virtually been imprisoned in their homes since the Taliban militia took control of the capital city of Kabul in a military coup on September 27. The Taliban, who are Islamic fundamentalists, have ordered women to stop working outside the home and girls to stop attending school.

As well, the Taliban have declared that when women and girls venture from their homes, they must wear the Islamic burqua, completely covering their body and face.

Women workers in some sectors—including healthcare—continue to work, but in reduced numbers and with caution. Nurses are reported to now be working 24 hour shifts in order to reduce the time they are publicly seen going to and from work.

"We are afraid to go outside," said one high school teacher who has remained at home since the Taliban takeover. "It feels like in a week our country has been turned back hundreds of years."

Operations at schools, government offices, the United Nations and aid organizations have been stifled by the ordinance. Due to the deaths of so many men during 17 years of war, women currently make up a large percentage of the workforce: 70 percent of teachers, 50 percent of the civil service and about 40 percent of doctors.

Afghan women have condemned the severe interpretation of Islamic law. The UN and non-governmental organizations have also warned that the restrictions on women's rights may even cause foreign donors to stop channeling much-needed financial aid to the country. However, the Taliban leadership refuses to change its policies.

Kuwaiti women campaign for vote

A coalition of about 300 women in Kuwait have launched a campaign demanding the right to vote and run for political office. In September, the women organized a symbolic one-hour work stoppage, in which 570 women participated.

The strike was the first action in the campaign aimed at changing the 1962 law which prohibits women from being a part of electoral politics in Kuwait. The organizers say the campaign will focus on education and lobbying, and that the goal is to have the law amended so women can vote by the year 2000.

Marriage declared 'void' without male consent

Hundreds of women demonstrated in the streets of Lahore, Pakistan in September to protest a recent court ruling which says that women must get permission to marry from their male guardians. The Women's Action Forum (WAF) has pledged to fight the ruling, stating it violates women's constitutional rights.

The case involved two young women who asked for court protection from harassment by their families after each had married without their fathers' consent. The judge ruled that both marriages were void.

MOVEMENT MATTERS

listings information

Movement Matters is designed to be a network of news, updates and information of special interest to the women's movement.

Submissions to Movement Matters should be no more than 500 words, typed, double spaced and may be edited for length. Deadline is the 18th of the month preceding publication.

compiled by Joanne Namsoo

Womyn's Braille Press

In December 1994, the Womyn's Braille Press (WBP) shipped their collection of over 800 books to the Bureau of Braille and Talking Book Services in Daytona Beach, Florida. The library had agreed to take on distribution of the WBP titles through the network of National Library Service libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) after WBP decided to shut down.

For 14 years, Womyn's Braille Press served as the only press in North America translating books written by women into Braille and onto 4-track tape. WBP had been vital and active in the production of feminist and lesbian literature for women who are blind or visually impaired.

Incorporating their books into the NLS system became their best alternative when the core group of volunteers running WBP found they could not continue the enormous amount of work that was required to keep it going.

In the US, WBP books can be ordered through any local NLS library either by CBF number, title or author. Subscribers from other countries should contact their own libraries concerning the availability of inter-library loans from NLS. In Canada, women can also contact the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, which can request books from the US.

Copies of the index of WBP books, listing authors, titles and book numbers, are available free in Braille, print, large print, on cassette, and on computer disk for IBM or Mac. The 1994 WBP catalogue, is also available free of charge in regular print or on 4-track cassette, and on computer disk. Requests must include choice of format and be placed before December 1 as the WBP plans to end its official existence as a nonprofit organization by the end of this year.

Send requests to Womyn's Braille Press, PO Box 8475, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, 55408-0475; or by email: schn0105@maroon.tc.umn.edu.

Women of colour land project

Maat Dompim, a nonprofit, women of colour land project, is currently seeking funds and in-kind donations for the development of a rural women-of-colour retreat and conference centre in West Virginia.

Maat (the name of the ancient African goddess of balance, truth and justice) Dompim (a place in the bush where the goddess is heard) says it is developing the retreat as a safe space for women of colour to explore, revive and share "our respective traditional values and perspectives in a place that is free from racism." The centre will also serve as a gathering place for individuals or groups who are actively engaged in anti-racist, social-change work.

The organizers of the project say they envision a space for retreats, small conferences, workshops, seminars, ceremonies, research and study, meditation and realization, and skills apprenticeships. They also hope to house an Institute of Ancient African Herstory and a centre for ecology and education.

Maat Dompin has already acquired $22,000 in grants and contributions, but still needs another $28,000 in order to put a down payment on the land. In-kind donations being sought include: material for the African Herstory Library, a Macintosh LC-compatible laser printer, a fax machine. As well, they are looking for volunteers to help with fundraising and grantwriting.

Anyone interested in making donations to the project or in giving a long-term low-interest loan, should write to: Maat Dompim, Womyn of Color Land Project, Auto Rd, Auto, West Virginia, 24917 USA; or call (304) 497-3737 or (804) 263-8363.

[Information from *Sojourner*, September 1996]

Community organizing through pop ed

Tools for Peace, a non-profit organization with a 16 year history of supporting social change in Nicaragua and BC, is embarking on a Popular Education and Community Organizing Training Program to support community organizations in BC working for social change.

Popular education is a method of organizing which was developed in Latin America. The Tools for Peace training program was developed through a process that involved communities across BC coming together to share their knowledge and define their training needs. The program provides organizing tools to strengthen grassroots work and to create new strategies for intervention in the community.

The program consists of four workshops which build on each other: "Our Daily Organizing and Popular Education," "Culture, Communications and Organizing," "Power and Community Organizing" and "Planning for Action."

Tools for Peace will hold its first workshop series November 7th to 11th in Vancouver. The workshops will be facilitated by Freddy Morales and Montserrat Fernandez of CANTERA, a Nicaraguan organization working to support grassroots democracy, Denise Nadeau, a BC-based popular educator with 20 years experience working in the women's movement and in organized labour, and Carmen Miranda and Dina Mazariegas from the Latin American women's organization Nuestra Voz.

Subsequent workshops are planned for next January, March and May. Costs are on a sliding scale with subsidies for childcare and transportation available. Space limited to twenty-five participants.

For more information, call Ana Torres at Tools for Peace at 879-7216, or fax: 879-0709.

Clothesline against violence

This year on December 6th—Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action to End Violence Against Women—the YWCA of Vancouver will be setting up a Clothesline Project, a visual display bearing witness to violence against women. The project idea, which involving painting t-shirts with slogans, words and images and displaying them, has previously been used by women in other parts of Canada to raise awareness about violence against women.

The YWCA is inviting women to participate—take a plain white T-shirt; use paints, markers, buttons, photos, crayons sequins, embroidery (any medium of your choice); and depict a loved one, the effects of violence in your life, or what you are doing to promote healing in the midst of violence, or your feelings.

The display will be unveiled during a commemorative ceremony in the lobby of the YWCA, 535 Hornby St, on Friday, December 6 at 12:15pm. T-shirts for the display can be dropped off at the main floor reception desk of the YWCA. Women who choose to bring their t-shirts with them to the ceremony are asked to call the YWCA in advance, so a place can be reserved on the clothesline.

For further information call 895-5777.

Stop abuse of women migrant workers

INTERCEDE, the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights, has launched an appeal to the Canadian government to sign and ratify the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

The Convention was passed five years ago at the UN General Assembly, but to be in force it must be signed and ratified by at least 20 member nations. So far, only six have signed. Ratification of the Convention has been high on the agenda of migrant workers' groups all over the world because of notorious abuses against migrant women workers, highlighted by the execution of Flor Contemplacion in Singapore, and the rape and near-execution of Sarah Balabagan in the United Arab Emirates.

Recently, INTERCEDE received an urgent appeal from a Manila-based Association of Migrant Workers and their Families called KAKAMMPI, which is seeking justice for a domestic worker, Elisa Salem, who died from torture just four months after arriving in Jordan.

The Convention, if ratified , will serve as a basis for holding UN member states accountable for protecting the rights of workers temporarily residing within their territory. While it may not stop the abuses, it can serve as a deterrent.

INTERCEDE has asked the National Action Committee on the Status of Women to help lobby the Canadian government to sign the Convention. They are also asking all sympathetic individuals and organizations to sign a Statement of Appeal currently being distributed.

For copies of the statement or more information call INTERCEDE, (416) 483-4554.

[Information from *Domestics' Cross-Cultural News*, the newsletter of INTERCEDE, September 1996.]

Regressive changes to Citizenship Act pending

Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lucienne Robillard, says she intends to introduce new citizenship legislation this fall, which may include a new citizenship oath, a new preamble to the Act, and the removal of the automatic right of citizenship to babies born on Canadian territory.

The removal of automatic citizenship status shifts Canadian citizenship policy from one based upon principles of birth and naturalization to one where the racist concept of "bloodlines" becomes paramount, says the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC)

NAC is encouraging women to get involved by having their organization sign a letter written by the Canadian Coalition for Refugees to Minister Robillard opposing the changes; writing their own letters to the minister; writing letters to the editors of local newspapers, or joining NAC's Immigrants, Refugees and Migrant Workers' Rights Committee.

Forward all letters to the Immigration Minister to: The Hon. Lucienne Robillard, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 1L1. (No stamp necessary.)

For more information about the campaign, contact NAC, #203-234 Eglinton Ave. East, Toronto, Ontario, M4P 1K5; tel: 1-800-665-5124.

[Information from Action Now, the newsletter of NAC, October 1996]

Women Work Society

Under the wing of the Single Parent Resource Centre, the Women Work Society was created this year in Vienna to help single mothers and low-income women start businesses and gain independence, while they support each other and contribute to community growth.

The Society now has charitable status and a board representing a broad range of community groups, single mothers and low-income women. Executive Director of the Single Parent Resource Centre Marg Hermann says the group is seeking start-up funding from the Ministry for Women's Equality to set up an office and hire a staff person. All the work so far has been done on a volunteer basis.

Applicants whose proposals are accepted will be given start-up grants, and the equipment they require for their venture will be paid for by the Society on a loan basis. As the enterprises earn money, the "loan" will be repaid and the funds will be recirculated to assist in the development of more new businesses. The Society has also set up a mentoring group to support and advise new entrepreneurs, and workshops in business practices and other relevant courses will be made accessible.

The Women Work Society has almost reached its goal of a thousand pledges from private sources--each a minimum of $10 per month for two years. The Society is seeking more members from the community and more (tax-deductible) donation pledges. A T-shirt designed by a single mother as a fundraiser is available for $25.

To donate or for more information contact Marg Hermann, Single Parent Resource Centre, 602 Gorge East, Victoria, BC, V8T 2W6; tel: (205) 385-1114.

FEATURE

BC Benefits?

A year of decline

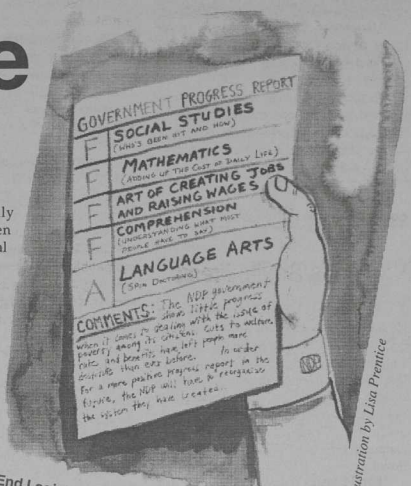

illustration by Lisa Prentice

End Legislated Poverty's gives NDP government a failing grade.

by Sandra J. Kerr

As *Kinesis* goes to press, women in British Columbia are marking one year of the province's regressive welfare policies, called by the NDP government, "BC Benefits." These policies introduced last November were enacted despite strong resistance from both women's and anti-poverty groups, as well as members within the New Democratic Party itself *[see* Kinesis *December/January 1996.]*

The new welfare policies hit every "deemed employable" individual and anyone with a "substance abuse" (alcohol or drugs) condition, with a $46 cut to their social assistance. Below is a review of some of the NDP government's "benefits" as they apply to women.

Residency requirement

Newcomers to BC must reside in the province for a period of three months before becoming eligible to "be evaluated" by a social services intake worker (which does not guarantee they will be deemed eligible). Initially, refugees were included under the requirement but after strong protests from refugee groups, the government agreed to exempt them.

Last month, the BC Supreme Court struck down the three-month residency requirement as unconstitutional, but the province quickly moved to enact new residency legislation *[see page 5.]* While women across Canada have endured social policy cutbacks and changes as well as workfare, only in BC have women been further discriminated against because of the residency requirement.

What does the residency requirement mean in real life situations? It means some women leaving other parts of Canada to flee abusive relationships have not been able to get social assistance. It means some women have homesteaded in abandoned buildings, potentially endangering their lives as they light fires to keep warm. It means some women have caused themselves bodily harm in order to secure a bed for the night in an already "overburdened" emergency ward. It means some women have slept in doorways, garages and parks and, if this isn't life-threatening enough, still others have "hung out" with the hope they will find a companion for the evening who will provide them with shelter. All too often though, they are also "provided" with physical and sexual abuse, further adding to their daily struggle of survival in this era of legislated poverty.

Women, welfare and work

Most of the changes to the welfare system have impacted on the lives of young women, "employable" single women and single women with children at home. For instance, "Youth Works" and "Welfare to Work" are programs which force people to work for welfare (workfare) and have been found to have limited benefit overall. They are window dressing. "Job preparedness" or "employability," terms used by the government, are simply programs where one must demonstrate the ability to attend (appropriately attired) a class from 9:00 am sharp to 4:00 pm for a specified number of days, scrunch out a resume and learn a few interview techniques.

Youth Works for those between 19 and 25 years of age and Welfare for Work for those over 25 years are forcing women deemed "employable" into job search, training and work experience programs. Women who refuse to participate lose any welfare benefits they receive.

These programs do not benefit women, only the corporations being subsidized by government to exploit women's labour! Companies receive $8,000 in subsidized wages from the provincial government for implementing workfare programs. As Rose Brown and Michelle des Laurier, both with End Legislated Poverty, have commented repeatedly over the last year, the real problem is that there are just not sufficient "quality of life" jobs. Workfare programs do nothing to solve this problem.

The provincial government has spent a disproportionate amount of dollars on "job preparedness" or "employability" programs which don't assist women in finding paid work because they do not adequately prepare an individual for employment. Many women find themselves in the welfare system again or accepting "grunt work" to avoid this. They often become a statistic as one of the "working poor," which means they are in a constant state of dealing with the stigma of their situation.

