

Funding REAL Women will hurt women's cause



Woman in Focus

Fiona Thomas is currently in Antigonish to complete her thesis as part of her Master's programme in Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University. She is from England. She completed a Bachelor's Degree in Plant Science before spending five years in Andhra Pradesh, India, as an agriculturalist and community development worker. She will be returning to England at the end of March.

In this article, she describes the work in which she was involved as part of her Master's degree. This work was carried out parallel to her role as a community worker with tribal people.

Andhra Pradesh is a large province in the south-east of India, divided into three regions: the rich fertile coastal region; the southern drought prone region; and, the inaccessible interior region which is partly forested.

Having worked in the interior region of Andhra Pradesh for three years with tribal development organizations, Fiona became increasingly aware of the problems which women were facing as workers with development organizations. As head of an organization she had greater power and authority than the majority of women workers who tended to be isolated within predominantly male dominated hierarchical structures. Very few of the development organizations working in Andhra Pradesh are headed by women and whenever large gatherings of organizations were held, there was a definite polarisation of views between the majority men and the minority women. This was usually experienced as anger and frustration by the women and threatened aggressiveness by the men.

Realizing that this situation was not healthy for the general field of community development and certainly not healthy for the women involved, Fiona convened a meeting of other women who were in a relatively high position within their own organizations

and together they decided to organize a Women's Gathering.

Objectives of the Women's Gathering

The objectives of the Women's Gathering were as follows:

1. To organize an Andhra Pradesh state-wide three-day gathering in 1986 in Hyderabad of 200 women change agents from voluntary organizations (VOs).
2. To use the organization of the gathering as a means of expanding the management skills of women working in voluntary organizations.
3. To identify and orientate resource persons who can be helpful to women development workers.
4. To explore the potential and limitations of various leadership styles within an all-woman group.
5. To enable women working in rural development to - share common experiences - have exposure to a wide variety of learning resources - gain a deeper understanding of the forces acting against women's development - examine alternative models of development - form a network of supportive groups and individuals to respond to the needs of rural women.

The Approach of the Women's Gathering

A number of methods were used to bring women workers from VOs together including workshops, committee meetings and the gathering itself. The committee meetings often consisted of a period of informal discussion among the members before the official agenda business was dealt with. There was also use of problem-solving techniques such as brainstorming, sentence completion, and problem check-lists on different occasions. The workshops were usually attended by more members than the committee meetings and were



It's happening. Women are organizing and taking action for themselves.

Background

From continual frustration with the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women came a meeting on October 22. Here is a condensed version of the letter of Brian Young, Minister responsible for the Advisory Council.

Dear Mr. Young:

In response to recent developments with the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, On October 22, 1986, 300 women met in a public forum at Henson College, Dalhousie University, to discuss their mutual and collective concerns about women's issues and the status of women's programmes in Nova Scotia. These 300 women represented over 60 separate organizations each with its own specific mandate directed towards women, their concerns, their involvements, and their experiences; and the government's chronic lack of recognition and support of the same. Equally important were the individual women who came forward to speak out of their individual poverty, or need, or struggle.

As speaker after speaker came to the microphone, although each represented an individual concern, or group, or agency, what became increasingly clear was not our differences but our mutual realities and concerns. The voice raised that night was a diverse yet a collective one. Woman after woman came forward - old and young, Black and White, poor and middle-class, urban and rural - each with the statement that women in this province have real needs and that they are not being met.

The general consensus was that politicians need to address women's issues. Above all, there was a widespread and specific expression of discontent with the existing N.S. Advisory Council on the Status of Women. In

particular, it was expressed to the Council:

- that the members of the Council be selected by women's organizations;
- be independent of the Ministry;
- have adequate and independent funding;
- have a working and revised mandate which addresses the needs and concerns of all women in the province;
- heighten public awareness of the Council existence, mandate and action;
- be representative of women of all economic backgrounds, class, race, colour, age, and status in the province;
- have adequate funds to support research and publishings.