Workfare employee trainees who replace presently-employed individuals also find themselves becoming part of the vicious competition for jobs. Government statistics of displaced workers predict that, within the next two years, four to 12 thousand individuals working in the public sector will lose their jobs because of cutbacks. Only four short months after this statistic was released, the NDP government announced it planned to cut 4,000 jobs from the civil service. This only adds to the pressure and frustration for individuals on welfare seeking work, who are forced to compete even more for jobs.

Another big concern for women who have been forced into these programs is the issue of quality childcare. Before BC Benefits came in, a woman could remain at home until the youngest of her children reached the age of 12. Now, women are obliged to seek employment when their youngest child reaches seven. Many single mothers are being threatened with the loss of their children's daycare space if they are unable to find a job after attending workfare programs. Many are also being refused housekeeping/nanny assistance to help them in their search for paid work. If they lose their childcare space, emergency daycare facilities may be available, but this is limited to 72 hours a month...and only if there's room.

Hardship and crisis grants

Under the previous welfare legislation, a single parent could request a hardship or crisis grant (around $30) to provide food and/or clothing for their children. In most instances, grants were handed out when requested. Due to cutbacks, that is no longer the case and the appeal process has been rendered virtually useless for women who need additional support.

Cutbacks to the grants have created new problems for single mothers. Many single mothers and their young children have had to go to late evening food lines, enduring not only public scrutiny from passersby but often verbal abuse from the predominantly male clientele using the services. And some single mothers, instead of asking for one too many hardship grants—which may result in the apprehension of their children—have resorted to "other means" to get enough money to feed and clothe their children. These situations are particularly visible in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which has the lowest per capita income in Canada. It has been suggested by anti-poverty advocates that cases of child apprehension in this area are as high as 90 percent.

Other benefits lost

- Welfare recipients in BC no longer have the right to maintain a proper "savings" or "emergency" fund. For those under 55, the entitlement is now limited to $500, cut down from of $2500. For those between the ages of 55 and 64, the entitlement is $1000, cut down from $3000.
- The flat rate earnings exemption of $100 for single individuals and $200 for families no longer exists and has been replaced by a 25 percent exemption rate. This means a single mother working outside the home now needs to make $800 if she hopes to keep $200—$600 gets deducted from her welfare cheque. On top of this, she also has to pay for the added "costs" of working outside the home such as childcare, transportation, clothing, *et cetera*.
- Welfare is being denied to individuals who attend a college or university if they have previously been on welfare. This is forcing women to take out student loans or postpone going to school. For most, this means going to school is impossible.
- Individuals over the age of 60 who receive some sort of financial assistance from social services must now apply for benefits under their Canada Pension Plan, effectively having the full amount they receive from CPP deducted from their welfare cheque. This also reduces by 30 percent the amount of pension they will be eligible to receive once they reach age 65.

What we must do

The provincial government had promised a quantitative review of BC Benefits by August, but one does not seem forthcoming anytime soon. We must continue to speak out against the right-wing attack on poor people across this country and insist the provincial government conduct a "qualitative" review of BC Benefits, rather than one which only feeds its bottom line and self-interests. There are more than 1.5 million unemployed and almost 1.5 million underemployed people in Canada and too great a percentage of them are women.

End Legislated Poverty (ELP) continues to rally against regressive welfare policies and is joining its voice with other progressive networks across the country. ELP has two useful resources for other activists: the October 1996 issue of its newspaper, *The Long Haul* and its "report card" on the NDP government's welfare policies *[see graphic above.]*

In the meantime, the government's "proactive" thinkers are hard at work looking out for the best interests of the people it has been elected to represent. Not! It has been a year of decline, not a year of positive change for the working poor and recipients of welfare. In this the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, more than ever, we must become one voice if we are to be heard.

That women are losing some of the gains already made is a very real fact, and not one we should take lying down. The fact that there is even a single case of a government removing a child from her/his mother for requesting a mere $30 screams out for immediate remedial action on the part of that government. It also demands immediate and non-stop declaration that we, as citizens, will simply not allow these actions by elected officials.

The matriarchy must continue to meet all challenges, on all fronts, at all times!

To obtain a copy of ELP's resource materials, contact them at: #211-456 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1R3; tel: (604) 829-1209; fax: (604) 879-1229.

Sandra Kerr attended Carleton University in Ottawa and has worked with Pierre de Bané, past federal minister of regional economic expansion, now a member of the Senate. She is a writer, performing and visual artist, and women's rights advocate, currently living and working frontline in the Downtown Eastside community of Vancouver.

COMMENTARY

The challenge of the new reproductive and genetic technologies:

More than just choice

From a feminist perspective, the problem is not that women make choices, but the suggestion that these are the kinds of choices we were fighting for under the banner of "pro-choice."

by Fiona Miller

Manitoba has the distinction of introducing two important "innovations" which speak powerfully to the issue of women's reproductive rights.

The province was the first to introduce a prenatal screening program which uses samples of maternal blood to detect neural tube defects of the fetus—Maternal Serum Alphafetoprotein (MSAFP) testing. Manitoba also recently achieved notoriety when the Winnipeg Child and Family Services went to court to force a pregnant woman into "treatment" in the supposed "interests" of her fetus.

The MSAFP program began as a pilot project. It proved itself cost-effective because it succeeded in reducing the number of "affected" persons. In other words, it cost less to institute the program—given that most women abort pregnancies when the knowledge of possible neural disorders is made available—than to provide the social and medical supports for children born with neural tube defects. The MSAFP program was instituted province-wide in Manitoba and has since become standard practice in Ontario and British Columbia.

The technology has advanced since MSAFP was first tried out. Additional tests performed on maternal blood—termed the "triple test"—are available in most major urban centres in Canada and are used to detect Downs Syndrome as well as neural tube defects. Women are not forced to use these tests, but they are options that are increasingly provided as part of "routine" prenatal care. Many people—doctors as well as some feminists — see these tests as providing more "choices" for women. Others—in particular, disability rights activists—are less convinced.

The case in Winnipeg needs less of an introduction *[see* Kinesis *October 1996.]* A lower court judge ruled that a pregnant woman addicted to solvents could be forced into care. Though Judge Schulman rested his decision on the state's right to intervene in the interests of an "individual incapable of caring for her or himself," he also argued that the law should extend to protect the fetus and that if it didn't, Parliament should introduce legislation to ensure it did.

Judge Schulman's verdict was weak under law though enormously powerful in the court of public opinion. It was reversed by a higher court, which is something of a tradition in these sorts of cases. *[Following the ruling, the Winnipeg Child and Family Services sought leave to the Supreme Court of Canada to appeal the decision. The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the appeal and make a determination on whether or not a woman has a "duty to protect her fetus."]*

The Winnipeg case is one of a number of cases in Canada where the law has been used to coerce pregnant or birthing women in the supposed "interests" of the fetus. In the United States, this trend is even more visible: women have lost custody of children they were said to be abusing in utero; women have been charged with "delivering drugs to a minor;" women have also been imprisoned for "fetal abuse."

What, if anything, is comparable in the two Manitoba situations? In the case of MSAFP testing, women often have to make painful decisions about their pregnancies. And in the case of legal intervention during pregnancy, many poor women, women of colour and Aboriginal women are punished by the state in the name of expert medical opinion.

These two cases have much in common. Both are examples of the new challenge concerning women's reproductive rights and both illustrate the weakness of a feminist perspective premised on the argument of "choice."

In the case of MSAFP and other prenatal diagnostics, women are given information about whether the fetus they are carrying has, or is likely to have, a particular biomedical condition. This may sound good, but first off, there are no guarantees about the fetus' health. Any number of conditions which cannot be tested for could be present, and "good health", even if present at birth, is not guaranteed to continue.

Second, tests are not infallible and may lead some women to make decisions based on false information. Third, these tests indicate the presence or absence of a condition, say Down's Syndrome or neural tube defects, but they can't tell us the severity of the condition in the particular individual. Fourth, these tests suggest that a condition can be defined solely by biomedical science, which is like believing that gender is defined by sex alone. In fact, people experience disability as a product of social discrimination and systemic disadvantage as much as they experience it as a product of the biomedical condition itself.

Finally, these tests suggest that the right place, indeed the only place, for social action, prevention and health care, is during pregnancy. Such an approach ignores the economic, environmental, social and occupational reasons for ill-health. It assumes women are in full control of the world we live in and the forces that affect our pregnant bodies. It blames the victim. How many of us have been ashamed to drink a glass of wine or puff a cigarette while pregnant? How many have been told off by strangers for drinking a coke or a coffee?

There's a nasty word for what prenatal diagnosis is about—the word is "eugenics". The central presumption of eugenics is that human "quality" can be objectively assessed. From a feminist perspective, the problem with eugenics is not that it often uses abortion as an instrument, but that it pursues selective human reproduction. From a feminist perspective, the problem is not that women make choices, but the suggestion that these are the kinds of choices we were fighting for under the banner of "pro-choice."

Eugenic practices and goals denigrate human diversity and deny the lived experience of people with disabilities. They impact on women because we are the bearers and rearers of children. Historically, enforced sterilization has been the eugenicist's instrument of choice; more recently, it's coercive intervention in pregnancy and birth. In either event, women bear the brunt of the obligation to produce "quality" children. Where women will not make the "right" choices, we can be sure that these choices will sometimes be made for us.

Right now, women in Canada face an unprecedented opportunity to engage in a feminist discussion of new reproductive and genetic technologies (NRGTs). Last June, federal Minister of Health David Dingwall introduced legislation (Bill C-47) and a consultation document (for a proposed regulatory framework) on NRGTs. Dingwall plans to shepherd the legislation through a public review process and into law this fall.

The legislation is the second stage in the federal government's response to the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies, which delivered its report in November 1993. The first stage involved a voluntary moratorium on nine prohibited technologies, introduced last summer by then-Health Minister, Diane Marleau. Also introduced was a committee to monitor the voluntary moratorium, which has been largely invisible.

The third stage is under development and has yet to be introduced. It involves a national regulatory structure to manage acceptable technologies. This, together with Bill C-47, which prohibits unacceptable practices, will constitute the complete Canadian Human Reproductive and Genetic Technologies Act.

The Royal Commission, which cost $29 million and took four years, was set up as a result of a two-year, large-scale, intensive lobby effort by women's and health groups and many individuals concerned with the implications of an unregulated proliferation of reproductive technologies. The Commission was deeply flawed and some of those who advocated for its establishment have come to rue their earlier role. The document produced by the Commission ignored or downplayed some key dimensions of the issues, in particular, genetic technologies, commercial pressures, and the role of international trade agreements and intellectual property rights in the development and regulation of these technologies.

Many of the problems feminists had with the Commission's report have been written into the proposed Act. First, the model of analysis is rigidly biomedical—conditions like infertility and disability are viewed as largely biomedical in nature, and thus requiring biomedical diagnosis and a biomedical solution. Second, the lack of research into the actual lived reality of women is apparent in the recommended solutions. And third, the emphasis on "protection of the vulnerable" suggests the purpose of the legislation might be to protect the "vulnerable" fetus from the pregnant woman, rather than empowering people to address the causes of their "vulnerability."

Bill C-47 lists a series of practices to be banned under threat of criminal law. Some of them, like ectogenesis (maintaining an embryo in an artificial womb), the creation of human-animal hybrids, the cloning of human embryos and germ line genetic engineering (genetically modifying the sperm, egg, zygote or embryo) entirely warrant the full weight of the criminal law. But many feminists are less certain about other practices listed in the bill, like sex selection, commercial preconception contracts (surrogacy), and the buying and selling of eggs, sperm and embryos. These practices are deeply problematic, but the criminal law may not be the best way to control them.

A national regulatory system is the other instrument being proposed to restrict, license and monitor these practices. Unfortunately, the government's regulatory proposal seems committed to professional control, medicalization and cost-containment—a framework that pits "consumers" against other interests, and that fosters bickering over details rather than fundamentals.

We need a regulatory system that can't be hijacked by professional and commercial interests and that works in the interests of women's reproductive rights and social justice. At the heart of the feminist challenge is that we can't accept that these practices are just products of innovations in science or biomedicine, and hence outside the realm of political struggle.

Around the country, a number of grassroots groups are working on responses to the government's legislation and regulatory framework. We are trying to frame responses that respect our collective histories—responses that suggest a positive role for the state, which is a considerable challenge in an age of neo-conservative triumphalism. Most importantly, we will be trying to encourage the government to foster an open, public and accessible process so that women can see and assess what is being done in their name.

Fiona Miller is a member of the Feminist Alliance on New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies, a feminist collective based in Toronto, and is a Ph.D. student in History at York University.

Interview with Ninotchka Rosca:

Activism on many fronts

Ninotchka Rosca is a Filipina writer, journalist and long-time activist currently living in New York City. Last month, Rosca was in British Columbia to speak about the mail-order bride industry [see page 12.] Lisa Valencia-Svensson, a Filipina lesbian, had the opportunity to interview Rosca about her decades of activism, her writing and the women's movement.

Ninotchka Rosca

photo by Fatima Jaffer

as told to Lisa Valencia-Svensson

Lisa Valencia-Svensson: I'd like to start by asking you to tell us a little bit about yourself, what your roots are, your background in the Philippines and how you started as a journalist / writer / activist.

Ninotchka Rosca: I started writing when I was very young. My first published article was when I was twelve years old, so it was more or less predetermined that I would become a journalist and a writer.

Valencia-Svensson: When did you first become politically active and around what issues?

Rosca: I think I was around 15 years old and it was on the issue of the Vietnam war. I was a student at the University of the Philippines [UP] and the US military was using UP to test some of the defoliants and chemicals they were using in Vietnam. I was the head of probably the most radical organization at the time at UP, and we discovered this. We raised the issue of the Americanization of the university via corporate grants and funding from Rockefeller and Fulward, and we held the first university strike. That was in 1967.

Valencia-Svensson: Were you successful in that mobilization?

Rosca: Yes. It eventually led to the almost complete radicalization of the university. And it led very directly to what has become known in history as the "Diliman Commune," when students occupied and barricaded the entire university.

Valencia-Svensson: In 1972, Martial Law was declared by Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos *[Martial Law was nominally lifted in 1981.]* What were you involved in in particular during those years?

Rosca: By that time I went into full-time writing, joined *The Graphic*, first as a staff writer and then I became managing editor. Then I organized a union [at *The Graphic*], got fired and went into freelance writing. I was very busy. I was one of the 300 media people that the Marcoses had arrested immediately.

Valencia-Svensson: You were jailed as well. For how long?

Rosca: A very short time: six months.

Valencia-Svensson: When you were writing during the Marcos years, were you directly connected to the underground *[resistance movement]*?