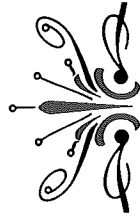
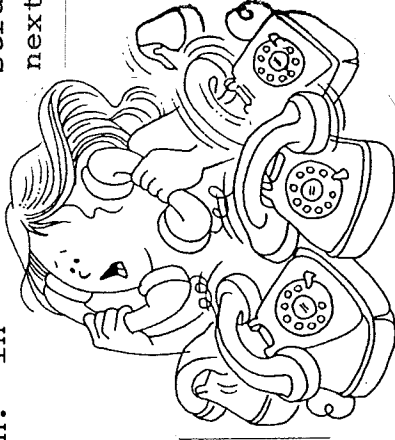
A call for action emerged from these proceedings to form a Women's Provincial Action Group. This group would be a provincial voice that would speak for and represent women of all economic backgrounds, all colours, races, age groups and classes.

A follow-up meeting is planned for November 22, 1986 in Truro to discuss the formation of this Provincial Coalition Action Group and the implementation of recommendations vis a vis the concerns raised at the public forum.

On Saturday, November 22, 1986, three women from Antigonish braved the storm and drove to the Cox Building at the N.S. Agricultural College in Truro, representing A.W.A. There were about 60 other women who had also gone from different parts of Nova Scotia. Regrets were sent from Cape Breton and from the Valley for those who could not attend because of the storm.

Marilyn Keddy chaired the meeting, and three questions were addressed to help us organize provincially:

- * Why a Provincial Women's Action Committee - expectations and purpose? * What it should look like - methods and structure? * What are the next steps?



It was decided that we need to explore creatively: * membership * name * ideology - clarify feminism - purpose/vision * decision making * funding.

It was evident that out of the discussions there was a sense of solidarity and amazing consensus but there were also some hard topics that would need further developing and discussion.

After small group and whole group discussion, three areas of responsibility are to be handled by three general regions.

ONE: Women from Guysborough, Antigonish, Inverness and Pictou will concentrate on looking at the principles and purpose of this provincial grouping in order to prepare a proposal for the next provincial meeting.
Contact: Antigonish Women's Association, 863-6221.

TWO: Halifax and County and Cape Breton will look at the structure, membership and funding, again to come up with a proposal for the next meeting.
Contact: Cheryl Aucoin in Sydney, 564-5926; Community Development and Outreach, Henson College, Halifax, Mary Morrissey, 424-2526.

THREE: Colchester and Cumberland areas will organize the next general meeting which will take place in Truro on February 14.
Contact: Margery Johnson, Continuing Education, 34 Lorne St., Truro, B2N 1E8, 895-1511, ext. 300; Janet Campbell, WHEN, Box 99, Debert, N.S., B0M 1G0.

We would like to encourage as many women as possible to attend the next meeting at St. David's United Church, Pictou Road, Truro (Exit 7) on Saturday, February 7, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (not the 14th as first planned). Childcare available on request.

Be a part of the Provincial Women's Action Committee. Please call the Women's Resource Centre if you are interested in attending and would like a ride or if you can take some people-863-6221.

For more information call Angela Miles 863-5472 or 867-3930, or Sachi Shimo 863-1691 or 863-6750.

Eighteen women attended a meeting at the home of Angela Miles, Thursday, January 22; five from Pictou County, five from Guysborough County and the rest from Antigonish. It was a follow-up to the November 22, 1986 meeting of the Provincial Women's Action Coalition and a preparation for the meeting to be held February 7 in Truro. The three counties were assigned the task of working on the expectations and purposes of this coalition. Each of the three drew up a statement of purpose or vision and was distributed for approval. A lively discussion ensued about whether the words "feminist" and "radical" are too strong for general acceptance by women.

The three briefs were edited and combined into one paper for the next meeting in Truro. Anyone wishing to go to the meeting or any additional information on the background of the Provincial Women's Action Coalition can contact the Resource Centre.

VALUES/VISION/BASIS OF UNITY

Basis for Discussion-Provincial Women's Action Coalition, Truro, February 7

Our vision is a world of justice, co-operation, equality and peace.

We come from widely diverse experiences but as feminists we strive to make changes in ourselves and in society to free us from all forms of oppression and to affirm the right of all women to live in dignity and autonomy. We want to build a world where women's activities and values of caring, sharing and nurturing are moved from the margins to become the central organizing principles. We seek to create a model in our organization of a society where self-determination is compatible with co-operation and interdependence, and all are fostered.

Historically, the functioning of our human communities, the care we show each other, the powerless and the needy has been women's work in the private and public realms. We have been involved in community development and human centred



reform and social improvement for many years. In fact, this has been the hallmark of women's activism. And we have a deep knowledge of human needs and frailties based on that experience.