Rosca: Yes, mostly in propaganda and support, logistics and materials gathering.

Valencia-Svensson: When did you come to the US, and why did you leave the Philippines?

Rosca: In the mid-seventies. I was ticked off that they were going to arrest me again, and that they were going to file charges against me before the Military Tribunal. At first I said, "Well if they're going to sue me for my writings, that's okay." But then I was told they were going to file gun-smuggling charges against me. As you know, with the Military Tribunal, there are no rules of evidence. I said, "Like hell! I'm not going to play this game." So I decided to leave.

Valencia-Svensson: And why did you pick the US?

Rosca: Because there was a fellowship available. *[laughter]*

Valencia-Svensson: Since you've been in the US, you've been involved in yet more activism *[laughter]*; it's never-ending. Could you tell us briefly some of the things you've been involved in?

Rosca: I was involved in organizing solidarity for the anti-Marcos resistance. I was head of the Friends of the Filipino People in Hawaii. Then a friend and I worked on establishing the Philippine Workers Support Committee for the KMU [Kilusan Mayo Uno], the trade union movement in the Philippines. And then I moved to New York and helped in organizing there. I was involved with a group, Pag-asa, which was in open declaration of their support for the National Democratic Front [the revolutionary movement in the Philippines]. And then I was involved in the campaign to get Filipino nurses residency in the US. I was also involved in setting up a Philippine Centre for Immigrant Rights.

And then finally, in 1989, I was one of the pioneers of the GABRIELA Network in the US. This is where my interest in women's work really came out. Usually I would work behind the scenes. I was the writer of statements and so on, but you never saw my name anywhere. But since this was directly connected to me—women's rights, women's work—I said, " I'm going to surface."

Valencia-Svensson: I'm going to ask you more about the GABRIELA Network and feminist activism later, but I'd like to ask you first about your writing. You've published two novels, two collections of short stories and a non-fiction book. Could you tell us about the novels and short story collections and what the main themes you were trying to explore were?

Rosca: State of War, the first novel, is a study of the archipelagic nature of both our territory and our history. There is this uncanny correspondence between the fractured nature of our land, because we have 7,100 islands--discontinuous territory. At the same time, our history is like a series of fits and starts. We have almost 400 years under Spain; and then that was almost totally wiped out by American colonization [from 1898-1941]; and then the Japanese came in [from 1941-1945], tried to wipe out American colonization, and then the Americans came back [1945-1946] and wiped out all the Japanese things. So it's like we have layer upon layer of cultural

Continued on page 14

The mail-order bride industry:

The global marketing of women

illustration by Lisa Prentice

by Ninotchka Rosca

In early October, Filipina writer and activist Ninotchka Rosca gave a presentation at a brunch in Vancouver hosted by the Philippine Women's Centre. Below are excerpts from her talk, the question-and-answer period which followed, and her interview with Lisa Valencia-Svensson on the mail-order bride industry.

Last night in Victoria, some officers of a local Filipino Canadian association said they receive calls in the middle of the night from women who were basically brought [to Canada] via a catalogue. Have you seen this catalogue? Now they have printed catalogues like the Sears and Roebuck catalogue with photographs of women giving their first names, their ages, what they like, and sometimes you will see a full portrait of a woman in a negligée. Then they'll say "ambitions": "I would just simply like to find a man I can serve." A woman is shown in this dazzling negligée like a complete boy- toy and her one ambition in life is to cook and clean the house for a man...Who are you kidding? But this is the kind of mentality men who go through these catalogues have.

Often it results in a very tragic ending. You are familiar with the three women who were murdered in Seattle by the husband of one of them [last year]. They were in a courtroom waiting for hearings to begin on his petition to annul the marriage. The woman had filed for divorce because he was beating her up. So the man whips out an automatic gun and kills her, two of her friends and her seven-month old fetus.

While this was happening I also got a call from Texas: another 22-year old Filipina woman had disappeared and the husband was claiming she ran away. But her car was found in a parking lot with the keys in it. Eight months later, her body was found in a shallow grave in Waco, Texas. It turned out this guy had been married four times: the first time to a Caucasian woman and he divorced her; the second time to a Latina and she supposedly drowned accidentally; the third time to a Vietnamese woman who allegedly committed suicide; and the fourth time to this Filipina woman. He has since been sentenced to 99 years in prison.

We have one case in Baltimore right now of a woman who wrote to her friend asking for help saying, "I don't want to die young." The friend called up the Philippine consulate in New York and as usual the Philippine Consulate gave the friend my telephone number. The Philippine Consulate in New York takes in a million dollars in taxes [from Philippine nationals working abroad] every year, but it has absolutely no programs at all for any of these women. Its only response is to give them my telephone number. What is this? Am I the service arm of the Philippine Consulate? Give me the million dollars, I'll settle it for you!

But this woman in Baltimore is so frightened because she has kids. She did not know what to do, and dealing with a battered woman in this situation requires a lot of time and caring. You have to go literally hold her hand and lead her step by step. Her husband is well off. She is very worried, and says, "Where am I going to take the children," and we say, "Don't leave the house. Kick him out." She says, "How am I going to kick him out?" We tell her to call the police and file charges. But she's so frightened.

Think of the pain in this kind of situation for 50,000 women. Three to five thousand such women come to the US from the Philippines alone every year. Many people think of mail-order brides as, "Oh wow. Romance, across the seas, across the continent. An affair to remember."

This is not the case. It's business and it's a global phenomenon: twenty thousand mail-order brides in Australia; 50,000 in the US. There are men from entire villages in Japan marrying women from villages in the Philippines, pre-arranged. What for? So the women will work on the farms because Japanese women don't want to work on them. Last year, 3,000 South Korean men married women from the Philippines for the same reason.

There is a system in Germany that includes two terrible components: the "discovery process" and the "30-day guarantee." I must say the western languages are fantastic when it comes to these euphemisms. "Discovery process"...that means men can take the woman, have sex with her in the office of the mail-order bride agency and see if he likes her. And then there's the "30-day guarantee." Like for a refrigerator or a washing machine. Men can take the woman home, use her however he wants; and if he's not happy, he can return her within 30 days. You have no idea how many women have lost their minds because of this practice, and how many women have attempted suicide.

You may ask, "Why are women subjecting themselves to this kind of horrible practice." The Philippine Ambassador to Canada will say these women choose to come here because they want the material goods, that they're materialistic. Like hell! These are not individual decisions. There is a whole subculture which has developed in South East Asia pushing women to go abroad and make money [and send it back through remittances to their home countries.]

In the Philippines, family responsibility and survival has shifted from men to women, and this shift has destroyed both genders. The men are totally infantalized and have become irresponsible, and the women are forced to go all over the world to make money.

The Philippine government will say these women are the heros of our economy. They don't even have the decency to get the gender right—the "heros" of our economy. Three hundred and forty thousand women were exported out of the country in 1994 alone. And for the last 15 years, it's been 250,000 women every year. If you draw up a chart of our exports, so many pounds of sugar, so many pounds of coconut meat, so many pounds of whatever...at the very top of the exports would be 2,500,000 pounds of female flesh.

Many people think of mail-order brides as, "Romance, across the seas. An affair to remember." This is not the case. It's business and it's a global phenomenon.

The Philippine government says the women work abroad as domestics. True, but the government will not tell you that the second most likely profession for these women is in the sex trade. Twenty thousand Filipino women are going around the sex farms in Europe; a hundred thousand in Japan.

We have to look at the phenomenon of the mail-order brides within the context of the labour export policy of the Philippines within the context of the global traffic of women.

Rosca was asked why international covenants—such as human rights laws—even though they exist, do not protect the rights of mail-order brides, basically allowing men to abuse and violate these women.

Rosca: International laws are based on the idea of individual rights. When we talk about the collective rights of women or of indigenous peoples, we run into trouble because the framework of laws and treaties does not understand what we are talking about.

I worked with Amnesty International for seven years, and Amnesty International does not recognize the traffic of women as a human rights violation. Why? Because they say human rights has to be in terms of individual or political rights, not economic rights. It's a major problem.

In Europe, prostitution is banned everywhere; it's illegal. But there's the question of implementation: who holds the power to implement the law? The police, the armed might of the state? We had a group of feminists go to Thailand to find out what is keeping the sex industry going after the US military bases were closed. They came to only one conclusion. Men are keeping the industry going. Very simple.

A member of the audience asked Rosca to explain how the mail-order bride industry fits into the development of APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), intended by world leaders and corporate interests to establish a "free trade" network among Pacific Rim countries.

Rosca: You have to look at APEC as one of the means by which treaties reinforcing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] agenda are being implemented. Under GATT-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), the Philippines is supposed to reduce its production of rice and corn. Then they're supposed to import rice from Thailand and Vietnam.

But what they don't tell you is that most of the rice farmers in the Philippines are women. So what's going to happen to these women? They are going to be replaced; they are going to be dispossessed of their land. Because in place of rice and corn, we are going to plant cash crops for export. These women are going to be moved off their farms; they are going to have to go to the cities; they're going to end up as squatters, jobless; they're going to end up as mail-order brides or as domestic workers overseas.

The government has already started to change the crops in the Cordillera region, our tribal area, where the beautiful mountain terraces are extremely rich, fertile areas. The people living there produce rice and the best vegetables. Now the Philippine government has replaced those crops with wheat and with flowers for export to Taiwan.

In Hong Kong, you will see that the Igorots, the tribal women, comprise the largest ethnic group among the Filipina domestics there. This [the ongoing invasion of local economies in the South by multinational corporations and international moneylenders based in the North] is destroying an entire way of life. These young women are screaming that this is ethnocide. APEC is one of the mean by which this is being carried out.

One woman asked Rosca about how Filipina activists in the US organize around the mail-order bride issue.

Rosca: We have an organization in the US called GABRIELA Network. We work specifically on issues that affect Filipinas, but which have their roots and origins in the United States. The mail-order bride issue is a very strong campaign of ours now.

We wish we could get stronger support from our own community because the response has been that we should not open up this issue : it's embarrassing, it's shameful. When the murders in Seattle happened, even the Washington state legislator of Filipino origin tried to frame it as a simple case of domestic violence. It's not.

What we are talking about are economic development models created by the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the World Bank and imposed on countries like the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. And this is the amazing thing, it's such a "success" story. Look at the Philippines: it's perfectly solvent; its credit line is huge. The IMF/World Bank is lending it money. We owe how much? $42 billion. That's our foreign debt. How can we pay that.

Overseas Filipinas are sending back between $6-$7 billion per year, so the government can pay the interest [on the foreign debt.] This economic strategy is a great success as far as the corporate banks are concerned. All of these banks are concerned [about their profit] and so they are replicating this model in Africa and Latin America.

And if you look at the mail-order bride industry now, they have gone into specialization. You have an agency that specializes in Asians, "Asian Encounters"; you have an agency that specializes in Latinas, "Latin International": you have an agency that specializes in Russian and Eastern European women; you have agencies that cater solely to disabled men.

Lisa Valencia-Svensson: What's the average age of the women who are brought over as mail-order brides?

Rosca: The women from Asia are very young. The youngest would be about fifteen; the oldest about twenty-five.

Valencia-Svensson: What background are they coming from in the Philippines?

Rosca: All sorts. It used to be that they came from very poor sections of the population, but now it's like almost everybody: teachers, accountants. Everybody is so desperate to get out of the country.

Valencia-Svensson: What are some of the common situations women who go abroad through the mail-order industry find themselves in?

Rosca: Well, the mildest form of abuse is control of your movement : you're not allowed to leave the house, you're not allowed to use the telephone. Then there's control over money: if he allows you to work, he takes all the money. He might put your name in the chequing account for INS [Immigration and Naturalization Services] immigration purposes, but you have no access to the cheques, the bank account, nothing. That's the mildest. The most severe of course is being battered to death.

Valencia-Svensson: What does GABRIELA see as the main reasons American men are bringing over mail-order brides?

Rosca: Some of the reasons are the increasing cost of sustaining a family. Many men have discovered it's cheaper to bring in a woman from the Third World, who has lower expectations in terms of material comfort, and make her clean the house, take care of the man, and then have children. For American men, there are two issues: control and power, and service.

If you draw up a chart of our exports, at the very top would be 2,500,000 pounds of female flesh.

Valencia-Svensson: How long ago did this whole phenomenon begin?

Rosca: Only in the 1980s.

Valencia-Svensson: What are some of the specific actions GABRIELA Network has been taking in support of mail-order brides, since it started its campaign in 1992?

Rosca: We have been pushing for legislation to regulate the agencies, if only with regards to two points. One is that they should not be able to list women who are underage, because they're offering girls, fifteen year olds. The second point is that there needs to be some kind of "breaker," because some of these men bring women to the US, batter them, throw them away, bring in another woman, batter them, and so on. There's nothing that can stop them. At the very least, men who have records of battering should not be allowed to bring over mail-order brides.

Valencia-Svensson: How successful have you been in getting this type of legislation?

Rosca: Not too successful because the agency owners have money. But basically we use this strategy to educate the public. We have no illusion that we can get a law, but just to get it on the floor, have it debated. It's a great public education thing.

Valencia-Svensson: GABRIELA has also been targetting newspapers that run the ads for mail-order bride agencies...

Rosca: Yes. We are asking local campaigns to go through all the periodicals and write to the magazines and editors and say this advertising by these agencies is really offensive. We've been pretty successful with that.

Valencia-Svensson: What support have you gotten from the Filipino community in the U.S.?

Rosca: The community is divided. Some of them are saying why are you raising these issues. But the women mostly are very, very supportive. And we've had women calling up and saying, "My ex-husband is now going to the Philippines, going to buy a woman." That's how we discover.

Valencia-Svensson: How about support from the women's movement in the States?

Rosca: Very strong now, but in the beginning, established organizations like the National Organization for Women would say, we only deal with national issues. So we'd say, what do you think these women are, where do you think these crimes are taking place?

Valencia-Svensson: What are some of the actions you would suggest women here in Canada take around this issue?

Rosca: I think local mobilization which targets the media and the periodicals who carry ads for mail-order bride agencies is very important. We always have this rule: maximum results for minimum effort, because we are so few compared to the larger population. It's very dramatic and concrete, and you really get a sense of empowerment, when you're able to convince a magazine to stop carrying the advertising. It's a great morale booster.

Valencia-Svensson: Anything else?

Rosca: We also have to build a system of support for the women themselves. We have to educate the Filipino community that these things that happen to the women should not be a source of shame. We should not be ashamed of these things. It's those people who commit these atrocities who should be ashamed. We should be proud that we survived. That's very important. And basically, I will repeat what I always say: it's very important to get organized.