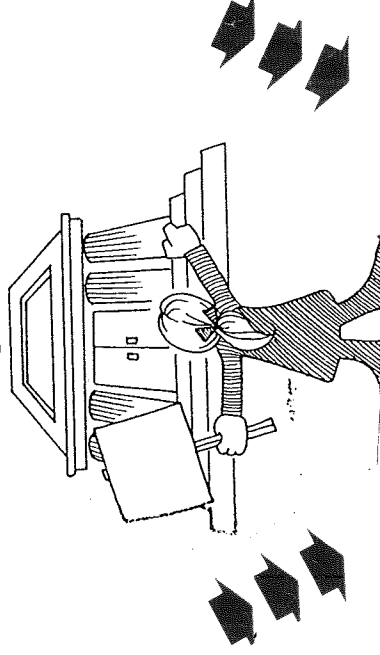
The governing principles of our society have not been the human centred values of caring, sharing and nurturing - but individualism and profit and competition. The public arenas of production and of politics are governed by competition and individual success won at the expense of others. This "success" is not admired in women who are judged by different standards of care and co-operation -- qualities which have been less valued and have been relegated to women and the margins of our society. The undervaluing and subordination of women is thus the denial of our human community.

Women in general, and the women in this organization, are a diverse group of different ages, races, classes, marital status, sexual orientation, educational backgrounds and life situations. But we believe that our shared subordination and shared responsibility for crucial, largely overlooked areas of life means that, at the deepest level, more things unite us than separate us. And we will be able to find ways to work together: to recognize and learn from women's diverse experience, skills and strengths; to build a sisterhood of mutual respect and support; to work to overcome and eliminate the differences among us which are based on power; to explore other differences as resources rather than threats.

We will lobby for women's interests but will not restrict our attention to "women's issues." All issues are women's issues. We want a world where: the values of caring, sharing and co-operation are the organizing principles; every-body, women and men and children are equally respected with equal rights and equal recognition as full moral beings; women's reproductive role will be redefined - child care will be shared by women, men and society as a whole; basic needs become basic rights; poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated; the massive resources used in the production of the means of destruction will be

diverted to areas where they will help relieve oppression both inside and outside the home, eliminate disease and hunger and give women the means for safe control of their fertility; the environment and all living species are protected from industrial, military and technological exploitation.

This is radical vision because it runs counter to all established arrangements of control, competition, inequality, violence, scarcity and insecurity. But it is also a realistic vision for it recognizes (1) that the only hope for women and for humanity in these times lies in major change, and that (2) women have the means to envision, and therefore the responsibility to seek, that change.



R.E.A.L. WOMEN OF CANADA

R.E.A.L. Women of Canada describes itself as an "organization of independent women concerned with the well-being of women and the preservation of family values." It opposes equal pay for work of equal value, universal day care, easier divorce, and affirmative action for women.

Recently R.E.A.L. Women stepped up its anti-feminist political activities. Its prime targets are Secretary of State's Womens Programme and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) which, it claims "will break up marriages and destroy family life." It has attacked some mainstays of the feminist press, including Hysteria and Herizons, on the grounds that they are anti-male, pro-choice, and pro-homosexuality. Studio D, the women's studio of the National Film Board (Not A Love Story; If You Love This Planet; Abortion Stories, North and South; Behind the Veil: Nuns) is another target, one likely to receive increasing attention in the near

future. Already the issue of the "appropriateness" of Studio D's "morally offensive propaganda" has been raised in the House of Commons by PC MP Bill Gottselig (Moose Jaw).

Our immediate concern is that R.E.A.L. Women has been unrelenting in lobbying the new federal government since it took office last fall. Its members, and other neo-conservative groups with whom they are connected, have swamped Prime Minister Mulroney and all MPs with letters and telegrams demanding that they receive funds from the Women's Programme. This is a demand that the government redirect money from feminist groups to them. The major groups funded by the Women's Programme have been identified and attacked as part of this campaign.

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S PROGRAMMES

On Friday evening, January 16, a large group of women gathered at Sachi Shimo's residence to discuss writing letters to government officials in response to the R.E.A.L. Women organization and their attempted efforts to discredit feminist groups and their work. A lengthy discussion ensued around the principles and goals of the R.E.A.L. Women's organization.