FEATURE

Interview with Ninotchka Rosca:

Continued from page 11

and historical artifacts that we have not been able to put together.

I think as a nation we are extremely schizoid because we had to shift from one value system to another, and this is the source of our famous, so-called adaptability and flexibility. I do not know yet if it's an advantage or a disadvantage. I tend to think it's a disadvantage. So that was *State of War*.

Twice Blessed came out of my curiosity about what happens to women when they enter a political system such as we have in the Philippines, which is extremely feudal, extremely patriarchal, extremely macho and male-dominated.

Valencia-Svensson: How about your collections of short stories? They must be on a number of themes.

Rosca: Yes, very different. I actually wrote only one detention story. It's called "Earthquake Weather." I remember when I was in Hawaii they asked me to read, and I thought, "Well, it's been almost five years since I was imprisoned." So I chose to read that story. In the middle of the reading, my voice broke. I was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to be embarrassed here." Because we were very macho in the Philippines, we never thought of how imprisonment and all of that trauma affected us. A great many of the stories are about the impossibility of having a normal existence in a situation like the Philippines, the impossibility of having even a normal relationship.

Valencia-Svensson: In little places here and there in your novel *State of War*, you talk about the strength of Philippine women before the Spanish arrived and how women were accorded a much greater amount of respect. Where did you learn this information?

Rosca: ...from researching in the library through all the old materials, and partly from my mother and her sisters. This is the one thing that very few people realize: that the record bearers, the cultural nodal points of our society, are the women. My mother and her sisters would gather in our house at least once a month and talk about what happened here, what happened there. I discovered very early on the secret world of women. These women were all Catholics, but they knew exactly where to go for abortions.

Valencia-Svensson: What is the current state of Philippine women's writing both in the Philippines and abroad? Would you say that it's grown recently, and has there been a lot of strong women writers over the past several decades?

Rosca: Oh, very many. And we have to credit the women's movement for this. They made the exploration of the feminine psyche a significant subject. So, alongside with rediscovery of the old women writers and appreciation for them, [contemporary] women writers are going very strong.

Valencia-Svensson: Did you get a lot of inspiration for your own writing from other Philippine women writers you were exposed to growing up?

Rosca: Some, yes. But I grew up in a male, patriarchal society, and we were brought up to think that women writers were a little lower than male writers. I was around 12 or 13 years old when I discovered *Genji Monogatari* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the two oldest novels in the world, and they're both written by Asian women. They never teach you this *[laughter]*.

Valencia-Svensson: What are you focusing your writing on now?

Rosca: I'm trying to finish a third novel. It's called *Fugitive Colours*. It's about colour-race interaction that involves Filipinos. The story is about a group of Filipinos staying in a building. You know how it is with Filipinos: one family moves to an apartment and then a second or third family moves in, and so this one floor becomes occupied by all Filipino families. Then, they plot to take over the entire building in the middle of Manhattan. That's the basic framework of the novel.

Valencia-Svensson: I want to ask you now more about the work of the GABRIELA Network and feminist activism.

Rosca: GABRIELA Philippines [named after national hero Gabriela Silang] is the largest alliance of women's organizations and institutions in the Philippines. It was founded in 1984 when it was realized that the first people to hit the streets after the assassination of Senator Aquino were women. *[Senator Aquino was killed by the Marcos regime while disembarking from his plane as he returned to the Philippines from exile in 1983.]*

GABRIELA was set up first as a coalition and later on as an alliance. GABRIELA Philippines is part of the National Democratic movement. Its views on women and women's issues can be best summed up by a slogan used back in 1992: "Women's issues are national issues and national issues are women's issues." This shows the dialectical inter-relationship between a country's liberation and women's liberation.

GABRIELA Philippines, in recognition of the massive export of women from the Philippines, encouraged the establishment of women's support centres wherever our women are. So the GABRIELA Network was established as part of that movement. There is a GABRIELA Holland, GABRIELA Germany, and so on.

Valencia-Svensson: What campaigns has the GABRIELA Network in the US been involved in since it began?

Rosca: Well, from the very beginning, because women's issues are so huge, we made the determination that we would only take up issues which have their roots in American policy decisions or American practices, but which affect Filipinas adversely. We also decided we would take on one issue and campaign for two to three years.

Our first issue was the US military bases in the Philippines, and the impact of those bases on the women and children in the area. We campaigned on that issue from 1989 to 1992. And then we followed it up with short campaigns on militarism and prostitution as manifested in the comfort women's issue [mostly Asian women who were forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese army during World War II], and on the Amerasian children [born to Filipina sex trade workers and fathered by American soldiers.] Then we went into the issue of the mail-order brides. We're still on that one. It's growing bigger and bigger because you can't separate the mail-order bride issue from labour export, domestic workers, and so forth *[see page 12.]*

Valencia-Svensson: The women's movement in North America is slowly but increasingly hearing the voices of women of colour, women from the so-called Third World. What do you see as the strengths of this movement and what do you see as the weaknesses and challenges for it?

Rosca: I think a great weakness of the North American women's movement is the separation between class, gender and race. It has really divided us. We have to come up with a comprehensive political economy of gender, of class and of race and see how these things interlock within what is basically a single mode of production, a single socio-economic formation. I think if we can learn to do this, we can find our basis for unity.

In the US, there's a real stratification. You have the White women's movement, the Black women's movement, the Asian women's movement, *et cetera*. We still have to work on the interfaces between them. What I have found really strong, and what I learned from the women's movement here, is being upfront: saying what you mean and meaning what you say. There is no being oblique, and you know we Filipinos like to be oblique because we don't like confrontations. I learned from the women's movement that confrontation can be a weapon and it has served us very well.

Valencia-Svensson: How has the GABRIELA Network in the US dealt with the issue of sexuality and lesbians' participation?

Rosca: This is a very interesting question. Admittedly, the Filipino-American community is very backward in its attitudes towards gay and lesbian rights. We've had instances where people would come up to us and ask if we are advocating lesbianism. How do you answer that question? We don't even know where to begin. So what we have done is helped our gay women form their own collective so they can support each other, especially when the members want to come out and be open about their sexual orientation. And we have supported them very strongly.

We had two instances where, during the Independence Day Parade [marking Philippine independence from Spain], lesbians were subjected to harrassment. Some of the marshals tried to prevent them from marching. So GABRIELA Network intervened and said they were with us.

Valencia-Svensson: I hear a lot of lesbians of colour say that, when they try to come out in their communities, whether that be in their country of origin or elsewhere, they come across the accusation that lesbianism is a Western disease and that if they were true to their cultures and origins then they wouldn't be lesbians. What is your response to that in terms of Philippine culture?

I discovered very early on the secret world of women. These women were all Catholics, but they knew exactly where to go for abortions.

Rosca: It's actually quite a mystery to me why we have this, on the surface at least, very hostile attitude towards gays and lesbians because if we examine our bedrock culture, historically there's never been any kind of negative perception of gays and lesbians. We don't even have a word to denote this particular kind of sexual relationship as far as women are concerned. We do have a word, *bakla*, for gay men, but I suspect that that word was applied to men who had to put on female clothing because they had a vocation for healing or religious negotiation between this world and the spirit world. It was a tradition that only women held those positions, and so if men wanted to perform those roles they had to put on women's clothing.

Valencia-Svensson: ...called the *Babaylan*.

Rosca: The *Babaylan* and the *Catalonias*. Being a lesbian or gay man is very common in the Philippines. I suspect the hostility comes from something that has been imposed, a cultural layer that's really not ours. It clashes very violently with our cultural instincts. But, for GABRIELA Network, to struggle for lesbian rights is a part of the struggle for women's rights.

I must say something about a recent study on Fillipina migrant workers in Canada, entitled *Our Own Voices* [published by the Women's Advisory Committee of the Philipines-Canada Human Resource Development program.] It's a very good study, and I'm sure the people were very well intentioned, but you can see there's a problem in consolidating one's progressive frame of mind with the question of sexuality. In this report, under the listing of social problems [for migrant workers,] there was something very weirdly phrased: "heterosexuals having gay or lesbian relationships."

Why should that be a social problem; and, if they're having gay or lesbian relationships, how can they be heterosexuals? Maybe they're bisexuals. And then they trace homosexuality to really weird causes like "unfulfilled physical longings." Why can't we just take this as something that happens very normally within our culture, and not look at it as a problem. So you can see we still need a lot of education, a lot of pondering and a lot of self-analysis in this area.

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Lesbians on screen at the Vancouver International Film Festival:

Fire leaves myths in ashes

by Fatima Jaffer

FIRE
Directed by Deepa Mehta
Trial By Fire Productions
Ontario, 1996

Fire is the best feature film about lesbians I have seen. Period.

As a South Asian lesbian, it makes sense I would appreciate this beautiful film told with humour and compassion about two Indian women in New Delhi who slowly fall in love and try to leave their husbands for each other. But what surprises and thrills is that so does virtually every woman who sees it. My mom included. It makes for a revolutionary film indeed!

I first saw *Fire* at the Toronto Festival of Festivals where it was having its Canadian premiere. The film was chosen to open Toronto's "Perspective Canada" program, which surprised many since the action of the film takes place in India, most of its cast is Indian, and only some of the crew is Canadian. *Fire* and its Canadian director, Deepa Mehta, who lives in Toronto, were also featured heavily in the local media.

The screening was sold-out and the audience gave Mehta, and lead actors Shabana Azmi *[see interview,* Kinesis, *Sept 1994]*, Nandita Das, and Ranjit Chowdhury who were present, numerous standing ovations.

Mehta told audience members that the film is in English, largely because she has lived in Canada for so long (almost 25 years) that she "thinks in English" and was able to better direct in English. Mehta also pointed out that since the film was received so well, *Fire* might just find a Canadian distributor and be shown in mainstream theatres soon.

That still hadn't happened when I saw *Fire* again weeks later at the Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF). The film picked up top prizes at the Venice and other European film festivals and had found itself European film distribution, but not Canadian.

Unlike in Toronto, there was little prepublicity for the film in Vancouver from the local mainstream media or in festival promotional material. What little there was underestimated the importance of the film, misrepresented its content and message, and focused primarily on its Indian-ness. *Fire* in fact reaches beyond its Indian context to carry a universal message. It takes on the homophobia, sexism, nationalisms and religious fundamentalisms endemic in most nations experiencing harsh conservative socio-economic and political control.

The South Asian community media in Vancouver, however, gave *Fire* excellent publicity, and together with word-of-mouth reviews among women, huge crowds came out for *Fire*'s two festival screenings in Vancouver. *[Ed note: Circumstances prevented* Kinesis *from running a review before* Fire's *Vancouver screenings.]* And at the close of the festival, that audience gave *Fire* further applause by voting it the Most Popular Canadian Film.

I had hoped my second viewing would allow me to better understand the many layers of this film, as well as find its flaws, which escaped me in my first viewing. I wanted to be able to write this review without gushing.

I don't think that is possible. I still can't find any significant flaws in the film. I enjoyed *Fire* even more the second time, for many reasons, not least of which is that it is a very good film, beautifully crafted, brilliantly acted, gorgeously textured, with infinite layers of intelligent social and political commentary. In fact, there is so much to discuss about this film, it would take many *Kinesis* pages and a thousand voices—South Asian, lesbian, women's—to examine them all.

The film opens with a conversation between a young girl, Radha, and her mother, as they sit in a beautiful field of green grass and yellow flowers. Throughout the film, we revisit this scene, as Radha's mother tries to show her how to see the (imaginary) ocean through the field with her mind's eye.

Most of the film's action takes place in the present, where the grown-up Radha (Shabana Azmi) has been married to Ashok (Kulbushan Karbanda) for almost 15 years. Shortly after their marriage, Radha was told she has "no eggs in ovary, madam" and is unable to give birth. Since then, Radha and Ashok have lived more as "brother and sister," as Radha puts it, than as lovers, due to Ashok's inability to deal with her infertility. While Ashok devotes himself to an all-male spiritual movement, Radha runs the family's takeout food and video store with the help of the family servant, Mundu (Ranjit Chowdhury) and Ashok's brother Jatin (Jaaved Jaaferi).

Everything changes when Jatin brings home his bride and Radha's new sister-in-law, Sita (Nandita Das). Sita is younger, has a feminist take on life, but finds herself trapped in a marriage that is not going anywhere. Despite his arranged marriage to Sita, Jatin continues his affair with Julie, a Chinese woman whose family has lived in India for three generations. Julie had refused to marry Jatin because she didn't want to become a mere "babymaking machine."

As Sita and Radha get to know each other, they fall in love and have a delightful, empowering love affair under everyone's noses, especially those who guard the family's morality—Mundu the servant, and Biji, the old, mute mother of Jatin and Ashok, who expresses her displeasure, censure and morality by incessantly ringing a bell.

Sita frequently offers a perspective so fresh, liberating and empowering, it pierces not only Radha's dulled senses but those of the women in the audience. At one point, when Sita and Radha dress in drag and perform a lip-syncing, love duet for Biji's entertainment, Radha hesitates and says: "Wait....I'm afraid I might make a fool of myself." Sita responds with a laugh: "And what is so wrong with that?"

On the surface, the film is a powerful love story between two women. However, the film is more than just one family's tale. Sita is named after the goddess Sita, the epitome of Hindu women's purity. The story of Sita and Ram forms the core of the Hindu religious epic, the *Ramayana*. As the myth goes, Sita was married to the god Ram, who gets banished to the forest for 14 years. Sita, among others, goes with him. While Ram is away hunting one day, Ravan (a devil-like god) enters Sita's tent in the guise of a deer. He asks Sita to feed him, and when she does, he turns back into human form. He then kidnaps her. She becomes a fallen woman in the eyes of the community even though she protests her innocence. She then has to undergo a trial by fire to prove she is still pure. Even though Sita endures and is unburnt by the fire, thus proving her chastity, she is still banished by Ram.

Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das in *Fire* *photo by Dilip Mehta*

Clearly, *Fire*'s Sita symbolizes a modern day, feminist Sita, the product of years of feminist organizing in India, which has one of the largest, most active and oldest women's movements in the world. Radha is named after another Hindu goddess, the dutiful and ever-faithful wife of the god Krishna. In the film, Sita repeatedly incites Radha to challenge and reject her husband's notions of wifely duty, which Radha gradually does. The feminist Sita and her lover Radha together challenge the most patriarchal and most Hindu notions of wife and woman. The ending, which I am trying not to give away, carries an empowering message to all South Asian lesbians, all lesbians, and indeed to all women.

While the importance of Mehta taking on the *Ramayana* can be central to understanding how revolutionary and exciting this film is, it is not crucial. Mehta gives enough information to help the non-Indian or less informed viwer get the basic messages. The film allows you enough room to bring your own personal understanding and a sense of identification across the cultural divide. In that, it far outdoes any lesbian Hollywood or Western independent film I have seen.

However, the *Ramayana*, and the story of Sita and Ram, contain the core messages of the patriarchy, in ways particular to Indian and especially Hindu society,,even as it is reminiscent of patriarchal messages in many cultures. In rewriting feminist roles for Sita and Radha, Mehta strikes at the core of Hindu male supremacy, and thus, all male supremacy.

Mehta goes further to undermine the influence of Hindu and Muslim fundmentalism in India today. Interest in the ancient myths of the *Ramayana*—in the form of text, video and religious readings—has been revived in India over the past decade by men seeking control over the wealth and power of the nation. The *Ramayana* has been used by Hindu nationalists and fundamentalists to incite hatred against Muslims, and vice versa, in part to distract and dissuade solidarity movement building among poor people (both Hindu and Muslim).

In *Fire*, Mehta takes on the symbols of Hindu fundamentalist power. Throughout, there are numerous references to the *Ramayana*. We see a popular dramatic production with an all-male cast, retelling the myth of Ram and Sita. The camera pans over movie posters in the video store advertising film versions of the *Ramayana*. The milkman, on his way to delivering milk to the Radha-Sita household, sings religious songs. Mundu masturbates while watching pornographic videos when he is supposed to be watching the video of the *Ramayana*.

Even the sexual frustrations of the men are linked to religious, spiritual or nationalistic failures. Ashok searches for truth in the teachings of a spiritual leader who says true salvation lies in ridding oneself off all desire, especially sexual desire.

Mehta also powerfully takes back saffron-coloured cloth, traditionally the colour worn by religious men and women. One of the most visually stunning scenes in the movie is when Radha and Sita are up on the terra-cotta terrace rooftop, hanging newly washed saris, particularly a saffron-coloured one. And when Radha and Sita are caught making love in bed, Radha picks up a saffron-coloured cloth to hide their naked bodies. A South Asian lesbian friend commented after the film, "We should make saffron-coloured cloth the symbol of our resistance and pride."

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Vancouver International Film Festival:

Feminism across cultures

by Patsy Kotsopoulos

FEMALE PERVERSIONS
Directed by Susan Streitfeld
USA, 1995

BE LOVE COLDER THAN DEATH
Directed by Canan Gerede
Turkey, 1995

Women face different struggles in different parts of the world. At its most effective moments, feminism emerges out of different cultural contexts as a vital force for change. Two films screened at this year's Vancouver International Film Fest—one from the United States and the other from Turkey—illustrate the diverse challenges feminists and women encounter in their day-to-day lives.

A few years ago in the "post-feminist" US, the media wrote an obituary for feminism, declaring it "dead". Women had made it, we were informed—we could be doctors, lawyers, even judges. What happened to those women—most of them white, middle-class and educated—who made it and didn't need feminism, or liberal feminism, any more? The independently made film *Female Perversions*, director Susan Streitfeld's feature debut, answers that question in a story about a successful lawyer named Eve (played magnificently by Tilda Swinton of *Orlando* fame).

At the pinnacle of her career, Eve is about to be appointed as a judge, but is stricken with self-doubt. The internal voice telling her she isn't good enough, smart enough, attractive enough, manifests itself in the film visually. At various moments, incidental characters from the film appear suddenly, whispering maliciously into her ear, sometimes groping her menacingly. At other times, Eve has nightmarish, indistinct recollections of the relationship between her father and her mother. As the film progresses to its conclusion, these memories become more distinct, and Eve makes a discovery that transforms her and how she relates to other women (whom she previously viewed as competition or as sexual prey).

Amy Madigan in Female Perversions *photo courtesy VIFF*

Inspired by Louise J. Kaplan's Freudian text of the same name, *Female Perversions* powerfully portrays the ways in which women internalize patriarchy, dividing us against ourselves and against each other, making us our own worst enemies. Some women have made in-roads into male-dominated professions thanks to liberal feminism. However, the film argues that insidious and subtle forms of sexism persist to the degree that it is impossible for women to become fully realized and to have self-worth.

Of course, women's struggles are not just limited to the realm of the psychological. External forms of coercion persist such as male violence against women—an issue taken up in the Turkish film *Be Love Colder than Death*.

Director Canan Gerede's film centres around the young and illiterate Belgin, who bellydances for a living in a seedy bar. She starts off as the quintessential male fantasy—beautiful, nubile and silent—but as the film progresses, she undergoes harsh experiences that distance her from that conventional image of femininity. She becomes a leather-wearing punk-feminist pop star, belting out songs about misogyny and domestic violence to raise money for women's shelters. The first suggestion that there is more to Belgin than meets the eye comes when she bargains with Ali, manager of yet another seedy bar, for a singing job. Ali has fallen for Belgin and has offered her a bellydancing gig. She will only agree to the job if she is allowed to sing as well. Soon, she and Ali marry, and as she begins to pursue her singing dreams, Ali becomes abusive and Belgin eventually leaves him. Ali interprets Belgin's desires and her success as an "arabesque" singer as a threat to his masculinity. He attempts to control Belgin through violence, stalking her and eventually disfiguring her.

The film portrays Belgin's anger after this crime as transformative though not without hardship. She abandons "arabesque" (mournful ballads featuring abandoned women pining for lost male lovers), in favour of feminist rock anthems. But at a fundraising concert, Ali, with the help of the police, asserts control over her again. Here, the film shows us that male violence against women is institutionally sanctioned in Turkey, just as it is everywhere else in the world, and that a woman who speaks out risks losing her life.

Bennu Gerede in her first feature role, and under the direction of her mother Canan, gives a fine performance as Belgin, and ably takes the character through her emotional upheavals to her political awakening. Ironically, she took on the role when the original actor quit after receiving death threats. *Be Love Colder than Death* is based on a true story.

Patsy Kotsopoulos is a freelance writer living in Vancouver and a former culture editor with Pacific Current, *a magazine covering culture, arts and politics in BC.*

The Guerrilla Girls in Vancouver:

Bringing out the "GG" within us

by Leanne Johnson

GUERRILLA GIRLS:
Performing at the Vogue Theatre,
Vancouver, BC

I was so looking forward to the Guerrilla Girl's (GGs) show that I was counting sleeps before their arrival. Opus Framing and Art Supplies brought the GGs to Vancouver in September as a fundraiser for the Contemporary Art Gallery. Two GGs arrived for their lecture/show: "Frida Kahlo" and "Kathe Kollwitz." (The GGs never reveal their own identities, but instead use the names of deceased women artists.)

Perhaps it was my pre-show research or just the limitations inherent in putting on the show, but I found myself squirming in my seat and checking my phantom watch to see if the show would ever end.

First a waiver: I am a fan of the Guerrilla Girls' work. How can you not admire the tireless grassroots activism of groups such as the GGs? Since 1985, the GGs have utilized guerilla media tactics to highlight discrimination against women and people of colour in the art world. As such, they have done an admirable job, making many inroads for traditionally marginalized artists in the US.

As a fundraiser, the show was a success: both performances sold well, and hardly an empty seat was to be found. It was inspiring to see so many Vancouverites lining up to see the lecture. It indicated to me that we are still interested in equal representation in the arts, and that the local arts community hasn't rolled over in defeat as a result of constant funding cutbacks from all levels of government.

However, art is art, performance is performance, scholarly discussion is scholarly discussion, and the show wasn't quite any one of these things. As such, it is hard to categorize.

Essentially, the show consisted of two women in gorilla masks reading from their book, *True Confessions of a Guerilla Girl*. The show opened with Kahlo and Kollwitz reading letters the Guerrilla Girls had received over the years—mostly not from fans of the Girls—and then reading from their posters projected on a screen.

I felt this was tiresome because I had already read their book. Many people I talked to after the show, who were not as familiar with their work, also said they were somewhat bored. Maybe this is a limitation of the GGs: they are better at doing than saying. The GGs might have been more effective at educating us had they just come through town on a postering blitz.

Prior to the show, I'd participated in a discussion with the two GGs and local Aboriginal artist Michelle Sylliboy. I found this dialogue more interesting than seeing them perform. The GGs were intrigued by the legacy of painter Emily Carr. They wanted to know whether having a famous woman artist in our region changed how women and art were viewed. Although I'm uncertain whether this question was ever answered or could be answered, it opened up many dialogues on issues of representation and appropriation, none of which came up during their performance or the question-and-answer period that followed. And that's too bad. We need more opportunities to have public dialogues on such issues.

The common theme of the many questions asked after the performance was about do-it-yourself-ism. This is the important legacy of the GGs. They point out that if you want to be represented, you must become active; you cannot expect groups like the GGs to represent everybody. This was made readily apparent when an audience member asked what the Canadian Art Report Card would look like. The GGs responded that it was our job to determine that, not theirs, and that they were not here to right the wrongs of representation of marginalized artists in Vancouver. Rather, they said they were here to deliver their message: anybody can do what the GGs have done. What the GGs do best is to provide a blueprint of how they accomplish their work in New York. They invited women artists in Vancouver to use their materials and attempt to bring out the "GG" that lies within each of us.

As far as providing methods of action for guerrilla media approaches the GGs were successful. But, as I said before, as performance goes, it was a disappointment.

Leanne Johnson is Vancouver-based writer and answering machine poet.

Frannie Sheridan's The Waltonsteins*:*

Coming out as Jewish

reviewed by Faith Jones

The Sheridans aren't your average Catholic family. For one thing, they're Jewish.

Frannie Sheridan's one-woman play, *The Waltonsteins*, is based on the true story of her childhood, during which her family changed names, changed religions, and moved cities in an effort to disguise that they were Jewish. In the play, the Holocaust-survivor parents live in fear of being found out as Jews. Daily, the children are told by the father, "Never tell anyone you're a Jew."

Playing all the parts—father, mother, six siblings, and the central character Frannie—Sheridan melds family history and personal crisis points with the history of Jews in this century. Fear and living in hiding are central themes. For the parents this means pretending not to be Jewish, but for young Frannie this means pretending not to exist. The little girl hides from everyone, enjoying tricking them when they can't find her, but also wishing they would find her—the real her—buried under the burden of secrecy and the inappropriate roles her parents put on their children.

The parents are unhappy in their marriage, but are bound together by their secret. They turn the home into a war zone, in which the children are assigned "sides" (Mom's or Dad's), and are sent to spy on the enemy and report back on the activities of the other "side." The children try to form alliances, but these disintegrate under parental pressure.

Young Frannie becomes Dad's confidante. He talks obsessively of his escape from the Nazis, and his subsequent imprisonment in Canada in the work camps for Jewish refugees and German prisoners of war. Late at night, the father creeps into Frannie's room to warn her of the Holocaust sure to come, just like the last one, and to explain how the two of them together will avoid detection.

This material is horrifying and difficult, but Sheridan is a skilled comedian who can carry off gallows humour. There were several moments in the play where, at the end of a scene that was particularly heart-wrenching, a joke or facial expression would drop into the mix, and the audience exploded with laughter. You have to appreciate Sheridan's ability in bringing the audience to the limit of its tolerance for the hard material, and then keeping them going with humour.

The play isn't all so difficult. Frannie moves out and gets a job. Sheridan does a funny series of vignettes showing a young woman trying to create her adult identity. This is something everyone can relate to, even those who didn't grow up in hiding. And the play's ending is hopeful. Family can change, Sheridan says.

Everyone I saw the play with was touched by the story, and was moved by the persistence of young Frannie pursuing some resolution to her continual identity problems and seeking out a better relationship with her parents. Sheridan is a skilled actress and comedian, and never gets boring to watch on stage.

The music by Laurie Lesk, which includes a separate line of music associated with each of the main characters, adds enormously to the dramatic impact of the text. Kerrene John's lighting deals admirably with logistics, using lights to indicate rooms of the house, furniture, and moods. Lynna Goldhar Smith's contribution, both in directing and in assisting Sheridan with choosing material and writing the script, is obviously central to the success of the piece. All-woman creative teams are still unusual in the Vancouver theatre scene; this one performed superbly.

The Waltonsteins *returns to the Norman Rothstein Theatre, 950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver, October 24, 26, 29 and 30 at 8 p.m. and October 27 and November 3 at 2 p.m. For tickets and more information: 257-5111.*

"I give myself the right to have selective memory."

photo by Orman Reinart

Faith Jones had an opportunity to speak to Frannie Sheridan about how she created her one-woman play, The Waltonsteins. *Sheridan grew up in Ottawa and now lives in Vancouver. She has been an actress and a stand-up comedian for a number of years. Jones is Jewish and a writer based in Vancouver. She is currently writing about family secrets, which is one of the reasons for her interest in Sheridan's work.*

"I give myself the right to have selective memory," Frannie Sheridan told me. We were talking about the process of writing about real events, especially about a shared history with people who are still alive. How do you choose what to take from reality? When do you allow yourself to change something to make the story better? What if you just can't remember what really happened?

Sheridan says that while a lot of the dialogue in *The Waltonsteins* is taken from real life experiences of her family, the names and professions of her siblings have been changed, and there are elements she has heightened for dramatic effect. She also says there are things she left out, and things she struggled with but eventually decided were too important to leave out.

Then there is that bizarre netherworld where memory and imagination meet. An incident Sheridan thought she made up to illustrate a point—the father in the play keeps the salt and pepper shakers in his pocket at meal times, and rigidly controls who gets to put any on their food—turns out to have been based on her father's real-life practice of getting one daughter to monitor how much salt each person had put on her or his food. Sheridan had forgotten the real-life incident until her sister reminded her.

It's not important to Sheridan whether each incident in the play is real or made up, as long as it adds to the story she wants to tell. "At some point it becomes a piece of art," she says. What proves it to her is that family members have changed as a result of the play. When she first mounted the play in August 1995, some family members threatened to sue her for revealing that they are Jewish. Now, although there are still siblings who don't want to be "out" as Jews, several other family members are reconverting to Judaism, are openly identifying as Jewish, and are taking strength from Sheridan and the play.

Perhaps most powerfully, the play and the publicity it has received in the international Jewish press enabled extended family members, whom their parents hadn't seen since their identity change over thirty years ago, to find Sheridan and her siblings.

For Sheridan, one of the most difficult aspects is trying to convey Jewish life and culture, and particularly religion, when her own experience of it is limited. One Jewish audience member did express concern over one scene, in which the main character tries to sing a Jewish prayer she doesn't know by making broadly Jewish-music-like guttural sounds. Not wanting to reiterate a stereotype, "I did a survey," Sheridan says. Nobody else had a problem with it, including the devout Jews she asked, so she kept the bit. But she certainly respects audience members who alert her to areas where she needs to be sensitive to Jews with more traditional upbringings. "I'm new to this," she says.