It was noted, much to our dismay, that they consider feminists to be anti-family, and that, for example, feminists would be happy to put children in day care on a 24 hr. basis if such facilities were available. Newspaper articles on the topic were available for reading, and further information was heard on a taped interview between Peter Gzowski and three representatives from the R.E.A.L. Women's organization. This tape, which was played at the meeting, gave a clearer idea of how REAL Women view feminists.

Several important points were discussed:

- Government officials were severely criticized by the R.E.A.L. Women for not funding them when they funded other women's programmes. The major reasons for not receiving funding were (a) they did not apply for project funding which is one of

the criteria of the Secretary of State Women's Programme, and (b) they have not shown they promote equality for women, which is another condition that must be met before money is allotted for any project.

- The Hon. David Crombie responded to comments made by the R.E.A.L. Women by saying that name calling of other groups (i.e., radical feminists, etc.) was not appropriate.

Everyone present was asked to write letters to the appropriate ministers and the Prime Minister in support of the Secretary of State Women's Programme, and its mandate to (1) promote and increase the participation of women in all aspects of Canadian society and (2) to increase the capacity and effectiveness of women's organizations and groups who are working to improve the status of women. Anyone who is interested should write to the following c/o House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Hon. David Crombie,
Secretary of State
Minister responsible for
Multiculturalism

Hon. Barbara MacDougall
Minister responsible for
Status of Women and
Privatisation

Hon. Brian Mulroney
Prime Minister of Canada

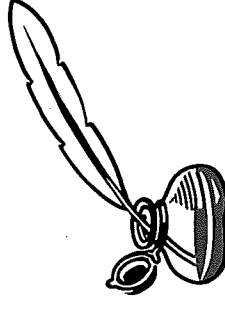
Lawrence O'Neill, M.P. for Cape
Breton/Highlands/ Canso
Room 326, West Block

During the evening's conversation, we discussed the possibility of a name for our group. Avon Burkholder suggested we call ourselves J.U.S.T. Women. It was decided that J.U.S.T. would stand for Justice, Unity, Strength, Truth.

It was great to see such a large and diverse group of women who are concerned about women's rights. The Guysborough women deserve special mention, coming so far on such a cold night.

DON'T FORGET TO WRITE YOUR LETTERS!

- Nasha Murphy



ATTENTION ALL WOMEN!

Come and participate in lively discussion around the issues which affect you. An assortment of topics will include wife assault, child abuse, rape, pornography, housing, childcare and job difficulties.

We will meet each Thursday morning at 10 a.m., starting February 12th at the Women's Resource Centre in Antigonish.

Childcare and travel expenses provided. For further details, please contact Dorothy Gilson, 863-3515.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WIVES - A RURAL PERSPECTIVE

A Naomi Society sponsored project funded by the Secretary of State Women's Programme, which began in August, 1986 and will continue through to May, 1987.

Initially contacts were made with women living in various rural communities in Antigonish County, in order to arrange four groups of kitchen meetings in those areas. Responses were excellent, and many women have participated in the kitchen meetings over the past months.

The purpose of getting together has been to explore the issue and extent of violence against women and to develop strategies for dealing with this problem.

The format for the groups has been five weekly meetings using videos on wife assault, child sexual abuse, rape and pornography and a concluding evaluation session. Presentations were conducted around the videos, followed by discussion and brainstorming sessions. Resource kits containing information on family violence and related topics have been made available to all the women who participated in order to further their understanding and awareness.

Positive responses and community activities have been the results of the kitchen meetings. For example, one group has started a drop-in centre for women in their particular area. Others have fundraised for the Naomi Society, while others have initiated the

child sexual abuse prevention programme, "Feeling Yes, Feeling No" in their schools.

The second phase of the project begins on February 12 with the first meeting of the follow-up group. This group will consist of representatives from the kitchen meetings and other women who are interested in knowing more about violence against women. As well as films, videos and resource materials, various speakers will be participating in this group in order to illustrate the problems and add their own research and practical experiences.

This group's mandate is then to develop strategies for long-term solutions, by examining, discussing and lobbying the issues which they find relevant.

Moreover, this project has shown that women in the community are very much concerned with issues which affect women and are willing to work towards improving the status of women.

- Dorothy Gilson

SINGLE MOTHERS SUPPORT GROUP

Quite frequently, single mothers approach the Resource Centre inquiring about a support group for single mothers. Plans are in progress for making a support group a reality. Should anyone be interested in working with or participating in a support group for single moms, they are asked to please call the Resource Centre at 863-6221 before February 13, 1987.