Although her story seems unique, Sheridan has learned that it is not. She is to be interviewed by the CBC soon for a documentary about secret Jews in Canada—some of whom are still in hiding.

I asked Sheridan what it meant to her to openly call herself a Jew. "It means being able to be who I am," she said simply. "That's all it is."

Reviews from the Vancouver Fringe Festival:

Constraints of society

by Caitlin Byrne

In September, the annual Fringe Festival hit the streets and stages of Vancouver's Eastside. In our October issue, Kinesis *reviewed several Fringe plays, and in this issue, Caitlin Byrne highlights a few more.*

WANTON DISREGARD
Written by Susan Helenchilde
Style of Cause
Vancouver, BC

Wanton disregard (for human life) is a legal term and a fitting title for Susan Helenchilde's play. The first act takes place in a courtroom at the trial of a working class mother of twins (Helenchilde) charged with the "wanton disregard" of one of her twins. The mother had taken a post-Christmas trip with her children to a remote northern cottage, while her husband is away working. Tragically, it snowed heavily and they became trapped in the cottage with no telephone and without anyone knowing where they were.

In her panic, the mother makes the decision to give her son sugar, in order to reserve enough insulin for her daughter to survive until they can get out. Both twins are diabetic and both may have died otherwise.

The second act shifts ahead to years later. The audience learns the mother has been in prison the entire time without any contact with her daughter. The scene takes place at the institution where her daughter, now in her twenties and pregnant, grew up. The act largely focuses on the daughter's plea to be released from the institution and the system's wrath towards her and her mother.

In the first act, Stephen Hinds plays the brutal Crown attorney and Alexis Kennedy the sympathetic defense lawyer. At this trial, no jury is present (or were we, the audience, the jury?) and the lawyers only address an invisible judge. The court proceedings stretch reality (a point Helenchilde herself concedes). Hinds attacks the mother for her many "disregards"—not preparing for the weather, not having a phone, having a narcissistic desire to kill her son because her daughter was more like her, and so on.

The script is more limiting for Kennedy, not allowing her to build an adequate case. In fact, she does little but beg the judge to stop Hinds from badgering the mother. She does not raise issues like the mother's economic, social and emotional status or bring in other witnesses to support the mother's case.

Playing the daughter in the second act, Helenchilde's performance was stronger, yet just as appropriately victimized as her portrayal of the mother. The daughter's complaints of confinement and isolation from her mother are valid, but are not validated by her hidden psychiatrist (Hersh Binder).

Throughout the entire scene, Binder sits with his back to the audience, speaking in a monotone, indifferent fashion. It was as if his words were merely statements of fact—a bit of a stereotype about psychiatrists. His role is to patronize the daughter and justify the system's actions—a portrayal not entirely believable, but seemingly exaggerated to add to the wanton disregard paradigm.

A parallel character to the psychiatrist, and perhaps the judge, is the husband/father. He is present in the story, yet in no way intervenes to support his wife or daughter. Is Helenchilde saying that, he, along with the judge and the psychiatrist, have themselves committed wanton disregard?

Indeed, Helenchilde aimed to create an uneasy feeling among the audience by trying to reveal the wanton disregard men have for women and children. This feeling is enhanced by the positioning of the husband/father, judge, and even the psychiatrist, somewhat off stage. *Wanton Disregard* also tries to show that men are treated very differently than women by the "system." The system accuses women and not men for inadequately caring for their children.

Helenchilde says she wrote the play as a platform for understanding the abortion issue, without being overtly about abortion. Abortion has been a battleground between "pro-life" and pro-choice philosophies. *Wanton Disregard* attempts to show that male-empowered society upholds a pro-life (anti-choice) philosophy, giving men control over women's lives and decisions.

The play shocked and touched me, and made me think. But I was bothered by the fact that the scenes were a bit too exaggerated, which made the play more difficult to interpret. It may have been more effective for Helenchilde to take a more realistic scenario to exemplify the double standards. Nevertheless, if I understand *Wanton Disregard* correctly, I agree with the point Helenchilde is trying to make.

THE TURKEY BASTING METHOD
Written by Theresa O'Leary
My Very Own Theatre Company
Steveston, BC

There are many methods of birth control, just as there are many alternative methods of conception, all of which are deemed unholy by the Catholic Church. *The Turkey Basting Method* addresses just one of those blasphemous ways of getting pregnant.

Theresa O'Leary's play pokes fun at Irish Catholic uptightness about sexuality with Mrs. Ryan's explanation of how to cook turkey, which has definite sexual undertones.

Mary Ryan (Nancy Robertson), Mrs. Ryan's daughter, knowing that she is no spring chicken, decides to use a turkey baster to conceive a child. With much help from her neighbor Joseph Cleary (Michael P. Northey) and her friends Colleen O'Reilly (Sera Rhyane) and Zerena (Diana Swayze), Mary proceeds. At times during the play, we hear thunder and see lightning, supposedly signs from God that something is not quite right. Maybe it's Mary's pious mother rolling around in her grave.

Robertson plays the coolest, most level headed character of them all. Still, her character is torn between motherhood and moments where she is imagining how she will explain to her curious 13-year old daughter the way in which she was conceived. Should she give up having children for her career as a sculptor? Will she ever create a work of art as equal to having a baby? She even questions if she was meant to have a child at all, knowing by thunder and lightning that God and mother do not approve.

Robertson succeeds in showing Mary's humor and quirkiness, as well as her awareness that all in the world is a bit weird. Some of her sarcastic looks had everybody in the audience in stitches.

As the gentle Joseph, Michael Northey patiently watches Colleen's sex flick videos without much interest. Eventually, Colleen has to step in with phone sex in order to help Joseph hold up his end of the deal. Joseph too is torn over conceiving a child with a turkey baster, questioning his role as just a tool for procreation.

As Colleen, Sera Rhyane's body language, voice, tone and overall manner were fitting. Whether it was the script or the acting, Colleen seemed to possess a self-assured sensuality rather than a submissive sexuality.

Zerena contributed an energizing tension, drawing interesting emotional reactions from the other characters. Throughout, Swayze delivered her lines at a nervous hyperactive speed. (Perhaps this is why she mucked up her lines on one occasion.) Overall, I was amazed at how well she could ramble from memory.

The Turkey Basting Method was at times so comic it went overboard, but the ending fit in line with the conflicts Mary and Joseph had in the play: the method fails to achieve conception despite all the assistance and careful planning. In a way, *The Turkey Basting Method* is an expression of the complexity of relationships and having a baby.

At the end of the play, Mary and Joseph get together for the first time. Is O'Leary implying that Mary and Joseph are going to fall in love and have a baby together "naturally," going full circle back to the traditional method of conception the play put into question in the first place? The other question that needs to be asked is, "Would it have been so bad if the turkey basting method had worked?"

"It's a... bastered!" **(*Top to bottom*) Sera Rhyane (Colleen), Diane Swayze (Zerena) and Nancy Robertson (Mary) work on their own unique method of getting a "bun in the oven" in "The Turkey Basting Method."**

MRS. CAGE
Written by Nancy Barr
Stage Troupers Equity Co-op
Vancouver, BC

In a parking lot of a grocery store, Mrs. Cage follows the box boy who is helping Miss Phillis Deen. A man grabs Miss Deen's purse. The box boy runs after the thief. The thief fatally shoots the boy and drops the gun. Mrs. Cage attends to the box boy, with whom she is enamored. Miss Deen screams for her purse. She does not care about the dead boy nor Mrs. Cage, only her purse. Mrs. Cage picks up the gun and shoots Phillis Deen dead.

The law in North America is a peculiar notion and often difficult to understand in practice. Perhaps it is best described by the *RawHide* song—an American western hunting tune—the box boy used to sing and which Mrs. Cage found endearing.

On this fateful day, the song rings true for Mrs. Cage (Ann Estrada) because she begins to realize she is the hunted animal. Unfortunately for Mrs. Cage, things will only get worse as she confesses to the crime to Lt. Angel, who appears to be like her beloved box boy.

How could all this have happened? Mrs. Cage's confession reveals more than just a crime, but also an insight into her life. She is a caged criminal and law abider at the same time. The people who love her most have failed to get her to understand herself and help her to grow out of her entrapped existence. It seems she could have an alternate perspective on life, but instead she is stuck to the fixed, traditional housewife role.

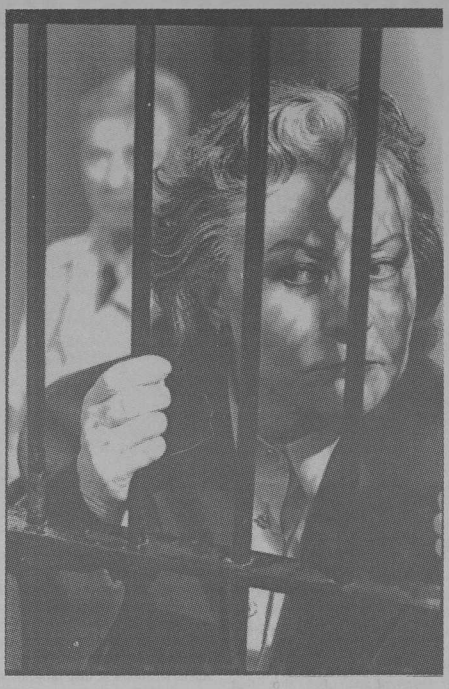
Mrs. Cage cracks up because she has committed the ultimate crime of murder, going against the law which she has supported her whole life without question. (Both her husband and daughter are lawyers.)

I found it difficult to decide whether her crime was forgivable given her character and fierce attachment to a role almost dictated to her by society. It seems Nancy Barr is suggesting that you must question the law (of the courts and of society) before you can understand it.

Sorting out the chaos of a new self-realization can be a delicate process, especially so in the case of Mrs. Cage. Not all of her can be expressed at once or in any formalized order. Bits and pieces of the puzzle of her being flow out in a mess, but, like nature, the pieces all fit together.

Estrada played so well this middle-aged, middle-class woman: an extremely tricky part to play not only because she is really having a rough day, but also because she feels so many things in recalling her life, all in one day. Estrada moves the audience through each of Mrs. Cage's deepest felt emotions, as if the feelings were embodied in her prior to stating the lines. I was on the edge of my seat watching her act.

Mrs. Cage is a one-act play. Being an interrogation and a confession all in one act intensified the atmosphere of the show. The simple setting kept the audience's focus intently on the actors, and the lighting pushed the audience's attention toward Mrs. Cage. The closing shadow of bars was particularly effective. How else could it have been done?



Mrs. Cage *photo courtesy of Adrian Cooper*

DUSA, FISH, STAS AND VI
Written by Pam Gems
Play On Words Company
Vancouver, BC

Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi are four women who live together. Home is their place for dealing with life's problems; troubles are begot outside. Unfortunately, what is outside gets inside.

One needs to watch Pam Gems' play closely for all the subtle influences do add up to an otherwise shocking end. *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi* is about women who attempt to help one another, despite their own troubles.

The stage opens in a living room of the house owned by Fish. Vi (Shannon Sigurdson) is lying on the couch, all wrapped up in a sleeping bag, watching TV. Sigurdson's Vi has a sharp wit which can be annoying to others. She makes fun of newly arrived Dusa, but later steals money from Stas to help Dusa buy bus fare.

For Vi, self-control is a central issue. Midway through the play, she starts taking "pills" which transforms her. To Vi, those pills have an enormous effect. Only after the pills does her buoyant personality hit the stage. She manages to gain the camaraderie and respect of the other women she did not have before.

Sigurdson commands a corporal presence on the stage. However, I wonder if Vi really could have gone so quickly from having no energy to lots of energy. And I question if Vi really does have control over her own body by taking the pills.

None of the other women take on this issue. Fish does mention that the effects of the pills will wear off, but even she does not speak to Vi about how her doctor has pushed her into taking the pills. There is no discussion on the possible long term effects of a pill diet, and I wonder why this issue was not addressed. Doctors do peddle pills—particularly anti-depressants—to women with any kind of problem. If women's equality really is being fought for in *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi*, I would have expected that alternatives for Vi be included.

Dusa (Mandy McKeen) is a young mother with two children. She moves in after leaving her well-to-do husband. Dusa comes to Fish impoverished, not only financially but emotionally. Her spouse has run off to Argentina with her babies. She frets and moans for their safe return: her children are the root of her identity.

Vi helps Dusa financially by stealing money from Stas, but takes only what she needs. Stas remains peculiarly distant from Dusa and never misses the money. Fish tries to help Dusa by listening to her and she hooks Dusa up with a reporter to broadcast a plea for the safe return of her young ones.

Eventually, Dusa gets her children back without the need of any public outcry. When her ex-husband tires of the caring for the children, he simply brings them back to Dusa. One question remains: will the children learn to associate good times with dad and poverty and boredom with Dusa?

All Dusa wanted was the safe return of her children, but now that that has happened, she has to deal with the issue of how to keep them safe. She seems emotionally over-wrought and without a plan.

Despite her stressful situation, Dusa is of some comfort to Fish, as Fish is to her. Similar to one another, they are both at a loss to provide any real assistance. I wish they would have talked about their long term goals and philosophical ideas about life, and not just their immediate problems.

Stas (Gwenda Lorenzetti) is independent and self-motivated. She busily works for her chance to go to Hawaii to study marine biology—she is a physiotherapist by day and a high-priced call girl by night. Lorenzetti's portrayal is self-confident and her mannerisms are fitting for the part.

Stas has accepted the notion that a woman's role with men is best played out as a business arrangement. But near the end of the play, Stas begins to believe the call girl business is dissatisfying and gives it up to spend more time with Vi.

Fish (Jennifer Wagner) is the play's central character. She is a wealthy woman desperately fighting for equality. She gives so much to others, but does not have enough resources for them nor herself.

Fish helps the other women in the house, but cannot address the long term issues, like Dusa's future financial security or alternatives to Vi's pill taking. And while she does argue with Stas about the importance of social equity versus being a microbiologist, she never questions Stas' decision to be a call girl.

Fish's fault may be that she loves too much. She has difficulty letting go of her boyfriend, even though he left her and got another woman pregnant. Eventually she does let go for his new girlfriend's sake. Unfortunately, this and other acts of devotion of not betraying other women, prove to be fatal for Fish.

Wagner acts in a very down-to-earth fashion appropriate to Fish's philosophy. She is magnificent in that I never would have guessed that Fish is really coming apart at the seams, until she commits suicide at the end of the play. And only in the end do her actions make sense.

Pam Gems brought Fringe theatre goers a dramatic and critical look at the lives of four women. By the end of the play, each woman has given the others some help and sharing, despite their personal differences.

One message I got from this play is that women have to deal with a lot of psychological violence, and perhaps too much as in the case with Fish. If I were to have written *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi*, I would have had Fish challenge the thinking of the other three women more thoroughly. Gem's version has "umph," but in ways lacks substance.

Review of Shinjuku Boys:

Focus on intimacies leaves out larger meaning

by Laiwan

SHINJUKU BOYS
Directed by Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams
Distributed by Women Make Movies, New York, New York
Screened in Vancouver at the Out on Screen: Queer Film & Video Festival, August 1996

The British directors of *Dream Girls*, Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams, have made a new hour long documentary focusing on "women who live as men" at the New Marilyn Club in Tokyo, Japan. In a press interview they admit that *Shinjuku Boys* was inspired by an article the filmmakers had read about them in *Marie Claire*, a fashion magazine.

I had looked forward to seeing this episode, hoping for the vibrant, campy performances of the Takarazuka Revue in *Dream Girls [reviewed in* Kinesis, *July/August 1995]*; however, *Shinjuku Boys* is filmed with a narrower focus.

The New Marilyn is a club where all the employees are *onnabe*—young women who dress and live as men and have girlfriends, but who do not consider themselves to be lesbians. Their job at the Marilyn is to entertain women customers who, the directors have said in an interview, are heterosexual. Openly lesbian women are supposedly barred from the club. The entertainment ranges from drinking, to karaoke singing, to birthday celebrations, to the *onnabe* being an escort or "boyfriend" for the night, or on a regular basis, to a female customer.

At the beginning of the film, we are introduced to Gaish, Kazuki and Tatsu who live and work as *onnabe* at the New Marilyn. We see that each has their role or character already defined for their customers—Gaish is a cool, tough-love type of dude; Kazuki is the cuddly one; and Tatsu is all fun and good times. In the course of the film, we find out many personal intimacies—from views about sex and their sexual boundaries (*onnabe* do not remove their clothes during sex); to their partners outside of work, even though they are not supposed to have steady relationships in their lives (Kazuki lives with Kumi who started life as a man and now works as a dancer-drag queen); to their dealings with customers both in and out of the club (Gaish's ultra-cool, cruel conversations are so reminiscent of many men); to how they keep their appearances with haircuts, shaving, breast-binding, make-up (or the illegal hormone treatments Tatsu receives), and on and on.

The trouble with some documentaries is the tendency to zoom into the "exotic of other cultures" with that sneaky anthropological magnifying glass. Sometimes filmmakers just fall into the anthropology set-up by accident — British filmmakers go to Asia and find the "unique" and the "interesting." Unlike their previous film *Dream Girls*, which gave some information surrounding the Takarazuka Revue and how it started, *Shinjuku Boys* gives no geographical, historical, cultural or economic context. Instead, the only framework we are given are the personal intimate details of the three *onnabe*'s lives. Some of the totally candid and trusting interviews reveal situations which may not all be consensual — when Kazuki is coming out to his mother on the phone that he lives with a male-to-female transsexual and that he lives as a transsexual: who knows if mum knew she was being recorded on film? Who knows if the customer being treated rudely by Gaish on the telephone knew that that moment of the conversation would be captured on film?

If documentaries like this must be made, then the directors must establish some basic context. Where is the club located in the city? What districts surround it? What do the women customers do when they're not at the club? Are they desk clerks, store keepers, government workers, fashion designers, musicians? Who owns and runs the club? Are there other clubs for women, and are there ones for men? What is the tradition of "drag" type entertainment for women, also in light of *Dream Girls*? What are the economic realities for the *onnabe*? What kind of backgrounds have they come from?

Leaving out basic information like this, the directors of *Shinjuku Boys* have zeroed in on the sex lives of the gender-bending *onnabe* without any external references. This zeroing in reminds me of TV talk shows like *Oprah* or *Geraldo* where participants are made to reveal intimate relationships that become sensationalized. It creates a claustrophobic vacuum that may portray the *onnabe* to be more outside of the social norm than they really are. They can be employed in a club in Tokyo where they can live as they have sexually defined themselves to be. Do we have anything close to that for our *onnabe* here in Canada?

Kazuki, Tatsu and Gaish in *Shinjuku Boys*. *photo courtesy Women Make Movies*

I found *Shinjuku Boys* to be a sad film—not because of Gaish, Kazuki and Tatsu, who impressed me with their strong, resolute identities and their acceptance of everything normal to them, contrary to any Eastern or Western conventions. It is a sad film because the directors chose to reduce their lives to the spectacle of detailing their attitudes towards intimacies and sex(lessness)—it is often revealed in the film that Gaish and Kazuki do not prioritize or partake in sex for their own pleasure.

To the directors of *Shinjuku Boys* I make the same recommendation I would to the director of *Paris Is Burning*, a similar genre of documentary that looked at an "exotic fringe": give the camera to your subjects, let them make their own film and let them keep the copyright.

This would be the ultimate post-colonial gesture.

Laiwan is an interdisciplinary artist and writer. Born in Zimbabwe of Chinese origin, she is currently based in Vancouver.

Fire *at the Vancouver International Film Festival:*

Continued from page 15

There are also frequent references to Muslim culture, which is posited against the dominant Hindu culture, and allows space for the two women to consummate their relationship. For example, Radha and Sita tie strips of cloth on the railings of a mosque to immortalise their union. The women go out to a mosque on their first "date," where they listen (to men) singing Qu'waalis, a Muslim tradition of music symbolizing a kind of "two-spiritedness" of female and male genders. And it is in a Muslim mausoleum that Radha and Sita plan to meet after they leave their husbands. It is as if the minority Muslim culture offers these Hindu women some freedom to express their sexuality, in part because they fall outside the strictures imposed on Muslim women.

One element that makes the message in *Fire* universal is the stylization of the film, which gives it an almost mythic quality. Deepa Mehta's New Delhi is beautiful, very much Indian, and yet it could be almost anywhere in the diaspora where South Asians have settled. The terrace where the two women spend most of their time reminds me of the terrace I spent my childhood on in Mombasa, Kenya. And it could also have been a rooftop terrace in Surrey or Richmond (stretching it just a little), where South Asian women might get together to hang up saris and talk.

Excellent production design and values by India/Vienna-based filmmaker Aradhana Seth, *[see* Kinesis, *Jul/Aug 1995]* highlight the colours, textures, and detail of the film. Every poster, every colour used, every scene is rich with detail that adds texture to the film, and enhances and deepens its message.

Mehta's depiction of the men allows us to see them in all their strengths and weaknesses, making them quite believable and recognizeable. Some of the men I spoke with after the film, however, objected to the depiction of Jatin and Ashok, who both veer towards violence against their wives when challenged. This shows how, while every man does not physically exert his power over women, he has the social, religious, cultural, economic and political sanction to resort to violence to keep patriarchal order. That power is held by all men, no matter how gentle or sensitive they might be when things are going their way.

At several points, the film comes dangerously close to the idea that the women may have turned to each other because their men were unable to be there for them. In fact, many lesbians I know, who saw the film not knowing it was about lesbians, almost didn't enjoy the film because they were sitting on the edge of their seats throughout the movie, waiting for that moment when the film must inevitably betray us.

But Mehta does an excellent job of doing quite the contrary—she makes it very clear that women do not turn to each other because they can't get a man or his attention; that women choose to love, have sex with and live with women out of a sense of self-esteem, self-respect, courage and self-love, out of a desire for freedom and of coming home. Radha stays behind while Sita leaves so that she can explain that to Ashok. Finally, Radha is able to see the ocean again, just as her mother once taught her to when Radha was a child.

Hopefully *Fire* will get a Canadian distributor soon. And perhaps Mehta will then take up *Fire* where she left off and tell the story of what we, as lesbians, risk, lose and gain, by following our desire to 'see the ocean.'

Fatima Jaffer is a Muslim-born South Asian lesbian from Kenya.

BULLETIN BOARD

read this

Bulletin Board listings have a maximum of 50 words. Groups, organizations and individuals eligible for free space in the Bulletin Board must be, or have, non-profit objectives.

Other free notices will be items of general public interest and will appear at the discretion of *Kinesis*.

Classifieds are $8 (+$0.56 GST) for the first 50 words or portion thereof, $4 (+$0.28 GST) for each additional 25 words or portion thereof and must be prepaid.

Deadline for all submissions is the 18th of the month preceding publication. Note: *Kinesis* is published ten times a year. Jul/Aug and Dec/Jan are double issues.

All submissions should include a contact name and telephone number for any clarification that may be required.

Listings will not be accepted over the telephone.

***Kinesis* encourages readers to research the goods and services advertised in Bulletin Board. *Kinesis* cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided or the safety and effectiveness of the services and products listed.**

Send submissions to Bulletin Board, *Kinesis*, #301-1720 Grant Street, Vancouver, BC, V5L 2Y6, or fax: (604) 255-5511. For more information call (604) 255-5499.

INVOLVEMENT

WANNA GET INVOLVED?

With *Kinesis*? We want to get involved with you too. Help plan our next issue. All women interested in what goes into *Kinesis*—whether it's news, features or arts—are invited to our next Story Meeting **Tues Nov 5** at 7 pm at our office, 301-1720 Grant St. For more information or if you can't make the meeting, but still want to find out about writing for *Kinesis*, give Agnes a call at (604) 255-5499. No experience is necessary. Childcare subsidies available.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS

Are you interested in finding out how *Kinesis* is put together? Well...just drop by during our next production dates and help us design and lay out Canada's national feminist newspaper. Production for the **December/January 1997** issue is from **Nov 20-26**. No experience is necessary. Training and support will be provided. If this notice intrigues you, call us at 255-5499. Childcare subsidies available.

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INVOLVEMENT

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Vancouver Status of Women needs volunteers to assist with its upcoming 25th anniversary gala, *25 & Alive*, to be held on **Sat Nov 2**. VSW is looking for women to help with selling tickets, setting up and cleaning up, delivering posters and decorating the venue. Four hours or more of volunteering equals free admission to the event. Come help VSW celebrate. Call 255-5511 to sign up.

VSW PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

All women are invited to join Vancouver Status of Women's programming committee and become involved in planning community activities, such as the Women's Film Series and Single Mom's Day in the Park. It's fun. It's important. It's cool. Interested? Call 255-5511.

VSW WANTS YOU!

Want to get more involved but not sure where to begin? Join us—become a volunteer at Vancouver Status of Women. VSW volunteers plan events, lead groups, raise funds, answer the phone lines, organize the library, help connect women with the community resources they need, and get involved in other exciting jobs! The next volunteer orientation will be on **Wed, Nov 20**, 7pm at VSW, 301-1720 Grant St. For more info, call 255-5511. Please call before the orientation to confirm attendance. Childcare subsidies available.

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EVENTS

VSW 25 YEAR BASH

VSW is 25 and Alive! Help celebrate the Vancouver Status of Women's birthday at a gala party and book launch on **Sat Nov 2**. Featuring Judy Rebick and Kike Roach launching their new book, *Politically Speaking*, plus fab performers and speakers from VSW's past and present. Everyone welcome! For more info call 255-5511.

WOMEN'S DANCE

A Little Bit of Country and A Lot of Rock and Roll...a women only dance presented by Whatever Next will be held **Fri Nov 8**, 8pm-midnight at the WISE Hall, 1882 Adanac St, Vancouver. From 8-9pm, come out and meet the COPE women candidates and ask them about the Nov 16 civic elections. The venue is wheelchair accessible. Admission is $5.

SAY NO TO APEC

A demonstration and march in Vancouver to oppose APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) will be held on **Mon Nov 25** at 11:45 am. The action coincides with the 1996 APEC leaders summit in the Philippines. The march will start at the new Philippine Women Centre, 451 Powell St. and will follow a route to Canada Place, the Trade and Convention Centre. For more info call 215-1103 or 322-6461.

THE WALTONSTEINS

Frannie Sheridan will once again be staging her one-woman show, *The Waltonsteins*, **Oct 24, 26, 29 & 30** at 8pm and **Oct 27 & Nov 3** at 2pm at the Norman Rothstein Theatre, 950 W. 41st Ave, Vancouver. *The Waltonsteins* is a twisted tale about family secrets and lies based on Sheridan's experiences growing up. Tickets are $15 adults, $13 students and seniors. All tickets are 2 for 1 for the Oct 29 performance. For tickets and more info call 257-5111.

RENEE RODIN

Vancouver-based writer and visual artist Renee Rodin will be launching her latest collection of writings, *Bread and Salt*, a book of prosaics (prose poems, narratives and images), **Sat Nov 8** at 8pm at the Vancouver Press Club, 2215 Granville St. Admission is free. Everyone is welcome. For more info call Talonbooks at 444-4889.

MURIEL DUCKWORTH BIO

Fernwood Publishing will be launching *Muriel Duckworth: a very active pacifist*, a biography written by Marian Douglas Kerans, **Sun Dec 8**, 2-4pm at People's Coop Books, 1391 Commercial Dr, Vancouver. Duckworth, who resides in Halifax, has been active in the peace and women's movement for over 50 years and is the founder of Voice of Women. For more info call 254-0393.

PWC DANCE

The Philippine Women Centre is holding its 7th annual fundraising dance **Sat Nov 16**, 7pm-1am at the Oakridge Hall, 650 W. 41st Ave, Vancouver. Tickets $10. There will also be a raffle draw with great prizes. Come support the Centre and have lots of fun. For ticket reservations or more info call Jane at 322-9852.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

Come celebrate International Migrants Day and the first anniversary of SIKLAB, an organization which fights for the rights of Filipino migrant workers living abroad, **Sat Nov 2**, 6-10pm at St. Giles United Church, 305 W. 41st Ave, Vancouver. The theme is "Isang Daan Taon ng Rebolusyong Pilipino: Tuloy ang Kasaysayan, Tuloy ang Pakikibaka." The event will feature cultural presentations. Admission is by donation. For more info call 323-0412.

BULLETIN BOARD

EVENTS

CANCER VIDEO & PHOTOS

Award winning documentarist Lorna Boschman will premiere her most recent work, *A Cancer Video*, **Thurs Nov 7** at Video In Studios, 1965 Main St, Vancouver. The event will also feature the premiere of *The Cancer Year*, a photographic collaboration between barbara findlay and Dorothy Elias. Reception and snacks start at 6pm, with the screening beginning at 8pm. Admission is free. For more info call 872-8337.

DAPHNE MARLATT

Daphne Marlatt will be reading from her new novel, *Taken*, on **Tues Nov 26**, 7-9 pm at Women In Print, 3566 W. 4th Ave, Vancouver. *Taken* is a novel suffused with the longing for a strifeless life, in which the narrator looks back on a life marked by conflict as she writes towards her now estranged lover. Admission is free. For more info call (604) 732-4128.

NOLAN AND BOWES

Ontario writers Patricia Nolan and Susan Bowes will be in Vancouver to read from their new works **Wed Nov 13** at 7:30pm at Women In Print, 3566 W. 4th Ave, Vancouver. Nolan will read from *Broken Windows*, her first collection of short stories. Bowes will read from *Crazy Sorrow*, her premiere novel about prejudice and the tragic consequences of cowardice in 1950's Nova Scotia. Admission is free. For more info call (604) 732-4128.

BARBARA WILSON

Well-known lesbian mystery writer Barbara Wilson will be reading from *If You Had a Family* on **Tue Nov 19** at 7:30pm at Women In Print, 3566 W. 4th Ave, Vancouver. Wilson's latest novel focuses on an adult Cory as she struggles to deal with memories of her mother's disappearance when Cory was ten. Admission is free. For more info call (604) 732-4128.

CUSTODY AND ACCESS BOOK

The Vancouver Custody and Access Support and Advocacy Association will launch its new book, *Women and Children Last: Custody Disputes in the Family Justice System* **Fri Nov 22**, 7-9pm at Women In Print, 3566 W. 4th Ave, Vancouver. *Women and Children Last* reveals the bias against women and children in the family justice system, which while claiming to follow an equitable principle of gender "neutrality," in fact ignores the gender realities that affect the lives of women and their children. Admission is free. For more info call (604) 732-4128.

DIANA HARTOG

New Denver, BC writer Diana Hartog will be reading from her riveting and disquieting debut novel, *The Photographer's Sweethearts*, on **Tues Nov 5** at 7:30pm at Women In Print, 3566 W. 4th Ave, Vancouver. Poetic in its evocation of landscapes and seasons, Hartog's novel is also painfully meticulous in its examination of the soul of a child molester. Admission is free. For more info call (604) 732-4128.

you could be using this space to reach feminists across Canada and the world.

EVENTS

JULIA SHILANDER

Julia Shilander will exhibit her recent work of paintings, *Want*, at Harry's Cafe, 1716 Charles St, Vancouver **Nov 1-30**. The opening reception will take place **Tues Nov 5** at 7:30pm.

SUSAN CROWE

Singer/songwriter Susan Crowe will be performing from her second CD *The Door to the River* at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, 1895 Venables St, on **Sun Nov 17** at 8pm. Crowe's previous CD, her debut, *This Far From Home*, was nominated for a Juno award. Tickets are available at the Cultch box office, (604) 254-9578.

SAMHAIN SPIRAL DANCE

Celebrate the Turn of the Wheel at the 4th annual Samhain (Hallowe'en) Ritual and Spiral Dance **Sat Nov 2** from 7:30pm at the Maritime Labour Centre, 1880 Triumph St, Vancouver. Pagans, witches, queers, goddess-loving folks and anyone who is interested are invited.
Tickets are $11-22 sliding scale and are available at Women In Print, Little Sister's, and Urban Empire. Some of the proceeds will go to Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. For more info call (604) 253-7195.

ARTS & CRAFTS FAIRE

The 3rd annual *Women's Arts & Crafts Faire* will be held at Heritage Hall, 3102 Main St, Vancouver on **Sat Nov 30** and **Sun Dec 1**. The event will feature artisans, a cafe and music. Entrance is $1-2 donation at the door, and will be shared with Crabtree Corner Single Mom's Program and A Loving Spoonful. For more info call (604) 253-7189.

LORETTA TODD

Capilano College's film and lecture series features Loretta Todd and her latest work, *Decolonizing the Screen and Beyond* **Wed Nov 27**, 7:30-9:30pm. Todd is one of Canada's most highly regarded Aboriginal filmmakers, combining dramatic, experimental and documentary techniques. The screening will be at Capilano College, Room CE148, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver. For more info call Margaret Denike at 984-4953.

SOCIAL JUSTICE SOCIALS

The Unitarian Church of Vancouver's Social Justice Committee is presenting a series of Social Justice Socials **every second Friday** until **Dec 6**, 7-9pm, at The Unitarian Church at 949 W.49th Ave (at Oak). The theme is "Share the Wealth" and will include speakers, videos, small discussion groups, chances to make posters or create skits, snacks and music. Cost is $2 per evening. For more info or to register call Lydia at 734-3769 or Margaret at 738-4217.

kan you spel, proofreed, kopy editt? Are yuo gud with tekst? kan you halp us...pleeezze? Kall Agnes 255-5499

GROUPS

ART THERAPY

VOICES for Survivors Support Society is hosting an evening of *Art Therapy for Survivors* **Thurs Dec 5** from 7:30-9:30pm at the VOICES office, 27A-250 Willingdon Ave, Burnaby. The session will be facilitated by Tatjana Jansen, Certified Art Therapist, and will be a process oriented workshop. Clay, paints and pastels will be provided. No previous art experience is necessary. Cost is by donation. Childcare subsidies available. To reserve a place in the workshop call or fax 298-4516. For more info call Shona Steven at 983-3554.

SELF-DEFENSE FOR WOMEN

VOICES for Survivors Support Society will be holding a *Self-Defense for Women* workshop in two sessions **Thurs Jan 16 & 23** from 7-9pm at the VOICES office, 27A-250 Willingdon Ave, Burnaby. The workshops, led by self-defense and assertiveness instructor Laurie Schuerbeke, will provide women with practical skills on how to prevent assault as well as physical defense techniques. Cost is by donation. Childcare subsidies available. To reserve a place in the workshop call or fax 298-4516. For more info call Shona Steven at 983-3554.

L'ARC-EN-CIEL

Ce mois-ci, les gens du groupe L'Arc-En-Ciel, les Francophones et Francophiles des Communautés Gaies et Lesbiennes, vous invitent à une soirée vidéo au Centre des Gais et Lesbiennes de Vancouver situé au 1170 de la rue Bute, coin Davie. Cette soirée aura lieu **le dimanche, 3 Novembre**, à 19:30. Pour de plus amples renseignements, n'hésitez pas à composer le 688-9378, poste #1, boîte vocale #2120.

RADICAL WOMEN

Radical Women is holding an evening study group called *Recipe for Winning Women's Rights: Revolutionary Politics!* every **Wed** from 7-8:30pm at Rebel Centre, 2278 E. 24th Ave, Vancouver. Topics for open debate and freewheeling discussion include the interconnections of race, sex, sexuality and class, and the revolutionary possibilities of women's leadership in action. Wheelchair accessible. For more info, call (604) 874-2943, 874-9048; or fax 874-9058.

IWD ORGANIZING

It's time again for women to come together and organize for 1997 International Women's Day in Vancouver. The first meeting will be held at the Vancouver Status of Women, 301-1720 Grant St., on **Tues Nov 19** at 7:30pm. All women welcome. For more info call 708-9491.

GROUPS

WOMEN AND DOCTORS

Have a health concern? Looking for a new doctor? Do you want good health information? Call the Vancouver Women's Health Collective Information Centre at (604) 736-5262.

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Looking to form a lesbian-only consciousness raising and discussion group for survivors of girlhood rape. No S/M, drink or drugs please. If you are interested, please contact Anne at PO Box 315, 916 W. Broadway, Vancouver, BC, V5Z 1K7.

LESBIANS AND ABUSE

The Surrey Women's Centre Society and South Surrey/White Rock Women's Place are co-sponsoring a 12 week program for lesbians who have been in or are currently in an abusive relationship beginning in early November. The group will meet **Tues evenings** from 7-9:30pm at the Surrey Women's Centre Society in North Surrey. For more info contact Fran at (604) 589-1868.

FREE LEGAL ADVICE

The UBC Law Students' Legal Advice Program offers free advice in neighbourhood clinics throughout the Lower Mainland in BC, including two special legal clinics for women. The program will run in the evening **through Nov 22** and begin again in the new year from **Jan 6-Mar 21**. Advice is offered on many subjects, including small claims, landlord-tenant disputes, welfare, UIC, WCB, employer-employee relations, and uncontested divorces. For clinic times and locations, call (604)822-5791.

GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S GROUP

The Philippine Women Centre in Vancouver initiated the Grassroots Women's Discussion Group to allow women opportunities to share common issues on a monthly basis. The next meeting will on **Thurs Nov 14** at 6pm at the new Philippine Women Centre, 451 Powell St. The evening will include a presentation and discussion on the present state of the women's movement in Canada. All women are welcome to attend, and there will be a potluck dinner. For more info call Mable at (604) 215-1103.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

Struggling with life issues? In need of a safe space and a compassionate ear? The Vancouver Women's Health Collective is offering free counselling. Call (604) 736-4234 to schedule an appointment.

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BULLETIN BOARD

SUBMISSIONS

SPIRIT MATTERS

Seeking personal essays and stories for *Spirit Matters: When Being Lesbian or Gay is a Spiritual Path* from women who love and accept themselves as lesbian or gay and spiritually awakening. All journeys welcome. Maximum 20 pages double spaced. For guidelines, send SASE (in US, please enclose International Reply Coupons) to D. Douglas, *Spirit Matters*, Suite 664, 101-1001 W. Broadway, Vancouver, BC, V6H 4E4. Deadline is **Feb 15**.

BRONWEN WALLACE AWARD

The Writers' Development Trust is calling for submissions of short fiction prose (under 2,500 words) for the Bronwen Wallace Award. Respecting the wishes of Bronwen Wallace, writers must be under 35. As well, they should be unpublished in book form, but have had their work appear in at least one independently edited magazine or anthology. Prize is $1,000. Send submissions by mail to: The Bronwen Wallace Award, c/o The Writers' Development Trust, 24 Ryerson Ave, Suite 201, Toronto, ON, M5T 2P3. Deadline is **Jan 15**

CHILDREN OF EXILE

Carol Camper, creator and editor of *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women*, is seeking submissions for an anthology of women and men of colour who were raised in white families or institutions, tentatively titled *Children of Exile*. Essays, articles, letters, journals, artwork, photography, interviews, *et cetera* are welcomed. Send submissions to Carol Camper c/o Sister Vision Press, PO Box 217, Stn E, Toronto, ON, M6H 4E2. Deadline is **Dec 31**.

PRESS GANG LAUNCH

Press Gang Publishers will launch and celebrate its fall release of feminist and lesbian books Thursday November 28 at 8pm at the Heritage Hall, 3102 Main St, Vancouver. The event will feature three first-time Vancouver novelists, Persimmon Blackbridge reading from her illustrated novel, *Sunnybrook: A True Story with Lies*; Shani Mootoo reading from *Cereus Blooms At Night*; and Nancy Richler with her debut mystery novel *Throwaway Angels*, set in Vancouver's East Side. Admission is free. For more information, call (604) 876-7787. *Left to right:* Nancy Richler, Persimmon Blackbridge and Shani Mootoo. Photos by Vicki Trerise, Susan Stewart and Kathy High.

SUBMISSIONS

BREAST CANCER CONFERENCE

The first World Conference on Breast Cancer will be held in Kingston, Ontario **Jul 13-17, 1997.** Delegates from around the world will be discussing a wide range of topics. For those interested in attending or presenting, or for more info phone the conference office at (613) 549-1118.

CLASSIFIEDS

COUNSELLING FOR WOMEN

A feminist approach to sexual abuse, depression, grief and loss, sexual orientation issues and personal growth. Sliding fee scale. Free initial appointment. Call Susan Dales, RPC, at 255-9173.

WOMEN'S SELF-DEFENSE

Women Educating in Self-defense Training (WEST) teaches Wenlido. In Basic classes, you learn how to make the most of mental, physical and verbal skills to get away from assault situations. Continuing training builds on basic techniques to improve physical and mental strength. By women, for women. For info, call 876-6390.

HOUSE FOR RENT

A furnished house in Victoria is available to rent from **January-July 1997**. Rent is $1,000 per month plus utilities. Five minutes from downtown. LR, DR, 2 bedrooms and a study/bedroom, garden, quiet street, close to schools. Non-smokers. Call Michele at (604) 721-7293.

ARTISTS' SHOW AND SALE

Fun and functional, colourful and contemporary gifts for the holidays. Ceramics by KAO. Jewelry and creations by TIENWEAR. Ceramics by GO GIRL GO. Show and sale takes place at 2814 Trinity St, Vancouver (one block north of Renfrew and McGill) **Fri Nov 22**, 7pm-midnight; **Sat Nov 23**, noon - 8pm; and **Sun Nov 24**, noon-5pm. Food and refreshments on opening night. For info and directions call 254-9487.

CLASSIFIEDS

KUJUNDZIC AND NORGATE

Artists Claire Kujundzic and Sheila Norgate announce a joint exhibition and sale of their new work. They Came, They Painted opens **Fri Nov 22**, 7-9pm and continues **Sat Nov 23** & **Sun Nov 24**, 1-5pm as well as **Tues Nov 26** & **Wed Nov 27** from 6-8pm at 800 Keefer St, Vancouver (at Hawks). Everyone is welcome. For more info call 689-4099.

CITYVIEW CO-OP

Cityview Co-op has one, two and three bedroom suites for $565, $696, $795 per month and refundable share purchase. Carpets, blinds, appliances, parking and laundry room. Children and small pets welcome. Please send a business size SASE to Membership Committee, Cityview Housing Co-op, 108-1885 E. Pender St, Vancouver, BC, V5L 1W6.

PRO-CHOICE PRESS

Subscribe to *Pro-Choice Press*, the BC Coalition for Abortion Clinics' quarterly bulletin with news and information on the fight for abortion rights. $10 per year for individuals; $25 for groups—includes membership in the Coalition. To subscribe, write to 219-1675 W. 8th Ave, Vancouver, BC, V6J 1V2; call (604) 736-2800; or fax: (604) 736-2152.

Where in the heck can I find Kinesis?

Vancouver
Banyen Books, Women in Print, Duthie's on 10th, Duthie's on 4th, Duthie's @ Library Square, Capers on 4th, Little Sister's, Manhattan Books, Spartacus Books, People's Co-op Bookstore, Magpie Magazine Gallery, Eastend Food Co-op, Mayfair News, and UBC Bookstore

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Kinesis is distributed to stores all across Canada by the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association (CMPA), so ask your local alternative bookstore or newstand to carry Kinesis for you.

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